

The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Group Psychotherapy

Edited by Jeffrey L. Kleinberg

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After the Conflict: Training of Group Supervision in Guatemala

Elisabeth Rohr

The Political and Social Background

After having signed a peace treaty in 1996, marking the end of a devastating war that lasted more than 36 years, Guatemala was confronted with the challenge to reconstruct a society that had known only violence, savage persecution, random killings and massacres for almost half a century. More than 200 000 people had lost their lives during the "armed conflict," 45 000 disappeared without any trace, one million fled to Mexico to live in refugee camps and more than 400 indigenous communities were completely erased from the landscape as a result of the military strategy of scorched earth, leaving a toll of more than 600 massacres in rural and ethnic regions of the country (Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico, CEH, 1999).¹

This Guatemalan tragedy had a global as well as a local dimension: In times of the cold war, the resurgent movement threatened the hegemonic power of the USA in Central America, already weakened by political transformations that had taken place in Nicaragua and in El Salvador (Molkentin, 2002; Kernjak, 2006).² Therefore, American interventions in Guatemala were a political strategy to maintain and to re-enforce the status quo and the hegemonic power of the USA in the region.

Beyond these global factors, the war developed a strong and home-bred racial and even genocidal dynamic. It turned out to be one of the longest, bloodiest and most

¹ Two Truth Commissions under the guidance of the UN and the Catholic Church stated unanimously that more than 93% of the atrocities had to be attributed to the army and 3% to the guerrilla (*Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* – REMHI 1998, CEH, 1999).

² Under Reagan US-military interventions, CIA-intelligence, weapons and counter-insurgency trainings increased to support the Guatemalan army in their efforts to fight the guerrilla, whereas Carter minimized military support, when human rights violations by the army provoked international protest (Bornschein, 2009).

violent wars of South America (Kurrenbach, 2003).³ Both "Truth Commissions" left no doubt that a considerable part of the population was psychologically damaged and heavily traumatized (REMHI, 1998; CEH, 1999).

However, the devastating effects of war and of human rights violations especially affected the marginalized and impoverished indigenous population, representing 60% of the total population. Since the army perceived indigenous people, mostly of Mayan descent, as natural allies of the rebel forces, defenseless civilians were mercilessly and with extreme cruelty slaughtered, "en masse" (CEH, 1999).⁴ As a result, the rural ethnic population made up 83% of the victims of the war (Bornschein, 2009: p. 61).⁵

The main reasons behind the armed conflict were the extremely unequal distribution of wealth and of land,⁶ in combination with racial discrimination and social exclusion of the indigenous population (CEH, 1999). To be Indian always equated to being poor. This is still true today. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 56% of the 13.4 million of Guatemalans are poor, 16% extremely poor, living on less than one US-Dollar per day (UNDP 2009: p. 228). But within the indigenous rural population 74.8% are considered to be poor and 24.4% are defined as destitute: extremely poor.⁷ Today Guatemala has the fourth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world and 70% of indigenous children under the age of five are malnourished.⁷

The cultural, social and economic polarization within Guatemalan society has always been structured along racial lines. War has aggravated this situation, adding to poverty and violence, trauma and impunity. Even though the UN-Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) was set up to monitor the peace accord implementations, which included strategies for greater democracy, equality and justice within Guatemalan society, the political elite of the country has managed to maintain an attitude of denial and willful ignorance, concealing a past that left deep scars and open wounds in the social fabric of society.

Therefore, a repressive strategy of censorship over those who wanted to uncover the dreadful acts of the past has prevailed in Guatemala. None of the well-known perpetrators was ever taken to court and convicted of human rights violations (Bornschein, 2009). Since the Guatemalan army was convinced of its victory in war,

³ This racial dimension of the war was one of the reasons why the armed conflict in Guatemala, in contrast to the wars in Chile and Argentina, did not find too much of a media echo outside of the country and hardly any international protest. The impoverished, illiterate and politically barely organized indigenous population had no international political lobby to denounce their human rights violations.

⁴ "In the majority of the massacres there is evidence of multiple acts of savagery, which preceded, accompanied or occurred after the deaths of the victims" (<http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc2.html>)

⁵ Whereas in urban areas people did not even want to believe that there was an ongoing civil war, asking "where is the war?" or "it can't be that there were so many atrocities, we would have noticed them" (Molkentin, 2002: p. 278).

⁶ 20% of the population receives two-thirds of all income (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Guatemala). Last reading: 11.7.2010; A small percentage of the population owns more than 80% of the country's best land (<http://www.undp.org/excebrd/pdf/ADR-Guatemala.pdf>). Accessed 24.05.2011.

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Guatemala, accessed 11.7.2010.

it only signed the UN-enforced peace treaty reluctantly. As a result, the government in power felt no urgency in fulfilling the requirements of a peace-building process. President Arzú even refused in 1999 to officially receive the 12 volumes of the "Report of the Truth Commission," thus publicly rejecting any recognition of the atrocities of the past and the suffering of the victims of the war (Örtler, 2004).

This post-war political atmosphere of denial and repression had severe psychosocial consequences: There was no public space to mourn the dead or to demand justice in the wake of large scale human rights violations, committed during a dirty and irregular war. The politically repressive climate did not allow any critical reflection on the past. Those who did not adhere to this unwritten law of silence were stigmatized as enemies of the state or, in some cases, even eliminated as was the anthropologist, Myrta Mack, who dared to investigate the tragic situation of Guatemalan refugees. She was one of many who were brutally executed in order to maintain the law of silence (Mack, 2004). The message was clear: To mourn the dead, to denounce the atrocities of the past or to demand justice simply meant risking one's life!

How then would it be possible to rebuild trust in a society whose social fabric had been severely damaged and almost destroyed, where democracy, justice, peace and human rights existed only in theory, but in reality, social and political life was organized according to utterly repressive and quite authoritarian laws and motives?⁸

How then would training in group supervision, relying on trusting relationships, working with theoretical and methodological concepts based on the notion of the unconscious, function, if life and work in society obliged its members to silence the past and to deny any historic memory? How would its participants dare to develop a desire to explore and to reflect upon critical incidents in their professional life, if, at the same time, all other desire to explore experiences of the past had to be suppressed? What kinds of difficulties, inhibitions, anxieties, defenses and strategies of resistance have to be expected in a training group, under these circumstances? The central question therefore is: How can training in group supervision work, under repressive political conditions, in a post-conflict society and within a population that has been heavily traumatized and confronted with injustice in its daily working experience?

The Organizational Background

After the war, a whole armada of international organizations entered the country trying to support Guatemalan efforts to rebuild trust and peace in society. An international network of support and pressure was the only way to ensure the implementation of the peace treaty. Otherwise, the government would simply allow the peace-building process to fade away.

One of these organizations was the German Technical Cooperation (GTC), an official government agency that had been working in the country for many years and therefore was quite familiar with political and social structures in Guatemala. Drawing

⁸ Guatemala is by no means an exception. For example Cambodia, Rwanda, Chile and South Africa have all required a combination of economic, social, cultural and psychosocial measures to meet the complex challenges of a post-conflict society, to reestablish peace, democracy and human rights, to break the silence and to mend the broken connections between people.

from experiences in other post-war societies, the GTC decided to put more emphasis on psychosocial projects in Guatemala, thus strengthening the few already existing national efforts that were reaching out to the victims of the war.⁹

An investigation had shown that a large number of social workers and psychologists were working in rather difficult areas: Some of them organized exhumations of mass graves in indigenous communities, counseling Indian families, who expected to find their dead family members in the ground. Some worked with lawyers defending criminals in prison, who had been law breakers and also victims of torture. Others worked in ethnic communities, supporting groups of widows, who had experienced sexual atrocities, helping them to cope with the effects of gang rape and the loss of their husbands and children during the armed conflict.

All of these social workers and psychologists were highly engaged and motivated young people, often carried away by their desire to help, trying to heal the wounds and soothe the pain of people, they worked with. All were part of an environment that Becker (2006) defined as a "traumatizing situation." They witnessed and experienced immense suffering by victims of the war and, at the same time, saw that the majority in society continued to deny the despair, pain and extreme poverty of the victims of the war and that there was no justice. Often enough they felt overwhelmed by the misery they experienced and felt left alone with their sorrow and grief, bearing and sharing so much suffering and pain. There seemed to be nobody, who wanted to listen to them, who wanted to share their sadness and helplessness. Within Guatemalan institutions, counseling the counselors or group supervision was unknown.¹⁰ Therefore, any desire to speak out had to be suppressed. It would have been misunderstood as a sign of professional deficiency. Therefore, they always had to be strong, never failing, never showing any signs of exhaustion, desperation or frustration. They were simply required to function.

There could not be any doubt that an enormous, desperate need for counseling existed. If the healthcare experts would not find a way to digest their painful experiences, the risk of burn-out, exhaustion and of being traumatized themselves would increase. Without continuous and professional support they might become contaminated by the surrounding trauma, not allowing them to stay healthy and sane, while fulfilling their professional tasks. Instead, they would be drawn into what is called "secondary traumatization" (Figley, 1995), which is the injury of experts working with, observing and attempting to heal traumatized patients.

Considering this complex situation, the GTC decided to establish training in group supervision, promoting supervisory skills and support, capacity building and tools to prevent burn-out and secondary traumatization.

The Participants

Before the training started, the GTC offered various workshops to find out, if supervision would be accepted as a specific form of counseling in Guatemala. It turned out that these workshops were always well attended by about 20-25 people, so that

⁹ The projects aimed at empowering indigenous women, at reconciliation processes in indigenous communities, at capacity building efforts, and at strengthening community mental health services.

¹⁰ A Masters in counseling has been established meanwhile, at the Universidad del Valle, in Guatemala.

the person in charge was quite confident in finding the necessary quota of 18-20 participants to begin the training. There was no prior assessment, simply an announcement was sent out to institutions which were engaged in the peace and reconciliation process, hoping to attract those who felt a strong need for additional qualifications. Since it was training sponsored by the German Government, there were no costs involved for the participants of the training. This might have been one of several factors contributing later on to the difficulties of reliable and continuous participation.

Twenty-two young people showed up on the first day of training, amongst them four indigenous women, one man of Mayan descent, three Germans and one Austrian. They were all working in peace and reconciliation programs inside the country. The majority of those attending were social workers and psychologists, but there were also three psychiatrists, one law student and one university professor. Almost all of them identified strongly with the victims of war, emphasizing that their engagement had to be understood as a humanitarian effort to compensate for the damages that the war had inflicted upon so many, mainly indigenous people. Of course, not all of those present shared these views. At least two of the participants supported and defended the government's interpretation of past and present events.

Undoubtedly, we had the political conflict, which had been splitting the country apart for ages, right in the midst of our training group. This proved to be a major challenge for the training. From the beginning there were strong tensions, fears and signs of resistance as a result of several important and hidden issues, emerging either as a joke or a whispered question at break time - Is there a "spy" among us? How safe are we in this unknown environment with this unknown group conductor and with unknown theories and methods, all coming from Europe? Is this a new way to "colonize" our minds and to impose new "imperialistic" ways of thinking, endangering our own culture and our Latin American identity?

Tendencies to split, project and scapegoat emerged throughout all phases of the training and demonstrated deeply entrenched feelings of anxiety and insecurity, pointing to the loss of trust in society and in human relationships.

Clinical Illustration

A young man kept on asking about the cultural background of the theories that were mentioned in the curriculum, doubting their validity for the Guatemalan context. At the same time, he was eager to present case material from his working experience. One day, after having discussed one of his cases in depth, he came to the conclusion that he had gained quite important new insights and understanding. He appeared to be very grateful for his newly acquired knowledge. But then he would regularly choose to be absent from the next stages of our working phase.

He seemed unable to bear sharing strong emotions within a group context. He always had to distance himself, in order to regain his emotional balance. Feeling close to others, seemed for him to be an overly frightening experience. After all, one could always be abandoned again, as had happened so many times throughout the war.

This ambivalence of wanting to be close, share experiences and at the same time being frightened of emotional intimacy inside the group was a recurrent and upsetting issue throughout the two and a half years of the training. These issues had to be understood as an emotional echo from the war and without the knowledge of the political, social and cultural background of the conflict these group dynamics would never have been understood. The question now was would the training in group supervision be able to overcome this mistrust and restore some hopeful trust back to other members and even throughout society itself, even though it was not considered a psychotherapeutic experience?

There were reasonable doubts at the beginning. After the first week's training, two of the Mayan women, who had been quite engaged throughout the five days, left without any explanation, leaving us alone with our speculations. Within the next two and a half years five others also stopped attending. Some of them changed jobs, others left the country and there were those who could not participate anymore, since it required too much time away from their employment.

In the end, a group of 15 people participated more or less regularly throughout the two and a half year period, four men and eleven women.

The Theoretical Background of the Training

The training course of group supervision was based on the theoretical principals of Group Analysis, a theory and method that had been founded by Sigmund Heinrich Foulkes, a German-Jewish refugee, who had been forced into exile, fleeing from Nazi Germany to Great Britain in 1933. At the beginning of the Second World War, he worked in the psychiatric ward of a clinic in Northfield, England, caring for traumatized British soldiers, suffering under the effects of "shell-shock," the terror of war. Since he had so many patients suffering from the same horrifying experiences, he decided to offer therapy in a group. He thought this would be more economical, more efficient and beneficial for the healing process, since all of his patients showed similar symptoms and could share their experiences not only with their therapist, but with each other as well.

These experiences in the clinic with traumatized soldiers of the Second World War inspired Foulkes later on to develop a Group Analytic concept, mainly relying on the principals of psychoanalysis, but eventually adding ideas and elements of other theoretical concepts as well (Foulkes, 1983).

Initially Foulkes parted from Freud's idea that group dynamics work according to a concept that he had developed in his famous study about "Mass Culture and Ego-Analysis" (GW, XIII). Foulkes did agree with Freud that group dynamics always reflected the group's "transference" onto the conductor, producing an illusion of love and a lack of emotional control, associated with "regression." Through this transference process, the group empties itself of all emotions, which are redirected on to the conductor and falls back into a regressive and passive state of mind and of emotion. The conductor thus changes into an idealized, omnipotent figure, nourishing the fantasy that only he or she is able to rescue the group.

But in contrast to Freud, Foulkes (1964) saw multiple transference processes in action, some directed toward the conductor and some placed upon other members

of the group. He was convinced that these transference processes were influenced by a variety of social, cultural and psychological factors that could not be understood by a merely psychoanalytic perspective. This was especially true for his understanding of group processes. Foulkes (1983) did not consider the group to be an undifferentiated conglomeration of people. He understood it as an agglomeration of individuals, insisting, at the same time, that a group was more than just a mere summation of individuals as (Slater, 1966) already had addressed.

According to Foulkes (1964), each group had a specific life on its own. This "matrix" influenced every person involved and vice versa. Consequently, he looked at the individual not as an isolated, but as a social human being by nature and, as such, always in connection to others. Foulkes now could explain why every change of an individual within the group affected every other member and the group as a whole. Theoretically, this meant that changing one element had an effect upon all other elements in the system.

This is one of the main differences between a group analytic concept of understanding and a psychoanalytic approach to the comprehension of group processes.

To conduct a session with group analytic tools is therefore an ambitious task, because the role and the task of the conductor change dramatically. In a dual psychotherapeutic situation, the professional always has a prominent position, whereas in a group analytic situation the conductor is considered to be an important person on the edge of the group, taking care of its boundaries, making sure that there is always a protected and safe space available to work in, thus being a safeguard, maintaining the rules and regulations within the group context.

Foulkes (1964) once compared the function of a group conductor with his musical counterpart in an orchestra. But this metaphor fits only at first sight, because this image is connected with a strong dominating, male position, aimed at training an orchestra to play together beautifully, erasing all mistakes and erroneous notes. This, however, is in no way the aim of group analysis, which is interested principally in the irritations that arise out of any group's communicative and interactive efforts to understand each other. This is not achieved by suppressing irritations or misunderstandings, but by allowing them to surface and then carefully uncovering the reasons for their existence. Only an error-accepting and accommodating attitude will aid in understanding unconscious anxieties and desires within a group. Therefore, group analysis is not a training technique designed to reach a perfect harmony or to overcome all dissonance. On the contrary, it is a proven and complex instrument created to explore these dissonances and their roots.

From a feminine perspective another image would be preferred. That of a midwife helping the group to explore its hidden issues, inhibitions and anxieties, examining and exploring obstacles, bearing pain and sharing hard labor that always connects to creative processes. Giving birth to new awareness, we find new ways of understanding, thus paving the way for real change, new insights and a more satisfying method of relating to oneself and others.

Group analysis wants to strengthen people's potential to resolve their conflicts in a more productive and creative way and to be more in touch with one's own and other people's desires. Group experiences always work on an individual as well as a group level. Therefore, Foulkes' notion of multiple transference processes is one of the key issues of group analysis, because it helps to explain the effectiveness of the

therapeutic group process. Of course, there are numerous controversies concerning the effectiveness of group analysis and there cannot be any doubt that there are limitations of the method. Not all patients (for example psychotic patients) can be treated in a group, no matter what instruments would be used.

It is easy to understand that multiple transference processes are quite effective and that they are quite a powerful tool in dealing with the complexity of group dynamics. There are simply more options offered to understand and gain insight. However, that is not the only reason for the effectiveness of group analysis. Another reason comes from the fact that these multiple transference processes are always connected to specific experiences of group reality. When transference processes of sibling rivalry occur in a group, one can be sure that participants do not accept these transference emotions like a conductor would, interpreting these emotions, reacting in an accepting way, staying calm and at a certain distance. Group members will react in a different way, since they might feel attacked and therefore are inclined to reject these transference emotions, responding with aggression and maybe even with fearsome attacks. Therefore, there is always a two-fold process of transference and of real life-experiences happening in the group at the same time, thus increasing the effectiveness and the benefit of group analytic therapy. Group Analysis is training in action.

Clinical Illustration

The young man, who always left whenever he had strong, emotional experiences in the training group, hardly reacted to my interventions concerning his attitude of leaving. Usually he simply left without excusing or even announcing his forthcoming absence, producing a lot of annoyance in the group. One day, one of the psychiatrists told him, in a very friendly, but firm tone of voice that she wanted him to stay in the group; she felt disturbed, irritated and frustrated and she simply wanted him to be there. This had quite an impact on him, he did not leave the training as often as before and when he left, he would announce it.

This intervention was quite effective, because he could hear and feel not only her concern, but also her anger and he could, in part at least, react to her desire, to have him in the group and be less defensive.

From a group analytic perspective, she did not only speak for herself, but she dared to pronounce a desire that most surely others in the training group felt as well, but did not dare to pronounce. She spoke for herself, but also for the group and even for me as group conductor and this made her intervention so psychotherapeutically effective.

This concept of group analysis as developed by Foulkes differs from essential notions of psychoanalysis, but without overthrowing core psychoanalytic issues like the unconscious, just including more social psychological and systemic ways of understanding group processes. To illustrate these differences once again, but in a more tangible manner, it helps to look at the famous Russian matryoshka dolls.

Freud would look at the Russian doll as the perfect image of an individual, detecting in every one of the Russian dolls another one and the further he would search, the more dolls he would find, one hidden inside the other one. Freud's thinking

revolved around a model of intra-psychic processes, which is still the core of psychoanalytic theory and practice. But Foulkes would take the Russian doll, pull them all out and put them in a circle, then watching what would happen between them and the conductor and between each one of the dolls. He externalized the intra-psychic processes Freud had been talking and writing about (the topographic model) and tried to investigate what was happening on an inter-personal and inter-psychic level. Foulkes (1964) was interested in the communicative and interactive dynamics, developing in the group, always understanding them as an externalization of intra-psychic processes of the individuals involved, now being mirrored and acted out in the group. He looked at these processes from five different perspectives: They represented according to his understanding:

- dimensions of society (the social class, ethnic background, organizational realities)
- dimensions of the family (biographic material, significance of parents and siblings)
- dimensions of the psychic reality of the individual (projections, introjections, resistances, etc)
- images of the body (who is the head of the group, the heart?)
- the archaic unconscious (culture, legends, myths).

To reach this complex way of understanding, Foulkes had to revert to the findings of social psychology as outlined by Norbert Elias in his famous book about the "The Civilizing Process" (Elias, 1994) and to more philosophical and sociological thoughts as outlined by Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer. He also benefitted from the works of the psychoanalysts Balint (1957) and Bion (1961) and from new findings in neuroscience. Goldstein (1995) had experienced in his practice that patients, who had lost one of their eyes, would eventually learn to substitute the loss of the one eye with an amplified way of looking at the world with the other eye. The brain helped to substitute the deficiency, by expanding the functions of the other eye. Foulkes (1986) took up these thoughts, applying them to his understanding of group processes. Now he could explain why any group would always establish a dynamic matrix of the ongoing group process, the group functioned like a brain: If there was an individual's neurotic conflict that had to be resolved the whole group, and each participant, would in different ways be involved in this process and finally benefit from the group's efforts to find a resolution. There was never just one individual benefitting from the group, but the group always benefitted from each individual as well.

This theoretical concept not only works in a clinical and psychotherapeutic setting, but can be applied in a supervisory setting as well.

The Concept of the Training

It took altogether five years before the first group analytic training course of supervision could start in September of 2005 in Guatemala. I was entrusted with the task to work out a design for the training in group supervision in cooperation with Dr Vilma Duque, a dedicated Guatemalan psychologist, who turned out to be the heart of the project. Since I spoke Spanish, it was not necessary to work with a translator; however, the theoretical readings and the learning exercises had to be translated into Spanish. As it was not possible to rely on any books or articles about supervision

that had been published in Central or South America, some books from Spain were copied for all participants.

The theoretical design of the training was basically group analytic. Since supervision does not share the clinical intentions of psychotherapy, even though it applies the same theoretical and methodological tools, some changes had to be introduced: To apply group analysis in the field of supervision and in a cultural foreign context, it is necessary to focus strongly on the dimension of society (ethnic, social, political, historical and institutional level), whereas the dimension of the family and the individual as well as the dimension of the body have lesser significance. But the dimension of the archaic unconscious again is important, because here cultural images, as represented in legends, mythology, fairy tales, songs, poems and literature can be used to clarify hidden issues in supervisory case work. Additionally, and due to the conflict burdened history and presence of Guatemalan society, methods of conflict resolution like mediation were introduced, as well as elements of organizational consultancy. Special attention was also paid to team supervision and to the history of the development of group theories.

The training did not include experiential elements. They would have been helpful, of course, but since the GTC would not finance two trainers, it was not possible to mix the role of a teacher and trainer and a group therapist. However, some of the participants had previous experiences of psychotherapy.

The training courses took place in six five-day sessions, spread out over a period of two and a half years. They ran from Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm, in a beautiful colonial style villa in Guatemala City, with plenty of coffee and refreshments during the breaks, and a delicious lunch at noon on the terrace under a huge avocado tree.

The morning sessions were all dedicated to theory and methodological questions, as well as to learning exercises, to present difficult theories in a more digestible form. The afternoon sessions were exclusively dedicated to case work.

A. Theoretical introduction	B. Casework: Life supervision
1. What is supervision and how does it work?	The afternoon sessions were life-supervisions focusing on casework and issues brought in and discussion by the participants.
2. Historical developments of group therapy.	Sometimes these were enriched with casuistic evaluations. For example: psychological mechanisms were explained with the help of material that had been discussed.
3. Essentials of Psychoanalysis and Group Analysis.	
4. Common grounds and differences.	
5. Team supervision.	
6. Forms of intervention in group supervision.	
7. Supervision and mediation.	
At the end of the training, the film "Babette's Feast" (1987) was presented and discussed as if it was a case that had been brought in for supervisory discussion. ¹¹	

¹¹ Babette's Feast is a famous Danish film, based on a story by Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) that brings to life, group processes with all its different features and helps to understand psychological defense mechanisms, like regression, resistance, suppression of desire, projection, projective identifications etc.

C. Supervisory experiences and supervision in a group	D. Self-organized theoretical control discussion
After the first block of the training, participants were expected to start with supervisory processes on their own, organizing a continuous process/supervision in a group.	Planned self-organized discussion groups in intervals between the training blocks. This never worked though, since controlled autonomous learning is not widely applied in Guatemala.
E. Feedback by e-mail	
Feedback by e-mail was also offered. This worked on rare occasions, but was not used as frequently as had been hoped for and promised.	

The Structure and Contents of the Training

Training Course – No. 1

What is Supervision and How Does it Work?

What is supervision? Supervision is a specific method of counseling, analyzing and reflecting the dynamics of working relationships. It is not a "little sister" of psychotherapy, because supervision is not concerned with biographical issues of the participants. Relationships with parents, sisters and brothers are not explored and supervision does not try to uncover infantile psychological conflicts. Instead, supervision does focus exclusively on working relationships, especially on relationships between professionals and their clients. In team-supervision relationships and/or conflicts between colleagues and between professionals and their superiors are being explored. The aim is always to try to find out what is the hidden issue that people in a group, the group-as-a-whole, or the team, is struggling with, using the group as a resonance body to mirror the conflicts, the participants are talking about. By doing this, the supervisor will always focus on the here-and-now of the group, trying to understand the conflict between a participant and his or her client, just being mirrored and acted out as a scenic play in the group.

How does it work? By establishing a secure space and a setting with well-defined boundaries, applying group analytic theory and techniques for the interpretation of group dynamics and by relying on a conductor, who is capable of containing the process and promoting confidence in the group's own resources. The primary focus of attention is the case, a critical incident that has been experienced by one of the participants in a working context and which is offered for discussion. After the case has been presented, the supervisor will invite the group to describe their observations, their thoughts and feelings, encouraging the participants to freely express what they might have observed or what caused irritations. The supervisor might point out some contradictions or hidden issues that were noticeable, until finally closing up the case, summarizing the results of the discussion. Maybe new perspectives on managing a case had developed and professional strategies to work with a client could now be reviewed and changed, but perhaps the reflection of the case just helped to relax and

feel reassured that the professional strategies applied in this case were adequate and more could not be accomplished.

What are the historical roots? Historical roots date back to social casework and to clinical applications of psychotherapy. Throughout the great depression in the USA (around 1930) social workers dealing with impoverished families were increasingly confronted with misery and suffering that were hard to bear and even harder to deal with. Some of them decided to get together and share their experiences with colleagues, to be able to stay healthy themselves and be able to continue and offer support to the families they worked with. This was one of the roots of supervision, which was professionalized later on, relying on an expert, a counselor, who would act as an independent, but reliable person from the outside, coming at regular intervals to counsel the social workers, thus helping them to professionalize their case work and avoid burn-out.

Around the same time, Freud established a network of friends and colleagues to share his experiences with psychotherapeutic cases and theoretical ideas. He eventually came to the conclusion that psychotherapy needed an external control. To explore psychic structures and to deal with unconscious conflicts was quite a risky affair and therefore needed an external advisor. Until today, any psychotherapeutic training, no matter what theoretical background, always will be accompanied by years of clinical supervision, to ensure that the future psychotherapist will not damage his patients, or himself.

Supervision therefore has two roots, the case work of social workers and clinical psychotherapy.

In which fields is it applied? Supervision today is essential within all psychotherapy professions, but also within psychiatry and in all medical professions, as well as in many profit and non-profit organizations. This, of course, depends strongly on where, and in which, countries supervision takes place. Within the USA and in central and northern Europe supervision is very well known and applied in almost all social, educational, medical and ecclesiastical fields of work. Outside these countries, supervision is usually only applied in clinical professions; for example, in Germany almost all social workers and many teachers and directors of social institutions are involved in supervisory work and supervision has turned out to be a profession all on its own.

What forms of supervision do exist? There are essentially three types:

1. Supervision of a single person, sometimes also closely related to coaching, especially if it is asked for in profit organizations.
2. Supervision of a team of colleagues (i.e. team-supervision).
3. Supervision of a group of professionals, coming from different institutions and a different professional background, also called Balint-Group.

What are the formal requirements? Supervision needs a secure and protected space, continuity, a set rhythm of reliable times, an agreement of confidentiality and a contract to keep to the rules that have been agreed upon in the beginning (for example, abstinence), including to pay the supervisor on a regular basis, to participate regularly, to announce any unavoidable absence, and not to take drugs or arrive intoxicated when coming to the sessions.

What is the role of the supervisor? The supervisor is a professional with a sound background of either psychotherapeutic or specific supervisory training experiences,

responsible for the boundaries, space, time, rules and regulations, which are necessary to establish supervision. He or she stays on the edge of the group, intervenes only when it is necessary and supports and accompanies the individual's or the group's struggle to analyze, reflect and finally understand the conflicts or critical incidents presented. A supervisor helps the group or the individual with his theoretical and methodological tools to find adequate answers to the questions that have been raised. Only very rarely will he or she give direct answers.

Supervision Case

After the first training week some started with their own supervisory experiences:

One of the female participants had been asked to start a supervision group with policemen. When she arrived at the police department, a friendly group of policemen awaited her and she explained what supervision is, how it works and then asked them what they wanted to talk about. First the group talked about their job, long hours, difficult clients and bad pay. Soon they started to get into a heated discussion about a slogan that was popular between them: "A good thief is a dead thief." Some agreed and some thought this was an awful thing to think and to say, and soon some started accusing the others of being bad policemen, aggressively attacking each other. The supervisor feared that one of them would draw a pistol and start shooting, so she broke off the supervision and simply left the room and hurried home.

That was the end of any further supervision efforts with this group of clients.

In the training we came to the conclusion that this was too big a challenge for a beginner and probably not even a case for supervision. These policemen needed capacity building and specific training, but not supervision.

There were obviously tremendous anxieties in this group of policemen, perhaps even enhanced by the presence of a female supervisor. Therefore, they unconsciously reverted to a "murderous" image, presenting themselves as dangerous men, thus "killing" the supervision and saving themselves from any further attempts to reflect upon their professional actions, behavior and their relationship amongst themselves.

Training Course – No. 2

Historical developments of group theory and therapy

In this training course, we focused upon historical developments of group theories, starting with Freud, continuing with Lewin, Bion, Balint, Schindler and Foulkes, trying to point out differences as well as similarities. Looking at the cultural background of these authors and the historical and political evolution of their theories it became evident that all of them had a transcultural heritage. Participants of the

training connected easily to the idea that all of the group therapists mentioned were refugees, and that early in Latin America, in Argentina, a group of psychotherapists (Grinberg, Rodriguez and Langer, 1957) had already applied group analysis in the 1950s very successfully, even with factory workers. It was important to draw attention to political and transcultural elements of group analytic theory (Dalal, 2002), thus contributing to the acceptance of a group analytic-orientated supervision training in a non-European country, and in a post-war society like Guatemala. These refugee biographies influenced to a considerable degree the elaboration of group theories, focusing strongly on social, cultural and political issues and not only on the individual.

Freud's model of mass-psychology mirrors his understanding and knowledge of the individual, of its intra-psychic forces that govern its soul, transferred upon a mass of people, reaching a surprising depth of understanding, but not really crossing psychoanalytic borders to reach a broader and not only intra-psychic understanding of group processes. Whereas Lewin (1947) like Freud, concerned with the mass hysteria under Hitler in Germany, asked himself what are the forces behind dictators like Hitler, who seem to be able to manipulate masses of people, transforming individuals to blind followers of a faith or a political ideology. He set up an experiment with groups of ten-year old boys, who had to fulfill certain tasks first under the guidance of a democratic, then an authoritarian, then a *laissez-faire* leader. It proved that the groups under the guidance of a democratic leadership were most productive and creative, fulfilling their tasks with pleasure and to the utmost satisfaction. In contrast, the groups under the authoritarian rule only worked whenever they were forced to and behaved aggressively within the group. The *laissez-faire* group was not at all able to fulfill its task and behaved as if it had been abandoned.

Lewin, who was considered a pioneer of social psychology and the founder of Gestalt-therapy, was able to separate Freud's model and show how different styles of leadership influence the behavior of a group and its members. Bion (1961) also has to be considered a pioneer of group theory and practice. He was very much concerned with the question of how group dynamics developed and how they could be explained and understood. Through his psychotherapeutic practice and his experiences with patients in a group, he came to the conclusion that group dynamics could be understood as an expression of basic assumptions:

Of dependency – of fight and flight – of pairing

- If the group process revolves around issues of dependency the group hopes to be saved by an almighty figure, the conductor (a God), the group feels very dependent, passive and overwhelmed by infantile desires.
- The group, that is concerned with fight and flight, is trying to avoid a conflict with the conductor, (the administration, an organization, a project, a superior) either by getting rid of him or her, or by taking refuge, themselves, challenging the setting.
- The group, that produces processes of pairing (two or more persons), is concerned with hope and utopian desire and illusion, feeling creative and productive, hoping that a Messiah (an idea) will be born out of the group. Pairing, a defense mechanism, helps to control anxieties and fears of a breakdown or an ending of the group.

Bion's understanding of group processes introduced the idea of the group-as-a-whole, but in contrast to Freud he did not try to apply the individual's intra-psychic structure as a model to explain group dynamics. Instead he invented the idea of basic assumptions, thus helping to understand group processes from within, but with the eye of a psychotherapist.

Balint (1957), a student of Ferenczi and a psychoanalyst from Hungary, having fled like Freud, and Bion, into exile to Great Britain, developed the idea of a group of medical doctors, coming together to talk about their patients, discussing difficulties, disturbances and irritations in their relationships with their patients in order to understand, also on the level of the unconscious, their physical suffering and pain. The idea of the Balint-Group was born, one of the most well-known forms of supervision until today. The core of Balint's concept is the idea that the unconscious issue between the professional coming into supervision and his or her client will be mirrored within the relationship of supervisor and client. The classical model of Balint-group is centered upon the idea of a case that is being presented for discussion in supervision. What is ignored is the internal dynamic of the group. Only the case counts and nothing else will be considered.

Schindler (1957-58) looked at groups more from a social dynamic point of view, insisting that there are four basic positions, that determine the behavior of human beings in a group. He called the central figure "Alpha," the representative of a group's initiative, with whom all other members of the group, the "Gamma" – individuals, will identify. Thus Alpha turns out to be a secret leader of the group. Alpha represents the identity of the group and invites all other Gammas to identify with him or her as an aggressor. This functions because this allows the Gammas to become norm setters on their own. Gammas are like a mirror of the unconscious projections of Alpha, expressing Alphas, hidden or suppressed desires. These identifications with the aggressor are usually used to rally against the weakest members in the group, the Omegas. Omegas search for a safe space, identifying with the enemy of the group. Omegas thus turn out to be the representative of the enemy of the group; they are the ones, who will break rules and norms.

Schindler looked at group processes from an individual's point of view, elaborating different roles that members of a group might take at different phases of the group, but he did not take into account the group-as-a-whole or the group's dynamics deriving from internal conflicts.

Foulkes (1964, 1983) in his exile in Great Britain was familiar with these authors and most surely knew their writings and their ideas about groups. Because Foulkes benefited in many ways from the writings of Lewin, Schindler, Balint and Bion and, in addition, to the contacts he had in Germany with Elias, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm and Goldstein, he systematically included social structures in his efforts to understand unconscious dynamics of group processes. Foulkes finally managed to combine both an individual's and group's perspective, considering the individual with its specific intra-psychic structures and the group-as-a-whole with its specific group dynamics at the same time. However, Foulkes insisted that the individual is always a social being whose individual psychic structures will be reflected in the way this individual relates to significant others. These relationships are always a mirror of the individual's disturbances, as well as its hidden anxieties and desires. To analyze the modes of interaction and communication and their unconscious expressions in a group thus helps to understand an individual's neurosis.

Foulkes' model of group analysis therefore is very beneficial for any group supervision, because it allows us to use the group as an instrument to analyze unconscious processes happening in the here-and-now of the group. These theoretical models were discussed and applied to the Guatemalan situation, trying to figure out, which theory can explain what kind of political, social and cultural experience and which elements help to understand the working experiences of the participants.

Supervision Case

After the second block training another experience with supervision was reported:

Two female participants from the training group had been asked by a women's shelter organization for supervision. When they arrived, they saw a nice new building, very modern, brightly painted, the doors guarded by armed policemen. Three social workers were working there and they were eager to start. They did not want any explanations, they immediately started to talk about their clients, the violence these women experienced and how difficult their job was. They went on to explain how sad and depressive they felt, realizing how little they could do for these women. Then one of their mobile phones rang, a screaming woman on the other end, crying out loud, that her husband was trying to kill her and that she needed help immediately. The social workers grabbed their bags, one of them still on the phone, asking for the address of the victim and then all three of them rushed out of the door, jumping into a cab and off they went leaving the two supervisors abandoned in the building. When the supervisors noticed that they were alone in the shelter, they panicked and left as hurriedly as they could, jumping in the first cab that came along and went home.

They said that they were overwhelmed with anxieties and fears and as soon as they arrived at home, they shut all the doors and windows. They felt threatened, persecuted and extremely helpless.

Discussing this case, we came to the conclusion that supervision under these circumstances is not possible, since minimum standards of a safe and protected space to work in, did not exist. We suggested that it might be a healthy move for the three social workers to leave their office and meet for supervision in a place offered by the supervisors and then clarify the working conditions, such as, mobile phones should be shut off during supervision to enable an emotional and psychological space to talk about difficult experiences.

At the end, the two supervisors said they could not imagine working with these three professionals, because the issues they talked about were too frightening and they feared they would be unable to keep their professional attitude and composure.

This case very clearly showed a fight or flight situation and that supervision needs not only a safe and protected space to work in, but also adequate working conditions, to be able to reflect, without any outside disturbances, about the existing and difficult relationships with clients. Additionally, the case illustrated transference and countertransference processes in action, producing in the supervisors all the emotions that

the endangered women felt: abandonment, panic, fears, anxieties, the feeling of being threatened, persecuted and to feel alone and helpless.

Probably these same transference feelings drove the three social workers to always just act and react, without ever finding a space to reflect.

Training Course – No. 3

Essentials of psychoanalytic and group analytic theory

Since the essentials of psychoanalytic and group analytic theory have already been discussed, it is now important to concentrate on techniques and upon the question: how knowledge and understanding of basic elements of psychoanalysis, as well as group analysis, were transmitted in the training.

At first it seemed quite a challenge to convey knowledge and understanding of basic psychoanalytic and group analytic principles to participants, who had hardly any previous knowledge of psychoanalytic or group analytic theory and method, much less psychotherapeutic experiences on their own. Two examples dealing with the unconscious and with resistance might illustrate our approach:

First we referred to a theoretical scheme explaining modes of communication developed by a German scientist, Friedemann Schulz von Thun (1998), a scheme that would allow a faint glimpse of the unconscious. According to von Thun, there are at least four different levels in every communicative interaction:

- a factual message
- a relationship-oriented message
- a self-explorative message
- a message of appeal.

He called this the four-ear model:

Example

A man comes home from work, very weary, lies down on the couch in front of the TV and says to his wife: "I am so thirsty."

Anybody in command of the English language will be able to understand this sentence.

The factual message on this level of communication is clear: "I am thirsty."

On the level of the relationship between this man and his wife, he insinuates: "Darling, I have worked so hard today and I bring home the money, therefore it's your duty to serve me. I need something to drink."

On the self-explorative level the message implies: "Darling, I am so tired and I don't feel like getting up from this comfortable couch, but I would love to have a nice, cold beer, please get me one."

On the appeal level he says: "Darling, please bring me a beer."

This scheme helps to introduce a glimpse of the unconscious, clarifying that a message always has different meanings, depending on the social and emotional circumstances of the speaker. Supervision always tries to unravel these different meanings, offering different possibilities for understanding a working hypothesis, which has to be clarified further in the developing process of supervision.

In our training, the participants were now asked to work in small groups and think about examples they had experienced to clarify this scheme even more. One group chose an example from our training that they interpreted according to the above mentioned model, referring to a sentence I once had said:

Example

As the majority of participants would come in late in the morning, I said:

"I thought we had agreed upon a 9 o'clock to start with our work. I am not able to work well under these conditions."

The factual message is: "We had agreed upon 9 o'clock to start with our work."

On a relationship oriented level this meant: "You don't keep to our agreement. Are there any doubts concerning the time to start our program? You make it difficult for me to work well."

On a self-explorative level it meant: "I feel quite frustrated and in my role as a trainer not taken seriously. Under these circumstances, I am not able to do a good job."

On an appeal level it meant: "Please come on time and keep to our agreement. I would like to do an excellent job for you."

These examples helped to understand that there are always different messages hidden behind any statement and that it is the aim of group analytic supervision to bring to the surface these hidden meanings.

Resistance Besides the "unconscious" we also dealt with other mechanisms, for example, resistance. It was first explained on a theoretical level. Resistance has to be considered quite an important issue in supervision, because resistance will manifest itself in any given process and has to be dealt with on a professional level. Resistance is always significant, because it points to unconscious anxieties, difficulties and inhibitions of the client that he or she might not be aware of, but that cannot be expressed in any other way. So resistance always has to be taken seriously and should not be ignored. This is one of the most important rules in dealing with groups, teams or individuals in supervision as well as in therapy.

Resistance can have different meanings:

- When changes are frightening, resistance serves to keep up the status quo.
- Resistance might be a creative, but desperate option to express something that cannot be expressed in any other way.
- Resistance should never be suppressed.
- Resistance always points to a hidden, but not yet available option for change and development.

Therefore it is important to realize that: supervision tries to work with the resistance and not against it.

Example

It turned out to be a very productive experience, when I managed to handle the group's resistance coming late in the morning in a less reproachful manner, by saying: "It seems very difficult for you to come on time at 9 o'clock in the morning. I wonder why?"

Without hesitation they agreed that it was difficult for them to arrive on time and then started telling me, why they almost always were late: one of the participants had just been robbed of her cell-phone. Another one had to get off the bus, because heavily tattooed young men entered the vehicle, probably gang members, ready to rob and steal, whatever they could get. Another one talked about a car accident, she had been involved in.

This approach, to working with the resistance and not against it, opened up new perspectives of understanding and of trust, because now they started to share some of their heartfelt reality with me and the others in the group. This produced confidence and, at the same time, diminished their anxieties concerning this new training program.

Therefore in supervision:

- It is important to recognize and accept resistance, because it is like a locked door that cannot be opened by force, but only with a lot of caution, taking care that nobody will be hurt.
- Resistance usually has nothing to do with the supervisor and should not be taken as an attack on his or her integrity.
- For any supervision, it is important to deal in a creative and productive way with resistance. This might be a model for the team, maybe even for the organization on how to deal with difficulties and different forms of resistance.

Of course, coming late is quite a common form of resistance, but this does not mean, that there are not many other forms of resistance to consider. For example:

- Clients keep on asking for more information about the qualifications and credentials of the supervisor.

- They keep on questioning the methods used.
- They seem to agree a lot, but then keep on having doubts: "yes . . . but"
- They maintain that problems have an unalterable social, political and historical background and they cannot be changed by any means.
- They keep projecting blame by always insisting that it is the fault of others and that the existing problem has nothing to do with their own performance at work.
- They want a prefabricated solution and are not interested in the process itself.
- They have already solved all problems on their own and now there are no more difficulties to be discussed.
- They agree with everything the supervisor says.

This list is only an example of a few standard situations that illustrate various forms of resistance which may occur in any supervisory process. There are many expressions of resistance. Groups as well as individuals are usually very creative when it comes to devising sophisticated forms of dissent.

The training group was, therefore, asked to look for examples of resistance they had experienced in their working practice, discuss them in a small group and later on present their results in front of the entire group.

The task was to describe how they had managed the situation and what kind of strategy had been used. If their approach had not worked, they were asked to explain why, elaborating different options on how the situation could have been acted upon in a more creative and productive manner.

In the afternoon, case work was used to enhance the theoretical explanations offered in the morning session. The group was split, one half sitting in a circle in the center, the other half forming an outer circle around them, tasked with observing the following psychological mechanisms in action: resistance, regression, projection, mirroring, identification, introjection, pairing, sub-groups and resonance. The group sitting in the inner circle would discuss a case that a participant had presented and the observers had to notice when and in what situation they were able to recognize what kind of psychological defense mechanism was used. After closing the case, all observations were collected and a second term of case work started, then including and evaluating the findings of the observers.

This exercise helped, in almost all cases, to deepen the understanding of the hidden issues involved and to grasp on an experimental level the meaning and the feeling of psychological defense mechanisms.

Supervision Case

In between the third and the fourth training course an invitation had reached some of our participants to start supervision in a social organization.

The director had been worried, since a strong fluctuation amongst his employees weakened the organization and inhibited a high working output.

He decided that all of his 160 employees had to participate in a supervisory process. How could this be managed?

We discussed several possibilities and came to the conclusion that out of the 160 employees 13 teams should be established, so 13 supervisors were needed. Each one would be responsible for one team unit. The supervisions were to take place once a month, for three hours on a Friday afternoon in a secure and safe space outside of the organization. Since this supervision was considered as part of their employment, it was mandatory for employees to participate.

Training Course – No. 4

Team diagnosis and organizational dynamics

Team-Supervision is considered to be one of the most difficult types of counseling, because it means bringing balance among supervision, organizational consultancy, team counseling and conflict resolution. Therefore it is important to clarify first, what is team-supervision and what is its aim and task in any given institution.

- Team-supervision is contracted when teams ask for a professional and systematic reflection of their working relationships, usually because there are conflicts that reduce their capacity to work. These conflicts might be located within the team, between the team and its clients, between the team and its superiors or the team and the organization. Since institutions are not created to satisfy human needs of their employees, but are created to fulfill specific tasks, team-supervision is asked to support or to increase the employee's capacity to work and to help them in fulfilling their professional objectives.
- Team-supervision never works within an isolated space, because it cannot be separated from the structures, culture and institutional realities of the organization. Team-supervision has to reflect this reality and take into account any changes that team-supervision might induce.
- Team-supervision always has to bear in mind the tasks it has to fulfill within the institution. This includes the study of relationship-oriented aspects or conflicts within the team or between single team-members or between the team and its superiors. These aspects cannot be treated in isolation from the reality of the surrounding organizational context.
- Team-supervision always offers an opportunity for institutional self-reflection with open results. If the organization rejects this potential, team-supervision will not function at all.

On the basis of this short introduction, the training group was asked to split up again and to work out a team diagnosis of a group in an institution, where they observed social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, according to the following criteria:

- **Institutional realities and how does the team deal with them?**
 - What is the institutional task of the team?
 - Where and when do disturbances occur and how do they manifest themselves?
 - What are the expectations of the clients of the institution?
 - Are there contradictions between the task of the team and the expectations of the clients?

- Are the team-members identified with their institutional task?
- Are the organizational structures transparent?
- Is the distribution of tasks and roles clearly defined and is it acceptable?
- According to what criteria are resources distributed? Is the distribution transparent?
- Is the flow of information clearly regulated?
- How does the team deal with the existing relationships of power, with hierarchies, differences of status and payment?

Well-prepared with this diagnostic manual, the same small groups, which had worked out the institutional diagnosis, were now asked to evaluate a team process, which they had experienced as social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists, but now from the position of a (fictitious) team-supervisor, according to the following criteria:

• **Individuals in the team and their communication and interaction:**

- Who spoke and who did not speak?
 - Who took over what role?
 - What relationships were observed?
 - What constellations existed in the team?
 - Were there any sub-groups? Any alliances? Outsiders?
 - Communicative culture: how were decisions made: in a democratic, in a non-transparent, in a friendly way?
 - Were there friends, pairs or enemies in the team?
- **Contents of the meeting, the "supervision":**
- What did the participants speak about and what did they not address?
 - Which problem was first mentioned?
 - Which case was mentioned, but not put up for discussion?
 - Which case was offered for discussion?
 - What was mirrored in the case about the team?
 - What was mirrored in the team about the problem of the clients?
 - What was mirrored in the team about the organization and their conflict?

• **Interaction with the social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist (supervisors)**

- Were there any specific circumstances accompanying the request for support? (late in the evening, on a weekend, very urgent).
- Was it difficult to come to an agreement between the organization, the team and the social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist?
- What was the expressed aim of the counseling?
- Was there a secret agenda?
- Who wanted help and support and who did not? Who took over a leading role in contacting the professional?
- Who showed significant resistance? Who did not cooperate and why?

This manual proved to be very helpful in grasping the dynamics of the supervisory process and in concentrating on significant structures as they develop in any process of counseling.

Supervision Case

The supervision in the above mentioned social organization went exceptionally well.

Many questions arose in the course of this process: Some of the teams kept on complaining about their superiors, bad working conditions, political threats, about being very afraid at times, because there were secret cars without license plates stalking them.

It was difficult for many of the participants to accept and understand what supervision is about and what it is not about:

For example, some of the supervisors were asked by several teams to write letters on their behalf to their superiors, telling them about their concerns and anxieties. The supervisors were not only ambivalent, but felt trapped inside of a serious conflict: They could comprehend the concerns of their clients and thought they were correct in demanding more protection and actions from their employers. At the same time, they felt very unsure if it was advisable to write letters on their behalf.

We discussed the case at length, looked into their identifications and counter-transference reactions and finally at their impulses, wanting to help, needing to do something in order to protect their clients. They felt utterly helpless and insecure, because of not knowing what to do and if this was allowed or not by their role in supervision.

Taking their wish to help seriously, we analyzed the possible effects of their desire to actually help and write these letters of reference. Would it not be better to inspire the teams to communicate on their own, thus supporting them in their desire to do something positive and to change things within their own organization?

Yes, certainly, this would be an excellent suggestion! But, they felt very guilty, refusing to write these letters. We explored the matter a little more: Supervision is not action, but a method to empower clients to take destiny into their own hands. Why allow them to become dependent or passive? Politically speaking, not to write the letters, would help their clients to become more autonomous as individuals and teams in taking proper care of themselves. This argument convinced the training group not to act and the supervisors decided not to write any letters.

Not to act turned out to be a difficult challenge for this group of politically motivated people, because now their doubts became obvious: is it really worthwhile to work as supervisors, not getting involved, just reflecting and analyzing complex situations? Will this really be effective and produce results?

Training Course – No. 5

Different forms of intervention

There are different forms of intervention which become relevant to any group analytic supervision. Those frequently used are listed below. They were presented, explained

and discussed in the training. Afterwards, the group was divided into pairs and asked to work on at least five of these interventions looking into Guatemalan literature, films and songs, to find examples and discuss the effects these interventions had caused in this context.

- **To summarize**

Significant information will be emphasized. Less important information will be ignored.

For example, significant information is usually material that tends to suggest a potential solution of a problem, including precise questions and explanations concerning the emotional state of mind of the person involved. Less important information is trivial and has nothing to do with the case in question. Summarizing the information helps to structure the process of supervision.

- **To focus**

Within the material presented, priorities are pointed out by emphasizing or repeating and reinforcing certain aspects, thus drawing the attention to the core of the problem. This helps to steer the supervisory process.

- **To mirror**

To point out and repeat irritating formulations. This is a very effective way to draw the speaker's attention to the hidden meaning of his words that might have been mentioned unintentionally.

- **To support**

To understand and accept whatever is said. This helps to reduce anxiety and to create a friendly atmosphere.

- **To ask**

To clarify something, in order to understand more precisely a specific context.

- **To point to an issue**

To put into words a sensation or a hidden issue that can be felt, but not yet expressed verbally. This helps to promote an improved understanding of a problem.

- **To confront**

To point out blind spots. This helps to draw the attention to the unintentional effect of words and actions (it has an aggressive component).

- **To interpret**

To try to understand the unconscious message of a story or a plot, searching with utmost caution and very carefully for adequate words to express what might be the hidden issue. Interpretations are supposed to support the client in his effort to change perspectives, opening up new horizons of understanding. The aim of the interpretation is always to comprehend unconscious motivations and meanings.

- **To normalize**

To modify exaggerated demands thereby opening up new perspectives toward a more realistic approach.

- **To explain**

To offer professional knowledge, thus helping to promote the solution of problems.

- **To moderate**

To determine the direction of the process of supervision.

- **To examine and revise a working hypothesis**

To offer tentative interpretations of the problem that has to be examined, of the task that has to be elaborated and of the way the clients arrange their process of interaction and communication in the supervisory context. These tentative interpretations are the basis for any supervisory intervention. They should always be re-examined, varied or even discarded up, if additional material emerges that raises doubts or if the participants of the supervision reject the working hypothesis. This serves to reformulate the context of the problem.

Training Course – No. 6

Supervision and mediation – a tool of conflict resolution

Mediation is considered a very effective tool of conflict resolution. Considering the conflict burdened history and present state of Guatemalan society it was necessary to provide the participants with effective and powerful tools to deal with conflicts in their supervisions. First of all mediation was introduced and the five stages of the process were discussed:

STAGE 1: Opening statement

Purpose:

- Explain procedures and ground rules (structure, time, commitments, confidentiality)
- Discuss expectations
- Define roles and responsibilities

Techniques:

- Make contact with parties
- Balance communication
- Demonstrate competence and confidence

STAGE 2: Uninterrupted time

Purpose:

- Give each party equal opportunity to present from his/her point of view
- Mediator identifies key issues for discussion

Techniques:

- Listen for keywords, significant feelings
- Summarize
- Reformulate complaints

STAGE 3: The exchange

Purpose:

- Assist each party to understand how the other is affected by the situation
- Examine issues
- Identify underlying interests
- Move from positional statements to problem-solving

Techniques:

- Set agenda
- Paraphrase, mirror
- Translate, reframe, reformulate to open new perspectives
- Acknowledge to validate speaker
- Summarize to move process forward

STAGE 4: Building the agreement

Purpose:

- Develop options
 - Explore possibilities using objective criteria
- Techniques:**
- Offer support to develop creative options, fantasies are allowed
 - Moderate the process

STAGE 5: Writing the agreement

Purpose:

- Symbolic of shared commitment to resolution
- Memorializes specifics of agreement to reduce likelihood of future misunderstandings

Techniques:

- Support to verbalize the resolution

STAGE 6: Closing statement

Purpose:

- Acknowledge and reinforce efforts of parties
- Review results of mediation and follow-up procedures
- Formal closing on a positive note¹²

¹² The mediation process according to the San Diego Mediation Center.

While discussing this mediation scheme, it became clear that in many conflictual circumstances a more structured procedure is helpful, since this might help to maintain the composure of a supervisor and guide the group in trying to find a resolution to their disputes. For any supervision, Stage Two, uninterrupted time, and Stage Three, the exchange, are essential and might be deepened as well as extended to reach an understanding of the hidden issues.

For beginners, this mediation scheme is extremely helpful, because it offers more structure and orientation. Within the training group the participants were asked in small groups of three to apply this model to a conflict they had experienced either themselves or in their role as professionals and try to work it out according to this scheme. Later on results were presented to the entire training group. It turned out that this mediation approach was very helpful, especially when reviewing past conflicts they previously had tried to resolve, but at that time did not manage, since they simply did not have adequate tools at their disposal.

At the end of our training, the group was invited to watch a movie "Babette's Feast," which had been possible to acquire in a Spanish version, to enjoy images of a foreign culture: In a Danish village of fishermen in the 19th century, followers of an evangelical faith, encountered a female refugee from the revolutionary upheavals in France, who turned out to be a famous cook, spending her fortune to celebrate and share a luxurious meal with the villagers.

The film was treated like a turbulent case offering the opportunity to watch psychological processes and mechanisms in action as there were: suppressed desires and their negative social effects, seduction, anxieties, projections, regression, libidinous affects, shame, guilt and finally through a sumptuous feast and meal, the liberation of hidden and suppressed signs of love, and desire.

To enjoy a movie that was far from their own reality and be able to follow the plot and the process of interpretation with much empathy, showed how much the participants had gained through our training and how much they were capable of opening themselves to new perspectives, minimizing their anxieties, and developing at least some trust and confidence within themselves and within others.

Supervision Case

The supervision with the 160 employees of the social organisation prospered as well. All of them had resisted to writing letters on behalf of their teams. However, now, the teams seemed to have found ways to communicate their complaints to their superiors, and doing this in a way that their superiors were now able to listen to and even accept their critique. Things started to change:

- The cleaning women happily reported that there was not that much paper on the floors and that toilets were not that dirty any more.
- The group of the superiors reported that there were no more organized strikes in front of the building, but that employees would now come and talk to them.
- The employees received security trainings, enough toilet paper was supplied, as well as masks to avoid being infected, whilst working with dust and old documents.

- New hygienic standards were introduced as was a more transparent way of communication.
- Teams now said they felt like a family; supervisors learned there were parties on weekends and birthdays were celebrated within the institution.

Supervision worked, the culture within the institution had changed, there were fewer destructive conflicts, less sick-leaves and lower turnover and employees developed friendships and high standards of transparent communication with their superiors. There was more peace, trust and good working relationships developed as a result of the supervision. Therefore the director decided to extend the supervisory contract for one more year.

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