



Beyond behaviour

Transactional Analysis, a theory of human behaviour and communication, can help young people express themselves better and improve their behaviour, as **Giles Barrow** explains.

Transactional Analysis (TA) is a humanistic psychological framework that, like many such perspectives, offers ways of understanding how people grow up, how they communicate and how they see the world.

The distinctive features of TA are that:

- people are essentially OK, hence 'I'm OK – You're OK' (the catchphrase many people may be familiar with about TA). There is an assumption that individuals are of intrinsic value and worthy of recognition
- everyone can think, make sense of information, consider options and make choices
- anyone can change, learn and grow.

Founded by Eric Berne in the 1960s, TA has, for the most part, been practised in the context of psychotherapy and counselling. There have always been a few practitioners using TA in educational contexts and recently this has undergone a renaissance. Over the past ten years there has been a noticeable increase in the rate and range of education professionals using TA concepts in their work. Examples include:

- A secondary school using TA to develop leadership, whole-school planning and relational work with staff and students. This has involved most staff being trained in core concepts of TA, establishing a working group focusing on relationships and conducting research to investigate the impact of the work.
- An all-age support service in south London gradually incorporating TA into its work. Staff supervision is shaped round the TA process and other operational aspects; for example, agreements with mainstream schools are made using three-cornered contracting, a fundamental TA idea. The planning of programmes for individual students is informed by TA ideas including the 'cycle of development', basic hungers, games and ego-states. The service has trialled ideas for teaching TA to students as part of the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum.
- A rural primary school began to use 'contracting' to clarify expectations, and the 'drama triangle' concept for making sense of the patterns of behaviour students (and staff) display to get recognition. Working relationships between staff, students and parents have become more effective.

Generally, feedback from teachers about using Transactional Analysis highlights that TA ideas can be applied at a range of levels.

- Educators can use TA concepts to understand and respond to individual or group needs and behaviour and then plan and agree interventions.
- Schools and support services can draw on TA ideas to develop strategic and operational aspects of their work. For example, clarifying roles and responsibilities with mainstream and local

education authority partners, shaping supervision arrangements, or structuring staff and student induction.

- Young people can benefit directly from learning about TA concepts – it can provide skills and insights to prepare them for life beyond the classroom and generate insights into their experience and relationships.

TA provides a universal model for understanding and responding to behaviour. In other words it is an approach that does not separate out student/child behaviour from adult/staff behaviour. It provides a framework that takes account of the relational aspects of teaching and learning, recognising the internal processes of both student and teacher.

As is clear from its underpinning beliefs, TA offers an optimistic perspective for educators. When applied in the learning context greater emphasis is made on promoting growth and development.

Experienced teachers may recall references to TA during their initial training. The complexities associated with trying to improve behaviour for learning in schools will be familiar to teachers at all stages of their careers. TA offers a framework to help sort out those complexities and plan strategies to support all parties involved.

Further reading

To find out more visit: <http://insttdta.org> or www.ita.org.uk.

Giles Barrow will be the tutor on a 'Using Transactional Analysis' NUT CPD course for teachers and school leaders at Stoke Rochford Hall on 16-17 November with a follow-up on 16 March 2011. For details call 020 7380 4719 or email nutcpd@nut.org.uk.

