

Brief Reports

Counselling Supervision - A Visit By Brigid Proctor

Margaret Graham¹

Early in 1995, Brigid Proctor spent time in New Zealand giving workshops and seminars on the subject of supervision. She is a pioneer in the field of counselling and supervision training in Britain and recently with Francesca Inskipp she has developed open learning materials on supervision for counsellors and supervisors. These include probably the first systematic formulation of supervisee and supervisor roles, responsibilities, skills and art in group supervision.

At a seminar in Auckland entitled "Critical Issues in Counselling Supervision" Brigid began by commenting that "What you regard as a critical issue in supervision depends on whose view you take." The supervisor, the counsellor, the client, the agency that each represents and the professional organisation such as NZAC all have a different perspective. None the less there are some common themes and these were addressed.

Brigid's main idea and perhaps most important message is that "the heart of the matter is the formation of working alliances" between client and counsellor and counsellor and supervisor. Vital to the success of this is that they be immersed in an environment of empathy, respect and authenticity. The working alliance is embodied in a working agreement which may be verbal or better still written down. This may take more than an exploratory contracting interview to design, and covers expectations, and how both will work together. This includes basics such as time, length, frequency, venue, but also recording, boundaries, reviews, evaluation/assessment, and code of ethics. Information that needs to be shared between supervisor and

supervisee includes experience, theoretical model/s, background training, agency/organisation and from the supervisee professional needs and development. The contracting process both at the very beginning of the relationship and also at the start of every session provides clarity, and safety for client, counsellor and supervisor. The art for the supervisor is creating an atmosphere which is human, straightforward and in the interests of doing the best for the client.

Most of us have a desire for the perfect, all knowing, totally understanding supervisor. An exercise in the seminar highlighted the power of unspoken expectations when participants in the role of supervisor or counsellor were invited to speak from their child ego state (in TA terms) about their wants and needs. The exercise, while producing great hilarity, was an eye opener for many of the participants. It is Brigid's view that the supervisor does not have to be super human if supervisees are trained to take responsibility to make the most of supervision: in fact she invites us to give our wisdom away.

Brigid views the aim of counselling supervision as empowerment and enablement of the client, through assisting the counsellor to develop confidence, competence and ethical practice. The tasks of the supervisor in developing these are Restorative, Formative, and Normative, which require the utilisation of different roles for each. The Restorative task provides a safe place for the counsellor for support, and stress release, and utilises the roles of colleague, facilitator, counsellor, playmate, play promoter. The Formative task is about the development of competence of the counsellor and utilises the roles of teacher, tutor, facilitator, and trainer. The Normative task which refers to development of standards and ethical practice and is about rules, regulations and helping people become professional, utilises the role of inductor,

1. Counsellor, Massey University and Mairangi Medical Practice.

co-monitor, challenger, appraiser, assessor, and judge. The combination of roles used depends on the counsellor's stage of development and current needs and the supervisor's strengths and abilities.

Brigid has found Hawkins and Shohet's Process Model of Supervision (1989) very useful in training supervisors about focusing in supervision sessions and has given it the name of the "6-eyed Supervisor".

The possibilities for focus are:

1. The client's life and experience.
 2. The interventions and techniques.
 3. The process and relationship between client and counsellor.
 4. The internal experience of the counsellor.
 5. The here and now relationship and process between counsellor and supervisor.
 6. The internal experience of the supervisor.
- More recently Brigid talks in terms of a seventh focus.
7. The systems within which the client and/or counsellor and/or supervisor are a part.

She has observed that supervisors can get into a routine of focusing in only a couple of areas partly because of theoretical orientation but also because we continue to repeat what works and what we do well. Being aware of this and shifting focus when stuck or deliberately from time to time, can increase the flexibility and creativity in supervision sessions. Clear contracting with the supervisee about the focus facilitates this as well.

Exploration of other issues deemed to be critical such as clarity of boundaries between personal/professional, transference and countertransference, dual role relationships, accountability and ethical issues, can be facilitated through the effective use of the working alliance. It seems that her message is that if the emphasis remains on the development of the confidence, competence and ethical practice of the counsellor, boundaries can be more flexible.

Brigid's more recent focus has been on group supervision. Her basic message remains the same, regardless of the size of the group - the establishment of a working alliance within an environment of empathy, respect and

authenticity, is crucial. The heart of the matter is the counsellor's reflective space. In order to facilitate this, the responses of the group need to be managed so as to add, not to detract, from this. She highlights four different models of group supervision, perhaps more usefully seen along a continuum, in which the supervisor contracts the tasks which belong with her role in differing ways depending on the maturity of the group. This requires taking the role of the Authoritative Supervisor publicly as well as Manager, Teacher, Initiator, and Group Facilitator/Conductor.

This information will be shared in her open learning materials which consist of information, audiotapes and activities entitled "The Art, Craft and Tasks of Counselling Supervision". Part I has been published in Britain, and Part II is shortly to be published there. Plans are underway to make this available through NZAC.

I have found Brigid's framework very pragmatic, understandable and a sure guideline through the minefield that supervision can be at times.

Reference

- Hawkins, P. & Shohet, R. (1989) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*. London: Open University Press.