

*A critical Review +
Analysis
- Tang Morrison*

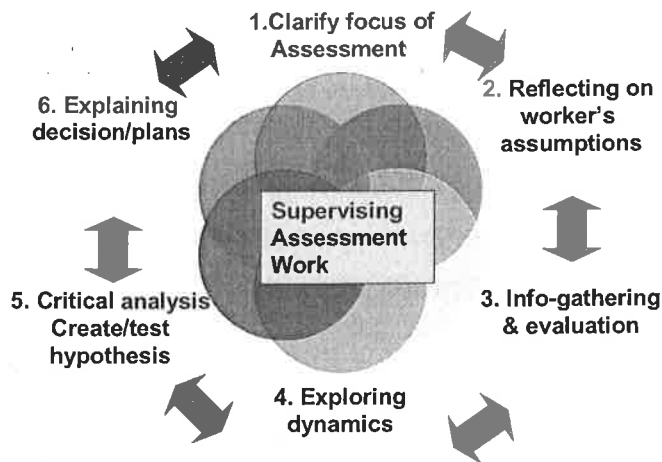


Fig 3 Six Stage Model for the Supervision of Assessment (Morrison 2009 ch.5 p 3 item 1)

The six stage framework addresses two limitations of the four part cycle (Fig 2) used in *Staff Supervision in Social Care* (item 2). Firstly, the four part cycle starts with the assumption that there is an experience or story as a subject for reflection. Whilst this is true where assessment is being undertaken on an existing case, this does not apply to new assessments. Hence there was a need to include a role for the supervisor in helping the worker to 'clarify the focus and scope' of the assessment at stage 1 of the six stage framework cycle.

Secondly, picking up Munro's (2008) concern about workers making assumptions about the family, before even meeting them, this framework includes a stage of reflection *before* rather *after* action (stage 2). This is an opportunity for the supervisor to help the worker reflect on what assumptions, concerns, knowledge, or gaps in knowledge, they may have about the family or undertaking the assessment. Reflection is thus separated into two parts: anticipatory reflection at stage 2, and reflection on the worker's experience of the family at stage 4. It can also be noted that 'the story' has

been moved from the top of the four part cycle (Fig 2) and is now contained with the 'information gathering' at stage 3. The six stage framework (Fig 3) has therefore added two new elements to the previous four part cycle (Fig 2) in order to adapt it to the supervision of assessment practice. The other important change was to separate evaluation of the quality of information in stage 3, from overall analysis of the case in stage 5. This was facilitated by the provision of the 'information evaluation matrix' (Fig 4) which is already proving to be a simple and practical tool in helping workers and supervisors address this important but often over-looked task.

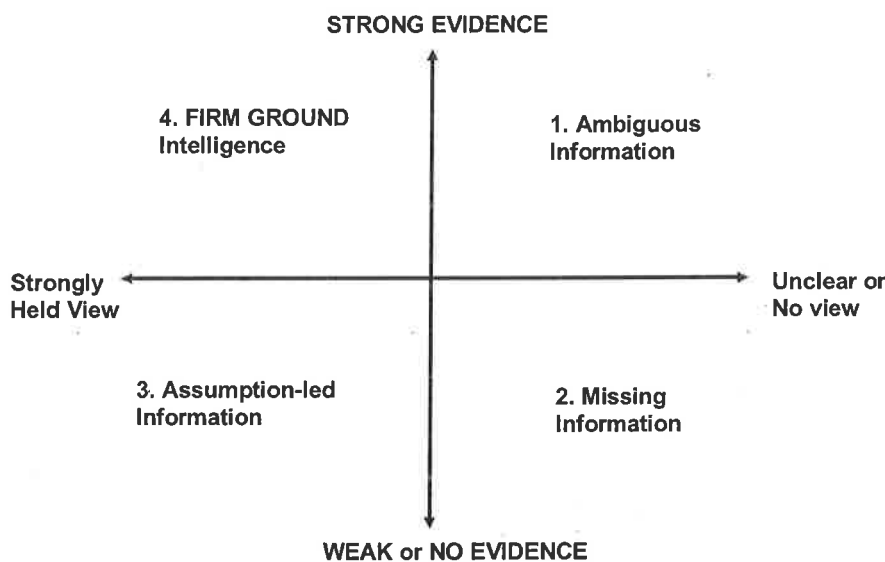


Fig 4 Information Evaluation Matrix Morrison Ch 4: p 13 (2009 item 1)

The final chapter in *Right from the Start* focuses on the role of emotion, power and anxiety under the heading '*Creating a Secure Environment for Practice*'. It describes the contribution of emotion, as a form of knowing, to effective practice (Ch 6 pp 6-7, item 1). It draws upon *Emotional Intelligence Emotion and Social Work* (Morrison 2007, item 10) which explores the influence of emotional competence in relation to five core social work tasks: engagement; observation; assessment; decision-making; and working with others. Finally, it addresses the impact of anxiety on organisational behaviour, supervision and practice (ch 6 pp 16-22, item 1), something that Lord Laming's (2009) recent review of child protection in England also highlighted:

It is important to recognise the stressful and emotional content of social work and to create an environment that enables social workers to share their feelings and anxieties without being labeled as inadequate. Such a support system needs to be reinforced by a system of good line management that is creative, empowering and sensitive to the individual needs of frontline staff, yet confident enough to set and secure high standards of delivery. (p 20)

Right from the Start (Morrison 2009, item 1) is not only the first national guide on the supervision of social workers, but it also contains, to the candidate's knowledge, the first attempt to describe a specific and reflective model for the supervision of assessment practice. Given the frequent criticisms of supervision that appear in child abuse inquiries, it is remarkable that this has not been addressed hitherto. Indeed Lord Laming (2009) echoes this concern:

There is concern that the tradition of deliberate, reflective social work practice is being put in danger because of an overemphasis on process and targets, resulting in a loss of confidence amongst social workers. It is vitally important that social work is carried out in a supportive learning environment that actively encourages the continuous development of professional judgment and skills. Regular, high-quality, organised supervision is critical, as are routine opportunities for peer-learning and discussion. (p 32)

An early test of the material has been feedback from a national CWDC supervision training programme that the candidate is currently co-directing, designed to help supervisors apply the material from *Right from the Start*. The programme evaluation (Morrison and Wonnacott 2009) indicated that the six stage model and the practical tools that accompany it were well received. As such, not only is *Right from the Start* a major advance in the candidate's own thinking, it is potentially a significant contribution at a national children's social work policy and practice level at a time when, as Trevithick (2008) states, there is:

A heavy reliance on agency policy and procedures - which is a highly accessible form of knowledge but the danger is that policy and procedures can be presented within agencies as the only form of knowledge that social workers need to acquire and apply. (p 18)

An interesting example of Trevithick's point was the outcome statements which describe the role of the newly qualified social worker almost exclusively in terms of compliance with national policy, legislation, statutory guidance, and procedures (CWDC 2008). Under these circumstances the fact that *Right from the Start*, which was written to improve the supervision of newly qualified workers operating to these statements, was endorsed by both CWDC and the Department for Children Schools and Families is interesting. The result has been the production of a national supervision guide that is grounded within a social work, not managerialist, paradigm offering practice knowledge that is valid for supervision practice (Sheppard 1998). Put more simply, *Right from the Start* offers a knowledge-based response to rule-based guidance (Munro 2009).