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ABSTRACT

A supervision analogue was used to determine whether counselor trainees' preference for supervision method affects the outcome of supervision. Subjects were enrolled in a counselor education master's program. Two treatment groups of 8 subjects received supervision according to their preference; 2 groups of 8 did not. A control group of 8 subjects received no supervision. Supervisory sessions focused on increasing levels of empathic understanding. An analysis of empathy ratings indicated that learning empathy was not contingent upon receiving the preferred mode of supervision. Type of supervision received was a significant factor. Subjects receiving didactic supervision were rated higher in levels of empathy than subjects in other groups. Interaction effect between supervisor and supervision method was also significant. (Author)

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College Park, Maryland



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ON EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING

Janice M. Birk

Research Report # 4-72

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GPA REPORT

Fall, 1971

	<u>FRESHMAN</u>	<u>SOPHOMORE</u>	<u>JUNIOR</u>	<u>SENIOR</u>	<u>TOTALS</u>
Credit Hours Completed	1-27	28-55	56-85	86+	
<u>COLLEGE</u>					
Agriculture	2.31 (196)*	2.53 (170)	2.62 (165)	2.77 (192)	2.56 (723)
Arts & Sciences	2.53 (2766)	2.63 (2371)	2.74 (2337)	2.90 (2462)	2.69 (9936)
BPA	2.31 (707)	2.40 (756)	2.33 (994)	2.59 (1081)	2.42 (3538)
Education	2.54 (734)	2.71 (969)	2.84 (1159)	3.09 (1149)	2.83 (4011)
Engineering	2.37 (267)	2.39 (236)	2.39 (275)	2.69 (481)	2.50 (1259)
Home Economics	2.50 (237)	2.47 (243)	2.68 (235)	2.92 (271)	2.65 (986)
Nursing	2.28 (187)	2.60 (201)	2.56 (26)	2.35 (4)	2.46 (418)
OIR	1.49 (324)	1.62 (143)	1.88 (30)	1.61 (3)	1.55 (500)
Physical Education	2.22 (102)	2.42 (118)	2.58 (156)	2.91 (211)	2.60 (587)
University College	2.78 (108)	2.61 (45)	2.81 (38)	2.71 (51)	2.74 (242)
Pharmacy	2.11 (39)	2.41 (33)	2.41 (11)	2.69 (2)	2.28 (85)
Architecture	2.43 (49)	2.48 (53)	2.68 (42)	2.91 (66)	2.65 (210)
College Park Medical	2.40 (121)	2.65 (88)	2.79 (39)	2.80 (7)	2.56 (255)
Totals	2.42 (5837)	2.56 (5426)	2.65 (5507)	2.86 (5980)	2.62 (22,750)

* Number in each group in parentheses

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Abstract

A supervision analogue was used to determine whether counselor trainees' preference for supervision method affects the outcome of supervision. Subjects were enrolled in a counselor education master's program. Two treatment groups of 8 subjects received supervision according to their preference; two groups of 8 did not. A control group of 8 subjects received no supervision. Supervisory sessions focused on increasing levels of empathic understanding. An analysis of empathy ratings indicated that learning empathy was not contingent upon receiving the preferred mode of supervision. Type of supervision received was a significant factor. Subjects receiving didactic supervision were rated higher in levels of empathy than subjects in other groups. Interaction effect between supervisor and supervision method was also significant.

Little research has been done on the relative effectiveness of different supervisory strategies. The research that does exist has centered around the types, didactic and experiential, which Truax, Carkhuff and Douds (1964) refer to as the primary positions of theorists. The emphasis on cognitive learning is implicit within the didactic model. The strong position taken by Mazer and Engle (1968) not only supports the value of cognitive emphases, but clearly asserts that the cognitive approach is actually the preferred training method. Clark (1965) likewise stated preference for a pedagogical emphasis in supervision by describing counseling supervision as "essentially a teaching situation in an academic setting." Krasner (1962) and Krumboltz (1967) recommended structuring trainee responses in accord with the supervisor's orientation.

The proponents of the experiential orientation (e.g. Altucher, 1967; Lister, 1966a; Sanderson, 1954) consider the intellectual aspect of supervision secondary to the emotional experience. Significant supervision learning, according to Altucher (1967), occurs "in situations where one's feelings are engaged." Gysbers placed import on feeling when he emphasized "trust" within the supervisory relationship (1963) and encouraged exploration of trainees' "need system" (1964).

Past investigations indicate supervisor differences exist in perceived roles during supervision. A survey by Johnston and Gysbers (1966) revealed that supervisors prefer the strategy of minimally structured discussion in a democratic atmosphere. These findings were inconsistent with those of Walz and Poerber (1962), and in sharp contrast to the findings of studies reporting supervisees' expectations of didactic supervision (Delaney and Moore, 1966; Gysbers and Johnston, 1965). Discrepancies are also apparent when contrasting the findings of Miller and Oetting (1966), that trainees resist

supervisors who approach them as therapists, with support for counseling-oriented supervision. Emphasis on didactic strategy (Krasner, 1962; Krumboltz, 1967), however, tends to contradict findings of Bonney and Gazda (1966) that trainees participating in a therapeutic group experience unanimously recommended counseling experiences within training programs.

Dissimilarity of opinions regarding effective supervisory strategy is obvious; thus far, dissimilarity which may occur between supervisor and supervisee has been acknowledged, but the implications have not been tested. Lister's comment (1966b), pertaining to the discrepancy between trainee expectations and the supervision received, was that the trainees may be frustrated. Gysbers and Johnston (1965), looking at the same discrepancy, conjecture the opposite: it may produce minimal tension that facilitates growth in practicum. Just as tentative was Miller and Oetting's comment (1966) that supervisees' expectations may be a crucial factor in supervision learning. Although opinions exist there have been no empirical investigations of possible effects when supervisees' preferences for a type of supervision are not met.

This study was designed to determine whether counselor trainees' preference for a type of supervision affects the outcome of supervision. The effect of matching or not matching supervisory style with the preferred type of supervision was examined. Comparisons were made also between each supervisory style's effectiveness in teaching the counseling skill, empathic understanding.

Method

Subjects

Supervisees were 40 graduate students enrolled in a Counseling and Personnel Services master's program, who participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Supervisors were two male doctoral students in counseling psychology.

One supervisor had nearly completed the first year of post-master's doctoral study, and the other had nearly completed the second year. Both supervisors were rated by two judges as comparable in their functioning level of empathic understanding. Comparable levels was deemed a necessary control in light of evidence that supervisees cannot change beyond the supervisor's level of functioning (Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff and Berenson, 1967; Pierce and Schauble, 1970).

Procedure

Counselor trainees were asked to respond to descriptions of two supervisory styles, didactic and experiential, by indicating the type of supervisory relationship they would prefer as a supervisee enrolled in practicum. The option was also provided to state "no preference." Those who indicated "no preference" and those students who had completed one semester or more of practicum were eliminated. The remaining eligible students were assigned randomly to one of four treatment groups or to a control group (eight per group). The five groups were stratified with respect to sex of the subject and practicum experience (i.e. no practicum experience or currently enrolled in Practicum I). The 20 students who expressed preference for didactic type supervision were assigned randomly as follows: (1) four to each supervisor under each treatment condition, that is, didactic and experiential mode of supervision (16 assignments); and (2) four to the control group. The 20 students who expressed preference for experiential type supervision were randomly assigned in like manner. Assignments were such that each supervisor employed both types of supervisory strategies, and with each strategy the supervisor worked with four subjects who preferred that particular type of supervision and with four subjects who did not.

Prior to the experiment the two supervisors received training to the point where each supervisor could clearly and distinctly execute each supervisory strategy. After training, the criterion of competency was met when three outside raters unanimously concurred in their judgment of which strategy was being employed based on viewing a 15-minute videotaped segment of supervision. During the course of the study each supervisory session was monitored by the experimenter through a television monitor in an adjacent room to insure that the designated strategy was followed according to the specific guidelines predefined for each approach.

The experiment was conducted as a supervision analogue. Prior to the beginning of the experiment each subject was told that he would have three 10-minute interviews with a coached client in a videotaped setting, and that he should interact with the coached client as in a counseling relationship. Immediately following the first interview, each subject in the treatment groups had a 15-minute supervision meeting with his assigned supervisor under one of the two supervisory strategies, didactic or experiential. A second interview followed immediately with the same coached client presenting a different problem. The second interview was also followed by a 15-minute supervision period with the same supervisor and under the same supervisory strategy as the first. Finally, a third interview followed immediately with the same coached client presenting a third problem. Thus, the experimental sequence was interview-supervision-interview-supervision-interview. The focus of each supervisory session was increasing the supervisee's level of empathic understanding. For the control group, the 15-minute interim following the first two interviews was spent by reading popular magazines available in the counseling room.

The counseling and supervision occurred in the same room, so that experimental subjects were always in contact with only one person: either a coached client or the supervisor. Members of the control group were either with a coached client or were alone. So that subjects would be unaware that some received supervision and others did not, control and experimental groups were run at different times.

To determine if different levels of empathic understanding were attained by those who received their preferred mode of supervision in contrast to those who did not, or who received no supervision at all, four-minute videotaped segments of each interview were rated by three judges. So that judges did not know which interview was being rated (first, second or third), the segments were presented in randomized order on a master tape. Judges independently rated all segments. The average of the three ratings was the single empathy rating used for the analysis.

Dependent Variable

Subjects were rated on Carkhuff and Berenson's (1967) Empathic Understanding Scale, a five-point scale with "one" indicating the lowest and "five" the highest level of empathy. Prior to the actual rating procedure, interrater reliability was maximized by rater-training in use of the scale. Interrater reliability on Interview I was .65 for all subjects, and .92 on Interview III. Ebel's formula (Guilford, 1954) was used to calculate reliability.

The Experimental Interview

The interview content presented by coached clients pertained to some aspect of college adjustment, each presentation involving a different problem. Unrelatedness of interviews was used to control for possible increases

in empathic understanding ratings as a function of increased understanding of the client problem over time. The coached clients, who assumed the role of a freshman at a large Midwestern university, were trained by the experimenter prior to the study.

Supervisory Conditions

For the experiential type of supervision, an informal discussion atmosphere was maintained. The supervisor was instructed to ask the supervisee for relevant personal life experiences in the present or past that may be similar to that of the client. Supervisors, via their empathic behavior, explored the supervisee's dominant emotional quality while interviewing the client, and when appropriate utilized the supervisory relationship as a living emotional experience wherein the supervisee could sense himself in relationship to the client. Thus, emphasis was placed on the parallelism between the supervisory and the counseling relationship. As much as possible, the supervisor used his behavior as a model for the supervisee.

For didactic supervision the supervisor maintained a structured approach in which he gave direction to the session. He specified for the supervisee those remarks which appropriately communicated empathic understanding. For weak and inappropriate responses made by the supervisee, the supervisor suggested responses which could have been more effective. The supervisor questioned the supervisee to test his recognition of appropriate and inappropriate responses made during the counseling session, and positively reinforced verbally the supervisee's accurate recognition of appropriate and inappropriate responses. Supervisors further suggested techniques which facilitate empathy, e.g. voice modulation; matching client tone, volume and rate of speech; use of specific gestures, etc.

Results

An analysis of variance of the empathic understanding ratings of all subjects prior to treatment indicated they were initially equal in empathic understanding ability. Other steps in the analysis were subsequently conducted, namely, a three-way analysis of variance of Interview III empathic understanding ratings. It may be seen from Table I that the main effect of supervision preference was not significant.

Insert Table I About Here

Supervision method, however, did appear to provide differential effects in learning empathic understanding ($p < .01$). To assess the more specific effects of supervision method, paired comparisons were conducted using the Scheffe method (Ferguson, 1966). The resultant F-ratio was significant for the didactic supervision group when compared with both the experiential supervision and the control group.

The analysis of variance also indicated that an interaction effect existed between supervisor and supervision method. Paired comparisons were conducted using the Scheffe method to assess the more specific effects of the interaction. Supervisor I using the didactic method of supervision was compared with himself using the experiential method and with Supervisor II using both strategies. The critical value of F was significant at the .01 level for all comparisons, except that with Supervisor II using the didactic method of supervision ($p < .05$).

Discussion

This study provides some empirical evidence to answer a question which, to this point, had been left to conjecture. The results suggest that learning during at least the early phases of supervision is not contingent upon

being supervised in the mode which the supervisee prefers. The beginning counselor, for example, may prefer structured supervisory sessions which provide a "this-is-how-you-do-it" orientation. Understandably such an orientation might be viewed by the novice as providing some handles to clutch in the unfamiliar and threatening interview room. The data presented in this study suggest that should the above novice receive instead experientially oriented supervision, mismatch of the preferred and the actual supervision would not in itself deter learning during supervision. Likewise, receiving the preferred mode of supervision would not necessarily facilitate learning during supervisory sessions. The nature of this experiment, conducted as an analogue, does not permit generalization to the practicum experience of one or two semester duration. It may be necessary to re-examine the question in an actual practicum setting of longer duration.

The question of supervisory strategy effectiveness has been responded to by researchers presenting contradictory evidence. Support for any one approach can usually be contradicted by positive evidence for other approaches; thus, the question remains within the heap of issues with discrepant research findings. The results of this study lend support to those favoring the didactic approach to supervision, at least when learning empathic understanding is the focus of learning. These findings are similar to those of Payne and Gralinski (1968) who contrasted technique-oriented supervision (didactic) with counseling-oriented supervision (experiential) and found that counselor learning of empathy was superior under the technique-oriented supervision. It should be noted, however, that the high degree of effectiveness for the didactic method may have been influenced by the fact that the subjects of this study were all beginning students in a masters degree program and had no previous practicum experiences. It may be, for example, that had the

subjects been advanced students with prior practica, then the didactic method with its technique orientation would not be as effective. What does seem supportable is that learning certain counseling skills by beginning counselor trainees is made more effective by a didactic and structured approach during supervision; the analogue experience within a practicum can be a useful model for that learning.

The efforts of other researchers (Ivey et al., 1968) have already brought attention to the efficacy of microcounseling or analogue learning situations for the practicum student. The significant differences occurring in this study after two 15-minute supervisory sessions support the feasibility of learning counseling skills in short blocks of time. If future evidence continues to confirm shortcourse treatment of counseling skills, then modification of practicum experiences as currently conceptualized may be in order. The reconceptualizations seem especially relevant for pre-practicum experiences in which skill training is frequently the focus.

Significant interaction effects between supervisor and supervision method suggest that an effective tool, in this case didactic supervision, is more effective for some supervisors than for others. Exploring "the fit" of several supervisory strategies may maximize the learning potential during supervision.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance of Empathic Understanding by Supervisor, Supervision Method, and Supervision Preference

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
Supervisor	1	.69	.69	2.30
Method	1	7.36	7.36	24.53**
Preference	1	.02	.02	.07
Supervisor x Method	1	2.71	2.71	9.03**
Supervisor x Preference	1	.21	.21	.70
Method x Preference	1	.05	.05	.17
Supervisor x Method x Preference	1	.70	.70	2.33
Error	24	7.14	.30	
Total	31	18.88		

** $p < .01$

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