Is there a felt need from head teachers to support their wellbeing through the offer of professional reflective supervision? If so, what model would suit them best?

Authors: Bernadette Cairns, University of Strathclyde/Highland Council; Dr Clare Daly, University of Strathclyde; Professor James Boyle, University of Strathclyde

Abstract

Rationale: Schools provide direct support to a range of pupils, many of whom have social/emotional needs or are vulnerable due to their economic status or family circumstances. Teaching can therefore be considered a profession with a high level of emotional demand, that requires the need for reflection, support, and a consideration of the emotional and psychological impacts on children, their families, and other colleagues within schools. The provision of supervision has been found to support the emotional wellbeing of education staff who engage with it, but this offer is not made to all. In addition, the model of supervision used in schools is often one 'borrowed' from another discipline and may not be completely suited to meeting the wellbeing needs of HTs who carry a significant emotional load in schools.

Aim: This small-scale research study was undertaken with a group of twelve head teachers (HTs) and eight educational psychologists (EPs) in one Scottish local authority. The research considered whether professional reflective supervision (PRS) could have a role in supporting HT wellbeing and if so, what form this should take.

Method: Both qualitative and quantitative information was gathered from questionnaires and from four workshops. HTs discussed whether PRS could be a helpful support to them. This was then offered by EPs, based on a model created by the HTs and was evaluated through an end of trial questionnaire and two workshops.

Findings: HTs agreed that PRS could support their wellbeing but that a bespoke model was required. Both HTs and EPs provided positive feedback on their experience of this model, where the wellbeing of HTs was central. This led to the creation of guidance, training and the ongoing offer of supervision for all HTs within the local authority, delivered by the EP Service.

Limitations: This research was context specific and small scale and so no causal claims are made from the patterns and trends emerging from the findings.

Key words*: professional reflective supervision, educational psychology, head teacher wellbeing*

Introduction

Although professional reflective supervision (PRS) is provided for many groups working with children and young people (Inskipp & Proctor, 1993; Carpenter et al., 2012; Reid & Soan, 2019; Hawkins & McMahon, 2020), this support is not provided as a matter of course to teachers working in Scottish schools (Lawrence, 2020). In general, "...teachers are largely alone in not receiving a boundaried space in order to reflect on their professional practice." (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015, p. 30).

The role of a teacher within a local authority school in Scotland has altered in line with the changes in policy over time. Teachers are not simply passing on knowledge or focused on learning but are expected to manage the complexities presented by their pupils, 34.2% of whom have additional learning needs (Scottish Government, 2022). They have a responsibility for the wellbeing and mental health of their students (Scottish Government, 2021) and a requirement to be trauma informed (NHS Health Scotland 2017; NHS Education for Scotland, 2020). They have oversight of the social and emotional needs of their pupils and families (Scottish Executive, 2006; Scottish Government, 2014) which can provide a greater level of emotional demand on them (Hanley, 2017; Ravalier & Walsh, 2017). It has therefore been argued that to expect this level of social and emotional engagement from teachers, without providing a safe reflective space, could be problematic for them as individuals and for the education system as a whole (Reid & Soan, 2019).

Hawkins and McMahon (2020) note 4 significant stressors in the current context for anyone in what they call the 'helping professions', all of which can be seen to significantly impact on schools:

- Greater demand from a wider number and range of people.
- Higher expectations from those receiving a service and a requirement for a higher quality of service.
- Fewer resources overall, due to diminishing budgets in local government and statutory services.

- Global issues such as climate change and economic volatility, leading to greater levels of poverty, psychological overload and fragmentation of the usual community and family supports.

(Adapted from Hawkins & McMahon, 2020, p. 7)

Even before the impact of the global pandemic in 2020, Lawrence (2020) suggested that these wider structural pressures had created a context where stress and psychological distress can feel overwhelming at times. Lawrence (2020) concluded that, "As each year passes staff are asked to do more and more, the workload increases and staff feel under so much pressure from all sides..." (p. 23).

These increased demands fall squarely on the shoulders of HTs, making their role more complex and one where the level of accountability and responsibility is taking a greater toll (Savill-Smith & Scanlon, 2022). HTs carry the responsibility for the school and therefore feel quite alone and open to judgement from parents, local authority managers, pupils and inspection bodies (Jerrim & Sims, 2019). Interactions are often with people leaving them with their concerns. These might be complaints about the service being delivered; the behaviours of others; sharing of concerns about learning; or complaints regarding a lack of resource (Kennedy & Laverick, 2019; Lofthouse & Whiteside, 2020).

These demands can impact more significantly on HTs of small rural schools where pupil and staff numbers are very low and there is no wider management structure to support the individual HT in solution finding and decision making (Wilson, 2009).

To address these tensions, many have advocated for PRS as a space to be able to share the emotional load with someone outside of the school. Someone who can hold and contain the level of emotion felt and provide a safe space to explore issues and to rehearse different ways of understanding and managing them (Ravalier & Walsh, 2017; Lawrence, 2020; Bainbridge et al., 2022).

This proposition has been further strengthened by the impact of the recent pandemic (Connor et al., 2022), which has provided the catalyst to bring into mainstream discussions the possibility of PRS being more regularly provided in schools, as the increasing pressure on staff to keep children safe and improve, not only their academic skills and successes, but also

their wellbeing, has been recognised and acknowledged (Hanley, 2017; Reid & Soan, 2019; Lawrence, 2020; Beattie et al, 2022; Public Health Scotland, 2022).

If the level of stress is the main determinant for PRS to be provided, many school senior managers would argue that this is a growing feature within our education system (Ofsted, 2019; White, 2020; Education Institute of Scotland, 2021), and therefore an exploration of the benefits of PRS for HTs may now be an essential consideration.
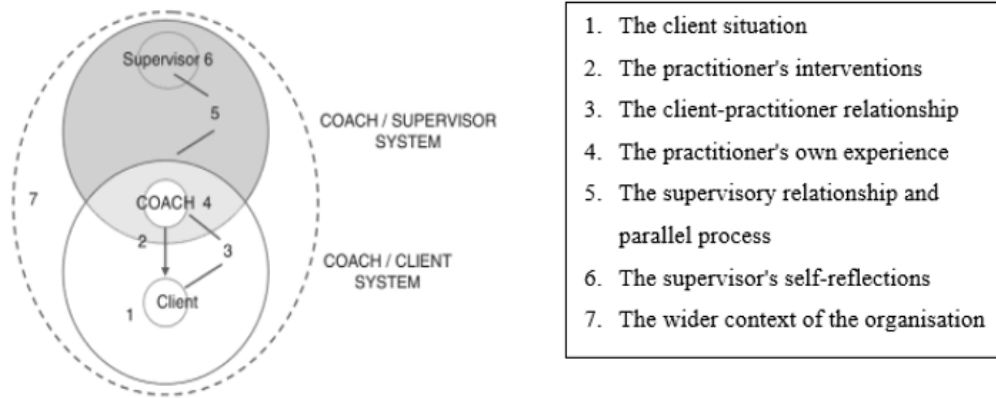
Where supervision is provided in schools, it can support teacher wellbeing, develop resilience and help HTs manage stress (Reid & Soan, 2019). It can contain and reduce the emotional load on school staff and support their growth and development and consequently enhance their skills in working with children and young people (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013). Such a reflective space can also increase competence in finding solutions and provide protected time for strategic thinking that can bring benefits to HTs, their staff and the children and young people within the school (Alila et al., 2016; Bainbridge et al., 2022). Sturt and Rowe (2018) suggest that "...supervision can be an essential part of establishing and maintaining this culture of safe practice, which will safeguard both children and staff" (p. 9).

Many models of supervision understandably draw from the experiences of therapists or clinicians (James et al., 2006; Simon et al., 2014). Others focus on the development of the supervisee over time (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), or the management functions, with the supervisor taking a more evaluative or quality assurance role (Kadushin, 1992; Soni, 2019). Within social work an integrated model is used. This attempts to incorporate the various stakeholders, purposes and functions of the work, as well as the process of supervision itself and the needs of the organisation, (Morrison, 2005; Wonnacott, 2012). In the world of psychology, a process model, maintaining a focus on an individual child or family is often supported (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). This model requires the supervisor to take account of the relationships, emotions and behaviours influencing outcomes in the real world as well as within the supervision session itself. See Figure 1:

Figure 1:
The 7 Eyed Model of Supervision

A diagram of the seven-eyed model of supervision:

1. The client situation
2. The practitioner's interventions
3. The client-practitioner relationship
4. The practitioner's own experience
5. The supervisory relationship and parallel process
6. The supervisor's self-reflections
7. The wider context of the organisation

(Reproduced From Hawkins & Schwenk, 2011, p. 30)

Across all of these models, there are some common features as outlined in Table 1:

Table 1:

Most common features of supervision models

1	It is always a collaborative approach and requires human interaction between a supervisor and supervisee(s).
2	It always has the client(s) as the focus.
3	The supervisee and supervisor need to have a level of self-awareness and understand their own unconscious and conscious biases and how these play out with the client and within the context of supervision.
4	There needs to be consideration and an understanding of systemic and ecological thinking (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in relation to all parties who have an interest in the supervisory process.
5	It is not just a space for reflection, but there needs to be a focus on learning improved practice for the supervisee, better service provision and higher levels of skill and respect within the profession.

Adapted from (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989)

However, these models and frameworks, have all been created with other professions in mind and although some of these theoretical underpinnings are useful within the context of education, they do not reflect an understanding of the unique context of schools. Where there are studies involving teachers and HTs, the model adopted is generally one borrowed from a

clinical setting (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015), with a few exceptions (Simon et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2018). The role of the HT and the context of the school are very different to that of a counsellor or clinician, supporting just one client, or to that of a social worker with a specific focus on one family. These models in themselves may not therefore be sufficient when considering support within schools.

There are many examples of EPs providing supervision to support individuals or groups of colleagues within education (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013; Kennedy et al 2018; Kennedy & Laverick, 2019) and most would follow the British Psychological Society (BPS) guidance on how supervision might be undertaken both within the profession and by the profession (BPS, 1993; Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010; BPS, 2017).

EPs are certainly in a good position to provide supervision. Through their training and experience, they have the knowledge and skills identified above to be able to provide supervision to others (Nolan, 1999; Farrell et al., 2006; Kennedy & Laverick, 2019). They are already a regular presence in schools, building positive relationships with school staff (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013). In a survey undertaken in England in 2016, school staff reported that EPs were the key providers of mental health support, providing 81% of the specialist mental health support (Sharpe et al., 2016) and therapeutic work can be part of their role (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019). They regularly engage in consultation with school staff, more so than other applied psychologists (Newman et al., 2017). They employ strong interpersonal styles of working that are required for consultation and support, with psychodynamic psychology being evident in their practice (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). They are considered to "…employ highly sensitised consultation skills, often in times of perceived crisis or helplessness…positioning the EP as the highly skilled humanistic driver of cognitive and behavioural change." (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020, p. 13).

This study accepted that EPs were well placed to provide PRS to colleagues in schools and acknowledged the benefits reported in many cases to date. Supervision can give space to HTs to discuss and reflect on their current situation and the impact of their role on their wellbeing. However, this study considered whether the models often used by EPs for this purpose are also the ones most suited to supporting HTs.

Research Aim

6

This was a small-scale research study, undertaken with a group of twelve head teachers (HTs) and nine educational psychologists (EPs) in one rural Scottish local authority. The research considered two questions:

1. Do HTs have a felt need for PRS as a support for their wellbeing?

   And if so,

2. What model would suit them best?

Research Design

Through two initial workshops with the HTs, the phenomena of supervision and wellbeing were explored. This enabled a detailed consideration of the current experiences of HTs and whether they felt there was a place for supervision to further support them in their role. Six, one-hour long supervision sessions were then provided on-line to the HTs by EPs at monthly intervals. Pairings were decided by matching EPs with HTs they had not worked with before, to reduce the possibility of role confusion (Worthington, 1987), or the possibility that sessions would become case consultations about familiar pupils in the school. Both HTs and EPs were then involved (separately) in two further workshops to provide feedback on the experience of supervision and to inform decision making within the local authority regarding the future offer of PRS for HTs.

Developmental Work Research (DWR) (Sannino, 2011) was used together with focus group methodology in all four workshops. DWR aims to support changes in professional practice through directly engaging with participants in discussion and analysis of their own activity system (in this case, local authority schools). Through this process, practitioners become more knowledgeable of the various cultural and historical bases to their existing practices that would be less of a focus in other approaches. DWR workshops are led by a researcher/facilitator who supports the 'cycle of expansive learning' (Engeström, 2001), through a series of workshops, that leads to practice change over time.

Activity systems undergo cycles of expansive learning as established practice and associated contradictions are challenged and then resolved (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). These cycles come into being through collective 'Zones of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky, 1978), where a group of individuals see the same tensions in the system at the same time and start to nudge change within the system as a result. This new collective learning and knowledge

creation can be supported through DWR methodology as an intervention and application of the theory of expansive learning. (Warmington, 2011).

The DWR workshops in this study drew on the dialectic nature of theory and practice and were able to support discussion of the issues within the education system, specifically in relation to impacts on HT wellbeing. They supported the HTs to identify required changes and with the researcher, incrementally enabled changes over time, to embed a new processes and practice in PRS.

DWR workshops require a structure and for this research it was decided to use focus group methodology, which would comprise an element of teaching or information giving to stimulate discussion and gather participant views across the four workshops. Focus group methodology was chosen as an approach, rather than individual interviews, as this allows scope for clarification and qualification in responses. It was expected that few, if any, of the HTs would have experienced PRS before and so it was thought that discussion would be richer in a group, where participants were able to collectively discuss this new concept and relate it to their current situation. Additionally, the researcher would act as moderator, able to invite further comment and discussion from participants. This process could support individuals to begin to collectively make sense of the phenomenon being discussed and to construct a shared meaning around it (Reid & Reid, 2005).

COVID-19

This study was undertaken while restrictions were in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These restrictions meant that physical distancing was required. Travel was restricted and visits to offices and schools was much reduced. As a result, adaptations had to be made to the usual ways of gathering data. Ethical approval was received from the University of Strathclyde and the local authority in which the study was undertaken. This allowed only on-line contact with participants and therefore the workshops were conducted on-line using [Microsoft Teams](). This was a familiar platform for the participants involved. As a rural authority, the council had already provided laptops to all school senior managers and centrally based staff well before the start of the pandemic and so the provision of software, hardware and reliable internet connection and processing speed were not issues. This meant that participants were all comfortable and confident with the use of the technology, familiar with meeting on-line and used to using Microsoft Teams. This context overcame many of the

drawbacks often cited in using video conferencing for group discussion (Archibald et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2020; Boland et al., 2022).

Participants and recruitment

HTs were chosen as a focus for this study because in their management role they may feel a greater need for supervision from someone external to the school (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015). They are often in the position of listening to and absorbing the anxieties and concerns of their staff (Ofsted, 2019). Supporting their wellbeing could also have wider benefits across the school (Glazzard & Rose, 2019).

It was not feasible to undertake the study with all local authority HTs as time was limited. Purposive sampling of participants from the HT cohort within the LA was therefore undertraken (Palinkas et al., 2015). This technique was considered appropriate to the study as it required a range of participants who had an interest in this area of study and were therefore prepared to share their time, which is limited. They also needed to have the knowledge and experience that could inform a detailed description of the system across the range of schools of different sizes, from both primary and secondary sectors (Creswell et al., 2011).

Selecting three participants from each of the four administrative areas of the local authority provided a representative group of 12 from those who indicated an interest in participating in the study. It was considered that this gave enough variability in knowledge and experience, without being too large as to impact negatively on the engagement of participants. This number could also be accommodated within focus group methodology and was appropriate for use within a Developmental Work Approach (DWR) (Engeström, 2001), where workshops usually have between eight and 12 practitioners (Warmington, 2011).

Because data would be gathered through group discussions being conducted on-line, it was considered important that participants could all see each other on screen. As the chosen platform for the focus group discussion, Microsoft Teams helpfully supports seeing 12 participants on a screen.

All HTs within the local authority were asked to note their interest in participating in the study. Those who responded first and met the requirements of the selection criteria were asked to participate and to complete the Participation Agreement. There were no criteria set

for the length of time the HTs had been in post as this could have led to some participants being identified in such a small sample. Some were however very experienced, and others where more recently appointed. One secondary HT and two Primary HTs were required from each of the four administrative Areas. Four of the HTs were male (two Primary and two secondary) and eight were female (six primary and two secondary).

Eight EPs from within the local authority Psychological Service also participated as supervisors, providing supervision sessions for the HTs and contributing their views of the experience in a final workshop at the end of the study. EPs were chosen to act in the role of supervisor because it was considered they would have the appropriate skills and knowledge to do so. They are trusted by school staff and are used to undertaking sensitive support and emotional containment generally in their role. They also understand the role undertaken by HTs and were familiar with the pressures on schools at the time.

The sampling of EPs as participants in this study was also purposive (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants needed to have the knowledge and appropriate level of skill to be able to provide PRS to HTs. (It was not considered appropriate for Trainee EPs or for those with less than 2 years' experience post qualifying as they would be unlikely to have had significant experience in delivering supervision to others in any context). They also needed to have an interest in this area of work and the time in their scheduled workload to be able to commit to provide six sessions of supervision to the HT participants allocated to them.

All 15 eligible EPs within the LA service were invited to note an interest in participating in the study. It was considered that in terms of current workload, it would not be appropriate for an EP to support more than two HTs and so between six and 12 EPs were required to support the 12 HTs who potentially could have participated. Nine EPs expressed an interest in participating in the study and eight eventually were able to offer sessions.

Procedures

Even though it has been recommended as a benefit within the literature (Osborne & Burton, 2014; Reid & Soan, 2019; Lawrence, 2020), it was important at the outset of this research to clarify whether HTs themselves thought that supervision would support their role and help address the tensions and stresses that are associated with it. Workshop 1 was therefore undertaken as an initial scoping study. It explored the culture and nature of the work of HTs

within the local authority. Information was gathered using a priori themes identified within the second-generation Activity Theory model (see Figure 2). This model was chosen as a means of framing the discussion and organising the data received from the workshop as it allowed the various aspects of the activity system (in this case the context of a local authority school) to be considered in detail and the tensions and contradictions within the system to be identified and categorised under the various themes:

Figure 2:

Second Generation Activity Theory Model
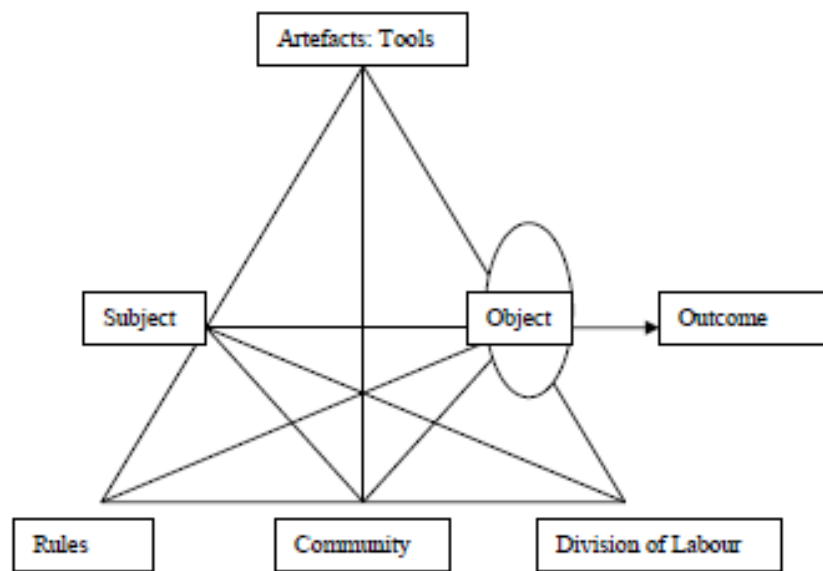
(Engeström, 1987)

The second workshop with the HT participants enabled a discussion of the possible models of supervision and those most offered to staff in schools. The focus of this part of the research was to consider what approach would be the best fit for the HTs. A framework for supervision was then able to be designed with participant input.

The supervision framework that was created was then trialled with regular monthly supervision sessions offered to the HT participants by EPs already experienced at providing such supports. After the final supervision session, each HT participant provided feedback on their experience of supervision using the Manchester Clinical Supervision Scale (MCSS) (Winstanley, 2000). This survey is often used in evaluations of supervision practice to gather

the views of supervisees on their experience, responding to a set of statements on a five-point Likert Scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

A further two workshops (one with the HT participants and one with the EP participants), also gave space to consider whether participants felt a benefit from the provision of regular supervision and if it had supported HT wellbeing. This discussion then informed consideration of whether PRS should be a support offered more widely within the LA.

Method of Data Analysis

The four workshops were recorded, for ease of analysis of the discussion content. They were then transcribed and anonymised.

Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring, 2019) was used to analyse the data as it allowed both the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the workshops to be analysed together. It also supported the use of a priori themes and questions that guided the workshop discussions, that would be less suited to other forms of thematic analysis.

The MCS Surveys were completed anonymously by the HTs and results collated on a spreadsheet. The statements in the survey broadly sit within the Formative, Normative and Restorative domains, often reported in relation to models of supervision (Inskipp & Proctor, 1993). An overview of common responses could then be reported on. In this research a more general view on supervision was sought and so those areas where there was collective agreement was of most interest.

As an output from the overall research, the framework for supervision that was co-created and trialled with the HTs was then summarised, along with guidance for the delivery of supervision, informed by the participant discussion. This provided an agreed framework and rationale for this support that can be used by others within the LA or wider, in the future.

Results

Workshop 1

Analysis of the results from the first workshop were recorded using the second-generation Activity Theory model (Engeström, 1987). Analysis indicated that the HTs in this study saw themselves in a leadership role, working through their staff to support children, young people

and their families. They understood that their role was relational in nature and as well as supporting the creation of the vision and values within their schools, they also acknowledged their responsibilities in managing crises, which they felt were inevitable.

The tensions and contradictions they experienced within the system caused them considerable stress and they were able to describe the impact this had on their wellbeing. These tensions are summarised in Figure 3:

Figure 3:

Tensions and contradictions within the current system
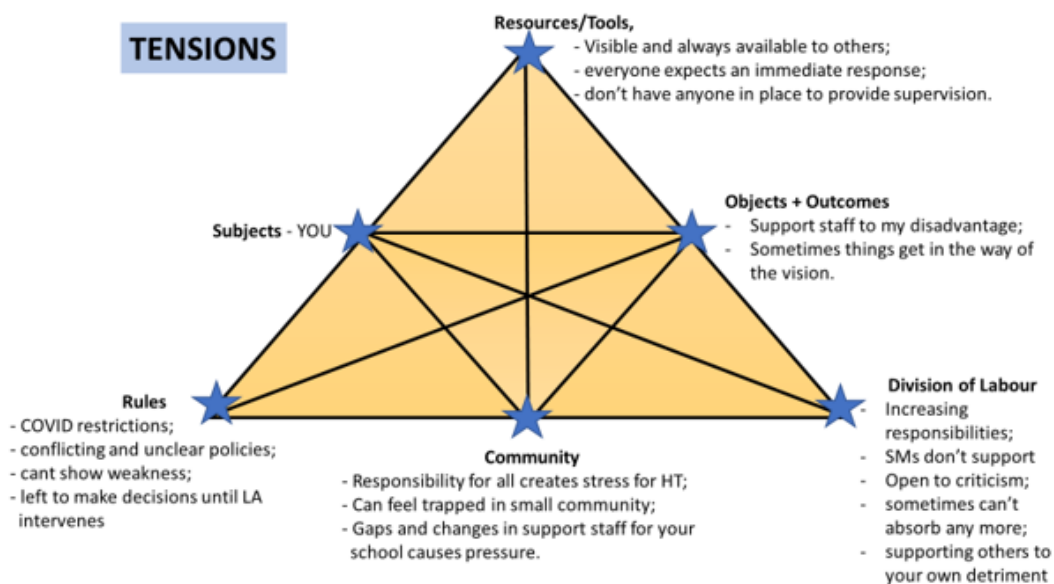
The HTs in this study felt responsible in some respects for the wellbeing of their whole school community and were aware that they often supported others to their own detriment. They could see that there was a gap in provision in terms of support for themselves in their role and they were keen to consider further how this need might be met.

HTs reflected on the importance and benefit to having access to computers and on-line communication, but there was also a vulnerability that they felt by this making them always visible and accessible. They reported the pressure from the demands from others and the expectations that they would respond immediately to concerns or complaint.

In a rural authority, there were tensions caused by living and working within the geography of the school community and a difficulty in finding the balance between their personal and professional lives. This was more acute in small schools, where the HT may be the only promoted member of staff, and it was further exacerbated when there was felt to be limited personal support from senior managers within the LA.

Those participants who had been HTs for some time, noted the changes in their role. Some of this pressure had come from the recent impact of COVID-19. However, they also reported a growing emphasis on meeting complex needs and supporting children and families at a time when they perceived a reduction in resource to do this. This left them holding the burden of these expectations.

HTs often reported feeling left to make decisions on their own and looked for clarity in policy and guidance to support them in their role. HTs needed clear, unambiguous guidance to reduce the feelings of vulnerability or isolation in the decisions they made. Similarly, advice and guidance from line managers was reported to not always be clear or accessible.

Workshop 2

In the second workshop, HTs reported regularly taking home the stress they felt in their working life and using family and friends to provide support that they were not able to access within the LA. While they often had established support networks among their HT colleagues, there were some issues they felt inappropriate to discuss with them and there was a level of guilt experienced in taking time from colleagues who they knew were also under significant stress. When considering the gaps in support, the HT participants in this study noted the lack of a trusting culture and skilled practitioners who could provide them with the appropriate emotional support. Within this context, they could see the potential benefits of receiving PRS from an experienced colleague who was familiar with their role, with time specifically ring fenced for this purpose.

The HTs involved in this research considered some of the models often used to provide supervision and while they could see some benefits in them, they felt that their circumstances required a different model. The models shared and discussed with them are displayed in Table 3, with some comments made by the HTs in relation to each one. They considered none to be wholly appropriate to their needs, but instead, were able to describe what they felt

14

would suit their situation better. The analysis of the workshop transcription identified key principles from their discussion that could be embedded within a framework of support and supervision, rather than creating a prescriptive model. One benefit they saw in having a framework rather than a defined model, was that it would allow a range of approaches to be used in supervision sessions, as appropriate to the context. The agreed framework covered aspects of the role of the supervisor as well as the process of supervision itself and is exemplified in Table 2:

Table 2:

Agreed principles for a Framework for Supervision

1. PRS should be provided as a discrete service, contracted for this purpose, rather than an add on to someone's role
2. Supervisors should be familiar with the role of the HT to better understand their context
3. Supervisors should be experienced in delivering PRS and be skilled at containing emotional distress and knowledgeable about human psychology
4. The process should be clearly focused on supporting the wellbeing of the supervisee
5. Supervision sessions should provide a safe, confidential space to discuss issues that are of most significance to the supervisee
6. Supervision should not feel hierarchical in nature. The relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee should be built on trust
7. Supervisors should be able to support the supervisee in finding solutions, but also be confident in advising on potential actions and interventions that may help in a specific situation

Table 3:

Models of supervision

| Supervision Model	Descriptor	HT Comments
Therapy specific Models e.g., James et al., 2006;	Models a therapeutic approach for therapists	*These were mentioned but not considered with HTs as therapy and counselling was not being offered to them.*
Developmental Model e.g., Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987	Focus on the changing needs and incremental development of the supervisee over time	"I imagine that if you are getting supervision, you're increasing somebody's capacity to manage those situations and move forward themselves." "The model in the way that it's described ... suggests that the supervisor would ... have some expert knowledge or background around about how they could support the supervisee."
Functions/Managerial Model e.g., Kadushin, 1992	Evaluation and appraisal of the supervisee	"...because it's about the impact on the client and the outcomes for the client in the long run that then puts that kind of performance element possibly on there, rather than the well-being of the supervisee." "...a feeling of judgement which would affect the trust." "... is that containment because of the business interests rather than containment because of the sort of emotional welfare ... we better sort this out because we don't want a complaint, rather than ... how you grow as a leader and a manager."
Relational Model e.g., Kennedy et al., 2018	Build trust and security, guided by the supervisee	"...you want somebody that's got a bit of empathy with what you're going through." "...out of the models it was one I liked best, but that's because it suits education and suits our context more than perhaps the other ones do."

16

Process Model e.g., Hawkins & Schwenk, 2011	Attend to wider issues in the system	"A lot rides on the supervisor." "...not starting with the client but looking at it starting at the supervisor." "You've got to stick the supervisee at the centre of this process. Without doing that you're stuffed; it's not going anywhere." "I almost want to draw a circle around the supervisee and the supervisor." "You might feel, as a supervisee, that actually what you want to bring isn't necessarily client focused." "And with that in mind it could almost bring a feeling of guilt if there was another aspect that you're bringing to the supervision."
Integrated Model e.g., Morrison (2005); Wonnacott (2012)	Integrates all aspects of the system	"... this one to me...doesn't make much sense to me. This just looks confusing to me." "I was thinking the same thing." "But where is the person at the centre of this? I don't see it." "The emotional aspect of working in a school or in education is often missed for the workers within it." "...it's useful but it doesn't really focus on you. It focuses on something else and it's quite clear because that's what it says - that's what's in the middle."

The HTs in this study already understood one of the main aims within their role was to support the wellbeing and academic success of the children in their care and they could see the consequential benefits to the children, families and staff they worked with if they were better supported through a supervision model focused on their emotional wellbeing. The framework created from the discussion in Workshop 2 therefore places them at the centre, which is quite different to other models where the child/client is the focus. This is illustrated in Figure 4:

Figure 4:

Component Parts of a Framework for Supervision in Education
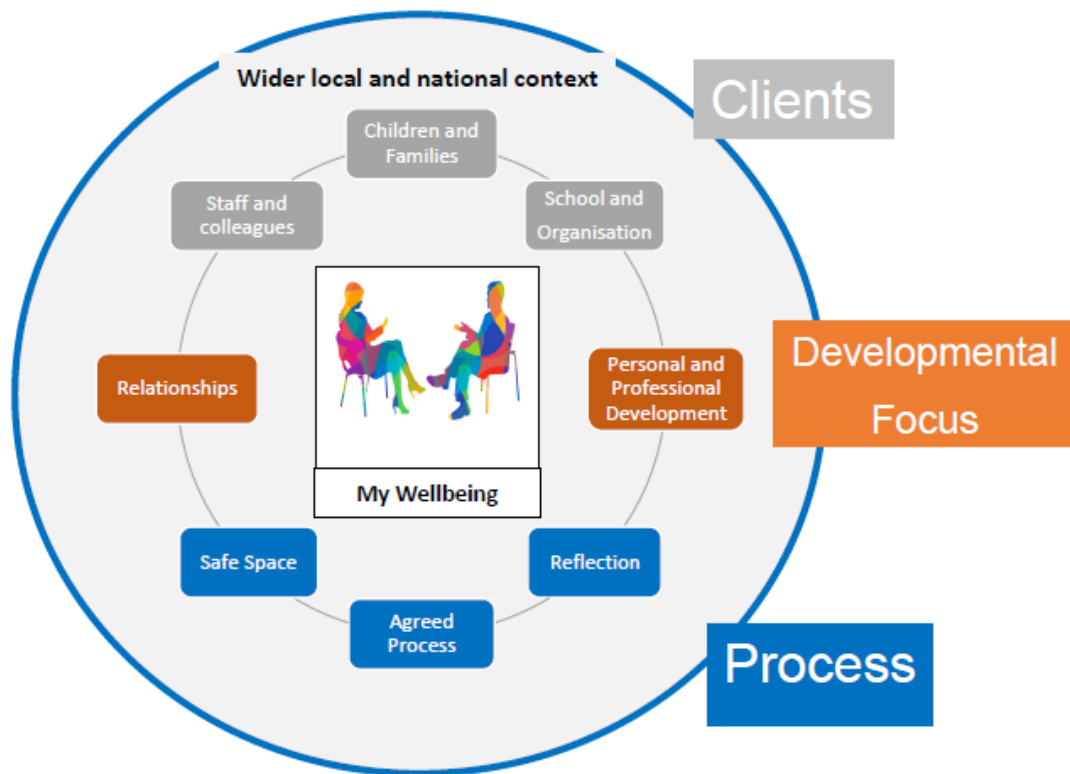
The delivery of PRS

Ten of the original twelve HT participants continued with the next part of the research – the delivery of PRS. The framework advised by the HT participants and illustrated in Figure 4, along with the key principles, was shared in a training session with the EP participants and then used to offer each HT, six supervision sessions. However not all HTs were able to engage in the six sessions. One HT had to withdraw from the research completely, due to illness. One HT completed the baseline questionnaire but did not manage any of the

supervision sessions, having to cancel the first session due to staff absence initially and then being unable to continue with the study due to other pressures in the school. Of the eight HTs who engaged in the supervision sessions, only five accessed all six sessions, although a further two accessed five out of the six offered. One only managed four sessions.

It is perhaps ironic, that an intervention established to support staff wellbeing and reduce stress, was not able to be accessed by all participants, usually due to stresses at work.

Impact of PRS

At the end of the study, *The Manchester Clinical Supervision Scale* (Winstanley, 2000), was completed by all eight HTs who received supervision.

There was unanimous agreement on the survey returns that "Supervision gives me time to 'reflect'." The HTs also all strongly disagreed with the statement "Supervision is unnecessary for experienced /established staff".

They were able to see the benefits of reflection for themselves as experienced practitioners. They agreed that there were significant benefits to be gained from support and supervision and agreed that "Supervision makes me a better practitioner" and "I feel less stressed after seeing my supervisor". Specifically, they agreed that "I can widen my skill base during my supervision sessions" and "I think receiving supervision improves the quality of care I give".

In relation to the skill of the EPs providing supervision within this study, the HT participants all agreed that "My supervisor provides me with valuable advice" and that "My supervisor gives me support and encouragement". They did not feel that supervision was intrusive or unhelpful in anyway and the unbiased nature of the support offered seemed to provide an open platform for sensitive topics to be explored.

On all aspects of the restorative domain (trust/rapport and supervisor's level of skill/advice) and formative domain (reflection and improved care/skill), there was positive agreement from participants. In relation to the normative domain, there was agreement on the importance of supervision, but real issues with HTs finding time to engage with the process, as noted above.

A summary of the statements where the participants unanimously agreed is provided in Table 4:

Table 4:

Responses from the Manchester Clinical Supervision Survey

Questions where there was unanimous agreement in the HT experience of supervision (N=Normative, F=Formative, R=Restorative		
F	I can widen my skill base during my supervision sessions	Agree (7) or Strongly Agree (1)
F	I think receiving supervision improves the quality of care I give	Agree (7) or Strongly Agree (1)
R	My supervisor provides me with valuable advice	Agree (5) or Strongly Agree (3)
R	My supervisor offers an 'unbiased' opinion	Agree (5) or Strongly Agree (3)
R	Supervision makes me a better practitioner	Agree (5) or Strongly Agree (3)
R	I feel less stressed after seeing my supervisor	Agree (5) or Strongly Agree (3)
N	It is important to make time for supervision sessions	Agree (4) or Strongly Agree (4)
R	My supervisor is open with me	Agree (4) or Strongly Agree (4)
F	Work problems can be tackled constructively during supervision sessions	Agree (2) or Strongly Agree (6)
R	My supervisor gives me support and encouragement	Agree (2) or Strongly Agree (6)
F	Supervision sessions facilitate reflective practice	Agree (1) or Strongly Agree (7)
F	Supervision gives me time to 'reflect'	Strongly Agree (8)

The final two workshops provided an opportunity for the HTs and the EPs who were involved in the study, to give their views on their experience from the perspective of either supervisee or supervisor. HTs and EPs attended separate workshops as it was felt they would be more honest in their comments if those they had been partnered with, were not involved in the discussion.

In each workshop, both HTs and EPs were asked similar questions. Initial responses were gathered anonymously on a Google JamBoard, with some discussion to gather further detail from those wishing to share. These comments are recorded in Table 5 below:

Table 5:

Responses to workshop questions

1	**Did you get on with your supervisor/supervisee?** All participants stated "yes"
2	**If there was an option to continue – would you?** All participants stated "yes"
3	**What themes were discussed in supervision?** Staff and colleagues; wellbeing, children and families, school/organisation; relationships; personal and professional development were all noted by both HTs and confirmed by EPs.
4	**On a scale from 1-10, to what extent do you feel your wellbeing was the focus of the supervision sessions?** A mean score of 8.13 was provided by the HTs and 7.3 by the EPs. (One EP noted that their score was low (6) because much of the discussion was focused on the wellbeing of others rather than the HT)
5	**On a scale from 1-10, to what extent were you able to use the space to discuss what YOU/HT brought?** The EPs had a mean score of 8.7, while the HTs had a mean score of 9.875. They obviously felt that they were able to lead the conversation in the sessions.
6	**Does anything need changed regarding the model we have created?** There were only three issues raised by the HTs in response to this question: - Supervision wasn't immediately available when there was a challenging issue, but it was accepted that this would be difficult to provide. - The name 'supervision' could suggest a managerial or hierarchical process with negative connotations, which was not how the participants experienced the process of PRS. They proposed calling it 'support and supervision' instead. - The need to be flexible around agreeing time and ensuring agreed times were protected.
7	**Does anything need changed regarding the model we have created?** For the EPs, there were only two comments made in relation to the framework. - What was delivered conformed well to the model provided, indicating that this seemed to work intuitively for the EP. - This was further confirmed by the second comment from one EP, who reported "The model worked OK for me. it was enough to provide a framework and ideas, but not restrictive at all."

A final question was asked of both sets of participants: *"What worked and what didn't?"* Several themes emerged from the qualitative content analysis of the transcript of the end of study workshops with both the HTs and EPs. The comments from the HTs are recorded below in Table 6 and those of the EPs are recorded in Table 7:

Table 6:

Themes identified by HTs from the workshop discussion

Themes identified	Examples and codes from the data
Timing and time commitment	Supervision wasn't always available when required Using supervision to support time to reflect around specific topics/tasks that needed completed Having other things demanding your time
Building Relationships between supervisor and supervisee	Getting to know your supervisor at the outset Building trust
Being Supported	Feeling supported by the supervisor Confidential space to discuss emotionally charged issues
Planning, preparation and delivery	Finding a distraction free time in the diary to keep for supervision sessions. Training, knowledge and understanding of supervision. The use of a virtual platform.
Skill of the supervisor	Flexible, Containing, supportive, psychological skills, listening skills, able to build coherence, perspective taking, suggestions for action, objective, etc
Reflection and challenge	Space to be able to consider, discuss and reflect. Being able to have deep conversations about issues that challenge

Table 7:

Themes identified by EPs during the workshop

Themes identified	Examples and codes from the data
Timing and time commitment	Timing in the school term/year Finding a time/space that wouldn't be disturbed Workload and competing priorities
Building Relationships between supervisor and supervisee	Building trust Developing a relaxed relationship
Being Supported	Providing direct support to the supervisee
Planning, preparation and delivery	Using a contract initially and agreeing dates in advance General planning and preparation The use of a virtual platform.
Skill of the supervisor	Flexible, Containing, supportive, psychological skills, listening skills, able to build coherence, perspective taking, suggestions for action, objective, etc
Reflection and challenge	Space to be able to consider, discuss and reflect. Being able to have deep conversations about issues that challenge

All participants in this research reported being positive about the provision of PRS, from the perspective of both the supervisors and supervisees and all stated that if there was the option to continue with supervision sessions, that they would. The benefits for the HTs were clearly linked to support for their emotional wellbeing, decision making and professional practice, while for the EPs the benefits were seen in the improvement of their skills and practice in supporting others.

Both HT participants and EPs were pleasantly surprised that providing supervision on-line seemed to work well. For all EPs their experience of both providing and receiving supervision, up until their experience during the global pandemic, had been face-to-face. One EP commented, "But actually, and maybe it was just because we were all used to working on-line by the time we started it, we were able to kind of do it and it didn't feel too strange at all. I was quite surprised that it didn't feel odd."

Discussion and limitations

This research considered whether HTs have a felt the need for PRS as a support for their wellbeing and if so, what model would suit them best?

The HTs in this study were clear that, even with other supports in place, there was a role for PRS to support their wellbeing, particularly to help process the emotional content from their role. They recognised the skills, knowledge, and experience that EPs have and confirmed that in their view, EPs were well suited to delivering PRS. This was however based on very limited experience, and it is not the case that EPs are the only group capable of acting in the role of supervisor. Indeed, while it is acknowledged that EPs have significant skills in this area and already provide supervision to specific groups of staff from time to time, this is a limited resource that would not be able to support all HTs with PRS without significant investment from local authorities. That said, not all HTs would wish to take up this offer and if PRS can support a HT who might otherwise feel overwhelmed and leave their post, perhaps this investment would be justified.

In considering the format of supervision and the model offered, the HTs in this study were happy with an on-line offer of PRS and within a rural authority, this worked well and was time efficient. They did not feel that the more frequently used models were best suited to their situation and wanted a framework where their wellbeing was the focus of sessions contracted with them. This framework was subsequently used to deliver supervision sessions, which were positively evaluated by both HTs and EPs.

This was a small-scale study, initially involving 12 HTs, but attrition rates were high, with only eight being engaged throughout due to illness and other work-related time pressures (mostly due to COVID). In common with other qualitative research however, the limitations in the techniques used also reflect their inherent strengths. The relatively small sample size and reliance on practitioner self-report are limiting factors, but this did allow the phenomena of supervision and staff wellbeing to be investigated in a comprehensive and in-depth manner, with next steps being guided by the HTs themselves.

Working so closely with participants over the eight months of the study may have influenced responses, with participants wanting to be positive about those they had developed a relationship with. There is therefore potential for positive bias in the responses provided, with no scope to control for variables in such a small sample of participants. This could only be tested by gathering more objective measures of impact over time.

Some writers would suggest that six supervision sessions are the minimum number that should be undertaken before any attempt be made to evaluate the process (Winstanley, 2000). Since this was not the case for all participants in this study, some caution must be taken in the interpretation of the results of the MCSS in relation to the impact of the supervision sessions.

The results of this research are context sensitive and specific to the HTs and EPs that took part and to the local authority in which it was undertaken. While no causal links are claimed for the research findings, the analysis did allow the extrapolation of patterns that are similar to findings from other research, adding to and strengthening the evidence base in this area of study (Tracy, 2010). The impact of workload and the pastoral support for pupils on the emotional wellbeing of HTs is a constant in the wider research (Education Institute of Scotland, 2021) and was a clear finding from this research too. In line with other research (Collie et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Lawrence, 2020), the HTs in this study felt the emotional load of the responsibilities they have in their role and understood that this has a direct impact on their wellbeing.

In the absence of other help, HTs will turn to each other for support, which can be beneficial, but also can create a negative echo chamber or feelings of guilt in taking up the limited time of a respected colleague. The provision of PRS can mitigate some of the effects of the emotional load HTs feel and can impact positively on their decision making through the opportunity for reflection and reframing with a skilled practitioner in the role of supervisor. It can also help them develop their professional standards for leadership (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021) in relation to reflection and decision making.

What was experienced by the HT participants and reported back in the DWR workshop discussions was in line with research about "good supervisors" (Bordin, 1983). This included letting supervisees self-direct the sessions, agree their own goals, building positive relationships and for the supervisors to challenge and support with feedback to the supervisees (Ladany et al., 2013).

What was different in the framework used in this study however was the central position of HTs in the supervision sessions, rather than a focus on the 'client'.

25

Calls for supervision to be a feature of the education system are not new (Steel, 2001). However, if this is to be provided to HTs, perhaps we need to listen to our HT colleagues and consider a more bespoke framework to meet their needs:

> "As work in human services becomes increasingly complex and ill-defined and practitioners are faced with significant vulnerabilities in the clients with whom they work and in those who support them, the place for supervision in ensuring effective practice has never been more important."
>
> (Kennedy et al., 2018, p. 295)

<u>Next Steps and Future Research</u>

The output from this research was the creation of guidance, information and a training module on the framework co-created by the participants, which is now being used in the LA in which the research was undertaken. Some additionality was provided to the Psychological Service to continue with the provision and to offer supervision to any HT within the LA who wanted to engage with this support. Six months after the initial offer of PRS was made to HTs in the LA, around 15% had engaged in this process. It is not expected that all HTs will avail themselves of this support, but monitoring take-up and capacity is clearly important in terms of managing a finite resource.

Continuing with this provision has enabled a larger cohort of HTs across the LA to be involved and further research is planned on the potential wider benefits to the development of individual leadership skills and the subsequent benefits to pupils and staff that was not able to be undertaken within the timeframe of the original research.

Many studies look at satisfaction rates or self-efficacy of the supervisees (Cheon et al., 2009; Mor Barak et al., 2009; Johnston & Milne, 2012; Rothwell et al., 2019), but far fewer consider the wider impact. Making the link between HT supervision and direct outcomes for pupils in school is difficult. Considering the leadership and decision making of HTs being supported through regular supervision sessions and assessing wider impact is the next logical step to take in further investigating this intervention.

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