

Supervision of School Counselors

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The Need

Professionally appropriate supervision is emerging as a highly effective means of nurturing school counselors' professional development. New challenges in schools and increased understanding of the complexity of professional development dictate the need for increased attention to and use of effective supervision practices. Today's children and youth need highly skilled help in managing the complicated situations in which they live. School counselors see an increasing number of suicidal children as well as adolescents. The upsurge in substance abuse, gang involvement, and violence are well publicized. Increasingly, parents turn to the schools to help them solve problems that face them, including those posed by their children. In order to effectively help children in their classrooms, teachers seek consultative help from counselors. The comprehensive guidance programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994) being implemented in today's schools call for school counselors to use *all* of their professional skills.

Focused and constructive supervision is of benefit to all practitioners whether they are novices or experienced, highly competent or insufficiently trained. Due to reductions in caseloads, renewed commitment to elementary counseling, and retirement of counselors who entered the field in the 1960's, the number of new school counselors is increasing. As noted by Matthes (1992), "we expect novice counselors to assume the same responsibilities as experienced counselors" (p. 245). They encounter the same complex problems posed by today's students and they face similar ethical dilemmas. Such problems require the consultative and educative assistance of a competent counselor supervisor.

Wiggins' (1993) longitudinal study adds urgency to the need for supervision by experienced counselors. He found that "more than 28% of the total group ... were independently rated as low in effectiveness ... 10 years previously [and] were still rated in that manner — and still employed as counselors" (p. 382). Clearly, in the ten year period, supervisory interventions would have helped some of these counselors improve the quality of their performance!

The Process

Although it is a relatively new discipline, supervision is compatibly defined in both education and in counseling. The purpose of supervision is the growth and enhanced effectiveness of the practitioner (Borders, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1984). "It is characterized by a cycle of feedback, practice, and additional feedback" (Borders, 1991, p. 253), based on interpretation of gathered data in light of established standards.

Because of the emphasis on skill-based performance evaluations generated by educational reform, many states (e.g., Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas) have defined school counselors' roles and needed competencies: program management, counseling, guidance, consulting, coordinating, student appraisal, and referral. With these

behavioral standards as a basis, supervisors and counselors operate with the same definitions for effective performance. The value of timely feedback has been reinforced in the career-ladder-related-teacher-appraisal systems, setting the climate for the same practice for all categories of educators.

Clinical, developmental and administrative supervision

When competently done, supervision not only enhances the quality of counselors' skills, but also helps hone professional judgment, "encourages greater self-awareness, and fosters an integrated professional and personal identity as a counselor" (Borders, 1991, 253). Barret and Schmidt (1986) outlined a useful schema for distinguishing between the kinds of supervision needed for/by school counselors: clinical, developmental, and administrative. In this distinction, the purpose of each supervision type accounts for the different procedures used by the various supervisors available in schools.

The purpose of clinical supervision is enhancement of counselors' professional skills and ethical functioning. The data sources which support clinical supervision include observations of counselors applying their professional skills and values. In the school setting, the typical opportunities for gathering data to support clinical supervision are available (e.g., live and/or recorded observations, case presentations, and consultations). Clinical supervisors must be counselors who are competent in the school counselor functions and in supervision practices.

The purpose of developmental supervision is improvement of the guidance and counseling program and counselors' pursuit of professional development. Data sources which support developmental supervision are recordings of goals and activities undertaken to attain goals and measures of goal attainment, program plans and implementation calendars, self-reports, and consumer satisfaction surveys. Developmental supervision is best provided by competent school counselors from the same system as the supervisee.

The purpose of administrative supervision is assurance that counselors have worthy work habits, comply with laws and policies, relate well with other school staff and parents, and otherwise work effectively within the school system. Data sources supporting administrative supervision are such things as work schedules, recordkeeping and documentation systems, and evidence of team efforts. Either school counselor supervisors or building administrators may be providers of administrative supervision.

Performance Improvement Systems

Particularly relevant in the school setting is clarifying the place of supervision in the overall system for helping counselors' improve their performance. Whether or how data used in supervision will apply to summative evaluation needs to be spelled out. Supervision provides

opportunities for personalizing the professional development processes. The combination of feedback from supervision and from performance appraisal is data which counselors and their supervisors use as the basis for professional development goals.

Supervisors

The cyclical nature of the supervisory process is enhanced by the lengthy supervisor-supervisee relationships typical of elementary and secondary school settings. The multiple opportunities for supervision over significant lengths of time allow supervisory relationships to be rich ones.

The primary obstacles to fully effective school counselor supervision are caused by the insufficient number of school counselor-competent supervisors. Where there are such supervisors, there is little or no relevant counselor-supervisor training available and/or no specialized certification required. Although the building principal can provide useful administrative supervision, it is unlikely that they are current in the clinical functions of counseling. Competent school counselors are usually available to fulfill the developmental and clinical supervision roles, but they often lack training and certification in supervision.

Although development of the appropriate job descriptions and provision of the relevant training at this time are the responsibility of local school districts (Henderson & Lampe, 1992), the *Standards for Counseling Supervisors* (Dye & Borders, 1990) and the *Curriculum Guide* (Borders et al., 1991) provide the guidelines needed. A pool of potential clinical and/or developmental supervisors are available in many communities. Current school counselors can fulfill roles as peer supervisors. An increasing number of mid-sized school systems employ central office-based guidance supervisors. Some intermediate education agencies and some state departments of education provide such expertise. Schools are also contracting with community-based, Licensed Professional Counselors, or counselor educators.

The Status

Supervision of professional practice is an effective, but perhaps underutilized means of nurturing the professional development of new and experienced school counselors. It is a personalized vehicle for assuring that children, their fami-

lies, and teachers benefit from quality services. For counselor supervision to be practiced more universally in the nation's schools, states need to require appropriate certification, counselor education programs need to offer appropriate counseling supervisor training, and schools and district counseling supervisors need to report their counselor supervision practices and findings.

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