



Cultural Parent and Learning in the Knowledge Society: A Survey with Students of Primary Education

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Some changes have been made so that significant footnotes are now included within the text and references have been added.

Abstract

This article describes a research study involving 132 students on a Primary Education Sciences degree course at Roma Tre University. A complexity paradigm was employed for the research, which used group activities to design a questionnaire that was subsequently analysed to provide 8 different perspectives. The underlying theoretical perspective involved investigation of the applicability of the transactional analysis concept of Cultural Parent (and the associated concepts of Frame of Reference, Script and Ego States) as a way of understanding how changes are needed in educational processes to reflect how family, school and societal cultures have changed, with particular reference to Generation App and the increasing impact of technology on virtual spaces, and the need to reflect cultural diversity.

Introduction

This work was done within a framework of experimentation and research which began from 2011 onwards within several Italian universities. The aim was to define a model that will incorporate elements of transactional analysis in order to understand the didactic processes within primary schools. The learning and teaching process is seen from a perspective that integrates cognitive aspects,

metacognitive dimensions and affective elements, and assumes they can become 'objects' of the teaching activity in order to facilitate the development of self-efficacy and autonomy (in line with key competencies for lifelong learning established by the European Council 2006).

It was increasingly evident that new processes and modalities of social communication were occurring within the external social context of schools, and that these could be related to the characteristics of virtual places (social networks, internet, video games) and to real places (in which complex multicultural and intergenerational communication processes are developed (Prensky 2012)). This means that each of us is immersed in processes of innovation and change and we are therefore invited to revisit frequently our repertoires of personal skills, attitudes and cultural references (Newton, 2015).

Theory Review

Transactional analysis as an educational process was described by the author (Fregola 2011). It was chosen as the reference theory (Montuschi 1993) to be tested against a background of didactic models (Baldacci 2004; Ballanti 1988), learning theories (Olmerti Peja 2015) and competence design models (Castoldi 2011; Scapin and Da Re 2014). Applications of transactional analysis within the educational field have been documented by Emmerton and Newton (2004), who described the journey of educational TA from its beginnings, and by Newton and Barrow (2015), who produced an international guide to theory and practice of educational TA. The research was founded on the assumption that there would be observable affective and relational variables that could be traced back to Bernian constructs, with many possibilities for applying TA from a pedagogical and didactic point of view within schools proposed by Chalvin (1986). This author has also written about the relationships of learning processes and strategic studying (Fregola 2012) and

it was expected that such processes would be influenced by specific skills acquired by the teacher that would improve the teaching-learning process from an educational perspective. We intended to maintain the boundaries between the disciplinary fields relating to the peculiarities of theory and technique.

Cultural Parent, Frame of Reference and Script

The concept of *Cultural Parent* within TA was introduced by Pearl Drego (1983), an Indian Transactional Analyst, incorporating into it the Bernian concept of group culture (Berne 1963). It refers to a metaphor of a place in the mind in which individuals find acceptance within the systems of convictions and beliefs held by their cultural or family groups. Referred to within TA as the group etiquette, this characterises the socio-cultural model that has shaped over time. It occurs alongside the technical aspects, or technical culture, about how the culture produces artefacts, and the group character, which includes the emotional aspects which are manifested within the group. According to Drego, the Cultural Parent is learned directly from parental figures, mainly by modelling.

A *Frame of Reference* is held by each individual (Miglionico 1998), fed by every social group, family, country and city which contribute aspects that unite everyone, although with different intensities and drawing on their individuality in terms of their Cultural Parent. Schiff (1981) defined it as "the structure of associated (conditioned) responses (nerve connections) that organises thoughts, emotions and behaviours in response to specific stimuli... [and provides the individual with] a global perceptive, conceptual, affective and action set that is used to define themselves, others and the world." (p.60-61). The frame of reference therefore represents a filter that determines a large part of the perception and understanding of reality (Stewart and Joines 1990) and the processes of selective attention. It leads to recognition strategies of discrimination and classification, and on other levels to decision processes, problem solving and actions (Gagné 1973).

Berne (1961) described the *Script* as a life plan based on decisions taken in childhood, reinforced by the adult world and by contexts that have been characteristic within the individual's biography. These factors largely determine the emotional, thinking and behavioural responses which can, in turn, be organised into automatic reactions that obviate any self-awareness and precede any assessments of situations in the here-and-now. Within transactional analysis, autonomy (Berne 1961) is regarded as the concept that avoids script-bound reactions. Communication can therefore be more effective when autonomy allows

the individual to express their talents spontaneously and authentically. In this sense it is a process that allows the individual to recover times, spaces, ways of communicating and internal resources that drop from affective intelligence (Montuschi 1987) and promote self-efficacy (Bandura 2000; Olmetti Peja 2007).

The Hypothesis

It is a common hypothesis that educational and didactic activities impact on some affective variables that can influence the teaching-learning process. We can begin from various theories of reference (Visalberghi 1978) to consider experimental pedagogy to be integrated into the theoretical and methodological aspects of general teaching. The purpose of the research described in this article is to experiment with some situations in complex learning environments that will characterise the deductive interaction of digital natives – i.e. those of the Generation APP described by Gardner and Davis (2014) and Olmetti Peja, Fregola and Zona (2015), and their parents. The intention is to study phenomena about unconscious reactions to continuous innovations in a linear and direct manner (Bocci, De Angelis, and Olmetti Peja 2016).

Studying the educational interactions within the knowledge society, with the current generation of digital natives and Generation App, will present new features to explore and study, the opportunity to revisit prejudices rooted in technological innovation, and the relational dynamics between parents and teachers, outside of the automatic reactions that might be generated by script. Within the complexity paradigm (Alberici 1999; Marescotti 2015; Morin 2001, Ceruti 2009), the Cultural Parent can be reinterpreted in terms of the emerging educational needs and educational roles and how these need to be reconciled to the primary purpose of the evolution of knowledge within a framework of culture, social dynamics and the need to maintain ties with culture and tradition (Fregola 2010).

The Research

The procedural plan of the research developed according to the following phases:

1. Sharing and study of the concepts of Cultural Parent, Frame of Reference and Script in a plenary session with students attending the Laboratory of General Education.
2. A survey of beliefs designed to collect useful data for the preparation of the questionnaire. For this, the theme of the Cultural Parent was described and examined in depth, including the link with ego states. Subgroups were formed for brainstorming on that, producing examples that covered typical situations in which the Cultural Parent might be

recognised from the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of parents and grandparents.

3. The investigation began with design and administration of the questionnaire containing three open questions:
 - a. Write a thought and feeling arising from the meaning that you attribute to the term "Cultural Parent".
 - b. Describe the educational characteristics of an effective parent in the current times.
 - c. Describe the educational characteristics you find in your parents.
4. The final stage was the study of the frequency and quality of the statements, defining them and identifying clusters. Replies to the questionnaires were collected and grouped under the categories of group etiquette, technical culture and group character, which allows us to relate them to the Parent, Adult and Child ego states. The comments were also classified in terms of whether they were:
 - a. descriptive definitions – statements that highlight the relationships between the phenomena and the behaviours;
 - b. argumentative definitions – statements that allow us to specify the relationships between phenomena and related behaviour;
 - c. subjective interpretation – statements that highlight prejudices, values, beliefs, priorities, uses and customs;
 - d. expression of feelings/mode – affirmations that highlight emotional and affective aspects;
 - e. 'magical' expectations – requests for attention or actions and behaviours exhibited by a child with little chance of parents responding accordingly.

Results

The research highlighted eight different visions, presented here in ranked order in terms of frequencies.

Vision 1 – the Cultural Parent directs education – the parent has the precise task of educating and raising the child. This task is influenced by its culture of origin. It clearly emerges that the culture has always been the common thread that has linked past generations with the present, and parents are the spokespersons of that culture. Traditions are to be handed down following what the parents were taught, and passed on by the family. Secondly, the parent teaches their child what they themselves have introjected during their own childhood of their own culture – what Berne defines as the Parent ego state containing stereotypes, thoughts,

beliefs, prejudices, knowledge, ideals, values, customs, models of behaviour, rules, norms, prohibitions, beliefs, traditions, practical knowledge, customs, implicit and explicit laws of the culture of the group – these elements will determine the training and education of children.

Vision 2 – in this perspective, the Cultural Parent generates culture. The Cultural Parent is the one who generates culture, imparts teaching, follows the second birth of an individual which is the educational-intellectual birth that separates a human from other animals. A student identified her own Cultural Parent in her grandfather: although he did not bring her into the world, he raised her and instilled in her all the wisdom in her possession and taught her how to constantly add to it.

Vision 3 – the Cultural Parent understands that education is received from the environment outside the family and excludes that received within the family. This perspective is determined by the traditions of a certain personal life context within the culture of a specific group, and is conveyed by the media, by the school, by the people with whom one comes into contact and therefore depends on the personal experiences of each individual. It is represented by rules dictated by companies and various institutions, including schools. This situation can lead to ambivalent feelings: on the one hand, the parent can feel reassured by the support of the whole community in the process of education and growth of the child, and place reliance on the knowledge and experiences of others; on the other hand, the parent may feel frightened by the influence external sources are having on the child and therefore upon the family context, since such sources are not always positive and controllable.

Vision 4 - in this perspective, the Cultural Parent instructs the children and is likely to be very attentive to the need for education and may be competing with the proposed education provided at school and by society.

Vision 5 – the Cultural Parent is a place of multiculturalism in a global world. It is framed in the phenomena of globalisation and multiculturalism and therefore has an attitude of openness and acceptance towards the new, of curiosity towards the difference, and is in search of an open mind. It is therefore available for comparison and cohabitation with people from different cultures and ages.

Vision 6 – the Cultural Parent is the expression of the dynamic relationship that is defined between schools and families. This means that parenting transmits the culture as it exists today and as it is created dynamically and defined between schools and families. Some saw this figure as a Regulatory Parent,

like the ones that were very common in the past, e. g. when it is too attentive to the rules and spheres of control; others saw it as a competent Adult who researches, is guided by an active Free Child, and actively facilitates consideration and comparison between action models and educational schemes.

Vision 7 – the Cultural Parent here has the function of mediating the culture in the host country, so it is associated with the parent who has been forced to emigrate to another country and has been put in a position of confronting themselves with a different culture to that of their origin. The task of this parent is very complex: on the one hand, there is the need to protect the origins and identity, whilst at the same time searching for ways of integration with the community they are entering into.

Vision 8 – the Cultural Parent here has been identified as a parental figure that is fully inserted into the 'culture' of our time, which means that they are educated, scholarly in terms of education, professionally competent, and a person with experience in facing life and its changes. Their relationship with people is oriented to lifelong learning and generation of self-efficacy.

Comments on Student Results

The Cultural Parent can be seen as a learned instance of which many manifestations that complement each other can be observed. From the eight visions emerges the need to revisit the methods that have been used until now to create a secure cultural base on which to develop a valid and well-founded personal identity. Schools and families may not even share the same rules, the same ideals, the same habits and customs, as was the case up until the end of the last century, when the rules taught to children in school did not conflict with those imparted by parents. This favoured the clarity of boundaries between educational functions of school and family, because anyone who disagreed or did not accept them was considered deviant from society.

From the analysis carried out, as many as 83 out of 132 students have explained that their families are less dependent on school education and that they try to offer and integrate their children's education with extracurricular training courses available and based on expectations (e.g. English courses, European computer licence, sports, music, etc.)

It can be said that until a few years ago the Cultural Parent was mostly shared and unanimously known and accepted, at least within the same national territory. Today things have changed and many different Cultural Parents need to co-inhabit. This creates within each family the need for integration between parental figures for intergenerational and intercultural reasons.

Further Considerations

The research has shown that the transformations underway have resulted in the variability of the forms, amplitude and modes of communication which define the relationships within families and schools and influence mutual expectations.

It was also seen that transactional analysis provided a basis for investigation and study. Students were able to break away from their own Cultural Parent in a process that allow them to return to the Adult ego state so that they could think critically and undertake analysis and synthesis in a way that is free from the automatic reactions that are normally the results of the script. This process is defined by Berne as decontamination (which means that the Adult ego state is no longer being 'contaminated' by the Parent and/or Child ego states).

It seems that we need further research to consider a decontamination process associated with the development of educational processes that will reflect the needs of our time.

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