



Advocacy: Implications for Supervision Training

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Supervision is a process of professional and personal development in which the supervisor challenges, stimulates, and encourages the supervisee (counselor) to reach higher levels of competence. The term *supervision* can be separated into two words, *super* and *vision*, implying that the supervisor is an experienced professional who teaches a less experienced supervisee how to become an effective counselor. The supervisory alliance facilitates the professional role identity and focuses on behaviors to be acquired by the supervisee. A salient role for the supervisor to teach and model for the supervisee is the role of advocate. Implicit in this supervisory role is the assumption that the supervisor values advocacy and has expertise in operationalizing advocacy principals.

Throughout the history of the counseling profession, there have always been counselors who carried out advocacy efforts on behalf of their clients and students (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Lewis & Bradley, 2000; Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006; Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, in press). If we think of *advocacy* as the act of speaking up on behalf of others or as taking action to make environmental changes on behalf of our clients, we can easily recognize this behavior as one that is pervasive among professionals who want to do everything they can to enhance the lives of the people they seek to help. "In most cases, however, these courageous counselors have had to act on their own, without professional resources and without guidance for ethical and effective implementation of the advocacy role" (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, in press). The authors believe that the advocacy competencies provide the link for the supervisor to teach the supervisee that advocacy is a process of professional development in which the supervisor challenges, stimulates, and encourages the supervisee (counselor) to reach higher levels of competency.

Advocacy

The counseling profession has made active strides in recent years to bring the concept of advocacy into the mainstream. The American Counseling Association's Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002) have played an active role in disseminating the idea that advocacy, far from being a mere adjunct to the counselor's role, is central to the counselor's day-to-day practice. This concept raises an urgent question: If counselors are expected to be competent advocates, how can their efforts in this direction be taught, supervised, and supported? Although there are a growing number of resources related to advocacy and a still-larger literature on supervision (Bradley & Ladany, 2001), a need exists for

resources that address the question of how these two strands of theory and practice can be brought together. Now that advocacy has earned recognition as a central part of the professional counselor's work, counselor educators and supervisors are faced with the challenge of developing advocacy-specific educational interventions. Advocacy competencies, no less than clinical competencies, require *real-life practice under supervision*.

The advocacy competencies suggest that advocacy should be carried out at three levels: (a) the client or student level; (b) the school or community level; and (c) the wider public arena. If counselors are to be effective in carrying out this work, they should have experience under supervision. Being an effective counselor goes beyond direct service to include competent advocacy practice at the micro and macro levels. For example, supervisors must help supervisees recognize macro level issues such as oppression and social injustice while also assisting supervisees to help clients integrate skills related to self-advocacy. Thus, effective supervisors facilitate supervisees' integration of intrapsychic and systemic issues which in turn impact clients' lives.

Advocacy in Action

The authors have been involved in two separate advocacy efforts that can be viewed as examples of supervised practice. One example involved students at Texas Tech University who participated in internships in a setting with a strong advocacy component. The students gained extensive experience at the micro level, which involved case advocacy. Students enrolled in internships at a local adolescent treatment center developed advocacy competencies by advocating for access to services and for clients' rights in the juvenile justice system. Another example, this one at the macro level, involved students and new professionals connected with Governors State University in Illinois. Students involved in a health justice advocacy project took part in community-based health advocacy training, gave testimony at public hearings in their congressional districts, delivered presentations to community groups, and participated in lobbying efforts on behalf of the Illinois Health Justice Act.

The concept that advocacy is part of the counselor's role can move from theory to practice only through purposeful efforts to stimulate, supervise, and support competent practice. Soon, we hope, examples of supervised advocacy practice will become commonplace. Advocacy as presented by Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, and D'Andrea (1998) indicates that advocacy must serve two primary purposes: (1) increasing the client's sense of personal power, and (2)

fostering environmental changes that reflect responsiveness to personal needs. Similarly, Lewis and Bradley (2000) state that advocacy is the act of speaking up or taking action to make environmental changes on behalf of clients. Counselors must become a voice for their clients and their communities. This voice should speak against bias and oppression while advocating for clients rights at all levels.

Sometimes advocacy is directed toward client advocacy while at other times the focus is on political advocacy. Regardless of the focus, advocacy must be an active, integral part of the supervisor's work. Although numerous articles and books have appeared in the counseling literature about supervisory roles and methodology, and on the need for advocacy, the literature is sparse regarding the supervisor's role in teaching the supervisee to be an advocate.

In order for a supervisor to teach a supervisee to be an advocate for the client, that supervisor must not only *understand* what advocacy is, but also be able to put advocacy into *action*. That is, it is the supervisor's ethical responsibility to be an advocate. Furthermore, the supervisor must be cognizant of and willing to stand against the oppressions and biases that exist. Concurrently, the supervisor must also teach the supervisee to actively stand against oppression and bias.

Recommendations

Since supervisors are in a unique role to teach supervisees (counselors) how to become successful advocates, supervisors should:

1. Develop a model for teaching supervisees to be advocates (Astramovich & Harris, 2007; Wood & Rayle, 2006; Pearl, 2004; Portman & Portman, 2002).
2. Help supervisees understand that advocacy exists at different levels.
3. Help supervisees implement the advocacy competencies into counseling practice (Pearl, 2004; Portman & Portman, 2002).
4. Provide support and consultation to supervisees in their quest to become advocates.

Summary and Conclusions

Advocacy is a client right, not a privilege. Accordingly, it is the supervisor's ethical responsibility to teach supervisees to be active, successful advocates. Supervisors play a key role in helping counselors become successful advocates.

Specifically, advocacy has the potential to help clients: (a) find a more successful solution to the problem; (b) change the situation variables contributing to the problem; and (c) enhance the well-being of the client.

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