

How does T. A. deal with feelings

Lilly Stuart *interviews*



Laurence Collinson, Corinne Gledhill, Michael Reddy and Margaret Turpin



Lilly One of the commonest arguments I have heard from people is that TA is all head stuff - analysing problems with mainly the goal of gaining insight. What's your view on that?

Margaret The people that come to therapy using a TA model are people with emotional problems or life problems and their feelings and behaviours and ways of thinking are what TA has to work with. Through the whole person, not simply the theory.

Corinne You're assuming here, that you can separate out quite distinctly, thinking from feeling. I would not agree that that is entirely possible.

Lilly Can you tell me a bit what you think about that?

- Corinne The frame of reference a person brings to life will determine the way they think about it and the way they feel about it, and by changing thinking it's possible to change feeling. . . I present a situation where they can re-evaluate their thinking, to give them feedback so that they can hear what they are thinking.
- Laurence I am very much with Corinne about thinking and feeling and acting are all inseparable and that if someone has a feeling, then they are going to have thoughts along with it, and they are going to act along with it. Therefore a feeling change can also involve a thinking change. It's not a matter of getting people to think differently, it's a matter of changing any point in their whole life situation, or frame of reference, that will help to change all the other aspects of the way they think, feel and behave.
- Lilly I'd like to hear what *you* think, Michael.
- Michael There is some stereotyping going on, we're under- lining it. I'm not really interested in defending the stereotype or even convincing anybody else about the way I think. I'm willing to buy into even the vague way in which the problem has been put. *I'm* impatient sometimes when I see people using analysis to not do anything. But I'd like to complete it by saying that I am equally impatient when I see people using getting out their feelings in some monumental kind of way as though that also by itself is going to solve something. As far as I can see it is very much a rhythm between the two. If I thought that TA was only concerned with analysing head-stuff, I wouldn't be in it.
- Lilly It seems that none of you can really see it as a thing separate from feelings.
- Michael Yes, there is a difference, I think that people are predominantly feeling at some times, and predominantly thinking at some times the stereotype from the opposite side is of a bunch of people who go to workshops every weekend to have their third, fourth and fifth primal, as though that was going to do the trick, and that's the stereotype in the opposite direction. I don't think any of them hold the stereotypes, except for certain individuals and I'm going to be just as impatient with the one as with the other. Because I do accept the difference between the primacy of thinking and feeling at any one time; for me it is rhythm. I like to go backwards and forwards and in TA terms that means that I want as much as possible to get a dialogue going between the Child system and the Adult system. The Child is thinking mostly on the basis of feelings and the Adult is thinking not mostly on the basis of feelings. The simple fact is that a big part of what people do is, they talk to themselves in their heads.
- Corinne As I see it, my function as a therapist is when someone is in their feeling, to hear what they are saying in that regressed situation so that I can feed

that into their Adult when they are ready to receive it, so that they can combine the two functions of themselves.

- Lilly It sounds as if in a way you don't agree with that sweeping statement at all.
- Corrinne I am immediately seeing here that TA therapists work very differently, there are some who do not encourage regression and stay steadfastly in working Adult to Adult. I am personally more comfortable working from both. Feeling and thinking.
- Michael Yes. I think that within the whole TA spectrum there's probably three major schools. One I think, is the old traditional one, the so called 'Steiner' San Francisco/Social Psychiatry School, which I think does tend to stick very much to the structural and transactional and game analysis. But I think the widest teaching and training within the whole TA spectrum is Gouldings, who spent two years with Perls and are linking TA and Gestalt. . . . Mow if you take the third one, the Shiffs, are dealing with psychotic individuals for the most part, and the heaviest emphasis with them is on letting people know that they can *also* think; so there is going to be a lot of talk about problem solving in a Schiff context, because it comes from a context where people have not been thinking productively. They have been going on the basis of their feelings and even if it's not psychotic they're among the average bear that wanders in and out of groups. I don't want to go into a group and have somebody simply evacuate their feelings without doing some thinking about it, anymore than I want somebody just talking and head rapping. . . Yes. . . I mean using the old terminology the difference between obsessive, compulsive and an hysterical personality. I'm going to work differently with each one, with one I'm really going to push to think and with the other I'm going to really push to feel.
- Lilly That school issue. Do you feel there is a split in Britain?
- Laurence No. I don't think there is a split. My own guess is that most of the people working with groups are, in England, primarily from the Goulding school. Combining TA and Gestalt. I've got to add that whenever I've been in groups, my observation is that other therapists do use, as Mike says, whatever is appropriate to the situation. It may be Gestalt, Bioenergetics, it may be simple Structural Analysis. It can be anything that seems right for that particular person at that particular moment.
- Michael Would you also say, Laurie, that individual therapists will have a leaning preference towards one method, will consider one or two appropriate, because it really is within the limits of their comfort, as much as because it is just appropriate.

- Laurence Yes. My own preference is the Social Psychiatry School, and yet last night in a group I was using Gestalt. It's a matter of what suits with your own comfort.
- Lilly If someone gets in touch with heavy feelings in a workshop or therapy group, how do you all deal with it?
- Michael One person maybe starts getting into heavy feelings and I'll be much more interested in pushing them all the way through and in getting them to be even more fully in touch with their feelings. Other people I'd be more invested in showing them that their own feelings do not determine reality.
- Lilly Would that refer to racket feelings?
- Michael Yes, but racket feelings pushed to a level where it allows a person to evade thinking about something.
- Lilly Which raises an interesting question! You talk as if you intuitively and immediately decide what is the most appropriate way of dealing with something. Is that true?
- Corrinne For me, I would consider this one of my skills as a therapist, in having available to me, different ways of dealing with differents situated people in different situations.
- Michael The other thing I would query is the word intuition, I would rather say 'educated guessing'.
- Margaret I would like to add something to that. One thing, I do a script analysis on my group members, so I don't have people just coming in off of the street. I have script analysis, so I have some information in my head about what went wrong when they were little, and that is available when they are into something heavy; so that is part of my 'educated guess'.
- Laurence This is where we come into an area which I think distinguishes TA from some of the other growth therapies. That is the conception of racket states and general ill feelings. The idea of going to groups and simply letting your feelings out. There can be very few therapists who go along with 'you've got to express it, you've got to let your anger out, you've got to go along with your misery'. That's what both Mike and Margaret have been talking about that the therapist is in a position because of prior interviewing, because of working with a client over a period of time, to know whether what is coming up at that particular moment is something that always happens. Whether it is the racket, and therefore an evasion of what is the real need of the client or whether it is something unexpected, something that shows that the client is at last in touch with where he or she is. Every

therapist working in TA has to be ready to make that judgement, or at the very least have a look at what is going on at that point before making a decision.

Lilly That sounds interesting. Now, if you suspect a racket or an evasion - do you confront the person with it or how do you actually deal with it?

Laurence If I don't think the person is ready to have this confrontation then I won't at that particular moment. It's no use confronting someone who isn't protected, because it might have a disastrous effect.

Margaret I would like to add something to what you are saying about protection in that in the majority of TA workshop and groups there is an ongoing situation which I don't know if the AHP is aware of, that I may have somebody in a group for six, eight, or twelve months, so there is that protection of an ongoing situation, and the other is the contracts. We always work with contracts.

Lilly Could you tell me a bit about contracts?

Margaret They are agreements between the therapist and the group member, about what can be done. What they have come for, what they want and what I am prepared to agree that they can get. That's the sort of mutually agreed contract.

Lilly Could you elaborate this just a bit?

Margaret My side of the contract is that I am available, I am competent, and I'm giving my time and they're giving their time and their money and their motivation, to get through a piece of work that they want to do.

Lilly Would you for instance give them your home number and if they are in a crisis between group sessions - could they ring you up?

Margaret Yes, they can.

Corrinne I would add that I take into consideration whether I'm going to be around and how long I am going to be around before I would offer that.

Michael You brought up the term confrontation earlier on. In point of fact what happens I think is not so much confrontation in the bald sense that you were implying, but that the therapist is going to be subtly reinforcing or de-reinforcing the expression of certain kinds of feelings.

Lilly Do you decide with somebody, 'right, I'm not going to reinforce this depression anymore' for instance.

Michael Yes, that's right.

And conversely that when I see somebody, say in a depressive state who is beginning to be in touch with some real anger that's directed outwards instead of inwards, I'm likely to reinforce it.

Lilly Is that an open thing you bring up with them and say 'look I'm not going to have this anymore'.

Michael No, I'm more likely to do it first of all by not reinforcing or by de-reinforcing, in other words keep them in their Child ego state until they have experienced that, and then I may do some explaining of why I was doing that and why I see it necessary to do, so that after that I'll do some teaching and this is where I think it is important that a TA therapist uses all of their ego state. I think a TA therapist who doesn't know how to listen to the Child of the other person won't get very far, because in the last analysis, I think changes take place in the Child ego state. I think some therapists are afraid to teach and to use their Adult and to explain what they're doing. I think some therapists are afraid to use the Parent and to protect a person and to insist with a person that they don't do certain kinds of things if they want to continue with their treatment.

Lilly I'm interested in what you just said because I feel it's almost my duty to tell the person, so I have a fairly open discussion even if a they're in that feeling, and say 'look, it seems to me that it's not a good idea if I continue reinforcing you for that', and then we have a deal whether they agree with that.

Margaret They tend to think that I am just being rotten

Lilly that's what I worry about.

Margaret I think you can do that in a group, that's what it is about. So that they understand why I'm doing what I'm doing and they feel safe to cope with that situation when it's for them.

Corinne I don't like the work racket. What I do do is to stroke survival. It's to say 'yes, those were viable and surviving methods at that time, they may no longer be functional, but it's O.K. for you to exist'.

Lilly You said you don't like the word 'racket'. What else would you use.

Corinne 'Inauthentic'. I prefer inauthentic.

Laurence I think Corinne is right, racket has come to be a kind of dirty word now.

- Corinne And it raises the hackles; people feel there is a Critical Parent.
- Michael I prefer to say feelings that people are very practised in.
- Laurence There is the connotation with rackets, that by telling the client that if he or she is in the racket, their feelings are being discounted, there is a possibility that the client will feel bad about having feelings. The racket feelings are as 'genuine' as any.
- Lilly Could you tell me a bit about what you as TA therapists would actually understand and define as working on an 'experiential level'. It is a very woolly word for me.
- Michael It might be clearer to me if I knew what the opposite of working on an experiential level was.
- Lilly Analysing and staying on the rational level only?
- Michael It seems to me that if that's what it means, that we're already covering that waterfront and I don't think there's anybody here who works on a rational level only. I think most of us would probably go home and not bother anymore if we thought that all that we were dealing with was rational analysis. So then what we do is experiential, in terms of that definition.
- Laurence I believe it can be useful and can create a change that people do simply discuss what is going on, on a rational level. So I would include that as part of experiential work.
- Michael That's a good point, but can you keep getting discounted as being 'non-experiential'?
- Laurence I was in a psychoanalytic group yesterday and the discussion seemed on a very Adult level and someone said something, talking in a very straight-forward manner, and somebody burst out crying, so in a very simple, almost discussion context somebody was deeply touched.
- Michael Thinking, believing, feeling, behaving.
- Laurence It's just occurred to me that all TA therapy must come back to the simple issue of the Adult of the person making the decision around change and then doing something, then acting. It's impossible for any change to occur, whatever feelings are touched unless the person's Adult looks at the options and decides to follow a different option from the one he or she's been previously following.

- Michael And that will only in fact work, the other side of the coin, if the Child is tickled by the change. So the motivation and the change eventually will come from an alliance between Adult and Child.
- Lilly I guess this is where maybe you find yourself in a slightly different position to some people in growth movement who just 'tickle a Child' as you call it and think that's enough. Do you think that's true?
- Michael It may well be in some situations, it may well be we tickle the Child then the Adult will start thinking again. If the Child is tickled then Adult thinking may be released. Again it's not an either or.
- Lilly You brought in the word 'behaviour! I noted that TA more than any other school I know of, apart from Behaviour Therapy, actually does stress 'what are you going to *do* about something'.
- Corrinne This ties in with what Margaret was saying about contracts. Contracts are based on changes of behaviour.
- Michael That's right, so a contract to feel better about myself is a non-contract.
- Lilly So you actually aim for a change of behavior as the ultimate thing.
- Margaret Definitely.
- Lilly Now what happens if someone, taking it to the ridiculous extreme, comes back after a year and says, 'well I really do feel better but the behaviour for instance has not changed'. Let's take an example of somebody being obsessional, the person says, 'I really feel better' and they still go round cleaning the cooker for five hours a day.
- Corrinne It depends what the contract is about. If it is to change their cleaning the cooker, then unless they have stopped cleaning the cooker compulsively, then the contract would not have been kept.
- Margaret Yes I think that's a problem. If I agree a contract with somebody and they sit there for two months and there's no sign of anything happening, they've made no effort to complete the contract, then I need to examine what I am allowing them to do, to not complete the contract. Well one of the things is the time factor. So long as I don't state a time and they don't agree a time, then it looks good and it is powerless.
- Michael Yes, I have one final statement which is in the end TA is in fact only a language and I think this is where the initial stereotyping come from. It's a language that talks about human behaviour. But in practice one cannot just talk about human behaviour, the people have to experience, people

wanting to change have to experience. It's that linking between feeling and thinking that I think is Transactional Analysis' strong point.

(This is a shortened version of a 45 minute interview, held in London on 13th May 1977.)

Corinne Gledhill

On the OK road as a T. A. trainee

Looking back to beginnings is a useful way for me to measure the distance travelled and so I welcome this chance to retrace my route on the road to becoming an advanced member of TA.

The beginning began in New York at Pace University where I, a thirty-eight year old 'Freshperson' was enrolled in the BA psychology course. Several members of the department were involved with TA in one way or another and in the Psychology course TA played a major part in the teaching of Child Psychology, Psychology of Human Relations, Group Dynamics and Interviewing and Therapeutic Techniques.

Even so I stayed uninvolved, content to listen with some amusement to the TA jargon which was the 'lingua franca' of many members of staff and students. My reaction was to hear this as coming from Adapted Child in response to a Critical Parent that said 'You are not OK unless you are saying the 'right' 'in' things'. At special gatherings the pastimes were 'who's playing 'Rapo' with whom.' 'What's your script?' and 'Me and my Therapist.'

It was the last week of my last term at Pace University. The last session of the course on Group Dynamics was drawing to a close. The two TA orientated female professors had asked for critical feedback and the room was full of the cooing of students well into a game of 'Gee you're wonderful Professors'. Naively I took the women at their word and gave them critical feedback that produced 'I'm OK - You're OK' mutterings from behind clenched teeth. The hostile glares of the other students were beamed in my direction as I brought logical, reason and judgement to my dissertation. At the end of it the session was brought to a swift close and as the classroom emptied one of the lecturers took me firmly by the arm and started asking probing questions about my hostilities to women in general and to mothers in particular. As my relationship with my mother had been a stormy one she was able to show me, to her satisfaction, that she was OK and that I was most certainly not and therefore my critical evaluation counted for naught.