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Supervision of supervisors - on developing supervision as pedagogy and support in Post-graduate education

Abstract

Supervising Supervisors and Ph.D. Candidates – on the development of supervision as a form of instruction and a pedagogic instrument in postgraduate education

Supervision

This developmental project is focused on a so-called "relationally-oriented perspective on subjective understanding" in supervision, where the theoretical framework is of a social-psychological nature with a psychodynamic foundation. It's a combination of the importance of relationships in learning situations and the function of supervisors in this context. My understanding contains an assumption that the relationship between supervisor and Ph.D. candidate is of central importance for the course and amount of time that postgraduate studies take. Emphasis is placed on supervision as a professional activity and the development of professional knowledge centring on relations.

Methodology and operative approach

Supervision as a model for learning in postgraduate studies can be described as a meta-level, where the developmental project's pedagogic method in itself functions as a training arena. At the same time that the participants learn the "craft" of supervision by actively participating in it, they also gain insight and knowledge of how this process can be understood and conducted from an interpersonal perspective. In the process-oriented supervision model that lies closest to this developmental project, it is not just the relationship between, in this case, the research supervisor and the Ph.D. candidate that is emphasised. Even the interplay between people in the workgroup and the supervisory group provides the basis for reflection and analysis in the aim of understanding what takes place in the give(ing) and take(ing) of postgraduate studies.

Aim

The overarching aim of this pedagogical project is to make an improvement of the Ph.D. candidate's learning possible by developing the supervision setting as an instructional form and pedagogic instrument in postgraduate education. As the project's primary model for learning and evaluation is also supervision, the

pedagogic approach can be described as "supervising on supervising;" a "meta-level" for both research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates. Training in reflection over situations that may arise with the help of, among others, communication theory and social-psychological explanatory models comprise a central aspect of the learning process, along side an ever-present gender perspective. An ambition is that this skills training in interpersonal interaction will serve as a model for giving and taking supervision. Through the renewal that this pedagogic method implies, the place and importance of supervision in postgraduate studies is highlighted and reflected upon. The difference between the student-teacher relationship at the undergraduate level is articulated in order to more easily facilitate the transition to postgraduate studies. The intention of the developmental project is, with the Ph.D. candidate's learning at the centre, to improve the possibility for postgraduate education to attain its overarching goal: to develop the Ph.D. candidate's ability to conduct independent, scientific work, and eventually even to function as a research supervisor.

Planning and content

The pedagogical project would be carried out at Lund's Technical University's. Research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates from this department will participate in the project. I, as project director, and another supervisor will carry out the instruction and supervision. Below is a list of the areas of the interplay between research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates that will be the object of description, reformulation, analysis and reflection:

- Research supervision and the content of the developmental project
- The importance of relationships
- The various phases of the research process from a relational perspective
- The various roles over the course of postgraduate studies
- The importance of the research supervisor and Ph.D. candidate's personality
- The development of the Ph.D. candidate's identity on the way to becoming an independent researcher.

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Supervision of supervisors – on developing supervision as pedagogy and support in Post-graduate education

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Final report (026/F01)

Background

The background to this pedagogic project has its basis in the supervisors' and the postgraduate students' situation at the Universities in Sweden. During the 1900s, the path to a Ph.D. degree has seen many changes for either of these two groups (Odén 1991). The idea of postgraduate studies as an *education*, with a component of coursework was introduced into the Swedish university system in the mid 1950s with the aim of leading to higher degrees – the Licentiate degree and the Ph.D. (Sörlin 1996). Over time, the supervisor's job has increased in scope. Today's supervisors can be expected to do anything from choosing a research objective and applying for funding to reading final manuscripts (Odén 1991; Jensen, et al 1991). Even the demands made on Ph.D. candidates have increased; one especially poignant area of concern is the introduction of time limitations for completion of the degree. Overall, postgraduate studies can be said to contain difficult situations for both the supervisor and the Ph.D. candidate, where neither of the two parties might be competent to deal with problems that can arise and where relationships play a central role (Grant & Graham 1994:165).

The form and content of postgraduate studies in Sweden has been investigated in detail in the past (see, for example, Jense 1985; Strömberg Sölveborn 1983). The necessity of supervision for Ph.D. candidates has been increasingly emphasised in connection with the need to create a rational and effective postgraduate education. In the government bill "Research and Renewal" [*regeringspropositionen "Forskning och förnyelse"*], training in supervision is named as one of the matters given high priority (Prop. 2000/2001:3 p.13). A report from the Swedish Association of Higher Education (Sveriges Universitets- och Högskoleförbund 1999) states that among the primary reasons that the actual time taken to

complete a Ph.D. degree is longer than the statutorily allotted four years are “all too high demands/standards, inadequate supervision, and teaching and other departmental duties.” The proportion of Ph.D. candidates who name poor supervision as a reason in delaying the completion of their degree is 37% (Sveriges Universitets- och Högskoleförbund 1999:6).

Åsa Bergenheim (2001) believes that it is most often the viewpoints of Ph.D. candidates that are the focus of most investigations. In a study on the daily activities of supervisors, she finds that they experience problems that can be described in terms of “loneliness, insecurity, lack of rights, distress, and incompetence” but that they also affirm that their job also comprises many sources of happiness (Bergenheim 2001, cf. Lauvås & Handal 2001). Similar experiences of the interplay between supervisors and Ph.D. candidates were reported in a study conducted by Jensen et al in 1991. Lindén (1998), however, contends that this field has not been questioned and investigated in the same way that other supervision situations have, such as in psychotherapeutic activities, for example. In psychotherapeutic activities, as in social work, supervision is part of a professional praxis. Both those who carry out as well as those who receive supervision possess knowledge within the given professional field, as well as special competence with regard to supervision as a pedagogic method for the transmission of knowledge.

Courses in research supervision are being carried out at more and more universities and colleges. The government has also proposed an additional clause to the Higher Education Ordinance of 1993 stating that “institutions of higher education with postgraduate programs must offer training in supervision (Prop. 2000/2001:3). In the newly published report "A New Doctoral Education" (SOU 2004:27 p 43) you can read that at least one of a doctoral student's supervisors must have attended the especial course required. At the same time, we see that research supervisors report roughly similar problems in their work today as before training programmes were initiated. Many of the problems are attributed to the relationship between the supervisor and the Ph.D. candidate, and similar experiences are reported in international studies (see, for example, Aspland & O'Donoghue 1994; Conrad 1994). These interpersonal processes of a psychological nature have an inherent complexity that is difficult to convey with traditional methods of instruction. Supervisor training in human service professions therefore emphasises learning to intervene in these psychological processes, both for the giver and recipient of supervision. Within the framework of today's training of supervisors in postgraduate studies, there usually still are no supervision or process-oriented activities that take place over a longer time-span. Neither was there the opportunity for training supervisors

in their role as the “master,” and Ph.D. candidates in the role of “apprentice,” a role that many may not recently have experienced after many years of independent professional activity.

Aim and points of departure

With this fundamental knowledge base, the overarching aim of this project was to make an improvement of the Ph.D. candidate's learning possible by developing the supervision setting as an instructional form and pedagogic instrument in postgraduate education. As the project's primary model for learning and evaluation was also supervision, the pedagogic approach can be described as "supervising on supervising;" a "meta-level" for both research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates. Training in reflection over situations that may arise with the help of, among others, communication theory and social-psychological explanatory models comprise a central aspect of the learning process, along side an ever-present gender perspective (cf. Clinchy 1990; Lundmark et al 2000; Lorentzi 1996; Trojer & Guldbrandsen 1996).

The focus has been on a so-called "relationally-oriented perspective on subjective understanding" in supervision, where the theoretical framework is of a social-psychological nature with a psycho - dynamic foundation. It's a combination of the importance of relationships in learning situations and the function of supervisors in this context. The understanding contains an assumption that the relationship between supervisor and Ph.D. candidate is of central importance for the course and amount of time that postgraduate studies take. Emphasis is placed on supervision as a professional activity and the development of professional knowledge centring on relations.

An ambition was that this skill training in interpersonal interaction would serve as a model for giving and taking supervision. Through the renewal that this pedagogic method implies, the place and importance of supervision in postgraduate studies is highlighted and reflected upon. The difference between the student-teacher relationship at the undergraduate level was articulated in order to facilitate the transition to postgraduate studies. The intention of the developmental project was, with the Ph.D. candidate's learning at the centre, to improve the possibility for postgraduate education to attain its overarching goal: to develop the Ph.D. candidate's ability to conduct independent, scientific work, and eventually even to function as a research supervisor.

Orientations

The various forms of supervision are compartmentalised depending on what one focuses on. In so-called “problem-oriented supervision,” one focuses on tasks that are undertaken together with the client, or in this case, the Ph.D. candidate, comprising of identified problems to be solved. In this basic situation the central objective is to teach the supervisor how best to solve the problem. This orientation can be based on psycho-dynamic, system theory, or cognitive approaches, or a combination of these. The basis for the learning process in these problem-oriented supervision models lies, in other words, primarily in the problems that “the other” causes. Translated into the supervisory relations in postgraduate studies, from this perspective focus would be given either to the Ph.D. candidate and his or her problems, or the shortcomings of the research supervisor, rather than the supervision situation or the importance of relationships.

In so-called “process-oriented supervision” attention is directed to the interpersonal processes that take place in the professional meeting, placing both the practising professional and the client, and the relationship they create, at the centre. Olsson (1992:2) believes that “...the experience of the supervised provides the basis for a reflection and learning process. This process is meant to lead to greater insight into the basic issues of the problem to be tackled and a better capacity to contribute to constructive solutions among the supervised.” This orientation, with its concentration on processes and relationships, has its roots in psychotherapy, and has its conceptual points of departure in psychological and social-psychological theories. In contrast to the problem-oriented supervisory model, the relationship, and in this case the experiences of the research supervisor and the Ph.D. candidate, form the basis for a reflection process that is both educational and supportive in nature (cf. Bernler & Johnsson; Cajvert 1988; Egidius 1997; Gjerms 1997; Kadushin 1985; Olsson 1991; Sproul-Bolton 1995).

Methodology and implementation

Supervision as a model for learning in postgraduate studies can, as stated above, be described as a “meta-level”, where the developmental project’s pedagogic method *in itself* functions as a training arena. At the same time that the participants learn the “craft” of supervision by actively participating in it, they also gain insight and knowledge of how this process can be understood and conducted from an interpersonal perspective. This approach to learning can be

compared to how psychotherapists in training undergo therapy themselves to attain increased knowledge of not only their own personality but also how therapy can be conducted. Social workers are trained as supervisors on a similar basis.

In the process-oriented supervision model that lies closest to this developmental project, it is not just the relationship between, in this case, the research supervisor and the Ph.D. candidate that is emphasised. Even the interplay between people in the workgroup and the supervisory group provides the basis for reflection and analysis in the aim of understanding what takes place in the give(ing) and take(ing) of postgraduate studies. So-called parallel processes describe how material moves from one field to another, and “that the patient’s unconscious, or unrecognised by the therapist, or non-comprehended, communication is expressed indirectly in supervision (Stiwne 1993:16; also Belin 1993). With regard to research supervision, one could compare, for example, how the supervisor’s own research problems come to expression in his or her view and experience of the Ph.D. candidate. The supervisor, probably unconsciously, transfers his or her disappointment over private relationships and lack of positive results in the study to the supervisory relationship. It can also be the case that the supervisor’s or Ph.D. candidate’s contact or competition with other persons in the local environment is also reflected in the contact between supervisor and supervised.

The project has been carried out at Lund’s Technical University’s [*LTH*]. I, as project leader, and another supervisor have accomplished the instruction and supervision. As a psychologist and social worker, with supervisory capabilities and a Ph.D. in Social Work, I have many years of experience in supervision and teaching. Eva Johnsson, the other supervisor is a social worker and certified family therapist with a Ph.D. in Social Work. She also has extensive experience in supervision and teaching. The reasons for co-operating over faculty borders are rooted in psychological and ethical considerations, as it would be impossible and inappropriate to supervise one’s own colleagues. Furthermore, supervising research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates from an entirely separate discipline would accentuate the communication theoretical and social-psychological process orientation without the risk for intervening or interfering in the content of what is taught in the relationship between the research supervisor and the Ph.D. candidate.

Content

The areas of the interplay between research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates that has been the object of description, reformulation, analysis and reflection are:

- Research supervision and the content of the developmental project
- The importance of relationships
- The various phases of the research process from a relational perspective
- The various roles over the course of postgraduate studies
- The importance of the research supervisor and Ph.D. candidate's personality
- The development of the Ph.D. candidate's identity on the way to becoming an independent researcher

The pedagogic orientation has its base in the basic assumptions that are used in problem-based learning, that "all learning takes its point of departure from already present knowledge and experience." To this we add the conviction that professional activity demands a scientifically based theoretical perspective with an associated capacity to apply this in practice in everyday situations.

Based on these assumptions, the developmental project's content and pedagogic construction can be described as three integrated parts that run parallel - lectures, cases and supervision:

- **Lectures:** A theoretical perspective on communication and interpersonal processes from psychological and social-psychological approaches
- **Cases:** For research supervisors: a concluded supervisory experience that serves as the basis for theoretical application and reflection. This is carried out via a written reconstruction of the research process and the relations it entailed as a "case". For Ph.D. candidates: a description of a case that they formulate themselves containing a "problem" arising in a supervision situation that they wish to investigate and understand.
- **Supervision** and theoretical applications on the supervision situation that they currently are engaged in, where their own experiences and reactions as well as on-going processes in the interpersonal relations in the supervisory context is of primary focus.

The participants

The supervision was carried out in two groups: one with the research supervisors constituted of seven persons and one group of Ph.D. candidates with four members.

The group of supervisors consisted of one professor and six senior lecturers/associate professors. Among the supervisors five are women and two of them are men. Only one was younger than 40 years old and the oldest was 53. All are working at the same department but one of the women is stationed at a different part of the institution. The initial idea for the co-operation began during a course in supervision. The contact deepened and the plans for this developmental project took form later on. Ten research supervisors participated in the concrete planning of the project. The ideas were then taken up with the Ph.D. candidates at the department, who showed an equal interest in undertaking the project. For various reasons not all of the research supervisors at the department then took part in the project, and for some unknown reasons the number of Ph.D. candidates also diminished.

The group of Ph.D. candidates consisted of four persons, two women and two men, who belonged to two different departments. The men were in their twenties and had been promoted to Ph.D. candidates directly after the graduate studies. The women were about 10 years older and had been employed in different kind of work before they entered the Ph.D. studies. They had approximately one year to go before their dissertations, and the men had between 2- 3 years to come before finishing their doctoral studies.

Different expectations - different experiences

All in the group of research supervisors expected great things from this supervision project and meant that the experiences came up to the expectations. Due to their experiences of being supervisors and the courses in research supervision they had attended, they were interested in getting more knowledge about themselves as supervisors. They wanted to learn more about psychological aspects on relationships and they asked for "tools" to use in the communication. On the contrary, the Ph.D. candidates were not so motivated and for them it was already in the very beginning difficult to understand the usefulness of this kind of supervision. In order to describe the process in the two groups, which in a certain sense makes part of the project's result, I'll start with the research supervisors.

Supervision of supervisors

In the group of supervisors the work followed the project plan from the very beginning to the end (except of some extension in time). Therefore the description of the implementation with regard to the content gives insight in the realisation of the original ideas. But only in that sense as the group-processes for natural reasons never can be planned in advanced. The whole project started and ended with common meetings for all participants. Altogether 13 sessions (usually during three hours) were accomplished from February 2002 until May 2003 as follows:

January 2002: *A collective introduction* where both research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates participated and expressed their thoughts about the upcoming project.

February 2002 through March 2003: *Supervision, totalling 11 meetings.* The reason that the model was built on supervision of the two groups of research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates *separately* was to afford members of both groups to honestly and openly express their feelings without the risk that such expressions could complicate their work and study situations at the department. The ethical aspects of confidentiality about what was said in these groups was both a central and for us self-evident component. During this period it was also possible for other constellations of supervision to arise if so desired but no such supervision was demanded.

During the first session the supervisors made an introduction of themselves and their expectations. The method of working with an own case was orally introduced and a written description was given. According to the schedule the participants in this group reconstructed a completed research supervision case in writing. At the following meeting each participant gave an oral presentation and to the next session all had read each other's case descriptions. These case descriptions provided the basis for applications and discussions during the rest of the course.

The supervising sessions

From now on each supervision meeting started with a lecture on relevant psychological, social-psychological or communication theories in this order introduced at the first common meeting:

- Communication - theory and practise
- Supervision - theories and methods

- Personal constructs and cognitive processes of attribution
- "Meta - communication" and levels of communication
- Transference and communication
- Acknowledgement and communication
- Empathy in communication and relationship
- Group-processes and interaction based on system theory

At each meeting the lecture was followed by process supervision when the participants were given the opportunity to express their experiences and reactions in their roles as research supervisors. With the help of the other participants in the group, as well as the supervisor, an attempt was made to analyse and understand situations based on their own experiences and theoretical approaches. Training in reflexive thought is a central aspect of this pedagogic model. To wind up the session titles on scientific based literature were given. After each meeting, the supervisor wrote detailed process notes that later comprise the basis for describing, reformulating and analysing supervision as an educational method.

The eleventh and final session: *A whole day seminar*. The supervisors' written analysis made (based on the theoretical perspectives introduced during the course) provided the basis for group discussions and used at the conclusion of the course in both a knowledge transmission and evaluative purpose.

May 2003: Evaluation of the supervision given. The initial expectations expressed at the beginning of the project and the actual results attained during the project were first discussed in each of the two groups, then collectively in one large group.

The process

All the research supervisors were present nearly every time with the exception of one that finished the work and left the department in the middle of the project. As mentioned above only one of the group members came from another part of the department, which meant that six of them knew each other quite well already before we started. They had been working together for quite a while and they all were active in the concrete planning of this project. The high degree of activity continued through out the whole project work and all the group members were included. Great interest and devotion to supervision as a matter and pedagogic method distinguished the meetings. The participants constructed their "cases" according to the schedule and they were all well prepared for the presentations and seminars. During the

lectures they actively tried to apply the theories on their own situations as supervisors and even on the group processes. Thanks to their curiosity for the social sciences, and effort of will to learn and understand these theories, the meetings were characterised by respect and lively discussions.

Beside the reflections on their own acting and the meaning of the relationship between themselves and the Ph.D. candidates, especially two matters can be emphasised: *liability* and *demands*. Issues about whether the supervisor or the Ph.D. candidate is having the main responsibility for the research student's post-graduate education and the writing of a dissertation were frequent. Even questions about how to confront a person to get necessary research work done, either in a project with responsibility to the funding organisations or for the research student's own best were discussed.

In one sense the group of supervisors could be described as homogeneous. They came from the same department with comparable working situations and experiences as supervisors and all of them also were full of expectation to the pedagogic idea. On the other hand the group could be described as fairly heterogeneous consisting of seven individuals with different sex, ethnical extraction and personalities. What they had in common was the thrust to themselves, the group, the supervisor and the situation. In a social - psychological interpretative context this thrust can be understood as the basic platform on which they could allow them to honestly discuss their experiences and feelings (cf. Erikson 1974). In the very beginning when they worked with the "cases" one of the supervisors said enthusiastically: "*Now it's real. During previous courses it has been more like swimming - stroke practice out of the water*".

Supervision of Ph.D. candidates

In comparison with the research supervisors' work the Ph.D. candidates' process became quite different in certain respects. As mentioned above the group in the beginning consisted of four Ph.D. students but after a while two of them left the group. Even the way of working and the content as a whole were relatively disparate which will be clear from following description.

Method

The method planned was the same as the one described for the supervision of the research supervisors. The participants in the Ph.D. candidate group would formulate a "problem" of

their own from their own postgraduate studies that they would work with during the course of the project. This problem formulation would be treated in the same way as the research supervisors' "cases." Due to some difficulties that will be described further on in the text some modifications of the structure were done. The number of meetings reduced from eleven to eight because of non-attendance of group members. Another modification was that three of the attendees were individually interviewed after the project was completed. The aim of this interview was to evaluate the project. After every supervision session, the supervisor has written diary notes. The notes have focused on the matter of fact aspects, which were discussed, and the group process including reflections about these different aspects.

The modified structure

The first five meetings followed the main structure of the research project. These meetings included lectures about: a) theories of communication, b) supervision - theory and method, c) theory of attribution, d) communication in different levels and e) different aspects of communication. Parallel to the lectures the students also worked with their case study/ task and there were discussions about their present situation as doctoral students. Modification of the main structure were then made for the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth meeting which were reduced to two appointments instead of four. At the sixth meeting the lecture focused on psycho - dynamic theories, highlighting transference and counter transference in communication processes. In the seventh meeting with the group the lecture focused on group processes with emphasis on system theory. At this last meeting with the group, the group - members had prepared their task/case study, which were to be discussed in the individual interview.

The process

The students had different motives for the participation in the project. One person wanted to learn more about human processes, another emphasised personal development, a third participated because he wanted university points, and the fourth joined the project because it would be embarrassing if so few students wanted to participate. These different motives for joining the project were reflected later on in the group process, which can be divided into three phases:

Phase I included the three first meetings and was characterised by a search for a common attitude to the project. The group member's feelings of uncertainty and suspicion to the pedagogic model were discussed, and became obvious when some of them did not write the task/case. Those who wrote the task/case described complicated supervised situations, expressing feelings of abandonment from their supervisor and in their scientific work. The group discussions focused on doubts about their ability to get doctors degree, and uncertainty of whom to ask for help.

The lectures focused on theories and methods in supervision and attribution theory. It was thus difficult for some of the group members to reflect upon theories and their task and present situation. Despite the effort to get an explicit communication there were tendencies to lack of reliance in the group. In psychological theory it can be described with concepts as "trust - mistrust" (Erikson 1974).

Phase II: In the second phase the group started to fall apart because of the absence of 1-2 persons each session. The lectures continued according to the main structure and focused on communication on different levels and communication as a process. There were discussions about power and hierarchies and the differences between how this was manifested in the departments. There were also differences according to how closed the student worked with his/her supervisor in research projects. Because of the lack of presence of the participants a recapitulation was made of the project, its aim and structure. One person left due to the work and another left for studies in another country. It also appeared that some of the group members meant that they had nothing to talk about because the relation with the supervisor was very good. The meetings had so far been once per month, which all of them meant was to long time between the occasions. Together with the participants the supervisor decided to intensify this until two times per month instead. At the sixth meeting only one person came and it was cancelled. From this moment the structure changed. Instead focus was on lecturing and individual evaluating interviews with the group members.

Phase III: The group was now minimised to two persons and at the two last sessions we focused in psychodynamic theory and system theory. After the structural change there was a great interest to participate and engage in the group. There were more vivid discussions and reflections about theory and personal experiences in their work situations. Concepts as transference and different aspects of communication were reflected upon.

Evaluation and outcome

Implementation in the form described can be seen as a large collective developmental project where both research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates participate. At the same time, the project can be seen as two parallel, contemporaneous projects, as one group comprises of research supervisors and the other of Ph.D. candidates, each with their own supervisor. As the project was based on voluntary participation only one research supervisor had an own Ph.D. candidate in the project, and vice versa. The project was open to all research supervisors and Ph.D. candidates at the department, and participation was not contingent upon one's own research supervisor or Ph.D. candidate also participating in the project.

Results of the evaluation

As mentioned above, in this type of projects the implementation and process *per se* in some sense must be considered parts of the outcome. Therefore most we have arrived at has already been described. What remain are the evaluations made in connection with the completion of the supervision sessions and afterwards with all participants together.

During the last meeting with the research supervisors, after the examination of the "papers", some hours of evaluation of the project on the whole and the process in the own group were accomplished. All supervisors were completely satisfied with the supervision project in its entirety and even with the achievements of their own. According to their opinion they had learnt a lot about communication and relationship as well as about theories to use in order to understand what's going on between people. They felt that had got "tools" for reflection and analyse of the own behaviour but also knowledge about the interaction going on in groups. Concerning the schedule they were content with both the length of each session, as they meant it would have been impossible with less than three hours work. They also were pleased with the periodicity with more or less one meeting a month. Even if it had been interesting and fruitful with more frequent supervision occasions they expressed that it would have been difficult to give priority to additional time. However, the group of supervisors was very interested in a continuation of getting "supervision on supervision".

According to the group of Ph.D. candidates three of them were individually interviewed after the project. The main critique of the project was that the meetings should have been more often. The participants wanted stronger, clearer structure and more lectures. The positive

experience was that they finally "became a group". They also expressed that they had learned to reflect theoretical reasoning to their work reality and a higher degree of understanding other peoples' point of view and acting. However, during the final common evaluation occasion one of the Ph.D. candidates emphasised the importance of similar projects for the research students even in the future.

Conclusions and discussion

Supervision as an educational form as accomplished in this project was before our work surely an untested model in the context of postgraduate studies, but far from unknown in, for example, the training of social workers, psychologists and psychotherapists (cf. Lindén 1998).

Which are then the conclusions possible to draw out of this project? Is supervision as pedagogy and support an adequate way to make an improvement of the Ph.D. candidate's learning possible by developing the supervision setting as an instructional form and pedagogic instrument? Relating to the group of supervisors the answer would definitely become "yes" Perhaps even so for the group of Ph.D. candidates, after some changes in the structure, which was not optimal for their need of support as doctoral students. The main purpose - which through theoretical models of communication and social psychology, practise the skill of reflection in personal experienced situations - has to some extent been, fulfilled even for them.

But the very small group with diverted ambitions to participate, and even conflicts between some of the members, inflicted the climate of the group. Some structural factors within the education system as the unclear borders between students and supervisors also complicated the supervision situation for the Ph.D. candidates, as their roles became unclear and hard to define. When their supervisor at the same time is both supervisor and manager it creates double loyalties that can be hard to handle for the students but even for the supervisors (cf. Grant & Graham 1994).

Finally it must be taken into account that supervision, for the research supervisors, is a continuing task to deal with in the frame of their daily professional work. However, for the Ph.D. students the process of supervision is a part of a time-limited educational situation with different kind of needs and support along the way.

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