

# A Proposal on the Educational Transactional Analysis as a Dialogical Vision of Culture: Conceptual Signposts and Practical Tools for Educators

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**Abstract**—The multicultural composition of today's societies poses new challenges to educational contexts. Schools are therefore called first to develop dialogic aptitudes and communicative skills adapted to the complex reality of post-modern societies. It is indispensable for educators and for young people to learn theoretical and practical tools during their scholastic path, in order to allow the knowledge of themselves and of the others with the aim of recognizing the value of the others regardless of their culture. Dialogic Skills help to understand and manage individual differences by allowing the solution of problems and preventing conflicts. The Educational Sector of Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis offers a range of methods and techniques for this purpose. Educational Transactional Analysis is firmly anchored in the Personalist Philosophy and deserves to be promoted as a theoretical frame suitable to face the challenges of contemporary education. The goal of this paper is therefore to outline some conceptual and methodological signposts for the education to dialogue by drawing concepts and methodologies from educational transactional analysis.

**Keywords**—Dialogic process, education to dialogue, educational transactional analysis, personalism, the good of the relationship.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**M**ULTICULTURALITY is a fact and at the same time an inalienable goal in a globalized world; but, the term pluriculturalism expresses clearly its large meaning, not defining only the growing presence of other cultures in our educational context, but also remarking the cultural eclecticism that characterizes the social composition of this specific historical time. Pluriculturalism, therefore, is a term with which this essay means a cultural heritage poorly shared with the people belonging to the same history, culture and geographical area, but of different Weltanschauung, and with strong accents of individuality, when not of individualism. The same concept does not imply a reciprocal enrichment between coexistent cultures as opposed to the concept of multiculturalism, but rather highlights a fragmentation observable in a constellation of opinions and existential choices which have little common denominator.

Pluriculturalism is an "absolute" phenomenon, in the sense that it is a form of thought that looms "loose from the obligation" to relate to the thought of others, in order to leave room for a sum of individualities. In such a climate, we are increasingly moving away from the concept of "dialogue" and

this centripetal movement in relation to the pedagogical tradition that poses new educational issues and questions about ethics of the responsibility. In this frame, educational dialogue must be rethought in terms of the inclusiveness and practicability of shared strategies.

The multicultural dimension must be pursued on the basis of its anthropological foundation: Transactions are always between concrete people and not between concepts.

The correct setting of the Communicative Act is the relational nature of the human person, who cannot develop without others. This highlights the greater contradiction of the expression of human sociality in our time: On the one hand, people tend to the cultural and social eclecticism; and on the other, human nature leads to shared sociality to the point that the search for recognition by other people becomes the root of psychiatric behavior. The questions that arise from these brief considerations are: How to promote an effective educational dialogue with shared aims and goals? Which is the most efficient structural frame for promoting a non-violent and inclusive society, whose educational system has among its main goals the development of the *dialogic aptitude*, necessary in the complexity of our time?

## II. THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS TO EDUCATION TO DIALOGUE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

Pluralism is therefore a reality of the contemporaneity and the challenge for the humanities is to enhance the potential existing in the dialogue, whose education becomes one of the few opportunities of grounding a society that aims to promote constructive relationships and whose members want to write a common history.

Education to dialogue is based on the awareness of the dignity of the people with whom we relate and the shared value that all people "are OK".

Education to dialogue is profiling as a critical and valued deepening of the category of the relationship; it must not remain in theoretical reflection, but must be concretely pursued with realistic and maneuverable techniques and strategies. These can be identified in the Educational field of the Transactional Analysis of Eric Berne (the exhaustive bibliography on such a vast and multi-dimensional argument is out of range of this writing [1]). The use of the interpretative framework of the ego-states in the educational relationship allows the student (or the interlocutor) to be placed at the center of every pedagogical action, enhancing first as a human

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person. The *Person-centered Vision* of Eric Berne's method allows to develop the egoic system of each student, because it takes into account the factors that promote or block the communicative process in growth. Studies [2] have also clarified in recent times, how emotional intelligence grows together with cognitive intelligence, also highlighting how a block of emotional intelligence can achieve a blocking of the ability to think. Educational Transactional Analysis offers a framework that achieves the Education to Dialogue and realizes the most appropriate techniques of intervention to pursue both affective environment and logical-rational context.

### III. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL TOOLS

Educational Transactional Analysis provides an effective operational tool to describe the interpersonal dynamics that are at the basis of each communication/transaction. The observable aspects of the personality can be described using a simple, concrete and evocative terminology, within the reach of educators after a short training/educational course or inserted in the basic formation of the teachers.

Drawing the image of three overlapping circles called Ego-States, Berne mapped the three Instances of the Personality (Adult, Parent, Child) that are activated in each *Transaction* (minimum unit of relationship between persons, which translates into repetitive and easily recognizable behaviors). The Ego-States represent, respectively, the elaboration of the factual and indwelling reality (*Adult-Ego-State*), the behaviors and thoughts copied by the parents (*Parent-Ego-State*) and the feelings lived in childhood and relived in the present (*Child-Ego-State*). The optimal Transaction in a communication between two persons is that between Adult-Instance and Adult-Instance; in the alternative, however, it is desirable between *parallel* Instances. If the transaction is *crossed* (between different Instances) the communication stops, giving rise to misunderstandings and quarrels. The Ego-State called *Integrated Adult* listens and verifies the data coming from the other Ego-States and examines whether the information is consistent with reality, and then decides the consequent behavior. If a subject reaches the awareness of its own transactions and those of the people with whom he communicates, he recognizes the dynamics of a possible discomfort and can freely decide to disable transactions that give rise to unproductive behavior.

### IV. THE DIALOGUE PROCESS IN EDUCATIONAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

The school is a *permanent meeting laboratory*, a *community of practice*, in which teachers dialogue with each other, with families and with the students. Education to Dialogue through the knowledge of the communicative modalities of each person offers a motivational propulsion that triggers the prerequisites for each learning. In establishing relationships with others, each person has a particular style that has been formed during the development of the personality. Knowing the communicative modalities of ourselves and of the others

contributes to highlight the dynamics of acceptance of the others and of the self, which establishes a healthy emotional and social life, and takes into account the characteristics of a complex post-modern society.

The Educational Transactional Analysis' Dialogic Process, although philosophically connected to the therapeutic and counseling use that has characterized the transactional analysis to date, requires a special structuring for the educational context. A problematic situation of which we want to highlight the communicative components and strengthen them in order to achieve inclusive and non-conflicting existential life-plans should be staggered in such a structured path. Our proposal is a progression in six phases.

#### A. Definition of the Problem

When a situation is problematic, it is necessary to first circumscribe the problem itself, in order to acquire the factual data from which the logic of the intervention can emerge. The problem must be described in its factual and social components, and some questions must be clarified, including:

- What are the benefits that in that situation the empowerment of dialogue will bring to the solution of the problem; and,
- If there is a need for external experts, or whether the support of Educators is enough.

The first practical step is to directly contact the beneficiaries and *actively listen* to their definition of the problem; they must be allowed to express inconvenience and observations and describe how they have dealt with the problem until that time. *Active Listening*, is an accurate listening, attentive to the subject matter and simultaneously keeping in mind the objective of the contract and takes care to leave space of expression to those who have the problem to solve. For Active Listening, there are many models in the practice of Transactional Analysis in Therapy and Counseling, often taken from methods related to other theories. Together with the well-known method of Rogers [3], today the model of Friedemann Schulz Von Thun [4] represents a valid proposal.

The analysis of the context "photographs" the problematic situation, in which the stakeholders identify themselves. It is important to clarify that this process analyses the Communication, and not the Personality of the involved people, which belongs to the Therapeutic environment. In this moment it is advisable to immediately route the formulation of problems, not in the form of "lack" (form known also as "absent Solution", situation that moves away from the real problem), but in an already proactive way on the possible solutions. The language has to be direct and clear, expressed in a few simple sentences.

It is useful to write a table in which emerges the context analysis to:

- Cognitive aspects
- Motivational aspects
- Emotional aspects
- Social Aspects.

These are at the basis of the communication, to identify the forces in play and set the next phase of analysis/diagnosis of

the Ego-States.

### B. Diagnosis of the Ego-States

It consists in graphically representing the model of Berne's Structural Diagram, which will allow to examine and describe the relationships between the Ego-States of the people communicating, and their manifest and hidden intentions. There is a vast literature about this; here, we refer to the classic scheme, which is meant only to be referred to. This scheme has been enriched by various contributions over the years. We only mention the last one, the TIFF [5]. In the diagnostic phase, *Parallel, Crossed and Further Transactions* can be easily described in order to have a description of the evident elements of communication.

### C. Feedback

This is a phase of critical reflection that requires to be connected to the theoretical model. (The management of the Educational aspects of Transactional Analysis is simple and easy: However a brief training (previous experiences suggest a minimum of 12 hours) is necessary. In the training, teachers are taught through frontal lessons where to learn the Theoretical Frames for Educational Environment, practical exercises and role-playing, and how the theoretical model is applied to concrete cases).

In our case, the preparation of a Check-list is useful, where it is clear:

- If the problem has been formulated correctly,
- If the problem has been centered, in order to discriminate if the problem described is the real one or has been expressed in a circumlocutory way.

In this phase it is advisable to reformulate the problem to the stakeholders through questions of specification and laddering, which concerns the analysis of the consequences of moods or dreaded events. In our case it would be useful to clarify the fears related to the new choices, which could hamper new resolutions. This technique was born with Georg Kelly (1955) [6], and used in the therapeutic settings with the aim to be aware of the power of fear. After the message has been identified and understood the stakeholders can "observe" themselves from outside.

Very useful is the theoretical integration called "phenomenological feedback" [6], in which the educator creates an epoché or suspension of judgment on a person in order to abstain from negative injunctions.

According to this model, the people involved can "look from outside" [7] and take awareness of their communicative modalities.

### D. Targeting

The stakeholders should be aware that they are meeting a change and consequently new choices.

A phase that we define "pre-contractual" clarifies which goals can be achieved, and their hierarchization. The problem in this phase is transformed into a possible goal by target, and in this case, the technique of *reformulation*, well-known to Transactional Analysis' Counseling, allows a positive re-edition of a negative situation previously described. This is not

about identifying the solution or actions to resolve the problem, but to make the problem a resource.

The *pre-contract - this expression is ours-* is useful in the educational environment because people in crisis experience an imbalance of their habitual behaviour patterns; they need time to realize new choices and behavioral patterns. The educational field is not a therapeutic setting, and the timing is different. In this case it is very useful to look for the first practical solutions to the problem or to prepare those that Woolmas and Brown call "work-arrangements" [8]: a general agreement on the fact that highlights the actual changing potential of the stakeholders in order to identify what is concrete and achievable.

### E. Transactions as Recognition Units: Choice of Permits and Injunctions

The focus should be placed at this stage on how the Recognition of the Dignity of the Person can be put into practice through the enhancement of the communicative styles.

Each Transaction is a unit of Recognition that evolves from a sublimated infantile need. Berne, based on the studies of René Spitz, recognized that the "*Stimulus Hunger*" present in early childhood, then evolves with script-modality in the need to be recognized by others in our Dignity as a Human Being and in those characteristics that make us the people we are, in our skills and choices. From the biological point of view, it is possible that the emotional deprivation also produces organic changes; that is, the *Hunger of Stimulus* has with the survival of the human organism, the same relationship of food hunger. Stimulus Hunger is the fundamental need of man. The atavistic need of physical and psychological stimuli for survival evolves in the growth in *Need of Recognition*. It is so important to man that he accepts painful or negative stimuli rather than the absence of stimuli. Stimulus Hunger will accompany man throughout his life, although in the course of it, it will require different ways and types of recognition. It evolves into *Structure Hunger* (the Hunger for Structure means that our brain is built to create structure out of chaos. It is the organization of perceptions into patterns which is giving names to, and which manages in the imagination or in real life), as an extension of Stimulus Hunger, - defined by V. Frankl *Need for Purpose in Life* [9]. Structural Hunger is typical expression of adulthood and consists in structuring as many strokes as possible, even through scriptural modality.

The *Strokes* (acknowledgments), identified by Berne as the basic needs of the person, are grounded on our existential position, and that is why it is important for each person to be aware of her own level of OK-ness. Berne coined the term *Stroke* to describe our *Hunger for Recognition*; the term is also translated with "caresses", and indicates an interrelational message that, if it has a response, triggers a transaction. A negative, positive or conditioned Stroke makes an acknowledgment of the person of the other: or it confirms his state of *underestimation*, or recognizes him for what he is (making possible *unconditional acceptance* and activating in this way parallel transactions), or expresses a *conditional*

*acceptance*, in which the person does not apply for what he is, but for what he does.

It is consequently crucial that Educators choose the Strokes, related to each single Need of Recognition to be given in the specific educational Relationship. Permits and Injunctions should be chosen case by case. They favor the personal realization of the pupil in a decisive way and enable him to become an adult who knows how to set goals and achieve them. (If we have received Restrictive Injunctions in childhood or if we believed we could be loved and accepted only under certain conditions, then we need those permits that were denied to us.

Examples of Restrictive Injunctions include:

- Permission to exist and to be the person we are.
  - To feel and express our emotions.
  - To think, to be creative.
  - To be ourselves, of our own sex.
  - To be children.
  - To have the age that we have.
  - To succeed in achieving our objectives,
- and many others).

In the educational field, the student who feels recognized, stimulated and secure, matures a positive vision of learning, and gradually becomes himself, through his effort, the primary resource to be able to recognize, procure stimulation and orientation in a learning context. In other words, in a situation of autonomy: learning becomes self-stimulating; perception of the efficacy is increased; the structure, from directed, becomes self-produced [10].

#### F. Contracting for Changing

One of the most famous methodologies derived from Berne's doctrine is the "*Contractual Approach*" [11]. (Transactional Analysis is, by definition, already characterized by the contractual approach, being a "psychological and social theory characterized by a bilateral contract of growth and Change") [12]. The "*Contract*" (understood as "an explicit bilateral commitment to a well-defined course of action" is the main instrument that Transactional Analysis offers in order to promote change, and it is a strategy that can be adopted in education as well. It is a precise commitment of the person towards the realization of its objectives and, at the same time, it borders the boundaries of the people involved. In Educational Transactional Analysis contracting is a fundamental option, because it is in this moment that we identify what we want to change and how. Contracting does prevent Games, and avoids vents and lamentation.

Berne, who had been formed as psychoanalyst, soon understood that the change should not be linked to a psychiatric diagnosis, as to a matching contract that aims to support the resources of a person left inactive. This promotes self-confidence, while in psychoanalysis is promoted as trust in the therapist. The Transaction is the centre of Berne's perspective, and not the person of the psychotherapist. Self-awareness comes from the analysis of the Ego-states, and the "contractors" are only supposed to promote it [13].

In ETA are possible "Contracts" called of "Social Control"

or "level II". This type of contract, unlike those of "Autonomy", related to Therapy and Counseling, has as its objective a behavioral change and its maintenance over time. They deal with the solution of a temporary imbalance or random events, and aim to solve the problem. Berne defined the "Contract" "in "*Principles of Group Treatment*" (1966) [14]. He indicated to explicitly clarify: content, timing, methods, and objectives. "The reason we are here is...". The contract is *bilateral*, and both respondents must ask themselves: "Why am I here?"; even if their roles are different. There is a Distinction between "Contracts of Care" and "Contract of Change": both belong to the therapeutic environment, in Educational context contracts can be only of "Social Control", in which the goal is to energize the Adult Ego-State. Berne described this type of "contract" with a metaphor: each person was born a prince or princess and the events of life convince her to be a frog, and hence, an imbalance. The imbalance occurs as a result of an internal and external change, or of evolutionary crises. The "Social Control Contract" helps the frog to progress and to feel better at solving a current problem, while a therapeutic contract helps to find the prince or princess.

We suggest an articulation of the Contracting in three points: 1. Timing; 2. Events; 3. Behaviors

As to the timing, a Contract needs reasonable timing to reach the goal. For example, the correction of Negative Prior Learnings can require several mounts: the Teachers know how much time is necessary to work with specific material. A new life-plan requires "settling-times" before being embodied and obviously, a too short timing could lead to failure, even if the timing can be re-discussed during the periodic check-moments.

Check moments have to be carefully planned, so as not to run the serious risk of a negative Stroke (Disclaim instead of Recognition).

The Events should be described in each check-moment, noticing positive progresses and describing eventual difficulties, which must be posed under new consideration.

A written diary of the process is not usual in Transactional Analysis' practice, but in the specific Educational environment it could be useful, if only employed to mark the path, even expected and contracted new Behaviors cannot be planned, but only supported with positive Strokes and focusing to the centrality of the *Person* of the stakeholders and the Freedom of their Choices. Also, the will of Changing is an element of the Contract.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS: THE *GOOD OF THE RELATIONSHIP* AS A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

The Science of Education is called to grasp the challenges of the social characteristics of every epoch, and for this purpose we are called to find efficient tools and techniques; for avoiding to incur the risk in "educational passing fads", techniques and methods must be anchored in solid philosophical pillars and founded on a fully sharable human trait, which is the *Good of the Relationship*. It is a *Value* that deserves to be gained as a pedagogical paradigm in a reality of

multiform complexity that is increasingly moving away from the concept of Dialogue.

The *Good of the Relationship* is part of the Personalist's Thought and consequently, a Pedagogy that assumes the reality of multiculturalism is directed to a Personalistic Vision of man.

The Personalist's thought promotes a respectful, inclusive dialogue that has as its end the attainment of the *Common Good*, being it a current of thought focused on the existence of free and creative people outlining the centrality of the person as its absolute value. Maria Teresa Romanini proposes a "personalistic" version of Transactional Analysis [15]. Her perspective is inspired by the personalism of Stein and Mounier, to the existentialism of Heidegger and Binswanger, to the phenomenology of Husserl and Jaspers. She develops her interpretation around the concept of "identity", as a form of adaptation to the environment, which occurs with scriptural characteristics [16].

It is not possible not to notice how Mounier and Berne, have many shared concepts: The difference lies in the fact that Berne created a structured method to put it into practice, while Mounier leaves in fact the realization of the educational method to the initiative of the individual educator: in the *Traité du Caractère* Mounier, [17] addresses the analysis of Character formation in a psychological sense, but does not provide guidance for pedagogical practice.

In conclusion, this is a small proposal in a vastly increasingly articulated area. It aims to highlight, through a proposal for Educators, the many potentials still little explored of Educating to Dialogue emerging from Eric Berne's thought. Furthermore, it aims to emphasize the value of researches and experiences [18] that, despite many difficulties, listen actively to the educational needs of our time.

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