Legacy More: The Fourth Component

Abstract

The three-fold legacy of William Glasser, MD, described in a previous article consists in the formulation of Choice Theory, a major change and a brilliant extension to control theory, a long standing explanation of how the human mind functions. The second leg of his legacy was the delivery system Reality Therapy which preceded the theoretical foundation. The third leg of his legacy was his founding of the organization, at first known as the Institute for Reality Therapy, subsequently changed to The William Glasser Institute, and most recently altered to the more cumbersome name, Glasser Institute for Choice Theory (GIFCT). This current article identifies a fourth component of Glasser's legacy. The legacy chair is not a tripod, but rather a four-legged chair. This fourth component represents the dynamism of Glasser's thinking. He continually changed and developed his ideas, especially the conversion of Control Theory or Control System Theory to Choice Theory. He left a legacy containing the explicit principle that his contributions can grow, develop, and be applied in innovative ways to the ever-changing world.

Legacy More: The Fourth Component

Extending Theoretical Principles: Options and External World

Traditionally, practitioners of reality therapy have viewed the quality world or world of wants as primary in both theory and practice. It is the driving force of all behavior (Glasser, 1998, 2011), (Wubbolding, 2000, 2017). Glasser (2011) emphasized the unique significance of the quality world by stating that it is the world we want right now, our ideal world and the world we must have to satisfy our needs. This theoretical principle becomes operational in the practice of reality therapy by helping people clarify and define their wants: what they want from the world around them, from family, career, and even what they want from themselves (Wubbolding, 2017). In his classic biography of Glasser, James Roy (2014) states that the quality world or world of internal wants lies at the heart of Glasser's formulation of the Quality School Consortium, at that time consisting of over 200 schools.

Clearly, when individuals and groups seek to implement Glasser's legacy they focus on their wants: the pictures in their quality worlds. They define them, measure them as how they will be fulfilled, and examine them from many perspectives.

This component of choice theory and the delivery system reality therapy serves as a useful starting point. And yet, it is possible to expand the starting point. A basic economic principle is that the world does not exist to satisfy our needs. Rather, it provides us with options. I suggest that in addition to asking individuals and groups what they want, another starting point is to inquire about, "What are your options?" The implication is that a client or client system, e.g., a school, might have options that do not appear to be need satisfying. The following brief dialogue represents a practical way to implement this principle.

Client and Counselor

The client, 15, referred to a counselor for acting out behaviors: breaking curfew, flunking in school, drug abuse, and hostility toward authority figures and others.

Counselor: What thoughts went through your mind as you came here today?

Client: I hate those people who *forced* me to come here: the teachers, my mother, and everyone else who told me, "You have a problem."

Counselor: (Conventional initial interventions.) What do you want to have happen in this session and what do you want from the people around you?

Client: I want to be left alone.

Counselor: (Alternative starting point.) So you were forced to be here and you had no choice in the matter. What are your options now?

Client: What do you mean?

Counselor: What are your possible choices regardless of whether you like them or not?

Client: They ought to leave me alone.

Counselor: I can guarantee you *they* are not going to leave you alone. They're going to stay on your back. They're going to continue to come down on you like a rainstorm.

Client: They can go . . . I don't care.

Counselor: Whether you care or not, what are your options? What are your choices?

Client: I don't know.

Counselor: Here's an idea for you to think about. The rest of the world does not exist to make you happy or to make it easy for you to do whatever you want. Whether anyone of us likes it or not, the world owes us nothing. It was here first. And so, what are your options right now for dealing with your situation in this unfair world?

Client: I have no idea.

Counselor: I'll tell you. You can either make the best of your situation or you can make your life more miserable. You have only 2 options, and neither of them is very satisfying to you. Which will bring you the least pain and which will bring you the most pain?

The above simple and direct dialogue illustrates the possibility of emphasizing two options: to make life better or to make life worse. At this stage, there is no explicit discussion of the client's desires. Of course, a skillful helper can assist the client in defining wants and goals as the relationship develops. The extension of choice theory and reality therapy includes a more explicit consideration of the external world including how it limits, encroaches on, and even violates the quality world.

Reevaluating "Past" Behavior

 We are accustomed to looking at the choice theory chart *How the Brain Works* (Glasser, 1996, 2015) as a two-dimensional diagram explaining human behavior and motivation. I suggest we can look at it from another dimension, a dimension of depth. We teach that we have control only over present behavior. And indeed sometimes we shun any mention of the past. And yet, how do we define the "past"? William Faulkner, the great novelist, once stated, "The past is never dead. In fact it is not even past." Anyone who has experienced trauma or worked with people who have experienced trauma realizes that the event is indeed historical, but there are many lingering and serious consequences of past abuse, injury, witnessing a death of family member or friend, and many other events as described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5)* (2013). The event itself is past, part of one's history. But there are often current consequences: a change in one's neural pathways resulting in irritable and angry outbursts, reckless or self-destructive behavior, problems with concentration, sleep disturbance and many other current behaviors

labeled as post traumatic stress disorder. In short, Glasser's comment that we are products of our past has profound implications.

Re-evaluating Human Needs

The chart *How the Brain Works* (Glasser, 1996, 2015) presents two pathways: Situation A, *Ineffective* Control and Situation B, *Effective* Control. The graphic displays heavy arrows aimed at the real world indicating that all behavior is purposeful. It is impossible for a human to generate purposeless actions, thinking, feeling and physiology. Does it follow that we have a genetic need for purpose and meaning built into the structure of our minds? In working with clients, such as the one above, the helper could assist them to identify the purpose of their actions and thinking and even their emotions as well as their overall life purpose. Teaching them that being truly happy is a result of a positive purpose would be a useful endeavor.

Adding to the Purpose of Behavior

The basic purpose of behavior is to impact the world around us, to mold it so that it matches our quality world pictures and thereby we gain more effective control. And yet, can there be a secondary purpose of behavior? Human behavior sends a signal to the world around us. It communicates a message to our environment. (Perhaps this purpose i.e., sending a signal or a message is contained in the first purpose. But communicating a message or sending a signal can be *so significant* that I suggest it can be seen as a nuanced second purpose.) We rejoin the counselor and client from above with a brief dialogue illustrating the second purpose of behavior.

Client and Counselor

Counselor: You have readily described what the people around you said you have been

doing. And you agreed that they are accurate. I'd like to talk to you about something

related to what you've been doing. Is that okay?

Client: Yeah, go ahead.

Counselor: You know, everything we do sends a signal or a message to the world around

us. If I drive my car 75 miles an hour on an expressway in a 55 mile per hour zone,

and a policeman pulls up beside me and points his hand toward the curb side of the

road, he's signaling. What do you think he's trying to tell me?

Client: "Pull over buddy, you're in trouble."

Counselor: So he is signaling two things. All of our actions send a message or a signal to

the world around us. When you do what you admitted doing, what message are you

trying to communicate to other people? For example, when you skip school, what

are you trying to tell the school authorities?

Client: I hate this place. Get off my back.

Counselor: You're very clear about your intention. But I believe that they misunderstand

you. They're getting the message to get on your back even more. The same is true

of your probation officer, your mother, and everyone else who is on your back.

Client: They're so stupid.

Counselor: These people you call stupid are really in charge of you, running your life, giving

you orders, making it difficult for you to get an honest job. It must be very painful

for you– to have all these people running your life for you, not understanding the

language you're using. I'm really glad that nobody tells me what to do. Oh wait,

there is that policeman, the traffic laws, my boss, the government that takes tax

money, my family's expectations of me, my neighbors who would not appreciate it if

I had a noisy party with 100 guests. So, I guess there are people trying to run my

life to some extent. But for you, the people around you are not getting the message you'd like them to have. Am I right or wrong about that?

Client: You're right.

Counselor: How about trying a different language, sending them a different signal, communicating something about the hopes and dreams inside of you?

Client: What language?

Counselor: That's the key question. Let me ask you this. If the language of fighting them at every step of the way is not bringing any joy or freedom to your life, how about trying the language of cooperation for a short time, say a week?

In this abbreviated conversation, the helper sees the purpose of behavior in a slightly different light than an attempt to control the world or even to control their own behavior. The helper presents the student's ineffective lifestyle in a way that is more acceptable to the young person. This second purpose of behavior opens a wide range of possibilities for counselors and therapists. Educators can ask themselves, "What messages do I want the students to get about the curriculum, social behaviors, their future possibilities and a myriad of other topics?"

The above dialogue represents a specific example of implementing a second purpose of behavior. The interaction between a counselor and a young student can be similar to that of a consultant and members of an organization. The purpose of the initial exploration could be what options the members of the organization have and what are their choices. A school seeking to become a Glasser Quality School might start with a detailed discussion of their possible options followed by an attempt to define what they can realistically achieve.

Adding a Third Filter

The chart described above illustrates the working of the perceptual system. The lower level filter of the perceptual system, the total knowledge filter, represents labeling the information as it enters the perceptual system. A person seeing a chair simply acknowledges it as a chair. As the information proceeds further, the person then identifies the chair as comfortable, uncomfortable, valuable, worthless, etc. Of course, this process gets more complicated when the incoming information is not the image of a chair but rather the image of an idea, a person, an event, a complicated system, or a possible decision.

Can we insert a third filter that can be called a relationship filter? It appears that after labeling an object, another mental step is necessary before seeing it as valued, favorable, unfavorable, need satisfying, etc. It appears that the human mind sees a relationship. A chair is for sitting. It is not an idea, an event. It is simply a chair. When we see a person, we label the information, the perception in a neutral way and then label the individual as a valued, beloved person. The relationship filter sees the person as in some way connected to the viewer.

There is precedent for adding a relationship filter. In fact, it is not really an addition. It is a re-insertion. As early as 1981, Glasser described 10 orders of perception (pp. 89-115) with the sixth-order called "Control of Relationships" (Glasser, 1981). He states, "Relationships are the way things go together; they keep our world predictable and prevent it from being fragmented" (p. 105). He described a famous case of a brain-damaged victim of war, Zharetsky, who for many years was unable to perceive relationships. But after intensive neuropsychological therapy he was able to connect the perception of his mother with what he ought to do when he met her, i.e., kiss her. He perceived the relationship between himself and his mother and he understood how to demonstrate the important expression of the relationship of mother and son.

Because of the emphasis on relationships, (Glasser, 1998) it follows that it is at least useful to re-insert a filter that sees relationships prior to the valuing filter. Of course, this process often occurs instantaneously. Glasser continually developed his ideas and extended choice theory. It is in this spirit that I suggest that a third filter can be a helpful and a useful addition for completing our understanding of Glasser's brilliant legacy.

Glasser Quality School

In presenting the quality school to the public we have emphasized the centrality of relationships, especially teacher/student relationships, but also the interconnections among administrators and other educators as well as parents. This is the central feature of the Glasser Quality School. And yet, as of this writing in the United States there is but one school that identifies itself as a Glasser Quality School. As I stated in a keynote address at the International Conference of the William Glasser Institute in 2017 in Raleigh, North Carolina, we are promoting *features* not benefits. The central feature of the quality school is enhanced human relationships. However, benefits reside in the quality worlds of the consumers. These consumers, i.e., educators have told us in many ways what they want. I contend that anecdotal evidence indicates that they see a relationship between choice theory/reality therapy and helping students behave more appropriately. Educators put a positive value on skills that we teach. In other words in Institute training, they almost always role-play difficult children, resistant colleagues, or uncooperative parents. Moreover, national surveys conducted by professional organizations such as Phi Delta Kappa indicate that educators' top concerns revolve around student behavior, drug abuse, safety and security, as well as related issues. According of the research of Grace Chen (2019), among the major concerns of public school teachers are student bullying, apathy, disrespect, and absenteeism along with parental involvement. Media frequently report statistics that 10% of teachers feel endangered and in 2015-16 the media reported 5.8% of teachers were

assaulted. Obviously there are relationship issues involved. Improved relationships are at the heart of choice theory and reality therapy and yet, the benefit or the desire of teachers is often expressed as, "I would like to have skills for dealing with students more effectively."

If we distinguish between features and benefits and present CT/RT as *benefitting* educators by teaching them skills we will likely be able to increase the number of schools that identify themselves as "Glasser Quality Schools".

Simply put, the skills we teach help teachers create an atmosphere in which they can instruct more effectively. A school staff tells a potential instructor, "We want to have better control in our classrooms" a helpful response is, "That is exactly what we teach." An inappropriate response is a feature-focused response: "This is not a discipline program. We teach the central component of the quality school which is interpersonal relationships." In these interchanges teachers are expressing their desired benefits: their wants and the potential instructor focuses on a feature of the quality school. Hence, the result is often a missed opportunity for both the client system, i.e., the school and the potential instructor. When teachers learn specific skills for implementing the principles of choice theory/reality therapy, they have more control of their own behavior and better skills for classroom management. Teachers gain respect and cooperation by working together with their students on mutually satisfying educational goals. And most significantly the heart and soul of the quality school becomes manifest: healthy relationships and a safe environment leading to school success.

In answering the question, "Where do we go from here regarding CT/RT and the application of Lead Management to schools the Institute has two choices: In the words of Michael Mynatt, leadership expert, we can change the product or change the message. The above comments about quality school suggest that the institute change its message. In the future when messaging, stress benefits not features.

Conclusion

We are now in the third wave of CT/RT. The first wave was the development of reality therapy. The second was the development and extension of choice theory. The third wave might be called: "Where do we go from here?" in which the persons in the Institute confront even more controversial issues. In a future article, I will discuss several of them such as the use of medication, making peace with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, treating trauma, and dealing with 19 characteristics of "hype" as described in an unpublished paper by Donald Meichenbaum.

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Robert E. Wubbolding, EdD, LPCC, BCC, CTRTC

Biography:

Senior Faculty William Glasser International, Director of Training, William Glasser Institute (1988-2011), Professor Emeritus Xavier University

Title:

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