1-1-2012

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the supervision experiences of 11 new professional school counselors. They reported that their supervision experiences were most often administrative in nature; reports of clinical and developmental supervision were limited to participants whose supervisors were licensed as professional counselors. In addition, participants' descriptions of supervision focused primarily on concerns with their own behavior as new professionals, and they frequently confused the process of supervision with activities that were more characteristic of mentoring and evaluation. Recommendations for the practice of school counselor supervision for new professionals are included, along with suggestions for future research.

Traditionally, professionals in the mental health field have been permitted to regulate themselves under the ethical condition that they place the welfare of the general public above their own interests (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). The counseling profession has used the practice of supervision to monitor the welfare of those served by assessing the performance and professional competence of both trainees and new professionals (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

Consideration of the practice of supervision in school settings had been limited until the past two decades, during which a growing body of research informed the applied practice of supervising school counseling trainees who were enrolled in master's degree programs (Baker, Exum, & Tyler, 2002; Cigrand & Wood, 2011; Getz, 1999; Henderson, 1994; Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Peterson & Deuschle, 2006; Roberts & Morotti, 2001; Stickel, 1995; Studer, 2005, 2006; Wood & Rayle, 2006). Studer (2006) noted that attention to the practice of supervision for school counselor trainees has ensured that individuals with whom

the trainee works are not negatively affected. However, Studer also commented that discussion of using supervision to support new school counseling professionals continues to receive little attention. This concern was also identified by Moyer (2011), who noted that the limited material about school counselor supervision is rapidly becoming outdated. This study addresses this inadequacy by documenting the supervision experiences of 11 new professional school counselors.

Background

Henderson (1994) and Studer (2005, 2006) have documented the shortage of competent professional school counselors who are trained and/or certified to provide supervision in schools. Studer (2006) noted that formal training in the practice of supervision is generally limited to specialist and doctoral programs rather than master's degree programs. As a result, the supervision of new school counselors is most often provided by professional school counselors and/or principals who have had no formal training in supervision.

An additional concern is that professional school counselors who have been trained in supervision received training in supervision theories, models, and modalities that were designed and implemented for use in clinical settings, such as mental health agencies and private practices. Until recently, these supervision training experiences failed to address the unique application of supervision in school settings (Getz, 1999; Henderson, 1994; Studer, 2006). Studies focusing on post-degree supervision of professional school counselors have documented the underutilized practice of school counselor supervision in schools and included recommendations for the practice and delivery of supervision for school counseling professionals who have completed their formal educational training. Samples of these recommendations include peer supervision (Agnew, Vaught, Getz, & Fortune, 2000; Borders, 1991; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997), peer consultation (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996), group supervision (Crutchfield et al., 1997; Gainor & Constantine, 2002), and clinical supervision (Henderson & Lampe, 1992; Sutton & Page, 1994). Several authors have focused their work specifically on theories, models, and modalities of supervision that attempt to address the practice of supervision for professional school counselors (Borders, 1989; Getz 1999; Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Peace, 1995; Protivnak, 2003).

While it is critical that school counselors develop counseling skills as part of the delivery of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2010), the responsibilities of school counselors also include the development of skills in individual student planning, guidance curricula, and system support. As Devlin, Smith, and Ward (2009) concluded, few supervision models meet the complex needs presented by school counselors. On its own, clinically focused supervision does little to inform these additional areas of responsibility. Without supervision that addresses the development of all the skills they need, new school counselors might unwittingly overlook areas of their work that are not addressed by supervisors who provide clinical supervision (Borders, 1994; Roberts & Morotti, 2001).

This lost opportunity for adequate professional development has poten-

tially negative outcomes for new professional school counselors because they depend on support from other professionals to meet the complex needs of their students (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). These complex needs can quickly overwhelm new school counseling professionals, leading to anxiety, fear of appearing incompetent, feelings of inadequacy in meeting students' needs, and burnout (Moyer, 2011; Portman, 2002). For new school counselors who function in isolation, the process of induction into the profession has been described as "sink or swim" (Matthes, 1992, p. 248).

Supervision is intended to help new professional school counselors maintain ethical standards of practice by facilitating their socialization into the profession following the completion of their formal training (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). However, as demonstrated by the "sink or swim" analogy reported by Matthes (1992), new professional school counselors who do not receive any supervision — or only supervision of their counseling skills — are often isolated. Yet they are expected to assume the same responsibilities as their more experienced peers, with little to no support or supervision (Wilkerson, 2009). They are often left on their own to socialize themselves into the profession without appropriate guidance or supervision to help ensure ethical standards of practice.

Using supervision to protect the welfare of those served and to assure appropriate delivery of services and interventions has become the standard in counselor preparation programs that are accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009). However, no similar guidelines exist in the ethical standards adopted by ASCA (2010) to inform the supervision of professional school counselors who have completed their formal education and are beginning their work as professionals. Students served by new professional school counselors could face negative outcomes if these counselors are not adequately supervised as they provide services and interventions to effectively respond to and meet students' counseling needs (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). If students' needs go unmet, the profession of school counseling risks failure to fulfill its charge of self-regulation that protects the welfare of students.

As this review of the literature indicates, the practice of school counselor supervision has been informed by numerous factors: (a) the limited formal training of school counselor supervisors, (b) the use of supervision models that limit school counselor supervision to a focus on clinical skills, (c) the failure of supervision models to address the full scope of school counselor practice, (d) reports of isolated school counselors who receive minimal supervision, (e) documentation of increasingly complex student needs that pose challenges for school counselors, and (f) a lack of professional guidelines in the ASCA ethical standards to inform the supervision of new school counselors. This study was conducted to examine the ways in which these findings affect the supervision experiences of new school counselors, if at all.

Method

Since the objective of this study was to gather data about the supervision experiences of new school counselors, phenomenological inquiry was utilized to examine the essence of these experiences. The semi-structured inter-

view was selected as the means to collect data. Rubin and Rubin (2005) have noted that semi-structured interviews offer some structure and focus needed to address the participants' experiences, while allowing them to become conversational partners during the interview. Participants have the opportunity to influence the direction of the interview by changing the subject, guiding the pace, or indicating that the interviewer is asking the wrong questions. Questions planned for the qualitative interviews used in this study were open-ended in design, as recommended by Hatch (2002).

When all of the interviews were completed, inductive analysis was used to search for patterns of meaning in the data by moving from a focus on specific content to the formation of broader statements about the phenomena under investigation (Hatch, 2002). Accordingly, inductive analysis was used to identify common themes or threads among participants' descriptions of their supervision experiences. As recommended by Hatch (2002), the data were reviewed to identify frames of analysis. Domains were created based on semantic relationships discovered within and across the frames of analysis, and salient domains were assigned codes. The interviews were reread, a master outline was created that demonstrated the relationships within and among domains, and data excerpts were identified that supported the domains identified in the outline.

Relevant to this study, the investigator has been a professional school counselor, with 10 years of experience in the field. These experiences may have affected the study design and interpretations of the data. However, since researcher bias was anticipated as a limitation of this study, the investigator sought to maintain the trustworthiness of the data through continuous and systematic bracketing of his biases, values, and interests, as recommended by Creswell (2003).

Participants

Since phenomenological inquiry requires participants to describe their everyday lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied, it was crucial that participants in this study were carefully selected to ensure that they had experienced the phenomenon being investigated. In an attempt to understand the supervision experiences of professional school counselors at all three school levels (i.e., elementary, middle/junior high, and high/senior high), a minimum of three new school counselors from each of the three levels within public schools in Michigan were sought. Participants were solicited using a criterion sample method of potential participants who were known to the investigator through professional contacts, and 14 were selected for an initial interview. Those who had a master's degree in some other aspect of counseling (e.g., community counseling) and had returned for further education to become professional school counselors did not qualify as participants.

During the interview process, three of the participants indicated that their supervision experiences were deficient because they were not formally assigned a supervisor as new professionals. These three participants were removed from the study.

Participant Demographic Information

Pseu-donym	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in pro-fession	Grade level	Employ-ment status as school counselor	Case-load	Li-cense/ Certifi-cation	Follow compre-hensive guid-ance
Jillian	Female	44	Cauca-sian	2	9	Full time	325	SCL, LLPC	No
Lena	Female	39	Cauca-sian	2.5	6-8	Full time	340	ESC, LLPC	Yes
Dan-ielle	Female	26	Cauca-sian	2	9-12	Full time	280	SCL, LLPC	No
Olivia	Female	32	Hispanic	1.5	9-12	Full time	280	SCL, LLPC	No
Margie	Female	35	Cauca-sian/ Hispanic	.5	9-12	Full time	251	ESC	No
Ben	Male	31	Cauca-sian	1	K-5	Part time	180	ESC	No
Jackie	Female	27	Cauca-sian	1	9-12	Full time	400	ESC	No
Pamela	Female	31	Cauca-sian	1.5	K-8	Part time	350	SCL, LLPC	Yes
Grace	Female	31	Cauca-sian	3	6-8	Full time	300	ESC	Yes
Elaine	Female	49	Cauca-sian	1	6-8	Full time	490	ESC	Yes
Carol	Female	26	Cauca-sian	1	K-5	Full time	1100	SCL, LLPC	No

Procedures

All interviews were face-to-face and took place in the school offices of each participant. Interviews ranged in length from 27 minutes to 53 minutes, with an average of 42 minutes. After each semi-structured interview was completed, the investigator listened to each audio recording. These recordings were then transcribed by a professional transcriber. All identifying information was omitted from the transcripts and replaced by pseudonyms. The investigator listened to the recordings again as all transcripts were checked for accuracy. Following the transcription of each interview, participants were asked to review the transcripts of their interview to make any revisions or clarify any responses. A second reading followed this participant review, during which time the investiga-

tor bracketed initial reactions to the data in the margins of the transcripts. These bracketed notes included assumptions, preconceptions, and preliminary interpretations of the interview transcript.

Analysis

Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) have noted that researchers who use phenomenological inquiry assume that there is a commonality to how individuals understand and describe similar experiences. In their text on research in education, these authors indicated that this commonality is referred to as the "essence of the experience" (p. 429). Analysis of the data in this study included searching each participant's statements for those that appeared to be particularly meaningful in describing his or her supervision experiences. As explained by Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), this method is marked by a constant interplay between the researcher and data as the researcher clusters these data into themes or common aspects of the participants' experiences.

To facilitate the analysis process, the investigator uploaded each of the 11 transcripts and 11 audio files into Transana, a software package designed to assist with the qualitative data analysis process. The investigator then used inductive analysis to identify frames of analysis or units of meaning. As each transcript was read, individual clips were identified that contained a unit of meaning or piece of information that described supervision experiences reported by the participants. In keeping with the process described by Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), these units of meaning formed the essential structure of participants' supervision experiences as they were clustered into themes, ultimately leading to the narrative description of the phenomena reported in the following section.

Results

When the 11 participants of this study described their live supervision experiences, it emerged that supervision was provided by LPCs, building principals, licensed or endorsed professional school counselors, social workers, or teachers (in the form of administrative supervision). Although some of the participants described their supervision experiences positively, the combined descriptions demonstrated that these experiences were deficient in quality and/or missing critical elements. Five themes ultimately emerged from the supervision experiences reported by the participants: (a) quality of supervision experiences, (b) supervision types, (c) role confusion, (d) structure of supervision, and (e) focus of supervision.

Quality of Supervision Experiences

Only one participant described the quality of her supervision experiences as good. This comment was made by Grace, who stated: "I had a really good supervisor. I felt that she gave really valuable feedback." No other participants described their supervision experiences as good or even satisfactory.

This deficiency in quality was reflected in the following comment by Jillian, in which she indicated that the supervision she received was lacking because she was not sure what to ask for from her supervisor: "…it is sort of as-

sumed that I already know how to do this or something…. and sometimes, I don't even know what to ask for because I'm not aware it's going to come up." Jackie expressed a similar concern, but focused more on assumptions and oversights made by the person who was supervising her when she stated: "A lot of supervision is just…a lot of it's surface…sometimes they don't even think to fill me in on something because they all know what it is."

Ben indicated that the quality of his supervision experiences was related more to the limited amount of time during which he could meet with his supervisor. He commented: "The way my position was set up was not conducive to getting supervision I would like to have gotten."

Pamela was assigned a mentor whom she considered to be the individual available to provide her with supervision. She described a deficiency in the character of her supervisor that created less than satisfactory supervision experiences: "One thing is I guess I would have liked my supervisor/mentor this past year to be a little bit better of a listener."

Supervision Types

As they discussed their supervision experiences, all of the participants in this study described one or more of the three supervision types that were first reported in the literature by Barret and Schmidt (1986): (a) administrative, (b) clinical, and (c) developmental.

Administrative supervision. Administrative supervision includes a focus on the tasks of the job that are not specific to the role of counseling. This type of supervision provides support with the daily administrative activities professional school counselors need to perform. When supervision experiences were described by the participants, they were most often described as administrative in nature rather than clinical or developmental.

Margie commented that she found it very helpful when her supervisors were ". . . very clear and concise about what things you have to do versus things that can be put off on the back burner, you know, organization, time." Related to these specific directions, Jackie reported: "I go to my colleagues, my experienced colleagues, which in essence I guess are my supervisors, more for advice." This description of supervision was similar to Pamela's need for information to help with planning. She described the following regret: "A couple of things that I had wished that my mentor had gone over a little bit more were some of the school traditions."

As new school counselors needed to know specific details about their new positions, supervisors used administrative supervision to provide this information. Ben indicated: "You know, just being new, I don't know everything, and I need to know procedures for the building." Grace indicated what her supervisors were really intentional about: "'Okay, this is what we do here. . . . this is what happens in December.'"

As Anne observed, administrative supervision also helps new professional school counselors socialize themselves into the culture of the school:

> I had no idea of the workings of the school. I'm not a teacher, and so I
> didn't have any grasp of how the school operates and . . . what a
> school counselor actually does in reality. My first supervisor was really

helpful in saying, 'You know what? You're gonna spend a lot of time on registration and class enrollment and dual enrollment; and these are the types of things you'd better learn, like right now.' So she was helpful . . . just teaching logistics of the job.

Clinical supervision. Clinical supervision involves the supervision of supervisees' clinical counseling skills. In this study, the only comments discussing clinical supervision experiences came from the four participants who were currently engaged in supervision to meet the requirements of their LLPC credential (i.e., Jillian, Lena, Pamela, and Carol). Jillian described clinical supervision experiences when she shared: "But anything that's related more clinically, you know, to things that come up with kids, probably more personal/social kinds of things, I think we take more time to sit down during that hour and kind of go over." Pamela commented: "I guess my weakness would be one-on-one counseling. I think that's something that can only come with experience. And so I would ask for advice."

Lena sought supervision to inform her of effective resources to assist in her work with students: ". . . here's a good resource for ADHD, and here's a good resource for autism." In describing her confidence in her counseling skills, Carol indicated that she used clinical supervision "if a situation that I haven't encountered comes up. This year, I had kids removed from Protective Services. . . . 'What do I do in this situation?'"

Developmental supervision. Developmental supervision includes supervision activities that focus on the professional growth and development of the supervisee. This supervision type was described the least by the participants. Only two of the participants (Jillian and Lena) described supervision experiences that included a developmental focus. Jillian stated: "I'm still learning, and it's nice to be able to go to somebody else." Lena said that she used supervision to increase her knowledge as part of her commitment to development. She commented: "One of my goals . . . is to become more knowledgeable about professional needs or kids that need special things in the way of accommodations or whatever, because I feel that's the part that's lacking in our training."

Role Confusion

When analyzing the data, the investigator identified two roles that were often confused with supervision: mentoring and evaluation. When asked to describe what their supervision experiences looked like, several of the participants' comments highlighted this confusion. Jillian described the complexity of this confusion:

You got a supervisor who is also your co-worker. They're kind of your mentor and kind of above you in that way, but yet you're trying to have this equal relationship working together. . . . just trying to figure it all out is sometimes hard.

Role confusion was inferred from Anne's report because the role of mentor and supervisor were categorized together. Anne was assigned an individual who was not trained as a professional school counselor to mentor and supervise her, and those establishing the assignment did not appear to under-

stand the role of either activity.

Pamela described a similar confusion about understanding the differ-ence between a supervisor and mentor:

> Even teachers can be considered supervisors or mentors. . . . And the only problem with that is you have 60 different people trying to guide you in what you should be doing. . . . it's better to have a supervisor, a mentor, that can understand a little bit about what you're going through.

The confusion expressed by Jackie was not around the specific roles of supervisor and mentor as expressed by others; her confusion stemmed from her difficulty understanding the differences between the purpose of supervision and evaluation:

> I'm not sure there is a difference between supervision and evaluation. I think maybe supervisors are more directive. If somebody's supervising, they're either giving me instructions, guiding me in what I need to be doing . . . where an evaluator is more looking at what I'm doing and then offering feedback. It's confusing.

Structure of Supervision

Five participants described how their supervision was structured — the frequency of supervision sessions and the degree of formality of the supervi-sion. These descriptions varied between two formats: (a) weekly supervision that was more formal and structured, and (b) supervision provided as needed that was less formal and structured. None of the participants mentioned a for-mal agreement or contract that included a description of what the supervision would look like. The degree of structure appeared to be subject to the need for supervision expressed by the individual participants. Time for supervision also appeared to influence whether or not supervision was provided. One participant, Ben, described that he met with his supervisor two or three times, but then it got busy and they stopped meeting.

Regular, formal supervision was described by Jillian and Grace. Jillian reported: "We kind of set aside like an hour a week." Grace stated: "We do meet regularly. My partner and myself [sic] meet with administration and talk about issues on a regular basis; so we are proactive in that sense."

Descriptions of less-structured supervision came from Pamela and Car-ol. Pamela said, "We had to meet at least two hours every month for the whole year. . . . they weren't all just like one-hour meetings. . . . It was more as I need-ed it." This was also expressed by Carol:

> It's basically on an as-needed basis. We don't have a set weekly meet-ing just because of my schedule and her schedule . . . that would never be possible. We do try to do, you know, working lunches once a month or so, and talk about things; and we keep each other updated on e-mails, phone calls, that sort of thing.

Focus of Supervision

Supervision literature has identified the area of self/other awareness as an indicator of a counselor's level of development (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). As participants of this study described their experiences with supervision or their perceived supervision needs, their focus fell into one of the following three sali-

ent domains described in the literature: (a) focus on self, (b) focus on both self and others, and (c) focus on others.

Focus on self. Beginning counselors often focus on their own needs rather than on the needs of their clients (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Consistent with this notion, 9 of the 11 participants in this study described the impact their supervision experiences had on the needs for their development as it related to "self," rather than on how these experiences and needs affected "others" (e.g., students, parents, or colleagues). Margie reflected: "A supervisor should provide a good leadership role, just a professional, mentor kind of role. You know, someone who can also critique you but not put you down."

Focus on both self and others. Four of the participants described a focus on both self and others when describing supervision experiences. Focusing on self and others is an indicator of a counselor who is advancing in their development as they use a focus on self to inform their work with others. Elaine identified a focus on her own needs to inform her work with students: "If you are doing something that might not necessarily be to the benefit of students, it would be good to know before it becomes an ingrained practice, you know, or a habit."

Focus on others. A focus on others is described as an indicator of counselor development in which the counselor moves beyond a focus on his or her own needs, demonstrating a greater concern for the needs of others. However, a focus that is limited to consideration of others indicates room for development since a focus on self is as important in the work of counselors. This focus was least reported among the participants in this study. Grace reflected this focus as she described her supervision: "Sometimes we'd focus on student concerns; and there might be a student that there's an ongoing concern . . . and I want to keep them up to date."

Discussion

The new professional school counselors participating in this study clearly described supervision experiences of poor quality. These descriptions of supervisory experiences are consistent with reports of several researchers who have concluded that the practice of school counseling supervision is lacking in the field (Borders & Usher, 1992; Portman, 2002; Roberts & Borders, 1994; Usher & Borders, 1993).

The results of this study also point to a discrepancy in the field of counseling that has not been discussed in supervision literature. Those who practice counseling in private practice and agency settings are required in most states to pursue post-graduate supervision for a prescribed number of hours on the job (e.g., Michigan Department of Community Health [MDCH], 2003). No such requirements are expected of new professional school counselors. In fact, to date there have been no studies that have advocated for similar requirements for school counselors or called on the profession of school counseling to recommend mandating supervision experiences for new professional school counse-

lors. Consequently, the profession of school counseling may be failing in its duty to protect the welfare of those served by these new professionals. Although such requirements cannot ensure that every new school counselor receives adequate supervision, they could emphasize the importance of this activity to the work of these new professionals.

Recommendations for Practice

Three recommendations from this study are intended to inform the practice of new school counselor supervision: (a) provide new school counselors with administrative, developmental, and clinical supervision; (b) encourage new school counselors to participate in professional development activities; and (c) advocate for professional school counselor associations to develop supervision guidelines or standards for the practice of supervision.

Provide three types of supervision. Participants in this study indicated that their supervision experiences were primarily administrative in nature; they also needed clinical and developmental supervision. Unless those who provide professional school counselors with supervision understand this, it is anticipated that supervision will continue to be primarily administrative in nature and confused with the process of evaluation. This may be particularly problematic for new school counselors who are provided administrative supervision by building principals who have limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of professional school counselors.

Encourage professional development activities. In an effort to meet the developmental needs of new school counselors, administrators should support their participation in professional development activities, such as joining professional associations, attending conferences, and fostering opportunities for networking. Professional school counselor associations could serve as an important training resource. They could provide all school counselors with supervision resources as they communicate appropriate school counseling roles and advocate for supervision that meets the needs of any professional school counselors who receive supervision. In addition, professional organizations could help those providing professional school counselors with supervision to understand the differences among types of supervision and learn supervision activities that facilitate effective administrative, clinical, and developmental supervision. As leaders and members of these organizations continue to advocate and educate others about the roles of the professional school counselor, it is anticipated that the supervision experiences of these professionals will reflect supervision that supports professional school counselors in their work while protecting the welfare of those served.

Advocate for supervision guidelines and standards. Since many counselor educators are involved in professional school counselor organizations, they could urge school counseling associations to develop supervision guidelines or standards of practice that encourage new professionals to pursue supervision. Such a position could reduce the number of new counselors who are left to sink or swim. Counselor educators might also advocate for profes-

sional school counselor organizations to develop guidelines and standards of practice directed toward those who provide supervision.

Conclusions

The descriptions of supervision experiences supplied by the 11 new professional school counselors in this study add to the existing literature by indicating how supervision for new school counselors is lacking. In addition to protecting the welfare of those served by professional school counselors, greater attention to the practice of supervision for new professional school counselors could provide support for their socialization into the school counseling setting once their training is complete. Finally, effective supervision practices are needed to ensure that the welfare of students with increasingly complex needs is protected as the continued growth of new professional school counselors is encouraged and supported. In light of these conclusions, suggestions for future study include examining differences in supervision experiences according to supervisors' credentials and type of supervision training, and exploring and developing best practices for new professional school counselor supervision.

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