

Become A Clinical Supervisor - You Are a Resource to Future Professionals!

by Claudia Meyer

When I first started placing graduate students in educational settings I had the opportunity to talk to a group of SLPs about supervision. I asked them to write down their best and worst moments as practicum supervisors. We delighted in a response that described how a graduate student created a picture schedule that was helping a child be successful in school after months of struggle. We cringed at a story of a graduate student texting during a staff meeting. What became apparent in our discussion was that all of the supervisors felt that they gained as much, if not more, than they gave. Beyond the satisfaction of helping a graduate student, there were practical benefits for the SLPs themselves.

As graduate students it was our job to learn and develop competence. As SLPs our job is to guide and teach both our clients and future SLPs. None of us would have the careers we have today without the willingness of professionals to supervise and guide us on our journeys. Despite the fundamental importance of supervision, SLPs receive very little training in this area. This article will help you find resources and give you information that will help you get on your way to incorporating supervision into your practice.

What are the obstacles to supervision?

Obstacles to supervision vary for each of us, but are typically related to how comfortable we feel about our jobs and our own professional competence. Many supervisors have shared with me that prior to working with a graduate student, they assumed that they were not ready, not able to be the role model that they thought they should be. My experience as a placement coordinator at Portland State University has convinced me that once you begin to supervise, your fears disappear and you are able to experience the full benefits of incorporating a new aspect of your professional role into your career.

What are the benefits of supervision?

As a supervisor, you can gain a fresh perspective through your graduate student. You will also have the opportunity to see what an amazing resource you are to future SLPs (YES YOU ARE!). One unanticipated benefit is that many supervisors are able to “assign” their graduate students to conduct research and lesson planning on a perplexing client. Many supervisors enjoy having a student clinician to brainstorm with and to take on projects that have been on the back burner because of lack of time. In addition, university programs sometimes offer stipends, credit vouchers for university classes, and continuing education discounts. Finally, you will know that you are doing the same service for a student that your supervisors did for you during your training as a graduate student. One supervisor described it in the following way: “I just couldn’t believe how much I had to offer. It’s almost like I did not realize, how immersed I have been these past few years in speech-language pathology. I am so happy that I can give back!”

What should you expect from your student? (...and what will they expect of you?)

Graduate students typically spend a week or two in an observer role and then begin to take on the tasks of a professional SLP under your guidance. Depending on the complexity of the population you work with and the graduate student's experience, this time period can vary. Your graduate student will expect you to be more directive at first, then move to a more collaborative role as they gain experience and, finally, to a consultative role as they become more independent and competent. Your graduate student will expect you to give them feedback on how to improve in areas that are challenging for them. By that same token, graduate students will expect you to encourage them by pointing out when they are successful and what their clinical strengths are.

What should you expect from your university liaison?

The university liaison is there to support you and your graduate student in understanding procedures related to supervision. For example, your liaison will help you learn how to complete a midterm and final evaluation for your graduate student. They can also guide you in understanding what you can expect from your graduate student. Universities frequently offer opportunities to learn more about supervision through continuing education and meetings. You can be kept in the loop on university websites or facebook pages.

Getting Started:

Check out the website of your nearby university program and contact the placement coordinator to let them know you are curious about supervising a graduate student.

Ask the placement coordinators from the university programs in Oregon to give a talk on supervision at your facility.

Ask a colleague who has supervised a graduate student about their experience.

Check out the resources that ASHA has to offer at:

<http://www.asha.org/slp/supervision/>

Contact the author of this article at meyerc@pdx.edu

We look forward to hearing from you!!!