

INTRODUCING A META-METAPHOR FOR DEVELOPMENTAL TA

This article presents, for the first time, some thoughts and ideas about the nature of developmental TA. I think that they are intriguing and I welcome other's views about them.

BACKGROUND

I have been a member of a training group for the past couple of years. The group comprises practitioners working in the field of education and specifically behaviour support work. A recurring theme in our discussions has been to positively re-frame core TA concepts. In other words, as part of our work we routinely set about using TA ideas to account for individual/organisational potential, promote growth and, importantly, to make TA widely accessible.

An integral dimension of our approach has been to consider how best TA ideas can be applied in non-problem-focussed ways. In other words, to seek out means of 'mainstreaming' TA as an approach for schools to use in developing policy and practice. This maybe quite different from other, more familiar applications of TA. For example, common practice has been to use TA concepts in interacting with children and families identified as vulnerable. Whilst the work of the group includes this type of application, making TA a tool accessible to all remains the priority. In practice, this has led to a range of activities involving directly teaching TA to whole class groups, training staff teams in schools and nurseries and running general parent workshops based on TA.

Much of the theoretical basis for the work of the group has centred on a diverse range of authors; Acey Choy, Petruska Clarkson, Jean Illsley Clarke, Susannah Temple, Trudi Newton, Julie Hay and Rosemary Napper. How the work of these players is incorporated into an emerging framework is discussed later.

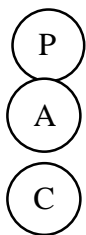
The EGO-STATE METAPHOR: LAST TABOO?

At different points in the history of TA key re-frames have been established. At each point, a core TA idea has been re-energised and understood with closer attendance on growth and development. For example, Choy's antidote to Karpman's Drama Triangle, Clarkson's extension of Kahler's Driver theory and Illsley Clarke's adaptation of Levin's Cycle of Development. At each point, a subtle and distinct shift has occurred that re-phrases the core concept in a way that more explicitly promotes growth.

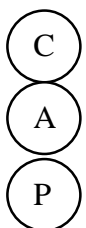
Much has been written on the ego-state model. It remains the core concept in TA and generates tremendous interest and debate. The most recent collection of ideas on ego-state theory re-states both its importance and multi-faceted nature (Sills, 2003). However, even this most contemporary commentary focus remains almost solely on the world of the clinician. Only Temple's work on ego-states represents what is arguably the most helpful interpretation for educators, Temple (1999).

A year ago (October 2002) our group made a discovery that made a profound impact on our thinking. For us the discovery crystallised precisely our beliefs and intentions.

Take the familiar P-A-C model:

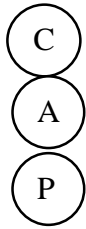


Now, how do you respond when we simply reverse Parent and Child?



Berne (and Steiner) reminds us that the ego-state model is a metaphor, (Steiner, 2003). And it is an ambiguous one. The original model was borne out of Berne's work with patients and

this emphasis has been reflected in the application by thousands of clinicians since the '50s and '60s. It has served them well and continues to stand scrutiny. It remains a legitimate and highly relevant metaphor for understanding key aspects of the clinical process and indicates the type of dynamics that the clinician seeks to resolve when working alongside the client. However, it is not quite as powerful a metaphor for articulating the purpose and process of developmental TA.



By re-ordering ego-states the intention of developmental TA becomes clearer. Instead of existing under the implicit repression of the Parent ego-state, the Child is regarded as at the 'growing edge', the arena through which individuals, groups and organisations will reach further potential. This growth is underpinned by Adult reality checking and the security of healthy Parent beliefs and values.

Our emphasis in sharing TA universally is about using core concepts for further creativity and development, as opposed to tools for diagnosing failure and remediation. In practical terms, it is more appropriate to encourage insights, creativity and personal development via C-A-P with a class of 30 nine-year-olds, than have them reflect on the subdued role of the Child ego-state indicated in P-A-C.

CREATING A META-METAPHOR FOR DEVELOPMENTAL TA: KEY CONCEPTS

Having identified an alternative ego-state model, it is also possible to introduce additional concepts to make a more comprehensive picture of what we believe our work as TA practitioners is about, see fig. 1.

1. A critically successful technique in promoting growth is the use of bullseye transactions. This lesser-known type of transaction was first identified by Berne but very much neglected, despite his reckoning that they can often be highly

effective. Once again, this idea has been revisited recently and revitalised by Tina Hamilton-Jones in her work with families, (1999).

2. In informing the development of bulls-eye transactions we can draw from some of the re-framed core concepts referred to earlier. For example, Illsley Clarke's developmental affirmations (1989), which is indicated by Levin's spiral in Diagram 1. Choy's Winner's Triangle, (1990) is also featured, as are the quadrants for Windows on the World and the use of strokes. Other ideas that may inform generating bulls-eye transactions might include imago theory (shown in the diagram) and Clarkson's positive attributes for driver behaviour.
3. All of our work is framed within a contract, based on English's 3-cornered model, our work explicitly accounts for the context in which the work takes place.
4. Finally, how can we have a metaphor for developmental TA without acknowledging the importance of Physis, the life-force that is integral to feeding the aspirations at personal, group or organisational levels. So it is that physis is explicitly identified and its line runs through all three ego-states. The reason for this is that whilst it is realised by the Child through aspirations, it is framed through Adult thinking and is supported by the security of the Parent.

AND FINALLY

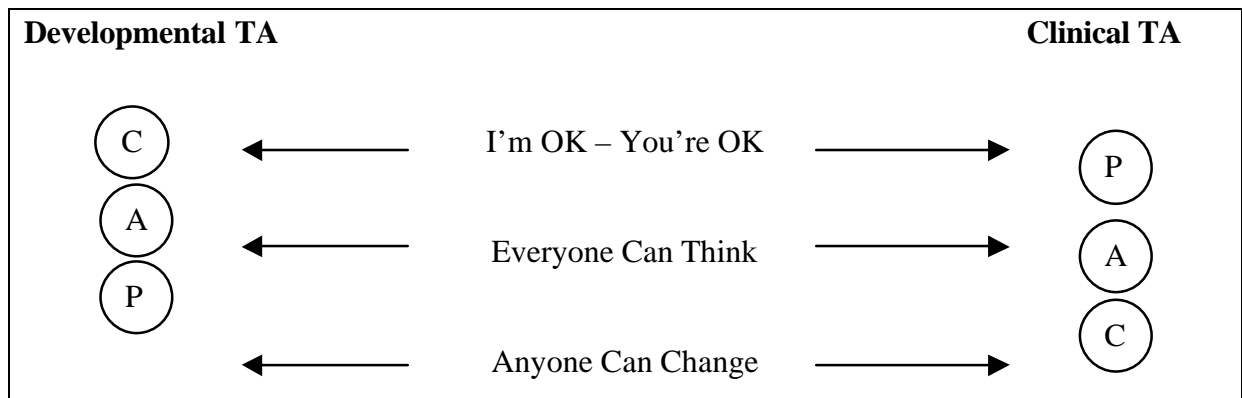
Without any question, this is a promotional model for working with others using TA. It is, unashamedly, a hopeful model. At its boldest, the ideas articulate what our group anticipate might become a distinct movement in TA. It reckons on individuals:

- Having a history of success
- Being essentially well motivated
- Capable of articulating what they want to become.

In these respects, there is a close connection with the three guiding TA principles:

- I'm OK – You're OK
- Everyone Can Think
- Anyone Can Change.

Perhaps to finish, I can offer a most recent observation. If we take these three principles and insert them alongside both the developmental and clinical ego-state models, see what happens:



I would welcome any comments, observations on any of the aspects covered here. Feel free to e-mail: giles.barrow@virgin.net or give me a call on 020 8286 2439.

And thanks for taking part.

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