



Dramascope

The Paradoxical Playspace: The Intersection of Boundaries and Liminal Concepts in Developmental Transformations

A Poster Session

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Introduction

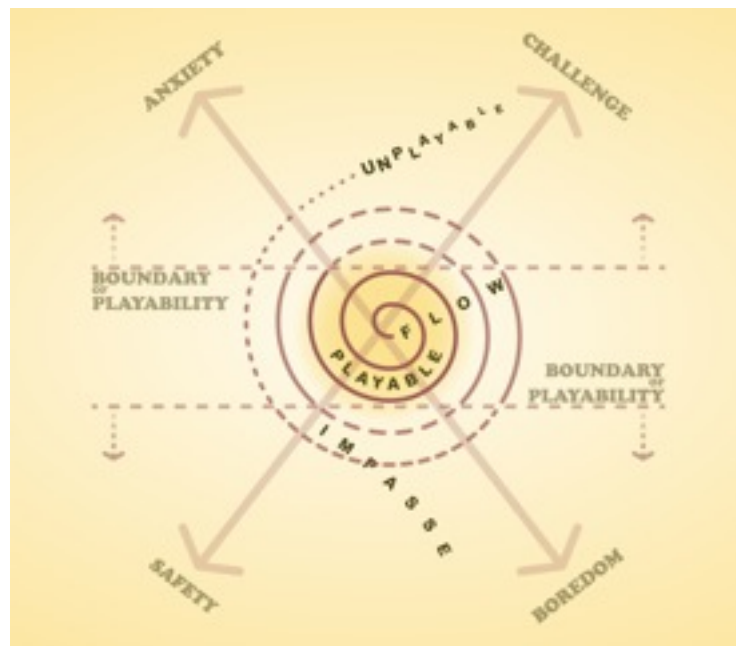
Developmental Transformations (DvT) has produced a rich body of knowledge in thirty years of evolving theory and practice. Its influences, methodology and case studies have been widely documented. Despite this wealth of publication, none include visual representations specific to the method.

Johnson (1999) offers apt graphics of creative arts therapy processes generally applicable to DvT. However compatible, these graphics do not address the Instability of Being or other concepts central to DvT's postmodern theory. Although these graphics are informative, questions remain:

Why the dearth of diagrams unique to DvT?
Might it be useful to propose some?

This year's NADT conference theme inspired this effort to "present drama therapy in the written word" (Johnson & Emunah, 2009, p.21). The Paradoxical Playspace is an attempt at innovative expression of DvT, via poster session. It proposes to establish a visual dialogue to stimulate discussion within the DvT community and beyond. It is an invitation for others to join the conversation.

The Paradoxical Playspace



Development, according to a well-known definition, is precisely the struggle of opposites. ~ L.S. Vygotsky (1993, p.282).

Establishing the premise, this illustration provides the base upon which the subsequent figures are built. Cross-referencing Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development with Mihaly Csikszentmihali's (1990)

notion of Flow and theories from the fields of Trauma/Recovery (Ogden & Minton, 2000; Siegel, 1999) and Object Relations (Winnicott, 1971), this postmodern adaptation assumes individual work; however, the concepts also apply to group work.

The oppositional forces inherent in the Instability of Being are noted as directions along the continua. The 4 Emotional Aspects, Anxiety, Boredom, Challenge and Safety conceptualize the larger processes that arise from instability and manifest as themes that are played with in session.

The DvT playspace and its Boundary of Playability exist at the intersection of the Anxiety-Boredom and Safety-Challenge continua. A relative balance of the 4 Emotional Aspects must be maintained for play to be sustainable. When any of the Aspects become prominently out-of-balance the client or therapist risk falling out of the playspace.

Each Aspect represents a range of possible responses to the playspace. The continuum offers potential antidotes to the falling out:

Anxiety (Flight), hyperarousal/vigilance, avoidance

Boredom (Freeze), hypoarousal, depression, dissociation, shame

Challenge (Fight), oppositional/defiant behavior, shame.

Safety (Orientation): While operating within the standard boundaries of ethical practice, DvT acknowledges that the potential to do harm exists whenever people enter into relationship.

According to Johnson,

DvT does not attempt to convince the client of... or achieve a state of 'safety'...but rather assumes that the embodied encounter in the playspace among people is likely to be experienced as Not Safe...Ultimately, the representation of harm/instability that the participants could cause each other (but do not), forms some of the most healing play (2005, p.8).

Similar to the role of paradox in play and development, the DvT playspace can both contain and expand the liminal realm simultaneously. Through a gradual exposure process the client learns how to play. De-sensitization

occurs via recursive processes. It modulates affect enough to allow the client to play with difficult material at increasingly tolerable levels. This provides opportunities for re-orientation towards a more stable state of being amidst states of disorientation or arousal. Continued variations in play increase tolerance towards gradual expansion of the playspace.

The Intersection of Boundaries and Liminal Concepts



The DvT Playspace, like theatre, is a lie that seeks to reveal itself as a lie, and therefore is honest. ~ D.R. Johnson (2009, p.89).

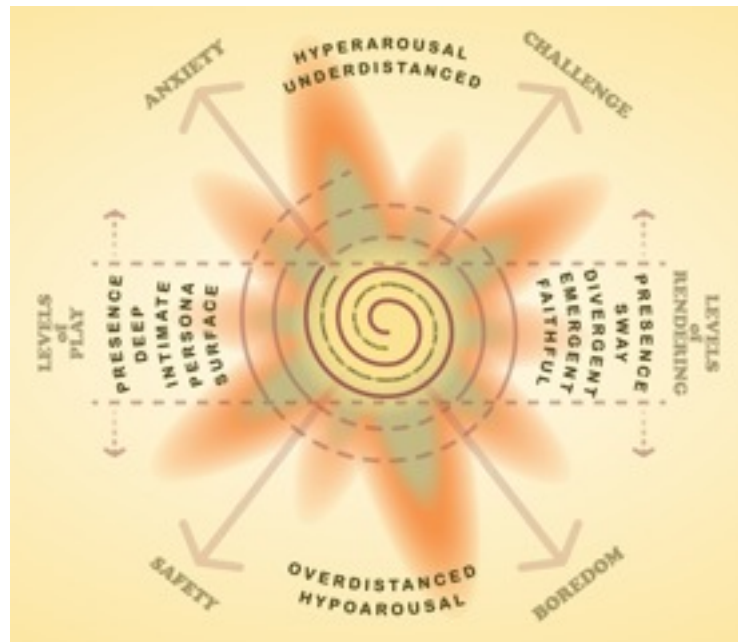
Creativity comes from limits, not freedom. ~ Jon Stewart (2010, WHYY, producer).

The Intersection is a playful visual aid summarizing the stated purpose and implications of DvT. The concentric circles emphasize the elegance of DvT theory: Inherent boundaries and ethics provide the limits that allow for play in the liminal realm. It is illustrated as if in "close-up".

Purpose

Deemed an Embodied Encounter in the Playspace, the practice of DvT is meant to address the Instability of Being, treating disorders of embodiment, encounter, play, and transformation (Johnson, 2009). Johnson (1992) defines the playspace as "an interpersonal field in an imaginal realm...in which any image, interaction and physicalization has a meaning within the drama" (p.112-113). To support and sustain meaningful play, the 3 Conditions of DvT, Restraint from Harm, Mutuality and Discrepant Communications, must be met simultaneously.

In Developmental Transformations (DvT)



...psychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that of the patient and that of the therapist... ~D.W Winnicott (1971, p.54).

This illustration is an attempt to visually represent the co-created playspace ("the overlap") by something other than the effective, but

ubiquitous, Venn diagram. The intent is to exhibit aspects of DvT in theory and practice as clearly as possible, despite (perhaps because of) the obvious challenges in doing so.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Building on the previous figures, the yellow area in the center now represents the client and therapist at play. The maroon spiral features the words "Noticing, Feeling, Animating and Expressing"(NFAE), key tenets of DvT theory (Johnson, 1999; Werner and Kaplan, 1964). This recursive process suggests the client and therapist literally "playing off of each other" while in the Flow.

The DvT therapist as "good enough" play object models the form, using NFAE processes. Over time, assimilation/accommodation occurs and the client's playspace expands. This is similar to Vygotsky's (1978) "scaffolding" theory and notion of a "more capable peer", however, DvT tries to invert typical hierarchical roles (Johnson, 1999). More accurate to DvT theory, the therapist would be viewed as a "Broken Toy" (Johnson, 2005, p.20), imperfect but playful and willing to explore ambiguous terrain.

The green shaded area emanating outward from the playspace represents the client's total experience as well as their potential for development. Spikes of activity exceeding the Boundary of Playability symbolize moments when the client has fallen out of the playspace, or has not yet made contact with material considered unplayable. The therapist's larger orange area highlights tracking and the "holding environment" for the client's experience. While the entire playspace is considered the container of the play, the therapist remains the manager, responsible for its maintenance and sustenance. When impasse occurs or the client falls out, the therapist must revert to less-stimulating processes and invite the client back in.

Specific improvisational and developmental techniques are employed to re-establish the playspace as needed. To address states of hyperarousal, the therapist will take a distancing approach, using perhaps simple repetitions of sound and movement, mirroring, or re-orienting. When the

client appears disengaged, the therapist seeks to find even the smallest aspect of something playable within the client to engage and expand.

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