Learning to be a Police Supervisor

The Swedish Case

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Abstract

This paper discusses the findings of a case study concerning a rarely investigated learning process in a police supervisor course (PSC) in Sweden. The paper argues that the educational design of reflective activities stimulates the course participants' self-awareness and professional development in their new tasks as supervisors. By using written course evaluations and longitudinal focus group interviews, the study facilitates the identification and articulation of the supervisors' learning processes during the PSC course. Results of the study emphasise the importance of well-educated supervisors to empowering the learning process of the police probationers creating sustainable professionals in a complex environment. The findings are thematised in three sections: Elucidating the Context, Changing Perspectives and Considering Consciously, which can be viewed as a general model for explaining similar learning processes in other occupations.

Keywords: Police training, Supervision, Constructing Knowledge, Reflexivity, Professional Development

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1. Introduction

There are many opinions about police forces in the world. Some people would say that during the last 30 years, police officers in the democratic world have become more aware of professional ethics and their mission in democratic society, which has led them to slowly become more professional (Chan, Devery, & Doran, 2003). Others would strongly disagree with this statement and cite examples of daily police abuse, corruption and destructive police culture (Crank, 2004). However, in literature regarding the police occupation, it seems clear that major changes have occurred during the last three decades. For example, in order to adapt to the demands of a changing democratic society, policing methods have become more proactive than

reactive, like community policing (COP) and problem based policing (POP) (e.g. Chan et al., 2003; Cox, 2011; Paoline III, Myers, & Worden, 2000). Police training methods will also have to change for societies to have police officers who are well prepared for the shifts in their occupation (e.g. Chan et al., 2003; Crank, 2004; van Maanen, 1975). In addition to the previous major academic work on police training by van Maanen (1975), Manning (1988), Fielding (1988), Chan (2003), Crank (2004) and others, there are several studies about police training programs and learning issues (e.g. Campbell, 2009; Tyler & McKenzie, 2014; Werth, 2011; White, 2006). Common ideas in these studies include the issue of self-awareness in entry-level police officers and versions of the concept of critical reflection (van Woerkom, 2010). Hence, in order for police to achieve and obtain professionality, they must gain the ability to critically reflect on their experiences and develop professional ethics, which evidently demand proper competence from the police educators.

Literature about intra-professional educators (de Ruyter & Kole, 2010) is fairly scarce, especially qualitative studies concerning learning processes and how educators conceive of their mission. However, White and Heslop (2012) imply that in a comparison between the educators of teachers, nurses and police educators, the practice of educating teachers lies centrally between theory and practice. This may be due to the fact that educating teachers has been connected to higher education (HE) for a longer period of time than educating nurses and police officers. The nurse educators talk a lot about *"legitimising"* the nurse profession, and the most important concept taught is *"caring"*. Police educators seem to focus on their own personal development as well as their mission as educators, and they distinguish between training and education. The latter is seen as an add-on to training that merely *"accessorises"* the professional (White & Heslop, 2012). These studies raise the question of whether to use the notions occupation, vocation or profession and whether training or education is used and connoted. According to literature on the subject of occupation or profession, it seems that occupational/vocational institutions strive to elevate professions via academician (Chan et al., 2003) and thus increasingly using the notion of education instead of training. White (2006) also identifies a hidden and obsolete behavioristic agenda, regarding British police training and education, within the Homeoffice in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, research concerning police training and educating often suggests a social constructivist perspective on occupational learning, which focuses on the process of the learner, hence questioning the quality in knowledge transfer pedagogies (e.g. Beighton, 2015; Campbell, 2009; Heslop, 2011). The dystopic descriptions of desctructive police socialisation where new police officers are forced into a culture of passivity and hostile views on the citizens, made by van Maanen (1975) and Crank (2004) among others, can also be challenged by encouraging images of heterogenic police cultures with possibilities to change, done by Chan et al. (2003).

Literature concerning the Swedish police training context mainly focuses on police students and the socialization process by which they become police officers (Bek, 2012; Lauritz, 2009; Petersson, 2015). However, studies concerning educators in the Swedish police training context is very scarce. Therefore, studies about

intra-professional educators, in this case police officers educating police officers, and how they perceive and learn about their mission, are rare.

Performed course evaluations on the investigated course (PSC), made 2014 by the Evaluation Department of the Swedish Police Academy, confirms rumours that this actual course is appreciated by the participants. The points of the overall benefits of the PSC were here graded 4.79 of 5.0, which may indicate a successful educational concept. This fact has also inspired the author to conduct this study. Hence, this paper on a Swedish police educator case can partly fill a research gap and inspire further studies on intra-professional educators. The contribution can be regarded as both conceptual and empirical. The intention is to show how longitudinal focus groups and the concept of practical reflexivity can identify, describe and explain this rarely investigated learning process in a vocational education context. The main research question is as follows: How do the Swedish supervisors, independently and while interacting, identify and describe their learning process to a capable police supervisor, and how can that process be understood and conceptualised?

2. Related literature

This section presents and discusses literature and research aligned with the research questions of the study, thereby preparing a foundation for interpreting the findings of the study.

2.1. Reflexive practice in the education context

> *Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it.* (Dewey, 1966, p. 139)

The concept of reflection is frequently mentioned in contemporary research concerning vocational and professional sets of education and professional development, especially literature written from a social constructivist point of view (e.g. Avis, 2002; Beighton, 2015; White, 2006). In this view knowledge can be developed by reflecting on and learning from experience and interaction. Schön (1983) dealt with the professions and their way of developing by reflecting on and in action. Moreover, reflection as a notion in learning concepts as situated learning and communities of practice was discussed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) was developed by Kolb (2009). In the 21st century, reflection seems to be discussed as a matter of individual (metacognitive) and collective (interactive) activity (Reynolds & Vince, 2004). In the same line of argument regarding collective learning, Knapp (2010) developed a model "Team learning", where reciprocal reflecting activities in teams can facilitate increased collective competence, especially when focus lies on the actual practise.

Moon (2004) thoroughly investigated the use of the concept of reflection in learning contexts and found that reflection sometimes seemed rather routine and fell

short of things like intuition and instinct. Moon (2004) also looked into theoretical approaches to the concept of reflection in learning and professional development. Moon further elucidated a situation of reflective practice in the professions from both a theoretical and a practical stance and reviewed the literature on reflection and learning among higher education students, focussing on the representation of learning. According to Moon, reflection is closely related to learning:

> *Reflection seems to operate mainly in three areas of learning and the representation of learning. They are reflection in initial learning, reflection in the process of representation and reflection in the upgrading of learning.* (Moon, 2004, p. 161)

Furthermore, Moon presented a model of how to use reflection in professional situations, building on two case studies "*in which reflection is consciously involved in processes occurring in professional situations in order to improve the outcomes of those processes*" (Moon, 2004, p. 177) The model includes with four phases: (1) developing awareness of the nature of current practice, (2) clarifying the new learning and how it relates to current understanding, (3) integrating new learning with current practice and (4) anticipating or imagining the nature of improved practice (Moon, 2004, p. 180). Following Moon's thorough overview of the concept of reflection, Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004) argued in favour of moving away from the concept of reflection as a cognitive activity towards the concept of practical reflexivity, which is characterised as a dialogical activity. Their definition of practical reflexivity connected to experiential learning was based on an ontological approach:

> *... practical reflexivity challenges the idea that learning is an internal cognitive process and replaces it with the notion that learning is an embodied, dialogical, and existential activity intimately tied to how we feel, what we say, and how we respond to each other* (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004, p. 35).

Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004) characterised "*good conversations*" (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004, p. 38) using a dialogue in which the participants questioned their assumptions and analysed how they could affect others and then hopefully create new practices.

However, there may be obstacles to implementing reflexivity in the Swedish police force. Rantatalo et al. (2015) implied that there could be resistance to soft values like reflection within the somewhat masculine police culture.

Using Moon's (2004) concept of the stages of the learning process enhanced by the interactive reflection concept of Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004), this study will argue how Swedish police supervisors have constructed new professional knowledge.

2.2. Supervision in an educational context

In this study, the notion of supervision is used because it has a prominent position in research related to occupational education and development. How supervision is to be understood in this particular context is presented below.

Reviewing contemporary research regarding supervision in occupational education, it seems clear that most studies have focussed on learning processes and pedagogics concerning therapists, counsellors and nurses. However, some literature has described educational supervision in vocational and professional contexts in a broader sense. Tveiten (2008) stated that the learning aspect of supervision is central and that the learner should be in focus.

Moreover, Tveiten (2010) defined the areas of supervision as pastoral care, leadership, therapy, evaluation, teaching and counselling. She stated that the borders between these are not in any sense clear and that supervisors are sometimes free to cross these lines as long as they can identify the consequences and keep their focus on the purpose of occupational supervision. Tveiten further discussed different kinds of supervision strategies and problematized the supervisor's role, focussing especially on the importance of a trusting and interactive relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Tveiten & Severinsson, 2006).

Lauvås and Handal (2001), who are often cited in research concerning occupational supervision, emphasized that supervisors can develop a theory of practice whereby the grounds in theory and practice are tested alongside ethical considerations using continuous reflection activities and further articulating tacit knowledge (Handal, Lauvås, & Lycke, 1990; Lauvås & Handal, 2001).

Regarding educational supervision, James et al (2007) have reviewed the existing theories about supervision in the context of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). They identified seven existing theories of supervision in the CBT field and further presented five steps to a successful learning process in supervision. Johnston and Milne (2012) connected with James et al. (2007) and explained how CBT-therapist supervisees learn in supervision. They argued in favour of a Socratic approach in which a reflective process occurs and there is a reciprocal relationship between probationers and supervisors. Following a similar path, Gazzola and Theriault (2007), who focussed on probationers in a master's course in counselling, built their study on the concepts of narrowing and broadening processes in supervision in order to demonstrate the importance of supervisors making *"efforts to create a safe, respectful and nurturing supervisory environment"* (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007, p. 202). Broadening refers to when supervision creates positive emotions that can lead probationers to think in new ways and get new options. Narrowing processes occur when supervision increases a person's options for action (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007).

Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) carried out a study of psychotherapists and argued in favour of high quality supervision in occupational training and education. They also accentuated the importance of continuous reflection in professional development: *"Reflection is understood as a continuous and focused search for a more comprehensive, nuanced and in-depth understanding of oneself and others, and of the*

processes and phenomena that the practitioner meets in his/her work" (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003, p. 29). Furthermore, they implied that bad education and supervision can lead to insecure professionals, early stagnation and professional closure. A similar argument can be found in a study regarding post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the New Zealand police force. Here, Stephens and Long (2000) showed that conversations between peers and supervisors may have a positive effect on their psychological and physical health, though it seems better to have negative communications with one's supervisor than with one's peers.

To summarize the chosen literature on supervising in occupational education, the concept of interactive, reciprocal and continuous reflection seems very important in building trusting relationships in educational supervising, especially in creating a durable and ethical professional human being.

3. Object of study

This second section will contain a description of the object of the study, the police supervisor task and course.

3.1. The fifth semester of SPBTP, the internship semester

After graduating from the Swedish Police Basic Training Programme (SPBTP), the police probationer applies for an internship in a Swedish police authority. The internship period, in which the police probationer receives a salary and the full mandates of a regular police officer, shall fulfil the overall aims of the police training curricula by applying the knowledge attained during the SPBTP to a real world context (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2013).

For six months, the police supervisor is responsible for supervising, giving feedback and assessing the probationer through regular conversations in groups or one-on-one, depending on how many probationers the supervisor is overseeing at the same time. The police field training officers (FTOs), on the other hand, are the ones who lead the probationer in the actual police work, but only in periods of two to eight weeks. The FTOs are supposed to give feedback and reports, both formally and informally, on the probationer's performance to the supervisor (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2009). During the internship period, the probationer rotates between different sections of police work: field work in uniform, traffic assignments and criminal investigations. The probationer also meets different FTOs during this process (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2013).

3.2. The Police Supervisor Course (PSC)

During the years 1995–1998, the Swedish police education system went through major changes. A revised basic training programme was created to build a contemporary Swedish police force and to introduce problem-based pedagogy (Bergman, 2004). The police supervisor was here regarded as a very important actor when

it came to organisational changes in the Swedish police force and making new police officers understand their mission in society (Polishögskolan, 1995). Since 1999, except in 2013, all the PSCs were executed by the Swedish Police Academy in Stockholm. The usual routine was that police officers applied to their police authority to attend the PSC and become supervisors. In relation to this study, the PSC was performed at four different occasions in 2013–2014 at the Swedish Police Academy.

The PSC at the Swedish Police Academy lasts 25 days, 12 of which are carried out on campus on four different occasions, while the remaining 13 are for home study. Once supervisors have completed the PSC, each one should be able to "*connect theories within the supervision field to his/her own practice, reflect on actions and consequences in the supervision situation, [and] exemplify how the probationer can be assessed within specific situations*" (Polishögskolan, 2014). Concerning the pedagogic design of the PSC, two main concepts are central: reflection and parallel processes. During the PSC, participants take part in the following activities: problematizing the supervisor assignment by working in groups, practising supervision through individual and group conversations, engaging in class discussion, doing home assignments and logging their thoughts throughout the course. Every course day on campus starts with individual reflections using the "*review mirror*" (backspegel) in the class (with 12 participants), focussing on the course and the assignments as supervisors. The idea is to make use of different kinds of reflection strategies as inspiration for the meetings with probationers. The concept of parallel process, where every move the course leaders make is an example of good or bad supervising, is thus often applied to the different activities in the PSC. Table 1 shows the curriculum of the PSC:

Table 1. Police Supervisor Course – Curriculum 2014

Occasion 1	Occasion 2	Occasion 3	Occasion 4
Check-in	*Check-in*	*Check-in*	*Check-in*
Self-presentation	Literature seminar (Tveiten)	Home assignment (probationer interview)	Experiential exchange
Contract/Rules (group)	Intro individual supervisor conversations	Intro group supervisor conversations	Show video on own supervisor conversation
Learning styles	Practice individual supervisor conversation	Practices on police students	Discussion
Supervising experiences	Communication obstacles (group)	Ethical dilemmas in police work (group)	
Supervisor and FTO role (group)	Assessment procedure (group)	Individual feedback (positive boost)	
Leading conversation			
Pedagogic view			
Review mirror, log (every day)	Review mirror, log (every day)	Review mirror, log (every day)	Review mirror, log (every day)
Checkout	*Checkout*	*Checkout*	*Checkout*

4. Methods

As the purpose of this study was to identify and describe a rarely investigated learning process in a specific occupational context where the educational actors should be inspired to articulate their views on the subject, a case study with an exploratory and a qualitative approach seemed most applicable (Louis Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Hence, in order to describe and interpret the learning process, course evaluations from all PSCs performed 2014 (N=58), combined with longitudinal focus group sessions with four PSC participants in 2014 were used. The course evaluations had several questions where the participants were encouraged to independently express their views on their learning in their own words. For example: *"The most important knowledges from the course? What course activity has particularly contributed to my learning through the course? In what way has the course changed my views on supervising? Following activities within the PSC will be of certain importance in my occupation because ... Suggestions on improving the course?"* Moreover, as there was a partial focus on the interactive aspect of the supervisors' learning process, focus group interviews were appropriate because they allow informants to challenge and extend each other's ideas and even introduce new perspectives to each other, which helped them to go deeper in their conceptions of learning (Louis Cohen et al., 2000). Furthermore, focus group interviews could be a way of getting access to tacit knowledge, which decreased the effect of the researchers pre-understanding:

> *Hence the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge – the participants' rather than the researcher agenda can predominate. It is from interaction of the group that the data emerge* (Louis Cohen et al., 2000, p. 288).

The focus group interviews not only generated conversation-based data, but also helped the informants dig deeper into their given assumptions about supervisory tasks because of the opportunity to receive the views and perspectives of others. Regarding the size of the focus group, there was a need to consider two aspects. First, the bigger the group, the more there may have been individual perceptions and contradictive statements. Second, revealing personal thoughts and reflections in group interviews required a safe and secure milieu (Wibeck, 2000). Cohen (2011, p. 437) suggests between four and twelve participants considering intra-group dynamics effects in a small group, and difficulties in handling a large group. With that and earlier negative experiences of large focus group interviews in mind, the researcher decided that there would be a group of four participants. Moreover, using longitudinal focus groups (i.e. Balogun, Huff, & Johnson, 2003; Brown, Nolan, Davies, Nolan, & Keady, 2008; Louis Cohen et al., 2000, p. 174), the researcher could get access to changes in conceptions during the assumed learning process. The individual course evaluation data were considered as additional perceptions and regarded as text for interpretation.

In 2013–2014, the researcher and author of this paper was a trainee course leader in PSC courses 1, 2 and 4 who concurrently interviewed participants in course

3 (see Table 2). This situation may have caused a possible bias concerning the researchers'/course leaders' own positive or negative opinions of the curricula of the PSC. However, there were several advantages with small focus group interviews with unknown supervisors in an acquainted educational context. For example, the researcher was more familiar with the curricula of the PSC and the situation of the informants, which facilitated appropriate follow-up questions. Moreover, although the focus group attendants were not familiar to the researcher, they did not need to explain notions and concepts connected to the PSC. However, that interview situation required the researcher to get some distance from the course leader role by applying a reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). By using a reflexive approach in the analysis and making the choice to show several quotes in the findings, the intended to create transparency in order to ensure validity and reliability in this particular study (i.e. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; L Cohen, anion, & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore it is important to remember that statements in a qualitative interview are 'in reality, co-authored', (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 282) and the participants may want to be perceived as involved and therefore state opinions in line with the actual context (Louis Cohen et al., 2000; Wibeck, 2000). Nonetheless, the methodological choice of anonymous course evaluations and focus group interviews allowed the supervisors to express their own sometimes differently expressed thoughts and interact with and reflect on others' thoughts, which could have decreased the researcher effect (Louis Cohen et al., 2000, p. 288). As an example Diana states:"*I do think in a similar way, but with different words again*."

4.1. Ethical considerations

As mentioned earlier, the author of this paper was familiar with the PSC and made certain ethical considerations as a consequence. Hence, the decision to interview a course group unknown to the author was crucial, as there was an examination in the PSC and therefore an unbalanced situation of power. Furthermore, the interview persons in this study had been treated according to the ethical rules of social science research concerning information, consent, confidentiality and the use of the empirical data (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), and pseudonyms were used in place of real names in all materials related to the study.

4.2. Data and Procedure

Course evaluations (N=58) containing individually written comments on the learning processes of the supervisors were assembled in May of 2014 due to practical circumstances. That resulted in a total of 21 pages (TNR 12p single-spaced) of written text that could be analysed like interview transcripts (Louis Cohen et al., 2000). Furthermore, three longitudinal focus group interviews with four participants from a PSC course were performed in 2014, which involved a total of four and a half hours of recorded conversations. The focus group interviews took place throughout the participants' time in the PSC (see Table 2). The supervisors were interviewed on the second day of course occasion one (March 2014), on the second

day of course occasion three (May 2014) and on the first day of course occasion four (December 2014). The fourth occasion took place when they had finished their first task as supervisors, which meant that they had concrete experiences of supervising to reflect on.

Table 2. Data collected 2014, course evaluations and focus group interviews.

Course evaluations (N=58)	**May 2014**	
	Course 1 (Occasion 4: had supervised probationers) N= 28 Course 2 (Occasion 3: had not supervised probationers yet) N= 12 Course 3 (Occasion 3: had not supervised probationers yet) N= 11 Course 4 (Occasion 3: had not supervised probationers yet) N= 7	
Focus group interviews (N=4)		
Session 1	**Session 2**	**Session 3**
Course 3 occasion 1 (day 2) March 2014	Course 3 occasion 3 (day 2) May 2014	Course 3 occasion 4 (day 1) December 2014

The focus group sessions were designed as follows: the first interview dealt with the participants' views of professional knowledge and educational issues, as well as their views of knowledge and learning in the police organisation. The second session, which occurred just before they received their first probationers, concerned how they felt about their task, the design of the PSC and the connection between these two issues. The third and last session, held after they had supervised and assessed their first probationers, focussed on the outcome of their tasks, their analysis of obstacles, how they solved the tasks and the overall learning outcomes of both the PSC and their first tasks as supervisors.

As the object of knowledge in this paper relates to the learning process in the PSC, the course evaluations and transcribed narratives from the focus group interviews were used as objects of interpretation built on a model inspired by Cohen (2011). By using an open code model, which Cohen (2011) describes as attaching new labels, or codes, to the transcribed text and further group the codes into categories, the content of the focus group interviews were initially analysed. Then the categories were extrapolated by using the research questions and the theoretical concepts, for example practical reflexivity (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004). Table 3 shows examples of codes and the categories that were used to present the findings.

In the next section, the narratives of the supervisors are presented within the chosen themes, providing insight into the realities of the police supervisors.

5. Findings

The main themes explained in the previous section are constructed in order to show how the learning processes of the supervisors can be described and interpreted. It is important to clarify that the themes don't fully align with the chronology and design of the focus groups interviews. One phenomenon can appear and be contextualized

in the second interview session, then later lead to changing perspectives and finally end in conscious considerations in the supervisor task.

5.1. Elucidating the context

The design of the study was intended to allow the supervisors to collectively contextualise their supervisor task, which was done continuously throughout the interview sessions. It was also intended to let them create a foundation to further analyse police supervision and to articulate their new knowledge concerning supervision. In the first interview session, the main focus was to reflect upon learning in the police organisation and in general. In the following interview sessions, new phenomena appeared and were contextualized through reciprocal conversations in the focus groups.

In the course evaluations, one question was phrased: "*What are the most important learning outcomes of the course?*" The supervisors here gave several examples of how they received new insights into police supervision:

> *The purpose and benefits of supervision and that is useful when you are a fresh police officer and further during the whole career* (Comment from course evaluation).
>
> *What supervision is, how it can be performed and obstacles in supervision* (Comment from course evaluation).

The first focus group session was initiated by discussing the virtues of a good and able police officer and how officers could develop professionally within the police organisation. The participants mentioned that they seldom got official acknowledgement from colleagues on soft values, such as treating people with respect or communicating well with partners, but they were recognized for hard values, such as how fast they could run or drive (i.e. Crank, 2004). These virtues were mostly expressed by young and inexperienced male police officers.

> *... if someone thinks you are good at taking care of your colleagues you can feel that appreciation, but you don't get to hear it.* (Beatrice)

Regarding how official and professional feedback is given and received within the police organisation, the supervisors criticised some of their bosses. They stated that feedback does not seem to be important and that this may be caused by a lack of knowledge about how to give feedback (i.e. Lauvås & Handal, 2001), a fear of making enemies or perhaps the fact that feedback isn't a part of police culture at all:

> *... as long as nobody says anything, it's all right, you will find out if you do anything crazy, you can be sure of that* (Diana)
>
> *... the soft stuff isn't that important, maybe they think you have understood yourself when you have made a great job* (Anna)

The supervisors often returned to the issue of hard and soft values in the police force in the second interview session, and Diana gave an interesting analysis of how feedback on soft values, such as communicating and caring, was given implicitly. She stated that it's easy to misunderstand feedback on soft issues when it is given by a police officer in a masculine manner.

Though they agreed on the importance of having time to reflect on everyday police work and on receiving good feedback from bosses and peers, some of them stated that there was often a lack of time for these learning activities and that their police organisations did not promote them. However, in this conversation, i.e., a practical reflexive activity, the supervisors-to-be collectively disclosed that continuous reflections in the patrol car between tasks allowed them to build new professional knowledge about concrete actions (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004).

Focussing on the supervisor course and task, the supervisors gave different reasons for applying for the PSC. Overall, these mainly seemed to be intrinsic reasons, like "*personal development*". Some of the informants had heard stories about the PSC. In the first interview, they expressed concern about the course being too 'woolly' which means talking in a philosophical manner, which is often stigmatised in ordinary police discourse. When the researcher dug a little more into this conception, it became clear that the former course participants found it "*woolly in a good way*". This can be interpreted as showing that though the participants were not used to a high level of reflection in police courses, they seemed to approve.

In the last interview session, when they had received their probationers, the supervisors identified different kinds of relationships in the internship period. They also identified obstacles in communicating with the FTOs and issues in terms of crossing the borders of supervising in their contact with probationers. It became evident that the supervisor assignment is very complex and that the participants really had to sharpen their communication skills to solve problems during the process.

Regarding the supervisors' relationships to the probationers, it became clear that the probationers saw their supervisors as a safe harbour to an extent during their somewhat stressful internship semester:

> *They have described it as a pause for breath where they can just be...* (Diana)
>
> *A safe harbour ...* (Carl)
>
> *... here you can tell everything, but you don't tell the FTOs, you don't open up in the same way.* (Beatrice)

The fact that the probationers used the supervisors as a safe harbour (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007) and only complained within that particular forum aligns well with Stephens and Long's (2000) treatment of PTSD in the New Zealand police force. However, Anna stated that it was still important to keep a professional distance:

> *... we are colleagues, not buddies* (Anna)

Related to the different relationships in the supervisor task, the quotes within this theme revealed some professional challenges that the supervisors faced, which both Tveiten (2010) and Lauvås and Handal (2001) pointed out as important to consider. The quotes also reveal different opinions on what was important concerning professional development in the police organisation, a lack of feedback and a top-down culture, especially concerning soft values. A police supervisor's reality is mutually constructed, and supervisors make sense of situations by questioning given assumptions, or as Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith point out: "*This requires engaging in dialogue in which one not only advocates a view, but also enquires into its roots, assumptions and impact, as well as into the view of others*" (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004, p. 39).

To sum up this theme, the supervisors interactively painted a picture of what kind of context they should act in as well as obstacles and options present in the supervision task, which was further compiled when they finished their first task.

5.2. Changing perspectives

The longitudinal focus group interviews gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on their roles as supervisors and change their perspectives on themselves as police officers and supervisors. This is an example of practical reflexivity and the participants dealing with mutual existential aspects of the supervision task, rather than intrapersonal cognitive activities, as described by Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004). Further there are several examples of broadening processes as well (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007). Thus, the second theme deals with the question of how the participants changed their perspectives on supervisor issues and on themselves as professionals—for instance, due to encouragements given in the PSC. It also deals with whether the educational design of the PSC has any kind of impact on the participants.

The police supervisors emphasised that the PSC provides them with a feeling of security and opens up an environment for self-reflection and self-awareness. One of the informants emphasised that the 'brushing-off' procedure and attending the course activities without having a bad conscience were very important for her:

> *This maybe sounds ridiculous but for me it has been very important, because it has helped me to be here-and-now, and then I have managed to listen to others in a review mirror for one hour and twenty minutes. Earlier I'd only been nervous and impatient.* (Anna)

This atmosphere of safety seems to enable reflection and the facilitating of new perspectives and reflexive learning. One informant narrated his transition as a participant:

> *In my earlier studies it has been very hard for me, more just like you, when it becomes too abstract, when it isn't right or wrong … now it felt quite different, I spent my whole yesterday evening reflecting, it felt like, yes it was nourishing* (Carl)

Another participant acknowledged personal development due to the activities in the second interview session of the PSC. She was opposed to the expression 'going outside your comfort zone' and used a map metaphor to contrast it with finding new areas inside her comfort zone:

> *Well it sort of got bigger... not really like you are going outside it, like wow I found another thing that feels comfortable, I never thought it was, but it was ... or more like a world map, suddenly, wow I liked Brazil as well* (Diana)

This expression of personal development in an educational context shows the supervisors' changing perspectives of themselves as human beings and police officers. This process is similar to the reflection of Katy, a police officer and police educator, in White and Heslop's (2012) study on teachers, nurses and police educators. It may be that the police forces in the United Kingdom and Sweden have similar environments that impede the possibilities of personal development.

Beatrice gave another perspective on her changing mindset during the course when she described how she felt about the supervisor assignment in the second interview session:

> *... I feel more calm, it is not that large as I thought in the beginning ... I try to tune-down my stress over the [supervisor] mission ... I see it as I am just helping them sort out their feelings ... in the supervising dialogues anyway. Of course, the assessment process is separate ... but I used to think that I don't want to ruin people [the probationers], but now I think more, like, we sit down and have a conversation, it does not need to be that big. (*Beatrice)

On this subject, Carl also used the word 'stress' several times, and it was clear that when the supervisors first joined the PSC and began problematizing their assignment, they felt a lot of stress. It was also clear that they had gotten a better grip on it. When they were asked if there were any particular parts of the PSC that helped them in this regard, they mentioned the 'review mirrors', in which they would share their feelings and experiences. Furthermore, Diana pointed out that they were 'forced' to reflect on themselves in the PSC, which is something that continued in the ordinary police work that occurred between the course occasions. This gave them time to reflect and sort out practical issues concerning the supervising mission. The following quote demonstrates the nature of the reciprocal and reflective process (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004; L. H. Johnston & Milne, 2012) in the focus groups and how Diana changed her perspective of herself through the work at the PSC:

> *... I thought like you, but with different words again, because we have sort of been forced in thinking what I believe is important in the police occupation, and what I think about myself as a police officer* (Diana)

In the course evaluations, the participants gave comments on the way the content of the PSC led them to new perspectives on the tasks and on themselves:

> *Since it has been a lot of time to reflect on ourselves and less focus on achievement, the atmosphere has become more positive, which in the end probably gives a better result than higher demands on for example achievement.* (Comment from course evaluation)

> *The insight that the supervisor (me) has a very important role in making the probationer feeling safe and being able to perform. The role also contains assessment, the importance of assessment is crucial.* (Comment from course evaluation)

> *What I have learned about myself.* (Comment from course evaluation)

As Table 1 shows, the PSC is dominated by group activities in which the participants share their thoughts on a given theme related to the supervisor task. Group discussions are, in most cases, followed up by summaries in classes led by the course leaders. The interviews and course evaluations clearly stated that these activities were the most important when it came to learning more about the assignment and handling the supervisor knowledge process. The collective reflections of participants in the course combined with individual reflection time seemed to provide the participants with tools to fulfil the supervisor assignment as an ongoing learning process (i.e. Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004; L. H. Johnston & Milne, 2012; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). The following dialogue extract shows how Beatrice narrated her learning process:

> Beatrice: *... people could have thought about something in a way I couldn't have done, but when they say it, well it sounds obvious. Of course we should think that way!*
> Researcher: *And what do you do with that input?*
> Beatrice: *I write it down because I don't remember things*
> Researcher: *Ok, and in what way does that have an impact on your thinking about something?*
> Beatrice: *Well it does, it forms my plan of handling my probationers, how shall I introduce them ...*

She continued to explain how she does so more precisely:

> *... I write down quotes and stuff, things that comes to my mind, but then I get more aspects on the matter when I drive, writes logs preparing the review mirror, because then I get the time to reflect in a more calm environment what really was said and how I can use it, and if it arises thoughts and feelings within me... and then I lift that up in the review mirror the day after and I get even more input, it is a lot of constructing* (Beatrice)

Thus, a picture emerged of a learning process built on practical reflexivity, which was explicated in the quotes in this theme. The participants clearly received incentives to change their perspectives on themselves as learners and on police work in general. What did that learning process lead to in terms of the development of professional knowledge in the supervisor task?

5.3. Considering consciously

The third theme was related to how the supervisors developed the ability to see themselves and the supervisor task in a deeper way. They gave examples of how this development transformed into new and personal theories of practice as police officers and police supervisors.

In terms of the overall benefits of the PSC in the course evaluations, several participants mentioned that they had new tools for their task:

> *It has given me insights in what supervision is and provided me with tools enough to believe I can manage in being a supervisor* (Comment from course evaluation)

> *I will use reflections more actively, both in the supervisor situations and ordinary work, as I have realised what use it can be for my personal development* (Comment from course evaluation)

In the third session, after finishing their first tasks as supervisors, they gave several examples of how they dealt with conflicts of interests within the supervision task. At this stage, they showed conscious consideration or personal theories of practice as well as consideration from the police supervisor point of view (i.e., Chan et al., 2003; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

For example, Diana and Beatrice both described conflicts in which the FTO took control of the assessment process:

> *In that particular situation the FTOs were the ones 'who was in charge', 'you are fine you are going to pass' [to the probationers] ... then I noticed that the probationers got an attitude in the corridors, when I gave them feedback [they said] 'I already know I'm cool' ... I interpret that as now the probationers also believe that the FTOs is in charge, 'now I listen to them'* ... (Diana)

Both Diana and Beatrice solved problems with the FTOs but in different ways. Beatrice felt confident in the initial relationship she had already built with the probationer, whereas Diana took control by sending clarifying but polite emails to the actual FTOs. She said in the message that she appreciated their contributions, which gave a hint as to who was in charge.

The other main subject of the last interview session was the supervisors' relationships with the probationers, how they handled the pressure the probationers felt and the impact it had on the probationers. In answer to the opening question, which asked whether anything stood out in their first supervising assignment, Beatrice stated almost instantly:

> *Well handling them when they were feeling down during the internship period, that one had to be a therapist suddenly, from being a fully functional and decisive person, to being almost helpless, begging me for help.* (Beatrice)

One of the pieces of PSC course literature, Tveiten (2010), problematizes the borderlines of supervising: it involves therapy, counselling, teaching, leading and so forth. Therefore, Beatrice was asked if she had reflected on that aspect in action. She confirmed that she had tried to direct the conversation about the actual probationer's personal problems to a more professional subject:

> *... I gave a guideline or something, I changed, I didn't stop her, I changed track a bit.* (Beatrice)

She explained that she learned to use the probationer group so that they could support each other. This allowed the role of the supervisor to remain appropriate, and it seemed that in the focus group interviews, this strategy was consciously chosen to solve a supervision dilemma. Moreover, if she articulated the dilemma in occasion four of the PSC, the other participants may have had tools to solve new dilemmas that arose, which would have led to the mutual development of practice theories, like Moon (2004) suggested.

In terms of doing the right thing as a police supervisor, Anna clearly showed that she thinks of her mission as overseeing a learning process focussed on the probationer:

> *... if you think that it is important [your own knowledge] that you point out everything you have done, and how much you know, then I think you soap your own upslope sort of, ... I believe you lose your feeling ... you lose focus on learning and instead focus on achievement in the group, sort of* (Anna)

Diana also discussed how she looked at her supervisor mission from an ethical point of view and separated the probationer's needs from her own, hence creating a trusting relationship with the probationer (i.e., Tveiten & Severinsson, 2006):

> Diana:... *there isn't quite that balance that we have the same pre-requisites, they have approached me with their issues ... but we as supervisors don't approach them in the same way ... and regardless of what kind of tasks we have had the day before, you wouldn't bring it up there, in supervision, if they are talking about something else.*
> Researcher: *Why not?*
> Diana: *Because it is their forum, I ventilate my own problems in another forum*

Carl had only one probationer and chose to ride with her on several occasions, which would have been difficult to do with two or three probationers. In the last interview session, he pointed out that riding with the probationer, which was more akin to acting like a FTO, allowed the probationer to watch him perform police tasks in action and ask questions about whatever choices Carl made. This made Carl think a lot about himself as a police officer in a more ethical way, which was clearly connected to Johnston and Milnes' (2012) notion of a Socratic approach to supervision:

> *... well you have got an opportunity to develop yourself and reflect on your own work and on how you act in different situations, it is kind of like you get to put your own values at stake, with help from the probationer ... getting supervised yourself simultaneously, that it's how I perceive it, anyway* (Carl)

"*Put your own values at stake*" is surely an example of an existential aspect of educational and practical reflexivity, e.g., Carl questioned himself as a professional by interacting with his probationer in 'an egalitarian atmosphere where students and teachers can engage in mutual learning' (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004). Here, Carl revealed a reflective and self-conscious attitude towards himself.

Closing this theme, it seems evident that the supervisors could articulate how they developed as professionals by reflecting on issues related to the supervisor task and thereby create personal strategies, or theories of practice (Lauvås & Handal, 2001), to handle these issues. By doing this with the other participants in the focus groups, they received many more examples of how they have become more competent police officers and police educators.

6. Discussion

This study shows how a theoretical concept of practical reflexivity can be actualized within the learning processes of police supervisors. It also shows how their learning processes can be identified and articulated in longitudinal focus groups and interpreted and conceptualized within three main themes. These three main themes could be aligned to Moon's four-stage model of enhanced professional development in short courses (Moon, 2004, p. 174). However, the interpretation model in this study is adjusted through a combination of phase 3 (integrate new learning and current practice) and phase 4 (anticipate or imagine the nature of improved practice) into a phase of dialogic-based reflection on experienced and concrete actions in the supervisor task. That is exposed in theme 3, *Considering Consciously*. Table 3 shows identified codes in the supervisors' narratives, how they are connected to each theme and how they can be understood as a three-stage learning process in a collective and reflective procedure (i.e. Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004; Moon, 2004).

Table 3. Interpretation model of the learning process of the supervisors with examples of codes in the transcribed data

Elucidating the context	Changing perspectives	Considering consciously
Descriptive Situations Relations Issues Obstacles	Then-Now Differently Existential Me-Others Self-understanding	Concrete actions (supervision) Motivated choices (literature) Effects of actions Deeper framing the task Understanding themselves as supervisors

Viewed through the three-staged model developed from Moon (2004) and Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith (2004), the supervisors described how they were able to create personal and professional strategies in their new task (e.g. Handal et al., 1990; Lauvås & Handal, 2001). Moreover, the curricula of the PSC (see Table 1) is very similar to this three-stage model. The first PSC occasion involved *elucidating* the supervision context at a high extent by discussing the different roles and thus creating awareness of complexities. By further problematizing the supervision task in occasion two and continuously reflecting in review mirrors, the supervisors collectively created new understanding (e.g. Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004) and thus *changed perspectives* to a professional supervisor perspective. In order to integrate new knowledge with experienced practise (Moon, 2004), the supervisors got to practice supervision and reflect on that experience in occasion two and three of the PSC. Finally, the third stage of reciprocal and conscious considerations was fulfilled in occasion four when the supervisors had their first supervision task. On the fourth occasion, the supervisors got an opportunity to exchange experiences and motivate their choices, and they were therefore provided new tools to handle future supervision issues by discussing *conscious considerations* in the supervising task.

The findings of the focus group interviews show that the pedagogic ideas of the PSC may have influenced the supervisors to develop knowledge in a learning process that can be understood using the three-stage model. Furthermore, that can be seen not only as incentives for the supervisors to construct themselves as supervisors, but also to apply the three-stage model to the learning process of their probationers, which can have a positive ripple effect on professionalizing Swedish Police according to presented research (e.g. Campbell, 2009; Chan et al., 2003; Tyler & McKenzie, 2014). In a Swedish Bachelor thesis in behavioural science, five Swedish police probationers were asked how they perceived the supervision. The findings showed that collective reflection on issues and situations during the internship semester, facilitated by the majority of the supervisors, deepened the probationers' knowledge of police work. Furthermore, the supervisors created a safe environment in which to open up (Österlund, 2009). This confirms the findings and implications of the research related to supervision (i.e. Gazzola & Theriault, 2007; L. H. Johnston & Milne, 2012; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001, 2003) presented in this paper. Furthermore, connected to the police socialisation phenomenon (Chan et al., 2003; Crank, 2004; Lauritz, 2009) this safe environment for the probationers could be important in developing police culture and thus moving towards a more reflexive and professional police.

Although the supervisors in this study had similar positive opinions of the PSC, there were course participants who did not appreciate the educational design of the course. A couple of the participants expressed frustration about the slow tempo and the focus on soft issues in the PSC, which did not prepare them sufficiently for the task of assessing probationers, for example. Another obstacle was that the PSC required time beforehand to perform reflexive supervision with the probationers and collaborate with the FTOs. Moreover, in the focus groups, there were implicit indications that the police organisation did not allow sufficient time for learning and education through reflexive activities, which Rantatalo et al. (2015) implied as well.

This phenomenon aligns with White (2006) and Beighton and Poma (2015), who have identified an obsolete and behaviouristic ideology regarding police education in Great Britain, and argue for a change from a training orientation to an educating one with soft issues and professional ethics in focus.

However, this possible change of view must be accepted and supported by the police leadership. Haake et al. (2015) argues that in Swedish Police Force a hierarchic ideology is promoted through change of professional values by large reorganisations and focusing on hard numbers; efficiency and results. This situation puts the lower management in an awkward situation due to other expectations from below, which breeds suspicion and resistance within this important group of police leaders and makes them poor change agents.

The author will make some conclusive remarks to close this paper. First, the supervisors in this study revealed that Swedish police officers in general need more professional affirmation through feedback. It seems to be an issue in the organisational culture of the Swedish police force to focus on quantitative measurements and efficiency instead of quality and structures that support a learning Swedish police organisation (e.g. Andersson Arntén, 2014; Bergman & Jansson, 2010). Secondly, the presented literature regarding occupational and educational supervising has emphasized the importance of preparing new professionals in a way that prevents professional burnout and premature closure, as Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) point out. Considering that, treating a police probationer like a no-good rookie with no life experience (e.g. Campbell, 2009) and merely providing him or her with theoretical knowledge from the police academy, or "*bullshit castle*" (Chan et al., 2003, p. 89), may cause premature professional closure that affects citizens in the long run. The presented police research also argues that a more self-aware and confident police officer can make better decisions in a momentary and complex police practise.

Finally, this study has implications for supervision in other occupational contexts. As adjacent research suggest, professional development can be enhanced by opportunities to collectively reflect on daily practice. Policing in particular apparently requires a police officer who is prepared to face backlash related to the misuse of power or meeting victims. However, there seem to be creative and positive incentives within the Swedish police force, here exemplified by the supervisors, that should be further investigated.

7. Limitations and further studies

This case study was performed in order to identify and describe rarely investigated learning processes among intraprofessional police educators. Whereas the study followed a focus group of four participants, although involving opinions of additional 54 supervisors, it does not claim to make major generalisations concerning Swedish police supervisors. Larsson (2009) argues that qualitative studies of this kind can be seen as a little piece in a large jigsaw puzzle and not explaining a whole of any kind. Larson claims: "It is the whole configuration – interpretation in context – that is the

basis of generalization – an experience of a recognition of something." (Larsson, 2009, p.18) Thus, through comparing with similar contexts and applying appropriate theories, this study can be a contribution to the occupational learning field; it is in the eyes of the beholder to determine if the findings can is useful and applicable (Larsson, 2009). However, as the author is involved in the PSC and there may be a bias problem in interpreting the empiric material, a reflexive approach may have decreased this possible problem.

Therefore, there are more studies to conduct. The author suggests a large survey or a more comprehensive interview study on supervisors and FTOs, preferably in small focus groups completed with individual interviews. These studies could investigate how the educators perceive their task and if there is acceptance of social constructivist education theory in police organisations overall (e.g. White, 2006). A more comprehensive study on police probationers could also reveal how the pedagogics of the internship period are received. Moreover, it would be interesting to know more about how the three-stage learning model in this paper, which combines the ideas of Moon (2004) and Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith (2004), can be applied to other occupational learning issues.

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