

Peer group supervision as an adjunct to individual supervision: Optimising learning processes during psychologists' training

Jacqui Akhurst, York St John University College, &

Kevin Kelly, Rhodes University, South Africa

Peer group supervision has had little attention in the research literature, although it is a common form of supervision utilised by psychologists in practice. The development and implementation of a structured peer supervision group (PSG) with nine trainee psychologists, within the training setting of university-based services, is described in this study. Audio-recordings of nine hour-long PSG sessions, four individual supervision sessions, a focus group evaluation and individual trainee interviews were gathered, to explore the potential contributions of PSG to a training programme. The data were subjected to a systematic data analytic procedure based on the principles of grounded theory. The findings illustrate a different form of learning experience in PSG, which may complement the learning in dyadic supervision. Strategies which seem to facilitate learning for trainees are derived from a comparison of case material presented in the contexts of both PSG and dyadic supervision. Potential ways of optimising supervision experiences are discussed, and recommendations are made for the further development of the PSG model.

SUPERVISION is acknowledged as a key component in the training of psychologists (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Holloway, 1995) and is also viewed as important in the continued professional development of psychologists in practice (Skovolt & Ronnestad, 1992). Lindblad-Goldberg (in Haber, 1996) noted that although supervision is seen as a central activity for many mental health professionals, 'many supervisors do not have a clear perspective of the essential issues, processes, and methods' (p.vii). In the last decade, casework supervision has gained increasing attention, and training programmes for supervisors have been developed (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). Prior to these, learning about the process of supervision was through having been a recipient, and people became supervisors without sufficient training to address the complexity of the role and the variety of tasks involved.

In higher education there is an acknowledgement that educators need to gain a

deeper insight into students' learning processes (Ramsden, 2003), and of the different kinds of learning configurations which contribute to student development. There is greater recognition that students learn a great deal from each other, prompting the examination of alternative modes of delivery. Research into collaborative learning has promoted increased utilisation of peer learning in different forms (e.g. Bruffee, 1993), and has shown that students learn through helping one another when undertaking practical tasks and problem-solving.

Much of the research in the area of practice supervision in the training of helping professionals has focused on dyadic (one-to-one) supervision of novices by supervisors with greater expertise (Robiner & Schofield, 1990). The field of group supervision has had much less attention, even though it is widely used, both in the initial training and ongoing professional development (Lenihan & Kirk, 1992). For some practitioners, group supervision may be a principal mode

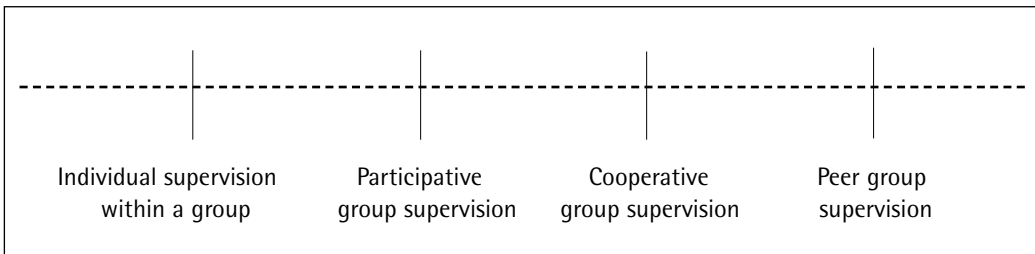


Figure 1: Continuum of the forms of group supervision (adapted from Inskipp, 1996, p.278)

of supervision, and it will be a supplement to individual supervision for many others (Kadushin, 1992). Peer supervision has had even less research attention, although it is also commonly used. Lewis *et al.* (1988) conducted a survey of 480 psychologists in the USA and found that 23 per cent were currently involved in peer group supervision, and that 24 per cent reported involvement in the past. A substantive number of respondents expressed the desire to participate in peer group supervision.

In the context of the examination of professional education and training of psychologists, and the debates regarding the continuing professional development of practitioners, the study described in this article explores the potential contributions of peer group supervision to trainee psychologists' development in their final year of training. The relative achievements and limitations of an experience of peer group supervision are explored, and some comparisons with individual supervision emerge from the evolving research process. Before describing the study, a brief exploration of the relevant literature and terms will be undertaken, to provide a framework for the research.

Forms of group and peer supervision

In the early days of psychoanalysis, peer supervision was utilised; however, there are few references to peer supervision groups (PSGs) prior to the 1980s (Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987). For many practitioners, peer group supervision offers the opportunity of relieving the potential circularity of their learning when they practise in isolation, and

it enhances coping skills. It is also a way of keeping pace with developments in the field. Since practitioners can bring difficulties and issues for peer review, it may also be protective of clients' interests. Peer contact may make a significant contribution to professional development; however, many peer consultations may be informal and relatively unstructured.

It is useful to distinguish peer group from group supervision. In peer group supervision all participants are of equal status, deciding on the roles and functions of group members, and the way in which the group will be structured. Group supervision, by contrast, includes a supervisor who is at a more advanced level of expertise and who may have some form of hierarchical authority. The supervisor is responsible for the supervisory functions of education, support and management, as well as for managing and utilising the group process in some way. Inskipp (1996) describes the variations in the structures of group supervision along a continuum (see Figure 1) that distinguishes between the levels and types of involvement of the supervisor and group members.

On the continuum in Figure 1, supervisor activity shifts from a high level on the left to low on the right. The converse occurs for participants' active involvement. In the first category on the left, a supervisor 'supervises individuals in turn, and the other members are audience' (Inskipp, 1996, p.278). In the second category, group members are encouraged to contribute to the discussion, and in the third, the members are more involved in a progressive process of supervising each other. Peer group supervision

occurs when members supervise each other and negotiate the structure and functioning of the group. The chosen structure of a group determines what issue(s) are to be discussed, how the material should be presented, the relative contributions of group members at various times, and the amount of time to be spent on the activities which have been decided upon (Abels, 1977).

Following a literature survey reviewing research on practicum supervision, Hansen *et al.* (1982) noted the potential for peer supervision to increase facilitative communication and to be used in conjunction with didactic methods. Dual supervision, where students receive both peer and more expert supervision, is likely to be found in training contexts. Crutchfield and Borders (1997) have noted that few 'peer-group models have been implemented, and even fewer evaluated for their impact' (p.221). Up to 2000, there were a limited number of studies describing and evaluating models of peer group supervision. The following studies proved most relevant to the development of the model to be described in this article: Greenburg *et al.* (1985), Hare and Frankena (1972), Hunt and Issacharoff (1975), Marks and Hixon (1986), Meyerstein (1977), Nobler (1980), Schreiber and Frank (1983), Todd and Pine (1968), Winstead *et al.* (1974).

Motivations for the study

Peer group supervision has the potential to increase the amount of supervision available to trainees in professional psychology without the need for additional staff resources (while trainees would continue with dyadic supervision as prescribed). It is also possible that for trainees, learning to use a model of peer group supervision might provide a means of structured continuing supervision, post-training. Participatory decision-making and individuals gaining appropriate autonomy and control may 'foster a greater sense of self-efficacy' (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p.478). Engagement in peer supervisory practice has the potential to promote the development of such factors in the work-

place. In the field of social work, peer supervision has been one of the alternate modalities used to promote greater 'worker responsibility, authority and accountability', and to counter potential dependency issues which dyadic supervision might promote, thus enhancing professionalism (Hardcastle, 1991, p.65).

Consideration of the literature indicated that peer group supervision could provide an experience of learning that differed from that in traditional supervision (Winstead *et al.*, 1974). Peers are able to provide each other with support and encouragement, thus increasing morale. Skills may be enhanced through mutual observing and critiquing, new ideas may be generated and conflicts discussed. There is the opportunity for feedback in an environment where formal evaluation is absent. Finally, individuals learn some of the skills of supervision, and there is the potential for participants to develop a greater ability to supervise themselves (Greenburg *et al.*, 1985; Schreiber & Frank, 1983). Clearly, there are also potential pitfalls inherent in peer groups, including group interaction difficulties, lack of experience possibly inhibiting the challenging of faulty concepts, and mutual empathy masking development needs. We were therefore interested in exploring actual peer group supervision interactions to assess the potential contributions of these to training programmes, and to assess their efficacy.

A model for a PSG

The PSG model developed for this study was based on that described by Wilbur *et al.* (1991). They describe a structured group supervision (SGS) model, and report their findings after conducting a pilot study of the model's effectiveness. The structure of the model provides 'for the orderly input and processing of the supervision focus and feedback' (Wilbur *et al.*, 1991, p.97). The structure of the model is as follows:

- phase one: request-for-assistance (RFA) statement;

- phase two: questioning period and identification of focus;
- phase three: feedback statements; pause period
- phase four: supervisee response;
- phase five: optional discussion period.

This model was designed for use by both counsellors in training as well as those already in practice. A good group size is said to be eight to ten members, and the five-phase process takes approximately an hour. In a pilot study by Wilbur *et al.* (1994), ten groups were run over a seven-year period in three different universities, with five control groups using conventional group supervision. Participants were master's degree candidates randomly assigned to experimental ($N = 194$) and control ($N = 50$) groups. The groups met weekly. Evaluation was by author-designed pre- and post-test ratings completed by trainees. Statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-test means of the SGS group; however, the authors acknowledge limitations to the study. Further research into the model, including greater exploration of the interactive process was recommended.

One of the features of the model is its potential to be adapted for peer group supervision without the presence of a supervisor. Wilbur *et al.* (1991) comment that participants 'quickly adapt to the structure ... and require little or no direction from the supervisor' (p.92). Bernard and Goodyear (1998) note that the SGS model may be useful when group members are particularly timid. This model seemed to provide a useful structure for peer group usage, with a group member acting as facilitator.

Methodology and data collection

The aim of the research was to implement and evaluate peer group supervision, based on the structure described by Wilbur *et al.* (1991), in an exploratory way. The research questions were refined during the course of the study, and are listed at the end of this section. Being aware of the reductive nature of much of the research in the field of supervi-

sion (Holloway, 1995), we were keen to engage with the richness and complexity of data generated from recordings of actual supervision sessions, which posed methodological challenges. While we considered the use of rating scales and other more formalised procedures, we were reluctant to impose a particular interpretive framework on the potentially rich dialogical data, and chose to follow a more open-ended approach. We aimed to represent and understand the experiences of the participants during an unfolding process in the naturalistic setting of a training programme. The procedures of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992) seemed best suited to the needs of the study, providing guiding principles for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The approach allows for the continual interplay of data collection and analysis, and encourages discovery of both the participants' perspectives and the underlying mediating social processes. The phenomena are described and then a rationale for the findings is generated, going beyond a descriptive account which characterises certain forms of qualitative analysis.

Data collection and evolving analysis

During 1998, a group of nine professional psychology trainees were working in a university child guidance and student counselling facility. The trainees agreed to participate in the study, and the arrangements for a PSG as a supplement to individual supervision were made with the programme organisers. The interns met bi-monthly for an hour, prior to a case conference. A roster was set up, with each person presenting for one meeting and facilitating for another. The participants agreed to have the sessions audiotaped (they were unwilling to be videotaped), and these were transcribed to form one of the data sources.

After initial data collection and analysis, tentative relationships between concepts are built up. According to the principles of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992), these are then refined through further cycles of data

collection and analysis, including the perspectives of both the participants and researcher(s). After the transcription and initial descriptive analysis of the first five PSG sessions, we decided that the analytic process would be strengthened by being able to compare the dialogic processes of the group with processes in traditional dyadic supervision. Therefore, from session six onwards, the respective presenters (and their supervisors) were requested to undertake an audio recording of their matching individual supervision (ISV), in which they presented the same case as in the PSG. These were also transcribed. Following the ten agreed sessions of the PSG, the group met for a focus group discussion. During this discussion, the participants evaluated their experiences of the PSG and compared these to their experiences of ISV. A further four individual interviews with participants were subsequently conducted, to probe researchers' interpretations of the data.

A grounded theory approach is able to incorporate a variety of data into the analysis (Charmaz, 1995). The data collected over the course of the study included trainees' written reflections of their prior supervision experiences, audio recordings of PSG and ISV sessions, an audio recording of a focus group discussion and audio recordings of individual interviews with participants. The two last-mentioned sources of data added to the rigour of the study as forms of triangulation procedures, and since within the focus group the participants might be reluctant to criticise the process, it was hoped that tensions might emerge in the individual interviews. The audio recordings were each transcribed, with the transcriptions checked at least twice, building levels of familiarity with the material contained in each.

The process of analysis included initial coding, which involves examining each line of data and defining the actions or events represented (Charmaz, 1995), leading to topics being generated (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). This process is repeated for each following data set, in order that links

between topics may be made, and the first categories are then generated. Certain hypotheses about the PSG process began to emerge and axial coding was used to relate categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

An analysis of each of the four comparative PSG–ISV pair of audio recordings was then undertaken. Glaser's (1994) 'constant comparative method' was utilised. Once the emergent categories which seemed to distinguish between features of the interactions had crystallised, a reading guide was then constructed. This follows Brown *et al.* (1989), where each pair of transcriptions was subjected to the same questions, enabling the development of a comparison and account which integrated findings from the four pairs. Analysis of the additional data collected from the focus group discussion, and further interrogation of the transcribed data, led to the generation and refining of hypotheses, which were then subjected to a process of verification through further interviews. Finally, following Glaser (1992), categories related to the learning process were identified.

There are some inherent methodological weaknesses in the approach outlined above. For example, supervisors in ISV were aware that supervisees had also discussed the case in the PSG, and this may have accentuated the differences between the two forms of supervision recorded. Also, trainees are likely to have used the differing contexts of the PSG and ISV in different ways, thus confounding the nature of the comparison. It would thus be difficult to come to conclusions about the PSG in the absence of ISV or vice versa; however, this was not the aim of this study because it was not intended that the two forms should be used in isolation in this training context. The aim was rather to consider ways in which the PSG might add to the traditional dyadic supervision employed. Furthermore there are limitations in relying on trainee self-report for evaluation of supervision; however, since this study was exploratory, it was hoped that subsequent research might employ other methods of evaluation.

The specific research questions, which evolved over the course of the analysis, were:

1. What are the relative contributions and limitations of peer group supervision and individual supervision?
2. What strategies, which may facilitate learning, are evident in the two models of supervision?

The emergent findings are described in the following sections, with the next section detailing the findings related to the comparison of the two supervision methods (with examples of data in italics), and the subsequent section proposing ways of optimising the learning process. Participants' words are signalled by the use of italics.

Findings

At the broadest level, the study shows that the two forms of supervision seemed to be additive when considered together. The presence of the one appeared to enhance the other:

I never really thought of them as separate ... I think that's because they both complemented each other very well ... I often remember something my supervisor might have told me ... the comments that she made then, I'm remembering it now, or using it now, or something that might have been said in the peer supervision ...

This excerpt refers to the contributions of both forms of supervision, and also indicates something of the process of trainees internalising material from both, which enabled a form of self-regulation at a later stage. Themes which emerged from comparisons of the two forms of transcribed data and from participants' comparative experiences of ISV and the PSG are described below.

Structuring

PSG offers an explicit procedure to follow, and the goals of the interaction are clearly stated:

... useful in terms of keeping a direction and getting our questions answered. So even though it seemed a bit rigid when you first heard about it, I think it's a very useful model.

The structure of the PSG enabled participants to focus, in a detailed way on one case:

It was really a facilitative structure which meant that everyone was heard ...

A further value of the PSG structure is that trainees could make a 'trial' presentation in preparation for a more formal case conference presentation. In contrast to the explicit structure of the PSG, the implicit structure of ISV results from the continuity of weekly meetings, and these enable a working relationship to develop between supervisor and trainee.

The presenter's experience

In the PSG presenters reported feeling support and encouragement or reassurance from the group members:

I felt that people here were understanding where I was coming from, they were able to empathise ...

The 'response' phase led to the presenter having an opportunity to respond to phase three, thus developing a sense of agency in making choices and taking decisions:

I got to think out loud why I wanted to do what I wanted to do, which I'd never got to do till then ...

ISV is also a context for shared problem solving, but this is dependent on the supervisor's style. Trainees felt less supported when supervisors were confined to a particular theoretical framework:

... telling me that all you have to do is this and relax and things will happen, you know containment. At that stage I wanted a bit more practical stuff which I got from here ...

A further function of ISV is that feedback and evaluation of progress over time are possible, though there was not much evidence of this in the transcripts.

Attributes of the 'other'

This relates to the contributions of peers in the PSG and to the supervisor in ISV. In the PSG there was a sense of the sharing of experiences, and trainees felt less alone in the challenges that they faced:

just being able to talk about a case to a

group of colleagues ... helped me to see the case quite differently ...

Peers are able to describe the means of undertaking an approach in a 'step by step' way, providing clarity in descriptions and explanations, because of experiential closeness. In a PSG they may also argue the merits and demerits of various perspectives. In ISV, supervisors have greater experience from which to draw, skills to probe trainees' understanding, to enable trainees to clarify their position more explicitly, and a deeper theoretical understanding. However, a number of trainees commented that the power differential in ISV had an impact:

I felt very conscious of the hierarchical difference ... it wasn't here, we were all equals.

The more expert supervisor potentially offers greater expertise theoretically and practically, whereas PSG offers the opportunity for reflection in a less anxiety-laden context.

Interactions

In the PSG participants have equal status being at similar levels of experience, and this felt safer for some:

it's a free forum and very empowering in that ... here we have the solutions, and I found that very refreshing and quite freeing ...

Trainees seemed to be more frank about their experiences here. In the PSG they also formulated cases theoretically, finding an opportunity to examine the arguments they were making. In ISV, there were examples of supervisors using forms of questioning or different theoretical perspectives to take trainees further. ISV also allows for the tackling of systemic and transference issues related to the case. These were not evident in the PSG, possibly because of the structure or more limited understandings of these complex issues.

Broader contextual benefits

Some of the participants reported that the PSG compensated for the interactional diffi-

culties they were experiencing in ISV. Group solidarity developed in the group, and was evident in some of the discussions, which went beyond case matters. This enabled change to be negotiated related to some aspects of case conferences and to some workplace demands.

The above themes identify the main contributions of the PSG and ISV that emerged in the study. Limitations related to each model were also identified and these are summarised below.

Limitations of the PSG

One of the areas of development which clearly needed attention in the PSG was that of the group facilitation skills of some of the trainees. Some of the facilitators saw their role only as time keeping, and were not active enough in confining the discussion to the 'request for assistance'. At times the discussion was unfocused, and some trainees would have liked more active discussion management from the facilitator. There are examples where the facilitator was too passive, of another group member taking up the role to bring the discussion back on track.

It also seems that the more competent peers were assisted less in the process. The exploration of theory was limited at times by some of the participants' knowledge levels. It also became evident that the PSG at this level was not effective in dealing with the systemic and transference issues of some of the case material. This was possibly also due to the participants' varied levels of expertise and understanding of the issues.

In two of the later individual interviews, participants remarked on the potential effects of group dynamics on group functioning. They recognised the greater expertise shown by certain of the members, and this led to those members' contributions being viewed as having greater impact. It is clear that this may have influenced the group's functioning had it continued beyond the ten sessions studied.

Limitations of ISV

In ISV, the power differential between supervisor and trainee is a variable, which influences and may inhibit open and frank dialogue, and some interns felt unable to challenge the views or guidance they received. This was the case for some interns when there were tensions between differing paradigms of case formulation or differing understandings of the purposes of supervision.

A further criticism from participants was that ISV was not trainee-centred enough, leaving some feeling that their concerns were unheard. They also felt that the feedback they were given was too limited, both in its frequency and quality. From a more systemic perspective, they noted that they had too many cases to deal with in the limited supervision time available.

Summary of findings related to the first research question

There appear to be merits in both forms of supervision, even though participants were very critical of ISV in the focus group discussion. Their criticisms may have been a function of the trainees' stage of professional development, but they may also be an expression of the difficulties this group were having in training, related to structural shifts which were occurring in the renegotiating of relationships between the two main settings for their work. One of the participants also noted in the later interview that during the focus group discussion she had been referring only to the supervisory experience at that point in time, but that at other times she had more positive ISV experiences (and others agreed to this). Perhaps then, participants chose to present cases in the PSG when they were having difficulty in ISV. This possibility would support a stronger complementary relationship between the two models.

It would thus seem that the addition of the PSG enabled the trainees to have a richer learning experience than having ISV alone. There are varied experiences of ISV, and in this training setting they experience at least five supervisors within their training year,

thus increasing opportunities for valuable learning experiences from ISV. A PSG offers a less hierarchical, more focused and supportive experience, and a number of trainees noted its empowering nature.

With regard to the key considerations for peer group supervision, identified in the literature, the following features were confirmed in this study:

- The group size (nine participants) seemed workable, although a slightly smaller number (six to seven) would probably have facilitated more cycles of the PSG.
- The fact that members had equal status as trainees seemed facilitative, since they were grappling with many similar issues.
- Leadership was managed by rotating the role of facilitator, with varied levels of success.
- The goals set were circumscribed by the RFA statement, and were mostly achievable.
- The major goal of providing the presenter with support was achieved in the PSG.
- The structuring of the process was helpful to participants.
- The PSG interactions seemed to be most beneficial when the RFA was task focused.
- Further training of participants appeared to be required in the skills of facilitation, and more explicit linking of case issues to theoretical paradigms was suggested.
- Participants were motivated to engage in the full cycle of ten sessions.
- No form of evaluation was included in the PSG.
- Organisational factors were supportive of the PSG once the process was underway.

The PSG also seemed to serve important social and emotional functions. Wilbur *et al.* (1991) note the value of structure as enhancing of interpersonal behaviour at early stages in a group's development, and this seemed to be confirmed in this study; however, they caution that later in a group process the positive effects of the structure are reduced, and

Table 1: Strategies that facilitate learning for trainees

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| <p>A. Talking through ideas about the material in a setting where listeners give active attention, without engagement in dialogue, in itself has value.</p> <p>B. Active listening to a discussion about issues with which one is grappling assists the listener to reflect.</p> <p>C. Empathic connection with the presenter's conceptual understanding of the material assists the helper to provide suggestions more in keeping with the presenter's needs (e.g. peers provided step by step, practical suggestions because they identified what was needed).</p> <p>D. A supportive learning environment seems to facilitate openness in the learner. There also appears to be a developmental process from support towards greater autonomy; thus the level of support and the needs of the trainee need to be matched.</p> <p>E. Effective questioning has the potential to help shift understandings.</p> <p>F. Explicit structuring of supervisory interactions provides security.</p> <p>G. A greater sense of equality enables participants to argue their case.</p> <p>H. Engagement in dialogue socially leads to some form of internalisation of that dialogue.</p> <p>I. A crucial element seems to be the learner's construction of her/his role. The positioning of one's role on the following scales seems to be influential: active/passive, inept/competent, helped/helper.</p> <p>J. The explicit linking of experience to theories previously learnt is of value.</p> |
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that it may even 'impede the group process' (p. 99). A longer-term study would be needed in order to report on this.

Overall consideration of the PSG process leads to our concluding that the structure has promise for further development. This study seems to support Abels' (1977) thesis that one needs to trust group interactions to be the 'teacher', and Kadushin's (1992) assertion that some trainees find a group situation a more comfortable learning environment. The PSG group offers exposure to a variety of different cases and approaches, experiences of dialogue which allow for a range of perspectives, the opportunity to define issues in the trainees' own words and to explore and actively construct meanings at their own pace, collective problem-solving and participants having a say in what is to be learned.

Optimising the learning process in supervision

In response to the second research question, which was to consider facilitative strategies for the promotion of learning, a table was

constructed to summarise the form of learning strategy utilised and the content of the resultant learning (Table 1). This was in order to develop possible relationships between concepts in axial coding (as described in Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p.278). Consideration of the data using the second research question led to the synthesis of the categories in Table 1 from the evidence presented in the preceding section, describing some of the ways in which learning might be promoted.

Exploration of the strategies in the table in relation to each other led to the distillation of six themes, described below. These indicate ways to optimise the learning process.

Learning through speaking

In Table 1 phenomena specifically related to language strategies are identified in A, B, E and H. Both the PSG and ISV rely to a great extent on various ways in which language is used in interpersonal contexts. Trainees' exposure to a different structure in PSG, having experienced and become familiar with

ISV, enabled them to identify language features that enhanced their learning. Example are talking the case through; features of both peers' and the presenter's listening; and remembering feedback given in both forms of supervision.

Learning as transmitting information or as constructing meanings

The view of learning espoused by each supervisor and trainee appears to have a crucial influence on the learner's construction of his/her role (category I in Table 1). An approach to learning that reifies knowledge as an entity, linking 'facts' in a system, transmitted from the teacher to the learner depends on the one who 'knows' passing the knowledge on to the one who is learning. This affects the relationship between learner and teacher and may be seen in the greater formality in some ISV sessions, which influences trainees' frankness. In such an approach, the learner is a more passive recipient, expectant that the other will provide both knowledge and judgement. The responsibility for transmission thus rests on the supervisor leading to dependence. This relationship has the potential to provide a sense of safety for the beginner, and the trainee will feel the need to demonstrate increasing competence, since the hidden expectation is that the learner will 'reproduce' knowledge gained in the process.

An alternate view is that knowledge is constructed in the social context to which participants in the process all contribute. Theory is thus used to make sense of links already emerging in the material, and understandings are negotiated. The learner is encouraged to express current understandings of the issue, and further steps are negotiated in discussion, with speculation and the generation of various alternatives. The skills of the 'teacher' are to use various discursive strategies appropriate to the learner's needs. The learner is therefore more active, with increased awareness of personal contributions, which then contributes to the learner gaining confidence in problem-solving.

Moving from supervisor authority to intern autonomy

This category is implicit in the previous paragraph, and inherent in categories D, G and I in Table 1. It underlines the importance of the intersubjective space to provide a safe enough context for learning. Relationships based on the hierarchy of expert and novice may provoke in the trainee a need to demonstrate competence rather than reveal uncertainties. Trainees are at varying levels of confidence in their ability to function more independently. Once they have qualified, they will need to be autonomous and make choices and decisions linked to theoretical understanding; thus they need to develop a means of building confidence and more independent functioning. In supervisory interactions, trainees need to move from being dependent on the supervisor for guidance towards a greater sense of being able to 'work it out' for themselves. The PSG offered examples of peers of similar levels of competence working through the issues, leading to a greater sense of personal agency as participants. A growth in confidence in being able to consider alternatives and generate solutions was evident over the course of the PSG.

Oscillating between support and challenge

There were differences in trainee needs for support and challenge in both forms of supervision (category D in Table 1). Some felt supported and contained in both ISV and the PSG, others felt unsupported and criticised in ISV but supported in the PSG, and one reported feeling more supported in ISV than in PSG. These variations may be partly a function of experiences of different supervisors and may also relate to trainees' stages of development as practitioners, and their own particular needs.

Making the implicit more explicit

Category F in Table 1 refers to one of the clear differences in the recordings of the PSG and ISV: the evidence of structuring. Procedures for each phase of the PSG are explicit, enabling participants to focus their

attention on the particular issue specified. For example, the role of the group as listeners in phase one frees the presenter to make a full presentation without fear of interruption. A further example is the structure of phase three in which the presenter becomes a listener, without needing to argue any points. In contrast, in ISV, the role of the supervisor as listener is varied, with some interns feeling 'unheard'; and the trainee is also not necessarily open to hearing the supervisor's perspective. In ISV, the talking and listening is thus much more dependent on implicit interpretations by each participant of the intentions of the other, which has an impact on what is said and how it is heard. While in the PSG the intern's needs for assistance are specified, in ISV these often remain unsaid, increasing the potential for the participants to be approaching the interaction with differing expectations of its result.

The purposes of the PSG and ISV also differ, with ISV having a greater number of aims, sometimes not clearly specified. The supervisor's varied roles are not necessarily made explicit, and supervisors may shift between roles of evaluation, support or management in any one session. This has an impact both on the trainee's presentation of material and response to supervisory comments.

Shifting between the interpersonal and the intrapersonal

This theme is implicit in categories C, G and H of Table 1, and in the theme of 'learning through speaking'. There seem to be links between the interpersonal dialogue and developments in the individual's thoughts and feelings. The support of peers being at similar levels as the presenter, identifying with her or his struggles, seems to enable the trainee to have a sense of not being alone. It is possible that this external reassurance is internalised to enable the individual to use self-reassurance.

There may also be a number of perspectives present in the supervisory contexts –

the trainee's, the client(s)', the supervisor's, peers' – and one of the achievements of effective supervision relates to trainees being able to take on these different perspectives.

Limitations of the study

Since the study was of an exploratory nature, in order to generate ideas and propose possible reasons for the phenomena reported, the findings and discussion above are not conclusive. The study has a number of limitations: the circumscribed number of participants and the fact that they moved on after the study, a number becoming inaccessible for further follow up interviews; the fact that it was undertaken in one setting only; the time frame of under six months; and the methodology used.

An expansion of the study to other groups of trainees at other stages of their training and in other settings is necessary. Furthermore, a longer-term approach, perhaps tracking the trainees over the whole period of their training, including more extensive narrative accounts of trainee experiences, would have been beneficial. The study purposely focused on the trainees' perspective, since more research in the area of supervision has been from supervisors' perspectives, but this leads to the risk of the findings being one-sided. A more comprehensive study, including more from the supervisors' perspectives, would lead to greater balance. Robiner and Schofield (1990) note that a great proportion of the supervisory literature focuses on the experiences of novices rather than advanced practitioners. This is also a limitation of the present study.

With regard to the methodology, the transcription of audiotapes led to the 'smoothing over' of gaps in the interactional processes, and naturalistic observation may have led to a fuller account of the interactions. Also, the method of transcription used was not as rigorous as that used in forms of discourse analysis, thus limiting the micro-interpretation of the data. As an evaluative study, the techniques of action research may have been

better employed in a more formative way. Furthermore, a more rigorous evaluation would have led to data being gathered from other criterion-related measures.

We hope that more extensive research, possibly including other methodologies, will result from this work. Given the changes in professional training which are underway, the evaluation of various models of supervision is of great importance. Research into the various forms of group supervision currently used in many training settings will be of value, particularly given the constraints on staff time in many contexts.

Conclusion

In this paper, the development of a PSG model has been described, and a study of the comparative functioning of this form of supervision and individual supervision has been presented. The findings show that the two models provide differing forms of interaction and thus have the potential to contribute to trainees' development in different ways. The inclusion of both forms of supervision in a training programme has the potential to enhance the learning process of trainees through:

- providing additional opportunities for reflection on casework,
- encouraging trainees to become more active in constructing their own understandings,

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- enabling a shift towards greater autonomy,
- providing contexts which optimise conditions of support and which appropriately challenge trainees' constructions of meaning.

More broadly, we believe the study described in this paper has the potential to make a contribution to professional development in psychological practice. Since, as a profession we ascribe to the concept of lifelong learning, we believe that it is valuable for professionals to utilise different resources to reflect on and learn from their work. The PSG model enables participants to reflect on their learning in other contexts and gain greater insights into their own learning processes. Opportunities to work reflectively may be limited in traditional top-down modes of learning, whereas a more egalitarian approach promotes greater individual responsibility for learning. This has the potential to enhance critical reflection on one's actions, deepening moral responsibility. In training contexts, both dyadic supervision and other forms of supervision need consideration, if we are to optimise trainees' learning experiences.

Address for correspondence

Jacqui Akhurst, Sports Science and Psychology, York St John University College, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31 7EX.
E-mail: J.Akhurst@psych.york.ac.za

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