LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Margaret Pack

Dear Mary and Kieran

Congratulations on drawing out the theme of leadership and supervision for your first issue of Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review as editors. I can see the value in future issues drawing out a theme so that there is a wider space to reflect and respond to key issues in social work practice in Aotearoa.

This issue has triggered some reflection for me on what makes for a 'good' supervisory relationship from my own experience. I offer these reflections to the readership in the hope that this may spur an ongoing reflection to continue this theme. Articulating themes from practice provides another level of understanding where new and reformulated frameworks for practice emerge.

In the mid 1990s, I found it illuminating attending a supervision training course within a transactional analysis framework in which the supervisee's 'adult' is affirmed so there is an explicitly negotiated process within each supervision session. In training to become a clinical supervisor myself I realised that I had never been taught how to use supervision, so it had remained in my mind associated with the experience of being managed. This perspective meant that the supervisory process always felt just outside my grasp and it appeared to me to be non-negotiable. The TAPES model of supervision I became acquainted with as a clinical supervisor empowered the supervisee to drive the process of supervision by beginning each session with an agenda setting and negotiation around the supervisee's needs in the present moment. The supervisory relationship, established in this way is less grounded in guilt and shame for the supervisee due to the open discussion of the role of supervisee and supervisor, with the resulting process being more transparent.

If the supervision relationship follows a parallel process to that between the client and social worker, and if the supervisor provides a 'blank screen' to avoid a sharing of her humanity with the supervisee, the same themes can be mirrored in the therapeutic relationship. Conversely, if the supervisor either self discloses too much or often or intrudes upon the supervisee's self by offering personal therapy without explicitly negotiating any contract for this, a boundary violation occurs.

One of the advantages of negotiated or interactive models of clinical supervision is that the supervisee is empowered to ask and is expected to have met an agreed contractual relationship for supervision. This understanding is renegotiated with the supervisor at the start of each supervisory session with an agenda constructed out of a 'what's on top' discussion with the supervisee. The relationship, thus established, is less grounded in guilt and shame provoking field conditions as the underlying power dynamics, roles and responsibilities are made transparent and explicit at the point of contracting, the understanding of which is revisited at the start of each session. This 'interactive' or 'negotiated' approach enables the supervisee to express more freely feelings and responses as the focus is on the dynam-

ics of interaction between client and social worker, and defines the supervisor/supervisee relationship as a co-created field.

In managerial approaches based in apprenticeship models of supervision, the supervisee's person and actions tend to be the primary concern of supervision with the potential for shame, blame and narcissistic wounding for the supervisee. However, 'negotiated' or agreed models whilst fine in theory, often fall down in practice and this is where some shared understanding is needed about the nature of the process and relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. Without this shared paradigm, there is not a climate of trust and faith established to encourage the supervisee to enter unknown or what I have referred in previous research as 'liminal zones' of becoming (Pack, 2004, 2007). This is where it is helpful to be supervised within the tradition of one's own training or area of interest though this is an area that has not been researched widely from a supervisee's perspective (Clarkson, 1995).

This gap in research on the supervisee's perspective of the usefulness of sharing the same theoretical background as their supervisor has led to my thinking about 'the dialogic relationship' (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995) applied to the supervisory process. In addition to sharing theoretical frames of reference, reflection is only possible when the 'liminal' or holding space of the supervisory relationship is available, which most usefully occurs as an 'adult-to-adult' contact and is conceptualised as a way of being. I understand that this quality of relationship is discussed by Sue Hannah (2001) 'Not So Strange!' and in another context by Michael Dale and Andrew Trlin (2002) in leadership within the probationary service.

The 'dialogic' or 'I-Thou' quality of the supervisory relationship provides the safe place that is recognised by Gestalt psychotherapists as providing the community across different professional and ethnic cultures (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995). This space speaks to the deeper, existential truths about being human. This shared understanding about the quality of relationship means that the supervisory relationship can encompass and attend to the cultivation of the dialogic relationship explicitly and the supervisor and supervisee can work from an evolving understanding of what this 'I-Thou' relationship means to each person. Together supervisee and supervisor can decide how to bring this attitude of 'I-Thou' to the process supervision, using a shared frame of reference, a tolerance of paradox and complexity, grounded in existential concepts of being.

There needs to be a clear mutual understanding and explicit boundary about the interface between supervision and personal therapy to avoid unintended intrusions of privacy and shaming. In training and fieldwork supervision where academic assessment is required, this function also needs to be made explicit and open for ongoing discussion and debate. Safety of the supervisee and client, the boundaries of confidentiality and privacy also need to be part of the dialogue and understanding about the purpose of supervision. Such mutual understanding is critical yet usually untested until the welfare of the supervisee and/or client is compromised.

In summary, and on reflection after reading the Spring issue of ANZASW's Journal, I believe there are a number of conditions necessary for supervision to be successful for the supervisee. There needs to be an attitude of hope held by the supervisor for the supervisee's practice, and for the supervisee's way of being in the world and an attitude of 'optimistic perseverance' (Mederios and Prochaska, 1988). These factors need to be present and avail-

able. Supervision requires a tolerance of paradox, complexity and the unknown where 're-moralisation' (Frank, 2002) can occur in situations where demoralisation may have taken place. The holding space that supervision offers is akin to the therapeutic impasse or 'creative void' where there is 'the danger of symbolic death'[and] 'the perils and promise of rebirth' (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, p57). Faith, and a softening of boundaries is necessary within this holding space 'as the individual gives up his or her self image in order to contact his or her emergent sense of self' (Ibid, p57).

If the supervisor can provide this liminal space and has the capacity to model the holding of faith and trust necessary for the dialogic relationship to be there, the supervisee's capacity for empathy and use of the whole self with clients is enhanced. The practice of the dialogic relationship in supervision is trusting in becoming. This is the challenge for the dialogical process that the supervisory relationship can be.

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