

***"Travelling with Berne through the paths of an integrative mind: towards an intra and inter-personal harmony from industrialized to developing countries".***

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I want to share with you today my thoughts about one experience as a transactional analyst, having worked in recent years in an environment very different from my usual one. I like traveling, I like meeting people, tastes, smells and sounds of different locations, capturing the richness of diversity. I guess is the same for many of you.

Let me tell you something about me... I'm a psychologist, psychotherapist, I am Teacher and Supervisor at the Superior Specialization School of Clinical Psychology of Salesian University in Rome and at IFREP in Cagliari, Sardinia. Since 1996 I've been a member of the Scilligo's research group at IRPIR (Istituto di Ricerca sui Processi Intrapsichici e Relazionali), which carries out scientific research activity in the area of TA using the Socio-Cognitive TA model. I'm one Founding Member of the IPDM (Institute for the Prevention of Minors Distress), a non-profit association working in the area of prevention of childhood difficulties with specific attention given to the problems of neglect and traumas.

About three years ago a colleague of mine, transactional analyst too, proposed to me a professional adventure, sure I would have said *"...wonderfull, but... no thanks"*: to bring some psychological help to educators and children in one of the the poorest regions of Brazil. I ask you for a moment to put yourself in my shoes: what would be your first thought if you had a proposal of this kind? What would be the first questions in your mind? I will never forget my surprise at this request, mixed with other emotions, and the question that arose was, *"Don't they need food or drugs more than a transactional analyst?"*

After this first question, I spent months thinking and working on this project, and I finally decided to go, accepting its challenge.

Let me show you now, as I speak, some images that can help you imagine the situation (videos).

Our help was requested by some nuns who give care to 600 children in two little villages in the interior of Maranhao. They asked us to help them in their effort to give education and rehabilitation to children who have problems related to family breakdown and condition of extreme poverty in which they grow. The aim was to promote their psychological and physical development reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors in relation to psychological distress and neglect by their families. The professional team consisted of four psychologists (including me) and a doctor and two assistants who would do the children play when they were not engaged in activities. Each day the nuns give children a meal, they teach to read and write, providing for clothes and medicines. They are a "safe haven" for their growth in a place where poverty is much less harmful than neglect and abuse. It is a land where children disappear for organ trafficking or child abuse ("*desaparecidos*"), where the fathers are out to get drunk and mothers wash clothes of "*facenderos*" for a handful of beans.

Parents frequently split up and abandon their children to grandparents or even into the street with all the consequences, crime, drugs, prostitution and illegal employment. The lucky ones live in mud houses, "*casas de barro*", built on a framework of branches with a roof of palm leaves. These rather dilapidated houses collapse during the rainy season.

They are also without water, so the population uses wells or rivers near the village. However this water is not drinkable and should be purified through filters as it is mixed with clay soil and is the vehicle of many infectious diseases such as hepatitis, intestinal wormy, cholera, typhoid and malaria. The sewers are open and flowing along roadsides, 90% without asphalt.

The hygiene conditions are alarming. In the area of Peritorò health care is missing: the only place where getting a little ambulance is a small pharmacy. The only health garrison is located about 30 km distant, and covers an area comprising 42 villages within a radius of one hundred miles. So many diseases that are easily treatable in the industrialized countries in these places become fatal.

Another sore is illiteracy. Although at Bom Jardim and Peritorò there is a public education, most children are left to themselves, and then over time they demotivate and prefer to learn the street, where, however, they are more likely to do some money to live (prostitution, illegal work etc..) Social injustice is so strong and poverty is so great that people live in a state of deep resignation.

We could say that the most common existential positions are "I'm not OK - You're not OK. - I'm not OK - You're OK." I'm sure you're already thinking about how central were the cultural aspects in our thoughts as we prepared to work with non-European minds.

What "*minds in action*" would we have met? This was the question!

We were aware that we had some answers just being there, so we prepared a preliminary project to help educators and children and support their development, being flexible to adapt to context. Anyway, what should be the core of our intervention? We worked with adults and children, which would be the point of convergence of various activities? The core of our intervention, in my opinion, could be summarized this way: to promote well-being stimulating the development and integration of mind, in every possible way.

I think now it is important to stop and reflect with you on the concept of mind. Daniel Siegel [probably many of you already know him] Dan Siegel, from Department of Psychiatry at UCLA, is the father of Inter Personal Neuro Biology, and the author of "The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being". He claims that 95% of mental health practitioners, have NOT a clear operational definition of mind. I like his definition, because it's clear and consistent with Transactional Analysis.

The '**Mind**' is a **relational** and **embodied process** that **regulates the flow** of energy and information

What was the idea of mind of Eric Berne? He had a relational view of the mind: The ego states formation, the importance of the recognition-hunger, the concept of "strokes", the whole social psychiatry, the protocol and the script theory show that we cannot explain the formation of personality and its development unless we refer to a system of relationships that continually influence the vision of self and others. The mind, in Berne, emerges from relationships and the "mind in action" can be seen through patterns of behavior observed in reality. He says that "*The term ego state is intended merely to denote states of mind and their related patterns of behavior as they occur in nature...*" (Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy. 1961, p 30).

Coming back to the project, stimulating the mind development and integration meant promoting intra and inter-personal processes linked

with well-being, energizing the ego states that characterize them. According to Berne, well-being is manifested in autonomy with the three capacities of awareness, spontaneity and intimacy, the capacities of an harmonic mind, what Berne called an "Integrated Adult". In his own words *"...The aware person is alive because he knows how he feels, where he is and when it is.... Spontaneity means option, the freedom to choose and express one's feelings from the assortment available... Intimacy means the spontaneous, game-free candidness of an aware person..."* The absence of one or more of these skills leads to some sort of mental disharmony, in Berne's words, the Adult can't be integrated. The question is:

"What are the key-processes that occur with autonomy and well-being?"

From an Inter Personal Neuro Biology point of view, the brain functions in harmony when integration occurs. *"Without integration, neural function moves toward rigidity, chaos, or both. Integration is the key to moving toward the flexibility, harmony, and adaptability that accompany complexity and the promotion of health in living systems"*. Integration can be defined as the linking together of differentiated elements of a system into a more complex whole. This movement toward integration generally occurs when a system remains balanced yet reorganizing, a synthesis of stability and change, adaptively developing through time. The outcome of such flow is the creation of new combinations that move between familiarity and disorder, an integrative state with qualities that can be summarized in the adjectives flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable (Siegel, 2010).

"Integration is the key process for health promotion in living systems"

There is an interesting overlap between secure parent-child attachment, the integrative processes of the mind and functions of the middle prefrontal cortex (see Siegel, 2010).

The nine specific functions that correlate with integrative neural activity in the middle areas of the prefrontal cortex are body regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, fear modulation, response flexibility, insight, empathy, morality, and intuition. These nine functions are also the established outcomes and process of the INTRA personal attunement developed through the reflective skill of looking inward and internal dialog full of permissions (instead of injunctions). Recent data show that the first eight on the list are also the outcomes of the

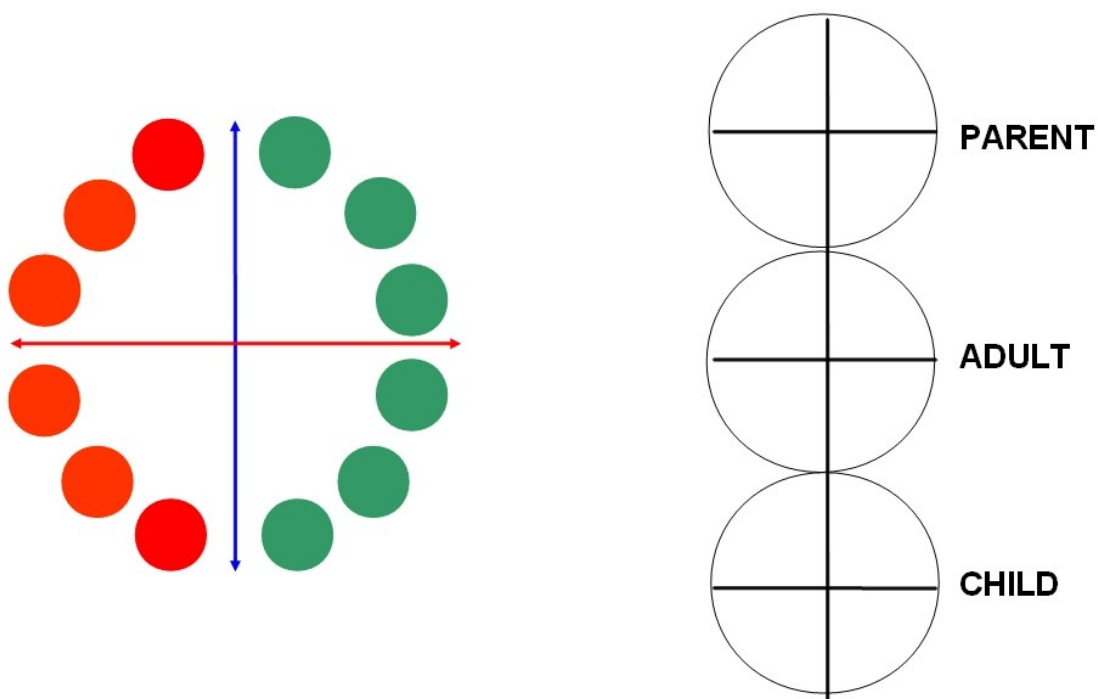
interpersonal attunement of secure attachment, such as a parent-child relationship filled with love, congruence, and compassion.

Integration and the role of Ego States related to prefrontal cortex area is also at the center of TA conceptual reframing produced by Scilligo and his group with Socio Cognitive TA. Scilligo and his group, with I belong, has long appreciated TA for its basic values, for the relational approach and the wealth of knowledge based on clinical experience. SCTA is NOT a new TA model, it's a development of traditional TA, based on the models of mind and interpersonal relationships, in agreement with the data of contemporary scientific research.

These data can be summarized in two basic ideas:

- the mind explained in terms of schema
- interpersonal relationships have a central role in mind construction.

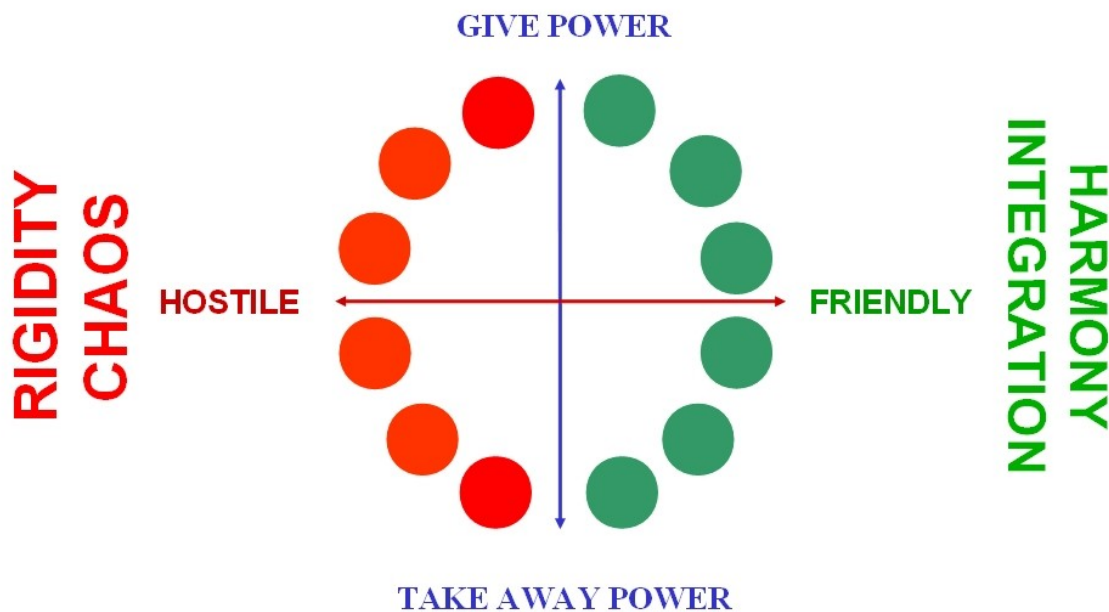
Ego States are explained in terms of patterns of processual nature (Scilligo, 2009) underlying the representations of self, others and their relationship (a concept similar to the Bowlby Internal Working Model).



SCTA diagrams are easily translatable in traditional ones

Socio Cognitive Transactional Analysis diagrams are easily translatable into traditional ones, though in some ways the meanings change.

In Socio Cognitive Transactional Analysis distress and well-being can be conceptualized as different Ego States configurations, related to the emotional and the power dimensions, in other words attachment and differentiation dimensions; these are the fundamental dimensions of the SCTA model, and both can be found in Berne.



Distress is related to Rebellious and Critic ego states (Red: hostile differentiation, violence, control or comply, self-oppression), while well-being is related to Free and Protective ego states (Green: friendly autonomy, friendly influence or acceptance, empathy toward self/others, self-cultivation).

Rebellious ego states impede contact with the body's signals, making chaotic the logic and lead to destructive exploration and impulsivity. Critic ego states are permeated with fear and lead to addiction and destructive criticism and hard charges toward self and others.

So these Ego States have to do with processes characterized by chaos or rigidity, in other words processes that lead to disharmony of mind.

Free Ego States facilitate contact with the inner world (feelings, intuitions, attributions of meaning, personal projects, aspirations and ideals) to support personal initiative.

Protective Ego States promote contact with the outside world using the information mediated by the senses in relation to physical and interpersonal context, to consider how to act constructively in their environment, taking into account physical and relational limitations.

So these Ego States have to do with processes of empathic resonance and INTRA and INTER personal attunement, in other words integrative processes that lead to harmony of mind.

"Free and Protective Ego States  
are linked with autonomy, well-being and integration"

These are the ego states that children (and adults) activate more easily if the attachment relationship is characterized by internalized security. If the attachment relationship is characterized by internalized insecurity, people develop an easy access to Rebellious and Critic ego states. In Peritorò and Bom Jardim, some of the children showed poor self-esteem, low interest in learning, oppositional behaviour, and physical symptoms related to neglecting and maltreatment. Many of them were raised by caregivers that were abusive, neglectful or unable to nurture properly. For example, José had "unexplained" headache, and during the session with his mother we discovered that he was sexually abused by young men in the neighborhood. His mother knew it but criticized him because he was ill, aggressive toward her and would not go to school. We worked with his mother to become protective and supportive to her son, and with the child to encourage him to seek protection and safe places to attend, as the house of the sisters. We also talked with educators to give him positive strokes he needed. After several days, José had begun to smile again, came to the nuns's house where he ate several times with us, and participated in activities with educators, without headaches.

The theory behind our model argues that mental and behavioral patterns are largely internalized from interpersonal processes experienced in the past and present, particularly within attachment relationships. We all know that caring and attuning communication between adult and child can promote healthy development, linked to secure attachment. Children are naturally curious and eager to observe and learn from caregivers. They form automatically and unconsciously internalized

representations of caregivers they observe. These mental representations are part of self that act like or imitate those caregivers, called introjects. Newly discovered mirror neurons appear to explain why we develop Ego States that mimic our caregivers: it's not a choice, it's a sort of biological reflex!

And this is why promoting healthy attachments can be the heart of a true preventive action. Strengthening the competences of adults is a strategy that in the short, medium and long term leads to *intra and inter-personal harmony*, that is, states of mind capable of integration.

Playing with children, talking with them about their experiences in informal way, were the settings where we offered an overdose of listening, compassion, empathy, acceptance, respect, informations, encouragement, a "distillation" of what should provide an adult to a child who is growing up.

How to summarize what we have done? I can say that we supported the okness in every possible way and in all available settings, from classrooms to the homes made of mud.

We met parents or caregivers, to find together ways to protect children, thinking together about their education, setting limits and rules, giving appropriate messages to grow, learn and be ok. With the Drama Triangle in mind, we spent a lot of energy to stay out of Rescuer and Persecutor roles... often their basic position was infact the Victim one, asking for advices they would never put into practice, ready to play a "Yes, *but*" game.

We made very focused clinical interventions with adults and children, also teaching some relaxation techniques, as the "*safe place*". We have taught this technique especially to children showing distress related to abuse and neglect. We were moved looking at children falling asleep after relaxing, the same agitated children who, at the beginning, moved away from us fearing a slap, when we were approaching.

We gave informations to stimulate the Adult Ego State of parents and educators, implementing courses for parenting and teaching proper use of strokes and concepts such as attachment and attunement.

Of course we taught the basics of TA (i.e. ego states, script, definitions and types of strokes, transactions, games and so on) expecially with people who had some basic education.

All this has a strong link with Berne who said "*...people can think for themselves and resolve their difficulties when they are given the right information*".

We spent two months during the summers of 2008 and 2009, and next August another team of transactional analysts will go to Maranhao to continue this experience of mutual enrichment. I hope that the harmony of Brazilian sounds will be reflected in the harmony of the minds of the children we met, with whom we played football in the dusty streets of their villages. Certainly they helped me to harmonize mine... After all, I have lived with them in a surprising way the essence of our basic philosophy.

Obrigada! ("Thank you" in Brazilian)

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