

BIBLIOGRAPHY—GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY AND THERAPY

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**ON THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF TRANSACTIONAL
ANALYSIS AND GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY WITH
APPLICATIONS TO COMMUNICATION THEORY
AND PRACTICE**

That there is overlap between Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology should be obvious after examining the first two sections of this presentation. Both attempt to view man in a holistic and integrated framework without fragmented, inseparable parts.

Both also emphasize the need for responsibility for self (self-direction, self-movement) through awareness of experience and through the ability of an individual to adapt and adjust not only physically but mentally (outwardly as well as inwardly). The words of Alexander Pope of "know then thyself" and "the best study of mankind is man" apply particularly to Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology. Through them, a person can know himself better; as a result, his interpersonal relationships should improve, including his communicative behavior. Thus, individuals should become more fully human and achieve more of their potential—functioning at more than the five and six percent figure that Margaret Mead and Herbert Otto have estimated.

In this particular vein, Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology fit into what Abraham Maslow referred to as the Third Force. Also labeled as Humanistic Psychology and the Human Potentiality Movement, this approach to the study of man stresses growth and positive aspects of human development. Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology fit into this area by taking an optimistic view of man, his potential, and his improvement. Viewed in this manner, man becomes a human being with vast and untapped abilities and resources for achievement and fulfillment. While Freudianism looked at man negatively and behaviorism looked at man through environmental conditioning, humanism (the Third Force) looks at positive aspects of man and examines ways of growth, achievement, and development of untapped abilities, skills, and resources.

Still another way of examining Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology is through their conceptual overview. With holistic and integrated characteristics, they appear to bear close similarity to systems thinking—at least at the human being level of analysis. Also, such characteristics are more in line with the total communication process viewpoint. Transactional Analysis, Gestalt Psychology, and communication process would appear to have commonality with one another through systems thinking.

With an analysis of the communication process in mind, Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology relate to the field of General Semantics, a well-established way to approach the study of the communication process. Both Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology emphasize the present—the here-and-now; they analyze the present through awareness of past experiences stored in the mind. All of this past and present emphasis is done so that an individual can develop himself more fully in the future. This past-present-future relationship parallels the time binding thesis of general semantics as developed by Alfred Korzybski. Moreover, the adult position in Transactional Analysis along with awareness, responsibility, and openness in Gestalt Psychology would appear to equate generally with the concepts of sanity, maturity, and accurate evaluation of Korzybski's general semantics. Transactional Analysis, Gestalt Psychology, and General Semantics all seem to lead to balance and adjustment in human beings.

More specifically, Transactional Analysis and Gestalt correspond in one way or another to various miscommunication patterns evolving from general semantics concepts. Using

William V. Haney's patterns in *Communication and Organizational Behavior*, along with other selected general semantics concepts, the following similarities are noted:

1. *Polarization*—Transactional Analysis attempts to overcome this pattern of thinking with its four basic OK positions; Gestalt does the same through integration between topdog and underdog as well as through its various levels of awareness.

2. *Frozen Evaluation*—Transactional Analysis overcomes this faulty evaluation through past, present, future orientations; Gestalt emphasizes continually "here and now" awareness, differentiating indirectly past and future orientations.

3. *Indiscrimination*—Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology both extol the value of unique human experience and awareness; as such, they would seem to counteract this discrimination failure as well as Allness.

4. *Pointing and Associating*—Like the ideas given for indiscrimination, Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology bring out different associators through Parent, Child, Adult behaviors and levels of awareness. With such an emphasis, it would appear that both bring out the difference, even though indirectly, between associative and pointing dimensions of meaning.

5. *Inference-Observation Confusion*—Through emphasis on Adult behavior in Transactional Analysis and "here and now" awareness in Gestalt, both fields differentiate between what is perceived at the moment and what goes beyond such perception. In addition, both differentiate, again, between past, present, and future experiences, which would imply an order to abstraction level.

6. *Bypassing, Intensional Orientation, and Blinding*—That only people have experiences and that they are unique should reveal that Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology attempt to overcome these faulty orientations and evaluation patterns.

7. *Undelayed Reactions*—All of the foregoing ideas, as well as the ideas presented in Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology, focus on this basic point. Structuring of the fragmented parts of the personality and structuring of the Parent, Child, and Adult force delay. General Semanticists contend that delay in evaluation depends upon well-differentiated thalamic and cortical stimulation in neurological terms. In terms of order, delay occurs with the natural survival order—that is, from lower

order sense abstractions to higher order abstraction in the mind, with delay between thalamic and cortical regions of the brain (from the mid-brain to the outer layers where learning, memory, and association occur). Although they use different terms for it, it can be inferred generally that Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology create this same type of delay.

The previous attempts to correlate Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology with General Semantics should point out a general relationship. More specifically, key general semantics concepts such as multidimensional order, undefined terms, "over/under" defined terms, multiordinality, semantic reactions, extensional devices and orientation, and organism-a-whole-in-an-environment have similar overlap with the two fields condensed in the outlines. To explore all of them would be too exhaustive a task for this basic outline. Perhaps individual teachers would like to make such comparisons in their own lectures, presentations, or class discussions.

The preceding points concluding this presentation have been developed from the general to the specific. First the general relationship between Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology was shown; next their applicability to human behavior and the communication process was developed. Following that step, the correlation between the two fields and the discipline of general semantics was established. Continuing downward on the abstraction ladder, the next step is to show the relationship of Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology to communication practice and skills—particularly writing.

In this next step, the emphasis will be placed on Transactional Analysis. Gestalt could also be applied but its terminology is somewhat more difficult to transfer. Every effort in this report, and particularly this conclusion section, has been to simplify concepts. Because of its more familiar terminology, Transactional Analysis will be used in the application to writing.

As can be seen in the outlined points concerning Transactional Analysis, the field does pose ways of analyzing verbal behavior. In fact, many of the examples given in the first outline did just that; they were given in verbal form representing child, parent, or adult forms. To be sure, Transactional Analysis forces delay in evaluation; to the extent that it forces or structures thinking before writing, then better writing effort should result.

Still more specifically, the structure of Transactional Analysis

appears to reinforce the rationale for writing business letters directly, indirectly, or persuasively (or in Plans A, B, C). The adult position in Transactional Analysis forces emphasis on the present, modifies parent and child ego states, and creates deliberateness before action. It would appear that adult behavior, with its deliberateness and structured thinking, creates the decision to write directly in positive situations, indirectly in negative ones, and persuasively in ones requiring unusual action. In addition, adult behavior forces an analysis of receiver ego states.

Also, adult ego states could aid decisions about whether to present business reports directly or indirectly. They would force attention on the needs of the receiver, the complexity of the report, and the way in which the report might be received.

Although it has not been brought out previously, stroking is a basic concept in Transactional Analysis. By stroking is meant the recognition of another human being's presence. While stroking can take either positive or negative forms, positive stroking represents the most enduring, nourishing, satisfying, and fully human approach. Most people, through normal development processes, progress from positive physical strokes (or touching) to positive verbal and nonverbal strokes (smiles, winks, nods, and the like). This idea would seem to accentuate the basic principle of positive emphasis in writing business letters.

It would appear from the foregoing remarks that only adult ego states are of value in thinking patterns affecting writing. Quite the contrary is true, though. The idea is to be aware of what ego state is working at what time and with what effect. Inappropriate parent behavior could quite effectively force more objectivity in business reporting as well as create the need for appropriate tone and adaptability in letters and reports. Also, child ego states could generate needed creativity in all types of business writing situations.

In conclusion, Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Psychology create a structure, a pattern, and an approach to analyzing human behavior. In addition, they show the relationships between and among concepts in the patterns they establish. As such, they could find productive use as an approach in business communication courses involving theory and practice or practice courses alone. Put differently, they could expand theory-oriented sections of courses as well as reinforce existing principles of functional business writing.

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