5

Surviving and flourishing

A study of two counsellor educators' experiences of a year of peer supervision

Niccy Fraser and Toni Horrell

Abstract

Increased economic pressure, reduced resources, new technologies and results-driven educational contexts place continual demands on counsellor educators. In the face of these, peer supervision has the potential to support and develop counsellor educators in their roles. This autobiographical study presents two senior counsellor educators' experiences of peer supervision. The year of peer supervision was recorded by one peer colleague in a reflective journal. Analysis of written conversations and goals concluded that the peer supervision relationship and reflective process were valuable in providing support, managing role demands, enhancing confidence, preserving wellbeing, offering peer modelling, promoting professional development, and supporting teaching performance.

Keywords: Counsellor educators, peer support, peer supervision, wellbeing

This article is an account of a significant year of peer supervision in the lives of the two authors. The idea of formal peer supervision arose as we two senior counsellor educators faced significant new role challenges. These included an academic review of the bachelor's degree in counselling at our institution, a new e-learning platform, and teaching new courses, all coinciding with declining counselling staff resources. Anticipating increased stress with these significant extra occupational tasks, we decided to take a proactive stance in exploring closer collegial support within the institution. Peer supervision seemed like a pragmatic solution.

Both authors were experienced counsellors when engaging in peer supervision. Niccy had taught in the undergraduate counselling programme for 14 years, completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and had a master's degree. Toni had been counselling and involved in tertiary teaching for 30 years, having taught on this particular programme for one year. She also had a background in mentoring and was completing a Master of Education (e-learning).

Organising peer supervision

We believed it was important to have goals for our peer supervision as well as for the peer supervision process. A contract was therefore agreed to and potential problems and possible ways to deal with them were identified.

Goals for peer supervision

> Niccy: *My goals were to develop strategies to "keep calm and carry on," receive support, decrease "electronic avoidance" of developing skills for the new e-learning platform, review my teaching practice, and receive peer feedback. Further general goals for work wellbeing were to take regular lunch breaks and meditate daily.*

> Toni: *My goals were to reflect on tutor/student relationship issues, practise safely by maintaining boundaries, check that I was doing things "right" as I was still relatively new to the institution, and have a witness to my development. Further general goals for work wellbeing were to minimise working weekends and employ regular mindfulness strategies.*

Peer supervision contract

The peer supervision contract clarified broad expectations of providing professional peer support, keeping each other accountable for our goals, discussing current work concerns and examining relevant aspects of our teaching practice. It also specified that the supervision was confidential, excluding significant practice concerns in accordance with the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) *Code of ethics* (NZAC, 2016a). We contracted a commitment to fortnightly supervision with a clear structure for sessions, including session reviews. Overall progress towards our goals was also to be monitored.

Peer supervision process

Long-distance peer supervision was conducted by telephone as we worked for the same institution in different cities. We used a solution-focused, strengths-based framework for peer supervision. This means we used a practical, problem-solving approach while supporting each other in identifying existing strengths.

The session structure began with an overall "check in" followed by a presentation of current concerns. We negotiated time-sharing based on need. In each session we alternated positions as peer supervisor and supervisee. The supervisee presented her concerns, saying what she needed. If necessary, the reflective conversation would clarify needs or resources. The peer supervisor focused on the supervisee, using active listening, clarifications, strengths-based questions, and validations. For example, when facing a particular challenge, the peer supervisor might ask, "Given your existing knowledge of similar situations, do you have any thoughts about what might work in these circumstances?" When sufficient understanding was developed, the supervisor reflected, or continued questioning, or offered appropriate resources.

Peer witnessing was an important part of our process. As supervisees, we used the supervision space to explore, self-reflect, and re-story. Being witnessed by the supervisor through acknowledgement and validation contributed to the strengths-based aspect of the supervision process. Occasionally, when deemed necessary, we used more of a mentoring approach. Initiating mentoring was negotiated between us, related to specific knowledge or expertise held by one of us which helped the other.

At session's end, we gave feedback on how the session had met our needs. We reviewed the overall usefulness and effect of the supervision conversation and restated any new helpful perspectives gained or strategies to action.

Power in the peer supervision relationship

An issue we identified as a possible problem was perceived differences in power. Peer supervision is a supportive, collaborative approach to supervision, and the peer relationship must be one of equality. It is important to make power between peers explicit (Žorga, Dekleva, & Kobolt, 2001). Niccy was more experienced in her counsellor educator role, with a deeper understanding of the institution and its history. Toni was a relative "newcomer." We discussed whether these differences

could undermine the equality of the peer relationship. Niccy welcomed Toni as a new colleague who could offer fresh perspectives and expertise in e-learning. We agreed that if difficulties arose, such as having less of a voice in the relationship, we would commit ourselves to having a courageous conversation and find ways forward.

Positioning ourselves as researchers

As we began this new peer supervision relationship, we also decided to study ourselves to find out how the peer supervision might assist us in our educator roles. Niccy kept a reflective peer supervision journal and wrote summaries of our supervision conversations during each session. This content represented our data collection. Further details are explained below.

An ethics proposal was submitted to our institution's research committee. Ethics approval was granted, with the recommendation that the study have both an external and an internal supervisor. The ethics committee stated that an external supervisor was necessary to ensure that readers understood which author's voice was being expressed through the study.

The research question for this study became: "How might formal peer supervision support counsellor educator wellbeing within the demands of our professional roles?"

Literature review

The professional role of the counsellor educator

The profession of counsellor educator is demanding. Developing counsellors to grow into knowledgeable, ethical, self-reflective counselling practitioners is a complex, developmentally staged task (Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2010). There are also high expectations of counsellor educators that they will produce research and provide leadership and services to the profession and community. Alongside such pressures, it has been found that professionals who have high involvement with others, such as those in human services occupations including mental health, education, and counsellor education, can have a heightened vulnerability to burnout (Lim, Kim, Kim, Yang, & Lee, 2010; O'Halloran & Linton, 2000).

Examining the role of a counsellor educator more closely, they are responsible for the careful design of curricula to support students in developing their self-

awareness (Leppma & Young, 2016), engaging in personal development (Leppma & Young, 2016; Wester, Trepal, & Myers, 2009), and developing enhanced capacity for cognitive flexibility (Leppma & Young, 2016; Pieterse, Lee, Ritmeester & Collins, 2013). Counsellor educators must also model the values and behaviours of an effective counsellor, despite the differences between these two roles. In the classroom, counsellor educators use themselves to inspire growth in students, translate theory to practice, and provide regular counselling demonstrations which include a mindful presence, core conditions, and effective interpersonal skills (McLeod & McLeod, 2014).

Teaching relationships must be carefully managed by counsellor educators, who need to maintain their awareness of the potential for enacting unconscious parallel processes with students (Bennett, 2008). Modelling boundaries and showing how to attend to one's own wellbeing are important in teaching their students skills for managing their professional lives and for coping with the stresses of learning to become professional counsellors (Meyer & Ponton, 2006).

The demands of the tertiary education roles, including that of counsellor educator, have become more difficult with the steady decrease in government funding for polytechnic institutions.

> *Institutions repeatedly respond to Government under-funding with austerity measures and pressure on staff to do more for less. This is bolstered by performance measures surrounding research and teaching which create never-ending pressure to produce 'outputs'. Work that cannot be easily counted, measured, made a matter of compliance or budgeted for is considered superfluous to the job. (Grey, Sedgwick, & Scott, 2013, p. 16)*

Such funding shortfalls and increased pressure on staff can adversely affect tutors' wellbeing.

Why is wellbeing relevant to counsellor educator performance?

According to Niles, Akos, and Cutler (2001), the more resourced and present (focused) counsellor educators are in their practice, the more effectively they are able to promote student/counsellor cognitive and skill development. Given the demands of their role, it is imperative that they continually attend to their own wellbeing. Wellbeing can be enhanced by avoiding perfectionism, checking out assumptions, being honestly human, approaching feelings, being courageous,

developing an individualised therapeutic approach, and discouraging an expert counsellor role (Yager & Tover-Blank, 2007). These are necessary as counsellor educators directly influence counsellors-in-training and therefore the larger client populations (Davis, Levitt, McGlothlin, & Hill, 2006; Hill, 2009; Leinbaugh, Hazler, Bradley, & Hill, 2003). Processing feelings also involves regulating emotions, which Easton, Martin and Wilson (as cited in Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2016) have connected to counsellor educator wellbeing.

Sufficient time for their teaching role is also needed to practise wellbeing. If educators are continuously performing in time-pressured environments, time constraints can be a primary stressor. Counsellor educators often perceive time as inadequate in relation to work and personal demands (Lackritz, 2004). Insufficient time for role demands can lead to decreased occupational satisfaction, stress, and ultimately burnout. Burnout experienced by counsellor educators can lead to impairment that affects the quality of the counsellor education they deliver, and therefore the clients served by their counsellors-in-training (Lackritz, 2004).

Peer supervision can support wellbeing

Peer supervision is one way in which educational systems can support counsellor educators. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) view peer supervision as a pragmatic solution to the shortage of similarly qualified, senior practitioners available as supervisors.

Peer supervision is a supervisory model which involves a non-hierarchical, collaborative relationship between two experienced practitioners seeking mutual support, reflection on practice, resources, and peer feedback on performance (Benshoff, 1992). This collaborative relationship assumes power based on knowledge or expertise, as opposed to power based on role or role function (Kraus, 1980). In this working partnership, the members take individual responsibility for what happens in the supervision session, and they both view themselves as accountable to their peer. The relationship depends on trust and a high degree of professional regard. Collegial equality is important for providing a safe space (Žorga et al., 2001). A clear contract and commitment to the agreed structure and method of working were also identified by Žorga et al. (2001) as essential for accountability, collaboration, and productive peer supervision.

Peer supervision can also include peer mentoring which, with coaching, is becoming more widely practised in educational institutions. Becker (2014) has

asserted that the process of peer mentoring supports reflection, mutual problem-solving, and the sharing of ideas. The benefits of peer mentoring/coaching are widely documented, including improvement in motivation and morale, increased collaboration, and greater reflection on pedagogy (Brancato, 2003; Menges, 1987, as cited in Huston & Weaver, 2008).

According to the literature, peer supervision has many advantages but also has potential pitfalls. These can include dynamics such as power and competition, evident in peers striving to be cleverer or more supportive than the other. These interactions can interfere with the process of collaboration. Fine (2003) recommended watching for such dynamics and intentionally exposing them, should they occur. To manage any obstructive interactions or group dynamics, it has been recommended that peer supervision has regular internal and external evaluation (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012; Žorga et al., 2001).

Nevertheless, supervision and mindfulness training have been found to be protective factors in relation to staff burnout, job satisfaction, wellbeing, and the ability to manage work-related stress for helping professionals (Irving, Dobkin, & Park, 2009; Puig et al., 2012; Sterner, 2009). The reciprocal interaction of peer supervision can promote learning, offering different perspectives and professional development (Carrington, 2004; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Strengths from both peers are utilised through joint learning (Gabriel & Kaufield, 2008).

Peer supervision is currently acknowledged by NZAC as an important contribution to counsellor supervision. The *NZAC Guidelines for professional supervision of school guidance counsellors* (NZAC, 2016b) have recently been extended to include facilitated group supervision and peer supervision, which require a clear contractual agreement about how supervision is provided for each practitioner. These guidelines state: "Group or peer supervision can be an additional form of supervision but does not usually replace one to one professional supervision particularly for inexperienced counsellors" (p. 1).

This reflects the view of Hawkins and Shohet (2012), with the exception that:

> *peer or group supervision can be quite adequate for senior practitioners who may find difficulty in seeking a supervisor of sufficient seniority and who have developed not only their own individual competence but also an integrated form of self-supervision. (p. 195)*

In a review of research into clinical supervision in counselling and counsellor education in the United States, no studies could be found on peer supervision for counsellor educators (Borders, 2005). Similarly, there does not appear to be any New Zealand research, nor any accounts of peer supervision for counsellor educators. We therefore hope that this study will add a small offering to the supervision field for counsellor educators.

Method

For this exploration, narrative inquiry seemed an appropriate method that would help us develop a deeper understanding of how the supervision relationship could benefit us in our professional working lives. In addition, we hoped that exploring peer supervision could benefit other counsellor educators facing similar challenges. This account is therefore an autobiographical oral history recorded in writing by the researchers, as described by Ellis (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2017).

A narrative study emphasises the importance of attending to setting the scene or the context for the exploration—for example, the influence and/or constraints on individuals and their interpretation by the story tellers (Chase, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2017). Stories represent people's understanding of their lives and experiences and help them to make sense of the events that have occurred (Bruner, 2002; Crossley, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Creswell and Poth (2017) describe the re-storying of participants' experiences in narrative inquiry to make meaning of them. Bruner (2002, p. 64) asserted that "People constantly construct and reconstruct themselves to meet the needs of situations we encounter, being guided by memories of the past and hopes and fears for the future." In his view the narrative form can be used to restore a sense of order and meaning to experience. Our hopes were that through narrative inquiry, we could construct a sense of forward-moving, resilient experiences for our working lives. By reporting the findings, we also hoped to stimulate other counsellor educators to consider peer supervision.

According to Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2017), there is a difference between narrative analysis and the analysis of narratives. This research used an analysis of narratives in order to identify and describe themes from our supervision conversations.

We were specifically interested in our professional identities as shaped by the work environment and within the movement in our conversations in peer

supervision. "Even in the midst of my present engagement with the past, I am moving into the future, giving form and meaning to the self-to-be" (Freeman, 2007, p. 138).

Data collection

From the beginning, Niccy kept written summaries of each supervision session, including verbatims of collegial reflections in both roles—as supervisor and supervisee—and quotes from our feedback on the session. Writing during our sessions was an important part of her reflective process. Toni chose not to write, as it distracted her from reflection and processing. Although this meant that the peer-supervision relationship was recorded by only one person, Toni regularly reviewed the notes to confirm they were an accurate summary of the concerns discussed and new perspectives that emerged from sessions.

Data analysis and verification

Analysis of the case study data took the form of thematic analysis of Niccy's year-long journal. As Toni was involved in completing her master's degree, Niccy undertook this responsibility. We chose thematic analysis as it is considered a rigorous, systematic, yet flexible method of examining data that identifies and presents the themes. It can be applied across a range of epistemologies, as long as the method suits the research question and the researchers' assumptions are made transparent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can also be conducted in an inductive or theoretical manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As this study was experiential and exploratory, Niccy did not consult relevant theoretical literature before beginning this analysis; in this way an inductive (or "bottom up") approach was used. The analysis was carried out manually and included immersion in the data through repeated readings, in order to become deeply familiar with it; the collection of themes; and their refinement into subthemes, in consultation with Toni, until a satisfactory "map" was co-constructed that showed the essence of the data.

As both participant and researcher in this study, Niccy's assumptions about and experience of peer supervision had been very positive. In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, it is important to make any assumptions explicit. To check for their influence, decisions related to themes and subthemes

were monitored by the internal research supervisor to ensure that they were representative of the data.

Research supervisors

The external research supervisor was a university counsellor educator and experienced supervision trainer, with a doctoral degree. The internal research supervisor had been a tertiary teacher and a research support advisor across the institution. Her role was to provide background support and encouragement for the completion of required research outputs. Both supervisors were involved in checking the process of analysing the data to elicit the findings.

Findings

Themes from the analysis of the data included being witnessed and understood by one's peer, alongside gaining peer support for new stories of capacity. The peer supervision process enabled us to claim time to reflect on teaching practice, including the ethical questions that arose in teaching. Managing anxiety in tutor/student relationships was a central, regularly discussed theme. Attending to wellbeing was also a continuous theme throughout the peer supervision process. The peer supervision partnership provided peer modelling to develop confidence in using technology. Lastly, the depth of our reflection on all themes during the peer supervision process enabled us to strengthen our professional identities.

Each theme is expanded upon below, with illustrative examples that are verbatim quotes from the journal kept during our sessions and an extract from the reflective journal. Although we have identified each of the themes separately, they are often intertwined.

Being witnessed and understood

It can be isolating having to present "a teaching face" of the institution when professionalism silences us from acknowledging background pressures. Sharing regular work–life experiences, and hearing these reflected back, assisted us in acknowledging the scope of our roles.

> Toni: *This is such a big job!*

Being witnessed by our peer created a really important connection which reduced our isolation.

Toni: *I feel so validated and seen and heard. Acknowledged.*

Peer support for new stories of capacity

Receiving consistent peer support had a powerful impact on job satisfaction. The foundation of peer support empowered us to feel more capable.

Niccy: *With this support I can do anything . . .*

Another example focused on adequate preparation for teaching. Given that teaching preparation can always be further developed, this was often an area of exploration.

Niccy: *After hearing your reflections on my process, I know what I am doing, I am prepared sufficiently, and the teaching relationships with students are key.*

Through the process of peer supervision, we developed preferred and stronger identities as counsellor educators.

Claiming time to reflect on teaching practice

The time we committed to peer supervision provided a welcome reflective space in which we could intentionally slow ourselves down, stand still, and look at our practice together. After one of us had presented a concern, a common question from our peer supervisor was: *What do you need?*

Niccy: *Hearing that question helped me refocus on my own reflective process. The question helped me centre myself, slow down and consider particular resources I needed. This question starkly contrasted with my dominant concerns: what do my students need, and how could I best meet their needs?*

This fundamental peer supervision question was a helpful reminder that because of multiple pressures, including teaching preparation, little or no time was left for reflection.

Attending to wellbeing

Role overload meant that specifically discussing this mutual goal of attending to wellbeing was often addressed last in supervision sessions.

Niccy: *I am practising daily meditation for ten minutes in my lunch break, which*

> *works well for re-focusing me and re-energising me. It's difficult to find a private room so I have problem-solved that by even lying down on the floor under my desk to meditate.*

As the peer relationship deepened, we examined our own beliefs and unhelpful work behaviours more closely, such as:

> Toni: *I hear myself accepting more and more challenges, which leads to stress, anxiety and then overwhelm.*

Guided by our contracted goals, we actively challenged each other.

> Niccy: *So as you hear yourself saying this [above], what do you make of this? How does this fit with your goals?*

If we witnessed each other agreeing to unreasonable demands, we would occasionally be directive. We would remind each other of more appropriate actions, such as wider team discussion of these demands.

Sorting ethical dilemmas in teaching practice

We discussed many ethical dilemmas and guided each other regarding appropriate frameworks such as teaching pedagogies, guidelines from professional bodies, and academic policy. One of the most stressful situations was assessing failing students. The peer supervision space was a "safe" place where we could express ourselves.

> Niccy: *I feel so awful about being the assessor who failed this student, yet I am accountable for standards of practice and to the community.*
>
> Toni: *Yes, and sometimes we do have to make these tough calls. You have worked so hard with this student, but she still needs more development to pass.*

Collegial support for maintaining standards of practice was experienced as critically important in our assessment roles.

Peer modelling to increase confidence using technology

Niccy had presented low confidence with the new e-learning site. Toni modelled her attitude to tackling e-learning.

> Toni: *So, you have described lots of barriers as you use the new e-learning site. For*

> *me, often I don't know what to do. I need to trust that I'll find an answer. I click on frequently asked questions, knowing the answers are there somewhere. I click on various options and explore. Or, if I can't source what I need, I call a help person quickly!*

Niccy really appreciated receiving peer mentoring. Given that her colleague was already skilled with this technology, Niccy was surprised that she, too, often felt lost. Knowing this was useful, as it meant Niccy could also challenge the feelings of frustration and stupidity that came forward as she wrestled, often publicly, with technology while teaching.

The result of this peer conversation was that Niccy then practised less avoidance. She built on growing a more confident view of expecting to succeed, and also used a mindful, accepting approach. Here is an example of her new, changed thoughts as she taught:

> Niccy: *Oh well, the e-learning site isn't working (again) so I'll take a breath, use this as a teaching opportunity with my class, to demonstrate and verbalise a mindful, accepting attitude toward my class, and I will find another way to access those teaching files.*

Managing anxiety in tutor/student relationships

Often, students felt very stressed in relation to personal issues, financial pressures, counselling placements, being observed practising counselling, receiving tutor feedback, managing technology, and academic assessment. Student stress could affect our teaching relationships. We regularly felt as if we were doing a double act by teaching a room full of anxious students while managing our own performance anxiety. An entry from Niccy's teaching journal provides one such example when teaching a new research course to a very anxious student group:

> *My intentions were to manage student anxiety and my own as I taught this new course. My teaching goal was to influence students to change their negative attitudes toward research and to begin to develop as critical thinkers of research. I felt pleased to receive peer feedback from the learning support tutor (who was note-taking for a student and observing me teaching). She said, "By the end of the day, most students had understood research course requirements and felt more confident and able to*

begin critiquing the research. You have given the world a gift, teaching and supporting them to think in that way."

Previous peer supervision discussions had contributed to my confidence and growing abilities. My professional identity was enhanced by hearing this encouraging peer teaching feedback.

Growing professional identity

Overall, the strengths-based, supportive, reflective learning process led to positive outcomes from peer supervision. Our conversations stimulated new, creative teaching ideas.

> Niccy: *I know what we could do to help students further understand the dimension of counselling presence and skills: we could use the counselling skills scale from Eriksen and McAuliffe (2010) both as a teaching tool, a self-measure, and as a feedback guide for the third observing student in the triad.*

A second example:

> Toni: *But the students still don't have a deeper understanding of the self-reflective process.*
>
> Niccy: *Yes, I agree. I have tried . . . across time and yet . . .*
>
> Toni: *How about I source some new models of self-reflection and we also introduce unmarked student practice on self-reflection, offering regular tutor feedback to encourage and grow their capacities.*

New resources on self-reflection refreshed the curriculum for the third-year counselling class.

Benefits and value of the study

The relationship

As experienced colleagues, we were well matched for peer supervision. We both brought commitment, integrity, openness, steadiness, and reliability to the peer supervision relationship. We benefitted from receiving different expertise from each other—for example, mindfulness, and mentoring in e-learning technology.

The relationship offered an important place of collegiality and teamwork where we explored role demands and our vulnerabilities openly. We appreciated becoming deeply known and understood in our professional roles. Consistent mutual encouragement sustained our wellbeing. As trust increased, we gave more direct challenges to each other. Overall, peer supervision was instrumental in developing a strong foundation of emotional, academic, and professional support for us as educators.

The time

Committing regular time to discussing teaching practice in a pressured work environment was valuable and rejuvenating. Spending time together to reflect deeply on our practice felt consistently rewarding. Refocusing on our needs and actioning them (when possible) was a really satisfying process, and a counterbalance to the habit of rushing through tasks.

Support for teaching

The use of regular, formal peer supervision to monitor and reflect on our attitudes, thinking, and teaching behaviours better equipped us in teaching more mindfully. We used peer supervision for teaching preparation, reflection on teaching strategies, and performance. Preparation together involved regular strategising and reflection, to lower anxiety and enhance our confidence for teaching. Modelling a positive "can-do" attitude in peer supervision created a mutually inspiring energy for teaching. Strengths-based questioning and reflections opened up new self-capacities. The peer supervision process created dynamic, shared learning, and professional growth.

Research conducted by Niles et al. (2001) had yielded similar findings, underscoring the pressures of the counsellor educator role and the importance of coping strategies. In their study, as in ours, trust and professional regard were paramount in peer relationships to support a process of openness for sharing constructive feedback.

Progress towards goals

Both Niccy and Toni achieved all the goals they had set. Peer supervision was a useful, regular place in which to be mutually reminded of our intentions and explore obstacles impeding movement towards our goals.

One such obstacle was the complex morass of ethics in teaching. The peer supervision space can be useful for exploring many ethical issues in teaching practice. While these conversations also take place in the wider team, peer supervision can offer another opportunity to deepen these ongoing discussions. We also experienced increased job satisfaction and developed a stronger sense of professional identity. This reflects Crocket and Kotzé's (2012) observation that a supportive witnessing process between counsellor educators can contribute towards shaping professional identity.

Limitations of the study

In retrospect, audio-recording of the peer conversations would have provided a more accurate record for data collection. In addition, our peer supervision group contained only two educators, which was probably beneficial for building trust and intimacy but a limitation in terms of monitoring our interactive process. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) have recommended that a third person observes the interactive process and provides feedback. A larger peer group may have offered more resourcing as well as more challenges to peers.

Despite widespread use of peer supervision and enthusiasm about the benefits, there is little empirical evidence of its efficacy (Borders, 2012). Borders cautions that this model can provide peer support at the expense of a desired challenge for professional growth. Indeed, Toni wondered if her "newcomer" status might have somewhat limited her capacity to provide Niccy with constructive feedback.

Considerations for setting up peer supervision

Peer supervision relationships must be collegial relationships of equality, with neither person holding a position of authority over the other. Quality of relationship is pivotal to providing professional support and growth. Peers therefore need to choose their supervision partners. A clear supervision contract and regular review, including the monitoring of changing peer dynamics, are essential (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Power between peers must be discussed frequently, and honest communication is essential for peer supervision to be a safe and productive relationship.

As discussed earlier, educators frequently experience high stress levels related to programme demands, which can impair the quality of communication and,

subsequently, team relationships. If debriefing because of stress associated with workplace teams becomes part of peer supervision, ethical principles need to be determined to guide this process. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) have warned against peer supervision deteriorating into repetitive negative conversations.

In peer supervision, if collegiality deepens into friendship, when might the professional relationship become limited through familiarity? If neither recognises that the relationship has changed, supervision could develop into a process in which there tends to be compulsive mutual agreement, such that the supervision has lost its “potency,” with no monitoring eye on process and outcomes. In peer supervision, Hawkins and Shohet (2012) recommend seeking another supervisor to review the supervisory relationship, in order to become clear about the parameters and effectiveness of the relationship.

How do peers differentiate between peer supervision and personal counselling? Inevitably, challenges will arise at times for counsellor educators in their professional worlds and teaching practices that are strongly influenced by their personal backgrounds and experiences, such as their own family dynamics. Such matters may necessitate personal counselling for deeper exploration.

There are risks in not addressing both the relationship between the personal and the professional and the boundaries between counselling and supervision when contracting with one another in establishing a peer supervisory relationship. For example, a peer in the same institution might witness her colleague struggling with personal boundaries, such as too much personal disclosure to students, which could unwittingly compromise student learning. The peer would not be meeting NZAC professional standards for supervision practice if she neglected to raise this concern with her colleague. The matter of appropriate self-disclosure when teaching is a legitimate topic of discussion and reflection in supervision, but the question of what evoked an inappropriate disclosure is likely to be better explored in counselling.

In addition, the practical differences between peer supervision with a colleague and professional supervision with someone outside of the workplace would indicate that the collegial peer relationship involving multiple roles may not be the best place to explore all issues, such as educators experiencing parallel processes with their students. An example is a counsellor educator being personally triggered when teaching the dynamics of abuse. It may be easier and more appropriate for

a counsellor educator to explore their own process with an external professional supervisor.

Given that counsellor educators are a small group of professionals, there are few available to set up peer supervision. The process of peer supervision may be less effective with a colleague with whom one works very closely. Being physically separated by distance (as we were) created a protective boundary. Counsellor educators could set up peer relationships with other institutions, leading to more networking between organisations. Management support could enable more counsellor educators to become involved in peer supervision.

Conclusion

This study displayed an in-depth, subjective view of two counsellor educators' year-long experiences of institute-specific peer supervision. As a small pilot project, the degree to which the findings of this study could be generalised to counsellor educators in other programmes is debatable. However, this study has shown that peer supervision between experienced counsellor educators can provide emotional, academic, and professional support to manage the demands of the counsellor educator role. The peer supervision process can preserve wellbeing, offer peer modelling, and facilitate professional development, enabling participants to experience both a higher sense of job satisfaction and a stronger sense of professional identity.

This study could be further developed by gathering quantitative data, as suggested by Baker (2012). Initial goals set by each peer could be regularly measured, providing a quantitative view of the effectiveness of the peer supervision process. Other forms of larger-scale qualitative research could also be undertaken to investigate the dynamics and potential of peer supervision in greater depth.

The limits of peer supervision revealed by the present study include, for example, addressing and managing complex dynamics such as parallel processes that can arise in and adversely affect the relationships between counsellor educators and their students. Such limitations provide insight into why professional supervision and peer supervision are both required.

References

Baker, S. (2012). *A new view of evidence-based practice.* Retrieved from http://www.ct.counselling.org/2012/12/a-new-view-of-evidence-based-practice

Becker, J. M. (2014). *TNLI: Action research: Professional development: Peer coaching for improvement of teaching and learning. Teachers network*. Retrieved from http://archive-org.com/page/3592280/2014-01-26/http://teachersnetwork.org/TNLI/research/growth/becker.htm

Bennett, S. (2008). The interface of attachment, transference, and countertransference: Implications for the clinical supervisory relationship. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, *78*(2-3), 301–320.

Benshoff, J. M. (1992). *Peer consultation for professional counselors*. Retrieved from http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-3/peer.htm

Borders, L. D. (2005). Snapshot of clinical supervision in counseling and counselor education: A five-year review. *The Clinical Supervisor*, *24*(1-2), 69-113. doi:10.1300/J001v24n01_05

Borders, L. D. (2012). Dyadic, triadic, and group models of peer supervision/consultation: What are their components, and is there evidence of their effectiveness? *Clinical Psychologist 16*, 59–71.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Bruner, J. S. (2002). *Making stories: Law, literature, life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carrington, G. (2004). Supervision as a reciprocal learning process. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *20*(1), 31-42.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crocket, K., & Kotzé, E. (2012). Counsellors becoming counsellor educators: A New Zealand example. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *40*(3), 247–260.

Crossley, M. (2000). Introducing narrative psychology: Self, *trauma and the construction of meaning*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press:

Davis, T. E., Levitt, D. H., McGlothlin, J. M., & Hill, N. R. (2006). Perceived expectations related to promotion and tenure: A national survey of CACREP program liaisons. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *46*, 146–156.

Eriksen, K., & McAuliffe, G. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of counselor preparation: Constructivist, developmental, and experiential approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fine, M. (2003). Reflections on the intersection of power and competition in reflecting teams as applied to academic settings. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *29*(3), 339–351.

Freeman, M. (2007). Autobiographical understanding and narrative inquiry. In D. G. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 120–145). London, England: Sage.

Gabriel, M. A., & Kaufield, K. J. (2008). Reciprocal mentorship: An effective support for online instructors. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *16*(3), 311–327.

Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1986). Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 22–44). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Grey, S., Sedgwick, C., & Scott, J. (2013). *Te Kaupapa Whaioranga: The blueprint for tertiary education*. Tertiary Education Union, Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa. Retrieved from http://teu.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/TKW.pdf

Hawkins, P., & Shohet, R. (2012). *Supervision in the helping professions.* Maidenhead, England: McGraw-Hill Education.

Hill, N. R. (2009). An empirical exploration of the occupational satisfaction of counselor educators: The influence of gender, tenure status, and minority status. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *87*(1), 55-61.

Huston, T., & Weaver, C. L. (2008). Peer coaching: Professional development for experienced faculty. *Innovative Higher Education*, *33*(1), 5–20. doi: 10.1007/s10755-007-9061-9

Irving, J. A., Dobkin, P. L., & Park, J. (2009). Cultivating mindfulness in health care professionals: A review of empirical studies of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, *15*(2), 61-66.

Kraus, W. A. (1980). *Collaboration in organizations: Alternatives to hierarchy.* New York, NY: Human Sciences Press.

Lackritz, J. R. (2004). Exploring burnout among university faculty: Incidence, performance, and demographic issues. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*, 713–729.

Leinbaugh, T., Hazler, R. J., Bradley, C., & Hill, N. R. (2003). Factors influencing counselor educators' subjective sense of well-being. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *43*(1), 52–64.

Leppma, M., & Young, M. E. (2016). Loving-kindness meditation and empathy: A wellness group intervention for counseling students. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *94*(3), 297–305.

Lim, N., Kim, E. K., Kim, H., Yang, E., & Lee, S. M. (2010). Individual and work-related factors influencing burnout of mental health professionals: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *47*, 86-89.

McLeod, J., & McLeod, J. (2014). Personal and professional development for counsellors,

psychotherapists and mental health practitioners. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education.

Meyer, D., & Ponton, R. (2006). The healthy tree: A metaphorical perspective of counselor wellbeing. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *28*, 189–201.

New Zealand Association of Counsellors (2016a). *NZAC Code of ethics: A framework for ethical practice.* Retrieved from http://www.nzac.org.nz/code_of_ethics.cfm

New Zealand Association of Counsellors (2016b). *NZAC Guidelines for professional supervision of school guidance counsellors.* Retrieved from http://www.nzac.org.nz/supervision_guidelines.cfm

Niles, S. G., Akos, P., & Cutler, H. (2001). Counselor educators' strategies for success. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *40*(4), 276–291.

O'Halloran, T. M., & Linton, J. M. (2000). Stress on the job: Self-care resources for counselors. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *22*, 354–364.

Pieterse, A. L., Lee, M., Ritmeester, A., & Collins, N. M. (2013). Towards a model of self-awareness development for counselling and psychotherapy training. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, *26*(2), 190–207.

Puig, A., Baggs, A., Mixen, K., Park, Y., Kim, B., & Lee, S. (2012). Relationship between job burnout and personal wellness in mental health professionals. *Journal of Employment Counselling*, *49*(3), 98–109.

Sterner, W. R. (2009). Influence of the supervisory working alliance on supervisee work satisfaction and work-related stress. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *31*(3), 249–263.

Testa, D., & Sangganjanavanich, V. F. (2016). Contribution of mindfulness and emotional intelligence to burnout among counseling interns. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, *55*(2), 95–108.

Wester, K. L., Trepal, H. C., & Myers, J. E. (2009). Wellness of counselor educators: An initial look. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, *48*(1), 91–109.

Yager, G. G., & Tovar-Blank, Z. G. (2007). Wellness and counselor education. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, *46*(2), 142–153.

Žorga, S., Dekleva, B., & Kobolt, A. (2001). The process of internal evaluation as a tool for improving peer supervision. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 23(2), 151–162.