Sample Student Responses: Week 6 Discussion of the Supervisory Relationship
SPSY 610 Clinical Supervision

Below, I’ve included sample student responses from one of our weekly discussions. Students were given the choice of two topics to discuss, both on the topic of the supervisory relationship. I’ve included one of the topics, followed by the initial responses given by four students. For the “Student 1” response, I’ve also included student responses from the discussion thread that followed the initial student post.

Instructor Post: The last couple of weeks, our readings and discussion have focused on factors that affect the supervisor-supervisee relationship. What are the key lessons or strategies you will take from these readings as you approach the task of establishing a supervisory relationship with future supervisees?

Student 1 Initial Response
Since professional development is a lifelong process, I think the supervisor and supervisee relationship is essential. Supervisors do not only supervise the development of specific skills, but need to be supportive of the supervisee learning how to be a supervisee. That is, learning how to learn and to feel comfortable engaging in supervision is a skill in and of itself, and one that I believe can only be fostered in a positive supervisor/supervisee relationship. Goodyear and Bernard (2009) discuss 6 behaviors and attributes that predict the supervisor alliance (i.e., interpersonal style, use of power, use of self-disclosure, ethical behavior, attachment style and evaluative practice), all of which I hope to consider when I become a supervisor. As I reflect on my own experiences as a supervisee I know all six of these have impacted my relationships with my supervisors. For example, self-disclosure stories about mistakes made by my supervisor helped me feel more comfortable sharing and accepting my own mistakes while learning how to handle when mistakes occur. Also, as a supervisor, I would be especially mindful about how to create an effective system to provide feedback, which may vary depending on the supervisee’s style. My aim would be to provide constructive feedback that leads to behavior change, while maintaining a positive relationship. Goodyear and Bernard (2009) cite research on how supervisees and supervisors react and manage feelings of shame and anxiety, which directly impact supervisee behavior. I believe that supervisor’s should make effort within the limitations of the supervisory relationship to ameliorate such negative feelings and recognize when their own behavior as a supervisor is affecting the supervisee negatively.

What are some things that your supervisors have done that you feel enhanced your relationship? Or, are there things that your supervisor has done that have made you feel anxious or ashamed? How did you respond?

Student 2 Reply
My past supervisors have done many things that I feel enhanced our relationship. One thing that I have appreciated is having a standing meeting time with my supervisor. This has made me feel as though my supervisor has enough time to devote to the supervisory relationship, and that they value having a supervisee. I have also appreciated when supervisors take the time to personally introduce me to other staff members. I had one supervisor who did this every time that I took on a new case, and this always made me feel much more comfortable and reduced my anxiety about starting a new case. Overall, the best supervisory relationships that I have been a part of have been ones in which my supervisor valued my assistance and truly enjoyed having a supervisee.

Student 1 Reply
I agree that feeling valued is critical. Also, I think I will try to use your supervisor’s strategy of introducing my supervisees to teachers. In addition to having a standing meeting time, my first supervisor always encouraged me to seek him out or to ask questions when I needed to. He always reinforced my asking so that I never felt like I was
getting in the way. I am not I would have felt comfortable doing that if he hadn’t precorrected for that.

Student 3 Reply
There were many things that my school site supervisors have done to enhance our relationship. First, they both had a good sense of where I was developmentally in my experience and knowledge in school psychology. During my first year, my supervisor invited me to observe him in a lot of different settings (i.e. testing, interviewing, conducting observations, etc.). He oversaw a lot of the activities I conducted and sat in on interviews with teachers, chiming in when needed. My second year supervisor also offered me the same type of support during the first half of the year but now that the end of the year is approaching, he has allowed me to work pretty independently, while still providing me with support when necessary. Often times he'll supervise me on tasks unexpectedly, just to see how I am doing. Also, I've noticed that my supervisor enjoys engaging in conversations on the bigger picture and asking me to think about "why" things are done the way they are.

Another very important detail that has enhanced my relationship with my supervisors was their commitment to their job as a supervisor. Magnuson et al. talk about how being "professionally apathetic" was a common category of a lousy supervisor. Luckily, both my supervisors were dedicated on training, supervising, and teaching me all that they could. For example, at the beginning of the year both of my supervisors did an excellent job on introducing me to teachers, administrators, and other faculty members. Both of them were familiar with my assignments and helped me accomplish them by setting me up with teachers, and handing me cases that were appropriately challenging. Both did an excellent job at normalizing my fears and anxiety as well as allowing me to openly discuss any difficulties that I was encountering at my practicum.

I felt that both of my supervisors had been well trained and were excellent at giving a lot of positive feedback and constructive criticism. This was especially important to me because I tend to become really anxious during evaluations, and tend to need a lot of feedback during supervision. Lastly, both valued my opinion during supervision. They would ask me what I thought during observations, question what type of intervention I might want to try, and what assessment I might want to conduct. All these little details taken together really helped to build a great supervisory relationship and experience.

Student 4 Reply
I agree with the importance that you put on supervisors disclosing mistakes that they have made. I think that this has really helped me develop relationships with supervisors. Supervisors may have a difficult time admitting to mistakes in front of the people they are supposed to be evaluating. As a supervisor, I can see how someone would want to represent themselves as experienced, skilled, and capable of supervising others; some supervisors might believe that by admitting mistakes, they are undermining the authority of their position. From my perspective as a supervisee, I have found it helpful when supervisors discuss past and current mistakes that they have made in their work. Because every individual will make errors throughout his/her career, it isn't accurate or helpful for supervisors to fail to disclose these. By discussing mistakes that a supervisor made with his/her supervisee, it presents an important learning opportunity for the supervisee. The supervisor may benefit from supervisee perspectives and suggestions about how to remedy the situation as well. Lastly, if the supervisor has been open about mistakes that he/she has made, a supervisee may be less likely to hide his/her own mistakes and be more comfortable talking about them with the supervisor.

Student 5 Reply
My supervisor has made a point to establish an open and honest communication between the two of us. In concordance with the guidelines established by Bernard and Goodyear (2009), she and I established an open and supportive relationship from the very beginning. While still maintaining authority and professionalism, she has shared with me mistakes that she has made in the past that she has learned from in order to normalize errors that I have made and also help me to learn from
her previous mistakes. For example, the first time that I administered the WISC-IV to a student at my practicum, the administration took longer to complete than my supervisor was expecting. She and I had discussed the fact that I would administer the WISC-IV in the morning, and she would administer other assessments in the afternoon.

However, the student I was testing was very talkative, and I wanted to establish a positive rapport, and therefore did not move the testing along as quickly as I should have. I was not aware that this was a significant problem until my supervisor expressed surprise at how long the testing was taking. However, rather than make me feel ashamed, she expressed surprise that we were not done yet, and then briefly mentioned a time when she was completing her practicum and took longer to administer an assessment than was expected. This let me know that I should be moving along in a more timely manner, but did not make me feel ashamed, because she disclosed having been in a similar position, and understanding that I was in the process of developing these skills. As such, she communicated effectively and conscientiously, and I was able to work on those skills.

Student 2 Initial Response
Given the discussions and readings we’ve done over the last few weeks, there are several key concepts that I plan to integrate into my establishment of a relationship with future supervisees. First, I’m more aware of how important it is to take into consideration one’s theoretical background. Understanding the theoretical orientation of a supervisee is important, akin to taking into consideration cultural differences in perception of a situation. By having an open discussion about theoretical orientation, I hope to understand where my supervisee is coming from, which will in turn help me understand how they perceive situations. Additionally, if I have the choice of who I supervise, I want to make sure that their orientation is at least in the same general domain as mine. I think that taking on a supervisee who has a dramatically different perspective than mine (e.g. purely psychodynamic) is a good way to set up conflict. Taking this into consideration can hopefully avoid any future problems. Second, I’ll think very carefully about how to conduct performance feedback, as well as how to evaluate a supervisee. Constructing a form that will be used to evaluate supervisee feedback was a very informative exercise, and made me think critically about how I’d wish to evaluate a supervisee. Importantly, I’d want to make sure that evaluative criteria are clearly established and communicated at the onset of supervision. I’d also want to make sure that evaluation forms are clear and objective, and that the supervisee has room to give their feedback on how they view their own performance and growth. And third, I’ll think very carefully about the boundaries and nature of the relationship with supervisees. Prior to this class, I’ve always thought that it’d be nice to have a collegial and friendly relation with a supervisee, and by in large I still do. Something that I haven’t spent a lot of time considering, however, is how this type of relationship may set up conflict. I can now see why it’s important to think about boundaries and the nature of the relationship with supervisees. Additionally, I think it’s important to try to feel, or directly ask, how the supervisee would like the relationship to be. I can imagine some supervisees would be more comfortable with a professional, less-casual supervisory relationship, while others may be just the opposite. This class and the readings have raised a host of issues that are related to psychological supervision that I had not previously considered, I look forward to continuing this investigation!

Student 3 Initial Response
As I approach the task of establishing a supervisory relationship with future supervisees, I will incorporate many of the lessons and strategies from the readings and discussion in this course. Specifically, I plan to establish an open and trusting environment, utilize clear and consistent evaluation criteria, and recognize and react to supervisee resistance.

I feel that an overarching theme of many of our readings has been the importance of an open and trusting supervisory relationship. For example, many of the items in the table "How to be a lousy supervisor" (Nelson, 2002 as cited in Bernard & Goodyear, 2009) relate to the degree of trust and openness in the supervisory relationship. As a supervisor, I feel that it will be my responsibility to ensure that an open and trusting environment is achieved. In order to do so, I will need to explicitly focus on many elements including cultural competency, sensitivity to individual differences, clear communication, and supportiveness.
Another strategy that I will take from the supervision literature is to utilize clear and consistent evaluation criteria. The use of clear and consistent evaluation criteria is an important factor in supporting supervisee progress as well as in maintaining a trusting atmosphere. In addition, shared goals for evaluation contribute to a positive working relationship and a stronger working alliance (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009).

Finally, I will work to recognize and react to supervisee resistance. Before participating in this course, I had limited knowledge about supervisee resistance and no experience with this. After reading more of the supervision literature, I am now aware that supervisee resistance is a common problem in supervisory relationships. Resistance can take multiple forms, including resistance to the supervisor’s influence, resistance to the supervisory experience itself, and noncompliance with tasks (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). The research conducted by Wilcoxen et al. (2005) is useful in providing a schema that may assist supervisors in identifying potentially troublesome behaviors, attitudes, and skills, as well as bolster identification of strategies for remediation. As a supervisor, I plan to deliberately create a climate that minimizes supervisee resistance, and to be aware of common signs of resistance so that I can be responsive to this behavior and intervene effectively.

McColley & Baker (1982, as cited in Bernard & Goodyear, 2009) found that novice supervisors identified their primary difficulty to be that of not knowing how to intervene effectively with supervisee resistance. While our readings have focused on characteristics of supervisee resistance, little information has been provided on how to effectively intervene. What are some ways you, as a supervisor, might react to supervisee resistance?

**Student 4 Initial Response**

As I approach the task of establishing a supervisory relationship with future supervisees I tend to rely on the notion that one can not possibly predict everything, but that one can be prepared for almost anything. Using our readings as references, I believe that we will be better able to achieve positive and productive supervisory relationships.

It seems that aside from functioning as a good teacher and model for a supervisee, specific and proactive efforts can enhance the dyadic relationship. As we have discussed the value of being planful and programmatic in our evaluation activities by using structured tools and methods, in addition to previewing and reviewing goals and expectations with our supervisee, I believe that the same type of forethought should be put into the building and maintenance of the relationship.

I believe an awareness and anticipation of the multiple factors which can help or harm a supervisory relationship is a necessary starting point. I will take the advice from Bridges (1999) as cited by Bernard and Goodyear (2009) by creating a "shame free learning milieu" or as I like to say, a "safe space" during supervision. The notion here being to acknowledge the power differential, behave accordingly and with respect, and to bring awareness to the supervisee that while expectations are high, expert performance is not immediately expected and may not be possible for them at this point in their path. Furthermore, I will communicate the importance of sharing mistakes so that open discussions can take place during supervision. Here, the outcome being to help prevent similar mistakes in the future and to appropriately handle them in "real-time". Suggestions by Bernard and Goodyear to "share personal mistakes" may be one way to help achieve this understanding and create a more open communication of a supervisee's performance and self-appraisal. If this type of arrangement and ongoing effort to establish this type of dynamic are not made, negative products (e.g., supervisee feelings of shame, resistant or non-compliant behavior, anxiety during supervision, etc.) are likely to manifest.