Psychoanalytic supervision as one of the three basic categories of requirements for psychoanalytic training has remained constant for almost 60 years. The other two categories—the so-called training analysis and assorted course and clinical seminars—have also continued to be an integral part of psychoanalytic training. However, with the development of variable jurisdictional bodies and the proliferation of training institutes, there seem to have been more modifications regarding these other two categories, and fewer changes in psychoanalytic supervision as these pertain to the teaching and learning of the therapeutic aspects of psychoanalysis as well as to the evaluation of progress in training of the psychoanalytic candidate.

I shall mention only a few of the modifications in the training-analysis requirement and its implementation. These include aspects of frequency of sessions and overall duration of the training analysis, the extent to which it is prescribed as a prerequisite to beginning course work or supervision, the training analyst’s participation or not in the evaluation of progress in training of the candidate, factors entering into the appointment of training analysts, and even the consideration of retirement of training analysts. Of lasting and shared importance is, of course, the almost general prohibition for the training analyst to be or to become the analysand’s supervising analyst, at least for the fulfilment of the requirement of supervised analysis. As for the category of courses and seminars, curricula have had to be modified, if not radically, at least in regard to chronology and emphasis.
Compared to the previously hinted at evolution, the category of analysis under supervision seems to have remained almost unchanged. In most instances, psychoanalytic institutes continue to require supervised work with a minimum of three supervisors and a total of four different patients for a varying number of hours as specified by the institute. Supervising analysts are so appointed and accredited by the particular training institution, and candidates are permitted to make their own choice from the official roster. Assignment of a particular candidate to a particular supervising analyst may be made by a training or educational committee—usually in cases where there is considerable conflict or discrepancy in reports of progress between or among supervising analysts. Rarely is credit given for supervision with an analyst not accredited by the candidate’s institution. Occasionally, supervising analysts may be accredited by more than one psychoanalytic institute and thus are available to candidates in different institutes. Generally, it is conceded that the model of psychoanalytic supervision instituted by the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute in the middle 1920s and 1930s, with some sprinkling of Viennese and Hungarian stipulations, has been adopted and continues to prevail close to three-score years later.

In this essay I shall consider that supervision is a presumably valuable necessity and instrumentality in the development of resourceful psychoanalysts. In that context I shall state some impressions and raise some questions as to educational and clinical aspects that may constitute potentially problematic areas in psychoanalytic supervision. By extension, and to a variable extent, these observations may prove applicable to psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy as well, although this is not going to be the focus of my inquiry. These problematic areas are composed of the following:

1. The questionable equation of teaching and learning
2. The tenuous aspects of a transmissible body of knowledge
3. The difficulty in bringing similar or dissimilar assumptions about psychoanalytic supervision into alignment or integration
4. The attendant vicissitudes regarding roles, processes, and contents

Although a number of questions pertaining to the preceding areas may remain unanswered and—preferably and probably—should continue so, I shall make some attempts at clarifying the more effectively contributory elements of psychoanalytic supervision both to the candidate’s training and to the patient’s welfare, not to mention the inevitable corollary of the supervising psychoanalyst’s concerns and morale.