

Prelude

The Rhythm of Life is a methodology based on Collective Narrative Practices that uses the musical instruments as its major metaphor. The origins of this approach can be traced looking back to the history of my life, and also, to some special persons I had the great opportunity to meet.

Concerning my family background, on my father's side, my relatives live in several different countries in Europe and America. Every time we get together we have to deal with some speaking and cultural aspects. That's why I've learned since an early age, that even speaking different language, we are able to communicate and we are all part of a big family.

With my mother's side of the family, I've learned how to care. And, also, I've learned the power of music. My grandfather was a doctor and, besides that, he used to play several musical instruments – he even (believe it or not) played songs on leaves from the trees. So I came to learn that everything in life can become a nice tune - and, above all, that music can cure.

According to the Rhythms of Life we are different musical instruments playing, each one of us, our own music. But, when we get together, we may form a beautiful orchestra.

I also acknowledge Michael White's contribution. I had the opportunity of meeting him in 2005, in a workshop in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. In that workshop I learned about the Narrative Therapy – and that has perfected my professional perspective in life.

In 2009 David Denborough and Cheryl White came to Vitória (ES), Brazil, for a workshop – their first workshop in Brazil! On that occasion, they presented the Team of Life as well as the Tree of Life methodology. I began using both methodologies in my work with individuals (clinical work) and with groups

(rehabilitation and third age group). The results of every one of these experiences are always invigorating.

It's well known that Brazilians love football and are concerned about the environment. That's probably one of the explanations why the Team of Life and the Tree of Life methodology have great acceptance among the groups I have worked with. So, I decided to focus on another subject: Brazilians love music. It all began with samba (actually with carnival), but then I realized that carnival has so many different aspects depending on the place and the people involved that it would be better to focus on what they have in common: the samba. And then, I thought about the instruments: drums, tambourines, plates, agogos... That's when I realized that music is a global language and I could think about as many instruments as the human race has created. That's how the Rhythm of Life got started.

I hope this methodology is an instrument that will help other narrative practitioners to develop their work in helping people to respond to the dilemmas they are facing in life. It also can help people to reinvigorate folk culture through music.

Andante

Basic aims: To allow individuals to build a safe identity territory and to reconnect with their own abilities, values, histories in a way that they can feel their lives are in their own hands again.

Participants: the metaphor 'Rhythm of Life' can be easily understood by people of different ages and from distinct social classes and levels of instruction. Therefore, this methodology can be used in a great variety of groups. It's important that people in the group have a common issue: some problem they

need to overcome, some difficulty they have been facing, some kind of event they all have been through, among other possibilities.

Number of participants: The Rhythm of Life was planned to be used in groups from 10 to 15 participants. But, it can also be used in smaller groups or even with individuals. If the group is too large, it's better to split it into small groups and have a tutor to help. This is due to the fact that in some steps of this methodology participants are asked to talk about their histories and memories. If the group is too large, cross-talk and side-conversation can hinder the process.

Steps:

- 1) My instrument
- 2) My interpretation
- 3) The Orchestra of Life
- 4) Getting attuned
- 5) Our song

Each one of these steps will be presented further below.

Hourly Load: The Rhythm of Life was created to be applied in an eight-hour activity, divided as follows:

- Step # 1 (03 hours) – this is a particular moment when the participants get in touch with their own history and, also, with their precious memories. They are asked to talk about these events. This sharing moment helps everyone in the group to reconnect with their own lives. Therefore, it takes longer to go through this step.

- Step # 2 (1h30) – it can be taken as a transition between individual and collective moments.

- Step # 3 & 4 (1h30) – that's the time to focus the group and, also, to relate the metaphor of the instruments playing in an orchestra to life itself.

- Step # 5 (02 hours) – that's the time when the group has to create their own music and rehearse this song.

Sometimes the group needs more time to finish this activity. And also, some groups prefer to present the song to a specific audience. In these cases, another date can be set for the presentation and the recording.

It's important to have the music recorded so that it can be shared with others that are facing similar problems.

Intermezzo

Let me introduce you to the Rhythm of Life methodology. It is a five-step process:

- 1) My instrument
- 2) My interpretation
- 3) The Orchestra of Life
- 4) Getting attuned
- 5) Our song



1) MY INSTRUMENT

The first thing they are asked to do is to think about an instrument they like and then to draw it on a piece of paper – right in the middle of the page –, leaving room on the top and on the bottom for further steps.

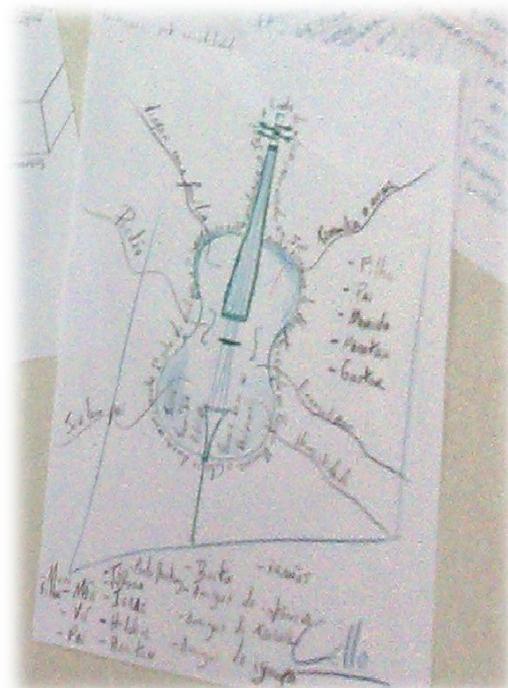
There's no need to be an instrument the person knows how to play – it's important to be one that the participant likes (because of its sound, or its shape, or its relevance in the person's life...).

Then, we focus on some aspects of this drawing.

The stage: Right under the instrument the person draws a line, meaning the stage: the place where the person is playing this instrument. It means *present life*. Questions about the person's present life, regular activities, and roles that the participant plays in life may help. (It's very similar to the ground on the Tree of Life methodology).

The instrument: It can be split in two parts – the Sounding Board and its Vibration. Every musical instrument has both parts: the one that produces the sound and the one that resonates it.

- The sounding board: The person is asked to write all around the instrument the *precious memories* of his/her life that give him/her strength. It may include the place where the person was born, special moments on the participant's childhood, significant persons, particular songs, places the person has been to, and many other memories that each one holds precious and that give them strength.
- The vibration: it's about what makes the instrument have this specific sound (violins sounds differently from flute, and from cello, and so on...). We ask the person to write inside the instrument his/her values, abilities, skills, and everything else that is important in the person's life. Things that the participant would never



leave behind; what makes he/she to be unique in a world of 7 billion people.

The sound waves: They are represented by waves coming from the instrument to the edge, just like musical waves. These waves represent the person's dreams and hopes. It's an answer to the question: "Where do I want my music to get?". The person writes down these answers on these waves.

The audience: At the bottom of the drawing, the person is required to write down the names of the ones that he/she would like to be there listening to the music that the participant is playing. "Who do I want to listen to the music of my life?".

2) MY INTERPRETATION

After this individual drawing, each person shares his/her production with the group. At this moment, I ask them what music they've been playing and how the audience is reacting.

Then, participants place their instruments either on the floor or on the wall. In so doing we have the Orchestra of Life in front of us.

That's what Paulo Freire¹ used to call "the invention of unity in diversity" (Freire, 1994).



¹ Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of what's known as critical pedagogy.

3) THE ORCHESTRA OF LIFE

Having all the instruments put together shows a wide range of possibilities that might emerge from the group.



And the idea of playing together in an Orchestra sounds very different from playing by yourself. When you're by yourself you can do things in a different way (in your own way). But when we're 'playing' together, things can get a bit more defying.

There are many points that can be brought up: in which ways each instrument can get attuned with the others, what's the importance to the whole orchestra to be playing in the same rhythm, how to coordinate personal discipline in training (one can play 8 hours a day but the other one only plays twice a week – how can they manage to play together?)

Some questions at this point are: "How to get attuned?"; "What music can we play together?".

At this point, there might be no difference between the metaphor and life itself: being an orchestra and being a group dealing with some difficulties is almost the same.

4) GETTING ATTUNED

There are many challenges an orchestra has to deal with. And getting attuned might include some aspects.

First, the **responsibility**.

It's important for us to understand our own responsibility inside the group. Not the responsibility as 'being blamed for', but as 'the ability to respond to' (what I call the response-ability).

Michael White was always aware of the questions raised by Foucault in relation to "practices of power". This awareness surfaces in the techniques of the narrative therapy which try to separate the person from his/her problem as well as to give this person voice.

This means, for example, to help people notice they are not to blame for the situations they face (or have faced) in life nor are they victims. They are people who have passed through difficult situations and who have managed, somehow, to give these challenges an answer. Thus, the focus is not the problem, but the person.

Taking some time to think about the characteristics and the history of this person's life, trying to rescue the roots of his/her capacity to act is what I call "response-ability": the ability to respond to life's dilemmas.

We are all, in a very peculiar measure, "response-able": we have competence, values, skills, knowledge, beliefs, and principles that help us to weather the weather and overcome our difficulties. And so we become "response-able" along our lives. Our "response-ability" has a history which, after being outlined, reveals our potential.

Some questions that could be made at this point are:

- How does your instrument get along with the others? What abilities do you have that are unique in this orchestra?
- How do all these instruments play together? What are the difficulties faced by an orchestra? What are the ways for an orchestra to respond to these challenges?

- What are the difficulties that we face in life? And how do we respond to it both as an individual and as a community.
- How did you learn to respond in this way? Is this way of responding linked to your family, community or culture? If so, in which ways?

Second, I also use a play on Portuguese words. I'll try to relate to English!

A **Symptom** is often considered a sign that something is not going well. We may consider the symptom as being "out of tune": the members of the group, or the family members, are playing their instruments; however, they cannot play "in tune". As a matter of fact, their interaction is often taken as noise, rather than music.

As soon as the members of such group are able to get attuned and, eventually, **in synchrony**, they may play music. And, as they learn to play together the great variety of songs in life, they will be able to play awesome **symphonies**.

In so doing, they move from the **symptom** (being out of tune) to **synchrony** (the ability to play together). And by practicing **synchrony** they get to **symphony** (the ability to play beautiful songs together).

5) OUR SONG

That's when the group has the chance to contribute to the lives of others who are facing similar problems. Usually the group writes the lyrics and plays a song sharing what they've learned about their own skills, abilities, values, hopes, dreams, and 'response-ability'. Then this contribution is shared with other groups and we keep on waiting for the answer to come.

If the group/person does not want to write their own song, they can choose a song that represents them. They can also change the lyrics of a song they know and play their personal version of it.

There are many possibilities. All of them are unique – and, therefore, special. Each group will find out which one is the best for them. Choosing their own way to share what they have learned makes all the difference. Let's sing along!

Finale

These are the steps of this methodology. The music metaphor can be well understood in every culture. That's what makes this methodology easy to be put into practice all over the world. It also can be used both with individuals and community work, with no need to modify it.

It is based on Narrative Theory and Narrative Practices². The key themes that are included in the Rhythm of Life are: responding to social issues through a methodology that focus on strengthening the alternative story, re-membering significant people and honoring them, helping people to understand that their lives are connected and that one's story can contribute to someone else's story, and sharing all this knowledge through collective documentation (White, 1991, 2007; Drewery & Winsdale, 1997; Monk, 1997; Epston, 1998; Denborough, 2008; Newman, 2008; Madigan, 2011).

I hope every one of us can make the music play and, in so doing, we can all be attuned to the Rhythm of Life. Let's get in sync to make this world a better place!

² For more information about these ideas, please contact Dulwich Centre (www.dulwichcentre.com.au)

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