Supervision: One construct, many practices?

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And from my colleagues in the School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work
Aims of presentation

- To explore the idea that ‘one supervision’ might be an impossible construct.
- This paper will explore the literature in an attempt to refine further investigation of the plurality of models of supervision, drawing on examples from the international supervision research.
Supervision as an artefact

- Supervision is frequently presented as a universal artefact of social work.
- In the Anglophone world the meaning of its practice is assumed in a conversation about supervision.
- Supervision is so embedded in our national and regional systems of education and professional development that it forms part of the landscape of social work.
Supervision is not politically innocent

- Adamson (2012, 194) suggests that in making the arguments ‘for’ supervision we must be very mindful of the context.
- Supervision is not, and should never be presumed to be, politically neutral...
- Aspects of power, gender, ethnicity, race, cultural and geographical locations, possession of different forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic, education and managerial barriers all impact on relations in supervision.
Literature at times assumes supervision’s neutrality

“[W]e are fast becoming a world committed to supervision and its enhancement....

In our view, all indications point to further embrace and strengthening of supervision’s stature as educational *sine qua non* across countries and continents” (Watkins and Milne 2014, 674).
Exporting supervision

- Arkin (1999) identified two main approaches to the challenges of cross cultural supervision.
  - minimising cultural differences
  - magnifying cultural differences

......”an exploration of culture within supervision, via “deliberate and studious consideration is vital for supervision’s future” (Watkins and Milne 2014, 681).
Two rides, two landscapes – habitus?
Bird’s eye View

Just because we have this view doesn't mean we know the detail or understand the context.
What is the bird’s eye view?

- Top down/managerialist discourses produce professional cultures which generally reflect dominant worldviews and practices.
- This habitus is often invisible to us because it encompasses taken for granted assumptions.
- There is a gap between the espoused theory of supervision and the theory-in-action in western contexts, thus a danger of passing such tensions on, if supervision is imported uncritically.
Habitus

- Habitus includes the mental habits and internalised dispositions which lead to “particular perceptions and actions that are durable in character” (Houston 2002, 157).

- Contained within habitus is the “acknowledgement that social structure is deeply ingrained within us all, that our ways of interpreting the social world are influenced by our social milieus” (Houston 2002, 157).
Curious questions

Hair and O’Donoghue (2009, 78), drawing on their knowledge of practice in Canada and New Zealand, urge supervisors to “ask ‘curious’ questions” about the contexts of supervisees and their service users, including an exploration of dominant political, economic and legislative influences on practice.
Not assuming transferability

- Wehbi (2011, 24) has argued we need to begin practice across borders, even internal ones, “with an understanding that social work is not a set of tools that one can pack in a suitcase and carry across” and this is clearly applicable to supervision.
More than cross cultural

- the development of cross-cultural competency is only part of the pictures.
- Explicit cultural models are developing which are not only steeped in cultural understanding but have at their heart praxis.
- Such models go beyond explanation and insight to promote change and social justice, where oppression has featured before.
- see for example Eruera (2012)
Supervision in the cable car

People engaged in supervision can represent the forces in play in a microcosm of the wider social world in supervision.
The way forward: Culture and context

Supervision and developing the profession: one supervision or many?....

Liz Beddoe (forthcoming)

See also Tsui, Ng & O'Donoghue (2014)
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