

MAKING
THE MOST OF
FIELD
PLACEMENT

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3RD EDITION

Developing good supervisory practices

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

Good supervisory practices result from understanding the different functions and clarifying expectations of supervision, building the supervisory relationship, monitoring what is discussed in supervision, structuring supervision sessions, keeping records and giving feedback.

All situations on placement are opportunities for teaching and learning. In this chapter, the focus is on formal supervision sessions; yet we recognise that many of the issues discussed apply to informal situations (e.g. chats in the corridor and in the car). Informal supervision is one way that students or supervisors can deal with an immediate need for checking procedures: gaining important information or receiving support to handle a crisis, for instance. It essentially is responsive rather than planned supervision, and it occurs more frequently at the beginning of a placement. The behaviours of both students and supervisors in both formal and informal contexts will have an impact on the supervisory relationship and can have a profound effect on students' learning. Whatever the context and type of supervision, it should involve two interlocking functions: learning about the tasks and learning about the learning.

THE FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISION

The literature takes a number of approaches to describing what processes are needed for effective supervision and the roles supervisors may choose to play. Different functions and roles may be dominant at different phases of the supervision process over time, and in relation to different issues that the student or the organisation faces. Some student learning styles may also suggest different roles to the supervisor.

There is broad agreement that the supervisory process in fieldwork commonly has three principal functions – administrative, educational and supportive – that may complement or be in conflict with each other (Kadushin 1976). For example, if a student's standard of work is a problem, the supervisor can be caught between the requirement to protect a client or community and the need to allow the student the opportunity to work on tasks so that he or she can learn (administrative and educational). The supervisor may want to reassure the student (supportive), yet also may have to judge the student's standard of work (administrative and educational). The student must meet his or her obligations by telling the supervisor what he or she has been doing, even if the student suspects that his or her work might be criticised. There is support for a fourth role, a mediation role (Morrison 2001), for the supervisor who serves as a buffer between frontline staff and administration.

The three main functions of supervision, and an example of each are summarised in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Kadushin's functions of supervision

Type of supervision	Description	Example
Administrative	The focus is on the student meeting the appropriate standard and quantity of work.	'It would be important to record this information in the client's file and to inform the case manager of your contact.'
Educational	The focus is on the student learning tasks and linking them to theoretical or empirical knowledge.	'What signs or indications did you observe that led you to take this action?'
Supportive	The focus is on recognising and responding to the efforts made by the student and the impact of the work on the student.	'You handled that difficult case with great sensitivity.'

Adapted from Kadushin 1976.

All of these approaches are needed. The weight given to each will depend on the particular tasks at hand and perhaps on the stage of placement. The three functions are rarely carried out in isolation: for example, debriefing a student after an event is both educational and supportive (Kadushin 1976, p. 86). A common danger is that supervisors concentrate on ensuring the work is done adequately instead of incorporating a developmental and educational focus. If they focus solely on the support function, supervision may come to resemble therapy.

A healthy supervisory relationship comprises these functions and manages the inherent conflict between them. If the relationship is based on sufficient levels of trust and respect, these tensions can be managed to minimise any harm. Within these broad functions, others provide some expansion by combining aspects of these functions. Davys (2000), for example, adds the following:

- *Enabling*: a mix of the field educator's supporting and empowering students, achieved by reliability, encouragement, approachability, respect for difference and intolerance of any marginalisation of the student by others in the organisation.
- *Assessing*: a mix of the broad education and administrative functions, addresses the issue of evaluating whether or not the student's work reaches the required standard and, indeed, the extent to which it exceeds this baseline.
- *Being accountable for student work*: an aspect of the administrative and education functions that needs to be clear to all parties and which requires that field educators have access to student work; it also includes accountability to the educational program for the student's learning and assessment.

EXPECTATIONS OF SUPERVISION

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, it is essential that there is negotiation early in placement to clarify the parameters and expectations of the supervisory relationship. Drawing up a contract is a useful way to record the specific expectations of supervision as well as the practical requirements of the training institution (see Chapter 5 for more detailed information). Examples of such an approach follow.

<i>Supervisor:</i>	I generally take a problem-oriented approach, where I can be fairly directive. I am looking for your ability to explain a situation. Or, perhaps:
<i>Supervisor:</i>	I generally take a process-oriented approach in which I am more interested in exploring your responses to a situation.
<i>Student:</i>	How would you suggest that we address any concerns or differences of opinion that might arise during my placement?

Exercise 7.1, adapted from Morrison (2001, pp. 37–43), helps to clarify the degree to which supervisors and students have shared expectations about supervision and the different functions outlined earlier, and draws attention to any areas that are not being addressed. It is a good idea for students and supervisors to do this exercise at the beginning of placement, perhaps as part of the negotiation for the supervision agreement (see Chapter 5), as well as before the halfway point.

Exercise 7.1

For the student and supervisor

The tasks outlined in the following lists relate to the different functions of supervision. Make a photocopy of these lists so that you both have a copy. Tick the tasks that you feel are appropriate to be supervised. Compare your lists and discuss any items that are not shared.

Repeat the exercise before the halfway point of placement, ticking what you still feel are appropriate tasks for supervision. Then tick the tasks in the second column that you feel are being carried out in supervision.

The support function checklist

Tasks	Before placement	During placement
To validate the student both as a developing professional and as a person		
To create a safe environment for the student to reflect on his or her practice and its impact on him or her as a person		
To clarify the boundaries between support and counselling and the issue of confidentiality in supervision		
To debrief the student and give him or her permission to talk about feelings raised by his or her work		
To help the student explore any emotional blocks to his or her work		
To explore issues of difference and discrimination that may be experienced by the student		
To monitor the overall health and emotional functioning of the student		
To clarify when the student should be advised to seek professional help		
Other (specify)		

The educational function checklist

Tasks	Before placement	During placement
To assist the development of the student's professional competence		
To appreciate and assess the student's theoretical base, skills, knowledge and personal abilities		
To understand the student's preferred learning style and blocks to learning		
To discuss the student's value base and its impact on his or her work		
To give regular and constructive feedback to the student on his or her work		
To help the student to be self-reflective about his or her work and interaction with clients and other staff		
To give the student access to opportunities to develop further knowledge and skills		
Other (specify)		



The administrative function checklist

Tasks	Before placement	During placement
To ensure that the student understands his or her role and responsibilities		
To ensure the student's work is reviewed regularly		
To ensure that the student has an appropriate workload		
To ensure that student activities are properly documented and carried out according to agency policies and procedures		
To ensure that the student knows when the supervisor needs to be consulted		
Other (specify)		

The following exercise, adapted from Collins, Thomlison and Grinnell (1992), is another way to acknowledge and define expectations of supervision.

 **Exercise 7.2**

For the supervisor

Complete a preliminary assessment of the student's placement using the following headings:

- Adjustment to the setting and learning activities
- Developing strengths
- Emerging concerns
- Other comments

For the student

Complete a self-evaluation using the same or similar headings. You can also include responses to the following questions:

- 1 Do you feel supported?
- 2 Are you happy with the supervision arrangements?
- 3 How well do you think you work with your supervisor?
- 4 What issues do you tend to focus on most in supervision?
- 5 Are there any areas on which you would like to spend more time?

This exercise should not be seen as a formal evaluation. It facilitates the process of an open dialogue between student and supervisor, limits the possibility of misunderstanding and disappointment, and lays a good basis for the supervisory relationship.

DEVELOPING THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

The most exciting tasks and learning environment are no substitute for a good supervisory relationship. As in all human service practice, teamwork is often the way work gets done. In a good relationship, shortcomings on either side are forgiven; in a poor one, very few are forgotten or forgiven. A good supervisory relationship does not occur by chance. A number of factors can be influenced by the development of the supervisory relationship, including the use of power, personal differences, styles of supervision, responses to difficulties, and the balance of the different functions of supervision. You may have an opportunity to have some choice in selecting a student or supervisor, but more often than not the training institution and/or the agency controls the allocation process. But despite any organisational constraints, both student and supervisor can negotiate and develop a professional and respectful

working alliance, even if it is characterised by some anxiety and conflict on either side. The relationship can elicit a range of responses from the student. On the more negative side, it might be characterised by dependency, perceived threats to autonomy, failure to engage, and submissiveness; and, on the positive side, by autonomy, success, independence and pleasure. For the supervisor, emotions can include anxiety, competitiveness and the desire to nurture the student.

Use of power

Supervisors can feel uncomfortable with the authority and power vested in their role and they may seek to side-step it, which will only confuse the student, who is only too aware of the power imbalance (Kadushin 1976, p. 98). The power inherent in the supervisory role may be amplified or minimised by differences and similarities in age, gender, culture, experience or (dis)ability.

The supervisory relationship is almost always affected if supervisors abdicate authority because they are worried about upsetting students or fear students will not accept their authority. If, on the other hand, supervisors abuse their authority and are overly critical and judgemental, the supervisory relationship also may become dysfunctional. It is recommended that the following principles are discussed in initial supervision sessions in order to develop a positive supervisory relationship:

- Students and supervisors recognise the legitimate power of supervisors inherent in their formal role and position.
- This power is to be exercised constructively in a two-way relationship between people of equal status and worth as human beings.
- Students and supervisors recognise the informal power that derives both from their professional and personal attributes, and from identities based on gender, age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ideology or (dis)ability (Brown & Bourne 1996, p. 34).

Difference

The impact of difference is a reality in supervision. When perceived differences are linked to the need to raise issues with the other party, it can make students and supervisors anxious, fearing they will make things worse or perhaps be accused of discrimination. Differences between the student and supervisor need to be openly recognised. If differences are ignored and the supervisor maintains that he or she treats everyone the same, others may be forced to assume the beliefs of the dominant individual or group. If difference is confused with disagreement, it can mean that issues, such as those about performance, are avoided. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 14.

Issues of diversity and difference between student and supervisor need to be addressed in the supervisory relationship. The following examples illustrate this.

A Greek female worker supervising a Greek female student in Australia may share strong, empowering feelings of mutual identification of gender and culture. However, a collusive alliance may be formed that denies the formal power of the supervisor. If the student fails to complete some tasks satisfactorily, the supervisor may protect her rather than confronting her about her learning difficulty.

An Anglo-Saxon female worker supervising an Asian female student may use her membership of the dominant culture to undermine the student's cultural identity by negating her knowledge of 'normal' family values. Conversely, the supervisor may feel uncomfortable about giving critical feedback because she fears it will be perceived as discriminatory or because the student will not respect her authority.

A supervisor might negate a male student's skills in working with oppressed female clients; conversely, the supervisor could defer to the power and status of the student's gender and feel uncomfortable about being critical of his work.

If a supervisor is a feminist, the student may find it difficult to express different values because the student is in a position of less power. If the student is a feminist, the supervisor, if he or she has a different ideology, may try to undermine that of the student; conversely, the supervisor may be anxious not to appear to be anti-feminist and may become defensive about sharing his or her ideological position during supervision.

Styles of supervisory relationships

The way power is exercised or avoided will have an impact on your style of relationship as supervisors and students. Supervisory styles can be broadly categorised as authoritative and facilitative (Heron 1990). Authoritative styles are:

- *prescriptive*: supervisors give advice and explicit direction to the student
- *informative*: supervisors impart knowledge and information to the student
- *confrontational*: supervisors give clear, direct feedback about behaviour and challenge beliefs and attitudes.

Facilitative styles are:

- *cathartic*: supervisor enables the student to release tensions and emotions
- *reflective*: supervisor encourages the student to be reflective and self-directive
- *supportive*: supervisor confirms and validates the student's values and worth.

Exercise 7.3 consists of questions to help supervisors and students consider supervisory styles and expectations of supervision.

Exercise 7.3

For the student and supervisor

- 1 How much will you disclose of yourself in terms of how your life has shaped who you are now?
- 2 How do you cope with making mistakes?
- 3 What do you do if you are feeling under pressure?
- 4 How do you let people know you don't approve of what they are doing?
- 5 How do you let people know you like the way you are being treated?
- 6 How do you cope with being assessed or assessing others?
- 7 What expectations do you have of a supervisory relationship?
- 8 What previous experiences have you had that might impact on how a supervisory relationship develops and works?

The style of the supervisory relationship may change over time. There are different opportunities, tasks and issues, depending on the stage of development of the relationship. Using a journal or diary (as discussed in Chapter 8) may help you to chart any changes in the style of the relationship over time.

Balancing the functions of supervision

It is important to review supervision at regular intervals throughout placement in terms of which functions – administrative, educational or supportive – are getting most 'air play'. If, as a student, you think that the supervisory relationship is not balanced in these functions, it may be for one or more of the following reasons:

- Your supervisor lacks time to devote to each function.
- Your supervisor experiences conflict between the need to support you and the requirement to point out inadequate work.
- You are not clear about supervisory goals.
- Your supervisor lacks skills and knowledge in supervision.
- Tensions in your agency limit your opportunities to learn.

One way to ensure you are keeping as good a balance as possible is to consider the tasks you are focusing on and the skills you are using. Use the checklists from Exercise 7.1 to help you do this. Once you can categorise the tasks and skills, you are in a stronger position to make conscious decisions about how you will use supervision time.

Techniques and content of sessions

Describing what is talked about and how it is talked about will help you to monitor what is happening in supervision sessions more precisely. Of course, much communication is non-verbal and you will also

need to pay attention to this important part of what is transacted in supervision. Supervision that relies heavily on just one style of talk, or ignores students' learning styles, is unlikely to be responsive to most students' needs. Wilson (2000) offers some other communication techniques to use in supervision (see Table 7.2).

Technique	Description	Examples	Limitation
Linear questions	Investigative. Assume that phenomena are connected in a linear way.	'Could you tell me what that was about?' 'What problems are you having with that report?'	Students may not feel supported to explore underlying learning issues.
Circular questions	Explore the relationship between different elements.	'What happens when you try to raise that issue with your colleague?'	It can be time-consuming to explore issues.
Strategic questions	Challenge the student's view. Raise specific expectations about future action.	'Do you think that you are ready to take on this type of case?' 'How long will it take you to finish that report?'	Students may feel directed and confronted.
Reflexive questions	Assume circular connections between the issues faced. Look for ways to move forward.	'If you were able to raise these ideas with the manager, how do you think she would react?'	It can be time-consuming to challenge students to problem-solve.
Reflecting	Supervisors paraphrase what students have said to check that they have understood what students wished to convey.	'When Mr V. kept wandering around the room you got pretty frustrated with him.'	It is more time-consuming than supervisors telling students what they think is happening.
Interpreting	Supervisors suggest ways in which two matters might be linked – this may be expressed as a question or statement.	'Perhaps Mr V. kept moving around because he did not want to hear what you had to say.'	The supervisor may do the thinking and it may be hard for students to challenge his or her interpretations.
Giving directives	Supervisors provide explicit directions to students.	'You will need to finish that report by tomorrow.'	The supervisor can do all the thinking about the task.
Giving information	Supervisors pass on knowledge about practice issues – this may be practice wisdom or be from policy documents, theoretical material, etc.	'Our service is funded by a variety of government sources.'	Supervisors may do all the talking, which can be boring for students.
Encouraging and reassuring	Supervisors are explicit about what has been done well or is to be done in the future.	'You handled that situation in a courageous manner.'	This feedback may not be useful if it is too general and too repetitive.

Table 7.2 Some suggested communication techniques and examples

Adapted from Wilson 2000, p. 36.

These techniques can be used to focus on the student's thinking, feeling or action. When these means of processing information are balanced, students are most likely to benefit from the learning. This is explored further in Exercise 7.4. You can use the table in this exercise to list what you currently do and identify other things to try in supervision.

Exercise 7.4

For the supervisor

If possible, tape your supervision sessions. Count the number of times you use each technique in a half-hour session. Alternatively, you could number the sequence of behaviours you use in covering a particular issue. Start again with a different coloured pen when you move to a new topic. Do you tend to follow the same sequences? Is this a good thing?

	Student's		
	Thinking	Feeling	Action
Questions – linear			
Questions – circular			
Questions – strategic			
Questions – reflexive			
Reflecting			
Interpreting			
Giving directives			
Giving information			
Encouraging and reassuring			

The following example shows the record of the activities of two different supervisors. The first is represented by letters, the second by numbers. The first is a typical pattern for busy supervisors. The style of supervision is administrative – supervisors satisfy themselves that they know enough about the situation, then issue directions about what to do next. The second record using numbers shows a supervisory style that is more focused on facilitating the student's thinking about the task and assisting the student to come to some conclusions about what to do next.

	Student's		
	Thinking	Feeling	Action
Questions – linear		1	A, C
Questions – circular	B, D 2		3
Questions – strategic			7
Questions – reflexive		4	9
Reflecting			E 6
Interpreting			
Giving directives			
Giving information	8		6
Encouraging and reassuring	10		

The pattern of techniques used by supervisors will vary with the stage of placement and the issue under discussion. Nevertheless, if you find that you consistently ignore certain aspects, think about what this means for your supervisory style. In broad terms, the more boxes you use – with the exception of directives about feelings! – the more comprehensive the learning opportunity offered to the student.

Another method you can use is to measure in minutes the time spent in discussion of particular content in a session using the table in the following example. Four key areas are divided into specific facts and the broader issues that underpin them. If the discussion in supervision is all above the line (facts), you are unlikely to be generalising the learning. If the discussion is all below the line (issues), individual tasks may not be receiving enough attention. While the specific task and the stage of placement will have an impact on how time is spent, in general there needs to be a balance across the four areas and above and below the line.

	Task	Student as learner	Agency matters	Human service field
Facts				
Issues				

In the following example, the content areas have been filled out for two interactions marking the minutes with forward slashes. Interaction A was slightly quicker, but concentrated on the specifics of the situation in the agency context. It would be difficult to discern what the student learned from interaction, because the supervisor did not check the student's understanding. In Interaction B, there is more linking of the specific issues to the broader issues and there is more chance that the student has been helped to learn in more depth about the specific task.

		Task	Student as learner	Agency matters	Human service field
Facts	A	//		//	/
	B	/	/	/	
Issues	A	/			
	B	/	/	/	/

SUPERVISION SESSIONS

Structuring sessions

Although informal contact, feedback and information-sharing are part of the learning process, supervision sessions are planned – regular times in which students and supervisors discuss students' work and review their progress. As such, supervision is different from consultation or briefing or debriefing activities (Ford & Jones 1987, p. 63). The norm for formal supervision in most placements is about one hour per week.

A supervision session, like other formal interactions at work, should be planned, purposive and goal-directed. Planned contact ensures that supervision is a priority and doesn't just occur 'whenever things slow down', because most human service agencies almost never slow down (Kiser 2000, p. 89). The frequency, timing and duration can be negotiated when the supervision contract is set up at the beginning of placement (see Chapter 5). Supervision time is valuable and often difficult to arrange, so you will want to use the time well. Setting an agenda and preparing material to be discussed will help you to focus on the learning objectives and any concerns and questions. The following strategies ensure that both parties can prepare and that issues are not being avoided or discussed because of lack of time:

- Students propose an agenda and give it to their supervisors two days before the session.
- Students give their journal, process records and other relevant material to the supervisor two days beforehand, so that key issues and concerns can be highlighted.
- Students and supervisors use the last five minutes of each supervision session to set an agenda for the next session. The following questions will help you to set this agenda.
 - 1 Why is this meeting occurring?
 - 2 What is its purpose?
 - 3 What would you like to cover?
 - 4 What are your desired outcomes?
 - 5 What questions do you wish to ask?

Supervision sessions should also include planning for future learning activities. The following strategies will help you plan such activities:

- Allow some time before the end of each session to review how the time was spent.
- Review the processes as well as the content of the session. Ford and Jones (1987) suggest that the style of supervision can get 'fixed'; using a variety of methods and tools can make the process more interesting (p. 68). These methods are covered in more detail in Chapter 8.
- Supervision is usually focused entirely on the student, but you can use the sessions to do other things such as reviewing a journal article or preparing a joint piece of work.

Recording sessions

Keeping a record of student activities, including a summary of each supervision session, can be onerous, but clarifying what will be recorded and planning how to use summaries from the outset of placement can make this job easier. Recording sessions has the following advantages:

- It means that everyone is clear about feedback, especially if the notes are shared.
- It ensures transparency and reduces students' concerns.
- It models the process of keeping careful records of contact (as a worker would do with a client or project).
- It collates examples and concrete evidence that can be used in required evaluation documentation.

A useful format for recording supervision sessions follows. The possible content areas are given a number. A record sheet is then filled in for each session, identifying the topics for that session by number. It is easy to use and the activities can be changed to reflect the context of your placement.

Record of supervision session/meeting

Student's name:		Supervisor's name:	
1	Reviewing case notes, diary, process records, journal	7	Supervisor provides educational input
2	Reflecting about practice (student)	8	Student provides educational input
3	Problem-solving about practice issues	9	Reviewing learning agreement
4	Discussing additional skills or strategies	10	Feedback about student's progress
5	Demonstrating skill or strategy (supervisor)	11	Discussing evaluation documents
6	Demonstrating skill or strategy (student)	12	Other (specify)

Date of meeting	Time spent	Material covered (select number from list)	Comments	Initials (student)	Initials (supervisor)

Here is another format for recording supervision sessions that could be adapted for use in any placement setting.

Notes on supervision session		
Between and		
Date		
Topic	Discussion	Agreed action, timeline, who has responsibility
Agenda items for next session:		Preparation required:
.....	
.....	
Signed	
Date		

Giving feedback

Feedback is a key component of learning and teaching during supervision as it promotes open communication and ensures that information is understood correctly. By offering or inviting feedback, students show that they are prepared to accept criticism, and supervisors invite feedback on their own teaching style. However, giving and receiving feedback can be difficult for both supervisors and students because it requires being able to deal with the feelings that this brings up (Trevithick 2000, p. 98). As a result, it has been found that supervisors make very few assessment comments during supervision, even though it has also been found that students are usually worried about some aspect of their performance (Hughes & Heycox 2000, p. 93).

Feedback is the process of relaying observations, impressions, feelings or other evaluative information about people's behaviour for their own use or learning (Ford & Jones 1987, p. 74). Egan (2000) describes three purposes of feedback in the context of working with clients, and these are just as relevant to the placement context:

- *Confirmatory*: It lets clients (or students) know when they are on course.
- *Corrective*: It provides clients (or students) with information they need to get back on course.
- *Motivating and challenging*: It shows the consequences of both adequate and inadequate performance (p. 389).

Giving feedback has primarily been the responsibility of supervisors, but students also need skills to offer feedback about their experiences of supervision and the placement itself. Most students welcome the opportunity to discuss how they are progressing but feedback doesn't always occur frequently enough and it is not always conveyed effectively (Cowan 2001). Either the student or the supervisor could raise the subject using cues such as 'It would be good to spend some time talking about that last interview' or 'Could we talk about the interview I did yesterday?'

There are three types of feedback and each type would be used at different points during the placement:

- 1 *Brief*: Succinct comments are given immediately after observation of student performance.
- 2 *Formal*: Longer periods are set aside to deliver feedback.
- 3 *Major*: Feedback is given at scheduled sessions at mid- and end-point of the placement (Branch & Paranjape 2002).

Exercise 7.5 is a useful means for students and supervisors to evaluate whether they are giving or receiving adequate feedback.

Exercise 7.5

For the student

Think over your supervision sessions:

- 1 If feedback or constructive comments on your work are not a regular part of supervision sessions, do any of the following reasons explain why?
 - You are achieving but your supervisor is not aware that positive feedback is required for your confidence.
 - You are not achieving and your supervisor does not know how to give you constructive criticism.
 - You may be giving cues that you are vulnerable and your supervisor feels uneasy about your reaction.
- 2 What can you do to change this?

For the supervisor

Think about the feedback you have given to the student recently:

- 1 Is the feedback evaluative as well as descriptive?
- 2 Is your feedback encouraging as well as honest and direct?
- 3 Does the student know what you think about his or her progress?
- 4 Do you find it easier to give feedback to certain people (e.g. people who may be younger, subordinates, women)?

Finding the balance between being honest and being facilitative can be difficult (Trevithick 2000, p. 98). For effective feedback to occur, the student must trust the motives and intentions of the supervisor and the content of the feedback must have credible sources (Marriott & Galbraith 2005). The following guidelines should help you find this balance when giving feedback. Note that the term 'receiver' is used instead of 'student' or 'supervisor', as either one may need to give the feedback. When you give feedback, try to remember the following points.

- 1 *Be concrete:* Describe specific behaviours and give reasons or examples: for example, instead of saying 'I thought that the interview went well', it would be more helpful to say, 'I really liked the way you started the interview by quickly introducing yourself and putting the client at ease.' Feedback methods can include verbal, written or, perhaps, information from an audio or videotape.
- 2 *Be timely:* Try not to have a delay between the activity and giving the feedback, and have sufficient information. Some receivers may require more time and preparation to receive feedback.
- 3 *Be careful about language:* Instead of using the term 'criticism', use terms like 'coaching', 'critical appraisal', 'critical feedback'.
- 4 *Be consultative:* It can be irritating for the receiver to hear something he or she already knows about his or her work. Doel et al. (1996) suggest it is preferable to say, 'As we agreed, I'm going to give you some feedback about your court report, but I thought it only fair to ask you what you thought about it first' (p. 76).
- 5 *Be balanced:* Recognise both strengths and weaknesses. Doel et al. (1996) recommend giving feedback in terms of 'what I would keep' and 'what I would change'.
- 6 *Be objective:* Focus on the behaviour, rather than on personal attributes: for example, 'It was a good idea to focus on the issue of his gambling, but I don't know if he appreciated you bringing it up in front of his wife. Maybe you could have waited to see if his wife brought it up first', rather than 'You were too confronting with him.'
- 7 *Be supportive:* Focus on sharing ideas and information, rather than on giving advice; and explore alternatives, rather than offering answers and solutions. This leaves receivers free to decide for themselves how to use these ideas (Shardlow & Doel 1996, p. 111): for example, 'I was interested in how you decided to handle the disagreement during the committee meeting' or 'I would have thought that some of the members would have liked to be given an opportunity to speak' or 'What were you thinking could be achieved by choosing to change the agenda?'
- 8 *Be creative:* Most feedback tends to be given verbally and thus is open to misinterpretation or misunderstanding, or may not be heard at all. Demonstration, direct observation and process recording will promote understanding and self-evaluation. Written feedback can provide a useful record for students and contribute to the evaluation process.

- 9 *Be informed:* Incorporate literature from the classroom and other research to support feedback and to encourage the expectation that critical feedback is part of human service education and is essential for practice development (Abbott & Lyster 1998, p. 54).
- 10 *Be respectful:* consider the type and intensity of the feedback and how the person may respond. How would you expect or appreciate the feedback if you were the receiver?
- 11 *Be careful about understanding:* Always check that the message is understood.

Receiving feedback

Doel et al. (1996) offer some strategies to help you receive feedback. It is important to be aware of your own responses when receiving feedback. Do you seek feedback or do you avoid it? Do different situations or different people make a difference to how you react?

- 1 *Ask for feedback:* Both students and supervisors need feedback so that they can develop their practice skills. It can be particularly hard for students because supervisors have more power, status and experience. If supervisors show themselves willing to receive feedback, the student can practise giving it and it helps to equalise the relationship.
- 2 *Try not to become defensive:* Challenging feedback is often delivered as criticism and can trigger defensiveness. Treating feedback as one source of information about yourself, rather than as personal criticism, is a way of discovering more about yourself.
- 3 *Respond to unfair feedback:* If feedback is not given appropriately or makes you feel overly vulnerable, it is important not to deny the other person's perception, but let it be known that you have a different view: for example, 'I hear that you have not been happy about [X]; however, I see that situation a bit differently.'

OTHER MODELS OF SUPERVISION

Traditional, or one-to-one supervision continues to be the most common model used and it is argued that this type of supervision is extremely effective to meet the unique learning needs of individuals (Cooper and Maidment 2001). However, this model is sometimes criticised as being time-consuming and it limits students' exposure to different practice styles and theories (Cleak, Hawkins & Hess 2000, p. 165). There is now more pressure to use other supervisory methods to improve an agency's capacity to take more students but there is a lack of evidence to suggest that alternative models result in positive learning outcomes. A recent study of four different supervision models found that students were highly satisfied with the one-to-one model and were significantly dissatisfied with external supervision (Cleak and Smith 2012; Stiller, Lynch, Phillips and Lambert 2004). Possible alternative arrangements for supervision include task supervision, external supervision and a range of collective supervision arrangements that use group processes.

Task supervision

Another worker in an agency may contribute to a student's learning by supervising the student in a specific project, program or task, and taking responsibility for the educational function of supervision in this context. The task supervisor usually comes from a different occupational background from the student. A student is increasingly likely to be supervised by a task supervisor on a day-to-day basis on placement, and the designated supervisor may be located in a different section or agency.

Using a task supervisor can expand the opportunities for the student to undertake different learning tasks and can dilute dependency on a single supervisor and provide a different perspective on the student's performance (Cleak, Hawkins & Hess 2000, p. 165). However, it is especially important that lines of accountability are clarified, particularly about feedback and assessment responsibilities, and the role of the primary supervisor.

External supervision

In the external supervision model, a non-social work task supervisor provides the day-to-day supervision and an external social work supervisor is provided by the university. This person may be a staff member or a social worker contracted to offer the supervision. This external supervisor will usually visit the organisation on a regular basis and concentrate on linking theory and practice and ensuring that professional practice issues are covered. This model is useful when the potential social work tasks are desirable but the agency does not employ or is unable to offer a social worker to supervise. As mentioned above, this model needs to be used with caution as results of a recent study suggested that students are more satisfied across all aspects of the placement where there is a strong on-site social work presence (Cleak and Smith 2012).

Co-supervision

Co-supervision is a less well-known model of supervision but Cleak and Smith (2012) describe it as an 'emerging' model, where two or more social workers were involved in the professional supervision of the student. Along with one-to-one supervision, co-supervision reported high levels of satisfaction by students. Co-supervision was used by practitioners working at a community health centre in Sydney, and reported that it provided a broader base of support and accessibility for the student, provided a richness of experience and knowledge, and a diversity of learning opportunities. Benefits for the supervisors included:

- support and reduced isolation
- sharing the workload of supervising a student
- it being a workable model for part time students and supervisors
- prevention of supervisor burnout
- shared problem-solving.

Coulton and Krimmer (2005) described 10 key factors that contributed to successful co-supervision and although many of these need to be present in all supervisory models, clear communication channels, trust and commitment between parties and a common approach and philosophy towards the work are particularly important here.

The main challenge in this model is ensuring that there is trust and coordination between the supervisors to minimise misunderstanding and the chance of supervisors becoming competitive with each other or playing power games that impact negatively on the student (Coulton and Krimmer 2005, p. 165)

Group supervision

The traditional structure of face-to-face and one-to-one supervision provides a highly individualised approach to teaching and learning. Group supervision can offer some creative additional learning opportunities for students, as it shares the responsibility for teaching and can avoid some of the potential difficulties of the dyad structure.

Group supervision of students is characterised by a regular pattern of focused discussion between supervisor(s) and two or more students (Ford & Jones 1987, p. 94). It can be used in any setting (such as community-work agencies, hospitals or larger statutory organisations) in which a group of students are undertaking their placement at the same time. There are a variety of models of group supervision:

- A group of students receive individual supervision, but also meet in a group with one or more supervisors for mainly educational and supportive functions.
- A group of students meet with a supervisor, who conducts all aspects of supervision in the group, including individual evaluations. Student units often use this model.
- A student has an individual supervisor but co-works with other students or workers on a particular project or program.

The potential benefits of group supervision are that it can save time for an agency and allow the agency to support a number of students on placement at the same time. When group supervision is properly structured and planned, it has a number of distinct advantages over individual supervision. It:

- allows students and supervisors to observe and learn from each other
- encourages use of different learning methods, such as group discussion, structured exercises, working in pairs or triads
- provides new insights for students because of the diversity of perspectives of group members
- exposes students to a range of values and supervision approaches, minimises issues of power, and allows students more freedom to differ with supervisors (Ford & Jones 1987, p. 96)
- encourages students to develop supportive relationships with other students and workers
- gives students the chance to experience group activities and explore their responses to group processes.

However, group supervision should not be considered a substitute for, or a cost-saving alternative to, individual supervision. It doesn't suit all learning situations and placements (Morrison 2001, p. 201). The disadvantages of group supervision are similar to those of any group process:

- The group can be derailed by members who are very vocal or needy or vulnerable or disruptive, so that learning needs of individuals are subjugated.
- Scrutiny by peers and assessment by the group may diminish a student's capacity to share honestly. The student may lack trust, or may fear that they will look bad.
- An inexperienced or unskilled facilitator may not be able to handle the dynamics of the group.
- Students can become frustrated by a group agenda that may not be appropriate for the varying levels of competence and learning needs of group members.
- There is too much focus on administrative issues such as scheduling and procedures.
- Too much time is spent sharing information rather than on reflection and dialogue.

Group supervision is an approach with enormous potential and one that may become more common in the future as workers find it harder to juggle work and the demands of supervising placements (Brown & Bourne 1996, p. 163). For group supervision to be effective, it needs to be planned and organised in the same way as individual supervision. Group members should develop a contract to decide on aims, tasks, methods, expectations and regular reviews. The list of questions and issues in Table 7.3 will help you to develop a group contract.

<p>Clear structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often and for how long do we meet? • Who can join? • Is attendance voluntary or compulsory? • Are sessions only for students or can other people join in? • How will the time be structured? 	<p>Lack of structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The agenda is not made clear at the beginning of sessions and there is no time to discuss the focus of the following week's session. • The group often runs over time and some members miss out on presenting their work or ideas.
<p>Clear purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the group aimed at providing support, education or self-discovery? • What activities will be undertaken? 	<p>Diffuse purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members often introduce irrelevant issues that are not part of the group contract. • Members give long descriptive accounts of a case without any clear purpose for doing so.
<p>Clear rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the group handle confidentiality and sensitive issues? • How does the content and outcome of group activities relate to individual supervision? • What are the rules about attendance and participation? • How are decisions recorded? 	<p>Unclear rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are unclear about whether they have permission to bring up an organisational issue. • Some members miss sessions and are not required to participate in the exercises, which leaves it to a few 'regulars' to contribute.

Table 7.3 Aspects to consider when developing a group contract



PART 3 Teaching and learning on placement

Aspects to consider when developing a group contract (continued)

Clear role for facilitator

- Should the supervisor be responsible for guiding and balancing the content and process, or should the group have this control?

Methods are negotiated

- What can students expect to be involved in (e.g. role plays, case discussions, student presentations, small-group exercises)?
- Who decides what the group will do?

Unclear role for facilitator

- The facilitator is unable to control members who play out their antagonistic relationship within the group.
- Presenters often feel that they are being criticised by other members and this is not challenged by the facilitator.
- The facilitator does not encourage participation.

Methods are not negotiated

- Facilitator plays the expert and does not introduce opportunities for members to share their own views.
- Group members take a conservative approach and rely on discussion rather than try out other more creative methods.

Morrison (2001, pp. 229–30) suggests the following group exercise that is useful in developing the interviewing skills of group members. It is based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle, described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Exercise 7.6

For the student and supervisor

In the group, identify someone (the presenter) who is willing to bring a case or issue to share with the group. The presenter gives a brief outline of the case or issue (no more than five minutes).

Other members (the interviewers) are allocated one part of the Kolb cycle: one person focuses on 'experiencing', one on 'reflecting', one on 'analysing' and one on 'action planning'. The task of each interviewer is to explore the case or issue using questions and ideas from their part of the cycle. For example, the reflector will ask 'feeling' questions, the experienter will ask the presenter to describe the event, the analyser will hypothesise about the situation, and the planner might suggest ideas to help.

The interviewers should spend five to ten minutes preparing their questions. Use the ideas on questioning suggested in the previous section on techniques and content. Discuss the case or issue for about 30 minutes, starting with the first interviewer in the cycle and going around the group, remembering that you may go around a number of times and not always in order. Try to stay within your designated role. You could coach another interviewer to add something relevant to their role, if appropriate. At the end of 30 minutes, the interviewers should summarise what they have heard: for instance, the reflector summarises what was heard in terms of feelings, the analyser focuses on the explanations, and so on. Finally, the presenter identifies:

- what has become clearer
- what has become more complex or confusing
- the ideas they now have for taking the case or issue forward
- what further help may be needed.

The task of the facilitator is to ensure that the guidelines for the exercise and the time lines are followed and to identify any follow-up action and support.

Student units

An agency and training institution may provide a placement for a small unit of students – usually a work group with a particular set of obligations to the host agency. For example, in a hospital the unit may be responsible for work in particular wards, or in a community centre the unit may work on a specific project. The supervisor may be an employee of the agency, or sometimes is an employee of the training institution.

It is an efficient way of providing training: placements can still be offered even if there is an insufficient number of qualified supervisors, and it can provide a labour force for agencies to carry out an innovative form of practice. Teaching and learning in student units is similar to that experienced in supervision in all placements; however, one key difference is that the students are developing relationships with each other, as well as with the supervisor and other workers. It is important that attention is

paid to the process of group formation, that group rules are clear and that the supervisor treats all students fairly. A mix of individual and group supervision is appropriate for student units. It is not unusual for students to be somewhat competitive in terms of the level of difficulty of the work they are allocated, how well they are going and how they are regarded by the supervisor.

It is important for the supervisor to monitor the group's development, to set tasks that encourage cooperation rather than competition, and perhaps to draw students' attention to how they are functioning as a group. A functional unit can provide students with a great deal of support and peer learning, but relies on strong leadership; it may be preferable for students who are independent learners and are prepared to collaborate and be team players (Anand 2007).

Anand (2007) suggests that student units may not be suitable for students with identified learning needs or emotional difficulties because of the potential impact of team dynamics and the learning needs of other students. Another study of a student unit found that peer learning allowed them to have their feelings and opinions validated, broadened their peer relationships and created collaborative pathways of information sharing. Limitations include a lack of organisation and formal structure which led to feelings of disengagement especially when power relationships between students, supervisors and the agency existed (Jordan and Townsend 2010: 30).

Interdisciplinary team supervision

Interdisciplinary teams within the health and welfare industry are becoming an essential part of service delivery by providing quality of care through better coordination and continuity of care and improved case finding, consultation and referral (Cleak, Williamson and French 2004). In addressing the care needs of this changing work environment, students are required to function effectively within interdisciplinary teams. Sometimes called interprofessional teams, this form of student learning puts students from different disciplines together to undertake a range of interactive tasks.

Types of learning	Examples
Exchange-based	Debates, seminars, workshops, case study sessions
Observation-based	Joint client interviews, joint observational tasks
Action-based	Collaborative inquiry, joint research, community development projects
Simulation-based	Role plays, experiential group work

Table 7.4 Types of interprofessional learning activities

Adapted from Freeth 2005.

Each approach makes different demands on the learning goals and support needs of students and the time and expertise of the supervisor. Freeth (2005) states that student motivation such as their perceived relevance and status of the team supervision, whether participation is voluntary and the teaching methods used affected the learning gains. The composition of the student group, including a good balance of different disciplines, smaller rather than larger numbers (no more than 10) and a stable group membership are also important features of an effective interdisciplinary supervision team (Freeth 2005, 91).

SUMMARY

The supervision relationship – whether it is individual, group, or in some form of student unit – is the crux of placement for students and can influence how much or how little learning takes place for supervisors and students. A planned approach, in which there is a balance of the three key functions of supervision, will establish a solid basis for a healthy and constructive supervisory relationship.