

'You kind of pull back the layers': The experience of inter-professional supervision with educational psychologists

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Aim: *The aim of this study was to add depth and enhance our insight of the lived experience of the less-explored area of inter-professional supervision with Educational Psychologists (EPs). It was the intention to enrich our understanding of these 'human-to-human' experiences and consider the process of supervision in more depth, thereby exploring the value of EPs offering supervision services.*

Method: *Seven Family Support Key Workers (FSKWs) who had engaged in supervision with EPs over a period of 10–15 years took part in the study. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to ask about their experiences, and the transcriptions were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).*

Findings: *Five overarching themes were identified. Supervisees experienced a safe relationship with the EPs and took the opportunity for the deeper exploration of the self. They also experienced supervision as a learning space and had the choice of whether to engage in supervision. The findings also describe movements and changes in these experiences over time.*

Limitations: *The potential of positive bias, the selection process used to recruit participants and the medium of language as the main tool for accessing the supervisees' experience, all limit the transferability of the findings of this study.*

Conclusions: *Each of the themes is considered in light of existing literature. The importance of establishing a foundational relationship to create space for the deeper exploration of the self to support learning and development is emphasised. The value of EPs offering supervision is elucidated.*

Keywords: *Supervision; inter-professional; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; educational psychology*

Introduction

THE GUIDELINES produced by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) define supervision in the context of Educational Psychologists (EPs) as 'a psychological process that enables a focus on personal and professional development and that offers a confidential and reflective space to consider one's work and responses to it' (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010, p.7). The guidelines highlight the value of EPs supervising other professional groups. In a national online survey by Dunsmuir et al. (2015), it was found that 28.6 per cent of EPs reported supervising other professionals who work with children and young people, and over half of the EPs who responded to the

survey reported that they used the Hawkins and Shohet's (2012) seven-eyed model for supervision.

Supervision in the local context

The EP service in which this research took place recognises a separation of managerial and professional supervision in line with the DECP guidelines and has a policy which recognises different functions and processes of supervision. A supervision strategy group, led by a Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist, oversees supervision policy and practice in the service.

The EPs who offer supervision complete a two-day service-based course that is offered every two years and is a formal part of their

induction. This is grounded in Hawkins and Shohet's (2012) work, and in particular, in the seven-eyed model that brings to the fore the seven systems within which a supervisory dyad functions. The training also draws upon principles from the solution-focused approach (Knight, 2004), Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 2002, 2003) and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Dryden & David, 2008). Supervisors are required to attend periodic refresher training. In addition, twice yearly group supervision for supervisors is facilitated by a Senior Specialist EP. It is expected that a contract is drawn up at the beginning of a supervisory relationship and periodically reviewed, and the service provides a contract template, addressing practical issues such as timings and contact.

Family Support Key Workers

The Family Support Key Workers (FSKWs) at a local government authority in England contribute to a programme that supports preschool children with significant and severe needs and their families. Pre-school specialist teachers lead the home-based programme of advice and support, which may include the involvement of a FSKW and includes a series of visits and parent workshops. FSKWs in this context are para-professionals without particular qualification requirements. Their work is supervised by the pre-school specialist teacher allocated to the case through weekly group meetings.

Inter-professional supervision with EPs was first established around the year 2000 with FSKWs as it was recognised that the intensity of their work with families and the complex nature of the child's difficulties place demands on the FSKWs. Supervision every six weeks for an hour is believed to offer FSKWs the opportunity to explore and reflect on their work. All FSKWs are directly contacted by an EP and offered the choice of whether to take up supervision. The EPs supervising FSKWs may change as a result of leaving the organisation or in order to offer other EPs the opportunity to be supervisors. The service conducts annual evaluations

of the supervision EPs offer, using a survey where positive feedback has been received (Ayres et al., 2015).

Educational psychologists supervising other professionals

A systematic literature search guided by the question 'What do we know about Educational Psychologists supervising other professionals?' was conducted using the following search terms: 'Educational Psycholog*', 'School Psycholog*' and 'School Counsel*' in the following databases: 'PsycINFO', 'Education Source', 'Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC)', 'PsycArticles', 'Psychology' and 'Behavioral Sciences Collection', 'The PEP Archive' and 'SocINDEX with FullText' (see appendices for further details). Seven relevant studies and four theses were identified following a refined search with the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria and the use of The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2014) (Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Callicott, 2011; Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013; Dunsmuir et al., 2015; Garwood, 2012; Hulusi & Maggs, 2015; Madeley, 2014; Maxwell, 2015; Osborne & Burton, 2014; Soni, 2010, 2013, 2015). Most published studies thus far have been based on group supervision arrangements. It is recognised that there are notable differences between group and individual supervision (e.g. Osborne & Burton, 2014; Rawlings & Cowell, 2015) and concluded that even just very few sessions of group supervision is perceived to have a number of benefits outweighing negative outcomes. Direct causal outcomes of the impact of supervision on service users and specific elements of the processes are recognised as being particularly hard to determine, attribute and measure due to a number of intervening variables, ambiguous definitions and multiple hypotheses (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Smythe et al. remind us that the

'Lived experience' is often overshadowed by theories, structures, models, knowledge and standards ...

Complex, intuitive, embodied ways of 'being' are reduced to something that can be pinned down, followed, and evaluated. Here then comes the risk of silencing the spirit that breathes soul into human-to-human experience. (Smythe et al., 2009, pp.17–18)

Dunsmuir et al. (2015) and Ayres et al. (2015) suggest that an important issue to address is determining the evidence of impact of professional supervision, which presents a similar challenge to measuring the impact of EP consultations. Callicott and Leadbetter (2013) also proposed that research should be aimed at making localised improvements in supervision, bridging the gap between academic research and practice.

Aim

The aim of this study was to enhance our insight of the lived experience of the less-explored area of inter-professional supervision with EPs, namely individual supervision over an extended period of time. It was the intention to go beyond the descriptive, interpreting the descriptions of the participants' 'human-to-human' (Smythe et al., 2009, p.18) experiences in order to enrich our understanding and consider the process and experience of supervision in more depth. This in turn creates the potential to generate further research into processes and mechanisms, informing EP practice.

Research questions

The above aim was conveyed through the following primary research question: What are the experiences of FSKWs engaging in supervision with EPs? In addition, the following four questions narrow down the focus of this study:

1. How is this supervisory relationship experienced by FSKWs?
2. How is this perceived to differ from the other types of supervision FSKWs receive within the team?

3. What influence is this perceived to have in relation to FSKWs' personal and professional development?
4. What impact do FSKWs perceive this to have on their practice?

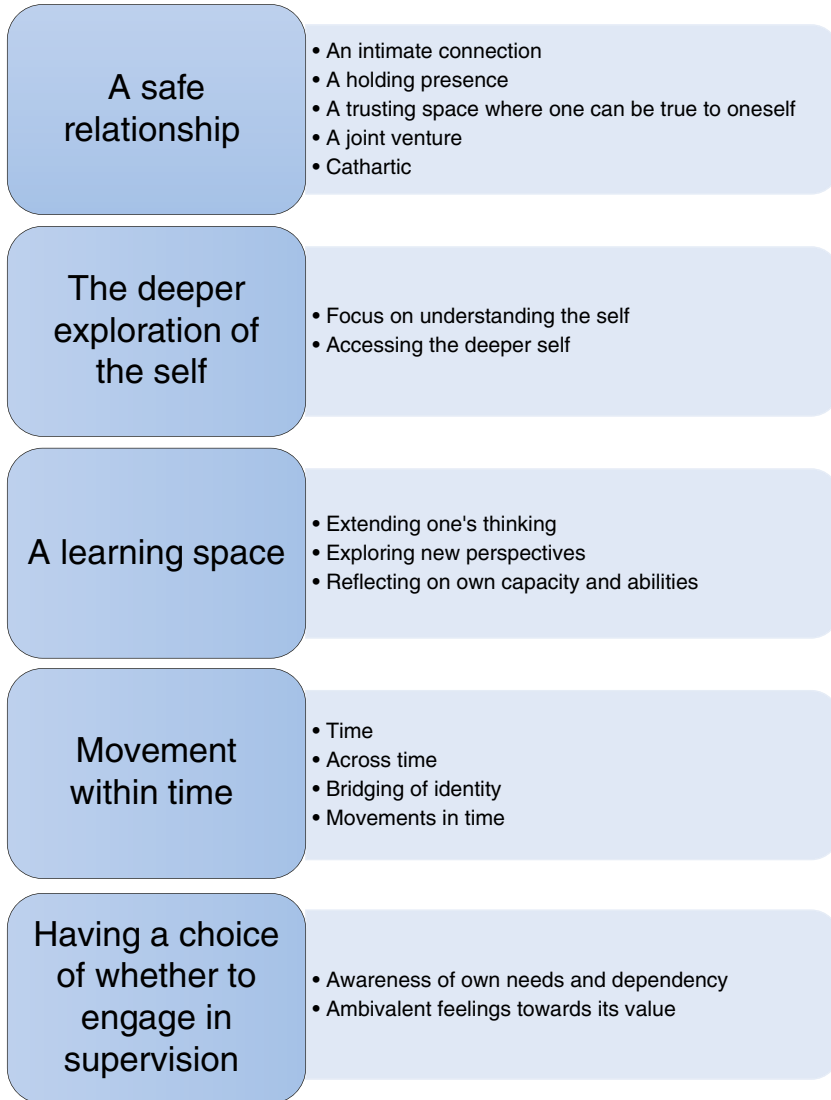
Method

As inter-professional supervision in this context involves relationships between two people and multiple variables outside that relationship, the relativist ontological and epistemological position of constructivism was adopted. This position considers that there are as many realities as there are participants, including the recognition of the interactive co-constructing role of the researcher (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Robson, 2011).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used as it seeks to capture the richness of each participant's experience through interpretation and commits to the texture and depth of the individual experience, each person's meaning making (Smith et al., 2009). IPA has been informed by the following three key underpinning philosophical concepts: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). IPA endeavours to enable the experience to be expressed in its own terms, to 'go back to the things themselves' (Husserl, 2001, p.168), rather than be limited to predefined ideas (Smith et al., 2009). It is designed to describe a rich and comprehensive understanding of the texture and quality of a phenomenon (Willig, 2013). Ethical approval was sought and given by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust ethical committee.

FSKWs who had the longest experiences of supervision were selected. Eight EPs were supervising 21 FSKWs in total. Three of the EPs were male, five were female and all the FSKWs were female. EPs' knowledge of the longevity and structure of the supervision with the FSKWs was sought through the use of a data capture form. Seven FSKWs with the longest experiences of supervision were selected; they had experienced supervision in the range between two and four EP supervisors, each over a total period ranging

Figure 1: Overarching themes with corresponding super-ordinate themes.



between 10 and 15 years. In sum, this study represents the experiences of approximately 500 sessions of inter-professional supervision. Being an exploratory study, the authors were interested in rich, detailed accounts of experiences and chose interviews as the means of accessing such accounts. The interviewer adopted Dahlberg et al.'s (2007) proposed motto of 'less is more' and the idea of 'bridling' during interviews to allow for the phenomena to present themselves. All

interviews were conducted by the first author in a quiet room and recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed by the first author.

After the interviews were completed, a second data capture form was sent to all eight EPs who currently supervise FSKWs to collect contextual information around their supervision, intended to 'contextualise the interview material' (Smith et al., 2009, p.73). Smith et al.'s (2009) six steps were used to guide the analysis: (1) reading and

re-reading; (2) initial noting of exploratory comments plus deconstruction; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections across emergent themes; (5) moving to the next case; and (6) looking for patterns across cases. This process enabled the author to get ‘experience close’ and move cyclically between the part and the whole, emphasising both commonality and divergence within and across participants.

The supervisors

In addition to the supervision training the service offers, some EPs had experience in receiving or providing supervision for several years through their role, doctoral training or previous employment. Other models and psychological underpinnings reported to be used in a second data capture form included the CLEAR model (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012), Person Centred Psychology (Rogers, 1957), Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 2002, 2003), Psychodynamic theory, Psychoanalytic theory, Solution Focused approaches (Knight, 2004), Solution Oriented approaches (Rees, 2008), consultative questioning techniques, active listening skills, accessible dialogue, positioning theory and systemic thinking. Whilst all the EPs had the same supervision training in the EP services, it is possible that the different psychological underpinnings they use may have affected the homogeneity of the supervision on offer.

The experiences of the supervisees

Five overarching themes were identified: (1) a safe relationship; (2) the deeper exploration of the self; (3) a learning space; (4) movement within time; and (5) a choice of whether to engage in supervision. These are

presented in Figure 1 and elaborated upon, using pseudonyms for participants.

A safe relationship

For the FSKWs, the supervisory relationship offers an intimate connection with an EP who is able to provide a trusting space where they can reveal their true selves. It can tolerate a catharsis and offers a protective holding presence that is gradually established through a joint endeavour. Barbara experiences qualities different to those from within her team and are important for meeting her needs. She uses the space to reveal and offload things on her terms that are ‘simmering away’, enabling a sense of release and to ensure that she is protecting herself in her role:

‘... I could have gone to my line manager, but I dunno, [EP]’s more, I dunno, I felt [EP] listened more and could support me in that more ...’

Trust is an essential aspect in Christine’s experience of supervision where there is no risk of ‘judgement or recrimination or it getting back to anybody’ permitting her to drop her guards and give more of herself in supervision:

‘... things can be left unsaid, and actually [EP] would know ... intuitively because [EP] knew me, ... [...] ... it was an incredible experience actually, to be in a situation where I could, I could just be, myself and say anything ...’

Christine’s experience of the presence of supervision is also highlighted below:

A safe relationship

- An intimate connection
- A holding presence
- A trusting space where one can be true to oneself
- A joint venture
- Cathartic

‘... I feel it’s very, um, live with me all the time, it’s not just an hour, that’s it, it’s in my diary, I come, I go, it’s very potent, actually for me ...’

Daphne needs to feel that the EP supervisor can hold whatever was to come ‘flooding out’. This trust is fragile initially and can take time to establish:

‘... it’s knowing, do you feel confident enough that, if that comes out, that you can, that can be managed in that situation ...’

Francesca experiences a nervousness and delicacy around this trust that is shaken up with each change of supervisor, but once established, she uses the metaphor of a ‘net’. In order to get to the place where Georgia feels she can be authentic to her true self, a mutual understanding needs to be negotiated. Georgia experiences this as an ongoing and explicit negotiation achieved through partnership and joint exploration, where a joint vision and understanding of what they hope to achieve in order to reach that more comfortable place:

‘... it was just laid out in the very beginning that we, so we both had a clear understanding of, one what supervision was, but actually ... what ours was going, going to, to look like, and that actually, we could negotiate that at any point, if either of us needed to ...’

The deeper exploration of the self

Supervision with an EP offers the unique opportunity for supervisees to be the focus of the relationship, offering a space for accessing and exploring their deeper selves. Christine emphasises the importance of the uninterrupted and personalised space where she feels heard and focuses on what is important to her, as she sums up ‘it is all about me’, and:

‘... it was very much, um, me discovering about ... [...] ... what was important to me as a practitioner.’

Georgia experiences supervision that offers something deeper and beyond the team’s capacity:

‘... [the team] can help deal with the practical sides of things, but actually, they are there to help support you with the, the rest of it ...’

Daphne experiences supervision as an opportunity to ‘pull back the layers’, to go beneath the surface and access and explore what she calls ‘the nitty gritty’ where the ‘depth of kind of conversations you might have’ enhance over the years.

Francesca experiences a resistance and is averse to raising things that are too revealing:

‘... I just feel that if you start talking about certain things it just digs a deeper hole and you’re probably gonna need a whole day and months of ... [laughs] ... and I suppose maybe it is a fear of being judged ...’

The deeper exploration of the self

- Focus on understanding the self
- Accessing the deeper self

Eleni values supervisors only when they share a theory or approach in a way that is ‘relevant and to do with’ what is being spoken about. When supervisors are intuitive to what she is in need of at that time, this authenticity and focus on what matters to her, it encourages a sense of feeling valued:

‘I would say that a facilitator needs to be maybe intuitive to, to bring that out of you, but to not be, um, talking as much as if it’s about them, it’s there to facilitate you, to bring you out.’

The issues Eleni explores reach beyond the capacity of her team and are particularly hard to talk about. This includes the tolerance of the difficult feelings that arise from confrontational or challenging situations, children with life limiting illnesses, and in particular the death of a child she was working with.

A learning space

Supervision with an EP offers a space where new ideas and perspectives are introduced and considered in relation to what is being brought. It also offers an increased awareness and confidence in supervisees’ strengths and capacities they already hold and recognition of potential areas they could build on.

Barbara’s expression ‘food for thought’ encapsulates two aspects of learning that supervision offers. ‘Food’ encompasses the new ideas and new perspectives that are not only introduced, but also sought after, experimented with, held on to and further processed later. This enables her to consider alternative actions in her role:

‘So, you know, I might come out of supervision and think, ah ok, I hadn’t thought about that and, you know, I’ll be playing things over in my mind and might think when I go back in to see that family, ok I’m gonna take a different, dunno, turn on this, or I’m gonna try this, or I’m gonna step back a bit ...’

‘For thought’ encapsulates where Barbara’s thinking is extended, taken further through the facilitation or ‘pointers’ offered from the EPs. She therefore furthers her understanding of herself and the emotional impact the work has on her, recognising her own developmental journey and nurturing her own competence and confidence.

Christine uses many words that reflect she learns to perceive aspects of her work differently such as ‘many a light bulb moments’. This changes how she relates to and empathises with those she works with. Daphne also experiences supervision extending her capacity to think about and understand others and her relationships with them:

‘... I think you know the, the more you kind of know about yourself, the more you know about other people, um, and why you know, people do what they do and that kind of thing and how they respond to you, the easier it is to form a relationship and to get a kind of working partnership and things going ...’

Eleni expects the supervisors to take on a nurturing role where their facilitation is pitched at the right level for her:

A learning space

- Extending one’s thinking
- Exploring new perspectives
- Reflecting on own capacity and abilities

‘... they don’t do a lot of speaking, but yet somehow can ... kind of drip-feed-come-guide you to sort of draw out what it is you’re wanting to say, trying to say, um whether it is you want to brainstorm that idea ...’

Eleni’s self-awareness increases in learning to deal with and manage confrontational situations and being left to ‘work on those areas of grey’ building her confidence and self-belief in her abilities and the transferable skills she can apply to her role, thus empowering her.

Georgia seeks a reframe from supervision that enables her to ‘completely flip how I was looking at something’ through the way the questions are put to her that enables her to break out from a cycle of thinking. It also contributes significantly to Georgia’s resilience in managing feelings and strength in tolerating situations such as those of not knowing.

Movement within time

Supervision with an EP over an extended period takes on a significant role in the bridging of Eleni’s identity over time following a major illness and recovery where she had to re-learn some fundamental skills. Her supervisory relationship with this EP played an important role in bridging the person she was who the EP knew before this event with the person she is now; her past and present identities:

‘... because of how long I’ve known [EP] is that [EP], reminds me of different things that I knew, and because part of what I had, you do, you do forget certain things, but, [EP]’s done that during our supervision, reminded

me, well you used to do that, and remember this and remember that, and that’s allowed me to go over a lot of things ...’

Georgia experiences movement within an academic year, that of a cyclical annual pattern, where supervision is a punctuation point, an opportunity to look back and revisit things ‘again and again’, as well as looking ahead and planning for the future. Supervision therefore provides a space for reflecting and processing of the past as well as preparation for the future.

For Barbara, time makes a significant contribution in changing how she views supervision, from a more critical stance to a more supportive stance. This demonstrates the role of supervision with an EP in supporting her on her developmental journey.

Having a choice of whether to engage in supervision

A tension is experienced around the perceived value of supervision with an EP that lies alongside an awareness of one’s own needs and dependency towards it. This arises over time, both within sessions and is particularly enhanced during times of a change in supervisor.

Angela seems to fluctuate in her awareness of her perceived reliance on supervision, on one hand perceiving it as a way of ensuring her ability to stay afloat during more difficult times, and on the other hand, questioning this dependency and recognising that she has other support systems she could make use of.

Francesca experiences ambivalent feelings towards the value of supervision and

Movement within time

- Time
- Across time
- Bridging of identity
- Movements in time

Having a choice of whether to engage in supervision

- Awareness of own needs and dependency
- Ambivalent feelings towards its value

considers ‘pulling’ out of supervision at times of changing supervisor. Whilst recognising her own need for it, Francesca needs time to adjust, settle and trust the new person so as to continue to hold it as a positive experience.

Daphne recollects a less-positive experience of supervision with an EP. This involved a supervisor who sometimes didn’t keep to arranged meetings, leaving her with a sense of regret for taking the risk. This played a big part in rocking the boat of whether she can trust the supervisory relationship again:

‘... I just thought, ooh, I don’t know, if I can be bothered with it, I don’t, I don’t need [emphasises ‘need’] that, I didn’t want something that was going to be like that, and so I think I became a bit kind of, ambivalent towards it ...’

Georgia experiences a certainty in her value of supervision and its significant contribution to her role, ‘it is, a massive part in actually, in what we do’. Yet new doubt challenges her value of it following a recent change of supervisor after having the same supervisor for many years:

‘... it’s very different at the moment, it’s not quite holding the same value as it did, but I’m persevering with it, because obviously, you’ve got to build that relationship before, before you can make those judgements really.’

When Georgia’s stress increases in her role, she experiences supervision to protect the

relationships of those she works with. With an awareness of her dependency comes a fear of losing this space, to the point that the idea becomes unbearable:

‘... I would be absolutely devastated [laughs] if they ever, pulled it from us ... [...] ... I can’t imagine, there’d be uproar here ... [...] ... it wouldn’t happen ...’

Discussion

A safe relationship was the element that seemed to dominate the experience of supervision with an EP for the participants. This concurs with trainee EPs’ experiences of supervision as ‘a safe space for authentic learning’ being the most important factor in Gibbs et al. (2016). This is also in line with Davys and Beddoe’s (2010) overview of supervision where the supervisory relationship is perceived as the medium through which any function of supervision is achieved and is key to any process and outcome (Scaife et al., 2008). This experience relates closely to the Rogers’ (1957) concept of unconditional positive regard where as one accepts themselves, they can then become more accepting of the world (Wilkins, 2000). This has the potential of having a profound impact on the empathy and relatedness supervisees have with the clients they work with, in likeness to Wilkins’ (2000) ‘agape’.

Supervision can play a key role in serving the primary aim of ‘containing’ (Bion, 1962; Music, 2010), bearing and metabolising a supervisee’s anxiety in relation to their work, whilst prioritising their well-being in order for the supervisee to contain the client’s anxieties (Howard, 2007). If painful

or distressful emotions can be repeatedly accepted, understood and 'detoxified' (Bibby, 2010) by another without becoming overwhelmed, one then has the capacity to be reflective and thoughtful, in turn producing new combinations of meaning, which then allows for intellectual and emotional growth and development (Bibby, 2010; Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999). By connecting with this learning experience, the supervisor can 'set an example of maintaining curiosity in the face of chaos, love of truth in the face of terror of the unknown, and hope in the face of despair' (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999, p.60).

The developmental function of supervision that the theme of the learning space encapsulates could be viewed through Freud's concept of maturity, one's ability to work and to love (Waddell, 2002), as opposed to simply acquiring knowledge. This learning therefore includes that of acquiring greater empathy and understanding of the people FSKWs work with, and in turn moving closer themselves towards being able to demonstrate unconditional positive regard.

Supervision with an EP was experienced as a space for the hardest things, for example for dealing with confrontation and the prospect and reality of death. There is therefore a space to explore parts of the self that are not usually readily accessible, yet has an impact on one's personal development and is intertwined with professional development.

Participants became more acutely aware of their dependency on how supervision was meeting their needs during stressful times or when it was at threat with a change in supervisor. There seemed to be a tension between trying to meet those needs as they repeatedly reviewed their judgement about the value of supervision. Falender and Shafranske (2012) argue for the adoption of greater accountability through the use of a competency-based framework for supervision practice, enabling a more collaborative alliance which reduces ambiguity. This may make it easier for supervisees to make a value judgement and consequently a choice.

Participants experienced communicating their needs and contracting an agreement as a joint process. By supervisees taking a proactive role in contracting, a sense of mutuality, agency and joint responsibility is encouraged. When practitioners know what they want, then they are in the best position to negotiate an alliance which delivers what is needed (Davys & Beddoe, 2010).

Scope for further research

This study has explored only the experiences of supervisees engaging in supervision with EPs and therefore there is scope to further explore supervisory dyads in more depth from the perspectives of both parties. There is also scope for research that maps across developmental stages of the supervisory relationship through a longitudinal study that punctuates the relationship over the years as it develops and changes.

Implications for EP

The findings suggest that in similar contexts, when embarking on a supervisory relationship, EPs need to consider how they demonstrate their capacity to contribute to the establishment of a safe relationship.

EPs need to appreciate that supervision can offer not only session-by-session but also long-term continuity and the opportunity to review, revisit and build on the learning and discovery that take place, influencing the personal and professional identity and development of supervisees.

The experiences of participants make it clear that the quality of the supervisory relationship is key to it being valued. This relationship will lay the foundation for a learning space. If the relationship is safe and trustworthy enough, the hardest things can be thought about, things that are beyond the capacity of the day-to-day workings of a team, and demand a space that is removed from this, yet understanding of it.

The findings further suggest that EPs need to recognise that supervisees experience a tension between taking the risk of entering a supervisory relationship and

having their needs met. A value judgement will be made and so the more involved and explicit both parties are in contracting, agreeing and regularly reviewing how they will work together, the more likely the relationship will offer a valuable journey that creates the space for both to grow as individuals, personally and professionally.

EPs need to be aware that various power imbalances in the relationship can influence the communication making it difficult for supervisees to initiate contracting and reviewing processes, so EPs hold more responsibility in ensuring that this becomes a routine practice so that it can be expected from supervisees.

Implications for EP services

This study demonstrated that the EP supervision is highly valued by the FSKWs; therefore, it is important for services to support EPs in ensuring they have a secure understanding of supervision, the power of it and the sensitivity needed to be able to make a valuable contribution so it will benefit a supervisee. Inter-professional supervision makes a contribution to building and growing relationships between teams of professionals working with young people and their families. In the context of multi-agency working, services could consider what teams of professionals are in proximity and could benefit from supervision.

Smythe et al. (2009) caution against a tendency to rely on formal structures and evidence-based practice for supervisory practice and, as a result, feel more certain in one's practice. They believe that 'the real mark of excellence can only come when we allow ourselves to become lost in the unfolding of each unique moment of a supervision relationship' (Smythe et al., 2009, p.19).

Bartle (2015) suggests that there is scope for the relational aspect of supervision to merit a greater emphasis on professional guidelines and practice. The evidence found in this study of the importance of the safe

supervisory relationship supports this. The authors suggest that there is a recognition of the degree, depth, extent and breadth to which supervision can cultivate the development of a professional individual. Good-enough supervision would benefit many practitioners who serve children, young people and families facing challenges.

Limitations

Transparency of the procedures used enables a reader to evaluate how transferable the study's findings might be to other similar contexts. Further limitations are that there is a possible bias towards a positive view of supervision and against more negative or challenging experiences of supervision.

Concluding comments

The participants' accounts reinforce that people learn through relationships and as Christine said, 'our job is all about relationships'. The richest and most unique feature of engaging in supervision with EPs for these participants is the opportunity to focus on, and more deeply explore, the self. In pulling back the layers, they access parts of themselves that call for further insight. The participants enlighten us of this inward-looking process where the potential for change lies. As Daphne states, 'the more you kind of know about yourself the more you know about other people'. This will only transpire for them in the context of a safe and trusting relationship.

Through the supervisory relationship, we see how EPs can model and influence the relationships supervisees have with service users. Supervision as experienced in this study demonstrates the potential to question and challenges thinking in a way that enables supervisees to learn about themselves. As supervisees experience themselves develop in supervision, they can in turn mirror this experience and endeavour to replicate it with the families they work with.

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Appendix

Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to systematic literature search

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer reviewed	Not peer reviewed
Written in or translated into English	Not written in or translated into English
A doctoral study or published article	Editorials
Study focuses on 'professional supervision' as defined by the DECP (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010, p. 7): 'A psychological process that enables a focus on personal and professional development and that offers a confidential and reflective space to consider one's work and responses to it'	The term 'supervision' is used with a focus on line management.
	Supervision appears in the findings/outcomes of a study only.
Educational Psychologists (or equivalent School Psychologists or School Counsellors) are the supervisors.	Supervisor is not an Educational Psychologist (or equivalent School Psychologist or School Counsellors). For example, supervisor is a Clinical Psychologist or Counsellor.
Study where the supervisee is of a different profession to supervisor.	Supervisee is an Educational Psychologist (or equivalent School Psychologist or School Counsellor) in Training.
Study where what is offered by EPs is identified as 'supervision'	Other professional support groups not identified by authors as 'supervision' per se, although overlapping features/qualities may be present e.g. studies around Work Discussion Groups, staff sharing schemes, group consultations, solution focused groups or collaborative problem solving groups.

Studies identified in literature search:

Author(s) (year)	Title	Supervisee roles	Individual or Group	Amount of supervision accessed	Design	CASP rating
Soni (2010) thesis	Educational Psychology work in children's centres: a realistic evaluation of group supervision with Family Support Workers	Family support workers (FSWs) and their managers	Group	0 to 5 sessions	Realistic evaluation	***
Soni (2013) published article of above thesis	Group supervision: Supporting practitioners in their work with children and families in children centres.					
Garwood (2012) thesis	Becoming an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA): exploring the relationship between training, supervision and self-efficacy.	Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs)	Group	Minimum of 6 2-hourly sessions (12 hours), twice termly	Questionnaires and interviews	***
Soni (2015)	A case study on the use of group supervision with learning mentors	Learning mentors	Group	Minimum of 9 sessions, termly i.e. 3 per year	Group case study	***
Madeley (2014) thesis	What do Early Years education and care staff value in professional supervision? A Q-methodological study	Early Years (EY) education and care staff	Not stated	Not reported	Focus group and Q methodology	***
Osborne & Burton (2014)	Emotional Literacy Support Assistants' views on supervision provided by Educational Psychologists (EPs): what EPs can learn from group supervision	Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs)	Group	2 hours every half term. Period of time not reported.	Questionnaires	***
Callicott (2011) thesis then published as Callicott & Leadbetter (2013)	An investigation of factors involved when Educational Psychologists supervise other professionals	Specialist early years (EY) teachers	Individual and group	Not reported	Individual semi-structured interviews	***
Dunsmuir, Lang & Leadbetter (2015)	Current trends in Educational Psychology supervision in the UK	Mixture e.g. Portage workers, therapists, teachers and teaching assistants.	Individual and group	Mixture	National online survey	***

Maxwell (2015)	A reflection on the work of an Educational Psychologist in providing supervision for a team of community based support Workers, Supporting Families with Vulnerable Adolescents at Risk of Exclusion from School	Community based support workers	Group	1 year, 2 hours monthly	A reflection	N/A
Bartle & Trevis (2015)	An evaluation of group supervision in a specialist provision supporting young people with mental health needs: A social constructionist perspective.	Key workers (non-teaching staff) with a pastoral role in a specialist provision.	Group	Fortnightly over one academic year (an estimate of 19 sessions)	Evaluation with focus group and thematic analysis	***
Hulusi & Maggs (2015)	Containing the containers: Work Discussion Group supervision for teachers – a psychodynamic approach.	Teachers in special secondary school for young people with autism.	Group	Weekly for a term (an estimate of 12 sessions)	Exploration using psychodynamic theory	N/A

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2014) of identified studies in systematic literature review

Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising the report of a qualitative research:

- Are the results of the review valid?
- What are the results?
- Will the results help locally?

The 10 questions below are designed to help think about these issues systematically. The first two screening questions is answered with

a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’. If the answer to both is ‘yes’, the remaining questions are then answered using ‘-1’ for ‘no’, 0 for ‘unsure/can’t tell’ and +1 for ‘yes’. These scores are totalled up to reach a rating of high (between 3 and 7) medium (between -2 and 2) or low (between -7 and -3). The final rating is then converted to stars (high=3 stars***, medium=2 stars**, low=1 star*) and included in Table 4 in the main body of the text. The two papers that did not continue beyond the first two CASP questions are rated as ‘not applicable’ (N/A) due to the nature of the papers.

Study → CASP questions ↓	Soni (2010) thesis + Soni (2013) published article of above thesis	Garwood (2012) thesis	Soni (2015)	Madeley (2014) thesis	Osborne & Burton (2014)	Callcott (2011) thesis then published as Callcott & Leadbetter (2013)	Dunsmuir, Lang & Leadbetter (2015)	Maxwell (2015)	Bartle & Trevis (2015)	Hulusi & Maggs (2015)
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is it worth continuing?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No, this is a reflective piece.	Yes	No, this is a discussion piece.
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-	+1	-
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	+1	+1	+1	0 [only 5 of the 30 participants were engaging in supervision at the time of this study]	+1	0 [How much and for how long supervision was accessed, as well as whether it was an individual or group arrangement]	0 [Self-selecting bias]	-	+1	-

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-	+1	-
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-	+1	-
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	+1	+1	0 [more detail on how research was explained to participants would enable this to be clearer]	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-	+1	-
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-	+1	-
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-	+1	-
10. (Total) How valuable is the research?	(7) High	(7) High	(6) High	(6) High	(6) High	(6) High	(6) High	(6) High	(6) High	-	(5) High	(7) High

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