

## Clinical Supervision Strategies for School Counselors

### Working with Twice-Exceptional Students

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#### Abstract

Clinical supervision is a way for counselors in training to develop needed skills (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). Best practices indicate that counselors trained in the application of supervision theory should provide clinical supervision. However, many school counselors receive administrative supervision by non-counseling professionals who may overlook the school counselors' clinical development. In addition, there is limited research on school counselors' clinical or administration supervision with special population such as twice-exceptional learners. This article reviews current literature on school counselors' clinical and administrative supervision practices with the twice-exceptional population, in consideration of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model. Implication for counselors, suggestions for future research, and strategies to increase this type of supervision will also be discussed.

*Keywords:* Supervision, school counselor supervision, twice-exceptional students, special education, gifted education

## Clinical Supervision Strategies for School Counselors

### Working with Twice-Exceptional Students

School counselors shape the development of students' unique academic, social/emotional, and career needs (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). Counselors may address these unique needs through a variety of counseling services offered through the school counseling program. While trained to address these diverse student needs, school counselors often do not receive adequate clinical supervision to perform these duties effectively (Studer, 2006). In particular, school counselors meeting the needs of twice-exceptional students have singular clinical supervision needs and considerations.

Twice-exceptional students can be defined as students who possess an identified disability in conjunction with gifted abilities (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). The knowledge and skills of school counselors can address the unique presenting needs of twice-exceptional students (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Neilson, 2002). A discussion of supervision in the school setting follows.

#### School Counseling Supervision

Different types of supervision exist in the school setting. What is supervision? Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth (1982) define supervision as an intensive, interpersonal focused relationship, usually one on one or small group, where the supervisor helps the counselor learn to apply wider varieties of assessment and counseling methods to increasingly complex cases (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). Hart (1982) defines supervision as an "on-going educational process in which the supervisor helps the supervisee acquire appropriate professional behavior through an examination of the trainee's professional activity (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Bernard and Goodyear (2004) define supervision as an intervention provided by a senior member

of a profession to a junior member of that same profession. Further, Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum (2002) state that supervision is “a contractual formal process in which a relationship is formed between supervisor and trainee” (p 8). Boyd (1978) identified the purpose of the supervision relationship as facilitating trainees’ personal and professional development (Studer, 2006). The supervision of school counselors should be implemented by a “senior professional to a junior professional *of that same profession*” (italics added).

Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton (2001) define administrative supervision as “an ongoing process in which the supervisor oversees staff and staff communication, planning, implementation, and evaluation of individuals, programs, or both individuals and programs (p. 144).” School counselor responsibilities are multifaceted in relation to designing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling plan. As well, school counselors are sometimes the only professional in the school who possesses knowledge of education as well as mental health (Henderson & Gysbers, 2006). To this end, school counselors’ time, attention and supervision should focus on their roles as outlined by the American School Counseling Association Model [ASCA] National Model (ASCA, 2003).

The duties of a school counselor may vary across school settings. The building administrator (i.e. principal) may have counselor expectations that deviate from the ASCA National Model; this misalignment of duties may stem from the principal’s lack of knowledge and understanding of professional school counselors’ roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the principal’s administrative supervision may focus more on the management of inappropriate (non-counseling duties) administrative duties such as registering all new students, performing disciplinary actions, teaching classes, and administering cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests (ASCA, 2003). However, a professional school counselor who serves as lead counselor or

the guidance and counseling director may be able to focus program development on appropriate administrative and clinical tasks such as designing individual student academic programs, counseling students, collaborating with teachers to present school counseling curriculum lessons, and interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement test through clinical supervision.

Research has shown while school counselors may not receive clinical supervision, they recognize its importance and would like to receive clinical supervision (Crespi, 2003; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). In a study conducted by Crespi (2003), approximately 95% of school counselors confirmed the importance of clinical supervision and reported a desire for clinical supervision. However, many reported that they do not receive clinical supervision. In a previous study by Sutton and Page (1994), 20 % of school counselors received clinical supervision and 63% expressed a desire for supervision related to intervention with client problems and developing skills and techniques as important goals. Clinical supervision is an integral part of the professional development of mental health professionals clinical supervision and provides a way to develop needed skills (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004) in school settings (Crespi, 2003) and community settings. Thus, the multifaceted role of school counselor demands appropriate and meaningful clinical supervision.

A site supervisor is a school counselor with more professional experience, who works in the building with the counseling trainee pursuing a Master's degree or higher. The site supervisor is available on a daily basis or accessible via phone or distance technology. The building administrator or his or her designee usually serves as an administrative supervisor. The Director of Counseling, who coordinates the guidance and counseling services for the district, is usually located at the district level and not the school building with the supervisee. Lastly, a head counselor usually works in the building with the supervisee but does not work one on one with

the supervisee on a daily basis. The clinical supervisor in the school setting is often non-existent; the absence of this type of supervisor may result in supervisees entering the field of school counseling without important developmental skills of school counseling (Studer, 2006).

School counselors often receive supervision from principals, school psychologists, or other non-counseling professionals, which may be ineffective for school counselors' professional identity and development. As well, many site supervisors working with school counselors trainees have not received formal preparation or coursework in clinical supervision. Therefore, they may rely upon their experience as a school counselor to guide the supervision relationship. This type of site supervision may be ineffective in assisting the school counselor in formulating counselor identity and developing professionally. Administrative supervisors not trained as school counselors may not fully understand the role of the school counselor and may expect the school counselor to engage in inappropriate duties such as monitoring lunch or dealing with disciplinary problems rather than appropriate tasks such as behavior modification and conducting social skills groups (Burnham, 2000). Incorporating appropriate administrative supervision as well as clinical supervision is important to the development of school counselors.

### **Role of the School Counselor**

The profession has redefined the role of the school counselors over the years; societal changes and expectations have precipitated this redefinition (Burnham, 2000). Since the mid 1960's, the Association for Counselors Educators and Supervisors, along with ASCA, have categorized the role of school counselors into the areas of counseling, consultation, and coordination (Muro & Kottman, 1995). ASCA states that professional school counselors are responsible for serving all students. The ASCA National Model promotes advocacy, leadership, and service delivery through organization and programming (ASCA, 2005). Professional school

counselors assume responsibility for the academic, social/emotional, and career development of *all* students. This includes twice-exceptional students whose needs are not considered fully in the school counseling or supervision literature.

### **Defining Twice Exceptional**

The term twice-exceptional is used to define a student who has presented with a special need, such as physical, emotional, behavioral or learning disability, while simultaneously possessing gifted and talented abilities (Moon & Reis 2005). Disabilities can mask twice-exceptional students' gifts and vice versa (McEachern & Barnot, 2001). Neilson (2002) notes that these may present as "high level problem solving" masked by "processing deficits"; "advanced ideas and thoughts" masked by "inflexibility"; "superior vocabulary" masked by "uneven academic skills." Other characteristics may include low self-esteem, inappropriate social skills, impulsivity, and highly distractible behavior (Neilson, 2002 p.95).

When students receive identification as twice exceptional, they face many challenges and frustrations (King, 2005). These challenges stem from feelings of confusion about excelling at some tasks and demonstrating less skill at other tasks (King, 2005). Some challenges include feeling academically inadequate compared to their gifted peers; this feeling of inadequacy may lead to resentment and aggression toward peers (King, 2005). Twice-exceptional students may display inappropriate social skills that negatively affect how students develop and maintain peer relationships. Lack of social skills and low self-concept isolate twice-exceptional students and may prevent them from reaching full potential in the gifted program. Thus, adequate attention to the social and emotional needs of twice-exceptional students is as important as attending to their academic needs (King, 2005).

### **Needs of Twice-Exceptional Students**

The needs of twice-exceptional students include but are not limited to, understanding of self, ways to cope with feelings of confusion, frustration, inadequacy, depression, and anger (Neilson, 2002 p 105). In addition, twice-exceptional students need social skills training, opportunity to interact appropriately, career guidance, and study techniques that will assist them in working with their disability (King, 2005; McEachern & Bornot, 2001). Socially, twice-exceptional students may have difficulty developing solutions for social problems, understanding social cues and using appropriate social skills (King, 2005, p.18). Students would benefit from engaging in activities that will help them explore their gifts and talents as well as understand areas of deficiencies (Neilson & Higgins, 2005). In order for school counselors to assist twice-exceptional students effectively, school counselors benefit from reading available literature, case conceptualization, and counseling skills development to understand twice-exceptional students in multiple contexts. Supervision is a way to help school counselors develop these skills.

### **Strategies for Supervision**

School counselors' work in a "time challenging" world that requires them to find ways and time to serve their schools effectively (Studer, 2006 p. 25). Therefore, supervisors of school counselors require supervision strategies that are effective and efficient. When working with a population such as twice-exceptional students, supervision can provide strategies that help counselors understand needs of twice-exceptional students.

### **ASCA National Model**

Integrating the ASCA National Model is an integral part of supervision with school counselors (Studer, 2006). ASCA is a professional organization of school counselors that provides guidance on the roles, functions, and ethical standards for school counseling practice.

Therefore, any supervisor working with school counselors should integrate a working knowledge of the model in supervision and assist the counselor in acquiring a working knowledge of the model (Studer, 2006). This will allow the supervisor to examine how their school counseling program integrates the model and provide a chance for the supervisor to use the ASCA National Model to incorporate activities for the supervisee. Therefore, school counselors will be equipped to help twice-exceptional students develop attitudes, skills, and knowledge in academics, social/emotional, and career development that they will need to reach their full potential. Many school counselors are not aware of the characteristics and unique needs of twice-exceptional students. Incorporating an educational/information component about twice-exceptional students increases the likelihood that the counselors will address the needs of twice-exceptional students in school counseling programs.

Supervisors should choose a supervision model that will address the development of the supervisor and meet the needs of twice-exceptional students. Developmental supervision provides an opportunity for supervisors to guide the supervisee through the levels of development as a counselor in training. This perspective addresses clinical development and appropriate administrative development in the supervisory relationship with school counselors. Using supervision strategies that focus on the counselors' development and promotes positive interactions with twice-exceptional students helps counselors meet the needs of these students.

### **Future Research**

Research can examine the effectiveness of clinical supervision on school counselors' service delivery to twice-exceptional students. This research can examine how counseling supervisors' lack of clinical experience affects the supervised counselor's demonstration of "clinical skills" used in the school setting. Researchers can study school counselors' knowledge

of twice-exceptional students and counselors' role in identifying these students. Research can explore how school counseling programs have included twice-exceptional students in school counseling programming. Future research should also provide knowledge about innovative ways to include twice-exceptional students in training for school counselors; this will lead to increased and relevant programming for twice-exceptional students in the school setting.

### **Implications for Counseling**

School counselors are vital to a dynamic school setting. It is important for supervisees to receive supervision from a trained professional in their profession. As counselor educators, we must insist that site supervisors are from the profession of school counseling and have an understanding of the supervision process. In addition, supervisors must provide opportunities for supervisees to explore current literature on underrepresented populations such as twice-exceptional students. Supervision provided by a professional trained in school counseling as well as supervision models will provide the appropriate personal and professional development supervisees need to function in the role outlined by ASCA.

### **Conclusion**

The literature has begun consideration of twice-exceptional students. However, there is no current literature on how school counselors can affect this population. School counselors uniquely can address the counseling needs of twice-exceptional students given their training as both educators and human development professionals. The supervision experience is one way to increase the knowledge of school counselors about the needs of twice-exceptional students and increase the inclusion of twice-exceptional student programming by school counselors. Utilizing the supervision strategies outlined in this article will allow supervisors to integrate specific supervision models that facilitate knowledge, innovation, and development of school counselors.

Moreover, supervision helps the school counselor provide appropriate services/programs for all students, including twice-exceptional students.

As gatekeepers to the profession, counselor educators must provide supervision experiences that will provide appropriate personal and professional development of school counselors. Increasing the clinical supervision experience will also provide support in the professional identity development of school counselors. Furthermore, supervisors have a responsibility to provide school counselors with a well rounded knowledge of the school setting; this requires increasing their knowledge of twice exceptional students. Utilizing a developmental perspective and integrating the ASCA National Model will increase the effectiveness of the supervisory relationship as well as produce well-trained school counselors.

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