Meeting School Counselors' Supervision Needs:

Four Models of Group Supervision

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Abstract

Lack of clinical supervision continues to be a major problem for school counseling practitioners. In this article, the authors describe group supervision as a viable option for addressing this important issue and outline four models of group supervision. Additionally, several considerations for planning and implementing supervision groups in school settings are discussed. The purpose of this review is to provide school counseling practitioners, supervisors, and counselor educators with a basic understanding of group supervision practices and to encourage these professionals to engage in a more detailed exploration of the topic.

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Supervision is a critical component of effective professional development for school counselors (Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 2005). While participating in counselor training, school counseling students are closely supervised by both university and site supervisors and have the opportunity to receive guidance and support from peers and supervisors (Borders & Leddick, 1987; Peterson & Deuschle, 2006). After graduation, clinical supervision for school counselors becomes less available (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). In a 2001 national survey of 267 practicing school counselors Page et al. found that only 13% of the surveyed counselors received regular individual supervision and 11% received regular group supervision after graduation. Because school counselors often work in isolation from other school service professionals (Peterson & Deuschle, 2006; Thomas, 2005) many have described the decreased availability of supervision for school counselors as problematic (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996; Borders & Usher, 1992; Christman-Dunn, 1998; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Sink, 2005). The purpose of this article is to present group supervision as an option for addressing the supervision needs of school counselors.

School counselors have expressed a desire and need for clinical supervision (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996; Roberts & Borders, 1994). Page, Pietrzak, and Sutton (2001) reported that school counselors in their sample most frequently desired supervision for assistance in "taking appropriate action with [student] problems," "developing skills and techniques," and "improving skills in [formulating diagnostic

impressions]" (p. 146). McMahon and Patton (2000) found that school counselors desired supervision to address issues of professional isolation, support, accountability, debriefing after difficult cases or situations, personal and professional development, and issues of client welfare. Agnew, Vaught, Getz, and Fortune, (2000) reported that school counselors who took part in clinical supervision reported an increased sense of professionalism, confidence, comfort on the job, and professional validation.

Because of the many demands placed on school counselors' time, efficient and effective methods are needed to provide school counselors with clinical support and supervision. In this article, group supervision is presented as a viable and economic option for meeting school counselors' clinical supervision needs. The target populations for this article are school counseling practitioners who want to receive supervision, senior school counseling practitioners who may want to provide supervision in their schools or districts, and counselor educators who want to provide school counselors-in-training with models and methods of supervision for use in post-degree practice.

Potentially, school counselors receive different types of supervision in their daily job duties. This includes supervision by school administrators (administrative supervision) and supervision of their counseling and guidance work from a clinical perspective (clinical supervision). Bernard and Goodyear (2004) defined this second type of supervision as:

> An intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a
> more junior member or members of that same profession. This
> relationship is evaluative, extends over time, and has the simultaneous
> purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the more junior

person(s), monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the

client(s) she, he, or they see(s), and serving as a gatekeeper of those who

are to enter the particular profession. (p. 6)

Throughout the remainder of this article the term supervision will be used to

describe supervision that is clinical in nature and designed to enhance

counseling and guidance skills and services offered to students.

Group supervision is a widely used modality of supervision in the field of

counseling (Altfeld & Bernard, 1997; Borders, 1991; Carroll, 1996; Goodyear & Nelson,

1997; Holloway & Johnston, 1985; Prieto, 1996, 1998; Proctor, 2000; Proctor & Inskipp,

2001; Riva & Cornish, 1995; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). In a well-cited

definition, Bernard and Goodyear (2004) characterize group supervision as a:

regular meeting of a group of supervisees with a designated supervisor,

for the purpose of furthering their understanding of themselves as

clinicians, of the clients with whom they work, and/or of service delivery in

general, and who are aided in this endeavor by their interaction with each

other in the context of group process. (p. 111)

This comprehensive definition makes reference to all aspects of the group supervisory

process including purposes, goals, and roles of the supervisor and supervisee.

It is important to note that Bernard and Goodyear's (2004) definition distinguishes

group supervision from other types of meetings that school counselors may attend such

as administrative and staff meetings, trainings, or individual educational plan

conferences. Group supervision meetings are designed primarily for the purpose of

discussing cases and developing counseling skills. McAuliffe (1992) states that persons

taking part in group supervision, therefore, must work diligently to maintain this focus on professional development and guard against other issues infringing on supervision time. This is especially important in school settings where school counselors provide many services to students, teachers, and administrators in addition to individual group counseling and guidance.

A second important component of Bernard and Goodyear's definition of group supervision involves group process, and it is this aspect of group supervision that distinguishes it from other forms of training and development (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). While individual and group formats of supervision may share the same overall goal of counselor development, "the supervision of counselors in a group is not the same as supervising them individually" (Hayes, 1990, p. 226). Accordingly, a supervisor utilizing a group format must be ready to utilize his or her knowledge of group process to foster professional and skill development (Werstlein, 1994).

Group supervision offers an efficient use of supervisee and supervisor time (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Because of increased demands placed on school counselors (e.g., counseling, program implementation, classroom presentations, administrative tasks), lack of time may contribute to the inadequate amount of supervision received in school settings (Borders & Usher, 1992). Lack of time may prevent school counselors from receiving supervision and deter more senior or experienced practitioners from providing supervision. When compared to individual supervision, supervisees in group supervision receive considerably more feedback due to the presence of several practitioners, not just one supervisor. This allows supervisees to maximize the amount of benefit that they receive from supervision meetings.

Additionally, the group format is beneficial for those providing supervision because it allows one supervisor to supervise several practitioners at one time instead of seeing each supervisee on an individual basis.

In one study of counselor trainees, group supervision alone was found to be as effective as a combination of group and individual supervision in fostering counselor-trainee's professional growth (Ray & Altekruse, 2000). Measures of growth in the study were obtained through reports from the trainee, supervisor, clients, and objective observers. In other qualitative studies supervisees continually self-report positive gains made in group supervision (Linton, 2003; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006; Starling & Baker, 2000; Walter & Young, 1999). These include increased confidence and feelings of independence, clarity in treatment goals, decreased anxiety, ability to take a "larger view" of cases, and benefits of learning by watching others.

In the remainder of this article four models of group supervision will be presented and discussed. This review is not intended to serve as a detailed training in group supervision. Rather, it is anticipated that this brief review will provide a general understanding of the models that are included, and encourage school counselors and supervisors to engage in a more detailed exploration of this topic. Following this review, specific steps and practical considerations are offered to assist school counselors in implementing supervision groups in their schools.

<center>Group Supervision Models</center>

While many models of group supervision are present in the literature, only four have been selected for presentation here. These are: (a) Structured Group Supervision (Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Morris, Betz, & Hart, 1991), (b) Systemic Peer Group

Supervision (Borders, 1991), (c) a case presentation model (McAuliffe, 1992), and (d)

Structured Peer Consultation Model (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996). These four models

were chosen because they are structured in format, which may be useful for school

counselors with time constraints. Structured models provide a series of steps or

guidelines for group members and supervisors to adhere to during group meetings.

Structured models were created to make efficient use of supervision time and to keep

group members and supervisors "on-track" during supervision meetings (Borders,

1991).

Structured Group Supervision

Wilbur et al. (1991) created the Structured Group Supervision (SGS) model in

response to the perceived lack of research and practice directives in the area of group

supervision. They stated that "the [SGS] model attempts to strengthen the link between

group supervision and its justified use in counselor training" (p. 91). As a structured

model of group supervision, SGS provides a format for case presentations and specifies

how supervisees and supervisors are to interact and provide feedback during

supervision meetings.

The SGS model is a five-phase process designed to assist supervisees in

focusing their case presentations during group supervision. During group meetings

supervisees discuss a single case for approximately 1 hour. In Phase 1 of the model a

group member makes a request for assistance to the group. Then, in the questioning

and identification of focus phase (Phase 2), group members clarify the request for

assistance and gather further information about the problem. During Phase 3, group

members provide feedback pertinent to the presenter's request. This feedback is

provided in an "I statement" format such as, "If this were my client I would…" In Phase 4 the supervisee responds as to whether or not the feedback was helpful. In the optional fifth phase, the preceding four phases are processed.

Systemic Peer Group Supervision

Borders (1991) developed the Systemic Peer Group Supervision (SPGS) model to address unproductive and problematic aspects of peer group supervision approaches. She noted that in supervision groups, "peers may be overly supportive and prone to giving advice, and [that] the group may have difficulty staying on task" (p. 248). Borders stated that in order for supervision groups to be effective, "group meetings need an organizational structure" (p. 248).

The SPGS model offers a structure for group supervision meetings. It was created to address the following goals:

> (a) to ensure that all group members are involved in the supervision process; (b) to help members give focused, objective feedback; (c) to give particular attention to the development of cognitive counseling skills; (d) to be adaptable for groups of novice and/or experienced counselors; (e) to provide a framework for supervising individual, group, and family counseling sessions; (f) to teach an approach that counselors can internalize for self monitoring; and (g) to provide a systemic procedure that can be employed by novice and experienced supervisors. (p. 248)

The model was developed through applied practice in the training of novice and experienced counselors.

Procedurally, the SPGS model was designed for use with three to six counselors/supervisees and one trained supervisor. During SPGS meetings supervisors guide group members through a series of six steps. In the Step 1, a supervisee identifies questions and asks the group for specific feedback about his or her performance in a videotaped or audiotaped segment of a counseling session that he or she will show during the supervision session. Then, in Step 2, group members are assigned tasks, roles, or perspectives for responding to the presenter's questions. These may include observing body language or a particular counseling skill (task), taking another role such as that of the counselor or a significant other of the client (role), responding to the session via a particular theoretical orientation (perspective), or using a metaphor to describe the counseling process.

In Step 3 of the model, the supervisee shows the video or audiotaped segment of counseling mentioned in Step 1. Group members then present feedback from their particular tasks, roles, or perspectives (Step 4). This feedback is directed at the supervisee's specific questions offered in Step 1. Then, in Step 5, the supervisor facilitates a feedback discussion. Lastly, in Step 6, the supervisor summarizes the feedback presented by the group and facilitates the presenter's evaluation of the feedback. Throughout all six steps, the supervisor's role is to keep the group on task and engage all group members in the discussion.

Critical to the success of the SPGS model is the Step 2 process of assigning tasks, roles, or perspectives. Borders (1991) noted that neophyte counselors are often "self-focused," "overly aware of their every move," and "assume that the client's report is the only truth about the problem situation" (p. 249). When other group members

respond from these alternate tasks, roles, or perspectives supervisees are assisted in reducing self-focus, viewing the case through "a different set of eyes," and broadening their view of the client and counseling session. For instance, if a group member provides feedback from the role of the student/client's caregiver, the presenter's vision of how other persons respond to the client's behavior may be enhanced. Role taking also allows group members to provide challenging and constructive feedback in a less threatening manner.

Case Presentation Mode

McAuliffe (1992) offered a Case Presentation Model (CPM) of group supervision for use with practicing professionals. Procedurally, the CPM was designed for use with a small group of experienced counselors led by an experienced supervisor. During each group meeting, one group member presents a single case in detail and discusses it with the group.

The format for case presentations in the CPM is a four-stage process described by the acronym *SOAP*. In the *S* stage, the presenter describes the *subjective* aspects of the case, including why the case was selected and specific issues to be addressed by group members. Then, in the *O* stage, objective information is provided such as the client's background, psychological testing data, and a summary of counseling work to date. Next, in the *A* stage the presenter provides a provisional diagnostic impression. Finally, in the *P* stage, the presenter outlines his or her current treatment plan. McAuliffe (1992) noted that the four-stage *SOAP* process assists counselors in taking responsibility for their clinical decisions.

After the *SOAP* presentation is completed, group members and the supervisor "ask questions, suggest further information to be gathered, and propose treatment possibilities" (McAuliffe, 1992, p. 168). During this discussion, the supervisor uses reflection and probing skills to keep the group dialogue on track. At the end of the session the presenter gives feedback as to whether the group's feedback and suggestions were helpful. During the process, the supervisor assumes the role of process facilitator and expert and models professional behavior, diagnostic expertise, and case presentation skills. McAuliffe stated that having an expert supervisor can prevent the likelihood of the "uninformed leading the uniformed" as may happen without the presence of a supervisor (p. 165).

In implementing the CPM model, McAuliffe (1992) suggested that group supervision be explicitly distinguished from other types of staff meetings. Group supervision time, McAuliffe stated, should be reserved for "intensive clinical analysis" of cases (p. 170). McAuliffe also suggested that group norms should be established, which may include the use of group contracts. Finally, each group meeting should entail some degree of peer facilitation and group members should routinely process their work together.

Structured Peer Consultation Model

Benshoff and Paisley (1996) developed the Structured Peer Consultation Model (SPCM) for school counselors. The SPCM is designed as a peer model of supervision and does not include the use of a supervisor for facilitation of the group. As a result, it is different from the three models presented above. Benshoff and Paisley used the term consultation rather than supervision to denote the lack of a supervisor's presence in the

model. They state that the advantages of peer consultation over supervision include: (a) greater interdependence between group members and less dependence on one expert supervisor, (b) increased responsibility for personal growth and development, (c) increased self-confidence and self-direction, (d) enhancement of consulting skills, observational learning and use of peers as models, and (e) lack of evaluation from a supervisor and any emotions associated with such an evaluation.

The SPCM provides guidelines for use across a nine-session span. Group meetings are 90-minutes in duration and occur on a bi-weekly basis. During Session 1, group members share their beliefs about counseling, describe their approach to their work with students, and set goals for the peer consultation experience. Prior to ending the session they are also assigned the tasks of reflecting on their roles as school counselors and audiotaping one counseling session to bring to the next meeting. Then, in Session 2, group members discuss and evaluate aspects of their school counseling program and set goals around changing one part of their program to improve the services that they offer. Following this, participants exchange audiotapes to review and critique before the next session. When critiquing the audiotape the reviewer is instructed to focus on the counselor's performance rather than the student-client and address the following questions:

1. What seemed to work or not work?

2. What their a sense of purpose in the interventions used?

3. Were the counselor's interventions consistent with his or her style as described in Session 1 of the SPCM?

4. How well did the counselor develop rapport with the student-client and "stay

with" the student-client in session?

Sessions 3, 5, and 7 are used to review these tapes and provide feedback to the

individual consultee. This feedback is related back to the goals set by the consultee

during Session 1.

Session 4, 6, and 8 in Benshoff and Paisley's SPCM are used for oral case study

presentations. During these sessions group members take turns presenting brief case

histories (5 to 7 minutes) of a student-client with whom they are having difficulty. This

presentation includes personal data about the client-student, the presenting problem

and counseling history, and the current problem for the counselor. These sessions allow

for each group member to both give and receive feedback during group meetings.

Lastly, in Session 9, group members evaluate their experience together and

terminate their peer group meetings. This meeting allows group members to reflect on

their experience in the peer group and to review their progress towards reaching their

personal goals. Group members are also encouraged to share their plans for how they

will continue to maintain the changes that they made during the SPCM meetings.

Considerations for Beginning Supervision Groups

One of the first questions to ask when forming a supervision group is, "Who will

be in the group?" In particular, it should be determined whether the group will be

comprised of highly experienced counselors, less experienced counselors, or a mix of

both experience levels. The decision rendered regarding group composition will impact

the remaining decisions to be made when forming the supervision group. As

Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Delworth (1998) suggest, supervisees at different levels of

professional development have different supervision needs and goals. In order to be most effective, the group supervision experience should be designed in a way that can address the needs and goals of all group members.

School counselors who wish to begin group supervision must decide whether to use a supervisor led or peer-led model. In supervisor-led groups, one expert or senior member of the profession takes responsibility for leading the group and managing the group process (e.g., McAuliffe's CPM). In contrast, in peer led models, no expert supervisor is present; the group takes responsibility for leading itself (e.g., Benshoff & Paisley, 1996). For groups with several novice counselors, it is recommended that a designated and experienced supervisor be used to facilitate the group.

Those school counselors who want to be in supervisor-led groups have several options available to them. School counselors in Borders and Usher's (1992) study expressed a preference for a credentialed school counseling practitioner as a supervisor. Accordingly, school counselor practitioners may wish to identify one senior school counselor and designate that person as the supervisor for their supervision group. Another option that group members may consider is to rotate group supervisory duties. In this scenario, different group members would act as supervisor of the group for a predetermined amount of time. No matter which option is chosen, one of the most important factors to take into account when selecting a supervisor is the potential leader's knowledge of and skills in group facilitation. Group processes are a powerful force in group supervision and can have both positive and negative effects on supervision outcomes (Linton, 2003; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006). As such, the group

leader needs to be prepared to use his or her knowledge of the group process when facilitating the group.

Another factor to consider when forming and maintaining a supervision group pertains to frequency and location of meetings. Benshoff and Paisley (1996) suggest 90 minute bi-weekly meetings in their peer consultation model. Results from Agnew, Vaught, Getz, and Fortune's (2000) examination of an ongoing group supervision experience for school counselors suggests that even less frequent (monthly or bi-monthly) meetings are sufficient to foster increased confidence and professionalism in group members. It is therefore recommended that this issue be discussed in early supervision group meetings and decided upon by group members. Group meetings should be frequent enough to meet the clinical needs of its members but not so frequent that they become another burden in an already taxing schedule. As a result, the issues of meeting frequency should be revisited often to determine whether changes need to be made.

Group members should also consider location of meetings. When choosing a location, group members may want to answer several important questions before making a decision. For example, is the school district supportive of group supervision meetings? Will the district provide time and space during the school day for meetings? How far are group members willing to travel to be involved in the group? Is there a central location that would be best for all members? Would it be helpful to rotate locations? Are any members willing to open their homes for group supervision meetings? Most importantly though, group members should ask, does the location that we select provide a comfortable, professional, non-distracting, and conducive

environment for group supervision meetings? Answering these and similar questions will assist group members in choosing the most appropriate location for their group meetings.

Finally, it is recommended that supervisors and supervisees work diligently to create a warm and cohesive climate in their supervision groups. Research on group supervision suggests that a supportive group climate and cohesive atmosphere is important to professional development (Christensen & Kline, 2001; Linton, 2003; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006; Starling & Baker, 2000; Walter & Young, 1999; Werstlein & Borders, 1997). Specifically, supervisees have stated that a supportive group climate assisted them in becoming more honest and interactive with their peers and motivated them to become invested in the professional development of their peers (Linton 2003; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006).

<div align="center">Implications</div>

The potential implications and benefits of group supervision for school counselors are many. Regular group supervision can assist school counselors in making connections with other professionals and managing the isolation that they experience in their primary work setting (Peterson & Deuschle, 2006; Thomas, 2005). Group supervision can also improve school counselors' ability to cope with stress and burnout. One aspect of burnout that can be addressed in particular pertains to professional development. Alarmingly, school counselors may often avoid reading professional literature and attending conferences due to burnout (Thomas). In this regard, group supervision can serve to enhance professional development, address

issues of stress and burnout, and provide an outlet for school counselors to receive continuing education.

Further implications and benefits of group supervision relate to professional induction into the school counseling profession. Little research has been conducted on the socialization and induction process that school counselors face in their job settings (Thomas, 2005). Christman-Dunn (1998) noted that school counselors are often "expected to act as seasoned professionals upon graduation" with little to no post-degree training (p. 7). Group supervision can assist school counselors in effectively managing the induction process and applying what they learned in counselor training programs to complex clinical situations (Christman-Dunn, Sutton & Page, 1994). The presence in supervision groups of senior school counselors who are already entrenched in the school counselor role can assist in the induction process.

If school counselors are to receive group supervision as a regular tool for professional development, training for supervisors in the field is needed. According to the Code of Ethics (2005) of the American Counseling Association, counselors who provide supervision to others should be "trained in supervision methods and techniques" (p. 14). As a result, school counselors desiring to receive supervision services must verify that that any potential supervisor has received some type of training in supervision practices and techniques. This may necessitate administrative support within school districts for advanced training in supervision methods.

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

Although the models in this article propose guidelines for the structured group supervision of school counseling practitioners, there may be other models to consider

that could provide some type of professional development. Thomas (2005) offered the School Counselor Alumni Peer Consultation model of group supervision which involves the use of counselor educators as supervisors. As well, several unstructured models of group supervision have been offered in the literature (e.g., Altfeld, 1999; Rosenthal, 1999) and it has been suggested that these types of models may be more effective for use with experienced school counselors. While research indicates that group supervision can be a valuable and effective method to enhance professional development, further investigation on its implementation and efficacy is needed, especially with regards to the types of models utilized in the school setting.

Research is also needed on the effects and efficacy of group supervision with post-degree school counseling professionals. To date, the majority of research on group supervision has been conducted with counselor trainees (e.g., Christensen & Kline, 2001; Linton, 2003; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006; Starling & Baker, 2000). While there may be some commonalities between the supervision of counselor trainees and seasoned professionals, some key differences may also exist. In particular, there may be differences between these two groups in regards to supervision needs, types of techniques that are most effective, and models for use during group supervision meetings. Research on experiences school counseling supervisees can help to make this distinction.

Finally, research on the training of school counseling supervisors is needed. Much of the supervision literature has examined the training of generalist counseling supervisors and has not focused on the particular supervisor training needs within the school counseling discipline. While school counselors must posses the same skills and

competencies as counselors in other disciplines, they also require opportunities for professional development in areas specific to the school setting. This includes the creation of school guidance programs; the delivery of classroom, and small and large group guidance; and the provision of leadership administrative duties within the school setting.

Conclusion

In conclusion, lack of clinical supervision continues to be a major problem for practicing school counselors (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996; Borders & Usher, 1992; Christman-Dunn, 1998; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Sink, 2005). In this article, the authors presented a case for the use of group supervision with practicing school counselors and provided a brief review of several group supervision practices and models. It is hoped that school counseling practitioners, potential supervisors, and counselor educators will use the practices, models, and references provided in this article as a starting point when planning, implementing, and maintaining supervision groups in their school settings.

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