

Games people play in University culture: An ethnographic blended dramatic research based on transactional analysis

Delfim Paulo RIBEIRO^{a,2}

^a*Drama teacher, Escola Superior de Educação, Instituto Piaget, Portugal*

Abstract. This paper reports a study on life experience and creative productions of students (participating researchers) about university culture. The research is based on character creation and dramatic interactions in real and virtual world. The adopted theoretical framework is transactional analysis, which relies greatly on graphical representations of human interactions centered on three ego states (parent, adult and child). The dramatic research perspective accepts the subjectivity of the researcher as a tool, allowing an interpretive and critical intentionality that can fracture the cultural evidences, permitting the emergence of new ways of acting within the conformed tradition.

Keywords. blended dramatic researching, ethnographic metafiction, transactional analysis, University culture

1. Introduction

This work does not pretend to be understood as a theoretical exploration or a quest about methodology. It just aims to describe an experience of character and image creation that made use of online tools. This work is part of a journey that begun a few years ago when we started to reflect on dramatic ethnography (Ribeiro, 2007, Ribeiro, 2011). It should only be considered as another step in what we believe will be accepted as an emerging methodology within the context of the performative arts based research (Biggs 2006, Cahnmann-Taylor 2008).

2. Context

This specific project was carried out at Instituto Piaget, in Portugal, with a group of university students during the curricular development of the Social Psychology unit. Instituto Piaget is a Portuguese private institution that offers university courses in several areas. Currently, due to the demographic and economic crisis that is felt in Portugal, added by the university campus.

² Corresponding author: Delfim Paulo Ribeiro, Drama teacher, Escola Superior de Educação Instituto Piaget, Portugal, rdelfim@viseu.ipiaget.org

3. Theme

During the curricular development of the Social Psychology Unit, which involved eight students and a teacher, a project was designed to explore, in a creative and dramatic way, the theme of transactional analysis. The project was based on the students' reflections on interpersonal relationships that could occur in several university contexts: including student / student; student / teacher and teacher / teacher, in different locations: classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, bar, library and outer spaces, and in several situations: e.g. lectures, study situations and conviviality. The research adopted online collaborative processes, mainly through the social network platform called Dolphin.

The basic theory for this project was the Transactional Analysis (TA) developed by Eric Berne around 1960. As a theory of personality, the TA allows to analyse the attitudes and behaviours of each individual facing the most diverse situations. Largely based on graphical representation of human interactions, the TA assumes that we communicate through three ego states: parent, adult and child (Berne, 2010, Fachada, 2012). The Transactional Analysis allows the subjects to become aware of the way they think and behave within relationships. For Steiner (Steiner 1990) ultimately, the Transactional Analysis seeks to identify patterns of interpersonal functioning; preventing individuals to merely become reproducers of the pre-established.

4. Methodology

The designed methodology for this project was entitled as a blended dramatic ethnography, since it implies a close relationship between the physical and the online interactive experiences and between the real and the virtual world. The idealized dramatic processes allowed the participants to create characters and to adopt the multiplication of identities as a tool for reflection (Ribeiro, 2007, Ribeiro 2011). Moreover, these multi-subjectivities induced the participants to adopt interpretive and critical points of view, allowing them to engage with cultural rupture and with the emergence of new ways of being and acting, estranged to the conformed tradition (Madison 2005, Denzin 2003b). The dramatic research was used as a strategy to promote a deeper understanding of community problems and to induce the participants to commit themselves with the actions that can transform the existing reality (Ribeiro 2011). Indeed, dramatic ethnography corroborates Norman Denzin (Denzin 2003a, p. 273) when he says that the performative practice "interrogates and criticizes those cultural narratives that make victims responsible for the cultural and interpersonal violence they experience".

5. Process

In order to clarify the development of the project, we organized its various stages as followed:

1. Participated discussion and online research about the theoretical components of the project, particularly those related to transactional analysis;
2. Adaptation of a social platform where participants could create characters, publish images and interact through forums and blogs. During this phase, the participants (students) were invited to create three platform users, with their

corresponding nicknames and avatars. One of the nicknames corresponded to the students' real self and the other two to imaginary characters (a teacher and a student). The image below displays an example of the character creation by two participants:






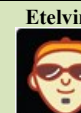
Real Name	Nickname	Role	Personal traits
A	Darkira 	Student	Myself
	Rocket 	Student	Music student. Clumsy and rushed. Likes to do several things at the same time and usually leaves everything to be resolved at the last minute. Likes to help everyone.
	Chuck-Norris 	University Teacher	Specialized in martial arts. Thinks that he knows everything. No one can object to him because he usually rejects anything contrary to his thinking. He is very demanding and not very close to his students. Although, he is always willing to help...
B	Luigi 	Student	Myself
	Jornas 	Student	Accounting student, called "Nerd". Is a person with many skills, with a high IQ ... always finds explanations and theories for almost everything, even the most small and insignificant... Manic with cleanings, does not allow anyone to enter his house with the shoes on. Is very careful with his personal hygiene and with home cleaning. Has great difficulty with socializing and to create friendship.
	Etelvino 	University Teacher	Specialized in obscure mathematics and sciences. Is very insecure about what he does in his profession ...his students are correcting him constantly...

Figure 1. Examples of characters and avatars created by two participants

- After the character creation, the participants used the platform to idealize imaginary situations using photographs and montages that could represent, in a creative way, different relationships in the university context. This was done taking into account the transactional ego-states (parent-adult-child);
- In the final phase, the participants took performative photographs and organized an exhibition in the real space of the university campus.

6. Platform Fragments

To share an idea of the works that were created online, we display some image crops of the platform dolphin with their corresponding subtitles. During this phase, the participants were invited to adapt internet images and add on them dialogues about interpersonal relationships



Figure 2. Crop of the platform homepage.

Legend: 1 - Blogs and forums; 2 Images and comments; 3 - Users and Avatars

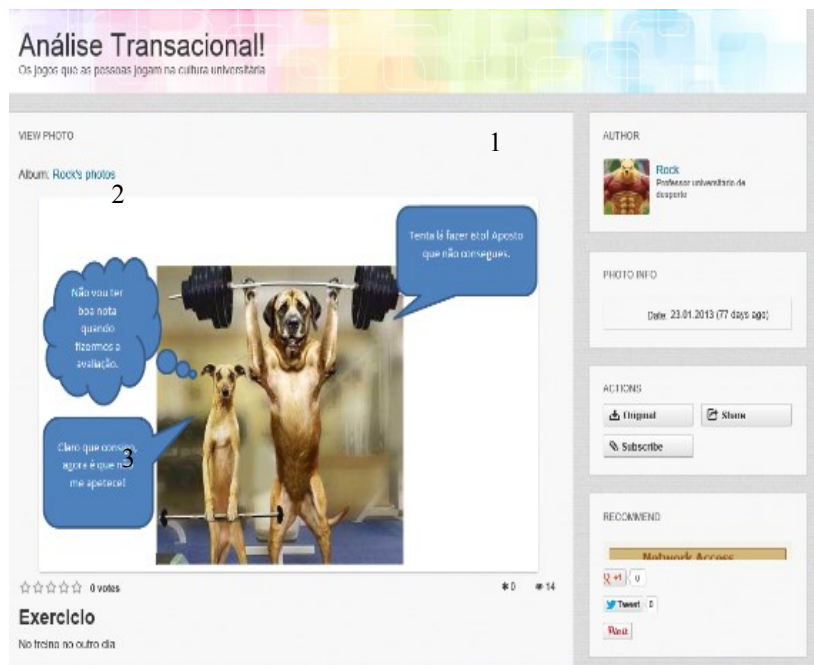


Figure 3. Crop of a published image.

Legend: 1 – Try to do this. I bet you cannot endure! 2 - I will not have good marks on the evaluation; 3 – Of course I can, but now I just don't feel like.

Blogs e fóruns; 2 Imagens e comentários; 3- Utilizadores e Avatars

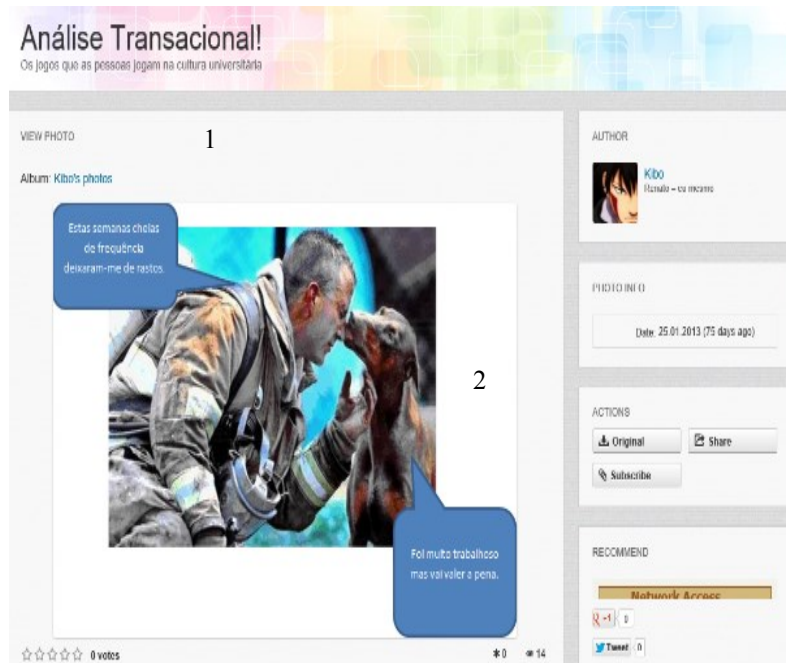


Figure 4. Crop of a published Image.

Legend: 1 –These weeks, full of tests, rocked me to the core; 2 - It was a lot of work but it will be worth. Blogs e fóruns; 2 Imagens e comentários; 3- Utilizadores e Avatars

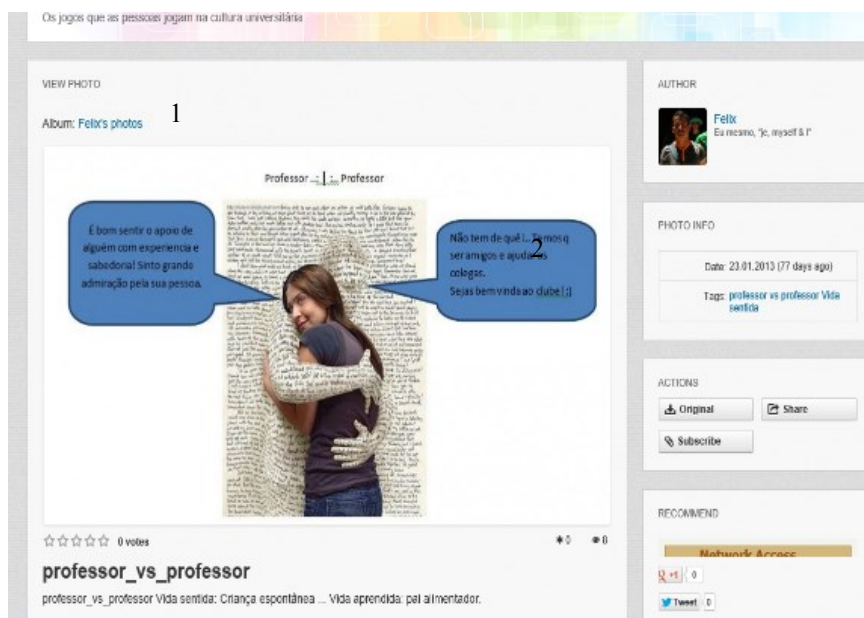


Figure 5. Crop of a published Image.

Legend: 1 – It's nice to feel the support of someone with experience and wisdom! I feel a great admiration for you; 2 - You're welcome! ... We have to be friendly and help our colleagues. Welcome to the club ;) ; 2- Foi muito trabalhoso mas vai valer a pena Blogs e fóruns; 2 Imagens e comentários; 3- Utilizadores e Avatars

7. Performative photographic creation / Exhibition



Professor/Professor: **Transação Cruzada**- Criança Espontânea com Pai Crítico

Figure 6. Teacher / Teacher: Crossed transaction – spontaneous child with critical parent.

Legend: 1 - Distinguished Professor ... I have a doubt in this part of the matter. Could you give me some help? 2 - No wonder! You took the course in the manner of a politician that we all know.



Aluno/Aluno: **Transação Cruzada**- Pai Alimentador com Criança Rebelde

Figure 7. Student / Student: Crossed transaction – Nurturing parent with rebellious child.

Legend: 1 - So, Joaquim, we are at the end of the semester ... How are you getting away with it? 2 - I don't care! There is another semester. What I really want is to have fun. Blogs e fóruns; 2 Imagens e comentários; 3- Utilizadores e Avatars



Professor/Aluno: **Transação Paralela**- Adulto com Criança Espontânea

Figure 8. Teacher / Student: Parallel transaction – Adult with spontaneous child.

Legend: 1 - Dear students ... We are at the end of the semester ... is still time for one last work? 2 - Oh teacher! Is complicated ... we're tight with the latest frequencies and works, but if all agree ... Why not? Blogs e fóruns; 2 Imagens e comentários; 3- Utilizadores e Avatars



Professor/Professor: **Transação Oculta**- Pai Crítico com Pai Alimentador/Criança Espontânea

Figure 9. Teacher / Teacher: Hidden Transaction – Critical Parent with Nurturing parent and spontaneous child.

Legend: 1 - My students do not have any rules or discipline; 2 - It's true! 3 - In your time you should have been much worse!

After the work done within the dolphin platform, the participants, in groups of three, were invited to idealize some performative photographs in several university places.

Masks (memes) and dialogues were added to represent, in a creative way, some possible relationships in the university context, taking into account the three ego-states (parent- adult- child). The final versions of the created photos were then exhibited at the university. Here we can see some examples:

8. Conclusive Dramatization

In order to highlight the most significant aspects of this research, the project ended with a group interview. Later on, the interview transcription was used as groundwork and inspiration for the creation of a joint drama. This dramatic creation was based on the adaptation of an existing youtube documentary with an interview to Eric Berne. Below, is a short passage of this work:

Scene 1 (In classroom with Eric Berne and a group of students).

- Professor Lion (voice-over) Dr. Eric Berne, psychiatrist, creator of transactional analysis and the author of "Games People Play" was invited to visit the Instituto Piaget. During this visit, Doctor Berne spoke with the participants of the dramatic research group. He congratulated their research initiative, especially the idea of connecting the transactional analysis with new technologies. Dr. Eric Berne also gave a lecture about his theory.

Scene 2 (Professors Lion and Eric Berne car tour).

- Professor Lion (voice-over) The known Avatar of Professor Leon and Doctor Eric Berne took a ride through the university campus of the Instituto Piaget. Doctor Eric Berne wanted to visit the city of Viseu.

Scene 3 (Interview on the terrace).

- Professor Lion Doctor ... what do you most emphasize from your joint reflection with the students about this project?
- Eric Berne Well... I'll ... I'll explain ... from the conversation I had with the participants about this research project ... I essentially highlight two or three ideas ... look ... one of the things that was referred by the participants... is that, in this research ... they took greater awareness...greater awareness of their environment ... of the interactions between people in the university context ... they also referred something ... look ...they stressed that ... very interesting ... this project prompted them to reflected on their own past ... their teachers...
- Professor Lion Yes Doctor ... go ahead... go ahead...
- Eric Berne I was explaining that ... fundamentally ... they have reflected about their past academic experiences ... they also talked about other things... they focused the creativity in this research process ... the students enjoyed it ... for example ... (drinks water) ... as I was telling you ... look ... I'll tell you one thing ... one of the aspects that we found really interesting ... and it was stressed by one of the participants ... was the process of creating characters
- Professor Lion Creating characters ... the avatars? ... Are you talking about this?
- Eric Berne (stirring his cup of coffee) ... yes ... I'm ... I'm ... I'm ... I'm talking about that ... (pours milk into the cup) ... I'm talking... hear ... about characters...typical characters ... for example ... the slacker student...the teacher that helps the students ... they also referred the existence of some solidarity ... interesting...

- Professor Lion Yes ... yes ... it was evident in their work. Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Eric Berne Look ... I mean ... yes ... I think that this work should be continued ... It has a lot of potential ... it touches a multitude of complex issues ... so, there are questions that should be deepened ... thank you ... and today we have such nice weather ... thanks.
- Professor Lion It has been a pleasure to have you here... with us ... participating in our research.
- Eric Berne I'm the one that should be grateful ... greetings to everyone ... I wish a great future for these students and for the entire college ...
- Professor Lion Thank you.

9. Conclusion

The work here presented does not intend to reach conclusions in an objective and definite way. It simply relates a specific pedagogical experience based on dramatic processes which included the creation of characters and dialogues. We admit that the social web platforms can be used pedagogically as a resource to intensify the dramatic and imaginative work, revitalising the conventional Interrelationships through the rhizomatic creation of dramatic images and dialogues. Above all, the dramatic blended experience opens new spaces for the educational thought where the past, the present and the future can be combined in an imaginative and critical way, in order to keep alive the experiences that foster the intimacy of the individual consciences on community life.

We should recognize that this work touches the limits of the expected, the convenient, the acceptable and the known. Still, we believe that it is only through the bold challenge that the educational thought can influence the subversive power of interrogation and transgression, which has allowed us to break with the alleged match between seeming and being. And we question: would not be this the crux of drama?

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