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Developing a Pre-practicum Environment for Beginning Counselors: Growing My Counselor Educator Self

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Abstract

This paper is a narrative of the challenges experienced as a faculty member in an attempt to transform the existing educational model for how school and clinical mental health counselors are trained to enter field-based clinical experiences with students and clients. The author shares the pre-practicum laboratory training as an important step towards the growth of a counselor both personally and professionally. The laboratory training addresses aspects of student anxiety and self-efficacy with relation to live supervision with use of technology, nature of feedback, reflective journaling, reflective teams, and process group experiences as pedagogical adjuncts to enhance the training and developmental needs of beginning counseling students.

Keywords

pre-practicum, counselor self-efficacy, supervision

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Counselor Educator Self

This paper is a personal narrative of some of the challenges I experienced as a

new faculty member in a counselor education program as I attempted design a research-

informed, experiential training environment for new counseling students. Additionally, I

hope to provide counselor educators with tentative scaffolding regarding the construction

and implementation of an intensive, experiential based model that can assist students in

developing increased confidence with skill acquisition, effective and timely use of

culturally appropriate interventions with clients, awareness of relationship factors,

increased self-efficacy, and an enhanced capacity to receive and integrate supervisory

feedback to inform the counseling process.

During my master's training, I was exposed to a pre-practicum model of

counselor training that required me to begin working immediately with a peer client

while being supervised and observed by a small group of my peers and a doctoral student

supervisor (Hackney, 1971; Kagan, 1980). This process was additionally supervised by a

faculty member. Counseling sessions were recorded, and I received feedback directly

after each interview. I remember experiencing a significant amount of anxiety due to

feelings of incompetence. Participating in counseling practice sessions, viewing recorded

work, and observing peers practicing counseling skills while receiving various forms of

supervision encouraged critical reflection and increased my capacity to confidently

counsel another person. I knew that I could help clients and had enough of a solid base

of therapeutic skills that I could be present with clients. The pre-practicum experience

was a defining educational landmark in my personal and professional life as a counselor

and educator. Research in the field of counselor education supports the use of training

environments that provide students with practice environments supported by various

forms of technology enhanced supervision methods (Buono, Vellendahl, Guth, &

Dandeneau, 2011; Marino et al., 2015; Moody, Kostohryz & Vereen, 2014).

During my doctoral experiences, I had opportunities to teach a beginning

counseling techniques course as a part of my teaching assistantship. I was surprised to

find out that a number of counselor education programs use a model of one or two

instructors that focus on a lecture format while providing class time for experiential

practice with a wide range of technologically-enhanced supervisory methods (ACA-

ACES Syllabus Clearinghouse, 2015; Lauka, McCarthy, & Carter, 2014; Marino et al.,

2015). I found this educational context to miss important components of counselor

development that were vital for preparing counselors to work with clients in the field. I

continued teaching the course, discussing the various micro-skills and providing activities

to stimulate application, while watching student tapes in isolation and handwriting

feedback in a narrative fashion onto their transcripts. I sensed there was a facilitative

process that could enhance their educational experience, but I did not have the resources

to create this experience. One of my primary goals when accepting a teaching position

was to determine whether the program would support my interests in this model.

As a new counselor educator, my first teaching assignment was to co-teach the

Counseling Laboratory course, where students were exposed in lecture format to the

micro-skills model (MacCluskie, 2010), including active listening, attending,

paraphrasing and more advanced working stage skills such as reflecting meaning,

confrontation and interruption. Time was provided at the conclusion of each class for

students to work in small breakout groups in the classroom and practice each of the skills while receiving peer feedback from an observer. I quickly recognized that I was not able to effectively supervise individual students as they practice relationship skills.

After a few weeks into the semester, I gained access to a room in another building on campus that had a one-way mirror and microphones that transferred the communications to an observation room. We spent the remaining part of our semester in this area. Students took turns practicing with a peer, while I observed through the one-way mirror with students in the class and provided alternative statements as well as underlined appropriate counselor behaviors. I requested feedback from observing students and at the conclusion of practice sessions, we processed with the counseling students and provided constructive feedback. In a short period of time, the students began sharing real material from their lives and appeared to benefit, both personally and professionally from the supervision and counseling interventions that were being displayed during each counseling session. The cohesiveness and trust in the group also began to mature in a manner that supported deeper levels of feedback processes. Due to the complex nature of student/peer relationships (dual roles), a significant amount of time is spent at the beginning of the course to define and stress the importance of confidentiality as a result of students sharing personal material in role-play counseling scenarios. Students are afforded the opportunity to present artificial scenarios or to identify an area from their personal life that is not currently causing distress.

As I prepared for the next semester, I purchased two-way radios and earpieces to facilitate communication between practicing students and supervising faculty in order to demonstrate how to use specific skills in an immediate fashion. The majority of students

found the bug-in-the-ear equipment to enhance their counseling experience and while anxious to "try it out," reported afterward that it enhanced practicing sessions.

During this time I also trained counseling doctoral students in providing supervision and facilitating the feedback process with students. With the addition of graduate student volunteers, I was able to have small groups of students who worked with one another throughout the semester, which afforded students access to increased opportunities to practice and receive feedback, while I monitored the process and provided feedback in a variety of formats, including live supervision, face to face, reflecting teams, and interpersonal process recall (Andersen, 1991; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Buono, et al., 2011; Chapman et al., 2011; Goodman, Brady, Duffy, Scott, & Pollard, 2008; Kagan, 1980; Kline et al., 1997; Klitzke & Lombardo, 1991; Miller, Miller, & Evans, 2002; Monk & Winslade, 2000). After each class meeting, I would facilitate a small supervisory group to discuss the needs of the supervising students.

During this time, I began writing proposals to utilize my start-up funds as a new faculty member, which provided me with TV monitors, high definition cameras, digital recorders and updated sound and microphone equipment. These proposals were subsequently funded, consequently supporting the construction of three technology-enhanced laboratory environments consistent with 65% of CACREP accredited counselor education programs (Lauka et al., 2014). Additionally, monies were allocated to doctoral students who completed the course with me previously to utilize their services in the course while working under my supervision. The training clinic consisted of three designated classroom laboratories that now serve as intensive learning environments for students to practice and record their sessions while working under supervision.

The classroom was transformed into an engaged and participatory environment for personal and professional discovery and students and teachers became involved in a collaborative effort to promote and encourage discovery and to support students in developing a solid understanding of skill implementation to prepare them to work confidently with clients during practicum and internship field experiences. The laboratory environment can assist students in navigating challenges that can interfere with development while developing confidence in an array of therapeutic modalities (Bandura, 1977; Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003).

One additional challenge with respect to the development and implementation of a technology enhanced laboratory training environment was assisting my colleagues in understanding its utility and how to promote and monitor student development with respect to counseling skills and interpersonal competencies in a dynamic learning setting that involves technology and group supervision. Over time, this model of training was integrated into the counseling program, paving the way for the development of a counseling clinic staffed by counseling internship students that provide supervised mental health services to undergraduate students and community members.

While there are many unique student-learning objectives that emerge for the students in the course due to context and cultural factors, with the assistance of program faculty, students were evaluated on nine standards of performance, which are delineated in a supervisory artifact I co-created with my faculty colleague, Dr. Kathryn MacCluskie, "Counseling Student Interpersonal Competencies" (see Appendix A). Students are evaluated regularly across each of these domains of interpersonal competence, beginning in the pre-practicum course. Students must receive a satisfactory grade of 2

("acceptable") on a scale of 0 ("not acceptable") to 3 ("exceeds expectations") in each

domain in order to progress in the program. Students receive opportunities to remediate

any problem areas in response to formative, supervisory feedback. With the focus to help

enhance students' self-efficacy and learning, the rest of the article focuses on the specific

laboratory experience that can be generalized within other settings.

Prepracticum Laboratory

The primary goal of the pre-practicum experience is to attend to key

developmental concerns that beginning counselors commonly experience (Bradley &

Fiorini, 1999; Campbell, 2015; Folkes-Skinner, Elliott, & Wheeler, 2010; Hackney,

1971; Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006; Johnson et al., 1989; Jordan & Kelly, 2004;;

Jordan, 2006; Mattox & Hurt, 1992; Woodard & Lin, 1999; Woodside, Oberman, Cole,

& Carruth, 2007), which include (a) significant worries about perceived competence and

ability to help others or feelings of diminished/limited self-efficacy, (b) negative

experiences with supervision and feedback, (c) navigating stressful and anxious feelings

that impact performance, (d) student dependency on a perceived expert for advice and

direction, such as a teacher or supervisor, (e) limited self and other awareness, (f) intense

focus on self, and (g) difficulties attending to relationship factors. Another important

objective of the pre-practicum experience is to provide students with meaningful

opportunities to work with peer clients under supervision and to gain confidence in using

counseling skills to support clients (Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003; Mariska, 2015).

Oftentimes, many students are reluctant to "undress" themselves of interpersonal habits

of relatedness and try on new ways of behaving (counseling skills) and relating to others

due to fears of being "phony" or feeling "weird" or "silly" (Woodside et al., 2007).

Supervising students as they try to implement counseling skills can provide them with unique opportunities to receive feedback about their performance (Barnes, 2004; Daniels & Larson, 2001; Jordan, 1999). Working in small groups with observing peers while a supervisor communicates with the counseling student and the group also provides an instructional climate where vicarious learning enhances each student's development.

A common phenomenon for beginning counseling students when meeting with a real client for the first time is anxiety and feelings of decreased self-efficacy (Howard, Inman & Altman, 2006; Jordan & Kelly, 2004). Woodside, Oberman, Cole and Carruth (2007) noted that early in the process of the beginning counselor's development, students valued conceptual learning but found the most educational value in experiential learning settings. Woodside et al. (2007) examined the experiences of eight students who participated in an experiential pre-practicum environment. Some of the themes generated from this research included the importance students gave to having "actual" counseling experiences and negotiating self-doubt through performance feedback.

Developing an experiential laboratory environment that provides students with varied forms of live supervision upon the point of entry (pre-practicum) shows responsiveness to the breadth of historical and contemporary research in the field of counselor supervision and preparation (Bandura, 1997; Bradley & Fiorini, 1999; Buono et al., 2011; Campbell, 2015; Chapman et al., 2011; Folkes-Skinner et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2008; Hawley, 2006; Hill et al., 2007; Howard et al., 2006; Jordan, 1999; Lauka et al., 2014; Marino et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2002; Moody et al., 2014; Shapiro & Gust, 1974; Smith, Mead & Kinsella, 1998). While the creation of technology-enhanced pre-practicum laboratories are used in the many counselor preparatory programs (Lauka

et al., 2014), the bulk of the research on the impact of live supervision on counselor

student development underlines the correlation between live supervision and counseling

student anxiety (Barbee et al., 2003; Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Fernando & Hulse-

Killacky, 2005; Johnson et al., 1989; Jordan, 1999; Mauzey et al., 2001; Schauer et al.,

1985; Tang et al., 2004).

Student anxiety is a commonly reported concern during beginning counselor

preparatory experiences and often mitigates performance, including perseveration on

correct counselor behaviors, difficulties being present for client concerns, and being

overly self-critical (Birk & Mahalik, 1996; Costa, 1994; Daniels & Larson, 2001;

Fernando & Hulse-Killacky, 2005; Hill et al., 2007; Jordan & Kelly, 2004; Mauzey,

Harris, & Trusty, 2001; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Schauer, Seymour, & Green, 1985;

Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). In the proposed pre-practicum setting,

students receive weekly opportunities to perform counseling skills in front of a small

group of their peers and observe one another's practice sessions. Due to persistent and

frequent exposure to this practicing environment, the experience of performing

counseling skills becomes less threatening and is conceptualized as a vehicle for

developing confidence (Costa, 1994; Daniels & Larson, 2001; Folkes-Skinner et al.,

2010). Drawing from earlier counselor education models of pre-practicum that involve

live supervision and small group practice settings (Daniels & Larson, 2001), students take

turns making mistakes and doing things well and become teammates, supporting and

encouraging each other with constructive feedback. The course also includes a small

group experience (Kline et al., 1997) which enables students to connect through

expression of feelings, such as self-doubt and difficulties feeling comfortable in the

counselor chair and display counseling skills in an alternative practicing environment.

Costa (1994) articulated that a vital part of setting up a training environment that

includes live supervision is explicitly prescribing a clear training contract that includes

specific and clear standards for student performance while interacting with peer-clients in

the live supervisory environment. Students are also instructed on methods for providing

peer feedback during group practice sessions and are also supported in developing

concise, measurable goals to promote clinical development.

Other pedagogical interventions include reminding students about the importance

of making mistakes, demonstrating and modeling relationship/facilitative conditions,

including empathy and genuineness, and focusing on student strengths. The willingness

to try out the counseling skills is celebrated in the supervisory component of the course.

Another important part of the process is balancing the appropriate amount of student

independence and autonomy with supervisory feedback. At the beginning of the course,

students will typically want to depend on the supervisor for the "right" interventions

(Howard et al., 2006). While this is a natural output of practicing new behaviors, as a

supervisor, I emphasize what students appear to be doing well and encourage them to

come up with solutions while providing targeted feedback correlated with their goals.

Hackney (1971) suggested the significance of pre-practicum experiences for allowing

students to meaningfully participate in an environment of ongoing consultation regarding

skill development and to provide access to activities that nurture confidence.

A critical component of encouraging counselor development is monitoring the

quantity and quality of performance feedback (Bandura, 1997; Daniels & Larson, 2001).

Daniels and Larson (2001) explained that new counseling students are frequently

dependent on feedback from supervising instructors and peers in order to self-assess

performance. Corrective, supervisory feedback must be tempered heavily with positive,

encouraging forms of feedback in order to moderate anxious feelings and enhance initial

feelings of student efficacy (Daniels & Larson, 2001). Students are trained to listen and

observe closely for the student's willingness to use counseling skills and to self-monitor

themselves in a way that shows they are conscious of many aspects of developing

therapeutic rapport.

An imperative part of the process of beginning counselor development is the

successful negotiation of counseling student self-efficacy. Bandura (1977; 1997) defined

self-efficacy as the student's "conviction that one can successfully execute a desired

behavior" (p. 193). Counseling student efficacy includes an attempt at a given task

(integration of counseling micro-skills into a practice environment with a peer), the

quantity or amount of effort applied toward the task (repeated opportunities to practice

counseling behaviors in a supervised environment coupled with the task of reviewing

practice tapes as homework assignments), and persistence in the face of challenging

obstacles. Larson et al., (1992) further indicated that counselor self-efficacy is

conceptualized as the counselor's self-appraisal about his or her potentialities to

effectively counsel a client in the immediate future.   It became clear to me while

working with novice students in the counseling laboratory that in order to engender

feelings of self-efficacy, there needed to be a strong relationship between student

confidence and encouraging performance feedback. It was also imperative to highlight

effort at implementing counseling interventions while also giving adequate attention to

the student's unique growth edges. Involving students in the feedback process also

provided the practicing counselor with additional points of affirming feedback that

tempered student anxiety about participating in practicing sessions. Promoting

opportunities for early success with skill integration was a vital task in the laboratory

environment for promoting feelings of counselor efficacy (Landis & Young, 1994). To

assist students in having opportunities with successful implementation, a variety of

supervisory methods were used, including bug-in-the-eye, bug-in-the-ear, and

interrupting counseling sessions.

Schauer et al. (1985) explained that beginning counselor anxiety primarily stems

from concerns about competence and evaluation. Beginning counselors are primarily

motivated by the desire to avoid failure, which can be amplified by the accompanying

anxiety that is tied to evaluation by others during counselor preparatory experiences. The

impact of observation and the perceived threat of evaluation with respect to counselor

performance depends largely on the student's personality factors and existing

self/counselor-esteem. While the evaluative component of the practicing environment

oftentimes evokes increased anxiety in students during the early stages of pre-practicum,

feelings of universality are activated early on after each student has had the opportunity

to participate as a counselor and peer-client. As students are encouraged to provide

encouraging feedback to their peers, they quickly realize that the evaluative environment

is designed to comfort students by encouraging them about areas of strength. What is

commonly noted is the importance for students to "dive in" and begin experiencing actual

involvement in counseling-related tasks and the byproduct of student confidence when

accomplishing the tasks (Tang et al., 2004).

In the study conducted by Barbee et al. (2003) regarding pre-practicum service learning, they found that providing field based clinical experiences for beginning counselors early in their development has a significant correlation with student self-efficacy and reduction of anxiety over time. High levels of anxiety can be disruptive to student efficacy and subsequent performance over time (Johnson et al, 1989). It was important to shape a practice setting that could provide students with supported opportunities to mitigate moderate levels of anxiety while trying on new behaviors in a counseling arena. While the laboratory environment does not provide students with experiences of working in a clinical environment with clients presenting with diagnostic issues, it does give students ample opportunities to work with peers who are discussing legitimate concerns while being able to engage in a constant feedback loop.

When students are provided with sustained supervision for counseling behaviors, levels of anxiety are moderated after persistent exposure to supervision in a live-training environment, which can contribute to increased trainee self-efficacy (Birk & Mahalik, 1996; Cashwell & Dooley, 2001). Bradley and Fiorini (1999) additionally found in a national survey of CACREP accredited counseling programs that counseling students who can clearly identify multiple skills and use them confidently in practice with peers before entering field-based practicum experiences through real-life settings are more likely to engage in clinical settings with higher levels of confidence. These findings are supported by research conducted by Hawley (2006) and Howard et al. (2006), highlighting the importance of positive, supervised pre-practicum experiences for counseling students prerequisite to field-based experiences such as practicum and internship. The laboratory environment provides a meaningful practice setting where

students have multiple opportunities to interact with a peer-client, integrate skills learned in the classroom and receive immediate feedback on the impact of said skills.

Pedagogical Design: Laboratory

The existing literature and recommendations for multiple training experiences to help students become competent counselors was integrated into the pedagogical and practice design of the existing course. There are between 13 to 17 students in each section of the pre-practicum course. The students are divided into three groups of between 4 to 6 students with a supervising graduate assistant who aids in leading the group experience, providing written feedback and facilitating the experiential process. The course instructor spends time with each group, assisting students who are observing with conceptual feedback and providing suggestions, while also supporting the counseling student with two-way radio communications (bug-in-the-ear technology), communicating to counselors via computer prompt (bug-in-the-eye technology) and using reflecting teams and interpersonal process recall.

For each group of students, there is a counseling room and an observation room. In the observation room, there is a control unit, which consists of a large TV monitor (72 inches) for viewing, a camera control device which enables me to zoom in and adjust the tilt of the camera in the counseling room, a 27 inch computer monitor (bug-in-the-eye technology), a digital recorder that enables students to view their work at home and a sound box that enables me to speak with the students while the counselor is working in the practice room.

Reflective Journals

Students are provided with a handout that discusses student responsibilities with respect to learning objectives and are asked to tape this to the front of their learning journals, which they write in regularly throughout the semester, utilizing a notebook format. In Hubbs and Brand's (2005) article on integrating reflective journaling into the classroom curriculum, they found that encouraging students to think critically about their learning in a regular fashion in a written format aided students to increase their awareness about their inner dialogue process. This benefit of increased awareness assisted students in making connections between their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The reflective journal was implemented in the pre-practicum experience to encourage students to focus on their inner process as beginning counselors, which according to Woodard & Lin (1999) is an important experimental learning component that can broaden student perspectives relative to client concerns.

The learning journal additionally provides students with the opportunity to accept an added portion of responsibility for their overall learning experience and invites them to complete the following tasks after viewing the recorded counseling session on their own time: (a) identify between two to three concrete behavioral goals to work on for the next counseling session, which are centered on the feedback they received from previous counseling sessions, (b) reflect in a narrative fashion about their strengths and areas for improvement, (c) reflect on the feedback they received in writing and orally from their supervisor, the instructor of the course and their peers, and (d) identify any countertransference issues. Journaling also offers a neutral context for processing information and can encourage critical thinking, which is an invaluable part of counselor development (Griffith & Frieden, 2000).

Technology-Assisted Live Supervision Modalities

In Crawford's (1993), Gallant et al. (1991), Jumper (1999), West & Bubenzer (1993), and Goodman's et al. (2008) research regarding the use of bug-in-the-ear technology (BITE) in counselor training, counseling students consistently rated the use of this form of technology as a means of providing immediate supervisory feedback as a significantly effective training intervention that had a positive correlation with enhanced self-efficacy when compared to the exclusive use of post-session review. While students' anxiety levels were not found to decrease in training environments during the initial stages of implementation that employed the bug-in-the-ear equipment, students did appear to favor its' use in order to correct in-session behaviors with supervisor suggestions. In Buono's et al. (2011) review of various models of live supervision, including BITE technology, minimal disruption was reported in addition to improved counseling effectiveness, per student and supervisory self-report. While some research does exist that reports the disruptive nature of bug-in-the-ear technology in the training setting (Mauzey, Harris, & Trusty, 2001; Klitzke & Lombardo, 1991), seeking student feedback about its implementation has been a vital part of its usage in the courses that I teach.

Spivack (1972) also pointed to the increase in demand on the supervisor to provide immediate feedback, engage in counselor's processing, and ultimately shaping a dynamic modality for training beginning counselors. In their research on the impact of training in communication skills in pre-practicum school counselor settings, Mattox and Hurt (1992) found that an intensive, experiential training atmosphere that included access to live supervision aided students in improving areas of verbal communication and

paraphrase development, active listening, and the ability to manage difficult client

feelings. Bernard and Goodyear (2009), Buono et al. (2011), Chapman et al. (2011),

Goodman et al. (2008), Klitzke and Lombardo (1991), and Miller et al. (2002) all

examine the effectiveness of live supervision methods, including BITE technology along

with bug-in-the-eye (communications sent from a supervisor to the counselor via a

computer monitor), suggesting that they allow for clinical expertise to be brought into the

immediate practice situation and consequently enhance the supervisory processes.

Delayed supervisory review via video or audio recordings often proves to be a less

efficient instructional intervention because they limited the supervisor's capacity to assist

the student in altering the course of the therapy experience in practice settings (Buono et

al., 2011; Marino et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2002; West & Bubenzer, 1993). DeRoma et

al. (2007) similarly highlighted the importance of a more direct observational approach as

a powerful training modality with beginning counselors. Providing opportunities for

students to view their counseling practice via digital recordings is considered an effective

way to facilitate learning in addition to direct supervision methods (Moody et al., 2014).

To accommodate for the potential for supervisory technologies to disrupt student

development, students begin the semester practicing with a peer on the other side of a

one-way mirror before implementing BITE or bug-in-the-eye. During this time, students

are closely monitored from an observation room with a small group of their peers. After

each student has had the opportunity to practice a couple of times, the technology-

enhanced supervision is explained to students, and students are provided the option to

choose from the available supervisory methods. Many of the students report that it is very

helpful to have suggestions they can use in the moment and seeing how using the

suggestion can benefit the session. One of the primary purposes for providing live

supervision to beginning counselors is to assist them in advancing their understanding of

using a variety of therapeutic skills in a counseling setting and to help students accurately

conceptualize client concerns (Marino et al., 2015).

It should be noted that additional technologies are being implemented in

counselor education training clinics that include the LANDRO Play Analyzer (IRIS

Technologies, 2006) and other software programs that afford faculty and students unique

access to live sessions from remote locations as well as assists students in being able to

conveniently access specific types of counseling skills for review and analysis.

According to Lauka et al.'s (2014) review of counseling programs, nearly 40% of

counseling training environments make use of LANDRO equipment. Due to the expense

of this equipment, it has not been implemented in the training clinic at this time.

Reflecting Teams

The idea of "reflecting teams" comes from Tom Andersen's work (1991) with

families in therapy. Initially, it involved the counselor and client(s) in a counseling room

while a team of supervising professionals observed from the other side of a one-way

mirror. At an agreed upon time, the team would change places with the counselor and

client(s) and report their observations while the counselor and client(s) listened from the

other side of the mirror. Andersen contended that this could allow for multiple realities

to be experienced at once, including the possibility for unique perspectives to emerge

through dialogic processes.

In Chang's (2010) study regarding the implementation of reflecting teams in the

classroom/supervisory environment for training family counselors, the reported results

were increased counselor self-efficacy and decreased anxiety for managing counselor

developmental concerns. In Hawley's (2006) study, counseling students reported that

reflecting teams were helpful in affirming the counseling student's use of a particular

counseling skill and the perceived impact on the student-client. Additionally, the

participant-students in this study explained that the reflecting team format of supervision

provided them with an alternative way to conceptualize client concerns and aided both

the practicing and observing counseling students in skill development. There are

multiple studies that support the effectiveness of implementing reflecting teams into

counselor training during early stages of student development (Buono et al., 2011;

Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Landis & Young, 1994; Monk & Winslade, 2000; Moran et al.,

1995; Woodside et al., 2007). The reflecting team approach in supervision can also aid

with students that are resistant to corrective feedback by providing space in the feedback

loop between sender(s) and recipient. The student can observe the feedback from an

emotional distance without feeling compelled to provide an immediate response. The

feedback is framed from a place of tentative curiosity, which can aid with its reception.

Reflecting teams have been a vital part of the educational process in the pre-

practicum experience. It can provide students with a unique educational forum to give

and receive immediate feedback about their counseling performance with one another

and encourages students to interact on a variety of levels of cognitive and interpersonal

functioning (Landis & Young, 1994). It is imperative to thoroughly explain the

implementation of the reflecting team for supervision purposes, prepare students how to

participate and extend invitations beforehand.

Process Group Experience

The implementation of the process group experience was the outcome of a few

factors after the first semester of teaching the laboratory skills course under its initial

design. Students had provided me with formative feedback that they would like to have

opportunities to get to know everyone in the class better and learn from others'

counseling styles and not just the few peers in their practicing groups. Additionally, due

to the fact that the program I teach in does not follow a cohort model, I noticed that many

of the students that came through the program had difficulties connecting with their

peers. Since the laboratory course is a required course for students entering the program,

I wanted to provide an interpersonal opportunity for students to connect as a group and

perhaps as a byproduct, could support one another throughout their shared educational

journey. Finally, the development of the process group was also motivated by my

pedagogical stance, which underlines the importance of giving students multiple contexts

in which to learn and apply their knowledge in practice settings.

We developed the group experience that could afford all of the students enrolled

in the course to learn vicariously from one another outside of the context of their smaller

practicing groups. The model for these small process group experiences was based

primarily on the work of Kline et al. (1997) and Shapiro and Gust (1974) and their

research concerning the effects of counselor student participation in growth-oriented

process groups during early training experiences.

The group was implemented after students had completed their first required

video recordings. We divided the class into two work groups and placed the students

with the stronger skill sets into the first practice group. The graduate student facilitated

the group and after going over informed consent and confidentiality encouraged students

to negotiate the hat of counselor and the hat of client in order to see the group experience

as an opportunity to share personal information, receive support and connect in a

meaningful manner with their peers, and to demonstrate the relationship-stage counseling

skills under supervision. While the graduate student facilitated the group, I interacted

with the other group who was observing from the other side of the mirror. The instructor

takes on a dynamic supervisory role with the observation group by providing multiple

examples of potential counseling skills that could be used or discuss the purposes of the

group when members would intervene with nontherapeutic forms of self-disclosure. In

addition, feedback is provided to the group leaders via bug-in-the-eye technology to

enhance the group counseling experience. After an hour and a half, the class would go to

break and then the observing group took their turn in the counseling room, while the

group that initially went observed from behind the mirror. At the conclusion of the class,

we processed the experience in the classroom for several minutes. There are many

benefits to this form of counseling practice and supervision, including group cohesion,

vicarious peer-learning, and increased confidence for implementing counseling skills in a

therapeutic context.

       Another important part of the small group experience was to monitor each

student's interpersonal skillset due to the fact that the laboratory course also requires a

specific level of interpersonal competence as outlined in the evaluative rubric used by the

program to evaluate student progress. The group environment provides the instructor

with additional data points from which to create a formative evaluation for each student.

       In a study by Kline et al., (1997) it was found several positive outcomes for

students that participated in unstructured group settings that emphasized feedback and

relationship counseling skills, including: (a) increased awareness of the student's impact on others, (b) increased insight into personal issues, (c) emotional awareness, and (d) behavioral learning. Additionally, the participating students noted an increase in confidence in implementing the counseling skills in an interpersonal setting. Many of these benefits have also been noted as an adjunct to the group experience in the laboratory course.

Summary

In conclusion, I am excited about the continued development of this course. I enjoy interacting with students at the infancy stages of their development as they make decisions about how to engage (sometimes reluctantly) in the experiential, laboratory setting. I have found that students are constantly making decisions at the personal level (as the client) as well as the professional/developmental level (willingness to relate to someone in a therapeutic manner through the acquired skills in the course). The willingness to try on new skillsets and ways of relating to others is celebrated in an environment where making mistakes is an encouraged process. The pre-practicum laboratory has been and continues to be the most rewarding part of my journey as a counselor educator, and I am excited to envision how the construction of this course will continue to grow and shift as I work to remain responsive to the educational needs of beginning counselors.

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Appendix A

Counseling Student Interpersonal Competencies: Evaluation Rubric

	0	1	2	3
Empathy	Absence of ability to accurately identify feelings in clients	Inaccurate or narrow feeling vocabulary "stressed out"	Accurate most of the time, moderately broad feeling vocabulary	Advanced, consistently accurate; extensive feeling vocabulary
Insight	Lack of awareness of any relationship between emotions and behavior	Concrete awareness of relationship	Able to recognize or expand upon someone else's identification of emotion/behavior relationship	Initiates awareness of relationships between emotional experience and behavior
Self-Awareness	Denies dynamic cycle - externalizes responsibility	Unaware of dynamic cycle	Able to identify examples when prompted or can expands on example provided by others	Can provide concrete examples of dynamic cycle of interaction
Self-Reflection and Countertransference	Denial of any hot spots	Minimal ability or only identifies limited, concrete example	Able to identify own emotionally charged topics with prompts	Readily able to identify own emotionally charged topics that may interfere with client dialogue (e.g. perseveration on a topic, facial flushing, diversion away from a topic, or visible agitation)
Openness to fdbk	Arguing or completely denying	Defensive or denying response; minimizing	Moderately congruent - some evidence of defensiveness through incongruence in one of the three - verbal, paraverbal, nonverbal	Demonstrates congruent verbal, paraverbal, and non-verbal openness to constructive criticism

	0	1	2	3
Ability to effectively integrate supervisory feedback	No behavior changes identifiable	Minimal evidence of effort; more instances of undesired behavior than instances of approximating desired behavior	Moderate evidence; some reversions to previous but clearly making effort to approximate desired behaviors	Significant evidence of modified behavior among targeted areas
Emotional stability	Consistent inability to participate in a full class meeting	Evidence of being so overcome by own emotional concerns that class behavior is noticeably affected on more than one occasion	Moderate ability - class behavior noticeably affected on one occasion	Ability to bracket own emotional/personal challenges to perform in class
Self-assessment accuracy	Accurate self-assessment $\leq 30\%$ of the time	Accurate self-assessment in 30 - 44% of taped sessions	Accurate self-assessment in 45 - 89% of taped sessions	Accurate self-assessment in $\geq 90\%$ of taped sessions
Professional commitment	Two or more from adjacent column	Consistently late for class Unprepared Late assignment submission OR Poor planning in clarifying assignment expectations OR assignments done wrong	Prepared for class Occasionally late - >2 times	Prepared for class On time for class <2 times tardy Initiates questions about assignments prior to due date Assignments turned in on time