

Best Practices in ACPE Supervisory Education: Reflections of a Practitioner

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This article is a summary of a presentation given at the Summit on Supervisory Education sponsored by the North Central Region of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE).¹ It is the result of a collegial dialogue process with my supervisory colleagues and students at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. Together we have created an educational community where each of us shares the role of teacher and the role of learner. Three questions shape my reflections in this article of our work together: (1) What is best practice in ACPE supervisory education? (2) What are examples of best practice in ACPE supervisory education? (3) Is there one set of best practices that will serve all ACPE supervisory education centers? Finally, I conclude with my understanding of some future challenges that ACPE faces in providing supervisory education.

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Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry

WHAT IS A BEST PRACTICE?

Best practice is a management idea that asserts that there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive, or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, or process. The idea is that, with proper process, checks, and testing, a desired outcome can be delivered with fewer problems and unforeseen complications.² In the context of ACPE supervisory education, I define “best practice” as a whole set of curriculum practices that facilitate the achievement of the objectives that define supervisory education.

Those objectives are stated simply and masterfully in ACPE Standard 313:

- 313.1 To develop supervisory students’ knowledge in theories and methodologies related to CPE supervision drawn from theology, professional and organizational ethics, the behavioral sciences, and adult education.
- 313.2 To provide students practice in the supervision of CPE under the supervision of an ACPE Supervisor.
- 313.3 To facilitate students’ integration of the theory and practice of CPE supervision in their identity as a person, pastor and educator.³

Those practices that are best are particularly effective in assisting supervisory education students as they build a theory base for their supervision (313.1), as they practice supervising students and being supervised in that ministry (313.2), and as they integrate theory and practice in their own identity as person, pastor, and educator (313.3). Best practices are particularly effective in assisting students to develop the competencies articulated in Standards 314 through 319, the Outcomes of Supervisory CPE.⁴ Best practices are particularly effective in assisting students to obtain professional certification and to secure real jobs where they can pursue the wonderful vocation called being an ACPE supervisor.

Best practices set standards for supervisory students to become excellent supervisors and assist them in passing regional and national certification committees. It is my conviction that in carefully articulating competencies to be demonstrated for chaplaincy certification, the Association of Professional Chaplains has provided ACPE with a model that could help to make our certification process more transparent and just.⁵ Best practices are

also particularly effective when they assist students who do not have the gifts or motivations needed to be ACPE supervisors to leave the process and find other ministry positions in which they can flourish.

I want to describe three best practices from my center that have helped our students build their theory base, practice supervision under supervision, and integrate their theory and practice with their identity as person, pastor, educator. The three practices include a core curriculum, a contract between the center and the supervisory student, and educational seminars. I will explain why these practices, in the particular embodiment we have given them, are best practices.

BEST PRACTICE NO. 1:

DEVELOP A MAP OF THE SUPERVISORY EDUCATION PROCESS

What is it that supervisors and supervisory students are doing together in the supervisory education process? What kind of container does the transformative process of ACPE supervisory education require? A map or core curriculum is meant to answer questions like these and to provide a specific yet flexible statement of what this educational process is all about. The relative importance and unimportance of such a map is well articulated by Peter Hawkins and Robert Shohet:

The map is not the territory. Before setting off on an expedition into new terrain, you need to ensure that the map is as good as you can get, but once you have embarked on the journey you do not want to spend the whole time buried in your map. You only need the map to send you in the right direction, or to redirect you when you get lost and also to make periodic checks that you are going in the right direction...Finally it is important that the map you develop is accessible to and understandable by your supervisees. Supervision is a joint journey and works best where there is a shared model and framework.⁶

Our center calls this map of the process “a grid.” Figure 1 (Figure 1-1, p. 170; Figure 1-2, p. 171) provides a picture of the axes that define the grid. The horizontal axis articulates four developmental phases into which we have divided the supervisory education process. We believe that the educational process is different, in fact quite different, in each of these developmental stages. Phase One, usually eight months in duration, begins when the supervisory student starts her supervisory residency at our center and ends when she is granted status as an ACPE supervisory candidate (SC) by

| Phase I | Phase II |
|---|--|
| Supervisory Resident: The Supervisory Resident (SR) will articulate his unique pastoral identity, competence, and theology as well as grapple with his own story, gifts, limits and the impact these have on his way of being pastor. The SR will observe individual and group supervisory activities. During this segment the SR will meet with Regional Certification Committee to assess readiness and to seek status as Supervisory Candidate. | Supervisory Candidate, Part One: The Supervisory Candidate (SC) will begin the actual work of supervision. She will provide individual supervision for students in either a parish or hospital-based unit and will co-facilitate group seminars with a faculty supervisor. The SC will develop further her own theoretical frameworks for supervision in the areas of pastoral theology and personality theory. Initial drafts of these two theory papers will be written during this time. |
| I-A Skills Development | II-A Skills Development |
| I-B Theoretical Mastery | II-B Theoretical Mastery |
| I-C Key issues in pastoral and supervisory identity formation | II-C Key issues in pastoral and supervisory identity formation |
| I-D Learning Formats/Program Setting | II-D Learning Formats/Program Setting |
| I-E Select Bibliography | II-E Select Bibliography |
| Figure 1-1. Grid Outline for Supervisory Education.®Department of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Education. Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, 2007. | |

the Regional Certification Committee. Phase Two, usually eight months in duration, begins when the SC begins supervising students and developing drafts of the three theory papers required for certification. The transition to Phase Three begins as the SC assumes responsibility for developing the curriculum for the Level 1 ACPE educational units he is supervising. During this phase, usually eight to twelve months in duration, the SC completes drafts of all three required theory papers and solo supervises a Level 1 educational unit. Phase Four, usually eight to twelve months in duration, begins as the SC submits theory papers to the National Certification Commission and pursues the work of integrating her supervisory theory and practice with her identity as person, pastor, and educator. Phase Four is complete when the supervisory candidate achieves certification as an Associate ACPE supervisor.

The vertical axis of our educational grid defines five dimensions that supervisees and supervisors tend in their work together in each of the four developmental phases of the educational process. The five dimensions are:

| Phase III | Phase IV |
|--|--|
| Supervisory Candidate, Part Two: The SC will be responsible for developing the curriculum for an educational unit and will act as unit convener, scheduling all seminars negotiating all planning. The SC will develop further her own theoretical frameworks about teaching, learning, and the art of supervision. An initial draft of the education theory paper will be written during this time. The SC will also supervise a congregation or hospital-based student group. | Supervisory Candidate, Part Three: The SC will submit final drafts of her theological personality and educational papers to the National Certification Commission. While doing work of integrating her supervisory theory and practice. |
| III-A Skills Development | IV-A Skills Development |
| III-B Theoretical Mastery | IV-B Theoretical Mastery |
| III-C Key issues in pastoral and supervisory identity formation | IV-C Key issues in pastoral and supervisory identity formation |
| III-D Learning Formats/Program Setting | IV-D Learning Formats/Program Setting |
| III-E Select Bibliography | IV-E Select Bibliography |
| Figure 1-2. Grid Outline for Supervisory Education®Department of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Education. Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, 2007. | |

- Skills to be developed
- Theoretical mastery to be achieved
- Pastoral and supervisory identity formation tasks to be addressed
- Program settings where work will be done
- Select bibliography required

The purpose of the grid's dimensions is not to create an exhaustive (and exhausting) master list of all required competencies. Rather, the dimensions (the vertical axis of the grid) provide supervisors and students with an orienting direction for their work together. The dimensions describe skills, theory frameworks, pastoral and supervisory identity tasks, practice settings, and bibliographic resources that are minimal and fundamental for a student who seeks certification to begin practice as an ACPE associate supervisor.

A brief description of the dimensions of Phase One of our supervisory education process will illustrate the way the grid functions. As noted above, Phase One includes the first eight months of supervisory education.

During this period, the supervisory resident (SR) is preparing to meet the regional certification committee to seek certification as a candidate. The focus of Phase One is the development of grounded pastoral care competence. The clinic for this part of the process is pastoral care in the medical center where our Phase One SR has significant pastoral responsibilities. The skill dimension in Phase One requires the SR to further develop and demonstrate competence according to ACPE Level 2 outcomes.⁷ The theoretical mastery dimension of Phase One invites the SR to develop those theory frameworks that guide pastoral care and pastoral identity formation. Soon, the SR will be using these theoretical foundations to supervise and teach Level 1⁸ pastoral care students. Another theory focus in Phase One is the exploration of twelve foundational concepts related to cultural competence.

Cal Stoltenberg and Ursula Delworth indicate that the development in professional understanding moves from beginning the journey to trials and tribulations to challenges and growth.⁹ We use this model to clarify key issues in pastoral and supervisory identity formation in each phase of the supervisory education process. So, for example, as a pastor/chaplain, the Phase One SR has moved to the professional level of challenges and growth. This means that after orientation, the SR is ready to take her place as an excellent provider of pastoral care to our patients and staff. However, as an SR learning the art of supervision, he is beginning the journey. This means that the SR joins faculty supervisors as they lead a Level 1 case conference or an interpersonal relations seminar. In these seminars, the SR begins in the role of an observer. As the SR is ready he moves to function with the faculty supervisor as participant observer and finally as a co-facilitator.

The SR uses all of the program settings our center provides to work on the tasks that Phase One requires. In addition to her work in individual supervision, the SR's two central learning settings are our center's Theory and Practice Seminar (see description below) and the bimonthly seminars provided by our sub-regional supervisory education meeting. The required bibliography in Phase One includes a basic resource related to the practice and theory of pastoral care.¹⁰ We also think it is important for the SR to select a resource where she is able to watch an excellent pastoral practitioner build a theological anthropology.¹¹

What makes our grid/map a supervisory education best practice? The grid describes concretely what student and supervisor are generally about as they address different phases and dimensions of the supervisory educa-

tion journey. The grid attempts to enumerate minimal competencies to be developed in and by the beginning practitioner of supervision. The grid makes provision for the developmental nature of the supervisory educational process. This assists faculty supervisors in defining a level of supervisory presence/absence that is responsive to the supervisory student's educational need in each phase. Developmental frameworks also provide student and supervisor with clarity that some care giving skills are foundational to other skills that will be developed later in the educational process. Finally, the grid provides our supervisory faculty a flexible, overall view of the work we are doing together in supervisory education. This allows us to be a community of supervisors who all can take our turns working with supervisory residents.

BEST PRACTICE NO. 2:

A TIME-LIMITED, THREE YEAR CONTRACT FOR SUPERVISORY EDUCATION

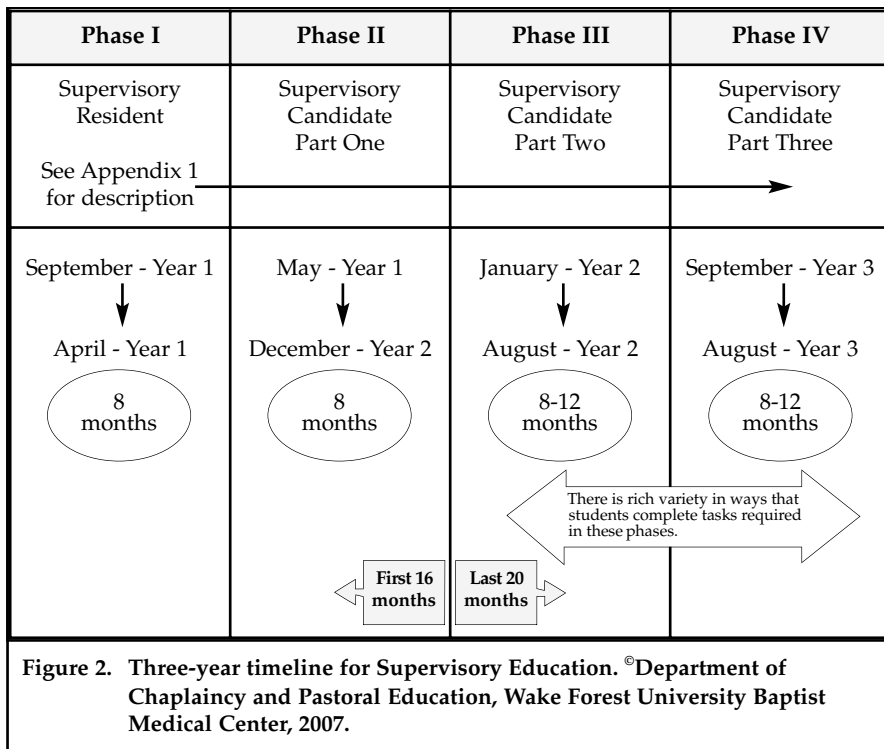
Supervisory residents know when they are accepted into our program that their contract is for three years. The contract is renewed annually following a review (usually scheduled in June) with the department faculty. In the review, the supervisory education resident shares her progress toward certification, as well as needs and goals for the upcoming year. Figure 2 (p. 174) illustrates approximately where we expect our supervisory residents to be as they pursue the course of their training.

What makes a time limited contract a best practice? We find that this contract helps our students be self-defining. For example, students set their own deadlines for completion of theory papers. The time limitation tends to help our students be active participants in their own educational process. From the center's side of things, the time limited contract is situated in our commitment to provide supervisory residents with generous personnel and time resources as we participate in their journey. It is part of our ethic not to take advantage of supervisory residents by extending for months and years the time they work on a student stipend with limited benefits.

BEST PRACTICE NO. 3:

REGULARLY SCHEDULED, STRUCTURED, EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS

Our supervisory residents participate in three seminars each month. Some of the seminars occur weekly and some occur bi-weekly. In an average



twelve-week educational unit, our supervisory residents spend approximately forty-five hours in the following educational seminars:

- *Theory and Practice Seminar.* This seminar occurs weekly at our center. It is seventy-five minutes in length and meets approximately twelve times during each of the three annual educational units. As the name suggests, this seminar is devoted to the relation between practice and theory. Supervisory residents bring drafts of their theory papers for discussion and feedback. Faculty supervisors also take their turns presenting theoretical frameworks they are currently finding helpful as they supervise and minister. Sometimes all seminar participants read and discuss selected chapters from a book relevant to concerns of pastoral supervisors. Each unit provides space to clarify and reflect on the basic practices that constitute the clinical pastoral educational model. Recently, for example, two supervisors made brief presentations on the place of the case conference in CPE curriculum. These presentations were followed by an open discussion about possibilities, formats, problems that seminar participants experienced in leading a case conference. Our supervisory residents also present their final evaluations for each unit in the theory and practice seminar.

- *Consultation Seminar.* Our assumption is that every practitioner of pastoral supervision needs consultation assistance. All faculty and all supervisory residents attend this sixty-minute weekly seminar. Supervisors and supervisory residents bring issues/concerns from their own supervisory practice and seek consultation. The meeting is convened by the department director, who determines the agenda by simply asking who, during this particular week, needs time for consultation. The time is allotted in ten to twenty-minute blocks. Supervisory residents are encouraged to present often and usually bring video clips from their supervisory sessions as basis of their consultation.
- *Sub-regional Supervisory Practice Seminar* Several of the North Carolina training centers participate in this seminar. All centers that send supervisory resident(s) send a faculty supervisor. The meeting occurs weekly for three hours and has two sessions. All supervisory students are in a clinical presentation rotation for the first seminar. There are no spectators. The participants of the seminar break into two or three smaller groups to give feedback to the presenters who have e-mailed their material to those who will be meeting in their small groups. Presenters bring drafts of materials they are preparing to submit to regional or national ACPE Certification Committees. Often presenters bring video clips of supervisory sessions with their students or drafts of theory papers they are developing. This is followed by an interpersonal relations seminar (IPR), co-facilitated by two supervisors. There is an assigned (supervisor) process observer who leads discussion at the end of the IPR. This discussion provides great commentary on group process. The planning function for this meeting rotates among the centers with a supervisor from one of the centers acting as convener for each of the three annual segments of the gathering.

What makes our educational seminars a best practice? Our seminars provide regular workspaces where supervisory students develop and supervisors continue to develop the theory base for supervisory practice. The seminars provide consistent places for supervisory students and supervisors to be on their feet in participative educational process. In these seminars, students find dialogue settings where they can clarify their practice of supervision and the ways that their theory frameworks are functioning (or not) to assist them to be adequate practitioners. Our educational seminars provide students protected space where they can bring problems from their real world supervision for dialogue with more mature practitioners.¹² The role of convener in these seminars provides a gene rationally appro-

priate role for certified supervisors as they organize and invite and call all members of the seminars to learning and to mutual accountability.

IS THERE A "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL" BEST PRACTICE FOR ALL ACPE SUPERVISION?

My answer to the question is "no." I do not think that there is a one-size-fits-all set of best practices for all of our training centers. Training centers are different from each other, and that is one of the great strengths of ACPE. I do not believe, for example, that the best practices from my own center would function for all centers. Our best practices bear the marks of our center's needs, resources, gifts, and limitations. I know that some of our best practices have been helpful to some other centers. When I give workshops, I notice that as I share best practices from Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center what most often happens is that other supervisors begin creatively to engage the revision of their own unique practices in ways that fit their needs, resources, gifts, limitations. Reciprocally, as I listen to descriptions of best practices from other centers, I often have found creative ideas that have assisted our center in making needed changes.

The sense of energy, creativity, and possibility that emerges as supervisors articulate their own best practices in supervisory education and share them with each other is an important reminder of the competence and wisdom that live within us and within our own particular way of contributing to ministry education. I experienced that creativity and possibility at the Madison Summit. In my view, one function of best practice discussions is that they provide a context in which ACPE supervisors can celebrate, encourage, and assist each other.

CONCLUSION

Best practice discussions remind me that ACPE supervisory education is a sophisticated and complex educational project. In my view, the educational culture required for supervisory education is different in quality and quantity from that required to provide Level 1 and Level 2 clinical pastoral education. To survive and flourish, ACPE supervisory education must be rooted in a serious educational culture that will include these and other components:

- A map of the process of supervisory education that is understandable and functional for students and supervisors
- A structure for the educational process that provides for engagement and accountability between supervisory education students and training supervisors/training centers
- A capacity for training centers/supervisors to assist supervisory education students in building the knowledge base articulated in Standard 313.1
- A clear vision of the minimal skills/competencies required for students to be certified as associate ACPE supervisors
- A consistent setting for supervisory education students to be supervised as they attempt to live into these competencies in their supervision of students

It is a large order. The national organization of ACPE will need to invest significantly in the development of vision and resources for supervisory education centers. Centers and regions will need to assist each other as we work more creatively with distance learning possibilities and the development of library resources. As we continue best practice discussions regarding ACPE supervisory education, I hope that we will approach each other relationally as respected and wise co-workers who can learn from and with each other. The North Central Region provided a good model in the Summit experience.

NOTES

1. William R. DeLong, ed., *Proceedings of the Supervisory Summit* (Burnsville, Minn.: North Central Region, Association for Clinical Pastoral Education), available at <http://www.ncracpe.org>.
2. Wikipedia, "Best practice," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_practice.
3. ACPE Standards Committee, *Standards of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc.* (Decatur, Ga.: ACPE, 2005), 13, available at http://www.acpe.edu/acroread/2005_standards_manual.pdf.
4. ACPE Standards Committee, *Standards*, 13–16.
5. Association of Professional Chaplains, "Board Certified Chaplain Competencies," <http://www.professionalchaplains.org/index.aspx?id=254#1>.
6. Peter Hawkins and Robert Shohet, *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Open University Press, 2006), 79.

7. ACPE Standards Committee, *Standards*, 12–13.
8. ACPE Standards Committee, *Standards*, 11–12.
9. Cal Stoltenberg and Ursula Delworth, *Supervising Counselors and Therapists* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Press, 1988), ix.
10. Examples include Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1984); Margaret Kornfeld, *Cultivating Wholeness* (New York Continuum Press, 2004).
11. For example, Elizabeth Liebert, *Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000), 7–21.
12. In developing seminar structures, our faculty was influenced by Donald A. Schön and his concept of a reflective practicum. See, Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987).

Slaves seeking to escape to the part of our country that was “free” used the North Star to guide them toward their hoped-for destination. They never wanted or expected to reach the North Star itself, but they yearned and risked and focused on what it came to promise: freedom.

In our quest as the people of God to enter into the Kingdom of God, we strive to be the “Beloved Community” that opens up for all of us the opportunity to be at the table, in the community as equals, accepted as we are by God and each other. Even though we fall short, we still commit ourselves again and again to bringing into being, into our being, that “Beloved Community.”

It is our North Star. And so we must keep traveling along, yearning, reaching, hoping, striving to make that dream a reality.

Keep your eye on the Star and your feet on the path.

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