Countertransference in Supervision
Therapeutic Consequences for the Supervisee

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Education, as Professor Whitehead (1929, p. 6) wrote, is the acquisition of the art of utilizing knowledge. He added that this is an art that is very difficult to impart. Most psychoanalysts are engaged in some educational pursuit, whether in classrooms, hospitals, or liaison work with other professionals. Most of us also educate through supervision—that is, teaching the art of utilizing technical knowledge and the utilization of the self as an “analytic instrument,” as defined by Isakower (Balter, Lothane, & Spencer, 1980).

The psychotherapeutic aim of supervision is to improve the quality of the analyzing instrument—that is, the student’s therapeutic personality. The psychotherapeutic consequences for the supervisee derive from the supervisory experience itself and from its influence on the supervisee’s concurrent analysis, if he is a candidate in training.

This chapter is an attempt to pull loose ends together. Interweaving supervision and psychoanalysis is not firmly anchored in traditional paths of psychoanalytic education. On the contrary, as Daryl DeBell (1981) writes:

Perhaps one of the earliest and most persistent questions about appropriate supervisory activity is how much one should treat the analyst versus how much one should simply teach him. This is a peculiar question and becomes more strange the more it is discussed. For one thing, it is difficult to find...
proponents of the explicit "treatment" of candidates during supervision, certainly no one in the group\(^1\) advocates analyzing the supervisee. Still, every member of the group agrees that it is sometimes necessary to point out to the analyst certain obstructive patterns, and even on occasion to comment about and even inquire into their possible meaning and motivation. Such interventions by the supervisor are not necessarily thought to be unacceptably intrusive, i.e., "therapeutic." There is rather a tacit acceptance that such actions are often both useful and salutary.... The supervisor is demonstrating the existence of faulty technique, and is then permitted to pursue the matter by illustrating the possible origins of the error. To state the matter in extreme terms, everybody appears to oppose "treatment" of the supervisee, and yet everybody does it. Some do it with misgivings, and some without. (pp. 41-42)

The examples I choose to illustrate the interweaving of supervision and psychoanalysis are based on my experience in the conduct of both of these roles. At the William A. White Institute a candidate in the course of training is required to conduct several analyses under the guidance of several senior analysts. Different triads are thus formed, and each triad offers a different learning opportunity. The aggregate of these experiences enables the student to form the basis of his professional identity. As these experimental triads evolve, the student applies his learning effort to two simultaneous tasks: first, acquiring psychoanalytic technique, and second, understanding his emotional reactions to his patient—that is, countertransference. The emphasis on either one of these two tasks depends on the particular student, the particular supervisor, and the combination of the two. Personally, I discuss countertransference extensively with my students. Since candidates know about me through word of mouth and what I have written, those who are interested in countertransference request my supervision. There is a self-selection. It is, therefore, explicit in our initial contract that we will explore this.

In discussions of supervision in the 1930s and 1940s, the two learning tasks were seen as different areas of competence, which were to be handled by different teachers. The Hungarian system described by Balint (1948), recommending that both training and control analyses be carried out by the same person, was never approved by training conferences. In fact, the difference between the two tasks was emphasized. Teaching the student how to analyze a patient that presented problems different from the student's was termed *analysis Kontrol*. Analysis of the

\(^1\)Study group on supervision of the committee on psychoanalytic education (COPE) of the American Psychoanalytic Association.