The Experience of Supervisor-Supervisee Pairs Presenting Live Supervision

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It is often claimed that the tripartite system of psychoanalytic education is the best available, yet, we know that it produces a tradeschool atmosphere which spawns practitioners and not scholars or researchers, that it often stifles creativity and questioning. Although many psychoanalysts complain about the system of training, they do not work for reform. Most often at the outset of training much effort is put into conveying the method according to the book as much as possible. Traditions, conflictual organizational dynamics, and primitive defenses contribute to the rationale for how training is designed and defined. Many highly talented and creative candidates become discouraged and disenchanted by the shortcomings of training and the attitudes in the professional psychoanalytic community. Though psychoanalysis faces a crisis, there are few systematic studies on the process and outcome of psychoanalytic training. It would be

instructive to gather data on the process and its results during the training and devise some studies to see what kind of analysts emerge from the different training modalities at the end of it. From the results of our assessment, we then need to build innovative training models.

"Learning in supervision: a mutual experience" was chosen as the theme of the 17th IPA precongress for 1997. This chapter is based on a report of the follow up responses received from supervisors and supervisees who presented at the 8th IPA Conference of Training Analysts in Barcelona 1997 and who responded to a questionnaire concerning their experience. By including supervising analysts and candidate supervisees, the organizers intended to focus on learning and to create a mutual assessment of this aspect of supervision. They invited 24 pairs of supervisors and candidates or recent graduates to present material from, and thoughts about, their work together in terms of: a) the configuration of the supervisory setting creation and maintenance of the learning alliance c) ambiguities in the supervisory situation d) promotion or inhibition of development of mutual learning in the supervisor and the candidate, e) the promotion of independent and creative psychoanalytic thinking f) the influence of the institution on mutual learning.

The organizing committee in 1997 received both encouragement as well as criticism for inviting candidates and recent graduates to a conference of training analysts. In his report from the 4th IPA precongress on training back in 1971, Victor Calef had already emphasized that "the capacity to take responsibility is an important quality in the candidate and future analyst, and that the involvement of the candidate in his own assessment was repeatedly urged in the discussion. Greater freedom to question and explore, together with a wider circle of input and feedback, can contribute significantly to increased organizational flexibility and growth." Nevertheless, in 1997, the view of a significant number of institutes and training analysts was still that they had to protect their candidates from participation in their own evaluation and from taking part in the discussion about how supervision in general and the style of their supervisors in particular influence their learning!

The major concern was that inviting the candidate to participate at a training analysts conference would interfere both with the learning process and with the candidates' conduct of the analyses involved despite previous positive experience with the method. Supervisee-supervisor pairs from four institutes where supervision

was already being studied systematically had given presentations prior to the Barcelona conference, and almost all of the supervisors had emphasized the positive and enriching experience of working with the candidate preparing and presenting their work and only one of them had questioned the value of discussion in the presence of the candidate. Nevertheless concerns reached the organizing committee. So, the organizing committee for this precongress decided that this time data must be collected. They arranged to do a thorough followup, contacting each supervisor and supervisee to learn how they had experienced their participation at the conference - how it was for them preparing their presentations, what it was like actually participating in the Conference, how the presentation was used in the discussion groups, what happened in the aftermath of the Conference, and what influence they noted on their clinical work with the analysand, their work in supervision, and the institute to which they belonged. Similar questions were submitted to the supervisors: how did the participation at the conference influence their work with the candidates and their relationship with their institute? After the conference a questionnaire was sent to all 24 presenting supervisees and supervisors asking them to provide their answers and to add their

own spontaneous comments on the experience preparing for and taking part in the conference (questionnaire is attached). Out of the 24 pairs, 23 supervisors (95%) and 20 supervises (85%) answered the questionnaire.

Responses from supervisees

Responses from supervisees: 12 from Latin America; 6 from Europe, 6 from USA.

No response from supervisees: 1 from US, 2 from Europe, 1 from Latin America

All the supervisees who responded stressed that the preparation for the conference together with the supervisor increased the sense of collaboration and comprehension of the psychoanalytic process, and propelled a mutual effort to understand both the analytic and the supervisory interaction. Most of them emphasized what a useful experience it was to reflect on different approaches to the analytic process, on how learning takes place, and how knowledge is transmitted. Most of the supervisees experienced a transition to greater collaboration and respect in the context of which they felt that they matured from childhood to adulthood. The relationship with the

supervisor was enriched and deepened. Many underscored the impression that their identity as analysts deepened. They all emphasized that the relationship with the patient was not negatively influenced - at least on a consciously perceivable level – even though one analysand had clearly perceived the analyst's engagement in something outside the analytic setting. A few referred to the "crossing of boundaries from private to public" as they prepared to present to an audience, and yet they considered this a valuable experience. The triangular dynamics between supervisee-supervisor-training analysts attracted the attention of one candidate.

According to a number of candidates, the quality of the discussion in the small-groups was clearly dependent on the moderator. In most groups the focus was on the aspects of learning and supervisory interaction. 4 candidates mentioned the feeling of being intruded upon, criticized, and super-supervised in the groups. Several respondents mentioned the value of the cross-cultural composition of groups and the importance of respectful listening and acknowledgement of their work.

The institutes of the Latin American societies were strongly

committed to the idea and gave support to the presentations of the candidates, while in Europe there was no positive and even some negative involvement from institutes that questioned the propriety of candidate participation and expressed the fear that the experience might negatively influence the supervisory and the analytic process. None of the candidates who answered the questionnaire reported that their participation had any negative effect on their work with analysand and/or supervisor.

The general emphasis was that supervisors should make an effort to increase the competence of the candidate, and to reflect upon how they themselves function as supervisors. For instance, were they able to avoid interfering with and rivaling the supervisees or using them for narcissistic gratification? 6 supervisees had been invited to attend the two group sessions on the second day of the conference but of those who had attended only their own sessions, 6 mentioned that they would have preferred to be included in the whole of conference and they asked to receive the evaluation of the meeting and to read a review of the conference by the organizing committee. 4 supervisees mentioned that they will continue with the study of the supervisory process, and offered to write up their experience of the conference and

the supervisory process, focusing on how learning is facilitated as well

as hindered and how knowledge is transmitted. Some of them

mentioned the importance of being included in the evaluation process

of the problematic supervisor as well as of the candidate.

Responses from supervisors

Responses: 12 from Latin America, 5 from Europe, 6 from

USA, (one of which did not use the questionnaire)

No response: 1 from Europe

Most supervisors described the preparation of the presentation

as a mutually enriching, stimulating, intense, and profound experience.

It gave them the impetus to reflect about process, style, and manner of

dealing with transference-countertransference issues in both analytic

and supervisory interactions. Open exchanges with the candidate as

an independent thinker and writing together in partnership were

positive experiences. Only a few mentioned a candidate's experience

of anguish over the presentation. Discussion dealt with how to work

with countertransference reactions and blind spots in the candidate

without invading the privacy of the candidate's personal analysis.

Some emphasized that they became much freer to include personal

elements in the supervisory work. The group discussions were mostly supportive, nonintrusive, and enhancing of confidence. Some emphasized that teaching and learning are different processes and that it is extremely important for a supervisors to learn how they influence the candidates' learning. One of the discussion groups stayed focused on mutual preconscious contact and influence between the three participants – patient/candidate/supervisor. In all the discussion groups there were different perceptions about what constitutes psychoanalytic knowledge and how to convey it. For the most part these differences stimulated discussion but sometimes hampered it.

Quotations and Comments from Supervisees and Supervisors after the precongress event

Comments from Supervisees:

"Expanded relationship with supervisor (caring, friendship, respect, mutual learning. Enriching for development as analyst, demystified, freer to develop and write from own perspective. Preparing deepened and consolidated relationship with supervisor; discuss, broaden ideas; extremely positive experience. Analysis not influenced directly, but indirectly as analytic identity deepened.

Institute not really interested".

"To prepare the paper, allowed for a wider comprehension of the analytical work; we could establish our different positions and see how mutual learning process influences change of personality. Enriching to acknowledge the difficulties implicit in becoming an analyst, which is not an even and continuous path but full of complexities".

"The crossing of frontiers was a central experience; clinical work assumed a different dimension: turning public what is private, observing more carefully my style of making contact with the patient, all the difficulties to present clinical material with always nuances and particularities".

"The level of discussion in the small group was high; the questions posed were motivating for clinical, theoretical and institutional critical thinking. It was well conducted by coordinator. Negative was to be told we could not attend later sessions. I am not against a hierarchy of institutions; training analysts have to have their private time, as candidates do too. But there is a tendency to infantilize the candidates, treating them as somebody that should not find out about some dangerous topics!"

"The group was relaxed, open to learn from the candidate. Do go on with conferences like this; a good analyst is not always a good teacher; and the candidate too dependent to criticize! Should have criteria for helpful, encouraging supervisor, who does not satisfy narcissistic needs".

- "I had a stimulating and positive reaction towards my supervisor; we did receive support from the Institute but also met with a critical attitude".
- "My attitude to the patient did not change, but the method of following the patient changed to a more complete one".
- "I was first somewhat uneasy to publicly present a private relationship, but it was very positive to show how we agree/disagree and did solidify our intuitive connection and we worked on with continued ease".
- "A valuable experience".
- "After the presentation we had a much better understanding with each other and of how we work together".
- "After the conference we got a closer tie with the institute."
- "Strengthened in my opinion that too much of our training remains unsaid, especially when it concerns supervision; it is important to bring candidates together; I believe in a constant dialogue. We came to understand the process better during our preparation for the conference, we did find common grounds, did see parallel processes. It was a mutual learning. Our relationship progressed, became more a consultation than supervision; could freely talk about frustrations, and about evaluation. Supervision is becoming gradually more a theme for discussion at our Institute."

"Prepared to present our experience in the institute. I have now

more trust in my own learning and a stimulated interest in supervision."

"I am very much interested in how psychoanalytic knowledge is transmitted, and to share experiences with analysts of different backgrounds. It reinforced our relationship, new light, increased interest to conceptualise. We had firm support from our Institute".

"I was enriched by the cross-cultural aspects, but did miss a vision of the whole meeting, as I could not attend the final plenary.

The committee could organise a publication containing the papers and the result of this research".

"The first reaction of the group was rather disappointing, they wanted more clinical evidence not our approach to deal with mutual aspects of supervision. I was invited to attend next day, and was surprised by the intensity of my own participation, passionate, positive-enriching experience. Deep discussion concerning ways of working, relation supervisor/supervisee. Strengthened our relationship, to revise/reread, rethink. Decided continue investigate field".

"We could touch on matters of countertransference in supervision.

Would have been good/important to remain in the group throughout to think more deeply. I did use my own analysis to understand and work with my reactions to presentation.

It was important to reflect on my concerns to protect patient, confidentiality, privacy, still not to overwork the process, to be available for spontaneous discoveries. Much

was stirred up that lead to valuable learning".

"The group was very interested in the candidate's perspective on supervision and how supervision can do wrong. I was somewhat disappointed that there was really very little discussion of mutuality and that supervision is still very much considered as a 'downhill' process from supervisor to candidate".

Comments from Supervisors

"Discussion extraordinary interesting, intense, profound, sincere, helpful for reflecting more. Valuable experience, able to reflect."

"The major achievement was that the candidate was invited to all sessions; it was the best way for all to learn and share experience and have an open exchange of ideas. Our relationship was well perceived as mutually respectful, open to experiment on a "playground".

"The plenary at the end was somewhat repetitive".

"All in all a very positive experience, solidarity and partnership.

The supervisee could bring up more confident material which led to new perspectives on our work. The analysis is evolving well".

"Intense anguish in transference was seen also in supervision.

Elaboration of this allowed rethinking and deepening of

experience. Reflecting about the analytic and supervisory process provided a maturing experience, patient also benefited, and so did I, the supervisor, mature"

"We did rethink many questions: what is supervision, a training supervision, function of supervision, influence of the and on the emotional experience of the analytic pair. New questions in the group-discussion: emergence of supervisee's identity being respected by supervisor; how to research transference and countertransference phenomena of analyst, how to discriminate supervision from personal analysis, to respect, and not invade it, still demystify the omnipotence and omniscience of training analyst; to differentiate mutual learning from mimetic learning! Discussion is going on at our institute. I do not believe in the absolute neutrality of the supervisor - he should become aware of unconscious rivalry and conflicts with the evolving candidate. Supersupervision is important".

"Preparation promoted special reflection about supervision.

Preparing together had increased our capacity to communicate the process to each other and comprehension of process with the patient. The Institute is interested, discussion continues".

"I have serious doubts regarding the utility of this system, in this environment. That the candidate had to leave halfway (even if it permitted a greater degree of freedom in the discussion of the case) was infantilizing for the candidate who already suffers enough of this experience during the usual training

process. Preparing was positive, but not transcendental, based on a very good working relationship - without which it could become a distorting experience. No major changes, maybe increased theoretical preoccupation which I do not consider as favourable. Our Institute remained on the sidelines."

"The experience with the group was positive. The supervisee is now a colleague. The Institute was not in favour for the participation, but we did not ask for permission."

"The candidates conduct did not change, but his understanding of the patient improved. Our Institute is involved and interested. Be sure that confidentiality is provided".

"Most important was to get the privileged authenticity of the candidate and ignore the aspect of authority from the didactic analyst and the consequent intrusion of childish aspects in the candidate. We chose to mark the individuality of our jointly work to the congress during its writing, presentation and the congress. The discussion group was receptive, did not overstep in interpretation or criticism the supervisee. It gave also an opportunity to question the way knowledge is transmitted - not to clone candidates and produce childish dependency and imitation. It was interesting to notice the transferential remains in every relationship, the unavoidable presence of the personal was noticed as well as the respect for the individuality of the experience. From the institute there was a lack of interest in the IPA activities, with many reactions against the project to

invite candidates. In the whole I feel the proposal, the project and debate are a progress in the creative freedom of analysis. Wish would be more frequent experience".

"Teaching and learning two highly different processes and if the candidate is not included in these discussions, the supervisors who teach do not have data as to the effectiveness of their teaching. Highly appropriate for the learner to be present! Single candidate might be intimidated - but highly advantageous if different candidates can explore different supervisory experiences together with supervisors."

"The presence of the supervisee was an important facilitating factor in the success of the whole enterprise. It was unfortunate that the supervisee was not asked to stay with the group for the next day. The compromise solution arrived at in order to accommodate objections was unfortunate and potentially destructive. The underlying controversy pertains the different perceptions of what constitutes psychoanalytic knowledge and to the best way to convey it. As an educator Freud operated for the most part within the realm of a positivistic epistemology and therefore it is not surprising that many analysts still operate within the bounds of it. Accordingly psychoanalysis is in possession of a body of knowledge that can only be revealed within a completely structured situation in which the teacher remain in full control. Under such circumstances supervision resembles the analytic process despite the procedural differences involved. Anything that disrupts the formal structure is

considered intrusive and destructive. In recent years many analysts have departed from such notions. The body of knowledge of Psychoanalysis is for them not so well developed and interwoven with personal and idiosyncratic notions. In the supervisory setting the supervisor is perceived as a facilitator or as a constant where the interaction is only partially dialectic. There is a flexible procedural structure".

"The candidate became interested to write a paper on supervision from the candidates perspective.

"The exchange with colleagues and presence of supervisee in the discussions was helpful, promoting a meaningful supervisory exchange. I will write a paper on this".

"We presented our paper for the institute, which resulted in enthusiastic planning to repeat this kind of presentations. Discussion in the institute reduces superego fantasies and stimulates to transmit experience from both parts".

Answers to the follow-up study questions

Do the presenters confirm/disconfirm the assumption that the participation of the candidate will add new and important information about the supervisory process and increase understanding about what facilitates or hinders learning? With two exceptions the participation did add new information and increased understanding. The assumption is confirmed.

Do the presenters confirm/disconfirm that the participation of the candidate did intrude and negatively influence the supervisory process?

The participation did not have a negative influence.

Do the presenters confirm/disconfirm the assumptions that the presence of the candidate will hinder free discussion and reinforce the defenses of the candidates, and that conflicts could be acted out and negatively intervene with learning?

Two supervisors mentioned that the presence of the candidate did hamper discussion. Many emphasized that the candidate's presence was advantageous for the discussion and two wished that the invitation should have been for the whole conference. In six groups the candidate was invited by the group to stay for the second day.

Do the presenters report directly or indirectly that by revealing confidential material they were affected by the transgression of the boundaries around the supervisory interaction?

Three candidates mentioned that they were concerned about this and worked with the question. In one instance the intrusion of the coming presentation and its effect on the analytic process did become the focus of supervision. None experienced any negative effect.

Do the presenters confirm or disconfirm that they learned something new from the experience of preparing and doing a conjoined presentation?

Almost without exception, both candidates and supervisors emphasize strongly, that they did learn from preparing and participating in the conjoint presentation.

Do the presenters confirm/disconfirm that the presentation influenced the conduct of the candidate's analytic work in any way?

One presenter emphasized that the presentation was experienced as an intruder both in the analytic and in the supervisory

process, perceived in the dream-material of the analysand; but this did also enrich the supervision and also deepened the analytic process. To break the frame demands a firm and secure structure. According to the other respondent there was a positive influence on the ongoing analytic work.

Do the presenters confirm or disconfirm that the presentation influenced the conduct of the supervisory work in any way?

Did not interfere negatively, for the most it had a facilitating influence.

Did the presentation have any effect on the participant's relation to the institute?

Mostly not, with the exception of two Latin American, two North American, and one European Institute.

Did the presenters experience that the discussion in the small-groups was focused on the preselected aspects of the supervisory process?

According to a majority the focus was on the pre-selected aspects, in three groups it became more a supervision of supervision.

Do the presenters confirm/or disconfirm that the work they put into participating in the conference was worthwhile?

Without exception those who answered felt it worthwhile.

Do the presenters agree to collaborate with a follow up five years after the conference?

All of those who answered are willing to collaborate with a future follow-up.

Conclusion

I would like to close this chapter with a quotation from Leo Stone's 1975 paper: "The scientific group, like the individual whose sense of self and essential worthwhileness are well founded and secure, need not fear contacts with others, nor confrontations with new ideas and new methods" (p. 367). Nor indeed need it fear evolution, modification, and possibly improvement deriving from

other contemporary sciences. Cross-fertilization is not to be equated Most of the respondents emphasized the with contamination. importance of becoming more aware of the mutuality of the supervisory process and the positive influence of involving the candidate to reflect on and evaluate how learning proceeds and to become more aware of the positive respective negative influence both parties can have in this. The crisis in psychoanalysis can stimulate a response that is more profound than the usual individual and group self-examination. We need to respond by relinquishing the residues of a priestly omniscience that refuses to be susceptible to criticism from within or without. Giving this up will be in no sense a regression or a loss. It will be a prodigious advance. Psychoanalysis in its present form still has a plenitude of untapped resources to offer as science, as therapy, and as the parent to other therapeutic methods. It will probably remain the optimum treatment for certain individuals in the foreseeable future and a valuable basic training experience for all psychotherapists. In its present strictly delimited form, it provides a source of data, a model for comparative study, and a basis for experimental variations of incalculable value. But it would be fundamentally wrong to assume that it cannot change, or should not be changed, if adequate reasons for such change are developed. Well considered efforts in this direction should be welcomed with an open and tolerant mind, encouraged, and examined critically to be sure of the path. An important aspect of that change will depend on the place of the candidates in training and within the training institutions moving on from that of pupil to equally responsible collaborator.

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