

# **PEER GROUP SUPERVISION IN A LAY COUNSELLING CONTEXT**

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## DECLARATIONS

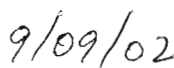
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DATE

## ABSTRACT

Supervision is a core prerequisite for the registration and ongoing education and professional development of various levels of mental health care workers in a South African context. There is, however, a dearth of South African literature that pertains to the supervision of such workers. It would appear that the dominant form of supervision of practice is dyadic, but such supervision is resource intense. This study explores a structured model of peer group supervision (PGS model) as a possible alternative to individual supervision. As the PGS model is in a preliminary, developmental phase, this research is also an exploratory investigation.

The main aim of this study was to explore how a group of experienced, voluntary lay counsellors, working under the auspices of a national, non-governmental mental health agency utilised and evaluated the PGS model. Four peer group sessions were held with the group of ten lay counsellors, in their usual site of practice. A focus group discussion was then held, followed by the participants completing a semi-structured questionnaire. The intention of this research design was that the participants' perspectives be given priority in this investigation. The concurrent collection and analysis of data was achieved by employing a qualitative, interpretive grounded theory methodology (Addison, 1989).

The findings considered the way in which the group utilised the PGS model, and examined the participants' experiences. The group of lay counsellors were enthusiastic about the potential for the PGS model to offer them a forum to collaboratively discuss and assist each other with their casework. The findings were then integrated with the literature pertaining to peer group supervision, as well as ideas from a variety of sources that discuss the construction of optimal learning encounters.

The findings were then discussed from a perspective of situated cognition and the notions of local knowledge and communities of practice were used to propose a deeper understanding of the experiences of the group. This research undertaking resulted in the participants making some recommendations for the adaptation of the PGS model. Further recommendations for both the application of the PGS model and for research into supervisory practice are made.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Mental health care within a South African context is embedded within a comprehensive Primary Health Care (PHC) model. In accordance with the guidelines of such a model are principles that emphasise the necessity of ensuring mental health services are sustainable, affordable, accessible and equitable to the entire population of the country (Freeman & Pillay, 1997; Lee & Zwi, 1997; White Paper of the Department of Health, 1997).

What is immediately evident from the literature pertaining to mental health services in a South African context is that there is a severe shortage of personnel to provide such services in accordance with the proposed restructuring (Freeman & Pillay, 1997; Lee & Zwi, 1997; Petersen, Parekh, Bhagwanjee, Gibson, Giles & Swartz, 1997). Additionally, such requirements will, in all likelihood, place immense pressures (professional and personal) on existing personnel, whose services are already maximised due to the intense demand for mental health services. Such demands are influenced by, amongst other considerations, high levels of violence, poverty and personal and substance abuse (Olivier, 1992). Of particular relevance to a South African context is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In this regard Whiteside and Sunter (2000) state in their introduction that “(a)t the start of the new century, South Africa probably had the largest number of HIV-infected people of any country in the world” (n.p). These indications place enormous additional demands on existing mental health care resources.

Therefore, primacy has been placed on increasing the number of health care workers in order to meet the changing demands in the provision of mental health care and the nature of the services that ought to be provided within a South African context (de Bruin & de Beer, 2001). Psychology as a discipline has changed the structure of its professional training requirements in order to meet some of these changing demands, with particular emphasis being placed on providing more counsellors at various levels of intervention within the PHC model (Naude, Heyns & Wessels, 2001).

The South African Professional Board for Psychology, operating under the auspices of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), is presently amending the professional requirements for the registration, training and education of mental health care workers. These central amendments include, from 1 January 2004, a category for Registered Counsellors. An additional amendment of particular relevance to this research is that the Professional Board for Psychology has recognised the “invaluable service to the public” (HPCSA, 2001a, p. 2) that certain institutions that employ lay counsellors have made, and the intention is to accredit such institutions. A condition for this accreditation, amongst others, is that such lay counsellors “will only be able to practice, under supervision, within approved institutional settings” (HPCSA, 2001a, p. 2).

In the abovementioned categories, supervision of practice during and after training is a central prerequisite for registration. Additionally, from 31 March 2002, the Professional Board for Psychology introduced a mandatory system for ongoing professional education and development, namely the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system. Within this CPD system there are three categories of educational and developmental activities. One of these is ‘small-group’ activities and includes peer review/supervision (HPCSA, 2001b, p. 4).

It is therefore clear that an implicit assumption is that existing counsellors (lay and professional) are encouraged to ensure that their own practices are continuously advanced in order to provide relevant and appropriate services to the broad diversity of South Africa’s population. However, within a South African context, not only are personnel resources highly restricted, but financial constraints for the training and development of existing personnel are also pertinent considerations. Individual supervision of trainees, and qualified counsellors, will, it is anticipated, be relatively inaccessible in more rural areas and many managers in the PHC system will have little time for supervision (Gerber, 2002). It is therefore envisaged that in order to provide ongoing support and educational development to both trainees and existing personnel, alternative forms of supervision that optimise resources need to be considered.

This study investigates the utility of one such forum, namely peer group supervision. This exploratory investigation has particular relevance for the training and ongoing support of lay

counsellors, due to the recognition of the immense demands that are being, and will be, made upon them, within the broader South African context.

## 1.2 LAY COUNSELLING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

On conducting an extensive literature search, as well as telephonically contacting various stakeholders in the sphere of lay counselling in South Africa, it would appear that to date no definite policy, or published literature, exists regarding the position, or formal recognition and/or accreditation of lay counsellors in a South African context. Such a position may also be indicative of the nebulous situation in which lay counsellors have found themselves regarding where they 'belong' professionally. Furthermore, this remains the current position in spite of the HPCSA stating in their Health Report (2000) that a committee would be formed to decide on the accreditation, minimum standards of training, mentoring and supervision of lay counsellors (p. 6).

It does, however, appear that members from LifeLine Southern Africa (as well as other role players) are currently in the process of advocating and negotiating with the Professional Board for Psychology to have an umbrella organisation accredited, namely the South African Council of Accredited Counselling Organisations (SACACO). It is intended that this body will oversee the accreditation of organisations that render lay counselling services. This function will also include, amongst others, the monitoring and determining of the professional conduct of its members and ensuring that such standards are maintained (Prinsloo, personal communication, April, 2002).

There are other role players who are lobbying for a form of registration that will enable lay counsellors, particularly those in the HIV/AIDS arena, to practice as individuals (Solomon, personal communication, April, 2002), however such debates are beyond the ambit of this study. Thus, whilst the position of lay counsellors at present does appear to be uncertain, various stakeholders are in the process of negotiating for the formal recognition of such mental health care workers.

## 1.3 THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

The central aim of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation of peer group

supervision in a lay counselling context. A model of structured peer group supervision (PGS model) was taught to and then implemented with a group of ten voluntary lay counsellors. These voluntary counsellors offer their services under the auspices of a national, non-governmental organisation (the Agency). This Agency offers the public two forms of voluntary counselling, namely telephonic and direct, face-to-face counselling. In this particular Agency, the counsellors begin as telephonic counsellors and then progress onto face-to-face counselling once they have gained experience. The group of research participants were all experienced counsellors.

The PGS model was developed by Akhurst (2000) and is based on a structured model of group supervision (SGS model) (Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Morris, Betz & Hart, 1991). The essential difference in these two models is that the PGS model does not require the presence of a supervisory 'expert'. In utilising the PGS model, peers adopt various roles in the group on a rotational basis. The PGS model consists of five phases. This structure provides a framework that encourages an egalitarian, participative forum for assisting counsellors in engaging with their casework.

Peer group supervision is widely used by psychologists in practice, but has been the subject of minimal research (Akhurst, 2000). The PGS model is currently in a developmental phase, and therefore, this research should also be regarded as a tentative, exploratory inquiry.

#### 1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question was: 'How did a group of lay counsellors utilise and experience a structured model of peer group supervision (PGS model)?'. In addressing this research question, data was concurrently collected and analysed from three sources. Four peer group supervision sessions were held, followed by a focus group discussion and a semi-structured questionnaire.

#### 1.5 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The role of the researcher in this undertaking was four-fold: as mediator of the learning process, participant-observer, facilitator (elevating the participant aspect) and researcher

(elevating the observer role). Whilst this multifaceted and fluid role definition and function enhanced the richness of the experience for the researcher, it was not without challenges and tensions, to be further discussed in Chapter Five.

As this research undertaking is a qualitative one and the role of researcher is central to the process, in writing up this research I have utilised the first person, subjective pronoun (Kelly, 1999).

## 1.6 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

There were various motives underlying the decision to conduct this study. Firstly, this project forms part of Akhurst's (2000) ongoing research around the development of the PGS model in a variety of contexts. An opportunity to partake in this further research arose, and as my interests are in the realm of empowerment and counsellor development, as well as the practical implementation and application of psychological theory, I requested that I be included in conducting one of the research projects.

Secondly, much of my tertiary training has been in a context that encouraged emphasising the social construction of knowledge. Therefore, an opportunity to engage in such a knowledge construction site, with adult learners, was a further motivation.

A third motivation for conducting this research was the total absence of research and theory pertaining to supervision of lay counsellors in a South African context. As already mentioned, upon doing an extensive literature search, including policy documentation, no relevant articles could be found. Furthermore, there are only three theses that concern supervision in the discipline of psychology in a South African context, namely Akhurst (2000), Gower (1989) and Snyders (1985).

A final motivation centred around my concern for the role, and recognition, of lay counsellors in a South African context. I believe that these 'human service workers' (Orford, 1992) play a crucial role, often without payment, in promoting the mental health of many of South Africa's population. As Moursund (1993) contends, these workers are "out there, in-

the-trenches, working with real clients in real situations” (p. 1). Perhaps, due to the absence of tertiary qualifications in psychotherapy, such counsellors may be socially constructed as less able than professional counsellors and therapists. I would therefore argue that, as these workers are often at a ‘grass roots’ level of service delivery, they face the same, if not even more, challenges in performing their functions as professionally recognised mental health care practitioners. Such challenges would include, but would not be limited to, an overwhelming sense of responsibility due to the numbers of cases and the types of issues with which such counsellors are confronted. I believe it is necessary and important for lay counsellors to be provided with the same support structures, in the form of mentoring and supervision, that exist for registered and legally recognised professional mental health care workers.

## 1.7 DEFINITIONS

### 1.7.1 **Counselling**

Various authors make a persuasive argument for either the interchangeability of the terms ‘psychotherapy’ and ‘counselling’ (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998), or for the two concepts to be regarded as located on a continuum (Hensen, Stevic & Warner, 1982). Within this latter perspective, counselling is regarded as being more concerned with short-term intervention, with the focus primarily being on the client’s interpersonal and role definition experiences.

Gillis’ (1992) definition of counselling as being a “facilitative process in which the counsellor, working within a framework of a special helping relationship, uses specific skills to assist ... people to help themselves more effectively” (p. 2) will be the understanding of counselling adopted in this research.

### 1.7.2 **Lay counsellor**

For the purposes of this research, a lay counsellor is understood as a person who does not have a tertiary qualification in the arena of psychotherapy, but has been trained in basic counselling skills and offers their services under the auspices of a mental health organisation.

This definition does acknowledge that various other professional bodies, such as nurses,

clergy, police and medical staff will, in all likelihood, also be required to provide counselling services in their various roles and functions. Such facets would therefore also be subsumed under this definition.

### **1.7.3 Supervision**

Hart's definition of supervision as "an ongoing educational process in which one person in the role of supervisor helps another person in the role of supervisee acquire appropriate professional behaviour through an examination of the supervisee's professional activities" (1982, p.12) illuminates the way that supervision is generally conceptualized (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; Holloway, 1992; Sansbury, 1982). However, in Chapter Two alternative ways of understanding supervision will be discussed.

### **1.7.4 Peer group supervision**

Peer group supervision refers to a collaborative, interpersonal relationship whereby colleagues provide emotional support, guidance and practical suggestions to each other.

### **1.7.5 Process**

'Process' is a recurring term in this thesis and is understood as a sequence of interrelated and progressive steps, not necessary chronological, that are followed in order to achieve a particular goal.

Whilst this definition will be followed in this particular research, it is acknowledged that 'process' may also include the interpersonal interactions and dynamics that emerge from group encounters. This alternative view is succinctly stated by Yalom (1985) as the "nature of the relationship between individuals who are interacting with one another" and includes the words, style and the nature of the interactions that indicate the "interpersonal relationship of the participants" (p. 137).

## **1.8 THESIS STRUCTURE**

The following thesis structure provides the framework for the unfolding research process.



#### Chapter One:

The introduction included an overview of the research undertaking, locating the research in a broader South African context. The aims and rationale, as well as motivating for the positioning of the researcher in the first person were described. Definitions relevant to this study were also outlined.

#### Chapter Two:

The literature review and theoretical basis for the study is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the concept of supervision and provides an overview of three different modalities of supervision. Central themes pertaining to the practical implementation of peer supervision groups are discussed. The second section highlights the theoretical underpinnings that were considered and applied when implementing the PGS model in the lay counselling context. These facets are also implicit in the PGS model. The relevance of the theoretical underpinnings of this research for a South African context are highlighted.

#### Chapter Three:

The research design and methodology chapter provides a description of the decision making process followed and the research design employed. The assumptions contained within a social constructionist worldview and the principles of a qualitative, grounded interpretive inquiry are foregrounded. The steps taken in collecting and analysing the data in order to address the central research question are described. Issues pertaining to ethics and other important methodological decisions are also reviewed.

#### Chapter Four:

The findings section highlights the grounded nature of this research inquiry. Two sub-questions are used to examine the data collected. The first section primarily highlights the researcher's understandings of how the lay counsellors utilised the PGS model. The second section provides the opportunity for the participants to provide their own accounts, experiences and evaluations of their learning encounters.

#### Chapter Five:

The discussion chapter interweaves the central theoretical underpinnings (Chapter Two) with the results that emerged from Chapter Four. The central research question is addressed, and the researcher's reflections on the research process are provided. Wherever relevant, ideas specifically relevant to a South African context are also considered.

#### Chapter Six:

The conclusion reiterates the core tenets and findings of this research. This chapter also explores the limitations of the research and provides some suggestions for further research.

The reader might find that Chapters Three and Four are more lengthy than is often the case in other theses. However, Mauthner and Doucet (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994) provide sound theoretical arguments for the methodology (Chapter Three) in qualitative research to be clearly and thoroughly described and explained. As a result of this close-grained explication, the findings (Chapter Four) are also richly descriptive.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BASE

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the intended aim of this research is to explore how a group of lay counsellors utilised and experienced a model of PGS, this chapter will focus on two central facets in which the research was embedded.

Firstly, the literature that theoretically locates peer group supervision as a distinct forum of supervision will be reviewed. This will be done by addressing three different categories of supervision in counsellor training. A thematic discussion of the predominantly American literature, wherein various models of peer group supervision have been practically implemented, and the benefits and limitations of such experiences, will then be provided. This will be followed by an overview of Akhurst's (2000) adaptations to Wilbur *et al.*'s (1991) model of Structured Group Supervision.

Secondly, Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) challenge the separating of "what is learned from how it is learned ..." (p. 32). Therefore, an outline of the theoretical basis of the learning context in which the PGS model was implemented will be provided. This will be done in order to accentuate the philosophical and conceptual frameworks that influenced my decisions regarding 'how to' implement the PGS model in the lay counselling context. Furthermore, many of these assumptions are implicit in the PGS model itself. An integration of these ideas will emphasise the metatheoretical assumption of this research undertaking, namely social constructionism.

From the outset, it is relevant to emphasise that the majority of literature is not South African. As discussed in Chapter One there appear to be only three South African theses available that address the issue of supervision. The dearth of available literature on group supervision generally, and peer group supervision in particular, appears to extend internationally as well. The applicability of the existing literature to a South African context will therefore be discussed.

## 2.2 SUPERVISION IN COUNSELLOR TRAINING

As outlined in Chapter One, the HPCSA, where the role of lay counsellors is acknowledged, states that the ongoing supervision of all counsellors, regardless of their category, is one of the prerequisites for registration (2001a). Mental health practitioners are also expected to maintain their professional development by earning CPD points. Furthermore, according to documents produced on the Minimum Standards for HIV/AIDS counsellors and trainees by the Department of Health (2001), supervision/mentoring for such counsellors is mandatory. Reasons for this mandatory supervision include the following: ensuring sustainability of HIV/AIDS counselling programmes, providing emotional support for the counsellors, ensuring ongoing development of the counsellors and, therefore indirectly ensuring that client services are of a high standard due to the counsellors being supported and guided in their roles. Therefore, all the aforementioned requirements either for registration and/or ongoing development necessitate that a form of supervision be undertaken, although the details of what the supervision should exactly entail are not clear.

In order to provide for possible variations in meeting such professional prerequisites, this section will therefore outline, and theoretically locate, three different forms that such supervision could take.

Akhurst (2000) cites various works that concur that there is much debate around various facets of supervision (e.g., Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Holloway, 1992). Such debates focus on: how supervision should be defined, what the functions and purposes of supervision are, how the supervisory relationships should be structured, and which form of supervision is most appropriate. For the purposes of this research, and in order to remain focussed, this section will only focus on the latter facet, namely the various modalities of supervision. Whilst it is acknowledged that additional forms of supervision exist, the central tenets of individual, group, and peer group supervision will be outlined in order to illuminate three alternative variations in conceptualising the modality of supervision.

### 2.2.1 Individual supervision

Hart's (1982) definition of supervision outlined in section 1.7.3 illustrates the traditional

notion of supervision, strongly based on a one-to-one, dyadic or 'traditional apprenticeship' model of learning (Marks & Hixon, 1986). Carroll (1996) believes that the strengths of such a supervisory relationship include the opportunity for an in-depth, concentrated and personalised encounter, in a context of non-competitiveness. There is, however, an implicit assumption that the transmission of skills, from the supervisor to the supervisee occurs in a linear way (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). Thus, there exists a hierarchical relationship between the 'knower' and the 'as yet unknown', with the supervisor, by definition, also assuming the role of evaluator within the relationship (Carroll, 1996).

Whilst this is probably the most popular understanding of supervision (Carroll, 1996), the benefits of such an encounter are highly dependent on the supervisor's skills, the supervisee's level of comfort regarding honest expression of possible difficulties being encountered and the level of compatibility of the two parties' theoretical approaches (Akhurst, 2000). There is also a concern that such a relationship may lead to dependency, with the supervisee not achieving a sense of autonomy (Carroll, 1996; Hawkins & Shohet, 1989). Furthermore, this one-to-one relationship, is, necessarily, what Hardcastle refers to as extremely "resource intense" (1991, p. 64), a potentially limiting factor given resource limitations in South Africa.

### **2.2.2 Group supervision**

In Holloway and Johnston's (1985) article 'Group supervision: widely practised but poorly understood' they define group supervision as a forum in which "supervisors oversee a trainee's professional development in a group of peers" (p. 333). Furthermore, their article states that whilst group supervision is possibly the most widely used form of supervision, the theoretical investigation underlying such a modality is insufficient. These contentions are also supported by Bernard and Goodyear (1992) and Inskipp (1996) who states that "there has been very little theory developed on group supervision, which has often been seen just as individual supervision done in a group" (p. 278). Inskipp (1996) describes four different kinds of group supervision that may exist along a continuum, as explained in the following paragraph.

The first category displays the characteristics implied in the definition outlined above where

individuals are supervised, in a group context, whilst the other group members adopt the role of audience. In the second, 'participative group supervision', the other group members are encouraged to participate in the supervisory process, whilst in the third category, 'co-operative supervision', the group members are encouraged to gradually adopt the supervisor's role, and supervise each other, with the supervisor acting as both facilitator of the group and peripheral supervisor of the content. In the final category, namely 'peer group supervision' the group members are completely immersed in the process of supervision of each other, without an 'expert' present (Inskipp, 1996). There is thus a gradual progression from a model of supervision where group members play a marginal role, with limited responsibility, to a position where the group members take over responsibility for the entire process. Additionally, there is an inverse relationship regarding the involvement in the process from the perspective of the supervisor, from being central to not being present at all.

Therefore, Kadushin's (1992) definition of group supervision, being "the use of a group setting to implement the responsibilities of supervision" (p. 404) is probably a more appropriate, albeit generic, understanding that captures the various forms that can exist within a group supervisory context. Kadushin also raises a multitude of positive contributions to counsellor development that group supervision can potentially offer, yet cautions that the group context can be a "complex and demanding" one (1992, p. 414).

A number of authors have explored the advantages and disadvantages of such a forum (Carroll, 1996; Kadushin, 1992; Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; Holloway & Johnston, 1985). The advantages include the economy of time, personnel and expertise. Such a forum offers a context in which supervisees can share their experiences, as well as receive support from other group members. The potential also exists for group members to learn group-interaction skills and the different perspectives of group members may provide a wider variety of learning input. Additionally, the hierarchy and accompanying power variables, amongst the group members, as well as between the group members and the supervisor, may be diluted. The group forum may therefore provide an enhanced opportunity for learning, interaction, feedback, responsibility, power sharing and challenging amongst the group. Hillerbrand (1989) believes that group supervision has a further advantage, in that the supervisor's language usage in a group forum can be adapted by and between group members to become

more relevant and accessible to each member's appropriate level of comprehension.

These authors suggest that disadvantages of group supervision include the possibility that not all people are suited to group work. In addition, they argue that group dynamics such as interpersonal rivalry and competitiveness may interfere in the process. Group members might possibly feel pressurized to conform to group norms. Such a forum can also be time consuming and client confidentiality may be compromised. Furthermore, group members may still become dependent on their supervisor (Meyerstein, 1977). Furthermore, even if the intention is to make the process an egalitarian one, the presence of a supervisor contributes to it being "not a democratic group" (Kadushin, 1992, p. 422).

Various authors discuss ways to counteract such disadvantages, including contracting between members regarding roles and responsibilities from the outset (Abels, 1977; Inskipp, 1996). Borders (1991) and Kadushin (1992) recommend that a structured form of group supervision may overcome many of the disadvantages that can evolve in group supervision. Wilbur *et al.* (1991) have developed one such model, namely a descriptive Structured Group Supervision (SGS) model. Akhurst (2000) adapted this model of SGS in constructing the PGS model and these adaptations will be more fully discussed under section 2.2.4.

Regarding the relevance of group supervision for a South African context, it would appear that this form of supervision has some advantages over individual supervision. These advantages include economizing on personnel and expertise (the supervision of many counsellors can occur simultaneously) and providing a forum for sharing ideas and various perspectives, as well as offering personal support and encouragement for counsellors. Hillerbrand's (1989) emphasis on group members potentially adapting language usage so that it is more comprehensible to other members also would have relevance in a multi-cultural South African context. Depending on the version adopted, group supervision subsumed under Inskipp's (1996) notion of 'co-operative supervision' would also have an added advantage, in that counsellors could be encouraged to become increasingly proactive and participative in their own, and other counsellors', ongoing development. However, this form of supervision usually still requires the presence of an 'expert', in the form of a supervisor, who oversees the functioning and structuring of the group. The type of group supervision,

outlined by Inskipp (1996), that does not depend on the presence of an ‘expert’ supervisor is described in the next section.

### **2.2.3 Peer group supervision**

As with Holloway and Johnston’s (1985) contentions regarding group supervision, Borders (1991) states that “peer group supervision is widely advocated but infrequently described” (p. 248). As the focus of this research is peer group supervision, this sub-section will focus on providing an in-depth description of the central characteristics of peer group supervision, and include some practical examples of the implementation of such a forum.

According to Marks and Hixon (1986) “peer group supervision differs from group supervision in that all members of a peer group share equal responsibility for the functioning, outcomes, and decisions of the group” (p. 419). More specifically, Wagner and Smith (1979) define peer supervision as “a process through which counselors or counselor trainees assist each other to become more effective and skillful helpers by using their relationships and professional skills” (p. 90). Additionally, Akhurst (2000) notes that whilst ‘peer’ and ‘supervision’ may appear to be mutually exclusive terms, this is not necessarily the case. The concepts could rather be interpreted as acknowledging that peers may have different levels of skill and experience, whilst ‘supervision’ denotes the boundaries and ethics in the collegial supervision process and recognises the presence of such conventions found in the forum.

Peer supervision can adopt a variety of forms, ranging from a dyadic arrangement, to groups of four to eleven (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975). Hardcastle (1991) points out that there has been a progressive move in various professional and para-professional contexts towards utilising peer groups as a supervisory forum. This includes supervision for in-service training, as well as for qualified practitioners. Stoltenberg (1981) suggests that this forum of supervision is particularly preferred by more advanced counsellors.

Regarding the potential benefits of peer group supervision, Benshoff (1993) provides an overview of peer supervision literature and concludes that this form of supervision provides a forum that can directly extend opportunities for counsellors to gain a sense of independence



and interdependence. In Yalom's (1985) terms this particular forum is regarded as a 'self directed group'. An increased sense of confidence and responsibility regarding the counsellors' own growth and development is an additional potential benefit. Gomersall (1997) states that such an approach to supervision may result in a "holistic, eclectic understanding of situations in which they (counsellors) come to see themselves playing powerful key therapeutic roles" (p. 118). This would be achieved due to multiple perspectives being generated through the process of collegial consultation and supervision.

Benshoff (1993) identifies a number of additional positive outcomes associated with peer group supervision. These include a more egalitarian environment that results in less dependency on a supervisor and members are empowered in and through the process. In addition, such a forum can overcome feelings of professional isolation, due to the mutual support and sharing provided by peers. The group dynamics and process can provide an additional learning encounter. A further advantage of such a method of supervision is an economy of resources, particularly finance, time and personnel (Carroll, 1996). For a South African context, these latter considerations become particularly relevant and appropriate.

Whilst the advantages of peer group supervision are extensive, various authors address the possible limitations in such a form of supervision. According to Tudge (1990) (whose ideas are primarily concerned with learning in children, yet may also have relevance in this context), it is important not to overlook the complexity of factors that interact in such a forum. Whilst each member should be able to equally participate in the process, such a peer encounter can lead to the regression of some members if the collaborative task is not adequately structured and/or if the group members' levels of experience and skill are too dissimilar. A further limitation is that the group may become too informal, with support and advice giving predominating, resulting in the accomplishment of the task being inhibited (Borders, 1991; Gomersall, 1997; Roth, 1986). Bradley (1989) also believes that counsellors "with serious skill deficiencies and those who are extremely defensive should not be candidates for peer supervision" (p. 163).

In the literature there is much debate over the issue of homogeneous versus heterogeneous skill and experience levels in peer supervision groups. For example, Carroll (1996) believes

that peers within such groups should be of a broadly similar level of experience, otherwise competitiveness, the inability to confront each other and group dynamics can take over the process. In contrast, Borders (1991) believes that peer supervision forums can accommodate varying levels of experience and skill within the groups. Hillerbrand (1989) would also argue for internal heterogeneity in any type of group forum (including peer supervision groups), where the more experienced and skilled members effectively provide a “novice scaffolding” (p. 295) for those who are less experienced and less skilled.

Borders (1991) identifies a number of issues that need to be addressed from the outset if the potential advantages of peer group supervision are to be realised. Care should be taken that all the group members are involved in the process and members must be assisted in giving focussed, relevant feedback. A structured framework including systematic procedures needs to be provided. Additionally, following this structure could result in each member gradually internalizing the content and process issues for the purposes of self-monitoring in applying newly acquired understandings in future instances and contexts. Such a structure needs to be adaptable in order to accommodate varying levels of experience in the group.

In order to investigate some of the key elements, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of peer group supervision more fully, the following section will briefly review nine articles that describe the practical implementation of peer supervision groups in a variety of human service contexts.

#### 2.2.3.1 Review of the practical implementation of peer supervision groups

On conducting a literature search, only nine articles could be found that related to the practical implementation of peer group supervision. These articles are all of foreign origin. Akhurst’s (2000) thesis was the only South African literature that addresses the potential implications for peer group supervision in a South African context that could be located.

The nine foreign articles include: Greenburg, Lewis and Johnson (1985); Hare and Frankena (1972); Hunt and Issacharoff (1975); Marks and Hixon (1986); Meyerstein (1977); Nobler (1980); Schreiber and Frank (1983); Todd and Pine (1968) and Winstead, Bonovitz, Gale and

Evans (1974). I will briefly overview some of the core qualitative themes that emerged from the practical implementation of these peer supervision groups.

The occupational contexts of the groups included social work (the most common), psychiatry, family therapy (para-professionals) and psychology. Two of the groups contained a combination of occupations, namely social workers and psychologists. Most of the groups (eight out of nine) were leaderless and unstructured. The groups varied in size from four to eleven members. Two consisted of trainees and the remaining nine groups consisted of qualified personnel. The length of the peer group sessions extended between one and four hours and the frequency of the meetings was variable amongst the groups.

Regarding the advantages that unfolded in the practical implementation of peer supervision groups, a number of facets were discussed. The Winstead *et al.* (1974) group emerged as a direct result of members feeling that individual or traditional supervision resulted in a limited and stilted appreciation of their cases, as well as emotional/affective elements being excluded from dyadic supervision. The level of formal evaluation in individual supervision was also regarded as negative by the group members. In contrast, due to the absence of formal evaluation in peer group supervision “it was a relief to know that others were struggling too” (p. 319). A further advantage, according to Marks and Hixon (1986), is that the skills learnt in peer group supervision were easily transferable to other group contexts and if such groups exist internally to organisations, such groups can “build and strengthen an internal support system” (p. 421).

The importance and value of collegial consultation was also a common theme, for two central reasons. Firstly, the group members provided moral support to each other, assisting in overcoming a sense of isolation and the overwhelming sense of responsibility with which many workers in the human services are regularly confronted. Of relevance to a South African context, Meyerstein (1977) addresses the utility of having such a supervisory forum when confronted with limited resources and often enormous amounts of responsibility with human service work. Hare and Frankena (1972), Meyerstein (1977), Todd and Pine (1968) and Winstead *et al.* (1974) also reported that such a forum had the potential to offer each member personal support and reassurance. Secondly, this forum can also provide an

opportunity for recognising the resources that peers have. In this regard, Meyerstein (1977) states that such a forum enabled counsellors to “recognise and gain respect for the various skill levels and competencies that existed in themselves and peers” (p. 486). An enhanced sense of self-confidence may also result from engaging in such a forum.

Additionally, the unique learning environment of such forums was noted:

the presenter gained increased awareness and more comprehensive understanding from the group’s discussion ... (t)he interaction with peers provided a diversity of alternatives and strategies for the conduct of therapy ... (t)he members also learned through other members’ presentations new ideas for dealing with similar problems ...  
(Todd & Pine, 1968, p. 95).

Therefore, such a forum can provide the opportunity for multiple perspectives to be generated and shared amongst members. There is also the potential for both direct and vicarious learning opportunities to be created for group members (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992).

A further theme expanded upon by all the authors was that such a forum tended to create an atmosphere characterised by a lack of evaluation and judgement. However, Greenburg *et al.* (1985), Hunt and Issacharoff (1975), Marks and Hixon (1986) and Nobler (1980) all caution against underestimating the vulnerability and potential risk involved in exposing oneself to one’s peers. Therefore, an additional, potentially restrictive dynamic also needs to be considered, whereby “fears of self-revelation were reinforced because members were colleagues outside the group and the group-group membership was a significant part of that community within which their professional reputations existed” (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975, p. 1165). Whilst this particular caution does have relevance on a micro-level (within smaller, professional communities of workers in human services) such a consideration may have particular relevance for a South African context, on a more macro-contextual level.

Particularly in light of the socio-historic interpersonal dynamics that were entrenched prior to 1994, the potential for remnant racial and bureaucratic hierarchies to emerge and provide a potential threat to the egalitarian atmosphere encouraged in peer group supervision contexts, may need to be considered.

Regarding group composition, there was much debate amongst the authors concerning the

preferable levels of experience in peer supervision groups. Hunt and Issacharoff (1975), Meyerstein (1977) and Todd and Pine (1968) reported that personal diversity provided an invigorating and interesting element within their groups. Whilst in principle, Hare and Frankena (1972) would agree that intra-group heterogeneity has the potential to contribute an added dimension to peer group supervision, they provide a qualification to it. They discovered that the disparity between levels of skill and experience should not be too large. They noted that too high levels of experience restricted free and open discussion, whilst little participation and numerous requests for assistance characterised the group if the levels of experience were too low.

Marks and Hixon (1986) argue for internal homogeneity in a peer group, particularly as the more experienced members may tend to be elevated to an 'expert' status by the less experienced members. Schreiber and Frank (1983) however state that whilst comparable levels of training and experience may be ideal, the unique characteristics of peer groups tended to promote a 'levelling' effect, whereby "unlike the traditional model, the peer supervision group emphasises the homogeneity of its members" (p. 30)

Greenburg *et al.*'s (1985) group primarily consisted of homogeneous members. Whilst this was initially a positive attribute in fostering cohesiveness, they argue that counsellors with heterogeneous socio-economic and racial backgrounds would have added an extra dimension in terms of providing a different and balanced perspective. In a South African context such variability may have potential benefits, particularly regarding inter-cultural and inter-religious perspectives.

Greenburg *et al.* (1985) and Todd and Pine (1968) believe that a further element to be considered in the composition of peer supervision groups was that members should ideally have had prior exposure to and experience with group facilitation and process skills. However, the relevance and appropriateness of such a prerequisite in a South African context is questionable, due to human mental health resources being stretched.

Concerning potential challenges that may be encountered in peer group supervision groups, various authors provide some cautionary comments. Aside from Hare and Frankena's (1972)

contention that extreme levels of counsellor experience and skills may interfere with group processes, Winstead *et al.* (1974) discuss what they refer to as a 'transient' disadvantage in their peer supervision group, in that support and advice giving were initially excessive, but possibly necessary in the initial stages of the formation of the group. Yet, Greenburg *et al.* (1985) believe that such a characteristic may also enhance the group's ability to tolerate conflict in the later stages of group development.

To overcome some of these challenges to peer group supervision, Hare and Frankena (1972), Hunt and Issacharoff (1975), Marks and Hixon (1986), Meyerstein (1977) and Schreiber and Frank (1983) all found that potentially destructive interpersonal dynamics were kept to a minimum under certain conditions. These included group norms being clearly contracted from the outset and an agreement to remain task or case focussed, as opposed to counsellor-oriented. In this regard, many of the authors also supported the idea of having a structure, flexible if necessary to ensure the smooth functioning of the groups (Borders, 1991; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Meyerstein, 1977).

Finally, Greenburg *et al.* (1985), Schreiber and Frank (1983), Todd and Pine (1968) and Winstead *et al.* (1974) all agree with Stoltenberg's (1981) contention that peer group supervision is particularly useful for advanced counsellors continuing their professional development, as well as providing a forum for peer consultation. These authors would all therefore agree with Marks and Hixon's comment that peer group supervision is ideally suited to being "an adjunctive method to integrate learning after formal training" (1986, p. 420).

#### **2.2.4 Akhurst's (2000) adaptations to Wilbur *et al.*'s (1991) model**

The theoretical foundations of the PGS model to be utilised in this research project originate from Wilbur *et al.*'s (1991) Structured Group Supervision (SGS) model. This section will firstly describe Wilbur *et al.*'s SGS model, followed by highlighting the adaptations made by Akhurst (2000) in order to shift the model from co-operative group supervision to peer group supervision (Inskipp, 1996) in constructing the PGS model.

Wilbur *et al.*'s (1991) SGS model draws from and integrates Hart's (1982) proposed three

categories for counsellor development, namely skill development, personal growth and integration, with Betz, Wilbur and Roberts-Wilbur's (1981) three group modalities. These modalities include task-process (corresponding with skill development), psycho-process (corresponding with personal growth) and socio-process (corresponding with integration) (Wilbur *et al.*, 1991).

Wilbur *et al.* (1991) use the aforementioned categories as a basis of 'Request-for-Assistance statement/s' (RFA statement/s) in their SGS model and Akhurst (2000) describes these categories as follows. 'Skill development' relates to challenges the counsellor is experiencing in succinctly defining a client's predicament or difficulties encountered in case formulation and/or management. 'Personal growth' issues are related to personal challenges the counsellor is experiencing, due to his/her own dynamics, in counselling a particular client. Issues of 'integration' pertain to challenges confronting the counsellor regarding the need to try and integrate or expand his/her own personal belief and value systems which may impact on the provision of an appropriate service to the client. Wilbur *et al.* (1991) give an example of this latter category. A counsellor who has strong 'pro-life' opinions when the client requires abortion counselling could have integrative difficulties.

According to Wilbur *et al.* (1991), the SGS model consists of four basic and central phases, as well as an additional phase for discussion at the end of the process. The total time allocation for the four central phases (including an optimal fifth phase for discussion) is approximately one hour. Therefore, each phase should extend for approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Akhurst's (2000) wording of Wilbur *et al.*'s (1991) SGS model is summarised over the page for ease of reference.



Figure 2.1: The Five Phases of the SGS model

Phase One: The Request-for-Assistance Statement

The presenter asks for specific assistance, related to the categories of skill development, personal growth or integration. These categories of Request-for-Assistance statement/s (RFA statement/s) usually pertain to a prior counselling session/s. The RFA statement/s is directly related to and is clarified subsequent to relevant case information being provided. The information may emanate from a variety of sources, including: a case analysis, a verbal summary of a session or audio or video taped portions of a session.

Phase Two: The Questioning Period and Identification of Focus

To gain additional clarity, the members of the group question (utilising a 'round-robin' format) the presenter regarding the RFA statement/s and/or the summary information.

Phase Three: The Feedback Statements

The group members provide their own personal responses to the information provided and relate this to the RFA statement/s. The presenter is required to remain silent during this phase. Again, a 'round-robin' technique is used.

Pause period

This sub-phase provides the presenter with time to reflect upon the feedback statements from the group members. The group members are requested not to interact with the presenter during this period.

Phase Four: The Supervisee's Response

The presenter responds to the feedback from the group members, detailing the benefits and/or limitations of such feedback. The remaining group members are requested to remain silent during this phase.

Phase Five: Optional Discussion Period

If time allows and members require this additional phase, it can be beneficial for purposes of closure and termination. Wilbur *et al.* (1991) stress the importance of avoiding discussion at other times in the process as "free discussion during the group process results in group phenomena that impede and interfere with the purposive structure of the SGS model" (p. 97)

Wilbur *et al.* (1991) practically implemented the SGS model, in the form of a pilot study, over a seven year period with different groups of trainees. Regarding the RFA statement/s, they found that novice counsellors tended to focus on issues related to skill development and personal growth, whereas integrative issues tended to require more experience and skill



sophistication, usually possessed by more “seasoned counsellors” (p. 99).

A group utilising the SGS model would ideally consist of eight to ten trainee counsellors, and a group supervisor who adopts the role of group leader. The leader’s role is to encourage the participation of all the group members (through utilising the ‘round-robin’ technique), as well as controlling the group process by keeping time during the various phases. Although encouraged not to do so at random, the supervisor/group leader may also intervene in the substantive issues if s/he deems it necessary.

Wilbur *et al.*’s (1991) model was adapted by Akhurst (2000) for the training of psychotherapeutic skills at a masters level in psychology in an academic, tertiary institution. In adapting the model, Akhurst (2000) maintains the various phases, but a central amendment involves removing the presence of the supervisor in the composition of the group. Following Wilbur *et al.*’s (1991) finding that the role of the group facilitator seemed to become superfluous after a while, with regard to providing content details, Akhurst believed that group members could adopt this role on a rotational basis (personal communication, April 2002). Essentially then, the role of supervisory ‘expert’ is replaced by a facilitator, who is also a member of the peer group, and whose central role is to protect the presenter, maintain time limitations and attempt to ensure that the process remains focussed and structured (Akhurst, personal communication, March, 2001). Additionally, the phrasing of the RFA statements have also been simplified, to improve their utility. Akhurst (2000) found that her group of participants benefited from utilising the PGS model as an adjunct to individual supervision. The participants’ learnings in the PGS context were substantially different from those in individual supervision and the participants found the peer group supervision forum to be supportive and affirming.

### 2.2.5 Summary

The above section has provided an overview of three different forms of supervision, namely individual, group and peer group. The advantages and disadvantages of each were highlighted by thematising the literature pertaining to each respective category. Peer group supervision has intentionally been given more attention as this research builds on from

Akhurst's (2000) exploratory study. Whilst the same PGS model was utilised in this research, the context in which it was applied was with a peer group comprised of voluntary lay counsellors.

The second part of this chapter will address the theoretical assumptions that guided the learning context in which the PGS model was implemented.

## 2.3 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PGS MODEL

In essence, the PGS model provides a framework (as suggested by the peer group supervision literature) for a structured process that provides the opportunity for all group members to actively participate in the various phases of the model, without the presence of a 'superior' who directs and controls the process. There are various additional implicit assumptions in the PGS model and these guided the way that the PGS model was implemented in the lay counselling context. This section will provide a brief overview of these.

The meta-perspective adopted in this research undertaking relates to a social constructionist view of elevating the dynamic, social, actively negotiated aspects of knowledge construction (to be further discussed in sections 2.3.5 and 3.2.1). Therefore, some of the key theoretical influences of such an approach to knowledge construction will be discussed. The origins of a social constructionist perspective can be traced to the Soviet psychologist, Vygotsky. Some of Vygotsky's core postulates will be outlined. This will be followed by an account of the expansion of some of Vygotsky's central ideas on cognitive development and include the centrality of activity and the co-operative and collaborative nature of optimal learning encounters. Whilst Vygotsky's ideas were essentially concerned with children's cognitive development, he was also concerned with the "socio-genesis of higher mental functioning" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 73), thus the relevance for adult cognition is of paramount importance as well. As this project specifically relates to adult education, some of the central principles for consideration in this sphere will also be referred to.

### 2.3.1 Vygotsky's theory of social mediated learning

Vygotsky developed a socio-cultural perspective to cognitive development, providing a

framework of how individuals develop cognitively. In particular, he contested an understanding of cognitive development as being a static, socially isolated, internally situated phenomenon (Rogoff, 1984). For Vygotsky, development originates in external social activity and gradually progresses towards an internal individual understanding, in that “the social environment ... is an important determinant of the form of internal intrapsychological functioning (Wertsch & Stone, 1985, p. 171). Therefore, an analysis of the historical and socio-cultural context (including the influence of institutional settings) in which learning occurs are central to Vygotsky’s approach (Tudge, 1990; Wertsch, 1991).

According to Vygotsky (1978), through social mediation and collaborative activity “*an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one*. Every function in ... development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on an individual level; first *between* people (interpsychological), and then *inside* ... (intrapsychological) ...” (p. 57, italics in original). Therefore, new ways of acting and thinking are socially guided and constructed, initially through the mediation of those more experienced.

Regarding the necessary collaboration and mediation, or ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976, in Greenfield, 1984) that is provided by more experienced others (including peers) in the learning process, Vygotsky utilised the term ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) to explain how the process of cognitive transformation can occur. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as “*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*” (1978, p. 86, italics in original). Thus, Vygotsky focussed on the potential of ‘not as yet matured’ aspects of cognitive development. Since activity was central to realising this potential, the active engagement of learners in tasks was crucial. This is directly opposed to ideas of learning that merely encompass the transmission of information (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Furthermore, progression through the ZPD through accomplishing tasks, and thus developing cognitively, is not necessarily a smooth, homogeneous process (Mercer, 1995).

Tharp (1993, in Daniels, 1996) describes seven conceptual tools, necessarily interpersonal

and collaborative, in assisting learners to progress through the ZPD. These tools are intended to assist learners to progressively take over responsibility for their own learning, through the monitoring of their skill acquisition (Hillerbrand, 1989). The first tool is modelling, whereby desired behaviour is learnt through imitation of more knowledgeable adults/peers.

Contingency management, the second tool, is concerned with recognising, validating and encouraging desired behaviour through the ZPD. Feedback, one of the most common and powerful, yet tacit, of the six tools, focusses on the need for the mediator to provide clear and continuous communication regarding task expectations and progression through the process of achieving tasks. Instruction, in the form of directing the learner, in graded levels of progression towards task accomplishment, is the fourth tool. Questioning, particularly ‘assistance questions’ (as opposed to assessment questions) encourage the learner to direct their thinking towards the ‘as yet undiscovered’ aspects of a task. The ultimate goal is to encourage the learner to internalize an infrastructure for solving future problems on their own. The sixth tool, namely cognitive structuring, is the development of an explanatory framework that guides thinking and acting. The final, seventh tool, related to the sixth, is task structuring. A task is broken into components to enable better engagement with the task.

Vygotsky’s theory therefore elevated the social realm and origins of cognitive development. Activity, collaboration, as well promoting the advantages of direct, concrete experience when engaging in activities, are at the forefront of his socio-cultural framework (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Mercer, 1995). The following sub-sections will provide a neo-Vygotskian explication and consolidation of some of these central facets.

### **2.3.2 Situated cognition and the concept of ‘activity’**

Many authors have adopted, and expanded upon, Vygotsky’s ideas of the ‘situatedness of cognition’ (McLellan, 1996). Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989) developed a model of situated cognition, that is centred around the notion that “knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used” (p. 32). It is therefore imperative that role players in any learning encounter take cognisance of these highly influential variables in the learning process and outcome.

More specifically, these authors advocate the ‘cognitive apprenticeship’ method of learning,

as proposed by the writings of Lave (1988). In essence, the centrality of co-operative activity in learning is emphasised, together with elevating the contextual influences that continually impinge upon the knowledge that is created in such social engagements. This approach therefore draws from ideas of modelling, whereby the nature of the learning encounter is often one of ‘enculturation’. New ways of thinking and doing are progressively adopted, through observing experienced others and then actively doing and practising those previously unfamiliar and unknown activities (Brown, J.S. *et al.*, 1989).

Furthermore, “learning methods that are embedded in authentic situations are not merely useful; they are essential” (Brown, J.S. *et al.*, 1989, p. 37) in order to ensure that the knowledge that emerges from such methods is robust. It is through direct experience, social negotiation and activity in practically-informed tasks that sustainable and relevant knowledge arises. The foundation of a cognitive apprenticeship model is therefore the belief that knowledge is “always under construction” (Brown, J.S. *et al.*, 1989, p. 33). Thus, knowledge and the process of gaining that knowledge will always be socially embedded and dynamically constructed.

Collaborative learning is a central aspect in situated learning and cognitive apprenticeship. Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989) identify four strategies that promote this collaborative learning. These include collective problem solving, taking on multiple roles, confronting misconceptions and ineffective strategies and providing collaborative work skills. The central tenets of collaborative learning will be further discussed in the following section.

### 2.3.3 Collaborative learning

Vygotsky states that “what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (1987, in Moll, 1990, p. 12). This emphasis on the power of collaboration has been expanded by many theorists, for example Bruffee (1999).

Similarly to Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989), Bruffee (1999) argues against the purely cognitive or ‘foundational’ appreciation of knowledge ownership and transmission, which has been widely accepted for centuries in the field of education, amongst other domains. Such a framework postulates that knowledge, like ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, can merely be transferred between



individuals in a socially isolated, hierarchical manner - from the knower to the 'not-yet-known'.

In contrast, Bruffee (1999) advocates collaborative learning which "assumes a nonfoundational understanding of knowledge. Knowledge is a social construct, a consensus among the members of a community of knowledgeable peers ..." (p. xiii). He therefore argues for a 'reacculturation' in understanding the learning process, whereby collaborative learning, interdependent relationships and ongoing social interaction and conversations are actively pursued in any learning context.

Bruffee's (1999) principle of ensuring that education, particularly the further education of adolescents and adults, is based on collaboration, is of key relevance to this study. He emphasises "how important interdependence and constructive human interaction and conversation are to learning and becoming learned" (p. xii). This is particularly the case if the goal of education is to produce individuals who can co-operate and actively seek interdependence in learning encounters, as well as being able to transfer and apply such skills in different contexts, such as to their everyday working environments. Bruffee (1999) also illustrates how this 'process of reacculturation' may initially be a foreign and unfamiliar way of constructing knowledge for both educators and learners. Firstly, for educators, due to their often taken-for-granted authority related to knowledge and the purveyance thereof, and secondly, for learners accustomed to adopting positions of consumers and processors of knowledge. Such stances are, necessarily, going to be challenged in the process of collaboration and consensus conversations.

Further considerations for understanding the adult learner, relevant to this research undertaking, will be outlined in the following sub-section.

#### **2.3.4 Principles of adult education**

Merriam and Brockett (1997), whilst acknowledging the difficulty in succinctly defining what constitutes an 'adult learner', discuss features of the adult learner which distinguish andragogy (adult education) from pedagogy (child education). They particularly emphasise how such facets as the learning environment (consisting of social, physical and psychological

aspects), experiential learning, learner participation and proactivity in the learning encounter are particularly important considerations in any adult learning encounter. Furthermore, according to these authors, adults tend to be more intrinsically motivated and able to draw from, and be motivated by, their perceptions of their needs in a learning encounter. In other words, an adult's meta-cognitive processing abilities and capacities are important considerations.

Concerning the centrality of acknowledging life experience in the process, the authors contend that adult learners "do not come to the learning situation with a "blank slate"; rather, they come with a range of life experiences - some of which can serve as possibly learning resources and others ... that can detract from learning" (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 150). Such considerations are therefore important when engaging adults in learning activities. Furthermore, Oberholzer (1979) states that "the adult draws from all (their) former, more or less assimilated knowledge gained from experience, puts that which is new next to this acquired background, thence judging what is new" (p. 82).

Additionally, Merriam and Brockett (1997) refer to the 'transformation theory' developed by Mezirow (1975). The foundation of this theory is that "the way in which individuals make meaning of their experience facilitates growth and learning" (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 140). Therefore, together with the adult's past learning histories, motivation to learn and accumulated experience, the meaning that an individual constructs from each encounter is of particular relevance. In order to enhance the sense that adults make from learning encounters, as well as ensuring that individuals become empowered and increasingly responsible for their own learning, adults therefore need to be informed and involved in the learning process in an egalitarian and transparent way.

Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989) also highlight the power and utility of learning based in concrete experience. Merriam and Brockett (1997) note that adult educators are increasingly recognising the utility of such an approach in understanding how the learning process, as well as the product of that process, is largely determined by the social construction of knowledge.

### 2.3.5 Metatheoretical perspective - social constructionism

From the aforementioned theoretical postulations, knowledge is embedded in, and strongly influenced by, the context in which it is constructed. This context refers to the socio-historical and cultural (including institutional) variables, as well as the personal learning histories of the individuals that comprise the communities within which the knowledge is constructed. A change in context will also change the knowledge that arises from the activities engaged in. Furthermore, knowledge construction is a social, seldom individual event and produces, through collaboration, socially negotiated meanings. Knowledge construction and negotiation are therefore dynamic, fluid processes.

This particular research undertaking is firmly embedded in such a framework. A social constructionist perspective argues against the idea that there are essential truths waiting to be discovered about human experience, but rather that our experiences are socially embedded and thus constructed and we negotiate our lives, practices and actions through such intricate webs of relatedness (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This has important implications for the decisions made in the conducting of this research, which will be further elucidated in section 3.2.1.

### 2.3.6 Summary

This particular section has outlined some of the implicit principles contained in the PGS model. The common threads include activity, acknowledging the social embeddedness of thinking processes, recognising the resources and past experiences of the learners, ensuring that learning encounters are collaborative and participative, as well as providing activities that are practical and relevant. In order to fulfil these requirements, this research undertaking was conducted in a naturalistic setting (the PGS model sessions were held in the participants' usual place of work). The research was linked to a group supervision process in which the participants were already engaged. Authentic client cases were utilised in teaching and implementing the PGS model. Finally, Brown, J.S. *et al.*'s (1989) contention that optimal learning "advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge" (1989, p. 40) epitomises the arguments made in the literature consulted regarding the method to be employed in conducting this particular research. These issues will be further outlined in the following chapter.



### **2.3.7 Relevance for a South African context**

Due to the restructuring of the PHC system and mental health care in South Africa, peer group supervision has potential relevance for workers in these domains. Furthermore, traditional forms of individual supervision, if available, are intensely demanding on existing resources. Peer group supervision offers an alternative and/or adjunctive form of supervision, utilising collegial relationships to provide 'scaffolding' and encourage counsellors to become interdependent and co-responsible for each others' ongoing development and enhanced service delivery.

The following chapter describes one such context in which the PGS model was implemented, and the research process utilised to evaluate such a forum of supervision.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

This study set out to explore how a group of lay counsellors utilised and experienced Akhurst's (2000) model of structured peer group supervision (PGS model). This chapter presents the framework that guided the research process towards this aim.

In order to conduct this particular exploration, the PGS model was briefly outlined and thereafter implemented, on four separate occasions, with a single group of ten lay counsellors who practised from an Agency offering voluntary mental health counselling to the general public. This study evolved over time, beginning with the practical application and implementation of the PGS model over four sessions, followed by a focus group discussion and concluded by a semi-structured questionnaire being completed by the participants after a number of months had passed.

The intended aim of this research was twofold. Firstly, to investigate whether the participants were able to engage with the PGS model in order to assist them in their everyday practice of providing a counselling service to a wide array of individuals and/or families. Secondly, to explore the participants' experiences of the implementation of the PGS model and to gain their opinions about the applicability and relevance of such a model for their practice.

In addressing these core issues, it was the intention that the participants elucidate whether, in their opinions, such a PGS model had the potential to be considered a viable alternative or adjunctive supervisory forum for such workers in the realm of helping professions. In the process of gaining this understanding, the potential for the PGS model to be implemented in differing contexts was also explored with the participants.

In addressing the aforementioned, this chapter will therefore focus on elucidating the methodological framework that guided the research process, from design to the presentation of the findings. In so doing, the decisions underlying the use of a post-modern approach to

understanding knowledge construction, namely social constructionism, will initially be outlined. This will be followed by highlighting the central tenets of a qualitative methodology, and in particular an interpretive grounded approach (Addison, 1989). Issues pertaining to the generation and analysis of the data will be followed by core additional, and closely intertwined, methodological considerations. These include an outline of how the research encounter was deliberately constructed, ethical deliberations and the role and position of the researcher throughout the research process.

As the PGS model is still in a developmental, preliminary construction and assessment phase, from the outset this particular research undertaking was to be regarded as a purposefully exploratory, not confirmatory, endeavour. This tentative investigatory stance also adheres to the recommendations of many theorists located within the realm of counsellor supervision, namely Holloway (1995), Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) and Wilbur *et al.* (1991).

In presenting this chapter, it is acknowledged that the intricacy and fluidity of the decision making process has been largely obscured by the need to present “a somewhat static and simplified picture of what (was) in fact a complex, dynamic process” (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 124).

## 3.2 THEORETICAL GUIDELINES

### 3.2.1 Metatheoretical stance - social constructionism

According to Burr (1995) social constructionism has its foundations firmly rooted in the cultural and intellectual framework of post-modernism. Accordingly, social constructionism encourages us to be mindful of and active in challenging conventional, all encompassing claims to ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. Therefore, an emphasis needs to be placed on the “co-existence of a multiplicity and variety of situation-dependent ways of life” (Burr, 1995, p. 14).

Accordingly, social constructionism elevates the social realm of experiences and encourages the acknowledgment of the ‘social intertwinedness’ of our existence - how our individual, interpersonal and social ‘realities’ are constructed and negotiated in interaction with others

and social institutions, and how these influences in turn play a crucial role in the meanings that we construct from our experiences (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Such a paradigm is therefore concerned with how meaning is socially constructed and negotiated. In essence, ideas, practices and beliefs arise through social interaction in community with others and are therefore not external, preexisting entities waiting to be 'objectively' unearthed and revealed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Due to this overarching meta-perspective in the research process, a qualitative methodology that encourages an inductive stance in guiding the process was best suited to this particular research endeavor. According to Strauss (1987), an inductive stance refers to those "actions that lead to discovery of an hypothesis and assessing whether it might provisionally work as at least a partial condition for a type of event ... (such) hypotheses are both provisional and conditional" (pp. 11/12). The intention was therefore to ensure that a consistent philosophical thread was woven throughout the research process.

### **3.2.2 A qualitative research methodology**

Of relevance from a methodological perspective is that much of the research on supervision has emphasised the need to embrace a methodological framework that allows for the recognition of the complexity and depth of the processes that evolve in the supervision process (Holloway, 1995). Accordingly, "life and research (should be) perceived as processual or as a set of dynamic interactions" (Smith, Harre & Langenhove, 1995, p. 3). A flexible and innovative methodological framework was therefore required to address the intended aims of this research undertaking (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Such a stance was primarily chosen because a quantitative approach to the research process, or a reductionistic hypothetico-deductive framework (Pidgeon, 1996), would have been inadequate to "captur(e) the meaning of social activity for individuals and social structures ... (and for) ... illuminating the conditions and context within which that social action takes place" (Addison, 1989, p. 39).

Whilst the validity of conducting research within a qualitative methodological framework has been well established (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1995), there are certain facets of qualitative research that remain contested (Silverman, 2000). These critiques are essentially concerned with issues of reliability and validity. This chapter will therefore attempt to address such contentions and explicate the decisions that were made in order to account for such possible limitations.

However, and whilst mindful of such possible limitations, there were some central tenets of a qualitative methodology that made this paradigm particularly relevant and conducive to the purposes of this particular research.

Firstly, a qualitative methodology emphasises the need to ensure that the research process is concerned with contextual integrity (Banister *et al.*, 1994; Smith *et al.*, 1995). By this, the context in which the research is embedded, as well as the contextual influences that play a role in the research process, are foregrounded. In a similar vein, and as a direct result of this contextual priority, it was intended that ‘thick’ and ‘rich’ descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the unfolding process would emerge and would thus frame the entire research process.

Secondly, numerous authors (Banister *et al.*, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1981 & 1989; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1995) emphasise the necessity of acknowledging the centrality of the role of the researcher in the research process. Guba and Lincoln (1981) refer to such a methodological stance as being a ‘naturalistic inquiry’, whereby the “inquirer is himself the instrument ... (and as a result) ... flexibility, insight, and ability to build on tacit knowledge ...” (p. 113) emerges from such an acknowledgement and position. This particular facet was a recurrent theme and was of crucial importance throughout this research. The need for consistent and constant researcher reflexivity will be discussed in more depth later on in this chapter.

Thirdly, Kvale (1996), amongst others, contends that qualitative research aims to be as close to the respondents as possible, concerned with “understand(ing) the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world

prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1). Adhering to this guideline influenced the research design from the outset, and will be more fully explicated later in the chapter.

Finally, Banister *et al.* (1994) contend that qualitative research is “part of a debate, not fixed truth” (p. 3) that unfolds over time. In the same way, in this research, whilst having a broad framework for the investigation, many of the decisions evolved gradually throughout the essentially iterative nature of the research process. The benefit of effectively being ‘led by the process’ contributed to the overall depth, detail and richness of such a qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990).

In summary therefore, the specific methodological decisions taken throughout the research process were primarily influenced by the appropriateness of the “questions it ... wants to ask and to the settings in which it wants to ask them” (Smith *et al.*, 1995, p. 2). Therefore, such decisions were primarily guided by the intended aims of this research endeavour, namely to explore how a group of lay counsellors utilised and experienced Akhurst’s (2000) PGS model. In order to achieve such an overarching aim and in accordance with the aforementioned qualitative methodological guidelines, the intention was that the research be an exploratory, descriptive and interpretative process, conducted in a naturalistic setting.

### **3.2.3 Principles of a grounded interpretive inquiry**

Many of the abovementioned principles are mirrored, albeit on a more micro level, by the principles underlying an interpretive grounded theory method (Addison, 1989). Particularly in regard to the purpose of this study, this method provided a framework that guided the iterative process of concurrent data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Whilst adhering to the core principle of continuously ‘kneading’ the data to ensure that the tentative theoretical findings were firmly grounded and embedded in the actual data, I did, however, develop my “own variations of technique” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 112). I regarded Addison’s (1989) approach to the systematic development of processual, contextual accounts that combine grounded theory with an interpretive emphasis as more appropriate for this research. This was done in order to maximize the richness of the data and to remain as close



as possible to the participants' experiences. Furthermore, an emphasis on the interpretive nature of such an appreciation of the participants' experiences, elevates the role of the researcher in the unfolding process (Addison, 1989). Additionally, the principles of an enriched approach to the simultaneous collecting, coding and analysis of data are particularly relevant to "the study of local interactions and meanings as related to the social context in which they actually occur" (Pidgeon, 1996, p.64).

### 3.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The core question that was to be addressed in the process of this research was: How did a group of lay counsellors utilise and experience a structured peer group supervision (PGS) model?

In order to answer this core question, two sub-questions were generated, leading to the structuring of the data generation and analysis processes. The presentation of the findings therefore mirror these two facets of the research process. The two sub-questions were:

i) How did the group of lay counsellors utilise the PGS model?

My own understandings of how the participants applied the PGS model, over four sessions, were utilised in answering this particular sub-question. Such an evaluation was done from the position of researcher and initial facilitator within the process.

ii) How did the participants experience and evaluate the PGS model?

The participants' reflections on their experiences and evaluations of the PGS model guided the answering of this particular research sub-question.

There was an evaluative component in answering both of these sub-questions. Such evaluations contained facets of both a formative (process orientation) and a summative (outcome orientation) component. In distinguishing the difference in these two distinct, but related, types of evaluation, Robson (1993) provides the following distinguishing guidelines based on the purpose that each form of evaluation serves. Formative evaluation is primarily

concerned with the process of implementing and developing the PGS model whilst summative evaluation is concerned with evaluating the outcomes of implementing the PGS model.

### 3.4 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The participants were all based at a mental health organization that offers the public two forms of voluntary counselling, namely telephonic and face-to-face (further details of 'the Agency' were discussed in section 1.3). In this particular instance, the director of the Agency requested that the more experienced face-to-face counsellors be approached to initially participate in the research.

It was then agreed with every stakeholder (my supervisor, the Agency's director, the group's supervisor, the participants and myself) that such participants, being experienced, would be a suitable group with whom to explore the utility of the developing PGS model. A further motivation for approaching these particular participants was that many of them are also co-ordinators and leaders of smaller groups that consist of members with less counselling experience. It was therefore agreed from the outset that should the research group find the model useful, the individual group members might thereafter be able to implement the model with the Agency's smaller groups. The PGS model could therefore be disseminated throughout the various levels of the Agency.

The single group of ten research participants therefore predominantly consisted of volunteers from the Agency's more experienced voluntary counsellors. The group from which the participants volunteered was already in existence and the members generally well known to each other. Due to these aforementioned facets, the research participants could therefore be considered as being a sample of convenience, or a 'natural group' (Patton, 1990) as no sampling procedure was undertaken.

#### 3.4.1 The participants

All of the participants were older than age 40 and, from the following table, it can be seen that their personal contexts and backgrounds varied. Five of the ten participants were retired



educators, two were from the medical field and three were from a business/organisational background. Whilst most of the group of participants had had many years of counselling experience, there were some members who had less experience, and one member had no experience at all with face-to-face counselling. However, I decided to include this particular participant as s/he indicated an enthusiasm to be included in the research project, was already part of the existing group of more experienced counsellors and would be commencing face-to-face counselling whilst the research project was being undertaken. Therefore, all the group participants had worked in the Agency for at least four years, with four participants having been involved for twenty or more years.

Table 3.1: The participants’ contexts

<u>Identified as Participant No.</u>	<u>Personal Context</u>	<u>Number of years with the Organisation</u> (approximate)	<u>Number of years involved in face-to-face counselling</u> (approximate)
P1	Retired educator	25 years	1 year
P2	Retired nurse	25 years	8 years
P3	Retired educator	27 years	10 years
P4	Director of Agency	10 years	7 years
P5	Retired educator	8 years	4 years
P6	Business Manager	4 years	No experience
P7	Retired educator	4 years	2 years
P8	Administrator	8 years	6 years
P9	Retired medical practitioner	5 years	4 years
P10	Retired educator	20 years	1 year

My decision to number the participants P1 - P10, was not my initial plan. I would have preferred to use pseudonyms to protect the participants’ identities, as well as those of their clients. But, when working with the data, I found the use of pseudonyms confusing. I therefore decided that participant numbers would be more appropriate and discrete.

Additionally, as there were only two men and eight women in the group, I have intentionally and randomly confused the use of gender identification regarding the use of terms such as ‘his’ or ‘her’ when identifying the gender of the counsellor/participant. This was solely done to protect client and counsellor identities. Therefore, this decision was primarily made for ethical reasons (further addressed in section 3.8.1).

Thereafter, the research process unfolded as detailed in the following section, with data being generated from each of the three separate, yet closely interrelated stages. Subsequent to being introduced to the PGS model, the first stage of data generation consisted of four peer group sessions, the second stage consisted of a focus group discussion and the final and third stage consisted of responses to a semi-structured questionnaire returned by eight of the ten participants.

An additional source of data emanated from a reflection journal (Banister *et al.*, 1994) where I recorded my personal reflections, in the form of questions, concerns and impressions during and subsequent to each of the four PGS sessions and the focus group discussion. In the intervals between sessions I would also record any further considerations that I had. These personal ‘mullings’ also continued after I had received the questionnaire replies, and primarily took the form of thoughts about the limitations in my research, as well as suggestions for further research.

### 3.5 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Figure 3.1 (over the page) provides an outline of the various stages in the data collection process and the following section provides a more detailed description of the central tenets in the research design.

#### 3.5.1 Gaining entry and introducing the PGS model

In order to conduct this research and simultaneously offer an organisation an alternative model for supervision of counsellors, the director of a mental health organisation (‘the Agency’) was approached by the Agency’s advanced group’s supervisor. The details of the model, as well as the research process were negotiated with the director. She, in turn, was

Figure 3.1: Gaining entry and data collection stages

**GAINING ENTRY:**

- a) Initial negotiations between the Agency’s director and the advanced counsellors’ group supervisor
- b) An initial meeting was held with the volunteers. The purpose of the research and an overview of Akhurst’s (2000) PGS model were discussed. Each participant was provided with a handout of the PGS model and individual consent forms were processed.

**STAGE 1: IMPLEMENTATION OF PGS MODEL**

SESSION 1

- 1. Brief repeat overview of PGS model prior to initial implementation
- 2. Implementation of PGS model: Phases 1 - 5
- 3. Post-session reflection phase

TRANSCRIBE DATA

*1 week interval*

SESSION 2

- 1. Pre-session reflection phase
- 2. Implementation of PGS model: Phases 1 - 5
- 3. Post-session reflection phase

TRANSCRIBE DATA

*2 week interval*

SESSION 3

- 1. Pre-session reflection phase
- 1. Implementation of PGS model: Phases 1 - 5
- 2. Post-session reflection phase

TRANSCRIBE DATA

*2 week interval*

SESSION 4

- 1. Pre-session reflection phase
- 1. Implementation of PGS model: Phases 1 - 5
- 2. Post-session reflection phase

TRANSCRIBE DATA

*2 month interval*

**STAGE 2: FOCUS GROUP**

TRANSCRIBE DATA

*10 month interval*

**STAGE 3: QUESTIONNAIRES FORWARDED TO PARTICIPANTS**

REPLIES CONVERTED TO UNIFORM TYPESCRIPT

very much in favour of the PGS model being introduced to the Agency.

Regarding existing supervisory structures, this particular group of research participants had been receiving group supervision from a psychologist, on a voluntary basis, once a month. This particular form of group supervision was understood to be primarily led by the supervisor, therefore located between Inskip's (1996) categories of 'individual supervision in a group context' and 'participative group supervision' as discussed in section 2.2.2.

Then, during a group supervision session for the advanced voluntary counsellors, the supervising psychologist outlined the intended research project and every group member was invited to volunteer to participate in the study. Subsequently, ten counsellors volunteered to participate in the study.

Subsequent to gaining entry via the Agency's director, an initial meeting was then held at the participants' place of usual practice, between the researcher, her supervisor and the ten research participants. The setting was therefore a naturalistic one (Patton, 1990). At this particular meeting the central focus was on introducing and providing an outline of the PGS model and discussing and explaining the intentions of the researcher. Any questions and/or concerns of participants were addressed and the need for confidentiality of the Agency, the Agency's clients and each participant was negotiated at length. The audio recording of the four PGS sessions and the focus group discussion was also negotiated.

The participants were provided with an outline of the proposed study and each participant was given a handout outlining the structure of the proposed PGS model (Appendix A). Each participant signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. This form also included consent for each session to be audio-taped (Appendix B). Arrangements for the first session were then made.

At the end of this meeting, one member volunteered to present a case for the first PGS session and it was agreed that I would adopt the role of facilitator. It was, however, brought to the groups' attention that whilst I, as researcher, would adopt this role for the first PGS session, it would be preferable that a group member adopted this role from the second PGS session

onwards. It was therefore agreed that at the end of every subsequent session the group members would decide and negotiate who would present and facilitate respectively in the next session.

It was also emphasised to the group from the outset that the implementation of the model was to be experientially based. So, whilst each participant had an outline of the PGS model to provide a framework for their learning experience, it was important that the group understood that it was their experiences and the way that they applied and utilised the model that was of particular relevance for this research project.

### **3.5.2 Implementing the PGS model and collecting the data**

#### **3.5.2.1 Stage One: Four peer group supervision (PGS) sessions**

- i) One month after the initial meeting, the first session was held. Prior to the actual implementation of the PGS model, my supervisor and I reminded the group of the structure of the PGS model, as well as emphasising each phase requirement. During this period, the participants were constantly encouraged to engage in discussion, to seek clarity if necessary and to provide us with any feedback, suggestions and ideas that they might have had.

Immediately following the introduction of the structure, the first PGS session was held. As agreed upon in the previous meeting, a research participant presented a case and I adopted the role of facilitator. Once again, throughout this initial PGS session the participants were actively encouraged to interrupt the process if necessary to ask questions and seek clarity on any issue/s.

At the end of the first PGS session, due to a spontaneous remark from one participant, a lengthy discussion ensued related to how the participants were experiencing the utilisation of the model. As a direct result of the apparent enthusiasm that the group had for such an additional phase, I decided to begin and end each of the following sessions with an additional 'pre- and post-reflection phase'.

At the end of the first PGS session the group negotiated who would present a case for

the next PGS meeting. I also requested the group to decide on who would play the role of facilitator for the next PGS session. However, and in spite of the group (at the initial meeting) agreeing that I would only adopt the role of facilitator for the first PGS session, the participants requested that I continue to play the role for an additional session. It appeared as if no participant felt sufficiently confident, or competent, after the first PGS session to adopt the role of facilitator. Whilst I agreed to continue in the role of facilitator for the second PGS session, I did encourage the group members to ensure that a volunteer attempted to play the role from the third PGS session onwards.

The audiotape of the session was transcribed within four days. As I was still attempting to become familiar with the voices of each participant, this was a lengthy process and took in excess of fourteen hours. Terre Blanche and Kelly's (1999) method of transcription provided a guide to this process. After transcription, I would immediately denote on the script my reflections regarding where each phase began and ended, as well as any instances where I felt that the group appeared to be encountering difficulties with following the phase requirements and the broad structure of the PGS model.

- ii) One week later, the second peer group supervision session began with a 'pre-session reflection' phase, wherein the group reflected upon and subsequently engaged in a discussion concerning their experiences of the first session. Any concerns, queries and ideas regarding the PGS model were also addressed and discussed. After the reflection phase, I played the role of facilitator and a different participant presented a case, as negotiated at the end of the previous session. The session ended with a 'post-session reflection' phase. The presenter for the following session was then negotiated amongst the participants, and one group member requested that he be given the opportunity to play the role of facilitator.

The transcription of the audiotapes was again completed within the next four days. As with the previous session, notes and reflections were made directly onto the transcript and in my reflection journal.

- iii) Two weeks later the third peer group supervision again began with a pre-session

reflection phase, wherein the participants were invited to provide feedback about their experiences of the PGS model. Another case was presented by a group member, with the role of facilitator also being played by a participant for the first time. At the end of the session a post-session reflection phase was provided for.

The audiotapes were transcribed, following the same conventions of the previous two sessions' transcriptions.

- iv) The beginning and conclusion of the fourth peer group supervision session, two weeks after the third PGS session, were again opportunities for reflection and feedback, as well as for addressing any concerns and ideas. The presenter and facilitator for that session were both participants.

Again, the audiotapes were transcribed, following the same conventions of the previous three sessions' transcriptions.

From the above, it can be seen that the first stage of the research design was intentionally constructed so that the process was gradually handed over to the group. Whilst it was my initial intention to hand the process over by the second PGS session, at the request of the group this was only achieved by the third session, when both presenter and facilitator were group members.

#### 3.5.2.2 Stage Two: Focus group discussion

Approximately two months after the fourth PGS session, I met with the group again, in the format of a focus group. Schon (1983) puts forward the notion of a 'reflective conversation' in describing a focus group discussion, and many of my decisions regarding how to construct and thereafter moderate the focus group discussion were theoretically guided by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) and Millward (1995).

According to Millward (1995) "the aim of focus groups is to get closer to participants' understandings of and perspectives on certain issues" (p. 276). Moreover, Stewart &

Shamdasani (1990) and Millward (1995) contend that, if the group process (being the interpersonal dynamics and communication) is adequately guided, such a collective forum can greatly contribute towards the stimulation, and enhancement, of a variety and multitude of perspectives. With particular regard to this research undertaking, this type of forum has the potential to become a core site, illustrating the potential and power of social construction in the creation of knowledge.

Both sets of authors emphasise the importance of the moderator in ensuring that full advantage is taken of the potential benefits of such a forum. According to Millward's (1995) categories, I adopted the style of 'process facilitator', thereby encouraging the group to direct the content issues for discussion.

I did, however, have a tentative guide of questions that I wanted addressed in the process, should the participants have not raised the issues themselves (Appendix C). When I did make use of this guide, Stewart and Shamdasani's (1990) recommendations were followed, in that I would begin with a general question and then gradually distill the answers by asking more specific questions related to the aforementioned.

Furthermore, this guide (Appendix C) was primarily constructed by the research question and, more specifically, from the issues that had been raised whilst I was conducting the first level of analysis of the first phase of data generation, namely during and after the four PGS groups.

Therefore, in moderating the focus group, it was my intention from the outset to be consistent with the philosophy of this entire project, namely to learn from the participants as much as possible. On my part therefore, I was required to be constantly mindful of maintaining a balance between focus and flexibility. This was done by encouraging the participants to direct the content of the process as much as possible, yet I also needed to ensure that certain issues and questions were adequately addressed and answered for the purposes of this research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Immediately after the focus group session I transcribed the audiotapes of the discussion.



### 3.5.2.3 Stage Three: Semi-structured questionnaire

Approximately ten months after being introduced to the PGS model the participants were requested to complete a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix D). The time interval was related to two considerations. Firstly, due to the group dynamics that emerged at times (there were some more dominant and vocal members in the group), I was concerned that some of the quieter participants may not have had sufficient opportunity to voice their concerns and issues. Secondly, I believed that it would be conducive to reflection about the learning encounter that the participants be provided with an additional opportunity to externalise their experiences, after a substantial time lapse from the initial implementation of the PGS model. It was also my intention to investigate whether the participants were still utilising the model, and if so, in what contexts they were applying and utilising the PGS model.

The construction of the questionnaire for generating data was theoretically guided by the ideas of Fife-Shaw (1995) and Patton (1990). These sources emphasise the need for ensuring that most of the questionnaire consists of open-ended questions that provide a framework that creates, as well as places primacy on, the participants being invited to “respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly *their* points of view about the world ...” (Patton, 1990, p. 24, italics added). Again, this was consistent with the entire research decision making process.

As with focus group discussion guide, the construction of the questionnaire was largely influenced by the research question, as well as the ideas that had been generated in the two preceding stages of data collection, namely the PGS sessions and the focus group discussion. Therefore, this final phase of the iterative process in the data collection process was strongly influenced by the emerging ideas and themes from the first two phases. The interrelationships and themes that arose throughout the entire data generation process had therefore been built upon, and therefore were closely intertwined, with each other.

Eight participants (out of ten) returned their completed questionnaires to me. I then transcribed the replies into a uniform typescript. This was done in order to simplify the reading of and subsequent analysing of the texts. It also gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the data.

#### 3.5.2.4 Reflection journal

In conjunction with the verbatim textual data generated from the aforementioned phases, I also made use of a reflection journal throughout the research process. Such recordings included my personal reflections, concerns and questions throughout the data generation phases as well as those comments and contributions made by group members outside the formal data generation sessions.

#### 3.5.2.5 Summary

In summary, a crucial element and the central intention underlying such a research design was that the participants be invited, both before and after each stage of the research process, to reflect upon their experiences and enter into discussions and debates around their respective experiences.

I also believed that the time intervals between each stage (see Figure 3.1) would provide the opportunity for critical reflection to occur, not only about the different research processes and experiences (that is, of the PGS sessions, focus group discussion and questionnaires) but such time lapses may also enable the participants to continue practically applying the PGS model.

### 3.6 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.6.1 **Transcription of data**

According to Silverman (2000) the collation of data by transcribing audiotapes is, in itself, the beginning of the data analysis phase, whereby “the preparation of a transcript from an audiotape ... is a theoretically saturated activity” (p. 136). Therefore, parallel to the three phases of data generation, analysis was a concurrent process.

After each PGS session the tapes were transcribed by the researcher and the texts read at least three times. This repetitive immersion (Addison, 1989) in the data allowed the focus group discussion questions to be directly derived from these and therefore evolved from the initial and preceding stage. Similarly, the construction of the questionnaire also depended on the two preceding stages, with the semi-structured questions being directly constructed from the two aforementioned phases.

In the transcribing process, the guidelines of Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) were followed. Therefore, only the verbatim, linguistic cues were initially transcribed. I then made bracketed notes on the transcripts when, for example, the participants were all talking simultaneously, or if certain participants were interrupted by others and when pauses occurred. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) state that such a method is adequate except for close conversational analysis.

### 3.6.2 Analysis of data

The analysis of the data proceeded on two distinct levels. On the first level, the data generated from the four PGS sessions was analysed. My understanding of how the participants utilised the PGS model guided this analysis process. On the second level, the data generated from the pre- and post-reflection phases, the focus group discussion and the questionnaire replies guided this particular analysis process. Therefore, the participants' reported experiences of the PGS model were utilised in this second level of analysis.

#### 3.6.2.1 The initial level of analysis

This level of analysis was concerned with answering the research sub-question: How did the group of lay counsellors utilise the PGS model?

In order to provide clarity in answering this sub-question, a contrived separation was made between 'content' and 'process' issues. This differentiation was made for two reasons. Firstly, the content details provided the background for explicating how the participants utilised the various phases in the PGS model. Secondly, whilst the PGS model was utilised in a dynamic way by the participants in the four separate sessions, there were patterns and themes that emerged across the sessions. Such patterns and themes were, to a large degree, dependant on the content issues that were covered in the different sessions. The majority of the interpretive analysis in this first level was concerned with undertaking a cross comparison, or by utilising the "constant comparative method" (Glaser, 1994). Thus, the way the participants utilised the PGS model was compared to the structure provided to them on the handout (Appendix A). The following paragraphs describe the analysis of the content details and process/utilisation of structure issues across the four PGS sessions.

Firstly, regarding the content details, the phases of analysis were constructed as follows:

- i) Regarding the first phase of the model, namely 'Presentation and Request for Assistance', initially a descriptive content summary was provided of the case presentations. The RFA statement/s were then categorised according to either:  
1) skill development/task orientation; 2) Personal growth and/or 3) integrative issues. These were therefore demarcated according to the RFA statement/s provided on the original handout given to each participant at the outset of the research process (see Appendix A).
- ii) Concerning the second phase, namely 'Questioning period and identification of focus', categories were constructed from the data that enabled the various questions asked by the participants, as well as opinions given and discussions entered into by the participants, to be coded as follows:  
  

RFA	refers to questions directly related to clarifying the RFA statement/s
CD	refers to questions related to gaining clarity on the case details
SD	refers to questions related to events that occurred during the actual counselling session
OP	refers to opinions being given by the participants, i.e. questions were not asked of the presenter, rather participants were giving their opinions regarding certain facets of the case
DIS	refers to participants entering into discussion amongst themselves. No questions were directed to the presenter.
- iii) Concerning the third phase, namely 'Feedback statements and discussion', a thematic descriptive content summary was provided of the issues addressed and discussed by the participants.
- iv) Regarding the fourth phase, namely 'Presenter's response', a descriptive content summary was provided regarding the presenter's feedback regarding the issues raised in the previous phase.

- v) Regarding the fifth and final phase, namely 'Optional discussion', the central issues that were discussed by the participants were summarised.

A comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) was then constructed across the four sessions and the details were then tabulated, giving preference to Patton's (1990) contention that "the data must be descriptive - sufficiently descriptive that the reader can understand what occurred and how it occurred" (p. 26). I considered this to be particularly important as the content issues foregrounded the analysis of the process/utilisation of the PGS structure, outlined in the following stage of analysis.

Secondly and concerning the process/utilisation of the structure considerations, the following issues were specifically considered. This became a reading guide (Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller & Argyris, 1989) to enable data analysis. Once again, this analysis was guided by a constant comparison with the outline of the PGS model the participants were originally given.

- i) Regarding the structure of the model, did the phases proceed smoothly and in the correct order of sequence?
- ii) If not, at which phase/s were the participants experiencing the most difficulty with and what was happening in and with the transition into and between this/these phase/s?
- iii) Were the specified roles (facilitator and presenter respectively) being adhered to and if not, what was happening in the process?
- iv) Were the time limitations adhered to for each phase?

In order to ensure uniformity in the analysis, exactly the same questions were asked of the text and process for each of the four PGS sessions.

Answering these questions and the analysis of this phase was therefore concerned with three different elements, namely: a) what was present; b) what was absent; and c) what was different. The analysis of this was done on three different levels: during the actual sessions (notes were taken), during the transcription of the audiotapes and by subsequently reading the transcribed texts numerous times.

By developing answers to the above questions, it was then my intention to try and ascertain, from the two subsequent data collection and analysis phases (focus group discussion and semi-structured questionnaire respectively) the participants' ideas and thoughts around their general experiences of the PGS model structure and resultant process.

#### 3.6.2.2 The second level of data analysis

This particular level of analysis was concerned with answering the research sub-question: How did the participants experience and evaluate the PGS model?

The data generated from three different sources was analysed at a second level, namely: the pre- and post-reflection phases, the focus group discussion and the questionnaire replies. This particular level of analysis was consistent with Kvale's (1996) claim that "the purpose of ... qualitative research ... has been depicted as the description and interpretation of themes in the subjects' lived world" (p. 187).

As it was recognised that the participants' own voices should guide this study as much as possible, once again the ideas of Brown, L.M. *et al.* (1989) constituted the primary theoretical scaffolding from which to concurrently process and analyse the data. This particular procedure concerns reading a text in order to identify "voice relevant' aspects ... (and is therefore one that) ... highlights the interpretive nature of the reading process" (Brown, L.M. *et al.* , 1989, p. 146).

Whilst utilising the aforementioned theoretical ideas as a foundation for analysis, various different readings of the texts were undertaken in order for unique themes to emerge that were directly related to answering the research sub-question. These interrelated sub-questions are listed in Appendix E. The texts were therefore read eight different times, each time focussing on the corresponding specific question to be answered.

#### 3.6.2.3 Summary

The data analysis therefore consisted of two levels:

Level One: Descriptive data generated in the four PGS sessions was utilised to distill:

- i) Content details (a descriptive summary was constructed of the content details in each of the four PGS sessions);
- ii) A cross-session analysis was made of how the group utilised the PGS structure.

Level Two: Data generated in the pre- and post-reflection phases, the focus group and the questionnaire replies was utilised in constructing eight central themes that emerged from the data.

This second level of analysis therefore moved beyond a description and was more interpretative and thus analytical than the previous level of analysis, with themes being constructed that more fully explicated the participants' reported experiences.

### 3.7 RIGOUR, REFLEXIVITY AND VERIFICATION OF DATA

According to Mauthner and Doucet (1998) "all research contains biases and values, and (it requires emphasising) that knowledge and understanding are contextually and historically grounded ..." (p. 122). However, and as briefly mentioned in section 3.2.2, qualitative research is often criticised for failing to adequately address what Kvale (1996) refers to as the 'scientific holy trinity' of validity, reliability and generalisability.

In the context of a post-modern, social constructionist worldview, (a particular worldview in which this research was embedded), Kvale (1996) calls for a reconceptualisation of such concepts, stating that researcher rigour, concerned with fully explicating every step of the research process, as opposed to seeking replicable truths about contextually dynamic phenomenon, is the crucial element in conducting qualitative research. Furthermore, the need for rigour should not be regarded as a separate stage in the research process, but should be present from the outset and throughout the entire decision making process. Similarly, Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999) believe that dependability, being "the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher said they did" (p. 64) is of prime importance to the post-modern researcher.

I attempted to provide as many opportunities for the verification of the data throughout the research process as possible. Firstly, I believe that the research design of this particular undertaking contributed to the verification of the data. As already discussed in section 3.3, the first phase entailed my understandings of how the group utilised the model. The subsequent phases, namely the pre- and post-session reflection phases, the focus group discussion and the participant's questionnaire replies were all concerned with prioritising the participants 'voices'. By designing the research process in this manner, the participants were provided with the opportunity to concur with and/or refute my understandings. Ideally, I would have liked to have met with the group once my findings had been completed, but due to time and distance constraints this was not a feasible option.

Therefore, respondent validation (that is, participant feedback throughout the process) and data triangulation (three different sites of data generation) were therefore central tenets in the verification process (Silverman, 2000). Whilst this author tentatively acknowledges the limited utility of such considerations, he is nevertheless critical of researchers who solely depend on them for verification purposes. Accordingly, such issues "should not be *confused* with the validation of research findings (Silverman, 2000, p. 209, italics in original). I would, however, contend that within the context of the research design and the philosophical underpinnings of this particular research undertaking, iterative processing and social constructionism respectively, that such considerations were contextually relevant.

Secondly, I was constantly mindful of the need to remain reflexive throughout the entire research process. Regarding researcher reflexivity, Mauthner and Doucet (1998) define it as a position where researchers are continually

reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents. Reflexivity also means acknowledging the critical role we play in creating, interpreting and theorizing research data ... (p. 121).

I was therefore aware of the need to constantly reflect upon and examine my own role, and how my position created as well as limited the participants' experiences and perspectives throughout the research process.



### 3.8 CORE ADDITIONAL METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 3.8.1 **Ethical considerations**

Throughout the entire research process, ethical considerations were at the forefront of the decision-making process. Such considerations included issues of informed consent (including the participants' right to withdraw from the process at any time) and gaining written permission from the participants to audiotape the sessions (Appendix B).

In particular, the issue of confidentiality was a recurrent theme throughout the process, due to authentic cases being presented by the participants. Although the participants were requested to change the identities of their clients as much as possible, this was an element that was particularly sensitive and was repeatedly reiterated. Therefore, requests and concerns pertaining to confidentiality were discussed in depth with the participants and every attempt was made to discuss and to protect the Agency's, the counsellors' and the clients' rights to confidentiality.

Additionally, an attempt was continuously made to ensure that there was consistency between the position the participants were invited to adopt throughout the entire research process, and Bruffee's (1999) ideas on collaborative learning (section 2.3.3). In addition to Bruffee's broad principles of ensuring that collaborative learning is an empowering process, the ideas of Gilbert (1997), described below, provided the micro considerations necessary in a context such as this research undertaking. This was particularly regarding my role as researcher in the process.

#### 3.8.2 **Gilbert's (1997) model: Constructing new 'communities of practice'**

Regarding how the PGS model was implemented in the lay counselling context, Gilbert's (1997) model provided a useful philosophical and conceptual framework for taking cognisance of the psychological dynamics involved when two different knowledge systems meet with each other. In this particular context, the two broad systems of knowledge were those of the counsellors, and the knowledge system that I brought to the encounter.

This model elucidates how a ‘meeting of minds’ (Gilbert, 1997) can be constructed in such a way that both knowledge systems benefit from the process, particularly regarding providing affordances to ensure “greater equity, social justice and (the) generat(ion) of ideas to enhance empowerment ...” (Gilbert, 1997, p. 277). Of particular importance in such an engagement was the need to recognise the counsellors’ extensive pool of ‘local knowledge’. Gilbert (1997) utilises Lave’s (1988) notion of ‘community of practice’ when defining local knowledge as “the everyday knowledge of a community of practice; the integrative frameworks - collection of ideas and assumptions - that are used in a community of practice to guide, control and explain actions within a specific setting” (p. 278). As already outlined, some of the counsellors had been with the Agency in excess of 20 years.

Furthermore, their own personal backgrounds (as educators, medical professionals and/or organisational workers) provided each with a wide variety of other ‘knowledges’. In comparison to the counsellors’ extensive knowledge of, and experience with, counselling practices, my own local knowledge (what Gilbert (1997) refers to as ‘exogeneous’ knowledge) had predominantly been influenced by studying in a tertiary institution, immersed in knowledges and practices of psychological theories and concepts. According to Gilbert (1997) people in my position are often regarded as being an ‘expert’ when engaging with others in a context such as this.

The ideal scenario in this context therefore would have been to ensure that the ‘meeting of minds’ was conducted in such a way to ensure that the different local knowledges and understandings of the counsellors and myself were made explicit, in order to ensure optimal active participation when introducing the PGS model (Gilbert, 1998). This could be done by continually creating opportunities to examine, and question if necessary, how the different knowledge systems (the counsellors’ and mine) understood, negotiated and constructed a joint act. By attempting to make the process as participatory and egalitarian as possible, it was intended that not only the counsellors’ practices could change, but my understandings would also be adapted in the process.

Whilst further considerations regarding my position as researcher will be discussed in the following sub-section, it was my explicit intention that these considerations put forward by

Gilbert (1997), be at the forefront whilst I was engaging with the participants.

### **3.8.3 The position and role of the researcher**

Firstly, regarding my personal position upon entering the research process, I had utilised the PGS model twice in my own peer group supervision sessions, within the context of my own training in a tertiary academic context. During these sessions, I had adopted the role of facilitator once. Curious, motivated and excited, yet decidedly 'novice status' would therefore most aptly describe my initial position in the research context.

Secondly, my role was ostensibly one of participant-observer in the research process. According to Patton "to understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method" (1990, p. 25). Additionally, according to Robson (1993) adopting the role of participant researcher/observer is ideally suited to a qualitative inquiry. It is, however, a role that requires a constant state of reflexivity, which has been discussed before, but what Lax (1992) refers to as "the act of making oneself an object of one's own observations" (p. 75). A reflection journal was one tool that I utilised in order to try and explicate my own personal position and proclivities.

Whilst cognisance was taken of the potential utility and power of adopting this role, it was not without its own tensions and difficulties. Particularly within the context of this research project, the role became further compounded by adopting the role of facilitator within the group for the first two peer group supervision sessions. Therefore, playing the role of both facilitator and participant researcher created a multitude of issues that required constant and ongoing critical reflection. This role and related issues will be more thoroughly addressed in Chapter Five.

My position was, however, assisted by my exposure to, through many of my years of tertiary training, a social constructionist view of understanding knowledge and human dynamics. My own familiar understandings of how knowledge is socially constructed, as well as appreciating the dynamic nature of such constructions were at the foreground of my

perspective, and therefore highly influential in the research process.

The following chapter will present the findings, in two sections, that emerged from applying the above methodological guidelines. In presenting these findings, the protocol followed was that all verbatim material has been kept at single line spacing and italicised. The participants are identified as 'P1' through to 'P10', as discussed under section 3.4.1. If a participant is not identified in the text, the verbatim material has emanated from the questionnaire replies, wherein the participants could choose to remain anonymous. The letters 'J', 'P' and 'F' denote the researcher (Jane), presenter (P) and facilitator (F) respectively.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

To present the findings, this chapter will be divided into two sections. As outlined in the previous chapter, the first section will focus on elucidating the findings that emerged from the four PGS sessions held with the participants. This initial section of the findings directly relate to answering the research sub-question: ‘How did the group of lay counsellors utilise the PGS model?’.

In addressing this initial sub-question, priority was afforded to the structure utilisation by the group. However, I recognised that the content-oriented and substantive issues were highly influential in the process issues that emerged from the group’s utilisation of the PGS model’s structure. Therefore, tables 4.2 - 4.5 provide a summary of the content issues that were addressed within each of the four PGS sessions. The subsequent interweaving of the content details with an interpretation of the process issues that emerged due to the participants’ utilisation of the PGS model structure, enabled a description of the patterns and common processes that emerged across the four PGS sessions.

The second section will discuss the findings that relate to answering the research sub-question: ‘How did the participants experience and evaluate the PGS model?’. As outlined in the previous chapter, the data utilised in this sub-section emanated from three distinct sources, namely: the pre- and post-reflection phases in each PGS session, the focus group discussion, and the semi-structured questionnaire replies.

The table on the following page provides a tabulated summary of the PGS model, with an emphasis on the structure requirements for each phase. This summary of the PGS model is included for reader reference, and will be referred to in the following pages.

Table 4.1: Summary of the phase requirements in the PGS model

<b><u>PHASE</u></b>	<b><u>CENTRAL PROCESS</u></b>	<b><u>TIME ALLOCATION</u></b>	<b><u>FOCUS OF PHASE</u></b>
1	Presentation and Request-for-Assistance Statement/s (RFA statement/s)	10 - 15 minutes	Summary of the case facts, the session process and the issue/s the presenter wants help with (RFA statement/s)
2	Questioning period and identification of focus	10 - 15 minutes	'Round robin' technique is used for questions to obtain additional information and/or gain clarity on the RFA statement/s
3	Feedback statements and discussion	10 - 15 minutes	Presenter withdraws and is spoken about in the third person. 'Round robin' technique is used for productive suggestions to be made. (An optional pause period then follows for the presenter to reflect on the suggestions)
4	Presenter's response	10 - 15 minutes	Presenter responds to the feedback, providing details of what was/was not supportive and useful about the feedback
5	Optional discussion period		General reflection and discussion period on the case or any related issues that the case may have introduced

#### 4.2 THE GROUPS' UTILISATION OF THE PGS MODEL: A CROSS-SESSION ANALYSIS

The four tables on the following four pages summarise the content issues that were addressed in each of the four PGS sessions. The descriptive summary follows the various phase requirements of the PGS model.

Table 4.2: Summary of the first PGS session:

<b><u>PHASE ONE: PRESENTATION AND RFA STATEMENT/S</u></b>
<p><u>Case Summary:</u> (1 counselling session)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A young, single mother whose partner had left her soon after conception</li> <li>- She was suffering from depression and was receiving medication for an underactive thyroid.</li> <li>- Whilst presently employed, the client was feeling socially excluded and trapped</li> <li>- She was also feeling angry and resentful regarding her present circumstances</li> </ul> <p><u>RFA statement/s</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initially not formulated. The group assisted the presenter to construct an RFA statement.</li> <li>- The group agreed that <i>investigating other potential avenues for exploration with the client</i> would be the most appropriate RFA. The RFA statement therefore fell under Skills Development/Task Orientation (RFA statement No. 1 on the handout).</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE TWO: QUESTIONING PERIOD AND IDENTIFICATION OF FOCUS</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A total of 36 questions were asked of the presenter</li> <li>- Categorised as follows: 1 x RFA; 34 x Case Details (CD); 1 x Session Detail (SD). Additionally, 10 x Opinions (OP) were given and 9 x discussions (DIS) were entered into</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE THREE: FEEDBACK STATEMENTS AND DISCUSSION</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All began by congratulating the presenter on the thoroughness of the issues covered</li> <li>- Details regarding how the thyroid functions and the need for a thorough medical assessment and medication were provided by a group participant</li> <li>- The members of the group suggested that the presenter could have addressed the client's feelings of powerless, anger and resentment in more depth</li> <li>- The group also addressed the issue of needing to create more social support structures for the client and various options were provided</li> <li>- How to deal with the frustrations of clients not returning for further sessions</li> <li>- The issue of single parenthood and the challenges thereof were discussed</li> <li>- Ideas were generated around how to increase the client's sense of autonomy and independence whilst bringing up her child</li> <li>- The utility of 'family tree diagrams' and addressing familial relationships were outlined</li> <li>- A general discussion regarding the father's responsibility and role in such a case scenario.</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE FOUR: PRESENTER'S RESPONSE</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appreciated the acknowledgement of and support that such cases are challenging as often counsellors have only one session to address a vast array of issues</li> <li>- Particularly found the medical advice useful, as well as the need to help the client visualise the various family relationships and dynamics, as well as illustrating extra familial social support structures.</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE FIVE: OPTIONAL DISCUSSION</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Again, support and affirmation for the way the case was dealt with by the presenter was given by the group</li> <li>- Discussing the frustrations of the 'realities' of clients who do not return and how to invite them to do so without the client feeling pressurised.</li> </ul>

Table 4.3: Summary of the second PGS session:

<p align="center"><b><u>PHASE ONE: PRESENTATION AND RFA STATEMENT/S</u></b></p>
<p><u>Case Summary:</u> (1 counselling session)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A couple with a young child who are presently living apart and finding this stressful on their relationship, particularly regarding the need to trust each other</li> <li>- One partner expresses anger about cultural traditions not being adhered to by the other</li> <li>- The couple became physically violent in the session (which lasted for over two hours)</li> <li>- After the clients had left the session, one of the partners revealed to the counsellor that they had just been diagnosed as being HIV positive.</li> </ul> <p><u>RFA statement/s</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presenter outlined their RFA as: <i>how to try and 'unearth' the central issue/s causing the anger</i> (for example, HIV status) - <i>how to 'detect' the main theme and also how to deal with 'it'</i> (that is, HIV positive status) <i>when it only emerges after the end of the session</i></li> <li>- The RFA statement therefore broadly fell under Skills Development/Task Orientation (RFA statement No.1 on the handout).</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b><u>PHASE TWO: QUESTIONING PERIOD AND IDENTIFICATION OF FOCUS</u></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A total of 46 questions were asked of the presenter</li> <li>- Categorised as follows: 1 x RFA; 38 x Case Details (CD); 7 x Session Detail (SD). Additionally, 8 x Opinions (OP) were given and 7 x discussions (DIS) were entered into</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b><u>PHASE THREE: FEEDBACK STATEMENTS AND DISCUSSION</u></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All began by congratulating the presenter on how the session was conducted, particularly in controlling the violence that had erupted during the session</li> <li>- How to address issues such as HIV status when only disclosed after the end of the session</li> <li>- Issues regarding session length and discussing how the group supervisor would have advised them to structure the session in order to elicit the central theme/s</li> <li>- The difficulties in dealing with cross-cultural issues and counselling</li> <li>- Addressing the need for protection from violent clients in the institutional setting.</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b><u>PHASE FOUR: PRESENTER'S RESPONSE</u></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presenter expressed his appreciation for the support and affirmation of the group</li> <li>- Particularly found the ideas regarding how to structure sessions and how to limit the time spent with clients useful.</li> <li>- Confirmed that he had advised the clients to seek additional counselling, as well as suggesting that the HIV status should perhaps be addressed from the outset in next counselling session. Nation-wide resources for HIV support were provided.</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b><u>PHASE FIVE: OPTIONAL DISCUSSION</u></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Again, support and praise for the way the case was dealt with by the counsellor/presenter</li> <li>- The group discussed many of their broader concerns. These included: HIV counselling, violence in the sessions and the need to ensure counsellor safety, how to provide appropriate 'cross-cultural' counselling and how to limit the session times, even when central issues are raised at the end.</li> </ul>



Table 4.4: Summary of the third PGS session:

<b><u>PHASE ONE: PRESENTATION AND RFA STATEMENT/S</u></b>
<p><u>Case Summary:</u> (1 counselling session)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A young person, recently married</li> <li>- Inadvertently and unexpectedly discovered that they are HIV positive</li> <li>- Recently retrenched and feeling rejected by everyone and feeling angry, alone and unfairly blamed for HIV status.</li> </ul> <p><u>RFA statement/s</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presenter was very clear on their RFA., being: <i>I want the groups' comments and opinions on my focussing on that one particular aspect</i> (the client's relationships) <i>and not addressing all the other possible issues.</i></li> <li>- The presenter detailed their RFA as being <i>actually task oriented, possibly spilling into personal growth</i> (RFA statements No. 1 and No. 2 respectively on the handout).</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE TWO: QUESTIONING PERIOD AND IDENTIFICATION OF FOCUS</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A total of 27 questions were asked of the presenter</li> <li>- Categorised as follows: 1 x RFA; 22 x Case Details (CD); 4 x Session Detail (SD). Additionally, 4 x Opinions (OP) were given and 5 x discussions (DIS) were entered into</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE THREE: FEEDBACK STATEMENTS AND DISCUSSION</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All began by supporting the presenter on the way the case was dealt with and giving positive feedback regarding the presenter's choice to only focus on one issue, although acknowledging that there was a risk involved by doing so</li> <li>- Medical issues surrounding contracting the HIV virus were discussed</li> <li>- Issues of informed consent regarding HIV positive clients were debated. The Agency's policy issues regarding informed consent for clients who are HIV positive were clarified.</li> <li>- Discussion regarding the need to schedule another appointment for this client and their spouse, yet many members still feeling confused about the intricacies and complexity of the case</li> <li>- Discussing how to locate alternative resources for referral and how to ensure that referrals are ethical and professional.</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE FOUR: PRESENTER'S RESPONSE</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specifically addressed the questions and issues raised in previous phase.</li> <li>- Appreciated that she had generally been supported regarding her decision to focus on only one issue</li> <li>- Agreed that trying to get clients to return to the Agency is very difficult</li> <li>- Further case content details were requested of the presenter.</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE FIVE: OPTIONAL DISCUSSION</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Again, affirmation and support for the way the case was dealt with by the presenter</li> <li>- The presenter discussed her dilemmas in making decisions regarding the case</li> <li>- General discussion regarding HIV positive status and the various resources available for client referral</li> <li>- The Agency's policy regarding the conflict of interest that might arise if another professional/s is simultaneously involved with the case and clients was discussed.</li> </ul>

Table 4.5: Summary of the fourth PGS session:

<b><u>PHASE ONE: PRESENTATION AND RFA STATEMENT/S</u></b>
<p><b>Case Summary:</b> (4 counselling sessions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A couple who were experiencing marital difficulties. A recent loss in the family had exacerbated the tensions and conflict in the relationship</li> <li>- There was a marital history of abuse and infidelity and the partners felt differently regarding future prospects for the relationship, particularly regarding issues of power and control</li> <li>- Religious differences were creating an enormous barrier between them</li> <li>- One partner was taking medication, but was reluctant to get adequate medical attention.</li> </ul> <p><b>RFA statement/s</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There were two central RFAs. Firstly, <i>how to handle a client's reluctance to be referred for medical assistance?</i> and secondly, <i>when doing couple counselling, how does one balance the time and attention given to each person?</i></li> <li>- The presenter outlined their RFAs prior to the case presentation and stated that the RFAs both fell under Skill Development/Task Orientation (RFA No. 1 on the handout).</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE TWO: QUESTIONING PERIOD AND IDENTIFICATION OF FOCUS</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A total of 32 questions were asked of the presenter</li> <li>- Categorised as follows: 5 x RFA; 20 x Case Details (CD); 7 x Session Detail (SD). Additionally, 4 x Opinions (OP) were given and 3 x discussions (DIS) were entered into</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE THREE: FEEDBACK STATEMENTS AND DISCUSSION</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presenter was supported and congratulated for the way the sessions had been conducted and the thoroughness of the issues that had been covered</li> <li>- The second RFA was addressed and debated at length (how to balance the time between couples when doing marital therapy). Ideas generated in group supervision were re-visited and discussed.</li> <li>- The first RFA was then discussed, with a multitude of ideas being generated surrounding the need for adequate referral and how to ensure that the client gets appropriate medication, that is consistently monitored by a qualified medical practitioner.</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE FOUR: PRESENTER'S RESPONSE</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presenter acknowledged the complexity of the case, yet felt that her core issues had been thoroughly addressed by the group</li> <li>- Many additional issues had also been inadvertently addressed, which was appreciated</li> <li>- The issue of how to structure the session so that each person was given an equal opportunity to contribute was particularly useful. The ideas provided regarding how to refer reluctant clients for medication, as well as the appropriate monitoring thereof was also useful, yet was still a challenging area and one of concern for the presenter.</li> </ul>
<b><u>PHASE FIVE: OPTIONAL DISCUSSION</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Again, affirmation for the way the case was dealt with by the presenter</li> <li>- Discussing the frustrations and perceived limitations of adequately dealing with 'cross-cultural' counselling</li> <li>- Discussing that marital counselling may require the sessions to be structured separately for the couples. Particularly if there is a great deal of acrimony and also to initially ensure that each person is given an equal opportunity to participate in the process. Reference was often made to the group supervisor's ideas in this regard.</li> </ul>

These four tables have been inserted to give the reader a sense of the content issues in the four PGS sessions. In the following sub-sections a cross-session analysis of the five phases in each of the four PGS sessions will be described.

#### 4.2.1 **Phase One: Presentation and Request-for-Assistance Statement/s**

This initial phase is concerned with a summary of an actual counselling case, including the facts, process involved and the issues the presenter requires assistance with (RFA statement/s).

##### 4.2.1.1 Case presentations

Throughout the four sessions, the cases presented illustrated the contemporary nature of many of the issues with which the counsellors were faced. These included issues such as single parenthood and depression; marital counselling and religious differences and counselling couples when either one or both of the partners had been diagnosed HIV positive.

Areas of commonality emerged between the cases as well. All four of the cases were centred around relationship issues. Two cases dealt with issues surrounding HIV status and two cases highlighted the challenges that the counsellors had faced regarding cross-cultural counselling.

The case presentations provided the counsellors with an opportunity to highlight and illustrate their own personal interests when counselling clients, as well as providing an opportunity for the counsellors to reflect upon and elucidate their perceived difficulties when counselling clients.

##### 4.2.1.2 Request-for-Assistance Statement/s

With the exception of the initial session, all the presenters had decided, prior to their presentations, the area/s with which they were requiring assistance. That is, they were clear on their Request-for-Assistance (RFA) statement/s from the outset, as intended in the PGS model. In the first session, the presenter requested the groups' assistance with constructing an appropriate RFA statement.

A common theme that emerged across the four sessions was that RFA statements pertaining to skill development/task orientation (RFA statement No. 1) was a central and common area with which the presenters needed assistance. However, as the sessions progressed, it also became evident that the presenters were experiencing difficulties in succinctly categorising their RFA statement/s according to the original guidelines. For example, in the second session:

P/P10 *oh .. there seems to be a lot of different issues coming in here ... there is one main one that I thought of before I presented the case ... now there seem to be a few ... and there is an overlap between all three RFA statements ... I'm sorry ... I'm just not so sure anymore ...*

From this example, it also became evident that in addition to the difficulties in neatly categorising their RFA statement/s, the presenters also acknowledged that subsequent to their presentations, they no longer seemed convinced that their initial RFA statement/s were the most appropriate and/or relevant. For example, in the fourth session:

P/P8 *I do realise that whilst I did outline from the beginning of my presentation that my two RFA statements clearly fell under skill development, I now realise that maybe I have four different requests in at least one of these questions ... and altogether they overlap over all the RFA statements ....*

In this particular case, the additional issues that had evolved by the end of the presentation tended to be more personal growth and case management oriented. Regarding this latter issue, the presenter was seeking assistance regarding input of 'where to from here', or case management - an option not clearly outlined nor provided for on the handout (Appendix A).

However, and in contrast to these difficulties, as the sessions progressed, it also became evident that the implementation of the PGS model was enhanced by the presenter outlining, even before presenting their case, the issues with which they were seeking assistance. For example, at the outset of session four, the presenter stated their intended area of seeking assistance, prior to presenting their case:

P/P8 *before I even present my case, I just want to let you all know that the questions I've been thinking about very carefully fall under skills development very clearly ... firstly, how to handle a client's reluctance to be referred ... and secondly, when doing couple counselling, how does one balance the time and attention given to each person ...?*



By elucidating these RFA statements from the outset, it is believed that a useful space and opportunity was created, from the beginning of the process, for the group to remain focussed on addressing those particular issues with which the presenter would be requiring assistance. For example, in the final session, at no time during the case presentation, nor when the RFA statements were reiterated at the end of the presentation, was the presenter interrupted.

In direct contrast to this, if the RFA statement was not clearly stated in the first phase, the group tended to move prematurely into the second phase. This was evidenced by numerous questions being asked, and such requests were lacking in direction and focus as to the needs of the presenter. Constant interruptions in the first phase were common practice during the first three PGS sessions.

The importance of the facilitator in ensuring that the presenter had clearly elucidated their RFA statement/s and then indicating to the group that the next phase could be entered into was illustrated clearly in session three:

F/P8 *OK, (P) seems clear on their area of assistance they are requiring the group to help with. We can now move on - so would you all like to start asking questions? These questions are either to do with clarity over the case presentation, or regarding the RFA statement. (P9) would you like to start?*

It was thus evident that in the initial stages of implementing the PGS model, the facilitator needs to be clear and directive regarding the exact phase requirements, as well as indicating when these had been achieved, and then highlighting what the next phase requires.

#### **4.2.2 Phase Two: Questioning Period and Identification of Focus**

This second phase of the model is intended to address questions relating to gaining clarity, regarding the substantive issues of the presenter's case and/or regarding the RFA statement/s.

##### **4.2.2.1 Additional case information and/or gaining clarity on RFA statement/s**

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 provide a tabulated summary of the categorisation (according to the comparative analysis and coding of the categories as discussed in section 3.6.2.1) of the number of questions directed to the presenter. Diversions from the original PGS model

structure, in the form of opinion giving and discussions entered into by the participants are also noted.

Table 4.6 provides an outline of the total questions, opinions given and discussions entered into during phase two by the participants throughout all of the four sessions.

Table 4.6: Comparative summary of total of question types in all four PGS sessions

<u>Category of questions raised</u>	<u>Number of times utilised</u> (out of possible 141)
RFA (clarifying the RFA statement/s)	8 (6%)
CD (clarifying case details)	114 (81%)
SD (clarifying sessional events)	19 (13%)

<u>Diversions from the PGS structure</u>	<u>Number of times utilised</u>
OP (opinions given)	26
DIS (discussion entered into)	24

From table 4.6, it was evident that requests for further case details (CD) were predominant across all four sessions (fourteen times more than seeking RFA statement/s clarification). Of pertinence was that opinion giving (OP) and discussions (DIS), both categories that involved diversions from the original PGS model structure (as they did not involve any questions being directed to the presenter), were also dominant and more widely used than questioning of the presenter regarding RFA statement/s or sessional events (SD).

Table 4.7 (over the page) provides a tabulation of the same issues, compared across the separate PGS sessions.

Table 4.7: Comparative summary of question types across each PGS session

Category of questions raised

<u>Session</u>	<u>RFA STATEMENT/S</u>	<u>CD</u>	<u>SD</u>
1.	1	34	1
2.	1	38	7
3.	1	22	4
4.	5	20	7

Diversions from the original PGS model structure

<u>Session</u>	<u>OP</u>	<u>DIS</u>
1.	10	9
2.	8	7
3.	4	5
4.	4	3

It becomes evident from table 4.7 that as the sessions progressed, the number of questions related to RFA statements, case details and sessions increased, whilst discussions and opinion giving exercises decreased.

During this phase of the first two PGS sessions, the focus and momentum was quickly lost as group members entered into discussions about the principles and content of the case with each other. It appeared as if the participants had not been provided with sufficient opportunity to satisfy themselves that all the relevant case details had been obtained in the preceding phase. For example, in both the first two sessions, the facilitator was only eventually able to move the process forward after three requests. From this, I wondered whether the requisite PGS structure and resultant process could only be adopted and implemented once the group were satisfied that the content issues had been thoroughly discussed and investigated in the first phase.

A further repercussion of the phase being overly content based, and the questions being unfocussed, was that some participants began to give their own opinions of the pertinent issues, as well as providing some additional suggestions for investigation. As a direct result, phase three was entered into prematurely and this resulted in confusion for some participants regarding the process requirements. For example, in the second session:

P3 *I'm really confused now ... where are we ... are we or aren't we supposed to help (the presenter) with our ideas at this stage ...?*

P5 *I thought that we were meant to be asking questions ... the presenter only gets our input next ... not now ... I think ...*

I noticed this phenomenon, and the participant's perceptions and understanding of these difficulties were explored in the focus group discussion with them. Section 5.4.1 therefore provides some explanation, from the participants' perspective, of these initial difficulties with the phase requirements in the PGS structure.

However, and in spite of this tendency to lose focus and momentum in the second phase of the PGS model due to further requests, discussions arising and opinions being given about the case details, by the fourth and final session, the participants were beginning to ask more RFA statement-related questions of the presenter and far fewer case and content related issues. As the sessions progressed, there was also a significant decrease in the number of opinion giving and discussion episodes arising.

This enhanced focus and stricter adherence to the PGS model structure could also have arisen due to various participants intervening in the process, when the facilitator did not. For example, in session two, when the general discussion around the case details continued unabated, the presenter took the initiative by stating:

P/P10 *yes ... now ... I think that I had ought to remove myself to the corner ... otherwise we may just be here all day!*

In session four a group member also picked up the threat of the group wandering off the topic by restating what the presenter's RFA statement/s had been:

P7 *there seems to be a lot of information that has been covered and its been covered thoroughly, and before we end up with even more, I'll go to the task involved ...*



The role of the facilitator being co-opted by one of the group members, in order to remain task-focussed, was clearly illustrated in this particular example.

#### 4.2.2.2 Phase structure requirements

In the first two PGS sessions, the participants were also experiencing difficulty in adopting and adhering to the 'round robin' technique when addressing questions to the presenter. This was evidenced by only two or three participants asking questions, and often asking numerous unrelated questions simultaneously. As a direct result, only specific facets of the case and/or RFA statement/s were addressed.

However, it was interesting to note that by the second session, other participants were beginning to address this particular issue and, again, effectively took over the role of the facilitator in ensuring the model was more closely implemented. For example:

P7 *okay ... so that is your one question for now ... remember that we have to move around to all of us ...*

It therefore appeared as if a strict turn-taking/'round robin' technique may have been too restrictive, and a foreign practice to the participants. However, by the final session, whilst the 'round robin' technique was not being strictly adhered to, the participants were beginning to ask only one question at a time and also to wait for others to ask questions if they so chose. A useful technique that counteracted the tendency for some participants to dominate the process, (and effectively utilised by the facilitators in sessions three and four), was to specifically ask certain participants if they would like to make a contribution.

An enhanced transfer between phases was encouraged by the facilitator reiterating the RFA statement/s that the presenter had outlined, as well as denoting what the next phase requirements were. For example, in session three:

F/P8 *(P6) do you have any questions, or are you all still OK with the case and what the RFA statement/s are? (P/P7) I think that its now time to take a back seat and listen quietly - thanks so much ... perhaps we could all just reflect for a few moments and then start a general discussion on what (P/P7) presented and requested help with ...*

and in session four:

F/P6 *OK, before we move onto the next phase, where (P/P8) will remove themselves from us all so that everyone's input can be made, does anyone have anymore questions?*

This last statement may also be a reflection of the phenomenon that I had noticed in the previous phase, in that the facilitator in the final session had also concluded that the process and structure adherence could not be advanced, until the group were satisfied that all their issues had been addressed.

It was also interesting to note that, from the second session, and the more familiar the group became with the PGS model structure, the participants themselves were beginning to create their own opportunities for reflection before asking questions (or providing their opinions). For example, in session four when the facilitator extended an opportunity to a specific participant:

P3 *no ... no ... at the moment I'm still thinking - I haven't got a question ... there's such a lot to think about, I need more time first ...*

When the group were taking turns in asking questions, this phase provided an opportunity to illustrate a useful dimension of the model. As with the case presentations illustrating the presenter's personal interests when counselling clients, the various questions asked by the participants revealed similar inclinations. For example, for the advocates of health maintenance, their questions would be directed towards client diet and exercise, for those proponents of social support structures, questions relating to the absence or presence of such resources would be directed to the presenter. The retired doctor's questions would generally pertain to medical and/or physiological inquiries.

#### **4.2.3 Phase Three: Feedback Statements and Discussion**

This particular phase requires the presenter to withdraw from the process, whilst the other group members provide their own suggestions regarding the case presentation. The presenter should be referred to in the third person during this phase.

##### **4.2.3.1 Summary of the content of the phase**

This third phase proved to be an important phase for demonstrating a number of positive and

productive facets of the PGS model that the participants found useful. Firstly, an opportunity was provided for illustrating how each group member's own expertise and experience could contribute to the presenter's case. The practical input and ideas appeared to be useful to the group. For example, in the third session, the central issue in the case was concerned with HIV and the transmission thereof. The retired medical doctor provided input regarding testing and the biological issues related to transmission, whilst others gave their opinions and discussed ideas surrounding various institutional policies, legal issues and concerns regarding notification of a positive HIV status.

Relatedly, this phase also provided the opportunity for discussing relevant resource allocation for the clients and counsellors. Therefore, the potential for the group to act as a consultative, practically-oriented multi-disciplinary team was illustrated in this third phase of the PGS model.

Secondly, this phase was also important for highlighting the potential for support from peers that such a forum may provide. Without exception, each phase three began with the group affirming the presenter. The general atmosphere was one of enthusiasm, wherein substantial support and encouragement for the presenter's (and each other's) opinions was vocalised.

Thirdly, this phase also gave the non-presenting participants an opportunity to engage with the case and process, yet from a distance. This was noted from the outset by participants:

P9 *I think .... I think that I'm quite delighted to sit in the background and make suggestions ...*

P7 *yes... with no responsibility ...*

Fourthly, this phase was also useful for illustrating how the participants were able to transfer and apply what they had learnt in their past group supervision sessions to the various cases presented in the forum. For example, in the second session:

P8 *didn't (the group supervisor) once tell us that we should put a limit on the time right from the outset ...*

P5 *... yes ... you know I also can remember ... (the group supervisor) has also told us that it's a safety issue for the client ... to structure the session, so that they know too ...*

During session three the participants began to openly express their differing opinions and challenge each other, with a lively debate developing within the group. Whilst in the first two sessions, the participants had, on occasion, expressed their disagreements with each other, it was kept to a minimal. It was therefore speculated that as the participants become more familiar with the utilisation of the PGS forum, their levels of confidence to disagree and challenge each other were simultaneously increasing. For example, in the fourth session:

P7 *it's a good question, but not really relevant right now, so lets move on ...*

This suggestion was agreed upon by the remaining group participants.

#### 4.2.3.2 Phase structure requirements

The initial phase requirement is that group members are to speak about the presenter in the third person. Without exception, this requirement was quickly adopted by all the members of the group from the first session. However, as with the preceding phase two, during this third phase (particularly in the first two sessions), there was a tendency for group members to enter into protracted discussions. As a direct result, the 'round robin' technique was soon discarded, discussions entered into between participants and, as a direct result, the focus of the phase was temporarily diverted.

This diversion, was however, again addressed by other group members who would interrupt the relevant parties if the facilitator failed to do so. For example in session three:

P3 *excuse me ... aren't we getting too far way from what we should be doing here ...?*

P7 *yes, but that's a whole different issue now ... and maybe we could keep that for a future session ...*

A re-focus of the requisite process was also achieved by other group members (not the facilitator) returning to the RFA statement/s in order to re-clarify the process and address the appropriate phase requirements. For example, in session three:

P7 *OK everyone, lets just remind ourselves what the RFA statement was about*

This was useful for attempting to keep the phase focussed on answering the RFA statement, as well as trying to ensure that everyone gave the RFA statement/s priority whilst giving their

opinions about the way the case had been managed by the presenter/counsellor. Comments such as these, from the various participants, served as a useful reminder of the process, despite these, again, not emanating from the facilitator.

Of particular relevance in the third and fourth sessions was that instead of the group tending to enter into discussions with each other, the participants began to negotiate with each other who would make the next contribution and the 'round robin' technique was used in a more constructive way.

In the final and forth session, the facilitator ensured the smooth transition between the phases by stating:

F/P8 *if we don't have anything more specific to say, should we give (the presenter) a few moments just to think on our pearls of wisdom?*

These invitations to constantly reflect and pause between phases was repeatedly extended to the participants by the facilitator throughout the final session, and proved to be extremely useful. At the end of phase three in the fourth session a long pause was notable, with the participants deep in reflection.

I understood this to be an indication that the group were beginning to create their own periods of reflection at the beginning of phases two and three in order to formulate their responses and questions. The difference between this action and the previous sessions (the immediate need to enter into discussion and debate concerning the content of the case presented) possibly indicated that as the group were beginning to become familiar with each phase requirement, they were becoming more confident to slow the process down and reflect upon the content issues, as well as considering what was required of them to continue the process.

#### **4.2.4 Phase Four: Responses from the Presenter**

This phase is concerned with the presenter responding to the suggestions and discussion of the previous phase, and highlighting what s/he found/did not find particularly useful for his/her case.

From the first session, the important role of feedback for the group members was highlighted.

This included not only general feedback, but the presenters were also requested by the other participants to provide their opinions on specific issues suggested by the group members.

The utility of multiple perspectives on the various cases was also acknowledged by the presenters:

P/P8 *There is just so much within this group isn't there - there are so many minds on the problem, I wish that you could all be flies on the wall with me ...*

The presenter also stated how useful she had found the session because many of her other concerns had been indirectly addressed by the group in the process:

P/P8 *thank you for bringing up (all these other issues) because its something that I didn't want to do - give you lots and lots of questions ...*

This phase also reiterated the immense support evident in the group. From the first session this was clearly illustrated in the following interchange:

P2 *How are you feeling ... are you okay with what we have said and suggested ...*

P9 *Yes, I'm worrying about you, because I'm thinking that you're thinking about this case all the time ...*

P3 *I agree, it seems that you're really taking strain over it too ... but you did so well and we really enjoyed your presentation ...*

To which the presenter replied:

P/P5 *I'm feeling fine ... I'm feeling very empathetically addressed ... um ... and all the feedback was really very ... very interesting and very constructive ... thank you all ...*

As within phase three, there was also evidence, in this fourth phase, of the presenters referring to advice given to them by the group supervisor:

P/P10 *thank you ... first of all ... (the group supervisor) has always told us that it is not only the counsellor who benefits from the session sticking to time limits ... but so does the client ...*

Particularly in session three, this phase also provided the opportunity to highlight how the facilitator (who, for the first time, was not the researcher) was struggling to remain 'detached' from the proceedings. The facilitator in this particular session asked the presenter three questions and on two separate occasions took part in the discussion that had arisen:

F/P5 *I'm sorry and I know that I'm cheating, but I really need to know how along ago this*



*all happened ...*

As this role requires that facilitators do not engage in any group discussions, or question the presenter, this comment clearly illustrated one of the difficulties that group participants were encountering whilst adopting the role of facilitator.

#### **4.2.5 Phase Five: Optional Discussion Phase**

Without exception, at the participants' request, all of the four PGS sessions included this additional phase for the purposes of general discussion.

Two common themes arose throughout the sessions in this specific phase. Firstly, the consistent moral support and encouragement that the presenter received from the group, and secondly, this phase provided the opportunity for the participants to address their concerns regarding institutional policies and limitations. This phase therefore provided the opportunity for the participants to discuss numerous broader issues that directly impacted on their counselling practices. For example, institutional policy issues surrounding counsellor safety if clients became violent, discussing the location of and the process involved in referring clients to appropriate resources, disclosure of HIV status, and the frustrations that the counsellors often encountered as, in the majority of cases, clients did not return for follow-up counselling sessions. The specific cases being presented therefore had a domino effect in introducing other more general issues that the group wanted to address.

From the second PGS session onwards, this phase was also used to negotiate which participant would present their case in the following PGS session. Although the group had agreed that a member would adopt the role of facilitator from the second PGS session onwards, I was requested to maintain the role in the second PGS session. Therefore, at the end of the second PGS session, negotiations were also entered into as to who would adopt the role of facilitator. There was variety in how the decision arose as to who would play the role of presenter and facilitator respectively in each session. For example, at the end of session one, the decision as to who would present the next session was discussed amongst the group and a group member was invited by the others to present a case, with the 'volunteer' replying:

P10 *I wouldn't like to ... but I will!*

During session three, as with all the previous sessions, the support and encouragement from all the group members concerning how the case was handled and presented was evident. The group members also recognised the utility of having a clear and succinct RFA statement from the outset, and the discussion thereof dominated this phase of the session.

The groups' enthusiasm regarding the model and how they were all feeling more confident about the structure was also emphasised in session four:

P9 *it suddenly began to go so well for us all and well, you've seen our enthusiasm ...*

An animated conversation followed, whereby the group members acknowledged the difficulties they had encountered in remaining with many of the phase requirements initially. They did however, believe that as the sessions progressed, a clearer appreciation and utilisation of the various phases had been gradually achieved.

This final session also reiterated the utility of feedback for the group, in this instance, I was requested to provide the group with feedback:

P7 *would you also give us some of your feedback about how you think we've been doing so far ... I think that we would all really appreciate it*

I understood this as being a request for reassurance from the group, from someone that they regarded as having more expertise than them in utilising the PGS model. A discussion of the progression that I felt they had made in the utilisation of the PGS model followed this request.

#### 4.2.6 Summary

The first section of these findings aimed to answer the research sub-question: 'How did a group of lay counsellors utilise the PGS model?'.

In summary, there was a definite progression in the four sessions from time spent on discussing case details and confusion between the phases to a gradual utilisation of the PGS model structure whereby the group members were creating their own spaces for reflection and group members assisted with the use of the structure if the facilitator did not intervene where necessary. It is therefore speculated that as the group became more familiar with the PGS



model and more confident about the conceptual requirements of the various phases, the more flexibility they brought to the process.

Despite this progression, by the fourth session, there were still instances where participants requested that the group stop the process so that clarity could be sought regarding respective phase requirements. This may be an important consideration when implementing the PGS model - the need to continually provide opportunities for questions and clarity, even when there are indications that the participants are becoming more familiar with the model.

4.2.6.1      Time allocations

According to the original PGS model, each phase should take ten to fifteen minutes. The following table shows the approximate time spent on each of the PGS sessional phases.

Table 4.8: Time taken per phase

<u>Session</u>	<u>Phase 1</u>	<u>Phase 2</u>	<u>Phase 3</u>	<u>Phase 4</u>	<u>Phase 5</u>	<u>Total time</u>
1	12 mins.	30 mins.	20 mins.	20 mins.	25 mins.	1 hr 47 minutes
2	20 mins.	25 mins.	30 mins.	7 mins.	25 mins.	1 hr 47 minutes
3	13 mins.	16 mins.	17 mins.	17 mins.	12 mins.	1 hr 15 minutes
4	26 mins.	23 mins.	25 mins.	10 mins.	15 mins.	1 hr 39 minutes

From this table it can be seen that by the third session, the time recommendations were being followed more closely. Whilst it may appear that the final session was exceptionally time consuming, this should be understood in relation to the original case that was presented. The case was extremely complex, and the presentation was concerned with four counselling sessions. In contrast, sessions one to three concerned a single counselling session.

With the exception of the third session, phases two and three tended to be the most time consuming. Particularly in the first two sessions, these phases became easily confused and premature entry into phase three was the general trend. As discussed, this was primarily due to the RFA statement/s not being clearly stated and/or understood by the group. From this, it

became clear that it was essential that the first two phases were focussed and clear, otherwise the remainder of the PGS session tended to be unfocussed and fragmented.

#### 4.2.6.2 The need for feedback

One of the particular features of the four PGS sessions was the need for consistent feedback, from peers, as well as from the researcher. Within each PGS session, and particularly in the initial stages of the group learning the PGS model, it appeared to be important for the group members to receive the presenter's feedback on their contributions. On a broader level, the group also requested, on many occasions, that I give them feedback on their general progress with the PGS model.

#### 4.2.6.3 Difficulties and attributes of the PGS model

The difficulties that the participants experienced with the PGS model appeared to be concerned with:

- Remaining with the original structure. Particularly in the initial stages of implementing the PGS model, it was important to ensure that the RFA statement/s were clearly stated and understood by each group member. If this did not occur, the remainder of the phases tended to be confused and unclear. Opinion giving and discussions also tended to arise, often not relevant to the presenter's requests.
- Questioning their colleagues over the decisions that they made regarding how the case was managed. The participants' questions tended to be case-content oriented. The group members appeared to be hesitant to question issues related to the process of counselling.
- Initially being able to apply the PGS framework to assist them with their case presentations. The PGS model appears to have an implicit assumption that users have an ability to apply their knowledge to a case in an abstract, thematic and not necessarily chronological manner.
- A strict 'round-robin' technique tended to be difficult to apply for the group. However, by the second session onwards, a more flexible and negotiated method had been adopted by the group, and by the final session, participants were inviting each other to ask their questions first.

- In the final two sessions, when group participants were facilitators, they found this role challenging and difficult to maintain. The requirement that the facilitator remain disengaged from discussions appeared to be the most challenging.

The positive attributes that emerged from the process included:

- The enormous support and encouragement that the presenter's received from the other group members. Without exception, phases two, four and five began with the group members commending the presenter.
- The groups' ability to act as a multi-disciplinary team and provide practical, useful input to each other.
- The forum also provided an opportunity for the group to discuss their concerns about, as well as gain clarity on, the Agency's policy issues and legal issues.

The aforementioned sub-section has primarily been concerned with my understanding of the groups' utilisation of the PGS model. The next sub-section provides an overview of the group participants' reported experiences and evaluation of various aspects of the PGS model.

#### 4.3 THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES AND EVALUATIONS

This second section of the findings is concerned with describing and thematising the participants' reports of their experiences of the PGS model. The information emanates from three sources, namely: the pre- and post-reflection phases of the PGS model, the focus group discussion and the questionnaire responses. The data sources are therefore varied, but all the material is drawn from the verbatim and/or written responses of the participants.

This section of the research findings is concerned with answering the research sub-question: 'How did the participants experience and evaluate the PGS model?'

In presenting these findings, more general issues raised by the participants will be foregrounded first, followed by the more specific facets.

##### 4.3.1 The groups' experience of the PGS model

The group were generally very enthusiastic about the potential value of the PGS model. The

reasons for this positive evaluation were numerous, but primarily revolved around recognising that a broader perspective on their cases was achieved through engaging with the PGS model. Support for this was gained by the comments from those who presented cases and included:

P/P8 *on a purely practical level, I presented a case ... and I found the input so helpful, and from such ... um ... so many angles and perspectives it gave me so much to think about*

P/P5 *when I was presenting ... I must say, although I thought I had covered everything, it became apparent that I didn't, so this is a very useful exercise ...*

Many of the non-presenting group members also recognised the utility of having multiple perspectives on one case. For example, one questionnaire reply and two comments follow:

*For me it was an exciting experience to be part of a "think tank" and I was surprised at the diversity of insights that we as a group came up with ...*

P4 *I just find it ... I just find it fascinating how different people take such different perspectives on the same case ...*

P9 *its just that its been so enriching ... for all of us ... I got the feeling that we are ten (presenters) here ... we multiplied (the presenter's) exercise by doing what we are doing ...*

Thus, the value of multiple inputs was emphasised. One participant expanded upon this notion of 'multiplication', stating:

P2 *I just thought that ... it was quite remarkable ... how everybody was able to bring up a different issue ... that I thought was really quite excellent ... because often one would think ... somebody else has already brought your point up ... but ... everybody was sort of able to bring a different view ... which is really very good ...*

Therefore, the group members repeatedly expressed the power of multiple perspectives, the sense that everyone had a contribution to make and the power of collaborative learning.

However, whilst the group repeatedly noted the positive contribution that such facets made in assisting the counsellors to engage with the substantive issues in their cases, they also noted that the PGS structure required a different and unfamiliar way of thinking about and presenting their cases. This was particularly related to the need to follow the specific phase requirements in order to progressively move through the phases of the PGS model. Three participants succinctly stated:

- P7 *its an ongoing process learning and learning process all the time ... (laughs)*
- P5 *I found it really hard to get into a type of 'process mode' of thinking - I realised that the model is there to help us get into this way of presenting and thinking ... but its really, really hard ...*
- P4 *the positive thing is that we have developed an ethos where we listen to each other and we're genuinely interested in each other ... but I think that we have also developed bad habits ... of not respecting the process, because in fact one needs to trust the process*

One participant, whilst confirming the difficulties encountered in 'process thinking', gave one reason for this phenomenon having been found difficult due to past habits:

- P8 *Its so easy to get stuck ... and its much more exciting to get into a discussion ...*

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties in remaining with the structure, some participants also noted that the structure enabled an egalitarian way of working in a group, for example:

- P4 *sometimes in the smaller groups ... it was inclined ... its often inclined to be the sort of ... more dominant people who take over ... but because of the structure ... everybody had a turn ...and was allowed to participate in a fair way ...*

A further theme was that the group acknowledged the affirming environment that characterized and accompanied the utilisation of the PGS model. Examples of this included:

- P/P8 *I was just devastated that they (the clients) did not come back ... but, you know ... I felt so supported and more confident ...*
- P5 *the most important thing is that we have come to realise that this is a safe environment for that process ... its been very, very supportive ... the safety as well ... to confront in safety ... we can agree to differ and there's no hard feelings ...*
- P5 *although we've been in this group for a few years now, what did impress me is that we all ... we all cared for each other ... and really, we could discuss any issues and people were protected ... if not by the facilitator ... by somebody else who jumped in ... and protected that person ...*
- P10 *the group and the method that was used here ... promoted confidence too ... I respect the other people's points of view, and they were affirming ... so I felt good about that part ... so this is what this type of group and method can do for other people ...*

The broader positive attributes of the PGS model, as well as the counsellors' need for such a forum was succinctly stated by one participant:

P4 *We are also getting more and more scary cases, so we need all the support and guidance that we can get I think*

Therefore, the participants reported that the positive attributes of the PGS model included recognising that a safe, affirming environment existed in which to present their cases and gain additional perspectives. The structure of the PGS model also provided the opportunity for an egalitarian process to unfold, although it was initially difficult to follow the various phase requirements.

#### 4.3.2 **Comparison of peer group supervision with past experiences of group supervision**

Throughout the four PGS model sessions, as well as in the additional phases of data collection, the participants made numerous references to their previous experiences of group supervision. Some of the more general comments made by the participants included:

P4 *in this peer supervision ... because we are all people from different backgrounds, we bring different skills to the whole process ...whereas when you've got ... just one person supervising us ... they may be a professional person and they may bring professional skill ... but the peer supervision brings something extra in that it gives the opportunity for each of those individuals sitting around here to chip in with their life experience or knowledge or skills*

P2 *I think that to some extent this process stops people from intellectualising ... its quite sort of feelings and um content based ... and I think that is pretty useful ... whereas when we have the other kind of supervision, you can get involved in some kind of theory around this ... and its much easier to theorise ...*

From these two comments, I believe that the counsellors were acknowledging, and validating, each others contributions to the process, even if, and particularly because, such contributions were not located in a formal, theoretical frame of reference. Rather, the peer contributions were possibly more relevant to the lay counsellors' familiar understandings. Therefore, even if the structure was initially hard to follow, the substantive issues that resulted from engaging in the PGS model resulted in contextually appropriate and practical knowledge being constructed.

When requested, in the focus group discussion, to provide a more specific comparison of the group member's experiences of peer group supervision and group supervision, a debate emerged regarding the characteristics of each forum of supervision. The debate revolved

around some members feeling that group supervision was an encounter where they felt less able to contribute their own opinions and included such comments as:

- P10 *well ... one of the things is .. um ... when (the group supervisor) is present ... we're all rather wary of jumping in ... because we have great respect for him ... not that we don't have respect for you too (all laugh) ... but also we're so aware of the enormous knowledge that he has that we lack ... that we really keep quiet most of the time ...*
- P5 *we hang onto his words ... as if they are pearls of wisdom ... I'm very aware that I've got to keep my little boundaries ... my little walls around me ... he's terribly skilled and we know that he's got this huge knowledge ... I actually feel much safer in this environment ... (in group supervision) I have this terrible awareness ... it makes you feel terribly self-conscious ...*

The above two participants thus evaluated themselves as lacking in knowledge and were aware of their perceived lack of knowledge, however this was not the case for all of the participants:

- P7 *I disagree - I'm quite willing to take a risk ... I think that he's very skilled and I don't feel intimidated by him ...*

This debate was concluded by one participant stating:

- P4 *If I can come back to the whole idea of the expert briefly, because in the peer counselling group that we've got here, we've got people who are terribly skilled in certain areas, and in fact who are experts in particular fields ... and yet, even 'the doctor' gets very little respect from us if we think that he's off line or we want to challenge him or something ... in the peer group, we are inclined to say 'do you think such and such' or 'what about this' ..., whereas with (the group supervisor) we do see him and treat him as the expert ... yet, if there are experts in the peer group we don't treat them as experts ...*

Regarding this debate, the group eventually 'agreed to disagree' about their varied experiences of group supervision, but most of the participants agreed that:

- P8 *its complementary isn't it ... its so complementary ... that form of supervision and then when we all get together and try out these skills ... I see this model as an exciting and empowering tool for counsellors which should however, and if possible, be complemented by further supervision by experts in the field of counselling*

Therefore, the complementary nature of having two forums of supervision was highlighted by this particular statement. A further insight into the different functions that the two forms of supervision fulfilled was illustrated by the following:

- P4 *the other thing that I had a concern about ... at one stage we were becoming too dependent on (the group supervisor). That type of supervision is quite dependency*



*based ... so I think it has been really good for us to go through this process ... because we needed to see that we could do something really constructive on our own ... not the same ... but really constructive ...*

This comment thus highlights the different learning process in which PGS enabled the participants to engage.

#### 4.3.3 The role of the facilitator

The pivotal role that the facilitator plays in the PGS model was continually referred to by the participants. The three central facets in the role of the facilitator included:

P10 *keeping the process on track ... to keep the process in mind when you're the facilitator becomes really important ...*

P8 *this makes me realise to make sure that the role of the facilitator is there ... for the presenter ... and to watch out for anything that might be too negative and confidence weakening ...*

P5 *I think the facilitator must be very careful to keep coming back to the Request for Assistance ... like clockwork ... keep on saying ... 'are we on track here?'*

The facilitator's role is therefore to keep the discussion from straying, to protect the presenter from negative comments and to keep the focus on the RFA statement/s.

There was, however, debate as to how much the facilitator should intervene in the group process. Whilst I played the role of facilitator in the first two PGS sessions, I attempted to keep my interventions to a minimum. I did, however, notice that the facilitators in the remaining two sessions tended to be more assertive in this role. Therefore, with one exception, the group agreed that facilitation needed to be a graded process, with the facilitator taking a progressively stricter stance as the group became more familiar with the PGS model.

P6 *by the same token as well ... when you're starting out ... you can ... you've got to do it very gently ... so maybe our way was a good way ... we got comfortable with it ... and at the end (by the fourth session) ... we started to come right ... the concepts came to us right at the end*

P8 *so it's a process in itself ... introducing ... takes time, and one mustn't expect from the outset, for it to go like clockwork*

However, one participant, in the questionnaire replies, felt that the facilitators needed to have kept a *tighter rein on the process, from the beginning*. It would therefore appear that the role



of the facilitator needs to be adjusted according to the group composition and atmosphere (for example, how much criticism is present), and how well the group is able to remain within the PGS structure.

The two group members who played the role of facilitator gave the following feedback:

P8 *I didn't enjoy it ... I hated it ... because I like jumping in and having my say ... but I think that this is a very, very useful role for everyone to play, especially for people who like to hold the floor ... learning to become a facilitator is a process, and its an uncomfortable process*

P6 *It went okay ... but ... I found that you're so aware of ... of this role that you're not really taking in much of the content ... for me I'd have to say you know "tonight I'm the facilitator, I'm not going to partake" ... you have to sort of step out of that ... and into a different role ...*

These two comments thus highlight the challenges in adopting the role of facilitator in the PGS model. A final, reassuring comment regarding those members who played the role of facilitator was:

P4 *we're all in a consciously unskilled place at the moment ... we need to remember that*

There was also the acknowledgement that despite the role being pivotal, other members of the group assumed the facilitator's responsibilities if necessary:

P5 *we could discuss any issues and people were protected ... if not by the facilitator, then by somebody else who jumped in and protected that person*

One participant also suggested that due to the centrality and importance of the facilitator, the role required more clarification and, if feasible, the facilitators need to be adequately trained and prepared to adopt the role.

#### **4.3.4 Group composition**

Regarding the size of the group, the respondents felt that ten had been an ideal number of participants, as on the rare occasion when one member could not attend, their absence did not interfere with the process. There was a recommendation that any group less than eight (six members, one presenter and one facilitator) would not be as useful and any member's absence would be felt.

The group generally conceded that the different levels of counselling experience in the group

was an asset to their experiences. They did, however, point out that their particular group had been together for many years and as such their experience levels were not overly dissimilar. However, there were also two suggestions that perhaps the comments from the more inexperienced members in the group could have been construed as “*inappropriate*”. Yet, such criticisms could also be useful for highlighting the need of more experienced and skilled members to exercise tolerance towards such possibly less experienced and skilled members in a group when in a forum of this kind.

In contrast to this concern, the majority of participants felt that the PGS model could be utilised in a productive way with less experienced counsellors. An example of this opinion was stated clearly in the questionnaire replies:

*This is a very appropriate model, and an ideal learning process, for the inexperienced counsellor*

There was, however, a cautionary conditional statement that was made by one participant, related to the abovementioned comment:

P4 *if you take the way that this group worked ... people seemed equally confident to present, to facilitate, and to generally be part of the group ... however ... other members of other groups may not initially be so confident to get involved ... and that maybe an important thing to consider ...*

There was also a suggestion that future groups could be formed that intentionally contained a mixture of levels of experience and skill. The success of such groups would, according to this suggestion, be strongly dependent on an experienced and skilled facilitator for the group, ensuring that the process was safely guided and contained. This may, however, detract from a core characteristic of peer group supervision, as the facilitator would be of a different level of expertise, relative to the other group members.

#### **4.3.5 The learning encounter**

All the respondents agreed that although many felt apprehensive and confused initially, as the experiential application of the PGS model to real cases progressed, the practice enabled greater clarity to be achieved. The benefits of this approach to learning was illustrated by the following comments in the questionnaire replies (in both cases, the emphasis is the respondent's own):

*The model was carefully and comprehensively explained, but it was in using it, with real case studies, that it became easier to understand how the model worked*

*This is a process whereby I learnt by doing it and greater insights and confidence came as I had more experience with the model*

The group also felt that the learning encounter had enabled them to realise and appreciate certain variables. These included an acknowledgement that despite similar levels of training within the Agency, an enormous diversity in personal insights and understandings had been clearly illustrated in each of the PGS sessions. The strong effect that the individual's personal contexts had in influencing the way they managed their cases was also noted. The need to exercise personal restraint and self discipline in the PGS forum, in order to give others the opportunity to contribute to the process was also commented upon by the group. Some of the participants also commented on their unfamiliarity with working with group processes in a structured forum. This learning experience gave the participants their first exposure to appreciating the complexity of the dynamics involved. These new insights were regarded as having made a positive contribution and having provided an enriching dimension to carrying out their roles in the Agency.

Two members also commented that the contemporary nature of the cases presented, and the variety of issues addressed within each session, would have general relevance in the future to them as counsellors.

#### **4.3.6 Issues requiring sensitivity**

There were a number of 'cautionary' suggestions from the group participants. Firstly, the majority of participants highlighted the importance of considering how the model is introduced to potential users of the PGS model. Such a sensitivity would include providing opportunities for each new group member to express, and have addressed, any anxieties they may have about utilising the PGS model. For example:

- P4 *I think that it has got to be introduced quite carefully ... it has to be like in the way it was introduced to this group - it was very appropriate and I think that's an important issue because um ... we already had um ... great respect and regard for (the group supervisor) and the way he deals with us ... and then ... he introduced it to us as a good idea and we were all open to the suggestion ...*

Then, a group member suggested that familiarity and comfort with issues pertaining to personal growth were important to realise and reiterate with potential users of the PGS model.

*I think that is a big criteria ... the whole idea of risking yourself ... in introducing this PGS model that is a very important issue ...*

An additional issue requiring sensitivity was the use of language in describing or explaining concepts. As one questionnaire reply stated:

*if you are going to mainly use this peer supervision with lay people, then maybe sometimes you need to be more obvious ... because often its not so obvious to groups of lay people who maybe don't have your (referring to psychologists') kind of knowledge ... so, maybe spelling things out too much would be erring on the right side ... rather than too little ...*

A fourth dimension requiring sensitivity was the term of 'supervision'. This was an issue that piqued my interest from the first post-session reflection phase when one participant asked:

P3 *what supervision was there ...this is peer group ... supervision ... not so ... so where is the supervision? ... because Jane is not supervising us ...*

In the focus group, this led to a further enthusiastic discussion and debate amongst the participants regarding the connotations of the term 'supervision'. The debate included such opinions as:

P5 *No its actually the wrong word ... supervision to me is: you have a supervisor whose in a superior position and they supervise that you're doing your job properly ... this idea of being 'supervised' is very, very prevalent in our society ...*

P8 *well, its balanced out by the term 'peer group' ... so it does give it a level of respect ...*

P4 *my meaning for 'supervision' is to see that a certain standard is maintained ... not in a hammer and whip manner ... but in an encouraging and empowering kind of manner ... and there really is a need to maintain standards ... but I do agree, for some people it does have a kind of 'whip' connotation ...*

From this debate, it became clear that the participants' own personal contexts and past experiences strongly influenced the connotation that each attached to the term 'supervision'.

Varied opinions such as:

P7 *its just semantics ...*

P5 *yes, but I think you've got to be careful that everyone understands it .. and what it actually does mean for them ...*

illustrate that acceptance of the term ‘supervision’ would be dependant on the term being deconstructed from the outset. This solution was proposed by one respondent in the questionnaire replies:

*‘Supervision’ is okay, provided this term is properly discussed and thrashed out in the beginning to give everyone a chance to think about the contexts in which it can be used, and the meanings that could be attached to the word.*

Alternative terms proposed by the participants included: *mutual reflection/interaction group*; *learning experience group* and *sharing group*.

#### 4.3.7 Applying the PGS model in a different context

It emerged from the focus group discussion and the questionnaire replies that some members of the group had implemented the PGS model in different contexts. These included with counsellors internal to the Agency, HIV/AIDS counsellors and with school counsellors. The feedback that the counsellors had received from these respective groups had been encouraging and positive. For example, two members had implemented the model within the Agency:

P8 *(P9) and I implemented it in our multi-cultural (internal) group consisting of both inexperienced and experienced counsellors. Group members partook in the process and were very enthusiastic and engaged in the process fully. We subsequently repeated the process at another meeting with the same group, and the groups’ response showed greater insight and confidence with the process ... it was so positive ... they were a little concerned ... and a bit excited about the fact that everybody had a turn ... everybody had a turn and participated in a fair way ...*

and regarding the HIV/AIDS counsellors’ group:

P4 *this particular group had never met before ... and the peer supervision idea was utilised as a way of introducing and structuring the group ...*

This comment therefore suggests that the PGS model may have another area of utility, in that new groups can be introduced to the model as a means of providing a collaborative task to effectively ‘break the ice’ with participants unknown to each other.

#### 4.3.8 Summary

This second section of these findings intended to answer the research sub-question: ‘How did

the participants experience and evaluate the PGS model?’.

In summary, the group reported that their experiences of the PGS model had generally been positive, and the potential benefits that the PGS model offered them, in dealing with their client cases, was extensive. The reasons given were varied, but centred around the practically useful and relevant multiple perspectives that emerged, as well as acknowledging the importance of the supportive and affirming environment that the PGS model encourages. Some members offered some suggestions for adapting the model, as well as offering some suggestions for sensitivity in applying the PGS model. This section will therefore conclude with some suggestions for adapting the model, directly derived from the participants’ reported experiences and evaluations of the PGS model.

#### **4.3.9 Recommendations for adapting the PGS model**

A number of recommendations involve the need for enhanced clarity from the outset of implementing the PGS model. Such suggestions included:

- Visual aids to enhance the initial presentation and better facilitation of the PGS model;
- The wording and visual appearance of the handout to be simplified and clarified;
- The RFA statements need to be simplified and the concepts more clearly defined and explained. ‘Case management’ could be added to the first RFA category;
- The group reiterated the utility of feedback and suggested that more opportunities for feedback were provided for in the original PGS model structure;
- Some of the questionnaire respondents felt that a useful precursor to implementing the model could have been to have an experienced group actually model it for potential trainees;
- An emphasis in the introduction to the PGS model that group members need to find as many opportunities to apply and practice the model;
- Most of the participants felt that more explanation of the PGS model should have been done at the outset of the implementation of the model.

With regard to some of the above suggestions, one participant sent a copy of a more ‘user

friendly' alternative to the Appendix A handout (Appendix G). This will be more fully discussed in section 5.5.2.

In this chapter, the data has been analysed, and the participants' utilisation and experiences of the PGS model have been discussed. Many of the emergent ideas will be further explored in the following chapter, interwoven with the relevant literature.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

One of the rationales of this research was my concern regarding the paucity of literature available pertaining to supervisory structures available for ‘human service workers’ in a South African context. Such a domain would include, but not be limited to, counsellors practising in a wide variety of contexts, with varying levels of qualification, including teachers, police, clergy, doctors and nurses (Orford, 1992). In attempting to address this paucity of literature, the aim of this research was to investigate how a group of such workers, namely lay counsellors, providing a voluntary counselling service from a national South African non-governmental organisation, utilised and experienced one form of supervisory structure, namely a PGS model.

This chapter will focus on linking the themes that emerged in Chapter Four with the literature presented in Chapter Two. Initially the participants’ general experiences of the learning encounter will be addressed. This will be followed by more specifically reviewing the positive attributes, as well as the difficulties, encountered by the participants in utilising the PGS model. Some considerations for the future implementation of the PGS model will then be discussed and recommendations will be made for adapting the PGS model. The chapter will conclude by reflecting upon my position as researcher in this study.

When applicable, additional literature not referred to previously will also be utilised in exploring some of the themes that emerged in this research when answering the research question: ‘How did a group of lay counsellors utilise and experience a structured peer group supervision (PGS) model?’.

#### **5.2 THE LEARNING ENCOUNTER**

Schon (1983) contends that optimal learning needs to occur in a context characterised by “freedom to learn by doing in a setting relatively low in risk” (p. 17). Without exception, each participant acknowledged the utility of ‘learning by doing’ in a safe, affirming



environment, in spite of finding experiential learning initially challenging.

The benefits of utilising direct, concrete experience in learning encounters is propounded by many theorists, as noted in Chapter Two. However, theorists such as Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), Edwards and Mercer (1987), McLellan (1996) and Schon (1983) expand upon this and provide an account of the reflective processes that are a central, yet often overlooked, component in an experiential learning encounter.

According to Boud *et al.* (1985) “reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations” (p. 23). Whilst individual activity is emphasised in this definition, the authors repeatedly note that social reflection, as performed in groups, has equal relevance. Boud *et al.* (1985), together with Edwards and Mercer (1987) believe that assisting the learner to become “conscious of his own mental processes” (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 92), through encouraging reflective thinking, should be one of the core tasks of educators.

Hillerbrand (1989) defines such metacognitive knowledge as “knowledge about one’s cognitive processing, including awareness of one’s thinking resources and capacities” (pp. 293/4) and suggests various means of attaining such a level of cognitive ability. A central means of facilitating such a skill is through monitoring and articulating one’s thoughts when engaged in a task. The benefits of such actions are greatly enhanced by having others, such as peers, acting as additional sources and contributors in the process.

In a similar vein to Gilbert (1997), Boud *et al.* (1985) contend that opportunities need to be provided in the learning encounter that make explicit tacit knowledge, or those taken-for-granted assumptions that various parties in the engagement may have. Schon (1983) uses the term ‘reflection-in-action’ to elucidate the reciprocity between doing and thinking about one’s experiences simultaneously. These theorists would therefore support the amendment to the PGS model, wherein phases were created for pre- and post-session reflection exercises from the second PGS session onwards.

The participants also concurred with Brown, J.S. *et al.*’s (1989), Mercer’s (1995) and Merriam

and Brockett's (1997) emphases on providing tasks that are personally relevant and meaningful in order to optimise the sustainability of the knowledge constructed in the learning encounter. The case presentations utilised in the PGS model were actual cases with which the counsellors either had worked or were still working. Hence, such cases were "authentic practices ... (and therefore) ... continuous with their everyday knowledge" (Brown, J.S. *et al.*, 1989, pp. 37/8). Merriam and Brockett (1997) emphasise that adult learners in particular need to be exposed to material that is reasonably familiar and to which new concepts can be applied and integrated with relative ease.

Regarding Tharp's (1993, in Daniels, 1996) seven means of assisting learners in progressing through the ZPD (section 2.3.1), I believe that all of these were relevant in this research undertaking. Regarding the first concept, namely modelling, there was a recommendation from some participants that it would have been useful to have the PGS structure modelled to them by those more experienced with the PGS model, prior to engaging with the model themselves. Whilst the entire PGS model was not modelled to the group in this particular instance, in adopting the role of facilitator, I modelled, to a degree, a core role in the PGS model. Although it was negotiated before the PGS model was implemented that I would only perform this role for one session, the group requested that I continue to play the facilitator in the second session. However, by the end of the second session, there were volunteers to play the role for the third and fourth sessions respectively. This particular issue also relates to what Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976, in Greenfield, 1984) refer to as 'scaffolding'. It appeared that it was only by the end of the second session that certain members of the group felt confident enough to remove this particular assistance or 'scaffolding' and attempt to facilitate the process themselves.

The importance of ensuring that feedback (the second means of assistance) is provided at regular and consistent intervals, even when it is not specifically requested, was illustrated in this research. The beneficial role of feedback in the learning process was repeatedly highlighted by the group, who suggested that more opportunities for feedback be created to monitor, direct and thus progressively enhance their learning experiences. Feedback assisted in guiding the group within the actual PGS model phases, as well as providing them with a sense of what the next phase required of them.

Contingency management, the third means, was illustrated by the participants themselves. At various intervals, different participants would recognise that a PGS session phase has been particularly useful and productive and would acknowledge and validate such progression. The groups' support of such an acknowledgement could be considered as a reinforcing, social reward (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

Fourthly, with regard to instructing, Gallimore and Tharp (1990) state that this has value initially in introducing the PGS model, but is thereafter used very little, except where participants perhaps convey information to each other in instances where they have developed expertise. As discussed in section 4.3.3 whilst I perhaps did not instruct the group sufficiently from the outset in my role as facilitator, the group agreed that the degree of instruction needs to be adapted according to each specific group. This would include considering such facets such as the presence or absence of trust, cohesiveness and sensitivity to criticism. More instruction may be required in groups whose members are unfamiliar to each other and where the atmosphere is characterised by criticism.

Concerning questioning, I used many 'assistance questions' in the first two sessions with the participants. Such questions would be framed as subtle directing cues. In the later sessions, the participants themselves were beginning to use such questions, particularly when group members thought that the facilitator was not guiding the process sufficiently. These assisted the group to remain with the task requirements of each phase of the PGS model. I therefore believe that such cues had become internalized by such participants as they became increasingly familiar with the PGS model.

Regarding the sixth means of assistance, cognitive structuring, Hillerbrand claims that any learning encounter should consist of opportunities whereby "cognitive strategies must be made overt" (1989, p. 294) in the initial phases of learning. This is recommended so that learners may progressively develop and internalize their own cognitive self-monitoring strategies. Throughout the four PGS sessions the participants were actively encouraged to voice their concerns, queries and opinions. By the final two PGS sessions, group members were answering each others' queries and concerns regarding the structure of the PGS model.

Finally, I believe that the PGS model itself is a form of what Tharp (1993, in Daniels, 1996)

refers to as ‘task structuring’. The PGS model provides a framework for guiding thinking and acting in a task-focussed, directed manner. Whilst the structure of the PGS model does provide consistency, one of the central contentions of this research is that the way different groups of counsellors make use of this structure is likely to vary according to a vast array of contextual variables. These would include education and training, expectations and prior experience of learning encounters, as well as broader socio-cultural variables (Brown, J.S. *et al.*, 1989; Holloway, 1992; Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

Many elements of collaborative learning, as espoused by Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989) and Bruffee (1999) have been practically demonstrated in this research. Regarding Brown, J.S. *et al.*’s (1989) four strategies that promote collaborative learning (section 2.3.2), the PGS model is structured in order to promote the first strategy, namely collective problem solving. Additionally, from the outset, opportunities were purposefully created that encouraged the participants to negotiate, socially interact and realise the benefits of interdependence. One example of this was in the PGS sessions when group members would take over the role of facilitator, if they felt that the group were not being sufficiently task-oriented. By alternating the presenter and facilitator, the participants were also provided with an opportunity to implement the second strategy, displaying multiple roles. Regarding confronting misconceptions and ineffective strategies, the third strategy, participants were actively encouraged to stop the process, at any time, to seek clarity and/or discuss their queries and concerns. Collaborative work skills, the final strategy, are also implicit in the PGS model, wherein participative and turn-taking skills are required in order to proceed through the phases. Further elements of collaborative learning will be discussed in the following section.

### 5.3 ATTRIBUTES OF THE PGS MODEL

The participants were very positive about the potential of the PGS model for assisting them in their roles as voluntary lay counsellors. Regarding the case presentations, the participants acknowledged that numerous issues that were raised in the presentations also had relevance for them when counselling clients, albeit in different circumstances and contexts. Todd and Pine’s (1968) contention that peer group supervision has the potential for peers to learn “through other members’ presentations new ideas for dealing with similar problems” (p. 95) is therefore consistent with this acknowledgement. This was primarily due to the

contemporary nature of the issues that were raised in the case presentations, including HIV issues and debates, single parenthood, cross cultural counselling, religious differences and the effects such variables had on clients' relationships.

The potential for peer supervision groups to offer moral support, reassurance and assist members to overcome an often overwhelming sense of responsibility was theoretically addressed by Hare and Frankena (1972), Meyerstein (1977), Todd and Pine (1968) and Winstead *et al.* (1974). This potential was particularly relevant for this particular group of lay counsellors. As noted in section 4.3.1 one participant remarked that the cases with which the lay counsellors were engaging were quantitatively increasing, as well as becoming qualitatively more demanding and challenging. The applicability and relevance of partaking in a group where counsellors share similar concerns and challenges therefore has relevance for a South African context. Such issues will be further addressed in section 6.3.

Additionally, the original intention of the PGS model was to offer counsellors an opportunity to gain insight, alternative perspectives and guidance from each other. This would usually occur after a counselling session with a client. However, this particular group of counsellors found that the PGS model could be utilised for a number of alternative purposes in addition to post-session supervision. Ongoing case supervision was one such example. The presenter in the fourth PGS session had conducted four counselling sessions with her clients, and was expecting to continue the process, so the group provided some suggestions for future directions in counselling. In the focus group discussion and in the questionnaire replies various group members also discussed how they had utilised the PGS model for the purpose of structuring a new group and for the training of counsellors internal to the Agency. Therefore, this research provided an opportunity to practically extend the functions and purposes of peer group supervision as espoused by Greenburg *et al.* (1985), Schreiber and Frank (1983), Stoltenberg (1981), Todd and Pine (1968) and Winstead *et al.* (1974).

On a practical level, the differing background contexts of the counsellors also promoted the emergence of a form of multi-disciplinary consultation team. A kaleidoscope of perspectives, including medical, educational, legal and ethical issues arose in every PGS session, giving a broad and varied scope to each case presented. In this regard, Gomersall (1997) and Todd and

Pine (1968) state that a potential benefit of this forum of supervision was the generation of a diverse, eclectic understanding and appreciation of various situations. The PGS sessions also provided an opportunity for clarification of the Agency's policies pertaining to each case that was presented.

More specifically and concurring with Gomersall (1997) and Todd and Pine (1968), many of the participants discussed how the PGS model has assisted them to realise the often widely diverse understandings and approaches to various facets that each participant had in the cases presented. In spite of most of the participants having worked together for many years, the unique appreciation of each other's contributions resulted in enhanced peer respect, as suggested by Hare and Frankena (1972) and Meyerstein (1977). Therefore, the power of interdependent and collaborative learning, was crystallised through utilising the PGS model. Whilst there was, at times, disagreement on various perspectives, the contentious issues were negotiated and debated amongst the group members, in the form of 'collaborative conversations', working together on "focussed problems (often) with no certain resolution" (Bruffee, 1999, p. xii).

Additionally, the counsellors were able to refer to, and assist each other to locate, various practical resources in the community of which the counsellors and/or clients could make use. These included: HIV/AIDS resources in the local community and in other parts of South Africa, medical sources that could be contacted for information on various drugs and the prescription and side-effects thereof, contact details for various support groups in the community and surrounding areas, as well as other members of the Agency who could be contacted for inter-cultural and inter-religious information.

The absence of evaluation in such a forum was commented upon by Benshoff (1993), Kadushin (1992), Meyerstein (1977) and Winstead *et al.* (1994). The participants acknowledged that were able to challenge each other, without fear of reprisal, due to this particular characteristic in the group. As discussed in section 4.3.2, two participants felt intimidated and self-conscious in group supervision, yet had no such reservations in this particular forum. The findings of this research therefore illustrated that some participants preferred and felt more comfortable in a context where the presence of an 'expert' was completely removed.

In section 4.3.2 the group also confirmed Benshoff's (1993) belief that peer group supervision has the potential for promoting a sense of egalitarianism. According to the participants, even the members who could have been regarded as 'experts' in the group (for example 'the doctor') were confronted and challenged if the other group members felt it was necessary. Therefore, regarding differing levels of skill and experience in groups, this particular forum of supervision also has the potential to 'homogenise' the group (Schreiber & Frank, 1983). An enhanced sense of egalitarianism was also achieved due to the PGS model's structure that promotes equality in participation. This need to ensure that each participant has an equal opportunity to participate in the construction of knowledge and generation of ideas was emphasised by Gilbert (1997) and repeatedly acknowledged by the group participants.

The participants repeatedly observed that the non-threatening atmosphere, characterised by the support and affirmation from their peers, had resulted in an enhanced sense of confidence for both the presenters and for the other participants. This was attributed to the fact that participants affirmed each other's approaches to respective cases despite their different viewpoints. Some participants also felt that the affirmation that they had received in the PGS sessions led to a greater confidence in participating in the group supervision sessions. With regard to this aspect, Hillerbrand (1989) states that one of the benefits of such a forum is the potential for increasing group members' perceptions of self-efficacy. From a more general perspective, the ideas of Benshoff (1993), Gomersall (1997), Hare and Frankena (1972), Meyerstein (1977), Todd and Pine (1968) and Winstead *et al.* (1974) are also relevant, in that peer group supervision has the potential to offer collegial support, assisting counsellors in overcoming a sense of isolation and overwhelming responsibility in their everyday practices.

Furthermore, the 'essential initial phase' that Winstead *et al.* (1974) and Greenburg *et al.* (1985) identified in their peer supervision groups was evident. However, while these authors found that peer support and affirmation mainly characterised the initial phase of their peer groups, in this particular research group of lay counsellors, the support and affirmation continued throughout, and across, all of the four PGS sessions. I would, however, agree with these authors that such an atmosphere was of vital importance in containing the increasing levels of confrontation and challenge that progressively developed in the PGS sessions.

Borders (1991) suggests that many of the potential disadvantages to working with groups



(such as interpersonal rivalry, competitiveness and other destructive dynamics) can be overcome by providing a structure within which the group operates. Whilst the participants acknowledged that following the PGS model structure and the phase requirements did initially present a challenge, the flexibility that the PGS model offered them was also noted and appreciated. They particularly valued the inclusion of the fifth phase that allowed for discussion and debate amongst the participants. The adjustments that were made by the group to the 'round robin' technique, wherein the group used their own variation in negotiating taking turns for asking questions, was also evidence of the flexibility that the PGS model offered this particular group.

From my perspective, the flexibility in the PGS model also allowed me the opportunity to include additional phases for reflection, which I do not believe had any adverse effect on the original structure of the PGS model. In fact, such an addition to the PGS model has been theoretically supported by Boud *et al.* (1985), Edwards and Mercer (1987), McLellan (1996) and Schon (1983). Particularly when groups are unfamiliar with the PGS model, the necessity of creating additional phases for reflection, in order to address any queries that the group members may have, needs to be considered (see Appendix F).

Two of the participants also commented on the advantages of working with a case, but from a distance and thus, different perspective. These participants commented that this 'removed perspective' assisted them to appreciate the case from many different angles, and also gave them the freedom to make a variety of suggestions, that may not have been apparent to them had they been directly involved in the case. The benefits proposed by Bernard and Goodyear (1991) wherein group members are provided with direct and vicarious learning opportunities therefore has relevance.

A final positive attribute commented upon by some participants in their questionnaire replies concerned the novel dynamic and learning experience provided by working in a structured group format, such as that provided by the PGS model. Benshoff (1993), Carroll (1996), Kadushin (1992), Hawkins and Shohet (1989) and Holloway and Johnston (1985) all contend that working in such a forum has the potential to enhance group members appreciation and understanding of group interaction skills.



In summary, a number of positive attributes of the PGS model have thus been identified. Counsellors are provided with the opportunity to appreciate and validate each others' contributions. The PGS model encourages acknowledging the rich, diverse perspectives that each participant can contribute to the encounter. Many participants described this as a revelation, as the majority of the members of this particular group had been working together for many years. The support and affirmation that characterised each PGS session resulted in an enhanced sense of efficacy for each participant. The atmosphere of support and caring also provided moral support to each presenter. The practical skills and ideas that emerged from the PGS sessions were relevant to each member of the group. Working in a structured group format also provided the participants with an additional learning experience in group interaction skills.

The participants also identified a number of challenges and difficulties that they had encountered in utilising the PGS model and these will now be discussed.

#### 5.4 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN UTILISING THE PGS MODEL

During the utilisation of the PGS model, the participants appeared to be having particular difficulty in three areas. These difficulties were identified as adherence to the structure, the adoption of the role of facilitator and problems with the RFA statement/s.

##### 5.4.1 Adherence to the PGS model structure

Firstly, regarding the difficulties in following the structure outlines, this was particularly evident in phase two, namely the questioning period and identification of focus. As discussed under 4.2.2.1, it appeared as if the next phase could not be entered into until the participants felt that all the case content details had been fully discussed. In the focus group one participant felt that there were two central reasons for this phenomenon and both related to institutional and thus, contextual factors.

The first suggestion was that the counsellors' training was such that they were familiar with obtaining as much information from the client from the first counselling session, and that *maybe we are repeating that sort of model in this process ... then maybe we should be trained ... re-trained.*

It would appear therefore, that the counsellors' 'everyday practices' (Lave, 1988, p. 14) and familiar ways of thinking were grounded in an atheoretical, pragmatic way of thinking, with concrete and chronological constituents dominating the counsellors' ways of thinking about their cases. In contrast to this, utilising the PGS model requires a cognitive shift into a more abstract, reflectively-oriented way of linking patterns and themes when presenting counselling cases (Akhurst, personal communication, March, 2002). Oberholzer's (1979) contentions regarding taking cognisance of adult learners' tendency to make sense of new material by initially attempting to assimilate it into previous, familiar ways of understanding are also pertinent in this regard.

A recurrent theme that emerged throughout the research process, supported by all the members of the group, was that being able to think and apply such thoughts in a process-oriented manner, was a foreign and challenging way of approaching their cases. One participant therefore recommended that future groups should be taught 'how to process think' in that *the people did not understand the concepts ... the concepts of process and/or versus content ... if you're clear on those concepts, then its very difficult to go off ... at different angles ... I think you should teach people the whole concept of process at the beginning ....* This was the case despite having a framework, namely the PGS model, to direct this particular form of thinking. Greenburg *et al.* (1985) and Todd and Pine (1968) also recommend that peer group participants should have had prior exposure to and experience with process skills. However, I believe that whilst this may be an ideal prerequisite for PGS membership, in a South African context this may not be relevant or appropriate. Primarily due to skill and personnel deficiencies, as well as existing resources being stretched to the maximum, such foreknowledge would, indeed, be a luxury.

I believe that Lave's (1988) term 'community of practice', as discussed under section 3.8.2 by Gilbert (1997) is of particular theoretical relevance. Within the counsellors 'community of practice', their cognitive affordances required them to be pragmatic and content/information intensive in order to carry out their roles as voluntary counsellors. It was therefore interesting to analyse how, due to these context-specific affordances, the counsellors understood, negotiated and constructed the activity, namely engaging with PGS model. I therefore would agree with Gilbert (1998) that this learning encounter enabled the counsellors' tacit knowledge to become more explicit in the process.

Additionally, not only was the counsellor's local, tacit knowledge made more explicit in the learning encounter, but so was mine. My own 'community of practice' has essentially been embedded in a formal, tertiary context wherein, I believe, the ability to think in an abstract, theoretical manner is taken for granted. Moreover, my assumption that others can automatically think in a process manner, that is, by linking and abstracting themes in a progressive, not necessarily chronological way, was therefore explicitly challenged in this particular research undertaking. I do however, believe that not only was this an assumption of mine in entering into the process, but it is also a dominant, implicit assumption contained in the PGS model as a whole. In particular, each phase requires a set of sub-tasks to be accomplished in order to proceed to the subsequent phase and many of these sub-tasks require an abstract, reflective mode of thought (Akhurst, personal communication, March, 2002).

Furthermore, Hillerbrand's (1989) distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge has relevance. It appears as if the participants' factual knowledge (declarative) was dominant over their procedural knowledge, defined as "knowledge of cognitive actions ... (t)hat is, how to engage in a particular task ..." (p. 294). Therefore, the dominance of and familiarity with, a factual, chronological way of applying their knowledges may also have been influential in the way the counsellors engaged with their cases.

The second reason given for the group becoming embroiled with content details was, according to one participant, *we need to have all the information because we don't ... we actually don't know ... if the client will ever come back again*. This particular institutional factor, and frustration, was repeatedly discussed by the participants.

Holloway (1992) states that "the influence of organisational variables on supervision has rarely been studied" (p.203). I have reiterated throughout this research that contextual factors must be taken into consideration in order to appreciate how knowledge is socially constructed. This is supported by Carroll (1996) who states that systems theory and systemic approaches are most useful in understanding "the role and effect that institutional structures, roles and responsibilities and climate have on actual client work" (p. 120). Moreover, contextual influences on various levels need to be considered. Such levels would include the previous learning histories of the participants (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Oberholzer, 1979), institutional/organisational factors, as well as the broader socio-economic and cultural context

in which the organisation operates (Brown, J.S. *et al.*, 1989; Holloway, 1992). Regarding the particular Agency from which the lay counsellors operate, the client-base is varied, but many clients originate from lower socio-economic environments, where difficulties in access to the Agency need to be considered and the possibility of counselling as an unknown entity must not be disregarded.

It was noted (section 4.2.2.1) that questions in phase two of the PGS model were mainly content based, and not many questions addressed the way the case was managed by the presenter/counsellor. Greenburg *et al.*'s (1985) and Winstead *et al.*'s (1974) notion of this being a 'transient' facet in group formation is appropriate. The initial PGS sessions were predominantly characterised by support, advice giving, personal opinions and general discussion. However, as the PGS sessions progressed, the group members seemed increasingly able to follow the PGS model structure. This was accompanied by the participants challenging and confronting each other, including questioning the presenters regarding their management of the case.

#### 5.4.2 Adopting the role of facilitator

The second area of challenge for the participants concerned the facilitation of the PGS sessions. Those group members who adopted the role of facilitator, in the last two sessions, expressed the difficulties that they had encountered in the role. In the focus group discussion, one participant requested that the facilitator's role be amended to allow for participation in the various phases. However, as the facilitator in session four outlined, he had difficulty in following the process and attempting to keep track of the phase requirements, so participating in the group process and discussions simultaneously would have been very difficult. In adopting a multi-faceted role to the process (keeping track of the time and keeping participants focussed, as well as protecting the presenter from criticism), should the facilitator also partake in the discussions, some of this meta-perspective may be diminished (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989).

As with Greenburg *et al.*'s (1985) and Todd and Pine's (1968) suggestion that group members should have had prior exposure to process skills, these authors make the same argument for group facilitation skills. Again, however, within a South African context, the



likelihood of counsellors having such skills is questioned. Whilst such exposure and skills would be enormously beneficial, it is speculated that not many participants would have had the luxury of such experiences, many not having trained full-time in counselling skills.

Regarding the recommendation by various authors and participants that users of the PGS model need to be familiar and experienced with both process and facilitation skills, a debate may exist around 'learning by doing' versus 'the bland transmission of information'. Authors such as Greenburg *et al.* (1985) and Todd and Pine (1968) would advocate the prior teaching of such concepts. However, Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989), Edwards and Mercer (1987), Gilbert (1997 and 1998), Mercer (1995) and Vygotsky (1978) and would certainly emphasise the power and enhanced sustainability of the participants 'learning by doing'. For a South African context, this may certainly be more applicable and relevant but would depend on the specific context in terms of availability of time and personnel to administer such training.

#### **5.4.3 Difficulties with the RFA statement/s**

The third area of challenge for the counsellors was with the RFA statements, particularly the way they were worded on the handout (Appendix A). As outlined under section 4.2.1.2 many of the presenters began by stating that 'skill development' was the issue they required assistance with. This finding is consistent with Wilbur *et al.*'s (1991) practical application of their SGS model, wherein they found that 'novice' users of their model also tended to categorise the assistance required under 'skill development'. It was only after either greater familiarity with the SGS model, or enhanced skill training, that the group participants began to utilise the remaining two categories of RFA statements, namely 'personal growth' and 'integrative issues'. However within this particular group of lay counsellors, in three of the sessions it became apparent that there were additional issues with which the presenters required assistance, that could not be succinctly categorised in the three categories presented. Many of the participants also queried the appropriateness of the language used on the handout given to them from the outset, claiming that the language was too complex. This was particularly regarding the third RFA statement, namely 'integrative issues'.

Once again, an implicit assumption of the PGS model is that the local knowledges of the counsellors (and any future users of the model) would include familiarity with such

vocabulary and psychological terminology. In this regard, the ideas of Hillerbrand (1989) are relevant, wherein he states that “novices use language ... that is more understandable by other novices” (p. 294). Therefore, language use needs to be adapted to those who are expected to apply such concepts in their everyday practices.

These aforementioned issues, particularly the latter point, namely the necessity of simplifying the language usage in such forums of supervision, have provided some indications and recommendations for future applications of the PGS model, which will be now be discussed.

## 5.5 FUTURE APPLICATIONS OF THE PGS MODEL

One of the recommendations made by a participant in the first PGS session was that future users of the PGS model should be encouraged from the outset to find as many opportunities to apply and practice the model. The advantages of this are theoretically supported by Brown, J.S. *et al.* (1989) who emphasise that such exercises could result in multiple roles being adopted (discussed under section 5.2). McLellan (1996) also advocates for the multiple practice of skills, stating that “repeated practice serves to test, refine, and extend skills into a web of increasing expertise in a social context of collaboration and reflection” (1996, p. 11). This section will therefore provide an overview of such opportunities that the participants had created for themselves.

By the fourth PGS session, two members of the group had already applied the PGS model in a different context, namely with a multicultural group, consisting of inexperienced and experienced counsellors, within the Agency. Therefore, Marks and Hixon’s (1986) idea of building and strengthening an internal support system, through transferring the skills learnt from this PGS model to other groups internal to the organisation, is relevant. The group members that implemented the PGS model with different counsellors found that teaching others enhanced their understanding of the model. By transferring what the counsellors had learned into a different context, opportunities were created for them to practice and hone the skills that they had acquired through utilising the PGS model. The benefits of McLellan’s (1996) notion of ‘multiple practice’ were therefore practically demonstrated.

However, contrary to the postulations of Carroll (1996) and Marks and Hixon (1986) these

particular counsellors reported that the cultural diversity and varied levels of experience in their groups were actually beneficial to the learning encounter. The contentions of Bernard and Goodyear (1992) are therefore appropriate in this instance, wherein homogeneity in cultural backgrounds is undesirable, “especially if the clientele being served is culturally diverse” (p. 74). As the Agency’s clientele emanate from a variety of socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, this is of particular relevance.

In the focus group discussion and in the questionnaire responses, approximately two and ten months respectively after the final PGS session, other members had also had the opportunity to apply the PGS model in a variety of contexts. Such contexts included HIV/AIDS counsellors (many of who had never had any exposure to any form of supervision) and school counsellors. The feedback that the counsellors had received from these contexts had been positive. These particular encounters also enabled additional considerations regarding applying the PGS model to be elucidated and will therefore be briefly discussed.

#### **5.5.1 Issues requiring sensitivity**

The application and implementation of the PGS model, by some participants, enabled some cautionary considerations to be illustrated regarding any future applications of the PGS model. Firstly, the way that the PGS model is introduced to prospective groups needs to be carefully considered. As one participant stated, it is important that the group participants are fully informed about the benefits, as well as potential risks, of engaging with the PGS model. Such risks may include exposing one’s vulnerabilities to peers. As discussed in section 2.2.3.1, Hunt and Issacharoff (1975) state that it is important not to underestimate the anxieties some counsellors may feel regarding the need to expose their concerns, as well as revealing their possible limitations, in counselling others. Secondly and relatedly, familiarity and comfort with issues relating to personal growth need to be discussed and negotiated with potential users of the PGS model. Thirdly and finally, the concept of ‘supervision’ needs to be discussed with potential PGS participants. It may need to be explained that such a forum of supervision does not contain an hierarchical structure, but that each member is given equal recognition and opportunity to partake in the process.

An additional consideration that may require explication with potential users of the PGS

model is that a fairly high level of trust is necessary to be built between group members in order to maintain the continuity and sustainability of such a forum of supervision (Akhurst, May, 2002, personal communication).

The application of the PGS model into different contexts also enriched some of the adaptations suggested by the participants in section 4.3.9. These will now be elaborated.

### 5.5.2 Recommendations for adaptations

These recommendations were constructed and negotiated with the participants in various stages of the research process. The co-construction of such recommendations were therefore a result of a 'joint meeting of minds', wherein "joint activity generates new emergent goals, action and technologies which draw on both the communities of practices" Gilbert (1997, p. 290). Whilst the participants made some recommendations for adaptations to the PGS model in the focus group discussion and questionnaire replies (outlined under section 4.3.9) and each issue has been theoretically addressed in the previous sections, these will now be briefly reiterated.

- Clarity needs to be provided regarding process thinking due to the obvious difficulty the participants were experiencing with applying a process-oriented way of thinking about their cases.
- The role of the facilitator needs to be clarified and emphasised more.
- Initial clarity may have been enhanced by the PGS model being modelled to the group by those more familiar and experienced in utilising the model.
- As the group found feedback to be particularly useful in assisting them to engage with the PGS model, more opportunities need to be created for feedback.
- The RFA statement/s need to be clarified and simplified, relevant to the level of counsellors utilising the PGS model. Additional categories could also be added. For example, 'case management' could be included under RFA statement No. 1.



- RFA statement/s should be stated prior to the case presentation, so that such facets could guide and focus participants' thinking from the beginning.
- The concept of 'supervision' may need to be deconstructed and negotiated from the outset with potential users of the PGS model. Adaptations to the term may need to be considered.
- Additional phases for reflection, such as the pre- and post-session reflection phases that were added in this research context should be considered for future applications of the PGS model, particularly in the initial learning stages.

Two additional recommendations are also particularly relevant and they will be discussed in more detail than the aforementioned.

- Cognitive heuristics in the form of visual aids may have also assisted the group to grasp the PGS model more thoroughly in the initial learning stage. Relatedly, the group also felt that the handout (Appendix A) they were given should have been graphically clearer (that is, more spacing and bolding of letters).

In meeting these recommendations, Appendix F provides an alternative to Appendix A, wherein diagrams are incorporated that visually represent what each phase requires of the group participants. If appropriate, in the initial learning stage the individual diagrams could be enlarged and displayed to the group participants in order to provide visual clarity of each phase requirement.

- The importance of simplifying the language used on the handout could also assist lay counsellors utilising the model in the future.

One participant forwarded me a copy of what they regarded as a more 'user friendly' example (Appendix 'G').

I believe that the inclusion of such an example with his/her questionnaire reply, illustrates this particular participant's level of motivation and commitment to the use of the PGS model. It

also illustrates the deepened understanding of the PGS model that this participant has gained through using the PGS model in the groups internal to the Agency. This particular alternative maintains the core structure of Akhurst's (2000) PGS model, yet the language is further simplified. An additional amendment is that the facilitator is invited to contribute in the optional discussion phase (phase five of the PGS model).

## 5.6 RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS

Consistent with this entire research undertaking and the PGS model, my role as researcher was essentially an evolving, dynamic one and this section will primarily be concerned with explicating the 'reflexivity' (Lax, 1992) of the research process.

From the outset of this research undertaking, my supervisor and I agreed that it was important to provide an outline of the PGS model to the participants, but the intention was that the participants would 'learn by doing' in order to gradually take over "an increasing proportion of the initiative, responsibility, control, direction and activity" (Kadushin, 1992, p. 423).

Therefore, on Inskipp's (1996) continuum (discussed in section 2.2.2), the intention was to shift the group from 'co-operative supervision' towards 'peer group supervision'.

This progressive 'handing over' process was necessary so that I could evaluate, with the participants, the unique usage that was made of the PGS model by one specific group in a specific context.

As outlined in Chapter Three, participant-observer was my core role, yet I was also facilitator and fundamentally a 'guide' regarding assisting the lay counsellors to apply the PGS model in their specific context. My four-fold position (participant, observer, researcher and mediator in the learning process) produced a multitude of challenges. Yet, I believe that by adopting such a dynamic and multifaceted role also enabled me to gain a richness of experience, and perspective, that would otherwise not have been possible.

Firstly, I was still learning the PGS model when my supervisor and I initially implemented the PGS model with the counsellors. In the first PGS session, where I adopted the role of facilitator, the presence of my supervisor provided both support and guidance. However, from the second PGS session onwards, I became the core mediator in the counsellors'

learning process, although I did have consistent support before and after each PGS session from my supervisor. As with the method of teaching the counsellors the PGS model, my position was therefore also one of 'learning by doing' with the counsellors. Whilst challenging, from a social constructionist perspective, the potential for the construction of knowledge being a "joint achievement" (Mercer, 1995, p. 72), resulting in shared understandings, may have been enhanced. Particularly as my stance was one of co-novice, with the participants, regarding this particular facet of the research process.

Secondly, I played the role of facilitator for the two initial sessions. In this particular role I was essentially needing to balance "leading without imposing, directing without controlling, suggesting without dictating" (Kadushin, 1992, p. 422). In attempting to achieve such a balance, a challenging tension arose - how to guide the participants so that they could engage with the various phases of the PGS model, yet do so in a way that did not overly direct them, whilst still overseeing the process as a researcher? A partial answer to this would be that I had particular difficulties with the role of facilitator, and tended to rather allow the group as much flexibility as possible. A few of the participants noted and commented on this 'loose rein' approach, and we discussed the tensions that I was feeling in my various roles. This was one of the limitations of this research, which will be more fully discussed in the following chapter. However, once the role of facilitator was adopted by the participants, my other roles became much clearer and easier to personally negotiate. Yet, I believe that because my particular stance was noted by some participants, and we discussed the inherent tensions I was feeling, two core dimensions arose. Firstly, the possible challenges that anyone adopting the role of facilitator could expect to confront were clearly illuminated, and secondly, my relationship with the participants became a more personal and involved one, and deconstructed any prior perceptions the participants may have had of me in an 'expert' role.

Thirdly, my intended position as researcher was to have been one of 'participant-observer'. More specifically, I took the position of what Robson (1993) refers to as adopting a 'participant-as-observer role' (p. 197). This role definition is appropriate, as the participants were clear, from the outset, what my roles were to be in the research. At no stage was there an attempt, or need, to deceive the participants about my position in this research undertaking. Furthermore, Robson states that adopting and maintaining "the dual role of observer and participator is not easy" (p. 197). For example, despite the group agreeing that, by the third

session, they would take over the entire process themselves, it appeared as if I was still considered a 'participant' in the group. This was revealed on at least three separate occasions when I was asked for my opinion in various levels of discussion. For example, in sessions three and four respectively:

P3 *Jane, how would you as a psychologist deal with this?*

and

P10 *can I just ask something to Jane here about these various psychological processes?*

In both instances, I hesitantly and tentatively answered the respective questions and reminded the group that it was 'their' PGS session. However, it appeared as if the participants were not paying much heed to my attempts to distance myself from participating to become more of an observer to their processes. The group members continued to attempt to include me in their group discussions throughout the remainder of the PGS sessions, as well as in the focus group discussion.

In summary, the various roles that I adopted throughout the research process were dynamic. Firstly as a mediator in the learning process, then as a facilitator (elevating the participant role), and then as an 'observer' to the process. The core benefit of adopting these various roles was that it did enable me to "understand 'real' people in their everyday situations, to learn about the world from different perspectives, to experience what others experience, to unravel what is taken for granted ..." (Banister *et al.*, 1994, p. 19). Whilst it appeared as if the group were content to accept the first two roles, mediator and facilitator respectively, I do not believe that they regarded me, at any stage, as a mere 'observer' to their processes, but as a member of their group. I regarded this as both a compliment and as a challenge. As previously mentioned, whilst adopting these various roles resulted in an enriching and diverse experience, there were some limits to playing such a multi-faceted role. These will be addressed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study, located within the broader context of mental health care service provision in a South African context, explored the potential use that a structured model of peer group supervision could have in one arena, namely with lay counsellors.

This study suggests that the PGS model has the potential to offer lay counsellors an alternative and/or adjunctive means of supervision. The research participants reported that the collaborative and affirming environment, as well as the multiple perspectives that were generated through engaging in such a supervisory process, were particularly beneficial.

A positive outcome of this research and a confirmation of the utility of the PGS model, is that a number of the research participants now facilitate groups of counsellors in training. This PGS model is also still used in the Agency on a bi-monthly basis almost two years on (Akhurst, personal communication, March, 2002).

Some limitations of this study and recommendations for further research will now be addressed.

#### **6.1 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

Firstly, due to the paucity of literature available on supervision and peer group supervision in particular in South Africa, the literature review has been based on a relatively small number of relevant articles. With the exception of Akhurst's (2000) thesis, these articles are all of foreign origin. Additionally, the methodology employed, whilst producing rich descriptive findings, was extremely time consuming and resulted in Chapters Three and Four being particularly lengthy and this potential limitation is acknowledged.

Secondly, the research group of lay counsellors were fairly similar in socio-economic backgrounds, age, levels of education, as well as counselling experience. All the participants

were also middle class whites. The majority of the participants had been born and raised in South Africa, but at least four had foreign backgrounds - viz. English, Scottish and German and one participant had lived in a variety of foreign and African countries. So whilst this mixture of backgrounds, as well as professional qualifications, was useful in contributing to a diversity of perspectives, the overall homogeneity in the group still concerned me. This was particularly in light of the fact that many of the cases, as well as the concerns raised in the group, focussed on the challenges of inter-cultural and religious counselling. I therefore believe that a group consisting of a combination of cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds may have been more conducive to this research.

A third limitation of this study, yet one that remains a personally inconclusive debate, is that it may have been preferable to have an independent facilitator for the first two PGS sessions. This may have enabled me to concentrate upon and thus negotiate fewer simultaneous roles. However, and as discussed, the multiple roles that I played also provided me with an in-depth, enriching experience that may not have arisen if I did not adopt these many roles.

A fourth limitation concerns one theme that repeatedly came to the fore in this undertaking and concerns the use of language. The participants often discussed their difficulties with the language that was utilised, particularly in the handout (Appendix A). I could therefore have focussed more on the language usage that was adopted by the participants in negotiating the implementation of the PGS model. Vygotsky (1978) also contends that language is a core psychological tool in the transmission of knowledge.

Finally and related to the aforementioned is that I did not focus on the interpersonal dynamics that emerged in each PGS session, as well as in the focus group discussion. In this regard, I acknowledge that theorists such as Yalom (1985) would have emphasised the importance of conducting a closer examination of such dynamics. Particularly as this study emphasised a collaborative, social constructionist view of the social embeddedness and negotiation of knowledge, it may have been useful to focus on such issues.

Many of these limitations have direct implications for recommendations for further research



and will therefore be discussed in more detail.

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Firstly, a closer grained analysis of both language and group dynamics could be examined in future research undertakings by employing different methodologies. For example, conversational analysis could be utilised to gain an enhanced understanding of the language used, negotiated and adapted by the group participants.

Secondly, a group comprised of a blend of socio-economic, racial and religious members may result in a wider variety of perspectives being generated in the PGS sessions. As one of the benefits of such a forum of supervision is the multiplicity of perspectives, this may result in a more perspectives being generated. It may also enhance the counsellors' access to and familiarity with alternative ways of 'being'. The indirect benefits to those receiving mental health care services from such counsellors may therefore be enhanced.

Thirdly, an independent facilitator in the initial phase of teaching new groups the PGS model may result in the researcher being able to enrich their perspective of a limited number of aspects that emerge in the process. However and whilst suggesting this alternative role for a researcher, this research, emanating from a social constructionist perspective, has repeatedly stated that the findings gained from implementing the PGS model in future contexts will be different, and will depend to a large degree on the context, the participants and the researcher.

Fourthly, a longitudinal study could be conducted, wherein various groups consisting of a diversity of participants could be studied over a longer period of time. This could provide some indications of whether the PGS model is further adapted as well as providing some indications as to the most common usage to which such groups apply the PGS model.

If at all viable, a final possible recommendation could be training all the members of a future PGS group in facilitation skills prior to implementing the model. It has been stressed throughout this research that the likelihood of users of the PGS model possessing such skills

prior to the application of the PGS model would be slight. However, it may be worthwhile to assess the viability and utility of equipping potential users of the PGS model with such skills in facilitation. It may then be possible to ascertain if the possession of such skills makes a significance difference in the way the PGS model is utilised.

### 6.3 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Whilst it is not the intention of this research to claim any form of generalisability of findings, the possibilities and resonance of the PGS model in a South African context, does, I believe, need to be briefly explored.

The positive contributions that the counsellors who transferred their skills to other groups found, particularly regarding the multi-cultural and multi-skilled demographics of the groups, has much relevance and potential for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, the new counsellors that are to be trained in the HIV/AIDS arena will, in all likelihood, emanate from a wide variety of familial, cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts. Secondly, the clientele of organisations that offer counselling services, it is anticipated, will emanate from a similar diversity of contexts. It will therefore become imperative that counsellors offering human services become more familiar and experienced with dealing with a wide diversity of cultural, religious and familial dynamics. Again, Bernard and Goodyear's (1992) emphasis on the composition of supervisory structures, including peer supervision groups, needing to adequately reflect the heterogeneity of the clientele that will be serviced by such counsellors, is of relevance.

An additional consideration, and potential benefit for a South African context, is that the PGS model offers an opportunity for workers in the human services field to engage in a supportive process that empowers and facilitates the recognition and affirmation of the skills and competencies that such workers may have. This may have additional relevance given the potential hegemony of 'authority voices' in other educational settings (Akhurst, personal communication, May, 2002). Particularly regarding the present position of lay counsellors in a South African context, the core postulation of Foucault, a French social historian, is



pertinent. According to Foucault (1988) in Western industrialized society it is impossible to divorce knowledge from power. This contention is extended by White (1991) who discusses how professional disciplines (such as psychology) have held a privileged position in society, primarily due to its members being professionally qualified and thus, legally recognised. As it is anticipated that many lay counsellors will not possess such professional qualifications and hence, recognition, their positions may be regarded as inferior. However, White (1991) strongly condemns such an artificial inflation of certain types of knowledges over others, particularly the 'professional' or 'formal' over the 'lay' or 'informal'. As discussed in Chapter One, lay counsellors in South Africa may face the same challenges and stressors as formally recognised mental health care workers, an aspect that I believe may be overlooked. Therefore, peer group supervision, and the PGS model in particular, may provide an opportunity for the skills and competencies of lay counsellors to be realised and elevated.

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## APPENDIX A

Akhurst's (1999/2000) adaptation of Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Morris, Betz & Hart's (1991) model of Structured Group Supervision.

This model synthesizes three central concepts that are understood to be central in the training of therapeutic skills, namely: task orientation, personal growth and integration of personal and practice issues.

Each phase requires 10-15 minutes of group time and a group facilitator takes the responsibility for timekeeping. There is one presenter who has prepared material for the session.

### **Phase 1: Presentation and Request-for-Assistance Statement**

The initial questions the presenter uses to frame the presentation include:

What are the facts? What was the process? What is the issue that they want help with?

The information may be in the form of a written case analysis concerning a counselling session or portions of an audiotape.

Following the presentation of the summary information, the presenter completes a Request-for-Assistance Statement which specifies whether assistance is needed with regard to skill development, personal growth or integrative issues.

### **Phase 2: Questioning Period and Identification of Focus**

Supervision group members question the presenter in order to obtain additional information and/or to gain clarity regarding the Request-for-Assistance Statement. A 'round-robin' technique is used, whereby each group member asks one question, the cycle of questioning may be repeated.

The Focus is identified from the Request-for-Assistance Statement:

- a) If skill development is requested, the focus of the group will be on the task.
- b) If it has a personal growth nature, the goal is to increase personal insight and affective sensitivity.
- c) If the integration of beliefs/attitudes with a particular issues is presented, the focus will be on ways of considering the presenter's dilemma.

The identification of focus will impact on the next phase.

### **Phase 3: Feedback statements and discussion**

During this phase the presenter is instructed to remain silent and listen, ie. No responses to feedback are made. The presenter may, however, make notes. During this phase it is recommended that the presenter is spoken about in the third person so s/he does not feel the need to respond.

After a short time for reflection, the 'round-robin' technique is again used and group members are encouraged to make productive suggestions. These suggestions need to be phrased as "I ..." statements. The facilitator must not engage in the feedback process, but needs to monitor the group process (discouraging judgemental comments and overly harsh criticism, and keeping the discussion to the identified focus).

A *pause period* then follows (about 5 minutes) to give the presenter time to process the feedback. It is recommended that the presenter does not engage in conversation/discussion at this time.

#### **Phase 4:       Presenter's response**

The presenter responds to the feedback with regard to its utility, and is encouraged to say why the feedback was/was not beneficial.

The facilitator may allow an optional discussion period following the completion of the four phases, depending on the time allocation.

## APPENDIX B

### USE OF TAPE RECORDING FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

#### PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM

Name of participant	
Address and contact telephone number	
Name of researcher	Jane Ingham
Level of research	Masters
Title of project	Peer group supervision in a lay counselling context
Supervisor	Jacqui Akhurst

#### **Declaration by participant**

1. The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me.
2. I agree to participate in the Peer Group Supervision sessions and focus group/s and agree to allow audio recordings to be made of them.
3. I confirm that I will commit to engaging in the research process on the following dates:

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Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX C

Focus group discussion - issues to be covered in the discussion include:

This is an opportunity for you to give me feedback regarding your experiences - so please go ahead and discuss any of the pertinent issues. I may ask you for further details in the process, or request that specific issues be addressed if you do not bring them up yourselves for discussion.

1. What are your general comments and impressions of the PGS model?
2. Some more specific areas that I would like your comments on include:
  - i) The actual structure that was utilised and the phase requirements
  - ii) The RFA statement/s categories
  - iii) What about facilitating and the role of the facilitator
  - iv) Any negative experiences of the PGS model?
  - v) Any suggestions for the adaptation of the PGS model?
3. You appeared to be having particular difficulty in proceeding through phase 2 - would you all agree and how do you make sense of this difficulty?
4. What, if any, was the value in utilising the PGS model?
5. Please evaluate the learning experience and the way the learning process was constructed.
6. In the PGS session some of you referred to your experiences in group supervision, could you provide me with a comparison of the two forums of supervision (group and peer group)?
7. What do you think about any future applications of the PGS model for your roles as lay counsellors?
8. The concept of 'supervision' is central to this research project. After the first PGS session one member of the group asked 'where was the supervision?'. What do you think of the concept, how did you all understand the concept and are there any alternative words that you think may be more applicable to the process?

## APPENDIX D

Dear Participant

Enclosed is a semi-structured questionnaire that I would appreciate you completing. In this final phase of data collection I have attempted to keep the questions as broad and flexible as possible, and I would appreciate any additional comments you may have regarding your experiences.

1. Comment on the way the model was initially introduced to you.
2. Please provide some details of what you thought was useful and/or unhelpful about the way the model was taught to you. (For example, did you feel confident from the outset that you were clear about the structure and process involved in the model? If not, why not and what could have been done to improve this understanding?)
3. Comment on the Request for Assistance areas on your handout. (For example, was the wording clear, was there sufficient clarity regarding the distinctions between the three areas and comment on whether you found the three areas to be useful guidelines or not).

4. What did you think about the size of the group (10 people) and how did you feel about attendance in the sessions? (For example, whilst group attendance was fairly consistent, there were times when some members were unable to attend. How do you think this affected the process, if at all?).
5. Your group was composed of members who had different levels of counselling experience, comment on the appropriateness of this composition.
6. The term 'supervision' was debated and negotiated with you all from the outset. What are your opinions and thoughts about the term at present - do you think it is an appropriate term for the process, or should it be amended? If the latter, what term would prefer and why?
7. Overall, what are your opinions regarding the attributes and limitations of the model?
8. What skills, if any, did you learn through engaging in the process?

9. Were there, in your opinion, any broader ramifications/implications of engaging in such a process? If there were, please comment on them and provide details thereof.
10. If you have had the opportunity to continue using the model, please comment on your current experiences.
11. If you have had the opportunity to implement or teach the model in a different context to that in which you were taught it, please provide some details and ideas regarding the success/failure of such attempts.
12. Please provide me with any additional ideas, feelings, and/or reflections regarding our encounters and the model of structured peer group supervision.
13. Do you have any ideas or suggestions that you feel could be applicable for any other persons utilising the model in the future?

Many thanks for your co-operation and contributions.

## APPENDIX E

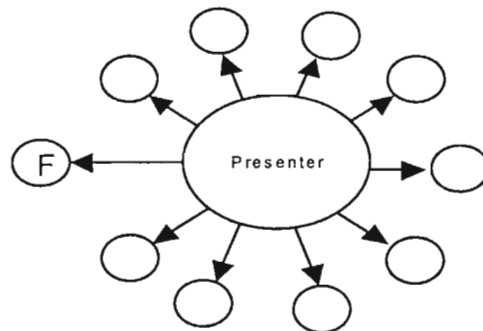
1. How did the research participants compare their experiences of the PGS with their past experiences of group supervision?
2. How did the group experience the structure of the PGS and the resultant process that emerged through engaging with the PGS model?
3. What was the participants' experience, and understanding, of the role of the facilitator?
4. What did the participants think about the levels of counsellor experience in their group and/or future PGS groups?
5. Had any members of the group had the opportunity to apply the PGS model in a different context and what, if any suggestions did they make regarding the possibilities for implementing the PGS model in different contexts?
6. What, if any, recommendations for the adaptation to the PGS model did the participants make?
7. What were the participants' experiences of the learning encounter that was intentionally constructed in teaching them the model?
8. Were there, according to the participants, any issues that required sensitivity and/or needed to be made explicit regarding the PGS model?

## APPENDIX F

### Akhurst's (2000) model of structured peer group supervision (PGS model)

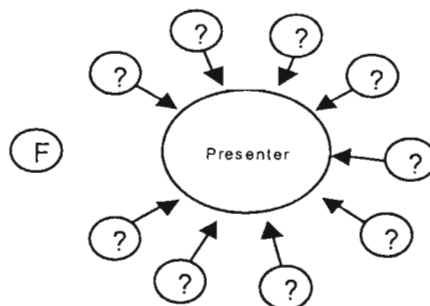
- Ideally, the group should consist of 8-10 members, including 1 presenter (P) and 1 facilitator (F).
- The role of the facilitator is to: monitor group process (including protecting the presenter from criticism), maintain time limits for each phase (10-15 minutes each), and keep the group task-focussed. The facilitator does not participate in any of the group discussions.

#### **Phase 1: Presentation and Request-for-Assistance statement/s (RFA statement/s)**



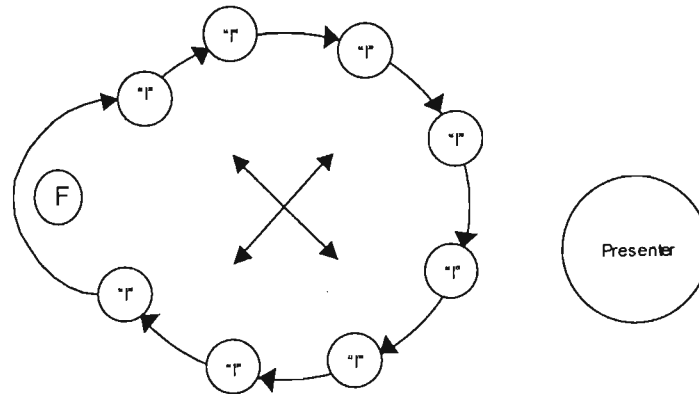
- The presenter presents their case in the form of a summary, providing details of the facts of the case, as well as the counselling process.
- The presenter states their RFA statement/s, specifying whether assistance is needed with regard to skill development, personal growth and/or integrative issues.

#### **Phase 2: Questioning period and identification of focus**



- Group members question the presenter in order to obtain additional information and/or to gain clarity on the RFA statement/s.
- A 'round robin' technique is used in obtaining this information.

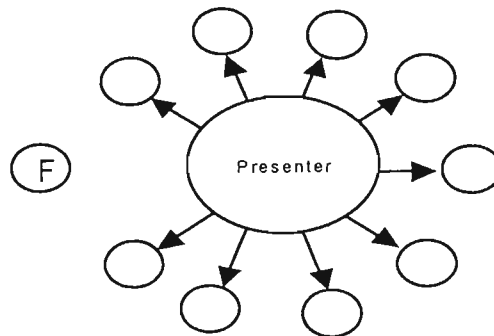
### Phase 3: Feedback statements and discussion



- a) Ideally, the presenter removes themselves from the group, does not participate in the phase, but listens and may take notes.
- b) The presenter is spoken about in the third person. The suggestions need to be phrased as "I ..." statements.
- c) The 'round robin' technique is used to make productive suggestions.

A pause period may follow to give the presenter time to process the feedback

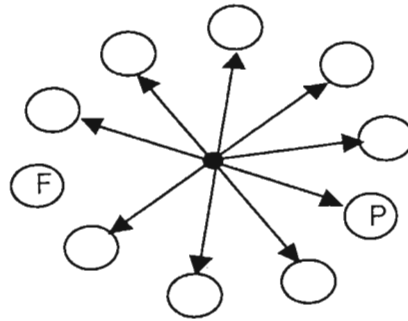
### Phase 4: Presenter's response



The presenter responds to the feedback regarding its utility and evaluates why the feedback was/was not beneficial.



### Phase 5: Optional discussion period



If time allows, a discussion pertaining to any facet of the case proceeds.

- It is recommended that pre- and post-session reflection sessions are added to these five phases in the initial stages of teaching new groups the PGS model.

The structure would therefore be as follows:

Pre-session reflection session

Phase One  
Phase Two  
Phase Three  
Phase Four  
Phase Five

Post-session reflection session

## APPENDIX G

### Peer Group Supervision Model

The model comprises four phases, each lasting 10 to 15 minutes. An optional fifth phase may be added. A facilitator is appointed to monitor and control the process, and to keep the subject on track. He does not take part in the questioning or discussion process.

#### **Phase 1: Case presentation and request for assistance ( R F A).**

A group member succinctly presents his case outlining the facts and the counselling process employed. He then asks for help with one of the following aspects.

- a) Skill development ( case management / Egan Model etc.).
- b) Personal growth (personal insight / empathic understanding / affective sensitivity ).
- c) Personal filters or bias ( individual beliefs, attitudes, prejudices and values ).

It may be that the presenter doesn't actually want help but would like the session simply to focus on the chosen aspect. He may request that some aspect not mentioned above be used as a focus point.

#### **Phase 2: Questioning period and identification of focus.**

Each group member is allowed to ask the presenter **ONE** question round-robin style. The facilitator keeps the questioning focused on the R F A. The cycle may be repeated.

#### **Phase 3: Feedback statements and discussion.**

Once more a round-robin technique is used for group members to make productive suggestions. The presenter is not addressed directly, but is spoken about in the third person. (" I...statements" to be used ). The presenter remains silent, but may take notes. The facilitator does not engage in the discussion but should protect the presenter against overly harsh criticism or judgemental comments. A **pause period** of about five minutes follows for the presenter to collate the feedback ; no conversation or discussion yet.

#### **Phase 4: Presenter's response.**

While the members remain silent, the presenter comments on how useful ( or not ) the group's input has been, and in what way.

#### **Phase 5: Optional discussion period.**

This phase is at the discretion of the facilitator, who only now may offer his personal input. De-briefing and closure is recommended.