

**The Need for Developmental Models in Supervising School Counselors**

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### **Abstract**

Developmental models, like Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth's integrated developmental model (IDM) for supervision (1998), provide supervisors with an important resource in understanding and managing the counseling student's development and experience. The current status of school counseling supervision is discussed as well as the benefits of developmental models, such as IDM, are identified with specific examples related to school counseling. Lastly, implications for the future in incorporating developmental models into school counseling supervision are mentioned.

## **The Need for Developmental Models in Supervising School Counselors**

School counselors serve an important role within their school buildings. They strive to provide counseling in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development. It is a challenge for school counselors to find opportunities for professional development that adequately meet all of their needs. In a review of the counseling literature, a common theme emerged; school counselors are not engaging in on-going clinical supervision (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002; Sutton & Page, 1994; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). Schools have typically neglected on-going clinical supervision for practicing school counselors. In order for current and future school counselors to benefit from continued supervision, counselor education programs and school counseling organizations need to promote the learning and use of supervision models, not only for current graduate students, but also for practicing school counselors. The purpose of this paper is to propose the use of a developmental supervision model to assist school counselors in understanding counselor development and to provide a framework to carry out supervision for both students and practitioners.

### **Current Status of Supervision in School Counseling**

There is a belief that school counselors do not have as much of a need for clinical supervision in understanding the mental health issues of clients because of the school environment (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002). Clinical supervision in counseling can be defined as an intervention for less experienced (or student) counselors from senior level counselors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Supervision also extends over a period of time and an evaluative element is incorporated into the sessions (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Schools are seen as institutions for learning

where academic concerns override any others. The ASCA national model was created, in part, to help provide a framework for school counselors identify and prioritize the elements of a quality program (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are called upon to provide a great deal of direct service to students and families and therefore, time for supervision has not been a priority because it is not seen as providing immediate assistance. This belief may be compounded by lack of supervision training and high student to counselor ratios; school counselors likely devote less time to clinical supervision or lack knowledge about developmental models of supervision. If supervisors are not well versed in understanding how to help supervisees, they are also less likely to engage in supervision beyond what is the minimum requirement to receive their degree (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002). As a result, current school counselors are not receiving on-going supervision and education for themselves and they are not gaining additional knowledge regarding the development of the interns they supervise within their schools.

School counselors dedicate time and effort to professional development throughout their careers, as noted in the American School Counselor Association's ethical guidelines (ASCA, 2010, Section E.1.). Clinical supervision can contribute to this development; yet, there is no mention of engaging in supervision on a regular basis by the ASCA, unless it is for the purpose of consultation (ASCA, 2010, Section E.1.f.). According to Sutton and Page (1994), supervision is an important part of school counselor's ability to grow professionally, yet they are behind in comparison to other mental health providers in utilizing this practice. As stated by Sutton and Page, "supervision bridges the gap between the basic counseling competence developed in

counselor education programs and the advanced skills necessary for complex or acute cases encountered in the work setting” (p. 32).

According to different state and national surveys, the majority of school counselors would like more supervision (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Sutton & Page, 1994). In a national survey, only thirteen percent of the counselors at that time were receiving clinical supervision whereas sixty-seven percent wanted to receive (or continue receiving) supervision in some capacity (Page et al., 2001). Participants in the survey rated improving their skills and learning how to help clients with their problems as their highest needs (Page et al., 2001). Supervision is an area not substantially supported to help school counselors feel more comfortable providing mental health services, yet it is the opportunity many of them need to enhance their skills (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002).

Competencies for counseling supervision have been identified and discussed in recent literature (Flender et al., 2004; Getz, 1999). Falender et al. (2004) have created a consensus statement that relates the importance of standards in counseling supervision. Standards related to school counseling could also be beneficial as supervisors within the school setting combine counseling issues and school policies (DeKruuf & Pehrsson, 2011). A framework was created for supervision competencies in order to reflect the specific knowledge, skills, and values that the authors believed would be relevant to supervising counselors. Under the category of knowledge, the authors list *knowledge of professional/supervisee development* as one of the component competencies necessary for supervision. In the category of skills, they list *ability to assess the learning needs and developmental level of the supervisee* as another component. These two

elements tie directly to the utilization of a developmental model like the integrated developmental model for supervision (IDM) (Stoltenberg, McNeil, & Delworth, 1998). The authors discuss the value of a supervisor possessing the knowledge and skills of implementing a developmental model that supports the learning of the supervisee. (Falender, et al., 2004) They also suggest implementing supervision training throughout the graduate curriculum to enhance skills and performance (Falender et al., 2004). This is important not only to gain an understanding of their own development as counselors in training, but also to identify the needs of their future school counseling interns. Counseling organizations and the current literature both support the need for knowledgeable and competent supervisors who utilize a developmental framework when working with supervisees.

According to Herlihy, Gray and McCollum (2002), there is a shortage of qualified supervisors to carry out the supervision demands of current school counselors. A contributing factor could be that counselor education programs are not training school counselors in formal supervision (Swank & Tyson, 2012). Therefore, literature related specifically to developmental models of supervision for school counselors-in-training has become a new area of interest. Lambie and Sias (2009) offer an integrative psychological model of supervision specific to professional school counselors. Within this model, they address the importance of providing supervision based on developmental models such as Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth (1998) and others (Lambie & Sias, 2009). They recognize the importance of school counseling programs that support the psychological development of students (Lambie & Sias, 2009). In

addition, they stress the importance of supervisors who understand the supervisee's growth before being allowed to oversee their counseling experience.

### **Why a Developmental Model?**

A developmental approach in supervision is considered best practice and supported by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES, <http://www.acesonline.net/>). Developmental models, like Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth's (1998) provide a framework for understanding the progression supervisees go through within counselor development. Developmental models can provide direction in regard to the supervision process and counseling roles (Nelson, Johnson, & Thorngren, 2000). The frameworks are designed to help supervisors identify characteristics that would be commonly found in counselors operating from various levels. Developmental models also provide supervisors with strategies of how to assist counselors in training develop and learn by providing the appropriate learning environment (Stoltenberg et al., 1998; Nelson et al., 2000).

Using a developmental model may help supervisors conceptualize the supervisory process and aid in understanding what can seem like an overwhelming enterprise. With tools to assist supervisors, perhaps more organizations will begin to adopt policies and standards that require supervision for practicing counselors. The supervisor is responsible for creating an environment that allows the supervisee to understand the therapeutic process and how to foster change in students (Stoltenberg et al. 1998; Nelson et al., 2000). A developmental model could be especially helpful in settings with specific populations, such as children and adolescents in schools.

An essential task of a professional school counselor is the commitment to continuous professional development. Within the school setting school counselors get pulled in many different directions. Taking the time to attend to the emotional needs of students can sometimes get lost as counselors prioritize academic or career needs. An emphasis on the development and refinement of counseling skills can help school counselors become more competent counselors. Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth (1998) identify eight domains of clinical practice: intervention skills competence, assessment techniques, interpersonal assessment, client conceptualization, individual differences, theoretical orientation, treatment plans and goals, and professional ethics. The opportunity for a supervisor to help the school counselor assess their development within each of these domains in addition to providing an environment conducive to growth, will not only improve the supervisee's self-confidence but also their ability to provide more effective counseling with their students (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). The supervisor/supervisee relationship allows the school counselor opportunities to talk about the mental health needs of their students. School counselors can begin to feel disconnected to the world of higher academia after graduating from their school counseling programs and therefore, may no longer be connected to the latest research and developments in these areas. The IDM model helps identify the areas of growth they can focus on.

Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth's (1998) model of supervision provides a significant amount of information regarding the common obstacles supervisees encounter and strategies for the supervisor to help them avoid or overcome these in the future. For example, in the area of professional ethics, supervisees may struggle with



limits of confidentiality in counseling sessions with adolescents. Supervisors can help the supervisee determine how to best handle this situation by using probing questions and helping them discover how ethical codes as defined by ASCA might help them navigate this situation. In the domain area of individual differences, supervisors can help supervisees take notice of how cultural influences, such as low socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender identity, or religious affiliation, might impact a student's access to resources or general wellbeing. For example, these resources could include tutoring, information on the local food bank, or a private place to perform a spiritual practice during specified times of the day. These are new experiences for the supervisee, and a counselor with the knowledge of how "school" influences can affect a child, can be a great asset to a counselor-in-training. Lastly, understanding how school culture can affect counseling plans and goals is important. Supervisors can help supervisees understand how counseling plans work within the school setting, the different school personnel or stakeholders that might play a role in the plan, and how to work within the parameters of the school environment.

### **Contrasting View**

An emphasis from school counseling organizations or from a state's licensing agency requiring engagement in supervision may help current and future school counselors understand the importance of ongoing supervision (ACES, 2011). Yet, incorporating a supervision component that includes a developmental model could be difficult for school counseling because, as in Iowa, school counselors are evaluated according to guidelines delineated by the state Department of Education. School counselors are categorized with teachers and are often evaluated by administrators, not

supervisors with mental health backgrounds and clinical supervision experience. This presents a problem for the school counselor who would like additional supervision related to counseling the needs of children and adolescents. It is hard to find the appropriate individuals to carry out this function, let alone those who might also have knowledge of developmental models, such as IDM, that could assist the supervisees (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Access to university faculty or even doctoral level students with experience in supervision could be difficult in many areas around the country. In addition, not all practicing school counselors would like on-going supervision. According to Page, Pietrzak, and Sutton (2001), thirty-three percent of the nationally surveyed counselors indicated they did not have a need for supervision. There are many reasons as to why current school counselors may not want to engage in supervision; there may be a concern for time associated with arranging supervisory sessions, a misunderstanding of its relevance, or simply a question of who would be appropriate to provide the supervision (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002).

### **The Future of Supervision in School Counseling**

The call for effective school counselors to meet the academic, career, and personal/social needs of students will continue. With a lagging economy, mental health services may become less accessible to many children outside of school. Therefore, children and adolescents may come to school looking for increased social/emotional assistance from the school counselor. School counselors have an obligation to meet the comprehensive needs of all students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (American School Counseling Association, 2010). A school counselor that has engaged in supervision and progressed in the development of their counseling skills may be more prepared to meet the complex

demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A developmental model such as the Integrated Developmental Model, provides a framework for supervisors and supervisees to understand the growth the supervisee is making in developing competence with their counseling skills (Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth, 1998). The model serves as a resource for showing the progress a counselor is making from beginner to master and divides counseling skills into eight domains for a more thorough identification of counseling components (Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

In addition to the need for more school counselors to engage in supervision, is the need for more qualified school counselor supervisors to provide developmental models of supervision to practicing school counselors. Current practices across the nation do not necessitate ongoing supervision for counselors and therefore, it is difficult to find supervisors to carry out this service. There is a need for training in the area of school counseling supervision so that more professionals can provide supervisory experiences. Research supports incorporating developmental models of supervision within this setting (Lambie & Sias, 2009). Collaboration between universities, professional school counseling organizations, and state licensing agencies could increase an awareness in the need for continued professional development for current and future school counselors. Courses offered, even from a distance from cooperating universities, may help fill the void in understanding counselor development by providing current school counselors the opportunity to improve their supervision skills.

### **Conclusion**

Developmental models, like Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth's (1998) provide an invaluable resource for school counseling supervisors in understanding how to

effectively engage in supervision. The model identifies eight counseling domains on which to assess students, as well as strategies in how to effectively create the supervisory environment that will most benefit the supervisee. Because of the lack of clinical supervision currently taking place in schools, this model provides an important tool that can be used to help school counselors engage in supervision beyond their graduation date. Professionals in the school counseling community can further the profession by seeking out opportunities to deepen their own supervision skills as well as provide these services to junior members of the profession.

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### **Biographical Statement**

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