

MAIEUTIC FOR DIALOGUE: CONNECTING AN ARGUMENTATIVE APPROACH TO  
MEDIATION AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS IN THE FIELD OF  
EDUCATION. INTERDISCIPLINARY SIGNPOSTS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND  
PARTICIPATORY SOCIETIES

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**Sommario**

Le competenze relazionali giocano un ruolo vitale in un territorio come il sud tirole, caratterizzato dall'interazione fra differenti lingue e culture. scopo di questo lavoro è fornire indicazioni metodologiche e teoriche per l'educazione al dialogo nella convergenza della prospettiva della mediazione e dell'analisi transazionale. l'interdisciplinarietà consente di trarre vantaggio dall'apporto di entrambe le discipline e di sviluppare un programma per l'applicazione pratica di educazione al dialogo centrato sullo sviluppo di un'attitudine dialogica, non solo nei rapporti interpersonali, ma allargata alla cittadinanza attiva.

**Keywords:** Conflict prevention & transformation; Education to Dialogue; Legal Mediation; Educational Transactional Analysis; Non-violent Communication.

**1. A vignette: harmonic relationships as a wealth and true resource for a territory**

In his insightful work on the *art and soul* of building peace, *The moral Imagination*, the famous scholar and peacebuilder John Paul Lederach (Lerdach, 2005) suggests that – in order to correctly relate to a certain context – it is fundamental to understand (and connect to) what he calls “the soul of the place” (Lerdach, 2005, page 106). With that word the Author provokes his readers to a different understanding of commonly adopted concepts, such as “definition of conflict roles”, “historical analysis of the conflict”, or “assessment of the needs and interests of the target setting”, which are usually fundamental in the first step of a peace process, such as the “mapping” of the situation on which interventions ought to be designed and evaluated. This activity

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includes understanding the origin of the situation, its outputs and trying to evaluate possible scenarios and developments.

Had such analysis been performed without adequate attention also to the interconnections between those elements and their territory, as well as the human, relational dimension that “lives” and “interacts” in that context (properly: the “soul” of the place), this would negatively affect the whole understanding of the situation, as well as the possibility of fully interacting with it. Without attention to the human, relational interconnections (and their interconnections with the other elements that form a certain context), each analysis and intervention would sort out to be abstract, lacking correct “fine-tuning”, and, therefore, ineffective if not even backfiring.

This peculiar attention to the “web” of interactions – seen both diachronically and synchronically – is a key element of the approach named “conflict transformation”, whose core-idea lays in proposing a relational approach to the issue of understanding and transforming conflict: this relies on the premise that conflict itself is placed within a complex pattern of relationships. Understanding relational dynamics and working with them is therefore the key for promoting constructive and lasting albeit not static balances, whose effectiveness relies on the fact that they are supported and “experienced” by the people who are acting and inter-acting in a certain context.

Lederach’s invitation can be applied, in our view, also to the broader context of social interventions, as building lasting and constructive change – one of conflict transformation’s cornerstones – is a goal that each society can assume, maybe only with the purpose of preventing potential conflict and transforming the “energies” of those controversies that each society experiences into forces which can promote positive change.

Harmonic relationships are not only a goal that regards those societies which are sadly challenged by hard and open conflicts: harmonic relationships between people, and between people and their context, even in historical and geographical terms, are a true resource and wealth for a territory.

The word “harmony” connects to the Greek notion of “*harmonia*”, strictly bound to the idea of “*kosmos*”: these concepts do not evocate a geometrical and static order, where differences are unwelcome, but rather a dynamic and “holistic” idea of order, in which differences and commonalities find a way to virtuously and “euphonically” coexist and interact (Moro, 2014). Elements which are part of a *kosmos* are not mutually indifferent, but all contribute to forming it; moreover, the order they belong to cannot be thought as the mere “sum” of each part, as their interaction and their connections are themselves fundamental elements, albeit not being properly “parts”.

It is no surprise that such image refers to a musical metaphor, as “harmony” requires, rather than the absence of tensions and dissonances, the ability of finding a way to “ride” the “waves” of those tensions and find a way for them to finally (and sometimes surprisingly) resolve (Cooley, 2006). This also helps to outline how a constructive change might happen: changes challenge and put at stake previously consolidated balances, but changes occur, and therefore challenge our ability of dealing with them in a constructive way.

To remain in the musical metaphor, we are constantly challenged by the issue of “modulating” between contrasts, as, e.g., between *identity* and *diversity*, between *tradition* and *innovation*, between *local* and *global*: and the way we do it cannot be standardized (as though we were not a part of such order, and dominated it from above, which is both conceptually and practically impossible): *harmony* opens also to the unexpected, and in the meantime requires not to lose connection from where we come from, as a trace of the past is always incorporated in the present and in the future. Somehow, in a dynamic situation, the question about “where we are” implies also the question about where we come from and where we are going (Lederach, 2005).

Much of what we outlined so far has much to do with dialogue and mediation, as both dialogue and mediation express connection, attention to commonalities and differences, research for harmony, capability to deal with tensions and contrasts in a non-destructive way.

Through a metaphorical vignette, we tried to stretch a first suggestion of a dynamic and contextual idea of ‘territory’, in which several different elements continuously interact and contribute to portraying “the soul of the place”, which is, in some sense, some sort of “hidden treasure” for each territory. Accessing to that treasure, developing its potential, preventing the risk of its deployment is a vital goal, and, to our view, it requires a

quest for harmony, in which dialogue and mediation are key-factors, both for preventing negative outcomes and for fostering positive ones. This is why, in a mid-long term perspective, also an “education to dialogue” turns to be one of the best investments for a territory and for the communities which live in it.

## 2. Potentials of a transformative approach. Contextualizing a proposal.

Potential and actual conflict is inevitable in human relationships, and this is remarkably visible at various levels of our complex, western societies, in which the lack of open conflicts (wars, civil wars) within each territory is paired by an underlying restlessness at an interpersonal and micro-social level, which affects both the sense of security and the sense of belonging that people have<sup>3</sup>. It seems that western societies are “pacified”, on one hand, but quite restless on the other, so that interpersonal, communitarian and social bonds – including those based on mutuality, reciprocity or solidarity – tend to be weakened<sup>4</sup>.

The absence of open conflicts is surely a resource and a quite positive element for a society, but this does not mean that such society is truly at peace and able to constructively rely on its resources.

We could somehow say that the lens of ‘*conflict transformation*’ is, therefore, quite useful also for those contexts which do not experience an open conflict, as it helps understanding relational and contextual dynamics in their potentials and limits and work on them in a harmonic and interconnected way<sup>5</sup>.

One of the limitations of other approaches to conflict resolution is, in our view, their tendency of developing a static and synchronic portrait of the situation, while *conflict transformation* invites to deeply consider it within its (social, geographical, historical, natural, communitarian) context: this means that analyzing relational dynamics requires a specific attention to the history, geography, economy and “social morphology” of a territory, and this has to be filtered through the lens of the relationships involved, at all their levels (personal, interpersonal, communitarian, inter-communitarian, societal, structural).

Such an approach, open to complexity but also to constructive change, is useful also in the designing of contextual interventions, meant to foster and empower the actual resources of a given territory, among which relationships play quite a vital role<sup>6</sup>. In this sense, the lens of *conflict transformation* can result quite useful also for the prevention of conflicts, as well as for the development of positive changes.

Acquiring methodologies and tools for *conflict transformation* can be quite useful in designing the development of a territory in its various dimensions, including the communitarian and social level, the economical level, and the design of structures and infrastructures<sup>7</sup>. This also helps preventing controversy, whose negative outputs can be quite visible both at a political and at a legal level. According to this perspective, *education to dialogue* and *mediation* are here understood in a broader sense, whose field of application is larger

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<sup>3</sup> Cfr. U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. New Delhi, Sage 1992.

<sup>4</sup> This is quite visible in the issue – which cannot be here fully stretched – of citizenship, in which many tensions are at stake: e.g., the promotion of participatory and inclusive societies and the protection of cultural, linguistic and historical identities; the globalized dimension of economy and social interactions and the fact that people still live and act within territories, cultures and communities. Cfr., M. Bulmer, A. Rees (eds) 1996. *Citizenship Today*. London: UCL Press 1996; M. Castells, *The Power of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell; Etzioni, A. *The Spirit of Community*. New York: Crown 1993; D. Karp, *Sociological Communitarianism and the just Community*, in “Contemporary Justice Review”, 3/2000, pp. 153-173.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. D. Korppen, B. Schmelzle, e O. Wils, «A Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation: Exploring Strengths and Weaknesses», *Berghof Dialogue Series*, 6/2008; R. Kraybill, *Training Manual for Conflict Transformation Skills* (Akron (PA): Riverside Press, 1988); J. P. Lederach, *The Little book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse (PA): Good Books, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> This emerges as a vital issue also in the so-called ‘*indirect competition*’. See, with specific reference to economic issues, connected to regional/local strategies, M. Faccioli (ed.), *Quali filiere per un progetto metropolitano? Slow tourism, spazi comuni, città*, FrancoAngeli 2015.

<sup>7</sup> See, again, the various contributions that are suggested in M. Faccioli (ed.), *Quali filiere per un progetto metropolitano? Slow tourism, spazi comuni, città*, FrancoAngeli 2015.

than the one of “solving conflict”, as it includes both the field of education and, in a wide sense, the “political” dimension of the harmonic life and development of a certain context.

Southern Tyrol is quite a specific and interesting territory, which requires careful and deep analysis in order to fully draw from its potentials and avoid (potential) conflictual dynamics that underlie its past and present. It is, first of all, a region ‘of borderlines’, and, in its history, shows the ambivalence of the concept of “frontier” (*Grenze*): frontiers are a *figure of limit*, as on one hand they ‘contain’ (*Schranke*) and protect (*Schutz*), but on the other, by de-limitating, they both ‘state differences’ and habilitate connections<sup>8</sup>. Thanks to delimitations, identity and differences can be understood, and this is also the base for promoting relationships, as relationships rely on both identity and difference. Frontiers are, therefore, not only constraints, but also connection-points, and in this polyvalence the attitude that people develop towards such notion can truly make the difference.

Often regions placed at a borderline experience wider and more pervasive connections between languages, peoples and cultures, and while often this can be source for conflict, this can also be seen as an enrichment: paradoxically, the meeting of diversities can be part itself of a certain identity, if it is welcomed and understood as one of its constitutive characters. This requires, nevertheless, the attitude to seeing this phenomenon as part of a territory, and as an opportunity for its people. The interactions of identities and diversity can actually become a means for shaping a peculiar identity at a higher and wider level, without meaning the loss of specificity for those elements which contributed to it.

There are connections and challenges also within the territory, which require a correct attitude to reading “through the lines” of contextual relationships, and to understanding their dimension, role and dynamics: in the economy of Southern Tyrol, e.g., both tourism and agriculture/breeding play a vital role. While they might sometimes conflict, they are also strongly interconnected, as the agricultural ‘vocation’ of Southern Tyrol contributes to shaping the landscape and the lifestyle that tourists so much appreciate, and, on the other hand, it is also thanks to tourism that the region has developed an overall richness that affects also the quality of its agriculture. Finding a correct balance requires a previous correct analysis and understanding of such dynamics, as well as the adoption of means of communication that enable a correct and virtuous confrontation between stakeholders (see, again, dialogue and mediation).

This regards also other sectors that typically characterize challenges for this territory, as, for example, (I) the balance between innovation and preservation (at the level of production, of architecture, of traditions), as well the (II) balance between openness to global perspectives and respect for local and communitarian habits, which also include the issue of multi-linguism. It is not to forget that, as it happens in the whole European territory, Southern Tyrol is also challenged by the phenomenon of immigration.

The toolkit for such purpose can be effectively drawn from instruments conceived both in the context of education and communication (Eric Berne’s *Educational Transactional Analysis*, from now on also ETA) and in the context of conflict transformation (methodologies for conflict analysis, mediation, dialogical approaches for the promotion of civic participation), showing how the issue of “education to dialogue” is a true challenge and goal for a territory.

### **3. Conflict Mediation as a ‘maieutic to dialogue’.**

Mediation is mostly conceived within the framework of *Alternative Dispute Resolutions* (ADR), a number of different instruments meant to offer forms of conflict resolution outside the traditional legal process, but still within the legal system<sup>9</sup>. While the legal trial cannot be fully replaced by other tools, the contemporary debate has revealed a widespread discomfort towards the traditional approach to interpersonal conflict that

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<sup>8</sup> On the difference between *Grenze* and *Schranke*, related to the notion of limit, see L. Illetterati, *Figure del Limite*, Verifiche, Trento 1996.

<sup>9</sup> See: MAYER, B., (2000). *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; MCKINNEY, B.C., FULLER, R.M. & KINSEY, W.D., (1992). *Mediator communication competencies*, Edina (MN): Burgess Publishing. MOORE, C., (1996). *The Mediation Process*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. MORINEAU, J., (1998). *L’esprit de la médiation*, Toulouse: Erès.

legal systems tend to offer. Such growing awareness has witnessed an increased proposal of legal tools and methodologies meant to offer more participative and person-centered approaches to conflict resolution: within such a flow, Conflict Mediation offers an alternative to the trial designed in a way that parties are directly involved to actively participate in a dialogue and to negotiate, with the help of a mediator, a decision that results suitable to their interests and needs.

Mediation, therefore, aims at an autonomous, voluntary cooperation directed to researching a sustainable agreement between the parties themselves, whose consensus is a key-factor in the whole process, which is based on a non-adjudicative but rather cooperative logic, and with the ideal goal of outlining a win/win solution.

Although consensus and negotiation are important factors, different approaches to mediation tend to put the accent on different elements, spanning from the role of emotions to the role of empowerment and recognition, to the importance of the narratives that parties construct and de-construct with the help of a mediator. Nevertheless, all these approaches seem to acknowledge that mediation is grounded in enabling a communicative situation between the parties and among all participants, including the mediator and, eventually, the lawyers: it occurs through a dialogue, enabled by the personal participation of the parties, and by some ground rules of interaction that are necessary to help such confrontation develop in a respectful, constructive and reasonable way (Reggio, 2017).

Some scholars have, therefore, put a strong accent on the fact that at the core of mediation there is a notion (and a practice) of reasoned dialogue, that is better understood if read through the categories of argumentation (Greco Morasso, 2011).

This way, consensus is not a mere meeting of wills, but rather an encounter of reasons and the outcome of a search for common grounds and outputs. In light of the Socratic notion of ‘maieutic’, the mediator, in his impartial role, acts like a ‘maia’, a nurse who helps dialogue be born and developed correctly<sup>10</sup>. According to such perspective, mediation is not shrunk within the idea of a facilitated negotiation, but is rather constructed around a dialogue that requires an attitude and a practice of active listening, a respectful explanation of each other’s viewpoints on the problem, as well as a common exploration of differences and commonalities, with the aim of verifying the possibility of an agreed-upon solution, tailor-made around the specificities that the case has revealed during – and in light of – the dialogical confrontation of the parties.

This character of Conflict Mediation helps showing how the methodologies that such process requires can be effectively applied also outside the sole sector of dispute resolution, and instead offer tools for enabling – at different levels – forms of confrontation, common analysis and research for consensus-based, fine-tuned solutions.

Mediation can be, therefore, understood as a practiced process meant to “educate” parties (differently involved into an issue which is open to agreed-upon, commonly designed solutions) to face the challenge of a dialogue based on mutual respect and recognition, and animated by an openness to expressing reasons, emotions, needs and viewpoints.

Developing spaces for enabling the adoption of such methodologies turns to be a key objective for any society that intends to foster inclusive and non-violent relationships, and to avoid the destructive potentials of conflict, either by preventing its rooting or by transforming its momentum into a positive shift towards a constructive change. This will be shown also afterwards, with reference to some of the main skills and methodology that endorse the mediative approach.

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<sup>10</sup> See: COOLEY, J.W., (1994). Classical Approach to Mediation - Part II: The Socratic Method and Conflict Reframing in Mediation. *University of Dayton Law Review*, 19:2, pagg.589–632. COOLEY, J.W., 2006. *The Mediator’s Handbook. Advanced Practice Guide for Civil Litigation*, Boulder (CO): National Institute for Trial Advocacy Press.

#### **4. Educational Transactional Analysis as an approach for analyzing and shaping communicative dynamics**

In a vastly increasingly articulated area which aims to highlight the many potentials still little explored of Educating to Dialogue we propose the contribution of Eric Berne's thought as a conceptual and practical framework to analyze and to train to communicative attitude and skills.

The path that we propose here is based on the Transactional Analysis of Dr. Eric Berne (1910-1970), a Canadian psychologist, who understood already in the 50s and 60s of the last century the need to found every helping relationship (whether psychotherapeutic, counselling, conflict management, or properly educational) on the effective, respectful and inclusive relationship, and for this reason has developed patterns of situational analysis and behavior with simple language and immediate applicability. Over time Berne's thinking developed successfully in different sectors: from the original psychotherapeutic field counselling took place; subsequently practice and studies were successful extended to the educational sector and to conflict management. The experts who over the years have helped to deepen the various theoretical constructs, expanding and sophisticated the initial construction, have remained faithful to Berne's intention, giving us a theory that, although sophisticated in its structure, continues to be easily accessible to anyone.

We refer, therefore, to the educational environment of Transactional Analysis, mainly represented by Giles Barrow & Trudi Newton (2016) and Susannah Temple (2007), who developed educational conceptual and practical framework for the specific sector, convinced that a healthy communication between educators and pupils is pre-requisite for any successful learning process and that the advantages of managing social and communicative skills are evident also in improving team work and relations with families and management. The educational framework can be applied both to any project to improve communication and to deal with conflict-situation, because its rules are now clear and there is no danger of overlapping with other areas of Berne's thought.

Educational Transactional Analysis looks at interpersonal relationships analyzing the relational perspective, through a simple and intuitive scheme and language, absolutely stress-free in its management and proposing problem-solving schemes that are easy to implement; it is also based on the conviction that changing unproductive communication behaviour is possible and that improving communication patterns also helps problem-solving. Its principles are widely used in teacher education in Northern Europe and in the German-speaking area, with results that are highly appreciated by teachers.

Unlike psychoanalysis, Berne's AT does not consider the individual as isolated from others and ineluctably conditioned by her childhood experiences, but, while aware that childhood experiences play a decisive role in adult behavior, it looks at the individual as a relational being, and outlines its behavior differently in each single relationship.

The goal of every individual in a potential conflictual field is to foster the development of an autonomous Ego-system, and this task can be carried out more effectively if he is aware of his own Ego-States-system: It is therefore appropriate that each individual involved in the process train to recognize the three active Ego-States (in themselves and in the others) and to distinguish constructive behaviors from destructive ones, learning to energize positively all their Ego-states. In fact, for a healthy and well-balanced personality, we need the balance of all three Ego-States. In Berne's thought, the harmonious and balanced development of the three Ego-States is a *sine qua non* condition for establishing healthy and effective relationships.

#### **5. Connecting Educational Transactional Analysis and a dialogical approach to Conflict Mediation. An overview.**

Dialogue is more than simple communication. Dialogue embodies a healthy exchange between people which recognize each other as "dialogants", enabling a relationship based on reciprocity and equal value of the participants (and equal value does not necessarily mean equal power). Nevertheless, communication has a central role in dialogue, as it implies both correct reasoning and effective expression. Lacking or incorrect communication might cause or escalate conflict, while, on the ability of managing effective interpersonal

relationships through communication is a key-factor for preventing conflict and, in case of its occurrence, for preventing its escalation and promoting relational paths for transforming its destructive potential into a constructive interpersonal confrontation.

The connection between *Educational Transactional Analysis* and *Conflict Mediation* is visible in some common underlying premises:

- I. Both approaches are grounded in recognizing an intrinsic value of each person, and in promoting dialogue as the 'place' where such intrinsic value is made visible and protected within a frame of mutuality and respect among participants;
- II. Both approaches pay attention to the framework of relationships that underlie communication, and consider, in the meanwhile, communication as a 'central space' for enabling and experiencing relationships;
- III. Both approaches are quite context-sensitive and look at relationships within the complex web of interactions in which they are involved;
- IV. Both approaches are sensitive to commonalities and differences, and promote the acknowledgement that equal dignity or equal value does not mean absence of diversity, but is instead often made visible by the mutual recognition of diversity;
- V. Both approaches 'work' on dialogue and consider it as both a means and a goal for their intervention: they also rely on personal autonomy as a key factor for enabling relationships, including their communicative outputs;
- VI. Both approaches pay attention to the dynamics of conflict and their communicative sources and outcomes;
- VII. Both approaches aim at promoting constructive confrontation between stakeholders, hopefully trying to promote, in case of controversy, solutions which are based on their autonomous consensus, rather than on the imposition by a third party.

When it's about analyzing the situation of a territory, or designing interventions on it, relational dynamics are fundamental, and therefore, the ability of working 'with' and 'on' such dynamics is vital. While often mediation is confined to solving peculiar interpersonal conflicts, and while ETA is confined to psychological therapy, both these methodologies offer very precious instruments for approaching the issue of conflict and dialogue in a positive and transformative way, thereby transcending the role that traditionally is given to such disciplines and methodologies.

This presentation considers, in facts, that methodologies specifically designed for mediation, or for ETA, can be effectively adapted to processes and instruments meant to enable, foster and promote correct and virtuous relationships in other fields, impacting in a positive way the development of a territory.

We can try to think of a scenario, to connect the theoretical part of this paper with its possible practical applications.

When a Public Administration is challenged by designing the development of its territory, many issues are stake, and shape a plurality of interests, needs, rights, expectations, fears and hopes, which need to relate to laws, economic factors and other elements. For instance, if the question deals with authorizing and designing the enlargement of a cableway, whose empowerment and widening will likely benefit the touristic appeal of that place, the economic interests connected with tourism need to relate to other issues, such as the protection of the environment, the impact on the life of the affected communities, and the acquisition of land which necessary for constructing the above mentioned infrastructure. Such a situation is potentially open to conflicts and might cause political and legal controversy. This is where a good context analysis and a good community mediation could offer to both politicians and technical-designers parameters for orienting their project and for presenting it to the affected communities, in a time in which the project itself can be 'fine-tuned' to the needs and interests of the territory. In other terms, dialogical participation becomes both a mean for preventing conflict and an instrument for acquiring information, ideas and consensus, which can support definition of the project itself. Consensus and involvement, enhance the level of civic participation and of trust between

administration and citizens, thereby invoking, on the other hand, an active attitude from citizens, which are invited to take part to a process and are responsible to the way they decide to approach it.

Such hypothesis can be actually performed when the territory can rely on professional mediators able to interact with local communities, entrepreneurs, representatives of categories, and to deal (possibly in a multi-lingual way) with all these stakeholders in a way that enables their dialogical confrontation.

Within this process, tools for analyzing the situation, and for habilitating a correct communication are central, and transform the participatory process itself into some sort of education to dialogue that is directed to all the involved stakeholders, which are invited to responsibly assume the role of participants in a dialogical process of confrontation.

This is where the transformative outcome is made visible, as such a process is not only meant to solve circumstanced problems (albeit this is one of its appreciable goals), but also to promote trust, mutuality and reciprocity among people, and therefore work on relationships in a way that they become resources for an active citizenship. The overall goal is promoting virtuous cycles, in which dialogue, confrontation and consensus are not only instruments for solving problems, but rather perspectives whose adoption is meant for preventing future problems and for liberating positive energies, acting also as a positive reinforcement for assuming dialogue as a key factor.

If this perspective is not only fantasy but draws possible scenarios – which of course require also a political impulse, that we are not further elaborating in this writing – education to dialogue turns to be a vital challenge for each territory and community, and this is not only confined to the level of education (school), but regards all the sectors of civic life, and this will, in a broader sense, also impact education. The fundamental step, in order to enable such an approach, is to understand that dialogue and mediation are not confined to specific sectors of human experience, but rather embody a specific lens, or, in sense, a style, which can inform all types of interaction. In a time in which everyone is interconnected to the world, but also more and more lonely and isolated – and this is one of the paradoxes of the postmodern societies – rediscovering the value of relationships.

## 6. Methodological tools – learning from Conflict Mediation

A well-trained mediator – also outside the narrow range of mediation as an instrument for conflict resolution – is expected to help creating an environment of reciprocal listening and respectful interaction different stakeholders are invited to jointly engage in a confrontation that aims at stretching the issue at stake with the purpose of searching for a common solution.

One first, key element for this, is his ability of offering an *active listening*, in which careful listening, note-taking and *paraphrasing* – as well a trained art of asking questions – are directed to help the mediator and the parties to: (1) access the problem, (2) understand its different components and their character, (3) work on shaping a common language and, possibly, at least a (4) basic common understanding (which does not mean, of course, neither having common feelings and opinions, nor necessarily reaching an agreement) (Kraybill, Evans, & Frazer Evans, 2000).

In exercising such competencies and skills, a mediator is called to understand how each conflict is a multi-layered, context-sensitive structure. This implies, for instance, learning: (1) to understand and detect the difference between a formalized position and its underlying interests and needs; (2) to perform an underlying activity of “mapping”, which can help placing the issue at stake in its context and in the web of relationships that nurture it; (3) to deal with the structural vagueness of language and to help creating common meanings and narratives; (4) to recognize and help parties understand the difference between different types of “opposition” (not all opposed theses are incompatible) and to focus on both differences and commonalities<sup>11</sup>.

The mediator seeks to help develop a multi-faceted sensitivity to webs of relationships, to personal and interpersonal dynamics, as well as to overcoming predetermined schemes and narratives of meaning, in order

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<sup>11</sup> See F. Reggio, *Concordare la norma*, Cleup Padova 2017.



to foster and keep an open-mindedness and a curiosity which help looking at unexplored directions, in which better balances can be found.

It is not infrequent that, as a mediation proceeds, its objects varies, as the way the issue is perceived and dealt with evolves according to the understanding of the parties and to how the mediator helps them develop strategies for effectively solving the problem: it occurs, therefore, that the overall understanding and qualification of the object changes, and so it does the perspective of the parties. This requires, from the mediator, the ability of promoting a *reframing*, thanks to which the conflict remains in all its richness and complexity but is envisioned in a different, often more constructive and future-oriented way. The art of reframing is very important also beyond the field of solving conflict, as it opens to the possibility of understanding situations in a flexible and open way, which is often a key to constructive change.

Argumentation offers both a common ground and a necessary toolkit for a mediator, as the above-mentioned methodologies require communicative capabilities that synthesize both logical skills (which also help maintaining impartiality), empathy and sensitivity, and the ability of working with language and narratives. This is vital at all stages of a mediation process, from its beginning to its conclusion, in which the ability of fostering common and sound agreements results a key-factor for the success of the process. This is vital in CM, as its outcome, for being truly constructive and capable of promoting durable effects, cannot be ephemeral but ought to undergo a verification of its soundness and sustainability.

Some of the elements that belong to the methodology of mediation are quite useful in educating each person to facing dialogue correctly, and to deal with conflict in a non-destructive way: therefore, in the path of education, some of these “ingredients” could result quite useful in shaping participative citizens, provided with ground-notions and skills on how to deal with communication as a means for preventing and constructively solving conflict.

This does not mean, of course, that such a complex activity can be performed without the help of well-trained professionals. According to our view, instead, one of the main interests of an advanced society is to acquire competencies and professional human resourced trained to offer mediation methodologies at various levels, including, as we said, participatory process which do not strictly belong to the field of conflict resolution, and that instead are more likely close to promoting active citizenship and participatory processes of political and social decision.

## 7. Methodological tools: learning from Educational Transactional Analysis

We can identify as basic-tools three sections of Berne’s Theory as starting points for every practice in the educational context:

- A. The Diagnosis/Description of the Ego-States<sup>12</sup>
- B. The Transactions<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> It consists in graphically representing the model of Berne’s Structural Diagram; Drawing the image of three overlapping circles called Ego-States, Berne mapped the three Instances of the Personality (Adult, Parent, Child) activated in each communication. The diagram of the three overlapping circles that represents the Ego-States is well known, and usually represents transactions that take place between two subjects; this does not mean that multiparty transactions, i.e. involving several stakeholders, cannot be described. The specific sector of Transactional Analysis that deals with the presentation of diagrams for the conflict-management in the world of the work, has skillful schemes available for the description of transactions between multiple stakeholders. The same patterns can be used also in the educational environment, when in a relationship various people are involved, e.g., between teacher, pupil, and parents.

<sup>13</sup> The Transaction is the slightly unit of relationship between individuals, which translates into repetitive and easily recognizable behaviors.

### C. The Existential Positions<sup>14</sup>

### D. The Contractual Approach<sup>15</sup>

To these must be added the *Active Listening*, which currently finds its references in the Theory of Schulz von Thun<sup>16</sup>, whose Diagram is today more appropriate for Educators than the method of Rogers, (which in any case remains a milestone and is still availed in the practice of TA Counselling and Psychotherapy).

The Educational Transactional Analysis' Dialogic Process, that can be extended to the area of Education to Dialogue, although philosophically connected to the therapeutic and counselling use that has characterized the transactional analysis to date, requires a special structuring for the specific context. A problematic situation of which we want to highlight the communicative components and strengthen them in order to achieve inclusive and non-conflicting existential life-plans should be staggered in such a structured progressive path:

- a. **Definition of the problem.** The problem must be recognized and circumscribed. This allows to acquire the factual data from which the logic of the intervention can start. From the description of the problem the context analysis is very important, and must include cognitive, motivational, emotional and social aspects. Vital role in this step is the active listening, which is the basic-skill of any helping relationship, but also of the mediation as well.
- b. **Description of the Ego-States.** It consists in drawing the classical diagram and identify the Transactions. From the description of the transactions soon emerges the existential position that underlies them, and on this issue it is necessary to focus to promote existential positions of Ok-Ness through reinforcements, which in the language of Transactional Analysis are called Permissions. Description is a term more appropriate to the educational field and also to mediation, because the term diagnosis, commonly used in the practice of AT, refers to the therapeutic field, which is outside our field of action.
- c. **Feedback.** This is a phase of critical reflection, that requires to be connected to the theoretical model. The feedback-phase provides for a check moment, in which the problem is rephrased to check if the problem has been centred and has correctly formulated; the phenomenological feedback<sup>17</sup> is the most useful technique for this purpose.
- d. **Targeting.** People in crisis experience an imbalance of their habitual behaviour patterns; they need time to realize new choices and behavioural patterns. In this phase of the process it is very useful to look for the first practical solutions to the problem or to prepare those that Woolmas and Brown call "work-arrangements": a general agreement on the fact that highlights the actual changing potential of the stakeholders in order to identify what is concrete and achievable

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<sup>14</sup> The Ego-State involved in a transition is in turn based on LIFE POSITIONS: they are basic ideas on self and other useful to motivate choices and behaviors. They are based on the obvious essential values.

<sup>15</sup> One of the most famous methodologies derived from Berne's doctrine is the "*Contractual Approach*" Transactional Analysis is, by definition, already characterized by the contractual approach, being a "psychological and social theory characterized by a bilateral contract of growth and change" (Berne, 1967). The "*Contract*" (understood as "an explicit bilateral commitment to a well-defined course of action" - Berne, 1967) is the main instrument that Transactional Analysis offers in order to promote change, and it is a strategy that can be adopted in Education to Dialogue as well. It is a precise commitment of the person towards the realization of its objectives and, at the same time, it borders the boundaries of the people involved. It is a fundamental option, because it is in this moment that individuals identify what they want to change and how. For our purpose are possible only "2<sup>nd</sup> Level Contracts", focused on the problem-solving and on the energizing the Adult Ego-State.

<sup>16</sup> See, for this issue: SCHULZ VON THUN, F., (1981) *Miteinander reden 1. Störungen und Klärungen. Allgemeine Psychologie der Kommunikation*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg

<sup>17</sup> It is an *epoché* or *suspension of judgement* on a person in order to abstain from negative Injunctions

- e. **Contracting.** The Contract is an agreement that has as its objective a behavioral change and its maintenance over time. People involved deal with the solution of a temporary imbalance or random events, and aim to solve the problem. The contract needs reasonable time to reach the goal, because new life-plans require “settling-times” before being embodied. Moreover, a too short timing could lead to failure.

## 8. The power of the limit.

In conclusion, South Tyrol is a region ‘of boundaries’: *figure of limit*, but at the same time, figure of a limit that can be exceeded in the ability to dialogue.

Thanks to delimitations, identity and differences can be understood, and this is also the base for promoting relationships, as relationships rely on identity and difference, being frontiers, in a logic of dialogue, connection-points: It is precisely because of the limitations that differences can be understood and diversity can be a resource for an efficient dialogical attitude. The phenomenon of tourism itself is a reality of shared living spaces, whose management requires collaborative spaces in a lasting dialogical planning. Educational Transactional Analysis shares with Mediation its basic concepts, and the transkill work of both the disciplines converges to promote an effective Education to Dialogue, that can be seen also as an Educational Paradigm to deal with the largest relational needs of our times.

The territory, space we tend to perform, is a competitive and creative heritage and can be transformed into an aggregating project, capable of communicating and self-communicating, offering a real field of experimentation to change also to other similar realities. Integrating methods of different discipline contributes to face it adequately.

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#### Abstract

The acquisition of relational and communicative skills is one of the main goals of an educational system that aims at promoting non-violent, inclusive and participative societies. Dialogue is the key factor for such purpose, acting both as a means and as a goal that education ought to achieve.

According to this perspective, Education to Dialogue matches ethical-behavioural aspects (dialogue as expression of interconnectedness) and logical-argumentative competences (dialogue as instrument of communication). Such elements trace connected dimensions: (1) the ability of managing a constructive communication, which implies both correct reasoning and effective expression; (2) the ability of creating and managing a situation of communicative reciprocity, which is an instrument for preventing and transforming conflicts (3) the acquisition of existential skills as a value of acceptance and respect of the others.

Relational Skills play a vital role in a territory like South-Tyrol, characterized by the interaction of different cultures and languages and by the necessity of matching the protection of identities with the aim of an inclusive and participatory society (Horizon 2020).

The goal of this paper is to outline some conceptual and methodological signposts for the Education to Dialogue by drawing perspectives, concepts and methodologies from both Conflict Mediation and Educational Transactional Analysis. This interdisciplinary work is directed to those who are professionally involved at all levels of education, with the purpose of offering a first conceptual framework for developing programmes and proposals aimed at introducing and empowering communicative attitudes and skills.