



SECTION 4

EXCELLENCE IN SUPERVISION REVISITED

Editor's Introduction

In 1993, the Association for Theological Education (ATFE) adopted a statement titled “Excellence in Supervision” at the ATFE Biennial Consultation in Austin, Texas.¹ Twenty-seven years later, much has changed in church and ministerial contexts, theological education and varieties of delivery platforms, and our understanding of contextual learning. On theories of learning, for example, Jane Vella’s *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* had not yet been published, nor had Étienne Wenger’s *Communities of Practice*. Several important books advancing the conversation about supervision in field education by William Pyle and Mary Alice Seals, Regina Coll, Ann Garrido, and others were all published after 1993. It seems timely and important to provide a review of current resources, theories of supervision, and perspectives of field educators, supervisors/mentors, and students as a resource for readers of *Reflective Practice*.

The relevance of our research is a concern for all field educators and can be framed as a question: To whom are we entrusting our students in ministerial contexts? Indeed, we all face this question once a student leaves our campus or engages in supervised ministry at an approved site through a distance learning program. Are we confident in the supervision? This is not a hypothetical question when a student in the Distance Program at Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia, does field education in a rural community in Saskatchewan or a Duke Divinity School student leaves Durham, North Carolina, to spend the summer in Chicago. Each of us as field educators depends deeply on the quality of supervision provided

in the ministerial formation of the student, whether near or far from our institution.

This was underscored by the written questions submitted at the workshop for new field education directors at the 2019 ATFE Biennial Consultation.² A sampling of the questions includes the follow:

- How do we prepare supervisors/mentors for the work of mentoring?
- What are best practices for supervising and resourcing supervisors/mentors?
- How much training is needed for supervisors/mentors?
- How can we connect with, develop, and ensure the quality of “distance” supervisors/mentors?
- How do you mentor supervisors/mentors?
- Where can I go to find a collection of best practices for educating, training, and forming site supervisors/mentors?

Prior to the 2019 ATFE Biennial Consultation in Asheville, North Carolina, an invitation was extended to the general membership to join this research project. Twenty-two persons responded and convened following the consultation. A facilitated conversation about the 1993 document on excellence in supervision and our experience working with supervisors/mentors resulted in a group of eighteen persons organized into five working teams, each addressing a discrete theme:

- literature review
- theories of supervision
- training sites and supervisors/mentors
- practical wisdom from our supervisors/mentors
- listening to our students

The articles that follow are the fruit of each team's effort to contribute to a 360-degree view of excellence in supervision in field education in 2020.

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NOTES

- 1 "Excellence in Supervision," 1993, ATFE, <http://atfe.org/resources/excellence-in-supervision-1993/>, accessed July 9, 2019.
- 2 This workshop was led by Matthew Floding, John Senior, Dipa Hart, and Mark Hearn. I want to thank all of my colleagues/participants for their helpful questions and active participation.



The Association for Theological Field Education is an international, ecumenical community formed in 1946 whose purposes include maximizing the quality of service to theological field education and providing for optimal growth and development of field education personnel.

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