Structures and Mechanisms in Practical Training: An Investigation of Apperception of Practical Knowledge by the Student During the Training Process, and the Development of Training Programs Based on Co-constructed Practical Knowledge Base

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Promotion of development of professional training programs requires investigation of structures and mechanisms of practical knowledge transfer processes. Since as psychotherapists we bear responsibility for the family system and transgenerational transmission, exploration of processes of practical training is an ethical obligation. Therefore, understanding the apperception of the trainee is especially crucial in mental health professional training. This article presents a research process of practical knowledge apperception, during the training process of professional development in psychotherapy, from the student's perspective. The training programs developed based on research understandings are presented. Further research on interdisciplinary practical knowledge and professional training is required.

Keywords: professional development, psychotherapeutic training, student's apperception, practical knowledge, knowledge transfer, practical research, knowledge transformation

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation is an autoethnographic presentation of my Ed.D. (Doctor of Education) - D.. Prof (Doctor of Professional practice) research process, which I conducted with my practice partner and co researcher, Ofer Erez, M.Sc. The first eight years of the research process focused on investigating our practical work in psychotherapy. During those years, we developed and investigated a framework for the extraction of tacit practical knowledge of an experienced practitioner through dialogue with a trainee during a practical training process. The collaborative research process which I conducted with Ofer was the source of transferable practical knowledge which I acquired and conceptualised during that time and comprised the knowledge content of the training courses which are the practical outcomes of this inquiry. Later in the process, another professional colleague, Dr. Anna Cristal-Lilov, a British-born physician, joined our

'research of practice' team. Her involvement also contributed greatly to the creation of interdisciplinary practical knowledge as well as to the development of our framework of practical knowledge evolution and delivery to professionals.

I embarked on the doctoral programme, having completed a B.A in psychology and a M.Sc degree in cognitive behavioral therapy, while already being a member of the academic teaching staff in the Israeli extension of Derby University. However, I had little practical experience in psychotherapy practice, which I had only begun to develop during my M.Sc training. At this time, I established a professional practice with Ofer Erez, who completed the M.Sc degree with me but had twenty more years of practical experience with children, adolescents, and their families in various settings. I identified his outstanding therapeutic skills and creative practical techniques, together with his ability to communicate efficiently with adolescents, which is known to be a challenging population to treat in psychotherapy. In order to acquire practical skills that I could utilise in my practice, I proposed to conduct an inquiry into Ofer's decision making process, for interventions in his practice.

In parallel to my dialog with Ofer, being directed towards an individual research project required for the doctoral award, during the first phase of the doctoral process, I applied a methodology which I could work on alone. The initial focus of my research was an inquiry into the utilisation of self-disclosure by practitioners in the field of therapeutic work with children and families. I adopted an interpretivist epistemic position to conduct my inquiry, and for my methodology, I interviewed twelve practitioners, a process which contributed more to my understanding of the different therapeutic approaches and techniques nonetheless, to my practical knowledge base. However, my on-going dialogue with Ofer provided me with the setting in which I developed my own theoretical approach as well as practical skills which I began to utilise in my practice.

The framework which Ofer and I co-constructed differed from traditional training approaches in therapeutic professions, in which the teacher usually supervises the trainee's early practical work. We discussed vignettes from Ofer's (i.e. the teacher) cases instead of him supervising or instructing me (i.e. the trainee) concerning my cases. From the outset of the training process, Ofer related to me as a peer practitioner, and insisted that I provide critical feedback to his narrative describing his practical approach, derived from my understanding, along with my academic knowledge base, and my evolving practical experience. In this way, we would achieve our mutual goal for the training process, which was that I develop my own personal practical approach and would not replicate that of the teacher's. At the same time, our dialogue in this training framework also comprised a setting and method which enabled the extraction of tacit knowledge, of an experienced practitioner through his self-disclosure. This also enabled Ofer, to improve his understanding of his decision-making process for his choice of interventions, and to achieve professional development.

Our discussions began when the teacher (Ofer) discussed a case with me and I stopped his narrative when he mentioned a practical intervention. I queried the decision-making process, underlying his choice of intervention, which was derived from conscious and unconscious knowledge, and by doing so I gathered practical knowledge related to the particular case. For the experienced practitioner, this knowledge is mostly tacit, and therefore by definition is mainly located in his unconscious realm. In his response to my queries, Ofer introspected and further disclosed information related to his curriculum of personal and professional experiences, which underlay his conceptualization of the case and the respective decision regarding his choice of practical intervention. My queries led to the extraction and explication of Ofer's practical knowledge by the process of transferring it to myself. In a similar way to the psychotherapy process, through his attempt to explain this content to me, Ofer also became conscious of the knowledge, which until then had been unconscious. Oxford English dictionary defines apperception as the mental process by which a person makes sense of an idea by assimilating it into the body of ideas he or she already possesses. During our dialogic training, knowledge extraction and transfer process, the teacher's conscious and unconscious practical understandings were transformed through my apperception of them, in accordance with my personal understanding.

Thus, apperception became the key feature of my research process, since in my view, it captures the transfer-transformation process which we developed. Our dialogic training process is distinctive from

traditional teaching in which knowledge is transferred to the trainee and later she attempts to replicate it in her practice. In our training approach, I as the trainee, constructed my personal understanding of the practical knowledge, assimilated it into my knowledge base, and utilised it in my practice in accordance with my personal approach. The nature of this knowledge transfer and transformation process illustrated how I developed an approach which focuses mainly on parental counselling, applying the knowledge I acquired from Ofer, while his approach focuses mainly on work with children and adolescents.

The basic assumptions of our respective practices and our therapeutic goals are similar, yet Ofer achieves the therapeutic goals mainly through therapeutic mentoring and psychotherapy for children and adolescents, while I achieve them through parental counselling. Furthermore, I produced training courses based on my approach to parental counselling which I began to teach in 2014. By conducting this process, we created a method for practical knowledge extraction and conceptualisation in other teams of experienced practitioners and trainees. We also developed and conceptualized our approach to the training and supervision of professionals in parental counselling, therapeutic mentoring, and psychotherapy which we adopt in our institute for practical development. Since our professional dialog in this framework continues to contribute to our individual knowledge bases, and professional development as practitioners and teachers of practice, the process is on-going till this day, though I now have fourteen years of practical experience.

I began to teach my course in parental counselling in 2014, and within two years I had over thirty graduates who were practicing in the field. In 2015, I concluded that the practical knowledge database which comprised the foundation of my parental counselling course, was the most significant practical outcome of my research which I should present in my dissertation. This knowledge database was clearly extracted from the long dialogic procedure which I had conducted with Ofer, rather than from the interviews which I had conducted with other practitioners on the subject of self-disclosure. In accordance with my obligations as an ethical researcher and my professional integrity, I requested to present the expanded focus of my research, the investigation of the collaborative research process which I had conducted with my professional partner over the years. I was astonished that my supervisor, a well-known proponent of academic freedom, refused to allow this, and in doing so, was suggesting that I deny my professional development and conceal the authentic source of my research understandings and outcomes. This led me to request to replace him, but this was refused by the university staff. I was prevented from submitting my dissertation by my deadline, being unable to do so without a supervisor, and leading to the termination of my studies for the second time. I appealed this decision, but the investigator was only willing to reinstate me, if I reverted to my original plan to present my work on self-disclosure. Obviously, once again my professional and ethical integrity prevented me from accepting this offer. I insisted on presenting the authentic collaborative research process which I had conducted with Ofer, and thus my studies were terminated again, for the third time. I appealed to the supervisory organisations and other authorities, my appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator was found to be partially justified but did not provide me with conditions for the completion of my doctoral studies.

Despite this predicament, in 2016, Ofer and I established our professional institute for Practical Professional Training which we named ROTeM (ReachingOut Therapeutic Method), and I continued to teach courses in parental counselling, and began to teach our psychotherapy course with Ofer, there. In September 2016, as Ofer's co-researcher and practice partner, I participated in the mediation process which was conducted in order to resolve Ofer's dispute with the University staff. In this meeting, for the first time, the University staff acknowledged the collaborative research process based on dialog which we had conducted since the outset of our doctoral studies. This recognition enabled both Ofer and I to resume our studies with new supervisors in 2017. At this time, I contextualised my research within a duoethnography, which enabled me to present the dialogical framework of professional development and knowledge transfer, apperception, and transformation. I refer to the period of time which began from the moment when I expressed my intention to present my collaborative research process for examination in 2015 until the completion of my duoethnography as the dyadic dialog phase of the research process which I conducted with Ofer.

During our disputes with the University staff, Anna worked with us to compose correspondence with them and with supervisory authorities, contributing her insights as a practitioner, as well as her English

writing skills. The third phase of the research process was trialogic (based on dialog between three researcher-practitioners). Due to Anna's interest in the areas of psychotherapy practice, which was related to her gynecology practice, she became a trainee in our training institute, while also reviewing and editing our duoethnography.

As Ofer and I constructed our epistemology and methodology chapters of our dissertations, Anna involved herself in our dialog on these subjects. She contributed insights derived from her medical practice, including the approach the doctor utilises when gathering data concerning his patient's condition, arrives at a diagnosis and chooses his intervention or treatment recommendation accordingly. For many years, Ofer and I were aware of the fact that there was a discrepancy between us with regard to the way we relate to the concrete reality of our patients' circumstances and their interpretation of them. At this stage, while each of us sought to formally identify our epistemic position, we concluded that this discrepancy was in fact a difference in the way we view the concept of "reality". The practical approach which I had developed was positioned in the relativist domain and I concerned myself with each parents' perception and interpretation of the circumstances and found it unnecessary in my practice to investigate the exact nature of concrete events that they described. Ofer's approach placed more emphasis on concrete events before the patient's interpretation of them and the relationship between the two. The dialog which we transcribed in our duoethnography clearly demonstrated two practitioners with different approaches to psychotherapy practice and did not demonstrate the presence of a teacher and a trainee in the traditional sense of the training setting. Instead, the duoethnography illustrates the democratic dialog arena, which enabled me to learn from Ofer while developing my own personal approach. Within the psychological domain, the term apperception described the process of knowledge transfer from Ofer to me and transformation, which had occurred in practice in our procedure. Nevertheless, it was a challenge to conceptualise and academically ground within a single philosophical framework how practical knowledge was transferred from one practitioner to the other when each was located within a different epistemic position.

Due to the requirement for an epistemic position which related to both concrete phenomena and occurrences and also the person's interpretation of them, Ofer located himself as a practitioner and researcher within the stratified reality of the Critical Realist (CR) Ontological framework. He conceptualised a theory of personal epistemology within this framework, in which each individual possesses a different viewpoint and interpretation of concrete events in the actual dimension. This is due to each individual's different position in the empirical dimension, his different curriculum of past experiences, and his interpretation of them. Understanding that the relativist position can be viewed as a stance located entirely within the empirical domain of the stratified ontology of CR, enabled me to position myself within this framework as well. In my practice, it is rarely necessary for me to consider and explore a concrete circumstance, but usually my practical approach is based upon the participant's individual perceptions and interpretation in the empirical-relativist domain of CR. These epistemic understandings provided a philosophical explanation as to how knowledge was transferred from Ofer to me in a way which frequently occurs in dialog between two people. The discrepancy in epistemic positions does not exist only in our dyad, but in every group of people, since each individual possesses his unique personal epistemology. Nevertheless, in most conversations, information is transferred from one to the other. Understanding and learning occurs when the listener identifies analogies to concepts which he is familiar with from his previous experiences, and is able to assimilate the new information into his existing knowledge base. An eloquent speaker who wants to communicate his message should try to utilise analogous terms and concepts which he knows the listener is familiar with in his narrative.

According to Blyth (1981), in his theory of education, Johann Herbart (1776 -1841) stated that in order to teach, the teacher should be acquainted with the students' mental development and make use of what she already knows (Blyth, 1981). This enables the efficient transfer of knowledge, its internalisation by the listener, and expansion of his knowledge base, which is the process of apperception.

According to McLear (2011), Kant (1724-1804) defined the term "apperception" as our ability to be aware of an internal state or modification of oneself due to this state. It is beyond just feeling a sensation and behaving accordingly but being able to ascribe a certain state of mind to ourselves. It is being capable of conceiving ourselves in this way (McLear, 2011). In line with these epistemic definitions, Ofer presented

knowledge to me derived from his personal curriculum of experiences and his interpretation of them in the empirical dimension. I apperceived the knowledge through my introspection and reflection on the incoming information, in light of my previously internalised experiences and existing knowledge. I then modified the knowledge and ascribed it to myself, making it my own or claiming ownership of it. This conceptualisation provides an explanation for the democratic teacher-trainee interaction between us, which is distinct from the power relations in the dyad of traditional apprenticeship framework. In our setting, knowledge was transferred from teacher to trainee, while each possessed and became aware of his/her personal epistemology and individual approach to practice, due to their different viewpoints in the empirical dimension, while relating the same occurrence in the actual dimension.

At this time, following the experience of our research process, Ofer conceptualised his methodology and method for research of practice based upon the framework of critical realism and the collaboration of researchers. By adopting this methodology, Ofer, Anna, and I continued to produce practical knowledge in psychotherapy and began to produce interdisciplinary knowledge in the area between psychotherapy and gynecology. This knowledge was utilised by Anna for the production of workshops which she presented to her colleagues on the subject of doctor-patient communication.

My participation in the collaborative research process was enriched by a practical knowledge base as well as teaching skills, which I utilise in my practical training courses. The insights achieved from this process are already being applied in our training institute for the past four years, making our training approach noticeably distinct from other training programs which are designed for professional development in Israel and abroad.

Nevertheless, now in 2020, despite the fact that my research process has been completed and its products are being extensively applied in my practice and in my professional training courses, my studies have again been terminated by the university staff. The grounds they provided for this decision are unrelated to my academic performance, but because they cannot provide me with adequately qualified supervisors. Currently, the University staff are investigating my complaint concerning this decision.

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