CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research interest of this dissertation stemmed from my own experience as a trainee clinical psychologist at Unisa. I experienced the trainers as presenting an ecosystemic model of training to me, on an explicit level. The tenets of this ecosystemic model suggest a non-hierarchical relationship between members of a system that is based on co-construction of meaning. Explicitly and theoretically, this idea was applied to the relationship between trainers and trainees. As the training process unfolded, I began to become aware that my experience of training, paradoxically, involved feelings of confusion and powerlessness, and that I experienced my relationship with my trainers as a hierarchical one in which they were in a position of power. This experience prompted me to formulate a hypothesis that there is a contradiction between the explicit and implicit contexts of training at Unisa (and probably also at other university, school and corporate training systems). I made the assumption that the explicit context at Unisa was ecosystemic, whereas the implicit context was scientific, hierarchical and “mechologic” (Auerswald, 1990, p. 29). I hypothesised that the inconsistency between these two contexts could culminate in an experience of confusion and powerlessness for trainees, a so-called “double bind” experience. I wished to research this hypothesis among my peers (co-trainees at Unisa), to see if they, too, had had this experience.
This chapter aims to explore the concepts of explicit and implicit contexts, and explains the idea of the double bind. The literature on the general experiences of trainees in training is also reviewed.

Explicit and Implicit Contexts

Auerswald (1990) refers to two different contexts, or “realities”, namely “mechologic” and “ecologic” realities. “Mechologic” reality is the western scientific Newtonian reality system that was explained in the previous chapter. It is mechanistic, “objectivist … reductionist, dualistic, and hierarchical. It uses concepts of linear time and linear causality, and truth is considered absolute” (Auerswald, 1990, p. 28). It uses formal logic, “common sense” and rationality. An ecosystemic reality (or “ecologic” reality, as Auerswald names it) has also been explained in the previous chapter and Auerswald describes it in a similar way as “monistic, relativistic, … creative, patterned, emergent, connectionist, and evolutionary. That which is observed is thought of as relational differences that expose shifting, emerging, receding, patterned shapes of events in a timespace terrain, and truth is considered heuristic” (Auerswald, 1990, p. 29).

In a similar vein, Auerswald (1990) refers to the “explicate and implicate family” (p. 20), which relate respectively to his “mechologic” and “ecologic” realities. The explicate family (or community or group) belongs to the verbal aspects of behaviour and to “the realm of rational thought, of ‘making sense’”, “as objects in a ‘sensible’ objective reality” (Auerswald, 1990, pp. 24, 26). The implicate family (or community or group) refers to the nonverbal aspects of behaviour and interactions and occurs in “the irrational realm of experience, feeling, creativity and play”, as “the experienced but difficult-to-
describe nonobjectifiable definition … (of) patterned connections in a domain of relations” (Auerswald, 1990, pp. 24, 26).

In line with Auerswald’s (1990) conceptualisation of explicate and implicate family, this dissertation assumes that explicit and implicit training groups and contexts occur. The explicate family is assumed to be synonymous with the explicit training group or context and refers to the members in the group such as trainers and trainees, and their assigned roles. The implicate family is assumed to be synonymous with the implicit training group or context and refers to the experienced connections and relationships between group members.

It is hypothesised that the explicit training group is explicitly shaped by ecosystemic (or “ecologic”) theory and discourse and purports to have a structure which is based on equality, with neither leaders, teachers, nor experts, nor rules that govern that structure. The implicit group is hypothesised to be shaped by a hierarchical structure with leaders (the trainers) and rules, and by traditional Newtonian, scientific theory and discourse. So the explicit ecosystemic discourse informing the explicit group is hypothesised to be inconsistent with the implicit discourse informing the implicit group. This inconsistency may lead to an experience of confusion and disempowerment among the less experienced, and therefore the less powerful, members of the group, namely the trainees, which can be explained as a double bind experience.

The tenets of this paper could be seen as taking Auerswald’s (1990) work a step further, or as a logical consequence of it. If systemic theory is explicitly presented as the training context at Unisa, but the implicit context is experienced as hierarchical and scientific, then the discourse at the implicit level has, in fact, become the very “reality”
that the explicit discourse is attempting to avoid. Therefore the discourse of training at the implicit level (the implicit discourse in the training context) has become the very reality that the discourse at the explicit level of the training context (the explicit discourse in the training context) is attempting to avoid.

Trainers at Unisa who espouse ecosystemic thinking and enforce it in the practical context may fear that the dominance of a “mechologic” reality will create relational disconnection at an ecologic level, for the members of the training system. This relational disconnection may occur if there is an exclusive focus on an absolute truth, rationality and formal logic. To prevent this, it is hypothesised that trainers construct and adopt “policies” and “actions” that attempt to prevent this disconnection by presenting an explicit model or discourse of training at Unisa that is ecosystemic and “ecologic” in nature. Ironically, it is the hypothesis of this dissertation that this manner of implementing ecosystemic theory becomes “mechologic” in nature, putting one model or theory forward as “the truth”, and therefore better than other models of training and thinking. This creates a context where trainees are taught to behave and think in an ecosystemic manner and not in other ways, implying that other ways are less acceptable. Accordingly, a framework of training is presented into which trainees must fit, as prescribed by the trainers. It is hypothesised that this creates relational disconnection for trainees in the implicit, “ecologic” training context (because they may feel that they cannot interact with others, or do therapy with clients, in a way that is uniquely themselves), and in this way, disempowers them (Auerswald, 1990).

Coale (1994) discusses how “[i]mplicit assumptions hidden within dominant (explicit) discourses can be more powerful than explicit assumptions and, in their
hiddenness, be potentially disempowering and conflictual” (pp. 9-10). The training system at Unisa, for example, presents a discourse which is explicitly ecosystemic. Hiding just below the surface of this explicit meaning, however, are realms of corollary meanings generally not acknowledged openly in the training system. The broader societal belief that trainees are entitled to be dependent on their trainers for educating and evaluating them, and that trainees’ comments on the training process, which would offer more independence and empowerment to trainees, jeopardises this entitlement, is one example of an implicit assumption that may lie below a dominant (explicit) ecosystemic training discourse. This implicit hierarchical assumption is inconsistent with explicit ecosystemic assumptions (based on equality and co-creation of meaning) in the training system, and this could contribute towards feelings of confusion and powerlessness for trainees.

In addition, “[m]any nondominant (implicit) discourses are pathologized by dominant (explicit) ones” (Coale, 1994, p. 11). Dominant discourses about ecosystemic models of training as the “ideal” training model emerge, for example. These beliefs can become rigid and can pathologise (or look down on) those training systems that do not use an ecosystemic model. In addition to the dominant discourses that pathologise nondominant ones, there are also explicit beliefs about “nonecosystemic” training models that are negative and disempowering. For example, the belief that other “nonecosystemic” contexts of training are ineffective, or limited in their outlook, is an explicit narrative within the training system at Unisa.

According to Auerswald (1990), in order to remain aligned with ecosystemic theory, one cannot totally reject Newtonian physics (or any other ways of thinking). One
can discount one of its rules, namely that there is only one objective reality which contains absolute truth. To claim that ecosystemic theory is the only way to think in the world is to adopt the Newtonian rule that ecosystemic theory attempts to discount. One can use the concepts of Newtonian physics within the context of ecosystemic theory, thereby acknowledging that there is a place for Newtonian thinking, albeit a limited one.

I now return to the idea that inconsistency between explicit and implicit contexts of training can lead to trainees’ experiencing confusion and powerlessness, and I explore the “double bind” hypothesis to further understand this point.

Double Bind

Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland (1963) were concerned with the importance of attending adequately to the complexity of communication. That is, there is never “a message” singly, but in actual communication always two or more related messages, of different levels and often conveyed by different channels – voice, tone, movement, context, and so on. These messages may be widely incongruent and thus exert very different and conflicting influences (p. 155).

Yeomans, Clark, Lockett and Gee (cited in Khalique & Haq, 1979) found that individuals may develop confused identities if they experience injunctions from others that are conflicting. These contradictory communications were found to provide an unstable foundation for the development of an individual’s behaviour and interactions with others.
In understanding the idea of conflicting messages, it may be useful to consider Russell’s theory of logical types (Arden, 1984). This theory proposes that there is a difference between a class and members of that class. According to Arden (1984), a member of a subset of a class can’t represent the class because the subset and the class belong to different logical categories. Arden (1984) clarifies this idea as follows:

An apple is a fruit but it does not possess all the characteristics of fruit. In the subset of apples any apple can stand for all apples, and any pear can stand for all pears in the subset of pears; but if one wants to denote the two subsets together then the category of fruit is required to encompass both (p. 443).

According to Arden (1984), Bateson applied this theory of logical typing to human relationships. When a signal is exchanged between people, this signal contains messages of a logical type that are higher than the content level of that message. So a message is conveyed in words (the explicit level), but also by other means such as gestures and tone of voice, and through the context in which the message occurs (the implicit level). When a message is received, one has to decide at which level the message is operating. Is the message “friendly or hostile” and “is it serious or is it a game?” (Arden, 1984, p. 443) In order to explain the confusion that occurs when one cannot decide which level a message belongs to, Bateson (cited in Arden, 1984) developed the concept of the double bind.

Bateson (cited in Becvar & Becvar, 2000) hypothesised “that there will be a breakdown in any individual’s ability to discriminate between Logical Types whenever a
“double bind situation occurs” (p. 21). According to Becvar and Becvar (2000), the general characteristics of this double bind situation are the following:

1. The individual is involved in an intense relationship; that is, a relationship in which she or he feels it is vitally important to discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated so that she or he may respond appropriately.

2. The individual is caught in a situation in which the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one denies the other.

3. The individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed to correct her or his discrimination of what order of message to respond to; in other words, she or he cannot make a metacommunicative statement [and cannot leave the relationship] (p. 208).

In this dissertation I hypothesise that a double bind situation occurs for trainees when explicit and implicit contexts of learning in psychotherapy are contradictory, and that this may create an experience of confusion and powerlessness for trainees. I also suggest that the above characteristics of a double bind situation can be directly related to the experience of trainees in training:

1. The trainee is involved in an intense relationship (with his or her trainer). The trainee feels that it is vitally important to discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated by the trainer, so that he or she may respond appropriately, as this may have an impact on whether or not the trainee is allowed to complete the training and become a psychotherapist.
2. The trainee is caught in the training situation in which the trainer in the supervisory relationship is expressing two orders of message (on an explicit level, that of ecosystemics, and on an implicit level, that of hierarchy and power relations) and the explicit ecosystemic context denies the implicit hierarchical context of training.

3. The trainee is unable to comment on the messages being conveyed by the trainers to correct his or her discrimination of what order of message to respond to (as the trainee may be afraid of being asked to leave the training context by the trainers); in other words, the trainee cannot make a metacommunicative statement (and he or she cannot leave the training if he or she wants to become a psychotherapist).

There are, therefore, three options for someone who is caught in a double bind situation: to comment on the double bind experience; to leave the field/relationship; or if neither of these is possible, to become symptomatic. All three options offer some sort of solution and allow some escape from the double bind situation, albeit in different ways. In the context of training, for example, trainees may feel they cannot comment on or leave the training context (for various reasons), so symptoms may begin to emerge such as feelings of confusion and/or powerlessness; intra-group conflict between trainees; or staying away from the training due to physical illness. This dissertation focuses on the symptoms of feelings of confusion and powerlessness for trainees. One purpose of the interviews that were conducted was to facilitate a context in which trainees could comment on their double bind experience, which is an alternative to becoming symptomatic (powerless), with the aim that the trainees would find some kind of liberation from this experience and regain a sense of their own personal power and personal agency.
For me, as the author of this document, the process of writing this research study has been my comment on my experience of double bind in training. I hope that this comment will also facilitate my own liberation from the confusion and powerlessness I experienced in training.

Double Bind Experiences in Learning Contexts

I now return to the literature for an exploration of the research on trainees’ experiences of double bind and inconsistency between explicit and implicit contexts of learning. So far, there seems to be a dearth of studies dealing with this topic.

Prentice (2001), however, did research this issue and found that trainees experienced their training context as

fraught with ambiguities, lack of clarity, contradictions, paradoxes, double binds, denial, a clashing between the theoretical and the practical, and incongruence between the explicit and the implicit. They experienced that the rules of the training context did not consistently permit, or provide for, metacommunication, and the option of fleeing the field was not viable.... the training context’s structure, purpose, agenda, rules, norms and definitions were unclear and inconsistent and this generated a training context which (perpetuated) ... an anxiety-provoking state of uncertainty (p. 38).

According to Prentice (2001), trainees found that it was difficult to “abide by rules which are unclear and continuously denied either implicitly or explicitly, but enforced nonetheless” (p. 38).
Prentice (2001) also comments that:

I raised the issue of authenticity, authority, and the notion of expert … . I questioned why it is that (faculty) denies his expertise explicitly. I go to university to be trained by experts, yet these experts continuously deny their expertise. However, when push comes to shove, these alleged non-experts pull in the reigns and clip our wings from the position of the knowing expert … . Why is it that the issue of authority is continuously denied at one level, but then enforced both explicitly and implicitly at another level?” (p. 38).

The research by Prentice (2001) highlights the importance of the relationship between trainer and trainee in training. For the purposes of this paper, this relationship is assumed to be the supervisory relationship, as the training at Unisa does not seem to me to distinguish clearly between what is supervision and what is not. It is further assumed that supervision is a central aspect of training. Models of supervision and accounts of trainees’ experiences of the supervision context, are therefore now explored.

Models of Supervision

I start by examining some definitions of training. Snyders (1985), for example, refers to training in psychotherapy as “a systematic attempt to persuade and teach trainees to behave and communicate effectively in order to facilitate change processes in clients” (p. 86). He suggests that supervision is the method most often used to achieve these aims.

Bernard and Goddyear (cited in O’Byrne & Rosenberg, 1998) propose a definition of supervision as an intervention offered by a senior member of a particular profession to a more junior member of that profession. The supervisor evaluates the
supervisee in a relationship that extends over time. The purpose of supervision is to enhance the professional functioning of the supervisee as well as to serve a gate-keeping function for those entering the profession.

According to O’Byrne and Rosenberg (1998), supervision is used as a guide in both knowledge and process elements of therapeutic practice. Many different models of supervision are used in the training of psychotherapists, and there is much literature on theories of supervision. In addition, many authors have researched and commented on the relationship between supervisor and trainee (Snyders, 1985). So the idea of examining how trainer and trainee meet is old but timeless.

Traditionally, the focus has been on sequential, stage, developmental models of supervision (Stoltenberg, cited in O’Byrne & Rosenberg, 1998). These models conceptualise supervision as “a linear process based on a hierarchical relationship between a novice counselor-in-training and expert counselor, with a power differential between a supervisor and supervisee” (Friedlander & Ward, cited in O’Byrne & Rosenberg, 1998), with supervisee growth seen as being stage specific.

Recently, more systemic approaches to supervision have been developed. According to Snyders (1985), many of the studies that have been undertaken show that systemic models of supervision are more effective than traditional models. The systemic model is believed to provide for a more complex process of supervision than is assumed by traditional linear stage models. Systemic models of training emphasise that emotional and cognitive growth on the part of supervisees occurs in a recursive and complex manner and many levels of learning are thought to be in operation. Systemic conceptualisations propose that supervisees’ growth is individual, but is informed by and
informs wider systems in which the individual finds him or herself. Not only supervision components, but also the supervision itself and larger systems, are seen as interrelated. This model promotes thinking that is flexible and sensitive to contexts of individual and cultural differences. It encourages the idea that human psychological functioning is situated within various interactional, societal, cultural, institutional and historical contexts (O’Byrne & Rosenberg, 1998).

According to Muratori (2001), certain theories of training (such as the traditional developmental perspective mentioned above) place greater emphasis on hierarchy and power differentials between supervisor and trainee than others (for example, the systemic view). The developmental models accept the existence of this inherent power differential in the supervisory relationship, whereas the systemic view suggests a supervisory relationship that is based on a more equal relationship, with a co-construction of meaning between supervisor and supervisee.

Some helping professionals see therapy and supervision as parallel processes, while others regard them as totally separate (Stoltenberg, McNeill & Delworth, 1998). Those who regard therapy and supervision as separate processes maintain that although both clients (in therapy) and trainees (in supervision) receive support and encouragement to grow psychologically, trainees are evaluated during supervision and assessed as to whether they have acquired the necessary skills and competencies required for therapeutic practice (Muratori, 2001). This is believed to expose trainees in supervision to closer scrutiny than clients in therapy, and is seen as related to an inherent power differential between supervisor and trainee.
According to Greben and Ruskin (1994), for the trainee, being taught and evaluated at the same time, by the same person, creates a supervisory context which may be experienced as unsafe. In order to benefit from supervision, the trainee should openly reveal to the supervisor the contents of sessions with clients and what she or he did and felt during the session. The trainee may, however regard this material as embarrassing or mistaken, and as she or he is likely to be aware of the supervisor’s role of evaluator and the resulting power differential (Greben & Ruskin, 1994; Soderholm, 1999), she or he may become suspicious and anxious about evaluations and feedback received from supervisors.

Haley (1976) suggests that when one observes people in a relationship (in this case a supervisory relationship) that has a history and a future, one can see that the individuals behave in organised, predictable ways in relation to each other. This organised way of behaving follows a pattern and is repeated over and over, which means it is redundant and involves rules and hierarchy.

Creatures that organize together form a status, or power, ladder in which each creature has a place in the hierarchy with someone above him and someone below him … and everywhere the messages that creatures interchange in their repeating ways are messages that define positions in organizational hierarchies (Haley, 1976, pp. 100-101).

According to Snyders (1985), in a similar way, “the process of supervision is characterized by a specific social organization with its own rules” (p. 96).

It could be argued that the hierarchy we observe in organisations is a function of our thinking, and not an inherent aspect of these systems (Haley, 1976). Notwithstanding
this point, the position I take in this dissertation is to adopt Haley’s view that relationships between people in an organisation (in this instance, the supervisory relationship in the training system) are hierarchical and involve power differentials. Muratori (2001) maintains that few would argue that this power imbalance exists in practice, whatever the theoretical orientation in terms of which the relationship is conducted. The supervisor’s role has an evaluative component, and is therefore inherently powerful. This too, is the stance adopted in this dissertation.

On this basis, I propose that there is a power differential between trainers and trainees, which is implicitly experienced by trainees in the supervisory relationship (at Unisa and at other training institutions). As already explained, I further propose that this power differential is explicitly denied at Unisa, where a social constructionist, ecosystemic model of training is presented to trainees. I propose, too, that trainees experience this as inconsistent and as placing them in a double bind and that the confusion and powerlessness this brings culminates in an overall negative experience of the training, which is not beneficial to the trainee. I have assumed that supervision is beneficial to trainees when they experience personal and professional development, growth and empowerment, although I acknowledge that within this overall experience, some negatively perceived events or interactions may facilitate development and growth.

There is a wealth of literature on what characterises both positive and negative experiences for trainees in the supervisory relationship, some of which is examined in the following section.
Trainees’ Experiences of the Supervisory Relationship

According to Snyders (1985), most of the research on training has focused on trainers’ and supervisors’ experiences and perspectives. He explains that it is because of this bias that Rosenblatt and Mayer (cited in Snyders, 1985) encouraged researchers to focus on trainees’ experiences of supervision, and he points out that Hutt, Scott and King (cited in Snyders, 1985) proposed that this emphasis on trainees’ experiences in supervision was important because these experiences ultimately influence trainees’ relationships with their clients.

According to Gray, Ladany, Walker and Ancis (2001), trainees’ experiences of positive and negative supervision relate to the quality of the supervisory relationship. Much like the importance of the therapeutic alliance in client outcomes, the supervisory working alliance is integral to trainees’ satisfaction and learning in supervision.

Many researchers have explored trainees’ experience of increased levels of emotional and cognitive dissonance in training (Borders; McNeill, Stoltenberg & Pierce; Rabinowitz, Heppner & Roehlke; Tracey, Ellickson & Sherry; cited in Ward & House, 1998; Soderholm, 1999). Soderholm (1999) refers to this dissonance as being between the personal and professional identities of the trainee. Ward and House (1998) focus on how the supervisory relationship can create a context in which supervisees can develop a meaningful framework for practice out of dissonant training experiences.

Rice and Fey (cited in Greben & Ruskin, 1994) propose that the trainee’s experience of satisfaction with the supervisory relationship may act as a direct measure of the effectiveness of the supervisor’s training method, and they propose that there are some variables that make the supervisory experience satisfactory for the trainee. First,
there is the importance of the “fit” between supervisor and trainee. Second, there are three qualities that influence this “fit”, and the resulting experience of supervision for the trainee, namely, the personal characteristics of the supervisor (“who is the supervisor?”); the content of supervision (“what does the supervisor do?”); and the process of supervision (“how does the supervisor do it?”) (Rice & Fey, cited in Greben & Ruskin, 1994, p. 85). I examine each of these in more detail below.

**Personal Characteristics of the Supervisor (Who is the Supervisor?)**

With reference to this first quality, namely the personal characteristics of the supervisor, Nelson (cited in Greben & Ruskin, 1994) found that trainees preferred supervisors who were flexible, self-revealing and permissive. Trainees experienced positive supervision with supervisors who were perceived as non-threatening, tactful and non-authoritarian. Other researchers have found that supervisees appreciate supervisors who are seen as respectful (Gandolfo & Brown, cited in Gray et al., 2001; Kraft Goin & Kline, cited in Greben & Ruskin, 1994), supportive, instructional, interpretive (Kennard, Stewart & Gluck, cited in Gray et al., 2001) and collegial (Gandolfo & Brown, cited in Gray et al., 2001). Negative supervision experiences are associated with supervisors who are described as rigid (Allen, Szollos & Williams; Hutt et al.; Kennard et al.; Nelson; cited in Gray et al., 2001; Greben & Ruskin, 1994), critical (Allen et al.; Hutt, Scott & King; Nelson; cited in Gray et al., 2001), inattentive (Chung, Baskin, & Case; Shanfield, Matthews & Hetherly; cited in Gray et al., 2001) biased, domineering and defensive (Greben & Ruskin, 1994).

In addition to the ideas explored in the research referred to above, I propose in this dissertation that, for the trainee to perceive the supervisor in a predominantly positive
light, the supervisor should be aware that the explicit and implicit messages he or she
transmits to the trainee should be consistent with each other.

The Content of Supervision (What Does the Supervisor Do?)

Some research has been done on the experiences of trainees with regard to the
content of supervision and what the supervisor does in supervision. Thus Kraft Goin and
Kline (cited in Greben and Ruskin, 1994) found that supervisors who presented
techniques and principles of psychotherapy were rated highly. Trainees appreciated
supervisors who guided psychological interpretations by revealing themes and presenting
theoretical frameworks. Greben and Ruskin (1994) found that trainees expected
supervisors to be experts in their ability to teach, to provide direct feedback, to transfer
knowledge and to establish rapport through genuineness and empathic understanding.

According to Greben and Ruskin (1994), supervisors who were ranked highly
focused on the process between therapist and client and “transference” issues. These
supervisors were seen as role models. Snyders (1985) reports that trainees had positive
supervision experiences when the supervisor actively engaged with them and explored
processes in their therapy with clients and addressed “blockages in the trainee’s learning
process” (p. 109).

Trainees enjoyed supervision in which the supervisor revealed her or his own
theoretical, practical and emotional difficulties and uncertainties (Snyders, 1985). In
addition, highly-ranked supervisors tolerated painful experiences of trainees such as
ambiguity, ignorance, impotence and failure (Greben & Ruskin, 1994; Snyders, 1985).
Hutt et al. (cited in Gray et al., 2001) found that trainees experienced their supervision as positive when the supervisor integrated a relationship that was facilitative and non-judgemental with behaviour that was task oriented. This reduced their anxiety and gave them the confidence to explore their interactions with clients. In a similar vein, Stoltenberg, McNeill and Delworth (cited in Steward, Brelan & Neil, 2001), found that the relationship between supervisor and supervisee should include “support-challenge” aspects, in which the supervisor provided support and encouragement as well as “confrontational and catalytic interventions” (p. 139) with trainees. Accordingly, Snyders (1985) found that “structure and support [should be] sensitively varied with opportunities for autonomy” (p. 110). Ward and House (1998) suggest that supervisors should work at establishing trust, orientation to context (of supervision and training in general), developing conceptual frameworks and encouraging clinical independence in their trainees.

The supervisory relationship has been found to affect supervisees’ perception of the supervisor’s style and to affect the way supervisees evaluate themselves with regard to counselling competence (Steward et al., 2001). Worthen and McNeill (cited in Gray et al., 2001) report that trainees appreciated being able to reveal feelings of inadequacy and to receive acceptance and support in supervision, which increased their level of confidence. Conversely, Allen et al. (cited in Gray et al., 2001) found that trainees did not appreciate experiences which involved supervisors who were authoritarian and demeaning. This may have led to a disempowering supervision experience for trainees in which they did not disclose their mistakes and developed a sense of low self-efficacy.
According to Nelson, Gray, Friedlander, Ladany and Walker (2001), it can be counterproductive if the supervisor does not manage the supervisory relationship carefully. It is therefore important for the supervisor to be able to establish a strong working alliance with the trainee and to be able to identify and manage interpersonal conflict. A “good” supervisor is regarded as being able to facilitate open resolution of conflict between supervisor and trainee (Snyders, 1985).

The supervisory relationship has an evaluative component, so a strong supervisory alliance is based on congruent expectations about this aspect. Nelson et al. (2001) found that trainees in supervision experienced some misunderstandings and conflicts which they described as harmful. Some trainees experienced a lack of constructive feedback and others regarded their supervisors’ criticisms as “unfounded or inappropriate” (Nelson et al., 2001, p. 408) and saw their supervisors as abusing their position of power. Some trainees decided not to raise their concerns about supervision for fear of their supervisors’ negative reactions (Nelson & Friedlander, cited in Nelson et al., 2001). According to Hutt et al. (cited in Snyders, 1985), trainees who experienced a negative supervisory relationship discussed their problems and frustrations with people other than their supervisor, in order to avoid their supervisors’ criticism. Kozlowska, Nunn and Cousins (cited in Nelson et al., 2001) found that trainees perceived the source of extreme stress in training to be “informational and emotional neglect” (p. 408) by supervisors.

According to Ellis (2001), supervision may become harmful to the trainee, and this harm can be recognised when the trainee starts to display symptoms of psychological trauma, such as continuing feelings of mistrust, debilitating fears, excessive shame, guilt,
self-derogation and loss of self-confidence. The trainee may become functionally impaired in his or her personal or professional life and his or her mental and physical health may suffer (Ellis, 2001). These symptoms may emerge when the supervisor does not focus on the trainee’s professional development; shows no respect for trainee boundaries; and does not show empathy and support (Gray et al., 2001; Nelson & Friedlander, cited in Ellis, 2001).

Chung, Baskin and Case (1998) found that trainees had positive supervision experiences when their supervisors modelled appropriate skills; taught them new ideas, concepts and techniques and provided them with feedback, resources and information. Trainees reported having a negative experience of supervision when they perceived their supervisors as “impersonal or distracted during supervision” (p. 762). This implies that it is important for the supervisor to nurture the supervisory relationship, and not simply to provide clinical training.

According to Murphy, Leszcz, Collings and Salvendy (1996), trainees were satisfied when their supervisors were able to note changes in their emotional and cognitive states from moment to moment. Trainees appreciated supervisors using this information to give a balance of “support, encouragement and knowledge” (p. 543) and, on the other hand, to encourage exploration.

According to Friedman (cited in Greben & Ruskin, 1994), trainees seem to get the most benefit from supervision when they are active participants in their own learning and the supervisor is seen as an “expert colleague” (p. 97) who creates “a comfortable environment for supervision within which material can be conveyed in a manner that is attuned to the resident’s individual needs” (p. 97).
Greben and Ruskin (1994) suggest that the process of supervision refers to the interactions between supervisor and trainee. According to them, trainees experience a useful supervisory relationship when they regard the supervisor as being able to create and maintain rapport and safety. Supervisees mentioned that they wanted different types of supervision at different times. They enjoyed doing role-plays so that they would have an idea of what to expect in supervision. Supervisors who provided a structure or framework for supervision ameliorated supervisees’ frustration, uncertainty, anxiety and misperceptions. Trainees found it helpful to talk about the expectations and uses of supervision. Highly-rated supervisors encouraged trainees to voice their own wishes, needs and concerns about work with clients and about the supervisory relationship itself.

Positive supervisory relationships that involve “warmth, acceptance, understanding, respect, autonomy, and trust” (Hutt et al., cited in Gray et al., 2001, p. 372) have been found to encourage self-disclosure and growth in trainees. A further area of research has focused on how perceived levels of trust and support are necessary prerequisites, firstly, for a supervisory relationship that is experienced as positive for the trainee, and secondly, for ongoing development of the trainee (Carey, Williams & Wells; Frankel; Heppner; Kennard et al.; Ladany & Friedlander; Piercy; Wark; Worthen & McNeill; cited in Ward & House, 1998). Negative supervisory relationships, on the other hand, are experienced as lacking “trust, respect, openness … support and instruction” (Gray et al., 2001, p. 372), and suggest an alliance that hinders trainees’ growth as therapists.
According to Snyders (1985), a positive supervisory context occurs for trainees when evaluation becomes a “co-operative activity” (p. 110) which happens between supervisor and trainee. The trainee learns to evaluate his or her own interventions with clients in terms of therapeutic effects, rather than in terms of the supervisor’s approval.

The process and outcome of supervision are also affected by events that occur in supervision. Gray et al. (2001) refer to studies by Hutt et al. and Worthen and McNeill, who found that trainees experienced enhanced awareness and knowledge, and felt more skilled and confident as a result of supervision events experienced as positive. In contrast, negative supervision events resulted in trainees becoming avoidant and censoring their disclosures to preserve themselves, rather than exploring in a vulnerable way (Hutt et al, cited in Gray et al., 2001).

According to Murphy et al. (1996), all trainees experienced “strong emotional reactions” (p. 543) to training, such as anxiety, self-doubt, shame and frustration. “Feelings of being bored, attacked, hateful, or therapeutically impotent” (p. 543) were, however, thought to be toxic to the trainee. It was found that these feelings were more likely to occur when trainees anticipated that supervision would be “critical or shame inducing” (p. 548). When supervision creates a context for the trainee to experience anxiety, the learning process may be interrupted (Costa, 1994). In addition to anxiety, other experiences of relationship problems between supervisor and trainee, such as failure, stress, threat or uncertainty, could interfere with the trainee’s focus on the task of learning to become an effective therapist (Snyders, 1985). The supervisor should therefore help the trainee to maintain this focus, while the supervisory relationship should be a means to an end and should at no stage become “an end in itself” (Snyders, 1985, p.
110). According to Hutt et al. (cited in Snyders, 1985), negative supervision contributed towards trainees feeling “powerless in relation to the supervisor” and these trainees played “communication games” (p. 110) to protect themselves from this feeling of powerlessness.

Blanck and Blanck (cited in Sumerel & Borders, 1996) maintain that therapists bring their previous experiences and their current values and beliefs into the therapeutic relationship, and that these shape the personal feelings and issues that they also bring into their interactions with clients. Therapists are consciously aware of some of their issues, while being unaware of others. Some of these unconscious issues may surface during interactions with clients, and may generate anxiety and conflicting feelings in the therapist without the therapist necessarily knowing why these feelings are evoked. The therapist may experience further anxiety and conflict as he or she becomes aware of these issues (Mueller & Kell, cited in Sumerel & Borders, 1996). Altucher (cited in Sumerel & Borders, 1996) believes that supervision should help trainee therapists stay open to their experiences and enable them to recognise the link between client behaviour and their feelings. He proposes that training to become a therapist involves both intellectual and emotional elements, with the emotional aspect the most crucial, and that supervision should focus on these elements.

Ladany and Friedlander (1995) and Olk and Friedlander (1992) found that trainees experienced role difficulties such as role ambiguity and role conflict in the context of supervision. “Role ambiguity arises when trainees are unsure of supervisory expectations for their performance or evaluation; role conflict arises when trainees encounter opposing expectations for their behaviour” (Olk & Friedlander, 1992, p. 389).
Such role difficulties arise when trainees perceive an inconsistency between the explicit and implicit levels of messages they receive from their supervisors. These role difficulties were found to predict work-related anxiety and dissatisfaction, and supervision-related dissatisfaction. Ladany and Friedlander (1995) found that when trainees saw the relationship with the supervisor as a strong supervisory working alliance, they tended to experience less role conflict and role ambiguity, and vice versa.

According to Anderson and Price (2001), trainees often experience difficulty around dual relationships and invasion of their privacy during training. With regard to dual relationships, the power differential between supervisor and trainee may place trainees in a vulnerable position. “When a teacher serves as supervisor and evaluator as well as a facilitator of the student’s self-awareness, there is a potential for the student to have less power and, therefore, diminished consent to participate in the training activity” (Anderson & Price, 2001, p. 112). This is potentially “harmful” to trainees, and Anderson and Price mention a number of researchers (such as Merta and Sisson; Merta, Wolfgang and McNeil; and Pierce and Baldwin) who have taken up the issue. Some students in training contexts may feel pressured to share their personal experiences, but may feel that this information could be used by the supervisor to negatively evaluate their performance (Anderson & Price, 2001).

According to Gray et al. (2001), when trainees give in to the power or authority of their supervisors and attempt to present themselves strategically, they may consciously withhold information and experiences from their supervisors (Ladany, Hill, Corbett & Nutt; Yourman & Farber; cited in Gray et al, 2001), or distort and conceal such information and experiences (Yourman & Farber, cited in Gray et al, 2001). Ladany et al
(cited in Gray et al., 2001) found that most trainees had experienced negative reactions to a supervisor and had not revealed this to him or her. Trainees reported considerable dissatisfaction if they perceived a supervisor as incompetent, or felt the supervisory relationship was poor, and did not disclose this to the supervisor concerned if there was a possibility of harming themselves professionally (Ladany et al.; Moskowitz & Rupert; cited in Gray et al., 2001).

Greben and Ruskin (1994) suggest that it may therefore be useful for supervisors to acknowledge their position of power in the supervisory relationship with regard to the evaluative role they have to play, and to acknowledge that they act as supervisors, not as therapists. Soderholm (1999) feels it might be useful for the supervisor to clarify what she or he expects from the trainee in supervision and also to clarify the trainee’s role. This acknowledgement and clarification may help to set clear boundaries for the trainee and to maintain coherence between the explicit and implicit contexts of learning.

It has been found that not only trainees, but also their families, are affected by the training process. Polson and Piercy (1993) discovered that stress experienced in training is not isolated to the trainee, but has an impact on his or her entire family system. According to these authors, trainers may not realise the impact that stressors have in training. They recommend that trainers should regularly evaluate the effects of training on trainees and on their families. This evaluation should, they suggest, include feedback from trainees, which would help to assess perceived detrimental as well as positive aspects of the training and could give trainers an opportunity to improve the training programme by building on its strengths. Polson and Piercy warn that without systematic
evaluation of training programmes, the emotional and psychological health of trainees and their families may be neglected, and this raises ethical concerns.

Polson and Piercy (1993) found that trainees did not necessarily want aspects of the programme removed, as a way of dealing with stress, but merely expressed a wish that the efforts made by them and their families in the training should be recognised and acknowledged by trainers. These findings by Polson and Piercy (1993) lead me to wonder if it could be that trainee stress has come to be expected as part of training programmes, and that this expectation inhibits efforts by the trainers to eliminate stress from the programmes.

Conclusion

This chapter covers the ideas of explicit and implicit contexts of learning, the double bind hypothesis, and experiences of trainees in training and, more specifically, in supervision. The supervisory relationship is assumed to be central to training, so trainees’ experience of supervision is a significant aspect of the overall training experience. It is proposed both in the literature and in this dissertation that training and supervision involve a hierarchical relationship between trainer and trainee. The supervisor holds a position of power in supervision because he or she evaluates the trainees and serves as a gatekeeper into the profession, deciding on who is and is not allowed to qualify as a therapist. It is hypothesised that this hierarchy is explicitly denied by trainers, but implicitly experienced by trainees, in the Unisa training system. So notwithstanding that the training system explicitly allows for the emergence of many of the positive experiences for trainees identified in the literature, the lack of coherence between the explicit and implicit training contexts creates a sense of confusion and powerlessness.
among trainees. This leads to a training experience that is less beneficial than it might be to trainees.

Another Conclusion

The above discussion sets out the hypotheses of this dissertation in a linear, progressive manner, which reflects traditional, scientific thinking. As explained in the previous chapter, this dissertation purports to have adopted a systemic, social constructionist perspective, so this linear way of thinking may be seen to be inconsistent with the perspective of this paper. Again, it may be stressed that social constructionist thinking does not exclude Newtonian thinking, but merely suggests that Newtonian thinking is limited in its scope. In addition, the very nature of language and words imposes linearity, so it is difficult to think and write in a systemic, social constructionist manner. The moment a word is thought or written, other words, thoughts and writings are excluded, which excludes other perspectives. The ideas written in this dissertation, therefore, are my ideas, and they exclude other ideas. Perhaps, however, as this text is read by others (as you are doing now), another perspective is generated by the act of reading.