

Networks of Professional Supervision

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An ecological analysis of the supervisory activity of 31 New Zealand school psychologists examined simultaneously the theories of school psychology, supervision practices, and the contextual qualities that mediated participants' supervisory actions. The findings indicated that the school psychologists worked to achieve the supervision goals of support, knowledge, and accountability through reciprocal interaction in multiple relationships within and outside of their professional community. With the notion of supervision broadened to include all activity undertaken to meet the supervisory goals, greater levels of participation and satisfaction with supervisory provision were shown than in many previous studies. The school psychologists utilized various opportunities for supervision support in their day-to-day practice rather than relying solely on traditional dyadic or fixed-group forms. Supervision practices of the school psychologists were situated within the activity of a networked community of supervision practice. Implications for conceptualizing supervision as a broad, situated activity are discussed.

Keywords: supervision, networks, educational psychology, school psychology, community of practice

Participation in Supervision

Supervision is regarded as an essential component of sound professional practice in various social professions. It is the cornerstone of professional development (Falender & Shafranske, 2004) and deeply entrenched in the ethos of professionals such as school psychology (Allison & Upah, 2008; Crespi & Dube, 2006; Flanagan & Grehan, 2011; Harvey & Struzziero, 2008; Sullivan & Conoley, 2008; Wells, 2009), counseling (McMahon & Patton, 2002; Nelson, Nichter & Henriksen, 2010; Scaife, 2001), nursing (Ashmore & Carver, 2000; Koivu, Hyrkas, & Saarinen, 2011), teaching (Marshall, 2009; Nolan & Hoover, 2007), and postgraduate study (Holbrook & Johnston, 1999; Stenken & Zajicek,

2010). Supervision in school psychology is an essential vehicle for professional development, facilitating effective delivery of psychological services, and maintaining competencies (McIntosh & Phelps, 2000). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) position statement on supervision (2011) states that "supervision of educators is essential to school improvement and student success" (p. 5).

Over the past two decades, school psychologists have reported low rates of participation in supervision, and many have expressed dissatisfaction with their supervisory experience (Chafouleas, Clonan, & VanAuker, 2002; Jimerson et al., 2006; Fischetti & Crespi, 1999; Pomerantz, 1993; Ryba, Annan, & Mentis, 2001; Smith Harvey & Pearrow, 2010). The findings of research conducted by Thielking, Moore, and Jimerson (2006) suggest that concerns with supervision continue. Their survey of 29 school psychologists in Australia found one third of the participants did not receive supervision and 46% did not experience supervision as satisfactory. Others have questioned the quality of supervision practice. For example, supervisors' failure to follow established models of supervi-

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sion or to use clinical techniques was seen to indicate a need for further education in supervision (Wells, 2009).

However, despite reports of unsatisfactory formal supervision, many psychologists are engaging in effective and competent work and have kept abreast of current school psychology practice. This observation suggests that they are discovering or creating other ways to meet the goals of supervision. Findings such as those in Thielking et al.'s (2006) Australian study of supervision in school psychology, which indicated that rates of formal supervision vary in relation to particular supervisory contexts and conditions, suggest that the supervisory environment plays a part in shaping the form of supervision that practitioners select. The nature of available supervision was not always acceptable to the experienced psychologists in Thielking et al.'s research. Supervision practice of school psychologists can be impacted uniquely by environmental influences, (e.g., systemic workplace qualities) (Smith Harvey & Pearrow, 2010). Other influences identified as mediating psychologists' experience of supervision included the nature and quality of professional relationships (Dickson, Moberley, Marshall, & Reilly, 2010) and cultural influences (Tummala-Narra, 2004).

The Purpose of Supervision

Supervision is undertaken for various purposes. Although each of the numerous models of supervision reflects a particular theoretical orientation, there is a high level of consistency about the foci of supervisory practice within the range of professions valuing and promoting supervision. In brief, supervision is carried out to achieve three broad purposes: (1) support, (2) accessing and developing professional knowledge, and (3) maintenance of professional standards. These three elements are assigned different names by the various writers. For example, Proctor (1987) named the three aspects with regard for their functions: *normative*, *formative*, and *restorative*. Similarly, Kadushin (1992) considered the functions of the three elements and chose to use the terms *supportive*, *administrative*, and *educative*. Supervisory activity in the various models of supervision usually involves each of these aspects simultaneously, with an emphasis determined by the supervisory

task at hand (Inskipp & Proctor, 1994; Scaife, 2001). The NASP gives weight to two dimensions: administrative supervision that emphasizes the normative aspect of practice and professional supervision that emphasizes the formative aspect of professional practice (NASP, 2011).

Thinking About Supervision

Activities most acceptable to people, and those in which they are most likely to engage, are those based on theories that practitioners genuinely hold (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Considering the wide diversity among practitioners and the dynamic nature of knowledge, supervision likely varies in form across different supervisory contexts and is transformed in response to various shifting theoretical perspectives. This suggests that professional groups such as school psychologists may not or need not be locked into thinking about supervision in one way, including its traditional form. Supervision in school psychology may extend beyond the traditional dyadic unit represented in most supervision literature. Flexibility is implied in the comment of McIntosh and Phelps (2000) below.

Supervision is an interpersonal interaction between two or more individuals for the purpose of sharing knowledge, assessing professional competencies, and providing objective feedback with the terminal goals of developing new competencies, facilitating effective delivery of psychological services, and maintaining professional competencies (McIntosh & Phelps, 2000, pp. 33–34).

McIntosh and Phelps defined supervision in such a way that did not determine any particular approach or type of relationship. Rather, the emphasis is on the purposes for which the supervisory activity was undertaken and, thus, is in line with the NASP perspective that comprises largely normative and formative aspects of supervision (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011).

Method of Inquiry

The purposes of the present study were to identify and understand participation in supervisory activity among a group of school psychologists. The scope of supervision was broadened to encompass all action taken by the participants to meet the goals of supervision: to

obtain and provide personal and professional support, further professional knowledge, and ensure that psychology practice was sound. This supervisory activity was viewed as the participants' supervision-in-action. Supervision-in-action was activity in which the participants had chosen to engage and therefore was able to shed light on the nature of participation and satisfactory supervisory events.

A situational analysis (Annan, 2005) based on ecological theory was undertaken to explore three levels of the context of supervision: supervisory practice, theoretical knowledge, and conditions that mediated supervisory practice and the theoretical knowledge. This method was chosen for two reasons. The method supported the development of understanding of the social, professional, and historical context of the current supervisory practice of the school psychologists, and it aligned with the casework conceptualization process of the participants. In a situational analysis, the method of exploring a topic is specifically designed for each situation and considers interdependent influences from multiple levels of the environment. It requires that the strengths of a situation are identified to provide a foundation for building new understandings and practices. The process is inherently collaborative, with participants taking an active role in creating shared meaning for their activity (see Annan, 2005 for details).

The situational analysis approach to research and professional practice requires that plans for data gathering are specifically designed to explore influences that may support or mitigate the situation and to seek information from various sources at various ecological levels. The social and historical contexts of supervision were explored using a combination of professional publication reviews and semistructured interviews to understand school psychologists' current means of pursuing supervision goals.

The exploration focused on the following areas. The methods to obtain information for each area are noted: (1) reported activity of the school psychologists in relation to the supervisory goals (using semistructured interviews and reference group consultation); (2) school psychologists' satisfaction with current supervisory arrangements (using semistructured interviews); (3) the historical and theoretical underpinnings of supervision (using reviews of supervision theory and research); (4) the theoretical basis of contemporary practice (using

reviews of contemporary educational psychology literature); and (5) conditions that mediate between supervision theory and supervision practice (using interviews).

Exploring the Supervisory Activity of a Group of School Psychologists

Thirty-one school psychologists whose professional experiences ranged from 1 to 18 years ($M = 9$ years) provided information about the ways they met their supervisory goals. The participants were employed in a government agency, in area offices, and independent of schools throughout the country. The school psychologists and other special educators employed by the agency (e.g., special education advisors and speech and language therapists) worked in multidisciplinary teams as consultants to surrounding schools and early childhood centers. The participants did not work in the same physical locations, yet being employed by the same agency they shared an Internet network and common practice guidelines. Most were connected through their participation in shared professional development meetings. Informed consent was received from each participant and from the employing organization. The study was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Auckland, New Zealand.

Using semistructured interviews, one researcher asked participants to discuss selected topics (listed below). Questions were designed to ensure that reference to supervision activity was generated by the participants and not imposed by the researchers. As the term *supervision* generally was assumed in the participants' workplace to represent a formalized, dyadic, or structured group activity, the opening two questions were framed to allow participants to report supervisory activity inside their familiar parameters. Responses to the opening questions served to document initial notions of supervision. The following five questions were asked: (1) *Purpose*: What is the purpose of your professional supervision? (2) *Concept of supervision*: What are the activities and content of supervision? (3) *Support and knowledge*: How do you access personal support and professional information for your work? (4) *Accountability*: How do you ensure that your fieldwork is proficient/of high quality? (5) *Satisfaction with su-*

pervision: Are you satisfied with your supervisory situation?

Participants were asked to comment on what they did rather than what they thought in order to help ensure that the data collected represented theories-in-action. Notes were taken in full view of the participants throughout the interviews and recorded as a combination of verbatim and summarized contributions. After the interview, all participants reviewed electronic copies of their contributions and modified these as they wished in order to help ensure that notes taken reflected participants' views. Each participant was asked to verify that the entries represented their view.

Deriving Meaning—Data Analysis

Information from interviews and literature or document reviews was considered simultaneously in the construction of a contextualized meaning. The situational analysis allowed institutional and professional discourse, a range of mediating influences, and the school psychologists' experience of providing and receiving support, professional knowledge, and accountability to be viewed simultaneously. Data were processed first by analysis of each ecological dimension and, during a second stage, by considering relationships among the dimensions.

Emerging themes in the data were categorized into discrete dimensions. NVivo computer software was used for coding, storing, and retrieving data provided by participants. The construction of meaning was performed manually. The theoretical dimension was informed by literature from the profession and from the participants' institution, the mediation dimension by written accounts (e.g., research reports) and the participants' views of influential conditions, and the supervision practice dimension by the participants' supervisory activity. When examining the supervision practice dimension, a process of identifying subthemes and assigning the data to each of these categories continued until the identified subthemes accounted for all information supplied by each participant. Once the three dimensions representing each level of the context of supervision were developed, five volunteer members of the professional community collaborated with the researcher to review and validate the results.

Results

The results are reported as three interrelated dimensions: (1) theories of supervision and practice, (2) contemporary supervision practice, and (3) mediators of supervision (See Figure 1).

Dimension 1: Theories of Supervision and Practice

Traditional notions of supervision. Over time, views of human development shift and social and professional systems change. What practitioners consider as assets, problems, or the best ways forward accordingly change (Munson, 2002). The nature of professional support is influenced by these changes.

Although the precise origin of supervision is not known, there are early accounts of supervision in the 1800s when social workers, within an arm of medicine, developed professional relationships with physicians. The traditional notion of supervision appears to have been shaped within the charity organizations of 19th century England where social workers guided the work of volunteers who provided moral treatments for the poor (Milne, 2009). Although the nature of professional practice and the relationships between fieldwork participants have changed recently, the espoused form and structure of supervision have remained reasonably constant, with a supervisor being responsible for the work of a nominated supervisee or group of supervisees whom they meet through regularly scheduled conferences (Munson, 2002).

Traditional notions of supervision remain implicit in many professions. This is evident in supervision literature that generally considers supervision as a dyadic interaction, usually between an experienced and less experienced member of a professional community. The single, often unidirectional, relationship is assumed in many supervision models, such as discrimination (Bernard, 1979), competency-based (Falender & Shafranske, 2004), developmental (Hewson, 1992; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998), systemic (Holloway, 1995), social-cognitive (Larson, 1998), double-matrix, (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992), and cyclical (Page & Wosket, 1994) models.

Contemporary practice. The nature of people's connections with one another recently has changed considerably, with growing na-

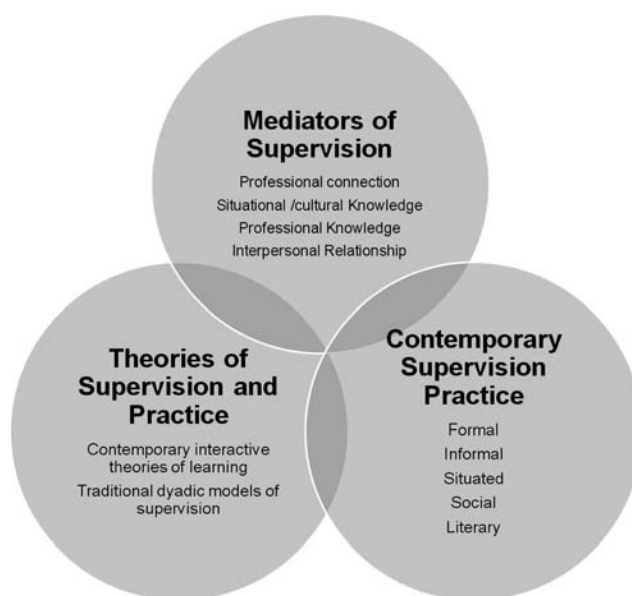


Figure 1. The three dimensions of supervisory practice.

tional and international mobility and an ever-increasing flow of knowledge through the Internet. People have access to a wider range of knowledge than ever before and can develop relationships with diverse groups of people. Just as the nature of human relationships has changed, so has associated social activity. In today's highly connected world, a single relationship is unlikely to satisfy practitioners' professional needs for support. Concurrent with changes in the social environment, there is a growing preference for theories of human development that view active reciprocity between people and their particular social environments and also increased recognition and appreciation of culture and diversity (see Annan & Priestley, 2011; Cameron, 2006; Farrell, 2010; Kennedy, 2006; Lee, 2010; Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Recent examples of mentoring that emphasize the support and knowledge aspects of practice indicate a shift in the way people think about professional assistance. Junior university staff members are advised to develop relationships with multiple mentors because single relationships may not provide all of the knowledge and support required for their projects (Stenken & Zajicek, 2010). Multiple supervision and mentoring relationships may contribute to individual and professional community

knowledge development as practitioners with varying levels of experience connect with one another. Tacit knowledge about organizational procedures comes to be known, notions of best practices are shared, and potential methods of problem solving are accessed through participation in such networks (Stenken & Zajicek, 2010). This suggests that effective and supportive mentoring is fostered through access to social networks.

Dimension 2: Contemporary Supervision Practice

The psychologists who participated in this study reported that they engaged in multiple activities to gather support, further professional knowledge, and help ensure that the quality of work was maintained. The forms of activity mentioned by the participants fell into five categories: informal supervision conversations, activity situated in the work of professional teams, formal supervision conversations, conferences and workshops, and access to professional literature through libraries and the Internet. Participants also noted the importance of professional reflection in meeting these goals.

Informal supervision conversations. All participants reported that they sought informal

or specifically targeted supervision conversations with colleagues concerning matters arising in their fieldwork. Some noted that supervision was an integrated process and that they never were really off-task at work and that supervision was what they did 8 hours a day. However, all participants reported making informal yet specific contacts with selected colleagues to discuss their work. Most commonly, they sought consultation with experienced psychologists who had knowledge and expertise in relation to a particular practice or project. The psychologists had a number of preferred colleagues who they approached first with professional problems. The nature of interaction within the group changed as individuals became more knowledgeable about school psychology practices. Several psychologists noted that as they gained professional experience, colleagues increasingly came to them for professional support.

Although most psychologists reported they would seek professional support from other psychologists, several approached professionals from other disciplines or colleagues who held management roles. Such arrangements often were reciprocal and developed for the duration of a specific project. Informal conversation was the preferred mode in emergency situations: some issues required immediate attention and could not wait 2 weeks. The degree of formality in specifically targeted supervision varied depending on the urgency and magnitude of the issue. Sometimes a brief conversation with a neighboring colleague would suffice, while at other times supervisory partners reported that they explored topics systematically and in depth.

Several participants indicated that informal or targeted conversations were the most efficient and effective means of meeting supervision goals. These conversations provided a focused level of support not always available in formal supervision. Some psychologists noted that they preferred informal, specifically targeted supervision and believed it offered benefits over formal supervision in terms of professional development, support, and ethical practice. One psychologist who did not find the provision of scheduled supervision rewarding indicated she was keen to work with colleagues and support them as matters arose and, on occasion, may suggest that they visit a field site together. While the participants valued informal supervision, some were mindful of their reliance

on the goodwill and schedules of the psychologists from whom they sought supervision. Participation in informal supervision required psychologists to consider the positions of other people and to construct shared understandings of roles and responsibilities when supervisory relationships were developed over specific issues.

Situated supervision: Professional/Interprofessional team activity. Participants discussed the supervisory benefits of active participation in service teams. Many spoke enthusiastically about the value of teaming to ensure high quality professional practice. All belonged to interdisciplinary teams that varied in the extent to which they engaged in coworking in field practice. One participant who worked closely with team members described the team functioning as a combination of shared working, shared reflection, and shared planning. Although members belonged to designated service teams, in practice, the composition of smaller working teams varied as teams were formed around specific field tasks.

Those involved in joint fieldwork welcomed the opportunity to work alongside others, debrief, review, and discuss case concerns. The team context provided opportunities to efficiently evaluate professional practice and to engage in meaningful interaction. Supervision often occurred amid activities associated with fieldwork (e.g., traveling to sites). One participant indicated that, following meetings, team members might ask if the situation could have been handled differently. Another commented she debriefed with colleagues while returning from sites.

Teaming provided many opportunities to learn with one another in an apprenticeship system. Working with other psychologists and team members from various disciplines provided a context that enabled the participants to gain a broader view and formed the basis of knowledge networks. The composition of teams also allowed members to work and learn alongside people from different cultures. Learning opportunities were available to new psychologists as well as to established members of the group who valued the opportunity teaming offered to associate with newcomers who contributed new perspectives on practice.

Most participants commented on the value of their participation in teams to check their practice with reference to relevant professional

codes. When working with people closely, practice was visible. Thus, to work unsafely, unnoticed, or ineffectively would be difficult. Teaming ensured that practices were visible and open. Some reported regular weekly opportunities to ask and to be asked, to seek advice, and to clarify concerns. Teaming was reported by participants to promote personal and public safety by allowing team members to identify when colleagues required help. It provided many opportunities to inform and affirm each other's practices on the job. Several participants commented that psychologists should not work alone and instead believed success increased as they evaluated the whole process with the group as they progressed.

In teams where coworking was infrequent (e.g., in smaller rural areas), school psychologists worked in relative isolation to their colleagues. Some of these participants noted that they would prefer to cowork more often yet made good use of informal supervision within their small office teams and supplemented support through other forms of professional connection.

Formal supervision conversations. Formal supervision conversation was the activity to which the participants most often referred as *supervision*. Psychologists were receiving formal supervision from other psychologists and were involved frequently with the provision of supervision for psychologists and professionals working in related disciplines. Although many formal supervisory relationships involved experienced and less experienced psychologists in relation to the type of work supervised, several carried out supervision in reciprocal arrangements with peers. Some had more than one formal supervisory relationship. Some psychologists belonged to supervision groups that comprised either similarly experienced peers, or psychologists with varying levels of experience and diverse backgrounds. Most supervisory relationships involved partnerships with colleagues within the same organization, while some experienced school psychologists sought supervision from psychologists in other agencies.

Supervisory relationships developed around general and specific aspects of professional work. For example, psychologists obtained supervision for their work associated with the family court and for cultural aspects of fieldwork. One participant of European descent explained that she supervised with a Kaita-

kawaenga (Maori cultural advisor) on general rather than Maori cultural practices. Psychologists also made contact with their nominated supervisor on an informal basis if difficulties arose in their work.

Sixty-eight percent of the school psychologists who participated in formal supervision placed a high value on its practice as a means to reflect on their work. This helped to ensure consistent scheduling of supervision sessions. Participants welcomed opportunities offered by formal conversations to reflect, to review programs, and to debrief. Formal supervision provided opportunities to discuss matters that might not be appropriate in more open forums, and to consider general professional practice matters. Participants were aware that their work required them to demonstrate their involvement in supervision through participation in a formal supervisory dyad or group. While some viewed this requirement as supportive others did not, and, as previously discussed, chose to pursue professional development and support in other ways.

Supervisory partnerships for some participants were changed purposely from time to time while others were maintained to ensure that established relationships endured. Sometimes supervisory relationships continued when a participant did not consider the arrangements to be ideal yet recognized that the relationship offered some degree of support and compliance with employment requirements. For example, one participant noted that in her formal supervision the two peers' supervisory styles did not match and that the sessions were used to obtain second opinions rather than to offer a primary source of support.

Social gatherings: Conferences, courses and seminars. Participants attended courses, conferences, workshops, or seminars when possible as a means of accessing knowledge, skill, and support for their work. They gained support and knowledge for particular and general aspects of their work through participation in professional committees, professional development courses, and research projects.

Literary connection. Participants consulted professional literature to support their work, recognizing that this form of connection with the wider professional community contributed to their professional knowledge. Most

school psychologists' reading focused on specific topics related to casework, while some participants kept current with general professional developments. They recognized the value of Internet sites and online journals and made frequent positive reference to their organization's library.

Satisfaction with supervision. When supervision was envisaged as a practice that encompassed the broad range of activities undertaken to meet the goals of supervision, 90% of participants reported they were satisfied with their current levels of supervision provision. Among the satisfied participants, 68% were engaging in satisfactory formalized supervision, 21% were not receiving formal supervision within their workplace, and 11% were receiving formal supervision they did not consider to be adequate. The overall satisfaction of the latter group was attributed to their meeting supervisory needs through participation in supplementary activities outside the formal dyadic relationship.

Dimension 3: Mediators of Supervision

The current study indicated that several qualities mediated supervisory activity. These were the nature and extent of opportunities for professional connection, familiarity with the cultural contexts of practice including community organizational and professional understandings, their expertise and professional knowledge in relation to professional responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships such as trust and cultural or theoretical perspective.

While formal supervision was required by the participants' organization, much activity to meet the goals of supervision reflected a degree of choice. As shown in the previous section, environmental qualities mediating supervision included participants' opportunity to interact with other psychologists and members of related professions. For example, those who coworked situated their supervision within their work while those who were more isolated relied more heavily on prearranged and distance supervision.

Relationships played a part in the school psychologists' selection of supervisory form. The school psychologists noted their preferences for approaching certain colleagues and commented that the value of formal supervision depended on the relationship between

partners. Participants identified four key qualities associated with either providing or receiving support: approach to school psychology practice, interpersonal style, trust, and level and nature of expertise.

Whether the supervision was formal or informal, the school psychologists selected their supervisory partners from those who had skill, expertise, and knowledge. They sought colleagues who had cultural or discipline knowledge and were highly esteemed by peers. For some school psychologists, expertise overrode other qualities. For example, one noted that she would look beyond poor interpersonal skill with a supervisor who maintained professional integrity and another commented that she would put professional competence before trust. For other participants, however, trustworthiness was paramount.

Discussion

Active participation in supervisory activity was reported by each participant in light of the perspective on supervision when widened to encompass the practice in which they engaged for the purposes of support, knowledge, and accountability. The school psychologists had chosen to conduct their supervision in ways that integrated with their work. They had developed multiple relationships within dynamic professional networks where knowledge was shared and constructed in the context of everyday practice. Supervisory interactions were both incidental and deliberate.

The participants largely were satisfied with their access to supervisory support, even though, in some cases, formalized dyadic supervision was not available or was not entirely satisfactory. In such cases, the school psychologists had developed a range of means to pursue the supervisory goals, the nature and particular mix of activities being mediated by contextual conditions. This finding contrasts with the low rates of participation and reports of dissatisfaction when notions of supervisory provision relied on dyadic supervision models.

Supervision Activity and Contemporary Theory

The theory-in-action of the school psychologists reflected contemporary interactive un-

derstandings of access to and provision of support, knowledge, and accountability. This was demonstrated through the close alignment of the school psychologists' supervisory activity with the espoused interactive theory of current educational and school psychology practice (see Annan & Priestley, 2011; Cameron, 2006; Lee, 2010; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Supervisory activity extended beyond traditional knowledge transmission and monitoring notions of supervision.

The participants took advantage of the increasing number of ways in which people could connect and share knowledge in the contemporary environment. The theory-in-action evident in the participants' reports of practice involved a dynamic network of diverse, context-specific connections. Although traditional notions of supervision were implicit in organizational requirements for supervisors, this practice seemingly had been supplemented or overtaken by the multiple modes of support and learning opportunities currently available to school psychologists.

While formal dyadic supervision has remained valued on the school psychologists' menu of supervisory activities, the present research has raised questions about its suitability as the sole or even compulsory form of supervision for experienced school psychologists. Supervision practices occurred among a group of professionals who had gathered knowledge within their own professional community, knew the boundaries of their profession, and had learned how to access support. They knew who knew what, who was available, who would be supportive, and who worked with integrity. They connected with peers and professionals from other communities in ways that allowed multiple professionals to know about one another's work. Their practice contrasted with that of newcomers to the profession who generally worked with formally assigned, experienced supervisors who introduced them to unfamiliar territory and supported them to learn about the nature and location of professional knowledge within the community. The school psychologists actively sought suitable mentors for particular tasks, taking personal responsibility for inquiring and networking as a matter of course.

Support, Knowledge, and Accountability in a Community of Supervision Practice

The school psychologists had created a network of reciprocal professional support that resembled a community of practice, namely an organizational structure developed upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory. The network of supervisory activity was shaped by participants who, although not necessarily colocated, similarly had voluntarily established relationships with colleagues around valued and shared professional knowledge and had utilized diversity within their membership to further their practice. Although this activity was not required by the workplace organization, it served to complement and extend the formal supervision it encouraged.

In a community of practice, as in the community of the present study, people voluntarily link with one another, bound together by their shared concern for a particular body of knowledge and purpose of their work (Wenger, 1998a; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The community of practice comprises three dimensions: the domain (body of knowledge), community (people and relationships), and practice (the activities of the group). These dimensions are interdependent and constantly transforming. There are core members, newcomers, and those somewhere in between, all of whom potentially contribute to the community in different ways. In brief, newcomers contribute new knowledge, and core members share and defend the community's valued traditional knowledge. While membership of the community is established upon its commonality of purpose and core knowledge, new knowledge is fostered through diversity and resolution of essential tensions arising from difference. This process serves to transform the community of practice and to create a process that further powers the community, keeping it alive, meaningful, and operational.

As in the community of practice, each participant in the present study connected with multiple people, the point of connection being determined by the task at hand. The voluntary supervisory networked activity that became visible had arisen alongside nonvoluntary work tasks. Knowledge shared by the participants included explicit procedures as well as the tacit understandings of the community (e.g., what

was ethical and who could help). Participants were connected by their shared concerns for school psychology practice and actively sought a diverse range of knowledge and views. The interdependence of these understandings and actions can be shown by depicting supervision as a community of supervision practice.

Figure 2 illustrates the three dimensions of a dynamic community of supervision practice: the domain, community, and practice. The domain comprises the knowledge that ties the voluntary group of members together and includes understandings that are explicit, readily available, and most often legitimized, as well as the more subtle tacit knowledge that can be acquired and constructed only through participation in supervisory interaction. The figure shows the supervision community dimension that mediates between theory and action, with experienced members at the core and new practitioners nearer the periphery. These positions can change in relation to the type of knowledge required for particular tasks. Within the group there is a balance of commonality and diversity to create the required tensions for ongoing change. The practice dimension represents the actions taken by members, in this particular illustration the actions of the participating school psychologists, to meet their requirements for support, knowledge, and accountability.

Multicultural environments require school psychologists to be prepared to work with peo-

ple who know the world in ways that are both similar and different from their own. Conducting work collaboratively, ethically, and culturally appropriately with reference to context is supported through the interaction within multiple relationships. In the present study, school psychology practice was made visible and known to a wider portion of the professional community than would be possible were only dyadic, closed relationships relied on to meet their supervisory needs. Working in a multilocalized, multidisciplinary institution, they had the opportunity to connect with the professional community for professional support, and they chose to do so. The paramount position of professional connections suggests that a key task for mentors and supervisors of new psychologists is to introduce newcomers to the community of supervision practice and for the more experienced professionals to remain committed to a dual participatory role as a learner and a consultant.

Were a community of supervision practice to be established, one aspect would need careful consideration: voluntary participation. For each participant in this study, as in the community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002), networks had developed naturally and interactions reflected voluntary participation. Mediating qualities (e.g., relevance of knowledge held in relation to tasks at hand and the level of trust between participants) played a part in the formation and

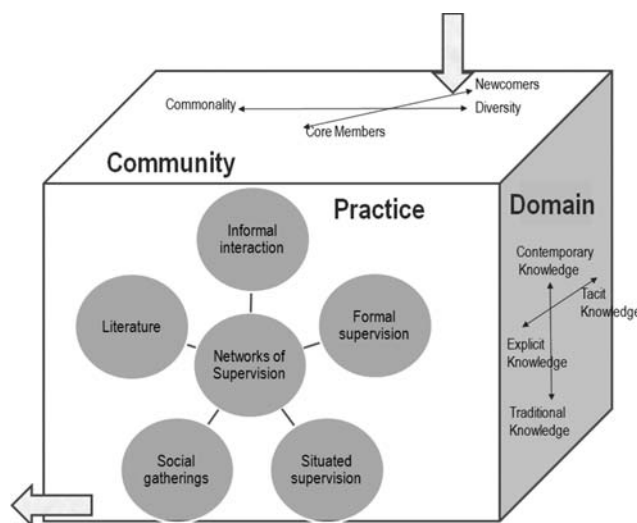


Figure 2. The community of supervision practice.

maintenance of the networks. When developing structures to support and encourage networking between school psychologists, organizations would need to resist formalizing supervisory groups to the point where intrinsic interest in participation was jeopardized. A community of practice is characterized by the extent to which participation is voluntary (Wenger et al., 2002). An organization that encourages a multirelationship model of supervision may expect that each group formed would have a trajectory or life span. Networks are formed out of need, gather energy, grow, and gradually wane as this need is satisfied (Wenger, 1998b). At this point, new networks may form to serve current needs.

In summary, a wider range of supervisory activity and higher levels of participation in supervision were revealed through widening the perspective on supervision to include the diverse practices undertaken by the school psychologists to meet their supervisory goals. The supervision activity that served the purpose of accessing support, furthering knowledge, and ensuring accountability for the school psychologists in this study comprised a range of activity and professional connections that responded to and integrated with the school psychologists' context of practice. Conceptualization of supervision as a multifaceted, multirelationship network, such as the community of supervision practice described in this article, aligns more closely than do traditional dyadic models with the interactive theories of learning upon which contemporary school psychology practice is based and the activity chosen by community members. The restricted relationships implied in traditional models of supervision are unlikely to meet the supervisory needs of those working in diverse, multicultural, increasingly connected environments. It is timely to reconsider the value placed on dyadic and fixed group models and to recognize, acknowledge, and legitimize diverse and contextually applicable supervisory activities.

This study has considered the supervisory activity of one group of school psychologists in one environment. Different environments may support different types of supervisory activity. Thus, further understanding of contemporary supervision may explore the actions taken by members of other groups to meet the supervisory goals of support, knowledge, and accountability. Research also may consider the mecha-

nisms of communities of supervision practice that encourage and sustain these contextualized systems and the nature of organizational structures that preserve and foster intrinsic interest in advancing support, knowledge, and standards.

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