

A Reflective Model of Counseling Clinical Supervision

Reflective learning Based Supervision

The model outlines the sequence of supervisee development as well as the interactive reflective learning cycle between the supervisor and supervisee. Hence, as dissonant experiences are transformed into meaningful schemas and corresponding counseling skills, the supervisee develops in concert with the progression of the on-site supervision relationship. This learning alliance is illustrated as a series of four phases representing the developmental process of counseling supervision: contextual orientation, trust establishment, conceptual development, and clinical independence. Each phase of the supervisory relationship illustrates the experience of the participants (supervisor and supervisee) and the central focus for the reflective learning experience of the supervisee. The model represents a dynamic interchange that demonstrates the concurrent development of both supervisees and the supervision relationship, which in turn leads to the clinical independence of the counselor trainees. Brief descriptions of each phase and two relevant themes that are applicable to counseling supervision and counselor education follow.

Phase 1: Contextual Orientation

Novice counselors are plagued by guilt, anxiety, perfectionism, confusion, and anger (Friedberg & Taylor, 1994), all of which challenge supervisors to work through these thoughts and feelings so that they are able to promote professional development. In this phase, supervisees experience significant levels of emotional and cognitive dissonance as they enter the counseling climate. Areas of supervisory focus may include the following:

1. Confronting the trainee's sense of contextual urgency in orientation to the counseling relationship and over-responsibility for client welfare
2. Addressing the disparity between academic understanding and clinical skill acquisition
3. The ambiguity associated with the application of ethical principles to counseling relationships

Phase 2: Establishing Trust

Perceiving the counseling supervisor as supportive has been shown to be important to both the perceived level of trust (Carey et al., 1988; Frankel, 1990; Kennard et al., 1987; Wark, 1995) and the supervisee's learning and growth (Ladany & Friedlander, 1995; Worthen & McNeill, 1996). Developing and maintaining a positive learning alliance is crucial for enhancing the supervisee's willingness to reflect on the dissonant counseling experiences as well as on the conceptual and clinical demands that are essential for further counselor development.

Phase 3: Conceptual Development

As trust is experienced within the supervisory dyad, the dissonance of supervisees shifts from that associated with contextual orientation to the conceptual uncertainties associated with working in a counseling site. The importance of conceptual complexity to the process of transforming early dissonant training experiences into meaningful schemas representative of advanced counselor trainees is clearly demonstrated in previous counseling supervision research (Borders & Fong, 1989; Borders et al., 1988; Cummings et al., 1990; Lutwak & Hennessy, 1982; Martin et al., 1989; Morran, 1986). Consistent with these research conclusions, this model

indicates that the supervisory relationship must address trainee conceptual dissonance before it can enhance the understanding of client issues and case planning.

Phase 4: Clinical Independence

In this final phase of counseling supervision, supervisees are encouraged, engendered, and supported as they develop their independence in clinical self-assessment and case planning and as they generate professional activities related to counseling. Furthermore, the supervisory relationship provides a context in which supervisees become more confident in professional risk-taking behaviors and strategies related to counseling relationships.

Applicability to Counseling Supervision and Education

The goal of counseling supervision is to maintain a relational context in which supervisees transform dissonant training experiences into a meaningful guide for their professional practice. This is done by supervisors who can establish and maintain a reflective supervisory dialogue with supervisees. By assuming that supervisees need a way to think through the puzzles presented by clients (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993), supervisors can assist counselor-trainees in developing their skills in hypothesis generating and synthetic thinking in relation to themselves and the counseling relationship. Characteristics of a supervisory reflective dialogue are presented as is a practical framework for applying the model to the counseling supervision relationship.

A Reflective Supervisory Dialogue

A primary characteristic of a reflective supervisory dialogue is a focus on thematic rather than content patterns of the supervisees' report of the counseling session. Open-ended thematic observations can prompt a shift from content review to a process-oriented supervisory conversation. Supervisors who expose counseling trainees to simultaneous tentative and opposing explanations of client/family dynamics increase the trainee's tolerance for generating and balancing multiple hypotheses. A supervisory dialogue overly focused on client content can lead to premature problem solving by the supervisor. This dynamic maintains a certain level of supervisee dependence on the supervisor's thinking process that, in turn, hampers the supervisee's confidence in his or her own conceptual abilities.

A secondary characteristic of a reflective dialogue is an emphasis on self-assessment. Central to reflective learning theory, this internal process is characterized by the trainee's ability to reflect objectively on the counseling process in relation to the needs of clients. Supervisors who encourage trainees to address the following questions promote self-assessment.

1. What hypotheses are possible for explaining the client/family needs?
2. Do you have the skills to address these needs effectively and ethically?
3. If not, what do you need to do to address this gap?

Supervisors can also promote self-assessment in supervisees by encouraging (a) an identification of goals regarding client issues and the counseling process, and (b) an increased self-direction in identifying professional gaps and strategies for development of the skills necessary for addressing supervisors' own professional learning needs. Supervisors need to engender supervisees to reflect on their "visions of professional learning" with increased critical assessment, less self-judgment, and increased ownership for taking deliberate and appropriate professional risks.

A Reflective Supervisory Framework

To assist supervisors in applying the precepts of this model to their work with supervisees, a pedagogical framework is presented. This seven-step reflective dialogue has been articulated in conjunction with clarifying supervisor questions and statements.

Conclusion

Although describing reflective qualities such as self-monitoring (Haverkamp, 1994), self-instructional cognitions (Borders et al., 1988; Morran, 1986), and conceptual development (Cummings et al., 1990; Lutwak & Hennessey, 1982; Martin et al., 1989), counseling supervision research has provided little in the way of identifying strategies for enhancing the growth and development of counselors-in-training. This gap was addressed in this article by the presentation of a counselor supervision model that integrated reflective learning theory with the principles of counselor trainee development. It is hoped that future research will investigate facilitative interventions that are used by supervisors to better understand how reflective learning theory can be linked to dynamics of counseling supervision.

- Ward, Colin, & Reese House, *Counseling Supervision: A Reflective Model*, Counselor Education & Supervision, Sep 1998, Vol. 38, Issue 1.