Bridging Ubuntu Pedagogy and Out-of-classroom Spaces in Professional Training: Reflecting on Ad Hoc Group Supervision

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ABSTRACT

Professional training in psychology is demanding. Part of professional training is psychotherapy supervision, and inherent to this process is professional identity development. Psychotherapy supervision is an ethical prerequisite but often operates outside of the formal curricula. As psychotherapy supervisors, we forged an additional space through ad hoc group supervision. The agenda of this space was to facilitate growth and the development of professional identity by foregrounding collegiality, peer engagement, and a space removed from the evaluatory aspect of the curriculum. We use collaborative autoethnography (CAE) in this paper to reflect on our role as the two supervisors within this group psychotherapy supervision space over the last couple of years and how this has operated as an out-of-classroom experience that facilitated development and professional identity formation, as well as the challenges that arose in this space. Three key themes emerged. The first highlights the psychotherapy supervision space, sometimes called clinical supervision. The second discusses the value of the out-of-classroom group created and its utility in facilitating learning. Lastly, we argue for interconnectedness and lessons learnt from creating these out-of-classroom supervision groups. We argue that adopting a posture of Ubuntu in how we interact with students creates a safer environment for learning, particularly outside of the formal classroom environment. We also recognise that this offering was limited by not having student voices and therefore privileges the perspective of supervisors.

Introduction

Professional training in psychology in South Africa usually encompasses a two-year master's degree. The first year focuses on theoretical engagement and an introduction to practical work. During this year, neophyte psychologists are registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as student psychologists. In the second year, the student is registered as an intern psychologist and works full-time at an HPCSA-approved internship site. Thereafter, clinical psychologists complete an additional year of (paid) community service.

Psychotherapy supervision is a core component of professional training. In South Africa, psychotherapy supervision is conducted by senior psychologists (with at least three years of experience post-registration) within the same registration category as the trainee psychologist being supervised. Psychotherapy supervision provides ethical oversight (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Hendricks & Cartwright, 2018; Hendricks, Cartwright & Cowden, 2021), development of psychotherapeutic competencies (Watkins, 2019), and an introduction to the field, which informs professional identity development (Watkins, 2020; Whipple, Hoyt, Rousmaniere, Swift, Pedersen & Worthen, 2020). As such, psychotherapy supervision facilitates the trainee psychologist's identity development (Kinnear, Khou, Kinnear, Carraccio & Schumacher, 2021), fosters self-awareness and self-reflection (Pieterse, Lee, Ritmeester & Collins, 2013), and finally, develops the necessary competencies for practice (Hendricks et al., 2021). Accordingly, psychotherapy supervision in professional training in psychology is an established practice for the ethical oversight of practical work and the professional development of neophyte psychologists. However, it does not always fall within the pedagogical curriculum. Psychotherapy supervision is set up with each supervisor and conducted weekly. It involves the evaluation of the supervisee's professional work. This evaluation is often not a formalised assessment that contributes to their academic performance but rather a continuous evaluation process.

The supervision relationship is also a relational process (Keum & Wang, 2020). Furthermore, the supervisory relationship has been associated with more effective supervision (Sköld, Aluan, Norberg & Carlsson, 2018), the promotion of supervisee confidence (DePue, Liu, Lambie & Gonzalez, 2022), and decreased trainee anxiety (Enlow, McWhorter, Genuario & Davis, 2019). However, at the same time, Sköld et al. (2018) also noted that supervisors and supervisees were not entirely aware of one another's vulnerability, leading to inaccurate attributions to the supervision relationship. This is demonstrated in the increase in negative supervision experiences. In South Africa, Hendricks and

Cartwright (2018) found that 73.81% of intern psychologists endorsed supervision as inadequate, and 45.65% noted harmful supervision experiences. This mirrors international research denoting harmful clinical supervision practices, with 79.2% of supervisees in Ireland and 69.5% of supervisees in the United States being reported as having received inadequate supervision, with 40.3% and 25.2% noting harmful supervision in Ireland and the United States, respectively (Ellis, Creaner, Hutman & Timulak, 2015).

In this paper, we look at Ubuntu as a potential guiding force in psychology training. We talk about adopting a posture of Ubuntu, a condition of ethical relationality that we hope starts to work against the perpetual harm felt by trainees due to supervisory processes, and the intentionality of creating spaces for connectedness in out-of-classroom learning experiences. This, in turn, can potentially ameliorate the influence of epistemic injustices and propose professional training immersed in humanness.

Before we journey forward with our thoughts, we want to briefly introduce who the 'we' in this paper are. Let us start with the first author, Nokulunga Shabalala. I am a clinical psychologist by training, and I started working as a full-time academic in 2019. This was also the year I was finishing off my PhD, which was conferred in December of that year. My training and work experience until that point was within the clinical arena, which supposedly qualified me for clinical supervision. And, by virtue of holding a master's degree at the time and working on my PhD, I presumably had the competency to supervise research. I reflect about how untrue both those assumptions were in another reflective piece (Shabalala, 2022), and for this paper I had to confront some of those assumptions. However, I also understand that these reflections cannot only live inside my head, and this paper offered a space for me to think out loud about the process of supervision, particularly clinical supervision. It was fitting to then have this reflective and critical conversation with Sarah Uren, who is introduced next.

Sarah: I have engaged in clinical practice as a counselling psychologist since 2011 and worked in academia since 2013; however, I only began psychotherapy supervision in 2014. I always had an interest in psychotherapy supervision but also experienced the lack of formal training as unsettling. As such, when I began, I engaged in my own supervision to oversee my psychotherapy supervision processes. Many years later, this interest in psychotherapy supervision led me to complete my PhD exploring psychotherapy supervision in professional training in South Africa. On a theoretical level, my PhD provided support, clarity, and insight into psychotherapy supervision processes andmodels,

as well as an understanding of trainee development. However, I still both needed and valued the input of colleagues from clinical arenas, with the guidance they were able to offer. The opportunity to co-author this paper became a space to reflect on these joint practices and the meaning of this for psychotherapy supervision in professional training spaces.

Ad hoc Supervision Group

We created an informal group supervision space with trainee clinical and counselling psychologists and the authors as supervisors, with a commitment to the scope of the profession rather than the superficial divide between the clinical and counselling psychology categories. Chan, Tsi and Yeung (2022:2) noted that "the learning environment of out-of-classroom events is mostly unstructured". As such, the ad hoc supervision group linked with the work-integrated learning component of professional training and created an experiential learning space. In this regard, the out-of-classroom "learning is a method of learning that positions students in a context that motivates them to learn" (Sulaiman, Mahbob & Azlan, 2011:12). Thus, the supervision group was set up as an additional activity outside of the formal curriculum and aimed to foster an out-of-classroom experience and develop neophyte psychologists' professional identity. The focus was placed on relationship-rich education (Felton & Lambert, 2020), where trainees could engage with peers and another supervisor to encourage collegiality and student growth. For this paper, we sought to explore the experience of the group psychotherapy supervision sessions over the years, and the strengths and challenges this out-of-classroom experience highlights as relevant for professional training from our perspective as supervisors facilitating the ad hoc supervision groups.

Adopting a Posture of Ubuntu in and Between the Classroom

The conversations between the two of us over the years regarding our master's students have centred around two common ideas. The first was an investment in the kind of psychologists we wanted to see coming out of the programmes, and the second was an appreciation that with the students registering as student psychologists, they had entered our field and were becoming our colleagues. We will unpack the idea of 'becoming' when we look at how Ubuntu is defined. Recently, including in our conversation for this paper, we have reflected on not wanting to be the kind of trainers our students needed to recover from, further perpetuating the woundedness that healers supposedly hold (Topacio & Ofreneo, 2024). Waghid (2020) offers us a way of thinking of Ubuntu philosophy's utility for higher education. This is particularly important given that Ubuntu has been

"overlooked and neglected in educational spaces" (Ngubane & Makua, 2021:2). Waghid (2020)
argues that the adoption of Ubuntu within higher education ought to be through people who are
committed to, and, to use his word, *serious* about addressing social and environmental ills. This
assumes that people ought to see themselves as co-belonging (with no pre-condition to belonging)
to a community of humans (Waghid, 2020).

We now look at some definitions of Ubuntu. Ramose (2015) describes Ubuntu as ceaseless
unfolding, constantly becoming a human be-ing. Be-ing is an active force and a concept of motion
(Dladla, 2020). Ramose (2015) further unpacks Ubuntu, describing it as humanness. Before delving
into the idea of humanness, let us consider Dladla's (2020:50) understanding of Ubuntu:

> Umuntu ngumuntu nga Bantu…it is essential before providing an English approximation to
> disclaim the fact that the meaning of this maxim is inexhaustible by English translation …
> Following Ramose we understand it to mean: "To be a human be-ing is to affirm one's
> humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations
> with them".

Returning to the idea of humanness, Ramose (2015) highlights that Ubuntu is about humanness, and
embodying humanness demands that we are respectful towards others. Dladla (2020:50) describes
this as an ethical imperative grounded by "the principle that one ought to always promote life and
avoid killing". Ramose, according to Dladla (2020:49), distinguishes between humanness and
humanism, where '-ness' is a state or condition that "in the language of motion openly admits its
temporality, as merely a state and stage in a much greater process". On the other hand, '-ism'
denotes a beginning and an end. For a deep appreciation of Ubuntu, it was important to highlight
this distinction, because to understand humanness is to understand that be-ing human is a continual
motion, always in a state of reflection and reconfiguration – a ceaseless unfolding (Ramose, 2015;
Dladla, 2020).

What it then means to adopt a posture of Ubuntu in and out of the classroom, and in higher
education more broadly, is to understand this condition of be-ing human in the ethical sense and
that this condition is mediated through the establishment of relationships with others. A recognition
that we are constantly evolving, affecting, and affected, and that our livelihoods are inextricably
linked to one another. According to Ubuntu, this promotes life and avoids killing or the dying of
humanity. In higher education, and indeed in psychology, competition has been the default posture
– students competing to get into professional programmes, and academics operating in silos and
secrecy (Parker, 2020; Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024). Adopting a posture of Ubuntu, with the
understanding that we are in community with our student psychologists, promotes co-belonging and

fights against seeing students as passive consumers, a target, or a number (Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024).

Fostering this in our group supervision space could be understood through Desmond Tutu's definition of Ubuntu, where he highlighted the willingness to share, participation, and belonging as central to the concept (Tutu, 1991 as cited in Waghid, 2020). Therefore, the group space we create for our supervisees supersedes the idea of separate categories and moves away from the idea of an individual race to privilege the sharing of knowledge between supervisors for the benefit of students. It makes way for students to participate as knowing individuals – without the pressure of being evaluated. They are simply be-ing in community with their colleagues (including us as supervisors).

Method

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an emancipatory form of qualitative inquiry (Todd, 2021) that privileges individual voices as knowing, and views experience as a powerful data force (Griffin, 2012; Todd, 2021). It also allows for an interpretation of the experiences being explored and allows those interpretations to be applied to a particular group of people (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Gough, 2015; Shabalala, 2022). Autoethnography is a reflective exercise, and this kind of reflection is important in research for higher education studies (Parker, 2014). Parker (2014) suggests that the current neoliberal landscape of global higher education constitutes a peculiar balance between secrecy and transparency, and that individual goals are rewarded more than collaboration. In South African higher education, this is illustrated through the Department of Training and Education's higher subsidy for single-authored publications (Tomaselli, 2018).

Autoethnography, as described in Carolyn Ellis' account of it, is like the pumping of humanness (to borrow from Ramose, 2015) into doing qualitative research, where the use of affect, an evocative voice, and experience is seen as a resource (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016). Autoethnographic work appreciates that knowledge is embodied. Stacy Holman Jones notes that "Much of the work focuses on telling stories that clearly locate the personal in the field, in the writing, and in the political contexts of research" (Jones et al., 2016:20). Jones et al. (2016) further describe this methodology as a way into researching, highlighting how text operates to write us in and out of being.

In this paper, we make use of CAE. This entailed the creation of a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate the online discussion that was recorded and transcribed through Microsoft Teams. 'First author' and 'second author' are used throughout the paper either to signal an author's voice or to outline methodological processes.

Collaborative Autoethnography

CAE is a multivocal inquiry that encompasses three concomitant elements: autobiography, ethnography, and collaboration (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2013; Lapadat, 2017). The grouping of these elements is dialectical in nature – studying the self collaboratively (Chang et al., 2013). It is a process where two or more researchers collaboratively (Collaborative) map autobiographical stories (Auto) about the socio-political and cultural context in which they are located (Ethnography) for interpretation (Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024). Our agenda in embarking on this CAE has been, through telling the stories of our experiences of supervision as supervisors, to engage with one another's experience. Through this engagement, we enter each other's worlds and, through conversation, co-construct what a future of training psychologists outside the classroom environment can look like, for both trainers and trainees (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2016; Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024). This is an inquiry born of the desire to experience psychology research as less alienating (Bochner, 2016; Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024).

Data Analysis

We used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Braun and Clarke (2021) describe RTA as a branch of thematic analysis. The aim of RTA is to proffer an understanding of the patterns across a dataset. In this regard, RTA provides an opportunity to tell a story about these patterns and make meaning from this process (Joy, Braun & Clarke, 2023). We used the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). In the first phase, both authors read through the data and made notes on the meanings and patterns of the transcript. The second step was the coding process completed by the second author. In addition, a list of all the codes and an overview of their frequency was created. Some of the codes that emerged were 'professional identity', 'roles', and 'safety'. In the third step, the first author reviewed the coding and the codes list and suggested preliminary themes. For example, codes such as 'competencies', 'supervisor training', and 'implications of competence' were clustered together to explain supervisors' navigating experiences of perceived incompetence. In the fourth step, both

authors met online to review and develop the themes further. The fifth step involved the refinement and finalising of the naming of themes. In the sixth and final step, we wrote the findings for each core theme.

Findings and Discussion

Three prominent findings were noted. The first describes the supervision space, the out-of-classroom experience, and how it collides with systemic imbalances. We argue for the value of Ubuntu pedagogy as a foundational approach to out-of-classroom learning. The second finding notes the bridge that out-of-classroom experiences can offer in terms of collegiality and belonging, as well as the epistemic injustices that may arise in the absence of such. Finally, the third finding concerns the role of connection and humanness in fostering a learning space that ensures the educational and restorative functions within psychotherapy supervision.

The Supervision Space in Professional Training

South Africa has no formal framework for psychotherapy supervision (Hendricks et al., 2021). This locates psychotherapy supervision on the cusp of teaching and learning, and professionalisation. As such, psychotherapy supervision becomes an ethical obligation for professional training rather than a pedagogical activity integrated into the curriculum. The first author highlighted a concern associated with this:

> I wondered to what extent, us going, you know, supervision is whatever happens between you and your supervisor, and then no one else, kind of knows, about what's happening in, in your supervision.

Psychotherapy supervision is constrained to the supervisor-supervisee relationship and, largely, removed from the professional training programme. At the same time, this leaves supervisors isolated and existing in silos (Shabalala, 2022; Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024). Having both experienced some uncertainty as we started our journeys as supervisors, competence and capacity emerged from our conversation. This was illustrated at the beginning of our conversation for this paper. The first author has been supervising clinically for five years and the second author for 10 years. However, in starting our discussion, the first author felt the need to preface it by highlighting her perceived incompetence in speaking about supervision with authority, seeing that her views were solely based on her experience. This was in contrast to the second author, who had conducted research in psychotherapy supervision and had been supervising for longer. The first author stated:

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> Okay, so let's, let's start then with the first thought about our perspectives on supervision. And I must, I must admit that mine will be a little unhelpful in the sense that you know, I'm just going to speak truth to my experience as someone who hasn't gone through a PhD on supervision.

When someone is positioned as a supervisor, this person may be seen as someone who oversees, audits, and guides students' performance to completion (this is especially the case with institutions embodying the neoliberal agenda). The supervisor's position is arguably one of power and authority. Therefore, it is interesting that with five years' experience as a clinical supervisor, the first author did not position herself as an authority. We could interpret this in many ways in relation to her perceived competency and capacity as a supervisor, and one way we may look at this is through the concept of liminality. Maistry (2017) discusses the idea of liminality (for our purposes, the space between being a novice academic and an established one) when reflecting on the experience of novice supervisors and how new academics are often asked to take up supervision without being trained for it. Maistry (2017) spoke about this concerning research supervision, but in both our experiences, it was and continues to be true in psychotherapy supervision as well.

The question of whether supervisors have, or feel they have, the competency to facilitate the supervision space is an important one to interrogate to review what conditions elicit feelings of incompetency. The first author further reflects that when she started in academia, she was immediately assigned students to supervise (clinically and for research), and she felt much uncertainty:

> But, but, truly, how I've kind of landed with supervision is initially just swimming blind.

Supervision is often seen as an addendum to the professional training process. However, for students, it still exists under the scrutiny of evaluation that is part of their formative assessments. For supervisors, supervision is not only a learning function but ought to have a supportive function too (Reese, González, Clements-Hickman, Clemons, Farook & Conoley, 2020); however, the ill-defined space (the lack of a framework) can lead to uncertainty and isolation. This typically happens because when we share about experiences and challenges of supervisory encounters, we seem to err on the side of discussing students' limitations and not those of the supervisors. The lack of engagement in the professional activity of supervision leads to a lack of support for one another. For the first author, this meant that there was a reliance on past experiences of supervision to help guide what she has done as a supervisor:

> And, and, really, just using whatever I metabolised of my supervision with my clinical supervisor during my M1. So, in some instances, you know, I would put technical things down like this is how you do a process note. This is, you know, again to cover myself ethically. But

> I'm not sure, how, how much of supervision that was, or what supervision is. I didn't have a clear definition in my head and nor had anyone sat with me and said this is kind of what we, we cover in supervision.

Over the years, we have noticed value in creating different spaces outside of the classroom environment and outside of formal supervision. Our rationale has been that instead of throwing students to the wolves and expecting professionals to emerge, we aim to create a space for personal development within the professional environment. We have seen in our respective teams that there is an effort to make space for the emerging professional and the developing person to meet. However, in an information-dense year (Qhogwana, Shabalala & Uren, 2023), there also seems to be a suggestion that there is no space and time to help students (the humans) to emerge and for us to support that. We discuss Ubuntu and its potential for fostering humanness in the supervisory encounter, and in the space we created outside of the formal learning spaces, later. In relation to what the supervisory and training spaces look like currently, the second author reflects the following:

> I think it's not always possible in other spaces in the professional training, because I think it's always, prove you understand this theory, demonstrate your competency.

We recognise that there is variability in professional development experiences, and that how this unfolds depends on the context of the developmental activities (Quartiroli, Fogaca & Wagstaff, 2023). Therefore, some supervision encounters may be endorsed by students and trainers as productive and supportive. At the same time, some may be experienced as inadequate and harmful; we continue to examine the potential for harm in supervision in the following section. We discussed a possible reason for the variability in development and students' experiences as being the lack of consistency regarding what is required of both students and trainers regarding the supervision space. Let us consider the following quote from the second author:

> And, and I think the difficulty is, is even saying it's a teaching space, offers very little guidance, right. And I agree with you in terms of this idea of consistency across different supervision spaces. I don't necessarily think we need to have, like a standardised approach. You know, there's different psychologists, different approaches, different theoretical understanding, but there should be consistency, in terms of what do we expect.

In the above quote, the second author highlights a problem of definition – how the space is conceptualised – as well as the difference in approach being influenced by individual differences. We agree that trainers ought to be allowed freedom to define the space according to their orientations. However, it is equally true that there are standard competencies that ought to be consistent for all supervisees to acquire.

Over and above one having to grapple with the newness of supervision and variability in supervision practices, once settled into it, one needs to show improvement on what is done each year through performance contracting. One of the indicators discussed in performance management is the need to 'get students through', sometimes without appreciating how different professional training is from other courses universities offer. Merely getting students through threatens the integrity of training, as it is in response to university targets and not always focused on students meaningfully participating and belonging in the university space and the professional programmes (Luvalo, 2015; Maistry, 2017; Maseti, 2018). Our ethical obligation in supervision, and in the professional programmes at large, is also to ensure public safety and whether the student is ready for the field, given their performance during the programme.

Additionally, we mention the neoliberal landscape and the uncertainty that we held starting as supervisors to introduce how and why we (in part) decided to create the group supervision space. It was also to support one another, and in many ways, because each of us held more expertise in certain areas over the other, and vice versa. We embodied something central to Ubuntu: an openness to sharing. To this end, 'if I know, you know', and together we could facilitate a learning space outside of conventional supervision and the classroom. It is also a way of working that fights against working in silos, which seems to be characteristic of the academic environment today.

Out-of-classroom Group Supervision as Bridging the Pedagogical Gap

Bridging the pedagogical gap highlights the role of out-of-classroom learning. The creation of our out-of-classroom supervision group provided a space to learn through interacting with one another. In many respects, it foregrounded the Ubuntu notion mentioned earlier of 'if I know, so you know' with our supervisees as well. In reflecting on the value of this space, the first author described supervisees' experience as well as the unexpected outcome this space has provided for students:

> I think they've enjoyed it, or they've gotten something quite unique out of that… that doesn't necessarily fall into group supervision and doesn't necessarily fall into the classroom. I do think, you know, unbeknownst to us, we have prioritised the human in front of us. But I know that, we, we care about the human in front of us, but I don't know that we went into that space going, okay, let's prioritise, prioritise the student.

The initial agenda of the supervision group was not to prioritise the student but represented the intentionality to create space for our supervisees. In trying to make provisions for our own incompetencies and strengthen our offerings to students, we unknowingly offered a space for their voices. This provided an opening for true dialogue, where both of us supervisors and the supervisees

could participate in the learning process (Riley, 2024). This, in turn, demonstrated a sense of epistemic hopeful trust (Brick, 2020), and reiterated the students' role as co-creators of knowledge (Ngubane & Makua, 2021), as suggested by both of us in the extracts below:

> It's not just about space to have a voice, but it's almost this idea that. I'd like to hear your voice, and I have I, I have faith that there's something you [as a student] can offer. [Second Author]

> To trust their thought processes a little more and, and trust what they're feeling in process a little more. So, I think that's worked quite nicely over the years. [First Author]

The group space not only allowed for attendees to invest in themselves but also brought our experiences and knowledge together. The epistemic value of supervisees' experiences is not restricted to their role as a student psychologist but extends to their role as a peer and colleague. It is through this process of participation, and in some respects socialisation, that not only professional identity formation emerges, but moreover, a sense of belonging. The Ubuntu pedagogy emphasises the role of participation and interaction (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). This is important given the implications of professional identity formation. Neophyte psychologists internalise institutional norms; in this process, "they go on to enact and reproduce institutionally sanctioned ways of being and doing" (Schubert, Buus, Monrouxe & Hunt, 2023:613). As the second author noted, this has far-reaching consequences beyond the immediate context of supervision:

> It sets a precedence for how you then go into the profession, thinking about the profession, feeling about the profession, engaging with the profession. Your openness to go to supervision after you've qualified. Which all is really important.

Furthermore, since professional training programmes exist and operate within systems and institutions, they have the capacity to maintain epistemic injustices (Kidd, Spencer & Carel, 2025). This practice of psychotherapy supervision then mirrors the overreliance on an "academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic standard" (Makhubela, 2016:3). As such, the practice of supervision positions supervisors and supervisees and perpetuates epistemic asymmetries (Kidd et al., 2025). As touched on earlier in this section, this is magnified for emerging psychologists still learning and negotiating their professional identity and the application of theory to practical work. For Kidd et al. (2025), this creates fertile ground for epistemic injustice. We reflected on how this often translates into professional training experiences of harm. The first author reflected on a common experience or statement about professional training:

> I always say to you in passing, you know, that I wanna create a training environment, be it in, in class, or supervision, or group supervision. An environment that students don't have to recover from. You know. How many times do you meet colleagues outside of, you know, the training environment and they say, 'oh M1 was a nightmare' or, or, 'hardest year of my life'.

For both of us, there is an acknowledgement of the status quo of professional training in psychology. In addition, the expectations of the supervision space have the potential to create obstacles to the educational function of supervision (Thériault & Gazzola, 2018). The first author described a sense of disillusionment with the lack of humanness in professional training, as demonstrated in the following statement:

> I think you and I are quite, you know, we, we, we get quite angry and sad, and all of these emotions that, maybe make us too emotional for the academic space. Where we really feel deeply about how, how certain processes often happen in the programme. That we want to create a space that feels a little safer.

The quote emphasises the investment in the human in supervision, and their potential as an emerging psychologist. For Brick (2020:493), "Educators, therefore, have a moral and epistemic obligation to extend hopeful trust to students". Thus, the notion of extending "hopeful trust" to students is a core component of an educator and provides the foundation for the development of epistemic capacities. But for this to exist, in professional training in psychology, we both suggest the need for safety and the ability for supervisors and supervisees to connect as humans.

Interconnectedness and Lessons Learnt from the Art of Connecting

The supervisory relationship is central (Buxton & Scudder, 2022) and has the potential to influence not just the experience of professional training. It contributes to emerging psychologists' failure within professional training programmes (Sköld et al., 2018), influences trainees' competence (Uren & Lourens, 2024), and neophyte psychologists' ability to advocate for their clients (Guttman, 2020). However, in Ubuntu pedagogy, there is an emphasis on co-existence and interconnectedness as a means of responsibility to one another (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). As such, the group space fostered a sense of co-operation and learning together. In many respects, the shared space operated to facilitate collegiality, as suggested by the second author:

> I think sometimes, you know, students get caught up in what differentiates, instead of like what collegiality is, and I think for me what's really important around professional identity is around. And how, how we connect with our profession as a whole, but also, how, how we work with others? Because sometimes that's so important, you know, multidisciplinary approach, contacting a psychiatrist. I mean these are not people that are necessarily in psychology but involving an OT or an … And I think that's something that isn't taught theoretically in the programme. I think that there's something.

The extract above highlights the value of the out-of-classroom engagement and the capacity to learn. These groups afforded student psychologists an opportunity for modelling of professional identity. This aligns with the aim of psychotherapy supervision to provide an experiential component

(Frederickson, 2015). However, without scrutiny, supervisees within these groups were offered a 'playground' to learn, negotiate, and explore their identity as emerging psychologists. But the ability to provide space within this out-of-classroom experience hinged on the connection to who they were, and not just the role that they fulfilled. The first author noted the aim of the space as establishing a connection as humans and not restricting professional training to an evaluation of their competence but consciously creating spaces to provide student psychologists with agency. As suggested in the quotations below:

> I think there's been something around the space offering more of us, as humans, rather than going where your evaluators, you know 'cause. I know in some spaces, we, we, we might push technical technical things, but in some spaces, we might push for people to trust themselves a little more. [First Author]

> The nice part of the group supervision really is the defocusing from [evaluation]. And really looking at the human in front of you and wondering how they interact. [First Author]

> There's something important about acknowledging the person. Because students don't train in isolation. They still have lives where they have experiences. They have struggles, they have challenges. And I think if we negate that part and then ask them to sit in front of another person and hold all of their parts, what then gets reinforced is in order to be a safe space for a client, I can't exist. [Second Author]

This process established our authenticity and honoured humanness within the educational space. Building a positive relationship is core to Ubuntu pedagogy (Ngubane & Makua, 2021) and emphasises the prioritisation of respect and sharing in learning spaces. Reflective environments, such as this group supervision space, provide the opportunity for professional identity formation through growth and authenticity (Schubert et al., 2023). In many respects, this authenticity opened avenues for exploring aspects of be-ing an imperfect human being and not knowing. This was invaluable given the angst created by evaluation in professional training (Khoshfetrat, Moore & Kiernan, 2022; Kocyigit, 2023) and the implications of this seen in a movement away from authenticity.

Moreover, an important reflection for us was the inherent connection between the personal and the professional. The ability to integrate professional and personal identities also provides greater authenticity (Schubert et al., 2023) and this authenticity, in turn, facilitates professional identity development (Zou & Chan, 2016). For us, there is something tangible about the intersection between the personal and professional positions professional training in psychology as distinct from other spaces:

> I would imagine like if you were a lawyer, you know it would look quite different, whereas, because [it is] the human element that we're also trying to grow within the programme it, it

> does become personal. In some aspects, and then when you open up a space and say, you know, be yourself. This is for you, guided by you. Then there is that suspicion. I would imagine that how do I know that this isn't going to be used against me? Or used in a punitive manner. [First Author]

> There's almost this creep in the same way that there's a creep between personal and professional. You know, we can't say 'this is just your professional space, shut it down'. That's not how psychology works. [Second Author]

The extracts above foreground the contradictions that emerge within the professional training programmes. There is a demand for students to grow, share, and open up, yet, as the first quote points out, there is a worry about the misuse of personal sharing. In psychotherapy supervision, there are often multiple intersecting demands (Zhang, Watkins Jr, Hook, Hodge, Davis, Norton et al., 2022). At the same time, there is a realisation that psychology training requires both personal and professional engagement. This is considered as not only the balancing of the demand for competency, but also the request to be open (Guttman, 2020). However, creating an out-of-classroom space increases the capacity for participation and sharing through a sense of safety. This safety is crucial to engagement in supervision. Likewise, safety in psychotherapy supervision promotes opportunities for restoration (Bradley & Becker, 2021).

Ultimately, as supervisors, we questioned our own competence; we worried about the safety of the spaces, and what the out-of-classroom experience could offer that is not provided in the curriculum. Yet, the main sentiment that we were left with was reiterated by the first author:

> We've been necessarily concerned with the type of human we're introducing to the field

Concluding remarks

Higher education today is starting to be shaped by neoliberal ideals that drive the strategic mission of many institutions for higher learning (Maistry, 2017). This is to say that some of the practices within higher education are organised to resemble the imagination of the 'market' (Ball, 2012). What is meant by a market-driven university is that the business dynamic of higher education, which is politically and economically informed, shapes higher education reform and seeks to profit from buying and selling education services (Ball, 2012). This then characterises the performativity and commodification of academic activities (Shabalala & Mapaling, 2024). It is still true that knowledge production and research are the hallmarks of higher education; however, achieving these objectives in a meaningful way remains a challenge (Maistry, 2017). Whether we are talking about research or psychotherapy supervision, supervision capacity and competence continue to be significant issues,

juxtaposed against the need to get as many students through as possible – a neoliberal ideal (Maistry, 2017). Ironically, the space we created emerged from us wanting to support each other (to ultimately support our students), but this meant that this transformative space was limited to the students we were allocated and not all trainees in the professional programme. This reinforces the tension that is often felt when transformation efforts are met with the neoliberal environment in which we find ourselves.

Therefore, this paper used a collaborative ethnographic approach to start reflecting on the processes that happen in professional training in and outside of the classroom. We reflected this in relation to the space we created a couple of years ago, which initially emerged in response to our feelings of needing support based on our capacity and competency. However, discussions, and this paper, have brought to the fore the value of our connection and relationship as supervisors (across categories) in facilitating authentic engagement and sharing with our supervisees. We retrospectively used Ubuntu philosophy and Ubuntu pedagogy to reflect on the value of humanness in our day-to-day encounters with colleagues and students, and as a way of bridging the pedagogical gap with out-of-classroom learning. This, in turn, provided the space for students to be active participants within the training environment. We believe that taking on the posture of Ubuntu in how we interact with students brings us closer to safe, consistent, and meaningful learning environments. We hope to have some reflective conversations with the students we see in these ad hoc spaces. For a way forward, we want to include past students who are now qualified to share their experiences with us. We believe that students ought to feel true authority over their experiences and stories, so we will also encourage students to embark on their autoethnographic accounts to reflect more openly about their experiences. Student voices are often left out in this kind of research, with reflections coming from the supervisor's perspective. As such, we highlight the need for further research that privileges psychology trainee voices.

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