

**Comments to Psychology Board of Australia
on
Consultation Paper
on
Guideline for Approved Training Programs in Psychology Supervision**

June 2010

1. Competency-based training

A. Competencies The guidelines specify a core competence of “the ability to develop and assess the necessary competence in supervisees” (p. 6) and list 6 somewhat more specific groups of competencies (principles, practices, assessment, alliance, legal and ethical, evaluating supervision process). Falender et al. (2004) provided a more detailed list with 5 essential supra-ordinate factors and 6 groups of core competencies comprising 43 more specific competencies (6 knowledge, 12 skills, 10 values, 6 social context, 2 training and 7 assessment). Several important components of the Falender et al. list are not included in the guidelines. Of particular note is the absence of

“recognition that attention to diversity in all of its forms (e.g. age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, etc.) relates to every aspect of the supervision process and requires specific competence” (Falender et al. 2005, p. 775)

Another absence is reflective practice. Although the following quote refers to the use of reflective practice in therapy, the same arguments can be made for reflective practice in supervision:

“Reflective practice is an essential foundational competency and is part of all forms of psychotherapy. Consistent with Belar (2009), reflective practice, as with other competencies, should not be considered in isolation; rather, reflectivity should be viewed in the context of other associated competencies and as an informer of appropriate action, for example, relationship, ethics and professionalism. Particularly challenging for the novice clinician (and perhaps, for experts as well) is developing skills of reflection-in-action, metacognition, and metacompetence.” (Falender and Shafranske, 2010, p. 47).

There is likely to be a wide range of views as to the necessary core competencies for supervisors. There is also a question as to how detailed the competency requirements should be; if they are very broad then they can be interpreted differently by different presenters, but if they are too specific then there is a risk of “stove-piping’ competencies and failing to recognise how they are interrelated and interactive” (Belar, 2009p. S63). A process of consultation is needed to maximise agreement on the competency requirements for PBA supervision training.

B. Board requirements Another issue in relation to supervision training is the place of training in the PBA requirements for registration (via approved courses or via 4+2). Around 40% of the NSW supervision package addressed the NSW Board’s requirements and reporting procedures/forms. Although participants often experienced some of this as tedious, there was general agreement between the 4+2 supervisors that it was an essential part of the training because they had been unable to grasp the details and intent of the requirements simply by reading the *Supervision Guidelines*. Furthermore, the Board was able to reduce future problems by ensuring that problems in supervisors’ application of the guidelines (e.g. not

ensuring 25 hours individual supervision per 6 months once an Intern had completed 100 hours supervision) were highlighted in supervision workshops. However, participants who only supervise students from approved Masters/Doctoral programs experienced most of the requirements-based content as irrelevant. Their primary learning was from understanding the principles underlying the Board's reporting processes so they could apply the same principles in their contracting and reporting with university Interns.

The PBA guidelines do not mention training in Board requirements and reporting procedures for 4+2 program. How will these be transmitted to 4+2 supervisors:

- by requiring 4+2 supervisors to attend an extra day of specific training?
- by including the material in the generic workshop, thus requiring university-Intern supervisors to learn the material?
- by requiring 4+2 supervisors to study the PBA supervision guidelines and pass a test on requirements?

My preference would be for the material to be included in the generic workshop, but I expect this would result in many complaints from university-Intern supervisors.

Recommendation 1:

- 1A. That the PBA conduct a consultation process to develop a more detailed list of the essential competencies (including cultural sensitivity) to be included in Board-approved training workshops.
- 1B. That the PBA conduct a consultation process to identify the optimal method of developing 4+2 supervisors' competence in applying the Board's requirements and reporting procedures.

2. Hours of training

Fifteen hours is far too many hours to do in 2 days. With short lunch/tea breaks (45, 15, 15) it would require two 8.75 days (7.5 + 1.25), that is, from 9 to 5.45. With short breaks, workshop participants complain that they are "brain dead" by 4.00 pm. How much learning would occur between 4 and 5.45?

Furthermore, even allowing for a further 15 hours of private study, 15 hours of workshop time is insufficient to develop sufficient competence across the huge number of essential competencies. The problem is even greater if the Board's 4+2 requirements and reporting procedures are included in the workshop.

One argument that I have heard for keeping the training to 2 days is that a longer training would be a disincentive to psychologists to become approved supervisors. However, the huge issue for NSW psychologists at the supervision workshops was their anxiety about the small test. Thus, the greatest disincentive to do the new training will not be the length of the training but rather, the exams and video assessment. Many NSW participants said they would be very reluctant to do a training that had much more rigorous assessment unless they received sufficient training to develop confidence to do the assessment. In my view, the more rigorous assessment proposed in the guidelines is necessary, so the challenge is to provide a training that is of sufficient length to develop participant's competence AND confidence. Extending the workshop time to 18 hours (3 days x 6 hours) or 24 hours (4 days x 6 hours) might discourage some psychologists from attending due to increased time and cost, but it is likely to be preferred by many psychologists to help them to feel prepared for the assessments.

Recommendation 2:

That the PBA increase the workshop hours from 15 to 18 (or 24) hours across 3 (or 4) days.

3. Assessment of potential supervisors

The guidelines state that in NSW there is a “short written knowledge tests that relates specifically to the administrative requirements of the internship program” (p. 8). This is incorrect. The test was designed both to assess knowledge of some core competencies and to provide further training in those competencies (by having the participants self-score the test using a list of criteria). The training openly highlighted the core knowledge to be tested to maximise learning of these competencies. The knowledge assessed is: negotiating external supervision arrangements with line manager, addressing previous problems in supervision, developing a strong supervisory alliance, conducting a needs assessment, goal setting and contracting, addressing a rupture in the supervisory alliance, legal requirements for use of videotapes, methods for using videotapes in supervision, addressing a competency/ethical issue, providing support for remediation, following due process. The test is scored out of 24 (3 scenarios x 8 points each). The majority (20) of the items are generic supervision competencies with no reference to the Board’s administrative requirements. On four of the items, half of the point involves the Board’s forms, but the other half is a generic supervision competency.

The guidelines propose assessment “across a number of domains using a range of techniques” (principles, decision-making skills, supervisory performance). I welcome the introduction of more rigorous assessment. If the written assessment occurs at a later date than the training then it will ensure that supervisors do further study (and avoid them having to do the written assessment at the end of a tiring workshop when they are ‘brain dead’). The video presentation will ensure further practice and that participants achieve a reasonable level of *skills* competence. However, it would be inequitable to have different tests and different standards across different trainers.

Recommendation 3:

- 3A. That the PBA contract a consultant or consultative group to design the written and video assessment methods and provide detailed scoring criteria so that all trainers can “be responsible for the administration and scoring of the assessment to a standard approved by the Board” (p. 8).
- 3B. That all assessments are conducted at least one week after workshop attendance to provide the opportunity (and expectation) that psychologists will do considerable private study and practice before undertaking the assessments. The written assessments could be done in open-book, exam conditions under the supervision of an authorised supervisor.

4. Endorsed trainers

The guideline proposes that “all trainers must... have endorsement in at least one area of practice” (p. 4). While it is obvious that a supervisor must be endorsed in the area of practice in which they are supervising, it is arguable that the trainer of supervisors needs to be endorsed. For competence-based training, I believe that the criteria for selecting trainers should be demonstrated competence in supervision and in training. Supervision is a generic skill relevant to all areas of practice; there is nothing in the criteria for gaining endorsement that indicates competence in either supervisor or training. Furthermore, I can’t think of any grounds for arguing that an endorsed psychologist in one area of practice (e.g. organisational) would be, on the basis of their endorsement, more competent to provide supervision training for

generalist psychologists or for psychologists endorsed in other areas of practice (e.g. counseling) than would a generalist psychologist.

When considering my comments on this point, it should be noted that I am a generalist psychologist, that I wrote the NSW supervision package in 2005 and that I have been a contracted trainer of the package throughout the time it has been presented (2006-2010). The trainings have been very positively evaluated by participants and have been very effective in developing supervision competencies (in terms of participant's self-assessment of their gains from the workshops). My views could be taken as a reasonable argument that supervision trainers do not need to be endorsed psychologists, or they could be dismissed simply as self-interest!

Recommendation 4:

That the PBA change the requirements from "endorsement in at least one area of practice" to "demonstrated competence in supervision and in training".

Belar, C.D. (2009). Advancing the culture of competence. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 3, 4(Suppl.), S63-S65.

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PS0004311