

Excellence in Supervision: Literature Review

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The literature review team explored resources that have been made available for theological field educators and the communities of students and supervisors/mentors they serve since the “Excellence in Supervision” statement of the Association of Theological Field Education (ATFE) was adopted in 1993. The team employed a twofold approach to identify the books, journal articles, and other resources published since 1993 that have been significant to field educators in their work of preparing and guiding those who supervise or mentor students in their programs:

1. Team members contacted representatives and perused catalogues of several major publishing houses to identify and develop lists of potentially useful books.
2. A brief survey was sent out to approximately 175 people on the ATFE email list with these two questions: First, What books or chapters in books have you found useful in your work with training and resourcing

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Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry

ISSN 2325-2847 (print)* ISSN 2325-2855 (online)

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supervisors/mentors in your field education program? And second, What other 'go-to' resources (e.g., blogs, websites, journals, TED talks, conferences) have helped you in training and resourcing supervisors/mentors?

Twenty-three people responded to one or both questions and suggested sixty-three books, fifteen articles, and various other resources. Roughly half of the respondents worked at mainline Protestant seminaries, and the other half were almost evenly divided between Roman Catholic and evangelical Protestant institutions. Fifteen of the books were named by two or more respondents, and nine books were named three or more times. Brief annotated citations follow immediately below for the five books that were suggested most frequently, appearing in the order of most frequent to least frequent. Other books that received multiple mentions are listed after this annotated bibliography.

Floding, Matthew, ed. *Welcome to Theological Field Education!*
Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2011.

Welcome to Field Education! is the first book in a series edited by Matthew Floding that brings together prominent voices from the field of supervised ministry. These seasoned practitioners offer insights on various aspects of field education from their own experiences to those who are just beginning to navigate the process and those who have been at it for many years, as well as everyone in between. It is a practical guide that lays the theoretical and theological groundwork upon which the tasks of field education build.

Each chapter draws on personal experience, case studies, and practical exercises to offer an incisive window into the necessary work of one specific aspect of field education. As such, the individual chapters can be used by seminary faculty and staff, field education supervisors/mentors, and pastors as well as students to delve into the learning experience with the helpful guidance of the contributing authors. Survey respondents commended in particular the chapters by Charlene Jin Lee, "The Art of Supervision and Formation," and Emily Click, "Ministerial Reflection."

The individual chapters come together as a whole to offer the reader insights into the difference between merely learning how to perform tasks and growing personally and professionally through the experience. As this vital resource explains, effective field education addresses both of

these goals and holds them together in ways that allow the student to engage in meaningful learning through the practice of ministry.

Garrido, Ann M. *A Concise Guide to Supervising a Ministry Student*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.

In *A Concise Guide to Supervising a Ministry Student*, Ann Garrido brings clarity, specificity, and vibrancy to the conversation of supervising students preparing for vocations in public ministry. Though written from a Catholic lens, the comprehensive nature of this work provides universal language and tools for those who seek to bring their own unique stamp of excellence to the art and practice of field education with ministry students. Garrido's thoughtful layout of the book gives brick-by-brick instruction that ensures both a sturdy foundation for beginning an internship experience as well as freedom for creative "framing" for any given ministry field education experience. Readers will especially appreciate the intentionality found in her periodic "hands-on" offerings throughout the book: a glossary of field education terms, ministry competencies lists (for both students and supervisors/mentors to consider), and a host of practical tools in the appendices that are gems for those resourcing supervisors/mentors and students alike. Garrido covers the landscape of tried and true practices for ministry formation: conflict resolution, ministerial boundaries, referrals, and time management. In addition, she refreshingly provides ideas for supporting the spirituality of the ministry supervisors themselves, as well as tools for their own self-assessment and reflection on their role. This alone, is a tremendous contribution to the field.

Garrido establishes, early in this book, that field education is not the same as *fieldwork*. The pages that follow give a resounding "amen" to that fact by deepening the imagination for being faithful to the church's call to shape ministers for thoughtful ministry and service in the church and the world. As with previous Catholic publications (e.g., Coll's 1992 book described below), Garrido's work will serve any educator or denominational leader well if they are serious about shaping pastoral leaders for serving in Christian communities. One noticeable distinction found in Garrido's work is the great care in addressing the metacognitive work needed by all emerging ministry students when discussing gender sensitivities and cross-cultural implications for ministry.

Coll, Regina. *Supervision of Ministry Students*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

Although Regina Coll's work *Supervision of Ministry Students* has been available since its published date of 1992, one can confidently state that it has withstood the tests of time and change through its enduring wisdom and meaningful practices. Simply stated, this resource provides a helpful guide for anyone aiming to do supervision work in ministry.

The thin yet robust volume of five chapters is well organized. As Coll alludes to in the preface of the book, the final chapter lands on the heart of the matter: theological reflection in context. Understanding that many supervisors/mentors feel pressed for time, she generously suggests that if a person were to only read one chapter from the book, the final chapter should be the one. It is the "sine-qua-non for ministry" (ix), she boldly states. Although this may be true, the other four chapters are not to be overlooked.

Readers will appreciate the rhythm of practice-theory-practice that results from the layout of the book. The first chapter draws supervisors/mentors into frank conversation about the supervisory task, offering concrete descriptions of what supervision is and is not, including multiple models of supervision that exist and vary in effectiveness. The reader will find a helpful list of "10 Commandments," as well as thoughtful questions for reflection at the end of each chapter. The second and third chapters dive into the etymology of the terms *ministry* and *education*. This deep dive helps anchor current conversation and practices in supervision within helpful historical, ecclesial, and educational frames. The fourth chapter leaps back into the very practical matters of covenants, learning goals, conflicts, and myriad other essentials a supervisor/mentor will need to address with forethought. As stated earlier, the final chapter shapes and defines one's telos or end goal masterfully. This book clearly has been an invaluable resource to Catholic communities and institutions as they have shaped Christian leaders. Its sheer practicality and keen insight make it commendable to the wider communion of Christian field educators as well.

Pyle, William T., and Mary Alice Seals, eds. *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

Experiencing Ministry Supervision, written by the field education professors at six Southern Baptist seminaries, is a very practical "nuts-and bolts"

guide to the essential components of nearly all field education programs. The introductory material in the first chapter (offering a brief history, philosophy, and mission/goals/strategies of theological field education) would be valuable for orienting anyone new to the responsibilities of directing a field education program and conveying its essence to a broad audience. Several subsequent chapters—i.e., on dealing with choosing a placement site/supervisor, vocational discernment, tools for data gathering—are written to be primarily beneficial for the student, whereas others—“The Supervisory Conference,” “Theological Reflection,” and “Evaluation in the Supervisory Experience”—contain information that would be helpful for orienting and training new supervisors/mentors. Among the book’s unique and useful highlights are the list of minimal competencies for those preparing to assume ministry (qualities, characteristics, attitudes, and skills) that Mary Alice Seals provides in her chapter on evaluation and the material on the rationale, function, and benefits of having a lay committee to support the seminarian outlined in Doris Borchert’s chapter on lay committees. The practical and pragmatic nature of this text may lead some to occasionally perceive an overly directive or narrow tone in a few sections. For example, after providing some helpful general content, the chapter “Theological Reflection” focuses on only one method—a distillation of the Whitehead’s model and method from their 1980 text *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*.

Hillman, George M., Jr. *Ministry Greenhouse: Cultivating Environments for Practical Learning*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008.

In this resource developed for colleges and seminaries, George M. Hillman, Jr., offers practical wisdom gleaned from his years of experience serving as the “internship guy” (vii) at Dallas Theological Seminary. Hillman walks readers through the joy-filled process of serving as a sojourner with and guide to students throughout their time in an institution of higher education while equipping them with opportunities that lead to discovery, clarity, and confirmation of call. From articulating a call, to discerning the specifics, to growing in ministerial competency through practical experience, theological reflection, and evaluation, Hillman lays out the key practices for a fruitful and faith-filled journey.

This book is a great resource for seminary students, field education supervisors/mentors, teaching communities, and theological field educators alike. With careful attention to each step of the formation process, Hillman offers a framework and core practices that help to foster faithful environments for ministerial formation and development. Two of the greatest treasures within *Ministry Greenhouse* are the theological reflection questions and the competency/goal-setting measurement tools that Hillman shares with readers throughout the book. Accessible and thoughtful, this book is a great resource for those who are new to theological field education and/or service learning. It is also a thoughtful conversation partner for experienced theological field educators who might be launching a new program within a seminary or reevaluating their existing practices.

Below are the next ten books recommended by more than one respondent to our survey.¹

- Brelsford, Theodore, and P. Alice Rogers, eds. *Contextualizing Theological Education*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.
- Blodgett, Barbara, and Floding, Matthew, eds. *Brimming with God: Reflecting Theologically on Cases in Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015.
- Floding, Matthew, ed. *Engage: A Theological Field Education Toolkit* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. Specifically mentioned chapters were Matthew Floding's "Engaging with Your Supervisor-Mentor," "Engaging with Your Student," and "Engaging in Theological Reflection," and Nathan Kirkpatrick's, "Engaging in Learning across Generations."
- Hillman, George, ed. *Preparing for Ministry: A Practical Guide to Theological Field Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008.
- Johnson, Abigail. *Shaping Spiritual Leaders: Supervision and Formation in Congregations*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007.
- Killen, Patricia O'Connell, and John de Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.
- McCarty, Doran. *Supervision of Ministry Students*. Atlanta: Home Mission Board, 1978.
- Pohly, Kenneth. *Transforming the Rough Places*. Franklin, TN: Providence House, 2001.
- Scarzzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.

- Whitehead, James D., and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995.

In addition to the book recommendations above, survey respondents suggested fifteen articles that were helpful to their work in training supervisors. However, each of these articles received only a single mention. In addition to books and articles, survey respondents also shared various other resources that fall into several broad categories. Some suggested other written materials such as program handbooks or training manuals that they or others had created for supervisors and students. Several named programs and places, such as the Ministering to Ministers: Certificate in Reflective Practices offered at St. Meinrad Seminary and the Pohly Center for Supervision at United Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. Some recommended specific YouTube videos, such as Dr. Theresa O’Keefe of Boston College speaking about the role of supervisors in supervised ministry (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtFX3BR1cEg&feature=youtu.be>) and TED talks by Brené Brown and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Also, Dr. Eileen Campbell-Reed has produced a series of videos, “Three Minute Ministry Mentor,” available for viewing at www.eileencampbellreed.org. The podcast “Manager Tools” was suggested by one respondent, and another recommended drawing upon concepts in Bowen’s family systems theory. Finally, one respondent commented that AFTE colleagues were a resource through whom she “learned about narrative therapy, action research, intercultural competency, and many more theories . . . used to train and resource others.”

In conclusion, we would like to suggest or name some further avenues for research on this topic drawn from our publishing house research, survey results, and conversations while writing and revising this article.

- Investigation and discussion with representatives of key publishing houses might be done to explore the dynamics of the types of books that are being published and how these trends may influence the pedagogy of field education programs. In other words, are the published resources shaping the teaching direction and content of current programs or are the demands of current programs more likely to influence what will be sought for future publication?
- Given the variety of resources that were shared by survey respondents, another possible avenue for research would be determining the breadth and depth of the use and influence of technologies such as podcasts or YouTube videos in training students, supervisors/mentors, and other stakeholders in theological field education.

- Reviewing and analyzing a large number of program handbooks to discern and disseminate the best examples of common essential components and delineate the differences stemming from varying program traditions, approaches, and audiences might prove fruitful.
- Finally, updating and disseminating the annotated bibliography of the relevant texts for field education based on the previous work of Dr. Emily Click would be a worthwhile undertaking.

NOTES

- 1 We hope to make the entire list of recommended books and other resources received from our survey available on the Association of Theological Field Education website: www.ATFE.org.