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From Transactional Analysis in education to Educational Transactional Analysis: a personal encounter

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Introduction

I became an educational transactional analyst almost by accident. TA was proving very effective in my counselling work and I had joined a psychotherapy training group – because that was the only TA training that was available in the UK nearly thirty years ago. I had no idea when I started that it was possible to actually qualify in the education field, but when I discovered that it was I could see how all my previous professional experience (social work and social work training, youth work, women’s groups, community development projects, adult education courses) could be framed in that way. Once I became a certified as an educational transactional analyst, however, things soon changed. The evident usefulness of TA in schools, particularly in behaviour support, and the network of people bringing the ideas into teaching meant that I was in demand even though I had never been a school teacher. But that didn’t matter – educators of all kinds were avid for ways of sharing TA in their work and were also realising what a difference it made to them personally in increasing their sense of self-worth and professional competence.

Background

In the UK at that time ‘TA in education’ was largely a question of applying TA concepts to situations in the classroom and in schools’ counselling, and very good it was too.

Transactional analysis in education began its journey with a primary focus on using a clinical approach in classrooms through small group work with students and teachers. It began to mature and gain focus and direction as educators began to adapt the theory to suit their specific needs (Emmertson, Newton, 2004).

There was a large network meeting for day-conferences and exchange of ideas, and publications were beginning to appear – ‘TA in Education’ edited by George Adams (1990) brought together some key articles from around the world, people in the education network were writing (collections of articles, edited by Evans & Temple, were published in 1997 and 1998) and Jean Illsley Clarke had just written ‘Growing up Again’, a book for parents and carers (Clarke, Dawson, 1989). Jean’s work was particularly important because she made a clear stand as an educator and she very much wanted to create a specific place for education in the TA world. In a recent retrospective (included in Barrow, Newton, 2016) she writes ‘Telling our stories is an important life-task because it helps us keep ourselves centred and our cultures grounded’ (p. 265). Jean speaks as a parent educator and as a TA practitioner, and in doing so tells a story of educational TA. I say ‘a’, not ‘the’ story because it is one of many, many, stories from around the world. You too will have your own stories – some personal, some shared – that tell of new expansions and fresh experiences.

Here I will tell you a bit of my story, and in particular how I see the shift from ‘TA in education’ to ‘educational TA’ – for me an important thread in a shared story. Of course, like all stories it is personal and reflects my individual context and experience – but the more we can share our stories (and I am delighted and honoured to be invited to do so here) the more we can build something that is part of being wholly human, the project of truly mutual educating and enabling lifelong learning, knowing that it will become something different in the future but/and cocreating that together.

A beginning story

An early incident that taught me a lot was a day training I was asked to do in a Pupil Referral Unit for students excluded from mainstream schools, with staff and students aged 15–16 together. I had been very nervous about this piece of work and was not at all confident about how I would manage the group process or at what level to pitch the input. Part of the unit’s contract with the students was that they could leave if they were finding the session too difficult (or tedious), and they could leave at the coffee and lunch breaks. After the introductions and check-in I was explaining the 3-cornered contract when one of the young men got up, came to the flipchart, took the pen and began adding to the diagram, talking passionately all the while and illustrating very clearly the contracts in his school, how they were distorted and how angry he was at teachers and managers

who didn't keep to the contract, without censure, when he and his peers were expected to do so. At this point I realised two things – TA, often through its 'visuals', will make an impact, no matter what the age or circumstances of the learner *and* doing TA is as important as knowing it. The day went on, with great energy and hope. I don't know where any of those young people are now... but I do know they all came back after the lunch break.

New metaphors

Encounters and connections are essential to building new structures though dialogue and discourse. Most educators are working in the public space and the discourse becomes public too. When people from different backgrounds and practicing in different contexts engage, as we learn from each other, some general unifying principles begin to emerge. So it was with TA educators. For example, Jean's work acted as an inspiration but her concern was mainly with parents and parent education. How would her ideas apply in schools, in colleges, even in later adult learning, formal and informal?

One of the challenges we often meet within the TA community is the lack of comprehension about what we do – the assumption that all TA educators must be 'working with kids' and applying TA as counselling or problem-solving. Another challenge, from schools and sometimes from colleagues, is the tendency to identify the 'problem' as lying in the behaviour or attitude of the learner, and the task as enabling the learner to change. We soon discovered as we talked that, while we would work one-to-one in behaviour support with troubled kids for instance, we were more concerned with enabling the *system* to change so that everyone benefits, in moving from using 'tools' in learning environments to looking at the whole picture, the underlying assumptions, beliefs and philosophies that create school and other learning cultures; and finding how TA could offer new understandings and ways forward.

This means making new metaphors – taking the well-known concepts that worked well as tools but needed to be 're-thought from the ground up' so as to avoid pathologising individuals or groups. And developing new descriptions. TA, in the current TAJ definition, is 'a theory of personality and human relations offering systematic methods for personal growth and professional development'. This almost, if not quite, neglects the *social, cultural and political aspects* of TA (Mazzetti, 2011). The EATA description of the education field addresses this by including 'the support of child, adolescent and adult learners within the family, the institution or society' and stating 'The aim is to further personal and professional growth, both scholastic and social.'

In our thinking, TA is also (my personal favourite definition) a practical psychology of learning. If learning is growth and development, what promotes that

and how can we use our vast array of models and knowledge to support and encourage it?

Towards a culture of well-being

How do we move from a culture of remedy to one of well-being? (Fregola, Lozelli, 2013) One way is by investigating ‘what is happening when things are going well?’

Over the last fifteen or more years this movement has been apparent in educational TA. Many TA concepts have been re-thought and reconsidered to look at their positive and developmental rather than their pathology-describing value – a reminder that when we encounter distress it is a *disruption* in the process of learning (Landaiche, 2016) not a fixed state.

James Allen, describing a range of practitioner styles among transactional analysts in his article ‘Concepts, competencies and interpretive communities’ (Allen, 2003), links transactional analysis educators with what he calls the transactional analysis positive psychology style. This approach “focuses on health, good feelings, hope, gratitude, flow, intimacy, mindfulness and repair of ruptures in communication” (p. 141). Rooted in such concepts as strokes, permissions and OK-ness, “we may”, he goes on to say “expect this to become a major trend in the future”.

So – TA offers a whole range of ways to look at what happens in learning, so that educators can develop their own options for working with whatever situation confronts them. The focus is often on emotional development, since healthy emotional development is a necessary prerequisite for cognitive learning. TA provides a model for the range of developmental understanding that is accessible enough for ordinary professional people, who can then use it in their own creative ways (Newton, 2003, p. 7). This can involve working with individuals, with groups, classes, teachers and support staff, whole organisations, all from the whole as well as the micro-perspective.

Reclaiming the Parent

In this section I share some examples of the ‘turning around’ of concepts that has become so much part of educational TA, an integration of the centrality of resourcefulness and resilience. I have chosen three, to connect with the fundamental TA ideas of egostates, script and OK-ness.

In 1989 Jean Illsley Clarke re-focused the cycles and stages of development model (Levin, 1982) as a guide to healthy parenting (Clarke, Dawson, 1989/1998). Levin’s work denotes stages of development from birth to adult-

hood, with developmental tasks to be completed and needs to be fulfilled for each stage. Originally it was a therapeutic tool, enabling clients to finish or re-do any uncompleted stages from childhood. Levin believes that as we become adults we do not stop developing, but continue to re-cycle the stages throughout life, first as adolescents, then as mature adults and as older people moving towards death. Clarke turned this into a parenting model where the focus becomes ‘what do babies, toddlers, children and adolescents need to create their own healthy script, and what do grown-ups need to discover or restore for themselves?’. This creative idea, brought (or restored) a positive emphasis to the Parent ego-state – which, with terms such as ‘critical’ and ‘controlling’, has so often been seen as negative. The need for, and meaning of, the Parent in providing care, support, space, encouragement and so on came to the fore. The ‘cycles’ model became a key to looking at what children (and teachers) needed in class – the chance to settle, explore, think, learn new skills and decide their own ideas and values. It also shed light on adult learning, how groups work and how people deal with new situations such as family or career changes (Napper, Newton, 2000).

Giles Barrow (2007), furthering this view of Parent, recalls Berne writing that he put Parent at the top of his three circle diagram intuitively, because this way of thinking, he believed, has come naturally in all times and nations. But what might happen, Barrow asks, if we put Child at the top? The visual impact confronts the perceived oppression of the power of the Parent and changes it to a supportive role that gives a base and enables the Child to develop. A startling idea, and one that often produces a gasp of recognition and amazement when presented to a TA audience.

Barrow went on to create the metaphor of the educator as cultivator; a positive parental role that, like a gardener, means taking care of the soil, allowing things to happen in their own time, and acting swiftly if something starts to go wrong (Barrow, 2011).

Sadly, this approach to learning is not fashionable at the moment (in the UK or USA at any rate). A very recent book by Alison Gopnik, *The Gardener and the Carpenter*, takes up a similar theme from the world of child development psychology (Gopnik, 2016). She likens modern parenting and, by extension, schooling to the craft of carpentry – aiming to produce a well-shaped and fit-for-purpose object; instead, she puts forward the skill of gardening, which lies in providing what is needful and then letting the plants (and people) grow and bloom in their own way.

Re-thinking script

Almost forty years ago, Fanita English suggested that ‘it is a fallacy to think of scripts as primarily negative. In fact scripts have many dimensions [...] They

offer essential structure for a growing child, even when some negative conditioning that may lead to harmful behavior or inappropriate expectations gets integrated into their personality' (English, 2007). In this quote, from an open letter in TAJ, Fanita was responding enthusiastically to another example of educational 'turning around', Agnès Le Guernic's social roles triangle, which takes fairy stories and folk tales as a guide. The drama triangle is an iconic TA concept, one that gives an instant insight into script, and a most useful tool for conflict resolution, family dynamics and anti-bullying programmes in schools and organisations. Other writers have suggested positive versions such as the winners triangle (Choy, 1990) that can help to bring about positive outcomes but the social roles triangle (Le Guernic, 2004) goes further in deepening our understanding of these dynamics. Starting with the idea of children being the heroes of their own stories and benefiting from help and guidance from others, Le Guernic's model names the healthy, normal developmental roles of initiator, giver/helper and hero/beneficiary. These can become distorted into Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim if the right supportive input is missing in childhood. Stories enable children to choose positive relationship models and move towards personal growth and autonomy (Barrow, Newton, 2016, p.36). A child can be the hero of his or her own story, benefiting from the help and direction given *by* others and learning to offer help and direction *to* others. Le Guernic presents a reading of fairy stories that contributes to the 'healthy, functional aspects of our personal reality' (2004, p. 216). Teaching the social roles triangle, I have found, goes beyond the winners' triangle in enabling people to 'normalise' their experience and understand the source of their disruption or distress.

Integrating OK-ness

An integrating model, variously known as *The Health System* or *The Resilience Cycle*, brings together some ideas for looking at what is happening when things are going right – emphasising health and promoting thriving (Newton, 2007). The intention is to illustrate the positive models that have been suggested by many TA practitioners to represent normal healthy growth, including concepts which emphasise strength and resourcefulness. The *Resilience Cycle* (an outer line) surrounds two inner cycles: the *Preventive Cycle* (preventing the formation of negative script patterns and supporting healthy development up to 6–7 years old) and the *Restorative Cycle* which supports change of any limiting patterns that have become established.

So what enables us to stay with the positive system and not go into our script? It helps to have had repair of disturbance modelled for us while we are small, so that we are able to draw on self-stroking and permissions. It also helps – at any age – to have healthy behaviours and healthy responses to our behaviour

modelled for us by parents, teachers and others. This demonstrates for us that we can choose to draw on our positive experiences and build up good memories to feed our response to new situations.

In the *Preventive Cycle* the aim is to enable small children to develop in as healthy a way as possible by offering the kind of ‘engaged care’ that promotes autonomy and OK-ness. The *Restorative Cycle* is based on a belief that damage can be repaired and developmental gaps filled; observable behaviours draw attention to a need, and this is when we may want to intervene (Newton, Napper, 2014).

Sometimes when I present this model I introduce it with an exercise based on childhood memories (Adler, 1988). Alfred Adler proposed that we collect and retain memories that are significant moments for us, and we filter out others. In TA language, of course, this is script formation. In the group, as one person tells us about a memory from early life, I ask the everyone to listen carefully and then say to the person what they have heard that indicates resourcefulness, autonomy, good thinking and so on. The memory may be linked to a negative script decision, for instance to avoid closeness or to adapt to others, and the story-teller is often surprised and moved by the very different meanings offered by the group members.

We know that people can experience a resonance that leads to change – through encountering someone who really ‘sees’ them. Someone who has difficulties can be offered new opportunities and another chance to thrive – often a liberating moment for everyone. This approach can be reinforced by teaching models such as the winners’ triangle, working styles, ‘straight’ transactions and authentic strokes.

Future directions

Educational TA continues to grow. I believe there are three key areas which will be of increasing importance in the future.

One is research – only by presenting evidence of the power of TA will we bring on board the education world. There are some fine examples already (Fregola, Lozzelli, 2013; Temple, 2004; Newton et al 2015) but we need more, and from a variety of learning contexts.

Another is networking. This is often frustrated by language differences. Great work is being done by educators all over Europe but unless we make sure that articles are translated and people connect with each other it is hard to get an overview and promote scientific dialogue. Setting up websites and education conferences as ways of meeting and talking is primary.

And finally we need to build more contacts in the world outside TA. As a keynote speaker at the EATA research conference in Rome said, we do great

work in TA but we are mostly talking to ourselves (Gelo, 2015). Publishing in journals other than those of the TA associations, and encouraging colleagues to make use of the resources of TAJ and IJTAR, is an important step.

Back to the PRU

And the most important issue – what difference could all this make to the young man who was inspired by the three cornered contract twenty years ago? Hopefully he began to see the parent figures in the room as supportive and respectful, he felt encouraged to make his own story, and his evident resilience and resourcefulness were upheld and enhanced. I just wish I knew!

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Od analizy transakcyjnej w edukacji do edukacyjnej analizy transakcyjnej: osobiste spotkanie

Streszczenie

W poniższym artykule autorka dokonuje retrospekcji własnych doświadczeń w odniesieniu do rozwoju założeń edukacyjnej analizy transakcyjnej. Opisuje analizę transakcyjną jako praktyczną psychologię uczenia się, rozumianego jako wzrost i rozwój, kładącą nacisk na rozwój emocjonalny, który warunkuje skuteczne uczenie się w aspekcie poznawczym. Podkreśla, że odeszliśmy w psychologii od nacisku na zaburzenia w kierunku dobrostanu (*well-being*) i nakreśla trzy obszary rozwoju analizy transakcyjnej: badania naukowe, networking i promocja AT wśród specjalistów z innych dziedzin nauki.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacyjna analiza transakcyjna, analiza transakcyjna w edukacji.