

Article 48

Collaborative Supervision of Counseling Interns

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This article describes an innovative approach to clinical supervision of counseling education students implemented at an urban community college counseling center. We discuss the rationale of our approach to clinical supervision, describe the process and the outcome, and suggest steps for others who may wish to engage in collaborative supervision of counseling interns.

Background and Rationale

We supervised counseling students enrolled in clinical practicum for 5 years using the traditional one-to-one model of clinical supervision. Often, we shared our experiences with supervision and provided coverage for each other, if required. However, the one-to-one supervisory model seemed inconsistent with our professional styles and work in the counseling department. We enjoyed collaborating and found that it contributed to our professional growth and development. We successfully collaborated in the past in teaching and writing, developing counseling initiatives and programs, and in conference presenting. Therefore, it was logical and natural to extend our collaboration to include clinical supervision of counseling interns.

Collaborative supervision is important because it synthesizes the concept of collaboration and clinical training yielding an innovative approach to supervision. Collaboration is stimulating, rewarding, and productive; it adds a dimension to counseling supervision that may diminish the isolation sometimes perceived by interns. Counseling can be stressful, especially for the novice professional. The relational aspect of collaborative supervision can impart social support to the interns, thereby serving to alleviate stress.

Collaborative supervision exposes counseling interns to collaboration early in their careers, and they may choose to incorporate it in their professional work as counselors. Collaborative supervision may allow for a broader and richer clinical experience for counseling interns and supervisors alike. As counselors, we contribute to our profession by supervising counseling

students, share an innovative approach to clinical supervision, and enhance the counseling services provided by our department. Further, collaborative supervision permits a redistribution of the supervisory responsibilities that perceptually reduces the burden of the additional tasks associated with supervision.

Collaboration and Supervision

Collaboration is an important concept noted in education literature (Hord, 1986), specifically as it pertains to school restructuring (West, 1990), the school counselors' role in educational collaboration (West & Idol, 1993), and collaboration as support for the research efforts of doctoral students (Burnett, 1999). Similarly, clinical supervision of counseling students is an important topic in the counselor education literature (Bernard, 1979, 1997; Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). The effectiveness of various models and approaches to the supervision of counseling students (Goodyear & Bernard, 1998), an integrated approach to supervision using existing models (Nelson, Johnson, & Thorngren, 2000), and the effectiveness of large versus small group and individual supervision and combined group supervision (Ray & Altekruze, 2000) are discussed in the literature. Silva & Dana (2001) brought collaboration and supervision together and explored a model of collaborative supervision in the context of professional development schools and teacher education. However, little guidance was found in the counselor education literature synthesizing collaboration and clinical supervision of counseling interns.

Our approach to collaborative supervision draws upon an interdisciplinary knowledge base of collaboration. Collaborative supervision is a conceptual framework with structured decision making and problem solving. It is a dynamic, interactive, and relational process with mutually agreed upon goals. The process is marked by parity, individual and group accountability, trust and respect, valued expertise, conflict resolution, and a positive approach to confrontation.

The Process of Collaborative Supervision

Typically, clinical practicum students contact the field site supervisor during the spring semester prior to fall placement. We provided the interns with a description of the counseling department and the application procedures during the initial phone contact. Interested practicum students were requested to submit their resumes prior to a formal interview. The interview determined if the placement would satisfy their practicum expectations, if they would be comfortable in our educational environment, and their willingness to work with another intern and to be supervised by two professional counselors. We wanted interns who could adjust to an economically, culturally, and academically diverse population.

The two supervisors held individual interviews for approximately 10 potential interns. We outlined the responsibilities associated with the field placement, for example, time commitment, expectations for sites and site supervisors, criteria for passing, and student and site evaluations. The responsibilities for the first semester were limited to the observations of counseling interventions for a total of 6 to 8 hours each week. For the spring semester, the practicum students engaged in direct student services, individual and group counseling, assessments, and workshops. We required the interns to be available if groups, workshops, or meetings were planned. We sought interns who considered themselves self-starters and felt they could adapt to a high-paced work schedule. We have large, active caseloads, and students frequently present problems that require immediate assistance. It was also important that the counseling interns were interested in our collaborative approach to the clinical practicum experience. We made a final selection, met the interns, and discussed the plans for the upcoming academic year.

The interns were from different ethnic backgrounds. One intern was Caribbean American, born and raised in New York City, and a graduate of a public university. The other intern was Japanese and had recently come to New York to complete her graduate studies. One intern had a similar educational experience as our client population; the other was familiar with the challenges faced by ESL students. Most important, they knew each other, had worked together on a graduate project, and were interested in our collaborative approach to supervision.

The interns alternated between supervisors to observe individual counseling sessions. If a workshop, group counseling, or program meeting was scheduled, the interns attended. They were given the opportunity to explore other resources in the college such as career, transfer, and advisement services. The supervisors

encouraged the interns to discuss with each other their observations in preparation for the weekly supervision conferences attended by both interns and supervisors.

At the very end of the fall semester, the interns were given the opportunity to provide direct but limited services to the students, given the ease of their adjustment and level of comfort with our client population. They planned a workshop for first semester students to assess their academic progress and to develop a plan for the next academic semester. As supervisors, we provided the interns with information, resources, and guidance to complete this project. They drew on each other's strengths and abilities and appeared to gain confidence through collaborating on this project.

Consistent with the mutually agreed upon structure and process of collaborative supervision, the interns worked well together, with the supervisors, and the clients they counseled. Motivated by the apparent success of our collaborative approach to supervision, we asked the interns if they were interested in joining us to conduct a workshop at an upcoming regional conference for special programs' administrators, counselors, and support staff. The interns were receptive and eager to work together and with the supervisors to present at the conference. We started with brainstorming for ideas that led to the final plans for the presentation. The supervisors and interns together identified the goals and objectives of the presentation and assumed areas of responsibility based on expertise and strengths. Certain areas of the presentation were designated for interns, for supervisors, and for both interns and supervisors. We shared with the workshop attendees our view of collaborative supervision, while the workshop itself served as an example of the effectiveness of this approach. Most importantly, the interns' professional self-esteem was enhanced. The workshop was a success!

Collaborative supervision involved structured activities that maximized the interns' acquisition of basic counseling skills, individually and with both supervisors. Collaboratively, we reviewed cases and discussed ethical and legal issues of counseling, particularly as they pertained to counseling in a university's counseling center. The practicum students maintained accurate records of the clients seen, secured written consent for the tapings of the sessions with their clients, and completed the paper work required by the practicum students' educational institution. The supervisors maintained shared files on the practicum students' activities and progress.

Outcomes of Collaborative Supervision

Collaborative supervision yielded benefits for the practicum students and the clinical supervisors in several ways. Collaborative supervision enhanced the interaction and relationships between interns, supervisors, and interns and supervisors. Multicultural competencies for the practicum students and supervisors were strengthened. The practicum students were able to apply concepts recently learned in their graduate multicultural counseling course and to further explore concepts and issues in a highly diverse client setting. In case conferences, practicum students discussed the multicultural subtleties present in the diverse client population, explored the influences on issues presented, and discussed possible interventions.

There are several key aspects of collaborative supervision that contributed to the positive outcome. First, the interns were willing to engage in an innovative approach to clinical supervision. Second, each member of the team generated and contributed ideas related to the innovative supervision experience. Third, the ability to listen without judgment and with the intent to build on an idea was critical to the multiple outcomes of collaborative supervision.

Why should a clinical supervisor choose collaborative supervision over a traditional approach or model of supervision? For us, the answer is clear. Collaborative supervision works. The experience was rewarding for the interns and supervisors alike. The interns benefited from collaborative supervision through the provision of social support, informal peer supervision, and a varied practicum experience. Case study preparation and analysis strengthened social support, and the informal peer supervision helped to increase the interns' efficacy. The interns were exposed to clients with diverse learning styles, communications patterns, and problem-solving skills, and they supported each other as they enhanced their personalization skills (Bernard, 1997). The interns' field placement experiences included one-to-one counseling sessions, groups and workshops, lesson plan development and classroom teaching, and presenting at a professional conference. The feedback and encouragement the interns received from both supervisors served to reinforce the efforts and successes of the supervisory experience.

In addition, the supervisors developed professionally as a result of the collaborative supervision experience. Each supervisor served as observer when the other was actively engaged as facilitator, and provided feedback to each other on their approaches to supervision and interactions with the interns.

Conclusion

Collaborative supervision can be conveniently adapted to the supervision of the practicum students. The steps to follow are (a) identify a partner or partners interested in collaborative supervision; (b) contact the local counselor education program and become an approved site; (c) identify the criteria for selecting the interns; (d) identify the goals for the supervision experience; (e) become familiar with requirements and guidelines of the sponsoring educational institution, looking to adapt them to your work setting; (f) create a structure for the counseling practicum students; and (g) implement your plan paying particular attention to the characteristics that mark collaboration such as trust, respect, and effective communication.

Collaborative supervision had outcomes beneficial for the interns and clinical supervisors. The interactions and relationships between interns, between supervisors, and between interns and supervisors were strengthened through collaborative supervision. The interns' and supervisors' multicultural competencies were reinforced. The practicum students applied counseling concepts learned in their graduate courses. Also, they gained an understanding that their personal perspectives have an influence in the counseling sessions. The supervisors developed professionally from the exchanges with the clinical counseling students as well.

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