Using Student Roles During Group Supervision To Assess Counselor Dispositions

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the use of student roles during group supervision in an online master's program to assess counselor dispositions and CACREP Standards. Counselor dispositions are considered an aspect of counselor competence and will be explored through a model of dispositional values and the application of student roles in group supervision. The possibility of future qualitative and quantitative studies regarding student roles in group supervision will provide a wealth of information for consideration in group supervision.

Keywords

Counselor Dispositions, Group Supervision, Student Roles

Counselor educators are tasked with assessing the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) standards, counselor dispositions, and counselor competence during practicum and internship (CACREP, 2022a). One aspect of measuring counselor competence is in relation to the dispositional values and beliefs of each student (Swank & Houseknecht, 2019). There are several ways that counselor dispositions are evaluated throughout a student's academic tenure. Two methods to assess counselor dispositions used in an online environment include student-written materials and student observations. An online learning environment includes both synchronous and asynchronous components, inclusive of group supervision. During an online master's clinical mental health counseling program, often the synchronous online group supervision meeting on Zoom with clinical mental health counseling students occurs at the end of one's program, during practicum and internship courses. This article seeks to better understand the process used by an instructor during group supervision in assessing counselor dispositions using student roles in the group supervisory process.

The Online Learning Environment

The online learning environment consists of both asynchronous and synchronous components. The asynchronous components comprise the majority of learning for most online students. Asynchronous components include reading study materials, viewing educational videos, answering discussion questions, and completing assignments at a time convenient to the student and posted to the course room. Synchronous components include time spent with the instructor at an agreed-upon time and day. Synchronous components within an online clinical mental health counseling program can occur during group counseling, practicum, and internship courses. Within CACREP programs, practicum and internship courses must include a minimum of 1.5 hours of synchronous group supervision with their instructor every week (CACREP, 2022b).

Online group supervision provides an opportunity for students to work with each other and their instructors synchronously. Such interaction allows the counselor educator to ascertain students' dispositions and their competence as they engage in conversation about clinical experiences (Wylie & Lyon, 2020). In some situations, instructors and students work together for many months and develop strong relationships, which may allow a deep understanding of the students' application of counselor dispositions and competence.

During the months of synchronous group supervision, students and instructors will review multiple clinical cases, allowing an opportunity for the instructor to examine the student's proficiency while providing an opportunity for that proficiency to increase (Shiflett & Remley, 2014). Students learn from their instructors, while also learning from each other's experiences. Students interact regularly and often suggest alternative ways of approaching challenging cases.

Counselor Group Supervision

Group supervision is used in most counselor education programs in the development of competence for counselors-in-training (CIT) (Stinchfield et al., 2019). Group supervision includes a minimum of three or more students attending 90-minute sessions with an instructor who has advanced counseling and supervisory skills to increase the skill level of the learners (Bernard & Goodyear, 2018). There are several activities that are conducted during group supervision to help CITs improve their level of competence in each of the counselor dispositions. These activities include case reviews (Shiflett & Remley, 2014), case conceptualizations (Rausch & Gallo, 2017), review of videotaped sessions (Routon, 2017), and review of verbatim transcripts.

Student involvement is based on both knowledge and experience during practicum and internship courses as an indication of competence (Johnson, 2018). As this is the end of students'

academic experience, it marks the melding of knowledge with experience. The beginning of one's career marks the intent to directly apply what one has learned or abandon it for the comfort of conversation with their respective client. Applying theory and counseling skills require deliberate action and intent on the part of the students. To help increase the deliberate application of learned knowledge, the development of counselor roles addressing course content within one's program is beneficial.

Analysis of counselor dispositions and competence may be enhanced by the added use of student roles during synchronous group supervision. Each student is assigned at least one role for a supervision class. Roles rotate from week to week, providing an opportunity for the instructor to assess dispositions, competence, and use of various roles for each student (Johnson, 2018). Students' fitness to become professional counselors may be assessed through the instructor's analysis of this process.

The use of student roles within a group supervision session provides clarity of purpose, understanding, and direct involvement in group supervision sessions (Gratrix & Barrett, 2017). The following roles were identified by the first author for use in group supervision sessions: leader, daily reader, strength builder, theoretical technician, timer, suggester, cultural reviewer, ethics reviewer, summarizer, and a case reviewer. The integration and understanding of each of these roles can be found in Table 1. At this time the use of student roles during group supervision has not been addressed in the literature.

Table 1

Student Roles During Group Supervision

Student Role	Explanation
Leader	Facilitates the group supervision session from opening to closing
Daily reader	Opens the group supervision session with a daily reading
Strength builder	Identifies a minimum of five strengths of the case reviewer after viewing the video presentation
Theoretical technician	Identifies two theoretical techniques used by the case reviewer after viewing the video presentation
Timer	Keeps time during a group supervision session and alerts the group of time remaining in the session
Suggester	Suggests two to three opportunities or suggestions (counseling techniques, theoretical considerations, etc.) to the case reviewer after viewing the video presentation
Cultural reviewer	Identifies two to three cultural considerations for the case that is presented.
Ethics reviewer	Reviews two ethical considerations from the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) code of ethics in relation to the case presented
Summarizer	Summarizes the group supervision session with three takeaways for further consideration
Case reviewer	Presents a videotaped client session for group supervision. Presents biopsychosocial information prior to the review of the case for students to consider in their group supervision roles.

The use of student roles within group supervision during practicum and internship courses helps the counselor educator to further assess counselor competence as it relates to counselor dispositions. To better understand the relationship between competence, counselor dispositions, and student roles, we will review key dynamics involved in counselor competence and counselor dispositions.

Competence and Counselor Dispositions Defined

Assessing counselor dispositions is the cornerstone of the development of counselor competence. Competence is defined as:

the synergistic understanding of a person's ability and functioning in his or her

developmental level of training or professional experience, in relation to the use of current knowledge and skills with consideration of their critical thinking abilities, emotional intelligence, and use of reflective practice (Johnson, 2018, p. 51).

Because the development of competence includes critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and the use of the reflective practice, the counselor educator must understand characteristics to review encompassing each of these dynamics. Critical thinking involves both clinical reasoning and problem-solving skills and is heavily used within case conceptualization, diagnostic understanding, and theoretical interventions (Williams & Wright, 2021). Williams and Wright (2021) go on to state that critical thinking improves clinical outcomes. Emotional intelligence includes personal awareness of feelings, managing personal feelings, understanding the feelings of others, self-motivation, and the ability to form social relationships (Odaci et al., 2017).

Reflective practice refers to both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). Reflection-in-action refers to a counselor-in-training's (CIT) ability to reflect on what is occurring during counseling sessions with clients and their ability to respond with effective counseling skills. Reflection-on-action refers to the CIT's ability to discuss what occurred during a client session during clinical supervision with their clinical and/or academic clinical supervisor (Schön, 1983)

Add to the definition of competence, the definition of counselor dispositions by Miller et al. (2020) to include:

Aspects of personal and professional functioning that subsume intellective factors, personality characteristics, relationship proficiencies, and value orientations accounted for by nine correlated, but independent, factors: cognitive, ethical/legal, interpersonal, personal wellness, personal-professional boundaries, professionalism, responsiveness,

self-control, and suitability for the profession. Counselor dispositions influence and are

influenced by cognitive, affective, and behavioral development in a manner consistent

with the advancement of clinical proficiency. As such, dispositions are both critical

prerequisites to and predictors of professional competence (p. 127).

According to Johnson (2018) and Miller et al. (2020) there is a direct connection between

counselor competence and the development of counselor dispositions. For a clearer

understanding, please refer to Table 2.

Table 2

Competence and Dispositional Connection

Johnson (2018) Competence	Miller et al. (2020) Dispositions	Terms	Impact
Critical thinking	Cognitive	Clinical reasoning and problem-solving skills	Case conceptualization, diagnostic understanding, and theoretical interventions
Emotional intelligence	Affective	Awareness of personal and other feelings, management of feelings, and social connections	Empathy, transference, countertransference, unconditional positive regard, congruence
Reflective practice	Behavioral development	Reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action	Therapeutic interventions, counseling skills

Exploring Counselor Dispositions

Miller et al. (2020) identified nine counselor dispositions aligned with CACREP

standards. These dispositions include the following: "cognitive, ethical/legal, interpersonal,

personal wellness, personal-professional boundaries, professionalism, responsiveness, self-

control, and suitability for the profession" (p. 123). These counselor dispositions are comparable

to the 10 counselor dispositions identified by Walz and Bleuer (2010) as demonstrated in Table 3. Both models are conducive for use with the student roles identified in this article.

Table 3

Counselor Dispositions

Counselor Disposition	Focus
Psychological fitness	Awareness and address any unfinished emotional/mental health issues prior to providing services to others.
Self-awareness	Awareness of personal values and the ability to abide by the principles of the ACA code of ethics
Cultural diversity	Develop cultural compassion of others diverse from their worldview
Acceptance	Helping clients to change in a nonjudgmental environment within the counseling process.
Empathy	Encompasses "understanding and compassion" treating others with "dignity and respect."
Genuineness	Encompasses honesty with self and clients.
Flexibility	Focus placed on client goals for therapy
Patience	Allowing the client to change according to the client's timeline.
Amiability	Adhering to nondiscriminatory values and behaviors and the ability to help clients with social justice.
Professional identity	Understands code of ethics as it relates to competency and use of best practice, adhere to regulatory agencies.

(Walz & Bleuer, 2010)

As previously stated, the counselor educator is tasked with evaluating each student regarding counselor dispositions, counselor competence, and CACREP standards. As we delve into assessment considerations through the lens of student roles during group supervision, counselor dispositions provide the backdrop for these considerations.

Assessment Considerations

At the end of the practicum and internship, the instructor is asked to rate each student in several clinical and dispositional areas. These evaluations can be subjective in nature without a clear set of guidelines to follow. The use of student roles provides an added layer to help with the

assessment process. Table 4 provides a review of the constructs that can be assessed within each role. The dispositions will be reviewed with a better understanding of how the student roles better inform the evaluative process. As each assessment area is further defined and understood, the student's role during group supervision will be explained to gain an understanding of how the area of assessment is evaluated. It is the counselor educator who evaluates each student in their respective student roles during group supervision. The students in each role do not offer an evaluation of the case reviewer; the students offer feedback to the case reviewer based on the videotaped review. The counselor educator evaluates student feedback based on the content respective to their student role and assesses the accuracy of feedback and quality of feedback.

Additional CACREP assessment areas include leadership qualities, active listening, solar skills, group work, facilitation tasks, the establishment of a working alliance with peers, preparation skills, critical thinking, use of silence, goal setting, collaborative abilities, knowledge of theories, gentle challenge, human growth and development, case conceptualization, assessment and diagnosis, openness to feedback, counselor identity and ethics, knowledge of ethics, and understanding of cultural dynamics of a case (CACREP, 2022c).

Currently, the evaluative component for the instructor is highly subjective. The provision of student roles provides the instructor with a different lens through which to view each of the additional assessment areas. Each assessment area provides a definition or guideline to view these constructs. These guidelines include the following (CACREP, 2022d):

- Leadership qualities - Ability to lead group counseling sessions demonstrating leadership qualities of organization, inclusion, and working alliance with peers.

- Active listening - Appropriate balance between attending, paraphrasing, reflection, and positive regard.

- SOLER - body language

- Group work - understands how group work impacts the individual members and the group. Incorporates counseling skills and techniques into group work. Demonstrates ability to facilitate the group.

- Facilitation tasks - Able to manage tasks affiliated with group supervision with assertiveness and self-efficacy.

- Working alliance with peers - ability to establish rapport and a strong working alliance with peers

- Preparation skills - Ability to appropriately prepare for group supervision role.

- Critical thinking - Ability to synergistically apply abstract counseling concepts to case presentations

- Use of silence - able to effectively demonstrate the use of silence effectively within group supervision and within counseling sessions.

- Goal setting - Collaborative goals with refraining from advice giving

- Collaborative abilities - Able to work collaboratively with peers during group supervision and colleagues when at their practicum/internship sites.

- Knowledge of theories - Able to gain a working knowledge of theoretical application for case presentation.

- Gentle challenge - Gentle challenge without shaming

- Human growth and development - Demonstrates skills that are developmentally appropriate and result in ineffective application

- Case conceptualization - Able to appropriately conceptualize a case utilizing client information and abstract concepts within the counseling field.

- Assessment and diagnosis - Comprehensive information gathering /case conceptualization and diagnosis.

- Open nest to feedback - Ability to receive feedback professionally and implement changes

- Counselor identity and ethics - Demonstrates the development of counselor identity as identified in ethical practice guidelines

- Knowledge of ethics - Able to understand ethical implications during case presentation and understand abstract concepts within ethics. Demonstrates an understanding of the ethical decision-making model.

- Understanding cultural dynamics of a case - demonstrates skills that are socially and culturally appropriate and results in the effective application

Each of these roles allows the instructor the ability to assess students' knowledge, critical thinking, counseling skills, and counselor dispositions. Each student's role aligns with what is being assessed by the faculty conducting group supervision during the practicum or internship course. The documentation template used during group supervision sessions by the counselor educator can be found in Appendix A. For a better understanding of dynamics assessed by the faculty member, please refer to Table 4.

Table 4

Faculty Assessments of Student Roles During Student Group Supervision

Student Role	Counselor Skills	Counselor Dispositions
Leader	Leadership qualities; Active Listening; SOLER; Group Work; Facilitation Tasks; Establishment of Working Alliance with Peers	Acceptance, Empathy, Amiability
Daily Reader	Preparation Skills; Critical Thinking; Use of Silence	Flexibility, Patience
Timer	Goal Setting; Collaborative Abilities	Patience
Strength Builder	Critical Thinking; Establishment of Working Alliance with Peers	Empathy
Theoretical Technician	Knowledge of Theories	Flexibility, Professional Identity, Patience
Suggester	Gentle Challenge; Establishment of Working Alliance with Peers	Genuineness
Summarizer	Critical Thinking	Patience
Case Reviewer	Human Growth and Development; Case Conceptualization; Assessment and Diagnosis; Openness to Feedback	Patience; Cultural Diversity; Self-Awareness; Empathy; Genuineness; Professional Identity
Ethics reviewer	Counselor identity and ethics; Knowledge of Ethics	Psychological Fitness; Self-Awareness
Cultural Reviewer	Understanding of Cultural Dynamics of a Case	Cultural Diversity

As each student fulfills their respective student role(s) during group supervision, the counselor educator utilizes the same Likert scale used in the student's final evaluation of their respective course. The Likert scale used is as follows:

(0) **Not Observed** - Supervisor did not observe the student demonstrate skills with consideration to the specific area. Please remember it is important for a supervisor to observe all the skills if possible.

(1) **Harmful** - Student demonstrates skills or lack of skills which are in violation of the

specific area of consideration. These violations could potentially be or could result in physical and/or psychological harm.

(2) **Below Expectations** - Student inadequately and inconsistently demonstrates skills necessary in the specific area of consideration for the development of the counselor.

(3) **Emerging Expectations** - Student adequately BUT inconsistently demonstrates skills necessary in the specific area of consideration for the development of counselor.

(4) **Meets Expectations** - Student illustrates a traditional level of skills in the specific area of consideration to demonstrate the development of a counselor adequately and consistently.

(5) **Exceeds Expectations** - Student illustrates a high level of advanced skills in the specific area of consideration to demonstrate the development of a counselor adequately and consistently.

The use of the Likert scale then informs the final assessment for the student based on information documented during group supervision.

Discussion

The intent of this article was to introduce the use of student roles during group supervision within practicum and internship courses by the instructor to assess CIT counselor dispositions and CACREP standards. This requires a foundational understanding of counselor dispositions as it aligns with student roles during group supervision. When one can accurately assess counselor dispositions, it caters to the development of competence secondary to the alignment of emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and self-awareness (Johnson, 2018).

There is much subjectivity in the assessment of student dispositions with the use of student roles. The use of clearly defined student roles that align with course content for application during

group supervision provides the backdrop for decreasing subjectivity. Add to this the use of the same Likert scale used in a final evaluation of the student during their practicum and internship courses, and the level of subjectivity decreases considerably. More research is needed in the area of assessing counselor dispositions.

As the use of student roles in group supervision matures to include rubric style information relating to each role, the level of subjectivity will decrease, and a new form of assessment will arise. Allowing students to assess their peers at skills provides another layer to further assess students and their ability to assess others accurately. This gives the counselor educator and the student the ability to gain an understanding for the potential of countertransference.

Future research could include quantitative studies regarding the use of emotional intelligence questionnaires in comparison to Likert scale assessments by counselor educators. Qualitative studies could focus on the perspectives of counselor educators using student roles during group supervision, and student perspectives of the use of student roles during group supervision. The student roles could be the focus of further study both quantitatively and qualitatively regarding each role separately.

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Students	Role	Involvement	Scale
Student 1	**Summarizer**	Identify their three takeaways	
Student 2	**Leader**	Identify any ice breaker, counseling skills in a leadership role, group counseling skills in leadership roles, etc. Collect feedback from students regarding how a student did in their role	
Student 3	**No Role (Observer)**	Pay attention to attentiveness, participation level, and contributions during group supervision.	
Student 4	**Strength Builder**	Identify five strengths of case reviewer based on video clip	
Student 5	**Cultural Reviewer**	Identify two to three cultural dynamics beyond ethnicity to consider in the case (i.e. military family, mother, grief issues, chronic illness) as an aspect of culture.	
Student 6	**Case Reviewer**	Identify student preparedness, case presentation, how they handle technical difficulties, use of appropriate humor, self-awareness, and other awareness.	
Student 7	**Daily Reader**	Document daily reading and their reflection during the daily reading.	
Student 8	**Theory Technician**	Document their ability to correctly identify theory and related techniques based on case presentation.	
Student 9	**Timer**	Document their level of assertiveness in keeping time during the group supervision session.	
Student 10	**Ethics Reviewer**	Document ethical codes identified, and their explanation of these ethical codes as related to the case presentation.	
Student 11	**Suggester**	Document ability to gently challenge and offer suggestions in a respectful manner to the case presenter.	

Developmentally appropriate Likert Scale

0 – Not observed

1 - Harmful

2 – Below Expectations

3 – Emerging Expectations

4 – Meets Expectations

5 – Exceeds Expectations