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School Social Workers and Multiple Supervisees

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Purpose/Significance

There are a limited number of school social workers in District #77, Mankato Area Public Schools. There are two school social workers who provide services in eleven elementary schools and middle/high schools as needed. It was proposed that if there were five or six school social work interns who could primarily provide direct services, the school social workers could perform more of a supervisory role. "Group Supervision lessens dependence on the supervisor and offers a supportive peer environment which lessens anxiety and enhances self-efficacy" (Bogo, Cloberman, & Sussman, 2004).

Research Questions

- How effective is group supervision?
- What are the pros and cons to group supervision?
- How beneficial is group supervision for supervisors and supervisees?
- How would group supervision function in a school setting?

Relevant Literature

- Group supervision proves to be cost-efficient, time-efficient, and clinically rich (Ray & Altekruse, 2000).
- Group supervision has evolved over time as it promotes a setting of peer learning in which professional identity and processing interventions with clients can be comfortably discussed (Zeira & Schiff, 2010).
- The group process tends to be supportive and provides an opportunity for students who would otherwise be isolated to meet together (McCafferty, 2005).
- Safety, as defined by students feeling as they are not at risk of psychological harm in the group, has emerged as a critical element in group supervision that predicts students' supervision experience as well as the breadth of learning they describe (Enyedy, Arcinue, Puri, Carter, Goodyear, & Getzelman, 2003).
- Students receiving group supervision tended to score higher on items pertaining to agency practice, innovation, and identifying their own areas of competence (Walter & Young, 1999).

Methodology

- Literature review utilizing Minnesota State University, Mankato online databases: Academic Search Premier, ERIC, PsychINFO, ProQuest, and Social Service Abstracts
- Informal interviews of three social work professionals
- Emailed and/or called professionals to gather information on group supervision models
- Project carried out from January to July, 2012

Interview Findings

- "Group supervision is a fantastic support for supporting supervision. I actually with the board had approved more group and less individual. I feel the most rich conversations and dialog occurs in groups" (D. Porter, personal communication, May 30, 2012).
- "Group supervision is intended to introduce new social workers to the profession and should be a mentoring process. The supervisees should be encouraged to identify areas of growth and supervision time should be used to address these" (B. Lindsey, personal communication, May 25, 2012).
- "Group supervision can be beneficial for looking at organizational culture" (J. Forbes, personal communication, April 9, 2012).

Group Supervision Models

Model	Reference	Key Features	Other
University of the West of Scotland, Paisley	Porter (personal communication, May 30, 2012)	- Students supervised individually and in a group on alternate weeks throughout the placement - Group supervision is run by facilitator, from the University staff, whose role is that of timekeeper, director of proceedings and manager of group process - Practice teacher of students in group attends and role is that of assessment, support of the group process and offering of feedback to students	- Group is both a learning and supervision group - Practice teacher of students in group attends and role is that of assessment, support of the group process and offering of feedback to students - Practice Learning Agreement is drawn up in advance and includes details of who is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of practice, the assessment of the student's practice, work in the group, etc.
The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen	Porter (personal communication, May 30, 2012)	- Based on partnership between university and social service providers - Practice Learning Facilitator (PLF) who coordinates packages of learning opportunities and involved in the teaching and assessment of students - Student supervision is provided as a combination of a pattern of group and individual supervision with a clear practice curriculum carried out by the PLF but supported very closely with a range of link workers who offer work based, task specific supervision	Student Supervision pattern involves weekly, fortnightly, three weekly, and three joint meetings
Peer Group Supervision	Bigley (1986)	- Two equally experienced workers meet to informally discuss cases - Neither person is designated as supervisor - Any decisions to be made are the responsibility of the person working with the client	- Utilized due to more economical use of educators' time and provision of a greater variety of models - Reciprocal peer supervision, in which the same two students meet once a week, each acting in turn as supervisor is as effective as supervision by a faculty member - Supervisor is the group leader
Structured Group Supervision	Hurlock (2008)	- Ideal for a group of 8 to 10 supervisees - Environment that has context for case reports and for providing feedback and performance evaluation - Focus is interpersonal in nature, with exchanges and responses between group members regarding their attitudinal, value, and belief systems - Relies on a diversity of input from group members - Format is structured for the active involvement and participation of all group members - Format is intended to minimize member interactions that interfere with the focus and goals of supervision, and to enhance group supervision productivity, reduce conflict and resistance and provide orderly input	Consists of skill development, personal growth, and integration models
Talking Model	Hurlock (2008).	- Peer review, peer feedback, and personal insights - Consists of a series of rounds - Talking stick is passed around to each participant - Round 1: Case presentation - Round 2: Clarification - Round 3: Feeling word - Round 4: Affinity - Round 5: Discussion - Round 6: Final Feedback	Based on assumption that supervisees bring important knowledge and experience as well as their own personal values, characteristic, and culture to supervision process

Pros and Cons of Group Models

Pros
- Combination of individual and group supervision
- Learning and supervision experience for students
- Support group for students
- Provides homework assignments to enhance professional growth
- Considers personal values, characteristics, and culture
- Allows field supervisor to partake in more supervisory roles
- Allows students to provide more direct services to clients
- Cost-efficient compared to hiring more school social workers

Cons
- Not all models created for social work (counseling and medical profession)
- Some models require more than 1 supervisor position (e.g. Practice Learning Facilitator, Link worker)
- Peer Group Supervision Model does not provide a formal supervisor

Feasibility Issues
- Financial Cost
- Partnership between University and School District (similar to student teaching)
- Planning time for supervision sessions by school social workers

Discussion and Recommendations
- Group supervision would provide benefits to District #77.
- First, group supervision would give the interns an opportunity to discuss their practice and provide support for each other.
- Second, field supervisors would have more time to perform a supervisory role as the interns would primarily be providing direct services.
- Finally, group supervision is more cost-efficient than hiring more school social workers.
- Recommendations for next steps include the district #77 school social workers presenting the results from the project to school administration. It is suggested that either the University of the West or Robert Gordon University model be implemented.