Multicultural SuperVISION: A Paradigm of Cultural Responsiveness for Supervisors

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Abstract:

The need for cultural characteristics to be addressed in supervision is discussed as a way of dealing with both opportunities and obstacles that may exist. The VISION model of cultural responsiveness is described as a practical means of supervisors exploring multicultural issues in the supervisory relationship.

Article:

Once, at the outset of supervision with a supervisee (European American) who was culturally different from me (first author, Native American), she jokingly said to me, "If this is supervision, then that means that you are going to have `super-vision' and point out everything that I do wrong?" We both laughed a little, and I assured her that I had no super powers, nor could I fly. "Actually, my job," I told her, "is to point out what you do right so that you do more of that and less of whatever is not working. So if you will keep yourself open, then I will do the same, and we will work on this together, and make you the most effective counselor possible." She agreed. We started talking about our supervisory relationship and how our respective cultures (difference in gender, race, cultural heritage, life experiences) might influence our perceptions of the world, communication styles, interpretations of experiences, selection of goals, and ways of working toward our chosen goals. This initial conversation also led into an equally important dialogue about how differences between her and her clients would affect the counseling process and about ways that she might want to deal with this.

I realized from this initial encounter how important it was to open a dialogue early on to establish mutual understanding, develop rapport, clarify expectations and roles, anticipate potential barriers, and just get to know each other as people and professionals. I was also reminded of my responsibilities as a supervisor, given the differential in power that exists in the supervisory relationship. Even though I am a member of an ethnic minority group, as supervisor

I was acting symbolically in a majority position; likewise, the supervisee, although a member of the ethnic majority, was in a minority position by virtue of her status in the relationship. I wanted our work together to be intentional and as collaborative as possible, realizing, too, that I was still in a position of power by serving in an evaluative role.

The need for cultural responsiveness in supervision

The supervision of counselors has been identified as a critical component in the continuous development of counseling performance skills, conceptualization skills, personalization or self-awareness, and professional behaviors (Bernard, 1979; Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). A growing need has been identified in the counseling profession for multicultural issues to be addressed as an integral part of counselor training and supervision. Research has shown that persons of color tend to underutilize counseling services, terminating at a rate of greater than 50% after the first session (Priest, 1994; Sue & Sue, 1999). This overwhelming rate of early termination, according to Sue and Sue, has been attributed to the biased nature of services and the lack of sensitivity and understanding for the life experiences of the culturally different client.

One of the major reasons for supervisees' ineffectiveness in working with culturally different clients has been identified as the lack of culturally sensitive material included in the curricula or the extent to which that material is processed on both an interpersonal and intrapersonal level even when present (Lee, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1999). Clients who do not feel understood or appreciated in their cultural context have a higher likelihood of terminating counseling early. Counselor education training programs often assume that effective multicultural counselors only require the acquisition of multicultural knowledge along with basic counseling skills. What is needed for supervisees, in addition to a basic competence in counseling, is the self-exploration and self-understanding that comes through appropriate training and supervision in cultural awareness, knowledge, and a range of communication skills and counseling techniques (Ivey, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1999).

To facilitate this process for supervisees, supervisors must also have attained a level of cultural awareness, knowledge, and range of communication skills. Several authors have indicated the need for supervisors first to examine their own knowledge, assumptions, attitudes, perceptions, and feelings and then to help supervisees engage in similar processes (Fukuyama, 1994; Leong & Wagner, 1994; Martinez & Holloway, 1997; Peterson, 1991; Priest, 1994). There are several possible consequences for the supervisor's not understanding his or her own cultural biases and assumptions. These include the tendency to prematurely judge supervisees according to limited conceptions of the world; miscommunication or misunderstanding, or both, in supervision that often leads to the giving or receiving of offense resulting in ineffective interaction; dominating supervisees; a lack of awareness of the relationships between members of different cultural groups or concerning cultural and linguistic differences; an insensitivity to the supervisee's nonverbal cues; an inability to anticipate the viewpoints of the supervisee whose assumptions about the world may differ; and an inability to appropriately frame questions and responses for

eliciting valuable information or providing feedback (P. B. Pedersen, 1994). The purpose of this article is to address the need for cultural responsiveness in supervision and provide supervisors with a paradigm to help them work more effectively with supervisees, given differences in values and belief systems, interpretation of experiences, structuring preferences, interactional style, operational strategies, and perceived needs of supervisees.

The nature of multicultural supervision: opportunities and obstacles

Multicultural supervision occurs when two or more culturally different persons, with different ways of perceiving their social environment and experiences, are brought together in a supervisory relationship with the resulting content, process, and outcomes that are affected by these cultural dynamics (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Brown & Landrum-Brown, 1995; D'Andrea & Daniels, 1997; P. B. Pedersen, 1994). The resulting dyad might include majority supervisor-minority supervisee, minority supervisor-majority supervisee, minority supervisor-minority supervisee (culturally different from one another), or majority supervisor-majority supervisee (culturally different from one another). Thus, the impact of the power differential in the supervisory relationship and potential barriers to understanding have great consequence. The question arises, How can power differential and cultural differences be addressed so that these factors do not adversely affect the supervision process but, even more important, further and enrich the supervision process?

Several studies have looked at some of the important variables involved in multicultural supervision. Constantine (1997) examined 22 internship programs concerning the extent to which multicultural differences were present in the supervisory relationship, the degree of multicultural training of supervisors and supervisees, the extent to which multicultural issues were addressed in supervision, and ways that the supervisory relationship could be enhanced regarding multicultural issues. Results indicated that 70% of the supervisors had not completed a course in multicultural counseling, whereas 70% of supervisees had completed one such course. In addition, many respondents reported that supervision could have been greatly enhanced had they spent more time processing issues surrounding cultural differences.

In a study examining the satisfaction of 225 Asian, African American, Latino, and Native American supervisees, Cook and Helms (1988) found that supervisor's liking and conditional interest contributed to greater supervisee satisfaction. In another study looking at the multicultural relationships of supervisors and supervisees, it was found that although there were few actual problems, both supervisors and supervisees expected more problems than benefits (McRoy, Freeman, Logan, & Blackmon, 1986). Therefore, satisfaction with and benefit from supervision may depend on the extent to which supervisors like and show interest in their supervisees and the extent to which both supervisor and supervisee expect benefits rather than problems. This presumes a high level of accuracy in the supervisor's and supervisee's understandings of each other's behaviors and expectations and in the effectiveness of the communication process (P. B. Pedersen, 1994).

The effectiveness of supervision is predicated on the effectiveness of communication between sender and receiver. Unfortunately, cultural differences have the potential for acting as interference in the accurate understanding on the part of sender and receiver to the messages being sent and received (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Towne, 1989). Cultural variances in communication and behavior, expectations, values and beliefs, preferences, perceptions, and culturally based assumptions sometimes result in miscommunication, misinformation, and misunderstanding. This can lead to supervisee anger and resistance, supervisor defensiveness, supervisor overidentification, supervisee resistance, supervisor countertransference, or supervisor patronization. The resulting breakdown of the communication process can affect content, process, and outcomes for the supervisory process, thus leading to poor development of the supervisee as an effective counselor.

There are several dimensions listed by Brown and Landrum-Brown (1995) that can act as potential barriers to effective multicultural supervision, including language, social and economic status, educational differences, differences in values and interaction styles, acculturation and oppression, race and ethnicity, nationality, geographic region, and occupational and economic background. Moreover, there are not only between-group differences but also within-group differences in dimensions such as racial and cultural identity development (Helms & Cook, 1999).

Many of the differences that can be found in a supervisory relationship between two culturally different people can present both opportunities for perspective and growth as well as potential obstacles in the supervisory process. Reducing the amount of miscommunication and misunderstanding stemming from differences in worldview precipitates the need for a paradigm of cultural responsiveness for supervisors needing to address the dimensions identified in the literature as critical areas. The necessity of understanding one's own worldview and the worldview of the supervisee arises from the need to communicate effectively with that person (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Sue & Sue, 1999). By learning to uncover implicit assumptions that may be unique to any particular culture, supervisors can recognize how these assumptions might conflict in the supervisory relationship (Bernard, 1994; Cook, 1994; Leong & Wagner, 1994).

There are two issues currently confronting counselor educators and supervisors regarding cultural diversity: (a) What is the best way to develop supervisors who are multiculturally competent and responsive? and (b) What is the best way to foster the multicultural development of supervisees? Obviously, supervisees will not become culturally effective until counselor educators become culturally sensitive and supervisors become more culturally responsive (Ponterotto & Casas, 1987). The ultimate responsibility for initiating discussion of multicultural issues in supervision rests with the supervisor (Fukuyama, 1994; Leong & Wagner, 1994). To successfully do this, the supervisor must demonstrate a certain level of cultural responsiveness in supervision. For supervisors to understand how to better deal with potential obstacles that arise in supervision as a result of cultural differences, it is equally important to consider what opportunities for learning these cultural differences offer both supervisors and supervisees.

Focusing the VISION

Researchers and practitioners in the area of multicultural counseling have recognized the need to operationalize the concept of culture in counseling and supervision to provide counselors and supervisors with a workable set of standards and competencies to be implemented in the training process (Arredondo et al., 1996; D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; DeLucia-Waack, 1996; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Locke, 1993; Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995). Culture has been defined by P. B. Pedersen (1994) as a pattern of assumptions that determines how we see the world (i.e., worldview) and is therefore, according to Deloria (1988), the expression of the essence of a people. This "expression" manifests as a result of the many characteristics-race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, nationality, physical ability-that make up who we are and contribute to the story of our life (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). Although many of these characteristics do not change (e.g., race), some of the characteristics can and do change as we change; examples include growing older or converting from one religion to another. Thus, culture has a strong conceptual, affective, and behavioral basis that is subject to change as we encounter new experiences and new ways of looking at the world. Part of the goal for the supervisor is to be aware of the components of his or her culture and how this affects the supervisee and the process of supervision.

The VISION model of culture (Baber, Garrett, & Holcomb-McCoy, 1997), coming out of the literature in both counseling and anthropology, is based on a definition of culture that consists of "standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it" (Goodenough, 1981, p. 62). In supervision, VISION is useful for relating the ongoing interactional process of culture in the way that supervisor and supervisee

V--structure their phenomenal world in terms of Values and

belief systems

I--respond to the internal and external stimuli of their

phenomenal world by Interpreting their experiences and

ascribing meanings

S--Structure their phenomenal world according to

personal/cultural meanings and preferences that provide

appropriate avenues for goal-directed behaviors and

expectations

I--engage in interactive learning and self-expression

through an Interactional style of verbal and nonverbal

communication in social groups and the surrounding

environment that requires a continuous process of

adaptation

O--develop Operational strategies and procedures for

accomplishing their expectations and goals

N--develop a particular perspective in seeking to fulfill

perceived physical, mental, spiritual (emotional), and

environmental Needs

The following sections delineate each component of the model to be addressed by the supervisor in the supervisory relationship with the supervisee.

VALUES AND BELIEF SYSTEMS

"What is important to you and why?" This component focuses on the match or mismatch of supervisor and supervisee systems of values and beliefs. The five dimensions of value orientation described by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) provide a useful framework in supervision for informal assessment by the supervisor of his or her own cultural values, the supervisee's cultural values, and the match between supervisor and supervisee in terms of these values. For example, in supervision it is helpful for the supervisor to discuss with the supervisee what they value in terms of human nature (bad, good and bad, good, neutral); social relations (lineal hierarchy, collateral group, individualism); people/nature relations (subjugation to nature/fate, harmony/coexistence, mastery over nature); time focus (past/traditions, present/here-and-now, future/planning); and human activity (being, being-in-becoming, doing). Although only one theoretical framework, this provides a basis for understanding differences in worldview between supervisor and supervisee to address potential conflict areas concerning basic cultural assumptions about the world before they become obstacles (Carter, 1991; Ibrahim, 1985; Ibrahim

& Kahn, 1987). Variations in value orientation show how individuals differ from one another on very basic ways of seeing the world around them and how the supervisee's value orientation can affect his or her style of interaction. In addition, exploration of values and beliefs also requires the exploration of power dynamics, issues of prejudice and racism, sexism, homoprejudice, ageism, and so on.

INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIENCES

"What's going on, what options/alternative points of view do you perceive?" This component involves the supervisor addressing the supervisee's interpretation of his or her experiences both in supervision (immediacy/process) and counseling (content/outcomes). Taking into consideration the differences in cultural characteristics and using what Helms and Cook (1999) refer to as a "here-and-now focus on racial/cultural issues," supervisors can address the immediate experience of supervisee in supervision by using statements like, "Tell me what you're experiencing right now in terms of what is going on between us." Another example statement might be, "I'm sensing some tension fight now between us, I'm wondering if you are experiencing it too, and what sense you make out of it."

In terms of content and outcome issues, supervisors can address the supervisee's interpretation of his or her experiences with the client using such interventions as Interpersonal Process Recall (Borders & Leddick, 1987; Kagan, 1975). With this method, the supervisor can ask questions that emphasize the supervisee's perceptions of the client, the supervisee's assumptions about the client's perceptions of the supervisee, the supervisee's interpretations and assumptions about the client's statements/responses, and the rationale and intentions for the supervisee's responses.

STRUCTURING

"How do you structure the relationship and process?" This component focuses on the way that the supervisor structures what goes on in the process of supervision and is therefore helpful and symbolic of how the supervisee may need to structure the counseling relationship and process. On the basis of discussion of values and interpretation of experiences, supervisors can get a sense of the way in which to best structure the content and process of supervision to effectively work with the supervisee. Culture varies according to values and beliefs concerning eye contact, space between persons, discipline, attitudes toward authority, customs of touching, nonverbal cues, need for privacy, display of affection, and male or female roles (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Larsen & Downie, 1988). All of these represent areas that determine how the supervisory relationship will be structured to meet its goals, and all of these are areas that are worthy of some discussion between supervisor and supervisee to clarify expectations for interaction. In addition, framing such things as confidentiality, goals for supervision, expectations by supervisor and supervisee, role of the supervisor and supervisee, definition(s) of the focus area, and specific procedures (i.e., interventions) in a culturally appropriate manner is important for opening and maintaining the lines of communication for mutual understanding and rapport. To achieve this,

supervisor and supervisee must be able to accurately and effectively communicate with one another.

INTERACTIONAL STYLE

"What is your preferred mode of (verbal and nonverbal) communication?" This component focuses on the preferred style of communication between supervisor and supervisee, including what each one says and how each one says it. Non-verbal interactional styles differ in terms of proxemics, kinesics, paralanguage, and whether communication tends to be high or low context (Adler et al., 1989; Sue & Sue, 1999). For the supervisor, being aware of his or her own style of communication and increasing the supervisee's awareness of his or her communication style and expectations reduce the chance for unintentional miscommunications.

P. B. Pedersen's (1994) and A. Pedersen & Pedersen's (1985) Cultural Grid serves as an example of a useful technique in supervision for identifying some of the variables (ethnographic, demographic, status, affiliation) involved in a particular interactional exchange, the behaviors observed, the expectations and underlying value(s), and the possibility that the expectation may or may not be the one intended by the person. The goal of this process is to understand culture as a set of assumptions functioning within the individual and to seek an accurate interpretation of a person's behavior (communication) in terms of the intended expectations, consequences, and meanings. Supervisor and supervisee can discuss particular preferences for verbal and nonverbal communication in cultural nuances and meanings.

OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

"How do you select and work toward goals?" This component focuses on the level of intentionality of both supervisor and supervisee in using certain culturally based strategies to achieve his or her chosen goals. The supervisor has certain goals (spoken or unspoken) for supervision; likewise, the supervisee has certain goals (spoken or unspoken) for supervision. Together supervisor and supervisee must lay all these goals out on the table, talk a little bit about motivations for selected goals based on personal and professional experiences, and come to consensus on which goals will be addressed in the process of supervision and specifically how they will be addressed in a mutually agreeable way. One example of a selected goal might be focusing on maintaining a clear view of the purpose and goals for the supervisee by practicing consistency in the theoretical orientation and his or her actual counseling approach. This may subsequently be modeled in supervision as the supervisor demonstrates consistency and intentionality in his or her approach and explores differences in method of approach while maintaining continuing awareness of the needs of the supervisee at any given time.

NEEDS (PERCEIVED)

"What do you want or need in terms of outcome?" This component focuses on the supervisor's goals with the supervisee and on the supervisee's goals with the supervisor by focusing on

perceived mental, physical, spiritual (emotional), or environmental needs toward clarifying desired outcome(s). For instance, a supervisor may perceive the need for a fairly nondirective approach to believe that the supervision process is working well. The supervisee may, however, be culturally accustomed to listening to a person of authority with the expectation of receiving specific direction. The supervisor can clarify differences or similarities in perceived needs and expectations of both supervisor and supervisee through both content and process at any given moment.

Conclusion

In supervision, both supervisor and supervisee embrace certain theoretical orientations, certain styles or preferred roles, certain strategies or focuses, certain formats within which they prefer to work, and certain techniques they view as most useful, all as a function of the way in which they view the world. Supervisors demonstrating a wide range of competencies included in the areas of cultural awareness, knowledge, and communication skills are more fully and effectively able to facilitate the competence and continued development of their supervisees. A number of authors indicate the need for supervisors to become more fully aware of their own cultural identity, more knowledgeable about various racial or cultural identity development models, more knowledgeable of specific cultural groups and cultural nuances that differ from their own, as well as seeking out formal training in multicultural counseling (Constantine, 1997; D'Andrea & Daniels, 1997; Martinez & Holloway, 1997; Peterson, 1991; Stone, 1997). More specifically, supervisors are encouraged to consider issues that can affect the supervisory relationship, including unintentional racism, power dynamics, trust and the supervisory alliance, and communication issues or differences (Fong & Lease, 1997). In other words, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to become more culturally competent and responsive to work best with supervisees who bring cultural differences to the relationship.

Supervisors involved in a supervisory relationship with supervisees who are culturally different have basically three options: (a) avoid addressing cultural differences (intentionally or unintentionally), (b) only address cultural differences if the supervisee brings them up or if they somehow come up during the process, or (c) proactively address cultural differences from the beginning. Of these three options, the third option seems to be the preferred mode of operation. This means supervisors have to be willing to be proactive, to be willing to do some self-exploration, and to have courage to talk openly with supervisees about potentially uncomfortable issues. Specific recommendations for supervisors include reading the literature, attending workshops, consulting with colleagues who possess cultural expertise, exploring cultural perspectives or identity with supervisees, addressing power dynamics, exploring issues of privilege, addressing issues around prejudice and racism (or any other "ism"), building trust, and clarifying communication styles (Constantine, 1997; Fong & Lease, 1997; Remington & DaCosta, 1989; Williams & Halgin, 1995). Together, supervisors and supervisees can examine the impact of their respective worldviews on the supervisory relationship concerning content, process, and outcomes.

VISION provides supervisors with a paradigm for increasing their effectiveness in communicating and working with supervisees to train effective counselors. This means taking a look at both the supervisor's and supervisee's values and belief systems, interpretations of experiences, structuring preferences, interactional style, operational strategies, and perceived needs. For supervisors, it is a matter of recognizing and responding to cultural differences in worldview that affect the communication process and being willing and able to address this as the need arises and, it is hoped, even before the need arises. In supervision, supervisors are challenged to recognize and respond to both the opportunities and obstacles that are presented by working with and training supervisees who are culturally different from themselves. This should be considered both a responsibility and a privilege.

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