

Supervision as rich description

In writing about supervision I would like first to clarify two different contexts of supervision (although of course many other contexts for supervision could also be described). The first is where the person being supervised is in a formal learning or training context and where the person supervising has a central role in monitoring and perhaps even assessing their performance, and may be in the role of 'teacher' as well. The second is where a person has approached the supervisor and has asked that they meet with the supervisor in order to contribute to their professional development and to provide consultation to the dilemmas that they meet in their work.

In this article I am primarily, if not exclusively, addressing the second situation.

Thinking about my supervisory practice over recent years certain dilemmas have emerged which have led me to think more carefully about what a narrative supervision would look like and this article is based on those reflections, although it is of course very much a work in progress.

People who come to me for supervision usually do so because they want to strengthen their relationship with narrative practice. Often I have a greater familiarity than they do with the range of narrative practices available. I also usually have more experience of working using a narrative approach. Thus there is much experience, both of direct practice and of the learning of ideas, that is available to me but not to many of the people who come to me for supervision. To withhold this experience would seem to be most unhelpful to the supervisees, but I found that in sharing it I have sometimes come to take a centred role in the supervision, and this often seemed to border on 'telling'. This centred role did not sit easily with my commitment to decentred practice.

Also, I wondered, how could I structure my supervisory process so that it fitted with narrative ideas rather than simply drawing on the weight of my experience?

In this article I will share something of the history of my relationship with supervision (as a supervisor) and put forward some ideas for a narrative supervision. I will include some transcripts of parts of actual supervision sessions to illustrate my ideas.

My background is in social work and I have been involved in providing supervision in one context or another for over 25 years. I first became involved with narrative ideas some 16 years ago, and at first I found grappling with the ideas and trying to put them into practice in therapeutic contexts was enough. I did not really address the question of how to use these ideas in supervision head on.

However I did ponder in what ways my supervision practice might be informed by my ideas of narrative, and indeed whether it was informed by my ideas of narrative at all, or whether I just did what I had always done.

About six years ago I started my first narrative supervision group, which ran over 9 months with just three members. My memories of this are that the members of the group shared practice and we discussed them trying to bring narrative ideas to bear upon the dilemmas that they presented.

The next year I ran another supervision group, this time with five members. On this occasion I structured the group differently, using the ideas of definitional ceremony and outsider witness practice. Although we did not always use these ideas, in general the work would proceed according to the four stages of outsider witness practice suggested by Michael White: an interview, or telling, involving the worker and

someone to interview them about a piece of their work; a re-telling by the outsider witness group; a retelling of the retelling by the worker; and then an opportunity for us all to talk together about the process. We audio-taped these discussions and the worker would routinely take the audio-tape back to the person or family at the centre of the work. I have written about this experience elsewhere. (Fox et al, 2002)

In this process I envisaged that the retelling should be a retelling of the stories of the people who were being worked with, ie the 'clients' and this was how I asked the outsider witness group to orient themselves. Thus the taking back of the tape to the family was part of a process of rich description of their lives, and provided an opportunity for workers who did not have access to outsider witness groups made up of professionals with a narrative orientation to have the lives of those they worked with witnessed and their preferred identities thickened in this way.

When I first thought of this way of doing supervision it immediately appealed to me as being consistent with narrative ideas, but I feared that without the traditional focus on what the worker did or might do that the workers would find this way of doing supervision unrewarding and unhelpful. To my surprise in fact workers invariably stated that they had found the process very helpful and that they had got new ideas for how to go forward in their work. The people to whom the tapes were taken back also were pleased to listen to these discussions and reported that they found them helpful.

For me though there were some dilemmas.

First, because I was significantly more familiar with narrative ideas than other members of the group I would often have ideas that other members of the group overlooked. And because these tapes were going back to the people who were seeking consultation I experienced an overwhelming sense that my ideas ought to be heard. However, when, as often happened, I acceded to this urge, I found that it positioned me as central, undermining the group members' sense of competence and ability and this seemed really unhelpful. It also left me with a sense of knowingness which fitted badly with my values and hopes for this work.

Secondly, and related to this, it became clear that group members had large gaps in their knowledge of narrative ideas and practices. However, as this context was defined as one of supervision I did not feel that I was able to step into a teaching role. This resulted in a sense of frustration for me and led me to think that what might be needed was a context of teaching and learning: and that as this process of supervision was so valuable – and did also provide learning in narrative skills – this context of teaching and learning could incorporate an element of group supervision.

Following this experience I devised and ran a course which incorporated learning of narrative ideas and practices as well as group supervision. This has led on to the birth of a further supervision group which has been running for a little over three years now; and also it has led to the further development of trainings in narrative therapy. In this most recent supervision group these dilemmas do not seem to arise, maybe because many of the members of the group have undergone narrative training prior to joining the group and are more knowledgeable and have developed more experience of practice.

However, it continued to provide a context for me to think about the issue of what a narrative supervision might be.

John Winslade (2002) proposes the possibility that counsellor education can be viewed as a process of storying of professional identity. Gershoni and Cramer (2002) describe training and supervision as 'the use of narrative ideas in building upon students' preferred stories of being a therapist'.

These ideas appealed to me, and as the supervision group that I ran swelled in numbers we started to have two outsider witness groups: one to reflect upon the life and identity of the persons at the centre of the work, and one to reflect upon the professional life and identity of the worker. Of course these two focuses were not mutually exclusive.

This double witnessing enriched the supervision process even further, and supervisees would not only experience the process as helpful in their work with the persons at the centre, but would also report that it had a positive effect on their sense of themselves as workers. My observation was that their confidence as narrative practitioners was significantly enhanced and this contributed to their practice.

This experience in the supervision groups has contributed a great deal to my understandings of narrative supervision, whether in groups or one to one.

I now propose that supervision may be seen from a narrative perspective as a forum for:

- The rich description of the lives and preferred identities of the people with whom we work
- The rich description of the professional lives of those who are in the position of supervisee
- The rich description of the relationship between the worker and those they work with, or, to put it another way, the rich description of the work itself.

Thus I propose that supervision may be seen not as a forum for problem solving (I'm stuck, help me to get unstuck) but as a forum for re-authoring and rich story development.

As one of the people who comes to supervision with me, Cathy, said:

“What I like about supervision with you is that you help me name stories and preferred identities and you give me a sense of myself as a good therapist by thickening the things that I do that work rather than those that don't. We end up with a story not about my inadequacy but about my success.”

Let me say something about the narrative values or principles that I mentioned earlier. Although there are certainly other useful principles that could be considered the ones that I have come up with are:

- Separating the person (whether this is the worker or the person consulting with them) from the problem – that is maintaining an externalised way of speaking; and stepping away from totalising descriptions.
- Centring the worker in the conversation and decentring myself
- Opening space for the telling of people's experience
- Taking a position that is curious and not knowing in relation to the experience of others, and that avoids 'expertise' on the lives and problems of people (including supervisees).
- Transparency

In attempting a narrative supervision I want my work to fit with these basic principles.

Another question that I had been wondering about was whether the various scaffolds of narrative practice could be usefully incorporated into supervision. I have concluded that they can and not only that, but that these scaffolds can be very useful in moving the worker from what it is that they already know to what it is that they are able to know in relation to this work. (See Michael White's teaching of scaffolding based on the work of Vygotsky).

More richly describing the lives of the people at the centre of the work

I am now going to consider in some detail rich story development in relation to the people at the centre of the work. I will be using hypothetical examples and the questions I will use as examples will be based around the statement of position map (Michael White's workshop notes, available at www.dulwichcentre.com.au). However, this is for illustration purposes only and other maps of narrative practice might also be used.

For those of you who are not familiar with statement of position map I will briefly describe it. **[David – this section could either be cut or developed more as you think might be helpful]**

This is a four stage process which invites a person to take a position. They can be invited to take a position in relation to a dominant (usually problematic) storyline of their life, or they can be invited to take a position in relation to an alternative storyline of their life. The sequence of questions is the same in either case, but in the first case this is known as statement of position map 1 and in the latter case statement of position map 2. Here are the four stages of the process as taken from Michael White's workshop notes.

Map 1

1. Negotiate an experience near name for the problem
2. Explore the influence of the problem in the person's life
3. Evaluate these effects
4. Justify these evaluations

Map 2

1. Negotiate an experience near name for a preferred story
2. Explore the influence of this story in the person's life
3. Evaluate these effects
4. Justify these evaluations

In putting forward the example questions that I am coming to, I will use the hypothetical case of a worker Dana, who has come for supervision in relation to her work with Jane. I will also play a tape which illustrates these ideas in action.

Whilst I have framed these questions as though the worker (Dana) is working only with one person, they can be adapted in a very straightforward way for situations in which a family or other group is being seen by the worker.

Two types of question

In talking with the worker I frequently find that early in the conversation I find myself asking about whether a name has been negotiated for the problematic story (or stories) of the client's life and if so what this name is. Whilst sometimes the worker is able to answer this question, frequently they are not able to as no name for the problem has been negotiated.

When this latter is the case I invite the worker to exercise their imagination with questions about what the person at the centre might give as a name for the problem story. This enables myself and the worker to enter into conversation about this matter, but it also invites the worker to use their imagination. For me, in working in a narrative style, the use of imagination, based upon experience, is essential. When we are hoping to help people find alternative accounts of their lives, based upon unique outcomes, we, the worker, need to have some ideas about where to look for these unique outcomes, and about what possibilities might be available for the storying and restorying of lives. Therefore, in inviting the worker into acts of imagination I am not only helping the supervisory conversation, and through this the therapeutic conversation: I am inviting the worker into useful ways of thinking and doing.

I will call the first class of questions ‘experience questions’ as they draw upon the worker’s experience of the language that has been negotiated and of what has been said. I will call the second class of question ‘imagination questions’ because they invoke the imagination of the worker. I am not here wishing to create a new categorisation of questions – just to have some way to refer to them.

Naming the problem story

Here I will provide some simple examples of questions that I might ask in supervision. A little later in this article I will be presenting some transcript of actual supervisory conversation and you will see that the actual process is of course more complex than the following might suggest.

Experience

“Dana, what name do you and Jane use for this problem story?”

Imagination

“Dana, if Jane was to give this problem story a name, what name do you think Jane might choose?”

Exploring the influence

Assuming that the worker had had to resort to imagination to name the problem story, then we can explore how identification of the problem story would influence the course of the work:

“Dana, if you and Jane were to identify the problem story in this way [eg, ‘feeling judged’] what conversations might you be able to have that you are unable to have at present?”

“Dana, if you and Jane were able to identify the problem story in this way and have these conversations, how do you think it might affect how Jane understands her life?”

“What do you think Jane might be able to do on account of this that she cannot do at present?”

Evaluating these effects

I might now invite the worker to imagine what Jane would think about such developments:

Dana, if things were to work out like this for Jane, what do you think she would think about this? Would she be pleased with such developments in her life?

Justification questions

And then I would go on to wonder what these imagined evaluations said about what was important to Jane.

Dana, what do you think this all says about Jane and her preferred ways of being?

And this of course leads to naming of a **preferred story**:

If Jane were to name this way of being, what name do you think she might give to it?

And then in exactly the same way as was used in relation to the dominant story we can now explore the effects of naming the preferred story.

What is happening in this example is that Statement of Position Map is being used, but instead of using it directly to explore the life of the person at the centre, it is being used reflexively upon the practices of the worker. But it is then being brought back to the life of the person at the centre. In the process the life of the person at the centre is more richly described through the telling of (imagined) preferred stories of their life.

Of course it would be possible to bring this conversation back to bear upon the professional identity of the worker if the context suggested that this would be helpful:

Dana, if you were to have these conversations with Jane, what would that be like for you?

But here we are considering the rich description of the lives of those we are working with. I will look at the rich description of the worker's identity later.

I think you can see that at this point the way is open to further richly describe Jane's life by looking for unique outcomes that support this preferred story; or by using imagination questions to think about where such unique outcomes might exist. The answers to these questions then lead to even richer description of the preferred accounts of the lives of the person at the centre.

My assumption is that as the worker steps into richer descriptions of the life of the person at the centre then this will enable them to work with the person in ways that more richly describe that person's life and thus contribute to the person themselves experiencing their life as more richly described. And of course in narrative rich description shapes ways of living.

As I said before, it seems to me that a process similar to the above process can be employed using other maps of narrative practice.

Illustration

Suzie is working with Qusser and Said (not his real name).

Said is 8 years old and the middle one of three brothers who are being fostered by Qusser. Said has been through two previous foster homes after having been removed from a family where there was abuse. Both previous foster placements broke down, and it emerged that Said was physically abused in both homes.

Qusser and her family have been providing a very loving home for Said and his brothers and things are going well. Suzie wonders if it is time to end her work with the family, but she is aware that Qusser values the work highly and believes that Suzie, a psychologist and family therapist, contributes something that she, Qusser, cannot contribute. This seems to contribute to feelings of self-doubt that at times overwhelm Qusser and make it difficult for her to end the work.

In this excerpt from supervision we are talking about these feelings of self doubt. The session we are discussing had taken place earlier that day.

Hugh: Mum gets caught up in some kind of story of self doubt?

Suzie: Yes

Hugh: And ...

Suzie: ... and an idea that there's something that professionals, there's some other ideas that professionals have that will help

Hugh: Yea, OK ... so a kind of story that professional knowledge is in some way above her own knowledge..

Suzie: Mmm

Hugh: Yea, OK, and, I'm not sure, how explicit would you say that story is for Qusser?

Suzie: Well, she would say that straight out.

Hugh: Well what I mean is, not that, what I mean is ... how explicit is it that she's caught up in a story of self-doubt and privileging the professional knowledge over her own knowledge?

Suzie: Yes, not that explicit actually, yes.

Hugh: If that was more explicit what do you think you'd be able to do that you can't do with it not being explicit?

Suzie: Well, we'd be able to talk about what was going to happen if I wasn't going to go anymore

Suzie talks about today's session with Qusser and Said and the externalisation of 'the robber', which led to a conversation about Said's expectation that when he has been naughty he will be hit. This expectation is not as strong as it was, and Suzie explores with him what has helped.

Suzie: ...in similar ways to the robber, really, tells me that the influence of this worry that his carers, mum and dad, will hit him, was reduced a lot over time and today we were talking about how it had reduced and what had stopped that ...

Hugh: The influence of which worry?

Suzie: The worry about his mum and dad are going to hit you, that grown ups hit you

Hugh: For him, the worry

Suzie: It's not there, big as it used to be. So we talked about that and how that happened and I tried to make him a consultant to other children in this situation, who'd been in a bad situation and moved to a new house And what had helped him, what happened before he left, which was really helpful because he acknowledged all the parenting things that Qusser had been doing like ... this is what he would say to foster carers – children being naughty had to sit on the stairs for 5 minutes to help them cool down instead of hitting them ... that's what she's been doing ... ask them to count to 15 to cool their heads down, getting hugs by mums and dads when there's been an argument or whatever, when everyone's calmed down, get a hug and saying sorry to each other – there's a lot of things really. What had helped big worries going back to being quite small. And then Qusser just joined in on that about what she felt her style of parenting had been Being relaxed, going with the flow, relaxing with the children, not worrying about the state of the house, everything being tidied up, lots of things and then also she feels she's given these children a message of love, which, partly seems to come from, she feels, the Asian [in the UK the word 'Asian' is used to refer to people from the Indian sub-continent] community in the way of sharing responsibility for child care .. she told me about how it's like they're united with other parents so if their friend's kids need looking after she will automatically do it, no question, her friend will trust her to do it, she told me lots of stories about that, so she thought that would be a really important thing children should see ... that people just send a general message of love going between people in the community. This is what we ended up talking about today, and, yea, she was very happy for me to share the ideas with other foster carers, so it was her expertise really, and was ...

Hugh: So she was able to step in essence from the story of self doubt and professional expertise into a story which was knowledgeable about her own style of parenting and the contribution of the community which she is part of To helping Said step away from some of his fears, that's connected to fears of being hit?

Suzie: Yes. He said he'd found out, he thought there was love and respect in the community, and trust and being nice, he was able to say those things, so that's good, and I've had these sorts of conversation with her before, but I still think she thinks that there's something else that I know that I can do that will I'll have to be there for ...

Hugh: So this sounds like a fantastic conversation and I can entirely understand why Qusser might feel that she wouldn't want to give up the opportunity for conversations like this ...

Suzie: Yes, true, yea.

Hugh: It doesn't sound like a conversation of your expertise, in a knowing way, but it does sound like you bring something

Suzie: Yea ...

Hugh: And I can certainly understand while you're doing such good sessions that she wouldn't want to lose that Try and do worse work!

Suzie: No, it's very rewarding, I really enjoy it, it's interesting really to hear about the Asian community which I know very little about ...

Hugh: I wondered in talking about this, there were two things in my mind, one was thinking about, wondering about what she knows about how much she contributes to you and the other thing I was thinking about was how she might prefer to position herself in relation to these two alternative stories, the one of self doubt and professional expertise, and the one of knowledge of her own parenting knowledges and skills and the contribution the community makes to it. These were the two things I was thinking about, and I don't know if we might have time to have both those conversations or whether there is some other conversation that it'd be better to have at the moment ...

There is then some discussion of how Qusser could contribute her knowledges to other foster parents, and Suzie talks about creating a written archive of these knowledges.

Hugh: I wonder if you developed an archive with her of her knowledges of parenting, how do you think that would affect her relationship with two stories we've been talking about?

Suzie: Mmm, hopefully it would (????)

Hugh: I wonder what she would say, because I asked earlier about whether the story of doubting herself and privileging professional knowledge was explicit for her, and at first you said no, not really, and then you said maybe it is and I want to ask the same sort of question about the story of skill and ability as foster parent in caring for a child who's clearly had a difficult background and I wonder if that story is explicit for her?

Suzie: Mmm, probably not.

Hugh: I wonder if these two stories were more explicit, I wonder what it would enable you to do, what work you could do, what conversations you could have together, that are harder to have if these two stories are not explicit ... what are your thoughts about that?

Suzie: Well, I think she probably doesn't see them as a story. She's either in one or in the other, she's experiencing a real sense of confidence or she's experiencing a complete "I don't know what to do, I really don't know what to do here" so ...

Hugh: Would you be able to have a conversation that talked about these ideas, stories of her life accounts of herself?

Suzie: Mmm, yes, probably ... could do, yes

Hugh: And if you were able to do that How do you think it would be different if she was positioned separately from these stories rather than experiencing herself as, according to which story happened to be uppermost at the time?

Suzie: Well, maybe she'd be moreresistant to it, I guess, or more able to see it as a story or ... a perspective as opposed to a truth or that kind of thing ... it feels like it'd be more transparent about what I'm doing and why I think I often don't do that, I just kind of do it and ... so it's less shared thinking ...

Hugh: So if it was more transparent, and she was able to see herself more as separate from these stories, how do you think it would affect her relationship ... well, what do you think it would allow for in her relationship with these stories that currently isn't available to her?

Suzie: Maybe, kind of spotting it, as opposed to being overwhelmed by it ... maybe

Hugh: If she was able to spot them, what possibilities do you think that would open up for her?

Suzie: That she could challenge, challenge particular stuff there, or think about what she needs to do to challenge it Who does she need, what does she need.

More richly describing the preferred identity of the worker

Maps of narrative practice can also be used to more richly describe the preferred identities of workers.

In one example a worker came expressing a sense of failure in relation to her work in setting up and managing a new service.

I enquired whether she might be interested in working through Michael White's (2002) 'Failure Conversations Map' and she said she would like to do this. I find this particular map of narrative practice to be complex and difficult. Because of this I suggested that we read through the part of the article that is about the map, and work through some of the questions together, and again she liked this idea.

As a result of this she was able to embrace a preferred identity as someone who worked in a way that was highly inclusive of others, collaborative and open. She was able to value this story of her identity very highly and through this to step away from negative identity conclusions. She left the session very relieved and in possession of a document charting her preferred identity and her knowledges in relation to it.

[Could probably expand this]

More richly describing the relationship between the worker and the person at the centre

Not only can the identities of the person at the centre and of the worker be more richly described during supervision, but also the identity or account of the relationship between the worker and the person consulting them – in effect the work itself is more richly described.

Cathy was feeling that her work with Pam was going nowhere. Pam was a middle aged woman whose father had died two years previously. Pam had not 'got over' this loss, and had become depressed and reclusive. Even before her father died she had experienced herself as anxious, but her father had always been there to guide and reassure her. Since his death the anxiety had become overwhelming, preventing her from going out and generally paralysing her.

Pam came to see Cathy and spoke very fully about her sense of being bereft and lost. She spoke so freely of these experiences that Cathy found it hard to find places where she could interject and take part in the conversation. When eventually Cathy was able to find a place to take part in the conversation then it seemed to Cathy that Pam was not responsive as although Pam declared herself relieved to have spoken

about these things at the next session is was as if they were back to square one. Cathy had the sense that she and Pam did not share the same ideas about the purpose of counselling. She felt that counselling was to help Pam make progress towards recovering her life from the difficulties that beset her following the death of her father, whilst it seemed to Cathy as though Pam thought that counselling was a place where she could talk in a stream of consciousness sort of way about her difficult feelings and experiences. Cathy had a conversation with her about how she saw counselling, and still Pam seemed determined to talk about everything that was wrong in her life!

An excerpt from supervision with Cathy follows. In this conversation we have actually been talking about someone else, Tim, but in passing Cathy has mentioned that there has been some progress in relation to the work with Pam. Tim may have to stop seeing Cathy and transfer to another counsellor for purely circumstantial reasons. Cathy tells me how much she will miss working with him and this leads to a conversation about what it is he contributes to her life, and what it might mean to him if he knew this. Cathy sees him as “a fighter” and as “determined”. She understands that he is trying hard to work his problems out, and she compares him with Pam who she says “is waiting for it to happen to her”, ie she is less proactive in the therapy context and lacks a sense of agency in relation to this.

The excerpt that follows primarily contributes to a richer description of the work and the relationship between Cathy and Pam, but it also leads to richer descriptions of both Pam’s life and Cathy’s life as a counsellor.

Hugh: I was thinking about how Pam is not immediately responsive to the ways of working that are important to you. And yet you were telling me, without having gone into any detail, that there was progress; and so it might be possible to see Pam as actually much more stuck than Tim

Cathy: I would say that she’s been stuck longer.

Hugh: Stuck longer. Yea. And less knowing how to get out of her stuckness.

Cathy: Yea.

Hugh: In a way that Tim gives you some clues ... So I was just thinking, if Pam has been stuck for longer, and has found it more difficult to engage in the process of unsticking herself than Tim, which I’m ... does that fit? That she has more difficulty engaging ...

Cathy: Yes

Hugh: Then I wondered what it meant for the point of your work that you are actually helping Pam to make some progress?

Cathy: What was the beginning of that question?

Hugh: Given that Tim, who is very responsive, that it makes you feel, that seeing his fighting and determination, it makes you feel that there is some point to be doing this work, it gives you some meaning to your life, I wondered what it meant to you that someone such as Pam who’s been stuck for a long time, and who is not responsive to this way of working is beginning to respond by making some progress, I wondered what that meant to you about your work, your identity and the meaning of your life? [!]

Cathy: Well, it’s good to remind me of this, and certainly [long pause] ... yes, I mean, I think the thing that was important is because ... her story about herself is that she’s a person who has anxiety and so I’ve been asking her about how different that would be for her to see herself as someone who is in the process of getting her life back and keep asking ... and I think she is getting a sense of that ...

Hugh: Right, OK.

Cathy: To me that's the most important thing for her to be able to appreciate about herself and who's noticed and how that's different for her because she then comes back the next week and she's still talking about "people know about me" .. you know? "I'm a person who can't do anything 'cos I'm so anxious". But that's what she means, but to me that's what's important, the issue about her dad dying is now secondary, but he does keep coming in because she has his voice very strongly, who's saying to her "You can do it".

Hugh: So I just wonder, because you were talking about the point of this to you and the meaning to your life, and you were experiencing this very strongly though Tim, I was just wondering for your work with Pam, how would you rate the importance of your work with Pam to Pam?

Cathy: Oh, that's a good question.

Hugh: How do you think she would see the importance of your work or what, how do you think she would assess the contribution you are making to her life?

Cathy: Well, I haven't asked her that question.

Hugh: I was wondering what you think.

Cathy: I think it's probably quite high.

Hugh: If you were more in touch with that sense of the contribution you are making to her life I wonder how that would affect your sense of the relationship with her, giving or not giving meaning to your life.

Cathy: Would. [Pause]

Hugh: And I suppose I was developing a kind of thesis which is that, I don't know if thesis is the right word, idea, that maybe actually the work that you do with Pam and other people who might be stuck in that sort of a way maybe is more important to their lives than the work – I don't know if I want to say more important – at least as important as the work that you do with people like Tim...

Cathy: ...and Andrew

Hugh: And Andrew, yea, yea.

Cathy: In a sense, I'm now getting a sense really that in fact in a sense it perhaps is more important, especially when I think of working in primary care [*doctor's surgery*] where there were people who, well Pam is one of them, who are forever turning up at the surgery and not really given much respect in a sense, and have been on anti-depressants for years and nobody ever says, Why's this person been on anti-depressants for ten years, or something like that, What can we do for them, you know, I've seen all that and so that's really ...

Hugh: I guess we can't compare Pams with Tims and say this is more important or less important, but maybe we can say, with Pams it is very important, a tremendous contribution if someone like Pam is able to make progress in their lives.

Cathy: Yea, yea ... yea, yea, she even said, because what she did over Easter, they went to Paris for the weekend, they had an absolutely disastrous time, 'cos it was terribly organised and one thing, she said it was a disaster, but in fact she did it and she said, yea, she said, my daughter said to me, I can't believe you are doing that, so yes, fantastic ...

Hugh: Fantastic, so people are seeing her differently, her daughter sees something she didn't see before ...

Cathy: Yea, and I'm saying to her, "Fantastic!" I certainly wasn't going to Paris for the weekend on a coach! O god! Nightmare scenario!

Hugh: Is this an OK place to stop?

Cathy: Yes, it's a brilliant place to stop!

Finally, I'd like to add two or three other small points.

Firstly, when someone tells me that they are stuck and asks what should they do, I do the same old thing as everyone else – I ask what ideas do they have? And as you will know it is remarkable how often people know already what would be good to do.

Secondly, when I am working with people and I am wondering what to do I often ask myself the question, How could I look at this from a narrative perspective? This can be a useful question to ask in supervision – How could we think about this from a narrative perspective?

Thirdly, of course I still often have ideas about how to go forward with the work, and I still get subject to the belief that I have these really good ideas and that I should share them with the worker. And indeed, often these ideas are received appreciatively. But nowadays I usually say something like "I have some ideas about this, would you be interested in hearing them?" This helps to position me not in a space of 'telling' but in a space of 'sharing' and this feels more respectful. Chris Behan, of the Family Institute in Cambridge Massachusetts often invites the worker to interview him about what he is thinking about. (2003) I have done this occasionally, and I don't know why I haven't done it more. I think that this is a practice I shall seek to embrace in future.

Summary

Finally then, in seeking to deal with some of the dilemmas of supervision from a narrative perspective it is possible to distinguish some ideas and guidelines to help develop a narrative practice.

These include a focus on rich story development in relation to the life of the person at the centre, the professional identity of the worker and the account of the work itself.

Some general principals of narrative practice are useful in guiding this work, and in applying these principals maps of narrative practice may be followed.

This account of supervision from a narrative perspective is by no means complete and many narrative principals and maps have not been explored. However, in thinking about these ideas and in preparing this piece I have found my practice developing and fitting better with my hopes for a narrative supervision.