

# Supervision as Cultural Partnership: Contributions to Dialogue

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## Abstract

The term *cultural supervision* has been coined as part of a strategy that implicates supervision in the support and development of culturally appropriate therapeutic practice. In Aotearoa New Zealand particular focus has been given to supervision where the client is Māori and the practitioner is a member of the dominant Pākehā culture particularly, or of other non-Māori cultures. However, while the phrase *cultural supervision* has entered common professional parlance, the practice has had little research attention in counselling/psychotherapy in New Zealand. Cultural supervision appears to encompass a range of understandings, and there is no clear agreement about practice implications. It is unclear what alignment there is between aspirations, regulations, and practice. This article reports on an exploratory qualitative study that investigated how supervision might work in supporting culturally appropriate counselling practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study's findings are presented as a multi-voiced dialogue. This arts-based representational practice enacts the uncertainties of post-colonial experience. Its intention is to make assumptions, ideas, and practices available for discussion. Its contribution is to join current dialogue about supervision and culture, and to raise further questions about how supervision and culturally appropriate practice come together.

## Whakarāpopotonga

Kua whakakaupapahia te kianga *whakahaere tikanga-ā-iwi* ki tētahi peka o tētahi rautaki hono whakahaere tikanga ki te tautoko, whakangungu haumanu tikanga-ā-iwi tika. I Aotearoa tōtika tonu te aronui atu ki ngā wā he Māori te kiritaki he Pākehā o te ahurea matua, o te hunga ehara rānei i te Māori te kaiwhakawaiwai. Heoi, ahakoa kua putaputa noa mai tēnei kianga i waenga i ngā kōrerorero ngaio, kāre anō kia āta rangahauhia kia arotikahia rānei i roto i ngā mahi kaikōrero/kaimahi hinengaro i Aotearoa. Te āhua nei he maha ngā mātauranga e tāwharauhia

Crocket, K., Flanagan, P., Swann, H., Swann, B., Soundy, T., Smith, B., ... Alford, Z. (2015). *Supervision as cultural partnership: Contributions to dialogue*. *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand*, 19(1), 67-81. DOI:10.9791/ajpanz.2015.06 © New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists Inc.

ana e te mahi nei, ā, kāre he whakaarohanga mō ngā hua o te mahi. Kāre i te mārama he aha ngā here mai i ngā whāinga ki ngā here me te mahi. Ko tēnei tuhinga he pūrongo rapunga matai wheako kimi me pēhea e tika ai te whakahaere tikanga hei tautokohanga kaikōrero whakawaiwai tikanga-ā-iwi i Aotearoa. Ko ngā rangahautanga kei roto i te reo maha. Ko tōna tikanga he whakatau mahara, whakaaro, mahi whakawai hoki hai matapakihanga. Ko tāna koha ko te hono ki ngā whakawhitinga korero onamata e pā ana ki te whakahaere tikanga me te tikanga-ā-iwi, ā, ki te whakaara pātai titiro me pēhea e hono tahi ai te whakahaere tikanga me te tikanga-ā-iwi.

**Keywords:** supervision; culture; counselling; research; dialogue

“Cultural supervision helps to bring all forms of psychotherapy more fully into the 21st century, into a complex multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and increasingly intimate and interdependent world,” suggested Morice and Fay (2013, p. 99). Amidst such aspirations, psychotherapy and counselling, like other health and social service practices, have been grappling with the modes that cultural supervision might take: as Morice and Fay suggested, “the devil is in the detail” (p. 97). This article takes up the opportunities for interdependent exploration — a counter-cultural move to the neo-liberal regulatory regimes that produce defining and dividing scopes of practice — by bringing counselling perspectives to the conversation about the contributions of supervision to just and ethical therapeutic practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. The article’s focus is counselling supervision and culture, reporting on a group research project that asked the following question: *how does professional supervision work as cultural partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand?*

This question is critically important for counselling in a post-colonial nation founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This statement from the Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC, 2002) provides a pou, or pillar, around which conversations that engage this supervision question might flow:

Counsellors shall seek to be informed about the meaning and implications of the Treaty of Waitangi for their work. They shall understand the [Treaty] principles of protection, participation and partnership with Māori.

Increasing attention has been given to the practice implications of the partnership ethics (see, for example, Cornforth, 2011; Cornforth & Crocket, 2011; Crocket, 2009; Te Wiata & Crocket, 2011). The questions this article raises are its contribution both to critique and to constructing other forms of supervision practice, responding to Mika’s (2011) suggestion that, “if anything, any partnership derived from Treaty expectations encourages the continual posing of questions that seek to both critique and construct other forms of practice” (p. 27).

## Conceptualisations of Culture in Supervision

There is considerable variance in how questions of culture and supervision are conceptualised in health and social service practice, both in New Zealand and internationally. There are two emphases within the Aotearoa New Zealand literature: a distinct practice

called cultural supervision (McKinney, 2006; Su'a-Hawkins & Mafile'o, 2004; Tawhara, 2010; Te Pou, 2009, for example); and an understanding that supervision is always a cultural event (Crocket, 2005; Davys & Beddoe, 2010). Morice & Fay (2013) elaborated this latter emphasis: "Cultural supervision does not require exotic identities as its subject matter. It is applicable to all people everywhere, equally relevant when therapist and client come from the same reference group as when they do not" (p. 90).

Within health and social work supervision practice there has been a significant move towards supporting practitioners to engage supervisors of their own culture, for example Pasifika supervising Pasifika (Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009; Su'a-Hawkins & Mafile'o, 2004) and kaupapa Māori supervision where Māori supervise Māori practitioners (Eruera, 2005; McKinney, 2006; Supervision Directory Steering Group, 2005; Te Pou, 2009). Tawhara (2010) described such practice as "supervision delivered from a position supportive of [the Māori social worker's] own world view" (p. 56).

Cultural supervision in the New Zealand context thus involves a mode of supervision in which practitioners of a certain ethnicity are supported in their practice by a supervision process that is grounded in spiritual, traditional and theoretical understandings that are congruent with the world-view of their ethnic group. Culture becomes the overarching environment of supervision. (Beddoe & Egan, 2013, p. 375)

A second understanding of cultural supervision constructs it as a practice where Pākehā and tauwi counsellors seek supervision from a Māori supervisor, particularly in respect of practice with Māori clients. This understanding is the more familiar practice understanding within counselling (see Crocket et al., 2013; Egan & Team, 2010; Mickell, 2008). This construction emphasises supervision as a site for the development of cultural competence. In nursing, Te Pou (2009) calls such competence-focused supervision *bicultural* supervision, its task to support the development of "an understanding of the historical cultural context of Māori", so that practitioners "specifically link cultural knowledge and understanding to their work with the service user" (p. 16). We note that Morice and Fay (2013) couch in quite cautious terms the contribution of cultural supervision to cultural and clinical competence in psychotherapy: "cultural supervision [is] a valuable form of assistance to this end [good clinical work]" (p. 90, our emphasis), a caution echoed in our own writing (Crocket et al., 2013). Complex questions emerge for supervision in the unique Treaty-based context of professional practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, and we value the slowly emerging local supervision literature that helps us grapple with these complexities.

## Method

Contemporary qualitative research places increasing emphasis on researcher reflexivity in constructing research methods, and the ethical tasks of making interpretations and representations (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Etherington, 2004; Speedy, 2008). Within psychotherapy and counselling — as with the wider social sciences — experimental texts and arts-based methods offer post-colonial alternatives to the traditional genre of

research reports (see, for example, Somerville, 2010; Speedy, 2008; Wright et al., 2008). Knowledge claims become more contingent (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005): as Sampson (1985) suggested, “if after we have written, the text enters into others’ dialogic encounters, then how can we claim to be the final arbiters of meaning for something whose meaning is so open-ended” (p. 1208). Open-ended texts invite dialogue, or on Lather’s terms (1997, p. 234), foster “brooding”. This article offers an open-ended research text: our research “results” are written in the form of a multi-voiced dialogue. Reading such a text might foster brooding, and contribute to and invite ongoing dialogue about supervision and culture — as writing it has done for us as researchers. Displaying our engagements with the ethics of our supervision practice as questions, tentative claims, or commitments to just practice, our multi-voiced text is offered in a spirit of reflexivity.

The multi-voiced text that follows arose out of a research study undertaken in the context of a masters-level course in counselling supervision which is taught by the first two authors of this paper. The other authors are experienced practitioners undertaking advanced professional education in supervision. We were insider researchers, studying ourselves/our own supervision knowledge in the contexts of our professional practice.

First, 16 individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken by the students/researchers in the class, in reciprocal peer/pair interviews. Thus each student-author of this article is both research participant and researcher. Each student-author transcribed the research interview where they were researcher, sending their interview peer the transcript for checking.

The next step in analysis was for each researcher to send their interview peer a witnessing letter. The letter’s purpose was to acknowledge a particular learning — or perhaps question or brooding — that the research interview had made available to the researcher. This practice of acknowledgement derives from witnessing practices in narrative therapy, where White (2007) emphasised the ethics of a “two-way account” of therapy, that is the acknowledgement of mutual formation in the therapeutic encounter, a long-held tenant of feminist research (see Lather, 2007). Drawing on witnessing practices in research (see, for example, Crocket, 2013; Speedy, 2008), the peer witnessing letters then became the research materials on which this article is based.

After the analytic step provided by the witnessing letters, teaching staff made an initial selection from these letters, ordering these selections in a trial sequence that might show our research team active in dialogue about culture and supervision. Further editing was undertaken by each research-pair, and then further editing and re-ordering by the full group. In these processes we continued to draw on the idea that writing is research (see Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005); that the link between field-work and knowledge claims is enriched through the use of writing as a means of analysis.

Our writing practices had now produced a series of inter-related “utterances”, selections that had been de-composed from their places in the witnessing letters and re-composed (see Crocket, 2010) into a new text, a multi-voiced dialogue. An utterance, suggested Russian literary theorist Bakhtin (1981, 1986), carries the presence of many voices for it has within it *addressivity* and *answerability*. That is, an utterance responds to and thus carries the messages of earlier utterances, and anticipates and shapes those that might follow: “[a]s each utterance is responsive both to other utterances and to the rest of our surroundings,

and itself provokes further responsibility, every utterance is shaped by other utterances, both actual and anticipated” (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 16). In our research text, addressivity and answerability are visible in action, showing our utterances as part of a “corridor of voices” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 121), each shaping the other, the dialogue, and thus what it is possible to say about the social action of supervision. In presenting our results as a multi-voiced dialogue in the form of what psychotherapist Speedy (2008) called a “troubling and incomplete text” that “explicitly invite(s) dialogue” (p. 145), we situate this study as a form of *exploratory* practitioner research (see McLeod, 2003).

Significantly, Bakhtin (1986) suggested that dialogue is unfinalisable, that is there is always more to be said. In our text we address each other as researchers, showing some of the brooding that our research conversations offered us, favouring inquiry over conclusion. In setting utterances alongside each other, one voice following after another — expressing addressivity and answerability — we also address practitioner-supervisor-readers in a form that imagines a dialogic response. We offer an invitation to read/listen in ways that foster brooding and that invite inquiry and dialogue.

We invite readers to further experiment with our multi-voiced text by reading it aloud, in this way creating — on the terms Bakhtin (1986, pp. 119-120) offered — something that did not exist before your particular reading. To assist in reading (aloud) a text whose method might not be familiar the font changes used below indicate each new voice as it joins the conversation.

## Culture and Supervision Through a Multi-Voiced Text

E te hoa tauria, tēna koe

I send this letter to honour the stories and thoughts you shared, and the relationship formed, in our interview. How might this relationship be described within understandings that embrace Māori worldviews? You asked, “What does te Tiriti actually mean if you put it into practice?” I’d like to think that our short time together in some ways modelled a way of being alongside each other. You said, “I wish to not continue practices in this country that have been dishonouring of tangata whenua.” It strikes me that you haven’t just spoken your intentions — you are living them, practising them, and continuing to learn.

*To me that is what partnership should be about, that I am representing one side of the partnership, in keeping the intention of the Treaty in the forefront of our work: that is my job as a white New Zealander to be doing my side of the partnership.*

What stands out is your sense of supervisor responsibility to recognise Māori as tangata whenua: to become familiar with local iwi, to learn some te reo, and to develop increased understanding about the world views Māori hold, while noticing differences such as in urban and rural settings.

*You spoke about what appears to be an understanding that positions an individual Māori as expert on “all things Māori”, as “the spokesperson regarding all cultural knowledge”. This positioning had the danger, you suggested, of producing the idea that there is “only one kete of knowledge that needs*

*to be imparted". This idea is contrary to your beliefs about belonging, connections and community, where responsibility for past, present and future are all considered. We talked about the consequences for individual Māori within an organisation, like NZAC, where the dominant kaupapa is western/Pākehā, and where there may not be support to resist a request for expert Māori cultural input. Your reflections have left me with questions about tauwi responsibilities and how, as a Treaty partner, tauwi counsellors — including me — go beyond current supervision practice in connecting with Māori ideas and values. I take to heart your words that there is some work to be done here.*

Your expressions of care around these matters have brought me to a stronger commitment to foster “ūkaipō” (nurturing, sacred) spaces within the hostile environment of the prison [where I work as a counsellor], spaces where Māori men can express and/or learn more about tikanga and te reo. I have also made a clear commitment that next year I will learn te reo.

*A sparkling moment was your description of a particular collegial relationship as “reciprocal: a tuakana — teina relationship. She is the teacher sometimes, and I am the teacher sometimes.” For you, as Pākehā, that means “bringing your knowing in tentatively, from a Pākehā point of view”, leaving space for peer engagement. I was drawn to this practice of consultative reciprocity, which has inspired me to be on the look-out for opportunities to build these kinds of collegial relationships in my new context.*

I felt privileged to hear you enlarge the scope of cultural responsibility, to considerations of white privilege — about which you’ve read, reflected, and listened to Māori colleagues. I appreciated that you had added to your understanding of colonising practices, and reviewed your sense of responsibility to mitigate those practices.

*You spoke of taking an area of concern to two different supervisors (each practising from different modalities) about what your responsibilities were as a Pākehā working with Māori. The supervisors offered differing, equally valued, responses, highlighting the opportunities that come from inviting diverse knowledges to speak into the space of cultural supervision.*

*[You said] “As a white male I need to be conscious I represent the coloniser and oppressor. When I sit with Māori I need to be mindful of that.” These words and the words that followed struck me not only in terms of content but in the way they were said. The genuine intent I experienced brought forward an immediate relational appreciation of trust.*

*Although our stories are different and we come from different cultural backgrounds, I noticed we share an almost identical relational connection to the effects of historical oppression. I’d like to think that our shared knowledge of oppression, both convict and Māori, gives an insight and awareness of its sometimes-accepted, subtle and hidden behaviours. I see us as trusted allies who would stand against dominant discourses of oppression and culturally oppressive practice. This has helped me to think further about what an intentional de-colonising supervision practice approach might look like.*

You spoke about cultural supervision having become a taken-for-granted truth, as though there were a cohesive, collective understanding of what it is. It seems almost irreverent to hesitate, to question, or seek to debate the idea of cultural supervision, especially in

recognition of the culturally privileged position you and I inhabit as part of the dominant cultural group in New Zealand.

*You talked about feeling unsafe about being directed to have cultural supervision. You said that you wanted to take your lead from your clients — you wanted to hear their voices from their community. What does this say about your values and beliefs, that you would stand up for those whose voices might not be being heard for a range of reasons — collective thinking being perhaps one of these?*

“Cultural supervision” could render *culture* too “black and white”, plastering over the myriad of cultural forces, discourses and ways of being that each individual, family, community or ethnic group encompasses.

*You reflect on your experience of seeking cultural supervision with a Māori supervisor. That experience gave rise to wondering what this kind of supervision is... What supervision practices are cultural? What is the content of these kinds of conversations?*

You spoke of the need for members of the dominant Pākehā culture to take pains to notice the impact of culture, and their own cultural sensitivity. You noted that we are always interpreting, on the basis of our own filters, lenses, discourses, experiences, awarenesses, cultural stories. So we need to know what those are. Not so we can *remove* them. But so we can *account* for them. We can notice their influence. I appreciate this view as it suggests fluidity, a relationship with culture — cultures plural. You made the point that various cultures such as gender, age, class as well as ethnicity, influence what we do and don't notice.

*I have a sense of a chasm of difference between what cultural supervision may achieve and what may not be acknowledged. You brought to my attention the impact of western culture in the way that Māori practitioners become such through Pākehā education; of a history of fear and distrust of a dominant Pākehā culture; the need for healing. I am left wondering if the concept of cultural supervision is a sticking plaster over something that is in more need of TLC. I join you in your question of how is it possible to ensure and standardise “safe cultural practice”. It has me wondering if it becomes colonising.*

Intentionally taking opportunities to build relationships with people whose cultural identities are different from your own is part of what you consider to be the cornerstone of responsible, non-colonising, culturally safe, and sensitive counselling and supervision practice. You told me that you have consulted people from a range of cultures different to your own.

I had held an expectation (that now seems unrealistic) about supervisors having a responsibility to address the cultural requirements of *all* the therapists they work with and therefore having to have an understanding of *all* the various cultures of *all* the clients of *all* those therapists!

*You spoke about the cultural professional network you have established, which enables you to access various cultural knowledges. This practice made sense to me, and seems to fit with narrative ideas about collaboration rather than expertness. I now have a commitment to work towards resourcing*

*myself with stronger community networks that support work with clients. Your practice encourages me to approach conversations about culture in a curious, respectful, not-knowing way that I hope will invite shared understandings. Previously I had an expectation that unless I held certain cultural knowledge I did not have a right to speak about culture. I love the metaphor you offered of an “unpaved path” that is co-constructed. If I apply this idea to cultural supervision, I imagine a path that is paved with cobblestones laid by client, therapist, supervisor, and colleagues who all have cultural understandings to offer.*

I was particularly interested in your experiences of mandated supervision and how this affected your confidence in your own ability with tikanga Māori. This has led me to question mandated cultural supervision. In my experience mandated tasks tend to produce resistance. However, how do we expand our knowledge and learn to be respectful of other cultures and grow both bi-culturally and multiculturally? You ask: “Is there another way of inviting people to attend to culture — culture of all descriptions — but keeping at the forefront the Treaty and the consideration that we are a bicultural nation?” I admired how you did not retreat from the early difficulties [you had experienced] but worked to find ways of gaining knowledge and using your team and a kaumātua, who knew your work, to explore other possibilities. These actions raised the hope that there are many roads to cultural knowledge and awareness and it may not be found in individual supervision. I liked the idea of consulting one person (supervisor) who understood your professional work, along with consulting widely with others.

*A number of times you asked the question, “Who decided this?” — about how supervision was provided, funded or taught. This question raises further questions as to whose interests are being served: is it Māori or Pākehā, clients or providers, institutions or students, government or communities? Your wondering about the appropriateness of a supervisor who is not from your culture or community speaking into your work and your life, with little or no knowledge or experience of you, invited me to reflect on not only my supervisors past and present but also on the various people I supervise. How can I as a supervisor and counsellor take better account of the differences between my cultural identity and the cultural identities of the people I am working with? You provided a great example of a way to address this question in your eloquent description of the concept of “whakaiti”, as a de-centering process. In “being small”, I create space for the other person to bring their cultural identity into our work together. This idea reminded me of my father and how he models this practice in his life, and as a consequence has great mana and respect.*

It is extremely difficult, sometimes, to find — using Christopher Behan’s (2003) idea — “some ground to stand on”. Always there needs to be space for conversation, for the ongoing negotiation of how things are. Any centrally situated realities have the potential to be inflexible. It is in locally situated realities, negotiated through ongoing dialogue, that growth and potential have a chance, maybe? I recently read this ancient Sufi quote by Rumi that I thought offered some of what I hope for in supervision, be it cultural or otherwise:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I’ll meet you there. (Rumi, 1995, p. 36)

Maybe *there* is the tolerance, goodwill, community and space that's needed for good supervision.

*You explored how strongly you felt about the responsibility for us all to learn more about tangata whenua and the binding nature of the Treaty. And how you have developed a respectfully consultative manner to address these issues. What came through clearly was that successful cultural supervision involves respectful enquiry that does not make any assumptions about who we are; that rises from a deep appreciation that we all have different stories to tell whether we are Pākehā, or tangata whenua, that through dialogue and consultation we can unpeel the layers to make connection.*

I appreciated and acknowledge your rich history and commitment to the principles of social justice. We share a history of experience and connection with what it means to us to be Pākehā, to have a commitment to understand more, and to acknowledge tangata whenua, and the uniqueness of Aotearoa and its history. We share not wanting to trivialise or pay lip service to the values we see as inherent within social justice. We acknowledge the importance of developing relationship and respect, seeking valid and respectful means to achieve this within Aotearoa, the counselling profession, and supervision.

*I had a sense of you gently and respectfully widening the meanings of supervision to being more inclusive and embracing of Māori worldviews, and challenging dominant western constructions. Although I raised the idea of tauīwi perhaps needing to be “forced” in order to learn about Māori, you persisted in your resistance to any ideas that would replicate the past history of colonising and exclusion. You were clear that you don't ever want to be “part of something that is in danger of doing to others what happened to me and mine [as Māori]”. In place of this notion of being forced, you used a metaphor of invitation: “If you're wanting to learn about Māori things, possibly you could come over to this space and be with us”, and “Do you want a piece of this cake?” I was profoundly moved by this kōrero, by the vision and hope for a different way to be in relationship in this country, in this world. Your words were of connection and being in relationship, and the learning that takes place in the spaces that are meaningful and treasured for you and your own.*

You shared your wish that however the profession responds to the challenges around culture and supervision that the answer is not in being prescriptive or essentialising, and that this in turn will be influenced to some degree by who has control of the ongoing discussion around this issue.

Ka pai ngā kōrero, ka kōrero ānō.

## An Open-Ended Ending

Research, psychotherapy, counselling, and supervision are practices where “culture is always present” (Agee et al., 2011, p. 28). In joining our voices to this ethical project of considering how supervision works as cultural partnership — particularly how supervision works in Aotearoa New Zealand to support just and effective counselling practice alongside Māori clients — our hope is to show something of, join, and contribute to the “corridor of voices”

(Bakhtin, 1986, p. 121) already addressing and answering each other and working to shape culturally responsive practice. In showing voices in dialogue, through the literary/research device of a series of extracts from letters about our learning experiences in research interviews, we bring into the written domain some of the conversation around us in the professional community. Some of these conversations speak the aspirational: “they look to cultural supervision to widen the scope of our imaginative capacities and transform our attitudes towards the Other and otherness” (Morice & Fay, 2013, p. 94). Some conversations emphasise the regulatory, others the scarcity of resource, others the complexities of culture. Through the writing strategy of this troubling and incomplete text (see Speedy, 2008), we invite both brooding consideration of ideas and practices available in our professional community, and participation in the ongoing production of possibilities for socially just supervision, counselling, and psychotherapeutic practice.

...the task becomes not so much to invent or incite as to use praxis as a material force to identify and amplify what is already begun toward a practice of living on. (Lather, 2007, p. 16)

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