

SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK

MARILYN J. HAYMAN

Centre for Behaviour Therapy and Assessment, Ottawa

Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of supervisor feedback in contributing to learning three basic counselling skills. It was hypothesized that trainees given supervisor feedback would learn the skills more effectively than trainees given no supervisor feedback or no training at all, regardless of previous counsellor training. Sixty-four counsellor trainees were randomly assigned to 12 groups (supervisor feedback, no supervisor feedback, and no treatment control) for three training sessions. Raters then judged the counselling skills effectiveness on a post-test interview using a Likert-type scale. Results indicated that contrary to the prediction, counselling skills were learned most effectively by those students who had no feedback from the supervisor, but evaluated themselves and heard feedback from peers.

Résumé

Cette étude avait pour but de découvrir si les réactions du superviseur contribuaient efficacement à l'acquisition de trois techniques fondamentales du Conseiller. On s'était fondé sur l'hypothèse que les élèves auxquels le superviseur ferait part de ses réactions apprendraient les techniques plus efficacement que les élèves qui ne recevraient aucune réaction du superviseur ou pas de formation du tout, quelle qu'ait été leur formation antérieure de Conseiller. Soixante-quatre élèves conseillers furent répartis au hasard en douze groupes (réaction du superviseur, pas de réaction du superviseur, pas de contrôle du traitement) pour une durée de trois sessions de formation. Les examinateurs ont ensuite jugé l'efficacité des techniques du Conseiller au cours d'une entrevue faisant suite à l'examen en utilisant une échelle du type Likert. Les résultats ont montré que contrairement aux prévisions, ce furent les étudiants qui n'avaient reçu aucune réaction de leur superviseur qui avaient acquis les techniques du Conseiller avec le plus de succès. Les élèves ayant suivi des cours précédemment avaient particulièrement bien réussi lorsque le superviseur était resté muet.

The effect of supervised training in achieving basic counselling skills continues to be one of the most pressing concerns in counsellor education. With an increasing interest in investigating the supervisory process, a proven format for teaching counselling skills is needed which allows specific manipulation of the feedback given by the supervisor. The highly systematized approach of microcounselling (Ivey, 1971) appears to satisfy this need, as the usefulness of microcounselling has been repeatedly demonstrated (Gluckstern, 1973; Haase & DiMattia, 1970; Miller, Morrill, & Uhlemann, 1970; Toukmanian & Rennie, 1975). There does appear, however, to be conflicting conclusions regarding the effectiveness of supervisor feedback experienced by the trainee following the videotape practice interview, as well as an inconsistency with respect to the critical period during the training program for supervisor feedback. The principal questions which arose from the literature were, given a proven training format: (a) Does supervisor feedback make a difference in the acquisition of basic counselling skills?

(b) Would previous counselling training experience influence the receptiveness to supervisor feedback and hence the acquisition of counselling skills?

To date, supervision research has yielded conflicting results. In several studies (Digiulio & Eshleman, 1972; Forge, 1963; Friessen & Dunning, 1973; Lauver & Brody, 1975; Ronnestad, 1973), the researchers contend that the supervisor did not contribute as much valuable feedback as other factors such as videotape playback and peer critiquing. On the other hand, various researchers (Authier & Gustafson, 1976; Belluci, 1972; Olson, 1973; Quinn & Silverman, 1973; Sodetz, 1972; Wallace, Horan, Baker, & Hudson, 1975) have presented a strong case to support the contention that supervisor feedback makes a substantial and necessary contribution to the counselling training program. This controversy in the literature clearly indicates the need for further research to determine the value of supervisor feedback in the training format. Virtually no work has been done to determine at what point

microtraining could best be assimilated, or when supervisor feedback could be most useful in counselling skills training.

The primary purpose of the current study was thus to examine the influence of supervisor feedback on the specific skills effectiveness scores of counsellor trainees; a secondary purpose was to determine the effects of counsellor course experience on acquisition of specific skills. In order to investigate these issues, a modified factorial post-test-only control group design appeared to be suitable.

Method

Subjects

Sixty-four counselling trainees, who consisted of American military personnel, dependents, and civilians stationed in Germany who were in a graduate introductory counselling course, volunteered for the study. Due to military rotation dates, some subjects were taking this required course near the end of their post-graduate degree program. Subjects were randomly assigned within classes to groups each composed of not more than six subjects, comprising in total eight experimental groups — four supervisor feedback, four no-supervisor feedback, and four control groups.

Procedure

Three female students and one male student in the Ball State Education Specialist program were trained to follow the microcounselling format for both experimental treatments thus ensuring consistency of procedure by acting as supervisors for both groups. The experimental treatment, six hours long, was conducted during three sessions of regular class times. Three behavioural skills were taught. Equipment, rooms, and meeting times were all counterbalanced.

Task. The experimental groups experienced identical microcounselling training except for the absence of supervisor feedback in half of the groups. Because of the proven efficacy of modelling and to ensure that no differences in treatment groups were due to modelling, all subjects watched the Ivey-Gluckstern modelling tape together. All subjects then read specific excerpts from the *Ivey-Gluckstern Participants' Manual*. The two treatment groups separated at this point for identical practice and videotape procedures with differing supervisor feedback.

Supervisor feedback group. Following the modelling tape and reading about the specific behavioural skill, the supervisor actively led a 15-minute discussion about the skill. The six were then divided into two groups; each subject took a turn at practicing that specific skill in a 3-minute interview with a peer who role played or talked of some personal concern. The three interviews of one triad

were videotaped, while the other triad practiced in an identical manner; the six then reassembled to watch the playback. The supervisor stopped the tape after each counsellor response, gave positive reinforcement and talked about the skill. The second triad practiced on its own and the procedure was repeated.

No supervisor feedback group. Following the identical modelling and written instructions, the supervisor programmed the identical procedure for this group minus supervisor feedback. He/she left the room for 15 minutes to allow group discussion of the modelling tape and reading. Based on the modelling and reading, the triads practiced the specific skills and were videotaped in turn in an identical manner to the supervisor feedback group. The supervisor then stopped the tape after each counsellor response during playback, but offered no feedback. Utilizing knowledge of the skill from the reading and modelling, peers were invited to critique each counsellor response for a brief period of time.

No treatment control group. Subjects who were randomly assigned to the control group in the classes spent the same amount of time in regular class activities as the experimental groups spent in microcounselling training.

Post-test. The dependent variable was the rated effectiveness of the basic counselling skill of trainees following the different treatments. A methodological pre-study indicated that raters rated audio and video interviews similarly ($p < .05$); therefore a half-hour audio-tape post-test interview was conducted during the fourth class week. For the post-test, subjects were randomly assigned within the class to serve first as either counsellor or counsellee, and then randomly assigned to the reverse role. The counsellee was asked to talk about anything that was concerning him at the present time, and the counsellor was asked to interview the fellow student as a regular client.

Eight trained doctoral student raters, having interrater reliabilities for the skills rating scale of $r = .82$, rated three 3-minute excerpts of each post-test interview. Excerpts were taken from minutes 1 to 4, minutes 16 to 19, minutes 25 to 29, and placed consecutively on a master tape. All interviews were coded and randomly ordered to ensure the anonymity of the subjects, then rated independently by two of the eight raters. The Ivey Gluckstern Rating Scale (1974) was used by raters to establish the level of skill effectiveness of the trainees.

Results

Statistical analysis involved the use of a 2 (levels of experience) \times 3 (feedback treatment)

Table 1
Rated Effectiveness of Skills

	<i>Open questions</i>	<i>Paraphrasing</i>	<i>Responding to feelings and emotions</i>	<i>Mean rated effectiveness of three skills</i>
Experience (2 levels)			PCE>NPCE**	PCE>NPCE**
Treatment (3 levels)	NSF>NTC**	NSF>NTC*	NSF>NTC* NSF>SF*	NSF>NTC** NSF>SF**
Interaction			NSF + PCE>SF + PCE* >SF + NPCE* >NSF + NPCE* >NTC + NPCE*	

Note: SF = Supervisor feedback
NSF = No supervisor feedback
NTC = No treatment control
PCE = Previous course experience
NPCE = No previous course experience
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

analysis of variance (a least-squares analysis for unequal cell frequencies, Winer, 1962, pp. 498-501) to test whether significant differences existed between any of the groups. Four null hypotheses derived from the research hypotheses were tested with separate ANOVA's conducted to compare: (a) no previous counselling course experience with (b): (1) subjects who had taken theories and techniques of counselling, (2) those currently taking practicum in counselling, (3) those previously having taken practicum in counselling, and (4) all subjects with previous course experience including the three above. The Scheffe-K test was used when the ANOVA indicated differences between groups.

As shown in Table 1, no difference was evident between trainees with no counselling course experience and those with previous course experience for the skills of open questions and paraphrasing. However, in responding to feelings and emotions and in the overall assessment of all three skills, those with other counselling course experience proved to be significantly more effective than those with no previous counselling course experience, $F(1,156)=7.91$, $p < .01$, and $F(1,156)=8.61$, $p < .01$).

Regarding the three levels of treatment, the group given supervisor feedback showed no significant improvement over those with no training at all. However, counsellor trainees with no feedback from the supervisor were significantly more effective than the control group who had no treatment for all three skills (open questions $F(2,156)=6.71$, $p < .01$; paraphrasing $F(2,156)=3.87$, $p < .05$; responding to feelings and emotions

$F(2,156)=11.30$, $p < .01$). Most noteworthy was the fact that subjects who had no supervisor feedback were even significantly more effective than those with supervisor feedback on the skill of responding to feelings and emotions, $F(2,156)=3.08$, $p < .05$, as well as those with supervisor feedback on the over-all skills level, $F(2,156)=11.30$, $p < .01$.

In examining the interaction of subgroups, the group with previous course experience and no supervisor feedback were found to be most effective of all in responding to feelings and emotions, $F(2,156)=3.70$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

Contrary to prediction, those counsellor trainees given microcounselling with supervisor feedback did not become significantly more effective than trainees with no microcounselling. However, trainees given no supervisor feedback became more effective than those given no microtraining as well as those who had had the microtraining with supervisor feedback. Students thus appeared to benefit most when the supervisor was silent. The written instructions, modelling tapes, and time elements between sessions were identical for both treatment groups, yet those who had to carry on their own discussion and who were given video and peer feedback learned more effectively than those who were given the supposed extra advantage of supervisor feedback.

An article by Wagner and Smith (1979) lends support to the concept of the value of peer supervision in helping trainees become more effective

helpers, while Robinson, Kurpius and Froehle (1979) contend that "self-generated performance feedback is as effective as expert performance feedback" (p. 99) in training new counsellors. Supervisors are thus cautioned to be less didactic and to allow for more time for self and peer feedback.

To answer the question of the effect of other course work on the acquisition of skills, previous counselling course experience did not differentiate between subjects learning to ask open questions or paraphrasing, but did influence the effectiveness of the more complex skill of responding to feelings and emotions. When all three skills were considered, subjects with other course experience did use the skills more effectively than the beginning trainees. It cannot be overlooked however that when the scores of all subjects (including subjects with practicum experience) were examined, the no supervisor feedback trainees were rated as significantly more effective than those in both the control group and the supervisor feedback group regardless of other course work. Possibly the more experienced students were operating at a higher level of effectiveness than the no practicum students prior to training and responded negatively to feedback from a supervisor thus lessening the impact of the feedback. In any case, those with additional experience benefited more than any of the subgroups when the supervisor gave no feedback and the trainees learned from self and peer assessment.

Before concluding, several points need to be emphasized. This study has raised provocative questions regarding supervision and the benefit of supervisor feedback: (a) Can a self-learning module be developed which will allow trainees to acquire basic skills without the presence of a supervisor? (b) Would trainees learn more effectively if the supervisor delayed feedback until after self and peer critiquing? (c) What are the relative contributions of self-video playback and peer critiquing in similar training format? There is much scope for future investigations to continue the definition of elements which contribute most effectively to counselling training programs and to the maximum utilization of the supervisor for trainee benefit.

While the current study was necessarily limited in the combination of skills, feedback, and training which could be investigated, the results have clearly indicated that supervisor feedback appears to inhibit the trainee involvement in assessment and learning which is essential to the acquisition of skills in the microcounselling situation. While the specific skills training of microcounselling appears to be a useful part of counsellor education programs, and the supervisor appears to be most effective in structuring procedures, the students seem to learn more effectively during training when the supervisor has very little to say and en-

courages student interaction and participation, particularly when students have had other courses in counselling. Results of the current study support the concept of a learning environment which fosters a systematic combination of modelling, written instruction, practice interviews, minimal didactic presentation, and most importantly, maximum active student participation.

References

- Authier, J., & Gustafson, K. Application of supervised and non-supervised microcounseling paradigms in the training of registered and licensed practical nurses. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1976, 44, 704-709.
- Bulluci, J.E. Microcounseling and imitation learning: A behavioral approach to counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1972, 12, 88-97.
- Digiulio, R.A., & Eshleman, W. Graduate students respond to televised microcounseling experiences. *Audio-Visual Instruction*, 1972, 17, 39-40.
- Forge, H.L. *Comparison of three variations of micro-training in teaching basic interviewing skills to counselor trainees*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, Ann Arbor, Michigan. (Available from University Microfilms, 1973, No. 74-1746.)
- Friesen, D.D., & Dunning, G.B. Peer evaluation and practicum supervision. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1973, 3, 229-235.
- Gluckstern, N.B. Training parents as drug counselors in the community. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1973, 9, 676-680.
- Haase, R.E., & DiMattia, D.J. The application of the microcounseling paradigm to the training of support personnel in counseling. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1970, 10, 16-22.
- Ivey, A.E. *Microcounseling: Innovations in interviewing training*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1971.
- Ivey, A.E., & Gluckstern, N.B. *Basic attending skills: Leader manual*. Amherst, Massachusetts: Microtraining, 1974. (a)
- Ivey, A.E., & Gluckstern, N.B. *Basic attending skills: Participants' manual*. Amherst, Massachusetts: Microtraining, 1974. (b)
- Lauver, P.J., & Brody, G.H. *The relative effectiveness of self-modeling as a procedure for teaching basic interviewing skills*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April 1975.
- Miller, C.D., Morrill, W.H., & Uhlemann, M.R. Microcounseling: An experimental study of pre-practicum training in communicating test results. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1970, 9, 171-177.
- Olson, R.L. *The effects of immediate and delayed feedback on counselor trainees' acquisition of two interview behaviors*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Eastern Texas State University, Ann Arbor, Michigan. (Available from University Microfilms, 1973, No. 74-5771.)

- Quinn, P.F., & Silverman, M.S. *Accountability in practicum: evaluation of supervision or monitor-modeling versus immediate feedback supervision in practicum*. United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, ERIC Document Reproduction Service: 1973, ED 119035.
- Robinson, S.E., Kurpius, D.J., & Froehle, T.C. Self-generated performance feedback in interviewing training. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1979, 19, 91-100.
- Ronnestad, M.H. *Effects of modeling, feedback and experiential supervision on beginning counseling students' communication of empathic understanding*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, Ann Arbor, Michigan. (Available from University Microfilms, 1973, No. 74-9882.)
- Sodetz, A.R. *The effect of videotape microtraining on counselor behavior*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, Ann Arbor, Michigan. (Available from University Microfilms, 1972, No. 73-21, 832.)
- Toukmanian, S.G., & Rennie, D.L. Microcounseling vs. human relations training: Relative effectiveness with undergraduate trainees. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1975, 22, 345-352.
- Wagner, C.A., & Smith, J.P. Jr. Peer supervision: Toward more effective training. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1979, 18, 288-293.
- Wallace, W.G., Horan, J.J., Baker, S.B., & Hudson, G.R. Incremental effects of modeling and performance feedback in teaching decision-making counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1975, 22, 570-572.
- Winer, B.J. *Statistical Principles in Experimental Designs*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1962.