

Introduction

This volume of 'Reflections' consists of five studies completed by students on the Integrated Masters Programme, Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Plymouth. They result from the Module "A Transactional Analysis Approach to Group Building and Leadership in Education". These five students chose the academic task of professional self-reflection as the framework for their course assignment. This task is designed to help educators understand not only what they do but also their reasons and purposes for doing it. The aim is to enhance educational practice through the stimulation of on-going reflection and development of ideas and methods. In this case the focusing tool was the application of educational transactional analysis (TA).

Each of the five educators comes from a different professional context and has applied TA in a unique and creative way that is the outcome of her learning on the course combined with practical experience. In this collection, therefore, we have the opportunity to read about a wide variety of TA educators at work and find out how they have used TA theory to enrich their thinking and illuminate their educational practice.

Jan Upton leads a behaviour support team in a rural community college. She recounts the way in which she grappled with the new demands this leadership role placed on her, how she learned to help the team members gain a sense of security and belonging and how she enabled them to work together effectively. She shows how she used the process of reflection to enhance her professional development at this important time. In this process, Jan uses a range of theoretical ideas including from TA the concepts of ego states, functional fluency and the structure and dynamics of organisations and groups.

Jan's reflection starts the collection because of the clear and precise way it shows how TA theory can be used both to illuminate issues of educational practice and to give a framework for planning change. Jan's primary focus is her work with her colleagues with the aim of enhancing their practice as a team. This focus is crucially important for teachers in striving to enhance the quality of pupils' educational experience.

Jacky Thomas is an infant teacher and uses a range of ideas both from TA literature and other sources to make explicit her understanding of the issues and dynamics of group building with some of the youngest children in formal schooling. Using TA concepts of leadership, group structure and imago, contracting, structure, nurture and stroke management, she clarifies her role and her tasks in this matter with the aim of providing her pupils with the best possible start to their school careers. In doing this she also creates a sound rationale for the principles and practicalities of her early years practice, thus, at another level, giving herself the confidence-building structure she writes about so eloquently in terms of her pupils.

Caro Hemmings maps the way she has integrated her TA knowledge into her educational practice. She uses examples from her work both as a support teacher for children with educational and behavioural difficulties, and as an urban secondary school Year Head and subject teacher. Her reflection illustrates how the TA concepts of ego states and scripting can be used as an internal process to support a teacher to stay in Adult even when provoked and under pressure. Caro manages to stay in touch with the young people's here-and-now needs without getting triggered into automatic transference reactions. She demonstrates how TA theory of life positions and strokes can be used in strategies to change classroom dynamics and enhance pupils' learning and behaviour.

Suzanne Richards, a Further Education lecturer and tutor in a School of Hospitality and Catering, tackles the development of her student induction programme. She applies several TA concepts concerning group building and leadership to make sense of her current situation and to plan her new interventions. She shows also how she intends to use contracting to make use of this important foundation stage in the life of the new student group to help the young people settle in well and engage with confidence in their chosen studies.

Janice Mercer is a teacher in a multi-agency behaviour support team working in primary schools in an urban context. She uses this task of reflection to summarise her thinking about the most important and effective elements in her group work practice. The principles of educational TA are implicit throughout and shine through her respectful and enabling approach to working with both individuals and small groups of troubled children. She uses TA concepts of strokes, contracting and group development to identify some important strategies for achieving successful outcomes, and begins to generalise the key factors in her methodology. This framing of a conscious rationale will in turn help her to be able to communicate increasingly effectively about her work with other professionals.

We hope that by publishing this diverse collection of writings, we are offering inspiration to others as well as our appreciation to the authors.

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