

## **The Brilliance of Berne and the Breadth of TA:- exploring the culture and context of the setting**

Based on input from and discussion with Rosemary Napper TSTA (O&E&C) at a EATA colloquium held in Florence , Italy ,May 2010

Culture is a topic addressed by Berne in his not-so-easy to read book about structures and dynamics of organisations and groups. Berne's model of culture had traditionally been somewhat under-rated within TA and certainly outside of transactional analysis. Pearl Drego drew attention to this model in articles for the TAJ (1983, 1996) and developed a diagram to illuminate Berne's model of culture as an introject into the Parent ego state (slide number 2). Napper(2010) has illuminated this further in describing culture as DNA which is transgenerationally transmitted (see also the work of Gloria Noriega 2010). The cultures the client grew up within, and those which are their current setting - family culture, workplace culture - are significant in shaping their script. This is also so for the TA practitioner.

Transactional Analysis itself has a culture, and in different countries and regions there are various sub cultures which have developed. This shapes the context in which transactional analysis is offered, as well as influencing script of the practitioner. The cultural history of TA itself can be seen to be shaped by the setting and context of its times: for example, amongst other factors, its origins in the postwar California; the setting up of an international organisation with 12 US citizens and one Canadian; its radical shift from its psychoanalytic roots with accessible theories and language; its early evolution in the 1960s when behaviourism was first popular; and its initial focus on clinical practice, despite Berne's writings about organisations and groups and the notion that TA101s were to educate and so empower clients with psychological maps. At conferences, many transactional analysts, from Moiso to myself, have wondered whether there is a 'don't belong' at the character level of transactional analysis which is manifest at the dynamic level as rebelliousness with regard to authority, and at the technics level in the common splitting of TA organisations. Perhaps as a result TA has not taken its place as a major force in psychology. However within the theory and practice of TA there is a spanning from the cognitive-behavioural to psychoanalytic spectrum. Does this reflect a certain grandiosity in the character of the TA culture?

And clients inevitably bring their own cultural expectations to whatever type of practitioner they select. Denton Roberts suggested that we belong to many cultures, which sometimes have different or even clashing elements: the family culture, ethnic and religious cultures; a gender culture, a regional culture, a national culture - and I would suggest we also inhabit and are influenced by organisational cultures from school to workplace, and professional cultures, throughout our lives. In each of these different cultures will be messages: attributions, permissions, driver demands and injunctions - including about seeking paid support from a professional other. These messages will influence the individual in all aspects of life.

Clients may know that they wish to seek a transactional analysis practitioner, or they may not know or even care about the approach the practitioner uses - they only know they want support from an external other. And the type of practitioner they seek may be determined by who refers them - whether its informally through peers and 'I've heard that there is someone who....' or more formally by another type of professional

such as a doctor or a lawyer. And these referral agents will also be influenced by their setting and its culture. Take for example the owner of a small business who is feeling stressed by the demands on the business exceeding what can be supplied due to the imminent move of one employee who has yet to be replaced, and who at the same time has a wife expecting their first child, and who was himself adopted at birth.

How the referrer perceives the context of this person will influence to whom they refer this business owner and the setting that then becomes established. Will they refer the person to an organisational development consultant? To a stress management workshop? To a coach? - and if so what type of coach - business coaching? Leadership coaching? Personal coaching? Or to a parent educator? A couples counsellor? A psychotherapist? The context of the referrer is serendipitous! All these different practitioners might provide good value. They are not mutually exclusive. Some might be more fit for purpose at different times - and unless the referring party really understands all these different ways of working AND the particular issue embedded in the clients request for support, then the result may be the wrong practitioner setting although the time is right!

Although Berne wrote both about clinical psychotherapy and the organisational systems of mental health settings, and set up education for clients of all types with the TA101s, it was not until the 1980s that the four fields of qualifications of TA became established and adopted by the professional standards committees of the ITAA and EATA. At first there were two fields - clinical and special fields - and then three and then four fields of qualification became formalised in TA's exam structures (which is part of the 'technics' of TA culture): organisations, education, counselling and psychotherapy. Interestingly UNAT, the TA association of Brazil, which has stayed separate from EATA and T&CC, has developed another field: jurisprudence.

These four fields in EATA have overlap and difference, and provide different contexts for the client, different practitioner frames of reference, and thus work with different contracts with different types of focus. Inevitably these different fields have begun to evolve their own concepts within TA and use differing ideas from outside of TA. I suggest in Slide number 3 that there is no overlap between the realm of organisational TA and that of TA psychotherapy. By this I mean to suggest that a practitioner in one field has no overlapping practice with the other - and that it might even be dangerous to meddle in another's field.

However in the same slide, and in slide 4 and 8 I am suggesting that there may be overlap between other fields of practice, although the frame of reference and the contract is fundamentally different. For example the TA counselling field can include personal coaching, and team facilitation in order to support individuals dealing with present issues, whilst the organisational field provides leadership and executive coaching and team coaching in order to provide organisational change - and might also provide mentoring and training to this end which are also educational in their intent. And although the essence of psychotherapy is to heal the past in the present, it may be that at times within the psychotherapy there is also counselling work resolving issues of the present and educational work in learning new behaviours and attitudes.

The 2007 winner of the Eric Berne Memorial Award for theory, Bernd Schmid, won this for conceptualising roles in a TA framework, and this has added an important framework for use in all four fields, and for us to think about our 'essence and edges'

as practitioners. He suggests that from conception onwards we are given and take on roles in relation to others. He defines a role as a coherent pattern with five features (i) attitudes and thoughts (ii) feelings or emotions (iii) actions or behaviour, (iv) perspective on reality and (v) relationships. He considers that we have roles in 2 or 3 realms (see slide 5): (1) private roles such as son or daughter, mother or father or childless, spouse, friend and so on (2) professional roles which often have particular expertise - not to be confused with job titles - such as drugs counsellor, couples counsellor, adult educator, primary school teacher, psychoanalyst, spiritual guide, psychiatrist, and so on and (3) some of us will also hold organisational roles where we represent a system such as leader, trade union representative, TA examiner and so on.

We '*inhabit*' roles, as we wear clothes - perhaps unthinkingly or perhaps with great care which becomes out of awareness as the hours pass. We might literally change clothes as we change roles - coming home and taking off the suit, or changing from leisure clothes to going to a party. Roles become part of our psychological meaning making and provide different opportunities to express ourselves. Many difficulties that arise in life are perhaps due to issues regarding role boundaries, which are psychologically held and may not be in awareness. For example there is *exclusion* of one world with a 'workaholic' (excluding the private world), or with the politician who only seems to spend time at social parties (excluding the professional and the organisational world). There is *contamination* of the professional world by the private world when we leave work early in order to collect our children from kindergarten, or when the psychotherapist and a client have a sexual affair. And there is *confusion* of roles when the organisational consultant brings his spiritual advisor onto the consultancy team, or when the TA trainer who is also qualified as a psychotherapist considers the pathology of the learners in her training group and sees conflict as a personality issue rather than as a group phenomenon.

Thus it is very important that as transactional analysts we become aware of the essence and edges of the different fields of TA and the boundaries of our own particular role. It is from this perspective that we make a contract with our client (see slide 8) or take the time to consider the nature of the key issue behind what is being presented and refer our client to a different type of practitioner who works in a different setting with a different context and a different contractual focus. Perhaps part of the character of the culture of transactional analysis itself is a grandiosity and this can manifest at the individual level as 'I can do any and every thing'.

Some transactional analysts have taken the care to train and certify in more than one field, and they usually are very aware of the different frames of reference of the different fields (slide 9) as these shape the provision of a different setting for seeing clients plus they hold a differing awareness and theory about the different contexts - and this results in a different contract with the practitioner able to easily articulate the boundaries of their particular role in relation to the specific contract. The professional level of a contract includes only clarifying the 'what' (or focus of the work) and the 'how' or methods which will or won't be used, but also the 'who' ie the role/s of the client and the role of the practitioner with regard to this piece of work. The psychological implications of these three aspects are often what it is most important to discuss in order to create a contract which provides permission and protection for all parties to be potent ie to maximise their potential.

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