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Louis van Kessel & Dinie Haan

THE INTENDED WAY OF LEARNING IN SUPERVISION SEEN AS A MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The specific way of learning that is aimed at in the Dutch concept of supervision is explicated. Learning in supervision is broken down into three segments and can be seen as a model for the guiding of the learning process aimed at in supervision. Each of them represents part of the way of learning which is to be covered by the supervisee. The following successive stages are distinguished: the *way of knowing*, the *way of choosing* and the *way of acting*. The steps which have to be taken in every segment are described, as well as types of interventions that can be made by the supervisor to facilitate this process.

INTRODUCTION

The object of the present paper is to explicate the specific way of learning intended in the Dutch concept of supervision. Learning in supervision - seen as a process of re-education focusing on adaptive adjustment to the tasks posed by the professional environment, as we stated in Van Kessel/Haan (1993) - can be broken down into three segments and as such can be seen as a model for guiding the learning process aimed at in supervision (Van Kessel, 1989). Each of them represents part of the learning trajectory which is to be covered by the supervisee. The following successive stages are distinguished: the *way of knowing*, the *way of choosing* and the *way of acting*. The first two are taken from Bos (1974, pp. 20-33); the third is an addition of ours because it is a self-evident next step to the two preceding ones.

The *way of knowing*: the central element in this segment is 'obtaining insight into something'. This is a problem of knowledge: What is it? What is going on? The result, the end of this trajectory, is a certain insight or conclusion. It is obvious that this way of knowing in the case of supervision is concerned with the learning of knowledge acquired on the basis of experience in dealing with professional tasks. We try to get the supervisee to look into this in order to discover the (hidden) meanings which it contains for the future development of his/her professional activity and to arrive at relevant insights.

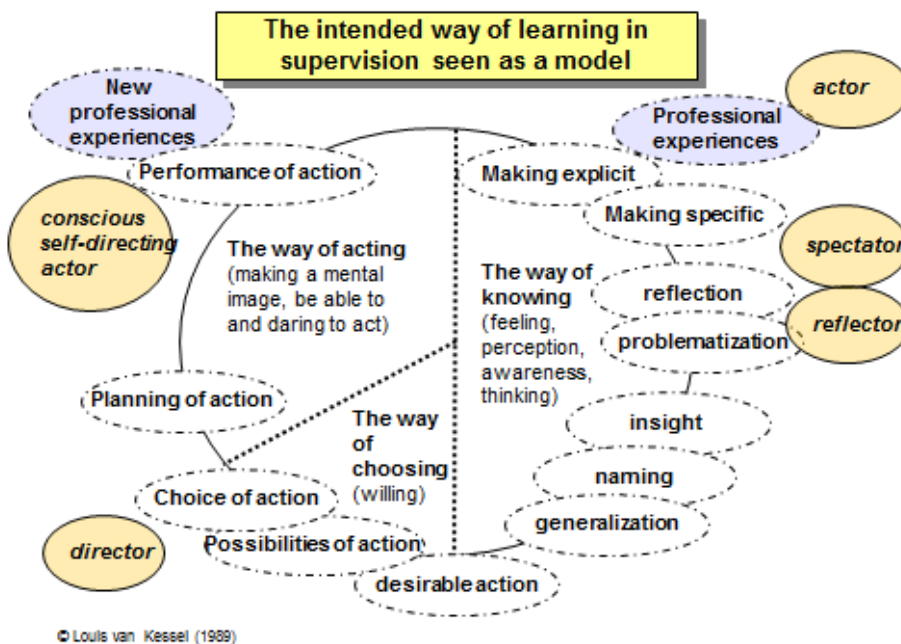
The second segment consists of the *way of choosing*. If the supervisee wants to or has to make the step of adjusting the way in which she/he deals with professional tasks, a choice has to be made. There is an obligation to make a choice resulting in a decision.

Although the way of knowing and the way of choosing are treated successively here, they are more intertwined in reality, even though they can be treated as separate phases. It is an iterative, cyclical process rather than a linear one. It is therefore desirable for the supervisor to pay attention to implicit choices which are made during the way of knowing, and to the implicit images which may play a part and call for further research during the way of choosing. The choice that is made concerns the deliberate adjustment of the way of dealing with professional tasks. This adjustment can be seen as the obligation to make changes to the way of acting. That is why we refer to this third segment as the *way of acting*.

The supervisee passes through these three stages during the process of learning in supervision. A number of moves are made within each segment for this purpose. The supervisor's interventions are intended to ensure that the supervisee makes these moves and thereby follows the trajectory of the learning process aimed at by the supervision. The rest of this paper is an elaboration of these moves.

The illustration of the model (*Figure 1*) suggests a linear succession. In fact, however, we hope that in practice a less rigid pattern will emerge. The cyclical dynamic of the process is difficult to illustrate visually, but the phases of the model are not arbitrary: the process of learning follows the phases indicated in the model. The model can therefore be used as a guide by supervisors in order to give systematic and effective form to the learning process aimed at in supervision. A loop has been indicated by dotted lines here and there to emphasise the cyclical nature of certain steps. This suggests the come-and-go movement which is characteristic of the iterative nature of the process of supervision.

Figure 1: *The Intended Way of Learning in Supervision Seen as a Model*



THE WAY OF KNOWING

Experience

In carrying out his/her professional work, the supervisee undergoes experiences which are introduced to the supervision. These experiences may be concerned with coping with professional tasks which the supervisee has with respect to methodically dealing with clients, organizational functioning and functioning within the policy of the institution.

The source of insight is still latent within this experience. The internal experience, the event and the professional tasks are still intertwined. It is not clear what role is played in the experience by feelings, interpretations, presuppositions and tendencies on the part of the supervisee's personality in giving shape to the professional tasks, on the one hand, and what role is played by professional principles (the professional reference system) and the influence of other parties (client/colleagues), on the other.

Making explicit

The first task for the supervisee is to make the professional experience explicit in both written and oral accounts which complement one another. The related task of the supervisor is to assist the supervisee in this task.

The experience of the supervisee consists of 'experience as felt experience' and 'experience as situational event'. This is usually diffuse, tending to preoccupy him/her from the background of consciousness (cf. Freire, 1974). The first thing to be done is to bring it to the foreground. By making the experience explicit (unfolding it), the nature of the experience is shifted.¹ Impressions are expressed in words and in a narrative. By making them explicit in language, the experiences which are by definition things of the past - this is a process of retrospection - are relived: the experience is presented in such a way that it can become the object of reflection later. Through the act of narration, the supervisee performs a preliminary ordering and processing of the experience by making distinctions in it. The experience, which appeared to lack a structure at first, is now given one.

What the supervisee makes explicit as an experience (the content) is important for *what the supervisee wants to and has to learn* in supervision. The account of the supervisee indicates where the difficulties lie or where the supervisee does not act in a proper professional way. It also reveals what the supervisee is or is not aware of.

But *the way in which (how)* the supervisee tells the story - the interaction between the verbal and the non-verbal - is also of interest to the supervisor. It provides information on how the supervisee deals with the experience, about *how the supervisee learns*. It is an expression of how the supervisee deals with the work and supervision tasks: what does she/he set in the foreground and what in the background? In this connection, the supervisor can focus on points such as:

- Which aspects of the experience does the supervisee emphasise or neglect: the event; the perception of the event; the act; the attribution of value; interpretation or facts; the objective; the professional task, him/herself, the other(s); the situation/the context.
- In which form, sequence and manner is the experience narrated? The supervisee offers a specific arrangement (Britton, 1970) of the experience. What is the role of the supervisee and how is it narrated? Or is it effaced?
- Vocabulary and narrative style: which deletions, generalizations and nominalizations are made (cf. Bandler & Grinder, 1975); is the language active or passive, action-oriented or reflection-oriented, based on choice or necessity, set in the present or the past, depersonalised (third person instead of first person), etc. (cf. Passons, 1975).
- Intonation, tone, tempo, (un)certainly, doubt, confidence, etc.

The assistance provided by the supervisor in this work of making the experience explicit consists mainly of bringing to the fore the contents which the supervisee has still left in the background. These

interventions can be seen as being directed toward the realisation of the *primary task* of the supervisee: *to present the content* of his/her professional experiences to him/herself and to the supervisor.

In addition, the supervisor can also get the supervisee to reflect (whether by feedback, confrontation or mirroring) on the striking features of the *way of making the experience explicit*. These interventions are directed to the realisation of the *secondary task* of the supervisee: the *development of consciousness and ability regarding the way the supervisee is functioning and learning*. This is followed by a preliminary making explicit of the way in which the supervisees experience is explained as an object of reflection. The aim is to encourage the supervisee to *learn to make experiences explicit* better, first here and now in the supervision, and afterwards in his/her professional practice. This can be illustrated by the following case.

EXAMPLE

The supervisor is struck by the fact that the supervisee (repeatedly) talks hurriedly and associatively, which leads him away from the theme that he had introduced. The supervisor asks the supervisee to reflect on his way of dealing with the theme and to describe what strikes him about it.

When it appears that the supervisee himself is able to give a name to this specific behaviour, a 'proof' is delivered that the supervisee is able (to a greater or lesser degree) to reflect on his behaviour. When the supervisee appears unable to do so, the supervisor gives it a name and tests to see whether the supervisee recognises the feedback. If so, recognition will take place more easily. The next step is to see whether this tendency which emerges in the supervision situation (important for learning in supervision as the secondary task) *also occurs in the work situation* (primary task).

A summary determination of the sub-themes which emerge in this process of making the experience explicit is used to direct the next stage: *reflection and problematization*. The supervisor may ask the supervisee to make his/her own summary, making additions where necessary.

Making specific

The experiences have to be made specific before they can be processed by reflection and problematization. Specification is a powerful resource. It brings the professional tasks and specific aspects of the experience undergone in coping with them closer. The general crystalizes out as the particular and specific. Making it specific also prevents the experience from becoming detached from professional practice. Making specific can take place in a number of ways.

- If the process of specification is not performed by the supervisee him/herself, the supervisor may ask for specific information on the following points:
 - what exactly took place?
 - what exactly did you experience?
 - what was the situation precisely?
 - what was your specific role in it?
 - what was that of the other(s)?
 - what are the facts?
 - what were your feelings then and how do you view the occurrence now?
 - what do you suppose about those of the other(s)?
 - what was your objective in the situation and on what basis?
 - what do you think you have achieved?
 - why do you think so?
 - what particularly concerns you about it?

- Some supervisees tend to keep the experience at a distance through their use of language. The supervisor should therefore encourage the supervisee to describe specific (aspects of) situations in direct language.
- The experience can also be *relived* by playing it out: behaviour and perception can then be confronted with insights, presuppositions and the supervisee's perception of self.
- Aspects of the perception of experience can be brought to the fore using techniques like *focusing* (Gendlin, 1978).

If a supervisee is unable to be (adequately) specific, it is an obstacle to learning in supervision. Sometimes it also indicates a reluctance to confront actually dealing with the professional tasks, which is precisely the skill which the supervisee is supposed to be learning to develop.

Reflection

Making experiences explicit (unfolding them) facilitates confrontation with them and reflection on them. The act of making them explicit draws a dividing line between ourselves and the experiences. Through the very act of narration, the supervisee is engaged in re-presenting the experiences (again). This enables supervisees to be viewed at arm's length. During this process, the supervisee is placed in three positions: the situation of participant/actor, of spectator/observer and of perceiver/evaluator of his/her own experience. From this position it is possible to reflect on one's own experience and to interpret it. 'Empirisches verstehen ist deuten', claims Jaspers (1948, pp. 296-297).

This activity is crucial in reflection. Not every supervisee is equally able to handle it. Some remain tied to the experience ('I don't know what to do about it'; 'I feel paralysed by it'), others prefer to race on ahead instead of pausing to reflect ('Just tell me what to do because I have to continue tomorrow'). The way in which the supervisee handles it is an indication of the learning-style of the supervisee: the first type of reaction refers to the so-called diverger, the second to the converger (cf. Kolb, 1984, pp. 61-98; Van Kessel, 1990).

We can undergo experience without reflection. According to De Groot (1966, pp. 1-2), this is a 'form of acquiring experience in which the learning effect can be read off clearly from the improved, i.e. more apt, faster or more efficient performance of apparently goal-oriented behaviour as a result of preceding experiences in similar situations, without any reason to suppose that this learning is accompanied by conscious processes of knowledge acquisition'. Knowledge can be defined as experience which the subject can reproduce in language in the form of statements.

Incidental and intentional learning

The unconscious or barely conscious acquisition of experience occurs *inter alia* in the form of non-arbitrary or unconscious learning processes (Van Parreren, 1960). They are characteristic of *incidental learning*. Reflective learning from experience, on the other hand, is a conscious and systematic realisation of what we do and/or experience and of the value that we (often implicitly) assign to it in evaluating and/or interpreting it. The experiential process becomes an *intentional learning process* in which we process experiences through reflection and arrive at insights from which we draw conclusions concerning handling situations in the future. If we pause for a moment as *spectators* of our own experiences and reflect upon them, we become able to bring about adjustments. 'Describing' is characteristic of the processes of making them explicit and specific, 'adjusting' is characteristic of reflection.

In a certain sense, reflection derives the inspiration to act differently from the experience: there is a challenge, a *perspective* is offered: I have other possibilities at my disposal, other possibilities are called for. A *transformation* takes place which can be described as a *transformational experience* (Chabot, 1988).

Professional reference system

An important role is played by the perspective of the desired professional behaviour (as *professional reference system*) in reflection. This reflection is also concerned with the evaluation of

one's actual behaviour in dealing with professional tasks. The experiences are seen in the light of the themes which are important for learning to improve the way one deals with professional tasks. It may concern the various aspects/dimensions of the actual professional experience:

- What was the objective/what did the supervisee hope to achieve? And what should have been his/her goals?
- In which direction and using what means has the supervisee tried to achieve this objective? How could the supervisee have acted/reacted differently?
- From which point of view/frame of reference does the supervisee appear to have considered the professional task? Is a different way of looking at it possible?
- Which choice did the supervisee make and on what grounds? What is the connection between this choice and his/her personality? What has he/she avoided?
- What significance does the supervisee attach to his/her experience?

Meta-reflection

The object of reflection need not be confined to the professional experience which is reported, but it may also include the experience contained in the manner of making it explicit and in the way of introducing it: this makes the supervisee aware of his/her way of dealing with professional experiences. In the same way, the manner in which and the extent to which the supervisee is able to reflect, may be treated as the object of reflection. We might call this *meta-reflection*. An essential feature of supervision is that the supervisor also helps the supervisee to develop the expertise to reflect by him/herself on the experiences against the background of the professional reference system.

An important source for the supervisor to perceive to what extent the supervisee is able to reflect, is the supervisee's language. The *language of the spectator* is different from the *language of the participant* (Britton, 1970). As *spectators* we organise our material as we please: evaluating, weighing up, inquiring, exploring, comparing, experimenting ('I wonder...; now I suddenly realise...; in retrospect I would rather have...; perhaps it's connected with...'). As a *participant* the supervisee still narrates actively: 'What happened was...; what I did...; what I felt...; what bothers me is...; what I would have preferred is...'. The non-verbal behaviour of the supervisee usually follows the same pattern.

Inner dialogue

Learning goal-oriented, deliberate and systematic reflection on the experience undergone in professional activity stimulates an *inner dialogue*: the supervisee becomes his/her own critical opponent and conversation partner. This brings about an important effect in supervision: the supervisee becomes more skilful in:

- reflecting on his/her own professional experiences in order to maintain or improve his/her ability to function professionally on his/her own;
- dealing with professional tasks in a more conscious fashion during the execution of his/her work, now that he/she is able to 'look through binoculars' at his/her own activities from the 'double perspective' (Bateson, 1980) of the 'observing self' and the 'participating self'. He/she becomes a 'participant observer' (Shephard, 1967).

Problematization

According to Freire (1974), learning should be characterised by *problematization*. This is typified by asking questions rather than proclaiming answers. Insights can only be acquired by invention and reinvention.

Problematization can be considered as a specific aspect of reflection. Questions are posed relating to facets of the experiential theme, which is the central issue, and to dimensions of the professional task, which are not so obvious to the supervisee because they are not yet (sufficiently) present in his/her own awareness. The supervisee may well pay some attention to the personal dimensions, but not to the organizational or social dimensions.

The reverse situation occurs too: the supervisee pays attention to the system-related aspects, but does not pay much attention to latent themes in him/herself nor to their influence on how he/she

cope with professional tasks. In that case the 'discovery' should focus on this aspect.

Problematization results in another perspective on the experience and the professional tasks, thereby opening up other perspectives for dealing with them. What is the experience connected with, what does it entail for me and my client, what is the impact of the organizational or social context, what is the impact of my own (learning) socialisation, etc.

By learning to formulate problems again and again, the supervisee develops an inquiring mind and an investigative skill which enable him/her to subject the assumptions and frames of references which he/she holds to continual inquiry, questioning and disruption. This enables him/her to develop his/her own awareness of the many meanings which can be attributed to the experience and the professional task.

Insight and naming

The previous steps along the way of knowing lead to insights. According to Freire (1974), 'problematization' is followed by 'conscientization'. According to Piaget (Flavell, 1963), insights are the result of *assimilation*: new connections are made. Insights have the significance of *conceptualization*, the formation of concepts. In order to do so, the discoveries that have been made and the insights that have been acquired have to be *named*. This is both active - naming something transforms it - and reflective: our choice of words gives meaning to it. Therefore in this phase it is important that the supervisee is formulating 'what have I discovered (learned) regarding to?' or 'what have I realised as being of importance for?' These questions concern:

- 'how I deal with professional tasks' (primary task);
- 'how I learn to deal with experiences undergone in the carrying out of these tasks' (secondary task).

Giving names has an important guiding effect on the development of the direction taken by the supervisee's learning process. The choices we make to put our insights into words have an important *heuristic* significance. A word imparts structure to ideas and feelings, and every time we name things, we structure our consciousness. The words we use 'make the experience' and direct our future behaviour. It is important for the supervisee to learn to 'treat' his/her experience of what he/she undergoes in such a way that it remains a genuine experience while at the same time being incorporated in the language system which his/her profession uses (Andriessen, 1975, pp.129-130). The supervisee should acquire a way of looking at things which is appropriate to his/her profession. In other words, is the supervisee also able to translate the experience and the insights derived from it into professional jargon? Only then is there genuine *conceptualization*.

Generalization

Generalization is seeing and understanding the clue (Van Parreren, 1983, p. 27). Generalization leads to the discovery of what is essential: the experience, the problem and the professional task are reviewed; there is an extension to other cases and situations, including the less obvious ones.

In the stages of the way of knowledge described above, the experiences made explicit and reflected on by the supervisee merge with earlier experiences and previously acquired insights. The totality of our experience is hereby changed. Moreover, in the course of the supervision themes and insights which at first appeared to be of little or no relevance to one another coincide: key themes and patterns can be named, thereby making it possible to make specific areas the object of learning in a more effective way.

In order to be able to incorporate the insights which arise into the totality of insights relating to him/herself in dealing with professional tasks, the supervisee must undergo a reorganization; everything has to be rearranged: the view of the supervisee's feelings, the events, the patterns of behaviour, his/her predispositions and learning behaviour as well as their mutual connection have to be organised and evaluated again.

THE WAY OF CHOOSING

'Cheshire Puss,' she began, rather timidly, (...) 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?' 'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to' said the Cat. (Carroll, 1970, p. 88).

Insight in itself is not enough: what is important is what the supervisee intends to use it for, what kind of actions the supervisee will attach to it. Action demands a *specific intention*, a certain orientation, a target to be achieved. It also demands specific foci of attention and the creation of new possibilities. The supervisee has to make a choice to this end. This brings us to the conative segment (related to the will).

The will is an important directive element for change and integration (Rank, 1947; Assagioli, 1974). It is an energetic process that is set in motion by conscious motives (Jung, 1977).

By practising in making deliberate choices, the supervisee comes to realise what she/he intends to do and how. Her/his ability to choose and to make deliberate choices is increased. She/he also learns to work towards a goal.

The importance of the will and the function of choosing is also apparent in the point of view of the so-called 'functional school of social work' (Smalley, 1967) and in John Dewey's views (1933). Haan (1975) sees in the related concept of the supervisee as 'chief actor' a guarantee against the occurrence of excessive dependence on the supervisor by the supervisee.

During this phase the language of the supervisee should change to the language of the *director*: 'What I want is...'; 'What I intend to do is...'; 'What I am going to do is...'. In reflecting on his supervision, one of our supervisees wrote in this connection: 'I have noticed how my energy becomes action-oriented if I specify what I want to do'.

THE WAY OF ACTING

'The first thing I've got to do,' said Alice to herself, as she wandered about in the wood, 'is to grow to my right size again; and the second thing is to find my way into that lovely garden. I think that will be the best plan.'

It sounded an excellent plan, no doubt, and very neatly and simply arranged: the only difficulty was, that she had not the smallest idea how to set about it; (...). (Carroll, 1970, p. 64).

Reflection on one's own experiences in dealing with professional tasks is the core of learning in supervision. But the supervision is not successful if the supervisee is unable to *transform into action* what she/he has learned in the role of supervisee and recognised in her/his role as a professional.

According to Freire (1974), genuine reflection leads to action: he defines *praxis* as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (p.36). But how does the supervisee get this far? Some supervisees (e.g., the doers: accommodators and convergers) almost have to be restrained from moving on to action too soon, while others (e.g., divergers and assimilators) have to be carefully incited to act.

Anticipatory action: forming a mental image facilitates transformation into action

Before moving into action by setting out on the way of acting, the action itself has to be thought out and prepared. We can form a *mental image* of the action (Lindsay & Norman, 1977, pp. 412-415) before it is performed. Since this brings the action closer in mental terms, it facilitates its transformation into practice. Moreover, it also makes it possible to weigh up possible difficulties which we might encounter and to explore the consequences of the intended action. It is on this basis that the decision is taken to move into action in a certain way.

This process of what we call *anticipatory acting* has its theoretical basis in the Russian cognitive psychology of learning (see: Vygotsky, 1962). External action (material action) can be transformed

into inner (mental) action by a process of *interiorization*. The interiorization of this structure of action forms a key element in a learning process. On the other hand, mental actions can also be used to prepare new actions. De Groot (1965) refers to this process as 'mental empiricism'. A typical example is the chess-player who mentally prepares his following move. The result of preparing action in this way is that the supervisee comes to acquire *repertoires of behaviour* or *mental programmes* which can be considered as *disposition toward behaviour* (De Groot, 1978) and resemble what Van Parreren (1983) calls *structures of acting* or Norman and Rumelhart (1975) call *mental schemes*.

Director of his/her own role as actor-participant

It will be evident that in this phase of the process of learning in supervision, learning from experience becomes learning how to act: the supervisee now becomes *director of his/her own role as actor-participant* instead of *spectator*. It is a case of what the Russian psychologist Luria (Luria & Yudovich, 1959) called 'planning talk'. This anticipatory acting is not the same as practising, because the process of creative integration calls for more time and space for the inquisitive search for one's own way and potential. Its significance is that it brings the perspective of acting and a systematic approach to it nearer. This can be given form in various ways as following examples us show.

EXAMPLES

- The supervisor asks the supervisee to visualise that she/he is confronted with the learning theme which crystallised out in this supervision a second time. How will you act then? What are the points on which you will concentrate? Is that what you want? What will you do to prevent it?
- Another method is for the supervisor to get the supervisee to act it out. How does it feel/what are you doing? Please, do it one more time. What will be possible effects (On yourself; and on the other(s) involved)?

The performance of the action

After the supervision session the supervisee returns to his/her own practice situation in the role of *participating actor*: acting and deciding are now decisive. In doing so, she/he carries out her/his intentions, sometimes later on. This is no linear application, but a creative practical search for the form and possibilities which match her/him. The supervisee acquires new experiences in the process, which can be reported in the following supervision session and made the object of reflection again. The learning trajectory outlined above begins all over again, and the learning process is broadened and deepened. The intervention of the supervisor may be: What were your intentions? What have you done? How did it go? What experience did you get out of it? How will you/must you go on?

FINAL REMARKS

The way of learning described in this paper is cyclical. It may be short-term (one session) or long-term (more than one session). The supervisor will have to offer inexperienced supervisees a lot of guidance. As the supervisee gains in experience and the supervision progresses, the supervisee will be expected to take over an increasing part of this guidance.

In the course of a process of supervision the supervisee follows the cyclical way of learning described above time and time again. Slowly but surely the supervisee becomes an experienced worker in this way: she/he not only knows something, but she/he can do it too. The supervisee can function better and continue to learn from her/his work. As far as the latter point is concerned, an important criterion is the extent to which the supervisee him/herself is able to follow this cycle on his/her own. The more the supervisor has guided the process of learning of the supervisee from the perspective of *meta-learning* (secondary task), the more the worker who is no longer a supervisee will be able to do so.

NOTES

- ¹ The Dutch word 'verhalen' (narrating) can be used in two senses:
- to tell a story;
 - to shift a ship. We use it here in this double sense: when the supervisee narrates his/her experience in realizing the professional work, he/she both tells a story and shifts the experience.

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