Importance of Ethical Practices and Blended Learning: Recommendations for the Field*

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Abstract

Blended learning models of training and education are gaining in popularity and availability. While such models are appealing for variety of reasons, they are not without unique challenges and concerns. Practitioners face ethical decisions every day and blended training models create their own set of circumstances that could become problematic without forethought and a deliberate effort to avoid such complexities. The authors share their own experiences after three years of a blended training model and offer targeted recommendations for educators, practitioners, administrators, and university faculty.

NOTE: This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the Connexions Content Commons, this module is published in the *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*,[1] Volume 6, Number 4 (October - December, 2011), ISSN 2155-9635. Formatted and edited in Connexions by Theodore Creighton and Brad Bizzell, Virginia Tech and Janet Tareilo, Stephen F. Austin State University. The assignment of topic editor and double-blind reviews managed by Editor, Linda Lemasters, George Washington University.

*Version 1.2: Dec 8, 2011 5:53 pm US/Central
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1 Sumario en espanol

Mezclado aprendiendo modelos de instrucción y la educación gana en la popularidad y la disponibilidad. Mientras tales modelos apelan para la variedad de razones, ellos no están sin desafíos y preocupaciones extraordinarios. Los facultativos encaran las decisiones éticas cada día y mezclados entrenando modelos crean su propio conjunto de circunstancias que podrían llegar a ser problemáticas sin prudencia y un esfuerzo deliberado evitar tales complejidades. Los autores comparten sus propias experiencias después de tres años de una instrucción mezclada que modelo y oferta concentraron en recomendaciones para educadores, para los facultativos, para los administradores, y para facultad de universidad.

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

2 Appeal of Distance Education

Distance education has become a significant part of our educational system. Elements of distance education permeate every institution from some schools offering limited online classes to institutions solely devoted to distance education. The Kohn Academy for elementary and high school students provides computer-based distance instruction on topics from basic math to physics. On-line universities such as Phoenix, Walden, and Western Governors University offer BA's, MA's and Ph.D's in a wide range of fields. Thus, distance education is quickly becoming a major avenue for people to receive basic and advanced education.

According to Mehaffy (2010), *"three forces"*, significantly altering the delivery of programs in higher education are decline in funding, rise in expectations, and rapid development in technology. Further, with state budget deficits and rising expenses, universities are exploring alternative education options. Mehaffy promotes the re-evaluation of the role of university faculty citing the Red balloon project. The author suggests that there a number of ways for university faculty to distribute information. Specifically, the author suggests that technology allows for new avenues for faculty to disseminate information far more efficiently than traditional lectures.

In response to these pressures, Indiana State University, with support from the Indiana Department of Education, created the Indiana Training Alternative for School Psychologists (ITASP) program. The innovative program, with its *blended learning* format, was designed to target current educators who wished to remain employed in a school setting while working toward their Educational Specialist degree in school psychology, the minimal degree required to practice school psychology in the state of Indiana.

To ensure the success of the program, several factors had to be considered relative to course delivery. First, the integration of technology with online course delivery would allow students from wide geographic area access to the program. Second, courses would need to be offered at times convenient for students holding full time employment. Program faculty would maintain a commitment to traditional, face-to-face (f2f) instruction for certain course content (e.g., assessment and testing procedures). Thus, the program would include a combination of f2f and virtual interactions among a cohort of students that would be led by one or more instructors, also known as "blended learning" (Dede, 2006; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). Blended learning emphasizes the importance of the intentional planning and integration of courses, field experience, and supervision. Blended learning formats offer several advantages over solely online environments (Zhao, Lei, Yan, Lai, and Tan, 2008; Means et al. 2009). However, Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, and McCloskey (2009) caution that further research in this area is needed to determine the most effective and efficient delivery.

Some academic content areas still offer challenges to distance education. In particular, applied programs such as counseling and school psychology offer unique challenges to distance education. School and counseling psychology both require teaching of interpersonal assessment and intervention skills. These skills require the ability to provide supervised practical experiences to ensure sufficient learning of the skills (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], American Psychological Association [APA]). The provision of properly supervised

practical experiences presents both pedagogical challenges and more importantly ethical challenges. While there have been recent articles dealing with the pedagogical challenges, very little attention has been given to the ethical challenges that exist.

3 Ethical Practices

Ethical practices are the glue that bonds professionals together and defines a set of professionals. It is the ethics of a field that define the role and function of the professionals (Bowser, 1995). Ethical principles set the boundaries for professional conduct and serve as the gatekeepers on professional practice. Without ethical principles, practitioners are free to do as they please, when they please, and to whomever they please. Thus, ethical practices are essential to professional development and sustainability.

Given the importance of ethical practices, it becomes essential to understand where professionals learn the ethical practices of their profession. Obviously, much of the learning occurs within the training program. Many programs have courses solely devoted to ethical principles. Further, many accrediting and approving bodies require the inclusion of ethics principles with a program curriculum. However, didactic course work is not the only place ethical practices are taught. Practicum experiences are key opportunities to teach ethical principles.

4 Ethical Principles

Each professional discipline has established a set of ethical codes that govern the professional conduct of members of those disciplines. However, adherence to these codes alone is insufficient for many reasons. First, professionals find that codes may be vague or even suggest contradictions in regards to the proper course of action should an ethical conflict or dilemma arise. Second, an ethical conflict or dilemma can and often does arise for which no guideline exists (Kitchener, 1984).

In a landmark article, Kitchener (1984) discusses the complexities and complications that may occur within the mental health profession, and offers a broad framework for approaching ethical conflicts and dilemmas. She defines her framework based on two levels of moral reasoning. The first is the intuitive level followed by a more in-depth level of critical evaluation. The intuitive level is defined as an individual's response based on previous training and experience and may be a 'knee jerk' reaction. She argues that addressing dilemmas and conflicts simply from the intuitive level is incomplete and that the critical-evaluative level of inquiry is necessary to assess and direct an individual's course of action. This level of inquiry can be described as a hierarchical arrangement increasing in abstraction. When a conflict arises, an individual attempts to resolve this conflict beginning at the first tier, or consulting the codes of his or her profession. If the conflict cannot be satisfactorily resolved at this level, the individual's inquiry moves to the second tier, ethical principles. And finally, if still no resolution is available the individual draws from his or her fundamental beliefs which Kitchener refers to as ethical theory. Kitchener postulates that these ethical principles, or the second tier, serve a crucial role in assisting professionals in guiding their professional conduct as well as resolving inevitable conflicts.

Given the complexities inherent in working with individuals and families, Kitchener (1984) further states that five ethical principles are essential to guide professional practice and to evaluate conflicts and dilemmas. Those essential ethical principles are: (a) autonomy, (b) nonmaleficence, (c) beneficence, (d) justice, and (e) fidelity. Autonomy means respecting others' rights and abilities to make their own choices and hold their own beliefs. Next, nonmaleficience refers to the ethical principle that professionals recognize as "above all do no harm." In addition to nonmaleficience, promoting positive growth and the welfare of others defines beneficence. Further, justice means acting toward others in a fair, impartial, and reasonable way. Last, fidelity is illustrated by an individual's faithful and trusting behavior toward others. Kitchener views these principles as fundamental to the helping professions by serving as the foundation for professional practice.

5 Ethical Decision-Making Process

Ethical codes serve many purposes including defining standards for professional conduct and competency as well protecting the welfare of the public. However, despite their intentions, ethical codes alone are inadequate to address the numerous ethical encounters, conflicts, and dilemmas that arise for mental health professionals. Further, many professionals find such codes ambiguous, insufficient, and difficult to interpret (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998).

According to Kitchener (1984), "acting ethically involves professionals in difficult decision making for which they are poorly prepared" (p. 43). In order to provide a format for resolving ethical dilemmas and conflicts, models for ethical decision making have been identified. The process of ethical decision making begins with the two levels of moral reasoning identified by Kitchener, the intuitive level and the critical-evaluative level. Hill, Glaser, and Harden (1995) refer to the level of critical evaluation as a cognitive level of ethical reasoning. They refer to this evaluative level as critical to the ethical decision making process, but further offer its limitations and barriers. To overcome these limitations and barriers, Hill, Glaser, and Harden propose a decision making model that not only illustrates the cognitive components to decision making, but one that recognizes and embraces aspects of emotion and intuition. Their model outlines a progression of seven steps: (a) recognition of a problem, (b) definition of the problem, (c) developing solutions, (d) choosing a solution, (e) reviewing the process, (f) implementing and evaluating the decision, and (g) continued reflection. Each step is comprised of cognitive components that represent the logical or rational approach to a conflict. In addition, the cognitive component is paired with reactions reflecting the emotional or intuitive aspects that an individual may experience. In the first step, recognizing the problem, the individual draws not only from his or her knowledge and experience, but from feelings of uncertainty and indecision. During the second phase, defining the problem, an individual identifies the nature of the conflict such as incompatible standards or codes and reflects of his or her own feelings of distress about the inconsistency and ambiguity. When developing solutions, an individual considers many possible courses of action and weighs in on his or her emotional response to a given action. Similarly, when choosing a solution, an individual considers both the cognitive and emotional aspects and selects the course of action that satisfies both. In the fifth phase, an individual contemplates if the chosen course of action considers the views and values of all parties including his or her own view. Next, the course of action is implemented with mindfulness regarding the outcome and possible consequences. Finally, the individual reflects on knowledge gained from the process as well as potential actions in the future. Ethical dilemmas and conflicts inherently have no clear course of action. With a diligent and thoughtful process of ethical decision making, mental health professions can conduct themselves competently and protect the welfare of the public.

6 Multiple Relationships

Once known as *dual relations*, the American Psychological Association adopted a new term, *multiple relations*, in 1992 to better articulate the complex nature of the work of practitioners. The term multiple relationships better encompasses the multifaceted aspects of clinical practice and recognizes relationships might exist that could be considered unethical and by the same token, some relationships might exist that would be constitute an ethical violation (Gottlieb & Younggren, 2009). Programs with a blended learning format such as the ITASP program, by nature and design, offer unique and intricate dynamics where multiple relationships are inherent. A graduate student enrolled in the ITASP program is also serving in another capacity in his or her current employment (i.e., classroom teacher, diagnostician). Further, he or she is completing required coursework expectations while also serving in this full-time role as employee. A case illustration: Mrs. Jones has been a 4rd grade teacher for 10 years. A local university offers an Educational Specialist degree in School Psychology and the training program is designed for students to complete the program and maintain his or her current employment. Mrs. Jones is eager to enter the program and expand her professional skills as well as employment opportunities as a school psychologist. One part of the application process is a commitment from her current employer that she will be able to meet specific programmatic requirements (i.e., have access to testing materials, have an on-site supervisor). The scenario for Mrs. Jones

is quite complex. Some possible questions are: Who will be her site supervisor? What is the relationship Mrs. Jones has with this person at this point? What are the paths if and when a concern arises relative to Mrs. Jones performance in the program?

Using an ethical problem-solving model, the first step is to define the problem. In this case, the problem is the multiple roles held by each individual. Multiple roles include expectations that are implicit, but problems arise when perceptions are incongruent. For example, the role of the university supervisor might be different depending on the person's perception. Specifically, the university supervisor may see their role as limited to the duties and functions relative to university expectations; yet, the field supervisor may have a broader perception and view the university supervisor as the student's main resource for case specific questions and guidance. To complicate it more, the student may be unclear as to which individual serves as their primary resource and supervisor.

To resolve the problem of multiple roles and role ambiguity, university programs can take several different approaches. Our experience has suggested that clearly stated and shared roles and expectations for each member can be helpful. The expectations can be published and shared through manuals, contracts, or compacts. Of these options, a compact has been found to be most useful. Another option is an initial meeting between the field supervisor and a representative from the university. At this meeting, the university representative can clearly articulate the expectations of all parties prior to the student's placement. Relevant university documents such as student handbooks and contracts can be reviewed at this meeting. In addition to this initial meeting, regularly scheduled ongoing contact can help reinforce and maintain the understanding of roles and expectations. This contact can be accomplished in person or through distance media. The frequent contact allows for discussion of arising issues and clarification of perceptions. Another option is for university faculty to have regularly scheduled contact with students as a group to discuss field experiences and reduce the number of issues that may arise. Finally, to avoid multiple relationships, the process should be transparent to all parties particularly the student.

7 Professional Development

National organizations such as APA, NASP, and the American Counseling Association (ACA) all report that professional development is critical to the continued professional practice of their membership and socialization of new members. As with many issues, new members of the profession perform as they are trained. Thus, if the training program emphasizes and requires professional development activities, then graduates of these programs are more likely to engage in these activities. For on-campus traditional students providing support for professional development is relatively easy. Students can be provided with excused absences from classes, additional assignments can be made, and financial support can be provided.

For the distance student, support for professional development can become more problematic. As described earlier, many distance students maintain full-time jobs, support families, and often do not qualify for support that more traditional students are able to garner. Also, the field practitioner often has a strong influence over the behavior of the student. If the field practitioner does not value or support professional development then it is unlikely that the trainee is going to value professional development. These forces increase the pressure upon the university trainers to ensure the participation of all students in professional development.

From our experience, ensuring distance students participate in professional development has been difficult. Attendance at state conferences has been challenging. Despite the inclusion of a requirement for attendance to the state conference within the practicum assignments and agreements, many distance students reported difficulty in obtaining permission to attend the conference. Attendance to national or regional conferences was nonexistent.

To increase the participation in professional development, faculty can take a progressive approach. Using the ethical problem solving model, faculty can begin by analyzing the problem and identifying particular supports and roadblocks. Supports can be the professional development of the supervising field person. A second could come from the gain in knowledge to all members of the staff by presentations of the practicum student following the conference. Roadblocks are the cost of the attendance and general attitude of futility

of the conference. The next step in the ethical problem solving model is consultation and identification of possibilities. In examining the reasons why professional organizations support professional development, ethical documents indicate that professional development ensures the ongoing improvement of professional skills, keeps professionals abreast of legal and ethical revisions, and keeps working professionals informed of best practices. It is also important to look at what allows people to attend professional development. This can include financial support and release time from the Local Education Agency (LEA).

In examination of the supports and barriers, there are possible actions program faculty can engage in to promote professional development. One method might be to increase the level of support within the LEA. This could be accomplished through direct communication with the directors of the LEA and discussion regarding the importance of students establishing professional habits and offer university support. This support could include funds to support the students and the field supervisor or offers of professional development to the staff in exchange for support for the student to attend. Universities are also in a strategic position to offer professional development for local practitioners. These opportunities could be provided free of charge for students and their supervisors. Such activities allow for continued professional development and networking for future employment opportunities.

8 Supervision

Training competent practitioners is a multi-faceted endeavor with its own set of opportunities and challenges. Bernard & Goodyear, (2009) define supervision as:

8.1

"an intervention that is provided by a senior member of a profession to a junior member or members of that same profession. This relationship is evaluative and hierarchical, extends over time, and has the simultaneous purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the junior member(s); monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients she, he, or they see(s); and serving as a gatekeeper of those who are to enter the particular profession. (p. 7)

It is within the supervisory relationship that several facets of training occur simultaneously including the development of knowledge and skills, as well as formative and summative evaluation. The evaluation component of supervision is one primary aspect that separates supervision from other professional activities within the professions of psychology and counseling. Supervision needs to be an on-going dialogue between the supervisee and the supervisor with particular attention to the development of the supervisee including evaluation components. It is important that questions and concerns be addressed immediately to support the supervisee and avoid any unnecessary complications that could arise in the future (Pettifor, McCaroon, Schoepp, Stark, & Stewart, 2011).

While individual supervision is predominately used within training settings, group supervision is also employed quite effectively. Students rated their group supervision experience as beneficial (Mastoras & Andrews, 2011). Based on a literature review that examined the benefits expressed by students relative to their experience in group supervision, Mastoras and Andrews (2011) offer several pragmatic suggestions for supervisors. Those include: (a) encouraging peer feedback, (b) balancing the multiple roles of the supervisor, (c) managing group process, and (d) working with supervisee anxiety. The first point related to peer feedback is that supervisees reported a positive response related to the various perspectives of their peers and that supervisors should actively engage students within the context of supervision. For balancing roles, supervisors are encouraged to foster a supportive environment that focuses on skill attainment and matches the student's development level. Similarly, being an active supervisor in establishing a safe and supportive environment leads to better management of the group processes. Anxiety felt by the supervisee is nature and expected. Within the context of group supervision, these feelings can be normalized and promote a valuable experience for the supervisees.

9 Confidentiality

Of the many ethical principles guiding a profession, few hold the importance of confidentiality. For distance students, confidentiality is a principle that requires significant effort and attention. Many of the technologies that are so important for distance education to occur become the very challenges to ensuring appropriate confidentiality. Many professional groups have focused on the use of simple technologies such as fax machines and e-mails. However, the use of such technologies as video conferencing, internet support programs, and distance education software still remain areas of difficulty with respect to confidentiality.

Video conferencing allows for the greatest interaction between the students and the professor using distance format. This allows for visual and auditory two way communication. This advantage can also be its disadvantage. The openness of the communication can lead to the feeling of actual dialogue, which can lead to the relaxation of standards. Thus, students and faculty may inadvertently have lapses in confidentiality when discussing cases and mention identifying information. Further, video conferencing commonly happens from one room to another. Having multiple rooms involved increases the opportunity for security to lapse at one of the rooms and thus, a break in confidentiality.

Internet support programs, such as Blackboard Learning, are often an important part of distance education. Blackboard lacks the visual communication available in video conferencing but its flexibility in textual distance communication makes it a major part of distance education. Since it lacks the video and auditory capability of video conferencing, the possibility of people overhearing or overseeing description of clients is not possible. However, Blackboard and others like it leave a permanent product online that can be hacked or observed by unintended people. Also, without proper maintenance, material from past courses can still be available online. This can leave professional material at-risk for an extended period of time.

Other support for distance education can be found in software programs such as Elluminate! These support programs are convenient in that they often include a video and/or auditory avenue of communication. The increased avenues of interaction make it appealing for distance educators because it allows for more open interaction without the expense of video conferencing. However, like video conferencing the increased audio and video interactions opens up the risk of being overheard. For Elluminate!, there is the additional problem that most sessions are videotaped. This leaves a permanent record that if not properly maintained leaves an open possibility for an unintended party to hack or view confidential material.

Thus, if we examine the main issues underlying the difficulties with respect to confidentiality and we follow our problem solving model, the difficulties focus around elimination of the viewing or overhearing of presentation of confidential material and the securing of permanent products left connected to the internet. Applying the model suggests the next step is consultation. In discussing supervision with distance technology, Mayer (2008) suggests that students take extra precautions in sanitizing and securing confidential reports sent via distance media. Specifically, Mayer recommends sanitizing that goes beyond the use of initials, or just last or first names. She suggests the use of fake initials, fake schools and fake teacher identity. There was also the suggestion to password protect any document transmitted via technology. While this assists security, it does not necessarily assist with over hearing or viewing by outside people. This can be done by assisting the security and limitation of rooms.

10 Recommendation Points

After three years of offering an Ed.S. program in school psychology via a blended learning model, the program faculty at Indiana State University have learned some valuable lessons and hope that such experiences can be helpful to others considering such a delivery model. Given these experiences and challenges, the authors offer targeted recommendation points across four areas: supervision, multiple relationships, confidentiality, and professional development.

11 Supervision

Supervision of early practitioners is a vital part of their training. However, supervision also creates the possibility of multiple relationships which are even more likely to occur in programs with a blended learning

format. Based on the supervision literature and our own implementation of a hybrid program, four key factors emerged: (1) group cohesion, (2) selection of site supervisors, (3) importance of communication, and (4) awareness of state regulations.

Group cohesion. An important issue for group supervision is group cohesion (Yalom, 2005). The members must feel that they are members of a group and sharing within the group is safe. This can be difficult with distance students who do not see each other on a regular basis as do on-campus students. To create feelings of group cohesion, it is recommended that first, the university supervisor make special efforts to learn the unique backgrounds of the participating candidates. For example, students who have had significant experience with low incidence populations can be specifically asked to comment on supervision cases involving that population. Further, the faculty member can share the candidate's background with the rest of the group, allowing the group to see the candidate as a resource they can make contact with outside of supervision times. A second recommendation is to build group and team building activities into the curriculum outside of the monthly supervision meetings. Ideally, this would occur during previous coursework. Collaborative projects using distance technology, on-campus meetings, both social and academic, during the summer months when candidates have less stress, and open discussion threads and chat rooms are methods for building cohesion among distance students. During supervision, on-line discussion threads, postings of upcoming events and topics, and weekly chatrooms can enhance feelings of group cohesion.

Selection of site supervisors. Other major issues with supervision focus around the field supervisors. In distance programs, field supervisors are even more important than with traditional programs. In more traditional programs, many supervisors are known by the faculty and may even meet with them during professional meetings and professional development activities. With distance programs, this can be more difficult especially where students take the responsibility of finding their own sites. To minimize difficulties with field supervisors, it is recommended that faculty take extra steps to be involved with supervisor selection and recruitment. Specifically, going to meetings of area professionals to deliberately recruit possible field supervisors is very productive. The f2f meeting between possible field supervisor and faculty to discuss supervision expectations and to allow for open discussion is very helpful in acquiring the best sites for future students. Also, consulting with students during the year(s) prior to practicum about field sites the candidate is considering can facilitate clear communication and the building of relationships prior to the practicum experience. Programs may consider developing a list of tested practicum sites, to encourage and inform candidates of sites where previous candidates have had good experiences. It is also recommended that programs find ways of supporting and regularly communicating with field supervisors. Faculty can use distance technology to provide in-services or mini-workshops for field supervisors. Faculty can also search for resources to compensate field supervisors with tuition reduction or free single credit workshops sponsored by the university. The field supervisors can then use the credits for license renewal requirements.

Importance of communication. Another area for field supervisors is effective and ongoing communication. Practicum compacts and manuals can be effective ways of communicating expectations and role boundaries. These written documents can be presented prior to the beginning of any fieldwork and can provide an initial base for ongoing discussion. It is essential for supervisors to be able to communicate with each other as well as the university-based supervisor. It is recommended that faculty consider holding regular meetings with field supervisors using the same technology that is used for distance instruction. Skype, video conferencing, and instructional tools like Elluminate! can be as useful for communicating and supporting field supervisors as it is with students. Scheduled opportunities where issues can be discussed and expectations be clarified or if necessary modified can increase feelings of ownership and support from field supervisors.

Awareness of state regulations. Finally, an important issue with field supervisors is differing state regulations. Many educational policy issues are determined by individual states and states often interpret policy differently. It is important faculty be aware of differing state policies and expectations, when considering field placements. For example, most recently states have been provided with the option of allowing or not allowing the use of a discrepancy formula in the identification of students with a specific learning disability. For this reason, candidates from the same program can be provided with very different expectations and experiences. Faculty need to be aware and supportive of the different expectations. It is recommended that

for programs moving into this model may limit their initial recruitment of distance students within the state or neighboring states to minimize broad differences in state regulations.

12 Multiple Relationships

Hybrid programs are rich in multiple relationships. Given our experiences, two factors are most salient. The first is that roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined to assist all parties involves and to avoid multiple relationships. The second, curriculum infusion, means an importance should be placed on attending ethical issues throughout the student's program.

Roles and responsibilities defined. Practitioners within the helping professions operate within and among complex systems and subsystems. Speaking specific to school psychologists, Lasser and McGarry Klose assert, "school psychologists must frequently navigate systems' boundaries, conflicting values and beliefs, and multiple roles" (p. 484). With respect to such multiple roles and relationships, the old adage an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure appears highly appropriate. In this case, the prevention comes in two forms – clear identification of roles and responsibilities and clear extensive review of ethics within the program curriculum. First, roles and responsibilities for all parties should be presented in explicit written format. This can be accomplished through practicum manuals but is likely most effectively done in a practicum contract or compact (The ITASP materials used by ISU can be found at: http://coe.indstate.edu/cdcsep/edpsych/itasp.htm). The manual is most often used to highlight overall issues and requirements and can often be unread by students and supervisors. However, contracts and compacts have the advantage of requiring signatures. Thus, these documents tend to not only be read but also to be carefully examined. The compact or contract should clearly identify roles and responsibilities of the candidate, the site supervisor, and the university supervisor and the authors recommend the inclusion of administrators in such a compact. The compact should also contain procedures for any party to seek assistance in case of conflict. Specifically, contracts should list procedures for addressing conflicts between candidates and training supervisors and/or administrators.

Curriculum infusion. Graduate training programs likely require at least one course emphasizing professional, ethical and legal standards that govern their practice. The authors recommend that for blended learning programs, such professional issues be addressed throughout the curriculum. At a minimum, the issue of dual relationships should be discussed and examined in all practicum and courses involving some field-based experiences. An emphasis should also be placed on a sound ethical decision-making process when dilemmas occur. For blended learning programs, given the authors' experience, dilemmas occur more often for those students as opposed to students enrolled in traditional training programs.

13 Confidentiality

Confidentiality of client or student information is critical in the fields of education, counseling, and psychology. In terms of blended learning, providing training and supervision while maintaining confidentiality creates some challenges that program faculty have to address. The authors offer targeted recommendations focusing on the following: (1) technology to ensure confidentiality, (2) clear expectations, and (3) on-going dialogue.

Technology to ensure confidentiality. First, programs need to ensure that the technology software utilized by all parties (i.e., candidate, field supervisor, program faculty) is confidential and is the only software used for communication and dissemination of sensitive course or fieldwork requirements (i.e., progress notes, evaluation reports). When using these programs, best practice strongly encourages two layers of security and this might include password protected log in and then a mechanism within the program that only the student and site supervisor can access.

Clear expectations. Program faculty and field supervisors must make clear the expectations relative to confidential information. Such expectations should be clearly spelled out in course syllabi and revisited periodically during meetings with candidates and field supervisors. For a training program, these expectations need to be beyond what one might think of in terms of 'sanitizing' a report. For instance, the use

of client or student initials and a false name for the school are no longer sufficient to ensure that the true identity of the student or client could not be identified. In the event that a program faculty member or field supervisor believes that a student has not clearly protected the confidentiality of the client or student, it is the responsibility of both the faculty member and the field supervisor to address the concern with the candidate and review the expectations.

Relative to supervision, assurance of confidentiality is critical. Video conferencing and Skype may be used for such activities, yet does not offer sufficient security to discuss confidential issues regarding candidate performance. While the communication of candidate performance between faculty and field supervisors is essential, it must occur through technology that guarantees the confidential of the candidate.

On-going dialogue. Ethical issues faced by practitioners occur routinely. Given this, ongoing communication is needed among all parties relative to the candidate's training. Specifically, field supervisors and program faculty need to have clear agreement on issues related confidentiality and a process to discuss possible breaches committed by the candidate. Of equal importance is the ability of the candidate to have a clear procedure for reporting suspected violations of their confidentiality by either field or faculty supervisors. These processes should be included in either or both practicum manuals and contracts.

14 Professional Development

In the area of professional development, blended learning programs offer a broader range of opportunities that engage the site-supervisor, the program faculty, and the student as opposed to training programs with a traditional format. However, these broader opportunities also create unique challenges. Among the challenges are participation, socialization of the candidate, and the benefit for on-site personnel.

Participation. While non-traditional students already working in the field are likely familiar with professional development expectations, blended learning programs face separate challenges. For instance, candidates can be involved in work environments where professional development is viewed as a positive, but not fully embrace the expectation. Thus, it becomes imperative for faculty to clearly indicate minimum expectations for professional development activities.

Similarly, expectations relative to professional development need to be communicated with administrators and others' associated with the candidate's current employment. For instance, a candidate may be required by the program to attend a state conference sponsored by their professional organization. For the candidate to attend and meet this program requirement, the candidate's current administrator will need to be aware of and to support the activity. Thus, it is critical for the administrators to be informed of program requirements. Including administrators in discussion of program requirements via a compact assists in obtaining support for the candidate without placing all responsibility on the candidate.

Socialization of the candidate. Program faculty should support the professional development of the field supervisors. Candidates early in their field of study strongly benefit from socialization from senior practitioners as well as interaction with other candidates. Offering support to the field supervisors offers the candidate the opportunity to be immersed into the culture of their profession.

Benefit for on-site personnel. While attending professional meetings is an important avenue for professional development other activities can also be implemented within a blended learning program. One alternative is for the candidate to participate in the presentation of professional development material to their field-based colleagues. Site supervisors express many advantages to supporting placements for practicum and internship students. One advantage that many sites share is candidates enrich their site by bring the latest ideas and innovations relative to their field. Professional development opportunities provide a venue for the candidate to give back to their field based colleagues.

A second alternative that works well with blended programs is the provision of professional development activities through distance communication media. Faculty can enhance their relationships with field sites and increase the knowledge of the profession through mini-skill or full-scale workshops using distance technologies. Provision of such services has the added benefit of improving the breadth of experiences available at the field site for future candidates.

A blended learning training model has shown to be a valuable and desirable venue for the delivery of

graduate education for this professional practice field. It has not been without challenges and hurdles. Other programs will share the same success and reward. The authors suggest faculty, administrators, field supervisors and others form and implement a thoughtful, deliberate approach utilizing a problem solving method. With such a targeted strategy, they too will be successful.

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