

Ethics in the practicum and internship

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Presented at the 114th Convention of the American Psychological Association,
New Orleans, 2006¹

What do we know about the state of ethics training and the ethical development of students in practicum and internship? We will consider the structure of practicum and internship, teaching and supervision of ethics within these, future directions in integrating ethics into practicum and internship more effectively, and parameters for a self-assessment device trainees can self-administer to gain greater insight into the process of ethical decision making. Important in all of this is heightening a sense of the history and evolution of both personal ethics and the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 1992, 2002)—and to help to prepare trainees to deal with the complexity of ethical decision-making.

The practicum per se is mainly undefined: “practicum experiences must be ‘adequate and appropriate’” (APA, 2005, p. 13). **However, there are disconnects in communication and expectations between the graduate program and practicum sites (Lewis, Hatcher, & Pate, 2005).** Neutfeldt presents a manualized approach to first practicum supervision (2006) that highlights the interface of ethical considerations and personal reflection for practicum supervisors. While the internship is more defined, as it consists of “supervised training experiences that are characterized by greater depth,

¹ As part of a symposium on Ethical Acculturation of Psychologists: Ethics Education throughout Professional Development. Carol Falender, Ph.D., Michael Gottlieb, Ph.D., Janet T. Thomas, Ph.D., Thomas F. Nagy, Ph.D., and Stephen H. Behnke, Ph.D.
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breadth, duration, frequency, and intensity than practicum training.” There are no formal criteria or outcome measurements for internship or practicum, although a practicum competencies document has been developed. There is incredible variability in internships in models and adherence to model espoused (Rodolfa, Kaslow, Stewart, Keilin, & Baker, 2005) –in a recent study of internship training models, there was not a close or tight correspondence between how programs characterize their primary training model and how they conceptualize components of training including professional development. As the field changes, and as APA has recommended licensure after completion of internship, there is the necessity of enhancing and regulating practicum training. Hatcher and Lassiter’s (2005) practicum competencies are a huge step in this direction. However, as the APA recommendation moves towards implementation, the responsibility for graduate schools, practicum training and internship is significant to ensure that trainees completing internship are prepared for independent practice.

There is no articulation or game plan for sequential, ethical training or psychology training from undergraduate to graduate school to practicum to internship. This is particularly critical with respect to training in ethics as such training can be highly variable—from a sequence of courses, exposure to the codes of ethics, experiential learning, to nothing. Teaching of ethics has often been too narrowly construed, separated out from context, culture, diversity, personal morality, and personal factors. The subgroup on ethics of the APPIC Competencies conference concluded that multicultural and diversity considerations have been inadequately integrated into the teaching of ethics (De Las Fuentes, Willmuth, & Yarrow, 2005) which is ironic as diversity competence is a guiding principle of the ethics code.

In a recent study conducted in Australia, analysis of the curricula syllabi from all of the psychology training programs revealed “mainly slavish attention to professional and research ethics codes” (Davidson, Garton, & Joyce, 2003, p. 220).

Trainees often receive the meta-communication that to each ethical dilemma there is one correct answer, rather than of the critical importance of the process of ethical decision making, critical thinking, and the multitude of factors which can and should be considered in the process.

Each of the individuals on this panel is contributing greatly to enhancing ethical problem solving and providing valuable perspectives on the process. Gottlieb and his colleagues presenting here today are doing much to correct the isolation of ethical training from other realms with their acculturation model. As is Steve Behnke with his columns on ethics in the Monitor, and Dr. Nagy with his Practical Ethics book. Janet has a book in progress as well as an important article licensing board complaints and minimizing the impact on a psychologist’s practice. What I want to talk about is ethics training in the practicum and internship—the state of the art and what we need to do.

How do we define ethical competence? It entails knowledge, skills, and values of ethics and law (de las Fuentes, Willmuth, Yarrow, & Weinberg, 2003). Knowledge includes: ethical/professional codes, standards and guidelines, statutes, rules, regulations, and relevant case law. Skills include ability to recognize ethical and legal issues, ability to apply knowledge and skills to practice, ability to recognize and reconcile conflicts among relevant codes and laws, appropriately seeking information, consulting and offering consultation appropriately, building and participating in a collaborative, supportive peer network, and raising ethical and legal issues assertively. Values and

attitude include adopting or adapting one's own ethical decision making model, applying the model with personal integrity and contextual sensitivity, and self-assessment, self-awareness (De Las Fuentes, Willmuth, Yarrow, & Weinberg, 2003). This was further refined by De las Fuentes, Willmuth, & Yarrow (2005) who suggested that advanced graduate students should be able to demonstrate “culturally appropriate and reasoned ethical decision making skills and ethical behaviors in (a) content areas including case studies, vignettes, and role plays in didactic situations, and (b) process areas such as in their interactions with faculty peers, clients, supervisors and organizations and institutions in which they work and study” (p. 364). They state that internship and postdoctoral trainees should be able to consistently demonstrate an integration of the above skills in a culturally-appropriate, smooth, and compelling manner in all aspects of their professional lives (i.e., not only in the presence of an ethical dilemma) and with appropriate consultation, recognize and reconcile conflicts among relevant codes and laws to deal with convergence, divergence, and ambiguity” (p.364).

As competence is comprised of knowledge of codes, etc., skills including problem-solving, and values it is a complex area—and a tall order for trainees who are struggling to integrate incredibly large amounts of knowledge, skills, and values. A disservice educators and supervisors perform is making psychotherapy and practice look too easy, teaching ethical dilemmas as if there is one answer, and creating the expectation that **ambiguity of practice—and especially ambiguity in ethics--** does not factor in. Because practicum and intern students have not had the bulk of experience which they could compartmentalize to transform their interventions from rote to intuitive and artful places them at risk for acute stress—and inadequate attention to ethical issues. **There is**

the issue of balancing developmental level of the trainee with level of training—or choosing between the overriding principle strategy/fundamental rule and the moral dilemma approach (O’Neill, 1998).

Assessment of values and attitudes is particularly difficult. Typically summative ethical evaluation comes about when there are serious concerns about a trainee—or when individuals are reported to the state board or ethics committee. Most consideration of the ethical functioning of practicum and internship students comes about in questions of character and fitness for the profession, areas of increasing interest (Johnson & Campbell, 2004). Johnson and Campbell (2004) defined psychological fitness as emotional mental stability while character relates to moral excellence or uprightness, but as they point out, there is no consensus on what constitutes the presence of character and fitness—it is much easier to identify their *absence*!

Are we justified in inquiry into this? Since the ethics code states that psychologists responsible for training programs ensure that students will be prepared to meet licensure requirements (7.01), and that applicants and students may be compelled to disclose aspects of their personal history if either 1) the program has clearly identified their requirements in its admission and program materials, or 2) the information is necessary to evaluate ... students whose personal problems could reasonably be judged to be preventing them from performing their training—or professionally related activities in a competent manner (7.04)—the answer is YES.

Further, the state of Florida (Florida Bd. of Bar Examiners Re: Applicant, n162) ruled that applicants themselves put their mental, emotional, moral, and educational fitness at issue when they file state licensing applications.

We have evidence from the medical profession that early unprofessional, unethical behavior can be predictive. Disciplinary action against practicing physicians was associated with previous unprofessional behavior by these same individuals when they were medical students (Papadakis, Teherani, Banach, Knettler, Rattner, Stern, et al., 2005). Later disciplinary action was predicted by two types of earlier student unprofessional behavior: 1) irresponsibility (including unreliable clinic attendance and not following up on activities related to client care) and 2) diminished capacity for self-improvement (failure at accepting constructive criticism, argumentativeness, and displaying a poor attitude).

Introduction of personal factors, personal morality, and diversity and belief structures, biases, etc. into ethical decision making has been endorsed by a wide range of professionals and theorists. But it does not appear to have generally permeated ethics education.

We need to reinsert morality, as ethics is disconnected often from morality -- not just moral judgment (judging which action is morally right/wrong) but add moral sensitivity, moral motivation, and moral character (Rest, 1994).

- I. Moral sensitivity—awareness how our actions affect others; considering different paths of actions and how these would affect concerned parties
 - Empathy and role taking skills
- II. Moral judgment—Once individual is aware of alternative possible lines of action and how people would be affected by each, Component II judges which line of action is more morally justifiable
 - Danger of overly simplistic constructions

- III. Moral motivation—Rest concludes that most notoriously evil people in the world were not deficient in awareness of what they were doing (I.) or couldn't figure out the fair thing to do (II.). Rather they set aside moral considerations to pursue other values—how important are moral values compared with other values like self-actualization or protecting one's organization—over doing what is right
- IV. Moral character—ego strength, -perseverance, backbone, toughness, strength of conviction, courage—does not wilt under pressure, is not easily distracted or discouraged.

In addition, Kitchener's (1984) two tiered model of intuitive and critical-evaluative aspects of the ethics decision-making process is useful: intuitive includes personal moral beliefs and immediate response while critical evaluative relates to codes, principles. Intuitive responses are very strong, especially among practicum trainees—and this is another understudied area of ethics development. Ethics code can't cover everything—when you apply it have to use judgment, but have to inform and train intuitive judgment—it might be wrong—intuitively when you drive down icy highway, the car skids, intuitively people believe they should turn away from skid, but correct practice is to turn into skid—intuitive reaction of a caring professional can be a wrong one.

An interesting description of levels of ethical dilemmas is drawn from nursing training: (and the caveat that too much ethics training focuses on the first group).

1. Situations in which moral principles, compassion for clients provide unequivocal direction—issues of exploitation or sex with clients. A large portion of ethics training focuses on this.

2. Experts and moral philosophers might agree but novices might be confused by the seemingly conflicting principles and ethics: trainees perceive a fellow trainee coming to work several times under the influence of alcohol—how does one prioritize loyalty to a friend, figuring out how to protect clients without getting the friend in trouble, placing the immediate well-being of the friend (avoiding being sanctioned, thrown out of the program) from long term well-being (receiving treatment going into recovery); threatening safety of current and future clients of the trainee about to become a professional.
3. True dilemma to ethicists and highly ethical practitioner—two or more ethical standards are clearly relevant, a panel of expert clinicians and moral philosophers might disagree as to which competing standard should take precedence—administering life-prolonging treatment that most providers viewed as futile (Duckett & Ryden, 1994).

Multiple experts in ethics and training have stated that self-assessment is a critical part of ethics training—for the trainers and the trainees, yet there is not self-assessment device currently available.

The Competencies Conference group on ethics (de las Fuentes, Willmuth, & Yarrow, 2005) suggested a variety of assessments including assessing ethical integrity in every course, ethical competence throughout training including all ethical violations or procedural breaches with ethical or legal implications; use of 360 degree assessments, how trainees respond to actual ethical dilemmas through use of critical incident methodology (processes by which trainee has or has not recognized the ethical or legal dilemma, used consultation and supervision, cultural and contextual sensitivity, and addressed all this in an ethical manner. They also suggested that programs obtain data

from licensing boards on all their students' scores on ethics of the EPPP and adjudication of each program's graduates—which would provide validation of ethics training.

A first step in the development of self-assessment for pre-practicum and practicum are the competencies that have been articulated by Hatcher and Lassiter (2005).

Competencies: list ethics competencies for pre-practicum:

a) <u>Ethical & Legal</u>
i) Principles of ethical practice and decision making (APA, 2002)
ii) Legal knowledge related to the practice of psychology [Federal (e.g., HIPAA), State law]

Hatcher & Lassiter, 2005

Specifics of ethics training

What do we know?

We need to shift ethics training from the egregious and “sexy” to the more everyday and mundane

- **Self-assessment as a core value of training as we move towards competency-based**
- **More attention to meta-competency—assessing what we know we do not know.**
- **No methodology exists for self-assessment of ethical behavior**
- **Supervisors must also self-assess which may be problematic as for some it is considered a violation of personal privacy to self-assess and share with supervisees outcome of such assessment**
- **It is now generally accepted that psychotherapy is not value free. It has not been as broadly taught that ethics is not value free.**

- **The inattention to cultural/diversity competence has led to rote approaches to teaching of ethics**
- **Acculturation approach is very promising but there is such a large time gap between new innovations and thinking and adoption in field and educational settings**
- **Input-output issue**
 - **If we consider only output (ethical behavior observed) we cannot understand what factors go into ethical decision making of our trainees.**
- **Because of lack of coordination of ethical instruction from undergrad to grad school to practicum to internship and beyond there is tremendous variability in instruction and in knowledge, skill, values**
- **Core issue of competence—how competent supervisors in practicum and internship are in ethics in the broader sense—inclusive of the values and personal factors, cultural/diversity**
- **Ethical disconnect. Ethics viewed as a discrete field**
- **Disconnected from personal values and beliefs**
- **Encourage more attention to history of ethics code, factors in development and changes that have occurred over time.**
- **Disconnected from diversity factors including cultural, ethnic, religious,**

Competencies for practicum period. This competencies document, in preparation, separates diversity from ethics from professionalism. This artificial separation may lead to greater separation of thinking about each of these areas. Combining them lends power to the ethical principles by allowing faculty/supervisors and trainees to consider impact of variables upon the process.

6. Diversity - Individual and Cultural Differences:

The APA Multicultural Guidelines (APA, 2003) noted that “All individuals exist in social, political, historical, and economic contexts, and psychologists are increasingly called upon to understand the influence of these contexts on individuals' behavior” (p. 377). Thus every competency listed in this document is thoroughly linked to matters of individual and cultural difference (ICD), including knowledge related to ICD, as well as awareness of, respect for, and appropriate action related to ICD. It is critical that practicum students begin to learn that culture influences the way that clients are perceived, the way that clients perceive the counselor, and that culture-centered practices may be more effective than practices developed for use with only one cultural group (e.g., European Americans). Practicum students need to know how individual and cultural differences influence clients' recognition of a problem and appropriate solutions for that problem.

Specific competency areas related to ICD are important to identify and train for include:

- a) Knowledge of self in the context of diversity (one's own beliefs, values, attitudes, stimulus value, and related strengths/limitations) as one operates in the clinical setting with diverse others (i.e., knowledge of self in the diverse world).
- b) Knowledge about the nature and impact of diversity in different clinical situations (e.g., clinical work with specific racial/ethnic populations)
- c) Ability to work effectively with diverse others in assessment, treatment and consultation.

7. Ethics:

During the practicum, the student will build on coursework in ethical practice, developing individual, practical knowledge of ethical practice, including linkage of the APA ethics code (APA, 2002) to behavior and decision making in actual clinical settings. In addition, students should increase and apply their understanding of legal standards (state and federal, e.g., HIPAA) and APA practice guidelines. Note that each of the domains described in this document is expected as a matter of course to be grounded in ethical practice.

More specifically, during practicum training the student will work to develop the following ethical competencies:

- a) Knowledge of ethical/professional codes, standards and guidelines; knowledge of statutes, rules, regulations and case law relevant to the practice of psychology.
- b) Recognize and analyze ethical and legal issues across the range of professional activities in the practicum setting.
- c) Recognize and understand the ethical dimensions/features of his/her own attitudes and practice in the clinical setting.
- d) Seek appropriate information and consultation when faced with ethical issues.
- e) Practice appropriate professional assertiveness related to ethical issues (e.g., by raising issues when they become apparent to the student).
- f) Evidence commitment to ethical practice.

E. Metaknowledge/Metacompetencies – Skilled Learning

The training program should help students begin on the path of reflective understanding and knowledge about their own knowledge and competencies.

<p>A broadly drawn definition characterizes meta-knowledge as knowledge about knowledge – knowing what you know and what you don’t know. Meta-knowledge includes being aware of the range and limits of what you know; knowing your own intellectual strengths and weaknesses, how to use available skills and knowledge to solve a variety of tasks, how to acquire new or missing skills, or being able to judge that a task can’t be done with current knowledge. Metacompetencies similarly refer to the ability to judge the availability, use and learnability of personal competencies. The development of meta-knowledge and meta-competencies depends on self-awareness, self-reflection and self-assessment (Weinert, 2001). For psychologists, this would include:</p>
<p>a) Knowing the extent and the limits of one’s own skills; learning the habit of and skills for self-evaluation of clinical skills.</p>
<p>b) The ability to use supervision, consultation and other resources to improve and extend skills (note the related relationship competence – to work collegially and responsively with supervisors).</p>
<p>c) Knowledge of the process for extending current skills into new areas.</p>
<p>d) Knowledge of the epistemologies underlying various aspects of clinical practice (e.g., assessment, diagnosis, treatment).</p>
<p>e) Commitment to life-long learning and quality improvement.</p>
<p>f) Awareness of one’s identity as a psychologist (Education Leadership Conference): an aspect and reflection of metaknowledge that is role specific, knowing what one knows and can do (and should do) as a psychologist.</p>

As psychology has adopted a core competencies approach to training, accreditation, and assessment, we must confront the question of whether we actually assess individual areas of functioning such as ethical practice?

There is a struggle with how to teach ethics, and approaches to the moral underpinnings of professional codes of ethics. An interesting evolution is how legal education works currently—in law school they use the case method, not a rule method. Courses are not rules that govern contracts, accidents, corporations—the students go immediately to situations where court had to decide who wins, based on facts, and the opinions the court has written.

- a. Practicum and internship are a chance to use the case method

The next step is translating all this into a self-assessment for trainees to provide them with tools to better understand ethics.

A Preliminary Self Assessment: (intended for personal use of the individual completing this)

- Think about your personal morality and your personal ethics—all those things you believe in and have through your whole life, even before graduate school.
 - Describe your strengths in these areas and those you would like to build further
- Ethical genogram (Peluso, 2006)
 - Ethical/personal codes you live by
 - Some things you absolutely would never do—based on your own personal ethical program or code
 - If I did not have an ethical program/code I might...
 - Who wrote or contributed my own program or code?
- How well do you know the Ethical Principles and Code of Ethics?
 - How fluent are you in finding sections and relating them to clinical situations?
 - How versed are you in the revisions from the 1992 code to the 2002 code? How much do you know about the history of the code and the previous versions? Are you aware of/have you functioned professionally within other ethics codes? Which ones? How did they differ?
 - When you step back and assess your ethical knowledge, what would you say are areas that you need greater knowledge, skills, or training?
- Think about the general principles in the ethical code. Think about their meanings to you.
 - Beneficence and nonmaleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people's rights and dignity
 - Think about which are most meaningful to you and how.
- Think about the history and development of specific ethical principles and codes of conduct over time. How does this influence your thinking?
- Think about the development of your own personal code over time. How does that influence your thinking?
- Describe the most difficult conflict between your personal morality and the Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct
 - Think about steps you took to approach it
 - What principles influenced you most
 - Consider your affective response
 - Consider cultural and diversity factors that impacted the decision
 - Think about personal values which impacted the decision
 - Think about the resolution of the ethical conflict

- In retrospect, do you have any new insights or ideas about it?
- Think about things that you have NOT disclosed to your supervisor. Think about the ethical content/ qualities of those and what you did to resolve them. Think about what you were most worried would happen had you told your supervisor
- Think about areas of conflict you have had with your supervisor/supervisee. Think about the ethical content/quality of those and what you did to resolve them. Think about what you were most worried would happen had you told your supervisor
- Using items from Pope, Sonne, and Greene (2006) have trainees self-assess about intense emotions/complex situations or critical incidents they have experienced in therapy or in supervision
- Use an Ethical genogram or consider dilemmas trainees raise and the opportunity to analyze and discuss personal ethical/moral and belief system factors that relate to or complicate adherence to the codes, etc.
- Use of a supervisor-supervisee (preferably group) model of self-disclosure of one aspect of each individual's personal background (Wisnia & Falender, 1999) including culture, ethnicity, any diversity factor, urban versus rural childhood, acculturation, etc. Supervisors model this disclosure and trainees follow (with informed consent having described this in introductory training materials). Assist the trainee in discussing how this impacts him/her as an individual and impacts ethical decision-making. Also using a grid derived from Falicov (1998) to draw comparisons among client(s), supervisee/therapist, and supervisor in SES, ethnicity, culture, etc.
- Use Roysircar's (2004) self-assessment of cultural self-awareness.
 - Identify some dilemmas in which there are competing values of culture or diversity and ethics.
- Have you ever done something you think or wonder if it was unethical?
- Has your client ever asked you to do something unethical? What were the competing factors for you?
- How accurate do you think your own self-assessment of your knowledge/skills/values in ethics can be? What are the limiting factors?
- Have you ever observed a peer or supervisor do something you perceived as unethical? How did you feel about it? What did you do about it?
- Have you ever suspected a peer or supervisor did something unethical? How did you feel about it? What did you do?
- Boundary issues (supervisor/supervisee)
 - How appropriate would it be to talk in supervision about
 - Your own experiences/struggles with substance abuse?
 - Your own sexual orientation?
 - Sexual attraction you may feel toward supervisor/supervisee?
 - Sexual fantasies about your client?
 - Interacting outside of supervision setting

- Discussing racial/ethnic differences between supervisor and supervisee
 - Developed from Heru, Strong, Price, & Recupero, 2004

How do you feel about

Having lunch with your supervisor apart from the training group?

Going to a sporting event with your supervisor apart from the training group?

Having your supervisor tell you personal things about him/herself

Buying a snack for your client?

Giving your client a ticket to a movie?

Giving your client a gift?

- What do you not know about ethics?
 - Influences
 - How does your training level impact your ethical decision-making?
 - How do you feel personal factors such as biases/beliefs affect your ethical behavior
 - How do your religious beliefs impact your ethical thinking/behavior?
 - Name and describe all of the ethical decision making models with which you are familiar
 - Which ethical decision model(s) do you prefer?
 - How were they helpful to you?
 - What aspects are most helpful?
 - Do you feel like anything is missing?
 - Areas that supervisees report they have the most ethical violations:
 - Confidentiality
 - Professional boundaries
 - Plagiarism
 - Procedural breach with ethical implications
 - Competency
 - Compromising client welfare
 - Fly et al., 1997
 - Describe which of these you agree with as the most frequent student ethical violation—give examples of ones you could imagine, have done, or have observed done by peers
 - Why do trainees commit ethical violations? (supervisee/supervisor opinion)
 - Avoiding confrontation 1/2
 - Shame 2/1
 - Procrastination 3/5
 - Too heavy a workload 5/11
 - Wanting more professional autonomy 6/8
 - Feeling like he/she knows more than supervisor 7/9
 - Relationship with supervisor unsafe 8/6
 - Personal problems 10/3
 - Worthington, Tan, & Poulin, 2002

- Do you agree with these? Why do YOU think are reasons trainees commit ethical violations?

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