Developed by Eric Berne during the 1950’s, Transactional Analysis (TA) is a simple method of describing our experiences of life in a way that makes both sense and brings a smile of recognition giving hope for change. It has a highly developed structure and a framework of thinking that allows for a wide-ranging approach to therapy. This includes:

- A description of personality in three parts: that of parent/adult/child (P A C) ego states.

- Observing the way in which people 'set-up' relationships (games).

- Observing the way in which people live their lives generally, producing 'pay-off's' based on early life decisions (scripts).

- By giving attention to what is going on between people (transactions) it is possible to find alternative options for relating to others.

- Clarifying and changing the way people see themselves and how they interact with other people.

**The ego states**

P A C are the 3 ego states that Eric Berne believed we all have within us (Berne 2000):

- Parent ego state

  This is a collection of thoughts, behaviours, attitudes and feelings taken from outside sources that have served as parental or authoritarian figures in our life.

- Adult ego state

  This is essentially a data processor that takes in information and determines the best course of action and when to act.

  It is the store of our accumulated knowledge, experience and understanding of our self and the world at large.

  It holds information determining how things work, how to organise, how to plan etc. It has nothing to do with being adult, mature, or right.

- Child ego state

  This represents the feelings and thoughts and behaviours of childhood.

  It is the part we are born with; the part that thinks, feels, acts and talks just the way it did when a child or at a certain age.
The child ego state is not regarded as childish or immature and should not be repressed or ignored. We should value its creativity and spontaneity as it is considered as clever and loving. Eric Berne said it is the best part of our personality.

We experience the child ego state through our feelings, needs and desires. It can be difficult to deal with at times because of bad experiences that have not been resolved.

The Development and Perpetuation of Neurosis

- **Scripts**
  Usually scripts are formed in early childhood (although they can also be formed during adulthood) that influence and shape a person’s life experience. They are formed from the child’s responses to its environment (particularly the response to interactions with parental figures and significant others) as a protective mechanism. By forming scripts, a person can limit their own capacity for spontaneity, awareness and intimacy in the interests of ‘survival’.

- **Script beliefs**
  These are self-limiting beliefs about the self, others, and one’s quality of life that have developed as a response to the formation of scripts.

- **Strokes**
  The human child has a vast capacity and need for love and recognition, a basic part of healthy human psychological development. The provision and withdrawal of love and recognition can have a profound influence on psychological and behavioural development. Berne proposed the concept of ‘strokes’ from this provision and withdrawal. Giving or withholding strokes (love and recognition) has a profound effect on the development of scripts.

- **Rackets**
  These are the behaviours displayed as a result of script beliefs. Rackets are reinforced by repetition of behavioural patterns in response to internal and external events in a person’s environment.

- **Transactions**
  These are the moment-to-moment ways in which we recreate the stimulus-response sequences that lead to the maintenance of the racket system. Transactions can be categorised as either predictable, unpredictable or covert (hidden agenda).
• Games

Games form the interactional sequence by which scripts are perpetuated. This can be seen in the way a person communicates with others; the result of which promotes and reinforces the script and script beliefs.

**Therapy**

The goal of TA is to achieve symptom relief (control) and/or release from limiting scripts (autonomy) (Berne 2000). In other words ensuring that the patient takes responsibility for their own life choices and personal development. This is carried out through the contract system, a set of very specific therapeutic goals that allow for a defined therapeutic outcome. Consequently the patient achieves a healthy and positive integration of the P A C ego states.

The process of therapy includes:

• Decontamination

Ego strengthening of the adult ego state whilst dealing with unintegrated material from the parent ego state (e.g. parental beliefs and assumptions that are out of date and no longer apply to the patient’s current situation) and the child ego state (e.g. unresolved childhood fears and conflicts).

• Parenting and reparenting

Utilising inner child techniques to gain resolution of child / parent ego state conflicts.

• Working with the parent ego state

For example, to change the patient’s conscious and unconscious negative self-talk to a more positive dialogue.

The roots of TA live in psychoanalysis and have now moved on to take into account ideas from other humanistic schools of thought that include Gestalt and Client-Centred therapy.

**Therapist qualities**

TA practitioners hold the following:

• A belief that everyone is OK, having intrinsic dignity and worth

• A commitment to change

• That we are all made self-limiting decisions created during childhood that we can re-evaluate and change
• That the nature of change is determined by contracts made between patient and therapist with both taking their share of responsibility for the outcome.

This method of therapy or communication is now widely used in education and industrial training.

Eric Berne believed we live or experience two worlds: the inner world of self, and the outer world of our reactions (Berne 1970). Our inner world contains our emotions, memories, beliefs, dreams, fantasies, and the secret world of our thoughts, hopes and fears. Here too are the images that create our self, our feelings about our self and others, as well as our private experiences of the world in which we live.

Our outer world is represented by the way we act out our feelings and beliefs, and how we spend our time and energy both alone and with others. This is the world of dealings and transactions. What we do depends on what is hidden inside, sometimes congruent and sometimes in conflict.

**TA and hypnotherapy**

It is obvious from the preceding text how the theories of TA can influence and enhance the way we as hypnotherapists work. Treating, analysing and integrating the various dissociated ego states that have lead to dysfunction is now an integral part of analytical hypnotherapy and should not be ignored by the practitioner. In fact, a whole area of therapy has now been formed, devoted to working with and reparenting the inner child by confronting the unresolved issues left behind in childhood and allowing for an emotional catharsis that frees the patient from self-limiting scripts.

**References / Bibliography**


A Conceptual Framework for the Ego States

The Critical Parent is one who finds fault; is controlling; is directing; is persecuting.

The Nurturing Parent is one who encourages; is caring; is supporting; is rescuing.

The Adult is the one who takes responsibility for self and not others; is thinking; is planning; listens; remembers; predicts.

The Free Child is one who makes its own decisions, but can be without morals; is expressing; has natural feelings; is being creative; is spontaneous; has fun.

The Adapted Child is one who fits in, can be bound by parents / societies views and limited by the constraints of others; is conforming; rebels; behaves; keeps the rules.