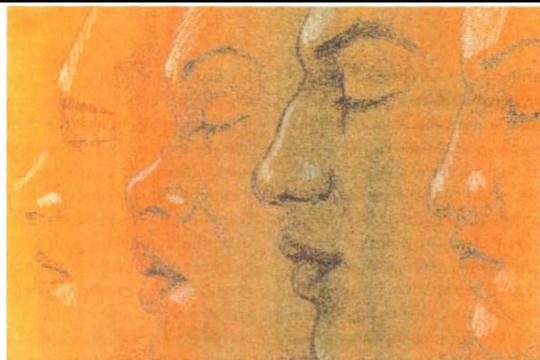


The 'soul' of the supervisory relationship is felt by many supervisees to be as important as its 'body'. Here four writers give their views on the place of the transpersonal in supervision



LISA ZADOR (PHOTO) DDC GRIE

# transpersonal in supervision

## Suzanne Dennis and John O'Reilly

At first sight supervision seems an unlikely place to find the transpersonal. The charts and diagrams that describe the models and skills of supervision, the check lists of competencies, sobering discussions on the use of authority, clinical responsibility and abuse of power, seem to indicate there is little room for soul or spirituality.

Indeed, John Rowan recently reviewed a large volume called *The Handbook of Psychotherapy Supervision*.<sup>1</sup> He writes, 'Nowhere in the book is there any mention of transpersonal supervision.' He notes, 'It seems remarkable to me... that there are such ignorant and such closed minds on the supervisory scene.'

Why might it be important to include the transpersonal in supervision? Some recent research<sup>2</sup> asked supervisees what competencies they looked for in a supervisor. Briefly, the researchers asked supervisees to select and write about a significant supervision experience. When these accounts were analysed the researchers concluded that the soul of the supervisory relationships is as important as its body. Various

transpersonal, dynamic qualities such as 'insight', 'creativity' and 'integrity' were just as important as 'sound theory', 'listening', 'support', and 'diverse knowledge'.

## Psychosynthesis

Psychosynthesis, one of the longstanding transpersonal psychologies has much to offer here. First, what do we mean by the transpersonal? For us, the human psyche includes the spiritual as well as the primitive unconscious. The spiritual unconscious is where our sense of purpose and our potential lie. If we repress the spiritual unconscious it can cause suffering and prevent growth and individuation, just as much as when we are unaware of the primitive unconscious. Life offers us obstacles and challenges and we are each on an unfolding path. In supervision we hold this global context.

We find that in supervision's rather secularised culture we have to work hard at giving the transpersonal a voice or otherwise it remains hidden. To stress this when we look at the useful process model of supervision called the 'seven-eyed model of supervision' that Hawkins and Shohet<sup>3</sup> devised, we add an eighth all-encompassing,

transpersonal 'eye' which circles all the other seven eyes or foci of supervision. When we look through this lens it can bring illumination as well as revolutionary new ideas to the therapeutic work.

The meta-perspective of transpersonal supervision is that it is a form of retreat, where supervisees come to communicate with their inner voice, images and symbols, not only to uncover the meaningfulness of the countertransference but also the subtlety of the latent potential of the spiritual unconscious. The supervisor provides the space for retreat, the holding for the retreat and the transpersonal context for the retreat.<sup>4</sup>

## Transpersonal presence

Our presence, therapeutic intent and our way of being are important ingredients of a dynamic supervisory process. Whatever our theoretical framework, and whether we are with trainee, developing or experienced supervisees, while we hold authority it is important not to place the supervisee under psychic or actual pressure for specific outcomes. However much we know, we must be able to let go; we must be involved but not attached to our

preconceptions of what ought to occur. This enables us to be reflective.

Michael Carroll, in his recent thinking about supervision<sup>5</sup>, has emphasised the importance of a reflective attitude, where both supervisor and supervisee are open to learning. He recently wrote about how values and spirituality are necessary. He urges us to 'test your supervisor to see how much humour and poking of fun about beliefs, slogans and dogmas is permissible'. He also writes, 'before

supervisor is supported by spiritual practice, such as meditation or creative visualisation. Spiritual practice is not prescribed; the point is that it is the practice of mindfulness that gives us the transpersonal perspective.

Whether in spiritual practice or not, it is important to recognise, as John Rowan<sup>6</sup> points out, that in order to work at this level, 'it is essential to have had some experience of what Wilber calls the subtle level of psychospiritual

the experiential exercise needs considered reflection and interpretation by the supervisory dyad or group. At best these techniques bring tremendous insight and empathy, at worst they release energy to loosen up the interactive field in the supervisory and therapeutic systems.

These experiential methods allow the supervisee to access a transpersonal context for the work. The transpersonal perspective is not a substitute for psychodynamic or

each supervision session check the batteries on your "supervisor bullshit detector" to make sure it's in good working order! Humour and humility are qualities of transpersonal presence.

Psychosynthesis identifies four key areas crucial to evoking the transpersonal in supervision.

Firstly, we hold a transpersonal perspective on the condition of human suffering rather than rigidly adhering to a particular psychotherapeutic doctrine. For example, clients have their own narrative and in the countertransference the supervisee may collude with this, perpetuating a cycle of self-defeat rather than self-actualisation.

Secondly, at the heart of supervision is connectedness. Transpersonal supervision contains and holds the client, partly via the supervisor modelling empathy and demonstrating respect, **which** the supervisee internalises. These introjects cascade down into the therapeutic relationship mirroring the essential qualities of the connection between the personal and spiritual self. And then the possibility of grounded insight, healing, growth, and individuation start to emerge.

Thirdly, the perspective and open presence of the psychosynthesis

development.' If not, talk of achieving non-attachment to outcome, or boundaries dissolving between self and other, becomes confusing.

Lastly, psychosynthesis supervision offers creative methods conducive to the transpersonal, which allow the supervisory couple or group to transcend the strictures of the cognitive mind. Guided imagery can dissolve a seemingly otherwise insoluble therapeutic block; the supervisee identifies and dialogues with an internal image or symbol representing the block, gaining insight and resolution. Creative visualisation is a method that is particularly useful when the therapy has come to an impasse; it can identify transference-countertransference dynamics and projective identification.

Another effective way of evoking the transpersonal is chair-work, borrowed from gestalt, or as systemic therapy calls it 'Interviewing the Internalised Other'. The principle being, that with which we 'identify' can allow us to own our projections, and reintegrate them. The supervisor guides the supervisee to identify with the client's soul or shadow. Through this dialogue the work shifts into a new and creative paradigm.

Obviously what emerges from

psychological work but complements it, illuminating, and enlivening supervision. ■

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