



Group Supervision: A Guide to Creative Practice (2nd Edition)

By Brigid Proctor
Counselling Supervision Series
Edited by Michael Carroll and Elizabeth Holloway
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Reviewed by Walter Logeman

Supervision, I like to think, is a look from above. It is a view from the balcony on the psychodrama stage. In 'Group Supervision: A Guide to Creative Practice', Brigid Proctor provides just such a bird's eye view. Although the author initially describes her work as a model, the Supervision Alliance Model, this book is not a presentation of one methodology. It is a supervision text book. A useful one, if a solid overview of supervision and group work has a place in your professional practice. Trainers and trainees in psychodrama will find it valuable, as will psychotherapists and social workers.

Proctor positions supervision as a discipline applicable to a wide range of professional services, as she usefully calls them. Psychodramatists will find this helpful as we often need to adapt books written for psychoanalysts or social workers to our broad vision. The author makes clear, however, that specific language and skills are required to suit each setting. As the title implies, supervision in groups is the main focus but the book is also a reference for other types of groups and for one-to-one supervision.

The book itself has a firm structure, four parts, twelve chapters, clear subsections, and a wealth of theory, descriptions, narrative examples, maps, models, diagrams and bullet-pointed lists. It is well indexed and its reference list includes many classical texts on the subject of supervision. The author provides a further reading section for each chapter and a glossary which briefly explains terminology used in this field.

This author covers a wide range of topics, from typologies for supervision groups to training, research and accountability, to hot issues in group life. Take chapter three for example. With reference to Eric Berne, founder of transactional analysis, four types of supervision groups are discussed: authoritative, participative, cooperative and peer. Such information will not be new or unexpected to most of us, but I appreciated the experience of having the familiar named and described as valid options. Here were old supervision favourites such as the drama triangle, and I learned the origin of forming,

storming, norming and performing, to which the author added mourning for the final stage of a group's life. Lists like these, and there are plenty of them, are useful for teaching and learning and easily lead to deeper reflection. I found myself constantly reflecting with pleasure 'I know this!' and realising that mostly I know it through psychodrama practice. For the psychodrama practitioner this is a great warm up to conducting supervision groups.

The narrative case studies, which appear to be observations from real groups, describe the unfolding process in each of the four types of groups. For example, the fourth case study describes a peer group's process over several sessions as it develops into a free-flowing hotchpotch of random responding (p.149). From the case material a series of principles and practice guidelines emerge. These guidelines are sound, with most backed up by references to research or original sources. There are useful guidelines for free-flowing discussions and many other formats a group can use.

I have to say, however, that I found the author's emphasis on structure, procedure, outlines of responsibilities and the supervision contract restrictive at times. The psychodramatist within longed for more trust in the power of relationships and creativity. He missed the love of group dynamics, complex systems and parallel processes. For example, it is hard to fault the Permission to Manage section on page 53. It is well presented and useful, but contracts and management-speak reign supreme. I found myself wanting an equally strong emphasis on psychodynamics, culture and connection building, a valuing of the metaphorical and the power of the psychodramatic in working with the human psyche.

For me, the highlights of this book are the preface and introduction sections. There we meet the author. Brigid Proctor is more than a chronicler of supervision practice. She and her United Kingdom colleague, Francesca Inskipp, worked together by trial and error "in the formative stages of an exciting and creative professional engagement" (p.xv). It was enlivening to be reminded that much of what we take for granted as standard group supervision, at least in psychodrama and psychotherapy circles, is only 25 years old. We are still part of that formative stage!

This is a book with wisdom as well as information to offer. To quote the author, "I am glad I do not feel any special responsibility for finding solutions when even the questions are unclear" (p.xv). "In terms of accountability I believe group work of all kinds has the edge over one to one practice . . ." (p.xvi). Proctor also argues that supervision as a form of "exciting and creative professional engagement . . . has been bullied into the background by academic, medical and educational priorities in training and practice" (p.xvi). Bold statements such as these in the introduction contrast with the more neutral tone in the rest of the book. I found myself wanting to hear more from the author in this assertive tone, and more personal reflections about such matters as when group work might not be indicated.

The book's downfalls are probably also its strengths. In contrast to the introduction and preface, I found the body of the book a bit dry. It was not much fun to read, but then that may be appropriate for a reference book. Irvin Yalom and Carl Jung are juicier when it comes to cases studies and psychological speculations. As well, some of the

conceptual models and diagrams are unnecessarily complex and therefore less useful. For example, the simple clinical rhombus of supervisor, agency, client and therapist that I learnt years ago and have since taught many times, seems to have been replaced by an eight element model that adds little to the more familiar construct.

In summary, Brigid Proctor's 'Group Supervision: A Guide to Creative Practice' will make a valuable addition to any psychodrama training library, and as a reference source it is a must for anyone planning a training course in supervision.