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Models of Supervision for Aboriginal Staff

A Review of Literature

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Scope

This literature review was commissioned by the Director of Unifam Clive Price, to inform the development of training courses for Aboriginal staff in UnitingCare Children, Young People & Families (UCCYPF) who have supervision roles; and to consider how all UCCYPF supervisors can provide effective support to Aboriginal staff. Internationally, the need for appropriate and effective models of supervision of Aboriginal and Indigenous¹ staff has been recognised in the literature. This was often in the context of recruitment and retention of staff (Broodkoorn & Wahanui, 2005; McKenna, Thom, Howard, & Williams, 2008; Robinson, 1994; Webber-Dreadon, 1999) and to reduce staff burn out (McKenna, et al., 2008). The literature also recognises that the supervision of Aboriginal staff, particularly by non-Aboriginal supervisors, has been problematic in that there is a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding (Bennett & Zubrzycki, 2003). However, with the exception of the Maori supervision model described, the idea of 'models' for Aboriginal staff proved somewhat of a misnomer.

There is limited literature around models of supervision specific to Indigenous staff internationally. The strongest literature was from Aotearoa New Zealand around models of supervision of Maori staff, usually in the education, medical and nursing domains however there was some limited literature specific to the field of social work. There was also some interesting discussion internationally around the use of stories in supervision, although this wasn't in the context of Indigenous staff but in the cross-cultural use of stories. A discussion of this has been included due to the cultural significance of storytelling as a tradition in Australian Aboriginal culture.

Don't Call it Supervision

A study conducted by McKinney (2006) which surveyed medical professionals in New Zealand found that many expressed concern over the use of the term 'supervision' to describe the process. It was felt that a suitable Maori expression needed to be identified that didn't reflect on supervision as an instrument of compliance. This concern has also been raised by members of Jaanimili, who have recently taken steps to address this issue. In response, the Learning and Development course 'Supervising Aboriginal Staff' has recently been renamed 'Supporting the Development of a Strong Aboriginal Workforce'.

This idea is supported by O'Donoghue (2002) who states that the term 'supervision' has been used as a tool in social work to reinforce colonisation processes through the establishment and maintenance of social cohesion through the state sponsored welfare. As a point of interest, while conducting literature searches on this topic, the majority of articles with the key terms 'supervision' and 'Aboriginal (staff)' or 'Indigenous (staff)', related to the supervision of Aboriginal prison populations internationally.

¹ Jaanimil, UCCYPF's Aboriginal Reference Group, prefers the use of the term Aboriginal in a local context.

Cultural Supervision & Cultural Safety

Much of the literature frequently used the terms 'cultural supervision' and 'cultural safety' to describe the requirements of supervision for Indigenous staff. According to Mafile'o and Su'a-Hawkins (2005, p. 2), the term cultural supervision is the process that facilitates the "cultural development and capacity of the supervisee through reflection, critique and action". In the Maori context, cultural supervision is usually conducted by those of like ethnicity e.g. by Maori for Maori and is aimed at building the knowledge of Maori cultural values, attitudes and behaviours whilst providing a supportive environment to address complex cultural issues (McKenna, et al., 2008). In New Zealand, this model has also been applied to other ethnic groups such as Pacific Islanders (Pasifika cultural supervision) (Mafile'o & Su'a-Hawkins, 2005).

McKinney (2006) described cultural supervision as the means for achieving cultural competency. Cultural competency is considered as the ability to work with those from other cultures through the acquisition of skills which enable the worker to gain a greater understanding of the other culture (McKinney, 2006). Extending on this, Allen (2007) states that cultural competence is also the understanding of the clients worldview and the ability to develop appropriate interventions based on this.

Cultural supervision is also associated with cultural safety (McKinney, 2006). According to McKinney, cultural safety centres on the acknowledgement of the impacts of colonisation and the impacts these have on the experiences of clients. In the New Zealand context, the emphasis of cultural safety is on the bicultural relationship between Maori and non-Maori and how the obligations of this relationship, as set out in the Treaty of Waitangi, are met (Gray & McPherson, 2005).

The use of the term 'cultural supervision' is not generally accepted and it has been suggested that it should be considered redundant as the term highlights that this form of supervision is: different to the usual or 'western' forms of supervision; based on cultural differences; and connected with the Treaty of Waitangi (Supervision Directory Steering Group, 2005) .

Maori Model of Supervision²

The study by McKenna, et al. (2008) found that Maori nurses often received two forms of supervision- cultural and professional. However, most nurses agreed that these should occur simultaneously (Broodkoorn & Wahanui, 2005; Eruera, 2005; McKenna, et al., 2008). It is argued that Maori staff often find it difficult to distinguish between clinical and cultural issues in practice, therefore such issues should be addressed together. Kaupapa Maori supervision is based on the principles of the Maori worldview or cosmology and aims to enhance wellbeing. These principles also seek to empower and strengthen the use of

² These models detail the roles of both supervisor and supervisee through the various stages of supervision, however only a summary of the models has been provided here.

Maori culture and language (Eruera, 2005). Eruera (2005, p. 61) define Kaupapa Maori supervision as:

an agreed supervision relationship by Maori for Maori with the purpose of enabling the supervisee to achieve safe and accountable professional practice, cultural development and self-care according to the philosophy, principles and practices derived from a Maori worldview.

There are two proposed Maori models of supervision discussed here, both of which draw on Maori cultural components. Eruera (2005) uses the analogy of weaving a *kete* (basket) with traditional Maori concepts and practices as the material. The basket can then be filled with the skills, knowledge, professional and personal experiences, protocols and values that the supervisee develops and recognises through the supervisory process.

He Tohu Matekite (to see beyond) is the model developed by Broodkoorn and Wahanui (2005) for Maori nurses which is aimed at integrating cultural and clinical knowledge. Maori cultural beliefs and practices are central to this approach. The growth of the supervisee is Maori understandings of the creation of the earth. Supervision is aimed at facilitating the supervisees movement along a spectrum from Te Kore (the nothingness) to Te Ao Marama (the world of light), thereby achieving understanding. The supervisor takes on various cultural roles in this process.

The importance of incorporating cultural understandings into the supervisory process is central to both models. These cultural ideas are utilised by both supervisor and supervisee to assist in the supervisee's journey of growth and development. A comparable model of supervision that was relevant and appropriate for Australian Aboriginal people could not be found in the research literature.

Peer Supervision

Peer reciprocal supervision, also referred to as peer supervision, moves away from the traditional top-down supervision model. Instead, in this model, supervision occurs amongst colleagues in similar roles (Polaschek, 2007). Participants in peer supervision will often take on the roles of both supervisee and supervisor during a session (McKenna, et al., 2008).

According to Hawken and Worrall (2002) an intentionally developed model of peer supervision would lead to greater personal and organisational learning through professional collaboration, sharing of experiences and establishment of professional connections. Hawken and Worrell (2002) explain that this learning is not achieved solely from others in the peer supervision process but also from the participant themselves through increased awareness of their own knowledge.

In their discussion of Canadian Aboriginal staff working in a mental health service which operates within a holistic Aboriginal framework, Maar et al. (2009) describe the use of peer supervision to meet the needs of Aboriginal workers in rural areas. The peer supervision model in this example maintains an open door policy and encourages informal consultations among the team. In order to encourage 'interprofessional education', Maar et al. (2009) describe a recently

introduced process of presenting client cases as a supervisory tool. These cases are often used to highlight the various responses to difficult situations. Maar et al. (2009) recognise that there are some limitations to this model in that established, site-specific norms may be reinforced and may not be challenged.

McKenna, et al. (2008) identify the advantages and disadvantages to this approach. Optimal safety and trust can be developed between participants and taking on the responsibility of their role in this process can be empowering. However, the informality could lead to a more social relationship forming which could lead to less challenges being made to poor practice in the absence of a hierarchical relationship. This is addressed somewhat by Baldwin, Patuwai and Hawken (2002) who emphasise the need for set protocols and principles to be established to ensure safe practice.

Using Stories: Narrative Supervision

The use of stories as a means-making tool in narrative supervision has a number of purposes (Sommer et al., 2009). According to Ward and Sommer (2006) this method promotes safety as supervisees can use the external perspectives of the stories to reflect on their personal difficulties. Stories can be chosen to reflect on specific situations. By looking at how a story's protagonist overcomes obstacles, Ward and Sommer (2006) suggest that supervisees can use this knowledge to attain professional and personal development.

Ward and Sommer (2006) consider the use of stories in the context of the Integrated Development Model (IDM) of supervision and conclude that:

by pairing the IDM with a narrative approach to supervision would provide a way to apply the model on a personal level and help supervisees make meaning of their experience (p. 65) .

In a study by Sommer et al. (2009), the use of stories from diverse cultures in supervision was considered for the possibilities it presented in transcending cultural boundaries as stories can often share similar characteristics and themes. Sommer et al. argue that a story will be interpreted by supervisees in difference ways depending on individual experience, personal reflection and individual frames of reference.

In the study by Sommer et al. (2009), three myths or fairytales were chosen that reflected Native American, East Asian and European Caucasian cultures. The use of these stories with those from various cultures was supported with some participants identifying that they could relate the story to their own culture and could identify similarities. One participant identified the usefulness of stories for bridging cultural gaps as she considered story telling as a daily custom in her culture.³

The use of stories as a tool for multicultural learning was also identified in this study. The use of stories in a group supervision environment where supervisees were from various cultures was found to be helpful in discussing multicultural issues while creating discussion on these issues (Sommer, et al., 2009). Stories in supervision were seen as providing an opportunity for exposure to various

³ The culture of this participant was not specified.

cultural values and customs that supervisees may otherwise not have been exposed.

Self Evaluation: Using Videotapes as a Tool

According to Robinson (1994) the recognition of skills and the opportunity for professional development are important to successful evaluation within supervision. Huhra, Yamokoski-Maynhart and Prieto (2008) describe the use of videotaping in the supervisory process as one that has been well established for decades. In their consideration of the use of videotaping in a mental health context, the advantages to using this tool were identified by Huhra et al. (2008) as being: the means to store and disseminate information; to encourage change in supervisee self-perception; for enhanced self-analysis by supervisees; as a method to accurately evaluate supervisees; and as a way for supervisors and supervisees to 're-experience' the therapy session.

In a discussion in relation to its use with Canadian Aboriginal educators, a study by Robinson (1994) considered the use of videotaping activities to allow for reflective evaluation processes as an adaptation to conventional clinical supervision. Robinson considers this process as one which is inclusive and holistic and which fosters growth through joint reflective practices. The authors consider this practice as different from clinical supervision in that there is no focus on any one aspect of practice. Rather, the process allows for the recognition and analysis or evaluation of successful methods of practice by Aboriginal staff.

This practice is also considered to alter the power relationships moving away from the traditional one of top-down (line manager) to a more collegial process. Both the supervisor and supervisee review the recording individually so that each is free from the other's bias. Afterwards a discussion of their observations occur although this was adapted to suit the supervisees in the study by Robinson (1994). This enables supervisees to see their work through their own interpretations rather than someone else's. At the same time, they can review the videotapes from many perspectives, weighing up their actions against each other.

It is for this reason that Robinson uses the analogy of a coil and a web to describe the difference between traditional clinical supervision and the proposed reflective evaluation model. In traditional clinical supervision, the focus is on one aspect of practice which is narrowed further during the process, reminiscent of a coil. In contrast, the reflective evaluation process allows for movement in the discussion about practice and can focus and refocus as needed, as part of the process.

A critique of this process is that some supervisees may experience anxiety at being recorded. This may have a negative impact on their performance (Huhra, et al., 2008; Robinson, 1994).

External supervision

The use of external supervision as an option when appropriate supervisors are not available is widely accepted (Ung, 2002). It has been suggested that this

approach moves to equalise the power relationship in comparison to line supervision models, as it is considered more collaborative in its approach (Hirst & Lynch, 2005; Ung, 2002). Hirst and Lynch (2005) state that supervisees may be more likely to raise concerns about their practice to external supervisors, therefore providing greater opportunity to recognise the professional development needs of supervisees.

In a discussion of this form of supervision, Ung (2002) states that external supervisors may be selected based on their expertise in a particular area, a recommendation by other professionals, or because they are known to the supervisee in another context. Eruera (2005) describes how an external supervisor can work in coordination with the clinical supervisor to provide the necessary cultural supervision needs of a supervisee (Maori, in this author's context). According to Eruera (2005), a coordinated approach to clinical and cultural supervision is increasingly being used by social work organisations to ensure that the cultural supervision needs are being met.

Critiques of this form of supervision identify the lack of knowledge of the supervisee and their practice, and the inability of the external supervisor to provide accessible support in a timely manner, as key challenges to this model (Hirst & Lynch, 2005). The recognition of the role of the external supervisor who provides cultural supervision must also be recognised as not being of lesser value to the supervisory process (Eruera, 2005).

Conclusion

The literature and research into appropriate and effective models of supervision for Aboriginal staff is quite limited. It is clear that in Australia, there has been no attempt to develop an approach to supervising Aboriginal staff in a way which meets their professional development needs in the context of their cultural needs and knowledge. Whilst there is some international literature available, the applicability of this to Australian Aboriginal populations is not clear as there are significant differences in the cultural needs of these staff. There are however, some important points identified in the literature that should be considered when developing a model of supervision for Aboriginal staff. These include but are not limited to:

- Are there specific Aboriginal practices/stories that can be used as a framework for an appropriate and culturally relevant model of supervision?
- Are there Aboriginal terms that have greater cultural meaning that could replace the term 'supervision'?
- Are cultural practices more aligned to individual supervision or peer/group models?
- Would the use of stories provide a culturally safe way for Aboriginal staff to explore practice issues?
- Who should the supervisor be?

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