From psychotherapist to supervisor. Supervisees' and supervisors' experiences of a supervisor training program based on group supervision

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Abstract

This study is a part of an ongoing research project examining group supervision in psychotherapy. The study was performed in a postgraduate training program for prospective supervisors. The two-year supervisor training program included theory seminars as well as group supervision of the prospective supervisor's supervision of a trainee who had a patient in psychotherapy. The training program was based on psychoanalytic theory and the psychotherapy conducted was psychoanalytically oriented. Supervisees´ and supervisors´ experiences of the learning process, supervision format in group and supervisor styles were explored in semi-structured interviews. Both supervisees and supervisors emphasized the importance of a specific training program for psychotherapists who intend to work as supervisors. The didactic aspects of supervision were pointed out. The group format was experienced as particularly suitable for this training level. The "super-supervisor's" style was important as a role model for the supervisors in training.

Key words: Supervisor training, supervisees, learning, psychotherapy training, group supervision, supervisor style, qualitative interviews.

From psychotherapist to supervisor. Supervisees' and supervisors' experiences of a supervisor training program based on group supervision

It is increasingly often maintained that psychotherapy supervision ought to be regarded as a professional specialty of its own. Specific supervisor training seems to be necessary to establish the identity as a psychotherapy supervisor (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Dye & Borders, 1990; Ellis & Douce, 1994; Whitman, Ryan & Rubenstein, 2001). According to Ellis and Douce (1994, p. 520), "clinical supervision has emerged as a distinct professional specialty, similar to teaching - but different - similar to counseling - but different - and similar to consulting - but different".

Few empirical studies have been carried out in this area (Boalt Boëthius & Ögren, 2003; Reichelt & Skjerve, 2002; Skjerve & Nielsen, 1999; Watkins, 1997). To become a good psychotherapist personal aptitude and interest as well as theoretical knowledge and supervision are crucial features of becoming a good psychotherapist. Supervision in psychotherapy is mandatory in psychotherapy training programs in Sweden (Gordan, 1996; Socialstyrelsen, 1996; 2005) as well as in other countries (American Psychological Association, 2000; Clarkson, 1998; Rönnestad & Reichelt, 1999).

Reichelt and Skjerve (2004) argued that the need of a special training program for supervisors has become increasingly more recognized in the Nordic countries as well as internationally. To become a good supervisor it is essential to be a skilful therapist with comprehensive knowledge and long experience. Many maintain that it is not enough "only" to be a skilful therapist in order to automatically become a good supervisor. The role of supervisor demands that the experienced therapist shifts focus from the patient's to the supervisee's development. Reichelt and Skjerve pointed out that there is a risk that psychotherapists use the same approach when working as psychotherapists and supervisors, and therefore, special training for therapists who are prospective supervisors is essential.

In their review, Skjerve and Nielsen (1999) discussed obstacles and difficulties in stimulating such a development in Norway, although, in recent years a number of initiatives have been taken and supervisor training programs are now offered on a regular basis at a number of educational institutions. They also stated that psychotherapy training in the USA usually contains a certain amount of tuition about supervision. Barnett (1998) presented a detailed overview of advanced training for supervisors in England and Switzerland. These training courses are generally one-year part-time courses, or intensive courses with "home-work". Supervisor programs are also currently available in other European countries (Lazar, 2005).

The contention that special teaching methods are needed to communicate psychotherapeutic knowledge and skills, and the need of further education of teachers and supervisors in psychotherapy was acknowledged relatively early in Sweden. Thus, the first state-funded supervisor program was arranged in 1974 by the Swedish Office of the Chancellor of the Universities and Colleges (UKÄ) as a trial course for teachers and supervisors in psychotherapy (Janson, 1975). In 1976 the Erica Foundation arranged its first teacher and supervisor training program (Gordan, 1996). Today there are supervisor training courses at most educational institutions in Sweden that arrange psychotherapy courses.

The supervisor as a model for learning and teaching

Earlier studies suggest that the supervisor's teaching style and function as a role model influence the development of the learning process as well as group processes and the group climate (Boalt Boëthius & Ögren, 2003; Braconier, 2005; Pertoft & Larsen, 2003; Proctor, 2000; Proctor & Inskipp, 2001; Reichelt & Skjerve, 2002; Richter, 1980; Ögren, Apelman & Klawitter, 2001; Ögren, Jonsson & Sundin, 2005). Ögren and co-workers (2005) reported evidence that the supervisor's style affected the focus of the supervision, the experience of group climate as well as

the perception of how much one learned as a supervisee. In a qualitative interview study of 18 supervision pairs (supervisor-supervisee) Reichelt and Skjerve (2002) found that supervisors with a non-authoritarian style, who were accepting and affirming, were perceived to facilitate a positive development. In the same way, supervisors who both elicited the group's competence and were able to share their own experiences with the supervisees were perceived as contributing to the supervisees' development. On the other hand, supervisors perceived as directive and authoritarian and who intervened too quickly with their own interpretations and instructions contributed to the supervisees feeling uncertain and inhibited.

Similar results were obtained in a recently conducted interview study with eight supervised students on a five-year psychology course at the University of Linköping (Braconier, 2005). Supervisors who maintained a good structure in supervision and who were supportive and encouraging were perceived as promoting development and learning in psychotherapy supervision, whereas an authoritarian and extremely directive leadership style, as well as a generally passive style, were experienced as inhibiting development and learning.

Based on the experience of a large number of supervision groups for prospective supervisors, Ellis and Douce (1994) developed a model with eight recurring central supervision themes. In turn, these themes were divided into three categories; themes related to the supervisor (insecurity, choice of appropriate supervision intervention); themes related to the supervision group (competition versus support); and themes related to the therapist-supervisor relation (responsibility, parallel processes, power, individual differences and sexual attraction). With this model, the authors wished to emphasize the complex nature of "supervisor-supervision" and thus emphasize the need for formal training programs.

The group in psychotherapy supervision

Ideally, the interplay between the participants in group supervision can stimulate the exchange of associations and give freedom to thoughts that can facilitate acquisition of new knowledge and skills. By sharing clinical experiences with others, the supervisees may obtain a broader frame of reference and the group members may learn from each other. In their study, Ögren and Jonsson (2003) found that group supervision trains the ability to establish a good working alliance in a therapeutic context.

Reichelt and Skjerve (2004) argued that group supervision in supervisor training is to be preferred to individual supervision. These authors believe that group supervision broadens the prospective supervisors' experience of supervision situations. A key question is in what way the group can/should be used as a pedagogic format in different psychotherapy supervision contexts. Judging from the current state of knowledge, there seems to be a tendency to regard all supervision conducted in group form as "group supervision", without specifically reflecting upon how the group as a pedagogic format can/ought to be utilized with regard to training level, psychotherapeutic orientation, and learning goals.

Proctor and Inskipp (2001) suggested different ways of using the group in psychotherapy supervision in a training program depending on the extent to which group interactions are taken into account. One end of the dimension spectrum is characterized by a dyadic relationship between the supervisor and each of the supervisees in the presence of a supervision group. Proctor and Inskipp named this "supervision *in* the group". In the other end of the dimension we find "supervision *by* the group", which is characterized by using the group interactions and processes as important teaching tools. The participative supervision, or "supervision *with* the group", in between these extremes, implies that the supervisor focuses on the individual group members, and encourages the supervisees' active participation in the supervision.

In the initial stage of a group supervision, supervision *in* a group often appears to be used. Gradually, the format supervision *in* the group may transform into "supervision *with* a group (Boalt Boëthius & Ögren, 2003). It is reasonable to assume that the training level, group composition and the supervisor's experience of group processes are of significance for the group supervision's focus and outcome (Altfeld & Bernard, 1997; Ögren & Sundin, 2004; Ögren & Sundin, in press).

Although findings from previous studies have suggested that group supervision in psychotherapy is profitable at a basic training level, few studies have examined the experience of group supervision in a supervisor training program. The present study will examine supervisees' and supervisors' experiences of the contribution of a supervisor training program, involving group supervision, on developing an identity as a psychotherapy supervisor.

Aim and research questions

The aim of the study was to explore the supervisees' and supervisors' experiences of a supervisor training program in psychotherapy, using a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. The general question was: How and to what extent can a supervisor training program stimulate a new professional identity?

The specific research questions were:

1. How and to what extent was the program perceived to contribute to the development of a supervisor identity?

2. What was the significance attached to the super-supervisor's function as a role model?

3. How was the group format experienced in the supervision?

Method

Interviews

A semi-structured interview that focused on supervisees' and supervisors' experiences of the effect of supervisor training in different aspects was used in this preliminary phase of researching the area.

Participants

The participants of the study were six supervised students who belonged to three different supervision groups in the training program. Each of these groups contained four supervisees, one male and three females. In addition, two female and one male supervisor with more than ten years of experience as supervisor at a supervisor training level were interviewed.

The supervisees who participated in this study along with their former supervisors, had completed the Erica Foundation's two-year supervisor training program one year prior to the interviews. The selection of supervisees for this study was determined by the fact that two participants, a male and a female from each supervision group, were to be interviewed. The female supervisees in each group were randomly chosen. The average age of the supervisees at the time of the interview was 51 years. All participants were Caucasian.

All the supervisors and supervisees were authorized clinical psychologists with at least ten years of experience in the profession. All of the supervisors had a psychodynamic orientation. Both supervisees and supervisors were representative, concerning age, gender and professional experience, for authorized, clinical psychologists on this level of experience in Sweden.

The supervisor training program

The supervisor program was a part-time program with a psychodynamic orientation. During

the training course the prospective supervisors participated in theory seminars two hours per week as well as group supervision. The supervision was conducted with a frequency of two hours every week; a total of 140 hours. Each group comprised four students and a supervisor. Each supervisee chose a psychotherapist who would receive supervision on an individual therapy by the supervisee under training. Before the supervisee began his/her supervision, the choice was discussed with the supervisor and the group in the training program. The goals of the supervisor training were that the supervisee should acquire:

- a heightened awareness of the importance of a supervisor's professional approach,

- knowledge and skills about teaching and supervising

- knowledge and experience of small group processes in connection with group supervision

The supervision groups were composed by the program's administrative management (director, course coordinator and supervisors). The supervisors participated in regular supervisor meetings arranged by the program administration. These meetings were arranged for discussing various events and situations that arise during supervision. The goals and content of the program, evaluation procedures and time frames for the students' treatment and supervision work, were clearly defined. Evaluations of both individual students and supervision groups were made continually and discussed in the supervisor staff group together with the course administration.

Collection of data

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by one of the researchers, who had a long experience as a psychotherapist, supervisor in individual as well as in group supervision, training coordinator and researcher. The interviews lasted about one hour and were for the most part

conducted at the respondent's place of work. An interview guide was constructed focusing on the research questions.

Data analyses

The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and independently scrutinized by two examiners (Drs. Ögren and Boalt Boëthius). An open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was carried out by each examiner according to the research questions. Textenheter från samtliga intervjuer lades in i en separat datafil med bibehållen markering om intervju och om var i den ursprungliga utskriften som texten hämtats. Material som inte var relevant för frågeställningen sorterades bort. Härefter genomfördes a horizontal analysis varvid ursprunglig text återigen penetrerades tema för tema.

I nästa skede gjordes en meningskoncentrering i form av att väsentlig innebörd i varje separat textenhet sammanfattades (Kvale, 1997). Various possibilities for coding were tested separately and independently, and as a second step, the codings were discussed. During these discussions, a number of themes emerged that were judged to be relevant for the research questions of this study. These themes were: The program's contribution to the formation of a supervisor identity (Shift of focus, Integration of theory and practice, Evaluation and scrutiny); The super-supervisor's function as a role-model (Finding one's own supervisor style, Non-authoritarian authority, Containing); and The group context in supervision (Group supervision in general, Advantages and Disadvantages of group supervision).

Results

The interview material is presented in accordance with the study aim and research questions. Each research question is divided into sub-themes, and the supervisor and supervisee

responses are presented separately under each sub-theme.

The program's contribution to the development of supervisor identity

The first question was divided into three sub-themes: Shift of focus, Integration of theory and practice, and Evaluation and scrutiny.

Supervisor perspective

Shift of focus. On the whole there was a strong agreement that supervision constitutes its own professional area, which, in addition to therapeutic experience, demands specific pedagogic knowledge. In consequence, supervision work necessitates special training. A supervisor program that is built on an integration of theory and practice was generally perceived as necessary as a sound basis for a becoming supervisor. The supervisors believed that there are several advantages with a time-limited program, e.g., each supervisee observes how their peers in the supervision work and reason. It is a forum in which different opinions can be ventilated. One disadvantage might be that a program can result in the development of a standard approach. However, many of the respondents reported that this risk was compensated for by the breadth of experience and ideas to which the prospective supervisor is exposed.

> Det finns klara fördelar med en tidsmässigt begränsad utbildning, även om det kan ta betydligt längre tid innan man känner sig som en handledare. Man ser hur andra gör och resonerar. Utbildningen erbjuder ett diskussionsforum där olika åsikter kan ventileras.

The supervisor needs to maintain a focus on the therapist's needs in his or her work as a psychotherapist, and to be observant of the impulse of wanting to conduct the psychotherapy himself or herself via the psychotherapist. An important task is to teach prospective supervisors to see their own role in relation to those persons who are involved in the process; the patient, the

therapist and the supervisor. A main task in psychotherapy supervision is to help the prospective

supervisor to listen to both the patient's and the psychotherapist's goals, in order to be able to

determine how best to help the psychotherapist support the patient.

> Något som man ofta ser i handledning på handledning är att patientens mål med behandlingen kommer bort. Det kan bli en kamp i handledningen om hur målet skall se ut för det som terapeuten skall göra.

Integration of theory and practice. The prospective supervisors must be able to apply their

supervision knowledge within various areas in the future and the supervised supervision must

focus upon general knowledge about supervision and the role of the supervisor. It was considered

important to convey that there is a need for a theoretical model of supervision. Theory-oriented

seminars in a larger group, and supervision in a smaller group, were regarded as constituting a

well-functioning design maintaining a balance between theory and supervision. Video as a

teaching tool was perceived to be of great value.

Evaluation and scrutiny. A supervisor training program's point of departure is that the

supervisees already are authorized psychotherapists with long-time experience of work as a

psychotherapist. The relation between the supervisor and the supervisee becomes more collegial

compared to the relation between the supervisor and a beginner psychotherapist. The supervisors

found it more possible to have confidence in the competence of supervisees who attend a

supervisor training program, where supervision is characterized by a mutual flow of ideas.

Opportunities to work with free-floating associations around utterances are more frequent in

supervision on advanced training levels compared to in supervision at a basic training level.

> Det blir en mer kollegial situation. Man kan lita på kompetensen hos dom som har kommit upp till en handledarutbildning. Det blir mer av ett ömsesidigt flöde. Det finns större utrymme att arbeta med fritt flytande associationer kring allt man hör i en handledning på handledning än i direkt handledning.

One difficulty that was mentioned by several supervisors was that the supervisees'

professional self-esteem tends to be more vulnerable and easily violated at the advanced training

level. At this level, the supervisee may find it hard to accept critical comments. It may be

especially painful when a supervisee experiences that he or she is questioned as a prospective

supervisor, since he or she has come a long way in the professional career. It is also important for

the other supervisees that the supervisor is capable of questioning one of the supervisees'

standpoint; to say stop when things are not working.

> Att inte godkänna en person på en handledarutbildning kan vara svårt. Det har dock betydelse för de andra i en grupp att handledaren säger stopp när det inte fungerar. När det händer är det i allmänhet tydligt för alla inblandade utom möjligen för den det gäller.

Supervisees' perspective

Shift of focus. There was a general agreement that long experience as a psychotherapist was

not sufficient for becoming a good supervisor. It was suggested that supervision of supervision,

where difficulties are discussed from various perspectives, is an important learning component.

Several supervisees reported that the training program gave an insight into different ways of

thinking about a supervision situation, and that this insight could counteract a tendency to

become limited and fixed in one particular perspective. The supervisees thought of themselves as

supervisors after having completed the program, and they experienced that the program had

contributed to the development of a new professional identity.

> Utbildningen har bidragit till att utveckla en ny yrkesidentitet. Jag tänker på mig själv som handledare vilket jag inte gjorde alls på samma sätt även om jag handlett tidigare. Det är inte bara att bli en vidareutbildad psykoterapeut utan det är en annan utbildning.

The majority of the supervisees seemed to have embarked upon the supervisor program with

the expectation of being able to deepen their knowledge as psychotherapists, and in so doing

become better equipped to supervise. Several supervisees expressed surprise over the fact that the

program so explicitly focused on providing the supervisees with a new professional identity.

Many expressed appreciation regarding the pedagogic thinking that permeated the various

components of the program: The supervisees had been provided with an opportunity to observe

various supervisor styles and models; the program presented an alternative new view of the

supervisor role, and the supervisees were given the opportunity to make discoveries themselves

rather than having the supervisor as the expert tell them how things should be. The supervisees

perceived that the focus was upon integrating an approach as supervisor, as well as how to be

able to communicate knowledge about psychotherapy.

> Den pedagogiska sidan av utbildningen är viktig. Den har bidragit till en ny förståelse för hur det är att vara i
> den handleddes situation. Jag var mer självsäker innan jag gick handledarutbildningen. Har genom
> utbildningen blivit mer ödmjuk och öppen för att utforska: Vem är det jag handleder och på vilket sätt skall vi
> bedriva handledning.

Integration of theory and practice. All supervisees perceived the supervision of supervision to

be the most important component in the program. However, the theoretical seminars were also

regarded as important for how the new professional identity as supervisor as a whole developed.

An important component in trying pedagogic styles was that the supervisees were given

responsibility for seminars of their own where they could choose their own focus. The

opportunity to let a new professional identity develop gradually was experienced as providing the

foundation needed to take on the professional responsibility as a psychotherapy supervisor. The

program offered an opportunity to try out new ideas as a student and in this way prepare oneself

for the role as a psychotherapy supervisor. The interplay between the input of the lectures and the

supervisees' work in supervision of supervision was important.

Evaluation and scrutiny. The program's evaluation components seemed to be perceived as a

security and a reason for experiencing that a certain authority as a psychotherapy supervisor was

acquired after completion of the training program. Many supervisees stated that they were used to the evaluations from previous courses and regarded it as a necessary component.

Someone voiced the opinion that there could be a risk that the supervisees might withhold feelings of insecurity or irritation in order to show oneself as capable in front of the supervisor and the group. The supervisor's responsibility as examiner and evaluator can at worst contribute to both parties finding themselves in a deadlock situation, both wishing to show the other how clever they are.

Super-supervisor's function as a role model

The second question was divided into three sub-themes: Developing a supervisor style, Non-authoritarian authority, and Containing.

Supervisors' perspective

Developing a supervisor style. The supervisors generally believed that it was important to assist the prospective supervisors in finding their own style as supervisor. To examine and help the supervisees develop how they thought and acted, i.e. posing questions rather than providing answers, was a central part of the supervision. The supervisor's way of relating to the supervisees was expected to provide a model for how supervision can be conducted. What the supervisor does and how he/she does it is just as important as what he/she says.

> Uppfattar att jag blir modell och en identifikationsgestalt. De handledda uppfattar lika mycket vad jag gör som vad jag säger. Viktigast är att skapa utrymme så att de handledda kan träda fram.

Non-authoritarian authority. It was considered important to try to be a sound authority, and thereby avoid being domineering and issuing directives. A power struggle with a supervisee

should be avoided. Instead of being drawn into a power struggle the supervisor should highlight and examine the perceived tensions. The supervisors believed that group supervision sometimes is advantageous since the different group members can contribute with their individual thoughts and experiences.

> … som t.ex. när en kandidat rusat iväg i handledningen med sin terapeut, utan att överhuvudtaget ta upp det i handledningen,……, då kan jag säga, "du ställer oss inför fullbordat faktum" – och så gör jag inget mer, personen tvingas själv reflektera.

Containing. The supervisors believed that it was important that they conveyed a humble attitude when they did not understand something that was expressed during the supervision. It was considered essential to wait for the supervisees and let each of them find their own pace of understanding what was happening in the interplay. On the whole it was pointed out that it was important not to be too quick in suggesting interventions, but to welcome alternative ways of seeing and discussing situations that arose. All the supervisors emphasized the importance of respecting the pace of individual supervisees, as well as the way in which the supervisor perceived and recounted supervision experiences. To listen and reflect upon underlying aspects and to find appropriate timing was important.

> Det är viktigt att ge tillräckligt utrymme för de handledda, så att de kan hitta ett eget tempo i förståelsen för vad som händer i samspelet mellan terapeut och patient. Ibland är det svårt att hitta bra balans och inte vänta för länge.

Supervisees' perspective

Developing a supervisor style. The supervisees generally experienced that the program supervisors had actively sought to create space for the supervisees to reflect and ponder. Supervisees were given the opportunity to find their own path to solutions. Focus in supervision was upon how one could best understand and help the person one was supervising rather than the supervisor showing how brilliant he/she was by providing solutions. It was reported that the

supervision on the program had become a model for the prospective supervisors; an attitude of openness and curiosity regarding the problems being wrestled with by the therapist. This attitude was experienced as having contributed to an increased confidence in both oneself as supervisor and the person one was supervising. To feel free to talk about one's work, to be able to associate without being scared of being "right or wrong" was emphasized as being important and a worthwhile aim.

> Värdefull att handledaren gav utrymme till reflektion och att inte genast ge svaren, utan att man i en process måste söka sig fram till det. Viktigt inte bara bli matad utan att själv få syn på handledningens process.

Non-authoritarian authority. Something that contributed to security and quality in supervision was that the supervisor was direct and expressed himself/herself clearly without being offensive. An unsentimental, neutral attitude in the supervisor in combination with warmth and commitment was appreciated. A tolerant attitude was regarded as valuable. An extremely passive style could, however, create insecurity amongst the supervisees. Supervisors who, in parallel with creating space for the supervisees to reflect and express their views, described their own successful and unsuccessful experiences were appreciated.

Containing. A trait in the supervisor that supervisees appreciated was sensitivity to reactions emanating from one's own supervision work. The supervisor's capacity to reformulate situations that were experienced as invading or emotionally difficult to comprehend in one's own supervision was of great help. Another aspect of the containing function was the supervisor's ability to wait and not be too quick in offering suggestions regarding interventions.

> Viktigt att handledaren hade förmåga att fånga upp det väsentliga och kunna omformulera när man själv satt i knepiga situationer som tex när den terapeut jag handledde inte var samarbetsvillig och bidrog till att jag fick svårt att formulera mig.

Experiences of the group format

The third question was divided into three sub-themes: Group supervision in general, Advantages of group supervision and Disadvantages of group supervision.

Supervisors' perspective

Group supervision in general. The supervisors considered group supervision at this training level to have major advantages. All the interviewees indicated the importance of, as prospective supervisors, having experience of both individual and group supervision. The view was that individual and group supervision respectively give rise to different learning processes. On the supervisor program, with more experienced supervisees, group supervision has the advantage that one can activate the group at an early stage and make use of its potential. As supervisor, the importance of taking responsibility for frames and that each supervisee is given space in the group was emphasized. This becomes especially important as the time available must be shared between the supervisees.

> Min erfarenhet är att det fungerar bra med grupphandledning på handledarutbildningen. På psykoterapiutbildning bör det däremot finnas både grupp- och individualhandledning. Det är lättare att gå på djupet med en enskild handledds problem i en individualhandledning. Grupphandledning förutsätter kunskaper om hur gruppers dynamik för att man ska kunna använda sig av gruppsituationens potential.

Advantages of group supervision. The supervisors perceived that one advantage of group supervision was that it provided scope for a diversity and variety of cases. Each group member is given the opportunity to follow the development of the prospective supervisors, their respective therapists and clients over time. It becomes clear that one can manage similar situations in various ways depending upon the particular circumstances. It was reported as an asset that several persons can listen to and think about the material presented. Different perspectives can enrich the

group and the supervisor is not alone in contributing with views and experiences. Another advantage of group supervision can be that transferences to the supervisor tend to be less intense. This can be helpful especially in situations where one as supervisor could adopt a defensive position. It is easier to restrain oneself and allow the group members to come to the fore until one feels less stuck and has had time to gain a perspective on the process in which one is involved. As supervisee one is less exposed to the supervisor and as supervisor less exposed to the individual supervisee. A well-functioning group was experienced as a healthy component in the work of supervision.

> På ett sätt är gruppen som handledningsforum friskare. Gruppmedlemmarna kan ge synpunkter som handledaren tänkt på. Man kan räkna med att gruppmedlemmar hjälper till med att ta upp något som låst sig för en handledd. Det lättare att upptäcka när en handledd eller man själv som handledare tenderar att gå i försvar.

Disadvantages of group supervision. The supervisors underlined that it may be too harsh to bring up possible criticism of individual members in group supervision. In contrast, the supervisor is freer to comment upon the difficulties of a supervisee in individual supervision as this does not entail exposing the person in front of a group.

> I en individualhandledning kan man som handledare både när det gäller handledning på handledningen eller handledare och terapeut, vara mycket friare kring att kommentera obehagliga saker. Om man ser något specifikt drag som kommer igen timme efter timme, som är mer personligt, så är svårare att ta det i en grupp.

There is a risk that a supervisee in a group can feel offended when an attitude or intervention is questioned. It was reported that some supervisees had felt exposed and vulnerable and had thus more easily felt blocked in a group supervision context.

> När man uppfattar att någon inte vill förändra sitt förhållningssätt, så innebär det en kränkning att få det påpekat.. Att arbeta med sånt i en grupp inför andra kan vara svårare än i en individualhandledning.

Supervisees' perspective

   Group supervision in general. With regard to the question about how the supervisees perceived the group as a way of working with supervision the majority were positive. However, a few were doubtful especially in the beginning. For those who responded positively, the group felt like the most natural way of working. These supervisees were interested in group processes and used to groups. They found it easy to find a place and to relate to several persons and felt that it was easier to do oneself justice in a group. Moreover, they felt less exposed to the supervisor.

> Och om jag frrån början hade fått välja hade det blivit individuell handledning eftersom jag inte är van att arbeta med grupper. Men jag börjar bli mer nyfiken på grupper.

> Individuell handledning blir mer personlig och djupare. Den griper tag mer, men man är samtidigt mer utsatt.

   Others were less used to group supervision and thought that it demanded another way of relating both to the material one presented and to the contributions of others. These supervisees appeared to be less comfortable with, and have less motivation to, find a place in the group, to share with and give to others. For supervisees "less used to groups" the group format could, especially in the beginning, feel like a definite obstacle. These supervisees felt freer in a two-person relation and not so exposed to the forces that can develop in a group. However, the program's group supervision had the effect of making many of those, who were skeptical to groups in the beginning, more positive in their attitude over time.

> Om inte gruppklimatet är bra, kan det ju bli hur dåligt som helst. Grupphandledning har sina svagheter, vilket även individuell handledning har. Avgörande är om man är en "en-till-en"- eller "grupp"- person.

   The supervisees emphasized the importance of the supervisor taking ultimate responsibility for the group's processes e.g. that an imbalance did not evolve in the group or that individual members took over responsibility. The supervisor was also expected to allocate time and space, and see to it that individual participants did not become too exposed.

The importance of the group's composition for the shared work was discussed with regard to whether the group members had corresponding or very different previous experiences as well as similarities or differences of personal temperament. A certain degree of dissimilarity was considered good, whereas major differences were perceived as more demanding both in relation to the group and to the supervisor. It was pointed out that too great a similarity between the participants could result in taking things for granted and not taking time to think things through when necessary. If the members of the group appear too similar there is a tendency to believe that the others think the same as oneself without actually enquiring. Some of the supervisees thought that it would have been beneficial if the supervisor had discussed the interplay in the group a little more often, e.g. with regard to the importance of professional affiliation etc.

Advantages of group supervision. Many supervisees believed that the interplay with the others, other group members´ presentations and views on their work brought new ideas and associations to their own work. The discussions in the group gave more life to one's own experiences. Other group members´ knowledge and experience enriched one's own work. It was possible in a concrete way to benefit from the others´ experiences of a specific area of work. This could concern professional knowledge within a limited field as well as differences regarding choice of supervision case. The containing function of the supervision group was emphasized throughout with reference to giving space to think together, weigh up different approaches and experiences against each other. The opportunity to find one's own pace in relation to the others in the group was regarded as important.

A good learning climate contributed to one daring to show one's work to others. Some were of the opinion that therapists are often too cautious in giving an account of how they work and think. The supervisees were of the opinion that they learnt more through presenting mistakes and

uncertainty than from relating things about which one was more certain. It was also reported that

it could be easier to capture certain phenomena such as splitting in group supervision.

> Det är svårare att ta upp tabbar man gjort i en grupp, samtidigt som det är en fördel att våga göra det i en grupp. Som terapeut är man van att jobba ensam i ett rum och det är oroande och ovan†, men nyttigt med insyn.

Disadvantages of group supervision. Competition over time and the experience of lack of

space contributed periodically to difficulties for the supervisee to find his or her place in the

group. The awareness that each member's time was limited could result in one holding oneself

back. A supervisee who tended to be defensive was more trapped by this than a supervisee who

found it easy to make his/her way in the group. It felt particularly difficult to raise uncertainty

and mistakes when there was a time pressure.

> Jag var tillbakadragen, men det ändrade det sig över tid genom en kombination av min egen beslutsamhet att vilja ta mig in i gruppen och att den kände välkomnande. Det var jag som hade svårt att ta plats och bra att andra satte ord på det.

The supervisees expressed a wish that the supervisor would have had more focus on unclear

aspects of the group's interplay. Thus, occasional deadlocks in the group's interplay contributed

to a supervisee's experience of being able to feel cognitively and emotionally inhibited.

However, it was difficult to point to any particular triggering factor that contributed to difficulties

in the group's interaction.

Discussion

What conclusions can be drawn from this attempt to a qualitative exploration of the

experiences of supervisees and supervisors in a supervisor training program? First, it is necessary

to state that an interview study with a small number of participants has a limited generalizability.

Vi har månat om god reliabilitet i form av att två forskare oberoende av varandra kodat materialet. I strävan efter en god "construct validity" har resultaten presenterats för och diskuterats med handledare och handledda som deltagit i studien.

Metodens begränsningar medför att denna studie ska ses om en första kvalitativ ansats inom ett oberforskat, men angeläget område. On the other hand, this pioneering approach may provide points of view and nuances that can serve as a basis for continued discussions, and constitute a good basis for further research. Supervisees, supervisors, teachers and training coordinators within similar programs may pose questions such as: Do we recognize this; and if so, can we find ways of developing and improving? What is specific to the Erica Foundation's supervisor training program, and what features might be generally applicable?

Is supervisor training necessary and if so, why? A central issue concerns the supervisors' and supervisees' views of what a specific training program for supervisors has to offer. It is interesting to note that there was a consensus in the supervisors' view of the purpose of training and supervision of supervision. Also, the supervisees agreed on what features of group supervision that were perceived as beneficial. It may be argued that it is natural for both supervisees and supervisors who participated in this training program to express positive reactions about the program as such, as they had applied for it and, respectively taken the role as supervisor. In order to find out what consequences this might have had underlines the need for further exploration of this field of interest.

It was evident that the program, with its integrative mix of theory seminars, exploration of pedagogic methods and supervision of the supervisees' supervisory work was able to bring new dimensions over and above the extensive experience as therapist. Many supervisees were surprised to find that the program provided them with the opportunity to develop a new professional identity. The supervisees had, become aware of new supervisor styles; a new view of

the supervisor role.

Both the supervisors and supervisees emphasized the importance of specific pedagogic methods for teaching psychotherapeutic techniques. The supervisor need to be able to provide space for reflection, to be able to refrain from being a psychotherapist, and from telling the psychotherapist how to conduct the clinical work with the patient, and instead focus upon the task of the supervisor, permeated the supervised supervision work. To be able in one's approach as "super-supervisor" to refrain from telling the supervisee what he or she should do and instead give the supervisees space to reflect and develop their own approach as supervisor, in other words to be a non-authoritarian authority, appeared to have been of decisive importance for the development of the supervisees as prospective supervisors. Our results concerning both experience of what a supervisor program can contribute as well as the importance of the supervisor's approach underline the observations that have been made in earlier studies (Braconier, 2005; Reichelt & Skjerve, 2002).

The shift of focus from psychotherapist to supervisor was reported to be one of the most important lessons gained from the supervisor training course. This change did not always occur without frustration, as the supervisees initially tended to expect the supervisor program to give advanced knowledge in the area in which they were already established, i.e. that of the psychotherapist. An argument that has been put forward earlier is that a supervisor training program can, in a unique way, contribute to this type of shift in perspective in the supervisees (Skjerve & Reichelt, 2004).

A further interesting aspect that was put forward was that a supervisor program has a unique opportunity to give insight into and enable discussions of various supervision scenarios. As a psychotherapist and self-learned supervisor, the individual is in general relatively alone with his or her clinical cases. It may also be, as reported by some of the supervisees in this study, that the

psychotherapist's resistance to inviting others to ventilate complicated processes in the clinical work can increase when opportunities to receive training and supervision are scant.

It should be noted that supervisors in this study expressed a word of caution regarding formalized training: This type of training has its limitations and there is a risk of contributing to a "standardization of thinking". However, a tentative conclusion is that the advantages of a supervisor training program appear to outweigh the disadvantages as long as one continually engages in discussions about standardized thinking and the risks of being influenced in one particular direction.

What are the supervisors and supervisees thoughts about supervision in a supervisor training program conducted in a group format? On the whole, both categories found that group supervision was suitable for this training level, given that the supervisees already had had experience of the unique contribution of individual supervision at the psychotherapist training level. The supervisors reported that they believed that it is possible to work more extensively with the group's potential at this training level. Group supervision provided the individual with a unique opportunity to gain insight into, and be able to discuss, a number of different supervision scenarios. The training level thus appeared to benefit from the supervision being conducted in a group format, which concur with findings reported by Reichelt and Skjerve (2004).

Each of the supervision formats that may be used has both advantages and disadvantages. Group supervision can involve issues about for example competition or the individual's reluctance to expose himself/herself to others. It is reasonable to assume that regardless of training context and level, both supervisor and supervisee will vary in their preference for working in dyadic and multi-person constellations.

However, an important conclusion is that this training level presents many advantages for the group as a forum for supervision. The responsibility for creating optimal conditions regarding

both group composition, awareness of frames, and the supervisor's knowledge of small group processes rests ultimately on the supervisor and the support that the program leadership and the educational establishment can provide. The importance of the organizational frame and the structure of the program and its different parts were mentioned by both supervisors and supervisees, but these aspects were not analyzed as they were not part of the main questions of the study.

Through supervisors' and former supervisees' experiences of a supervisor program this study has provided a certain insight into an important training niche. Even if the results support the view that there is a need for a special training program for supervisors and that such a program is experienced as valuable for prospective supervisors, the existing data do not allow further conclusions. This is a research area of some urgency considering the important role of a psychotherapy supervisor in contributing to the development of psychotherapists. Therefore, there is an urgent need for continued research using complementary methods and a greater amount of data.

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