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## Administration and Supervision

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### Cost and Benefits of Reflective Supervision

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#### Abstract

The article explores the cost and benefits of reflective supervision by using journalizing. Ten students' journals are analyzed using content analysis to look for recurring themes and categories. The final categories are used to make assertions about how student clinicians and their supervisor used the journals to work through critical issues in a university preschool program. Eight assertions are made about the ways student clinicians used journals and they include: asking for help, venting anger, solving problems, speculating, reflecting, tattling, and giving the supervisor positive and negative feedback. Five assertions are made about how their supervisor used the journals. The journals were used to affirm, to comment, to reinforce behaviors, to share experiences, and to express anger. The findings suggest that journals are a useful tool for clinical teaching.

Do I really need to get up and do this again? Why can't I just stay in the bed and pull the covers over my head? It is the beginning of the semester. I get a new group of graduate students and they get the same old lecture. How many times have I done this orientation? I'm losing track of time. Maybe this group will be better. OK. I'll just get up and get it over with.

It's the end of the first day. That wasn't so bad. "Jean, can I talk to you? Would now be a good time?" Oh, no! What is it now? Is she going to tell me that she hates this practica? Is she going to tell me that she's quitting? "Jean, I really want to talk about the journals. I've been looking over the format and I just don't want to share myself, but I don't want this to effect my grade."

#### Introduction

I know why she does not want to do it. She has not established a relationship with me and she does not trust me. Sharing your joys and sorrows with another person is taking a risk and in this scenario the risk is how you will be graded based on your journal. But the street goes both ways. Every semester as a clinical supervisor, I open myself to these students who may or may not care about what I am sharing with them. For me too, it is a risk.

This story began 8 years ago; it began with my feeble attempts to influence how graduate students in speech-language pathology interacted with their clients, with each other, and with me, their supervisor. It is a story about mentoring others on their journey to professional competence. In essence, it is learning how to tell, and model for students what is considered "best practices" for infants, young children, and their families. When all is said and done, the work is more than science; it is a form of art. The challenge for student clinicians is not knowing what to do when working with these families, but knowing why they have chosen to do something and what this *something* means beyond the therapeutic context. *Why* questions have inherent cost and benefits because *why* questions, of necessity, require self-reflection. The purpose of this article is to look at the cost and benefits of reflective supervision in a university setting. Specifically, it is about the cost and benefits of using journals as a strategy for helping graduate students to become competent practitioners.

According to Pawl (1995), "Supervision exists to provide a respectful, understanding and thoughtful atmosphere where exchanges of information, thoughts

and feelings about the things that arise around one's work can occur. The focus is on the families involved and on the experience of the supervisee. Depending on the discipline, content may vary enormously, but it is not possible to work on behalf of human beings to try and help them without having powerful feelings aroused in yourself" (p. 44). These feelings arise from working with complex family systems and children who are diagnosed with severe communication and developmental disabilities. These feelings include joy, anger, insecurity, and frustration. But what does one do with these feelings? What do these feelings mean for the supervisee and his or her practice? How do these feelings affect one's relationship with the client? The benefit of journalizing is that it is a strategy for building relationships with families and other stakeholders

Typically, clinical teaching methods have involved laboratory settings in which student clinicians are systematically indoctrinated into the practice of their fields under the supervision of an experienced clinical teacher. It is the supervisor's responsibility to give observational feedback from direct observation or from videotapes of sessions observed, to facilitate case staffings, and to conduct individual conferences with supervisees. Also, the supervisor often is ascribed the role of knowledge broker and thus, the person with the power in the supervisory/supervisee relationship. Hence, there are costs and benefits for both parties.

The students involved in this practicum were all graduate students at Infant Child Communication Research Programs (ICCRP) in the preschool classes. The children enrolled in the program were between the ages of 3 and 5 years and presented with a range of disabilities including autism, behavior and regulatory disorders, developmental disabilities, phonological disorders, oral motor/feeding disorders as well as gross motor, and sensory motor deficits. The children were seen in the preschool setting two or three times per week for two and one-half hours per session. Typically, there were three graduate clinicians and one supervisor assigned to each classroom.

### ***Journalizing Format***

Graduate students were asked to keep a clinical journal. The stated purpose of the journal was to reflect upon their clinical experiences and monitor their own growth over the course of the semester (Brown, Hebert-Remson, Budzysky, & Wilcox, 1997). The journal was a modified version of a format originally designed by Denhardt (1993). Keeping a journal required student clinicians to make an entry using five general categories and guidelines. Below I have listed the five categories of the journal format and have used P.C.'s

journal entry dated 10/4/96 to illustrate how students could use the format.

- **Outer Experiences:** An objective description of an incident that occurred during the session.  
"I feel as if spent all morning giving each child a 'lick and a promise,' and I never gave any of them any quality time."
- **Reflection and Generalization:** An objective appraisal of the significance of the outer experience. This can include knowledge gained by the student as well as observed changes in the children.  
"Next week I think I'll try to parcel out 5-10 minutes or so during center-based play of focused attention for each one of my kids."
- **Inner Experience:** A subjective analysis of the session, with a focus on how the experience may have affected the student (emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually).  
I need to suppress my perfectionist inclinations on this issue and realize each day each interaction is not going to be some important forum for a major breakthrough. It's a PRO-CESS we're focusing on here, and even though it may seem like watching hair grow, we're making progress even if we don't see "end results" each day.
- **Reflection and Generalization:** A subjective appraisal of the significance of the inner experience.  
"Maybe the same thing is happening to me! I sometimes feel I'm no more adept at this than I was 7 weeks ago, but I, too, am in the process mode."
- **Personal Growth:** Impressions (objective and/or subjective) of the student's current stage of personal/professional growth. P.C. did not complete this section on 10/4. But here is an example of this category from another entry dated 9/11.  
"Life is a journey. Everything that happens to us shapes who we are becoming. And in the adventure of each day we discover the best in ourselves."

Anonymous

Initially, I thought of this in terms of the children, but then I realized how much it applied to me."

### ***Procedure***

Using content analysis, I read and reread 10 student journals and made eight assertions about how students take risks in the supervisory process. Student

clinicians used journals as a way to ask for help, to vent feelings, to problem solve, speculate, reflect, tattle and give the supervisor positive and negative feedback. I made six assertions about my use of their journals. I used the journals to affirm, to comment, to reinforce behaviors, to make recommendations, to share experiences, and to express anger. How the journals were used is described below by using entries from the students' journals and my written comments about the entries.

## ***Student's Use of Journals***

### **Asking for Help**

Students use their journals to ask for help, particularly when they are at a loss. I have found that students do not ask for help in staff meetings because they are afraid that they will appear foolish or not as intelligent as their peers will. Journalizing allows students to ask for help. This excerpt from J.S.'s journal is an example.

I'm very frustrated and need help and/or other strategies to target his sounds. I feel I'm at a loss, since I've been trying to approach this objective in a naturalistic manner, but it is not working. Help! J. S. 3/7/97

The primary use for journals was to vent feelings. I identified five types of feelings vented by these students: anger, frustration, empathy, insecurity, and celebration.

### **Venting Feelings**

**Anger.** Anger feelings were expressed toward other clinicians and at parents. Here D. P. vents her anger toward a parent who was not as responsive as she thought she should have been. This particular parent was not yet potty training her child and it appeared that she encouraged her son to remain childish when he was past the age of 3.

I have spoken about my concerns for B. in our staff meetings several times. I feel a little guilty because I feel angry with B.'s mother. She seems unaware of how to be a good parent. Now that I write that, I think maybe some of my anger stems from my inability to affect my sister's life in a positive way of course. Well, I'll try not to feel angry at B.'s mother. Everybody has their own way of being a parent, even though it does lead to language delays. D.P.10/29/96

By journalizing and reflecting about her anger, D.P. was able to identify with her own personal frustration and anger about her younger sister. In a sense, she identified with this parent's frustration and perhaps became more empathic.

**Empathy.** Hepworth and Larsen (1990) define empathic communication as "the ability of the practitioner to perceive accurately and sensitively inner feelings of the client and to communicate understanding of these feelings in language attuned to the client's experiencing of the moment" (p. 86). In the example below, R.G. uses an empathic statement in her journal about a child who had not yet been diagnosed but his mother suspects autism based on Internet research.

The mother's manner, however, made me feel sad. She was very apologetic for D.'s behavior and I think that means that she was embarrassed for [his] being so out of control of the situation. This embarrassment is so unnecessary. I feel sad for L. because what she is facing is much more than a son with a communication disorder and she can't expect to be super woman and handle it on her own.

I am hurting in anticipation for the hurt that this family will go through upon possible diagnosis of autism. What shattered dreams for them! There are so many obstacles that they have yet to face. R.G. 9/3/96

**Frustration.** Frustration was defined as those feelings of being overwhelmed. J.S. worked with a child with a diagnosis of Down's syndrome who refused to follow the class routines. She expresses her frustration this way:

The whole incident brought out several emotions. I was frustrated that M. would not follow directions, angry that she kept fooling around while in "time out", and confused as to what to do next. J. S. 2/21/97

**Insecurity.** Insecurity was expressed as competition with peers and not fulfilling the expectations of the parents who frequently observed the sessions from the observation room. In the quotes below R.G. and D.P. express these incidents of insecurity.

L., our assistant would give me a reassuring look. At other times she would give me suggestions which were helpful, but they annoyed me a little because she's our assistant! She's already proven herself to be extremely assertive and creative with the kids ... two characteristics which I need to improve, so I guess this a little bit of jealousy. R.G. 9/12/96

I was very aware of his mother behind the window. I was wondering what she thought of the whole thing. Did she want me to ignore this behavior or interact with him despite his protests? D.P. 9/5/96

**Celebration.** The final category of feeling is celebration and I saved this for last because many of the journal entries are full of anger, frustration, and insecurity. However, as the students get more comfortable with their roles at ICCRP, they are more empathic and they celebrate both individual and team victories. P.C. does this by writing.

I don't know whether this is a good thing or not, but I certainly feel like this experience has helped me grow personally more than I could have imagined. I was so nervous coming into this. I can't believe how much self-confidence I've gained in only 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> weeks.

Hooray! We survived the first day all went well and J. [a student clinician] did a great job.  
9/30/96

As mentioned above, student clinicians also used journals to problem solve, speculate, tattle and to give the supervisor positive and negative feedback. An example of each of these categories will be given below.

### Problem Solving

Problem solving might be defined as one's ability to come to closure about some event or internal problem. P.C. allows us to see how she went about it through journalizing.

I'm usually very good at "seeing the woods instead of the trees." I guess this stems from being preoccupied with trying to remember intervention strategies, implement them, and keep 12 kids happy, learning, and safe. It's frustrating that I feel like I'm losing sight of some very important things while I'm focusing on minor details.

But I guess that's why I'm here to practice the minor details until they become second nature so I can focus on the big picture. So Friday is a new day ... 9/18/96

### Speculating

Speculation causes one to look at a problem using a wider lens or perspective. This quote shows how P.C. does this, but also points out that our speculating goes beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

I was thinking about objectives this morning on my way in, and realized that all 4 of the kids that I'm working with need extensive redirection when it comes to cooperative play.

Is this because they are all very quiet, shy, kids temperamentally or, is this lack of cooperative play an outgrowth of their developmental de-

lays? . . . I can understand the tendency for parents of developmentally delayed kids to shelter and overprotect. I have a great deal of admiration for all of these parents. It's difficult enough to send a typical kid into the world with all of the emotional bangs and bruises. 9/16/96

### Reflecting

Ultimately, one of the goals of journalizing is to reflect on one's practice. Below J.S. summarizes her feeling about the preschool.

I feel that the preschool setting allowed me to bring a lot of my "book smarts" into the actual world! I was able to implement many strategies I have only read about in the past and being in this setting allowed me to get a good look at myself, in other words, it has made me more aware of my feelings toward myself, my peers, and the children. I'm aware that I showed frustration at times, but for the most part truly enjoyed being in this setting, around the kids, and being in a position of "teacher." It was very rewarding to see some of the children progress as a result of our intervention J. S. 5/6/97

### Tattling

Tattling is a way to inform the supervisor of events that she is not aware of and for the supervisee to clarify any misunderstandings with the supervisor. In this quote the issue is cleaning the preschool after each session and A.B. feels that she has done her share. She writes:

OK, I confronted G. today. I wouldn't have ever done it, but J. [supervisor] was telling us how bad our cleaning was and I wasn't going to sit here and get chewed out when I'm the one doing the cleaning after everyone else leaves. G. just blew J. off, like nothing J. was saying mattered or applied to her and I was sitting there thinking "G. contributes virtually nothing." The first few weeks of the semester she really did almost nothing. Now, she will sweep the floor occasionally, but that's it. 10/16/97

### Giving Positive Feedback

Positive feedback did not occur often but when it did, it was well received. D.P. gives feedback to the supervisor about her concern.

Hey J., please don't worry so much about me. I've been particularly busy and stressed lately, but normally I'm fairly stable! I want you to know that I do appreciate it; not many people take the time out... Thanks! D. P. 10/29/96

## Giving Negative Feedback

This form of feedback is the most dreaded because clinical supervisors have the same feelings of anger, empathy, frustration, celebration, and insecurity. The difference is that supervisors often do not have someone to mentor them. This is an area of need in speech-language pathology. The risk for me is sharing this quote. R.G. never confronts me personally, but writes this entry in her journal:

For some reason, I have felt that my supervisor thinks me incompetent. I, therefore, feel very nervous around her and I can't be myself. One reason I feel this way is her reactions to my questions. She always answers them, but not in a "glad to help" manner, but more in a "I can't believe you need to ask that" manner. 9/5/96

## Supervisor's Use of Journals

Fortunately, our relationship got better over the course of the semester, but why did it get better? Did I have issues with her competence and was I afraid to confront them? Did I fear being labeled a bad supervisor, so I worked harder? In any event, supervisors use the student's journals to affirm and comment, reinforce behaviors, make recommendations, schedule meetings, share experiences, and express anger.

## Affirm and Comment

This category gave me the opportunity to comment on something the clinicians had written in order to validate their thinking and to give support. The quote below is a comment that was written in response to a student's statement about how rewarding it was to interact with the children.

It's a very rewarding line of work; these small moments carry you. J.C.B.

## Reinforce Behaviors

Often supervisors give reinforcement in passing or in negative ways on an observation form. The journals allow the student to see positive comments written about their thoughts. The comment below was used to reinforce a student's reflection about an interaction with a child.

So you learned that spontaneity is useful. You experienced joy and the activity was fun. All of these characterize effective therapy, good for you! J.C.B.

## Make Recommendations

Often, recommendations are used to answer questions and make suggestions about the use of intervention strategies. The recommendation below is about

reflecting on one's practice. In this instance, a student clinician stated that young children made her uneasy. Suggestions for self-reflection serve to connect the personal use of self to one's practice.

Good journal. Try to go to another level. How does it make you feel? What is it about young children that make you uneasy? J.C.B.

## Share Experiences

The response below was given to a student when she was unable to get a child to interact with her. By sharing personal experiences, I allow students to see my humanity and that I have not forgotten what it like to be a student.

Try asking T. why he doesn't want to do it. He might tell you. Second, ask yourself if you want to do it. If yes, why? If no, why not? Kids will not do anything if the approach is not sincere or genuine. I had a similar situation in grad school. It was not the kid. Have fun with him and he'll have fun with you. J.C.B.

## Express Anger

Supervisors get angry and they should express this anger as it shows their humanity and models appropriate communication skills for student clinicians. The cost of using journals is that you cannot see the body language of the person you are conversing with and often too much time is allowed to lapse before addressing the issue. Many times, only a face-to-face encounter will suffice. Below is an example of the supervisor expressing anger and requesting a meeting to clarify a student's performance.

Would you have changed if I'd given you the feedback? I don't think so because you don't appear to trust my assessment, R. I am more interested in the process of learning, not in a right or wrong way. Your goals have always been functional, but they have not always been complete, and I think that I addressed that early on. Believe me, I'm not out to get you, but if it helps I will not or will try to limit unnecessary comments because they seem to upset you or give you the impression that I'm obsessed with messing you up. I'm not. If you would like to talk about this further, please come see me, in fact, I insist upon it! J.C.B.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this article is to explore the cost and benefits of reflective supervision. The benefits include getting to know the student clinicians better, providing a venue to ask for help with troubling issues,

and to express negative and positive feelings about their practice. Additionally, students were given time to problem solve, speculate, reflect, tattle, and to give their supervisor positive and negative feedback. These were things that they would not do in individual conferences. Journals gave them this opportunity.

The cost included opening and sharing their lives with a supervisor for one semester. Given the hierarchical nature of the supervisory/supervisee relationship, there was little wonder as to why they were concerned about the link between their final grades and their journal entries. The issue of separating the facts from feelings is the difficult task of the supervisor. Journalizing is under the rubric of subjectivity while grades are in the realm of the objective.

Supervisors who choose to use journals will be rewarded when they witness the professional and personal growth of their students. The difference in their students' countenance from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester is quite remarkable. It is a frightening, but necessary, journey if we are to serve children and their families in the most appropriate way.

Why do I reveal my inner self to students every semester? Because the benefits far outweigh the costs. It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be a small part of the process.

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