Does anything go in Psychoanalytic Supervision?

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About the Author

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Imre Szecsödy was Director of the Swedish Psychoanalytic Institute 1989-93, president of the Swedish Psychoanalytic Society 1993-97, vice president of the European Psychoanalytic Federation (EPF) 1997-2001, member of COMPSED (committee of psychoanalytic education) of the IPA 2000-2004, member of the Working Party on Psychoanalytic Education of the EPF, Member of the Liaison Committee for the IPA interim Provisional Society Vienna Arbetskreis for Psychoanalysis, member of the IPA's Research Advisory Board, former chair of the Monitoring and Advisory Board to the

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The supervisory situation should provide conditions in which learning can develop and the candidate can integrate his personal and professional experiences, theoretical knowledge and his personality for a competent handling of the psychoanalytic situation. The supervisory process is complex and multi-determined, influenced by many factors, including the personality of participants, their previous experience, the structure of the training organization, and inherent ambiguities such as autonomy versus subordination and openness versus fear of being evaluated and assessed. The supervisor has to establish a working platform differentiating his own motives from other manifest and often conflicting interests in the supervisory system. I call the system of relationships and interests of analysand, analyst, supervisor, and Institute the *extended clinical rhombus*. Psychoanalysts need to study how to conduct supervision, how to train supervisors, and how to work within the extended clinical rhombus.

The aim of supervision is for the candidate to acquire *core competencies* for conducting psychoanalysis on his own. There are many articles and books published about psychoanalytic education and not a few of them are critical of

it. Challenges to models of training are often heated, divergent, and repetitive. As Kernberg (1986) wrote in *Problems of Psychoanalytic Education*:

"Idealization processes and an ambiance of persecution are practically universal in psychoanalytic institutes. Psychoanalytic education is all too often conducted in an atmosphere of indoctrination rather than of open scientific exploration. In conclusion, the changes in the structure of psychoanalytic education proposed, tending to strengthen the university college and art academy models - at the expense of reducing the technical school and, particularly, the monastery or religious retreat models - should go a long way in reducing the pervasive idealization and persecution processes that plague psychoanalytic institutes" (1986 p. 833).

In his paper *Does Anything Go?* (2005) David Tuckett held that judgments about candidate's competence are mainly based on implicit global criteria. He suggested using a three-frame approach with explicit and transparent indicators of competent practice. The use of this framework would allow institutes to know what criteria a person must fulfill to be judged as ready to qualify as a competent psychoanalyst. Deborah Cabaniss (2000, 2004) and her colleagues at the Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research conducted studies on how candidates' progression was experienced and evaluated at the larger institutes of the American Psychoanalytic Association. They found that there is a lack of clarity of the criteria to be used in judging the competence of candidates. Candidates must get credit for cases in order to graduate. The cases must continue for a long enough time period (average 18.3 months) and demonstrate "the presence of analytic process". Furthermore, supervisors are the ones who

decide whether a case counts. Instead of being defined by vague criteria, competence could be defined as the capacity to work within the three linked frames that Tuckett described specific to psychoanalysis:

i) *participant-observational* (ability to construct and maintain a specifically psychoanalytic setting in the analyst's mind),

ii) *conceptual* (ability to identify and conceptualize the development of the analytic process)

iii) *interventional* (ability to make appropriate psychoanalytic interventions).

The European Psycho-analytic Federation Working Party on Psychoanalytic Education (WPE) organized a number of workshops to test how to use these frames on examples of supervisory sessions, presented by analysts from different European societies.

Parallel to Tuckett's work, members of the WPE Gabor Szönyi and Bien Filet started a study on psychoanalytic competencies. They defined 27 core competencies. They collected the items on the list from several resources, which used competency lists taken from lists gathered for other purposes. So the items reflect terms from different origins and degrees of complexity without re-definition for relating to psychoanalysis. They used the list to generate questions for a survey of an ample number of psychoanalysts, candidates and psychotherapists, to learn what they regarded as the specific,

essential qualities for analytic work. As a second step they linked these competencies to the different components of training. They emphasized that explicit criteria are relevant to all aspects of the educational and training process including the selection of students, theoretical teaching, ongoing assessment, and final evaluation. They meant that it is important to be explicit about the competencies of training analysts, teachers, and supervisors as well as candidates.

How to gain and evaluate competence of supervisor

The number of publications that focus on the systematic study of supervision are rather few, and hardly any of them were done by candidates (Cabaniss 2000, 2004, Caligor 1984, Dijkuis 1979, Fleming & Benedek 1966, Gross-Doehrman 1976, Kline 1977, Kubie 1958, Martin 1978, Reichelt & Skjerva (2002), Sandell 1985, Szecsödy 1990, Wallerstein 1981).

The supervisory situation should provide conditions in which learning can develop, which is quite difficult and can be complicated by trainee as well as by supervisor. In "*Psychoanalytic models of supervision: issues and ideas*" (an internal working paper of the EPF-WPE compiled by Mary Target and Eva Aronowitsch 2002-02-22) Anders Zachrison wrote about the learning process:

"Learning of skills calls for training, the development of an analytic

attitude calls for education. Education implies growth, autonomy and creativity (ego and ego ideal functions); training implies acquisition of dos and don'ts from an authority (superego functions). In a good supervision process these aspects of the learning process are integrated in an enriching and fruitful way. Another way to describe the process is as a progression from imitation, via internalization to identity. If imitation is the end product, the result is lack of autonomy (a cloning of the teacher). But imitation may have a place as the first step towards an analytic identity. This identity is achieved after the teacher's attitudes and ways of thinking have been assimilated and integrated with one's own understanding and thinking. This process, however, has to build on the acquisition of knowledge and skills. And it is important that the candidate has 2 or 3 supervisors to provide him with more than one model of thinking, and more than one analytic dialect, out of which to develop his own identity. The analytic attitude requires the ability to distinguish between professional, personal and private, most importantly between private and personal. Because transference/ countertransference material is at the heart of the analytic process, the analyst needs to be able to make this distinction in order to avoid blurring the process with private matters. Being personal is different from being private. The analyst's personal presence (as more than a mirror or screen) is a prerequisite for a deepening of the contact with the analysand" (p.5).

In my opinion, even if imitation, identification, internalization do play a part in acquiring competence, it is more important to receive continuous stimulus and support so that the candidate can integrate his personal and professional experiences, theoretical knowledge, and his personality for a competent participation in the psychoanalytic situation and in the art of helping people examine themselves and their respective situations so that they will eventually be able to come to decisions that make sense, given their particular personalities and their circumstances (Field, Cohler & Wool 1989).

The more skilled and learned supervisor can propose ways to understand the "material" but it should be combined and based on mutual reflection on what is going on in the analytic as well as the supervisory situation. I would question the term "psychoanalytic identity", as each of us has our own identity, rooted in personal experiences, training, and professional work.

The supervisor's conscious, intentional influence on the supervision and the supervisee, together with what is unconscious, ought to be given more attention than it has previously received. Besides the fact that the complex, multidimensional, heavily charged emotional interaction between analysand-analyst and supervisee-supervisor is a challenge to the supervisors' ability to contain, understand, and assist the candidate in his development, supervisors must in addition reflect on, and admit, that they may have had a negative influence on the process. Well aware that their competence and status will be disputed and questioned if the supervision or the supervised analysis comes to nothing, they may defend themselves without being aware of it by re-establishing a position of power and interpret their own teaching problems in terms of the analysand's and the candidate's resistance, anxiety, and limitations rather than observing and recognizing them in themselves. These influences are multiplied by the fact that supervisors are obliged to control and judge the work conducted by the supervisee in the best interest of the patient, the profession, and the institute.

There is still a certain antagonism between adherents to an `experiential´ model which expects the supervisee to observe, accept, and understand her own role in its conscious and unconscious aspects in relation to both the analysand and to the supervisor, and the didactic model in this supervisors expect to increase the candidate's competence without concern for problems arising from reactions and limitations with roots in the candidate's personality which they believe should be taken up only in the candidate's analysis. In my opinion, it is undeniably important for the candidate to own his history, to have insight into his idiosyncrasies, his reactions to aggressive and sexual challenges, his handling of circumstances where he has been dependent, rejected, offended, exploited or appreciated and loved. Problems that have not been worked through can block learning and infringe on supervision. But, referring the candidate to his analyst can be interpreted as the candidate being rejected, and this may damage the continuing work of the supervision. Many times the supervisor may observe, in co-operation with the candidate, the way in which a recurring reaction or behavior, seemingly with roots more in the candidate's own history than in his patient's, affects his relation to the patient. A respectful analysis of this can stimulate the candidate to make a decision about a renewed or deeper analysis for himself.

Fortified by my studies of the learning process during psychotherapy supervision (Szecsödy 1990) I recommend a facilitating as opposed to a

confrontational stance. The candidate's learning problems are always allied to his goal of interacting analytically with his patient, and that is where the supervisor can help for the benefit of the patient and the candidate. One must observe the student's mistakes and think with him about what happened. I favor a technique, where the student's countertransference is presented as part of the therapeutic paradigm, which means that the reactions of the candidate are a natural part of the analytic process and not a reflection of his pathology. It is also better to stimulate the candidate to think about the significance of the interaction than to make suggestions about how he should continue, for this may intensify his uncertainty and anxiety before he has enough information and understanding. The supervisor needs to exercise caution in approaching the candidate's participation in the tumult of interactions during analytic and supervisory sessions. Rather than giving premature explanations, the supervisor should try to explore what he tried to ward off using different defenses to do so. Many supervisors become unduly supportive or actively intervene, explaining, giving corrective information about the patient, relevant psychoanalytic theory and treatment strategies.

According to psychoanalytic theory, the patient in analysis is directly and indirectly, manifestly and latently expressing wishes, needs and intentions towards the analyst in the narrative of the interaction. Concomitant with this, the patient reacts to his thoughts and feeling and elicits responses from the analyst, which often form a repetitive pattern. To

recognize and work with these patterns in the psychoanalytic interaction is a general aim of psychoanalysis. The unconscious, intentional influence of the analyst in perceiving and selecting these themes has to be acknowledged, recognized and understood, so that analysis can be conducted in the primary interest of the patient. In my study of supervisory processes, I found that changes in the trainee's level of understanding occurred regularly in a context that I wish to call a `mutative learning situation' drawing on Loewald's term for change in psychoanalysis (Loewald 1960). These changes happen when the trainee experiences something contrary to expectations and sees the difference between the expected and the actual experience.

Our basic frame of reference is there to facilitate our work but can also restrict understanding if we interpret our experiences within the frame according to our theories and expectations seen through colored glasses. Leuzinger-Bohleber (1984) studied how 80 analysts judged a videotaped interview. Interviewing the analysts during and immediately after the viewing of the tape, she collected and systematized information about the observing and decision making process. Her study suggested that an important quality distinguishing analysts is their readiness to "reconsider" in contrast to need to "justify" their judgments of selections and interventions. This ability to "reconsider" is an important criterion in evaluating the progress of candidates.

Both supervisor and supervisee operate in the context of a formal organization, which relies on preconceived notions of what is right and wrong. The narcissistic needs of the educators to gain power and receive admiration are secured by the idealization of hierarchic structures for the preservation of "the true gold of psychoanalysis". As confirmed in the studies conducted on the training in the Swedish Psychoanalytic Institute, idealization is extensive and permanent (Szecsödy 2003).

In his valuable book, *Hate and Love in Psychoanalytic Institutions. The Dilemma of a Profession*, Jürgen Reeder (2004) emphasizes the integral ambiguity of training institutions, in which explicit and implicit power is used to convey and preserve certain values. He describes the professional and institutional superego activated in psychoanalytic institutions and culture. This superego is related to the almost incestuous intimacy that prevails between trainers and trainees, the wish to strengthen individuality despite uncertainties; the idealization of the masters; the need for continuous self-reflection and self-questioning; and the need for support yet the impossibility of getting said support because of the need to protect confidentiality and avoid being judged or seen as deviant. This superego is also rooted in the soil of transferences, rivalry, and power-struggle both in reality as well as in the pre-oedipal and oedipal dynamics of individual development. Reeder repeatedly mentions that our educational models tend to indoctrinate rather than rely on epistemological search! Our reluctance to scrutinize our

educational programs and our reluctance to be cognizant of the limitations of our knowledge is a serious problem for our profession (Eisold 2004).

As Victor Calef (1972) reported after the 4th Pre-congress on training in Vienna, the capacity to take responsibility is an important quality in the candidate and future analyst. I believe that the involvement of the candidate in his own assessment is essential. Greater freedom to question and explore, together with a wider circle of input and feedback, can contribute significantly not only to that candidate in particular but to increased organizational flexibility and growth in general. We need to devote more attention to making explicit our educational goals and the rationale behind them, and to question the underlying ideas that shaped them, the influence of theoretical, ideological, educational, cultural and historical forces on stated as well as latent goals, and the detail and overall structure and performance of training.

We have to differentiate between evaluation and assessment.

Evaluation emphasizes mutuality, reflection, feedback, working alliance, clarification, and working through of problems. In evaluation, internalization of an analytic attitude occurs at the level of ego and ego ideal.

Assessment emphasizes the certification of competence, and thereby functions rather more at a superego level. Supervision can be confidential

without becoming secretive, and transparent, explicit criteria can be maintained. The presence of the third (the Institute) can and should be made transparent.

Writing after the EPF-WPE retreat on supervision in Amsterdam, Aronowitsch (2002) held that evaluation can and should be a continuous and mutual one, following the training of the candidate throughout. Already the process of selection enhances the feeling of "being chosen." It would be better not to convey at admission a promise that one will be made a psychoanalyst. But as it stands, the sense of specialness is increased throughout training – as psychoanalysis is often viewed as elite, as if better than psychotherapy. We need to reflect and understand why and how each seminar, analysis, supervision and so on went the way it did. The entire training should not become a secret place where nobody is allowed to interfere. We have to work against the idealization of the profession and of training by trainers and candidates. It is best for candidate and for institution if the candidate is included in evaluating how learning proceeds and becoming more aware of the positive and negative influence candidate and trainer can have in this learning (Szecsödy, I. 1999).

One could argue for separating training, evaluation of learning, and certification of competence. One could argue that external judges should make the assessment. At the least, we have to be open and transparent in our

evaluations – to engage candidates actively in the evaluation and planning of training, and to engage ourselves in research and theoretical work within our societies and in co-operation with other sciences and the academic world.

As Kernberg's papers (1986, 1996, 2000) are familiar to most, I will refer to the lesser known article by Silke Wiegand-Grefe (2004); she made 12 suggestions for change which can be paraphrased as follows:

1. Make training more professional and transparent

2. Change the hierarchical structure into a democratic one in which all discussions, evaluations and decisions are transparent and candidates take part in all committees

3. Include research and scientific work as an ample part of training

4. Stop emphasizing the generic term "psycho-analytic identity" and accept that each analyst had his own identity, rooted in personal experiences, training, and professional work.

5. Strive against idealizing psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts by continuously looking objectively at all parts of training – personal/didactic analysis, supervision, and seminars

6. Do not use diagnostic terms during admission and selection but make admission a mutual process of selection and goal definition

7. Base training on scientific ideals, supervision with a transparent

and mutual evaluation process, and didactic analysis consisting of a maximum of 300-400 sessions, conducted outside the institute

8. Thoroughly revise the whole training, take into consideration the candidates' former education and training and keep it to 5 years in length

9. Consider a separate curriculum for some depending on former training and future plans of practice

10. Define the competencies of supervisors and seminar leaders responsible for training

11. Organize the institute like a university not a family enterprise

12. Continuously reflect on the organization of the institute and its quality control

The need to increase the competence of supervisors via training is more and more recognized (Szecsödy 1994). Yet there are only a few institutes with organized training for supervisors. Training of psychotherapy supervisors was established in Sweden 1974 and training of supervisors of psychoanalysis in 1987. Individual members of the Society can apply for the training. Formal requirements are 4,000 hours of analytic work after acquisition of full membership. A committee of five training analysts interviews the applicants. The applicant has to give a presentation of his analytic work intertwining theory and technique. The presentation is

discussed with the members of the committee. The applicant is present during the whole discussion, including the evaluation of her/his presentation. The board of the institute's function is to authorize the recommendation as well as to administer appeals. Those who received the assignment as a training analyst can apply to enter the training for supervisors. The training is geared to preparing the supervisor to address the candidates' learning problems such as lack of experience, skill and knowledge, and defensive avoidance of information due to conflicts relative to the patient and the supervisor's problems about the candidate's learning problems (Ekstein and Wallerstein 1958).

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