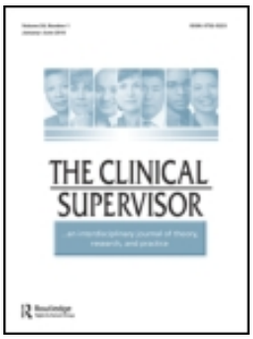

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Supervision As Pedagogy: Attending to Its Essential Instructional and Learning Processes

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The various supervision models each emphasize particular interventions. But to conceptualize supervision as a teaching-learning process permits a common framework and attention to supervision's basic change mechanisms. This article discusses the four learning strategies of modeling, feedback, direct instruction, and self-directed learning through reflective practice, arguing that their effects are mediated by the quality of the supervisory relationship. As well, it makes the case that feedback grounds a developmental continuum that extends from direct instruction when supervisees are learning new skills to reflective practice, which becomes increasingly prominent as the supervisee gains experience.

KEYWORDS supervision theory, supervision change mechanisms, supervision pedagogy

The acid test of how effective supervision is is simple: What are you (the supervisee) doing differently now that you were not doing before supervision? (Carroll, 2010, p. 1)

Note: An earlier version of this was presented at the 2013 International Interdisciplinary Conference on Clinical Supervision, Garden City, New York.

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INTRODUCTION

Supervision facilitates supervisee learning. It is surprising, then, that so few supervision scholars have drawn from the extensive literature on learning to inform their understandings of supervision processes. Johnston and Milne's (2012) concern that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) supervision has ignored modern educational theory is relevant to virtually all supervision models. This article argues that a learning perspective permits attention to supervision's elemental change mechanisms and, as Kazdin (2007) observed with respect to the related area of psychotherapy, "Understanding the mechanisms of change can bring order and parsimony to the current status of multiple interventions" (p. 4).

Supervision scholars have not wholly neglected learning mechanisms and processes. For example, Watkins and Scaturo (2013) proposed a learning-based model of supervision, and in a series of papers, Milne and his colleagues focused on interventions supervisors use to foster supervisee learning (James, Milne, & Morse, 2008; Johnston & Milne, 2012; Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick, & Ellis, 2008; Milne & James, 2000). This article builds on and extends that earlier work. Two studies are particularly relevant to that purpose: Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick, and Ellis (2008) identified 26 supervisor strategies, and McLeod, Steinert, Meagher, and McLeod (2003) identified 30 pedagogical concepts that clinical teachers in medicine use. But as important as these lists are, they are too extensive to give practical guidance in conceptualizing supervision. The other extreme, too much parsimony, occurs in Branch and Paranjape's (2002) focus on only the two methods of feedback and reflection.

This article proposes that supervisors promote supervisee learning through the two methods that Branch and Paranjape identify as well as through the two additional mechanisms of modeling and direct instruction. These four mechanisms reasonably encompass most of the Milne and colleagues (2008) and McLeod and colleagues (2003) strategies or concepts. And whereas the supervisory relationship seems clearly to be one of supervision's common factors (e.g., Ladany, Ellis, & Friedlander, 1999; Lampropoulos, 2003; Morgan & Sprenkle, 2007), these four strategies are sufficiently foundational to all supervision that they, too, should be considered to be among those common factors.

THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP: NECESSARY BUT INSUFFICIENT FOR SUPERVISEE LEARNING

Ellis's (2010) assertion that "good supervision is about the relationship" (p. 106) reflects both the evidence and the prevailing view of supervision experts. The supervisory relationship is necessary to enable supervisee learning. Moreover, the quality of that relationship will predict supervisees' perceptions of the extent

to which their experience constitutes "good supervision" (Worthen & McNeill, 1996), or on the other extreme, harmful supervision (Ellis et al., 2014).

Psychotherapy researchers have found the working alliance to be one of the most robust predictors of outcome (Wampold & Budge, 2012). Research does not permit an analogous claim with respect to the supervisory relationship and supervision outcomes, perhaps in part because of the multiple ways in which supervision outcomes can be conceptualized (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Tsong & Goodyear, in press). Nevertheless, the quality of the supervisory alliance has been shown to predict at least the extent to which supervisees are willing to disclose information to their supervisors (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, & Nutt, 1996; Mehr, Ladany, & Caskie, 2010; Webb & Wheeler, 1998), supervisee satisfaction with supervision (Ladany, Ellis, et al., 1999; Ladany, Lehrman-Waterman, Molinaro, & Wolgast, 1999), and quality of supervisees' alliances with their clients (Patton & Kivlighan, 1997).

But it is reasonable to consider the supervisory relationship as less an active mechanism of supervisee learning than a mediator of the four more basic ones discussed in this article (see Figure 1). My assertion that it is a

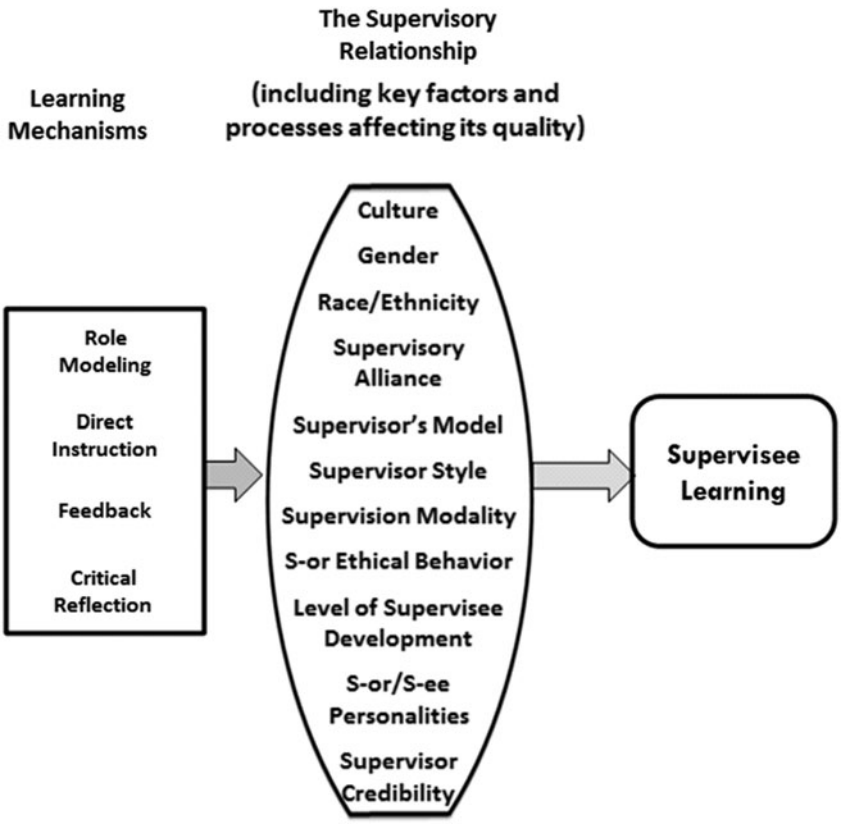

FIGURE 1. A mediated model of supervisee learning.

mediator draws from Baron and Kenny (1986): "A given variable may be said to function as a mediator to the extent that it accounts for the relationships between the predictor and the criterion" (p. 1176). By way of illustration, it can be useful to imagine each of the teaching strategies as a light beam the supervisor shines at the supervisee and the supervisory relationship as a lens through which that beam passes (see Figure 1). That lens can refract the light beam in directions the supervisor did not intend or even anticipate. Within the lens graphic in Figure 1 are listed many of the more important processes and factors that might affect relationship quality and therefore the refraction. The fact that space does not permit a discussion in this article of those factors does not at all diminish their importance. Reviews of their processes and impacts can be found in sources such as Bernard and Goodyear (2014).

FOUR KEY LEARNING MECHANISMS

Each of the four learning mechanisms of modeling, feedback, direct instruction, and self-directed learning is described in the sections that follow. All concern actions the supervisor takes to facilitate supervisee learning although those actions are more clearly direct in the first three instances; in the fourth, self-directed learning, the supervisor's role is to use Socratic and other types of questions (Johnston & Milne, 2012; Overholser, 1991; Watkins & Scaturo, 2013) to teach supervisees how to engage in self-supervision.

Modeling

Emulating others is a near-universal way of learning. It is one that is indispensable to novice professionals (see, e.g., Kenny, Mann, & Macleod, 2003; McLeod et al., 2003; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 1997). In their complementary attention to this type of learning, the two disciplines of psychology (esp. Bandura, 1969) and anthropology (e.g., Wolcott, 1982) both emphasize that it is one in which the teacher enacts that which the learner observes and then incorporates into his or her own behavior.

But whereas in the course of any particular day we have the opportunity to observe many potential models, we emulate only the very few with whom we identify in some way. This occurs with people we perceive as highly competent, as experts, or as celebrities, or as people with whom we see similarities on such dimensions as age, gender, social power, and race or ethnicity (Bandura, 1969). Von Feilitzen and Linné (1975) usefully distinguished between *similarity identification* and *wishful identification*. In the first case, people identify with and model the behaviors of those who are similar to them in some important way(s). In the latter case, people identify with and model the behaviors of those with whom they would like to be

similar. Both of these identification processes presumably operate in supervision: supervisors and supervisees are similar in some fundamental ways, including their interests reflected in their occupational choices; but supervisees *also* must experience wishful identification, for their supervisors have qualities they eventually want for themselves, in fact, often idealize the extent to which this is true (Yerushalmi, 1994).

Internalization As a Mechanism in Modeling

Vicarious learning can affect a person's self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1982): identifying with a person who performs a particular behavior successfully (or, conversely, attempts it and fails) causes people to adjust their own expectations about being able to do it. In fact, learners often internalize attitudes and perspectives of the person with whom they are identifying. The effects can be quite enduring. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) reported, for example, that one informant in their qualitative study

> … talked about John, his supervisor twenty years ago: "I have been running around in my mind words, phrases, quotes that I periodically pull back to … and sometimes I say to myself, how would John handle this situation." These "fantasy mentors" were often recalled with great fondness and appreciation. (p. 25)

Geller, Farber, and Schaffer (2010) found that "93% of our sample reported that they were aware of experiencing the felt presence of their supervisor a few times per month; 47% indicated that this experience occurred 2–3 times per week" (p. 215). Nye (2007) normalized this phenomenon when they observed that Vygotsky assumed that learning is social and, in fact, that "all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships" (p. 87).

Identification of this nature with the supervisor also accounts for the important influence of modeling on supervisees' professional identity development. In summarizing her studies of apprenticeships in developing societies, Lave (1996) asserted that observational learning in that context is much richer and deeper than the learning of simple skills. In fact, she noted that through observational learning in apprenticeship situations, "Mainly, people are becoming kinds of persons" (p. 157).

Intentional Modeling versus Incidental Learning

Supervisors serve as intentional models to their supervisees when they, for example, provide opportunities for supervisees to watch them live, on video, or as cotherapists. They also model desired interpersonal behaviors as they interact with supervisees. For example, the supervisor who models immediacy and interpersonal risk taking with a supervisee who is distant and intellectual with clients is providing that supervisee with the opportunity to learn a new

therapeutic stance. Supervisors also provide important modeling when they verbalize their thinking about clients and other clinical dynamics (Reilly, 2007). This last no doubt accounts for the strong influence that supervisors' theoretical orientations often have on the orientations their supervisees adopt (Guest & Beutler, 1988).

But at least a portion of what supervisors model is done *un*intentionally. Regardless of whether they are aware of their impacts, supervisors always are teaching by example through what Bandura and Huston (1961) termed "incidental learning." Such modeling can concern clinical phenomena. But it also can concern attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be a professional of a particular type (e.g., psychologist, social worker, counselor, and so on). As a result, supervisors have very important effects—for better or worse—on supervisees' professionalism (Grus & Kaslow, 2014) and ethical behavior. In fact, supervisees perceive supervisors' failures with respect to modeling ethical behavior to be one type of ethical violation (Ladany, Lehrman-Waterman, et al., 1999).

Feedback

Feedback is a term used so commonly that it can be surprising to realize just how recently it entered the social sciences vocabulary. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) reported that the social psychologist Kurt Lewin appropriated the word *feedback* from electrical engineering during the 1950s when he was working with human relations groups (t-groups). Performance feedback, the version of feedback that is of particular relevance to this discussion, is information intended to reduce discrepancies between what the person currently knows and is able to do and what is desirable for him or her to be able to know or do (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It is therefore a consequence of performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81) and so exerts an influencing function as the person evaluates his or her behavior against some standard. As Claiborn and Goodyear (2005) observed, "Feedback simultaneously conveys information about a behavior that has occurred and influences the likelihood and nature of its recurrence. In reacting to the past, feedback shapes the future" (p. 210).

Feedback is indispensable to supervisee learning. Supervisors, though, often—and perhaps typically—fail to maximize its effectiveness. At least two studies have confirmed that supervisors deliver feedback relatively infrequently. Friedlander, Siegel, and Brenock (1989) observed only 14 instances of feedback in 9 sessions of 1 supervisory dyad; 8 of those instances occurred during the last 2 sessions; Milne and Westerman (2001) found that only 3% of supervisor interventions they studied were feedback. In light of those findings, it is significant that Ladany, Lehrman-Waterman, and colleagues (1999) found inadequate and poorly delivered feedback to be the single most common ethical complaint supervisees had against their

supervisors, accounting for fully one-third of the reported ethical problems they reported.

There are several important dimensions to understand about the feedback that supervisors provide. Some of these are considered in the following sections.

Feedback Dimensions

One dimension Friedlander and colleagues (1989) suggested in their rationally developed taxonomy of supervisory feedback was that of feedback *specificity*. Bordin (1983) maintained that all supervisees want the reassurance that they receive from positive global feedback (e.g., "you are doing a really fine job in your work"). Certainly this has important effects on supervisee motivation. But learning requires feedback specificity: The best feedback is clear, direct, and based on clearly specified criteria.

In order to provide this, the supervisor must directly observe the supervisees' work and not rely simply on supervisee self-report. Self-report is the most common supervision modality (see Goodyear & Nelson, 1997), but one that precludes a truly accurate picture of supervisee behavior (Amerikaner & Rose, 2012). Even when the supervisee intends to provide an accurate account, there are the normal challenges of painting a verbal picture to another person of a very complex set of interactions. And then the accounts get further distorted by supervisees' understandable wish to manage impressions of their work. In fact, their tendency to distort or withhold information has been amply documented (see, e.g., Ladany et al., 1996; Mehr et al., 2010; Yourman & Farber, 1996). Haggerty and Hilsenroth (2011) vividly illustrate the challenges self-reports present by using this analogy:

> Suppose a loved one has to undergo surgery and you need to choose between two surgeons, one of whom has never been directly observed by an experienced surgeon while performing any surgery. He or she would perform the surgery and return to his or her attending physician and try to recall, sometimes incompletely or inaccurately, the intricate steps of the surgery they just performed. It is hard to imagine that anyone, given a choice, would prefer this over a professional who has been routinely observed in the practice of their craft. This example sounds extreme yet this situation parallels what frequently occurs in … psychotherapy training. (p. 193)

A second Friedlander and colleagues dimension was that of feedback *valence*. This concerns positive information to the supervisee that she or he is meeting or exceeding expected standards versus the more negative challenging or corrective feedback that his or her performance is not meeting expectations. Receiving either type of feedback elicits affect. Corrective feedback, for example, may elicit disappointment, demoralization, or even

shame (see Watkins, 2012). These and other emotional reactions can affect not only supervisees' motivation, but also their ability to "hear" the feedback they are provided. To help address this, Chur-Hansen and Mclean (2006) suggested that supervisors "Use the positive–negative–positive approach in delivering feedback: 1. say something about the student's strengths; 2. identify the specific problem; 3. finish with a motivating or positively enhancing statement" (p. 67).

But no matter how the supervisor delivers negative feedback, it still has affective impact on the supervisee. Therefore, as supervisors experience empathy for supervisees' vulnerabilities and feelings, they often find it difficult to deliver corrective feedback. Hoffman and colleagues (2005) found, for example, that supervisors reported becoming more vague when giving difficult feedback, thereby attenuating its usefulness. The irony, of course, is that these typically are the supervisees who most could profit from clear, direct feedback.

Racial and ethnic differences between the supervisor and supervisee also can moderate what feedback supervisors give and how. Constantine and Sue (2007), for example, identified supervisors holding back on critical feedback for fear of being perceived as a racist as a microaggression. Burkard, Knox, Clarke, Phelps, and Inman (2014) have demonstrated the challenges supervisors experience when delivering cross-racial/ethnic supervision. This seems to speak to the importance of the supervisor continually monitoring and improving his or her multicultural competence.

It is useful to consider feedback *formality* as an addition to the Friedlander and colleagues dimensions. Formal feedback is intentional and often has a particular structure to it. But Farr (1993) maintained that the informal feedback people receive in day-to-day interactions often can have greater impact than the more formal feedback. In fact, supervisors constantly give feedback even when they may not be aware of it (similar to the unintentional modeling discussed earlier). This informal feedback might be as simple as a raised eyebrow, a frown, or tone of voice in a question as the supervisor observes the supervisee's work. That supervisees pick up on and respond to these feedback "leakage" cues speaks to the importance of maintaining sensitivity to reactions from the supervisee that signal the need to process or otherwise attend to their reactions.

Finally, there is an important distinction to be made between feedback that is either formative or summative. Summative feedback punctuates the end of a particular training period (e.g., a semester; a midpoint or end of a practicum, internship, or internship rotation). This tends to be high-stakes feedback in that there can be consequences—for example, grades or whether a practicum or internship was successful—and so often is labeled as evaluation. Formative feedback, on the other hand, is delivered on an ongoing basis throughout the supervisory experience. Both formative and summative feedback influences performance, though formative feedback is more immediate in its effects on supervisee learning and Archer (2010) cautions that the dichotomy between these two types of feedback can be more illusory than real.

Changes in Feedback-Seeking Behavior As Supervisees Develop

No topic has dominated supervision research as much as has that of supervisee development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014): how supervisees' motivation, behavior, and attitudes change as they gain experience. A consistent finding is that beginning supervisees initially are more dependent on their supervisors and appreciate being given specific direction whereas more experienced supervisees appreciate a more consultative role from their supervisor. Put another way, beginning supervisees rely more heavily on being provided feedback whereas supervisees experience increasing felt-autonomy as they gain experience (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010) and the knowledge and skill base necessary for them to take more responsibility for their learning. These shifts in how feedback is delivered and used as supervisees gain experience are reflected in Figure 2 and are discussed in the sections that follow.

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction involves telling or showing (including, sometimes, modeling) the supervisee how to perform some skill or skill set, and then providing corrective feedback as he or she practices. Lewandowsky and Thomas (2009) observed that direct instruction

> . . . [first] involves a well-defined, specific task that the learner seeks to master. Second, task performance is followed by immediate feedback. Third, there is opportunity for repetition, and fourth, learners must actively exploit the opportunity for improvement afforded by errors. (p. 143)

Milne and colleagues (2008) found direct instruction to be the most frequent supervisory intervention in the studies they reviewed. Certainly this is true with respect to the development of basic skills and training that is

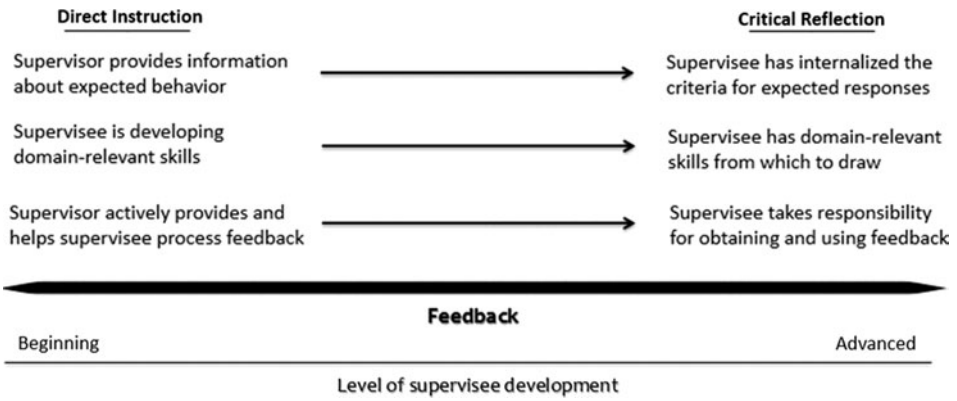

FIGURE 2. Direct instruction to critical reflection: Evolving uses of feedback as supervisees gain experience.

based on models of theorists such as Carkhuff (e.g., 1969), Kagan (1997), Ivey (1971) which have been found to have robust effect sizes (Hill & Knox, 2013; Hill & Lent, 2006). But direct instruction is not limited to use with beginning supervisees: this is an important instructional strategy for more advanced supervisees as well when they develop new skills in a specific domain.

Scaffolding

To scaffold is to "provide or support with a raised framework or platform" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2010; http://www.thefreedictionary.com/scaffold). Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) employed scaffolding as a metaphor that they applied to instruction. They described it as a

> . . . process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult "controlling" those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. (p. 90)

The concept of scaffolding, though, has been sufficiently fuzzy that its meanings have varied sometimes to include simply support for the learner (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010; see also James et al., 2008; Tilley et al., 2007). But despite some variability in how the concept is understood, Van de Pol and colleagues (2010) observed that there are two essential scaffolding strategies the teacher (supervisor) can employ: (1) gradually transferring responsibility to the supervisee and (2) gradually removing support. Both strategies concern customizing the learning experience to the capabilities of the particular supervisee. Perhaps it should be added that timing of feedback (Archer, 2010) can be another factor in scaffolding, with direct and immediate feedback much more important when a person first is learning a particular constellation of skills. Scaffolding is really the intention in the American Psychological Association's *Guidelines and Principles of Accreditation* (2009) requirement that training be "sequential, cumulative, graded in complexity" (p. 7).

It is useful to conclude this section on direct instruction by returning to Figure 2. It depicts a developmental continuum that is anchored on one end by guided instruction and on the other by self-directed learning. Feedback is the constant between them. The supervisee progresses from a state of not having internalized the expected performance standards to having increasingly done so. As those standards are internalized, a shift occurs from the supervisee having to look exclusively to the supervisor to obtain performance feedback to being able to seek and use feedback on one's own; to become a self-regulating learner.

Self-Regulated Learning Through Reflective Practice

Kaslow (2004) discussed self-regulation as a competence that involves "assessing a situation and making decisions about what to do or not do based on that assessment; and [requires] the ability to evaluate and modify one's decisions, as appropriate, through reflective practice" (p. 775). In fact, reflective practice is the primary means by which professionals enact self-regulated learning. The model of competencies that has become dominant in psychology (Rodolfa et al., 2005; Fouad et al., 2009) treats reflection as one of the foundational competencies.

Dewey's (1933) conception of the reflective processes is one that subsequent scholars (e.g., Schön, 1983, 1987) have employed consistently, albeit with their own small variations. In that conception, the reflective process begins with a trigger event (see Neufeldt, Karno, & Nelson, 1996): something happens that is unexpected, puzzling, or otherwise upsetting to the practitioner. In response, she or he begins an analysis of the situation that (ideally) culminates in new understandings of the situation. Bandura (2001) observed the following: "In this metacognitive activity, people judge the correctness of their predictive and operative thinking against the outcomes of their actions, the effects that other people's actions produce, what others believe, deductions from established knowledge and what necessarily follows from it" (p. 10).

Whereas the other change mechanisms discussed in this article depend directly on actions the supervisor takes, it is the supervisee who is agentic in reflective practice. But his or her ability to do this effectively will be affected by provision of knowledge about necessary content and processes. The content concerns the expected performance standards of the supervisee—what effective practice would "look like." Supervisees learn this through ongoing dialogues with their supervisors and from the feedback they receive. They learn the *processes* of reflective practice in the course of their own supervision as their supervisors help them recognize signals that something is amiss and as well as how then to think about the problem. Reasonably, this is learned through such supervisor techniques as Interpersonal Process Recall (Kagan, 1997) and Socratic questioning (Orchowski, Evangelista, & Probst, 2010; Overholser, 1991); Moffett (2009) described a self-reflection protocol that concerned questions for the supervisee specific to training issues that routinely have emerged at the particular training site. And because reflective practice involves hypothesis testing, the supervisor also can play an important role in guiding supervisees to seek and attend to not only confirmatory information (which seems a general human tendency; see Nickerson, 1998), but disconfirming information as well (see Tracey, Wampold, Lichtenberg, & Goodyear, 2014).

Feedback: Internal and External

Butler and Winne (1995) argued that self-regulation requires that the person engage in ongoing self-monitoring. Doing so enables him or her to be aware

of *internal* feedback when some discrepancy exists between his or her (1) performance and (2) an internalized standard. This awareness is a trigger event that initiates a cognitive process that is enabled by *external* feedback that the person then seeks out.

But external feedback also can trigger reflection. For example, the supervisee who is provided feedback concerning implicit racial attitudes that the supervisor is observing (see, e.g., Burkard et al., 2014) has an opportunity to engage in reflection that may result in seeking yet more external feedback. As well, routinely obtaining client feedback has been shown to increase treatment effectiveness (Lambert & Shimokawa, 2011; Shimokawa, Lambert, & Smart, 2010), and can have important effects on the supervisee as well (see Reese et al., 2009). But to receive feedback that a client is doing less well than expected is primarily a signal that something is amiss; it provides no specific information to the therapist about his or her behavior and its effects (Tracey et al., 2014). Therefore, it serves as a trigger event that stimulates the seeking of additional information and then a reflective process.

Self-Regulated Learning As a Vehicle for Lifelong Learning

By the time a mental health professional is licensed for independent practice, she or he should have both the ability and the will to self-supervise (Dennin & Ellis, 2003): to be able to engage in the intentional acts of seeking and using feedback. Farr (1993) described the work setting as an "information environment" (p. 164) in which a person has available a range of information that can be useful to him or her about his or her level of performance. As supervisees develop greater autonomy and have sufficient knowledge about both what is good or expected performance, they can seek feedback in their environments. This feedback might come from other supervisees (e.g., in group supervision) as well as in such environmental indicators as no-show rates and in routinely monitoring client progress as discussed earlier.

This is not to suggest that reflective practice is the exclusive domain of more advanced supervisees and professionals: Supervisees at all levels can profit from it, though less advanced supervisees rely correspondingly more on the supervisor to guide them in that process. In providing that guidance, those supervisors simultaneously are teaching supervisees how to do this for themselves as they internalize processes they then can employ lifelong for themselves.

In their studies of the very best therapists, whom they termed "supershrinks," Miller, Hubble, and Duncan (2008) found that they"without exception possess a keen 'situational awareness': They are observant, alert and attentive. They compare new information constantly with what they already know" (p. 19).

This stance is consistent with that of both a scientist-practitioner (Overholser, 2010) and a local clinical scientist model, the latter of which Stricker (2007) described as "the display of a questioning attitude and search

for confirmatory or disconfirmatory evidence" (p. 86). It speaks, too, of having metacompetence, or the "the ability to assess what one knows and what one doesn't know" (Falender & Shafranske, 2007, p. 232; see also, Roth & Pilling, 2008).

CONCLUSION

This article has presented the argument that all supervisors facilitate supervisee learning through several particular strategies that it described. It argued that these strategies constitute elemental, pantheoretical change mechanisms. Whereas it could be possible to describe more such strategies (Tharp and Gallimore [1988] and Watkins and Scaturo [2013] each argued for two additional ones, for example, though not the same two) these four have emerged from the supervision literature as those most important in fostering supervisee learning.

Two particularly notable aspects of this article are its proposals regarding (1) the role of the supervisory relationship in facilitating learning and (2) a suggested continuum from direct instruction through self-directed learning in which feedback is a common element. Both have the potential to inform supervision research and practice.

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