

**Who do we think we are?
Features of Developmental TA: A Discussion Paper**

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Physis is the most important concept in developmental transactional analysis. Creating insights, encouraging strengths and promoting growth are the key tenets of our work and are essential in giving rise to physis. As practitioners in the developmental field our objective is to promote physis for individuals within community, and through community. This paper sets out what can best be termed as features that underpin our work. They are our big rocks – the foundations of developmental practice.

The need for this paper – a declaration about the nature of developmental TA, is necessary for at least two reasons. First, as practitioners we want to be heard. We believe that within the TA community the centrality of physis as a creative, cohering and life-affirming energy is much underplayed. Second, within the wider contemporary context of psycho-social and cultural movements, the limitations of pathological theory and practice have become clear. We believe that developmental TA speaks to the present and future societies in which we live and work.

We have been in a process of identifying who we think we are as transactional analysts. This paper is an invitation for readers into reflection, provocation and action. Who do you think *you* are?

The Big Rocks: Distinctive Features of DTA

- **Multi-levelled contracting is a norm; integration of work within the wider environment is an overt dimension of DTA intervention.** When DTA practitioners contract there is a clear reference to the systemic implications of intervention.
- **Awareness of a political dimension of intervention.** Implicit in the commitment to multi-levelled contracting is the belief in community and social change. This is fundamental to DTA and connects with the idea of homonomy, in which individual potential is only truly realised in conjunction with growth in the wider society. DTA offers an approach that seeks equity in terms of the relationship of power between practitioner and client.
- **Emphasis on healthy growth and development.** Eric Berne maintained that TA was comparable to the features of the Model T Ford; 'inexpensive, reliable and safe enough to carry the average family to health and happiness'. This aim is echoed in the more recent movement advocating positive psychological theory. In many respects DTA provides a body of theory and practice that makes the key connection between the TA community and the positive psychology professional community;
Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage; it also is the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it is also building what is right. Psychology is not just about illness or health; it is about work, education, insight, love, growth and play' (Seligman, in Snyder & Lopez 2005)
- **Co-creativity is regarded as a fundamental influence on DTA theory and practice.** Co-creativity is the process whereby we co-create meaning, new insights and opportunities for healthy change. DTA does not operate in isolation. Nor can change be solely due to the input of a TA practitioner; development occurs through the process of being in relationship with clients
- **Universality: there is a priority on mainstreaming TA ideas within a public domain.** In DTA practitioners frequently work with individuals and groups in mainstream contexts, for example the workplace, schools, public services and business. These arenas typically reflect the diversity of communities and society at large.
- **Emphasis on prevention and promotion before remediation and reparation.** There is a tendency to pursue early intervention through pre-emptive input. DTA practitioners recognise that frequently they are engaged initially to resolve a current difficulty, dilemma or challenge. However, even where this is the case, there is recognition that DTA is often applied in situations where such difficulties have not yet emerged or where the client wants to build on effective practice.

People live in communities. They have strengths and resources. For the most part they are healthy and want the best for themselves and others. Whilst developmental transactional analysis has its roots in mainstream psychotherapy, its ambitions extend to a more radical political vision of human relations.

Reference:

Snyder, C.R.
& Lopez, J. (ed) **Handbook of Positive Psychology**, OUP, (2005)