

SUPERVISION AS A REFLECTIVE EDUCATIONAL SPACE FOR DEVELOPING SELF-REGULATION AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY-INFORMED TRAINING IN EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL PROFESSIONS

Carmen-Mihaela BĂICEANU VĂRĂȘTEANU^{1,2}

¹Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Ovidius University of Constanța,
Romania

²Institute of Psychotherapy, Psychological Counseling, and Clinical Supervision
E-mail: mihaela.baiceanu@365.univ-ovidius.ro

Abstract: *In the current context of professional training in educational and psychosocial fields, emphasis is progressively shifting from the exclusive acquisition of technical competencies toward the development of professionals' reflective, self-regulatory, and identity-related capacities. Although traditionally established as a mechanism for monitoring and guiding practice, supervision is increasingly recognized for its formative potential; however, its explicit role as an educational space that supports self-regulation and the formation of professional identity remains insufficiently conceptualized, especially outside clinical settings.*

This paper proposes a reconceptualization of supervision as a reflective educational space grounded in the paradigm of integrative psychotherapy, approached as an epistemological and relational reference rather than as a clinical intervention. Supervision is examined as a structured relational framework that supports self-regulation, guided reflection, and the integration of professional experience into professional identity development.

A central contribution of the paper is the introduction of the concept of reflective holding, defined as a non-clinical educational function of supervision that integrates relational containment, guided reflection, and the support of self-regulation. Building on this concept, the paper proposes a coherent conceptual framework that articulates the relationship between supervision, reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity in educational and psychosocial contexts.

The implications of this framework are discussed for initial and continuing training, mentoring, and professional development, with a focus on the role of reflective supervision in supporting professional sustainability and the ethical delimitation of practice.

Keywords: *supervision, reflective holding, reflective practice, self-regulation, professional identity, integrative psychotherapy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, professional training in educational and psychosocial fields has undergone significant transformations, driven by the increasing complexity of practice contexts and the diversification of professional roles. The specialized literature increasingly emphasizes that the effectiveness and sustainability of professional practice can no longer be explained solely by the level of technical or procedural competencies; rather, they depend essentially on professionals' capacity to regulate emotions, reflect on their own practice, and build a coherent professional identity [1, 2].

Within this context, processes of self-regulation and reflection are recognized as central mechanisms of professional development, directly contributing to burnout prevention, the maintenance of meaning in practice, and the consolidation of ethical positioning [3, 4]. Recent studies in education and helping professions confirm that the absence of structured frameworks for reflection and emotional regulation contributes to fragmentation of professional identity and heightened vulnerability to occupational stress [5, 6].

Supervision occupies a privileged place in the architecture of professional training, being considered one of the primary ways through which professional competence, ethical responsibility, and professional identity are supported and consolidated [7, 8]. Traditionally, supervision has been conceptualized as a mechanism for monitoring, evaluating, and guiding practice, with an emphasis on transmitting expertise and controlling the quality of interventions. These functions remain essential; however, recent research highlights an expansion of supervision beyond its evaluative dimension toward an explicitly formative and developmental function [9].

Contemporary models of supervision increasingly underscore the importance of the supervision relationship and the supervisor–supervisee alliance as key determinants of formative effectiveness [9, 10]. In this sense, supervision is conceptualized as a complex relational context in which reflection, self-regulation, and professional development are facilitated through a safe, predictable, and reflective framework. Nevertheless, most conceptualizations remain anchored in clinical settings or therapeutic training, and their transfer to educational and psychosocial domains is often implicit or insufficiently theorized.

This gap becomes visible in the literature dedicated to the training of teachers, counselors, or school psychologists, where supervision is frequently addressed in a fragmented manner, as an administrative tool or as a form of informal mentoring, without a coherent conceptual framework that articulates its role in supporting self-regulation and professional identity [11]. In the absence of such a conceptualization, supervision's potential to function as a complex educational device remains underutilized.

In parallel, research in interpersonal neurobiology and developmental psychology emphasizes the profoundly relational character of self-regulation. Self-regulation is not conceptualized exclusively as an individual skill, but as an emergent process supported by repeated co-regulation experiences in meaningful relational contexts [12, 13]. This perspective offers a solid theoretical foundation for understanding supervision as a privileged space for co-regulation and guided reflection, where professional experiences can be integrated and transformed into identity resources.

Integrative psychotherapy offers a relevant conceptual framework for articulating these processes through its emphasis on relationality, emotional regulation, and experience integration [14–16]. However, applying the integrative paradigm in non-clinical contexts

raises conceptual and ethical risks, especially in the absence of clear boundaries between therapeutic intervention and educational processes. The supervision literature warns of the risk of role confusion and the medicalization of formative processes when such boundaries are not explicitly formulated [7].

Based on these considerations, we argue for the need to reconceptualize supervision as a reflective educational space informed by the principles of integrative psychotherapy, while remaining distinct from clinical intervention. Such a reconceptualization allows the relational and self-regulatory dimensions of supervision to be leveraged without turning the supervisor into a therapeutic agent and without shifting professional training objectives into a clinical register.

Accordingly, the paper addresses three interrelated questions:

- (1) How can supervision be conceptualized as an educational and developmental space beyond its traditional functions of evaluation and practice guidance?
- (2) What is the role of self-regulation in the process of professional identity formation within supervision?
- (3) How can the principles of integrative psychotherapy inform supervision practices in educational and psychosocial fields without transferring clinical intervention models?

To answer these questions, we adopt a theoretical-conceptual approach that integrates contributions from supervision, reflective practice, self-regulation, and integrative psychotherapy. We introduce the concept of *reflective holding* to describe a specific educational function of supervision aimed at supporting emotional containment, guided reflection, and cognitive-identity integration in professional training processes.

2. INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY AS A FORMATIVE PARADIGM

2.1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

Integrative psychotherapy emerged as a response to the theoretical fragmentation of the psychotherapeutic field and to the limitations of one-dimensional models of explaining human experience. Epistemologically, integration is not equivalent to technical eclecticism; rather, it represents a coherent effort to articulate multiple theoretical perspectives within a unified relational framework centered on process, meaning, and experiential coherence [14].

A defining element of the integrative paradigm is its relational orientation. From this standpoint, development and change are conceived as emergent processes within meaningful relationships, where contact, presence, and recognition of subjective experience play a central role [15]. The relationship is not viewed as a mere context for intervention, but as an active space for organizing and integrating experience, facilitating self-regulation and continuity of self.

Experiential coherence constitutes another epistemological pillar of integrative psychotherapy. Integration is understood as the process through which fragmented, ambiguous, or insufficiently symbolized experiences are brought into a safe relational framework that allows them to be reflected upon and reorganized into a more coherent internal structure [16]. From this perspective, integration is not a discrete outcome but an ongoing process of meaning articulation with direct implications for identity development.

Contributions from interpersonal neurobiology reinforce this relational and process-oriented view of development. Authors in this field emphasize that emotional self-regulation, cognitive integration, and the development of reflective capacities are profoundly dependent on co-regulation experiences in meaningful relationships [12, 13]. This convergence between integrative psychotherapy and interpersonal neurobiology provides a solid epistemological basis for extending integrative reflection beyond the clinical setting into educational and formative contexts.

European training standards in integrative psychotherapy reflect this epistemological orientation, emphasizing relationality, self-regulation, and reflection as transversal dimensions of professional development, not exclusively of clinical intervention [17].

2.2. INTEGRATIVE PRINCIPLES RELEVANT TO EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

Although integrative psychotherapy is historically grounded in clinical contexts, its foundational principles can be legitimately applied in educational and psychosocial contexts, provided that goals and roles are clearly delimited. In this regard, what is transferable is not therapeutic techniques, but relational and formative principles that support deep learning and professional development.

A first relevant principle is the conceptualization of the relationship as a developmental space. In the integrative paradigm, the relationship is the medium in which experience is recognized, reflected, and integrated [16]. Transposed into supervision, this principle supports understanding the supervisor–supervisee relationship as a formative relationship that facilitates exploration of professional experience, clarification of dilemmas, and consolidation of identity positions, without implying a therapeutic endeavor.

A second central principle is emotional regulation as a relational process. Integrative and neurobiological literature converge in emphasizing that self-regulation develops through repeated co-regulation experiences within safe and predictable relational contexts [12, 13]. In educational contexts, this principle translates into creating formative frameworks that allow recognition and reflection on emotions associated with professional practice, thereby supporting professional self-regulation and preventing emotional overload.

Experience integration represents a third integrative principle of major relevance to professional training. Integrative psychotherapy emphasizes the importance of reflecting on lived experience and integrating it into a coherent narrative [15]. In supervision, this process is facilitated through guided reflective practices that transform fragmented professional experiences into learning and identity-development resources [18, 19].

By articulating these principles, supervision can be conceptualized as a reflective educational space in which relationship, self-regulation, and experience integration are systematically supported, without exceeding the boundaries of professional training.

2.3. FROM THERAPEUTIC PARADIGM TO FORMATIVE FRAMEWORK: NECESSARY DELIMITATIONS

Applying integrative psychotherapy principles in educational contexts requires rigorous conceptual and ethical boundaries, essential for maintaining role clarity and formative goals. The supervision literature warns about the risk of role confusion and the

medicalization of educational processes when clinical models are uncritically transferred to non-clinical contexts [7, 8].

Thus, what transfers from the integrative paradigm is the relational understanding of development, the focus on process, the valuing of guided reflection, and the recognition of self-regulation as a central mechanism of professional development. It also transfers attention to the relational frame and the importance of experiential coherence in professional learning processes [17].

By contrast, therapeutic goals, clinical language, and interventions aimed at symptom treatment or psychopathological restructuring do not transfer. Supervision informed by integrative psychotherapy does not aim to modify personality structures, resolve trauma, or intervene in psychological suffering in a clinical sense. The supervisor's role remains distinct from that of the therapist, focusing on facilitating professional reflection, supporting self-regulation, and developing professional identity [9].

This clear delimitation enables the responsible use of integrative principles in professional training and provides the conceptual premises for understanding supervision as a reflective educational space. Within this framework, integrative psychotherapy functions as a formative paradigm, offering theoretical references for understanding relational and self-regulatory processes without turning supervision into a clinical intervention context.

3. SUPERVISION AS A REFLECTIVE EDUCATIONAL SPACE

3.1. CONTEMPORARY MODELS OF SUPERVISION: RELATIONAL, DEVELOPMENTAL, AND TRANS-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The specialized literature describes supervision as a complex, multidimensional process combining formative, evaluative, and practice-support functions. Over time, multiple supervision models have been developed, which can broadly be grouped into relational, developmental, and trans-theoretical perspectives [7, 8].

Relational models emphasize the quality of the supervisor–supervisee relationship as a central determinant of formative effectiveness. In this view, the supervisory alliance is conceptualized as a relational framework in which safety, trust, and collaboration facilitate exploration and integration of professional experience [9]. The relationship is not reduced to a contextual support for competence evaluation; it becomes an active process of co-constructing professional meaning.

Developmental models approach supervision as a dynamic process adapted to the supervisee's stages of professional development. These models emphasize that learning needs, reflective capacity, and professional autonomy evolve over time, and effective supervision requires adjusting supervisor roles and interventions accordingly [7]. From this perspective, supervision is not uniform but differentiated, sensitive to professional identity development.

Trans-theoretical and “common factors” perspectives represent a relatively recent but rapidly developing direction that seeks to identify fundamental elements shared across supervision models. These approaches highlight transversal relational and formative processes, such as the supervisory alliance, guided reflection, and support for professional

development, regardless of specific theoretical orientation [8]. The Contextual Supervision Relationship Model (CSRM) is a relevant example, integrating relational, developmental, and contextual dimensions into a coherent structure [10].

Overall, these models converge in recognizing supervision as a relational and formative process, while their differences reflect distinct emphases on evaluation, relationship, and professional development. This theoretical diversity supports reconceptualizing supervision as a reflective educational space capable of integrating these dimensions coherently.

3.2. SUPERVISION AS THE PEDAGOGY OF PRACTICE: AN EMERGENT EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION

Beyond specific models, contemporary literature describes supervision as a privileged form of the pedagogy of practice, often considered a “signature pedagogy” of the helping professions. This conceptualization highlights that supervision is the primary framework through which theoretical knowledge is integrated with practical experience and transformed into professional competence [7].

As a pedagogy of practice, supervision facilitates situated learning processes in which concrete practice experiences are subjected to reflection, critically analyzed, and integrated into a broader conceptual framework. In this sense, supervision goes beyond the role of control or evaluation and becomes an educational space where metacognitive, reflective, and self-regulatory capacities develop [18, 19].

The educational dimension of supervision is also evident in non-clinical contexts such as teacher training, counseling, and other psychosocial professions. Recent studies indicate that reflection-oriented supervision contributes to organizational culture, supports continuous professional development, and strengthens professional identity [11]. In these contexts, supervision functions as a mediating space between institutional demands, the subjective experience of practice, and the individual’s professional values.

This educational perspective allows supervision to be conceptualized as a process of continuous formation in which guided reflection and experience integration are central. Supervision thus becomes a relational learning framework where professionals develop the capacity to understand their own practice, regulate emotional reactions, and build a coherent professional identity.

3.3. LIMITS OF CURRENT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SUPERVISION

Despite growing recognition of supervision’s educational dimension, the literature identifies conceptual limits that restrict its potential as a reflective space for professional development. One frequent limitation is the excessive focus on evaluation and technical competence at the expense of self-regulatory and identity processes [7].

In many training contexts, supervision remains predominantly associated with performance control, standards compliance, and competence assessment. While necessary, over-emphasis on these functions can inhibit deep reflection and the exploration of subjective experience, thereby limiting the development of self-regulation and professional identity [9]. In such frameworks, supervision risks being perceived as hierarchical and conformity-oriented rather than formative.

A second major limitation is the under-theorization of self-regulation and professional identity within supervision models. Although implicitly acknowledged as relevant, these dimensions are rarely integrated explicitly into coherent conceptual frameworks that explain the mechanisms through which supervision supports their development [20, 21]. Without such theoretical articulation, the relationship between supervision, self-regulation, and identity often remains descriptive rather than explanatory.

Moreover, most existing conceptualizations are developed in clinical contexts, creating difficulties for transfer to educational and psychosocial domains. Without clear delimitations, there is a risk of unjustified medicalization of educational processes or superficial use of relational concepts without theoretical integration [7].

These limits point to the need for a conceptual framework that explicitly integrates the relational, reflective, self-regulatory, and identity dimensions of supervision in ways adapted to educational and psychosocial contexts, creating space for new explanatory concepts that capture the deep educational function of supervision.

4. SELF-REGULATION AS A RELATIONAL PROCESS IN SUPERVISION

4.1. SELF-REGULATION: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Self-regulation is a central construct in contemporary psychological and educational literature, associated with individuals' capacity to manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in pursuit of personal and professional goals. Because the term is used across varying theoretical frameworks, conceptual clarification is necessary in the context of supervision and professional development.

Emotional self-regulation is defined as the ability to monitor, modulate, and integrate emotional reactions adaptively in relation to contextual demands [16]. In relational professions, this dimension is essential because constant exposure to emotionally charged situations requires the capacity to tolerate ambivalence, frustration, and uncertainty. Neuropsychological literature highlights that emotional self-regulation is not purely intrapsychic; it develops relationally through repeated co-regulation experiences [14].

Cognitive self-regulation refers to processes through which individuals plan, monitor, and evaluate their own thinking and learning strategies. In educational psychology, it includes metacognitive capacities such as self-monitoring, cognitive flexibility, and strategic adjustment based on feedback [18]. In supervision, cognitive self-regulation is supported through guided reflection, critical practice analysis, and integrating experience into a coherent conceptual framework.

Professional self-regulation represents an integrative extension of emotional and cognitive dimensions, defined as the ability to manage one's professional role, boundaries, values, and ethical decisions in complex practice contexts. This form of self-regulation is closely related to professional identity development and the capacity to maintain coherence between the personal and professional self [17, 21]. From this perspective, professional self-regulation cannot be separated from the relational and institutional context in which professional activity occurs.

Overall, in this paper, self-regulation is understood as a multidimensional and dynamic process integrating emotional, cognitive, and professional components, profoundly influenced by relational experiences within supervision.

4.2. CO-REGULATION AS A FORMATIVE MECHANISM IN SUPERVISION

Contemporary literature emphasizes that self-regulation does not develop in isolation but is preceded and sustained by co-regulation processes. From the perspective of interpersonal neurobiology, co-regulation is the mechanism by which individuals organize emotional and cognitive experience through a safe, predictable relationship [14, 15].

Schore highlights the role of significant relationships in developing emotional regulation systems, emphasizing that experiences of containment and external regulation are gradually internalized and become self-regulatory capacities [14]. This perspective is relevant for understanding supervision as a formative space in which the supervisor–supervisee relationship can function as a co-regulatory environment without having a therapeutic goal.

Interpersonal neurobiology also links co-regulation to experience integration and reflective capacity development. Relationships offering safety, clarity, and relational availability facilitate neural and cognitive integration processes, supporting self-regulation. [15] In supervision, these processes manifest as the supervisee’s ability to reflect on professional experience without being emotionally overwhelmed or defensive.

Thus, the supervisor–supervisee relationship may be understood as a privileged context of *professional co-regulation*. Through structuring the framework, clarifying roles, and supporting guided reflection, the supervisor helps create a safe space in which professional experiences can be explored and integrated. This function does not imply therapeutic intervention but supports an educational process of regulating and organizing professional experience [9].

Co-regulation therefore functions as a formative mechanism mediating the shift from unorganized emotional reactions to reflection, meaning, and professional self-regulation.

4.3. SELF-REGULATION AS A MEDIATOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Self-regulation plays a central role in professional development, acting as a mediator between practical experience, guided reflection, and the consolidation of professional identity. The literature indicates that professionals who develop strong self-regulatory capacities are better able to manage practice complexity, tolerate uncertainty, and maintain long-term professional engagement [20].

The link between self-regulation and reflection is supported by reflective practice theories, which emphasize reflection’s role in organizing and restructuring experience [18, 19]. Guided reflection within supervision transforms raw professional experiences into integrated knowledge, supporting cognitive and emotional self-regulation. Without such reflective mediation, experience risks remaining fragmented or may lead to professional rigidification.

Self-regulation is also closely related to professional identity development. Professional identity is not static but a dynamic process of integrating values, roles, and professional experiences [21, 22]. Self-regulation enables professionals to navigate external demands and internal values, supporting identity coherence and professional responsibility.

Recent studies confirm that supervision supporting self-regulation indirectly contributes to professional identity consolidation and increased professional satisfaction

[23]. From this standpoint, self-regulation can be conceptualized as a central mediator of professional development at the intersection of the supervision relationship, reflective practice, and identity integration.

Self-regulation is not merely an outcome of professional training but an active process supported by the supervision relationship. Understanding self-regulation as relational creates the premise for conceptualizing supervision as a reflective educational space capable of supporting coherent and sustainable professional development.

5. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND THE INTEGRATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

5.1. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: CLASSICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Reflective practice is a core concept in the literature on professional training and experiential learning, associated with professionals' capacity to critically examine their own practice and transform experience into knowledge. One of the most influential conceptualizations belongs to Schön, who describes reflection as the process by which professionals think in action and reflect on action, integrating experiential feedback into continuous practice adjustment. [1]

Schön's model has had major impact in educational and psychosocial fields, providing a framework for understanding learning as situated and dynamic. However, subsequent literature has highlighted the limits of a predominantly cognitive conceptualization of reflection, drawing attention to the emotional, relational, and contextual dimensions of reflective processes [2].

Moon expands the perspective on reflection by proposing a gradual model of reflective processes, in which experience integration is conditioned by the level of reflection structuring and the individual's capacity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. [2] From this viewpoint, reflection is not automatic but requires support, structure, and time to produce meaningful integration.

Critical approaches to reflective practice, represented by Fook and colleagues, add an additional dimension by emphasizing that reflection is neither neutral nor purely individual. These authors highlight the influence of institutional contexts, power relations, and professional norms on how reflection becomes possible and valued. [3, 4] Thus, authentic reflective practice involves not only examining individual actions but also becoming aware of the social and organizational framework in which those actions are situated.

Overall, these perspectives converge in emphasizing reflection as a complex, multidimensional process extending beyond cognitive self-analysis to include integration of emotional, relational, and contextual experience. This complexity justifies the need for structured frameworks supporting reflective practice in professional training contexts.

5.2. GUIDED REFLECTION IN SUPERVISION CONTEXTS

Although reflection is often promoted as an individual practice, the literature distinguishes between spontaneous reflection and guided reflection. Spontaneous reflection emerges naturally in response to experience and is often fragmented, emotionally charged,

and shaped by defensive mechanisms. Without a supportive framework, it may lead to rigidification, self-blame, or excessive rationalization, without genuine experience integration [2].

Guided reflection, by contrast, presupposes a structured relational framework in which experience is explored in a contained manner oriented toward meaning and integration. Supervision offers such a framework, where reflection is facilitated through guided questions, clarifications, and reflective feedback, supporting the organization of professional experience [1, 5].

The relational framework is essential. The supervision relationship creates conditions for exploring experience without excessive evaluative threat or fear of sanction. Through role and boundary clarification, supervision supports a climate of psychological safety that enables addressing professional dilemmas and the emotional difficulties associated with practice [6].

From this perspective, guided reflection in supervision is not a purely cognitive exercise but a relational process integrating emotional and cognitive self-regulation. The supervisor does not provide solutions or interpretations; instead, the supervisor facilitates reflection and integration, supporting the supervisee's development of autonomous reflective capacity.

5.3. REFLECTION AS A PROCESS OF IDENTITY INTEGRATION

Reflective practice plays a central role in identity integration, functioning as a bridge between lived professional experience and the construction of a coherent professional identity. The professional development literature emphasizes that professional identity results from an ongoing negotiation between experience, values, and institutional contexts [7, 8].

Reflection enables the transformation of raw experience into meaning, allowing professionals to understand not only what they did, but who they are becoming through their practice. This process involves moving from experience to meaning, and then integrating that meaning into a coherent professional narrative. The professional narrative functions as an identity-organizing mechanism, providing continuity and stability amid professional changes and challenges.

Without guided reflection, professional experiences may remain fragmented or may generate identity conflicts, especially in early career stages [9]. Supervision, by facilitating structured reflection, supports integrating experience into a coherent identity framework, contributing to the development of an assumed and flexible professional identity.

Thus, reflection can be conceptualized not only as a learning tool but as an identity integration process linking professional experience to self-regulation and the meaning of practice. This integrative function of reflection prepares the ground for conceptualizing supervision as a profound reflective educational space capable of supporting long-term professional development.

6. THE CONCEPT OF REFLECTIVE HOLDING IN SUPERVISION

6.1. THEORETICAL ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT

The concept of *reflective holding* originates in a theoretical convergence between three major directions: the notion of *holding* in the relational psychoanalytic tradition, the relational-integrative perspective on development, and guided reflective practice in formative contexts. This proposal does not imply transferring a clinical model into supervision; rather, it reconceptualizes fundamental relational functions within a non-clinical educational framework.

Winnicott introduced the notion of holding to describe the function of a sufficiently safe relational environment that enables experience organization and the development of self-continuity. In its original meaning, holding denotes a relational context of support, predictability, and containment in which experiences can be tolerated and integrated. Importantly, within the Winnicottian tradition, holding is not a technique but a relational function of the frame [10]

In relational integrative psychotherapy, this function is reformulated in non-technical language and associated with presence, contact, and support for experience integration [11–13] Integration is not the product of direct intervention but the outcome of a relational framework enabling reflection, regulation, and experiential coherence.

Reflective practice, as conceptualized in educational literature, adds an essential dimension: guided reflection as a process transforming experience into meaning and knowledge [1, 2]. Without reflection, containment remains merely supportive; without containment, reflection risks becoming defensive or fragmented.

Reflective holding emerges from articulating these three directions, describing a supervision-specific relational function integrating containment, guided reflection, and support for self-regulation within an educational framework. This articulation aligns with contemporary orientations that conceptualize supervision as the pedagogy of practice. [5, 6]

6.2. DEFINING REFLECTIVE HOLDING

In this paper, *reflective holding* is conceptualized as an emergent relational-educational function of supervision through which the supervisory frame simultaneously provides relational containment, reflective structure, and support for integrating professional experience. This function enables the professional in training to reflect on their practice, regulate emotional and cognitive responses associated with professional activity, and integrate these processes into the development of professional identity.

Reflective holding does not denote a technique or discrete intervention but a functional property of the supervisory relational frame, sustained through role clarity, process predictability, and guided reflection. Through this function, supervision becomes a sufficiently safe and structured space for exploring professional experience while maintaining the ethical delimitation specific to an educational context. Reflective holding facilitates the organization and meaning-making of professional experience, transforming dilemmas, challenges, and the complexity of practice into resources for learning and professional development.

A central element of the concept is supporting self-regulation as a relational process rather than as an isolated individual skill. Through guided reflection and co-regulation within the supervision relationship, reflective holding contributes to developing the professional's capacity to manage the emotional and cognitive complexity of practice without resorting to defensive mechanisms or emotional over-involvement. [14, 15] This self-regulatory stability creates the conditions necessary for integrating experience into the structure of professional identity.

A clear delimitation between reflective holding and therapeutic holding is essential. While therapeutic holding aims at restructuring personal experience and alleviating psychological suffering, reflective holding is oriented exclusively toward professional experience, within the role, purpose, and educational frame of supervision. Its objective is not healing or clinical intervention but the reflective integration of professional experience and the support of self-regulation and professional identity development.

With this delimitation, reflective holding can be responsibly used in non-clinical educational and psychosocial contexts without generating role confusion or medicalizing formative processes. The concept thus provides an adequate theoretical language for describing supervision's deep educational function, aligning with relational and trans-theoretical supervision models while bringing a specific emphasis on self-regulatory and identity processes [5, 6].

6.3. FUNCTIONS OF REFLECTIVE HOLDING IN SUPERVISION

Reflective holding manifests through interrelated processes operating simultaneously and mutually reinforcing one another, configuring supervision as a reflective educational space. These processes should not be understood as distinct stages or independent functions but as dimensions of the same formative relational mechanism.

The first fundamental dimension is *emotional containment*. The supervisory frame offers a sufficiently safe and predictable relational space in which emotions associated with professional practice can be recognized, tolerated, and brought into reflection without becoming overwhelming or disorganizing. This containment does not involve therapeutic processing or exploration of personal history; rather, it supports a baseline emotional stability necessary for reflective learning and integration of professional experience. Emotional containment functions as a condition of possibility for reflection, not an end in itself [14, 15].

The second dimension is *facilitating professional self-regulation*. Through co-regulation and guided reflection within the supervisory relationship, the supervisee is supported in recognizing and organizing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses generated by complex professional situations. Reflective holding creates a frame in which regulation initially supported relationally can be gradually internalized, supporting the transition from external regulation to autonomous professional self-regulation. In this sense, self-regulation is not treated as an isolated individual competence but as an emergent developmental process mediated relationally and consolidated through reflection [16, 17].

The third central dimension is *cognitive-identity integration* of professional experience. Guided reflection, supported by relational containment and self-regulatory stability, enables organizing professional experiences into a coherent narrative about the

self as a practitioner. Experiences are not analyzed solely at a technical or procedural level; they are integrated into the structure of professional identity, contributing to continuity, coherence, and meaning of practice. Professional identity develops not as a static attribute but as a dynamic construction supported by reflection, self-regulation, and relational validation [7, 8].

By articulating these dimensions, reflective holding can be understood as a complex educational process situated at the intersection of relationship, reflection, and professional development.

6.4. REFLECTIVE HOLDING AS AN EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF SUPERVISION

Conceptualizing reflective holding as an educational function of supervision involves an explicit positioning outside the clinical register in terms of both objectives and professional roles and boundaries. In the proposed framework, reflective holding is non-clinical by nature, oriented exclusively toward professional experience, reflective learning processes, and professional development, without implying therapeutic intervention or personal exploration for healing purposes.

From a formative perspective, reflective holding supports deep learning, professional self-regulation, and identity integration, giving supervision an explicit educational role. Through this function, supervision moves beyond a primarily evaluative or competence-control mechanism and becomes a space for sustainable professional development, applicable to initial training, continuing training, and mentoring. Reflective holding enables transforming everyday professional experience into a learning resource through guided reflection and progressive meaning integration.

From an ethical perspective, reflective holding supports maintaining professional boundaries and prevents role confusion between supervision and clinical intervention. Role clarity, educational goals, and the focus on professional reflection protect both supervisor and supervisee, sustaining a responsible formative process aligned with existing professional norms [5]. In this sense, reflective holding functions as an ethical regulation mechanism of the supervisory relationship, preventing emotional over-involvement and unjustified expansion of the supervisor's role.

By introducing *reflective holding*, the paper proposes a theoretical articulation that makes explicit supervision's deep educational function, integrating relational, self-regulatory, and identity dimensions into a coherent frame applicable to non-clinical educational and psychosocial contexts and adapted to the complexity of contemporary professional training.

7. REFLECTIVE HOLDING AS AN EDUCATIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION

7.1. THE NEED FOR A MINIMAL INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Contemporary supervision literature highlights a considerable diversity of models, perspectives, and practices, reflecting the complexity of professional training processes in educational and psychosocial domains [7-8]. This theoretical plurality, though valuable, is

often accompanied by conceptual fragmentation, in which dimensions such as reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity are addressed separately or remain implicitly assumed.

In this context, it becomes necessary to formulate a minimal integrative conceptual framework that does not compete with existing models but offers a structure for articulating the fundamental dimensions of supervision as an educational process. By “minimal,” we mean a framework general enough to be broadly applicable, yet precise enough to guide theoretical reflection and formative practice.

The proposed framework starts from the premise that supervision, reflective practice, self-regulation, and professional identity are not parallel processes but interdependent dimensions of a unified formative process, mediated by relationship and supported by the function of reflective holding.

7.2. COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

To support clarity and transferability, we identify four central components conceptualized not as separate entities but as processes co-constituted within reflective supervision.

- (a) *Supervision* is defined as a structured educational relational space with an explicit formative role, characterized by role clarity, ethical delimitation, and a professional development goal. Within this frame, supervision functions as a support for reflective holding, providing relational conditions necessary for reflection and self-regulation.
- (b) *Reflection* is conceptualized as a guided process of exploring and organizing professional experience. It involves cognitive distancing, narrative articulation, and meaning integration, facilitated by the relational structure of supervision and by the function of reflective holding.
- (c) *Self-regulation* is approached as a relational and developmental process that includes emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of professional functioning. Self-regulation is not treated as an isolated competence but as an emergent capacity supported through co-regulation and guided reflection within supervision.
- (d) *Professional identity* is understood as a dynamic meaning structure resulting from integrating professional experiences into a coherent narrative about the self as a practitioner. It develops progressively through reflection, self-regulation, and relational validation, functioning simultaneously as an outcome and an active factor of the formative process.

Thus, reflective holding is conceptualized as a transversal relational condition that enables the integrated functioning of these components.

7.3. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG COMPONENTS

Relationships among the four components are conceptualized as circular, recursive, and mutually influential rather than as sequential stages of a linear training process. Supervision creates the relational reflective holding frame that makes guided reflection on

professional experience possible. Reflection facilitates self-regulatory processes by clarifying emotional and cognitive reactions associated with practice.

Self-regulation supports the professional's capacity to remain reflectively engaged in complex situations without resorting to defensive avoidance or emotional over-involvement. This self-regulatory stability enables integrating experience into professional identity structure, contributing to coherence, continuity, and professional meaning.

Emergent professional identity, in turn, influences how experiences are lived, interpreted, and brought into supervision, feeding a continuous development cycle. Supervision thus becomes not only a context for practice analysis but a catalyst for sustainable professional transformation.

7.4. POSITIONING THE FRAMEWORK RELATIVE TO EXISTING MODELS

The proposed minimal integrative conceptual framework does not aim to replace established supervision models, but to function as a complementary structure for articulating supervision's educational dimensions.

In relation to the Contextual Supervision Relationship Model (CSRM), the proposed framework is convergent and compatible. While CSRM explicates relational dynamics, alliance, and supervisee developmental context, the present model adds a specific contribution by explicitly focusing on self-regulation and professional identity as central educational processes. Reflective holding can be understood as an emergent educational function within the relational frame described by CSRM, without contradicting or duplicating it.

The framework's specific contribution lies in:

- making self-regulation explicit as a formative mechanism, not merely an implicit outcome of supervision;
- conceptualizing reflection as a guided relational process rather than exclusively cognitive;
- integrating professional identity as a central dimension of educational supervision;
- clearly delimiting the framework as non-clinical, formative, and ethically bounded.

7.5. CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

To support conceptual clarity and facilitate understanding of relationships among framework components, a synthetic representation is useful. The diagram is not meant to introduce a prescriptive or rigid model but to visualize the dynamic relations among supervision, reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity as described above.

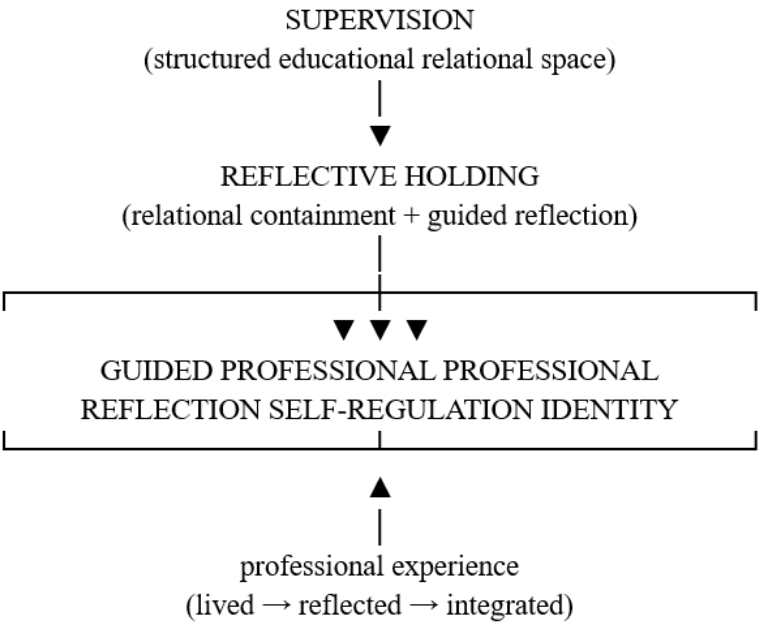
A graphic representation is justified by the circular and recursive character of the framework. Without such a synthesis, relations among components may be interpreted as sequential or hierarchical, distorting the theoretical intent. The diagram is therefore an explanatory tool, not a closed operational model.

The central element is the function of reflective holding, mediating the relationship between the supervision frame and emergent formative processes. Reflective holding is not a separate component but a transversal relational function activated within the supervision

frame, simultaneously supporting guided reflection, professional self-regulation, and identity integration.

Reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity are represented as interdependent dimensions influencing each other reciprocally. None is conceptualized as an endpoint; each may become, in different contexts, both a condition and a result of professional development. Professional experience is constantly reintroduced into the system, reinterpreted and integrated through reflective supervision.

Synthetic representation of the minimal integrative conceptual framework



The diagram illustrates the circular and recursive character of the framework: supervision, through reflective holding, simultaneously supports reflection, self-regulation, and identity integration, which mutually influence one another and are continuously reactivated through professional experience.

7.6. EXPLANATORY AND APPLIED VALUE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The value of the minimal integrative conceptual framework lies in its capacity to make visible formative processes often implicitly assumed in supervision. By explicating the relationships among supervision, reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity, the framework provides a shared language for research, training, and practice.

From an applied perspective, the framework can guide the design of initial and continuing training programs, structure mentoring processes, and clarify the objectives of educational supervision. It also supports a clear ethical positioning by avoiding confusion between supervision and clinical intervention and by consolidating supervision’s educational role.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING, MENTORING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

8.1. REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION IN INITIAL TRAINING FOR EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL PROFESSIONALS

In initial training, supervision is often reduced to monitoring practice or evaluating technical competence. The proposed framework supports an explicit expansion of supervision toward an educational-reflective function that fosters self-regulation and professional identity development from early training stages.

For teachers, reflective supervision offers a space to integrate classroom experiences, understand the educational relationship, manage emotions associated with teaching, and build a coherent professional identity. Reflective holding supports novice teachers' capacity to remain reflectively engaged in demanding contexts without rigidification or defensive avoidance.

For school counselors and psychologists in educational settings, reflective supervision supports clarifying professional roles and delineating boundaries between educational support and psychological intervention. Emphasis on self-regulation and guided reflection helps prevent role confusion and consolidates an ethically bounded professional identity without inappropriately transferring clinical models.

For social workers, reflective supervision facilitates integrating experiences of working with vulnerability, social trauma, and institutional system complexity. Reflective holding provides professional containment that enables reflexive processing of the emotional load of work, supporting self-regulation and continuity of engagement.

For clergy involved in counseling, social support, or community assistance, reflective supervision can function as a space for clarifying boundaries among pastoral, educational, and psychosocial support roles. Without entering a therapeutic register, supervision supports integrating spiritual care experiences into a coherent, ethically responsible professional identity.

8.2. SUPERVISION AND MENTORING IN CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In continuing training, reflective supervision and mentoring can be integrated into a shared professional development framework oriented not only toward performance but toward sustainability and identity coherence. The proposed framework supports supervision as a space for reflecting on current practice, professional transitions, and ethical dilemmas.

For experienced professionals, reflective holding supports reconfiguring professional identity amid institutional change, organizational pressures, or role expansion. Mentoring informed by reflective supervision becomes a process of accompanying professional development, not only transmitting expertise.

In interprofessional contexts, reflective supervision facilitates dialogue among different perspectives (educational, psychosocial, spiritual), contributing to role clarification and preventing competence overlap or conflict.

8.3. PROFESSIONAL SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICS, AND BURNOUT PREVENTION

A major implication of the proposed framework is supporting long-term professional sustainability. By integrating reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity within supervision, reflective holding contributes to preventing emotional exhaustion and professional burnout.

Reflective supervision enables early recognition of overload, rigidification, or loss of professional meaning. Through relational containment and guided reflection, professionals can reassess involvement limits, renegotiate expectations, and reconstruct the meaning of their practice.

Ethically, the framework supports developing healthy professional boundaries, preventing role confusion and emotional over-involvement. Frame clarity, non-clinical delimitation, and professional reflection orientation contribute to responsible practice aligned with each field's specificity.

Through strengthening self-regulation and professional identity, reflective supervision becomes an essential protective factor for professionals in educational, psychosocial, and community domains, supporting sustainable, ethical, and integrated practice.

It is important to emphasize that the proposed framework does not replace clinical training, regulated professional supervision, or licensure requirements in psychotherapy; it addresses exclusively non-clinical educational and psychosocial contexts.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to reconceptualize supervision as a reflective educational space oriented toward supporting self-regulation and professional identity formation in non-clinical educational and psychosocial contexts. Drawing on the paradigm of integrative psychotherapy, approached as an epistemological and relational foundation rather than as an interventionist practice, we proposed a minimal integrative conceptual framework linking supervision, reflective practice, self-regulation, and professional identity within a coherent architecture with clear ethical boundaries.

The central element of novelty and originality lies in introducing and defining *reflective holding* as a supervision-specific educational function, distinct both from therapeutic holding and from traditional forms of professional support or evaluation. Unlike clinical uses of “holding,” reflective holding is formulated as a non-clinical relational function oriented exclusively toward organizing, integrating, and reflecting professional experience.

The originality of the proposed concept does not derive from a merely terminological extension, but from the systematic integration of theoretical dimensions that, in the existing literature, are rarely articulated coherently outside clinical contexts. By correlating relational containment, guided reflection as an educational process, and self-regulation as a mechanism of professional identity development, reflective holding is conceptualized as an emergent formative mechanism capable of explaining how supervision can support professional development beyond technical competence without “therapeutizing” or medicalizing educational processes. In this sense, the contribution is conceptual-synthetic, offering new theoretical language for describing supervision's deep

educational function and for articulating relationships among reflection, self-regulation, and professional identity.

The proposed framework does not compete with existing supervision models but complements them through an explicit focus on self-regulatory and identity processes, insufficiently conceptualized outside clinical settings. By positioning reflective holding as a transversal educational function, the framework aligns with relational and trans-theoretical supervision models, such as CSRM, without duplicating them. While existing models explicate relationship and alliance dynamics, the present contribution adds a distinct educational emphasis clarifying how these dynamics support self-regulation and identity integration in professional training.

At the same time, the article responds to an identified need in the literature: to formulate concepts enabling responsible use of psychotherapeutic paradigms in non-clinical contexts without role confusion or boundary violations.

The proposed framework is theoretical and conceptual and is not currently supported by empirical data. It does not provide standardized procedures and is not intended as a prescriptive supervision model. Its application requires supervision competence, institutional clarity, and respect for professional boundaries.

It is essential to emphasize that this framework does not replace clinical training, regulated professional supervision, or licensure for psychotherapy practice. It addresses exclusively non-clinical educational and psychosocial contexts. Concepts from integrative psychotherapy are used strictly at the level of theoretical paradigm and relational principles, without transferring therapeutic interventions or clinical competencies to professionals lacking corresponding qualifications and legal rights.

This delimitation is not a limitation but an ethical strength, helping prevent role confusion, emotional over-involvement, and the risks associated with insufficiently bounded formative practices.

Future research directions may include empirical exploration of reflective holding in educational supervision, analysis of relationships between reflective supervision and indicators of professional self-regulation, and development of instruments for assessing reflective and identity processes in training contexts.

By formulating the concept of reflective holding and integrating it into a coherent conceptual framework, the paper offers an original and relevant contribution to supervision literature, supporting the reconceptualization of supervision as a pedagogy of sustainable professional development, ethically delimited and adapted to the complexity of contemporary educational and psychosocial professions.

REFERENCES

1. Skovholt, T. M., & Rønnestad, M. H. (2003). *Struggles of the novice counselor and therapist*. Routledge.
2. Rønnestad, M. H., & Skovholt, T. M. (2013). *The developing practitioner*. Routledge.
3. Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
4. Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13–39). Academic Press.
5. Orfali, C. H. (2024). How higher education teachers see their professional identity. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1429847. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1429847>

6. Lei, L., & Si, H. (2025). Supervisor conscientiousness and professional identity for graduate students: A moderated mediation model. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 76, 101221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2025.101221>
7. Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2019). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision* (6th ed.). Pearson.
8. Watkins, C. E., & Milne, D. L. (Eds.). (2014). *The Wiley international handbook of clinical supervision*. Wiley-Blackwell.
9. Watkins, C. E. (2014). The supervisory alliance: A critical component of supervision effectiveness. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 68(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2014.68.1.19>
10. Watkins, C. E., & Cădăriu, I. E. (2025). The contextual supervision relationship model: Integrating relational and developmental dimensions. *International Journal of Supervision in Psychotherapy*, 7(1), 15–32.
11. Miller, L. S. (2023). Supervision to support reflective practices: Implications for school culture and professional development. *Educational Leadership Review*, 24(1), 45–60.
12. Schore, A. N. (2003). *Affect regulation and the repair of the self*. W. W. Norton & Company.
13. Siegel, D. J. (2012). *The developing mind* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
14. Erskine, R. G. (1997). *Integrative psychotherapy in action*. Sage.
15. Erskine, R. G., Moursund, J. P., & Trautmann, R. L. (1999). *Beyond empathy: A therapy of contact-in-relationship*. Brunner/Mazel.
16. Erskine, R. G. (2015). *Relational patterns, therapeutic presence, and psychotherapy*. Karnac Books.
17. Siegel, D. J. (2015). Interpersonal neurobiology as a framework for psychotherapy integration. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 25(2), 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039685>
18. European Association for Integrative Psychotherapy. (2019). *Training standards and competencies in integrative psychotherapy*. <https://www.euroaip.eu>
19. Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
20. Moon, J. A. (2004). *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning*. RoutledgeFalmer.
21. Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781>
22. Fook, J. (2012). *Social work: A critical approach to practice* (2nd ed.). Sage.
23. Fook, J., White, S., & Gardner, F. (2006). *Critical reflection in health and social care*. Open University Press.
24. Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
25. Winnicott, D. W. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment: Studies in the theory of emotional development*. International Universities Press.
26. Milne, D. L., & Watkins, C. E. (2014). Defining and describing supervision. In C. E. Watkins & D. L. Milne (Eds.), *The Wiley international handbook of clinical supervision* (pp. 3–20). Wiley-Blackwell.
27. Vișcu, L.-I., Cădăriu, I. E., & Watkins, C. E. (Eds.). (2024). *Psihoterapie integrativă: Studii 5*. Editura Institutului Român de Psihoterapie Integrativă.
28. Skovholt, T. M., & Jennings, L. (2004). *Master therapists: Exploring expertise in therapy and counseling*. Allyn & Bacon.