Beginning in 1900, Sigmund Freud loved to spend his summer holidays in the small village of Lavarone in the eastern Italian Alps, better known as the Dolomites, then part of the Austria-Hungary Empire. He expressed his enthusiasm for this lovely place in a letter to his wife, Martha: “Unser Herz zeigt nach dem Süden” (“Our heart looks toward the south”) and came there again and again until 1923. He stayed at the Hotel du Lac, a small, old-fashioned hotel overlooking the gracious lake, where the father of psychoanalysis loved to swim. In the small library at the hotel he wrote “Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen’s Gradiva” in 1906, the first application of psychoanalysis to the study of a literary work.

More than a century later, in August 2008, a handful of transactional analysts led by Dolores Munari Poda, who also loves to spend her holidays in Lavarone, met in the same small library where Sigmund Freud used to sit. They gathered to share their interest, passion, and commitment to the analysis of very special literary masterpieces: the little scripts of little people. That was the first Lavarone Seminar on transactional analysis with children and adolescents.

In subsequent years, the number of participants who gathered for the seminar made it difficult to stay in the small library, so in 2010 we moved to a larger location, the conference hall provided by the Lavarone Municipality. The group has met there ever since.

The Lavarone Seminar has had considerable success and now brings together about 100 transactional analysts from different countries to deepen their knowledge about transactional analysis applications in education, counseling, and psychotherapy with children and adolescents. Most of these professionals are now members of the association of International Transactional Analysts with Children and Adolescents (ITACA), the acronym for which recalls Ithaca, Ulysses’s island, to represent a most desired territory.

It was during the Fifth Lavarone Seminar, in 2012, that the three guest editors of this special issue of the Transactional Analysis Journal—two of them former pediatricians (GJ-H and MM), one a long-time child therapist (DMP), and all enthusiastic participants of the seminars—decided to propose to the TAJ coeditors a special issue of the Journal on this theme. We are grateful to the TAJ team for their encouragement and support.

As we were talking about the transactional analysis literature on children and adolescents, we realized that there has not been an issue on that topic since 1988, when guest editor Frances Bonds-White edited one on children. Looking at research in child development over the past 25
years, we see exciting changes in knowledge and views about the significance of early relationships (e.g., attachment theory). The other big change is the environment in which children and adolescents today live and develop, especially the worldwide connections available via the Internet.

As we began working on this issue of the TAJ, we were impressed by the large number of manuscripts submitted. This presented a difficult challenge as we needed to select from among them in order to stay within our page allotment for this issue. Unfortunately, in the end, not all of those we received could be included, though we hope some of them will be published in future TAJs.

Looking at the articles in this issue, we find a variety of developments about using transactional analysis with children and adolescents, and this issue could easily have stimulated a theory discussion (e.g., current perspectives on ego state theory and script theory). However, we have chosen to begin with an article that considers the role of the practitioner, which is then followed by articles about working with children. The next group of articles concerns working with adolescents, and we end with an article highlighting important work with parents and other relevant adult figures in a child’s life.

Alessandra Pierini’s article, “Being a Child Therapist: How Working with Children Is Different,” opens this issue with a rich description of what therapy with children is like. She discusses some of the specifics of a transactional analytic approach with children, considering such relevant aspects as ego state theory, the complexities of contracting, and the implications of therapeutic process and technique. She also describes the concept of the real ego, which appears to be a significant and promising contribution to work with little people. We loved this article for its richness, which gives plenty of food for our transactional analysis minds!

Stefano Morena provides readers with insight into his work with traumatized children in “Children and Their Monsters: Childhood Trauma and Transactional Analysis.” He brings into the therapeutic relationship what he observes in children’s play, drawings, and narratives, keeping in mind the developmental stages of the Child ego states. He further shows that traumatic experiences contaminate the ability of the Adult ego state. Important aspects, such as respect in the therapeutic relationship with children, are described. The relationship is the foundation for the work, and in the examples Morena offers of children’s drawings, theory and therapeutic process are revealed in a lively and touching manner.

Cinzia Chiesa’s article, “On the Seashore of an Endless World, Children Play: Using Transactional Analysis in Play Therapy with Children,” revisits with a renewed outlook the thinking and work of Eric Berne, Marion Milner, and Donald Winnicott. Chiesa provides an intense, captivating, and well-documented review of their work, offering an in-depth analysis of the creative process in relation to the heart of cure and the role of play in the therapeutic relationship.

In “Alice in Writerland: Writing as a Therapeutic Tool and a Way to Understand Adolescent Needs,” Cetta Berardo tells the story of 15-year-old Alice, who was confronted with many problems, including a symbiotic relationship with her mother. Berardo describes how she used creative writing to both understand and work with Alice. She used various techniques to help this adolescent use all of her ego states to discover her needs and to establish a working alliance, in the process developing a holding relationship. The author observes an impressive script change in Alice’s self-confidence and capacity to see herself.

Sally Evans, in “The Challenge and Potential of the Digital Age: Young People and the Internet,” offers another surprising scenario. Probably most of us, even if we are aware of how much time today’s adolescents spend on the Internet, have not imagined the complexities and opportunities this new world offers to counselors and therapists who work with these youngsters. Evans describes some of her experiences working online with adolescents, using them to demonstrate how young people are using the Internet and how their involvement in cyberspace activities is influencing their development. The most fascinating aspect for us, as readers, was the creativity needed to deal with the challenges of this work: How does one treat an anonymous client? How does one deal with the
uncertain identity of these adolescents? How should issues such as confidentiality and protection be addressed and handled? Evans thoughtfully invites us not simply to be scared by these challenges but to discover and enjoy the potentials of this new world.

In an elegant and refined style that is at the same time intimate and touching, Giles Barrow shares his experience as a parent, teacher, and researcher in order to offer a picture of adolescence that is fresh and pragmatic, far removed from reductive, repetitive, or demonizing views. “ ‘Whatever!’ The Wonderful Possibilities of Adolescence” is an energetic and energizing contribution, courageously sincere and open to discovering the new potential of the adolescent person when the social environment is willing to recognize and value it.

Finally, in her article, “The Collective Parent: Theory and Process,” Cristina Capoferri enthusiastically points out the importance of working with the parental figures of a child or adolescent. Her goal is to bring together all of the relevant and responsible persons in a child’s life, including teachers, social workers, counselors, psychotherapists, and parents, to discuss the situation and to find a common way to decide what might be helpful for the child or adolescent. She emphasizes the increasing necessity in our time to help parents take up their roles as responsible and emotionally present caregivers. Working with the Collective Parent is group work that gives the child importance and a protective background. Capoferri illustrates her ideas with lively examples.

In closing, we want to express our appreciation to all the authors who submitted manuscripts for this issue of the TAJ. We hope you, our readers, will find those published here to be as stimulating and useful as we found them to be and that they will lead all of us who are passionate about TA to write about our work with youngsters. Let’s make sure that the literature about using transactional analysis with children and adolescents continues to grow and develop in the coming years, without having to wait too long for other precious contributions or another theme issue!