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Developing a Regional Supervision Training Program for School Counselors

Paper based on a program presented at the 2007 Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, October 11-14, Columbus, Ohio.

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Clinical supervision is an important part of counseling training (Goodyear & Bernard, 1998). The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) defines supervision as a tutorial and mentoring process, where a person in a supervisory position facilitates the professional development of one or more designated supervisees by monitoring and evaluating the clinical work of the student's activities in practicum and internship (CACREP, 2001). According to the professional standards established by CACREP, counseling students must complete a 100 hour practicum in a site specific to their major or area of emphasis and receive supervision from an experienced and certified on-site counselor. CACREP also requires that a site supervisor must have a minimum of a master's degree in counseling, a minimum of 2 years of pertinent professional experience in the program area in which the student is completing clinical instruction, and knowledge of the program's expectations, requirements, and evaluation procedures for students.

Due to the high standards and expectations established by the national standards, formal supervision training is important. According to an experimental study by McMahon and Simons (2004), supervision training was associated with an increase in professional counselors' supervision scores. McMahon and Simons also declare that many practicing professional counselors remain untrained in supervision. According to Borders and Leddick (1988), clinical supervision is the process that conveys counseling expertise to supervisees. Even though university programs have control over the quality of instruction provided on campus, there is no guarantee of the quality of supervision students will receive when placed in a practicum or internship. Therefore, having direct input in the type of supervision provided by site supervisors is important for counselor training programs.

Rationale

According to a recent needs assessment completed at the 2006 Western Kentucky Counseling Association's Fall Conference at Murray State University, 53% (36/68) of the

respondents indicated that they had previously supervised a counselor in training. However, only 16% (6/36) of those individuals had ever received formal supervision training. Moreover, 51% (35/68) of respondents indicated interest in receiving this type of training. These findings indicated the lack of supervision training among professional counselors in rural western Kentucky.

Due to the results of this needs assessment, it was determined that school counselors in west Kentucky called for more formal training in counselor supervision to better meet the needs of counselor trainees in the area. To meet this need, the coordinator of counseling programs at Murray State University decided to develop a formal supervision training program to begin meeting the needs of counselors in schools and other sites who did not have formal training in counseling.

A special training program for school counselors was proposed to the Dean of the College of Education at Murray State University through the form of a mini-grant proposal. To build a rationale for the need to conduct supervision training in west Kentucky, the CACREP Standards and data collected from the West Kentucky Counseling Association were used to make a case. The rationale also demonstrated that through a formal supervision training program, it would be possible to disseminate relevant research currently being generated in the field of Counselor Education to counselors in rural western Kentucky which would provide needed professional development opportunities. Therefore, it was determined that conducting a formal supervision training program for school counselors in western Kentucky would tremendously benefit the individual supervisors in the region and the Murray State University Counseling Program.

Recruitment / Marketing

Due to the grant awarded by the College of Education, the training program was fully funded. The grant provided approximately \$700 that was used to fund the development and implementation of this regional supervision training program. The program was targeted mainly to school counselors in the 22 counties of western Kentucky that comprise the Murray State University service area.

The majority of the grant funds went toward purchasing 20 copies of the text, *Supervising the School Counselor Trainee: Guidelines for Practice* by Studer (2006). The remaining grant funds were used to print materials and purchase refreshments for the day long training. Since this program was fully funded, area counselors were able to attend free of cost. This proved to be very beneficial for several participants, especially those working at schools on a local military base that recently stopped reimbursing professional development costs. Participants were also encouraged to attend by being able to receive state recognized continuing education credits.

Program Development

Content for the supervision training program was gathered from texts by Bernard and Goodyear (2004) and Studer (2006). The program content was divided into three

categories. The first part of the program focused on educating the participants about supervision. The second part focused on how to begin the supervisory process, and the final part of the program addressed models and approaches to supervision.

During the first part of the program, supervision was defined as being evaluative in nature, contractual, extending over time, and serving the purpose of enhancing the professional functioning of the counselor trainees. It was important for the participants to understand that one of the main roles of a supervisor is to evaluate, through formative and summative evaluation processes, the developmental functioning of the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

The purpose and function of clinical supervision was then contrasted with the purposes of teaching, counseling, and consultation. Although both supervision and teaching are evaluative and both serve as gatekeepers, teaching focuses on specific goals that are generally applied to all, where supervision is tailored to meet the needs of the individual supervisee and their client. Supervision differs from counseling since therapeutic interventions are limited to addressing the supervisee's developmental needs. Also, counseling clients generally seek counseling voluntarily, while counseling students are required to receive supervision. Furthermore, effective counseling is non-judgmental, while supervision is much more evaluative in nature. Supervision differs from consulting simply due to the fact that consultation generally occurs between individuals of various professional backgrounds and is more of a one-time only or as needed process, while supervision is conducted routinely and by an experienced person in the same profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). It was important for participants to be able to understand what supervision is and how it differs from existing roles they may have already identified with.

In addition to these discussions, an additional role of supervision was introduced. Discussion then focused on the necessity of clinical supervision in serving as a gatekeeper to the profession. This was an important topic to bring up to the participants since many had not thought about themselves as being gatekeepers. The importance of this role was conveyed to the participants by referring to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2005) that states, "Through ongoing evaluation and appraisal, supervisors are aware of the limitations of supervisees that might impede performance" (F.5.b.). Additionally, supervision requirements by CACREP (2001) were outlined. By beginning the training program with definitions, ethical standards, and accrediting requirements, participants were able to gain an understanding of what supervision is and why it is necessary.

After establishing a rationale for the need for supervision, the program moved toward describing the steps to begin the supervisory process. Important topics covered include, establishing a supervisory contract with the supervisee, developing a supervisory working alliance, and understanding what clinical knowledge to expect the supervisee to demonstrate. According to Studer (2006), when establishing a supervisory contract, the supervisor should meet with the supervisee prior to the beginning of the student's practicum experience. During this first visit, the supervisor and supervisee should collectively establish training goals. The supervisor needs to describe the criteria they will use for evaluation and discuss the difference between formative and summative

supervision, as well as how they will each look during their supervision experience. While establishing the contract, supervisors should also inform supervisees of school/institution policies and encourage discussion of expectations of both supervisor and supervisee.

After discussing the steps for setting up the supervisory contract, the program focused on establishing a supervisory working alliance. This is a relationship between the supervisee and supervisor that is focused on invoking change (Ladany, Ellis, & Friedlander, 1999). The program emphasized the necessity of establishing honesty, respect, and trust in the supervisory relationship and through an effective working alliance, positive benefits can be found in the client-counselor relationship.

The program then introduced the Kentucky and CACREP standards that dictate what counseling programs need to teach. After outlining the general standards, the site supervisors were introduced to the basic counseling skills their supervisees need to demonstrate. The skills were presented as basic relationship building skills and more advanced working skills. Relationship building skills included verbal and nonverbal attending skills, feeling reflections, effective paraphrasing, and effective summarizing. Advanced working skills included demonstrating the ability to reflect feelings and emotions that the client demonstrates but has not yet verbalized, the ability to identify and conceptualize the client's underlying issues, identify patterns of behavior and relate them to the client's underlying issue, point out blind spots, help clients gain self-awareness, demonstrate ability to confront client's inconsistencies and conflicts, ability to demonstrate appropriate self-disclosure, and the ability to recognize personalization issues that impede the intern's counseling. It was important to review with the site supervisors these specific skills so that they could more effectively evaluate these skills during the course of the practicum experience.

The last portion of the program introduced types of supervision models. Participants learned about the three general types of supervision models: theory specific models, developmental approaches, and integrated/social role models. Specifically, the program discussed in detail a developmental approach, paired with the Discrimination Model, which is a specific social role model.

According to Studer (2006), a developmental approach to supervision consists of four separate levels of trainee development. Level one is Orientation, which is the level that establishes the goals and the context of supervision. During this stage, the supervisory contract is established. Supervisees are generally very nervous and unsure during this level, requiring the supervisor to provide more direct feedback.

Level two is known as Transformation. During this middle stage, supervisees begin to demonstrate noticeable growth and skill development and are much more aware of their own strengths and challenges. Feedback is also more easily accepted. Supervisees reach level three, Professional Direction, towards the end of the supervisee's clinical experience. At this point, the supervisee has begun to develop an identity as a counselor, based upon the skills they have acquired and begun to master. The last level of development is known as Integrated. At this level, the counselor has developed enough skills and self-confidence to be able to work independently. This is the level supervisees work toward and generally do not achieve until after they have begun working full-time.

The Discrimination Model, like the developmental approach, also provides a framework for understanding supervisees' needs. As a social role model, this model focuses on the roles that the supervisor plays during supervision. As an integrated approach, the supervisor takes on different roles throughout the supervisory process. As dictated by the needs of the supervisee and the context of the supervision, the supervisor may function in the role of a teacher, counselor, consultant or evaluator. In addition to the various roles the supervisory may play, the Discrimination model identifies three supervisory focal areas that the supervisor addresses. During supervision, the supervisor pays close attention to how the supervisee conceptualizes their client's underlying issues and how they understand its impact in their life. They also focus on the specific counseling interventions that the supervisee is using and how those interventions effectively address underlying issues they have conceptualized. Finally, the supervisor looks for personalization issues, or areas that may be impeding the supervisee's counseling. For example, situations in the supervisee's counseling sessions where the client brings up a topic that is important to them but is difficult for the counselor to discuss. The supervisor may address these three areas of focus, through one of the four roles discussed earlier. Depending on the development of the client, the supervisor may address the supervisee's conceptualization from a direct teaching approach or from a more advanced consulting perspective (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

Outcome/Program Evaluation

The program was held at the College of Education on the Campus of Murray State University on Saturday, June 22nd, 2007. The program began at 9:00 a.m., with an hour break for lunch and concluded at 3:00 p.m., lasting approximately five hours. Eighteen individuals participated in the five hour training and received five state recognized continuing education credits. The majority of the participants were employed as school counselors in the western Kentucky region. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. To accurately assess program effectiveness, participants were asked to complete a program evaluation. The evaluation addressed program quality, presenter quality, content pertinence, and program organization. Participants reported that they valued the specific supervision training and appreciated understanding more clearly what they should be doing as supervisors and what to expect of their supervisees. Program evaluations revealed that 95% of participants felt that the training was excellent or very good and 100% of the participants indicated that the relevance or usefulness of this workshop was excellent or very good. In addition to providing needed supervision training to participants, workshop participants provided the Murray State University Counseling Program with valuable feedback regarding counselor training in the schools, needs of the site supervisors and ways the university could improve the counseling program. As a result of the feedback received, this program was offered again at the 2008 West Kentucky Counseling Association annual conference.

Conclusion

When establishing a regional supervision training course, Murray State University found success by following a step by step process. First, develop a sound rationale by collecting data that demonstrates the needs and the support for supervision training by regional counselors. Second, seek funding opportunities that will allow the program to use effective support materials without having to charge expensive attendance fees. Third, customize the program content around the needs of the potential participants. For example, this program focused on education and introduction of supervision concepts since most participants were new to counseling supervision. Finally, evaluate the effectiveness of the program in order to build support and a strong rationale to continue offering the training in the future, as well as to adjust program content to better meet the needs of the region.

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