

Transactional Analysis

The primary objective of this essay is to analyse and explain the communication model of 'Transactional Analysis' (TA) and its application within teaching, learning and assessment practices. I will also propose the notion of the 'Bruised Ego State' within this model, as a potential method of changing the learners' mind-set through a dramatic shift in the ego response pattern.

- Analyse theories, principles and models of communication.

In 1958, the psychiatrist, Eric Berne, published a paper in the 'American Journal of Psychotherapy', titled; 'Transactional Analysis: A new and effective method of group therapy'. This paper examined human behaviour and proposed alternative models of psychoanalysis, that were first developed by Sigmund Freud. Berne's models differed from traditional routes of psychoanalysis, which were solely concerned with analysis through talking. Berne proposed, that alongside, or in place of verbal communication, any kind of non-verbal, social interaction could be used to determine a psychological state.

For example, acts of non-verbal communication can be identified as eye contact, a nod, a frown, a smile etc. In TA language, these acts are referred to as 'strokes', the moment two or more strokes are performed then a 'Transaction' has taken place.¹

To form an analysis of these transactional acts of communication; Berne proposed a categorisation system of new 'Ego States' (ES) within human personality. The purpose of these ES, were to define the role of the person; which in turn, would govern a suitable transactional response to facilitate their needs and to evolve the analytical discourse. Berne developed the term ES, which was based upon Freud's model of the human psyche, which compartmentalised human personality into three distinct components of behaviour.

Freud's model of the human psyche, was given three categories; the 'Id', 'Ego' and the 'Super Ego'. A brief summary of these are:

Id is developed from birth and it lies in our unconsciousness and governs our instinctive and primitive behaviour.

Ego is based within reality, where its primary concern is to control and shape the urges from the Id into acts that are socially acceptable.

Super Ego develops at childhood, where it is responsible for marking judgments based upon moral standards that have been acquired from parents and society.²

¹ **Transactional Analysis**

Disorders.org - Find Therapists, Counselors, and Treatment Centers. (2017). *Transactional Analysis*. [online] Available at: <http://www.disorders.org/relationships/transactional-analysis/> [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017].

² **Freud and the Id, Ego, and Superego**

Verywell. (2017). Freud and the Id, Ego, and Superego. [online] Available at: <https://www.verywell.com/the-id-ego-and-superego-2795951> [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017].

It was these components and their subsequent study by Paul Federn (1952), that led Berne to develop the three models of behavioural states that form the core of TA.³ These are the '**Child**', '**Parent**' and the '**Adult**' ES; they share similarities with Freud's models, yet their application and potential transactional values differ. The 'Child', like the 'Id' is formed from childhood; it can be referred to as childlike, but it is not childish in its behavioural characteristics; it is within this state that lies traits such as creativity, spontaneity and joy. The 'Parent', is an absorbing state, where behaviours and thoughts are mimicked from parental figures and other strong leading influences; any figure of authority, will potentially still influence and mould this state. Finally, the 'Adult' governs the present reality, it regulates the other two states in accordance with our experience and understanding of current social conventions and behavioural practices.⁴

Once acknowledged and understood, these ES can be easy to follow; where subsequent discussion and reflection can lead to their development. To put them into context, let us explore a scenario, to better understand their transactional governance. At some point, we may have all experienced anger, which may have led to an emotional outburst. During this moment of anger and emotion, the 'Child' would have been the guiding ES, however, both the 'Parent' and the 'Adult' ES would have been present in observing this emotional transaction. Once the emotion has settled the 'Parent' ES is activated and engages in a period of reflection, where the childlike behaviour is acknowledged and internally discussed.⁵

My interpretation of TA, is that it's a potentially complex model of analysis, which is based upon the recognition, of not only speech, but body language. In some scenarios, this communication model may have limitations, where perhaps certain ego states are unable to comprehend the nuances of today's diverse and challenging culture.

³ **WIDDOWSON, M. Transactional Analysis For Depression**

Widdowson, M. *Transactional analysis for depression*. 1st ed. Routledge.

⁴ **What Is an Ego State?**

Uktransactionalanalysis.co.uk. (2017). *What is an ego state?* [online]

Available at: <http://www.uktransactionalanalysis.co.uk/news-events/articles/item/2-what-is-an-ego-state> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2017].

⁵ **Transactional Analysis: Ego States Explained**

Counselling-directory.org.uk. (2017). *Transactional analysis: Ego states explained*. [online]

Available at: <http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/counsellor-articles/transactional-analysis-ego-states-explained> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2017].

- Explain ways in which theories, principles and models of communication can be applied to teaching, learning and assessment.

The overall theory of TA was primarily developed for use within psychotherapy and counselling; however, it has gained popularity and recognition within education, with a range of practitioners applying key TA concepts within their work.⁶ So how can this psycho-communicative theory be used within educational practices?

TA is a powerful communication model; that once understood, can be used to analyse and observe the social interactions within an educational environment. Recognising the ES and how to apply their correct transactional response, is a key feature, which can be invaluable in classroom social dynamics. To guide this, Berne formulated a set of communication rules, which provides a variety of transactional paths that ES engage in. Any transaction, can be typically categorised as 'Complementary', 'Crossed' or 'Ulterior'.⁷ Let us examine some examples of these categories and explore how they govern and shape communication.

Complementary Transactions:

This form of transaction could potentially carry on indefinitely, where the predicted response from the other ES is given and a repetitive response cycle is initiated. Complementary Transactions take the following forms: Adult-Adult, Parent-Parent and Child-Child. However, if a 'Parent' ES addresses a 'Child' ES, the transactions could still be complementary via an argumentative discourse, in which the TA would still be evident. Here is a scenario based upon an actual classroom transaction: Lecturer - 'Parent ES' (P). Student - 'Child ES' (C).

P: "Please stop using your mobile phone in class and put it away"

C: "No! why should I?"

P: "Because it's one of our class rules"

C: "I don't care, it's a stupid rule!"

P: "I've asked you to put your phone away"

C: "You're always picking on me, 'Michael's' still using his phone"

P: "I'm not asking 'Michael', I'm asking you"

Crossed Transactions:

If an opening transaction is misinterpreted, it may activate an inappropriate ES, resulting in an unexpected response. If this occurs, the lines of communication between the two parties will become crossed; possibly resulting in the transaction ending. A reflection point, or a shift would be required to establish and realign the ego states to better understand each other. An example could be, that if a tutor in a 'Adult' ES addresses a student in an 'Adult' ES with a criticism, the line of transaction maybe misinterpreted, where the student adopts a 'Child' ES believing they are responding to the tutor in a 'Parent' ES.

⁶ **ANON. Beyond Behaviour**

Anon, (2017). Beyond Behaviour. [online]

Available at: <https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/Beyond-behaviour-Giles-Barrow.pdf> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2017].

⁷ **Ego States and Neural Networks**

www.Internet-of-the-Mind.com. (2017). *Ego States and Neural Networks*. [online]

Available at: http://www.internet-of-the-mind.com/ego_states.html [Accessed 12 Oct. 2017].

Ulterior Transactions:

These forms of transactions can be complex in their understanding and application; their main difference from the other two transactional models, is that they can potentially involve two or more ES operating during any one transaction. During such transactions only one ES is controlling the speech centre (body), yet another ES, potentially two are operating in the subconscious; which have a bearing on the controlling ES. Here is an example, which is based upon a lecturer/student transaction. During a constructive critique, advice was given to the student, which was received negatively. The transaction was 'Complementary', yet upon reinforcement of the advice, the ES of the student changed. As opposed to an argumentative response, a pacifying transaction was given; upon reflection, it was understood that this model evolved into an 'Ulterior Transaction', where the student did not mean what they said.

To conclude, a breakdown of how the TA communication model and its integration into teaching, learning and assessment practices is as follows:

Lesson Planning (Behaviour)

When structuring a lesson plan, knowing the learners and the possible ES that they may adopt, will help guide and shape the structure. This will enable you to address and reach all learner's as you can change your ES to respond to theirs.

Objectives

Setting out clear objectives is a prerequisite, in which utilising the Higher Order structural language in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy, will strengthen the overall development. However, if you adopt a 'Parent' ES and deliver the objectives as commands, the receiving ES of the learner's may not be as acquiescent.

Differentiation

At the planning stage, differentiation is to be addressed through ensuring that the content and mode of delivery will address all ES. This will be looked at organically, as the nature of the learners' psychology will change, depending on environmental circumstances and other behavioural influences.

Minimum Core

Some learners, may display negative behaviour, when they are aware that Maths & English are part of the lesson. Their ES may resort to 'Child', in which a rebellious approach could be taken; if this occurs, then adopting the same ES would be the best course of action, as to align yourself with their views. The challenge would be to evolve their ES and get them to approach the task from a new mind-set.

Readability & Inclusive Language

The impact of TA on language and readability structure may not be obvious, but it is evident; even if the correct Higher Order verbs are in place, the overall structure and stance could still be interpreted by the learners as being too commanding. Terms like 'You must...' or 'There needs to be...' could trigger a 'Child' ES to respond rather than an 'Adult'.

Listening Skills and Question & Answering Techniques

During a tutorial for example, being aware of the learners current ES would be an advantage, as this will enable you to form a critique that is not received negatively. Even if this is structured as a 'praise sandwich' the learner may only pick up upon the negative aspect and leave with that. Forming a bank of opening questions, which could be used to analyse the learners ES, would enable a better ego response approach, to then ensure the discourse is not disrupted.

To summarise, TA can be applied to teaching, learning and assessment through its integration into our language and communication toolkit. It will enable educators to assess their thinking, feelings and behaviour, enabling them to respond rather than react⁸ to the complex social dynamics in today's classroom.

- The 'Bruised Ego State'; facilitating a dramatic shift in mind-set, through a sympathetic response to an intentional ES disruption.

This notion, is in response to a recognised 'Complementary Transaction' that occurred between myself and a student, where both of us adopted the perceived 'Parent' and 'Child' ES roles. The discourse was stuck in a loop, of behavioural questioning and argumentative answering; where no parties were satisfied with the others transactional response. To counter another similar transaction, I formulated the idea of the 'Bruised Ego State', which in theory, would elicit an ES role reversal.

A couple of days later, during a practical session, the same student was exhibiting similar behavioural traits as before, which could have led to another argumentative transaction. I realised that this was an opportunity to test my notion; I considered that if I managed to dramatically disrupt my ES from 'Parent' to 'Child', the same paradigm shift in the student's ES could occur.

My 'Parent' ES, was the primary controller through the initial transactions, yet my 'Child' ES was also in play. When the first loop occurred, I deliberately sabotaged my advice, thus allowing the student to witness a 'Bruised Ego State'. The student reflected what had happened, in which their ES shifted to 'Adult' in an attempt to correct me of my perceived error. This tactic proved successful, where through the understanding and use of the 'Ulterior Transaction' model, I was able to foster a different communicative approach; thus, evidencing the effective application of 'Transactional Analysis' within my teaching practice.

⁸ **TOMLINSON, I. Why All Teachers Should Learn Transactional Analysis**

Tomlinson, I. (2017). *Why All Teachers Should Learn Transactional Analysis*. [online]

Available at: <https://manchesterpsychotherapy.co.uk/why-all-teachers-should-learn-transactional-analysis/> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2017].