

Adapted from William M. Timpson's (2002) *Teaching and Learning Peace* (Madison, WI: Atwood).

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Another way to think about emotional intelligence is to use the ideas of Eric Berne (1964) and others (Bry, 1973; Ernst, 1973; Freed, 1971, 1973; Harris, 1969) who described communication within *Child*, *Adult* and *Parent ego-states*. With references to the three ego-states associated with Freud's model of psychoanalysis—the Id (emotion), Ego (rationality), and Superego (conscience)—Transactional Analysis provides a relatively intuitive and accessible way to analyze past communication, especially conflicts, and think through future responses and what would be more desirable.

In Transactional Analysis, it would be the *Child* within you who can get scared or anxious and respond submissively. It can also be the *Child* within you who tries to rebel, who acts out against authority or sulks, who lashes out in anger, who reaches too quickly for a weapon. However, it also the *Child* within who can bring along spontaneous and creative joy to each and every task. While many adults, burdened with responsibilities at work and at home, can struggle to keep their *Child* alive and functioning, we know from research on creativity that accessing spontaneity and joy can be so important. Some psychotherapists will talk about reconnecting with an “inner child” when life seems too difficult, heavy and dark.

On the other end of the continuum, it may be the *Parent* within you, your conscience, who gets demanding, telling others what they should or shouldn't do, wagging a finger in their faces and scolding them. Like those who flaunt their power or authority, this kind of response can easily move into aggressiveness. The *Parent* within also can be compassionate and caring, especially when you face challenges and difficulties. The *Parent* can be empathetic and forgiving, allowing you to move past regret and guilt toward constructive action. The *Parent* within can also help frame the need for grieving when appropriate, a period we know is essential for recovery and resilience in the face of difficult loss. In the classroom, the *Parent* can set high expectations but then offer

comfort when students fall short. The *Parent* can be a task master but offer encouragement and emotional support as needed.

In between is the *Adult* response where you can rationally address even complex and emotionally charged issues, express yourself clearly and invite others to join you to rethink possible solutions. The *Adult* in you can devise the contract or plan that guides a student or class toward success or helps remediate when confusion reigns. The *Adult* can be completely logical. Of course, without the “joy” of the *Child* or the “conscience” of the *Parent*, the *Adult* can be “joyless” and excessively “task focused,” missing out on creative possibilities or the bigger picture. (goals, ethics).

Understanding Transactional Analysis can help you analyze a conflict—past, present or expected—and think about a preferred response. For example, have you ever felt patronized by someone or talked down to? In TA terms, this might be termed the *Parent* role. Was your response to become angry? Were you in the *Child* role—emotional and spontaneous? That makes sense; it’s a natural response to perceived condescension. However, staying in the *Adult* role could help you break these dynamics and get to a more rational, direct and honest basis for communication.

As with assertiveness training, TA is also easily understood by students. With practice it provides another set of tools for finding alternatives to angry, violent responses. My colleague, Eric Larsen, has taught in an alternative high school and developed a “life skills curriculum” he has termed the Discovery Program. Now used in many districts in over twenty different states, this program includes TA and has offered young people a proven model for managing their own lives, their thoughts, emotions and actions. In my own Honors seminar on Peacemaking, TA provides a mechanism for first year college students to think through how they could “make peace with themselves and others” as well as “with the planet.”

Using cooperative group work to support learning often hinges on the prosocial skills that students have or don’t have; i.e., their abilities to communicate effectively, to negotiate

and plan, to assess progress and make the needed corrections, or to address any problems that inevitably surface. The research on cooperative learning indicates that students very much enjoy the active and interactive aspects of group work but research also shows that groups can get off task when they lack the skills to focus and self-correct (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Most important, however, is how relevant these models can be on a personal level. For example, while many discussions about peace and nonviolence revolve around national or international issues, getting clear about constructive alternatives to violence for any of us as individuals can be profoundly important, grounding peacemaking efforts in real, meaningful, practical and personal context.

References

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