

Diana Goss Professional Paper 2014

Using My Power as a CPE Supervisor

Ian Bayliss

Abstract

A critique of the use of my power as a CPE supervisor utilizing two recent papers on supervision from other disciplines.

Recently I have become increasingly aware of the importance of my use of power as a supervisor of CPE. Although, as CPE supervisors, we may all feel powerless at some point in a programme, as seen from the perspective of students we have an immense amount of power because of our roles. So it is important to have particular sensitivity to this dimension of CPE supervision.

I intend to critique my current supervisory practice with the assistance of two recent papers on supervision, but will begin with three quotes that I have valued over the years:

We are given power, but the call from God to live justly tempers our need to affirm ourselves alone by asking us at the same time to affirm our neighbours.¹

We are creatures whose love is continually straying into power and whose power is occasionally transfigured by love.²

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be so brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. You playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just within us, it's in everyone. As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.³

Maori cultural protocols offer us a lead in to the first paper I am critiquing, as we journey from threat, through exchange to love as we get to know people. This process is enacted in Maori practices that I have experienced, where *manuhere* (strangers) approach the *marae* (meeting house) as visitors and enter into an elaborate exchange of rituals until the *tangatawhenua* (people of the land) are relaxed enough to welcome them into their home.

There are even appropriate things to be discussed at certain points in the encounter. Out on the land in front of the meeting house old grievances can be brought into the open. But once through the door into the meeting house, the interchange is typically much softer and more like a family gathering, as people relax with each other.

The parallel to CPE is the discussion at the start of the course about course expectations. In the Maori context, the question is "Why are you here?" In CPE the question raised by the supervisor is, "What do you want to learn? It is in this space that the student and supervisor resume the journey into learning which started when the student wrote their Application Papers. As the learning contract between supervisor and student is entered into, the journey deepens as student and supervisor start to share 'the food of learning.'

I always try to begin my courses with some acknowledgment of the local Maori presence in the region. I do this not just simply to assist Maori students to feel more at home in the group but also to state the importance of context in learning. Students come from different contexts and may offer ministry in contexts other than their own. Both these factors mould expectations and assumptions which are important to recognise especially in regard to the power we carry as pastoral carers. Students for example, need to understand how it feels for a patient when they enter their hospital cubicle. So as a Pakeha (European New Zealander) I find it helpful to be in a context other than my own to remind me how some students may feel in my mental health context, in the presence of a psychotherapist, or simply with someone who is different.

Another gain from acknowledging Maori presence in my New Zealand context is the wider picture of why some people feel marginalised in the dominant Pakeha culture. Why do some Maori call the chaplain "boss?" Why is it important to Maori to begin each formal occasion with prayer? These power-related questions are "in the room" right from the start.

¹ Paul Tillich, "The Courage to Be" 1952

² Rollo May, "Man's Search for Meaning" 1953

³ Quoted by Nelson Mandela from "A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course of Miracles" by Marianne Williamson, Harper Collins, 1992, pages 190-191.

First Paper

The first paper I plan to critique is written by Catherine Nye⁴ and is entitled, *Dependence and Independence in Clinical Supervision: an application of Vygotsky's Developmental Learning Theory*. This also addresses the question of context in supervision. Interestingly Vygotsky was writing from a Russian context in the Stalinist regime; (his work was suppressed in 1936). Along with other Russian psychologists of the time, he believed that human consciousness was constructed by social institutions. In order to change human behaviour and experience, the social environment must change, hence the need for revolution.

What follows from this for Vygotsky, is that the individual's developmental journey went from social interaction to internal interaction e.g. I learn to speak with others, then I learn to speak *within* myself. It is reassuring that his theories, which were developed within a totally different social/political context to my own, are very close to the theories of Heinz Kohut⁵ the founder of the Self-Psychology psychotherapy movement and Russell Meares⁶ co-founder of the Conversation Model of psychotherapy. These two both posited that we develop our individual sense of self through a process of the internalisation of our social contexts. To me this highlights the deep significance of the contextual background within which we both teach and practice pastoral care. They are powerful forces in the ways in which we interact with others.

I typically take a block of three full time days to start the Extended CPE Courses that I lead. This fosters an early development of trust. It is also important to get the students working quickly so they get an early sense of the style of pastoral care I hope they will learn. Along with exercises designed to help people to introduce themselves to each other, including sharing their beginning learning goals, I ensure that they have some idea of what it's like to write and present a verbatim report. By these means, I try to support the learning endeavour by pushing back at anxiety.

But it doesn't always work according to my plan. Occasionally a student may report that they are feeling "unsafe" at a point in this process. Then I need to pause to enquire what they need to happen in order to help them feel safe. Once addressed, we happily proceed. This makes the point that establishing trust is a very individual matter and has a time line of its own.

Vygotsky emphasised the importance of adequate "scaffolding" for the process of human development. We need to be 'held' to grow. He actually posited that it was the way in which human internalization occurs⁷. I was intrigued to hear recently a talk by the late Sir Colin Davis, a long time conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra⁸. He used the same word "scaffold" to describe how he conducted. He was a professional clarinettist before he became a conductor, so he knew that the musicians knew their craft. All they really needed from the conductor was a structure in order for them to play their best.

I think that the same can be said for CPE students. What they already know needs to be acknowledged and built on for them to improve their pastoral competence. The supervisor's job is to value their prior knowledge, help them identify gaps in their competence and assist them to develop more effective ways of relating pastorally.

Colin Davis also said that the conductor doesn't need to "beat the baton all the time." I take from this that our educative function is more effective for students, when we can spot the seminal learning moments for each student and offer supervisory input at that point.

Especially at mid-course evaluations, students who may have relaxed into the warm and supportive learning environment and utilizing the verbatim reporting process well, can still find old memories of bad examination experiences or domination of various sorts becoming negative transferences. So here the supervisor must pick up the baton and enquire what the student needs in order to offer their evaluation. Sometimes this can be an important learning moment: that a person can successfully ask people with power for what they need.

The supervisor's own anxiety at mid-course can also make it a bit harder to assess students' anxiety and also to become less able to adjust the process to meet students' needs.

Before leaving the theme of scaffolding, it's necessary to state the obvious: that the concept underlines the need for the supervisor to always be alert as to how much scaffolding the group *needs* in order function and grow in pastoral competence. Along with the need to offer enough scaffolding, it is important to both state and model the process of dismantling it so that the students can increasingly learn to evaluate their own and other students' work. It is one of the abiding pleasures of my supervisory role to notice students doing this as the course proceeds. As conductor of the orchestra, I hardly wave my baton at all!

⁴ Catherine Nye, *The Clinical Supervisor*, Vol. 26 (1/2) 2007 Howarth Press

⁵ Heinz Kohut principally in "The Restoration of the Self" 2009

⁶ Russell Meares principally in "The Metaphor of Play" 2005

⁷ Catherine Nye *ibid*, page 93

⁸ Sir Colin Davis, Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, Sky Arts Channel program 20/5/13.

Another key concept in Vygotsky's understanding of human development was what he called "the zone of proximal development."⁹ This is the space between what a child/student can accomplish for themselves and what facilitation they need from a parent/supervisor. As supervisors we try to be alert to student 'learning moments.' For me, this is formalised in the Learning Goals set at the start of the course but it is also addressed when each verbatim is presented: e.g. Question 7. What learning issues were raised for you? Any course goals met?

It is also important for us supervisors to have our own course goals as there always issues that the process raises that we need to reflect on within our own supervisory relationships.

My concluding comments on Vygotsky's model, is gratitude for his provocative restating of the role of the supervisor in CPE from another context. I especially valued the way he encouraged us to keep students inhabiting that place of optimal learning. He also reminded us of the fact that we all need to be "lifetime learners." This helps me push back against feelings of shame by trying to keep myself in that place of optimal learning too.

Second Paper

The second paper that I have found helpful to reflect on in relation to my use of power in clinical supervision is "**On Psychoanalytical Supervision**" by Thomas H. Ogden¹⁰. He begins by writing that the Psychoanalytic Movement pioneered by Freud, has generated both the analytic relationship and the analytical supervisory relationship. It is on the latter that I will focus my attention because it is through this relationship that psychoanalytic knowledge is passed on from one generation of therapists to another. It also has lots of parallels with the supervisory relationships that we utilize to pass on pastoral skills from one generation of pastoral carers to another.

One concept that I have enjoyed in my work as a supervisor is what he calls "guided dreaming." It is the posture of sitting with a supervisee and wondering together at a particular point of pastoral need "what if?" It is a shoulder to shoulder wondering. Someone once said that in order for a person to try something new, some significant other has to believe that they can do it. We see this repeatedly as children check back to their parents to have them watch and applaud new achievements. As supervisors, we hold this belief in our students that hopefully and increasingly they will grow to believe it for themselves and hold it for others too.

One fruit of "guided dreaming"¹¹ is a shared ability to generate metaphors. I find that a very facilitative question in supervision is, "What's it like?" It helps the supervisee see and *feel* the nature of a new challenge before it is encountered. In this way they are likely to be more accurate and empathetic about what might work in new pastoral situations. Most of us carry a caution about sharing our innermost beliefs. Students quite often get stuck here in their pastoral practice too. In supervision we can practice dreaming up pictures of what a parishioner/patient is facing, in order to be more '*feeling near*' and more in tune with what they need from their beliefs. Here, I encourage students to ask the empathetic question, e.g. "What's it like to face this or that?" to be told, "It's like walking off a cliff!" So the theme of trust/fear is in the room and available for exploration.

These methods to access deeper feelings and beliefs can only go as far as the supervisee themselves is prepared to go. The sticking place may well be within themselves as an "undreamed dream." Here the parallel process is in evidence between supervisee and parishioner/patient. Both may be stuck at the same point. It raises the question of when does supervision become therapy? My position on this is that we may facilitate students to some degree into 'dreaming the undreamed dream' but only in as much as it promotes better pastoral care. This too is another area where our supervisory power needs to be held with care.

So it is important for the supervisor to be very clear about whom they are "hearing about" in the session, the parishioner/patient or the student? This resonates helpfully with another comment that Ogden made. He wrote:

*... the unconscious level of the therapeutic (pastoral relationship) is not simply brought to the supervisory relationship in the form of the supervisee's spoken account of their work... rather it is brought to life in the unconscious and preconscious dimensions of the supervisory relationship itself.*¹²

This is where the Freud's pioneering discovery of the transference dimension of relationships, augmented by my own training in psychotherapy, has been very helpful in understanding some of the origins and texture of the power dimension in my supervisory relationships.

I find it most helpful to think of the supervisory relationship as a *co-transference* dynamic, something we make together and need ideally, to understand together. It is also important for me to remember that the supervisory relationship is not a static thing but hopefully evolves during the course.

Kohut's formulation of the nature of transferences¹³ best describes for me the ideal progression in a CPE course. He talks of **idealising** transferences where the student first looks up to the supervisor as the source of all knowledge in

⁹ Catherine Nye *ibid*, page 90

¹⁰ Thomas H. Ogden "**On Psychoanalytical Supervision**" *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*; 2005, Vol. 86, pp 1265-80

¹¹ Ogden *ibid* pages, 1269ff

¹² Ogden *ibid* page, 1268

pastoral matters, through **mirroring** relationships, where the supervisees need is to receive lots of encouragement as they try to offer pastoral care in new ways, through to a **twinning** relationship where they achieve a measure of peer-ship with the supervisor. Other writers have named additional transference dynamics including 'merger', 'adversarial' and 'erotic' ones.

As I work more with supervisors-in-training, this dimension of the work has become increasingly useful to me. Sometimes we may have significant 'histories' with students (including students-in training) and they with us. We need to be courageous enough to make course goals to address such transference issues and invite our students to do the same. The dream is that these destructive transferences will slowly be understood, dismantled and replaced with more positive ones as we work towards peership in ministry.

A final comment that I have valued from Ogden's paper is his stressing of the importance of "The Supervisory Frame."¹⁴ This at first glance might sound like the "scaffolding" concept discussed above, but its focus is less on "holding" the students in a supportive way than providing a boundary to the course process within which the group can safely "play."¹⁵ I believe that we forget how rare it is to be offered a space to play and try new things, with a supervisor who is committed to keeping us safe and wanting the very best for us. Here is a place where acceptance is offered, an effort to understand is made and encouragement abounds. No wonder so many of our students take the opportunity to grow in pastoral competence!

Summary

So to summarise: in my paper I have critiqued some aspects of my current supervisory practice with the assistance of two recent papers from other 'helping' disciplines. I focussed especially on the way in which my supervisory power is utilized to promote student learning. I have particularly valued Vygotsky's themes of context, scaffolding and zone of proximal development. They have highlighted for me, particular course moments (primarily structural) where power issues need to be carefully managed.

Thomas Ogden's themes too of shared dreaming, the undreamed dream and the supervisory frame, similarly have highlighted moments for me where in the deeper levels of the supervisory relationship, themes of supervisory power similarly need to be exercised with care. I especially valued his comments about the journey towards peership.

¹³ Heinz Kohut, described in "**The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders**", 2009 University of Chicago press Chicago

¹⁴ Ogden *ibid*, page 1269ff

¹⁵ Ogden *ibid*, pages 1272ff