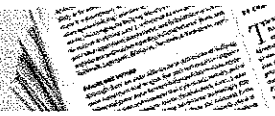




COMMUNIQUE Online



[NASP Home](#) > [Publications/Store](#) > [NASP Communiqué](#) > [CQ Indexes](#) > [NASP CQ 34-1 - Index](#) > [NASP CQ 34-1 - Positive Practicum Experiences](#)

NASP Communiqué, Vol. 34, #1
September 2005

A Clinical Supervisor's Guide to Positive School Psychology Practicum Experiences

By Oliver W. Edwards, NCSP & Lee S. Kananack

School psychologists who agree to mentor graduate students during their practicum period undergo experiences ranging from extremely enjoyable to surprisingly difficult and disappointing. Even when the relationship is well matched and buoyed by a responsible student and a well-prepared professional, it is almost impossible to avoid anticipated, as well as unanticipated, obstacles. Students and supervisors may expect obstacles associated with the time commitment required of both parties. School professionals, parents and PK-12 students may resist working willingly with the practicum student. Unexpected challenges can occur as a result of any number of real or misunderstood incidents. For example, a practicum student may inadvertently give the impression of believing – or be perceived as believing – that his or her recently acquired classroom knowledge is superior to, or, at the very least, more relevant than that of the veteran professional.

Despite the importance of the experience, a paucity of information is available that specifically addresses necessary practica experiences and how field-based supervising school psychologists can best help develop competence in the students who they supervise. It is our expectation that the suggestions offered in this article will provide supervising school psychologists with a potential practicum “curriculum” to help them navigate more effectively their supervisory course.

Supervising Practicum Students

Not surprisingly, consistently positive practicum experiences occur often. The gratification that arises from sharing one's time, knowledge and insight can be professionally and personally rewarding, as is the sense of “giving back” and contributing to one's profession. Moreover, supervisors develop a better understanding of psychological and educational concepts and practices when they model, teach and explain these concepts and practices (Dehn, Albrechtson, & Schaefer, 1998).

School psychology practicum training occurs within the context of a fluid profession that at this very moment confronts the potential danger of a critical personnel shortage and the reality of redefinition. We believe this zeitgeist in school psychology can serve as a catalyst for role expansion as well as to more directly link assessment to intervention. Thus, as we address the topic of the supervisor's role, we cannot regard the supervisor-supervisee relationship as an independent phenomenon. The relationships between supervising school psychologists and graduate students should instead be considered within the context of numerous interrelated forces such as the student/client receiving services, the characteristics of the supervisor (e.g., experience in supervision, self-presentation, etc.), the supervisee (learning needs, self-presentation, experience, etc.) and the tasks and functions of supervision (cf. Holloway, 1995). The relationship must also be considered within the context of the individual school district, the graduate training program and the profession in which the parties exist and interface.

If school psychology students are to receive high quality supervision during their practica experiences, our profession needs training programs and school districts to collaborate actively and develop formal supervision training opportunities. The university-based supervisor and the field-based supervisors should join forces to ensure the appropriateness and consistency of the practicum experiences. It is necessary for university training programs to work with field supervisors to offer experiences that will meet the training program's objective and help students become competent professionals.

In this article we do not address administrative supervision as evident in manager and employee relationships. Nor do we focus primarily on internship supervision or the dynamics and potential outcomes of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Rather, our goals are to explore the *practicum* supervisor's roles and responsibilities and present what we believe are several important objectives for school psychology practica.

Professional Standards

Classroom learning provides school psychology students with a developmental and systematic approach that orients them to the educational process and the culture of schools. However, classroom learning cannot provide students with experiences that authentically socializes them to

the profession. The practicum provides a school psychology graduate student with his or her initial opportunities to experience directly the realities of the practitioner. Clinical practicum standards established by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) require carefully "...supervised practicum experiences that include the development and evaluation of specific skills that are distinct from and precede culminating internship experiences that require the integration and application of the full range of school psychology competencies and domains" (NASP Standards, 2000, p. 17). Practicum essentially means an opportunity to apply or practice what the student has learned or is learning. School psychology administrators expect students to begin their internship possessing knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to apply to intervention, assessment, counseling and consultation activities. These entry-level practice skills for internship are expected to have been acquired during practicum (Dehn et al., 1998).

As part of the requirements for NASP Program Approval, universities are required to ensure that their students receive at least one semester of practicum experience. The Expanded Descriptions of the Domains of Practice and Training included as part of the NASP Training Standards (2000) address competencies that must be developed as part of training and therefore should be addressed in a practicum in some manner. However, the NASP Standards (2000) do not include a description of the characteristics of outstanding school psychology practica nor do they provide guidelines regarding how to supervise students (Dehn et al., 1998).

Three important types of resources are available to school psychologists who will supervise practicum students. The NASP Supervision Interest Group serves as a mechanism to increase clinical supervision skills (to learn about the group or to join see <http://www.naspwebservices.org/ScriptContent/resources/supervision2.cfm>). While not specifically focused on school psychology practica, NASP published an important text (Harvey & Struzziero, 2000) that offers considerable information regarding supervision in school psychology (see also Haynes, Corey, & Moulton, 2003 for supervision strategies relevant to school, clinical and counseling psychology). To acquire additional insight we can also access information and recommendations developed as a result of the conference sessions of professional school psychology groups.

The 2002 Multisite Conference on the Future of School Psychology is one such conference. The conference addressed how school psychologists can meet the current and future demands for their services and informs the profession regarding the implementation of school psychology practicum. Three goals identified by the conference planning team are particularly relevant to clinical practica:

1. To achieve consensus on current and future demands for school psychologists and the profession's ability to meet those demands;
2. To develop an agenda to use the resources available to maximize the benefits to the children and schools served;
3. To conceptualize the practice of school psychology in the face of diminishing numbers and increasing demand for services (Harrison et al., 2004, p.12).

Each of these goals has considerable bearing on our profession. However, when we narrow the focus and view the goals from the perspective of the practicum experience, we realize the tremendous importance of introducing students to both the positive and negative realities of the school psychologist's responsibilities and roles. One of the benefits of working as a school psychologist is that it allows practitioners the opportunity to help PK-12 students develop their potential. Yet, time demands, limited resources and test/place pressures may be barriers to achieving this objective. School psychology students who understand these challenges early in their training will be better able to manage them and function effectively in their roles.

As mentioned above, NASP provides us with some sense of what needs to be accomplished during the practicum period (e.g., "the development and evaluation of specific skills"), but this leaves much to the imagination and, in most cases, to the individual supervisor's preferences and priorities as well. We believe the three goals above suggest three comprehensive priorities school psychology training programs should emphasize and promulgate during practicum experiences.

Although the student-to-school psychologist ratio may increase in a school district, practicum students will need to recognize that this does not suggest the demand for school psychological services will necessarily decrease. High ratios may challenge practitioners' ability to provide comprehensive services and practicum students will need to obtain an understanding of the current and future demands for school psychologists in order to develop and enhance the skills that will enable them to meet these challenges and demands.

School psychology practicum students should learn the benefit of using all appropriate resources available to them to accomplish the overarching goal of the profession – engendering positive student outcomes. Positive student outcomes may require an expansion of school psychologists' roles and this third goal of considering the re-conceptualization of school psychology practice should be addressed during the practicum. These are only broad goals and we will address more specific objectives later in this paper.

The Current State of Practica Supervision

Graduate students enter their practicum with myriad abilities, levels and quality of training, degrees of commitment, types of expectations, and quantities of time. Additionally, practicum students' understanding of the profession's values and ethical guidelines vary substantially. Supervisors are a similarly disparate group. Supervisors' abilities, levels of training, degrees of commitment, expectations and times of

availability also differ.

In this section, we focus on the issue of supervisors' overall preparedness for their role. Despite NASP's supervisory requirements for those practicum students who will ultimately pursue NASP certification (NCSP), many training programs and school districts do not offer or require formal training in supervision for school psychologists who assume a practicum supervisor's role (Haboush, 2003). In some states (e.g., Florida), supervision training is mandated for educators who serve as formal mentors. According to Florida Statute 1004.04(5)(b)(a), "all school district personnel and instructional personnel who supervise or direct teacher preparation students during field experience courses or internships shall have evidence of clinical education training" (<http://www.firn.edu/doe/profdev/clined.htm>, March 29, 2005). Clinical educator training provides formal instruction regarding the supervision of educators. In some doctoral-level school psychology training programs, more experienced graduate students may be asked to supervise their less experienced peers. Yet, these supervising graduate students receive little training in supervision (Fischetti & Crespi, 1999; Hunley, Harvey, Curtis, Portnoy, Grier, & Helffrich, 2000). We trust this practice will change and supervising graduate students will receive more formal instruction from university faculty. Nonetheless, for what is often a most complex and challenging job, the vast majority of supervising school psychologists nationwide will likely admit they never received formal or specialized training in supervision.

Current School Psychology Curricula

Two separate curricula are said to exist inherently within school psychology graduate programs: (1) the formal curriculum (i.e., the development of "technical competencies") and (2) the informal curriculum (i.e., the development of more "autonomous professional functioning"). A formal curriculum is represented by the expressed goals, objectives and course of study articulated by each training program. The formal curriculum results in school psychologists possessing similar professional skills derived from similar syllabi content (Eshel & Koriat, 2001).

Nonetheless, school psychology programs with almost identical course requirements may embrace different views regarding the role and function of school psychologists. Thus, training programs differ substantially as a function of the informal curriculum (Eshel & Koriat, 2001). School psychology students tend to understand a training program's philosophies via informal or latent messages (Haboush, 2003). Latent communication shapes the informal curriculum. It influences how school psychology students are instructed and what experiences they are permitted to receive. It determines appropriate and inappropriate student behavior and what educational and professional values are important (Wren, 1999). The informal curriculum serves as a socialization process that offers insight into the nuances of the profession. In school psychology training programs, both the formal and informal curricula impact coursework, but the latter greatly influences the manner in which supervision is provided (Eshel & Koriat, 2001; Haboush, 2003).

Novice supervisors may begin their supervisory role with a somewhat tenuous safety net of limited experience in the field, limited previous experience supervising students, varying degrees of support, and a vague frame of reference. Essentially, the base upon which they define their role is grounded in interpretations of their own practicum experience and the countless pieces of information they have accumulated since, with each piece having its own very specific, personalized and perhaps informal association. Consequently, the informal curriculum shapes school psychology practicum experiences for many supervisors and their supervisees.

A good start in our field, as in all fields, cannot be overemphasized. "Students will find that experiences in practicum are professionally cumulative and will follow them into their career" (Rosen, 2003, p. 26). If a student receives effective formal supervision, he or she is much more likely to become a successful practitioner (Haboush, 2003).

Effective Practicum Supervision

Several specific approaches or models of supervision are available that are designed to help safeguard the welfare of students/clients and ensure high quality clinical services while responding to the next generation of school psychologists (cf. Falender & Shafranske, 2004). Cognitive behavioral (a skills-based perspective), person-centered (a relationship-building perspective) and developmental (a stage perspective) approaches are popular models used in supervisory relationships. Utilizing models encourages the formation of evidence-based practices that better describe the supervision process and improves the quality of supervision. Models help identify important learning goals and objectives and determine the processes by which they may be achieved. Models can also provide conceptual tools for understanding the interrelated forces that contribute to the process of supervision and detail the manner by which supervision fosters clinical competence (Falender & Shafranske). Frequently, effective supervisors explicitly or implicitly use models of supervision. Their theoretical orientation often dictates the model that is employed.

While supervision models guide practice, effective supervision is also dependent on the supervisory relationship. Violations of professional ethics and personal boundaries are barriers to successful supervisory relationships. Given the importance of these relationships, it is crucial that substantial levels of trust develop between supervisors and supervisees. Supervisors build trust effectively via the use of good communication,

warmth, genuineness and empathy.

Specific strategies are also necessary for effective school psychology practica. Practicum students are provided meaningful experiences when they are permitted to observe their supervisors in the practice of important skills and then allowed to practice those same skills under the watchful eye of their supervisors. Effective supervision involves supervisors helping supervisees to become observant and to reflect on the appropriateness of the provided services, their contributions to the process, and their subjective experiences regarding the process (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Harvey & Struzziero, 2000). Additionally, supervision that is effective often includes a collaborative component where the supervisor and supervisee describe their observations, address service opportunities and discuss potential alternate approaches to service provision (Haynes et al., 2003; Falender & Shafranske). A recurring debriefing period and requiring supervisees to maintain a daily reflective practicum journal will likely help to develop their metacognitive abilities to respond to the different and novel situations they will experience in the future.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are made in an effort to help ensure the provision of consistent and comprehensive practicum supervision services. In addition, we wish to foster a more time efficient and fulfilling experience for the supervisor. The suggestions may not be applicable across all situations, nor are they considered exhaustive. Of course, because practicum is not as extensive an experience as an internship, university trainers, supervisors and school psychology students can circumscribe the suggested strategies to fit the requirements of the training program and the practicum site. The following recommendations are simply considerations for inclusion in a field-based practicum supervisor's "syllabus" and among those topics that, at the very least, can be introduced in some form during the practicum period.

Fingerprinting and criminal background checks. In light of the nature of our practice, university training programs and practicum sites should require some degree of vetting before allowing practicum students to work with children.

Understanding the integrated nature and roles of school staff. Because school psychology is a profession that is, for the most part, practiced within the "context of the schools"

(NASP *Communiqué*, 2000), it is important that the multi-relationships of the profession receive emphasis. For example, practicum students need to know how the hierarchy and composition of different education professions operate. They should understand how school psychologists function in the circle of professionals in each of the different schools in which they work. Practicum students should be provided the names, titles and roles of specific multidisciplinary team members. They need to know how to function as part of multidisciplinary teams and how to interface with other team members. Information about timelines and the theoretical flow charts of responsibilities are also important.

Developing and using appropriate communication and interpersonal skills. Students may need to develop an understanding of when to listen, when to talk, how to articulate their thoughts, and to whom they should express those thoughts. Students also need to develop skills in responding to constructive feedback from their supervisor.

Increasing familiarity with assessment and the supporting materials used by school psychologists. Practicum students need exposure to a variety of both formal and informal assessment procedures, but particularly those procedures used most frequently or preferred by the supervising school psychologist, the district and/or the school. Supervisees need experience with the multi-method, multi-source and multi-setting approach to assessment. Information regarding the recommended combinations of assessment procedures used by school districts to reach decisions in eligibility determination, appropriate intervention planning and appropriate placement are additionally important. Further, practicum students need experiences to help them determine when and how different assessment procedures are selected.

Applying problem solving approaches. Students need to understand the integration of academic and support services, collaboration, and the use of research-based and data-driven interventions. They need knowledge about how to apply problem-solving approaches in the context of each school district's unique systemic issues, service delivery, decision-making, meetings, interventions and assessment procedures. Opportunities to practicing their consultation skills could be made available to students.

Working with families. Experiences working with families should include an understanding of cultural realities and considerations. Potential incongruity between school staff and family members regarding expectations, explanation of procedures, policies and purposes of process should also be discussed.

Observation opportunities. Students need to observe classroom interactions, cooperative/collaborative learning in the classroom, English as Second Language classes, special education classes and resource services.

Professional development. Opportunities to attend, and perhaps co-present, training workshops for parents and teachers can be invaluable experiences for students.

Intermittent activities. Students need exposure to experiences that may not occur on a regular basis, but are important nevertheless, such as crisis intervention, activities related to child abuse identification/prevention and school safety/student threat assessment.

Understanding IDEA. Students will need to understand the practical implications of IDEA and relevant state laws and procedures.

Increasing familiarity with NASP professional standards. Despite courses in ethics and legal issues applicable to the practice of school psychology, formal exposure does not necessarily guarantee consistent ethical behavior once students are in the field. Unethical behavior may occur as a result of an unawareness of actual ethical parameters or a failure to think through situations from an ethical and legal perspective. Tyron (2000) identified several of the more commonplace “ethical transgressions” attributed to school psychology graduate students. These include those that are under the categories of a) the “general standards” that apply to all psychologists (e.g., “providing services outside boundaries of competence”), b) “confidentiality,” (e.g., failing to “maintain the privacy and confidentiality of others”), c) “public statements” made that are misrepresentations of the truth, and d) “therapy” (e.g., failure to obtain parent permission prior to providing counseling services). Supervisors can present actual situations (case studies) to supervisees and use collaborative analysis and problem-solving to develop critical-thinking skills that will help supervisees respond appropriately to novel ethical dilemmas they may encounter in the future.

Review of relevant school district procedures. The district’s standard operating procedures manuals, or similar publications, provide the official blueprint for how educational, special education and school psychology services are to be provided. These manuals can also provide the practicum student a more global perspective of where school psychology fits in relation to the entire educational community.

Direct services opportunities. As appropriate, based on their training and readiness, practicum students should be given the opportunity to apply their skills directly with students, teachers, parents and school staff. Practicum students may benefit from receiving training experiences to help them understand the academic, social and emotional needs of students as well as the importance of working toward positive student outcomes.

Understanding HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). Understanding the implications of these Acts for education and psychology are crucial to competent practice.

Supervisor opportunities for learning. University faculty can provide supervisors access to appropriate articles from supervision journals (e.g., the *Clinical Supervisor*) and encourage supervisors to attend conference presentations at state and national conventions. Administrators and university trainers groups that are affiliated with state associations can jointly sponsor annual workshops for practica and intern supervisors.

Supervision contract. Strategies to help apply the above components appropriately include implementing a supervision contract. Such a contract will help supervisors and supervisees define and improve their roles, practices and expectations (see Harvey & Struzziero, 2000; Haynes et al., 2003 for a sample supervision contract outline).

Evaluation and monitoring strategies. Systematic multi-source monitoring of practica via self-evaluations, training program evaluations, and other accountability evaluations can serve to improve training outcomes (Falender & Shafranske, 2004). In addition, clinical supervision of clinical supervisors and graduate student feedback to the supervisor offer particularly helpful strategies to enhance practicum experiences (Falender & Shafranske).

Conclusion

School psychology practica provide graduate students with their initial opportunities to directly experience the realities of the profession. For students filled with coursework knowledge, the experience provides practical aspects of the discipline that cannot possibly be learned in a classroom. We believe students who receive effective supervision are much more likely to become successful practitioners. Despite the importance of the role, however, supervising school psychologists frequently receive little or no training prior to beginning the job. Accordingly, school psychology practica may result in very diverse and sometimes inconsequential opportunities for students and challenging and unfulfilling experiences for supervisors. Clinical supervision differs from clinical practice and administrative supervision. For supervisors to develop competence, we believe they will require formal education and training. An outline of suggested activities, practices, experiences and strategies to be considered for inclusion during the practicum and a more uniform/formal required preparation for supervisors prior to assuming their roles as “teachers” are recommended to ensure a smoother and more effective practicum experience for both the student and the supervising professional.

References

- Dehn, M., Albrechtson, R., & Schaefer, J. (1998, March). Supervising practicum students: Issues, benefits and suggested practices. *NASP Communiqué*, 26 (6). Retrieved March 29, 2005 from <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq266super.html>
- Eshel, Y. and Koriat, A. (2001). The informal curriculum: The latent aspect of psychological training. *School Psychology International*, 22, 387-400.

- Falender, C.A. & Shafranske, E.P. (2004). *Clinical supervision: A competency-based approach*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Fischetti, B. & Crespi, T. (1999). Clinical supervision for school psychologists: National practices, trends, and future implications. *School Psychology International*, 20, 278-288.
- Florida Statute 1004.04(5)(b)(a). Retrieved March 29, 2005 from <http://www.firn.edu/doi/profdev/clined.htm>
- Haboush, K.L. (2003). Group supervision of school psychologists in training: A case study. *School Psychology International*, 24, 232-255.
- Harrison, P.L., Cummings, J.A., Dawson, M., Short, R.J., Gorin, S., & Palomares, R. (2004). Responding to the needs of children, families, and schools: The 2002 multisite conference on the future of school psychology. *School Psychology Review*, 33, 12-33.
- Harvey, V., & Struzziero, J. (2000). *Effective supervision in school psychology*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Haynes, R., Corey, C., & Moulton, P. (2003). *Clinical supervision in the helping professions: A practical guide*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brookes-Cole
- Holloway, E.L. (1995). *Clinical supervision: A systems approach*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hunley, S., Harvey, V., Curtis, M., Portnoy, L., Grier, & Helffrich, D. (2000). School psychology supervisors: A national study of demographics and professional practices. *NASP Communiqué*, 28 (8).
- National Association of School Psychologists (2000, September). Effective supervision in school psychology: Interview with the authors. *NASP Communiqué*, 29 (1).
- National Association of School Psychologists (2000). *Standards for training and field placement programs in school psychology standards for the credentialing of school psychologists*. Bethesda, MD: Author.
- National Association of School Psychologists (2005). Supervision interest group. Retrieved March 29, 2005 from <http://www.naspwebservices.org/ScriptContent/resources/supervision2.cfm>
- Rosen, D. (2003). How to be a good practicum student. *The American Psychological Association Graduate Student Newsletter*, 15, 26-27.
- Tyron, G.S. (2000). Ethical transgressions of school psychology graduate students: A critical incidents survey. *Ethics and Behavior*, 10, 271-280.
- Wren, D.J. (1999). School culture: Exploring the hidden curriculum. *Adolescence*, 34, 593-596.
- © 2005, National Association of School Psychologists. Oliver W. Edwards, PhD, NCSP is Assistant Professor of School Psychology at the University of Central Florida; Lee S. Kananack, MA, is a graduate student in School Psychology at the University of Central Florida.

National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814

Phone: (301) 657-0270 | Toll Free: (866) 331-NASP | Fax: (301) 657-0275 | TTY: (301) 657-4155

[Site Map](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Copyright](#) | [FAQs](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)