

SUPERVISION

As questions about supervision have been uppermost in many dramatherapists' minds in recent times, we thought it might be helpful to publish some accounts of personal experience of supervising or being supervised

1. BEGINNINGS IN INDIVIDUAL SUPERVISION

i) The supervisee

I left the Dramatherapy course in the summer of 1985 bidding farewell to my friends, each one of us ready to set off on paths which may lead to practising as full time Dramatherapists.

By September I was feeling like a ship in stormy weather with the most difficult group of teenagers I had ever encountered in my workplace and it did not show signs of easing up. I wailed to the psychologist at work who supervised me on the individual pieces of work that I did.

"I couldn't possibly supervise you on your dramatherapy groups and I do not know of anyone in the N.H.S. who could. Don't you know anyone south of the river who is a dramatherapist that you could ask?"

As regional groups were unbeknown to me then I asked a woman I knew who had finished the course over a year ago, to furnish me with the telephone number of Marina who had been in her year and who had impressed me with her calm criticism on a dramatherapy intensive week; she had also been my partner in a movement workshop and had helped me to walk in a 'Puppet exercise'. Armed with the number I phoned and we arranged to meet at her place which joy of joys was only two miles down the road near the swimming pool where I tried swimming off the increasing anxiety that was threatening to engulf me as I dreaded the group and wished I had never set it up.

A hot sunny day, coffee, chocolate digestives, sitting on a deckchair in a beautiful garden having taken note of the inviting home, convinced me that I could work in this environment, who couldn't! The surroundings attracted me as much as Marina's response which was that I felt instinctively that we could work together. I was pleased by her offer to supervise me at a reasonable fee on a fortnightly basis. I was aware of feeling resentful about having to pay for supervision privately but realized that if I wanted to develop professionally this was the right way forward.

We began and for a while I berated myself; I know I should have kept proper evaluative process reports but hadn't been rigorous enough. The sessions came to a head after Christmas, it felt as though the swimming pool had been metaphorically transferred into our sessions and I was drowning with fear that I had no ability to be a dramatherapist as I could not see where I was going. All learning takes time and the supervision process is no exception, it was at least five months before things

began to sink in. This in itself is a point to consider as a practitioner in therapy, all change takes time. The support was consistent and encouraging and since then I have been able to understand myself in relation to my work increasingly and realize that the growing process is ongoing. Those first few months were crucial in that I had to learn to live with my own ignorance and chaos and believe that I was doing the right thing. I now have a lot more confidence in my ability to swim with the current instead of against it and to use it in my favour.

I have outlined some of the processes that I have been aware of occurring below over the fifteen months that I have been receiving supervision:

1. To write up each group process and to read it and reflect upon it.
2. To organize the group; into a size which is workable and to stick to the boundaries set.
3. Negotiating for the N.H.S. to pay for my supervision and getting the sessions backdated.
4. To understand the effects and nature of the projections, transference and counter-transference.
5. The use of structure and organization in negotiating for a job as a dramatherapist.
6. Considering why I am running a group before what and how I am doing it.
7. Understanding what is my agenda and what is the clients' agenda, keeping it in check and being aware of it.
8. Limiting the amount of groups run per week to five and allowing enough time for thinking and planning. (This is far more useful than being a martyr and allowing resentment to build up).
9. Developing the internal supervisor.
10. Developing better interview techniques for the purpose of assessment and diagnosis.

Since September 1986 I have been working as a full time Senior Nurse Dramatherapist for Kingston and Esher Health Authority, have weekly supervision paid for through the nursing budget, and am setting up groups in the community in areas which particularly interest me. I should like to add that a lot of the points outlined above were covered in the course I took to become a qualified dramatherapist, but

remained an enigma to the novice as I was then - too immature in experience to be able to understand the processes that were taking place.

Stephanie Daly.

ii) The Supervisor

A. This is Stephanie Daly here; I don't know if you remember me from the Dramatherapy course, the year after you... I was wondering if you'd consider being my supervisor.

B. (Thinks - 'Goodness - what a surprise - and here's me wanting to do more free lance work - what an opportunity - but could I do it? I haven't done any Dramatherapy supervision before...well, she must think you can do it or she wouldn't have asked you.)

(Out loud) Oh hello, Stephanie, of course I remember you. Um..

A. Well you see, I really need someone south of the river and..

B. (Thinks - 'So there is some advantage in being south of the river...') (Out loud) Well, I haven't actually done any supervision before so I'm not really in a position to say yes, but if you'd like to come and talk about it and then if you feel I can be of some use to you we can take it from there.....

A few days later sees us sitting in the garden, September sun hot on our faces, coffee, dozy cats basking. Steph talks, I listen like I've learned to listen since doing the Dramatherapy course - better, more focussed, relating detail to whole, piecing together a picture of the needs, the anxieties, the uncertainties. This, for me comes before specific information about the organization she works for, though obviously I'm picking up relevant details about that as she talks, essentially I'm feeling my way on all sorts of levels - not least checking my own reactions as she speaks to see how I feel about working both with her and with the kind of material she might bring to supervision. We talk for an hour and a half; this isn't a session but a preliminary exploration so it feels important to let it take the time it takes for us both to get a sense of how it would be working together. During our talk I've begun to feel excited by the prospect of the work and can be clear about that. I suggest that she might like some time to think about her decision but she says that she has found this initial discussion helpful and would like to continue.

Without realising it we had started. As I write this fifteen months later I understand more fully the importance of that initial interview. The supervisee has to find a mode in which to present her or his work to a new critical listener, one who will hear both

text and subtext, sift and sort, reflect back, raise questions, help the therapist to find new insights, make observations and suggestions, set tasks. In order for me to be able to assess whether or not I could undertake to be Stephanie's supervisor I had to have performed some of these functions in this initial discussion as a matter of course. If I had not then I doubt if she would have wished to engage me in that role.

After Stephanie left that morning I felt as though a new door had opened and I welcomed the challenge of entering into another way of working. At that time, as a Polytechnic Lecturer working on a variety of teacher training courses, I was experiencing a dearth of opportunity to work in dramatherapy but I realised that in becoming a Dramatherapy supervisor I could combine my years of teaching and training experience with my understanding of Dramatherapy. As we have continued to work I have realised more and more the value for me of this particular combination of skills. In the early stages I had to keep a careful eye on myself to wean myself off the way of supervising teacher-training students or even in-service teachers and develop a different way of working. Here there was an interesting parallel; Stephanie was working at an adolescent unit; in my own training I had had a similar client group on placement, but in a school. There I had had to become therapist, not teacher; it seemed as though I was now being given the opportunity to extend the process of adaptation I had begun on my Dramatherapy training course.

But first there were other things to consider, not least the practicalities - time, money; the fee must be low, Dramatherapists don't get paid a lot and the labourer had to prove worthy of her hire, I felt. Regularity was important so we fixed a fortnightly time which we could both make without difficulty. At the end of that first meeting I felt that expectations were important; regular process work and some very specific advice on organization of both her work timetable and her recording system. While the cats continued to sleep in the sun a new professional relationship had been formed.

We never sat in the garden after that and sessions lasted an hour; boundaries within my house, boundaries in her work, boundaries within our relationship. It was a word which was to crop up often enough during the first nine months of our work as Stephanie struggled with her adolescents' chaos and attempts at manipulation and I found myself modelling containment and structure. I enjoyed the work enormously and still do; the opportunity to work one to one with someone who spoke a particular language which was important to me - that of Dramatherapy - was exciting and rewarding. Often we used dramatherapy methodology in the sessions to explore issues which Stephanie brought to supervision or to bring to light what appeared to be being avoided. Sometimes we would analyse and work quite specifically on the material which emerged, other times the creative method itself would work through symbolism without comment from me until Stephanie would provide her own interpretations and gain insight into the central issue of that supervision session. Some of the most satisfying times for me in those early days were when I worked on hunches and set up structures for her to work within. For her to find her own way to the centre of the problem was far more useful than for me to give my interpretation to

her, at those times. The method allowed her to begin to discover the supervisor within herself; often some of the practical approaches we took, not least the various paper and pen methods, were tools she could take away and use for herself between sessions. The other thing which I found rewarding in this way of working was recognising when it was appropriate to allow the symbolic process to work its own wholeness and how productive that could be. Again the variety afforded by the eclecticism of Dramatherapy provides both a challenge for the supervisor and an ability to work at a variety of levels. In becoming a supervisor I was faced with that challenge in every session and rising to it taught me a lot about my new role. I realise now, looking back, how much I relied on the practical approaches to help me to become acquainted with many aspects of my supervisee's work. I believe that I learned more subtext than I could have done by a talking/listening approach which in turn helped me to perceive and connect threads both within a session and over a period of time. As time went on I tended to use the latter method more; the earlier action work had helped me to gain sufficient insight into the various aspects of Stephanie's client groups and institution so that I could rely more on my increasing ability to see links and patterns emerging through our talking together. This in itself reflects what can happen in an ongoing Dramatherapy group where action can gradually give place to more talking but where the action has been the vital element in revealing the group's material and which gives Dramatherapy its unique character. It seems to me valuable that supervision should reflect the character of the therapeutic medium in which the supervisee is working.

I have called this Beginnings; my brief was to write about the beginning of a supervisory relationship from the point of view of someone starting as a supervisor. If I had to define what has been the most rewarding aspect of this new area of work for me I think it would be the gradual build up of trust that must be fostered between the supervisor and supervisee. In supervising one has access to the intimate relationship the therapist has with her or his work which, like most relationships involves discovery, doubt, uncertainty, unexpected joy, discontent, satisfaction, hard work, frustration, fulfillment. To be privy to this relationship and act as some sort of anchor and guide as the therapist charts the challenging waters of clients' material I regard as a privilege. Although I have learned about structure and strategies and developed a personal style, each supervisory relationship will have its own unique character, each provide me as a supervisor with its own challenge to help create and sustain a professional environment in which growth and development can be fostered. It does not seem to be without significance that in this instance the initial meeting between supervisor and supervisee took place in a garden.

Marina Jenkyns.

2. PEER SUPERVISION

I had not been supervised in any role since my student days over 20 years ago. Supervision then was about learning to apply recently acquired skills. After an "apprenticeship" period, I thought one should have sufficient confidence to manage alone. Some years later, as a dramatherapist, I was not part of a team and compensated for this lack by relying on my husband to support me in times of crisis or indecision.

It was during my period of service on the dramatherapy "supervision sub committee" that I realised there was more to supervision than management and skills application. A subsequent 3 day course by Sheila Herrick convinced me of the need for adequate "process" supervision. My battles for recognition in the N.H.S. were enormous and I knew that further requests on my part would result in long and ineffectual discussions.

A few years previously I had met a colleague who was trained in both group and social work. We had much in common and had kept in touch spasmodically in a social setting. I knew she was a trained supervisor, and was someone I could trust. When I 'phoned her to put my proposal, she said she had something to ask me - would I supervise her private psychotherapy? So our supervision began with reciprocal requests and laughter! However, the serious nature of our new relationship soon became apparent. Supervision was no longer desirable, it was a necessity.

At first we were very careful to keep to professional issues. We tended to be client centred, dealing with management first, personal feelings second. As we became more skilled, we could find the client/therapist relationship reflected in our own. The first time this occurred, I was too shy to comment on it at the time. We discussed it the following week, tentatively exploring the effects of our new relationship. I had to admit it frightened me. I did not know how much I wanted to reveal to my friend, nor did I wish to pry into her affairs. We sought refuge in client centred supervision again, and kept our friendship unsullied.

During this period, I was facing changes at work which I was able to discuss, and personal changes which I felt I could not share. The vitality seemed to drain from our supervision, there were "good" reasons why we met less frequently. We had been meeting for supervision for 2 years and had found a safe but limited structure. Last year, after much consultation, we both severed connections with our respective institutions, to increase freelance work. These were independent decisions, but one of the many coincidental similarities which seem to happen to us. We realised how important our supervision would become as we worked in isolation. During this time our supervision of others had increased, and discussion of ourselves as supervisors became a topic for consideration.

Again, independently, we each decided to attend a workshop on Supervision given by Peter Hawkins at a Psychotherapy Conference. When we discovered our

Peter has made an extensive study of supervision. His workshop was stimulating and at times exciting. I realised how my approach to supervising others differed from my peer supervision, where I appeared to be wearing blinkers!

Our next supervision was spent in reviewing the workshop and its implications. We both expressed a need for change of pattern, but a fear that our friendship may suffer. We decided that our friendship was the more important relationship. If supervision interfered with it, we would seek new supervisors.

Subsequently, we have met weekly. Our supervision sessions have become alive, spontaneous and essential to our professional practice. There were hurdles to overcome - the first time I knew I was leading her into a painful area - the first time I asserted myself as initiator, and so on. We meet for 2 hours and normally divide the time strictly between us. Occasionally, if one is particularly needy, we have unequal time, but this is negotiated at the beginning of the session.

There are disadvantages of our peer supervision.

1. Now we are both freelance, we have to meet in each other's homes. It is difficult for families to accept that we are working and should not be disturbed. Domestic matters sometimes intrude - doorbell, telephone etc.
2. Boundaries of time, space and relationships are flexible and could overlap.

Our peer supervision is successful for us, but I am aware that it would not necessarily work for everyone. It is something to consider carefully before embarking upon. I think our success is due to:-

1. Our friendship was well established before supervision began.
2. We were both highly trained and experienced professionals before we met.
3. We had both received training in supervising and experience of being supervisors.
4. We are alike in temperament and outlook. There are many parallels to be drawn in both professional and social life.
5. We each bring differing skills as well as above.
6. We are very aware of boundaries, we keep strictly to time limits, sit at a table rather than relax in armchairs, do not discuss supervision socially, etc.
7. Confidentiality is sacrosanct we do not discuss supervision in front of our husbands or mutual friends.

8. We recognise the need for supervision if we are to maintain a high standard of practice.

9. We both want our supervision to succeed. We have learned to be honest with each other in a way that is not acceptable in a social setting.

10. We are prepared to take risks and experiment.

11. We view supervision as an equal partnership.

We are still learning, knowing that absolute honesty is paramount to success. We are clear about priorities in our dual relationship. Our mutual respect is growing and our professional lives benefit. Most important, our friendship is the richer for it.

Dorothy Langley

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