

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME ISSUE

### An Account of a Supervision Diploma

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We (Joan Wilmot and Robin Shohet) have been running supervision courses since 1979 through the Centre for Supervision and Team Development ([www.cstdlondon.co.uk](http://www.cstdlondon.co.uk)). In response to requests from students, we instigated a supervision diploma. Our first course started in early November 2018 and finished late September 2019.

Before the course started we asked people to write 500 words on why they wanted to do the diploma. The answers centred around needing an extra qualification and ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It seemed to help people focus on what they might want.

We started the course with an initial half-day contracting session with ten participants. The idea behind this was for participants to meet us (four of the ten had not) and to explain the requirements of the course. These consisted of a piece of written work, a book review, and a case study with the use of video. We explained that we were not going to mark the piece of written work, but that to pass the diploma they would need to get their piece of written work published, and we would help them with that. The thinking behind this was that their pieces would be useful additions to the literature, and have supervision more known and understood.

This has led to this special edition of the *Self and Society* magazine, showcasing their articles.

We also showed the Ben Zander Youtube clip on getting an A (see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTKEBygQic0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTKEBygQic0)). Zander is an orchestra conductor, and at the beginning of the year, he explains to his students that they are all 'A' students, and that he wanted them to write out how they got their 'A's, and he would teach that person. This approach ties in with our own philosophy, which is not one of pass/fail, but for us all to be learning together. We wanted course participants to use each other as well as us for their learning, and we asked them to form peer groups to support each other in this.

We also did an Appreciative Inquiry on supervision, looking at how they were already working well, how supervision has enriched their lives, and the miracle question of imagining it is a year hence, and how the diploma might have enhanced them personally and professionally – our version of the Ben Zander approach.

Finally we suggested their keeping a journal of some sort – again for their benefit, not ours. Here are contrasting extracts from two students (with permission):

...I leave the first meeting reminded of the frustration and challenge of self-directed learning spaces. A part of me would like it on a plate – that I could then kick against – but there's only me to kick against here! So I decide to engage and take responsibility for making it what I need it to be for me.... Philosophically it is congruent with my approach to therapy but reminds me of the hard work and the longing for a parent-teacher to tell me what to do to get it right....

...I really appreciated being told, 'You are all grade A students and you have already passed', however it took some months before I was ready to accept that statement. In the absence of punitive external assessment, which I have always expected from educational courses, there has been nobody for me to project my insecurities onto. Instead I have been starkly presented with my own self-critical beliefs....

After the initial November contracting meeting, there were three full days in February, April and July. We decided to add a fourth in September as we (Robin and Joan) felt that we could not do justice to all we had asked the participants to do in the time, i.e. the book reviews, the case study and the piece of written work. We asked them to meet in their peer groups at least once between the days with us, in which they could do some supervision and give each other feedback on their written pieces. These proved to be increasingly useful to the participants.

We had certain items to go through for each of these days, like watching their videos with them; but as far as possible we let the content emerge. For example, we did some impro drama, which one person commented was one of the highlights of the course for her. On the penultimate day in July – unplanned – we asked people to read out a paragraph from their writing and say to the whole group why they had chosen that paragraph, and we gave feedback. This proved very moving, and two people changed their writing completely to become much more personal, and several adapted theirs.

This tension between planned and emergent was a theme throughout, as these two accounts show.

...Beginning each session by discussing what we wanted to focus on and gain that week felt inclusive, and in some ways that we were on this journey *with* Robin and Joan, rather than being led. However, at times this meant that what I thought was going to happen, based upon emails, did not materialise. This was frustrating at times when I had prepared work, and myself, to present, and it did not happen. So, while appreciating space to respond in the moment, I would have liked us to stick to plans agreed, or for no plans to be made for the next session to allow for a focus to emerge in the opening round....

...Initially, I found Robin and Joan's unstructured approach to learning difficult and uncomfortable, as there was less certainty and order to follow and feel contained by. As I reflected on this, I decided to embrace the creativity and openness it gave me, to think differently and welcome uncertainty – which of course is a key purpose of counselling and supervising!

What I liked was the unstructured format of the course days that allowed the freedom to play and spontaneity to emerge....

It is worth saying a few words about the case study. We asked them to watch it first with their peers, and choose a bit to focus upon whilst watching it later with us. When we watched with them we used Kagan's Interpersonal Process Recall described in the forthcoming book *In Love with Supervision* (Shohet & Shohet, 2020, Chapter 6). We also asked participants to complete the Inquiry Form which can be taken from our website ([www.cstdlondon.co.uk](http://www.cstdlondon.co.uk)). This can be adapted to other relationships besides supervisory ones.

Before going on to the articles themselves, here are a few more comments from participants about the course. From their accounts it seemed that in the peer groups, and to some extent with us, there were dissatisfactions, especially at the beginning and middle of the course, with the degree of unstructuredness; but by the end the participants began to see its value.

I feel that the course leaders have assessed me in an accepting and encouraging way; I have been invited to explore my self-doubt in a way that has been inclusive of the whole group, and I have really enjoyed supporting other group members

in their own difficult encounters with self. I have found the course personally transformational: it has helped me recognise my self-deprecating tendencies, accept them, be vulnerable with those whom I trust, and developed trust in my own ability to heal past traumas.

I go forward in my work with greater confidence, more assured and less defended than before. Seeing my contemporaries was a great opportunity to hone my own style of supervision. The greatest impact on my practice is reflected in my increased congruence, to speak the unspoken, and to name the processes going on between supervisor and supervisee, rather than to think them, strengthening my transparency and authenticity.

There could have been greater clarity about the nature of the course, its explicit underlying aims (and hidden curriculum) could be helpful at the very beginning, as this may reduce resistance and confusion.... Equally, it may be that it is more fun, more rewarding and more worthwhile for people to work that out for themselves in time. A course booklet and rough outline of what will be covered, although this may not be feasible given that we co-create the course?

The Diploma in Supervision has been an incredible experience and surprising gift, not what I initially imagined or envisaged, yet somehow it exceeded all hopes and expectations. The course is unique, unconventional and challenging, both in content and delivery, encouraging us to expand our thoughts, to challenge deeply held beliefs and to veer out of our familiar patterns and comfort zones. I enjoyed many aspects of the course, including the chance to create peer support groups, to witness each other's supervision styles, to share feedback, and an opportunity to write an article 'an absolute gem', providing us with the invaluable opportunity to write from the heart. Above all, I liked the element of challenge, of

sharing ideas and philosophies arising from book reviews. The impact of the philosophy behind 'Finite and Infinite Games', a radical, uplifting, game changer in my approach to life. This course has facilitated my personal growth and development way beyond my wildest hopes. The work we did and discussions we had shone a laser beam on to the most defended parts of me, enabling me to begin to dismantle the last traces of armour, for which I am eternally grateful.

This was a pilot Diploma and has much creative potential. It invited several participants, who had studied more prescriptive models of supervision, into an enhanced relational authenticity with their supervisees.

The written pieces that follow (there are eight of them, as two people left – one for health reasons, the other for time commitments) are, I think, useful additions to the supervision literature. I have included a brief comment at the heading of each.

## Reference

Shohet, R. and Shohet, J. (2020). *In Love with Supervision: Creating Transformative Conversations*. Monmouth: PCCS Books.

## About the contributor

Robin and his partner Joan have been supervising for over 40 years. In 1979 they co-founded the Centre for Supervision and Team Development ([www.cstdlondon.co.uk](http://www.cstdlondon.co.uk)) through which they have been teaching supervision internationally. An account of their combined work is in their latest book *In Love with Supervision: Creating Transformative Conversations*, published by PCCS books in February 2020 (see <https://www.pccs-books.co.uk/products/in-love-with-supervision#.XjFpsjL7SM8>).