



Steve Page

Presence and absence in supervision

Yorkshire Supervisors' Forum

9th February 2019





Proposed ground-rules for today

1. The content of what is discussed remains confidential to where it is said;
2. We each take responsibility for looking after ourselves;
3. During exercises and discussion you offer high quality attention and restrain any inclinations you may have to judge or offer interpretations;
4. Questions; please feel free to ask questions, preferably not when I am explaining an exercise unless it is about the exercise;
5. Unless you are on call for someone, please keep electronic devices off/silent.



Exercise 1

Speaker: three minutes to say your name, how you are feeling right now and identify anything that may distract you from being fully present this morning.

Listener: use all your listening skills to pay very good attention to your partner. It is okay to reflect back what you have heard.

Both: brief silences are okay

Me: I will ring my bell to invite you to swap roles after 3 minutes



Presence



So, why am I particularly interested in Presence in supervision?

1. I think it is a fundamental quality of supervisory relationship, which I understand to be the most significant determinant of the effectiveness of supervision.
2. In my view the fact that supervision is a requirement for most of us brings with it a risk of presentee-ism (just showing up) rather than deep, committed engagement and Presence is for me about deep, committed engagement.
3. It also touches one of my core personal inner tensions: between wanting to be seen and wanting to hide.



Presence in supervision – my assignment

1. Explore presence in relevant literature,
2. Ask a sample of my supervisees:
 - a) How they understand “presence”
 - b) How they experience my presence in supervision
 - c) How they experience their own presence in our work together
3. Create a sculpture on the theme of “presence in supervision”



Presence – in therapy

“Accessibility” - the willingness for what happens to have an impact upon me,

“Expressivity” - being willing to share oneself

Bugental (1976), quoted in Mearns and Cooper.

Means & Cooper paraphrase Carl Rogers as saying he is most fully present with clients “at a time when I am closest to my 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”.

Mearns, D. and Cooper, M. (2005) Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy, London; Sage.



Presence – in neuropsychology

“Presence is a core neuropsychological phenomenon – it’s an organism’s capacity to locate itself in the internal world.... the ability to interact with another [*person*] 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.**”

Russell, Isaac (2017) personal communication quoted in Sally Brown, ‘Tap and talk’, Therapy Today, 28: 4, pp. 8-11



Presence – personal



Cuddy, Amy (2016) Presence: bringing your boldest self to your biggest challenges, London: Orion.



Presence – in supervision

“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”. (p.8)

Mullally, B. (2017) ‘The effect of presence and power in the pastoral supervisory relationship’, HOLINESS: The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge, 3:1; pp5-34.





Presence – in organisational change

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

Senge, P., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J. and Flowers, B.S. (2005) Presence: exploring profound change in people, organisations and society, London: Nicholas Brearley Publishing.



Exercise 2 - what does presence mean to you?

Speaker: think of a time when you felt deeply present with another person – describe your experience.

Listener: reflect back the key words you heard your partner use to describe their experience of presence or being present.

Speaker: please write key word(s) on a Post-it(s)





Presence – my supervisees' definitions

Multiple level awareness, in the moment	5
Active participation by supervisor, with immediacy	4
Clarity of purpose (of supervision)	3
Holding the client 'present'	3
Engaging in the supervisee's frame of reference	2
The supervisee holding their supervisor 'present' when engaged in their practice	2



Supervisees' experience of my presence

Offer accepting, safe space	7
Attentive, on many levels/dimensions	6
Immediate	3
Challenging	3
Purposeful	2
Playful	1



Supervisees' experience of their presence

Anxious about time and agenda – getting through everything	5
Anxious about what supervisor thinks of me	3
Feeling safe and able to be very open	3
Curious, often surprised by what emerges	3
Fully engaged	2
More superficial than I would like	1
More focussed on my way of working than specific clients	1



Supervisees – how our presence is reflected in our supervisory relationship

Feels natural, genuine	4
Engaged	3
Calm, relaxed	2
Mutual respect	2
Playfulness and humour	2
Tightly boundaried by Skype screen and subject matter	1
I am struck by how much authority I give you	1
How do we access our shadows and use them in supervision?	1
Occasionally we have an energy dip; we have a break and you often come back with a reflection that helps us re-engage	1



Supervisees' other comments

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.

As a supervisee I think allowing myself to be present in supervision is also a form of self-care as a professional.

This exercise has helped me review supervision as a whole and recognise the many positives I gain from it.

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.



Presence in supervision - my summary

Practitioner presence: clarity of purpose; inner calm; in the moment; high quality of attention; offering safe, accepting space

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, mutually respectful

Deep connected presence: unexpected ideas, playfulness, desire to go deeper, sense of timelessness



**Results from
Exercise 2
in Dublin,
May 2018,
with a group of
145 supervisors**

Connection (25)	Spiritual (7)	Energy (6)
Intimate (6)	Love (6)	Trusted (6)
Awareness (5)	Focussed (5)	Listening (4)
Profound (4)	Space (4)	Authenticity (3)
Felt-sense (3)	Joy (3)	Precious (3)
Safety (3)	Timeless (3)	Attention (2)
Attuned (2)	Being (2)	Body talk (2)
Compassion (2)	Contact (2)	Effortless (2)
Empathy(2)	Flow (2)	Heard(2)
Intensity(2)	non-judgemental (2)	Now (2)
Profoundly therapeutic(2)	Reflect (2)	Silence (2)
Soul recognition (2)	Tenderness (2)	<i>Other words - 88</i>



Presence & Absence



Sculpting –for me

1. Sculpting is one way in which I practice being fully present, with tools and material;
2. When making my “Presence” sculpture I had a number of moments of direct interplay; as I sculpted I had insight about my writing and as I was writing I had sudden clarity about what I wanted to do next with my sculpture;
3. This has brought about a paradigm shift for me; sculpting is not something I do in my “spare time”. It is a fundamental part of my practice. It nourishes the other strands and is nourished by them.



Integration

It is helpful to avoid the dualistic trap of considering presence as “good” and absence as “bad”.

Together they form a complimentary pairing.





Balance

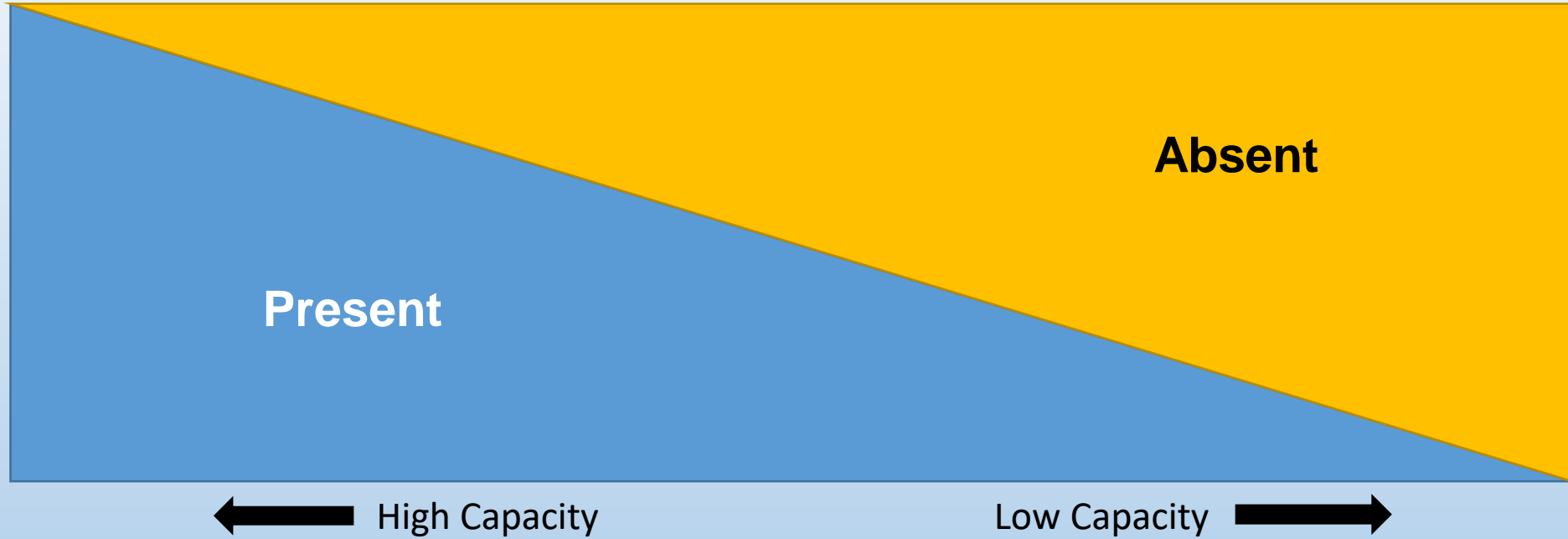
When carving, form is created by removing material.
Sculpture involves a mix of positive and negative volume.

When successful, a typical sculpture reflects a balance and inter-relationship between material that is present and material that is absent.

A metaphor for Presence and Absence in supervision.



Capacity





Commitment

As a supervisor, if my presence is too intense it may overwhelm the space and squeeze out my supervisee.

Nevertheless it is important that I fully commit my attention and energy when supervising.



Subtle inter-play

When two people with high capacity for presence
and high commitment to being present

Fully engage in supervision,
there is a natural flow.



Subtle inter-play

Each moves their attention between:

- what is happening for the other,
- what is happening within themselves,
- what is happening in their relationship, and
- their focus on the situation being supervised.



Subtle inter-play

I think of this as the dance; dynamic inter-relationship, each moving and shifting their attention.

This may be experienced as a movement between presence and absence, from the perspective of the other person.





Exercise 3

Form into groups of 4-5. Suggested questions for discussion:

1. How might I apply what I have heard about presence and absence when I am supervising?
2. What are the questions I would like to ask my supervisees about how they experience me as a supervisor?
3. How 'Present' is my supervisor with me?



Any thoughts or questions you want to share?

