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# Master's Level Supervision Training: Perspectives of Supervisors-in-Training

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## Master's Level Supervision Training: Perspectives of Supervisors-in-Training

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### Abstract

*Counselor preparation is lacking appropriate supervision training for master's level counselors. Post-graduation, many master's level counselors assume supervisory positions. Authors propose master's level supervision training. Five supervisors-in-training participated in this study. Results indicate significant increases in supervision self-efficacy for supervisors-in-training. Benefits of supervision training in master's level counselor education training programs is illustrated.*

**Keywords:** counselor education, supervision training, counseling, supervision of supervision

### Author Note

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### **Master's Level Supervision Training: Perspectives of Supervisors-in-Training**

Clinical supervision is a vital component of providing ethical (ACA, 2005), appropriate, and sufficient clinical counseling for clients (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Experiential learning opportunities for counselors in training, primarily practicum and internship experiences, are noted as critical incidents in the development of beginning counselors (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Supervision received during clinical skills courses has a considerable impact on the training experience of beginning counselors. The majority of literature regarding supervision training in counselor education is conducted using a sample of doctoral students or faculty members providing supervision (Ellis, 2006; Fernando & Hulse-Killacky, 2005; Gazzola, de Stefano, Theriault & Audet, 2013; Hein & Lawson, 2008; Nelson, Oliver & Capps, 2006). There is a dearth of literature pertaining to master's level supervision training. The current researchers propose that master's level counselors can benefit from supervision training as well. Notably, master's level supervision training is vital to future success in the field of counseling (Cardaciotto & Tonrey, 2012).

The current study serves several purposes that make it a valuable contribution to the literature on counselor education and supervision training. Given the novelty of master's level supervision training, research providing insight into the benefits of this approach will presumably enhance and inform counselor education training programs. Heppner and Roehlke (1984) noted that supervisees reported increased satisfaction with supervision when supervisors provided support as well as skills training. These findings promote the use of a supervision style that incorporates opportunities for supervisee personal and professional development. Additionally, Heppner and Roehlke (1984) initiated a discussion in supervision literature about the impact of developmental level of counselors-in-training on supervision experience and

supervision outcomes. In such, the population and settings of supervisee clinical practices can impact the supervision experience and individual supervisee needs. The primary objective of supervision, as outlined by Kaufman and Schwartz (2003), is skill sharing and facilitation of growth in competency leading to application and integration of clinical principles. Moreover, supervisors-in-training at all levels of development have clinical skills and experiences to enrich the professional growth of their supervisees.

Trepal, Bailie and Leeth (2010) remarked that obtaining feedback, direct observations, and normalization of counselor development from their respective supervisors were all positive outcomes of supervision for master-level counseling students. During supervision training, supervisors-in-training have the unique experience of viewing the effects of supervision from both receiving and providing supervision at the same time during the experience. An important component of providing supervision and building a relationship with supervisees is the idea that supervisors, themselves, are also experiencing ongoing counselor development. There are potential implications to the supervisory relationship depending on how both the supervisee and supervisor are developing in their respective roles (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009).

Efstation, Patton and Kardah (1990) deducted that a working alliance in a supervisory relationship is a “set of actions interactively used by supervisors and trainees to facilitate the learning of the trainee.” Supervisory alliance functions similarly to the therapeutic relationship strived for in counseling (Reese et al., 2009). Gazzola et al. (2013) noted the complexity of supervision training outcomes for doctoral level supervisors-in-training, specifically in regards to simultaneously managing multiple demands of a supervisor. Maintaining supervision boundaries, considering expectations of supervisees, balancing the needs of supervisees and clients, and negotiating how to provide feedback for supervisees were frequently noted as

difficulties present for beginning supervisors (Gazzola et al., 2013). Furthermore, Abernethy and Cook (2011) asserted that supervisee anxiety and resistance present clinical supervisors with a challenge to attend to the professional development of the supervisee as well as ensure the welfare of clients.

This study demonstrates the benefits of creating opportunities for second year master's level students to gain experience providing supervision. The incorporation of group supervision of supervision in this supervision training approach is explored as a necessary component for supervision training. Furthermore, this study explores the impact of providing supervision on the counseling self-efficacy of counselors-in-training. While there is existing and relevant literature on how supervision impacts counselors-in-training, research that explores master's level supervision training in counselor education programs remains unexplored.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the benefits of master level student supervisors in a counselor education training program. This study explored the following qualitative research questions:

*Research Question 1:* What is the benefit/value of supervision training experience for second year counselors-in-training?

*Research Question 2:* What is the impact of group supervision of supervision on second year supervisor development?

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Five advanced master's level graduate counselors enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program participated in this study. Of the five participants, there were 3 (60%)

females and 2 (40%) males. Three participants (60%) were pursuing degrees in school counseling and 2 (40%) participants were pursuing degrees in clinical counseling. Four of the five participants (80%) were Caucasian; one participant (20%) identified as Asian. None of the participants had received prior supervision training; however, all of the participants (100%) had completed 3 semesters of counseling coursework, practicum, and internships in alignment with a two-year 60 hour CACREP counselor training program model. All participants were recruited on a volunteer basis by the primary researcher and were identified as having potential to provide adequate supervision and possessing an interest in and capacity for supervision training.

### **Research Design**

Each participant was matched with a group of three first-semester students who were enrolled in one section of a basic counseling skills training course. The supervision group assignments were made primarily based on schedule availability for participants and counselors-in-training. The supervisors-in-training provided direct observation and supervision to their designated first-semester supervision groups during a total of 21 Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) sessions throughout the semester, including 7 IPR sessions for each of the 3 first-semester students per supervision group.

Supervisors-in-training participated in group supervision of supervision every other week throughout the semester, a total of six sessions. Group supervision of supervision was facilitated by the primary researcher in this study and served as a collaborative measure to ensure second-year clinical development and quality supervision of first-semester students. During group supervision of supervision, the supervisors-in-training were encouraged to discuss and process their experiences providing supervision, ask questions regarding supervision models, and receive feedback and resources to enhance their supervision training experience.

## Measures

**Supervisor Efficacy Scale.** The Supervisor Efficacy Scale (SES; Lent, Hill & Hoffman, 2003) is a two part measure. The first part of the SES contains 13 items; the second part of the SES contains 9 items. The 9-point Likert scale formatted items on the SES are designed to gauge supervisor's self-perceived ability to perform supervisory behaviors and attend to particular issues that present during supervision. In the current study, the SES was utilized to obtain pre and post measures of supervisors-in-training, completed during the first and last group supervision of supervision sessions. One supervisor did not complete the second part of the SES on the post-test measure; therefore, the results of this measure are limited to part one of the SES measure for both pre- and post-test measures in order to ensure consistency in results.

**Supervision Outcomes Survey.** The Supervision Outcomes Survey (SOS; Worthen & Isakson, 2003) is a 20-item measure using a 7-point Likert scale originally designed to assess a supervisee's satisfaction with the supervision process. Reese et al. (2009) evaluated the internal consistency of the SOS with coefficient alphas at .92 and .98. Items on the SOS include items such as, "The relationship I have with my supervisor is characterized by acceptance, trust, and respect; I feel comfortable sharing my perceived weaknesses and failures with my supervisor" (Worthen & Isakson, 2003). During the current study, second year supervisors were asked to complete the SOS following each of the six biweekly group supervision of supervision sessions.

**Follow-Up Interviews.** Individual follow-up interviews of each supervisor-in-training were conducted at the completion of supervision training. A research assistant, who had not been involved in the study as a supervisee nor supervisor, facilitated the interviews to help minimize bias. Additionally, semi-structured interview protocol was developed in order to guide the structure of the interviews while allowing for elaboration and flexibility. Interviews were

aimed to gain a candid, holistic view of the supervision experience. Transcripts of the follow-up interviews were transcribed; several key themes emerged.

## **Findings**

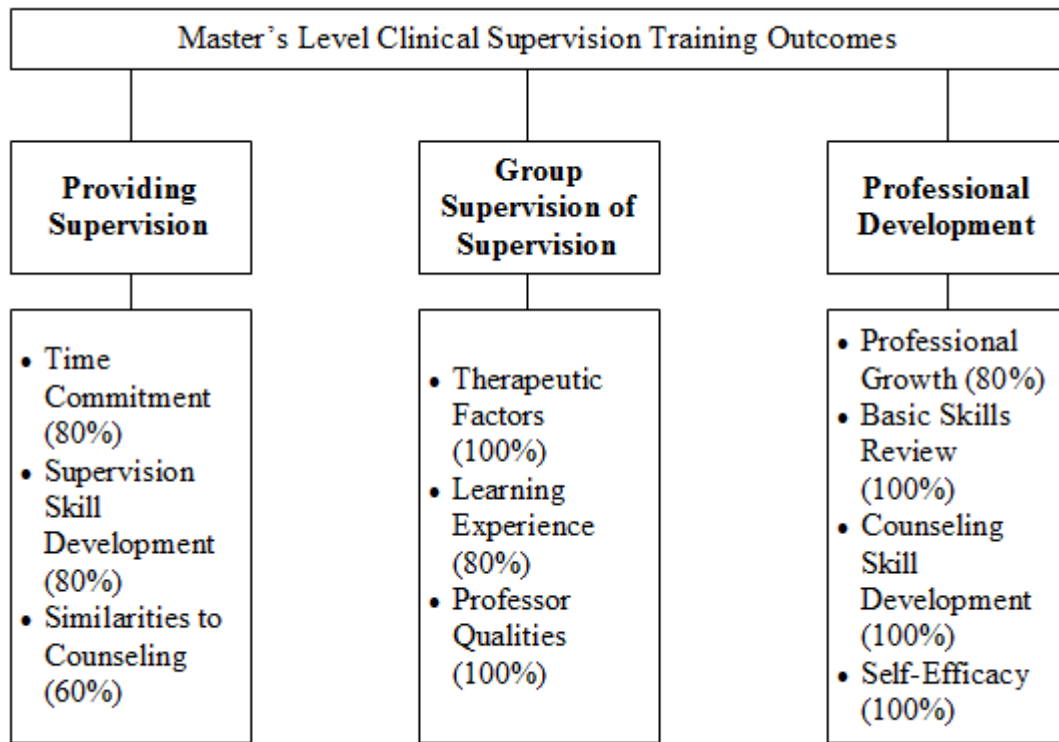
### **SES**

The results of the pre-test SES measure indicated that second year participants reported a mean total supervision self-efficacy score of 6.46 ( $SD = .830$ ). By the end of the supervision training experience, the second year supervisors-in-training self-reported a mean total supervision self efficacy score of 8.51 ( $SD = .858$ ). According to the results of a paired sample  $t$ -test, the second year supervisors-in-training ( $N = 5$ ) reported a significant increase in self-reported supervision self-efficacy levels,  $t(4) = -3.659$ ,  $p = .022$  (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ).

### **SOS**

The supervisors-in-training ( $N = 5$ ) reported a mean supervision outcomes score of 6.57 ( $SD = .370$ ) after the first group supervision of supervision session. After the last group supervision of supervision session, the supervisors-in-training all reported a supervision outcomes score of 7. According to a paired samples  $t$ -test, there was no significant difference between the mean supervision outcomes scores after the first and last group supervision of supervision sessions,  $t(4) = -2.598$ ,  $p = .06$  (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ).





**Figure 1.** Second year supervisor reflections about supervision training. Concepts were derived from semi-structured interviews with second-year supervisors (Total  $N = 5$ ). Percentages represent number of second-year supervisors who endorsed corresponding theme during individual interviews.

### Follow-Up Interviews

Researchers explored the perceptions of supervision training for a group of five master's level supervisors-in-training. Follow-up interviews revealed ten recurrent themes consistent with the conceptualization of the experience by the supervisors: *time commitment, supervision skill development, similarities to counseling, therapeutic factors, learning experience, professor qualities, basic skills review, counseling skill development, and self-efficacy*. Figure 1 illustrates the emergent themes organized within corresponding supervision training experiences. Key themes will be explored in the discussion section to correspond with the initial research questions.

## Discussion

An assumption of supervision is that being a successful counselor means that the same individual will also be an effective supervisor (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009); however, competency providing supervision is not always reciprocal with clinical competency. Providing supervision is a distinct intervention (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009) that requires an additional set of skills that are not always interchangeable with clinical skills. During the follow up interviews, four of the five supervisors-in-training highlighted the acquisition and utilization of developing supervision skills as noteworthy during their supervision sessions with first-semester students. Responses of this thematic categorization focused on expanding knowledge of supervision skills from previous preparation for supervisory experience, including information gathered from observing previous supervisors and professors:

*“It was a pretty fantastic experience being able to...take what we had learned from our professors and then apply that to help the new students coming in...We played the role of more of a supervisor getting supervision, so it was interesting because we could use our skills...and it wasn’t for a grade.”*

Effective supervisors are able to recognize unique counseling styles of their supervisees and facilitate supervisee development despite differences between supervisor and supervisee counseling styles (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Fernando and Hulse-Killacky (2005) asserted that a supervisor’s awareness of their own supervisory style can influence both supervisee satisfaction and self-efficacy. Navigating how to supervise a variety of counselors-in-training presented as a challenge for the second year supervisors in the beginning stages of supervision:

*“I think supervising, watching the different styles and critiquing how they performed and how they did different techniques was challenging because some*

*people would have different styles than I do and figuring out where they do need to improve and what they're doing really well was just a really neat thing."*

Of particular note, and illustrating the value in providing master-level students with the opportunity to supervise first-semester counselors-in-training prior to graduation from a counselor training program, all of the supervisors ( $N = 5$ ) in this study independently explained how providing supervision to first-semester students enhanced their own clinical skill development. Particularly, supervision training acted as a basic skills review for the supervisors, as an opportunity to revisit and reflect on the theoretical interventions they had learned during their own pre-practicum experience the previous year and since had put into practice during internship. One supervisor explained this review of skills:

*"As I went through it and as I learned more about the techniques and refreshed my memory, I was able to apply that to my students at my internship."*

Similarly, another second-year supervisor noted the basic skills review component of the supervision experience as a surprise to him:

*"The most surprising was probably how much I relearned the things...Coming back and going over, kind of nitpicking, each little detail of a theory- it helped them [supervisees] because that is what they were learning at the time- but, then it helped me because I could relearn from a year ago and kind of retune my skills."*

Supervision training for counselors-in-training enhances the conceptualization of supervision and improves supervision skills of trainees (McMahon & Simons, 2004).

Supervision training can significantly increase the confidence, skills, and theoretical knowledge of professional counselors (McMahon & Simons, 2004). Due to the critical importance of

supervision on counselor development, supervisors need to continually attend to their supervision development in similar accord as their counselor development to ensure they are providing adequate and appropriate supervision (Granello et al., 2008). The following supervisor-in-training illustrated their initial conceptualization of counseling skills and how their counseling skills were impacted through providing supervision:

*"I really enjoy how much I learned from the first year students and how much my skills increased because of doing the supervision...Going in, I had my skills and I thought 'oh I'll just pass those on,' but they tested me and they taught me a lot and it was really cool to learn alongside them."*

All of the supervisors ( $N = 5$ ) described that providing supervision to first-semester counselors-in-training significantly increased their own self-efficacy in counseling and supervising abilities. This supervisor-in-training emphasized self-efficacy as a direct result of the supervision experience:

*"It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed how much I learned from them and I learned what I can do and...it was interesting to take what I had learned and then apply that into the second year...It built my confidence as a counselor myself because I was like 'oh I do know that and I do know how to do this.' So, it was a huge, huge confidence boost for me."*

Without proper supervision, counselors may not continue to apply clinical skills and interventions learned in their counselor training programs to supervision (Studer, 2005); this phenomenon would theoretically decrease if counselors were provided with opportunities for supervision training prior to assuming supervisory roles in professional practice proceeding graduation from counselor training programs. Professional counselors hired into positions in

academia and community practice will likely assume a supervisory role during their career; therefore, counselors who receive supervision training during graduate studies are, presumably, more adequately prepared for professional counseling positions. Unfortunately, however, many professional counselors have never received supervision training (McMahon & Simons, 2004). Four of the five advanced master's level supervisors in this study specifically highlighted that receiving supervision training resulted in distinct professional growth. One second year supervisor provided a description of her own professional growth resulting from participation in supervision training as follows:

*I felt that this experience really helped me and I hope that they continue to do this for other students because it was phenomenal. It was a lot of fun. I got to see that I enjoy being a supervisor and in the future that is a role that I would like and that's a role that I want to continue out in the world."*

By receiving adequate supervision in graduate training programs, counselors-in-training will be better equipped to serve a variety of clients in an ethical and professional manner. Likewise, the supervisors-in-training in this study highlighted that supervision training impacted their future work as counseling professionals, but also facilitated a new awareness of passion and regard for the field of counseling. This aspect of the master's level supervision training may be best summarized by the following illustration:

*"I feel like I gained a big heart for the field once again, just seeing other students who really want to make a difference in others' lives and learn these techniques so that they can be effective counselors and reach out to people who need help. And so, I think it just reaffirmed that this is what I want to do and it was really encouraging to see others go through that"*

The aim of supervision training in counselor education is to increase competency and self-efficacy related to supervisor development and proficiency (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Therefore, it stands to reason that supervision training would assume similar goals for supervision of supervision, to increase the proficiency of counselors by increasing levels of competency and self-efficacy related to providing supervision. Bandura (1997) maintained that self-efficacy beliefs are significant predictors of subsequent behavior and intention.

*“We were all able to get together and talk about our obstacles and the things that we did well and the things that we want to improve on and we all got to bounce ideas off each other and we all got to feel like you know it’s kind of like group therapy. Whenever you come in we would feel awkward about this and then somebody else would have that question and you would feel better about yourself because it wasn’t just you and I just felt like it helped being able to have everybody together at once.”*

The process of becoming a supervisor is characteristically identified as a learning experience (Nelson et al., 2006). Similarly, second year supervisors in this study depicted the supervision experience as one of learning. Four of the five second year supervisors specifically addressed the learning experience component of supervision training. Group supervision of supervision contributed to the learning experience for many of the second year supervisors in this study. The group supervision of supervision notably included peer consultation, supervisor feedback, and group work factors. Granello et al. (2008) proposed forming supervisory peer consultation groups to develop diverse perspectives and enhance critical thinking of supervisors. Nelson et al. (2006) echoed the importance of peer consultation during supervision training,

highlighting the impact of peer relationship development, discussing supervision sessions candidly with peers, and reflecting on their own reactions to supervision as influential during group supervision of supervision. One supervisor-in-training reflected on the learning experience as follows:

*“I got to provide supervision to the first years as well as get supervision on my supervision. So it was really neat for me to be able to see both aspects of it to help the first years, which was the place I was just one year ago, then also receive supervision from someone who has been doing this for years and years. Helping at the same time as getting help; it was a really great experience for me.”*

All the supervisors ( $N = 5$ ) in this study reflected on personal characteristics that their faculty supervisor possessed that fostered supervision development; these supervisor qualities included presenting as trustworthy and knowledgeable, serving as a model of supervision, providing constructive feedback, and providing a safe environment for supervisee disclosure. Gold et al. (2013) investigated the impact of leader behaviors and perceived climate of group on the therapeutic factors present in group. Watkins (1995) asserted that self-criticality is the key factor in supervisor development, specifically continued growth and effectiveness. Supervisors demonstrating the ability to be self-critical will likely be more willing to accept feedback regarding areas for growth and improvement. Supervisors-in-training in this study appreciated their faculty supervisor's ability to foster self-criticality, awareness, and development. One supervisor-in-training described genuine appreciation for his faculty supervisor's contribution to his supervision training experience as:

*“My experience with my supervisor was great. I mean she has been doing this for a long time and she really knows what she is doing. I really trust her and um trust*

*her instincts and her advice. She really created a great environment for use to be kind of push because we, although we felt like we knew what we were doing a little bit, she also pushed us farther to kind of challenge ourselves to get even better and provide better supervision. So, we got to see ourselves grow through the semester as well.”*

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations present in this research. Probably the most notable limitation was the small sample size of five supervisors-in-training. The current research was the first time that advanced master’s level students were utilized as supervisors for first-semester students during Pre-Practicum in the aforementioned counselor education program; therefore, the researchers selected only five students based on proficiency of counseling skills and previously displayed professionalism. Future research on supervision training in master’s level counseling programs would benefit from increasing the number of supervisors-in-training.

Additionally, the researchers noted the inherent limitation that the data was collected at only one level of counselor development: beginning counselors in their fourth semester of graduate studies. This allowed for consistency among the sample, but future research would benefit from increasing sample size representativeness by utilizing a cohort design, conducting similar measures and interviews with supervisors-in-training in subsequent cohorts. Another limitation to the current research is the potential for graduate students in the same program to develop dual relationships which, therefore, impact the supervisory relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). The researchers in the current study recognized the benefit of conducting the supervision training experience



during the first-semester Pre-Practicum course in hopes of minimizing the potential that first and second year master's level students would have pre-existing relationships prior to supervision.

### **Conclusion**

Experiential supervision training for master's level trainees is novel to counselor education literature. The training of master's level counselors is enhanced by supervision training. The supervision experience was mutually beneficial, as first-semester students gained direct supervision for their IPR sessions and advanced-level students gained additional skills and experience. The supervisors-in-training reported both professional development and personal growth benefits to supervision training. Graduates of master's level counseling programs are likely to select jobs in which providing supervision to other counselors within the respective agency is an expectation. Receiving supervision training prior to graduating and obtaining supervisory positions is an exciting, and necessary way to further enhance the professional identity of counselors.

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