

## **The Significance of the Interpersonal Relationship in Practicum Supervision: What Is It About Fleur?**

**Delma A. Stormont,**

**School of Public Health, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park  
Road, Kelvin Grove. Q. 4059.**

### **Introduction**

The practicum is recognised as a highly significant time of learning in professional education, and the context of the practicum is an important determinant of its outcome. The aim of this study was to describe the role of the interpersonal component of context in the practicum. The practicum studied was clinical dietetics in the Graduate Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics at Queensland University of Technology. The physical context of the study was the dietetics department of a large metropolitan hospital. The study's strategy was to view the process of supervision through the eyes of the participants, four students and six supervisors in one four-week block of practicum.

### **Methods and Results**

Participants completed questionnaires, interviews, journals and logs of their supervision experiences. Data analysis used orientational qualitative analysis, based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and models of supervision, as theoretical frameworks for the analysis. A more detailed account of the background and theory of this paper has been previously presented (Stormont, 1997a). The purpose of the present report is to provide data analysis and discussion on the supervision provided by one supervisor. A brief description of the questionnaires that were used will be made first of all, so that points related to these data sources will be clear when results are discussed.

#### **The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)**

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a widely used tool for describing personality. The MBTI focuses on ways of perceiving information and ways of making judgements about that information (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) make it relevant to learning situations (e.g. Provost & Anchors, 1987).

Key word descriptors of the personality characteristics illustrate the basis of the MBTI (Freeman, 1993).

The Focus of Attention and Source of Energy:

Extraversion, E: "talkative"; "action"; "outward"; "people"; "expressive"; "do-think-do".

Introversion, I: "reserved"; "reflection"; "inward"; "privacy"; "quiet"; "think-do-think".

The Ways of Collecting Information:

Sensing, S: "facts"; "realistic"; "specific"; "present"; "practical".

Intuition, N: "ideas"; "imaginative"; "general"; "future"; "theoretical".

## The Ways in Which Decisions Are Made:

Thinking, T: "analyze"; "head"; "objective"; "criticise"; "fair".

Feeling, F: "understand"; "heart"; "subjective"; "praise"; "merciful".

## The Preference for Collecting Information or Deciding:

Judgement, J: "systematic"; "organised"; "decision"; "plan"; "closure".

Perception, P: "spontaneous"; "flexible"; "information"; "wait"; "options".

For practical purposes, it is important to understand the attitude, extraverted or introverted, of the perceiving and judging functions (Thompson, 1996). Therefore, a brief description of the attitude functions that are relevant to this paper follows.

### Extraverted iNtuition:

This function is alert to a very wide range of possibilities, can quickly comprehend the complex, and can read between the lines. Behaviour is marked by high enthusiasm for new projects, experiences, and challenges, brainstorming, and ingenious creativity.

### Introverted Thinking:

This function seeks a socratic, rational truth through the use of penetrating, systematic questioning and doubt. This focus may cause the person to appear stubborn, or oblivious to other people. What is clear to them may not be so to others.

### Extraverted Feeling:

This function relates to the world of interpersonal interactions that are governed by "appropriate" codes of behaviour for any situation. The strong focus on relationships results in an outgoing, friendly behaviour that considers others' needs as a priority.

Another important part of understanding the MBTI analysis used herein is the way in which elements of personality preferences develop with time (Grant, Thompson & Clarke, 1983). It should be noted that the years quoted in the following are a guide only. Individuals differ greatly, according to their life's experiences. The dominant function, the one that people prefer most, develops first, at around 6 to 12 years of age. The auxiliary function, with an attitude opposite to the dominant function, develops next, at 12 to 20 years of age. The remaining two developmental stages of adulthood represent a balancing of the personality, through development of functions that are the opposites of the earlier two. The tertiary function, which is the opposite of the auxiliary function, develops at 20 to 35 years of age. The quaternary or inferior function, which is the opposite of the dominant function, develops at 35 to 50 years of age.

Fleur, the supervisor in this study reported as an ENTP (Extraversion, iNtuition, Thinking, Perceiving) on the MBTI. In terms of type development, the four stages for an ENTP would be dominant Extraverted iNtuition, auxiliary Introverted Thinking, tertiary Extraverted Feeling, and inferior Introverted Sensing (Grant, Thompson & Clarke, 1983). In terms of age-predicted development, Fleur would be expected to be developing the inferior function. It should be noted, however, that the inferior function is indeed an inferior function in its development, and that the other functions would be expected to be much stronger influences

in her personality, in order from dominant to tertiary. It is also likely that in the limitations of the data collected that the extraverted functions would appear more readily than the introverted which, by definition, are not displayed externally. Therefore, discussion will focus on the Extraverted iNtuition and Extraverted Feeling.

### Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)

The university's formal assessment tool for obtaining feedback on teaching (QUT, 1996) was used to obtain general, background information on students' perception of important supervision issues. Students were asked to score the 33 items in banks of questions on teaching in clinical settings and relationship with students. Twenty-six out of the twenty-eight students in the class from which the participant group came completed this questionnaire. The items were rated from not important (0) to very important (4). Means scores were calculated and questions were ranked in order of their perceived importance.

According to this student group, the most important skills for clinical supervisors were:

#### **Scores Rank Item**

**3.73** 1. makes constructive criticism about students' clinical skills

**3.69** 2. deals fairly & impartially with each student

**3.62** 3. has good rapport with students

**3.58** 4. monitors students' clinical progress critically &  
constructively

**3.54** 5. assists students develop clinical problem-solving skills

**3.46** 6. is open to student opinion

### Questionnaire on Supervisor Interaction (QSI)

The Questionnaire on Supervisor Interaction asks students about interactions they have with supervisors (Kremer-Hayon & Wubbels, 1993). Using this questionnaire, students report on supervisor behaviours via 61 questions on two main scales:

- a supervisor's dominance or submission in relationships; and
- a supervisor's opposition to or cooperation with the student.

Questionnaire responses group into 8 subscales according to the extent of influence of each of the main scales. For example, a score on the leadership subscale relates to a high amount of dominance relative to cooperation. Conversely, a high amount of cooperation relative to dominance describes helpful and friendly supervisor interactions.

To summarise the scales:

Dominance - cooperation ~ leadership

Cooperation - dominance ~ helpful and friendly

Cooperation - submission ~ understanding

Submission - cooperation ~ student responsibility and freedom

Submission - opposition ~ uncertain

Opposition - submission ~ dissatisfied

Opposition - dominance ~ objecting

Dominance - opposition ~ strict.

Based on vector analysis of the 8 subscale scores, a single, overall rating of each supervisor can be determined, and a qualitative summary of supervisory style can be made. Based upon these overall scores, Brekelmans, Levy & Rodriguez (1993) described 8 types of supervision interactions.

1. Directive (dominance = cooperation);
2. Authoritative (cooperation > dominance);
3. Tolerant-authoritative (cooperation >> dominance);
4. Tolerant (cooperative with neutral dominance/submission);
5. Uncertain-Tolerant (submission = cooperation);
6. Uncertain-Aggressive (opposition > submission);
7. Repressive (dominance > opposition);
8. Drudging (dominant with neutral cooperation/opposition).

The three students who were supervised by Fleur gave excellent feedback on her supervision via the Questionnaire on Supervisor Interaction (Wubbels & Levy, 1993). All three perceived her to be a tolerant-authoritative supervisor, giving very high scores on leadership, helpful and friendly, and understanding scales. Students' statements on Fleur's supervision, taken from their journals and interviews, support the high regard in which they hold Fleur.

### **What is it about Fleur?**

### **Discussion of Results**

Students' feedback on one supervisor has been reported in this paper. The results from other participants have been analysed in similar manner. The supervisor described received consistently positive feedback from the three students she supervised. The remaining data have been used to provide fuller descriptions of students' opinions and Fleur's rationale of supervision.

For convenience in reading the following text, the supervisor has arbitrarily been assigned a female name and students have been arbitrarily given male names. This, intentionally, does not reflect the gender profile of the participant group, for the purpose of confidentiality. While it is recognised that gender is an issue in interpersonal communications, an attempt has been made to try to isolate issues that were specifically related to gender. No specific gender issues were raised by the students with regard to this supervisor.

General comments:

The three students who had Fleur as a supervisor were in agreement about their positive opinion of her supervision. First impressions appear to count for a lot. "I think it would have been beneficial if we had all had her because she is a very good supervisor" (Adam). "She's excellent. ... At first she comes across ... She doesn't smile much, but she has an aura about her. ... She's very professional ... like she could manage anything, a very calm person, ... yes, a take-charge type of person, I felt" (Colin). "Fleur, when she spoke, I thought she was lovely. I thought 'I'm so glad she's my supervisor as she is for two weeks', "She was with me and she was ... really normal, down to earth sort of person" and "Fleur, supervisor, is a fantastic person and educator. She puts all her faith in you as a professional dietitian" (David).

The comments made by students relate very well to students' ranking of important skills for supervisors:

2. deals fairly & impartially with each student
3. has good rapport with students.

The students' feedback via the Questionnaire on Supervisor Interaction (QSI) also relates very well to students' journal and interview data. Correlations can be seen with individual items rated highly by students on QSI leadership, helpful and friendly, and understanding scales. "She talks enthusiastically ... There is a pleasant atmosphere in our discussions ... She is friendly ... I can talk with her about my difficulties".

It is interesting to ask what it is that causes Fleur to make such a significant impact on students, or to express this another way, "*What Is It About Fleur?*" Answers to this question will be sought in the following discussion. On first encounter with students' diaries and interviews the rapport issue was very striking in their comments about Fleur. The MBTI can help to provide an understanding of how this rapport is achieved by Fleur.

It would be beneficial here to reiterate Fleur's MBTI function-attitudes and then show how they were demonstrated in Fleur. Her dominant function was Extraverted iNtuition, marked by high enthusiasm for new projects, experiences, and challenges, and ingenious creativity. "I expect them (students) to come in ... with a lot of enthusiasm and ... a fairly good knowledge of clinical theory and I also welcome them challenging what we do. As someone who does that I see that as a really positive trait"; "I think I am fairly unusual but I don't think that most people like to be challenged about what they're doing"; "the level of confidence and independence would be one way (of judging students' progress), that they could take initiative in going about their work without having to come and check all the time. There are some that are very confident and do that right at the start, and you know they're going to do it correctly, ... you know they're just checking all the time even when they are independent. If somebody comes in right at the beginning of the placement, and has indicated they're a fairly confident and independent person, I don't hold them back. I let them be independent"; "I have always been a free agent" (Fleur). These statements are about how she transmits her enthusiasm for challenge, and the need for confidence, initiative and independence. Fleur's interview thus provides evidence of how she generates an inspirational way of supervising.

Fleur's tertiary function was Extraverted Feeling. This function relates to interpersonal interactions, resulting in an outgoing, friendly behaviour that considers others' needs as a priority. It must be remembered that, as a tertiary function, it may not function as well as if it were a dominant function. However, Fleur provides a good example of how it works. "I always make a point of trying to be one of the first people that welcomes them (students). I always shake their hands. I always welcome them to the department, and say that we are

really pleased that they've come to work here, that we see them as a valuable addition to the department. So I come over very positive about their being here"; "I try to make a point of making them (students) feel at ease. Introduce them to everybody. Explain the way the department runs. Show them where the facilities are. Invite them to join us for lunch. Make them feel as much a part of the department as possible. Give them a map of the hospital" (Fleur).

The high regard that students had for Fleur was maintained throughout the practicum in spite of, as will be seen below, instances where Fleur did not fulfil students' expectations of a supervisor.

#### Role modelling of counselling:

Whereas students of many professional disciplines such as teaching, medicine, and nursing would have encountered professionals in these disciplines as a natural part of their lives, and would therefore have prior knowledge of the role to be enacted, the same cannot be said for dietetics. Many students come to study dietetics as an application of science, with many choosing it because the application has a strong focus on people and caring (Stormont, 1997b). Appropriate role modelling of dietetic counselling would seem to be a prerequisite for student's practicum in which they would be expected to learn and practise basic skills. None of the students had seen dietetic counselling prior to this practicum. "(I had) never watched anybody do it (counselling) before" (David).

In the first week three of the four students observed a supervisor counselling a client. It is not surprising that these students gave positive comments about the experience, which was, in turn, associated with Fleur. "Barry and I observed an outpatient. This was very useful. It was reassuring to see how unstructured and informal the whole process was. Just watching the interaction between the patient and Fleur was beneficial" (Adam). "After observing Fleur with an outpatient I felt as though I will be able to do this after some practice - put me at ease" (Barry). One student did not observe any counselling before he, himself, undertook counselling.

#### Student independence:

Fleur gives students independence and responsibility based on professional trust for the purpose of building their confidence. "You basically get her ward for the week. ... You actually get to go from go to whoa ... and you are actually doing something, not just running about waitressing" (Adam). "She said to me 'I totally trust you. ... I thought 'okay, I've got to do it right' and so everything I did I knew that I had to do it right ... I really felt good" and "She puts all of her faith in you as a professional dietitian" (David). Certainly, all students admitted to extreme nervousness at the start of their practicum and expressed their relief at being able to work without being watched. "I took a diet hx by myself and it felt so much better than when someone is listening in. I get very self conscious - using the correct language etc etc" (Adam). "When put under pressure from the supervisors, I find that I am so eager to do well and impress them, that I can't relax and think logically" (Colin). "When I was counselling the first week I saw Fleur standing outside the door so she must have been listening outside the door and I thought that was really nice ... to not just walk in and watch me" and "the issue's if there's somebody there all the time is that going to put me off" (David).

There were varying opinions regarding this independence, some negative, some positive. "I wasn't (reporting back all the time) and I thought maybe I should have been" (Adam). "At one stage during the week, Fleur came in and looked at me really strangely when I was doing some work that she obviously wasn't expecting me to be doing. I felt very stupid" (Adam). "This was pretty scary to start with. I had no idea of what was expected of me or if I

was doing the right thing. I felt a lot better by the end of the week" (Adam). "The first week Fleur let me go. She said 'right, I want you to see this and this ... And in that week I built up my confidence so much because there wasn't someone watching me. But I would still tell her exactly what I was doing and she said at the end that she deliberately did that for that reason" (David). This last statement suggests that support for students was a key factor in their independence. They were not abandoned. "She always said page me if you need something" (Colin). However, high educational motives were not the only factor in the independence that students enjoyed. "At the start of the day for a couple of days I didn't even see her or she wouldn't be there or she'd be at meetings" and "Fleur sat in with (only) one (patient) because she was busy ... She is always really busy" (Adam). "She didn't have time" (Colin). Yet it was this very issue of time that generated a positive impression with the students. "She was very definite she wanted to do it and made a time for it (feedback)" (Adam). "At the end of the day she made time for me to come and sit down and talk about it (counselling the student)" (Colin). Time was also an issue with regard to amount of feedback.

Overall, the building of confidence was a goal that was achieved by this strategy of independence. "I thought that was really good so by the second week I felt a lot better even though I was being watched all the time ... because I'd done it before" and "for the first three days I was with (another supervisor) all the time and if I spoke to a patient she would be that (demonstrated) far behind me and I found that really intimidating ... Not at all helpful" (David). There was no evidence from this group of students that the independence was a barrier to performance.

This independence also brought much reflective comment from students regarding their own progress. "If you have Fleur you just go off and she says 'these are the patients, go and speak with them'. You use your own discretion in that" (Adam). "My supervisor was away & I was asked to just go & do the ward - so I did & I felt that I did it really well. I asked other supervisors if I was doing the right thing & they seemed to think so! I still feel that my counselling is a bit long & I need to be able to take control more as time gets on & they're telling you about their fishing trip" (David). It is interesting to also note in that quote that the student has taken initiative in his actions. Other comments point to this student's initiative. "At the beginning though I found it good to let me just go and do what I had to do because I learnt so much just by going off on my own, ... learning how to find a chart and all that sort of thing, rather than having someone showing me. I mean, that was really difficult to do but I remember I asked the ward sister, I said 'excuse me where are the charts?' She said 'I don't know just look for them' and from then I thought right you know you think for yourself and that's it. And that's good" (David). This initiative is a direct result of the independence of the learning situation, but it might be speculated that the student's characteristics were a major determinant of his course of action. In the areas of confidence and reflective practice, then, the gift of independence brought enormous advantage.

In spite of the noted advantages, there are two major reservations about the amount of independence students had. Firstly, the student who had never seen a role modelling of counselling was given independence from the second day of his practicum. In this particular student's case, the long-term effect was beneficial. That does not necessarily mean that this or any other apparently confident student is doing appropriate practice. Confidence, while it is a big stimulus to performance is not, in itself, a guarantee of it. Fleur acknowledged that student characteristics were a factor in her giving students independence. "If somebody comes in right at the beginning of the placement, and has indicated they're a fairly confident and independent person, I don't hold them back. I let them be independent" (Fleur). Secondly, independence would seem to preclude many of the roles attributed to a supervisor in a variety of models of supervision. For example, it would not be possible to undertake the roles of instructor, observer, feedback, and evaluator, integral aspects of

Clinical Supervision (Cogan, 1973; Smyth, 1984; Turney, 1982). Indeed, clinical supervision was described by Cogan as "involving or depending on direct observation" (Cogan, 1973, p. 8). Similarly, the confronting or tutoring roles in a Coaching model of supervision (Kinlaw, 1989) or the information emphasis, facilitative focus, or confrontive focus of the Mentoring model of supervision (Cohen, 1995) would be difficult to perform.

#### Observing students' counselling:

Students were positive about Fleur's observation of their counselling of clients. Students' comments demonstrate that Fleur generated a supportive context for students. This possibly had two causes.

The first basis of the supportive context relates directly to students' descriptions of her unobtrusiveness. "When Fleur sits in she is so unobtrusive. She sits behind you. You can't even see her in your line of vision ... You don't lose your contact with the patient because I sat with the patient across from me and she was behind" (Adam). "One of the students told me a story that Fleur was hiding behind a wall listening, trying to make sure that she didn't affect what they were doing" (Adam). Because of this unobtrusiveness, students felt that they were in control of the interaction with the client. They were less nervous and, in comments noted above, say that they then perform better. She does not interrupt them, correct them in front of the client, or take over the interview as some other supervisors do.

The second explanation of the supportive context of Fleur's observation is inferred from students' comments. One student who was supervised by Fleur did not actually have her observe him, but he said that he would have liked her to. "She was excellent. I would have valued her opinion in actually sitting down ... with me" and "She would have been very happy to do it (sit in with me)" (Colin). It is possible that this relates to the confidence that she had already generated. It is also likely that other students had discussed their positive experiences of Fleur's observing them.

Ultimately, however, there comes a time when the supervisor's observation is important for the student in terms of progress and assessment. "I conducted the outpatient interview by myself today ... I missed a few things. I think I did okay but it is hard to know. I like doing things alone but in the end you need someone to comment on what you did & didn't do" (Adam).

#### Providing feedback:

Before explaining this issue it is important to note that students in this practicum did not have a formal assessment. At this and other practicum sites students were given feedback on performance and progress only. There was no need to meet a satisfactory level of performance. However, the block of practicum that followed did indeed have a requirement for satisfactory performance of professional entry-level competencies, and students in this block were conscious of that. The other contextual factor in the current block was the students' motive of impressing a potential employer. "I guess I went there with an idea of trying to make some impression on the supervisors, being that they would one day hopefully employ me" (Colin).

Fleur's feedback to students is on two levels of performance. The first level relates to the content of interviews, which is a relatively minor issue according to student comments. "We talked about the client briefly" (Adam). This type of feedback cannot be extensive because of the small amount of observation that she did. The second level of feedback relates to overall performance, which is strongly related to competencies used for student assessment. "That afternoon she talked generally on competencies related to other aspects, not just a patient

setting, managing time and things like that. ... Fleur went through that form that they developed and wrote on it. ... She was very definite she wanted to do it and made a time for it" and "Fleur was very formal about the way she did her feedback and she has tried, I know, to set a time to talk to them about certain areas" (Adam). This student's comments demonstrate an intentional time allocation on Fleur's part, and paralleled a comment to this effect in the discussion on observing students. This comment was couched in such a way that students appreciated the time they were given. They appeared to feel important. Taken along with comments made about other supervisors' feedback, it is this latter type of feedback that students want. They want to know how they are performing. That appears to be far more important to them than some of the comments made by other supervisors on day-to-day functioning. By addressing the matter of assessment in the way she did Fleur made a beneficial contribution to the issue of context, since the feedback was done in an atmosphere of professional trust and confidence. However, there are also some negative issues stemming from Fleur's feedback.

Two students reported that Fleur only observed them once during their week of practicum with her. "That afternoon she went through the feedback with me and she felt that I had improved over the week, and I felt that too" and "Fleur was quite confident, not confident but positive. Coming from her that was quite good. ... (that) was the most positive thing that affected what I know" (Adam). In spite of only the one observation session, the feedback was provided in terms of improvement. The feedback was therefore positive in this sense, but it was also effective because of who was providing the feedback. "In my first week Fleur saw me once and said that I was at a really good level at the end of my first week. And she thought that I was the same level as what I would be by the end of my fourth week so she was really, really pleased with me. And that made me feel good" (David). There is a huge impact of this type of feedback on the student. It is extremely positive. When the feedback is global it cannot, concomitantly, focus on detail, as does much of the content-level feedback that was done by other supervisors. This latter type of feedback was often perceived as negative criticism. "I do feel some of the dietitians supervisors are too full on about everything (like wanting us to know every(thing) - 2nd day). To me, that has only produced burn out & anxiety. All of us have reported that we wake up in the morning & feel sick about coming in! Maybe, some of the supervisors should think about what is realistic for us!" (David).

At this point in the discussion it is important to go back to what students thought were the most important interactions of a supervisor. To recap the rank order of skills related to providing feedback, students would like a supervisor who:

1. makes constructive criticism about students' clinical
4. monitors students' clinical progress critically & constructively
5. assists students develop clinical problem-solving skills.

Students appear to contradict themselves. The question that might well be asked is which type of supervisor would better provide these. Would it be the supervisor who watches constantly and comments often? Or would it be the supervisor who gives independence at the risk of not being able to provide this type of feedback?

It is significant that the pattern of professional development encouraged by Fleur appears to be to first of all to develop the student's confidence through independence and positive support. This assumes that the student has the prerequisite skills to manage, and presumes that students will develop professionally due to their own critical reflection. This point was emphasised when a scheduled assessment did not take place.

Given that a formal assessment was not required, final feedback to students may be desirable and educationally sensible, but not necessary if the intent was to de-emphasise assessment and if the student was expected to learn from reflective practice. But this is not how one student saw the events that took place. "I am pretty annoyed at Fleur because we were not assessed at all in our final week. Fleur had an RDO on the final day which I thought was kind of rude since I thought she was supposed to assess us & then discuss our progress with us. She told me that it had been arranged with QUT that the hospital would do our assessments and then nothing happened - I think it was kind of rude especially since we were given no indication of what was going on" and "I don't really know how I am going at this stage (the end of the final week) so I am a little worried and nervous about my next placement" (Adam).

Counselling role:

"At the end of the day she made time for me to come and sit down and talk about it."

"I got good feedback on that (difficult client) ..."

"She had a big counselling session. Yeah, she was good. It was good to have someone say 'well you know you are professional and I think you're doing a good job ... And coming from her it made me feel a bit better, especially ... when someone questions your professional ability.'"

The above comments were made by the same student who had had a traumatic experience with a client. In this instance a true counselling role was demonstrated. Fleur was proactive in ensuring that a debriefing occurred. The student made a specific point of this, indicating the importance that this held. In the session she directly addressed the issue that the client had used to criticise the student. The significance of the reassurance was heightened by the obvious esteem in which she was held, possibly in part due to the course of the counselling itself.

Mentoring role:

In her interview, Fleur drew a clear distinction between supervision and mentoring, on the grounds of responsibility. It is clear from students' comments, however, that some elements of mentoring are present in her style of supervision. The first example relates to the mentoring function described by Kinlaw (1989), that is, to assist mentees to manage their own careers effectively. "It was good because I talked about a few other things with her and that was good" (Adam). This student also spoke of another supervisor's professional experience being important in career direction. In both of these cases it was the supervisor who initiated the interaction.

However, a valuable example of Fleur's perceived status of mentor was given by another student. In this case, the student initiated a consultation in which he sought advice on conflict resolution. "I actually spoke to Fleur first just to ... clear it with her" (Colin).

Overall, in the discussion so far, students had positive perception of Fleur's supervision. The reader will have noted that several of the issues, however, had both positive and negative implications from an educational perspective. This leads to the question of whether Fleur generated any negative feedback from students, given their obvious high praise for her supervision. And the answer was 'yes'.

The issue of atmosphere of the work environment was obvious to the students. "You hear a fair bit and we knew that there was a lot of stuff going on here ... all the upheavals that had

been going on" (Adam). However, there were no recorded incidents in which this aspect of context affected students' opportunities or personal interactions.

There were some examples in which students were not clear about supervisory roles. "Fleur mentioned that she had talked to Harriet, so they obviously talk among themselves as to what each student's problems were" (Adam). This was not a breach of confidentiality, as might be suspected, but was due to the student not understanding the role of the student coordinator.

And finally, a lesson in flexibility came unexpectedly upon one student "I was supposed to have (another supervisor) in the third week ... I'd spent the whole weekend researching (her area of expertise) and then she came in and said 'you're doing diabetes'. Oh, no!" (Colin). This week was to begin with a blow to his confidence, but at the end of this week with Fleur it was considerably higher.

### **Conclusions**

Results indicate that interpersonal relationships are highly significant in determining how much a supervisor can encourage a student. Although the three students who were supervised by Fleur had very different personalities, the personality of Fleur has been demonstrated to have a large impact on how her supervision was received. For other supervisors, student responses were quite variable, and a personality component can be demonstrated in this variation. Still, students have the opportunity to learn independent of supervisory style. However, the types of learning in these different interpersonal contexts were quite different.

From these discussions with students and the supervisor, practical improvements can be made in the students' practicum.

1. Students need to see supervisors modelling of interviews so that they can see a variety of approaches and then perform their own trial and error of how they themselves will counsel clients. Supervisors may need a guide as to how much modelling is appropriate;
2. Students need freedom to perform their own trial and error interviews as a means to building confidence;
3. Students need a minimum of observation time from supervisors so that feedback can be meaningful;
4. Students need both specific observation and feedback on interview skills and global feedback on overall performance;
5. There was no evidence of supervisors and students having pre-observation discussions apart from content issues. Students' confidence might benefit from clearly focussing on individual skills at each interview, rather than not knowing what skills the supervisor will pick on.

Data from other supervisors support the above conclusions. In addition, for supervisors who practise close supervision, it raises other issues related to supervisors' teaching skills. It is hoped that this study will contribute to beneficial changes in new courses of study of Nutrition and Dietetics.

## References

- Brekelmans, M., Levy, J. & Rodriguez, R. (1993). A typology of teacher communication style. In T. Wubbels & J. Levy (Eds.). *Do you know what you look like?: Interpersonal relationships in education* (pp. 46-55). London : Falmer Press.
- Cogan, M. L. (1973). *Clinical supervision*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Cohen, N. H. (1995). *Mentoring adult learners: A guide for educators and trainers*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Freeman, D. (1993). *Talking type in organisations*. Melbourne: Australian Psychologists Press.
- Grant, W. H., Thompson, M. & Clarke, T. E. (1983). From image to likeness: A Jungian path in the gospel journey. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Kinlaw, D. C. (1989). *Coaching for commitment: Managerial strategies for obtaining superior performance*. San Diego: Pfeiffer and Co.
- Kremer-Hayon, L. & Wubbels, T. (1993). .). *Do you know what you look like?: Interpersonal relationships in education* (pp. 123-135). London : Falmer Press.
- Myers, I. B. & McCaulley, M. H. (1985). *Manual: A guide to the Development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.
- Provost, J. A. & Anchors, S. (1987). *Applications of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in higher education*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- QUT (1996). Obtaining student feedback on your teaching and units. Unpublished manuscript.
- Stormont, D. A. (1997a). Re-Designing Supervision in Clinical Dietetics Education.<http://www.swin.edu.au/aare/welcome.html> STORD97.364
- Stormont, D. A. (1997b). A Personal Approach to Supervision in Clinical Dietetics.<http://www.swin.edu.au/aare/welcome.html> STORD97.407
- Thompson, H. L. (1996). *Jung's function-attitudes explained*. Watkinsville, GA: Wormhole Publishing.
- Turney, C. (1982). *Supervisor development programmes: Role handbook*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.