ABSTRACT

This article presents a technique for assessing the pastoral supervision process. First we interpret supervision analytically and clarify its relevance by highlighting a typical problem in pastoral supervision, namely role tension. We then present the self-confrontation method, based on valuation theory, as a means of supervision assessment. Subsequently we illustrate its use by describing a case study of supervision that was analysed using this technique. Finally, we discuss the constraints and potential of this assessment technique in pastoral supervision. Elicitors for supervision assessment are provided in an appendix.

1. Supervision Model

An important part of supervision is to identify the learning requirements of appropriating professional roles. Supervision can be described analytically as interplay of three practices. First we have the social practice, in which the client interacts in the social context that represents a major part of the raw material for the supervision of supervisees in their internship or training situation. Thus the social practice is that of clients grappling with their social context in a way that indicates a more or less objective need for professional intervention of some kind. Aspects of this social practice provide the input for a professional practice, in which supervisees act professionally in their clients' social context. They explore a new professional context, develop skills and tackle problems. In so doing they simultaneously attend to the clients' social practice in their own context. This in turn presupposes an educational practice: the representation and mediation of the educational context by the supervisor in order to assess and develop the professional practice of the supervisee. We can describe these three practices by means of the following model:
The aforementioned three practices are related by two learning modes that are assessed in terms of their reciprocal significance during supervision. The first is the primary learning mode, in which supervisees come to understand the social practice of the client. Supervisees learn to observe and understand the needs, problems and coping styles of clients, and deploy their social skills to interact in this context. The second mode is secondary learning, in which supervisees come to understand their interventions in their clients' social practice as professional practice that they engage in, from the perspective of the educational practice facilitated by the supervisor. This mode of learning is more complex. Thus supervisees have to adopt a position in their clients' social context and use that position to fulfill a meaningful professional role for clients, at the same time developing their professional proficiency in this role according to the educational aims mediated, modelled and evaluated by the supervisor. From the supervisees' point of view the apprenticeship requires that they attune their primary and secondary learning mode in such a manner that, at the end of their internship or practical training, they will no longer need the support of the supervisor and will have internalized the various requirements for independent performance.

Note: the relationship between the three practices is important. For instance, the three practices are to some degree integrated when a clinician performs a medical examination on a patient in the setting of an academic hospital, involving and simultaneously supervising her apprentices. These topological supervisory alternatives are relevant, because they vary the opportunities for professional assessment and learning. Also note that the significance of each agent in the supervisory process can vary. The client may be the focus of supervision, as often happens in clinical diagnosis when highly specialized knowledge is applied to link the symptoms of specific cases to syndromes. Supervision may also focus on the supervisee, as commonly occurs in the helping professions where the supervisee's attitudinal stance as a relating person is the main professional tool. Finally, the supervisor can be the principal object of supervision when, for