Reflecting on the facilitation of supervision
A single-session case study

Jacqualine McFarlane with Margaret Agee[1]

Abstract

This case study, narrated in the voice of the first author, describes a supervision session she facilitated with an experienced counsellor. It provides a rare window into the single-session supervisory process in action, and is also an illustrative example of an integrative and process-oriented approach to supervision. Underpinned by a rationale based on both literature and the author's own values and experience as a supervisor, the case study includes an introduction to the supervisee, the first author's assessment of her needs, and the implications of these for her role in, and facilitation of, the session. The supervisory process is described, analysed, and evaluated, including the intrapersonal processes of both the supervisor and her supervisee. The case study concludes with reflections on the supervisory process and a critique of its effectiveness in meeting the supervisee's needs.

Keywords

counselling supervision, case study, single session, integrative approach, supervisory process

How do we gain insight into the skills and processes involved in facilitating counselling supervision? Because of its essential nature in supporting our practice, it is imperative that not only supervisors but also all practitioners as supervisees understand the dynamics of the relationship and processes that contribute to effective supervision, in order to be empowered as participants. Supervision is multi-layered and the dynamics are often complex. While foundational knowledge can be gained from relevant theoretical and research-based literature about supervision, understanding and reflecting on how this translates into practice can present challenges. Our own personal experiences of supervision are our most common, and often our only, means of gaining an experiential understanding of the dynamics involved in counselling supervision.

However, personal experiences tend to be limited, and we may have little to measure them against. As well as experiencing effective supervision ourselves, training for supervisors has increasingly been recognised as important, incorporating the capacity for critical reflection and reflexivity (e.g., Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Page & Wosket, 2015, Watkins et al., 2019). A lack of published resources to support the education of supervisors is nevertheless a limiting factor. In addition, "although the supervision process (e.g. supervision stages) is a widely considered topic, supervision session process—the workings of each individual session—is comparatively a far less considered facet of the supervisor–supervisee interaction" (Watkins et al., 2019, p. 15).

Case studies that analyse the dynamics and approaches involved in the facilitation of supervision sessions can therefore make a valuable contribution to the education and development of supervisors, providing windows through which we can witness and critically reflect on aspects of supervisory processes in action. A case study can also serve as a tool that assists us to review our own practice, fostering reflection, insight, and reflexivity (McLeod, 2010).

This single-session case study is an illustrative example of an integrative approach to the facilitation of a supervision session, and the value of this in working with the complex dynamics that can occur in supervisory processes. As such, it serves as a "lived experience" of what is written about supervision. It also demonstrates the use of self-reflection and reflexivity on the part of a supervisor, and their contribution to the effectiveness of supervision.

In the case study (narrated now in Jacqualine's voice), I explore the rationale underlying my approach to supervision, my assessment of this supervisee's needs, and the implications of these for my role and facilitation of the session presented. In describing, analysing, and reflecting on this session, I have considered our interactive process as well as my facilitation of both the supervisee's and my own intrapersonal processes, when assessing the overall effectiveness of the session in meeting her needs.

The context of supervision

At the time when this session took place, my supervisee Barbara (a pseudonym) was a counsellor with nine years' experience in both agency settings and private practice. She had two supervisors: one was internally appointed by the agency where she worked part-time, and I was the other, her external supervisor to whom she brought her work with her private clients. We had met at a workshop two years previously where I had mentioned to her that I was considering undertaking supervisory training, and she expressed interest in engaging in supervision with me. We were similar in various ways, including age and ethnicity. Because our focus was Barbara's work with her private clients, there was no contractual involvement of any third party in our supervisory relationship.

A skilled and competent practitioner, Barbara nevertheless had moments of self-doubt, leading to anxiety about her competence, and occasionally causing her to lose her objectivity. As a reflective practitioner she was, however, able to explore the emotional content of her work and the implications for her practice. Our supervisory relationship was collaborative, providing a safe place for authenticity to thrive and inform our work together. Barbara gave informed consent to the recording and writing up of the session as a case study, and she has also consented to its publication.

My approach to supervision

Effective supervisory practice requires a supervisor to have a conceptual understanding or framework for supervision based on models that guide one's practice by providing "a mental map for ordering complex data and experiences" (Proctor, 2008, p. 7). In practical terms, models assist us to clarify "what is done in supervision, how it is done and why it is done" (Van Ooijen, 2013, p. 12).

My approach to supervision would best be described as integrative, in that I incorporate more than one model in my work. In recent years, "innovative approaches to supervision have evolved that take account of the growth in integrative and diverse counselling approaches evident since the 1980's" (Page & Wosket, 2015, p. 12). Rather than supervising within a particular theoretical model of counselling or psychotherapy, my practice aligns with the contrasting, more integrative approach that Page and Wosket (2015) have identified as commonly used in contemporary practice, guided by a framework that enables the facilitation of supervision process, regardless of a supervisee's orientation, in order to best meet the needs and dynamics that arise in each session.

Such a framework is Watkins et al.'s (2019) four-stage trans-theoretical Supervision Session Pyramid (SSP) model, developed as a supervision teaching tool. SSP is an integrated amalgamation primarily of the Reflective Learning Model for Supervision (Davys, 2001; Davys & Beddoe, 2010), the Seven-eyed Model of Supervision (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012), and Page and Wosket's (2015) Cyclical Model. These approaches have been influential in shaping my practice. The SSP model focuses on the process in supervision sessions, depicting four identifiable components in the process as a pyramid: Event/Issue Identification and Clarification; Exploration and Elaboration; Experimentation and Consolidation; and, Review and Resolution. Defined as four different processes, Watkins et al. (2019) identify them as "transcendent commonalities or broad-band conceptual organizers that generally define any and all supervision session experiences" (p. 17). They also acknowledge that: "Although conceptually separable and step-wide in operation, some practical intermingling between the four processes inevitably occurs in proceeding up the pyramid" (p. 17).

As reflected in the key component models in this framework, first and foremost it is essential that the supervisory environment is one of safety and trust, in order to establish and maintain an effective working alliance. As Hawkins and Shohet (2006) declared: "How we relate to our supervisors and supervisees is far more important than mere skills, for all techniques need to be embedded in a good relationship" (p. 221), and the quality of the relationship between counsellor and supervisor is widely acknowledged as the most influential determinant of the effectiveness of supervision (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Watkins et al., 2019). As a supervisor, I see my role as facilitative in building and maintaining a collaborative supervisory relationship that fosters safety for a supervisee, openness, learning, and growth.

Within this relationship, I seek to create a climate conducive to critical reflection, as well as promoting the exploration of personal responses, feelings, and concerns. Reflective practice considers reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action: conscious decisionmaking while "on the job," and analysis and evaluation after an experience (Schōn, 1987). Supervision addresses reflection *on* action, providing the foundation for reflection *in* action. [See, for example, Davys & Beddoe, 2010, and Carroll & Gilbert, 2011, pp. 92–127 regarding the significance of, and skills involved in, reflection in supervisory processes.]

A significant influence on my view of supervision and my role as supervisor has been Davys' (2001) Reflective Learning Model, based on Kolb's (1984) Adult Learning Cycle and the work of Schōn (1987). This model "promotes a way of thinking rather than a blueprint for doing," thereby positioning a supervisor as facilitator of "a learning process" (Davys & Beddoe, 2010, p. 88) in which reflection is at the heart. It also "assumes that supervision and learning are lifelong processes in which a practitioner engages from the beginning of formal training to retirement from practice" (p. 89), which accords with the values and policy of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors.

Conceptualising the role of a supervisor in this way is compatible with Hawkins and Shohet's (2012) Seven-eyed Model of Supervision, "which is both relational and systemic" (p. 86) and in which there are seven Modes or "eyes" of the supervision process identified as the possible focus of supervisory attention, as well as two interlocking matrices consisting of the client-supervisee matrix and the supervisee-supervisor matrix. Although "the task of the supervisory matrix is to pay attention to the supervisee-client matrix," it also involves looking "closely at what happens in both the relationship with the clients and what is happening within the supervisory relationship, and considers the interplay of both within the wider systemic contexts of clients, practitioners and supervisor" (p. 86).

Focusing on our supervisory relationship (Mode 5) as an area for exploration may involve working with parallel process, reflecting the dynamics between counsellor and client, and may also identify and address transference and counter-transference when they arise. These psychodynamic concepts are explicit in the Hawkins and Shohet (2012) model. [For a fuller explanation of this model, see Hawkins & Shohet, 2012, pp. 85–111.]

 In contrast, at times our process involves practical decisionmaking regarding identifying and planning to implement optimal interventions to meet the needs of a supervisee's clients. I therefore also draw on a solution-focused approach to supervision in which "significance is placed on creating solutions rather than focusing on problems" (Juhnke, 1996, p. 48).

The supervision session

Beginning the session and establishing the supervisee's needs

After greeting one another and a brief chat about Barbara's previous week's holiday, our process followed Davys' (2001) reflective model and, as we moved into clarifying Barbara's needs in terms of the focus and goal(s) for the session, the first component of the SSP pyramid (Watkins et al., 2019). In the first stage of Davys' cyclical model, an issue is identified, and the related story is retold. This *Retelling* assists in clarifying the goal for the session. Stage two involves *Exploration*. Davys reminds us that in this stage, the supervisor's role is to assist the supervisee to find a solution themselves, facilitating the exploration of the issue from different perspectives, and helping the supervisee to find new understandings and insights.

Davys divides stage two into two sub-stages, the first being *Impact*. Here the issue is explored in relation to its effects on the supervisee, exploring their feelings, actions, beliefs, and links to previous behaviours. The second sub-stage of exploration, *Implications*, assists a supervisee to conceptualise the issue, applying a cognitive framework. In doing so, a course of action can be decided upon and further new understandings can be applied to the issue. Stage three is *Experimentation*; this is the stage to test out whether ideas arrived at during the exploration phase are viable in practice, identifying limitations in the plan of action and strategies for implementation. Finally, in stage four, *Evaluation*, counsellor and supervisor consider whether the matters of concern have been addressed, identify any other issues arising, and review the learnings from the process. It is interesting to note that this model mirrors most of the basic skills models describing the counselling process.

Barbara explained that she was experiencing both despair and frustration with the client who was "bothering her" and whom she wanted to focus on in supervision that day. She described her client, Kay (a pseudonym), as very negative and refusing to see anything positive in her life, including an inability to acknowledge any positive changes she had made while in counselling. Barbara also noted that Kay had unresolved grief and trust issues. The possibility of a parallel process in the client-counsellor relationship came to mind, so I saw the need to explore this further, while also realising that this could deepen the supervisee's intrapersonal reflection to potentially enrich our work together. As Barbara talked about her feelings of "stuckness" with this client, it seemed she had gone to a place of self-doubt and anxiety about her competence as a counsellor—possibly a further indication of parallel process with the client's self-doubt. I was reminded of van Ooijen's (2003) assertion that stuckness can be "seen as valuable in that it offers an opportunity to pay attention to whatever it is that is causing it" (p. 238).

In relation to Barbara's self-doubt, I saw my role as both validating and affirming, while also one of holding, containment, and exploration regarding her strong feelings of frustration with her client. Containment is a concept and practice that I see as central to supervisory processes—the provision of a safe space in which practitioners can experience and explore their emotional responses to clients, often finding these responses a rich source of information (Hughes & Pengelly, 1997).

I noticed that as Barbara described her client she had slid down in her chair, looking dejected. In the moment, reflecting upon Barbara's body language could have been a valuable intervention, enabling her to engage with her feeling state. However, while making a mental note to explore this further I felt somewhat anxious, conscious of the videorecorder. I chose instead the "safe" option and stuck doggedly to the first stage of the reflective model, in clarifying the goal for the session. It is possible in hindsight that parallel process was at work here in the choices I made.

When I asked Barbara what she needed from supervision that day, she indicated that she wanted to talk through the process between herself and Kay, and, in her own words, "look at what is happening and not happening." She also indicated she would like to explore some further ideas and strategies for working with her client. I reflected back my understanding of what she was needing from supervision and Barbara confirmed that we were "on the same page," thus we would be working in Modes 2 and 3 of the Seven-eyed Model (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). She also identified another client and her desire to look at further ways of working with her; however, Kay was "on top" for her and had priority for the session. In line with Davys' (2001) model, we agreed we would explore her work with Kay then move on to the second *client in the remaining time available.*

The development of the supervisory session

Although her client had identified her goals for counselling, it was frustrating for Barbara that she would "side-track" whenever Barbara attempted to work with these agreed-upon goals. She would check in with Kay whenever that occurred, asking her "Is this what you want to work with today?" and Kay invariably answered "Yes." I noticed that as she was relaying her frustration, Barbara seemed quite agitated, leaning forward in her chair, and she exclaimed, "Then after a few sessions Kay got angry and blamed me, saying we've not done any work on blah, blah, blah!"

Sitting back in my chair, I noticed my feeling of "ouch!" I felt blamed and defensive, as if I had been attacked. As I became aware of my heart beating faster in this moment, I was reminded of Lia Zografou's (2008) description of using her "whole body to listen, observe and be present in front of her supervisee" (p. 164), suggesting that these cues derived from the body can be used as an effective instrument in supervision, providing much valuable information. I wondered again about the possibility of parallel process, the unconscious process by which the dynamics in supervision replicate those that have been/are occurring in a supervisee's work with clients. This is therefore "an important conceptual approach to supervision, as a perspective to consider when supervision dynamics seem inconsistent with what was expected" (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998, p. 64). Van Ooijen (2003) further suggested that parallel process in fact serves to bring into the supervision room "an unprocessed bit of the client, in the hope that supervision will help the 'digestion'" (p. 137).

Working in Mode 5, I therefore described my feelings to Barbara, who confirmed that this was how she felt when sitting with her client: "At times I cringe inside because she doesn't sugar coat it."

At this point I noticed I was feeling anxious, stuck, and inadequate as supervisor. In the interests of authenticity and further exploration of parallel process, I decided to disclose my anxiety about feeling stuck and inadequate for the task at hand. In response, Barbara became animated, replying: "That's amazing because that's exactly how I feel with Kay. I start to think I'm a hopeless counsellor!"

I sensed Barbara was feeling heard and understood, safe enough to express her feelings about this client fully. The space between us was serving as a container for Barbara to release safely the emotion that seemed to have built up like steam in a pressure cooker. She barely paused for breath before expressing her frustration about Kay's unshakeable attitude that "life is 110% bad, everything is bad, nothing is going to work, there is no way forward. I get so frustrated because she seems to want to stay in that place!"

At this point, I saw the need to explore the relationship and process between Barbara and her client (Mode 3, Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Barbara needed the safe place that supervision afforded her to articulate and explore her feelings and responses without fear of judgement. In terms of Davys' (2001) reflective model, our process was consistent with the Impact stage. Barbara went on to identify that Kay *was* in fact making changes in her life that *were* bringing her closer to achieving her goals, but that for some unfathomable reason she was not willing or able to acknowledge them. In response, I used what Heron (1975) would describe as a catalytic intervention. To this end I asked, "How do you see yourself in relation to Kay?"

Barbara then identified a parallel process occurring between them. Formica (2009) captured the essence of parallel process as he likened it to a therapist looking into a mirror of their own issues. He identified that when as therapists we find ourselves in that situation, we can use our own process to benefit our client. Parallel process can therefore be a powerful tool, a teacher, and a guide. I shared that view and was delighted when Barbara identified her parallel process with her client. Having identified this, she went on to say,
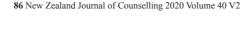
> I myself can get into that place easily lately, especially if I'm tired and at times get stuck in that "life is 110% bad." I will dig my toes in even more and get all the more determined to hang onto "my life is 110% bad." I get angry if anyone tries to talk me out of it.

Using Formica's (2009) notion of parallel process as a teacher, I used another catalytic intervention to encourage self-exploration of how it might be for Kay when Barbara attempted to change her own "110% bad" worldview:

J: What might happen if they [another person in her life] did?
(A long reflective silence.)

B: I have to be ready to move for myself.

J: How do you see that might relate to Kay?

B: Think I've been a little disrespectful, 'cos at times I've tried to jolly her out of it, then she gets angry and I get frustrated.

It may have been helpful to have explored more fully this further insight that Barbara gained into how her client might be experiencing their counselling relationship. However, I moved into a solution-focused mode (Juhnke, 1996), out of my anxiety regarding Barbara's concern about being in a stuck place with this client. On reflection in retrospect, I could recognise the influence of my own parallel process here, but in the moment, I sought to clarify her goals in working with Kay by asking a fast-forwarding question:

J: If you were to see yourself making a video of a session with Kay today, and then in your mind fast-forward to say, three months from now and see yourself recording another session, how might the two recordings be different? What would you like to see different?

B: Ummm…I think we would be talking again about her belief systems, making
    them that much more overt. Mmm…I guess we would be talking about her
    core beliefs and where they maybe came from…what are the life events/
    situations that have umm…I guess she has made some decisions about life,
    umm…I think we need to look at those, she would have an openness to
    explaining those issues, maybe finding alternative beliefs.

Barbara seemed to be thinking out loud, looking very contemplative as she reflected upon the
possibilities of the future session and how she would like it to be different from a present-day session.
I noticed that as she talked she had more energy, sitting more upright in her chair. I reflected her
identification of the shape the future session would take, and also affirmed her use of the word *again*,
because this was indeed where the work needed to happen for the client, just as Barbara had identified
earlier in the session:

J: So again, it's that identifying her beliefs, acknowledging them,
    unearthing them I guess. . .

B: Unearthing them, yeah. Although at times she is able to name the events or
    the situations where some of her beliefs have been formed. But…not really
    umm…not really…I dunno?

Barbara was able to see some of the movement her client had made, and I felt a sense of relief as
she discovered this because she had also reported in a previous session feeling stuck and "achieving
nothing" with this client. I picked up on what I intuited her "but not really…I dunno?" may have been
touching into. I believed she did intuitively know her client's process around her belief systems—she
just needed to explore and reflect a little more. Possible responses here to encourage further exploration
could have included echoing "but not really" or inviting her, "Tell me more about the 'not really'."
However, I offered my thoughts in the form of a question:

J: Is it like she is dancing around the edges, like she'll dip her toe in, then run back
    from the water's edge…ouch, this is too hard?

B: Too hard, too scary…hmm there's a lot of grief that she's going to have to face in
    the process of working through those beliefs.

J: So, in the process of unearthing those beliefs, there's going to come memories of
    painful experiences, grief and relationship losses.

As Barbara seemed to show a deeper understanding of how difficult and painful this process was
and would be in future for her client, I reflected back her acknowledgement while adding mention
of the grief and relationship losses the client had identified previously. However, some of Barbara's
impatience with the client underlaid her reply, and in response I reflected back an expression she had
used the previous session:

B: Yeah, and also the issues around trust, umm, actually realising that when people
    die, they don't make that decision to leave you, it's just what happens, so not
    trusting people because someone has died is sort of a bit…umm…

J: Wonky thinking?
    To which she replied:

B: Yeah, so if you have a belief like she does, that I can't trust anyone to be there
    for me, and that belief came because an important person in my life died…
    umm…and then it seems to have been reinforced by other important people
    dying, umm…none of these people have chosen to die just to leave her and yet it
    seems to be that that's how she perceives it.

Here I could have offered a further opportunity for her to explore her frustration more deeply by asking, "How do you see yourself in relation to Kay?" However, on hearing her reply, I noticed I was now feeling defensive on behalf of her client. Retrospectively, I could see that in this moment I had missed an opportunity for immediacy and transparency through further exploration of the dynamic between the supervisee and her client, and between the supervisee and myself. However, I remained focused on the supervisee's prior identification of the need for her client to explore her "core beliefs," while holding alongside that the client's pain and hesitation around that process. We were now working in Hawkins and Shohet's (2012) first Mode, and in terms of the SSP (Watkins et al., 2019), we were moving from Exploration and Elaboration to Consolidation.

> J: So, a lot of this is her interpretation of these painful life events forming her life script around them, so she needs to face into some painful memories to dig out and unearth those beliefs. Gosh, no wonder she's dipping her toes in and then running back.
>
> B: And it makes a whole lot of sense to me.
>
> J: Bit like going to the dentist, going to counselling, eh?!
>
> B: Yeah, why would you do it?! (Laughs)

In this exchange, the tone has changed as Barbara expresses empathy for her client, and the brief engagement with humour is a shared moment of light relief, although I was conscious of using humour to deflect my own feelings of stuckness and anxiety, rather than again taking an opportunity to explore the parallel process that was occurring. The humour could also have conveyed an element of challenge, based on frustration.

Moving back to the client's pain and difficulty in facing into her memories, and still drawing on the analogy of going to the dentist, I responded, "Yeah, this hurts…this hurts." In return, Barbara again identified her frustration as she brought it back into the space between us:

> B: Yeah, I guess I can see that she feels she needs to protect herself…umm I guess the frustration is at times that I can see what she wants to achieve and the only way I know for her to achieve that is to go through this stuff…and we've talked about that but she has just decided it's all too hard.
>
> J: Mmm…
>
> B: So, I guess it's constantly just going a little way into the pain, then backing off, going a little further, then backing off again.
>
> J: Like that "therapeutic window" we've talked about before, not overshooting, so as not to overwhelm Kay's internal capacity, as our friend John Briere would say. [see, for example, Briere, 1996] B: And umm constantly monitoring that because you know…that awareness of all the external stuff, the present day stuff that is happening, then her ability to "go there" is even less than if everything is say, ticking over quite nicely. So, you know it's just constantly watching that she isn't overwhelmed.

As I heard Barbara reminding herself of the client's need for careful pacing when engaging with this painful work, my own feelings of stuckness were lessening. I affirmed her understanding and sought to assist her in conceptualising this insight by reminding her of a seminar by John Briere which we had both attended and had talked about in a previous session. Barbara demonstrated her awareness of the "therapeutic window" and revealed her understanding of how she might work effectively with her client.

At this point, mindful of Barbara's early feelings of going nowhere with this client, I chose an affirming, supportive intervention in the form of a question, because I believed it would be more powerful for her if the answer came from her rather than from me.

J: I'm sitting here right now with a question on the tip of my tongue, and umm… hat question is: If you could give yourself some positive feedback around the work you've done with Kay so far, what might you say to yourself?

B: Oh wow, for one, I have hung on in there with her. I think that has been really, really important, because she has issues of trust, in that she has a belief that when the going gets tough, people abandon her…and umm…I have been careful not to give her more evidence of that, I guess. She has actually been quite hard work at times, she gets quite vocal when she gets angry, she can be full on…umm…I have been able to hold that…umm…allow her to vent and help her hold and contain her feelings. She sometimes has difficulty bringing herself back down.

J: So, you have modelled containment and stickability – "Look, hey, you can be angry, you can be sad, I won't leave you, I'm not going anywhere." That's huge Barbara, because it sounds like it's a new experience for Kay.

B: I'm pretty sure that it is—it's that process of building safety and trust I guess, umm, which I must have done or she wouldn't still keep coming and share at the level which she does at times.

I noticed the energy shift and rise in the space between us. Feelings of stuckness seemed to be falling further away. I reflected Barbara's realisation and acknowledgement of her good work and the progress she had indeed made with her client, reinforcing her self-affirmation. Barbara was able to recognise and acknowledge her success in building a therapeutic alliance with this client. There was an air of excitement in the room, a significant energy shift. Once again, I affirmed the work Barbara had identified for herself that she had done with her client. At this stage it seemed important for her not to lose sight of all that had been achieved so far, and her capabilities as a counsellor.

J: So, you have modelled what a trusting relationship can look like…something new for her…because as you say, she wouldn't keep coming every week.

B: Yeah, she comes every week…no mucking around…and she's even taken the risk at times of ringing between sessions saying I need to see you again during the week…quite pro-active, in that when times have been really difficult, she has actually asked for my support…that's relatively new…trusting the relationship enough to ask for what she needs.

J: Mmm…there's an even deeper level of trust.

B: Yeah, trust in that she knows I will be there, will listen, will hear and will support her but also with clear boundaries because I know she can be quite uncontained at times.

J: So again, you're modelling containment and boundary setting.

B: Yeah, I walk that line between "I won't abandon you, but I'm not available 100% of the time either."

A significant shift: Consolidating and applying the new learning

There was an air of celebration now as I saw Barbara owning her strengths as a counsellor and her work with this client. Her energy level was high, with no trace of the hopeless, despairing energy earlier in the session. She was "on a roll," excitedly discovering and articulating her fresh insights into the therapeutic alliance she had formed with her client, in face of barriers encountered along the way. I delighted in seeing her joy as she allowed herself to celebrate her work while she continued to identify other positive aspects of it. I reflected each of these areas as a supportive intervention, ensuring that she was hearing and taking in her celebratory realisations. Barbara had moved through her stuckness and was energised to move forward.

At this point I checked in with Barbara about the negative feelings she had expressed earlier about herself as a counsellor, given the way in which self-doubt can undermine a counsellor's whole practice. This needs to be addressed in supervision once a sufficiently high level of trust has been established in the supervisory relationship (Mearns, 1991). Barbara decided to engage in some positive self-talk during the coming week about doing a "good enough" job and wanted to reflect further on her self-talk. She would bring the results to our next session. She was then able to identify her good work teaching Kay about boundaries and about expressing anger, as well as teaching her emotional self-regulation skills.

I returned to a question about what a future "successful" session with her client might look like, in solution-focused mode. When Barbara had described this session, I asked: "I wonder how you might work towards that happening?" As Juhnke (1996) explained, "This response encourages the supervision to orient toward possible solutions and embeds the suggestion that the supervisee will begin behaviours that result in the desired goal" (p. 48).

Barbara anticipated that she might have difficulty enabling Kay to let go of her black-and-white thinking, so taking the role of naïve inquirer, I wondered whether it could be useful for her to identify what might be keeping Kay so attached to this way of thinking. I asked: "I wonder what might happen for Kay if she were to let go of her black-and-white thinking?"

My question led to a long, reflective silence; we sat together quietly, tarrying for a while in that place of not knowing, from which came a new insight. I was reminded of Shipton's (1997) affirmation of the ability of both supervisor and supervisee to sit comfortably together in this place of not knowing. Shipton concluded, "It is from this place that deep understanding and fresh insight can come, which in turn help the supervisor and supervisee to know" (p. 141). From this reflective time of sitting with *not knowing*, Barbara began to gain new insights into her client's world, realising that Kay used black-and-white thinking as a way of protecting herself. Continuing with a solution-focused approach, I asked, "Can you see a way forward now, knowing what you do?"

We were now located in the *experimentation* stage of Davys' (2001) reflective cycle, wherein we explored "where to from here?" To this end, Barbara's proposed course of action was to continue relationship and trust building, as she had a deeper understanding of how frightening the process was for her client, and acknowledged Kay's need to feel safe and held in their relationship before she could further explore her core beliefs. On a session-by-session basis, Barbara identified the need to check in with Kay about what might be happening for her when she "side-tracks." She also decided that as Kay identified her core beliefs, before moving on they would explore these together, and would challenge those that Kay decided were not useful in her life, replacing them with those that were more life-giving.

Bearing in mind her previously expressed self-doubt, I affirmed Barbara's ability to create a therapeutic alliance, a safe place for her clients. As her confidence in going forward with her client had been knocked by her sense of being blamed by Kay for her perceived slow progress, I wondered whether Barbara needed anything from me to assist her in implementing her plans for ways of moving forward with her client. When I put this to her, she responded:

> I think exactly what we have just done is what I needed. I needed to be able to talk about the places in me Kay taps into, like my own black and white thinking. I can go into that 110% bad place myself at times, like the world is a terrible place. It's good being able to talk that through with you because sometimes I can't see the wood for the trees, and I know you don't judge me or write me off as a hopeless counsellor when I get stuck. This time at supervision helps me recognise my own process, then I can help Kay do the same.

As I listened to Barbara summarising what she had gleaned from the session that day and what she had to take away with her, I noticed in myself a warm feeling of satisfaction, and of pride in Barbara and her willingness to engage in introspection to the benefit of her clients. She went on to add that if she pointed out what she saw as Kay's core beliefs, Kay would "deny they are there. She needs to uncover them for herself, kinda like I uncover stuff here in supervision."

Significantly, at this point I noticed the dynamic of what Doehrman (1976) referred to as "reverse parallelism" occurring. Doehrman observed that behaviours from a counselling relationship may duplicate themselves *in the supervisory relationship but also asserted that this dynamic could occur in reverse—that is, from supervision back into the counselling relationship. Barbara also identified this reverse parallelism in operation.*

The concluding stages

As we moved further through the session, towards the Review and Resolution phase (Watkins et al., 2019) I again affirmed Barbara for the work she was doing in modelling boundary setting and a healthy, appropriately caring relationship for Kay. She seemed to take this in, as she acknowledged that she was doing "a good enough job." We shared a few light-hearted moments, joking about how boring life would be if we were all perfect. I quipped: "So let's dispense with perfection and go with good enough!" To my delight, from this place of humour came fresh insight. Barbara replied:

> For Kay to be able to see I don't have to be 100% good or 100% bad, that I am "good enough," maybe then I am giving her the experience of being with someone who is "good enough." Hopefully this will lead to her re-examining her black and white thinking wherein she thinks that if someone isn't 100% good then they must be 100% bad. I think I have given Kay an idea of what "good enough" might look like.

I affirmed Barbara's insight and she looked thoughtful and reflective, then paralleling her desire to practise immediacy in her sessions with her client, she said: "I hope as time goes on, we can talk about what's happening between us during the session, right in the moment."

In fact, I had found immediacy to be a powerful illuminator of my supervisory relationship with Barbara, when used with an attitude of compassionate inquiry. I believed in this regard that Barbara would be modelling in the counselling relationship what she experienced in supervision over time, another example of reverse parallelism.

I then reflected the "reverse parallelism" process that was already occurring in the counselling:

> You're also working with the notion that what goes on in client relationships outside of counselling gets re-enacted in the counselling room. In Kay's relationship with you she gets to experience a different kind of relationship, a healthy one.

From working on developing an affirming perspective on her work with Kay, Barbara realised that she had become bogged down in thinking of all that she *hadn't* done in her work with her client. She was not seeing how far they *had* indeed come in their journey together in this counselling relationship. Again, Barbara identified the parallel process dynamics, in that Kay seemed also unable to recognise how far she had come in her counselling.

Aware that we had approximately 10 minutes of session time remaining, I checked whether Barbara had all she needed from the supervision session with regard to her work with Kay, and if there were any pressing matters regarding the other client she had mentioned at the start of the session. As there was no urgency about the latter, we contracted to focus on this during our next session together.

Reviewing the session

In closing, we were in the fourth and final stage of Davys' (2001) Reflective Learning in Supervision Cycle and the final component also of the SSP (Watkins et al., 2019), evaluating whether, and how well, the matters that were the focus of the session had been addressed, and reviewing the learnings. I asked Barbara how she would summarise what she was taking away from our time together that day. Her response reminded me how well we worked together, and how we could trust the process as a result of having built a safe and authentic relationship. As I reflected on how effective I had been as a supervisor in meeting her needs, I found Barbara's summary went some way towards answering that question. She said: "When I first started talking about Kay today, I felt like I was walking in tar. Now I can lift my feet and walk forward with her much more freely."

I noticed that I had felt that way also, very heavy in my body and stuck, whereas by the end of the session I felt much lighter. Barbara reported feeling affirmed and recognised she was doing *good enough* work with Kay, dispensing with the notion of perfection. She could see a way forward, in contrast to the stuckness that she had been experiencing, and described herself as feeling recharged, in that when she had walked in my office door, she had felt "like a walking flat battery." She also reported having discovered renewed trust in the process with Kay.

She felt less need to strive and force the process, also commenting, "No more beating up on myself." Barbara concluded her summary by saying:

> I have taken from today hope in my work with Kay and I believe in myself as a counsellor more than I did when I first walked in here. I now have a "where to from here" in my mind and I don't feel so stuck any more.

At the time of writing this case study, Barbara had undertaken four more sessions with Kay, during which they had worked together to identify and challenge several of Kay's core beliefs and life scripts. They had explored those that were not serving her well, and worked on developing alternative, positive beliefs. She reported that their relationship had become more transparent, with immediacy more evident, and Barbara thought this was creating a deeper level of trust between them.

Conclusion

In reviewing this session, I was reminded of both my supervisory strengths and weaknesses. I had been dismayed on noticing that my anxiety levels rose when I felt stuck myself and not sure where to go next. I needed to remember van Ooijen's (2003, 2013) contention that stuckness could be seen as an opportunity for exploration. It is also noteworthy that stuckness appears as a theme in exemplars of supervisory questions and interventions provided by Watkins et al. (2019), suggesting that this is a common experience.

After recording the session, I read further on this concept and noticed that, rather than quiet panic, my anxiety decreased while my curiosity increased to explore further. As Mason (1993) observed, staying in a place of certainty enables one to avoid the anxiety of not knowing, when all the while, not knowing is a useful therapeutic response. In addition, he maintained that *safe certainty* is found in solutions. Alternatively, safe *un*certainty, being comfortable with not knowing, opens the door to more creativity. This offers a helpful way of approaching feeling stuck.

On reflection, there were times in this session when it may have been helpful to have explored more fully Barbara's relationship with her client, whereas due to my anxiety, I chose not to. I do, however, engage both my head and my heart in my work, bringing genuineness and an attitude of compassionate enquiry to my supervisory relationships— Barbara has frequently commented on how safe she feels to "just be warts and all" in supervision. This case study illustrates those benefits as well as the process of creating a safe space to reflect and explore in supervision, wherein feelings and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal dynamics and experiences are valued as rich sources of information.

This case study presents a "lived experience" of the complex interaction of interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics that can occur in supervision and is written about in the literature. The description, rationale for, and analysis of the supervisory process in which these dynamics occur can enhance readers' understanding of both supervisory processes and of phenomena, such as parallel process, in action. This illustrative example of integrative, process-oriented supervision practice reveals the use and utility of the models that were drawn from and incorporated, contributing a range of understandings, strategies, and skills that enriched the supervisory process. Lastly, this case study exemplifies consistent, honest, and thoughtful internal processing, critique, and self-reflection on the part of a supervisor, an essential element at the heart of truly effective supervision practice.

Michael Carroll's (2001) words capture the essence of the rich and potentially life-changing nature of supervision:

> Is it possible that a supervisory attitude, viewing supervision as a reflective process that allows participants to think deeply and vulnerably about life and values, work and career, relationship and connections, might make an immense difference in how participants live? (p. 194)

Endnote

1. This article is based on a single-session supervision case study that was written by the first author, Jacqui McFarlane, in a counselling supervision course for experienced supervisors at the University of Auckland. While encouraged to publish it, and determined to do so, Jacqui has experienced increasingly difficult limitations associated with ill health. Margaret Agee has therefore assisted her in developing this article.
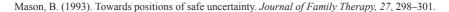
References

Bernard, J., & Goodyear, R. (1998). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision.* Allyn & Bacon.

Carroll, M. (2001). *Counselling supervision: Theory, skills and practice.* Cassell.

Carroll, M., & Gilbert, M. C. (2011). *On being a supervisee: Creating learning partnerships* (2nd ed.). PsychOz Publications.

Davys, A. (2001). A reflective learning process for supervision. In L. Beddoe & J. Worrall (Eds.), Supervision: From rhetoric to reality (pp. 87–98). Auckland College of Education.

Davys, A., & Beddoe, L. (2010). *Best practice in professional supervision: A guide for the helping professions.* Jessica Kingsley.

Doehrman, M. J. (1976). Parallel processes in supervision and psychotherapy. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, 40, 9–104.

Formica, M. (2009, January 7). The me in you: Parallel processes in psychotherapy. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/nz/blog/enlightened-living/200901/the-me-in-you-parallel-process-in-psychotherapy

Hawkins, P., & McMahon, A. (2020). *Supervision in the helping professions* (5th ed.). Open University Press.

Hawkins, P., & Shohet, R. (2006). *Supervision in the helping professions* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.

Hawkins, P., & Shohet, R. (2012). *Supervision in the helping professions* (4th ed.). Open University Press.

Heron, J. (1975). *Six category intervention analysis*. University of Surrey.

Hughes, L., & Pengelly, P. (1997). *Staff supervision in a turbulent environment: Managing process and task in frontline services*. Jessica Kingsley.

Juhnke, G. A. (1996). Solution-focused supervision: Promoting supervisee skills and confidence through successful solutions. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 36*(1), 48–57.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Prentice Hall.

Mason, B. (1993). Towards positions of safe uncertainty. *Journal of Family Therapy, 27*, 298–301.

McLeod, J. (2010). *Case study research in counselling and psychotherapy.* Sage.

Mearns, B. (1991). On being a supervisor. In W. Dryden & B. Thorne (Eds.), Training and supervision for counselling in action (pp. 116–128). Sage.

Page, S., & Wosket, V. (2015). *Supervising the counsellor: A cyclical model* (2nd ed.). Brunner-Routledge.

Proctor, B. (2008). *Group supervision: A guide to creative practice* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Schōn, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Jossey-Bass.

Shipton, G. (Ed.). (1997). *Supervision of psychotherapy and counselling: Making a space to think.* Open University Press.

Van Ooijen, E. (2003). *Clinical supervision made easy: The 3-step method.* Churchill Livingstone.

Van Ooijen, E. (2013). *Clinical supervision made easy: The 3-step method* (2nd ed.). Churchill Livingstone.

Watkins, C. E., Callahan, J. L., & Vîşcu, L. (2019). The common process of supervision process: The Supervision Session Pyramid as a teaching tool in the beginning supervision seminar. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 50*, 15–20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-019-09436

Zografou, L. (2008). The passion for change: A life story. In R. Shohet (Ed.), *Passionate supervision* (pp. 152–169). Jessica Kingsley.