

In search for shared content and design in supervision training: a syllabus analysis in Sweden

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Abstract

Purpose – Previous research has pointed to a lack of studies concerning supervision training courses. Consequently, the literature has little to suggest, and the research field is underexplored, so questions around the content and design of supervision training courses remain unanswered and need to be addressed systematically. The main aim of the present study is to explore and map whether shared content and design exist in supervisor training courses across different vocations.

Design/methodology/approach – A syllabus analysis is used in order to investigate characteristic features in supervisor training courses related to the professions of dentist, doctor, psychologist, police officer and teacher.

Findings – The results point to the existence of shared content in the different courses, such as an emphasis on learning and supervision theories, feedback, ethics, assessment and communication. Furthermore, the results conclude similarities in design of the courses, such as a problem-based approach, seminars, lectures and homework. Thus, there are common theoretical approaches to important supervisory competences.

Practical implications – Our results intend to offer possibilities to learn from different professions when improving supervisor training courses but may also constitute a starting point for developing a shared model of interprofessional supervisor competences. Furthermore, the results may support possible cooperation in interprofessional courses. This could include arranging interprofessional courses, where one part is shared for participants from the included professions and another part is profession-specific.

Originality/value – We seek to contribute to the research field of supervision at workplaces with knowledge and ideas about how to learn from different professions when developing and improving supervisor training courses.

Keywords Course content, Course design, Supervision training, Syllabus analyses, Tutoring, Vocational training

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

An essential part of education within such professions as police, teachers and psychologists is vocational training through supervised practices. Such practices are important learning environments for students to gain knowledge and experience related to their future profession but also to put theory into practice. The supervisors or field instructors are crucial links for creating learning experiences and evaluating the students' progresses and skills, as well as for problematizing the ever-present theory and practice dilemma of how theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge mutually enrich each other (Hewett *et al.*, 2019; Jossberger *et al.*, 2015; Phillips and Chetty, 2018). Consequently, many educational institutions provide courses in supervision, and these courses are mandatory within certain professions, such as doctor specialist and dentist specialist. But what content and design in supervision courses is crucial for effective training?

The research area of supervision in vocational training related to supervisory competences remains underexplored (e.g. Hilli *et al.*, 2014; Pilling and Roth, 2014). For



example, O'Donovan *et al.* (2011) argued that while a broad consensus exists regarding the importance of supervised practice in vocational training, there is considerable variation in supervisors' ability to provide effective supervision. Furthermore, when it comes to evidence about supervision practice and "what works", Kilminster and Jolly (2000) claimed that little research has been done, and they argued for a research focus on quality of course content and design. However, according to a later review study by Cutcliffe and Sloan (2014) focusing on clinical supervision, there seems to be a common agreement about the existence of specific knowledge, attitudes and skills related to supervision but no clarity about what these knowledge and skills consist of. Most of the reviewed texts also stated that clinical supervision constitutes a unique competence base. Although supervision research seems to be overrepresented by studies within clinical supervision, this reasoning also seems to be true for other vocations, such as teacher education (Akcan and Tatar, 2010). Therefore, an important question is whether generic competences exist related to supervision in vocational training and, if so, what the common core could be. What is known about how professionals can receive sufficient supervision in continuing education programs for supervisors, concerning content and design, to maintain and improve skills? The present study seeks to explore and map whether a shared core and design exists among different professions around supervision. This involves investigating the content and design of syllabuses related to supervision training within different professional occupations.

Background

For students in vocational training during their education, supervisors play crucial roles in terms of connecting theory and practice. In Sweden, supervisory training courses are mandatory for professions such as doctor specialists, dentist specialists and police officers, but optional for other professions, such as teachers and psychologists. However, Falender and Shafanske (2012) argued that supervisors who conduct supervision based solely on their personal experiences as a supervisee may be unwittingly limiting the scope and effectiveness of supervision. O'Donovan *et al.* (2011) concluded that supervisors who rely only on their previous experience within their field tend to give the impression of being insecure supervisors. Hoffman *et al.* (2015) concluded that when supervisors have not participated in supervision training – that is, have not received accurate preparation – they are often unsure of their role as supervisor.

Several studies have noted the important benefits of supervising after participation in supervision training. For example, Everett *et al.* (2011) explored the ways in which supervisors change their ways of working after training seminars. The seminars focused on a developmental model, assuming students were initially insecure, dependent and anxious and gradually became secure, autonomous and professional. That study showed that attendants of the training seminars were more likely to view themselves as consultants, emphasized relational processes to a higher degree, used written feedback and recommended readings. Deal *et al.* (2011) presented similar results. Through a randomized control trial of a field instructor program, they explored the effects of instructor supervision training on students in the field of social work and compared them with field instructors who did not participate in training. The authors found that the trajectory of change in students' ability to assess clients was significantly more rapid than that of students of untrained field instructors. Furthermore, students of trained supervisors showed a more rapid positive change in competencies regarding planning and implementing interventions. One explanation for this development, the authors argued, could be the taught conceptual framework to being able to assess students' cognitive and behavioral strengths and ways to enhance further development. Palesey (2017) concluded that:

... a pre-determined set of scaffolds in the workplace with which the learners can engage on an "as needed" basis, along with clear guidelines for their use, may facilitate learning and competency in workplaces which afford little direct supervision or support. (p. 380)

Thus, providing course participants in supervision training with clear guidelines for supervision seems to be a logical and relevant step in making independent and confident supervisors. Studies by [Palesey \(2017\)](#), [Deal et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Everett et al. \(2011\)](#) have highlighted how supervisees benefit from meeting trained supervisors and may be more rapidly socialized into their new professional roles.

Specific supervisor competencies

[Cutcliffe and Sloan \(2014\)](#) conducted a review on knowledge, attitudes and skills in relation to competencies in supervision. They identified competences in supervision such as knowledge of the purpose of supervision; knowledge regarding the management, educative, and supportive functions; knowledge of structure and theoretical models and knowledge of relationships and working alliances. [Falender and Shafanske \(2012\)](#) also emphasized supervision competences and argued for a competence-based framework for clinical supervision training. Based on a literature review, they suggested six different features for considering competences-based supervision: development of working alliance, skills in self-assessment and feedback, supporting formative and cumulative assessment, identifying specific areas for improvement, supporting career-long and life-long learning and supporting client welfare.

The literature referred to above often emphasizes feedback as an important supervisor competence (e.g. [Cutcliffe and Sloan, 2014](#); [Falender and Shafanske, 2012](#)). Other highlighted competences are assessment (e.g. [Deal et al., 2011](#); [Falender and Shafanske, 2012](#); [Palesey, 2017](#)), relational or communicational skills (e.g. [Everett et al., 2011](#)) and knowledge of learning theories (e.g. [Cutcliffe and Slone, 2014](#)). Therefore, we will touch upon these competences briefly below.

When it comes to *feedback*, this competence has been under scrutiny for a long time in educational contexts. [Marton and Morris \(2002\)](#) concluded that feedback was again identified as the most powerful single moderator that enhances student achievement. However, the best learning results were obtained when feedback was coupled with the setting of appropriate, specific and challenging goals. Feedback is not only powerful when it flows from the supervisor to the supervisee but also in the other direction ([Hattie, 2009](#)). According to the metastudies by [Hattie \(1992, 1999, 2009\)](#), effective feedback answers three questions: Where am I going (the goals)? How am I going? And where to next? Constructive feedback in general should also be timely, specific and manageable.

In vocational training, [Akcan and Tatar \(2010\)](#) explored the nature of feedback in the situation of preservice teachers and their supervisors through post-lesson conferences and written evaluations. Their results pointed to the existence of different levels of feedback as the cooperating teachers tended to give feedback in relation to specific situations in the classroom and focused on certain instances about the classroom. The university teachers, on the other hand, provided feedback that focused on reflections for helping the students evaluate their lessons more critically. Thus, it is clear that supervisors must identify appropriate, challenging and specific goals and be able to communicate these to the supervisee. This implies that supervisors need to be aware of the learning goals in the curriculum and have strategies to help the supervisees reach those goals ([Hattie, 2009](#)). It is also important for supervisors to be open to feedback from supervisees regarding what the supervisees know and to understand where they have made errors and have misconceptions ([Hattie, 2009](#)).

Another central supervision skill is being able to *communicate* effectively. This includes having a positive view of others and having energy and enthusiasm and being sociable and friendly ([Feldman, 1986](#)). However, according to [Hativa \(2000\)](#), supervisors that are monotonous, speak too quickly or use vague terms diminish the ability of supervisees to understand what is intended to be taught. It is also essential for supervisors to ask themselves what the actual consequences (intended and unintended) are of any given act of *assessment* on

student learning and on supervision training (Boud, 1995). Supervisees adapt to how they are going to be assessed, so supervisors must be aware of this and vary the examination forms. Also, El-Kafafi (2012) highlighted the importance of assessment for learning and formative assessment in relation to adult learning and preparing for lifelong learning. Kogan and Holmboe (2013) discussed the difficulty of assessment in workplaces as the assessment not only concerns the trainee but also the impact of trainees' competences on aspects such as teamwork or the quality of care provided to the patient. When exploring the effect of supervisor–trainee continuity on the quality of assessment, Cheung *et al.* (2017) found weak correlations. Supervisors included in their study did not complete assessment to a high standard, and the results suggest greater attention should be paid to improving the quality of assessment.

Another important specific supervision competency is *epistemic literacy*; that is, the capacity to create knowledge and make sense of the world (Tuomi, 2015). Epistemic literacy means the ability to reflect on the learning process, a capability for critical reflection and gaining generic capabilities that make meaningful and valuable action possible:

Epistemic literacy helps us cope with heterogeneous and dynamic knowledge landscapes. It means that we understand how knowledge is created and what constitutes the social basis for learning and education. (Tuomi, 2015, p. 4)

The research overview has highlighted the need for more research related to supervision training but also the impacts of attending such training for improving supervisees' learning and development within the actual vocation. We have identified feedback, communication, assessment and epistemic literacy as important competences when supervising. The referred literature considers several different vocations, and an emerging question is whether similar challenges are emphasized in different supervision syllabuses.

Aim

The aim of this study is to explore and map the content and design of supervision courses and determine whether a shared core and design among different professions exists in practical supervision training.

The study centers on the following questions:

- (1) Does a common *content* and *design* among different professions exist in supervisor training courses? If so, what are the characteristic features of this content and design in supervisor training courses?

The study primarily focuses on practical training of post-degree supervisors (those who supervise colleagues already holding an undergraduate or equivalent exam). Examples include medical doctors supervising prospective specialist doctors and dentists receiving specialized clinical training, police officers becoming supervisors for police cadets and teacher educators preparing working teachers to become internship supervisors (sometimes called cooperating teachers). There are other professions, of course, such as nurses or physiotherapists, that also could be of interest for this kind of study. However, we chose to limit this study to five professions.

Our focus was on practical supervision training (that is, organized supervision) offered to qualified professionals. Consequently, we excluded traditional and mainly theory-based research supervision between supervisors and doctoral students, as well as studies on teacher training of preservice teachers, master's students and graduate students. Instead of focusing on the effectiveness of supervision training or the supervisory relationship, we concentrated on what content is included in supervisor training courses to ensure supervisors are competent and focus on how the training is designed. It is not enough to just have personal

and professional experience of participating in supervisory courses. Through this study, we hope to scientifically explore and map the content and design of different professionals' supervisor training courses. Our intention is that the results will offer possibilities to learn from different professions when improving supervisor training courses but may also support possible cooperation in interprofessional courses. Furthermore, we highlight possible new research approaches to the field of supervision training courses.

We use the term supervision throughout the paper. The English-language literature on this subject also refers to supervision as tutoring, counseling, consultation, guidance and mentoring (Driscoll, 2006; Hawkins and Shohet, 2012; Cutcliffe *et al.*, 2005; Tveiten, 2006).

Methodological considerations

The aim of this study is to explore and map the extent to which common content and design exist in supervisor training courses for different professions. As the background section of this paper has shown, there is a lack of studies comparing and discussing supervisor training courses' content and design. Therefore, a possible approach is to analyze what content the course syllabuses within the different professional areas emphasize. Another possibility could be to conduct interviews with course directors, but as a first step and in this study we chose to approach the course syllabuses. This means that interviews could serve as a second study. Yet another possibility could be to conduct observations in order to explore the content discussed in action, but we argue that this could serve as a later study. According to Bowen (2009), content analysis is a process of organizing information into categories related to central research questions. Krippendorff (1980) concluded that content analyses serve as valid and replicable methods for drawing conclusions from observed communications. This process involves identifying and recognizing pertinent information. Our justification for using content analysis is that it provides possibilities to explore the research question in reasonable ways and to analyze a considerable number of syllabuses ($n = 17$). Analyzing syllabuses is a time-consuming task, and a content analysis creates opportunities to approach the data set systematically. Downe-Wamboldt (1992) separated *manifest analysis*, which focuses on "what has been said", from *latent analysis*, which seeks to understand "what aimed to be said". For the present study, this means a manifest analysis approach and gathering course syllabuses from five different professions that arrange supervisor training: dentists, doctors, police officers, psychologists and teachers.

Data collection

The empirical data consist of 17 course syllabuses: five from dentist specialists and three from each of the other professions (doctor specialists, police officers, psychologists and teachers). In order to find the syllabuses, we identified the higher education institutions that provide compulsory education within the actual professions. In cases where several institutions hosted the education, we chose the ones with most students. The syllabuses were then downloaded from the websites of the selected higher education institutes. In some cases, especially for noncredit courses or courses for professions without regulations, it was difficult to come across the course plans. Therefore, student administrators were contacted in order to gain at least three syllabuses from each profession.

When available, the empirical data consisted of nationwide regulations in authorized documents. This means that the nationwide regulations for doctor specialists (SOSFS 2015:8, 2015), regulations for specialist training of supervisors in dentistry (HSLF 2017:77) and regulations for the police supervisor course (Police Authority, A006.422/2018) were used in the second step of the analysis. No regulations exist for psychologists or teachers in terms of supervisor training.

Analysis

The analysis was performed in three steps. The first step involved an analysis of the individual syllabuses. The second step concerned a comparison of the course plans within each profession but also, when available, a comparison to national regulations. The third step involved a comparison between the included professions and how the content and design of the different professions' syllabuses were declared. For the first step, a manifest content analysis was chosen as the methodological approach. Based on a literature review, [Bengtsson \(2016\)](#) described a manifest content analysis in four stages: *decontextualization*, *recontextualization*, *categorization* and *compilation*. The first stage involves decontextualization, which means that it focuses on identifying meaning and gaining a sense of the whole. For the present study, this meant separating the syllabus content from the design and identifying different requirements stated in the individual syllabuses.

The second stage, recontextualization, involves verifying whether all content aspects have been covered. These initial stages were conducted independently by the two authors. The third stage, categorization, involves condensing meaning and creating content domains or categories. In this stage, syllabus content aspects such as feedback, methods for assessment and supervision theories emerged. In relation to the course design, aspects such as lectures, seminars, peer review and role play were identified. Unlike the two previous stages, where the authors worked independently, this stage involved collaboration and negotiation of the emerged categories. This was done to increase the validity of the analysis but also meant, for example, that some categories were merged. Thus, inter-rater reliability was applied when we interpreted the syllabuses.

Finally, [Bengtsson \(2016\)](#) described stage four, compilation, as drawing realistic conclusions. The compilation stage in this study involved steps two and three: comparisons within each professions' syllabuses and comparisons between the different professions' syllabuses. This is outlined and presented in the summaries from each profession and also in the conclusion section. This stage is also connected to discussing the results in relation to previous research, as has been done in the discussion section of the present article.

Methodological difficulties

Based on our syllabus reading, we as researchers only have indirect access to course content and design. This challenge was also discussed by [Bowen \(2009\)](#), who argued that documents are originally produced for reasons other than research and are likely to provide insufficient details. Consequently, there is a risk that researchers will not get the full picture of the phenomenon or misinterpret the content and design of what actually takes place in a course. This may concern misunderstanding of the significance of certain concepts; for example, "difficult conversations" can be equivalent to giving and receiving "feedback".

Another difficulty related to the data collection was the complication of obtaining access to syllabuses, particularly noncredit courses and those syllabuses that were not part of a national authorized document. [Bowen \(2009\)](#) described this challenge as low retrievability of documents and suggested that they could be blocked deliberately. For the present study, low retrievability could be explained by the absence of supervisor training courses or the absence of a syllabus related to a short course. It might also be relevant to compare courses with huge differences in length, for example ranging from 7.5 credits to a two-day course. Since our primary aim was to map out similarities and differences rather than quality aspects, we feel that our approach was constructive. Another weakness is that we searched for certain keywords, based on our readings of syllabuses and, in so doing, may have missed content and design that was not explicitly revealed by the syllabus but was actually included in the courses. Furthermore, the syllabuses examined in our study may be inadequate and unsatisfactorily presented, meaning that a certain content or design may be included in the course despite not being clearly presented in the syllabus.

Results

The focus of this study was to explore the existence of a shared content and design of supervision courses across the different professions: dentist specialists, doctor specialists, police officers, psychologists and teachers. Through a manifest content analysis, it was possible to investigate common features and to reveal differences in the courses' syllabuses. The first part of the results below presents content and design in relation to each profession's supervising courses. The second part presents the comparison of content and design between the included professions' supervision courses.

Each profession's supervisor courses

Dentist specialists. The syllabus analysis related to dentist specialists' supervision training comprised five syllabuses. Furthermore, national regulations ([HSLF-FS 2017:77](#), Chapter 6, 1 §) were included in the analysis and as a comparison to the individual syllabuses. According to the regulations, supervision training is mandatory.

The *content* of the five reviewed course plans included rules and regulations for dentist specialists, supervising, learning theories, methods for assessment, communication and ethics. These are in line with the assignments in the ordinance ([HSFL-FS 2017:77](#), §2 and §3). The syllabuses also focused on learning processes, leadership, practice supervision, different roles, constructive alignment, feedback, knowledge forms, self-reflection, managing crisis/conflicts and difficult situations, ethical principles and developing and using/constructing an individual study plan. The *design* of the courses was typically based on two- or three-day meetings, including homework. The supervisor training is based on lecturers, seminars, practical exercises, group work, oral reporting, problem-based learning and reflection. The most frequent levels of grading are pass or fail.

Doctor specialists. The analysis of course plans related to doctor specialists comprised three syllabuses, extending from one to three days, from three different higher education institutes. The national regulations for supervision training were also included and, as in the case of the dentist specialists, the supervisor training for doctor specialists is mandatory ([SOSFS 2015:8](#), 2015).

The manifest content analysis of the three syllabuses revealed a similar content comprising supervision theories, learning theories, feedback, assessment, communication and ethical perspectives. These findings are in line with the content of supervision training explicated in the national regulations for doctor specialists. Consequently, the supervisor's role is considered, and communication and feedback is covered, as are ethics and different forms for assessment. The concept of learning theories is not explicitly mentioned in all of the syllabuses' content; however, corresponding concepts like theory on competence are used. Guidelines and descriptors are included in all three of the syllabuses included in our study. Only two course arrangers present the course *design* and learning activities. Reality-based communication training based on interactivity, feedback and reflection comprise the foundation of the courses. Short lectures, practical training and group discussions connect learning theories with methodology.

Police officers. When it comes to the analysis of the police officers' supervisor training, three syllabuses were included. Furthermore, national regulations exist for supervisor training, and a supervisor must complete and pass a 7.5-credit supervision course, equivalent to five weeks of fulltime work. Course participants must also have at least two years of professional work experience ([Police Authority, A006.422/2018](#)).

The analysis of the individual syllabuses revealed common *content* approaches to supervision training. This means that all the courses covered supervision theories, learning theories, assessment, communication and ethical issues. Feedback was not mentioned in any of the three syllabuses. However, the content is in line with the national regulations.

The individual syllabuses also comprised learning theories, supervision theories/models, knowledge view, communication methods/conflict management, assessment, establishing an individual development plan and ethical challenges. The national regulations also highlighted the content of constructing and using an individual developing plan and the police force's societal mandate, but this was not mentioned in any of the individual syllabuses.

All three course plans comprise 7.5 credits; this means that, in terms of time, they vastly exceed the supervision training of dentist and doctor specialists. This is likely to have consequences regarding both course content and design. Problem-based teaching is the dominant *design*. Lecturers, seminars, thematic discussions, log books, group work, role playing, practical exercises under supervision, reflection, dialogs, and literature studies in between meetings/homework are common teaching and learning methods. Pass or fail are the grading levels used.

Psychologists. The three individual syllabuses for psychologists included in this analysis differ considerably in terms of scope and *content*. One syllabus comprises 7.5 credits, one is a five-day noncredit course and one course comprises a one-day session. This means that the 7.5-credit course and the longer noncredit course (to some extent) comprise more content, such as supervision theories, methods for assessment and ethics. Furthermore, learning theories and communication are highlighted in the 7.5-credit course. There are no national regulations related to supervision training for psychologists and no requirements to undergo supervision training.

The *design* of the psychologists' supervision courses also differs greatly, largely due to the great differences in scope. One course focuses on peer supervision training. Lectures and peer discussions are joint features. For the 7.5-credit course, pass and fail are used for assessment, whereas the other two require attendance at the course meetings.

Teacher educators. The analysis of the supervision course for teachers comprises three individual syllabuses. As with the psychologists, no national regulation exists for teachers to undergo supervision training. The *content* of supervision training concerns theories related to supervision in all three examples of syllabuses. Methods for assessment, communication and ethics are also emphasized in the different syllabuses. One syllabus highlights learning theories or knowledge theories, whereas none indicate that feedback is discussed. However, all three syllabuses comprise communicative assessment or formative assessment and could be considered as feedback.

The three syllabuses comprise 7.5 credits each, and two of the institutions have additional 7.5 credit courses at the advanced level. While these course plans are not analyzed here, they could convey the importance of the supervision field. It is not possible to find a coherent approach to the *design* of the courses for teachers, but the courses comprise lectures and seminars as well as peer review and peer supervision. The grading levels differ among the courses, as one uses A–F and two use the grades fail, pass and pass with distinction.

Comparison of content between the professions' supervisor courses. In this section, the different professions' supervision courses are compared in terms of content of the courses. The results of the comparison are presented in [Table 1](#) below. It is clear from the analysis that overlaps exist in terms of what content the different courses highlight and focus on.

As [Table 1](#) shows, the content is largely mutual for all five professions. However, the syllabuses for psychologists stand out as there is large variation among the psychologists' courses but also between the syllabuses and the other professions' syllabuses. In addition, practical training in giving feedback is not explicitly mentioned in the three police syllabuses or among psychologists. Ethics is mentioned in some of the syllabuses for dentist and doctor specialists as well as for psychologists. The results show that a content area is covered in a specific syllabus, but the extent to which the content is discussed and covered is not visible through this analysis.

Profession/learning goals in tutoring courses	Dentist specialists	Doctor specialists	Police officers	Psychologists	Teacher educators
Supervision theories	GU, HJ, MAU, ORU, UMU	KI, LIP, UMU	LNU, SH, UMU	LU, ORU	MAU, GU, SU
Learning theories/ knowledge theory/ epistemology	HJ, M, ORU, UMU	KI, LIP, UMU	LNU, SH, UMU	LU	MAU, GU
Feedback	GU, HJ, MAU, ORU	KI, LIP, UMU		ORU	
Methods for assessment	GU, HJ, MAU, ORU, UMU	KI, LIP, UMU	LNU, SH, UMU	LU, ORU	MAU, GU, SU
Communication/difficult conversations	GU, HJ, MAU, ORU, UMU	KI, LIP, UMU	LNU, SH, UMU	LNU, LU	MAU, GU, SU
Ethics	HJ, MAU, UMU	LIP, UMU	LNU, SH, UMU	LU, ORU	MAU, GU, SU

Table 1.

Analysis of syllabus content for supervision training related to five professions at Swedish universities

Note(s): GU = Gothenburg University, HJ = Jönköping University, KI = Karolinska Institutet, LNU = Linneaus University, LIP = Lipus (Lipus AB is a leader in Sweden in external examination of AT and ST as well as certification of courses and congresses for doctors. Lipus is a subsidiary of the Swedish Medical Association and is owned by the medical profession), LU = Lund University, M = Malmö University, SU = Stockholm University, SH = Södertörn University, ORU = Örebro University, UMU = Umeå University

Comparison of design between the professions’ supervisor courses. Comparing the design of the professions’ supervisor courses indicates a common inclusion of lectures and literature seminars but also some differences in working with problem-based learning and homework. A comparison of the supervisor training courses’ *design* is presented in [Table 2](#).

Design

There are several common features across the courses regarding *design*, such as lectures and literature seminars. These results are expected, given that most courses within higher education use lectures and seminars as a base for learning activities. When it comes to the use of role play and practical training, some differences can be noted. This means that role play seems to be an integrated part in supervisor training courses for doctors, dentists and police officers but less common for psychologists and teachers. There are also differences in the use of problem-based learning, and this activity is stated only in six of the 17 course syllabuses across the professions. For psychologists, no course syllabus contains problem-based learning, and only one considers role play.

There are large variations regarding the length of the supervision courses, examination forms and grading systems. These variations should be regarded as different frame factors (time, examination, grades, etc.) that may affect the course takers’ attitude toward the supervision courses and its legitimacy. The frame factors are interconnected to the content of the courses as shorter courses, as indicated above, and must inevitably cover the content on a more basic level.

Discussion

Based on the results of our study, it is evident that the *content* of the five professions’ supervision training essentially complies with the requirements of the three nationwide regulations included in our study. Our findings are predictable to some extent in that sense that it is logical that course instructors are to follow national regulations. In addition, most syllabuses included in the study highlighted similar content such as supervision theories,

Profession/teaching forms in tutoring course	Dentist specialist	Doctor specialists	Police officers	Psychologists	Teacher educators
Compulsory	Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare HSLF-FS 2017:77, Chapter 6, 2 §	Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (SOSFS 2015:8, 2015) Chapter 3, 1–3 §	National Police Board (2009), RPSFS 2009:6, FAP 761–1, 10 §	No	No
Credits/course length	2–8 credits	1 day (UMU); 2 days (LIP), 3 days (KI)	7.5 credits LNU, SH, UMU	7.5 credits (LU) 1 day (LNU) 5 days (ORU)	7.5 credits (GU, MAU, SU)
Lecturers	HJ, MAU, ORU, UMU	KI, UMU	LNU, SH	LNU, LU, ORU	GU, MAU, SU
Literature seminars/discussions, peer review	HJ, MAU, ORU, UMU	KI, LIP	LNU, SH, UMU	LNU, LU, ORU	GU, MAU, SU
Preparation task and home work	MAU, UMU	KI, LIP	UMU	LU	MAU, SU
Problem-based learning/case-based	GU, HJ	LIP	LNU		
Role play/practical training/supervision simulation, action learning	GU, MAU, UMU	Lip, KI	LNU, SH, UMU	LU	
<i>Examination forms (1–4)</i>		Not presented for UMU			
(1) Practical exercises	UMU	LIP	UMU		
(2) Seminars	MAU, UMU		UMU		
(3) Written and oral presentation of individual paper/educational development work	HJ, MAU, UMU	KI	L, SH, U	LU	GU, MAU
(4) Take-home examination/unsupervised examination	ORU				SU
<i>Grades</i>					
Pass or fail	HJ, MAU, UMU	No grades awarded at KI, LIP, UMU	ST, UMU	ORU no grades, 80% presence	A-F
Pass with distinction, pass, fail	ORU		LNU	LU	SU
Note(s): GU = Gothenburg University, HJ = Jönköping University, KI = Karolinska Institutet, LNU = Linneaus University, LIP = Lipus (Lipus AB is a leader in Sweden in external examination of AT and ST as well as certification of courses and congresses for doctors. Lipus is a subsidiary of the Swedish Medical Association and is owned by the medical profession), LU = Lund University, M = Malmö University, SU = Stockholm University, SH = Södertörn University, ST = Södertörn University, UMU = Umeå University					

Table 2.
Analysis of syllabus
design, including
teaching and learning
methods

learning and teaching theories, communication and feedback training (see also [O'Donovan et al., 2011](#)), ethics and methods for assessment ([Figure 1](#)).

Since three of the professions (dentist specialists, doctor specialists and police officers) have nationwide regulations that largely cover the same content regardless of profession, it is not surprising that the content of the supervision courses is similar to those. However, each of the three professions may stand out more clearly when it comes to aspects such as unique guidelines for the profession or ethics related to special situations in an exclusive context. This could deal with contact with patients and/or relatives (dentists and doctors) or the general public (police officers). Also, teacher educators and psychologists emphasized ethics in their supervision training courses.

The *design* ([Figure 2](#)) of the courses has common elements, such as lectures, different forms of seminars, practical training and discussions across the professions. Some courses are problem-based and include homework.

While the same content corresponds to several of the professions, the design of the courses differs between and within professions and course organizers. Accordingly, several fields of tension can be identified. One tension is the time scale and scope of the course; that is, how long a supervisor course should be in order to cover the required content realistically and in an educationally and appropriate way. Interestingly, supervisor training courses for teachers, and in some cases psychologists, are the ones that comprise 7.5 credit points. It could be expected that content such as feedback, assessment, learning theories and communication would be a well-integrated part in their previous graduate education.

The time scale of a course is strongly connected to legitimacy. Such large variations in course time affect and limit the quality of teaching and learning conditions in several important aspects, such as the possibility to include and in depth discuss different content and how to organize supervision courses. Furthermore, given the strong research evidence in favor of participating in training courses (e.g. [Everett et al., 2011](#)), it could be argued that courses whose scope is too limited risk lacking important features for comprehensive supervisor competences.

Figure 1.
Commonly occurring *content* in supervision training in the syllabuses included in our study for dentist specialists, doctor specialists, police officers, psychologists and teacher educators

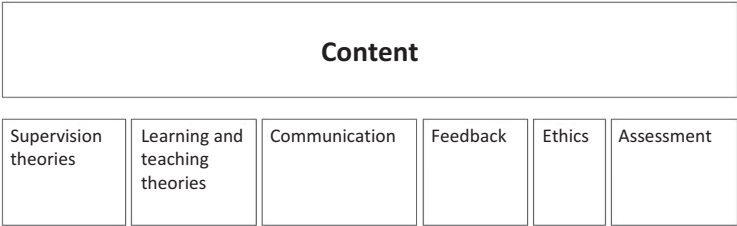
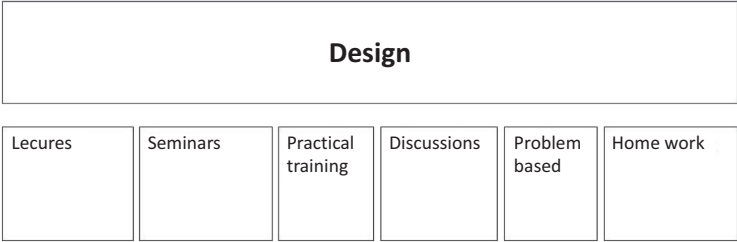


Figure 2.
Commonly occurring *design* in supervisor training in the syllabuses included in our study for dentist specialists, doctor specialists, police officers, psychologists and teacher educators



Another tension is connected to which examination form and grading system is used. This tension, sometimes referred to as consequence validity, points to the potential and actual consequences of applied testing (Messick, 1989). Boud (1995) claimed that the curriculum tells you what the faculty is doing, but the examination system tells you what the students are doing. The examination form greatly influences how course participants relate to the course. Thus, it is crucial whether the examination takes the form of a seminar and/or written and oral presentation, practical exercises or a take-home examination. Course participants adapt to the examination system. Closely connected to the examination form is the grading system. Regardless of whether grades are awarded, or pass or fail or pass with distinction is used, the grading system will affect the course participants and how the legitimacy of the course is experienced (Boud, 1995). The duration of the supervisor training, examination forms and grading system are three structural variables that need to be considered carefully when organizing supervision training.

Conclusions

Previous studies have pointed to important benefits for trainees' learning development when supervisors participated in supervisor training courses. These benefits include increased security in their role as supervisors, increased use of written feedback (Everett *et al.*, 2011) and increased student ability in assessing clients (Deal *et al.*, 2011). Several previous studies have also reviewed and identified supervisor competences (e.g. Akcan and Tatar, 2010; Cutcliff and Sloan, 2014; Falender and Shafanske, 2012) and have, to some extent, highlighted similar characteristics. The results from the presented study above point to a coherence of supervisor training courses when it comes to the content of the courses. These results are in line with the study of Pilling and Roth (2014), who emphasized the ability to employ educational principles to enhance learning, structure supervision sessions, reflect on the usefulness of supervision and the ability to give accurate feedback and assess supervisee competence.

An interesting question, then, is whether this content could be considered to cover generic supervisor competences. This means that those competences are nonspecific to any profession and include topics such as supervision training, learning theory, communication, feedback training and assessment. This may provide possibilities for a shared model of supervision training, which is in line with previous research by Hoffmann *et al.* (2015). From this perspective, the goals and content of supervision training are to develop supervisees' skills and knowledge and to enhance the development of their professional identity as supervisors and reflection skills (Phillips and Chetty, 2018; O'Donovan *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, what competences could be considered as profession-specific? Mapping supervisor competences in relation to profession would be valuable for future supervisor training courses.

It is logical that tension exists between the five different professions' unique core competences and subject knowledge versus generic supervision skills. The educational practice and supervision context also varies between, for example, dentist specialists, doctor specialists and psychologists in clinical supervision versus police officers and teachers in a nonclinical context. Based on the findings, an interesting approach to future supervision training courses could include an interprofessional supervision training module considering identified generic competences and allowing for crossprofessional learning, sharing ideas and reflections. Such a module could in depth focus on generic content in order to increase supervisors' knowledge of for example assessment and feedback but may also constitute a common knowledge base between professions and contribute to a mutual understanding and quality assurance. Previous studies (Stigmar and Davidsson, 2019) involving participants in higher education teacher training have noted that meeting professionals and colleagues from across subjects and faculties in courses is an appreciated outcome.

Additional benefits are the organizational synergy effects when several professions participate in the same course could be related to increasing frequency in offering the course as well as limiting costs. A profession-specific module could in depth connect theory and practice, highlight specific literature, ethics in relation to profession and other identified competences considered profession-specific. The challenges with such a module approach are, as argued the time and scope but also respecting the uniqueness of all different professions' traditions and on to supervision training courses. The differences between the various current supervisory courses constitute a major challenge for future interprofessional coordination.

Finally, this study opens up for several new approaches to research regarding supervision training. Future research questions could highlight and map other professions' supervision training courses in terms of content and design. As indicated above, conducting a systematic review of interprofessional supervisory competences, exploring the possibilities of a shared model of supervision and identifying profession-specific competences would be of great value. Another future research idea, as a consequence of the results presented in this article, is to find out how an interdisciplinary network for organizing supervision training can be assembled. There are several questions to unite around. For example, what content is suitable to be generic and interprofessional and what content should be unique for each profession? How can modules be designed in a flexible and digitized way? How can national and international collaboration be organized around the development of a competence framework? [Pilling and Roth \(2014\)](#) looked forward to international collaboration based on the emerging consensus among experts in different orientations and fields. Our findings reveal openings and possibilities regarding how to collaborate around a shared content and design in supervision training.

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