# CSTD Diploma in supervision 2016-17

## Exploring 'presence' and 'absence' in supervision – Steve Page

### Introduction

There is a dance I dance. I have danced it all my life. From what others tell me, it appears that my dance is a variation of "now you see me, now you don't". There are occasions when I realise that I must be dancing this dance again when I suddenly feel invisible, although quite often I do not realise that I have switched into stealth mode[1]. I generally don't like it when this happens, typically feeling quite exposed and uncomfortable, while simultaneously resistant to reaching out to another person. Or perhaps it is more likely that in certain situations I interpret a signal as indicating external threat, as a result I feel exposed and uncomfortable and then I switch into my invisibility mode. This particular version of the chicken and egg question was probably started by William James in 1884 (James 1884) when he proposed that emotions are interpretations of bodily experiences (rather than that we have bodily reactions to emotional experiences). It is very clear to me through some of the choices I make that I want to be seen, yet it seems equally clear from other choices I make that I want to hide. Sometimes I feel confident that I understand what drives these seemingly contradictory impulses, sometimes not.

When we introduced ourselves at the start of this Diploma, I found myself noticing and commenting on my uncertainty about how I 'present' myself in a group of supervisors and I heard the responses from others reflecting something of this dance of mine. Of course, my dance and the concept of presence for supervisors are not the same, although they seem linked within me, on occasion. I am aware that there are other directions in which I could have taken my thinking – into the area of self-disclosure for example. However, the concept of presence of the supervisor has caught my attention and therefore for this assignment I want to follow that path and see where it leads me, without any presuppositions about where that will be. My plan, as I set out to explore this further is to:

- develop my thinking about presence and its counter-part of absence in the context of supervision, drawing a little on relevant literature,
- seek feedback from some of my current supervisees about their perspective on 'presence' and their experience of my presence and their own presence in our work together,
- undertake a sculpting project (the wood/stone, chisels and mallet variety of sculpture), seeking to explore the nature of presence through the sculpting process and develop 'presence' in the completed sculpture.
- I shall then seek to draw these strands together, reviewing where I have reached in my understanding and consider how this may be relevant more widely in the field of supervision.

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[1] I am using this in the sense of vehicles that, as a function of their design and the materials of which they are made, can elude detection by radar and other similar tracking technologies.

## Literature: what does it say about 'Presence'?

> *"Presence is a core neuropsychological phenomenon – it's an organism's capacity to locate itself in the internal world, and the ability to interact with another in a shared physical environment enables the nervous system to recognise that it is in an environment outside of itself that is not a dream state or a product of its mind. The experience of embodiment in a shared environment is essential to our experience of being."*

> *(Dr Isaac Russell, quoted in Brown 2017)*

Amy Cuddy (2016, p.20/337)[2] uses terms such as comfort, confidence, passion and enthusiasm to describe personal presence. She goes on to warn of the risks of "faking" these qualities, presenting considerable research evidence that we are generally good at knowing the difference between acted and authentic presence. She quotes one of her correspondents, Abdelghani (from Morocco), who offers the following definition:

> *Presence is being myself and keeping confident, whatever happens.*

I like this as a definition of presence from a personal perspective; I understand it in terms of staying centred within myself. I want to add to it "maintaining awareness of my internal experience and external surroundings" as that is what I experience myself doing when I am in the place which I think of as being present.

Mearns and Cooper (2005), writing about presence in the context of the therapeutic relationship, paraphrase Carl Rogers (writing in 1986) as saying presence is "at a time when he is closest to his inner self, in a slightly altered state of consciousness and behaving in 'strange and original' ways that seem to be of great value to the client". (p.37). Bugental[3] (1976) writes about two aspects of presence. "Accessibility", which is the willingness for what happens to have an impact, to matter to the therapist, and "expressivity", which is being willing to share oneself with the client. For me there is a sense of openness in these descriptions, as if the membrane between myself and other is more permeable than in my more everyday interactions with others.

I was recently given a copy of an article by Peter Bluckert (2012) in which he is exploring the concept of 'presence' as a coach working in organisational settings. He proposes that it can be very helpful to be intentional in the 'presence' that we bring to different situations. That set me thinking about those arenas in which I do project my presence with a degree of intentionality. What initially came to mind was large groups where I am speaking, leading or participating in a collaborative way. In these situations, I sometimes become very much 'in the moment', experiencing what I say as almost passing through me rather than me being conscious of forming the sentences and then saying them. I notice that when this happens I do not have particularly good recall of what I said or did afterwards.

Do I do something similar in supervision? I certainly prepare for supervision, consciously checking how I am and in my mind sending out welcoming energy to my supervisee before they arrive, whilst physically preparing the room; setting out drinking water and ensuring I have a pad, pencils, any relevant documentation and my diary. My intention is to be ready to be fully present to my supervisee when they arrive. When I am with my supervisee I then aim for a state which I can best describe as being 'in flow'. One of my supervisees, when

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[2] The page numbering 20/337 refers to page 20 out of 337 in a Kindle edition. The font and screen sizes determine the total number of pages a book will fill on a digital reader.

[3] This is summarised from Mearns and Cooper (2005).

discussing presence in relation to this project, used the metaphor of a Murmuration of starlings[4], which is when a large flying flock swoops and turns in apparent unison. For me this is a really good image of the sense of being in a dynamic, shifting energy flow with a supervisee or a group of supervisees.

Central to my approach to supervision is providing a safe enough, reflective and exploratory space (Page and Wosket, 2014), where the supervisee(s) and I can be with the work they are bringing for our consideration. In my view, the quality of presence of both supervisor and supervisee is a highly significant factor in how effective that space can be.

Bill Mullally recently published an article with the title "*The effect of presence and power in the pastoral supervisory relationship*" (2017). He is using the term pastoral supervision in the context of the Methodist Church and for his article he undertook research with six Methodist ministers, members of two supervision groups. Mullally states that "My thesis is that supervision is influenced by the sense of safe presence, that is itself influenced by perceived or real power within the dynamics of the supervisory relationship". (2017, p.8). In addition to supporting my view that supervisor presence is a significant factor in supervision, this is a helpful reminder that in seeking feedback from some of my supervisees the power dimension within the supervisory relationship will inevitably influence what and how they share in their responses, whether they are conscious of that at the time of writing, or not.

In the introduction to their book entitled "*Presence: exploring profound change in people, organizations and society*" (2005), Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers describe their journey of understanding the meaning of 'presence' for them:

> *"…..deep listening, of being beyond ones preconceptions and historical ways of making sense. …..of letting go of old identities and the need to control ….leading to a state of "letting come," of consciously participating in a larger field for change."* (pp.13-14)

I find this a really exciting way of thinking about 'presence' and one that I can relate to in moments of work with individual clients and supervisees, as well as in a number of situations in teams and organisations. It is as if being fully in the present with the situation and the other people engaged in it, suddenly the step forward that has been so elusive until that moment beckons you to join it. When that happens to me I have always experienced it as feeling like time stands still, so I am curious that Senge and colleagues also use a time-dimension related description when they talk about letting the future come.

What emerges for me through this brief exploration of elements of the literature relating to presence is that different writers are using the term in slightly different ways. However, there are common threads discernible in each of them:

- being centred
- in the moment
- open
- attentive
- highly engaged
- curious

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[4] If you have never seen this, 'Murmuration of Starlings' is a good online search term.

**Feedback from supervisees**

I put together a questionnaire, of which there is a copy in Appendix 1. I then selected a sample of eight of my current supervisees and invited them to answer the questions, from their perspective. I sent it to each supervisee with a personalised email in which I explained briefly what I am doing and invited them to take part. I emphasised that it was their choice whether they take part and gave them a date by which I needed to have their responses to include them in my assignment. Seven returned their responses in time for them to be included.

I currently have twenty supervisees. In deciding how many to include in my sample I considered that I wanted the whole process to be open between us, as that felt congruent with the subject of the research. It also means that with each participant supervisee I can discuss this process and their responses in a way that I hope will enhance our work together[5]. Taking this approach may reduce the willingness of participants to offer feedback that they imagine I might find difficult to receive, but I decided that the benefits of an open process out-weigh this risk.

In selecting the final sample, I chose eight who are either in private practice or the only supervisee I work with from that organisation. Eight felt the right number to hold in mind comfortably, given that I want to pay attention to (and discuss with each participating supervisee) what we can learn for our work together from their responses.

I was confident that with a sample of eight I could achieve a good enough balance in terms of gender, mix of supervision of client practice and supervision of supervision and range of levels of experience (from final year trainee to over thirty years in practice). I also have a subset sample of two whom I only supervise by Skype, one of whom I have met in person, the other I have not.

Limitations of my 'research study'

This is a small-scale piece of practitioner research and I have collated and analysed the results myself. Inevitably the data is all influenced by my relationships with the respondents and I am aiming to achieve that influence as a two-way process, in that I hope the research will further influence those relationships, in a positive manner.

This study is therefore highly subjective; I anticipate that a different supervisor, asking their supervisees to answer the same nine questions, could receive quite a different set of responses to questions 2-9. There is probably sufficient shared understanding about the meaning of the term 'presence' amongst practitioners in the counselling, coaching and supervision fields that responses to question 1 would be very similar, regardless of the supervisor asking the questions.

How I am presenting the outcomes

Asking nine questions has generated a lot of data, so I have opted to place the analysis of the data itself into Appendix 2 in order that this assignment can be remain reasonably succinct, whilst you still have access to the data.

The responses to each question are contained in a table and the table numbers are the same as the questions they relate to, so for example table 5 is a summary of the responses

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[5] *I have had a discussion with all but one of the participants, which has been fruitful and with some has led to us agreeing some changes to the way we undertake supervision together. The one I have not spoken to is currently on maternity leave, but knew about my research and was keen to participate.*

to question 5. Each 'category' in each table is also numbered. This creates a numbering system for cross referencing, so if I refer to 2.3, for example, I am referring to the third category in table 2. You can then look that up in the Appendix, if you wish to.

Definition of 'presence'

I deliberately did not put any restrictions on whose presence is being referred to and in conversations about this research with some of the participants we have explored my presence as supervisor, their presence as supervisee and the presence of their client. Also in two the presence or influence of the agency they work for has been recognised as a significant factor.

The definitions of 'presence' offered, further support the components of *multi-level awareness*, *active and immediate participation* by the supervisor and being *purposeful*. 1.4 is very specific to supervision; *holding the client 'present'*, which can of course be done by both supervisor and supervisee. *Engaging in the supervisee's frame of reference* (1.5) can translate across therapy, coaching and other inter-personal engagements.

The final category (1.6); *the supervisee holding their supervisor present when engaged in their practice*; is different in that it happens outside the supervisory session, but can be an important part of developing an internalised sense of self-supervising, or the internal supervisor, as Casement (1985) described it.

Feedback about my 'presence'

Questions 2-5 provide various components of feedback about how the participants experience my presence as supervisor. These fill out the picture of what my supervisees are looking for in the 'presence' of a supervisor, giving me some direct feedback about how my presence is perceived as having a positive and negative impact. This also offers some significant leads that I shall pick up later when considering the concept of 'absence'.

The responses in table 2 add further weight to the categories of *multi-level awareness*, *being purposeful* and *immediacy* that came up in response to question one. They also add a high response level for *offering an accepting, safe space* and to a smaller extent introducing *challenging*. In table 3 the positive impacts of my presence are highlighted, with sense of feeling *safe enough to be open with you* forming the predominant category. Also, *openness to challenges* appears, again underlining the importance of supervision as an accepting, safe space in which challenge can be tolerated (Starr et al. 2013).

The response 3.3, *encouragement to be present, in the moment*; links to the modelling function of supervision. I am present to endeavour to be effective as a supervisor and at the same time I hope that this will enable supervisees to be more present with their clients, or their own supervisees.

The final category (3.4), *I can take the space and not have to look after you,* draws my attention to the delicate balance between being transparent with my supervisees whilst not expressing vulnerability to a degree that unduly pulls on the supervisee's caring tendencies.

There are just four responses to question 4; the negative impact of my presence. Nevertheless, they are each worthy of individual attention and I will check with each of the supervisees whether they want to explore the issue they raised further.

Table 5 summarises what supervisees have said they would like me to change about how I am or what I do in supervision. The responses are self-explanatory, some I shall pick up in the Discussion section.

Overall, I feel that the responses confirm my sense that generally I am highly effective in offering a safe enough, reflective, exploratory space to my supervisees. I noticed when I was collating and analysing the data that I have a strong tendency to quickly pass over the depth of the confirmatory feedback and look for the more 'negative' responses. It has been important to bring my awareness back to take in the consistency and depth of the 'positive' responses. My supervisees really are experiencing me doing what I intend to do!

Feedback from supervisees about their presence

I am surprised by the number of expressions of anxiety relating to time and getting through their agenda (6.1), each from a different supervisee. I shall pick this up with many of my supervisees and encourage them to explore this anxiety and consider how they set about determining their agenda. As described in response 6.7, I see supervision more as a space to explore ways of working than addressing the specifics of working with every individual client.

It is less surprising that supervisees are *anxious about what I might think* (6.2) as I know supervision can feel very exposing and this is balanced with those feeling safe and able to be open (6.3).

Response 6.4 *Curious, often surprised by what emerges* seems to me to reflect supervision at a deep level, with *full engagement* (6.5) part of that. That one supervisee (6.6) has recognised that they would like their presence to be at a deeper level suggests that responding to my questionnaire has been a reflective exercise for them.

I am not going to dwell on the responses in table 7; they all seem to be wise ways of addressing what emerged in table 6 and I shall encourage supervisees to reflect on their success in making such changes of approach to supervision.

Presence and our supervisory relationship

What I notice in the responses in table eight is an overall sense of the whole (our relationship) being perceived by my supervisees as greater than the sum of each of our individual presence. It also leaves me wondering, taken in conjunction with the responses in tables 6 and 7, whether the respondents are under-rating their contribution to the *natural, genuine, engaged, calm, relaxed and mutually respectful* supervisory relationship they describe. As supervisor, I set the tone in our work together, but the relationship only develops those qualities when we are both able to be present and engage, together.

Other comments

The other comments support the view that for some of my supervisees undertaking this process has been a useful self-reflective exercise.

## The Sculpting project

The idea of doing a sculpture as part of this assignment emerged within minutes of my thinking of 'presence' as my topic and I warmed to it immediately. I don't have a simple explanation as to why the idea came to me, but I embraced the idea because I am intrigued about how sculpting might inform and be informed by my therapeutic[6] and supervision work.

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[6] I use the term therapeutic to include my counselling and coaching work.

It has some 'face' relevance in that when I sculpt the process of engaging with the material through the tools I use is one way in which I experience 'being present'. Sculpting with a chisel and a mallet or a rasp is a highly visceral and immediate experience; often by-passing any cognitive intermediary. The sculpting for this assignment has provided me a space to simply be with the idea of presence in supervision, whilst I engage in a creative process in parallel with the more 'left-brain' research process described above.

The other link between presence in supervision and sculpting goes back to my earlier quote (see page 3) from Senge et al. (2005), about allowing the future to emerge. A sculpture doesn't exist until the work is completed; it is still becoming. Yet there is a growing relationship between the current stage of the sculpture and what it will emerge into. I talk about this in the fourth of the videos I have made about this sculpting process, the urls for which can be found in appendix three.

Undertaking a piece of abstract sculpture inevitably creates an opening for something to emerge from my unconscious. I started the sculpture with a shape that I had made by fiddling with a piece of blue tac on my desk. I converted this simple shape into the first maquette, using clay. I have not particularly tried to make sense of what this shape may represent, what meaning it may have for me.

When sculpting, I understand my task is to be bringing a shape or motif into being. The purpose of any piece of art is to have some impact, through its presence, upon those who view it. This impact may be at any level; emotional, tactile, spatial, cognitive, spiritual, etc. However, the impact on me occurs both during the process of creating the sculpture and when I then have the finished sculpture to further contemplate. Similarly, in supervision I want to be open to what may emerge, what is becoming in the supervisees work with a client, for example.

As I have been sculpting, other ideas have come into my mind that relate to supervision. One, which I have found quite uncomfortable, has been about the degree to which, as a supervisor, I seek to 'shape' my supervisees. As sculptor, the tools are in my hands and while I seek to relate to the shape as it emerges from the material, the material itself can only play a passive part in the creation of what it will become. I have been curious about my discomfort with this idea and have linked that discomfort to my recognition that there will often, perhaps always, be elements of the imbalance in the power relationship with a supervisee that remain undetected yet have an influence. I find it uncomfortable to be reminded of that. I am imagining that when I have finished this sculpture it will go in the room where I see clients and supervisees and as such can be a reminder to me of this dimension.

I was aware when I prepared to start the sculpture that sculpting is by its nature a very hidden activity. As my tendency to hide is an important element of what I am exploring I decided to deliberately counter that tendency by making the set of videos about making this sculpture.


**<u>Discussion</u>**

There are three distinct outcomes from this assignment. I have developed my thinking about presence and absence in supervision, informed by the inputs from and discussions with some of my supervisees. I have deepened my awareness of my unconscious process of hiding and revealing myself; what I described as my 'dance' in the introduction. I have also been exploring the inter-relationship between the practitioner and the sculptor facets of me.

I want to summarise where I have got to with each of these elements and describe my current thinking about where I take this from here; my response to the "… so what?" coaching question.

<u>Presence</u>

Distilling down the responses from my supervisees and linking this with the early exploration of what others have said of presence it becomes possible to describe three elements or levels of presence in supervision. I want to underline that these are not discreet, different aspects; rather they flow into one another and in any successful supervision encounter the presence of both supervisor and supervisee will shift and flow, move into and out of the first two. The third level is, in my experience, more rarely attained, although your experience may be different to mine. I have summarised the three levels in table 10 and have linked each to the items in the data tables (1-9).

I have intentionally blended presence for supervisor and supervisee as supervision is a collaborative activity. I have been impressed with the degree of consistency of understanding about presence and am delighted that my supervisees' responses have provided what I consider to be a satisfyingly full description of presence in supervision.

| Level | Description | Associated data from questionnaires [table.number] |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Practitioner presence**: clarity of purpose; inner calm; in the moment; high quality of attention; offering safe, accepting space | 1.1; 1.3; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 8.3 |
| 2 | **Connected presence**: engagement, active participation, multiple levels of awareness, immediacy, holding the client present, openness; engaging in the frame of reference of the other, connection, challenging, encouraging presence in the other, natural, genuine, mutual respect | 1.1; 1.2; 1.4; 1.5; 2.3; 2.4; 3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 8.1; 8.2; 8.4 |
| 3 | **Deep connected presence**: unexpected ideas, playfulness, desire to go deeper | 2.6; 6.4; 8.5; 8.8 |

*Table 10: levels of presence in supervision*

Before I started this assignment my idea of presence in supervision was limited to what I am now calling 'practitioner presence'. For many years I have been quite intentional in checking the degree to which I am present from that internal perspective. Being present is also something I practice through daily meditation.

Identifying the categories of 'connected presence' and 'deep connected presence' has helped me give a name to something I have been grappling to describe for a couple of years. Previously I had been thinking of it in terms of a co-created energy field between practitioner and client or supervisee; the 'so-called' zero-point field (McTaggart, 2001). However, seeing this through the lens of presence has given it a more substance, which I am finding helpful.

I am aware that I have not brought in the spiritual dimension to presence. By spiritual I mean the intentional practice of opening oneself to connection at a level beyond the personal. I am

aware of the overlaps and some of the extensive relevant literature. My decision was based on keeping a sufficiently tight focus for this assignment.

Absence

Moving on to consider 'absence' in supervision, I find this a much more complex picture. There are examples in the questionnaire responses of how my supervisees have experienced me as the supervisor absenting myself and how they absent themselves on occasions. These are summarised in table 11.

| No. | Description | Associated data from questionnaires [table.number] |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Anxiety, from intrapersonal or external factors | 6.1; 6.2; 7.2 |
| 2 | Scattered attention; distracted, unfocused | 4.1 |
| 3 | Judgements of self or other | 4.4; 7.1 |
| 4 | Restricted engagement; weak connection | 5.6; 6.6 |
| 5 | Withholding of experience or knowledge | 5.2 |
| 6 | Limited awareness; e.g. of power dynamics in relationship | 4.2; 8.7 |
| 7 | Lack of immediacy | 5.3; 7.4 |

*Table 11: Examples of absence in supervision*

Each of these can lead to absence, or indeed be the manifestation of absence. The shift from absence back to presence can occur as soon as the person affected recognises that they are no longer present and either brings themselves back into presence or says that they have been absent and starts exploring within supervision what is happening. I frequently have moments in supervision when my attention is briefly drawn to how I feel, something happening in my body, an image, a line from a song, another person, a situation, a metaphor etc. I notice, I bring my attention back and sometimes I say what just happened, other times I realise that what attracted my attention is probably not relevant to what is happening in the moment and I put it to one side.

Taking the examples from table 11, some of my own (thankfully rare) unhelpful experiences as a supervisee and my tendency to hide as an example of one form of absence, I have identified eight categories of absence in supervision, each of which can overlap and combine with others. I do not have sufficient material from the questionnaires and have found nothing in the literature to date to substantiate these categories, therefore I offer them as a starting point, with the potential for more in-depth investigation at some point.

### 1. Role or state absence

This occurs when the practitioner (supervisor or supervisee, or both) does not recognise the significance of presence in the supervision process, perhaps understanding supervision largely as a didactic or functional exchange. Consequently, there is no intention to achieve some, or all, of the qualities described in table 10 under practitioner presence or connected presence; they are not perceived to be relevant or important.

### 2. Profound absence

Occurs when the practitioner is profoundly affected by something from outside of supervision, which is demanding their attention. Examples of this include; significant physical pain, emotional disruption, a major project or piece of work they are undertaking, excitement about a forthcoming event, anxiety for someone close to them, etc.

### 3.  Developmental absence

The practitioner is seeking to be fully present and is committed to doing so. However, they currently have one or more areas in which they currently lack the capacity to be present. They may have 'no-go' areas due to aspects of their personal history yet to be recognised or addressed, my tendency to hide being a good example. All of us are likely to have some areas that fall into this category at any given time, which may or may not come up when we are supervising.

### 4.  Reactive absence

Something occurs in the session that the practitioner experiences as demanding their attention and they are reluctant to share this with the other person or people present, but have no space to process the situation. A major example could be that supervisee is unwilling to give an honest answer to a question the supervisor asks and is then thrown by having lied or dodged the question, or a supervisor may recognise that the client a supervisee is describing is a close personal friend, but cannot work out what they can or cannot say to the supervisee, feeling that their loyalties are split; confidentiality is compromised whatever they do or don't do. Two more minor examples from my supervisees are the supervisee feels my example is not quite relevant and is left feeling slightly misunderstood but not declaring that (4.3), or the supervisee distracted by my writing notes (4.1).

### 5.  Recurrent absence

Describes repeated absences as something keeps returning to distract the attention of one or both of the practitioners. One clear example being the recurrent anxiety about getting through the agenda, described by a significant proportion of my sample of supervisees (6.1). The second anxiety, about what I (the supervisor) think of them (6.2) might come into this category if it occurs frequently, or might be in the next category if it only happens rarely.

### 6.  Momentary absence

Described in the introduction to this section, this is those brief absences when something comes into conscious awareness; a thought, feeling, sensation, image etc. The practitioner brings themselves back into the present and may mention it in the context of the discussion or decide to put it to one side. Sometimes momentary absences may extend if the 'interruption' is not declared; for example, if the practitioner starts having an internal dialogue having just become critical of themselves (see 7.1).

### 7.  Negotiated absence

Following on from a momentary absence, a practitioner may ask for a few seconds pause whilst they work out what to do with something that has arisen in their awareness. Sometimes I find an image arises in my awareness when supervising and I need a few seconds to consider how it links (or perhaps does not) to what we are discussing at the time and I usually explain that.

### 8.  Self-determined absence

This occurs when supervisors relinquish being present because they follow their own agenda. This can happen when the supervisor decides where the discussion is

heading or what they think the supervisee should do and either interrupts the flow or disengages from the collaborative dialogue.

It was an experience of absenting myself that initially brought me to this subject. I have found it more difficult to focus on absence than presence, which is hardly surprising given that absence is, by its very nature, elusive. With hindsight, I wish that I had been more courageous when devising my questionnaire and included direct questions about 'absence', but that did not occur to me until I was analysing the data.

I don't see great value in the categories of absence for their own sake, however they potentially offer a framework for considering areas for supervisor development, which could prove valuable. At this stage I consider them to be a draft that needs testing out and refining.

### My unconscious process

I started this paper with my tendency to hide; to absent myself. My exploration of presence has led me into two deliberate acts of engagement/revealing myself; the antithesis of hiding.

- By asking some of my supervisees to complete a questionnaire I have intentionally opened discussions with a number of the participants about how they experience me and how our supervision together works for them. This dialogue has been lively, energetic and has felt direct and positive. I am confident that our relationships have deepened as a result. This has primarily been a confirming process for me because so much of the feedback has felt very positive. It has also identified a few areas to explore about ways in which I absent myself, but these feel manageable, concrete and useful to address. Before I felt free to send out the questionnaires I had to grapple with my reluctance to do so, which involved facing the sense of exposure I felt. I had to identify my worst fear that the feedback would tell me that I have been deluding myself all these years about my capacity to be an effective supervisor. Once I had named this I felt able to send out the questionnaires and, thankfully, received confirmation that this was not the case!

- Making the videos was a scary prospect, but it felt important as otherwise the whole process of sculpting as part of this assignment would be invisible to others involved in the diploma. After an initial rehearsal, I found myself quite enjoying finding ways to articulate what I do when I am sculpting, which I hope has communicated something of interest to others.

Throughout the time of undertaking this assignment my tendency to hide has moved into and out of my awareness. I have come to pay attention to it in a more consistent way and I am in no doubt that is useful, even though it can still leave me squirming uncomfortably at times. I don't feel that I have made a great breakthrough in what is one of my core psychological processes. It seems more that I am actively 'holding it in mind'; more engaged with my hiding/not hiding dance than has been the case for a long time. I am pleased with this, it feels constructive, and I want to continue to work with this aspect of myself in this way.

### Sculpting and supervision

It is clear to me that I practice presence when I sculpt, although this is my first experiment of sculpting with such a clear conscious intention of being present as I do so. I already knew that when I sculpt, when I am actively exercising my creative ability, that helps to bring a better balance to other aspects of my life. The workshop where I sculpt is my presence gym! There are, of course, elements of 'presence' and 'absence' in sculpture, indeed the process

of sculpting is one of removal. In the moment of writing this I have become aware that in the sculpture I am very confident that the major 'absences'; the two holes through the centre of the piece; are an important dimension to the piece and add greatly to its interest. Yet when I think about absence in supervision I still make the judgment that presence is good and absence is bad. There is much for me to consider further about absence in supervision.

Over the months of doing this assignment there has been a constructive interplay between the process of writing and the process of sculpting. A few times, I have had strong impulses to stop writing and go to my workshop and when I have done so sculpting has flowed easily and quickly. The same has happened in reverse; putting down my chisel and mallet to go to my computer and capture the phrases and ideas that have arisen in my thoughts as I have been carving.

This brings me to one of the most revolutionary outcomes from undertaking this assignment, the experience that intertwining the sculpting project with writing this assignment has enhanced the quality of presence that I have brought to both. It is revolutionary in that it is a complete reversal of my previous mindset, which has been that I fit sculpting into gaps in my schedule. These two approaches may look the same from a distance, but from inside me they are 180 degrees apart.

### Next steps

I want to continue to explore this subject, in particular absence in supervision. I am currently considering whether to write an article about presence and absence in supervision as a way of widening the debate. I will be presenting some of this material via a web-cast during international supervision week (11th July, 7 – 8pm through "online events"). The feedback I receive from that event and from colleagues on the diploma will help inform my thinking about how to take this forward.

In addition, I have set myself a challenge to undertake a sculpting project each 'term' of the next year (i.e. Autumn, Winter and Spring) to continue to explore how the sculpting inter-relates with my experience of my therapeutic and supervisory practice.

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*Appendix 1*

**Exploring 'presence' in supervision**

Below are a set of nine questions, intended to explore the concept of 'presence' in supervision. These questions are for you as a supervisee.

Please use as many words as you wish in your responses – this is a standard Word document, so the boxes should expand as you add more text.

Your results will be summarised and, possibly alongside some direct quotes, will be used in an assignment for a training programme, so will be read by peers and trainers on the programme. All the data will be anonymised. I may also include results and anonymous quotes in future publications, although that is not as yet planned.

If you want to discuss anything about our supervision work together having responded to these questions, please let me know when we next meet and we can discuss how to make time to do so.

Once my assignment is complete I will make it and my summary findings available to you as a participant.

| No. | Question |
|-----|----------|
| 1 | What do you understand the term 'presence' to mean, in the context of supervision? (please give as many understandings as possible) |
| 2 | Please describe how you experience my 'presence' in our supervision sessions. |
| 3 | Are there ways in which you experience my 'presence' having a positive effect upon our supervision? |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4 | Are there ways in which you experience my 'presence' having a negative effect upon our supervision? |
| 5 | If you could change one thing about how I am and/or what I do in supervision with you, what would that be? |
| 6 | Please describe how you experience your own 'presence' in our supervision sessions. |
| 7 | If you could change one thing about how you are and/or what you do in supervision with me, what would that be? |
| 8 | In what ways do you think how we are each 'present' in supervision is reflected in our supervisory relationship? |
| 9 | Any other thoughts you would like to share with me about 'presence' in supervision? |

Many thanks for your time and consideration, Steve

*May 2017*

*Appendix 2*

**Tables of collated responses to the Questionnaire**

The responses to questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 have each been analysed using the same methodology. I took each response and broke it down into component elements. I then went through a process of categorising each response, until I had what I considered to be the best fit of categories for the responses. Using this approach each participant's response can yield a number of discreet elements, so the total number of elements included is significantly higher than the number of participants. It is important not to ascribe undue significance to the number of times an element appears as the process used means that more than one element in a specific category can be from one individual.

The responses to questions 4, 5 and 9 are simply listed as there are only a small number of responses.

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Multiple level awareness, in the moment | 5 |
| 2 | Active participation by supervisor, with immediacy | 4 |
| 3 | Clarity of purpose (of supervision) | 3 |
| 4 | Holding the client 'present' | 3 |
| 5 | Engaging in the supervisee's frame of reference | 2 |
| 6 | The supervisee holding their supervisor 'present' when engaged in their practice | 2 |
| | Total number of elements | 19 |

**Table 1: Understanding of 'presence' in supervision**

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Offer accepting, safe space | 7 |
| 2 | Attentive, on many levels/dimensions | 6 |
| 3 | Immediate | 3 |
| 4 | Challenging | 2 |
| 5 | Purposeful | 2 |
| 6 | Playful | 1 |
| | *Total number of elements* | *21* |

**Table 2: supervisees' experience of my presence**

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Safe enough to be open with you | 7 |
| 2 | Open to your challenges | 2 |
| 3 | Encouragement to be present, in the moment | 2 |
| 4 | I can take the space, not having to look after you | 1 |
| | *Total number of elements* | *12* |

**Table 3: Positive effects of my presence**

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The Clipboard! I find it infuriatingly distracting as part of my brain is trying to work out where you write down what. | 1 |
| 2 | Not really, as you did make me talk about dynamics in the supervisory relationship so could process things there and then. | 1 |
| 3 | Sometimes (rarely) I feel that you have missed me slightly, usually when you offer something from your own experience which doesn't seem that helpful to me! | 1 |
| 4 | My stereotyping of you as a successful middle-aged man. | 1 |
|  | *Total number of elements* | *4* |

**Table 4: Negative effects of my presence**

**N.B.**

1. Refers to my tendency to make brief written notes during supervision sessions. I recognise this as a potential distraction for me and clearly it is for at least one of my supervisees.

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Spend last few minutes of session reflecting, so I can be sure to capture key points of the process in my notes. | 1 |
| 2 | I would have you share more of your practical experience of using techniques. | 1 |
| 3 | Share more of my impact upon you – immediacy | 1 |
| 4 | Understand more about your note-taking. | 1 |
| 5 | I wish we could have at least one session in person [Skype only supervisee] | 1 |
| 6 | You could be a bit more playful | 1 |
|  | *Total number of elements* | *6* |

**Table 5: Change about how you are/what you do in supervision**

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Anxious about time and agenda – getting through everything | 5 |
| 2 | Anxious about what supervisor thinks of me | 3 |
| 3 | Feeling safe and able to be very open | 3 |
| 4 | Curious, often surprised by what emerges | 3 |
| 5 | Fully engaged | 2 |
| 6 | More superficial than I would like | 1 |
| 7 | More focussed on my way of working than specific clients | 1 |
|  | *Total number of elements* | *18* |

**Table 6: Supervisees experience of their presence in supervision**

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | More accepting of myself as a practitioner; less self critical | 4 |
| 2 | Slow down and relax: allow myself to land more fully | 2 |
| 3 | Bring more humour and playfulness into supervision | 2 |
| 4 | Take more risks | 1 |
| 5 | Be more consistent about keeping a practice journal | 1 |
| 6 | Nothing? I feel safe to bring my issues and I know what I need from supervision | 1 |
| | *Total number of elements* | *11* |

**Table 7: Change about how I am/what I do in supervision**

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Feels natural, genuine | 4 |
| 2 | Engaged | 3 |
| 3 | Calm, relaxed | 2 |
| 4 | Mutual respect | 2 |
| 5 | Playfulness and humour | 2 |
| 6 | Tightly boundaried by Skype screen and subject matter | 1 |
| 7 | I am struck by how much authority I give you | 1 |
| 8 | How do we access our shadows and use them in supervision? | 1 |
| 9 | Occasionally we have an energy dip; we have a break and you often come back with a reflection that helps us re-engage | 1 |
| | *Total number of elements* | *17* |

**Table 8: how our presence is reflected in the supervisory relationship**

Other comments

| No. | Category | Number of elements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Working through the questions I have honed my personal concept of presence as being associated with experience, working at depth, feeling anchored in a relationship. | 1 |
| 2 | As a supervisee I think allowing myself to be present in supervision is also a form of self-care as a professional. | 1 |
| 3 | This exercise has helped me review supervision as a whole and recognise the many positives I gain from it. | 1 |
| 4 | I googled Presence and found Amy Cuddy's book. This led me to link authority to presence, giving a more dynamic, active, powerful view in relational contexts. | 1 |
| | *Total number of elements* | *4* |

**Table 9: other comments**

***Appendix 3***

To access the video clips about my sculpture project, please go to:

https://www.steve-page-yorks.co.uk/presence/

when it asks for the password it is: bluetac

I hope that you can then access the u-tube videos – let me know if not:

email@steve-page-yorks.co.uk

*Steve*