

Have Sight and Vision

A review of the Play of Life in comparison to other theories and models

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Helen Keller renowned for her tenacious ability to overcome a disability of blindness asked the question, "What would be worse than to be born blind? Her answer to the able-sighted revealed the paradox in which we so readily live - "to have sight and no vision."

The vitality of vision is not a new truth. Ancient wisdom and prophetic writers challenged people regarding its necessity. "Where there is no vision the people perish," (Proverbs 29:18) warns one. "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets that he may run who reads it" (Habakkuk 2:2) instructs another.

The Play of Life is unique in that it helps to create vision as "you look at your present reality from an objective, aesthetic and visual viewpoint." (Raimundo, 2002 p45) A scene is created on a 'stage' or board using human-like figures and symbolic shapes. Like an eagle whose scope of vision is 275 degrees, (Stringer, 1983 p52), the client and counsellor can gain a perspective from many angles as they look down upon the created scene, which can be rotated 360 degrees.

Another unique aspect is the creation of an 'ideal' or preferred future stage. As Raimundo says, "When people have a clear picture of where they want to be, it's my experience that they can find a way to get there. They create a path that leads them to their goal." (Raimundo, 2002, p40)

There are two benefits to creating an ideal stage in regard to vision. The first is the provision of extra literal vision as the first stage sits beside the ideal stage. Unlike the human eye an eagle's eye has two extra areas of acute vision called foveas. One area points forwards and the other points to the side allowing the eagle to see both at the same time. The setting up of two stages side by side provides the client with this eagle-like extra acute vision.

The second is a transcendent vision, the type Helen Keller referred to. While the first stage provides a 'here-and-now' picture, the second creates a clear visual picture of a preferable future, one not yet attained but "critical for effective strategic planning and implementation." (Barna, 1992 p145) This characteristic enables the marketing of the Play of Life as a tool within the corporate culture to help break unwanted moulds and bring real change.

The corporate world is not the only one to benefit from the Play of Life. Individuals also discover they need to break out of an unwanted mould. Psychologist Gerard Egan sums up the need for counselling as " many clients become clients because either in their own eyes or in the eyes of others they are involved in problem situations they are not handling well." (Egan, 2002, p4) Egan's 'skilled helper model' begins with the hear-and-now, like the Play of Life, but puts an emphasis on *hearing* the story and *listening* to identify blind spots. Over a number of sessions, 'possibilities' are explored which are similar in purpose to the 'ideal' stage in the play of life. However, unlike the Play of Life, which can create this stage even in the first session, the move is done slowly.

Also, Egan's model only supports the counsellor and not the client with a visual written image of a model and the skills used are almost solely auditory and reliant on the process of cognitive rationalization. The counsellor is the observer or spectator. In the Play of Life however, "one of the powers of the image technique is to allow the protagonist (client) to detach themselves from the situation, take the role of spectator, to make objective insights." (Raimundo, 2002 p31) Both client and counsellor see the same physical model presented before them.

To address the weakness in the modernist cognitive or epistemological approach, Parry and Doan have developed a narrative therapy which helps clients to revision their stories (Parry & Doan, 1994) drawing on post-cognitive or ontological theories where to "be" is more vital than to "know." They state that the important post-cognitive questions are "which world is this? what is to be done in it? which of my selves is to do it." (Parry & Doan 1994, p14) The Play of Life relates to this post-cognitive perspective. The client creates his or her world as they see it. It is not interpreted by an expert's knowledge. An answer to the above

second and third question evolves as the client is guided through the Play of Life's techniques of soliloquy, role reversal, creating an ideal and the first step.

One distinctive of narrative therapy is the use of externalizing conversations to decrease interpersonal conflict and a personal sense of failure and then open a "way for people to reclaim their lives from problems." (Parry & Doan 1994, p50) The language used facilitates a separation between the person and the problem. "The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem." (Monk 1997, p26) The Play of Life and SRMM relate to this as it allows the client to be "the scriptwriter, director, producer and lead actor, to play other roles and to be a spectator." (Raimundo, 2002 p45) A stronger emphasis however is placed on responsibility for one's choices as demonstrated in the first step - " firstly look at yourself and what you must do." (Raimundo, 2002 p45) In this respect it relates strongly to logotherapy. (Gazda, G., Ginter, E. & Horne, A., 2001)

Both narrative therapy and logotherapy are interested in 'meaning' as in what is meaningful for the client. Narrative therapy often asks, "what would it mean?" questions. Their theory emphasizes that the meaningfulness of something rather than its factual truthfulness, will create the motivation and spontaneity to re-vision life. (Parry & Doan 1994) Frankl, the founder of logotherapy believed that people do not invent their own meaning but discover the meanings that their lives hold, which are often connected to significant others. (Gazda et al) In the Play of Life meaning is found in the reality of the first step in relation to others on the stage.

Meaningfulness is different than knowledge. Logic may make sense and yet without meaning, knowledge is unable to do very much for us. Meaning adds life to knowledge. It makes it sparkle. Perhaps this is what is behind Helen Keller's statement about what is worse than blindness - to see but have no vision, that is no purpose, no sparkle, no meaning. It would seem that meaning is connected with our emotions, which are centered in the limbic area of our brain.

It is understood that psychodrama, an expressive model, integrates the use of the limbic and neo-cortex parts of our brain to bring about a fuller understanding of how to resolve a 'problem.' That is, it integrates all levels of a human being - their thinking, intellect, imagination, feelings and actions - in their social context. It is very concerned with the way we perceive and interact with the world. (ANZPA Inc.) The Play of Life identifies strongly with this as it is thought that the visual picture created on the 'stage,' imprints upon the limbic system, helping the neo-cortex develop a meaningful understanding.

In psychodrama the "protagonist is invited to physically represent feelings, emotional dynamics and relationships. The person not only talks about them and *sees* them on the Play of Life board but is also able to feel them physically." (Raimundo 2002, p31)

In conclusion, there is for the Play of Life and SRMM a definite relationship to theories and models that have one or more of the following characteristics: a focus on the here-and-now; creation of a meaningful and realistic future; relationship based; expressive. The ones mentioned in the review are Egan's skilled helper model, narrative therapy, logotherapy and psychodrama. Each of these theories and models together with the Play of Life seek to provide insight about what is happening in the current life of the client. Each is also committed to facilitating for the client, the creation of meaningful vision, in order to empower them for a successful future.

For other articles and more information about the Play of Life info@playoflife.com

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