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***Experiences of School Counselor Trainees
in Group Supervision During Practicum:
A Phenomenological Study***

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In this phenomenological study, we explored experience of students (N=6) in group supervision within a practicum field experience course. Using a narrative-focused approach for data analysis and interpretation of journal entries, we created a thematic structure of the participants' lived experiences using the *Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)*. Discussion and implications of this journal writing activity are offered to help reveal and understand the instructional effectiveness of a field practicum counseling course.

**Experiences of School Counselor Trainees
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Many educational programs in the human service profession include some type of introductory clinical field experience designed to both familiarize students with clinical procedures, and to apply educational theory into real-world practice. The primary purpose of a field practicum course in counselor education is "to gain a more in-depth understanding of the counseling process and what promotes effectiveness in counseling by presenting students with the latest research findings regarding best practices in the counseling field" (Hamlet, 2017, p.7). Building on this assertion, the Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2016 standards describes practicum as "[providing] for the application of theory and the development of counseling skills under supervision" p. 13). Yet, research is lacking that could potentially inform the pedagogy of counselor educators with regard to the best learning environment and supervisory instructional practices in which to design, organize and teach these skills

within a field practicum course.

Following CACREP standards, practicum is comprised of a minimum of 100 hours of "intensely supervised experience and serves as a transition from the techniques courses to the internship" (Faiver et al., 2010, p. 284). Relating to group supervision and practicum, CACREP (2015) stipulates:

Practicum students participate in an average of 1.5 hours per week of group supervision on a regular schedule throughout the practicum. Group supervision must be provided by a counselor education program faculty member or a student supervisor who is under the supervision of a counselor education program faculty member (p. 15).

Given that CACREP requires a group supervision component to any field practicum course in counselor education, one would speculate that a plethora of research exists regarding suggestions for instruction or execution; however, there is a paucity of counselor education research

regarding effective instructional practices to facilitate student learning more efficaciously. Specifically, there is little information in the counseling literature highlighting how students experience learning in a counseling field practicum, and the instructor's impact on such learning experience, specifically within the group supervision component. To date, there are only a small number of studies describing the experiences of counselor trainees during practicum (Mansor & Wan Yusoff, 2013; Park et al., 2017) neither of which describe the students' experiences in the group supervision component of a practicum course. This absence of adequate literature leaves serious theoretical and practical application implications; consequently, documented evidence of what occurs during the group supervision portion of practicum, or any generally accepted "blueprint" of how to design effective instructional experiences for practicum students, is woefully vague, and nonexistent. As such, there is a need to investigate the experiences of students enrolled in field practicum coursework in counselor education with a focus on how students experience the group supervision portion of the course.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore students' experiences and understanding of learning, and the instructional effectiveness in a field practicum counseling course. This paper presents the results of information specific to the actions during the group supervision portion of the field practicum course. The goal was to accurately depict the lived experiences of the participants in hopes to provide practical pedagogical ideas to inform and enhance professional teaching and supervision practice. This study was designed to answer the questions:

- (1) What are the experiences of group supervision during practicum class?
- (2) What is the role of an instructor/supervisor in student learning and engagement in group supervision?
- (3) What teaching methods are used in group supervision that helped students feel engaged in the learning process?

The findings from this study will serve to enhance both the researchers' professional journeys as educators, and to produce practical knowledge that will benefit counselor educators to ultimately enhance their teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Due to the increasing call for educational accountability measures in higher education, an emerging body of research is appearing in the literature addressing teaching and learning in counselor education. These accountability mandates have created an extremely strong need to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our educational programs. Students, who tend to be passive consumers of teaching and learning in many higher education programs, often criticize the quality of their educational experiences (Courts & McInerney, 1993), despite evidence supporting that learning is enhanced when students are recognized as co-creators of their learning experiences in the classroom (Bovill et al., 2011; Fink, 2013). Students are important stakeholders in a learning environment and their experience and satisfaction matter (Khandelwal, 2009); however, to date, there are no studies examining the experiences of students in the group supervision portion of a field practicum course. This literature

review defines and adds contextual dimensions of field practicum courses, group supervision within a counselor education program and the formative tool known as the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) (Brookfield, 1995). An overview of the theoretical framework that guided this study is also examined.

Field Practicum Course for School Counselors

Practica and internships are key components for clinical training and preparation in counselor education programs. CACREP requires a minimum of two semesters and 700 hours of field experience (100 practicum, 600 internship hours). Of these 700 hours, a minimum of 300 hours must be direct hours with a client. The practicum is designed to help students become familiarized with a variety of professional tasks that are typical responsibilities of a professional school counselor while under the supervision of site/school supervisor and a university supervisor (Studer, 2015). Additionally, a practicum field experience in school counseling provides trainees an opportunity to work with PK-12 students for the purpose of improving their counseling skills with individuals and groups, providing crisis intervention and classroom guidance.

During the field practicum course specifically, CACREP accredited programs require practicum students to participate in group supervision on a regular schedule throughout the practicum for an average of 1.5 hours per week under the supervision of a counselor education program faculty member (CACREP, 2015). Typically, in a practicum course, the professor identifies course objectives, makes assignments, and informs students as to how they will be assessed and evaluated (Kiser, 2008; Minton

et al., 2016). Some of the activities that may be part of a field practicum course include: role-play, case conceptualization and case presentations, discussing theory and techniques, role play, and sharing site concerns (Studer, 2015). The professor responsible for a field service practicum course must balance between being a gatekeeper for the profession and the program, all the while being a supportive and nurturing university supervisor (Faiver et al., 2012).

Group Supervision

Supervision is a process by which counselors in both training and practice receive information, support, and feedback from a more seasoned supervisor as related to their counseling effectiveness (Yager & Litrell, 1978). Supervision can be provided in a variety of formats including individual, triadic, or group formats. Group supervision consists of a supervisor and two or more supervisees. With that in mind, Haynes et al. (2003) adds supervision as a process using consistent observation and evaluation by a professional who has specialized knowledge and skills. Last, supervision is a required component and ethical obligation in obtaining a degree and license in counseling.

University training programs implement some type supervision during the trainee's program. CACREP requires programs it accredits to provide group supervision during practicum. Group supervision is defined by Bernard and Goodyear (2009) as "the regular meeting of a group of supervisees (a) with a designated supervisor or supervisors, (b) monitor the quality of their work, and (c) to further their understanding of themselves as clinicians, of the clients with whom they work, and a service delivery in general" (p. 244). Last and equally important, the university

supervisor providing group supervision for the field practicum course must be a member of the counselor education program and have appropriate education and training experiences as a supervisor.

Group supervision has benefits especially when specific conditions are met including a framework or structure to the session along with set expectations (Masteros & Andrews, 2011). Borders et al. (2015) echoed the sentiment of structure and specific procedures for practicum students in giving and receiving feedback in supervision because of the developmental needs of the students. Although group supervision has been proven valuable for increasing the skill development of counselor trainees (Riva, 2010), the use of the group supervision portion of a field practicum course is relatively nonexistent. Research does suggest case conceptualizations, case presentations, case updates, nor case autopsy as useful in group supervision formats (Chapin & Chapin, 2012), although it is not delineated specifically to the group supervision portion of a practicum course. It is unclear if counselor educators follow these recommendations in practice for group supervision, nor is it clear how school counseling students experience group supervision within their practicum course. The current study endeavored to give voice to the school counselor trainees as a way of understanding their experience within the course.

Critical Incident Questionnaire

Educators have been assessing learning as long as formal education has existed. But more recently educators have been finding ways to incorporate assessment activities as part of the learning process itself (Fink, 2003). The Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ), a formative

assessment tool by Stephen Brookfield (1995), was developed as a way for students to reflect, report, and explain their learning by responding to a handful of open-ended response questions. The original CIQ consisted of questions asking students when they felt most engaged or least engaged, to what actions did the student find most helpful or confusing about their experience within the class. After the forms are completed each class, the instructor critically analyzes and looks for themes that can suggest what is working well for students' learning and what may need to be improved.

The CIQ has been used in qualitative research in a variety of higher educational studies (Keefer, 2009) particularly in education and social science research. In counselor education specifically, Linstrum et al. (2012) examined the instructor's educational practices and the impact the instructor had on the student's learning experience in a counselor education diversity course. The instrument was chosen in this study as it provided "the opportunity to provide some structure around which the participants' responses about the classroom events could be framed" (p. 2). Their findings suggested that this tool provided a wealth of information that is useful to both for the counselor educator and for the field of counseling in general. For the reasons mentioned along with the purpose of the research, the CIQ was selected in this study as well.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are used in research to organize and give meaning to information and to provide a framework for researchers to conceptualize, analyze, and interpret facts (Miller, 2011). Qualitative researchers typically use a theoretical lens to ground

their research (Creswell, 2009) much like a counselor educator's educational stance guides and frames their teaching pedagogy. Ultimately, a researcher's theoretical position describes the philosophical underpinnings behind their methodology as well as their attempts to provide context for their study (Crotty, 1998). The theoretical perspective used by the researchers in this study was that of Social Learning Theory through the works of Albert Bandura. According to Social Learning Theory, learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1963). According to Bandura, people are "agents of experiences, not just undergoers of experiences" (2006, p. 168). A person's life is an interplay between their choices and actions, the influences others, and the broader environment.

Methods

When embarking on a qualitative research study, the first step is figuring out which type of research design would provide the best examination in a research phenomenon. As the focus of interest for this study, the researchers sought to understand the experience of students in group supervision within a practicum field experience course through conducting a phenomenological study. Results from this type of study provide the best picture highlighting the essence of the students' experience.

Phenomenological research focuses on the lived experience as a source of knowledge and seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning of the human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Phenomenology seeks to explore contextual meaning through the situational knowledge of those being researched as well

(Creswell, 2009). Van Manen's (1990) approach to phenomenology not only attends to the description of the phenomenon, but adds an interpretation by the researcher as a critical element of the lived experience or phenomenon and has served as a guiding influence in the development of this research study. To study how students experience and understand the group supervision component of a field practicum course within counselor education, we established our research framework based on three primary questions:

- (1) What are the experiences of group supervision during practicum class?
- (2) What is role of the instructor/supervisor in student learning and engagement in group supervision?
- (3) What teaching methods used in group supervision helped the students feel engaged in the learning process?

Tenets of transformative phenomenology are woven throughout the research design to ensure appropriate representation of the lived experiences of those being investigated.

The Context

A thorough and adequate description of the context in which the research takes place is important in phenomenological studies. Participants in this study were master's-level school counseling students from a 60 semester hour Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) counselor education program. The university in which these students attend is classified as a Research University (Very High Research Activity) by the Carnegie Commission, located in the Midwestern region of the

United States. The counseling program consists of both clinical mental health counseling, school counseling and a doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision.

Procedure for Group Supervision

The objectives for the practicum course framed within this study were designed to provide vicarious learning and orientation, applying theory to practice through the group supervision experience. The group supervision component of this course aimed to meet these objectives by facilitating peer support, the exchanging of experiences, and by drawing and borrowing from the multiple perspectives of the participants. During the group supervision portion of the course throughout the semester, students were expected to present two cases encompassing a biopsychosocial case conceptualization, coupled with 10 minutes of transcription of a counseling session video recording and a pictorial diagram of their theoretical stance. After the students shared their case presentation, the instructor led the group supervision component using a modified version of Borders et al. (2015) guidelines for peer review of counseling recordings. Although this was created by the authors mentioned as a triadic supervision tool, it provided a structured way for students to give and receive constructive feedback, while staying engaged and focused in the group supervision process as well. The questions for group supervision were used from Borders et al. (2015, p. 247) and were as followed:

As you listen to the counseling session, take on the role of the student. In giving peer feedback, answer the following questions. Please write in the first person.

- “How did you feel during the session?”
- “How was the counselor helpful? No session is perfect.”
- “What was one thing you wished for during the session that you didn’t get?”
- “What is your hope for the next session?”

Now think about the session from the counselor’s perspective and respond to the following questions.

- “What were my strengths during the session?”
- “What is a metaphor that seems to represent this session, the counselor-student relationship, and/or just from the student perspective? Explain your metaphor.”

Now think about this session from your own perspective and answer the following questions.

- “What is (at least) one thing you learned from observing this session? How might you apply this in your counseling sessions?”

For the current study, these questions and order of the questions were used for each case presentation throughout the semester. The students wrote their responses to the questions on a sheet of paper provided by the instructor. After students completed the feedback form, group supervision followed using the questions as a framework for discussion. Each group supervision session lasted roughly one hour to one hour

and fifteen minutes. Typically, two case presentations were delivered per class event.

Researcher Statement and Affiliation

In phenomenological studies, the researcher plays a vital role in the research because they serve as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merchant, 1997). For this study, the first author was the primary researcher as well as the instructor of the course being studied. The second author has taught field service courses in both counselor education and human services. Additionally, they served as the peer debriefer for the study. The topic of this study was of great interest to both authors as they both spend much time reflecting about what goes on in their classrooms. They often discuss their own teaching strategies about what works and what does not work. They are both curious about their teaching and their students' learning because they want to be more effective counselor educators. Last, they both believe that students are their collaborators and partners within the learning environment. They have experienced in their own teaching practices what McKinney (2009) described as learner-centered instruction allows for students to be more connected to their courses, their clinical training/discipline, and to other cohort members.

Participants

In phenomenological research, the only way to attain a thorough description of the "lived experience" is through a small sample size (Smith, 2004). Giorgi (2009) proposed that five to eight participants as an optimal number of participants for a qualitative study. Based on the scope of the research, the nature of the research question, and the usefulness of the information

collected through journaling, the researchers concurred with Giorgi that five to eight participants would be suitable for their study.

Before the start of the academic semester, the lead researcher submitted and received approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). One section of a semester-long field practicum course at the lead researcher's university was chosen for the study for a period of one semester. The lead researcher providing course instruction explained the purpose of the study, as well as emphasizing that participation in the study was voluntary and would have no bearing on the student's grades within the course.

All students completed the *Critical Incident Questionnaire* (CIQ) (Brookfield, 1995) as part of the course to be used for insight and improvement of the group supervision sessions during the practicum course. The CIQ has been used in education and the helping professions as a way to reflect and report learning. Additionally, an end-of-semester reflective journal was assigned for the course. Two questions that aligned with the CIQ were used as part of the study. These questions are described in more detail later.

A consent form was given to all students and all forms were collected by a graduate assistant and sealed until grades for the semester were posted. The consent forms were secured during the semester of inquiry in a locked cabinet by the lead researcher's colleague. After grades were posted, the consent forms of students who agreed to be in the study were then separated and only those responses were examined in the qualitative analysis. All students ($n = 7$) within one section of a school counseling practicum course were invited to participate;

of which, six chose to participate in the study. Due to the small pool of participants, and, in order ensure anonymity, demographic information was not collected. Names of the participants were changed in the course of the research study. The participants are identified as Allison, Becca, Cameron, Diana, Evelyn, and Fiona.

Instrumentation

According to Creswell (1998), “The qualitative approach allows the researcher to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 15). Based on the literature, theoretical framework, research purposes, the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ, Brookfield, 1995) was used in this study in the form of a weekly journal. The questions used in this study were the following:

- (1) At what moment in today’s group supervision did you feel most engaged and/or least engaged?
- (2) What action (if any) did anybody take during group supervision did that you found most affirming/helpful?
- (3) What action (if any) did anybody take during group supervision that you found most puzzling/confusing?
- (4) What was the most important information you learned during group supervision?

Data Collections

Since the participants’ lived experience narratives can be expressed in many ways (VanManen, 1990), the lead researcher utilized document review in the form of journals as the way to collect data for this study. Journal writing has historically been used in qualitative research

when the journal entries are analyzed for trends and themes (Walker, 2006). Building on that assertion, journal writing can be an interactive tool between the researcher and the participants in a qualitative study (Janesick, 1999). They further postulated “the clarity of writing down one’s thoughts, will allow for stepping into one’s inner mind and reaching further into interpretations of the behaviors, beliefs, and the words we write” (p.11). Journaling aids in documenting specific experiences, thoughts, and feelings within the given context (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012). Stephen Brookfield’s *Critical Incident Questionnaire* (1995) was used for the journal script. The participants responded to the questionnaire items after the case presentation and group supervision component were concluded for each class period. The completion of this questionnaire was a requirement for the class as stated in the course syllabus. However, only those participants who chose to participate in the study were analyzed through the data analysis procedures. The journal sheets were collected by the instructor after each class.

Lastly, at the end of the semester, a reflective journal paper was assigned and collected from all students. The end of the semester journal was used to facilitate reflection and allow students to express thoughts and feelings regarding their educational experiences throughout the semester. The two questions used from the end of the semester reflective journal for this study aligned with the weekly journals. These questions were:

- (1) What parts of group supervision did you find most helpful?
- (2) What parts of group supervision did you find least helpful?

Only those participants who chose to participate in the study were analyzed through the data analysis procedures. The

end of semester reflective journals were collected by the instructor during exam week.

Trustworthiness

Within the context of this research study, the concept of trustworthiness can be best described as the soundness of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criterion from which to judge the trustworthiness of a study is “closely tied with the paradigmatic underpinnings of the particular discipline in which a particular investigation is conducted” (Morrow, 2005, p. 250). Creswell (2007) posits that qualitative researchers select at least two validation techniques. In order to establish the credibility of findings, the lead researcher kept a reflexive journal, debriefed with a peer who had more than 15 years of experience working with qualitative inquiry. Through the CIQ instrument and end of semester reflective journal, the lead researcher analyzed journal documents at different times throughout the study. Through triangulation, the lead researcher gathered a thick description of the students’ experiences in group supervision during practicum in a Midwestern state to establish a level of transferability. In addition to the lead researcher’s reflexive journal, they acknowledged personal biases toward the data and its interpretation.

Data Analysis

The main objective of this phenomenological research study can be described as transforming personal meanings and experiences from the journal texts into disciplinary understanding (Van Manen, 1997). Journal entries were analyzed inductively using Creswell (2013) procedures for data analysis and interpretation. Through the inductive

process, the lead researcher organized the written text into chunks by identifying “significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p.82). Next, as recommended by Creswell, the researcher developed a small number of themes or categories. Themes as defined by Percy and associates (2015) as “patterns of patterns” (p. 81). This entailed a process of sorting and sifting of themes as described in Lichtman (2010). The lead researcher reflected on each emerging themes by asking: “Is this what the experience is really like?” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 99). Next, the data-driven themes and subthemes were refined to the level of more than a couple of sentences capturing the scope and content through multiple perspectives of the participants using quotations. Collaboration through peer debriefing between researchers was engaged in to uncover biases, perspectives, and/or assumptions. Lastly, new findings were compared with existing theories or explanations from existing research to ensure that described phenomenon accurately portrayed lived experiences of the participants.

Results

Phenomenology as described by Patton (2002) requires “methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience a phenomenon--how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p.104). To that end, the findings in this study were developed from the participants’ actual lived experience as described to us, the researchers. The results yielded three themes that were related to the students’ and the instructor participation in the group supervision portion of a practicum

experience. A select grouping of quotes and paraphrases from the students' journals are presented here to support each of these themes.

Findings for Question 1: Connection

At what moment in today's group supervision did you feel most engaged and/or least engaged?

The main theme emerged from Question 1 was the phenomenon of *connection*. To capture *connection*, the participants' stories described their distinct experiences of connecting and interacting to various elements embedded within the group supervision portion. During group supervision, all participants described their own thinking by making connections between their peers and their own experiences primarily through observation. Fiona experienced connection with Evelyn noticing her ability to stay present with her student client. "To see her stay so present with a student throughout the session is something to admire." Cameron similarly echoed his connection to Evelyn by observation as well by commenting, "It was beneficial for me to hear this [worrying about being ineffective] because I have felt the same way. It is nice to know we are making a difference." While Evelyn corroborated with Becca regarding being true and appropriate in various situations such as, "I felt connected with Becca as we both had similar ethical concerns."

Additionally, all the participants described being connected to the video recording of their peers' case presentation. Diana described her experience while watching the video case presentation as "I was most engaged with the cultural aspect of the student in the recording and [the discussion that followed] on how to properly

discuss religion. This is because the Hispanic culture really values religion and family, and I thought it was really amazing to see how that changes from culture to culture." Fiona discussed her connection with the video case presentation by way of observational learning in the statement, "...when listening to Evelyn's recording, I was very interested to see how my peers were handling talkative clients [students]." Finally, Becca described her connection with both her peers and the case presentation as, "I was engaged in the case studies and presentation during group supervision. At first I was anxious about the idea, but actually presenting and getting positive feedback and advice from my peers was an invaluable experience."

Findings for Question 2: Discussion

What action (if any) did anybody take during group supervision did that you found most affirming/helpful?

The theme of *discussion* captured what the participants felt was most helpful to their learning during group supervision. It was apparent in the journals that the participants were learning by observing behaviors and discussing outcomes. Discussion happened when the participants constructed knowledge, understanding, or interpretation of various aspects of group supervision. In their journals, the participants expressed multiple viewpoints, responded to the ideas of others, and reflected on their own ideas in an effort to build their knowledge, understanding, or interpretation of the matter at hand. Fiona described a dialogue from group supervision that was important for her learning as, "I found it helpful that my peers gave me feedback on my recording. They let me know about how often I was cutting off the student and not giving her time to talk. I was

able to reflect on what I could do next.” Diana described hearing other people’s recordings and having the discussion after as helpful to her learning. She continued, “I heard some really valuable comments during these discussions which I definitely kept in mind when working with my own students. I have been able to consider what I like or dislike about my peers’ counseling styles, and think about what I may want to use, or ultimately avoid when working in my own practice.” Cameron described a portion of conversation during group supervision that she found most helpful. She commented that, “When we were going around the room telling others what we thought we were good at. This was really good for everyone to hear how they have grown over the semester.” Last, Allison described how the helpfulness of the supervisor impacted the discourse during group supervision. She described that, “It was most helpful when [the instructor] would chime in at the end and offer a neat activity to try. One thing this reminds me of is my first student struggling with a direction and where to go in life. [The instructor] came up with the idea of presenting this student with a compass and I think having a tangible piece in front of me can be impactful in the counseling experience.” Diana echoed the sentiment of how the supervisor was helpful. They stated that, “I think the group discussions lead by the supervisor were most helpful because she was able to validate any of the feelings we were having and commend our strengths...the [supervisor] was helpful because she really encouraged us to build each other up. This helped me feel more confident in my skills and sometimes [she] would point out things going right that you yourself didn’t notice. The supervisor drew from her own clinical experience which I found helpful.”

Findings for Question 3: Metaphors

What action (,f any) did anybody take during group supervision that you found most puzzling/confusing?

The third question asked participants what they found most puzzling or confusing. The list of responses varied considerably from the other questions. As a result no specific theme was noted. One comment that was noted by two of the seven participants related to the confusion over the use of metaphors in counseling. During the group supervision, metaphors were utilized as part of the Borders et al. (2015) framework. The question asked to use a metaphor that would describe the counseling session.

Findings for Question 4: Practical Application

What was the most important information you learned during group supervision?

Unanimously, the participants named *practical application* of ideas, techniques and activities introduced in group supervision as the most important information they learned. Practical application refers to approaches that are perceived as effective for encouraging application of course material. Cameron stated, “Techniques to use to fill my toolbelt and being relatable” as the most important thing she learned in group supervision that week. Allison describe suicide prevention activities and threat assessments as the most important information to inform her practice. Becca added to the sentiment, commenting, “I think that the most important information today was what I learned about suicidality. I am inspired to research and learn more to be prepare (as much as I can be) in the future. Evelyn discussed the practicality of viewing different development levels of the students

she serves when she said, “[I learned] different techniques between younger students and the students in older grades with whom I work. I am thinking the friendship report card could be adapted.” Cameron added, “What I found most helpful about group supervision was how we were able to share activities we were using with one another. For example, I learned relaxation techniques that Diana used at the beginning of her session, we got a feeling workbook from [another student] in his recording, and I was able to share my counseling contract that I used with students. Sharing effective research-based techniques and activities helped engage our students in the sessions.”

Discussion

The phenomenological findings offer insights into how students experience group supervision within a field practicum course and what, if any, influence the instructor had on them. The results revealed three findings including connection, discussion and practical application. The depth of the information gathered from the CIQ over the semester provided a wealth of information beneficial and applicable for the counselor educator teaching a field practicum course, as well as supervising the group supervision component. The CIQ was originally designed by Brookfield (1995) to gather weekly feedback from students. The CIQ was used for instrumentation through weekly journals in this study, as it allowed for constant awareness of how students were experiencing their learning and perceiving their instructor’s actions. To date, there is no literature that specifically addresses the experience and learning of school counselor trainees in group supervision embedded within a field practicum course.

The behavioral dimensions identified in this study are in line with basic tenets of Social Learning Theory. It was evident that students were learning, informing, and changing their professional practices by interacting with their peers, along with interacting with their instructor. Important to the participants’ experiences were the relationships experienced with their peers and their faculty supervisor. The importance of such connections with their peers as well as counselor education faculty is supported in the literature as an essential component of student satisfaction (Hazler & Carney, 1993). Additionally, and equally important, the structure of group supervision including the use of questions from Borders et al. (2015) provided a framework for students to give and receive constructive feedback, while staying engaged and focused in the group supervision process as well. The importance of structuring the supervisory experience as instructional, supportive, and constructive aligns with the suggestions of (Chung et al., 1998) in that it may enhance the experiences for the trainee.

Adding to the support for a structural framework for the group supervision component, this study revealed that all the roles students utilized during group supervision (case presenter, peer supervisor and supervisee) were influential in professional growth. This is best described by Cameron and Diana.

Cameron: Watching myself in front of others during my presentation was most helpful. There are some things that I did not realize, that surfaced during my presentation in front of the class. This allowed me to reflect on my recording and figure out what I could have done to improve things such as my volume throughout the session.

Diana: The part of group supervision as being most helpful was not being able allowed to speak while I was listening to peer feedback after my presentation. This allowed me to fully concentrate on what they had to say and to be present. I also carefully looked at each students' nonverbal reactions to my sessions and when they were providing me feedback. I would see a smile, or act of confusion, etc. which helped me.

The richness of the experience described here by the various roles within group supervision speaks to once again the structure of the course and could be area for further research.

The findings of this study support that supervision provided by the university faculty can be instrumental to the growth and development of counselor trainees. This notion aligns with the importance of quality supervision for the counselor trainees by the university as described by (Hazler & Carney, 1993). Another interesting point from this study worth discussing is the integration of the instructor roles of clinician, supervisor, and educator. This study supports the argument by Grossman et al. (2009) on the importance of teachers being grounded from their own clinical [counseling] experiences in order to provide feedback and coaching models for students. The participants frequently described factors of helpfulness of the instructor/supervisor bringing real-world application and lived experiences to the classroom. The instructor/supervisor's skill level as both counselor and educator directly impacted their learning experience and connectedness during group supervision. Statements such as, "I am very glad our supervisor had school counseling experience," and, "It was

useful to hear from the supervisor who had dealt with similar issues and student populations in her practice" reinforced that clinical practice of the supervisor/educator positively impacts the educational environment and the experiences of students. The significance of the relationship between student and counselor education faculty and its influence on learning is supported in the literature by (Chung et al. 1998). Additionally, the narratives in this study affirmed the importance of integrating the clinician and educator role with/for students. The clinical practices of faculty benefiting students is supported in in the research (Lanman, 2010; Ray et al., 2014).

Implications for Counselor Education

The current study captures the findings relevant to master's level school counselor trainees in a practicum course at one research university in the Midwestern region of the United States. Their stories developed a foundation of knowledge surrounding how students experience and understand the group supervision component of a field practicum course. It is from the rich descriptions evolving from the students' narratives that we base our recommendations for practice.

Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) discuss transformational learning as it applies specifically to the teaching profession. In this article, one of the noted theoretical underpinnings is Social Learning Theory as proposed by Bandura. Understanding the cognitive learning process and its relation to social context can help counselor educators better plan instruction within the social environment of the classroom. Suggested is the impact that self-efficacy plays in classroom instruction, including the practicum experience for future counselors. These efficacy beliefs are tied directly with

optimism and how individuals perceive their own successes and failures. Another determinant in addition to the self-efficacy beliefs are the beliefs of others to include peer and faculty members as noted earlier in this paper. Students are impacted by factors such as connection and feedback from both faculty and peers. As a result, while conceptualizing further expansion of this research, one should consider possible parallels with Social Cognitive Theory in terms of designing potential questions, and as an additional theoretical underpinning.

Implications

The findings from this study have implications for counselor education faculty responsible for teaching a field experience practicum course in a CACREP accredited program. Considerable time must be spent actively participating in the learning process. Elements of this participatory process must include: developing learning exercises with a focus on structure, observation, discussion and feedback. As a counselor educator in a fieldwork experience such as practicum it is vital to foster a learning community. This community in some ways may parallel the ideas of Bandura and Social Learning Theory.

Another important implication is the idea of listening or connecting with how students conceptualize the fieldwork experience. Students in this study shared a plethora of information via journaling, which may have been missed had this reflective exercise not been a priority to the faculty member. Students desired to be active participants and engaged in the learning process. Similar to the counseling process, students who felt the open line of communication demonstrated more connectedness and communicated more openly in terms of their journal entries.

Structure is viewed as an important implication for counselor educators as well. Given the balance of time and other external commitments, having an effectively structured educational course and program contributes to a successful supervision and practicum course experience. This structure should replicate the structure that students are experiencing at their sites, and together, the similarities will contribute to an enhanced learning experience. Structure leads to structure and hopefully translates into future professionalism.

Limitations

As in qualitative studies, this one is not without limitations. Though the selected university has a diverse population, this study was not as diverse, as all the participants were female. More so, there is the geographical limitation of focusing only on one Midwestern state university. Further, a limitation of this study is that participants self-selected to participate in this study and as a result may be more willing to share their thoughts, feelings and story. By nature qualitative research lacks generalizability (Creswell, 2009), which may be considered a limitation. Though every attempt was made at eliminating all biases and assumptions, it is possible that some are still present. Another limitation of this study was that the researcher served as the course instructor. As a result, students may not have responded as honestly as they might have given an independent researcher.

Future Study

Understanding the experiences of counseling trainees enrolled in field placement courses is vital to counselor education programs. This study captured the lived experiences of counseling students enrolled in practicum. It is believed that this

study serves as a beginning point for future studies examining the experiences of group supervision during a practicum course. It is hoped future studies may be expanded geographically and in terms of gender and other diversity. Additionally, it is believed that some mixed research elements should be added to contribute to increased reliability and validity.

Conclusion

With a lack of existing research illustrating the interplay between the group supervision component and school counseling students, our study sought to develop understanding through the lived experiences of the participants, and to open the door to continued discovery. Creswell (2009) described that the phenomenological approach contributes to the literature by providing meaning where a void exists due to a lack of available research. This study was the first step to fill the void.

In counselor education specifically, instructors frequently note a positive change in a counselor trainee's clinical behavior and attitude, even in a brief exposure to the field such as in counseling practicum (Mansor & Wan Yusoff, 2013). Practicum represents a point in a counseling program in which the student blooms and begins the transitional phase, maturing from that of a student to that of a professional counselor. Students in this study provided three significant themes from four questions and supported the ideas of connection, discussion and practical application.

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