Practicum Supervision: What Students Need to Know and What Supervisors Ought to Know
Supervision de stage : Ce que les étudiants doivent savoir et ce que les superviseurs devraient savoir

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ABSTRACT

When graduate-level counselling students begin their practicums, they are often new to both counselling and the practice of supervision. In many instances, students arrive at their practicums with a limited understanding of supervision and how it ought to be carried out; this deficit, we contend, is to their detriment. The premise of this article is that a successful practicum rests on a successful supervisory experience, which is enhanced when supervisees have a foundational knowledge of supervision theory and practice. To meet this end, this article is written as a direct personal message to students, explaining the basics of supervision models, processes, practices, tensions, and possible solutions to common supervision struggles. Although this article is written for students, we believe that its contents are equally relevant to supervisors.

RÉSUMÉ

Lorsque les étudiantes et les étudiants universitaires de deuxième cycle entreprennent leurs stages, ils découvrent à la fois le counseling et la pratique de la supervision. Dans bien des cas, les étudiants amorcent leurs stages sans bien comprendre ce qu'est la supervision ni la façon dont elle devrait de dérouler; cette lacune joue, selon nous, en leur défaveur. Cet article a pour prémisse le principe selon lequel un stage réussi repose sur une expérience de supervision réussie, qui est elle-même favorisée lorsque les supervisés ont une connaissance de base de la théorie de la supervision et de sa mise en pratique. C'est à cette fin que nous avons rédigé le présent article sous forme de message directement adressé aux étudiantes et aux étudiants, en expliquant les principes de base de la supervision (modèles, procédés, pratiques, tensions et solutions possibles aux affrontements les plus courants en supervision). Bien que rédigé à l'intention des étudiantes et des étudiants, cet article est, selon nous, tout aussi pertinent pour les superviseurs.

Students enrolled in master's-level counselling programs receive extensive academic instruction across a broad range of counselling competencies. A central and required component of all counsellor education programs is the practicum. This period of supervised practice provides students the opportunity to develop requisite counselling skills, attitudes, and values in an applied setting. Counselling students typically approach their practicum with a mix of trepidation, excitement, and hope for a highly rewarding and transformative learning experience. Unfortu-

nately, this initial optimism does not always persist, as evidence suggests that some supervisees will encounter significant struggles within the supervisory relationship (e.g., Gray, Ladany, Ancis, & Walker, 2001; Magnuson, Wilcoxon, & Norem, 2000; Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). To a large degree, the responsibility for such struggles must fall upon supervisors due to their training, experience, and a greater degree of power and influence. We believe, however, that practicum students are better positioned to identify and address troublesome aspects of supervision when furnished with a solid understanding of counsellor supervision theory and practice before beginning their practicum.

Stated another way, we think that all counselling students can benefit immensely from insider knowledge regarding what competent and ethical supervision ought to look like. Also, in keeping with the title of this article, we contend that supervisors, many of whom will never have had formal training in supervision (Scott, Ingram, Vitanza, & Smith, 2000), can also benefit from an overview of key aspects of counsellor supervision theory and practice. In the discussion that follows, we provide such an overview along with ideas, meant primarily for supervisees, on how to manage and respond to difficulties within the supervisory relationship. To personalize our message to practicum students, from this point forward we will target our discussion directly to supervisees, at times conversationally. We believe, however, that the material in this article is equally relevant to supervisors and early-career supervisees of all stripes.

<div align="center">THE CONTEXT OF SUPERVISION</div>

Although the field of counselling and psychotherapy dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, the professional practice of counsellor supervision is relatively new. Historically, attaining status as a supervisor required little more than being recognized as a skilled counsellor who had been practicing for a reasonable number of years. In other words, years of practice automatically qualified one as a supervisor. It is only in the last 25 years or so that researchers and educators in counselling and psychology have focused on the methods, processes, training needs, and effects of supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Watkins, 2014).

Counsellor supervision is now considered a subspecialty with a defined set of competencies and training requirements (Falender & Shafranske, 2012). Two recent initiatives undertaken by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) underscore this trend. First is a recently developed supervisor certification program. Those wishing to become a Canadian Certified Counsellor Supervisor must have at least five years' clinical experience within the last 10 years and demonstrate adequate education and training across a wide range of counselling-related domains. Second is a national initiative to develop a competency-based clinical supervision framework to facilitate increased accountability to professional counselling and psychotherapy while also serving to support the Canadian Certified Counsellor Supervisor designation.

Whereas the term "supervision" can be intuitively understood as overseeing another's work, common definitions within professional counselling and allied professions reveal features that bear upon what you will, or should, experience during your practicum. Bernard and Goodyear's (2014) widely cited definition states that

> [s]upervision is an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior colleague or colleagues who typically (but not always) are members of that same profession. This relationship is evaluative and hierarchical, extends over time, and has the simultaneous purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the more junior person(s); monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients she, he, or they see; and serving as a gatekeeper for the particular profession the supervisee seeks to enter. (p. 9)

A few elements of this definition are worthy of commentary. First, the "senior-junior" distinction might be assumed to mean that only those new, or newer, to the profession receive supervision. Yet, in the counselling profession, supervision is not just reserved for the neophyte. Counsellors will, for varying reasons, participate in supervision across their career span. Common situations in which supervision is sought include when faced with a challenging client or vexing ethical concern, working with a new theory of psychotherapy or unfamiliar client population, or participating in administrative supervision as a requirement of one's employment. The various circumstances within which counsellors participate in supervision reflects a shift from viewing supervision solely as a preservice requirement to a career-long opportunity for continued personal growth and professional development.

Second, the Bernard and Goodyear (2014) definition noted that the supervisory relationship is hierarchical and involves evaluation, which ties into gatekeeping. This is to say that your supervisor assumes a position of power in the relationship. This power is amplified when the supervisor's role includes deciding if you are ready to progress toward independent practice. During practicums and internships, you are, in essence, accountable to two entities: your practice site (including clients, fellow staff, management, and your supervisor) and your university. Both entities are involved in a gatekeeping role. As will be discussed later, the gatekeeping role, if not carefully managed, can lead to difficulties within the supervisory relationship.

Third, this definition notes that in addition to promoting your professional growth and development as a supervisee, your supervisor assumes a monitoring role whereby he or she may be held vicariously responsible for your clients through the legal doctrine known as *respondeat superior*. Thus, supervisors bear considerable responsibility and must be adequately prepared to fulfill this role to help you gain knowledge and experience as a counsellor while also overseeing client safety. In our next section, we discuss common approaches to supervision aimed at assisting supervisors to fulfill the aims and objectives embedded within Bernard and Goodyear's (2014) definition.

Just as there are numerous counselling models available to guide your work with clients, so, too, are there manifold supervision models to guide the process of supervision. As with counselling models, supervision models serve as a guide or frame for the focus and process of the supervisory enterprise. As Corey, Haynes, and Moulton (2010) professed, "Effective supervisors have a clearly articulated model of supervision; they know where they are going with the supervisee and what they need to do to get there" (p. 74). A basic understanding of prevailing supervision models will help furnish a suitable context for your first supervisory experience, help you decide upon a practicum placement and supervisor suited to your learning goals, and facilitate effective engagement in the supervisory process through increasing your understanding of the purpose and function of supervision sessions. Finally, if you experience one model of supervision at your practicum site and another at your academic institution, you may be better equipped to reconcile differences between the two locales if you are already versed in supervision models.

Psychotherapy Models of Supervision

Historically, supervision was conducted exclusively from within specific models of psychotherapy. Psychoanalysts trained others to be psychoanalysts, cognitive behaviourists trained others to be cognitive behaviourists, and so forth. Supervisors drew on the assumptions, language, and process of a chosen model of therapy to frame their supervision sessions and interventions (Aasheim, 2011). For example, a cognitive behavioural supervision session would have a formal structure, with both the supervisor and supervisee setting an agenda that would include homework review, problems to be addressed, discussion of new material or client concerns, and a new homework assignment (Beck, 2011). The operative assumption was "[t]hat which is useful in bringing about change with clients is likely to be useful in bringing about change with supervisees" (Corey et al., 2010, p. 80). Although psychotherapy models of supervision can help you learn a particular model of psychotherapy, they also run this risk of blurring the distinction between supervision and therapy (Aasheim, 2011).

Developmental Models of Supervision

Developmental models of supervision focus on purported stages supervisees move through during their training and can be used with any psychotherapy orientation (Falender & Shafranske, 2004). These models are rooted in social and cognitive learning theories and theories of human development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Developmental models may focus on levels of clinical skill, self-awareness and reflection, and/or confidence and autonomy. Developmental models are flexible and can accommodate differing levels of development within a particular supervisee. For example, you might have advanced self-reflective skills but beginner intervention delivery skills. Supervisors who work within a developmental perspective tailor their supervision interventions accordingly (Bernard &

Goodyear, 2014; Falender & Shafranske, 2004) and should be closely attuned to your learning needs so that you feel supported rather than frustrated or discouraged (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). Supervisors who adhere to a developmental model of supervision typically will not expect you to narrow your focus to a single theoretical model early in your training (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014).

Process Models of Supervision

Process models of supervision focus on various components of supervision: the tasks, supervisory roles, social contextual issues involved in supervision, and processes of both the supervisor and supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Falender & Shafranske, 2004). Each supervision session is dynamic; the supervisor will adopt roles and tasks based on explicit and implicit cues from the supervisee and from the supervision session itself. A supervisor may adopt the role of consultant to provide a supervisee with additional resources or perspectives about a particular client issue and then, a moment later, step into a mentor role to support the supervisee as he or she struggles to identify and learn from a mishandled client situation. Process models can be used regardless of theoretical orientation or the developmental stage of the supervisee. Also, because *what* happens during supervision is meant to shape how supervision occurs, process models provide room to attend to varying developmental needs within each supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Process models help illuminate the complexity and specificity of supervisor competency, underscoring that clinical supervision requires more skills than those acquired through experience as a clinician or as a teacher (Falender & Shafranske, 2004).

Competency-Based Models of Supervision

Competency-based models of supervision are rooted in the identification and articulation of competency benchmarks, standards that can guide a unified method of training and assessing students of professional counselling and psychology (Falender & Shafranske, 2017; Fouad et al., 2009; Gonsalvez & Calvert, 2014). Competency-based models of supervision, which can be used with any psychotherapy orientation, allow for a flexible supervisory approach that can accommodate differing needs in a supervisee (Gonsalvez & Calvert, 2014). If your supervisor subscribes to a competency-based model, she or he will recurrently assess you and provide further intervention based on identified competency benchmarks such as assessment, intervention, interpersonal relationships, application of research, and culture and diversity. A supervisor operating from a competency perspective might also include a competency dedicated to effective engagement in supervision (Fouad et al., 2009).

It is important to note that while competency-based models of supervision focus on developing your competencies as a student, there are articulated competencies for delivering supervision as well. These include having knowledge about models of supervision, supervision theory, and research on supervision; understanding the various roles a supervisor may adopt; and having skill in providing

and seeking feedback (Falender et al., 2004). The focus on competency-based training through all stages of professional development has the potential to unify supervision practice across academic institutions, practicum sites, and accrediting bodies. We are, however, a long way off from achieving such an ideal. For now, it is the exception rather than the norm that supervision competencies will align across varied contexts.

By nature, all supervision models (just as with all counselling models) are incomplete, thus leading some theorists to create an integrated or an "amalgam" approach (Robinson, 2016, p. 125). This has resulted in a proliferation of supervision models; by some counts, there are more than 400 such models (Edwards, as cited in Robinson, 2016). With so many models available, it is impractical and impossible to address them all in this article. The apparent proliferation also muddies the waters when it comes to identifying what approach your potential supervisor might embrace. The chances are quite high that it will be difficult to discern the supervision model used by your supervisor or, for that matter, if your supervisor subscribes to a model at all. As we discuss next, in general there are significant gaps between supervisory practices indicated by supervision theories or models and what takes place within the supervisory relationship.

THE THEORY-PRACTICE GAP

The preceding discussion should provide a basic understanding of the structure and function of some of the more prominent supervision models. Unfortunately, because the practice of supervision has only recently been recognized as a professional competency (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014) and best practices in supervision are still being researched and developed (Watkins, 2012), there exists a significant theory-practice gap. Watkins (2012) eloquently and forcefully made this point, stating "We empirically know the least about the party [i.e., supervisors] who may exert the most substantial impact on supervisees' therapeutic development and actualization" (p. 70).

Even though research points to the importance of supervisor training (Watkins, 2012), many who supervise receive little, if any, formal preparation for this specialized area of practice (Hunsley & Barker, 2011; Watkins, 2012). Kaslow, Falender, and Grus (2012) highlighted this shortcoming, stating that in both academic and clinical settings what transpires within supervision frequently does not align with current standards of supervision practice. This could compromise the quality of your supervisory experience. At the heart of the theory-practice gap lies the assumption that if one is a good clinician then, by extension, one must be a good supervisor (Gazzola & Thériault, 2007).

Watkins (2012), in a comprehensive review of research and theory on supervisor development, concluded that there is little evidence to support the notion that supervisory experience alone leads to competence as a supervisor. Unfortunately, for those counsellors who do wish to be trained in supervision, such training opportunities have historically been hard to attain. This is beginning to change

as professional organizations such as the CCPA develop and provide ongoing competency-based supervision training. Granted, taking time off work and paying for supervision training may take a backseat to learning that is directly focused on client care (Hatcher, Wise, Grus, Mangione, & Emmons, 2012). A related concern is that there is little empirical evidence available to inform practice in supervision training or point to the components of supervision that positively impact client care (Hunsley & Barker, 2011; Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick, & Ellis, 2008; Watkins, 2012).

Watkins (2012) noted that "perhaps the reality of supervision training opportunities will come to eventually match our rhetoric about the need for supervision training and supervisor supervision" (p. 77). Not surprisingly, the inadequate training and the resultant theory-practice gap in supervision likely contributes to a wide variety of and qualitative differences in supervisory practices.

In the next section of this article, we move away from the theoretical and conceptual realms and toward the practical by providing a detailed description of what supervision typically involves. We say "typically" because, as the theory-practice gap would suggest, there will likely be significant discrepancies in how supervision is performed across various practicum sites and supervisors.

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SUPERVISION

Supervision is a complex process that encompasses teaching, skill coaching, modelling, encouraging reflective practice, corrective feedback, gatekeeping, and ensuring the safety of your clients (Falender et al., 2004; Milne et al., 2008; Veilleux, Sandeen, & Levensky, 2014). Stated another way, you can expect that your supervisor will teach you, critique you, encourage you, and challenge you—all while ensuring that your clients are not harmed and you are meeting the requirements of your program. The tasks involved in effective supervision are many and varied. Supervisors may engage in instruction, roleplaying, modelling, supportive listening, providing feedback, protecting client welfare, identifying and discussing cultural identities, setting appropriate boundaries, managing multiple roles, promoting self-reflection, and providing formative (ongoing) and summative (final) evaluations (Falender et al., 2004; Milne et al., 2008; Veilleux et al., 2014). Done well, these tasks should foster motivation to work with clients, an ability to self-reflect, increased positive attitude toward clients, and more effective therapeutic skills (Milne et al., 2008).

Milne et al. (2008) conceptualized supervision as offering a collection of didactic and relationship-based interventions intended to foster supervisee professional growth and learning. This conceptualization of supervision aligns, in part, with the metaphorical depiction of the supervisor as a travel guide. The purpose of a travel guide is to accompany travellers into parts unknown, warn them of dangers, point out important features of the land, keep them from straying into dangerous parts, and inspire them to learn all they can of the newly travelled territory. As such, the travel guide assumes a great deal of responsibility due to familiarity with

the territory and the client's vulnerability in not knowing. Thus, your supervisor/ travel guide will assume various roles to help you navigate the uncharted territory of counselling practice.

The role of a consultant is one that many supervisees believe is the key role of a supervisor. Unfortunately, it is also the role that some supervisors will narrowly view as their sole duty. Indeed, guiding your work with clients is a critically important aspect of the supervisor role; however, it is far from being the only role. In the role of teacher, your supervisor might variously offer further instruction in theory, assessment, intervention, or administrative duties. This could be accomplished through direct instruction, assigning readings, or suggesting other didactic tools (e.g., therapy videos, podcasts).

As an evaluator, your supervisor should provide formative feedback regularly during supervision sessions and summative feedback at scheduled intervals. Managed effectively, formative feedback should mean that you are never caught off guard when it comes time for summative feedback; that is, you should already have a very good understanding of how your supervisor has been evaluating your progress across multiple competencies. Lastly, as a gatekeeper to the profession, at the end of your practicum, your supervisor will make a global evaluation of your readiness to progress to the next stage of becoming a professional counsellor (e.g., graduate from your program, apply for registration with a professional body).

There are other roles (such as colleague or mentor) that your supervisor may or may not adopt depending on the nature and intent of the particular supervision intervention and the general approach to supervision taken by your supervisor (Barnett & Molzon, 2014). The extent to which a supervisor can adopt these roles is appropriately limited by the ethics of supervision practice (CPA, 2009). It is important for you to understand the roles your supervisor is required to fulfill versus the roles your supervisor may temporarily adopt in support of supervision goals. For example, your supervisor is required to fulfill roles such as evaluation and gatekeeping; conversely, taking on a collegial role, such as presenting at a conference together, should be negotiated ahead of time and should comply with ethical principles and standards (e.g., should not compromise professional boundaries).

The specific roles that your supervisor adopts through the supervision process are ideally discussed at the start of the supervisory relationship. Increasingly, these roles are identified as part of a formal informed consent process during which your supervisor will present you with a written consent form (sometimes referred to as a *supervision contract*) that outlines the various components of the supervisory experience, with special attention to mutual roles and responsibilities. Note that not all supervisors will engage in a formal informed consent process, and some may not even engage in an informal informed consent process. This might be especially so for supervisors who have not had specific training in supervision.

<div align="center">THE SUPERVISORY ALLIANCE</div>

The supervisory alliance is the foundation upon which ethical and effective supervision rests; the strength and quality of this alliance influences all aspects of the supervisory experience and, importantly, helps protect against some of the untoward experiences that can arise within the supervisory relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Ladany et al., 2012; Starr, Ciclitira, Marzano, Brunswick, & Costa, 2013). Bordin (1983) applied his widely accepted model of the therapeutic alliance to the supervisory alliance. Like the therapeutic alliance, the supervisory alliance is metatheoretical, meaning that it is viewed as present and important regardless of the specific supervision model one might be working from.

Components of the Supervisory Alliance

An effective supervisory alliance is thought to arise when there is a strong bond between you and your supervisor, and when there is agreement on the goals and tasks of supervision (Bordin, 1983). The alliance becomes the framework that supports a responsive supervisory environment. As you develop professionally, your supervisory needs will change. For example, it is not uncommon for practicum students to need reassurance, positive feedback, and teaching at the beginning of their supervision. Later, as you gain confidence in your skills and trust in the supervisory relationship, you will likely be more equipped to absorb and make effective use of critical feedback, be more self-directed, and want to take more risks. Because supervisors assume a position of power in the alliance, they are tasked with the monitoring and maintenance of the supervisory alliance, noting when goals and tasks may need to be renegotiated or the bond needs to be repaired or strengthened (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; CPA, 2009; Falender et al., 2004). You are expected to use the alliance to not only hone clinical intervention skills, but also to engage in professional skills such as being reflexive and self-aware, identifying learning needs, being receptive to feedback, and being open to and engaging in discussion if tension or conflict occurs (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Gross, 2005).

Goals and tasks. In general terms, the goals and tasks for practicum supervision are drawn from the learning expectations set out by your academic institution, the professional requirements of your targeted licensing body, and the scope of practice of your practicum site. You and your supervisor should also collaboratively identify specific goals for supervision along with the tasks each must undertake to achieve these goals (Borders, 2014). In keeping with the developmental models of supervision discussed earlier, supervision goals should be calibrated according to your comfort, confidence, and competence as a burgeoning counsellor. This also means that the clientele you work with should be chosen according to your developmental level. For example, if you have no experience working with "real" clients, then your first client should not be a suicidal person diagnosed with a personality disorder. As indicated earlier, the legal doctrine *respondeat superior* means your supervisor has legal responsibility for the work you do with your clients.

Thus, it is both a legal requirement and ethical imperative that your supervisor does not assign you a client whose needs extend beyond your ability to provide effective service.

Bond. The extreme importance of the supervisory relational bond compels us to give this topic greater attention than the other two components of Bordin's (1983) theory of alliance. As you begin your practicum, you are bound to have high expectations for the relationship between you and your supervisor. Indeed, there are many benefits to having a positive, trusting relationship with someone who is going to serve as your guide, teacher, evaluator, and consultant. Like all personal relationships, the relationship between you and your supervisor will be influenced by personal characteristics and cultural background (Falender & Shafranske, 2014; Watkins, 2014). Falender et al.'s (2004) competency model of supervision outlines the supervisor characteristics that promote a strong supervisory bond, including being empowering, sensitive to diversity, respectful, and committed to life-long learning (see Falender et al., 2004, for a complete list).

Personal characteristics that you, the supervisee, can draw upon to build a strong supervisory bond include honesty, personal responsibility, compassion, empathy, receptivity, and openness to learning and feedback (Fouad et al., 2009). An ethical approach to supervision, as outlined by the Canadian Psychological Association (2009), includes effective ways of being for both supervisor and supervisee. These include being respectful, understanding, open, and honest; willing to disclose personal biases or characteristics that could affect supervision; willing and open to the constructive resolution of interpersonal challenges; respectful of professional boundaries; and committed to discussing the supervisory relationship.

The relationship between you and your supervisor, although seemingly straight-forward, can at times be complicated (Falender & Shafranske, 2014; Watkins, 2014). This complexity arises from tensions that may exist due to multiple roles and the evaluative component of supervision**.** In some ways, the relationship between you and your supervisor is similar to the relationship between a student and a teacher. Both involve didactic and evaluative elements, and both are bound by time and place. A key difference between teacher and supervisor includes the personal element. Certainly, in some coursework you will be asked to share personal information; however, the nature of such sharing tends to be voluntary and circumscribed, meaning that often you have choices regarding the nature and amount you share with your teacher.

In contrast, in supervision, it is expected that you discuss with your supervisor aspects of your counselling work that bring to mind personal life experiences and trigger emotional reactions that could interfere with your professional work (Veilleux et al., 2014). This, as you would have learned when studying psychodynamic theory, is referred to as *countertransference*. Regardless of your theoretical persuasion, countertransference is a common occurrence that requires self-reflection and consultation throughout one's career, though especially when one is new to direct client work (Falender & Shafranske, 2014). Sharing your personal and emotional life with your supervisor has the potential, however, to bring forth

additional concerns for you. You might wonder how your supervisor will receive such disclosures, and you might hold back if you think what you share will cast you in a negative light or elicit criticism or concern. Indeed, in their study of 204 therapists in training, Mehr, Ladany, and Caskie (2015) found that 84.3% chose not to disclose important information to their supervisors within a single supervision session, and the most frequent reasons for not doing so were concerns about being viewed negatively, deference to the supervisors' authority, and worry about negative consequences. With an average of 2.68 nondisclosures occurring in a supervision session, it seems that nondisclosure is not an isolated occurrence.

It is thus likely that you will at some point during supervision be tempted to engage in self-censorship for reasons akin to those identified by Mehr et al. (2015). In life, we often take risks, and it is usually better that they are calculated. What to do? Well, there is another interesting finding from Mehr and colleagues that is, indeed, telling. What these researchers found was a positive correlation between supervisee disclosure and the supervisory alliance; in other words, the stronger the alliance, the more likely it was that supervisees would disclose important information to their supervisors. Intuitively this makes sense, and thus as a supervisee an instance of nondisclosure actually can be framed as a gauge, of sorts, for the strength of the relationship between you and your supervisor; if the reasons behind your nondisclosure betray a weak supervisory relationship, then this likely signals the need to broach the matter with your supervisor. We will discuss this later.

Conversely, nondisclosure might, upon self-reflection, have more to do with your insecurities or aversion to receiving feedback than anything amiss with your supervisor's approach or the supervisory relationship per se. Indeed, an important part of becoming, and remaining, an ethical and effective counsellor involves the ability to engage in self-reflection and adjust one's behaviour or deal with one's feelings of vulnerability (e.g., around accepting feedback) accordingly.

The Benefits of a Strong Supervisory Alliance

The quality of the supervisory alliance contributes significantly to the growth and development of supervisees. A strong alliance with your supervisor, characterized by a shared understanding of the roles, goals, and tasks, helps facilitate a safe and positive space for the work of supervision (Barnett & Molzon, 2014; Mehr et al., 2015; Starr et al., 2013). Importantly, it is essential that you feel enough trust and safety in your supervisory relationship to disclose not only your emotional experiences, but also doubts, struggles, questions, and mistakes related to your clinical work (Barnett & Molzon, 2014). Supervisees feel less anxious about supervision and are more likely to engage in the process fully when they sense a strong supervisory relationship (Barnett & Molzon, 2014; Mehr et al., 2015; Watkins, 2014). What should your supervisor be doing to foster such a relationship? A good start is to minimize the power differential in the relationship. Although this differential is unavoidable due to the responsibilities placed on practicum supervisors, it can be managed in ways that help neutralize some of the untoward side-effects of power.

A strong supervisory alliance is also facilitated when supervisors strive for a balance between offering support and challenging the supervisee. Without a doubt, you need to feel supported by your supervisor. Your supervisor ought to feel like a benevolent ally whose ultimate goal is to advance your ability to one day operate as an independent practitioner. Yet, you also need to be challenged, and by this we mean that your supervisor should not shy away from providing corrective feedback and direction. How this challenge occurs is another matter. In keeping with the developmental model of supervision, the degree and nature of challenges should be calibrated according to where you are in your professional training.

A strong alliance with your supervisor is also constructed through relational qualities and practices associated with any strong interpersonal connection such as respect, positive regard, empathy, and collaboration. According to Mehr and colleagues (2015), the presence of these qualities and practices helps facilitate open communication within the supervisory relationship, thus enabling conversations that address the inherent tensions within supervision, such as performance evaluation and the power differentials.

Tensions in the Alliance

The various qualities that foster a strong supervisory alliance are easily understood and therefore, one would think, easy to practice. This, however, is not always the case. In fact, research suggests that supervisees often report negative experiences. For example, in their survey of 126 predoctoral interns and practicum students, Ramos-Sánchez et al. (2002) found that 21% of respondents had experienced a significant negative event in supervision. Negative events were collapsed into four general categories: struggles associated with interpersonal style; conflict over supervision tasks and responsibilities; conflict associated with disagreements regarding case conceptualization and theoretical orientation; and ethical, legal, and multicultural concerns. Gross (2005) identified that a significant tension experienced by students is between that of perception of match and mismatch, including in training goals between site and supervisee, in fit between supervisor and supervisee, or in workload expectations. Difficulties can also arise simply through substandard supervision characterized by a rigid, unsupportive, authoritarian, insensitive, demeaning, defensive, and deficit-focused approach (Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2013; Magnuson et al., 2000; Watkins, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, the evaluative function of supervision invariably invokes tension within the supervisory relationship. On the one hand, as a supervisee you will naturally want to impart a favourable impression of composure, competence, and confidence to your supervisor in all aspects of your counselling work. You might, therefore, be reticent to share elements of your experience that you think may lead to a negative evaluation of your performance. Of course, your growth and development as a counsellor paradoxically requires you to express your challenges and uncertainties openly; otherwise, how can your supervisor help you with them?

Until now, we have provided foundational knowledge about supervision and the supervisory alliance that we hope will help orient you to the experience of being supervised during your practicum. It is possible for some of you that much, if not all, of this information will be provided, either through direct instruction or readings, in your practicum course (often a formal practicum course is offered concurrently with the practicum experience). Practicum courses could dedicate a section of the curriculum to teaching students about supervision theory and practice, and for discussing concrete examples of ways this new knowledge could support effective engagement in supervision. Time could be allocated for specific skill practice in reflecting on and articulating learning needs, navigating the intricacies of the supervisory relationship, and the art of providing and receiving feedback. Swank and McCarthy (2013) suggested a model for training counselling students in the skill of giving and receiving feedback so that they can learn to do so in an effective and nondefensive manner. Although this model was designed for use early in a training program, it is also suitable for the needs of students in the practicum phase of their program (Swank & McCarthy, 2013).

Additionally, it is common during the practicum course for students to video- or audio-record work with clients to present to their classmates for discussion about case conceptualization and intervention skills. Perhaps it would be beneficial for students to also present a recording of a supervision session. Classmates could reflect on strengths and challenges of each other's supervisory relationships, help one another engage in metacognition about supervision theory and process, and support reflexivity in one another.

If your practicum course falls short on some of these learning opportunities, then we hope that this article will at least fill in some gaps or offer an alternative viewpoint. For the remainder of this article, we shift our attention to general advice on how you, as a practicum student, might optimize the practicum selection process and proceed if you experience doubt or encounter difficulties.

What to Do in Your Practicum Interview

The focus of your practicum interview will, not surprisingly, be on you. Either your potential supervisor, agency manager, or both will interview you to determine your suitability as a practicum student for the site. This interview need not, however, be one-sided. The interview can and should be considered as an opportunity for reciprocal assessment of fit. It is routine for your interviewer(s) to at one point (often near the end of your interview) ask if you have any questions. The question is often posed in general terms, laying open your opportunity to ask some very important questions, such as:

1. Addressing the agency, as a whole:
   - How will orientation to the site be facilitated and what will it entail?
   - Is there a particular supervision model that this agency embraces?
   - How are new referrals assigned to students?

2. Addressing an individual supervisor:
    *   What is your background in supervision? How did you train to become a supervisor? How many students have you supervised? What is your theoretical background? How long have you been working in the field?
    *   What do you view as the foundation for a strong supervisory relationship? What are your preferred means to address conflict if it were to arise?
    *   What do you view as the characteristics of a strong practicum student?
    *   What do you consider to be the challenges and rewards in supervision?

These questions can help alert you to possible strengths, limitations, and "warning bells" associated with your supervisor and the site, keeping in mind that no site, or supervisor for that matter, will be perfect. These questions do not address items that ought to be included in the supervision contract between the supervisor/agency and your learning institution (e.g., evaluation requirements; frequency, duration, and type of supervision meetings; the number of required client hours; mutual roles and responsibilities).

In some respects, you are screening your potential supervisor and site just as they are screening you. Ideally, your program should have already vetted practicum sites with a fair degree of acumen and provide assurance through an accompanying list of "approved" sites. Even so, it is possible that screening may not be overly rigorous and that programs hungry to have their students secure placements may fail to exercise requisite diligence. This could mean a difficult choice on your part if your questioning leads you to doubt the suitability of your site or supervisor. In a context of limited placements, you may feel pressure to accept a questionable practicum. It may seem that your decision is between no practicum and a poor practicum. Of course, there are likely many other variables that will play into your decision, and it would be difficult to enumerate and discuss the full gamut in this article. What we will discuss, however, is a range of steps that you can take should you find yourself in a less-than-perfect practicum.

Managing the Institution-Student-Supervisor Triangle

In a perfect world, the roles and responsibilities of each side of the triangle are clearly articulated at the outset of the practicum, and communications lines and professional decorum all unfold harmoniously. This, however, is not always the case. When trouble does arise, it most often is a response to severed or circuitous communication between the three parties. A typical scenario has a disgruntled student report discontent to her or his program's practicum course instructor who then goes straight back to the supervisor with the complaint. In this instance, the supervisor will likely be caught off guard, upset with the student for not addressing the matter up front, and disappointed with the instructor for not requiring the student to do so. The lesson here, then, is to always communicate first with the person closest to the concern at hand. Following this general rule will circumvent many of the conflicts that arise within the supervisory triangle. This, however, is not always easy.

As was noted in the research by Mehr et al. (2015), students sometimes struggle to disclose information to their supervisors, especially when they have had a negative experience and the supervisor is viewed as unapproachable. There may also be situations where following this general rule is inadvisable. For example, a significant ethical concern regarding your supervisor would necessitate consultation with your practicum course instructor who could then explore options for addressing the matter.

Addressing Conflict

Although rarely pleasant, conflict is not necessarily a negative occurrence (Nuttgens, 2016), and given the nature of the supervisory relationship, it should be expected to some degree (Nelson, Barnes, Evans, & Triggiano, 2008). In some instances, conflict arises due to a poorly executed informed consent process. This is to say that many potential areas of conflict (e.g., caseload, supervision timing, evaluation) are unlikely to generate conflict if a thorough and collaborative informed consent process was commenced at the outset of supervision and continues for the duration of supervision. However, even if such a process was diligently conducted, conflict can certainly still arise. How you respond will be influenced by your general and historical tendencies in this regard, which of course signals the need for self-reflection: What is the core issue at hand? What emotions are coming up for me? How do I generally respond to conflict? Do I avoid it? Do I lash out? Is it important to me to always be right? Is my communication more direct or more indirect? How have I handled conflict with the people close to me in my life? In what ways do the personal characteristics of the person I conflict with influence how I experience and respond to the conflict? These are but some of the types of self-reflective questions that may help you when you are experiencing conflict. The process of self-reflection may recast conflict as a personal learning opportunity (e.g., "This has more to do with my sensitivity to feedback than the behaviour of my supervisor") and may be an occasion for additional processing with your supervisor.

If, however, after self-reflecting you still believe that your supervisor said or did something to provoke conflict, it is best to disclose this to your supervisor in a timely, respectful, and nonjudgemental manner. It is certainly possible that your disclosure will be met with surprise, for few supervisors intend to upset their supervisees and, thus, will be glad you shared and eager to make amends. Still, supervisors are human as well; they too can become defensive when presented with negative or dissonant feedback. In such instances, it may be challenging to know precisely how to respond.

Herein, it may be best to focus on what you *don't* want to do, which is to react defensively, critically, or harshly. Remaining calm, respectful, and using "I-language" to indicate your ability and willingness to own your perceptions and concerns (e.g., "I'm worried that we are not meeting enough") can help defuse an escalating conflict. Should a determined effort to resolve the situation fail, it will then be essential for you to consult with someone, such as your course instructor,

to come up with a context-specific way to resolve your concern. What is most important in this situation is that you do not retreat and isolate yourself when confronted with difficulties within your supervisory relationship. If you are unable to resolve the conflict between you and your supervisor, or repeated concerns arise, then a three-way meeting with you, your supervisor, and your practicum instructor or coordinator is indicated to openly address the unresolved conflict or concerns.

Navigating the Evaluative and Gatekeeping Functions

When it comes to being evaluated in pretty much any endeavour, no one likes to be surprised, either concerning process or outcome. For this reason, it is critically important that the terms and methods of evaluation are outlined and discussed at the beginning of supervision. The need for this clarity may not come to light if you are doing extremely well and no performance concerns have arisen for your supervisor. If, however, you are not doing so well, and your supervisor has not provided ongoing feedback, then you may be in for a big, unpleasant, and unfair surprise when provided your final appraisal. With so much at stake, your practicum supervisor should, at the outset of your practicum, review the evaluation procedures (often offered by your program), potential outcomes associated with this evaluation, and who will be privy to the results of your evaluation. Ideally, this information will have been included in the supervision contract and reviewed and clarified before commencing your practicum. If this does not occur, then you should initiate the conversation respectfully and transparently.

Even when formative and summative feedback is provided by your supervisor, as it should be, the quality of this feedback may be found wanting. The supervision literature is unequivocal when it comes to what constitutes quality feedback and performance evaluation. According to supervision gurus Falender and Shafranske (2014), supervisors are expected to provide honest, balanced, direct, clear, and objective feedback to their supervisees, while also requesting, and accepting appreciatively, feedback from supervisees on their supervision.

Developmental models of supervision and accompanying research (e.g., Nelson et al., 2008) suggest that feedback for the greenest among you ought to tip in favour of what you are doing well, building necessary confidence so that you can absorb corrective feedback when it comes. Your role, of course, is to be receptive to feedback, both positive and negative, while doing your best to learn and grow from it. Feedback that consistently sways too far to the negative or the positive side of the continuum compromises the learning experience and perhaps even negatively affects client outcomes; hence the need for clear, sufficiently detailed, and balanced feedback. It is more likely that your supervisor will lean toward positive feedback (Falender & Shafranske, 2014), ostensibly to bolster your confidence and fortify the supervisory alliance.

This, of course, does not provide much-needed corrective and/or growth-focused feedback and may lead to a false sense that you are "excelling," only to bump into evidence down the road that indicates you are not. One approach to eliciting more balanced feedback (outside of specifically requesting it) is to begin

supervision sessions with focused requests: "I would like your feedback on … [fill in the blank]." If your efforts to seek helpful, balanced feedback fail to produce desired results, this would once again occasion the need to engage in consultation and/or a three-way meeting, as described earlier.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

This article was written with the needs of counselling practicum students in mind. We did so in a manner akin to a conversation meant to inform, support, and empower students as they prepare to enter what is arguably the most important phase of their graduate training. The central thesis of this account is that an increased understanding of supervision leads to the increased likelihood of a positive and productive supervisory experience. Although we aimed to provide a clear and useful account of key aspects of counsellor supervision, this effort is certainly not exhaustive. We encourage readers to delve deeper than the offerings of this article, seeking out additional resources and guidance. We also believe that this article serves a similar educative function for supervisors in need of a refresher, or perhaps who were never formally introduced to many of the theories, ideas, and practices presented here. In both instances, we hope that this article will help facilitate a mutually rewarding and educative experience for supervisees and supervisors alike.

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