

19 Using supervision for professional development

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This chapter is written as an introduction to what we sometimes called non-managerial supervision. It is written for both students training to be informal educators and for workers in the field. It will explore the principles that underlie the model of supervision used by the YMCA George Williams College in its initial training courses for informal educators. The focus will be on your experience as a student or worker who is being supervised (the supervisee), and how you can most effectively use supervision to improve your learning about your practice and therefore be more effective workers.

Supervision and informal educators

Why do we see supervision sessions as an important part of your work as an informal educator? Let us start by looking at the nature of informal education and see how this relates to the process of supervision.

Informal educators work with people in a particular way. You are expected to be able to work without resources other than yourselves, using your abilities and skills to form relationships with others. Through these associations you endeavour to foster opportunities for others that make for human flourishing. The relationship is voluntary, in that you engage with people who choose to associate with you and work to provide an environment of mutual respect and active involvement. You are often called to work with people at times of tension and vulnerability. You often have to work on your own, sometimes in isolated situations. You are expected to be able to take decisions that are underpinned by the values and aims of the work you are doing and take responsibility for the work done.

These factors make for work that Schön (1982: 39) describes as demonstrating 'complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value-conflict'. However, these situations demand that you make decisions, often 'on the hoof'. The complex nature of each situation means that there are not always obvious solutions to problems and there is not always an opportunity for you to go away and think about what to do. The processes involved in having a conversation with another person mean that some decisions have to be made, at least in deciding what to say and how to say it. Schön (1982: 49, 69) calls this type of thinking 'reflection-in-action', where you reflect on what is being said and think, on the spot, about how you might respond.

This type of thinking, reflection-in-action, is not of course restricted to informal educators. It is a very common way in which we all obtain new insights, learn new theories or revise old ones about how the world works. We learn through doing a task and by reflecting on it at the same time,

whether it is bathing a new baby, or taking some young people bowling or chairing a committee meeting. We reflect on what we are doing all the time, often without consciously thinking as we change our theories from one experience to another.

But what about the times when we might not find it so easy to recognise at the time what was happening? We might feel confused and unsure of ourselves. We might feel so angry or upset that we find it difficult to think clearly about the situation. How do we learn to see more accurately what we had experienced?

Q1: Think about a situation in your work where you felt confused or upset. What did you do afterwards to try to make sense of what happened?

One possibility is that you discussed it afterwards with a colleague or friend. Or you may have written about it in your recording of the session and pondered over it. Schön calls this form of reflection 'reflection-on-action', the looking back on a situation after it is over, rather than thinking about it as it was happening. You may have discussed it with a colleague who had been there and who was able to give you their view of the situation. You may have found this helpful or you might not have agreed with their perception of what happened. In this case the picture may have been more confusing with two versions of the event instead of one!

You may have found that when you tried to discuss it with a colleague, that the *timing* was not good. You may have had to interrupt the conversation to continue with your work or your colleague may have had to go to a meeting or go home. Similarly, the *place* where discussions take place may also not have been helpful. The usual office space may not have been suitable to discuss a sensitive issue, as somebody else might have overheard your conversation. These issues about time and space mean that, while not dismissing the 'conversation over the teacups', you can find the results sometimes damaging to the work. At the very least, you might find them frustrating, as you may not be able to achieve clarity; it might turn out to be a 'hit or miss' situation.

You may therefore have decided that it is important to create the time and space that can facilitate deliberations without interruptions or worries about confidentiality. This is the focus of what we call 'supervision'.

The history of supervision

To some extent the history of supervision is as old as the human race itself. We all need to talk to other people at some time or other about things that confuse or concern us. We welcome possibly a different outlook on the situation or the giving of support. This need to discuss with others has gradually become more formalised for certain professions. Psychoanalysts, for instance, found difficulty in handling the complexity of the work they were doing so the profession decided that trainee psychoanalysts should have regular sessions where they could reflect on their work with their patients. These sessions were needed, firstly, in order to enable the trainee practitioners to understand why they were responding to their patients in a particular way,

and secondly, to receive help and support in their work. The sessions were therefore seen as being both educational and supportive. The sessions were on a one-to-one basis with a supervisor who would offer support and help in both analysing the work and relating it to theoretical models.

Psychoanalysis was not the only profession where it was recognised that supervision would be helpful, particularly to the trainee practitioner or to the newly-qualified worker. Other people-related fields such as counselling and social work also adopted the method. Social workers particularly found supervision useful when looking at casework and social group work. Later, the introduction of social group work into youth work 'naturally brought with it the possibility that supervision would also be valuable' (Tash 2000: 13). Nowadays supervision is seen as being helpful in all areas of the work of the informal educator.

Although formal supervision might have started with the profession of psychoanalysis, the supervisor in informal education is neither a psychiatrist nor a counsellor. The supervisor's role is an educational one where the holistic nature of the supervisee is recognised. We have both achievements and problems and both are important to our view of ourselves. This is echoed in a book written over thirty years ago by Joan Tash about a supervisor training project. The book is called *Supervision in Youth Work* and is still the standard work on supervision in this field. Tash said that in the supervisory process we are 'neither patients nor people in distress' (Tash 2000: 24). The focus in supervision is work-centred not problem-centred.

The function of supervision

We have identified the type of problems inherent in the work done by informal educators that can be clarified by the kind of support that is provided by supervision. Let us look more closely at the model of supervision that the college offers to its students. I will start by looking at a definition of the word 'supervision'.

The word 'supervision' comes from two words: super – meaning 'above', and 'vision' – meaning 'sight, or seeing', hence 'overseeing'. The word 'supervisor' is commonly used for a person, maybe in an office or factory, who has some managerial responsibility over other staff.

Some supervisors working in the field of informal education also have a managerial responsibility over their supervisees. This is often called 'line management' or 'managerial supervision'. There is further information about this model in the chapter by Turnbull.

But the model used at the college is slightly different and is sometimes called 'non-managerial supervision'. In order to look at the differences between the two models, we can look at the supervision model offered by Kadushin in his book, *Supervision in Social Work* (1992). Here he identifies three elements in supervision, the educational, the supportive and the administrative. The educational element is the focus on the learning of the supervisee about their practice. The supportive element is the recognition of the affective side of human beings and the need we all have to be recognised as being of importance. The administrative element concerns the supervisor who is also the line manager and, therefore, has the responsibility for the overseeing of the work of the supervisee. As line manager, the supervisor may have to forbid or instruct the supervisee to do something.

In the college model, or non-managerial supervision, the administrative element is not present, only the educative and the supportive. The responsibility for the management of the work would not belong to the supervisor.

The values of supervision

The supervision process is also a relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. Christian and Kitto call supervision 'a particular kind of working relationship' (Christian and Kitto 1987: 2). In order to see what kind of relationship, we will look first at the values that underpin the work.

All relationships are affected by the values held by the people involved. If I value going out for meals whereas my partner wants to always eat in, then this will affect how the relationship is conducted between us. We may both have to learn to compromise. If my friend does not value spending time with me, then maybe my values about friendship may be different to hers. I might decide to give up on the friendship because my expectations of the association were not being fulfilled. In this way, values can inform the expectations and the behaviour of both participants in the relationship.

So what are the values that inform the supervisory process? The college sees the following values as the foundations of the supervisory relationship:

- autonomy;
- relatedness;
- confidentiality.

Autonomy

The dictionary defines autonomy as 'self government', the freedom to determine one's own actions or behaviour. Kitto (1986: 67), in her book *Holding the Boundaries*, extends the definition to include not only the freedom to choose but also the 'ability to make a choice and to act on the basis of that choice'. McNair argues that 'it is as immoral to restrict another person's autonomy as it is to restrict their freedom of movement' (McNair 1996: 233). But autonomy does not mean doing what we like when we like. We live and work in social situations with others, and there are not many decisions that we make that do not affect or are not affected by other people. We might say that part of being human is to recognise our relatedness to others.

Relatedness

What do we mean by 'relatedness'? It is the invisible thread that binds us humans together. We allow people to get off the train before we get on to it, we form a queue and take our turn to get our food or pay our bill, we cook for our family or earn wages to take them on a holiday – all these actions (including our negative actions) suggest explicit or tacit ways in which we relate to people. Just as autonomy informs us about what we should do in relation to ourselves, relatedness informs us what we should do in relation to other human beings. Although autonomy and relatedness seem to be two different concepts, they are really two sides of the same coin, and they help us regulate our behaviour to ourselves and to others.

Confidentiality

A value that is also significant in supervision is that of confidentiality. The word 'confidentiality' comes from the Latin 'con fid' meaning 'with faith'. Having faith in somebody or trusting somebody is a state of mind, an attitude towards somebody than informs our expectations of the association.

For instance, we would have expectations about how a doctor should behave. We would not expect our doctor to gossip to others about any medical problem we might have. We would expect the doctor to hold that information 'confidentially', that is to keep faith with us about how we would want this information to be used. This is not to say that this information would therefore be treated as a secret between the doctor and us. A secret implies that the doctor cannot talk about us to anybody else whereas this might need to be done in order to help us get better.

But confidentiality implies that the doctor handles the material in a way that respects us as a separate, autonomous individual and acknowledges our common relatedness. Thus confidentiality can be seen as a value naturally arising from the two values of autonomy and relatedness.

These three values – autonomy, relatedness and confidentiality – inform the process of supervision. Let us look at how this happens in practice.

Autonomy in supervision

Q2: How do you think the value of autonomy might be demonstrated in your relationship with your supervisor?

I expect you may have said something like 'my supervisor would recognise that I am an individual' or 'I decide what to do about my work'. This means that you expect to be able to exercise your autonomy, to make choices and to take responsibility for them. The way you would exercise your autonomy as supervisee would be influenced both by the situation and the role you could play. In the situation of supervision, the focus of the work is on the education and support of you as supervisee in your practice. McNair would argue that educational processes are more likely to produce 'efficient learners' if the person being educated has a sense of ownership about what they want to learn (McNair 1996: 233). In this case you would demonstrate your autonomy and your ownership of the learning by choosing the piece of work you wished to bring to the session for discussion.

I would also expect your supervisor to behave autonomously, but within the role. It would not be the responsibility of your supervisor to tell you what to bring but it is the responsibility of your supervisor to work with it, whatever it is. Tash, in her book, *Supervision in Youth Work*, says that supervision sessions are:

to help the worker to learn more about his [sic] work and himself in it, and that for this to happen they (supervisor and supervisee) would need to explore the areas in his work in which the worker wanted help or needed to understand more. This meant that the material discussed would be brought to the sessions by the worker and would be about his

work. The supervisor would help him to look at what he was doing, to think about it and to learn about it.

(2000: 23)

It is also your perception as supervisee of the incident under scrutiny that is the starting point of the supervision process. It is how you saw the situation, what feelings you had, what actions you took and what motives you had for taking such actions that are significant. It is only by enabling you to reflect on the situation as you experienced it that you will be able to understand more fully what was happening. Therefore your supervisor 'works with the account of the events and not with the events themselves' (Christian and Kitto 1987: 8).

This is not to say that your supervisor does not exercise his or her own autonomy. Your supervisor does not merely reflect back to you like a mirror what you have said but is an active participant in the process, thinking about what is being said and making choices about how to respond. The supervisor's role is to 'show that the questions that the worker has brought can be thought about, and maybe to show ways in which they can be thought about' (Christian and Kitto 1987: 7).

Your supervisor's role is not to interpret what was happening for you or to say 'it was really like this'. The valuing of autonomous behaviour means that the aim of supervision is to support you as supervisee in your thinking, not that you become dependent on your supervisor's interpretation. It is necessary for the effective use of supervision that you do not see your supervisor as an omnipotent person with all the answers nor, conversely, that you see yourself as an impotent person without any capacities.

This is not to say that your supervisor will not learn anything through the sessions. We might expect your supervisor to learn as well, but this will be a by-product, not the main aim. Christian and Kitto, in *The Theory and Practice of Supervision*, also emphasise this important distinction. They see supervision as 'enabling the worker to see more, and to see it more accurately' (Christian and Kitto 1987: 9).

Relatedness and supervision

Q3: How would you expect the value of relatedness to be demonstrated in the supervisory relationship?

One of the ways I think that relatedness would be shown is in the way both parties accept their responsibilities in the partnership. If you, as supervisee, do not bring material to the session to be discussed then the work that can be done by your supervisor will be affected. You will also need to be prepared to look critically at your work, otherwise the learning may not happen. If your supervisor does not respect your viewpoint when talking about your practice, then the supervisory process, and therefore the work itself, may suffer. So both you and your supervisor need to take responsibility for the success of the relationship.

Supervision also gives you a chance to receive individual training and support, whereas often training takes place in groups. There the focus is on

what the group needs to learn, not necessarily on your needs as an individual. In supervision, you can look at your work in some depth and incidents can be discussed which you might be reluctant to look at in a group setting.

Confidentiality and supervision

Confidentiality, as I have said, arises naturally from the other two values of autonomy and relatedness. You and your supervisor must have confidence (another word coming from the same source 'with faith') in each other to handle the process in a way that demonstrates these values. These are manifested by the way these roles are held within the relationship.

Q4: In what way do you think you and your supervisor could demonstrate a belief in the value of maintaining confidentiality with each other?

I thought of three areas:

- setting;
- use of time;
- handling information 'with faith'.

The setting

Your supervisor normally provides a suitable environment in which the sessions can take place and where the importance of both the learning and the support that is being offered is demonstrated.

The material that is discussed is confidential, and you and your supervisor need to feel confident that you will not be overheard. The corner of a coffee lounge or a table in a café can make for an anxious session. It also needs to be quiet enough not to distract thinking. Next door to where the drama group is rehearsing might be too noisy!

It also needs to be somewhere where interruptions are unlikely to happen. Small children running in and out, other workers coming to ask for keys, telephones ringing are all things that are not conducive to quiet reflection. It is also the message that is being given to you as supervisee. The accommodation of interruptions by your supervisor implies that the session itself is secondary to other demands on the supervisor. There are times when emergencies occur, of course, and the session will need to be interrupted, but these should be just those, emergencies. A notice on the door saying 'Do not disturb' and the phone switched off give the message that this work is important.

The use of time

The use of time is not usually connected with confidentiality but it does arise if we consider it as being associated with 'maintaining faith'. This means meeting the legitimate expectations of others. In terms of the supervisory process it means turning up on time for meetings and endeavouring not to

cancel meetings without good cause. Again, emergencies do arise and meetings get cancelled at the last minute but you and your supervisor need to have confidence that both are equally committed.

There should be time enough during the session for both of you to reflect in some depth and also to come to some conclusions about what you have learnt. On the other hand the session should not be so long that concentration lapses or it degenerates into social chat rather than work.

The sessions should also happen regularly so that you get into the habit of using them. The variety of the work, the isolation of the worker and the feelings and emotions involved mean that supervision is very important. By taking regular supervision you will develop the necessary skills and emotional reserves to be able to use the sessions most effectively.

Handling information 'with faith'

The material that is discussed should be handled by both parties in a way that keeps faith with the expectations of both. This means that your supervisor will try to understand where you are coming from and how you see the situation in which you are working. This does not mean that your supervisor will never challenge what you say or offer another way of looking at what happened. These things will be done, but with the aim of extending the understanding, not predicting what that understanding might be.

You, as supervisee, meet the expectations of your supervisor by your open attitude to learning and your willingness to critically look at your practice. As the relationship continues you will hopefully show a confidence in it by maybe taking risks in the material you bring – something that you find difficult to talk about or that does not reflect well on you.

Handing the information 'with faith' refers to outside the session too. What is said in the session should not be used as gossip amongst colleagues or friends. This is not to say that what is said is treated as a secret. Your supervisor may need to discuss the session with another worker in order that she might learn to be a more effective supervisor to you. The focus here will be on the work of your supervisor not on the work of you as supervisee. 'Handling with faith', of course, also applies to any written recordings that are made about the sessions that should not be left around for anyone to read.

All these areas – setting, using the time, and handling information from the session – should demonstrate to both you and your supervisor that you have confidence in each other.

The supervisor

In this part we look at what qualities, background and skills you would need in your supervisor.

Q5: What skills, experience and background would you want in your supervisor? For instance would you want your supervisor to be an informal educator? Do you think it important that your supervisor is the same race, gender and age as yourself? Would you prefer somebody you already know?

Let me give you my thoughts concerning these questions.

Should your supervisor be an informal educator? You might see this as your first priority – that your supervisor should be from the same profession. You might have thought, 'I need someone with similar experience to me in informal education if I am to learn more about how I practice'.

Tash found, in looking at the process of learning by supervisees, that the professional background of the supervisor was not the main concern. She argues that the skills and attitudes that supervisors brought to the relationship were more important than their professional qualifications or experience. The qualities needed in all supervisors were that they should be able to demonstrate their 'flexibility, and ability to feel, learn, think and analyse...' (Tash 2000: 164). You might say that these are the qualities in all informal educators but it might be more difficult to argue that these abilities and attitudes are exclusive to this profession. These qualities are also in workers in allied fields – such as social work, teaching, the ministry and other people-related professions.

However you might argue that even though the skills are available in other professionals, the lack of previous experience of informal education could be a disadvantage to the supervisee. You might well ask, 'How is my supervisor going to understand what I am talking about when their experience is different?' To look at what this might mean, let us go back to an earlier point – it is your account of your practice that is under exploration. This experience will be unique to you. Even if your supervisor is also an informal educator, they only have their own experience to look back on. If their role was to talk about their experience or to give advice to you, then it might be a help to have somebody with similar experiences. But this would still be limited help as nobody's experience or situation is exactly the same. But the role of your supervisor is not to give advice or talk about their experiences but to try to help you to think more clearly about *your* situation. The aim is to enable you to learn more about *yourself* and how *you* work.

Indeed, sometimes you might find it an advantage to work with a supervisor who doesn't instantly seem to understand what you are talking about. If you work with someone from another profession you might find that you couldn't take for granted your supervisor having a similar experience or understanding. This might mean that in talking about the situation you will have to explain more fully and carefully what you want to look at. In this way a more accurate picture of your own perceptions about what happened emerges and, hence, more productive learning. Your supervisor may also find it easier to put aside their own feelings and judgements in order to understand those of the supervisee.

Attitudes and feelings do play a part in the supervision relationship as in any other relationship. If the situation seems a similar one to the one experienced by your supervisor it might be tempting to give advice and say, 'I did this when this happened to me'. But situations are never exactly the same and certainly the people involved are not. By giving advice your supervisor might be ignoring the differences and indirectly suggesting that their practice be followed. This could undermine your autonomy.

Same race, gender or age?

You might have said that the background of the person supervising you was also important and argued that you need to be supervised by someone with a

similar cultural and social background to you. For instance, if you are female then you are given a female supervisor. In this way your supervisor would be able to understand your experience of being female. A similar case could be made for working with somebody from the same racial or age background.

I think the same arguments against matching backgrounds could be made as for those with the same employment experiences. Even if your supervisor were matched to you by all the obvious points of difference, for instance, race, gender, professional experience, class and age, it would be difficult to guarantee that you would be two people of like mind. We are all unique and even within these four variations, there are numerous different experiences and attitudes, knowledge and skills, values and beliefs.

Being too similar in ways of thinking and attitude could also be seen as being a hindrance to learning in that it might narrow the path of exploration. Your supervisor is expected to help you to bring out different aspects of the situation that were not obvious before to you. This might be easier if she is coming from a different experience to you.

This is not dismissing any feelings that might be around for you at the beginning of the supervisory process concerning differences in background and experience. Kadushin certainly found that 'in each instance of age or race, or gender, different stereotypes may tend to shape *initial* behavioural responses in the relationship' (1992: 320). However as the supervision sessions continued and people experienced actually working together, these differences became less important. He found that:

The relationship between supervisor and supervisee established over time may be more significant than the factors of age, gender, and race.
(*ibid.*)

Somebody I know or a stranger?

It is a professional association, not a social one. This can be difficult if you feel that you must know something about your supervisor on a personal level before you can work together. We might say this is natural curiosity and we are all guilty of it. However it might be that it says something more about the anxiety we all have about starting a new relationship. We want to know more about the other person because it makes it easier to place ourselves in the relationship. We like to know about common areas of interest or belief. In the supervisory process, however, the areas of common concern are the pieces of work that you bring to the session. It is through working with these that you and your supervisor will get to know each other. But these understandings will be in terms of what needs to be known in order for the relationship to function. The problem with social contact is that it could interfere with or stop the work. Tash when writing about the supervisor training project, said that supervisors resisted getting to know the supervisees socially as they felt it could be 'used as a substitute for a working relationship', or it might block 'a worker's understanding of the possibilities within one' (Tash 2000: 23).

The one area that was not included in the question about the qualities of a supervisor was whether your line manager could also be your supervisor. I have already touched on this earlier.

In the supervision model used by the college, the supervisor allocated to the student or worker will not have any managerial responsibility. In this way your supervisor will be detached from your working situation and not subject to all the constraints that being a line manager as well will bring. This means that as supervisee you will be able to make your own decisions about the work and of course to be responsible for the consequences.

Your supervisor will also not be encouraged to visit you at your practice or to talk to your line manager about you. This means that your supervisor is not then 'subject to all the detail and flux of experience that surrounds the worker every day at work' (Christian and Kitto 1987: 14). For instance, if your supervisor had observed the situation you want to discuss, she might be tempted to say but 'it wasn't like that - I saw it like this'. The supervisor's interpretation may be quite comforting to you if you are unsure that what you did was appropriate but it doesn't necessarily help you to understand more clearly what was going on. It might even end up increasing your dependence on your supervisor, and thus make the process counter-productive.

This separation of the role of line manager from that of supervisor can give added strength to the supervisory process. It can be a helpful division particularly to people new to supervision, for instance trainee practitioners.

This is not to say that a line manager cannot be a supervisor, but that the managerial role may be better dealt with separately from the supervisor role. If the line manager and the worker are both competent and recognise the boundaries to each role, then there may be no problem. It will also depend upon the nature of the relationship between both parties. There may be barriers that are felt by the supervisee no matter how understanding the manager tries to be. If the supervisee feels 'tentative and inadequate, or ambitious and determined, the barriers are likely to go up to the person with power, however understanding he [sic] is' (Tash 2000: 162).

The process of supervision

Now let us look at what Christian and Kitto (1987: 2) call the 'particular kind of work', the supervision process itself. In order to look in more detail at how supervision works, I am including an account of a piece of work written by the worker. This is followed by a transcript of the supervision session where the worker discussed the incident with his supervisor.

Q6: Please read the process recording of the work and also the transcript of the supervision session.

Looking at the supervision session, how does the supervisor help Tom to identify and work on the questions he brings? Identify any of the three values, autonomy, relatedness and confidentiality, that you think inform the supervision process here.

The first thing I notice is that the supervisor asks Tom to identify what he wants to look at. Tom, however, seems a little uncertain at the beginning and answers in rather general terms. The supervisor does not challenge this and Tom seems to realise that he needs to be more specific (line 64). The supervisor

helps him to put his thoughts into words more clearly and identify what he wants to focus on.

I think the supervisor is recognising that Tom is an autonomous person and is in charge of what he wants to look at. Her role is to accept his autonomy but also to demonstrate how she is also part of the process (her relatedness) by helping Tom to identify more clearly what he wants to look at.

Tom picks up on the problem of his role (71) and asks the supervisor what he should do. The supervisor does not answer the question directly but asks Tom to say more about what happened that afternoon. By doing this the supervisor is enabling Tom to look in more depth at the incident. This brings the focus then back on what Tom experienced rather than on what might happen in the future. In this way the supervisor is not assuming that the problem has already been correctly identified but is helping Tom to concentrate on analysing more clearly what happened.

Again the supervisor does not attempt to take away Tom's autonomy by making decisions that are his to make. She also does not throw away hers by giving up the role she has to help the learning and instead to offer advice. She may feel that to answer Tom's question would encourage his dependency on her rather than develop his own skills in reflection.

Tom goes on to describe how he sees the situation and how he views the two young men (78). He sometimes asks the supervisor a question (82) but again she turns them round and puts them back to him. By her questions he is helped to think more deeply about his relationship with the two boys. The supervisor gives her opinion at one point (101) about what she thinks the problem might be, but gives her evidence from what Tom has said.

I think the supervisor's role might be seen as passive by Tom who might have become quite frustrated by not having his question answered. But I think the supervisor is not passive but quite active in choosing her questions carefully and by altering the focus of what is being said when she feels it appropriate. The supervisor in asking her own questions is not providing answers for Tom but opening up areas for him to consider. In this way Tom's and the supervisor's autonomies are both preserved.

I think that as the session goes on Tom is getting more confident about the nature of the partnership between him and the supervisor (113). He seems to have faith that he will be supported and accepted for what he is, his autonomy is recognised and the supervisor is working with him not against him. This confidence enables him to look more deeply into his practice and to accept more direct questions from the supervisor (121).

This active relationship is continued later in the session when the supervisor goes on to pick up on other areas that she judges important. For instance, why Tom used the word 'accept' (133). This gives Tom a chance to consider aspects he might not have thought of and to extend the interpretations with further evidence (141).

This seems to me to be quite an equal association in that both parties exercise their autonomy to say what they believe within the boundaries of the supervision session. But

the two people also show their relatedness to each other by listening carefully, by responding to what was said by the other, by being aware of the other.

The supervisor seems to be only interested in the young men as they affect Tom. She is not interested in them as themselves. The questions she asks about them concern their association with Tom (139), how they affect him, how he sees the relationship (146). In this way she helps keep the focus on Tom and how he feels and functions in this situation (152).

As the session goes on, the supervisor's questions seem to help Tom to focus in more depth on his work. He talks more about his feelings (178) and the values (185) that underpin the work he was doing with the two young men. He also explores in more depth the dynamics between them and himself (200). The supervisor's questions also become more direct as she challenges him about his role as worker (207-12). By the end of this part of the supervision session Tom is able to articulate some of the things he has learnt about himself and the work, and has cleared up some of his confusion (238).

Tom seems to have received both education and support from his supervisor. His autonomy has been recognised and the session has been one that demonstrated interaction and a sense of commitment between him and the supervisor. From these his confidence in the supervisory process grew and he was able to finish by identifying for himself the learning he had achieved.

The nature of the relationship between Tom and his supervisor

The session seems to have been a journey undertaken together; not that one person had all the insights but that they arrived at the end at a similar time. This is an important point in that it implies that the end point, in this case the supervisee's learning, is not predictable by either person. The supervisor is not the person who knows what the problem is and informs the supervisee. This is not to say that the supervisor is merely a passive recipient of information. We have seen that the relationship is a working partnership where both have a role to play.

Conclusion

We have looked at the nature of supervision, what is involved in it and explored an example of a recording. We have looked at the values of autonomy, relatedness and confidentiality that underpin the work, and how they determine the methods that are used in the sessions.

I would like to finish with a quotation from an OFSTED discussion paper on *Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development*. The words relate to the spiritual development of school pupils but I think they relate equally well to development through supervision. I have therefore taken the liberty of replacing the words 'spiritual development' with the word 'supervision' and changed 'pupils' for 'supervisees'.

Supervision relates to that aspect of inner life through which *supervisees* acquire insights into their personal existence, which are of enduring

worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality.

(adapted from OFSTED 1993: no page quoted)

How worthwhile to be involved in such a creative process, either as a student or as a worker!

Case Study

Process recording – Thursday 3.00 pm

Was around the market. By the Post Office ran into Chrissie, Jean W. and talked about the application to the Housing Department, then saw Phil and Ted and chatted about things for about 5 minutes, last night's International and so on. They are keen to arrange a match with Southview. All this took a good half hour. Went into Joe's for a coffee 5
feeling I needed to take the weight off my feet. Logie and Buster (age 15 and 16) came in. They saw me and I saw them say something to each other. I wondered what they would do (school-time). Then they went up to the counter. I kept my eyes on them so that I could signal I had seen them but they didn't look up. I wondered if they would ignore 10
me. They didn't look at me but brought drinks over to my table. I was quite pleased about this. Then said 'Hello then,' they were behaving almost as though we had an arrangement to meet. They sucked their drinks and I think there was a bit of a silence. I said 'How's it going then? Been let off school?' I felt I was taking a risk but felt awkward 15
about the situation. There's a few kids I regularly expect to find around during school hours but not these two. They grumbled about school, didn't like the afternoon classes, complained of being picked on, the usual. I talked a bit about my school experience, the things I didn't like (French) and how I tried to get off, and how good the craft workshops 20
were, some pretended enthusiasm here I think, I wasn't much good at craft. Boys were being a bit cagey, silent. When I mentioned French, they went off into giggles and behaved as if they were performing to me. Coarse remarks about French tarts etc. They rather took over and I relaxed and listened. Really they were quite funny. I find them a 25
couple of bright boys. They said they thought Allie and Sue would be coming. A bit 'man of the world' or guys waiting for their bit to turn up. I suddenly thought of Dina and asked Logie if she had managed to keep her job. He said vaguely he thought it was OK, didn't seem very interested. Buster said quite angrily that she was a fool and deserved to 30
lose her job if she couldn't keep time. I was a bit surprised at how angry he was. They went on talking about jobs they might get in the market and the sort of money they might earn, rather boasting I thought, saying how you had to work hard. Buster did most of the

talking, Logie a kind of chorus. Buster said his dad only paid him for cleaning the car if he did a proper job. 35

I felt I wanted to get a bit further with the question of school. I was a bit uncomfortable leaving it where it was. Asked Buster if he didn't think he ought to be in school because someone was paying. I tried to keep it a bit joking. He dismissed my remark. 'I don't have to go. Teachers can't do anything to you. They're suckers.' Feeling a bit daring I asked what he would do if he was a teacher. 'Belt them', he said, and laughed and they both laughed. Logie said Buster's dad would belt them if he knew he was off school. By this time the two were falling about. They talked for a few minutes about work in the market and then left. 40
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The Supervision

Tom: I picked this piece for supervision because it is easy to identify this as work, and that is not always easy, I find. Also it left me with some questions about my role. 50

Supervisor: Yes.

Tom: How would you like me to start off?

Supervisor: Well, I take it that what you want to explore today is what happened between you and these two lads.

Tom: Yes. 55

Supervisor: And they're 15 or 16 and you are worried about them being out during school-time.

Tom: I think I'm worried about my role as worker when I meet them when they are away from school. I feel if they choose to be away, in a sense, they take the responsibility for it, but what do I do if I meet them in the middle of the afternoon in public? 60

Supervisor: What did you do this time?

Tom: We had a conversation, and I swizzled from sitting and listening to them – they were horsing around quite a lot – and there was a part of me that felt I ought to put the situation to them, not being in school. They're club members, very reliable, useful members, Buster plays in the football team. They are not the regular school truants, you know. 65

Supervisor: Yes, (laughs). 70

Tom: The sort of people where you can make it a joke. So, here they are in the middle of the afternoon, and I suppose I didn't know what I was supposed to be. Should I sort out why they are off school and try to get them back? 75

Supervisor: Did you want to get them back to school? Is that what you had in mind?

Tom: I don't think I was as certain as that. I think I would have liked them to go back to school. (Wondering to himself)

- I think they are fairly able boys, could do some GCSEs at least. Of course, I am not certain. (Hesitant) And there is another thing which is about authority. What is my position in relation to the school? Should I back the school? 80
- Supervisor: How well do you know these boys?
- Tom: Well, I've seen them quite a lot and we have chatted a lot. Not problems. They're not the sort I expect to have problems. (Realising he doesn't know them as well as he thought) I suppose, I feel I know them fairly well because I've seen them around the club quite a lot, and outside, and I've met Buster's father. He turned up one day giving the boys a lift to a game. To be quite honest, they are not two boys that I've spent a lot of time thinking about. They are just there, and they don't create a problem. 85 90
- Supervisor: And yet there is a problem, because you were saying you didn't quite know what to do, and you are not sure about your authority, and what's going through my mind is that perhaps you see a problem, which is about the boys not being in school. 95
- Tom: You mean, because they aren't in school it's a problem for them. 100
- Supervisor: And then it's a problem for you, with the boys there and you not knowing what you should do.
- Tom: Yes. I think I see what you are getting at. Are you saying that there might be two problems?
- Supervisor: (Firmly) Yes. 105
- Tom: There might be a problem for the boys and there is a problem for me.
- Supervisor: Yes, because they are not where they are supposed to be, as you say. So, something is wrong. And you pick it up very quickly. In your record you say right at the beginning 'been let off school?' You are aware of something going on, aren't you? 110
- Tom: Yes, I am. (Pause). It did rather hit me, because if I'm around in the afternoon there are some people I am not a bit surprised at meeting. But these two came in and it gave me a little jolt, and I didn't know why and suddenly I realised; they are not the people I meet in the afternoon. 115
- Supervisor: So you were surprised. What sort of conversations do you have with people you are not surprised to see in the market place in the afternoon? 120
- Tom: (Pause for thought) It could be almost anything. We talk about... well, sometimes we talk about school. It depends who it is. If it's Bill, well, Bill's been away from school so long now that it's not worth talking about it. It's almost a

- joke. And, (a bit defiantly), I'm not going to do the educational welfare officer's job. So, we usually talk about other things. We have talked about school. He knows that I know that he's not there, and I suppose he must know that I would prefer it if he was able to use school, but he's not and I accept it and so we will talk about the next disco or something like that. 125
- Supervisor: You used an important word there, you used the word 'accept'. It seems to me that because you accept it with Bill you are very much more comfortable in your relationship with him, at least how you describe it. 130
- Tom: Yes. (thinking) I feel we have got over the difficult bit, which is what is my reaction going to be about him not being in school. 135
- Supervisor: Yes, whereas with these two you don't really accept it that they're not in school. 140
- Tom: (Long pause) I think I don't accept it because of what is behind it. I've talked to Bill a lot; he isn't really for school, his family aren't behind him. He's earning some money, he's the sort of kid who wouldn't be in school, if you see what I mean. 145
- Supervisor: I don't, actually. What do you mean?
- Tom: (Long pause) I sometimes feel with 14- or 15-year-olds that they have outgrown school, partly. They are earning money, getting jobs, making their way in the adult world, being men. I really feel that school doesn't have very much for them. They're learning things somewhere else. 150
- Supervisor: So you have made certain judgements which make you feel more comfortable about accepting truancy from Bill?
- Tom: (Pause) Well, there's nothing I can do about Bill. No effort of mine is going to get him back to school. I mean, if any kid comes to me and says he thinks school is a waste of time, and he is doing other things and they are of some use, I'm not going to turn myself inside out to get him back to school. It's not my job. At least, **technically** it's not my job, (pause) but I'm an adult and I suppose it's not so simple. (laughs) 155
- Supervisor: Well, what's going through my mind is the sense of discomfort you feel about your authority with Logie and Buster. I wonder if it is not **your** discomfort and insecurity you feel, around your authority. You say they are not bad boys and here you are almost suggesting to me that they **ought** to be in school. 160
- Do you think that these boys know that you think they ought to be in school? 165

- Tom: I should think that most kids think that most workers would expect them to be in school, because they're adults. Unless you actually say 'I don't mind whether you are in school or not.' 170
- Supervisor: Right.
- Tom: I think they felt a bit uncomfortable when they came in. They didn't look at me until they came across. We really have a very friendly relationship, quite an equal relationship. I like them. (Pause) You know, I suppose I felt almost as if I was sorry I was there. I felt I caught them out or perhaps I felt they caught me out. A bit unfortunate; I caught them with their pants down. 175 180
- Supervisor: Yes, yes. So both sides are feeling that perhaps there is something wrong, that some sin has been committed, perhaps.
- Tom: Yes, sin! (Both laugh) 185
- Supervisor: And also, perhaps, there's the feeling you have that you ought to do something about it.
- Tom: Yes, and I also feel that **they** feel I ought to do something about it.
- Supervisor: Yes. Perhaps that's why there's a bit of a silence. You know, 'they behaved almost as though there was an arrangement to meet. They sucked their drinks and there was a bit of a silence', in your recording. In other words, it was not a free and easy meeting, there was some guilt here. I wonder if you feel you helped to increase the guilt or to hold it. 190 195
- Tom: (Long pause) Well, I made a reference to school right at the start, feeling a bit daring, taking a risk.
- Supervisor: (firmly) Yes.
- Tom: Taking a plunge. I felt uncomfortable about it. I felt, I really can't go on meeting these two and pretending it's not school time. Of course, they may have had a perfectly good reason for being out of school, but I guess they hadn't or they would have said so. (pause) I think if I had said nothing – I don't think I could have done that – pretended. 200 205
- Supervisor: You couldn't have pretended very well though, because, unlike with Bill, you immediately felt some question about your authority, so if you had tried to pretend you would have communicated something about what you were feeling, wouldn't you? Or are you very good at pretending? 210
- Tom: I don't really approve of pretending, you can't do that. (Pause) Well, that's a very easy thing to say. (Pause) I

- suppose it's what I was saying earlier about Bill. With him it's all out. So, no pretence is necessary. 215
- Supervisor: Yes. You meet him as a **person**.
- Tom: Yes, as a person, who happens to be breaking the law, of course.
- Supervisor: Yes, but you have accepted the limitation with Bill. Whereas with these two, you seem to expect that they should be in school and you should do something. In other words, I wonder if you saw these boys as boys or whether you saw them in terms of your expectations, as schoolboys who were not in school? 220
- Tom: Yes, I suppose so. I've always thought of them as boys who do go to school. 225
- Supervisor: Why didn't you ask them more directly, then?
- Tom: Yes. (thinking) You are saying then, that I should have put it on the table more directly, or could have done. Certainly I could have done. Why didn't I? (Pause) Maybe that was to do with the way they were talking. They went into this conversation about the girls they were going to meet. It was a social situation, a chance meeting, having a drink together. I wonder if my problem was that I didn't want to spoil a friendly chat. 230
- Supervisor: But were these your friends, and were you on your job?
- Tom: Well, I think you've got a point. I did want to keep it friendly. I was a bit anxious about it turning into a healthy chat from the head of house at school. (Both laugh) 235
- Supervisor: On the other hand, since it is your work beat and it is work time, you have the worker's hat on. I agree that you wouldn't want to do any work with friends but this situation seems to me to be different.
- Tom: (Protesting a little) Well, I did open it up in the end. 240
- Supervisor: Yes, so I see. And you got them to relax quite a bit because your recording says **you** relaxed and listened and they were quite funny. 'I find them a couple of bright boys.' But, the interesting thing to me in your recording is that you say **you** relaxed and listened.' 245
- Tom: Yes, I suppose I was talking about school, because – well, we've all skipped off school. Who hasn't, who hasn't wanted to? (Both laugh) I didn't skip off school a lot. Some people were hardly there. I think I would have liked to have skipped off more than I did. I was a bit afraid when I was talking to the boys that they might think I was on the side of the goodies. 250
- Supervisor: Yes. 255
- Tom: Saying 'look, you ought to be at school.' I stayed at

- school and look where it got me. (Laughing) But I was 280
anxious that they would just tell me to eff off.
- Supervisor: Yes, and what seems good is that your relationship
remained intact even if you were feeling a bit tentative.
You and the boys seem to have got on well. It seems to
me that the early worry you had, has subsided. 285
- Tom: (Pause) You know, I think I was more worried than I
realise about keeping the relationship intact. Talking to
you now makes me think that I could talk about not being
in school on another occasion. You know, if they came
into the club one evening. I think there was a bit of a 270
shock when they came in. We weren't expecting to see
each other.
- Supervisor: Yes, yes.
- Tom: I mean, there may be nothing to it, they just skipped off
one afternoon. So what! But I do think it's a problem for 275
me when these things happen. About perhaps, the sort of
responsibility I have and keeping the relationship intact.
- Supervisor: Yes, so I suppose if you met them again you would be a
bit better prepared.
- Tom: Yes, if I met them again I might well make a joke about 280
'starting an out-of-school club?' or something like that.
(laughing)

The session continues with a short exploration of the worker's relation-
ship with the school and ends with a further and deeper exploration of 285
the worker's feelings when the boys came into the cafe and how he
may have imposed his own values on them.

References

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