

Whose field is it anyway?

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Discussions between ourselves and with qualified TA trainers in the Counselling field, about the type of work undertaken by Transactional Analysts with this specialisation, and what the public perception of counselling is in the United Kingdom, prompted us to write this article.

We will examine the perceived meanings of *counselling* in two contexts, Transactional Analysis (EATA), and the general understanding of the term in the United Kingdom.

Andrew Bates currently chairs the counselling committee within the ITA. There are two general purposes this committee is required to fulfil. Firstly, to promote Transactional Analysis Counselling alongside other modalities such as Psychodynamic and Person Centred. Secondly to ensure that therapeutic counsellors who use TA as their approach can be recognised and registered at the time of statutory registration.

Rosemary Napper is a TA trainer based in Oxford. She is a TSTA in both Educational and Organisational fields. She is also a BACP accredited counsellor and has worked as tutor and external examiner for a number of counselling programmes in England, including TA based courses. With regard to transactional analysis her approach is that TA is a model to use for the benefit of all the people we work with, through informing the practitioner about their own process and also to assess what might be going on in the work context in order to then plan appropriate interventions. It follows therefore that she thinks **being** a Transactional Analyst is central to working with TA and so primary to one's chosen field of specialisation.

People who carry out organisational and/or educational work are usually trained and qualified in these ways of working prior to learning and qualifying in TA as an additional qualification. This was the original situation for all people training in any application of Transactional Analysis in the early days – however in the last couple of decades in the UK it has become an initial training route for psychotherapists to learn their profession, rather than an additional approach.

In the United Kingdom the majority of Transactional Analysts are psychotherapists. Many consider themselves to primarily be clinicians, with Transactional Analysis as being a principal model they use to provide understanding and methodology for their work.

The prompt for Andrew to reflect further on the counselling field was a workshop led by Rosemary at the ITA conference in York (2007) along with one of her trainees who is a Certified Transactional Analyst in the Psychotherapy field. The outcome of the workshop suggested that if Psychotherapists are working with clients who present workplace issues then it enhances their potency to have a good understanding of a TA perspective on organisations – Berne put together a fascinating book on this topic and

subsequently some Transactional Analysts have dedicated themselves to this arena (including one of this year's Berne memorial award winners).

The workshop's central theme was a psychotherapy client whose distress was largely fuelled by difficulties at work. The workshop participants provided the resource to enable the sculpting of the systems into which this client fell. These systems included the client's immediate working environment, the wider organisation in which he was employed, the cultural setting and his personal relationships made up of family and partner. By using techniques drawn from Constellations and Psychodrama these different systems were brought to life, giving each of them a voice, expressing their roles, attitudes and relationships to the client. It became apparent during the course of the work that in all probability the underlying pathologies contributing to the client's distress were not solely originating from the *self*, but also from the organisation (or systems) in which he was enmeshed. The organisational system's script and the individual script interlocked and it is easy for a psychotherapist to misinterpret some of the organisational issues as stemming from the client (and likewise an organisational consultant might overlook the impact of an individual's pathology in impacting on the organisational system). This obviously has a quite profound effect on the direction of any psychotherapy, impacting on the assessment of the individual, diagnosis, treatment planning and contracting.

At the end of session feedback, Andrew found himself starting re-evaluate the relationship between himself as a psychotherapist and himself as a Transactional Analysts. Asking the question, **which comes first?**

After further discussion between ourselves, we both wanted to write this article and clarify what each of the four fields are about, and how they relate to each other. Below is a summary of the description from the EATA handbook plus our contemporary understanding of what is involved in each of these fields.

The Psychotherapy field is for trainees who aim to facilitate the client's capacity for self-actualisation, healing and change. The psychotherapeutic process enables the client to recognise and change archaic, self-limiting patterns – 'to deal with the pain of the past in the present so that they are free to live their lives in the future'.

The aim is for clients to understand themselves and their relationships and create options to live their lives in an aware, creative and spontaneous way. In contemporary TA relational thinking along with findings from neuroscience the medical model of 'cure' is not so widely used, and instead we might talk of healing coming about through the psychotherapeutic relationship, due to a re-patterning of neural pathways.

The Educational field specialisation is for people who work in the area of learning and study in pre-school, school and university contexts. It is also concerned with the support of child, adolescent and adult learners within the family, the institution and society. The work may be applied to the development of teaching teams and institutions. The aim is to further personal and professional growth, both scholastic and social.

The Organisational field is for practitioners who work in or for organisations, taking into account organisational frames of reference and contexts as well as organisational development. The work is aimed at the development, growth and increased effectiveness of people working within organisations.....the client is the organisation itself, not an individual or team who happens to operate in an organisational context.....the link with the development of the organisation as a whole must be visible....to increase the autonomy of organisations – their effectiveness, durability and capacity for development.

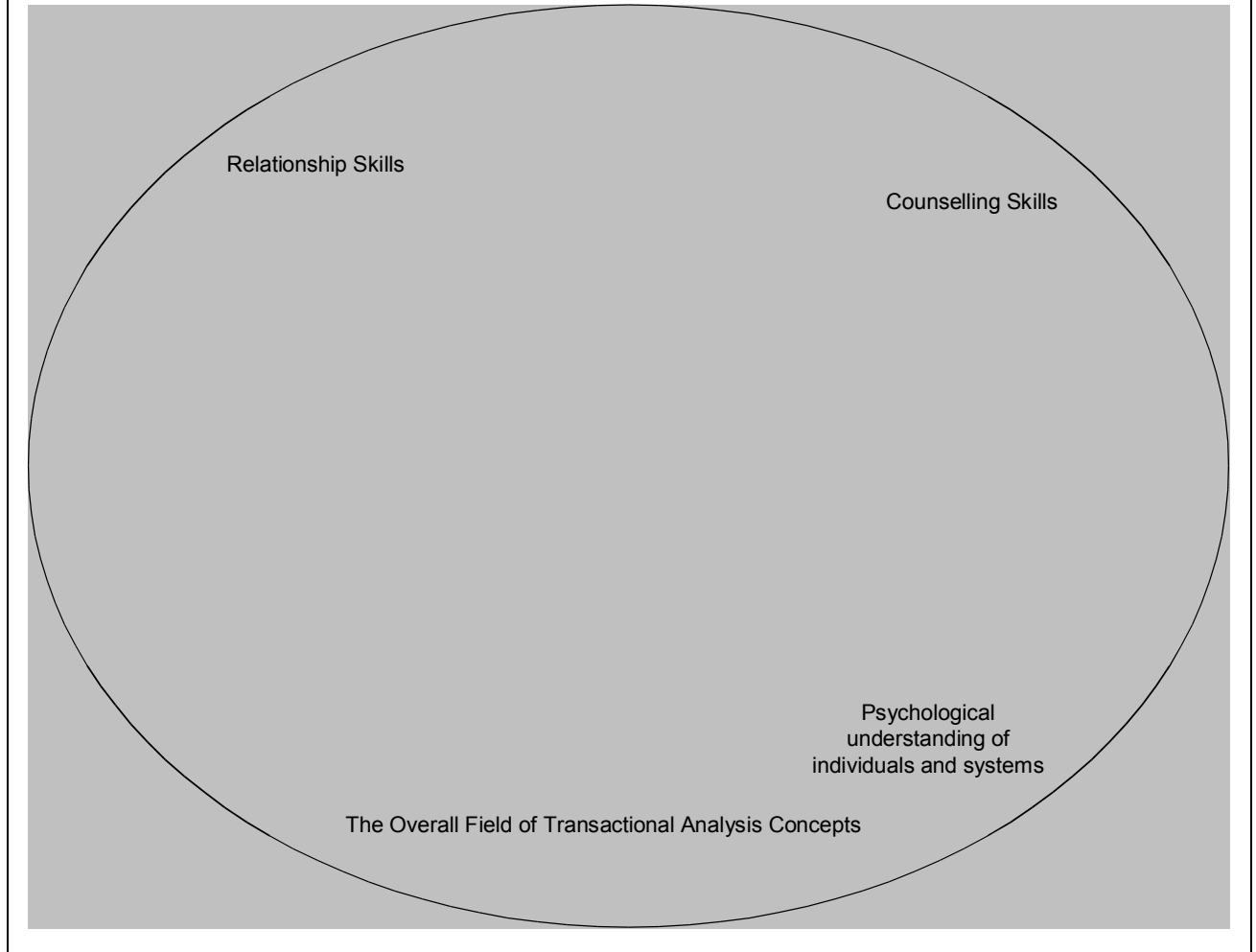
The Counselling field of application is chosen by those trainees who work in the socio-psychological and cultural fields of practice. The counselling process is a contractual one that enables the clients or client systems to develop awareness, options and skills for problem management and personal development in daily life through the enhancement of their strengths, resources and functioning. Its aim is to increase autonomy in relation to their social, professional and cultural environment.

There follows some examples according to the EATA handbook. *Amongst others of the counselling field are: social welfare, health care, pastoral work, prevention, mediation, process facilitation, multicultural work and humanitarian activities.*

Note that within TA there is only one EATA qualified TA counsellor and no TA Counselling PTSTA's or TSTA's at present. Through supervision with a Swiss PTSTA in the Counselling field Rosemary identified that the working definition used by practitioners on the continent is 'moving on' through enhancing resources in everyday life and that people are qualified as TA counsellors working in a vast range of settings such as:

- Mental health day and residential centres, where TA thinking is applied to daily life skills
- Insurance agents, bankers and lawyers who are involved in advising clients
- Social workers not only using TA to inform their client contact but also to work together as teams
- Rehabilitation work with the homeless and also addictions
- Families through parenting advice and coaching
- Life coaching and career development work

Different Orientations of the Four Fields of TA



As can be seen from the diagram above, Education and Counselling are the fields with the greatest overlap with both Psychotherapy and also Organisations – that is they take place in both. One way of thinking about these two central fields is that they provide both formal intentional learning (E) – that is learning which is specifically contracted for – and informal learning (C) that is where something else is the contract focus (support, guidance, rehabilitation, advice and so on) and incidental learning takes place in the process.

The main difference between how TA sees counselling, and how it is perceived in more general terms in the UK is in the scope of the work. Traditionally in this country counselling is seen as something akin to psychotherapy – and indeed in recent times practitioners qualified in counselling refer to themselves as practising therapeutic counselling (and this is becoming increasingly important as a signal to the general public now that organisations such as Lighter Life refer to their advice and support workers as ‘counsellors’ - which is what they could become with the EATA definition of TA counselling if willing to add several years TA training, practice and supervision

to their 11 day training programme). The length and depth of counselling training in Britain depends upon the modality practiced, although in general in Britain the Counsellor's BACP accreditation requirements are for 3 years part time training and no requirement for personal therapy, and Psychotherapists UKCP requirements are for four years part time training and more application hours with a requirement for own therapy. In reality of course there are many therapeutic counsellors who effectively and safely work to profound levels with their clients, including many who are in training or are qualified in other fields of TA (including Rosemary who is accredited by BACP and her certificate saying that she is a counsellor and psychotherapist). Amongst trainees and indeed qualified practitioners within TA in this country, counselling is often seen as a lesser training, or a stepping stone to becoming a psychotherapist. Perhaps in the UK only the overlap between counselling and psychotherapy is considered, and not the broader interventions used elsewhere. Note that this is not necessarily so for other modalities – Rosemary taught for a number of years on a psychodynamic programme and within this frame it is usual for people to use the terms counsellor and psychotherapist interchangeably, and practitioners are not linked into UKCP in any way.

Andrews' career has mainly been working in organisational settings as a 'therapist', drawing largely on knowledge and skills acquired from Transactional Analysis training. Formerly he worked as a therapist in a therapeutic community, a place where profound healing through psychotherapy undoubtedly takes place. This work also had many other facets to it. Often the client's in the community needed help in learning about everyday living. They often needed to be taught how to provide themselves with a balanced and healthy diet, how to keep themselves and their environment clean, tidy and safe. Therefore this work both had a large educative and 'counselling' (in the EATA advice and guidance sense) component. Being a community, there were several groupings of people such as staff, clients and volunteers. It was important to monitor and 'fine tune' the interactions between these groupings, in order to enable the community to operate efficiently and survive. This provided an organisational component to the work.

In a subsequent role, again as a therapist, Andrew worked for a social care organisation, whose work involved providing homes to extremely disturbed and disruptive adolescents. In addition to direct clinical work with the young people, Andrew also provided training and consultative support to the care staff, enabling them to work in a psychologically minded way. This in turn was an educational means towards meeting the organisations objectives of providing holistic packages of therapeutic care. This begs the questions, how did the different aspects of Andrew's work as a Transactional Analyst fall into the fields of specialisation? Although principally a psychotherapist, many of Andrew's interventions were a kin to those made by practitioners with specialisation in other TA fields. Does the broadness of these roles he chooses make his work more like that of a TA Counsellor? If the latter is true, are any of the interventions he makes, whichever of the four fields they fall into, less valuable? These authors maintain that the four fields of specialisation hold absolutely equal status in terms of practitioner skills, knowledge, and training requirements. Psychotherapy and Counselling are different activities with different aims.

We invite the reader to reflect upon their own TA practice. Are there times at which the interventions you make fall outside the TA field of application in which you have been trained? If so, how frequently does this happen? How do these hours get counted in practice logs? What additional knowledge and skills do you need to acquire to become a competently rounded TA practitioner?

And what can you add about our context and history in the UK? Why do we have no qualified trainers or active practitioners in the TA Counselling field in the UK, unlike the rest of Europe? How come in the UK counselling almost always means therapeutic counselling? How do we in the TA field account for legitimate valuable activities such as advice, guidance, support, rehabilitation and other interventions which are not psychotherapy, nor formal education, nor about organisational change?

References

Berne E (1963) *Structure and Dynamics of Organisations and groups*, Philadelphia: Lippincott.
EATA handbook