

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Then said a teacher, Speak to us of Teaching. And he said:

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind. For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man (Gibran, 1980, pp. 67-68)

Differentiation and integration of a psychologist occur in the test tube of the training programme in the laboratory of the training institution. The discerning supervisor is able, like the seasoned chemist, to evaluate the potential of the raw material provided by student applicants with a few simple tests. Intellectual, emotional, psychosocial and spiritual differentiation involves a series of repetitive processes, which result in a relatively pure material with various practical applications. Raw materials (trainees) are dissolved in a solution (become part of a training system) together with other substances (fellow trainees) and reagents (clients). The mixture is carefully heated (perturbation by the training context) to induce a chemical reaction (change) without the contents boiling over (containment by the supervisor). The solution is cooled (equilibrium established) and the chemist must patiently scratch the side of the test tube with a glass rod (expectations of student performance). Just when he thinks that the experiment has failed, magic occurs before his eyes. It requires only a single crystal to form in the vastness of the solution and the rest of the substance will coalesce around the one crystal. Suddenly the entire solution turns white to form solid matter (integration of knowledge). The knowledge imparted by the training context will suddenly fall into place, which results in the synthesis of new insights, further differentiation and a transcendence of theoretical knowledge. A series of these spiralling processes takes place over an extended period of time, leading up to a level 3i therapist or a differentiated, integrated and enlightened self (Bowen, 1988; Stoltenberg et al., 1998; Zohar & Marshall, 2001). If something untoward were to happen during one of these

processes, the contents may spill out and be burnt away by the flame (therapist burnout), or one may never achieve successful recrystallisation (disintegration of self), or the resultant crystals may be a spoonful of brown muck (stagnation of self). Documenting the steps and processes of the experiment (writing the dissertation) reveals new possibilities and insights (additional differentiation and integration) and provides a record that could assist other scientists (differentiation and integration of the therapeutic community).

These spiralling developmental processes are characterised by a series of paradoxes or double-edged swords. The task of the student is not to try and solve these paradoxes or choose between the “lesser of two evils”, but rather to negotiate her way successfully through the training labyrinth in order to become a street-wise, individuated psychologist.

The first paradox or double-edged sword the student faces is that she has to study with diligence to ensure good marks for the selection process, but be blasé enough to be able to handle rejection by the selection committee. During the selection process the student must be visible enough to make an impact on the selection committee, whilst risking doing or saying something that could result in being turned down. The elation of being selected must be weighed up against the impact on personal commitments and financial security, but turning down the offer could result in a lifetime of vocational non-fulfilment. The student then faces the intricacies of the supervisor-trainee relationship. Interaction seems to occur on a flat, hierarchical or collegial level, whilst the supervisor retains the authority to give the student a failing mark. A close bond of trust and respect must be established with the supervisor, but the student realises that she may have to relinquish the relationship at any time due to his other commitments. The student must disclose enough personal information to allow an exploration of issues pertinent to her training, but still maintain an air of psychological health and competence. In addition, if the student shares with the supervisor events in her personal life that may have an impact on her studies, it could give the supervisor insight into certain behaviour, but could also raise doubts as to whether the student can successfully integrate private and professional life. The suppression of emotions may give the appearance of a lack of empathy, but the unrestrained expression of emotions might be considered

inappropriate and should perhaps be reserved for a therapeutic relationship outside the training context.

Active class participation is encouraged, but overly dominant behaviour or inappropriate comments are frowned upon. If the trainee plays it safe and doesn't rock the boat during group supervision she may stay out of trouble, but she could become disconnected from the training group and impede her own developmental process. On the other hand if she takes risks by pushing the boundaries, she may elicit disapproval and a negative evaluation. Being too reserved and uncommunicative during therapy could be perceived as disinterest or disconnection, but excessive talkativeness and overassertive behaviour would intrude on the therapeutic space of the client. Concerns of the student during a therapy session could be included in the therapy report and addressed during supervision, but at the risk of criticism or a reprimand. If the supervisor raises sensitive personal issues, the trainee may decide not to explore the issue further, which may convince the supervisor that his premise was accurate. On the other hand if she initiates an open discussion, the supervisor may perceive this as defensive behaviour, which would also confirm his initial assumption. If conflict with a supervisor should arise, attempts by the trainee to clear the air may escalate the conflict and worsen the situation. However, if she decides to avoid the issue, it could be damaging to the supervisory relationship and could stunt her own development.

During therapy the student must display warmth, empathy and understanding, but must be able to announce that "the time is up" in the middle of an emotional revelation without feeling guilty. If she continues with the session she loses therapeutic manoeuvrability and may incur the wrath of the supervisor, but if she abruptly stops the session she may appear insensitive to the client and may lose out on vital information. The trainee will discover that her so-called strong points will become her greatest stumbling blocks and her perceived weaknesses could provide her with her strongest therapeutic tool. It is wise to follow the guidance of the supervisor regarding therapeutic interventions, but in order to develop an individual therapeutic style she must learn to bend the rules to suit her personality. As the therapist becomes more independent she must learn to take initiative during therapy

sessions, but she must assess a situation carefully to establish when it is appropriate to seek assistance from the supervisor.

During the interviews for an internship the student must demonstrate her acceptance and knowledge of professional ethics and an ability to cooperate with colleagues while competing with her fellow students for the prized positions. If problems should arise during the internship, the therapist could contact her supervisor at the risk of appearing infantile and unprofessional. However, if she decides to keep a stiff upper lip, she will be left to her own devices and the training facility will remain unaware of the problem. At the internship facility the therapist may be faced with having to support treatment plans that violate her own values, but if she makes her reservations known to the client, it could compromise patient care and cohesion of the treatment team. Supervisors at the internship facility may support a theoretical paradigm that could seem inappropriate or unproductive to the intern. However, these supervisors were entrusted with the further development of the intern and have the hierarchical advantage. At the end of the internship the therapist will discover that she cannot return to the comfort of her previous life, but may not yet have the resources to initiate a new career. Even though she will have undergone extensive changes and development during the training process, she may again have to face the belonging versus individuation paradox of her family of origin. The ultimate paradox is reached when the therapist strives to differentiate from a position of no-self, only to achieve a level of differentiation at the end of training that takes her back to no-self again.

It is the exposure to the thorny paths of the various training and therapeutic contexts and successful negotiation of the accompanying paradoxes that lead to growth and development, resulting in differentiation and integration of self. Each ascending level of differentiation will lead to new paradoxes that beg to be resolved. However, the ultimate test of successful differentiation lies in the period after formal training has ended and is influenced by important developmental processes and patterns that preceded psychology training. The period of academic training and the internship represent a snapshot in time, extracted from a person's total lifespan. It is like viewing one page in a map book. If you cannot extrapolate the information on the page to the rest of the map book, you are bound to lose your way. Psychology

training results in extensive changes to the self in a short space of time, and integration with the therapist's personal life may prove difficult. It is like a soldier returning home after the war in Vietnam. His community has changed very little, but he has experienced so much that he finds it difficult to reconnect with the routine of everyday life. Some students may have faced a divorce, illness of a family member or the death of a close friend during the period of training and may have to take stock of their life upon "going home" after their journey of discovery. The newly qualified psychologist has to face realities such as financial difficulties and feelings of disconnection from family and friends, and has to establish a career in difficult economic circumstances. A degree merely provides a qualification, whereas a career needs to be constructed. Newly qualified psychologists must be integrated into the family of clinical psychologists and must carve out a place for themselves in the community. However, if they are waiting for a welcoming committee they shouldn't hold their breath.

During the selection process, student applicants are likely to feel insecure and vulnerable due to the conspicuous nature of the selection process and the consequences of rejection by the committee. Students who fail to be selected may come to the conclusion that their personal qualities were unacceptable or insufficient and may feel inadequate. Some may even experience depression. It is important that the dignity and self-esteem of these students are respected and that they are encouraged to apply to more than one training facility to increase their chances or to explore other vocational alternatives in the field of psychology. Once the group of selected students enters the training system it is imperative to explain the training structure, rules and academic expectations at an early stage to give them a sense of security and help them settle in. If a supervisor intends not to structure a particular class or session and to allow it to evolve as a co-construction of the attendees, it will be helpful to clarify that this is the approach he has elected to follow. It is also important that supervisors discuss the nature of the supervisory relationship with regard to the hierarchical structure of the training facility, the trainee-supervisor power differential and their individual guidelines and expectations. A supervisory team that consists of psychologists with divergent theoretical paradigms and personal

characteristics could facilitate differentiation of trainees if these varied approaches are integrated into a comprehensive training programme.

The trainee needs to acquire an understanding of the interpersonal boundaries of the supervisory relationship in order to distinguish between the paradoxical supervisor roles of “colleague” versus “professor” and “supervisor” versus “therapist”. A context of open communication and experimentation that allows the therapist to learn from her mistakes should be established to form a working alliance that could withstand conflict and facilitate supervisees’ development. A balanced exploration of personal issues that could affect training, development and therapeutic efficacy should be maintained to avoid creating the impression that the supervisor is disinterested in the personal lives of his students or that he is overly intrusive. Similarly, appropriate personal disclosure and selected examples from the supervisor’s own clinical practice could improve the quality of the supervisory relationship and enhance the clinical knowledge of the supervisees. As the relationship develops, the supervisor could take more risks in addressing awkward personal characteristics, defence mechanisms and dysfunctional patterns utilised by the trainee. In other words, the experienced supervisor would know when to “hold” and when to “push” or when to be supportive and when to confront within a cohesive relationship.

When trainees face challenging training contexts, such as presenting workshops, it is important to validate their efforts and criticism should tap into the emotional as well as the intellectual resources of the trainee in order to make these experiences constructive. If trainee-supervisor conflict should arise during the training period, it is imperative to address this adequately. The power differential between them may make the trainee reluctant to initiate a discussion, and debriefing sessions could assist in clearing up unresolved issues and could model effective conflict handling to the trainee. Feedback from the trainees to the supervisors at the end of the training period about their experience of the supervisory relationship and its effect on their personal and professional development could give the supervisors valuable insights. However, most people, including supervisors, do not particularly enjoy a critical review by others and the nature of the feedback would depend on the trainee-supervisor relationship as well as the inherent characteristics of both trainee

and supervisor. The trainee often has high expectations of the supervisor in terms of guidance, acceptance, respect, support, validation, respect and ethical values. However, the supervisor is also a human being who has to deal with his own personal problems and daily stressors outside the supervision sessions. Therefore, it is wise for the trainee to show some understanding and compassion for isolated incidents of perceived irritation, abruptness and disinterest. Even when a supervisor makes an apparent error of judgement, it still provides a valuable learning experience as it provides a more realistic role model of therapist behaviour and could advance the supervisory relationship to a more collegial level, characterised by reciprocal tolerance.

The trainee's self-concept, personal identity and level of differentiation will have been constructed in the period preceding training, influenced by the systemic processes in her family of origin. This script of self-expression tends to be repeated within the therapy training system. As trainees become more proficient with therapeutic techniques, an examination of issues such as personal characteristics and dynamics, self-awareness, defensiveness, transference and counter-transference become the focus of personal development (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). An exploration of social roles and repetitive patterns of behaviour via methods such as "sculpting" and their effect on the therapeutic process could be fruitful (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980). The training environment is also a suitable context in which to attempt differentiation from the family of origin by engaging the assistance of a "coach" (Bowen, 1988). It is extremely difficult outside the training milieu to find a suitable person to assist in this process, and unless these childhood issues are resolved, they will continue to block differentiation and integration during the training process and thereafter. The systemic blueprint of the family of origin becomes the framework within which all life experience is viewed and unless it can be removed to allow a metaperspective, everything will be seen within these frames. This process could prove to be the Mount Kilimanjaro of the training course and will probably be met with fear and resistance. However, it may prove to be a reciprocal learning process as the supervisor will have to face the demons of his own family of origin. The climb will be brutal, but reaching the peak will give the "fool on the hill" a rare but

beautiful view of the world. It may also prove to be the most valuable gift the student can give the supervisor.

It is advisable to formalise contact with the training facility once or twice during the internship year to address any problems or concerns of the intern or supervisor. The brief progress assessment done by the supervisory team at the end of each intern rotation period does not allow the time or opportunity for an individual discussion with the training facility supervisor. Unisa students are at a disadvantage in this regard compared with students from universities like Rand Afrikaans University, which offers a one-year course and remains in contact with trainees during the internship period for additional supervision and training. This facilitates problem solving with regard to therapeutic and internship issues as well as monitoring of trainees' progress with their dissertations.

The completion of the dissertation offers the trainee renewed opportunities for differentiation and integration of knowledge. Unfortunately, the process could also be accompanied by all the trainee's unresolved emotional attachments to her family of origin as well as her acquired dysfunctional patterns of behaviour. Whereas supervision for theoretical and practical tutoring is usually done in a group setting, supervision for the dissertation normally takes place on a one-to-one basis. This represents a shift in the supervisory relationship, as the communication becomes more direct and personal. It is helpful if the basic structure of the dissertation, the details of the reference system that must be used, timelines for completion and details of the submission process are explained to students early in the course. Requesting a basic outline or proposal for the dissertation from trainees at a certain point during the training period would assist conceptualisation of essential aspects of the dissertation and would discourage procrastination. The completion of the dissertation offers new learning opportunities for the trainee as developmental tasks that have not been successfully mastered tend to be reflected as problems during the authoring process. For instance, if integration of self has not been achieved, the trainee may find it difficult to integrate various chapters of the dissertation into a harmonious flow of ideas, which could open new avenues of exploration within the supervision relationship and could provide additional insights. The finalisation of the

dissertation usually marks the end of the formal training period and represents a “coming of age” for the therapist.

In preparation for the future career of the trainee as a registered psychologist, certain additional resources could be mobilised. Lectures or workshops could be arranged on topics such as setting up and managing a private practice, ethical dilemmas and dealing with legal issues in private practice. Continuing professional development offered by training institutions could also assist in expanding psychologists’ knowledge of and ease their integration into the professional community. Feedback from psychologists on possible topics for discussion and exploration could improve attendance and assist in serving the current needs of the professional community.

#### Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The strength of this study lies in its exploration of the growth and development of an individual in a variety of social contexts and over a period spanning more than 40 years. It highlights the repetitive nature of patterns learnt during childhood and the continuous revisiting and changing of this spiral of differentiation and integration. A further strength is that the models of differentiation are drawn from a broad base of epistemologies to provide a comprehensive framework for this analysis. Human developmental theory and theories of differentiation provide the basic structure of how human beings deal with new developmental challenges and an established model for psychotherapist training served to confirm the author’s own experience of the training milieu, while metaphysical models provide a meta-perspective of differentiation and add purpose and meaning to the developmental process. An integrated model of differentiation was extracted from these apparently divergent voices to provide a map for supervisees and supervisors to negotiate their way through the paradoxical maze of the training process.

The limitation of the study is that it is based on the subjective account of one individual’s life in a particular training context, and the findings can therefore not necessarily be extrapolated to other trainees or training contexts. A qualitative or quantitative analysis of the experiences of additional members of a training group or

a selection of students from different training contexts could provide an understanding of common factors which underlie this context of differentiation. Further research could also be done on particular subsections of this study, such as the selection process or the ongoing differentiation of therapists after they leave the training facility. The experiences of supervisors during the training process and the reciprocal nature of differentiation may also provide further insights.

Ultimately, we are shaped by each other like pebbles in a river and differentiation of the self and integration into the broader social context are mutually enriching and meaningful experiences that add value to humanity. The training context provides a family of origin for the professional career of the therapist, and brief visits to its hallways would be indicative of successful differentiation from this family as well.

In the words of Gibran (1980, p. 113):

Fare you well, people of Orphalese.

This day has ended.

It is closing upon us even as the water-lily upon its own to-morrow.

What was given us here we shall keep,

And if it suffices not, then again must we come together

and together stretch our hands unto the giver

...

And if our hands should meet in another dream

we shall build another tower in the sky.

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