Is the Vignette Matching Task a way to get less biased supervisor assessments of student performance?

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Title: Using standardised vignettes to assess practicum competencies in psychology and other disciplines

Lead Institution: University of Western Sydney

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Overview

- Supervision of workplace-based learning is a major point of interface between the profession and the University.

- There is widespread reliance upon supervision reports in most health professional training courses

- Inadequate outcomes from current assessment practices.

Are Supervisors' Ratings Biased?

- Broad consensus across several health disciplines that their data suggest systematic biases affecting field supervisor ratings.

  In social work: Bogo et al., 2002, 2004; Lazar & Mosek, 1993)

  In psychology (Borders & Fong, 1992; Gonsalvez & Freestone, 2007)

  Similar trends from other disciplines

- Two prominent biases: leniency and halo.

Gonsalvez and NSW colleagues

- Extensive work for more than a decade to improve the rating scale ("CYPRS") used by supervisors of clinical psychology students:

  - NSW-wide collaboration agreed dimensions to be assessed, iterative improvements to clarity of wording and scoring scales including transition to criterion referenced standards

However, bias still evident……

Supervisor ratings of students

	CYPRS			
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
1. Relational Skills	0	0	30	70
2. Clin. Assessment	0	0	33	67
3. Case Formulation	0	0	37	63
4. Intervention Skills	0	0	31	69
5. Psychometrics	0	2	29	68
6. S-P Approach	0	0	20	80
7. Ethical Practice	0	0	20	80
8. Professional Skills	0	1	17	83
9. Progress During Placement	0	0	16	85
Grand Mean	0	0	25	75

Reasons for Leniency Bias
Robiner et al, 1987

- Guilt/fear of damaging supervisee's career (60%)

- Awareness of subjectivity inherent in evaluation (49%)

- Difficulty providing negative feedback (50%)

- Fear of potentially diminished rapport (48%)

- Personal identification with Se's problems (32%)

- Legal and administrative issues (10%)

Being Lenient: An Attractive Option?

- Being altruistic, supportive, and reinforcing of positive behaviours are valued within the helping professions,
  - "being judgmental" may be difficult
- If evaluations are negative and the recommendations is to fail a trainee, the supervisor may have to demonstrate
  - Fairness and impartiality
  - Diligence in following due process
  - Not just a "subjective" opinion
  - Potentially unpleasant confrontations with trainee

Are Supervisors' Ratings Influenced by the Halo Effect?

- It could be argued that several contextual factors collude to prime and accentuate halo biases in practicum settings

- The quality of supervisory relationship affecting ratings is a type of halo effect

- Psychodynamic theory would predict halo-type effects as a consequence of parallel process involving play of trans & counter-transference

Are Supervisors' Ratings Influenced by the Halo Effect?

- Supervisors are trained to be "positive, facilitative, supportive, and constructive" in their feedback to supervisees BUT are required to deliver "objective" ratings at end-placement

- "all evaluations are made within the context of the supervisory relationship and cannot be separated out from this."

(Tweed et al., 2010)

So, the operation of bias may be inherent to the supervisory relationship………..

But could an alternative format of rating scale mitigate the impact of these processes….?

The Vignette-Matching Procedure

- Pioneered by Marion Bogo and her colleagues (social work)
- Designed a catalogue of 20 vignettes representing competency profiles
- Supervisors were asked to read all 20 and to pick out the vignette that best matched their trainee
- Preliminary evidence indicated better results with the vignette procedure
- Less prone to rating biases

The Vignette-Matching Procedure: Problems

- Bogo used a prototype model for vignettes
- Trainee was forced into one of 20 moulds
- Inadequate discrimination among trainees and competencies in different competency domains

- UOW work on VMAT:
- Adopted a model that simulated the forensic model used to identify persons of interest (e.g., offender)
- Used 9 domains X 4 developmental stages from CYPRS. Allows independent scores on each domain
- Derived a calibration score for vignettes
- More rigorous standardisation process

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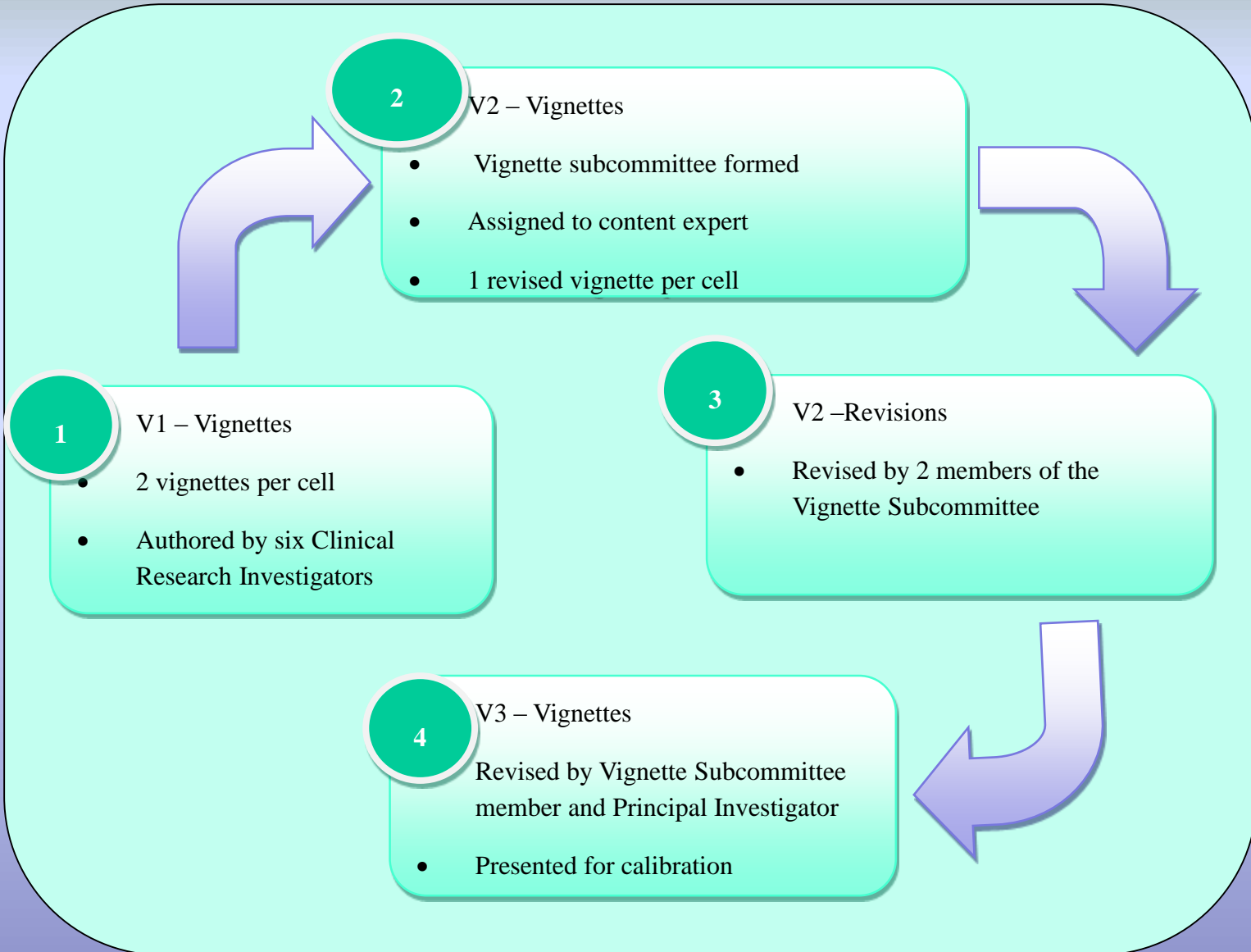
Supervisor judges performance of student against a "vignette"

- Vignettes developed to reflect achievement typical of each of four levels of performance

- Electronic delivery of vignette, supervisor judges student as at, below or above vignette.

- First presented may be from top or bottom of hierarchy

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Example: Relational Skills

- Trainee O relates to clients effectively in most simple client situations but experiences difficulties in more complex cases. She/he experiences difficulty in maintaining a comfortable, warm, respectful and confident demeanour due to a focus on self performance or other factors. She/he demonstrates genuine reflective listening skills and makes appropriate emotional and meaningful responses in some cases. However he/she may sometimes reinforce poor coping strategies by confusing empathy with sympathy. She/he may have difficulties in appropriately directing and guiding client focus.

Example:Use of Supervision

- Trainee A has a mature, open, and positive attitude towards supervision, perceiving it as an opportunity to acquire new ideas, to consolidate learning, to discuss one's approach to clients, and one's positive and negative feelings and reactions to the placement. She/he has a high level of motivation and prepares well for supervision and other practicum activities. The trainee is reflective and self-aware, and has a relatively accurate appraisal of one's capabilities. Supervisory sessions are pleasant, collaborative, professional, and effective. Overall, the trainee has made accelerated progress during the placement, much above the rate of progress expected of peers at a similar stage of training.

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Supervisor ratings of students

	CYPRS				Vignette Matching Procedure			
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
1. Relational Skills	0	0	30	70	0	2	55	44
2. Clin. Assessment	0	0	33	67	0	26	18	56
3. Case Formulation	0	0	37	63	0	4	63	34
4. Intervention Skills	0	0	31	69	0	4	47	49
5. Psychometrics	0	2	29	68	10	16	65	10
6. S-P Approach	0	0	20	80	0	7	58	36
7. Ethical Practice	0	0	20	80	0	2	29	69
8. Professional Skills	0	1	17	83	0	7	40	53
9. Progress During Placement	0	0	16	85	0	2	41	57
Grand Mean	0	0	25	75	1	8	46	45

Conclusion

- This small pilot study compared ratings of the same students using both the traditional rating scale (CYPRS) and the vignette matching task (VMAT).

- There seems to less reluctance to assign student skills and performance as less well developed using the VMAT.

- Although the preliminary results await confirmation in a larger substantive multicentre, multinational study now under way, the VMAT may a way of mitigating the biases inherent in clinical supervision reports

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Conclusion

- A healthy and respectful relationship between Universities and the profession of Clinical Psychology is essential to the future of the profession.

- The grading of student performance is a key aspect of that relationship, where authority to make assessments that may affect student progress is delegated to the supervisor.

- Better ways of capturing supervisor assessments of students, that are less prone to leniency and halo bias, may improve engagement and trust between academia and the profession.

Cite as …..

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