

theory and application

Supervisor Training: A Discrimination Model

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The delivery of supervision skills to those who direct counselors through practicum is not well defined in the counseling literature. This article addresses that issue by presenting a model for identification and training of those skills, the roles in which the skills are demonstrated, and the types of choices or discriminations that are necessary to make in tutoring trainees through the counseling practicum. This model attempts to pair the training of supervisors with the training of counselors in a systematic fashion.

The demonstration of counseling skills has been a major focus of counseling literature for several years. A by-product of this movement has been increased interest in the role and function of supervisors who work with counselor-trainees during the practical part of their training. Unlike the literature that addresses counselor training, little has been said about the training of supervisors. The training of competent counselors requires competent teacher-supervisors, so professional training programs are justified in giving equal time and attention to the training of supervisors. The purpose of this article is to present a model for supervisor training and to discuss how this model is translated into supervision activities. The model is called a discrimination model because a dominant characteristic is the identification and action upon choice points in the process.

BACKGROUND

Literature that examines the process of supervision is confusing and contradictory. Some studies suggest that the supervisor is the most pow-

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erful influence on the trainee's skill acquisition (Karr & Geist, 1977; Pierce & Schauble, 1970; Ronnestad, 1977), while other studies contend that the supervisor's behavior has very little to do with trainee competence (Authier & Gustafson, 1975; Wedeking & Scott, 1976). The most effective form of supervision is also argued: Some writers defend modeling as an effective form of supervision (Alssid & Hutchinson, 1977; Gulanick & Schmeck, 1977). Others report the success of a more didactic model of supervision (Hansen, Pound, & Petro, 1976). Still others suggest that sensitivity training exceeds learning derived from didactic materials (Selfridge, Weitz, Abramowitz, Calabria, Abramowitz, & Steger, 1975).

The supervision process, like the teaching-learning process, is complex. In order for it to be studied, it must be simplified in ways that allow for experimental control and evaluation. By studying dimensions of the process separately, researchers might arrive at differing conclusions. This leaves the counselor educators with an incomplete body of knowledge from which they can draw conclusions on how supervisors should be trained. Thus, a case can be made for a holistic approach to supervisor training, based on inferential and inductive processes. The discrimination model of supervision that follows includes many behaviors, and attempts to present guidelines for their use. It is not the author's intention to clarify the confusing issues represented in the literature, but to offer counselor educators a training model for supervisors that represents several research thrusts and might stimulate further study.

FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISION

The goal of supervision is to produce more competent counselors. Therefore, a supervisor's choice of content matter for working with individual counselors must relate directly to some outline of counselor behaviors that establish counselor competency. The first task is to define a competent counseling practitioner and to delineate the skills or functions subsumed under that definition. Conceptually, these functions are identified as belonging to one of three areas: (a) process skills, (b) conceptualization skills, and (c) personalization skills.

Process

Most of the counselor's overt behaviors fall under the general category of process. A list of process behaviors would include the following: (a) ability to open an interview smoothly, (b) competence in the use of reflections, probes, restatement, summaries, or interpretations (see Hackney & Cormier, 1979), (c) helping clients say what is on their minds, (d) using nonverbal communication to enhance verbal communication,

(e) successfully implementing intervention strategies, and (f) achieving interview closure. This list is not exhaustive but additional skills should be restricted to counselor behavior that can be observed either through two-way mirrors, videotaping, or audiotaping.

Process behaviors are those that most counselor-trainees learn early in their training; behaviors that differentiate the counseling contact from a social contact. These behaviors, most noticed by the client, become indicators that counseling has begun and social chit-chat has ended. Whether exhibited by the novice counselor or the experienced practitioner, process skills should be identifiable as enhancing the *process* of counseling. Likewise, it is helpful to remember that process skills follow a continuum of difficulty. An inexperienced counselor's first attempt at a meaningful reflection of feeling is a process skill; so too, is the experienced counselor's use of desensitization, paradox, or reverse role-play. When a supervisor is evaluating from a *process* perspective, the supervision issue lies in the execution, rather than the choice of, those skills and strategies of the counselor.

Conceptualization

Most of the counselor's covert behaviors fall under the general category of conceptualization skills. For this reason, it is not always possible to evaluate a counselor's conceptualization skills at the same time the supervisor is observing the interview. Kinds of behavior that are represented by this category include: (a) the ability to understand what the client is saying, (b) the skill in identifying themes in the client's messages, (c) the skill to recognize appropriate and inappropriate goals for the client, (d) skill in *choosing* strategies that are appropriate to the client's expressed goals, and (e) skill in recognition of even subtle improvement by the client.

Conceptualization skills are those that reflect deliberate thinking and case analysis by the counselor. There are two distinct kinds of thinking included in this area: the conceptualization done *in the counseling session*, and the conceptualization done *between sessions*. It is possible for a counselor-trainee to be very good at writing case reports and conceptualizing the client's world after sessions but be unable to think deliberately during the session. A well-trained counselor must be able to function at both levels of conceptualization. Thus, the supervisor must look for both levels of conceptualization during the practicum.

Personalization

This last category of behaviors represents the more personal aspect of the counselor's learning. They are overt and readily observable behav-

iors as well as behaviors that are subtle and more difficult to identify. Personalization skills include (a) the counselor's comfort in assuming some authority in the counseling relationship and taking responsibility for his or her specialized knowledge and skills, (b) the ability of the counselor to hear challenges by the client or feedback from the supervisor without becoming overly defensive, (c) the ability to be comfortable with the counselor's own feelings, values and attitudes, as well as those of the client, and (d) the ability to have a fundamental respect for the client. Although it is desirable that these personalization skills be developed during pre-practicum training, it is also inevitable that some aspect of this category will need further work during the counselor's practicum and intern training. Because counseling is both personal and personalized, it is difficult to become a more efficient and skilled counselor without also experiencing greater personal growth. This is a very positive condition in the counseling profession and should be treated as such during the practicum. It is important that a counselor-trainee feel no less adequate by having a personal issue to learn from than by having a counseling strategy to learn. If this is not the case, the counselor may learn to hide behind image, knowledge, strategies, and so on. It is our opinion that this kind of counselor will eventually become stagnant and will offer much less therapeutic help to clients.

These three learning dimensions can be used to delineate the abilities of a competent counselor, thus serving as an outline for supervision with the counselor-trainee. Having such an outline provides the necessary structure for supervision sessions and gives the supervisor and counselor a reference to help determine the efficiency of time spent in supervision. For example, if a supervisor's feedback addresses only the counselor's process skills, this outline would bring into focus other necessary areas for discussion and evaluation. The purpose of this outline, therefore, is two-fold: (a) it gives the counselor an outline of behaviors necessary for successful completion of practicum, and (b) it serves as a guide for the supervisor in establishing training priorities for supervision sessions.

THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE

In addition to the functions of the supervisor-counselor relationship, there is a second dimension that must be considered in order to complete the discrimination model. This is the *approach* the supervisor uses with the didactic material being presented to the counselor. It is important that this approach or *role* be as deliberate a choice made by the supervisor as is the choice of instructional matter. It is equally important

that the supervisor be trained to recognize and make these choices based on a sound rationale rather than random selection of personal preference. What then, are the supervisor's role choices to a given supervision session?

Three basic roles have been identified for supervisors working with counselor-trainees: (a) the teacher-student approach (Walz & Roeber, 1962), (b) the counselor-client approach (Arbuckle, 1958), and (c) the consultant approach (Hackney, 1971). There are permutations to these three roles as is evidenced in the Patterson Model (1964) that combines the roles of teacher and counselor. Defined simply, the three roles might be viewed in terms of their goals. The supervisor as teacher focuses on some knowledge or expertise that he or she wishes to transmit to the counselor. The supervisor as counselor places priority on the counselor's personal needs, with the belief that this focus will allow the counselor to overcome the nervousness or self-doubt that impedes natural development. The supervisor as consultant focuses on a relationship with the counselor that is explorative in nature and assumes that the counselor has the ability to express his or her supervision needs.

The Importance of Training

Suggesting that the supervisor function as a teacher, counselor and/or consultant is not a new idea. Supervisors are not often asked, however, to demonstrate competence in each of these three roles. This is unfortunate because there is a natural tendency to rely heavily, if not exclusively, on the role that feels most comfortable. Thus, it is fairly common to find that counselor-trainees have been "taught" throughout their practicum experience because teaching was the most comfortable role for their supervisor. This practice is accepted as the supervisor's idiosyncratic style. With a discrimination model for supervision, supervisors are asked to add to their idiosyncratic strengths by becoming comfortable with contrasting roles and using the data at hand to select the most appropriate role for a supervision contact.

There is also the danger of oversimplification in connecting specific roles with functions in the discrimination model. A supervisor working with a counselor who is deficient in process skills cannot assume that the teaching role is the best approach in the supervision contact. Some counselors are uneasy with process skills because these skills do not coincide with their experience or with their personal values as a counselor. If the supervisor perceives process issues as requiring a teacher approach at all times, then the supervisor is going to be ineffective at least part of the time. It is important to remember that the discrimination model is a *situation-specific* model and that there are nine potential choice points for the supervisor to consider (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Examples of the Discrimination Model in Use

Counseling Function	Supervisor Role		
	A. Teacher	B. Counselor	C. Consultant
1. Process	<p><i>Counselor</i> would like to use systematic desensitization with a client but has never learned the technique.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> teaches the counselor relaxation techniques, successive approximation, hierarchy building and the desensitization process.</p>	<p><i>Counselor</i> is able to use a variety of process skills but with one client uses only reflection.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> attempts to help counselor determine the effect of this client on him which limits his use of skills in counseling sessions.</p>	<p><i>Counselor</i> finds her clients reacting well to her humor and would like to know more ways to use humor in counseling.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> works with counselor to identify different uses of humor in counseling and to practice these.</p>
2. Conceptualization	<p><i>Counselor</i> is unable to recognize themes and patterns of client thought either during or following counseling sessions.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> uses transcripts of counseling sessions to teach counselor to identify thematic client statements (such as blaming or dependence).</p>	<p><i>Counselor</i> is unable to set realistic goals for her client who requests assertion training.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> helps counselor relate her discomfort to her own inability to be assertive in several relationships.</p>	<p><i>Counselor</i> would like to use a different model for case-conceptualization.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> discusses several models for counselor to consider.</p>
3. Personalization	<p><i>Counselor</i> is unaware that her preference for a close seating arrangement intimidates her client.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> assigns the reading of proximity studies in the literature.</p>	<p><i>Counselor</i> is unaware that his female client is attracted to him sexually.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> attempts to help counselor confront his own sexuality and his resistance to recognizing sexual cues from women.</p>	<p><i>Counselor</i> would like to feel more comfortable working with older clients.</p> <p><i>Supervisor</i> and counselor discuss developmental concerns of older people.</p>

THE DISCRIMINATION MODEL IN USE

The discrimination model is presently being field-tested with practicum students (master's level) and supervisors (doctoral level) at Purdue University. The procedures for applying the model are as follows:

1. The model is presented separately, to both the practicum counselors and supervisors, using laboratory method that consists of videotape presentations of counseling sessions, discussion of concepts and functions, and individual and dyadic exercises.

2. Counselors are asked to identify examples of behavior that illustrate process skills (students have already successfully completed a pre-practicum skills laboratory), conceptualization skills, and personalization skills. Through this process of identification, confusion or misunderstanding of the concepts is revealed and clarified.

3. Counselors are asked to role-play counseling vignettes in which each of the three functions is a focal point.

4. Role-playing is videotaped and presented for discussion and evaluation. Throughout the semester counselors are asked to evaluate their sessions and plan for future sessions with their clients in terms of the three model functions (process conceptualization and personalization). They also use the functions in case conferences to help their peers critique audio- and/or videotapes of counseling sessions.

Beginning lab activities for supervisors are similar to those for counselors. Training involves presentation of conceptual material, viewing pre-recorded counseling sessions, and asking supervisor-trainees to choose the function (process, conceptualization, and personalization) that would be their focus in a supervision session. Then they are asked to role-play supervision sessions using each of the three roles (teacher, counselor, and consultant) to work on the function identified. This helps supervisors practice the flexibility of the model and also helps them identify the approach(es) they find difficult within the context of different counselor functions. The process is repeated with observers providing feedback. During the semester supervisors meet weekly in case conferences to present "supervision cases" using the format described above. Supervisors are also asked to video-record their supervision contacts with counselors and present these tapes as part of the case conference. These case conferences are designed to offer input and feedback regarding (a) the supervisor's choice of content and function for working with an assigned counselor in a particular counseling case, and (b) the choice and execution of supervisor role used in the supervision session. Supervisors consistently report satisfaction with this process, in terms of their training, to be deliberate and successful in their supervision contacts.

Between weekly case conferences headed by a member of the faculty, supervisors and counselors work on an individual basis. One supervisor is assigned to a maximum of three counselors for the semester. Although case conferences within groups are important and helpful, these individual contacts are where most of the work and learning of practicum and supervision occur.

Evaluation

An important advantage of the discrimination model is that it makes feedback and evaluation easier. Since both counselor and supervisor are familiar with the same model, there is less chance of unclear language. For example, some of the counselors have made statements that their supervisors spent too much time counseling and not enough time teaching. Or, a supervisor might give a mid-term evaluation that suggests a counselor was doing well with process skills but needed to work on case conceptualization, goal-setting, and strategy selection. In another example, the faculty member might call to a supervisor's attention that he or she is relying heavily on the consultant role and ask whether a more authoritative role is uncomfortable for that person.

The sum total of these evaluations leads primarily to clearer communication, more apparent instructional agendas, and greater ease in dealing with problematic relationships. The process can also be used to translate present performance into a grade depending on the individual student's concern.

CONCLUSION

Supervision calls for a range of approaches and attention to a range of counselor functions. The particular counseling function and the counselor's idiosyncratic difficulty with that function should be the determining factors in selecting the appropriate supervisory role. Given these premises, it follows that the supervisor needs (a) a range of role alternatives, (b) a framework in which to fit counseling functions, and (c) guidelines for determining supervision goals and approaches. The discrimination model attempts to meet those criteria.

There are obvious limitations to this presentation of the model; only the structure of the supervisor training program has been described. Details would be determined by individual counselor education programs. The counselor training objectives may vary from one program to another. Finally, the evaluation process lacks objective conciseness. Despite these shortcomings, the supervisor discrimination model expands and enhances the supervisor/counselor relationship while offering those individuals a clearer understanding of performance standards expected

of them. The relevance of this approach is that it attempts to pair, in a systematic fashion, the training of supervisors with the training of counselors.

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