

Impact of the Supervisory Relationship on Trainee Development

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Abstract

This qualitative research explores a supervisory relationship between a counsellor trainee and a university supervisor. Ten counsellor trainees participated in this study, and their stories were gathered through a series of interviews, written documents and observation. Bond appears as a significant feature in the supervisory relationship between the trainees and the supervisors. It is also revealed that the trainee needs to work hard in creating the bond. Besides that, understanding of the required tasks appears as another important feature in the supervisory relationship. It also indicated that the bond and understanding of the required tasks between the trainees and the supervisors facilitates the trainee in fulfilling the university requirements as well as learning more about the role of the counsellor. Another important finding is that the supervisory relationship involves power, however a fair and genuine approach would help the trainees in their learning to become counsellors.

Keywords: supervisory relationship, counsellor trainee, counselling practicum, and university supervisor

Introduction

The counselling practicum is a significant event in counselling training. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs defines the purpose of the practicum as ‘providing an opportunity to perform, on a limited basis and under supervision, some of the activities that a regularly employed staff member in the setting would be expected to perform’ (cited in Pitts, 1992, p.197). On the basis of this principle, counselling trainees are expected to apply their counselling knowledge and skills, as well as to gain learning experience related to their professional role. In other words, the trainees are expected to be involved in counselling work such as conducting counselling sessions, helping with administrative work, conducting guidance activities and coordinating related developmental activities. Although the counselling practicum does not determine the career path of the counsellor trainees, it does constitute an important part of the practical experience that they will gain prior to their professional role (Pitts, 1992).

Amla (2001) conducted a survey on the practice of counselling practicum in counselling training programmes in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. The findings indicate that the counselling practicum is required by all counselling training programmes in Malaysia. Despite this, relatively little information appears in the professional literature, particularly about Malaysian writing and research in this particular area. Relevant to this, the university lecturers who are involved in providing supervision to the counsellor trainees do not receive any formal training. However, they are aware of their tasks, which are to provide guidance and to perform an assessment on the trainees’ performance. This situation indicates that every university supervisor might have their own interpretation of this process, and their lack of supervision training might result in unclear ideas about the supervision process.

Supervisory Relationship

While counsellor trainees learn how to perform the role of the counsellor, they have to participate in relationship with the university supervisor. Many researchers have examined the supervisory working alliance (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004; Hilton, Russell, and Salmi, 1995; Bordin 1983).

Bordin (1979) suggests the concept of the working alliance in a counselling relationship, and claims that this concept has universal applicability. Based on the idea of Bordin, Kivlighan and Shaughnessy (2000) describe 'the working alliance as the collaboration between the client and counsellor based on their agreement on the goals and tasks of counselling and on the development of an attachment bond.' (p.362). With the focus on 'cooperation, mutuality, and collaboration in regard to the work being conducted' (Schlosser and Gelso, 2001, p.158), the concept of a working alliance is applicable in understanding experiences of counsellor trainees in their relationships with the university supervisor. Consistent with the idea of cooperation, mutuality, and collaboration, Holloway (1995) writes about supervision. According to the writer, each supervisor and supervisee brings to the relationship of supervision his or her expectations of how the process will unfold. Some of these expectations will be the result of experience in being in supervision. As Holloway indicates, counsellor trainees and university supervisors bring their uniqueness to this interactional process, particularly their expectations about experiences during the counselling practicum. In addition, both parties have responsibilities for creating a meaningful experience from this relationship. On the other hand, university supervisors have a more important role, because of their greater experience related to the counselling practicum.

Kaiser (1997) develops further the idea of the relationship between supervisor and trainees, in a manner consistent with the concept of cooperation, collaboration and mutuality put forward by Bordin (1979). Kaiser (1997) suggests that there are three major components in the supervisory relationship: (i) the use of power and authority, (ii) the creation of shared meaning, and (iii) the creation of trust. The author emphasizes that the relationship between the supervisors and the trainees involves power. Supervisors have power over supervisees because they need to evaluate the quality of work of supervisees. On the other hand, supervisees are not powerless in this relationship. They can avoid supervision by sharing a minimum of information about their work or refusing to accept guidance of the supervisor. In consistent, Bernard and Goodyear (2004) note that counsellor supervision is an intervention in which a more senior member of the profession assists a more junior member of the profession to enhance professional functioning and ensure client welfare. However, the authors argue that the nature of supervision is evaluative. This experience may create a power imbalance between both parties. The key points from these writers (Bordin, 1979; Holloway, 1995; Kaiser, 1997; Bernard and Goodyear (2004) are firstly, a relationship between a trainee and a supervisor during the counselling practicum requires collaboration, cooperation and mutuality. Secondly, each individual who is involved in this relationship has his or her own expectations, particularly about the experience that will occur in this relationship. Thirdly, this relationship involves power, and it is possible that the individuals involved in the relationship may experience a power imbalance.

Many studies discussed about anxiety experienced by counsellor trainees, and it impacts to their performance and development (Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark, 1994; Hilton et al., 1995; Ward, 1998). A study by Hilton et al. (1995) indicates that supervisees with high support conditions were more satisfied with their supervisory relationship. The writers argue that beginning trainees are vulnerable, because they are more likely to experience performance anxiety during the beginning of the process of becoming counsellors. This study highlights three important points. First, support by the supervisor is very important, and affects development of the trainee. Second, the trainee can handle their vulnerability with support from the supervisor. Thirdly, support from the supervisor creates a feeling of security, which promotes confidence in the trainee. Another study (Horrocks and Smaby, 2006) shows a consistent result, trainee personal development also differed according to high and low supervisory working alliance.

A study by Worthen and McNeill (1996) is consistent with the findings by Hilton et al. (1995). The findings indicate that a good relationship with the supervisor helped the trainees in normalizing the struggle, and accepting their mistakes and failures. The authors note that the acquisition of professional skills and identity may be delayed, hampered, or not fully developed outside the context of an effective supervisory relationship. This situation shows that the quality of the supervisory relationship was crucial with regard to the professional development of the trainees. Also, the trainees reported that they developed greater confidence after their supervision experience. One important finding is that the trainees felt trusted by their supervisors, which contributed to their confidence, and thus affected their process of applying counselling knowledge and skills with actual clients (Worthen and McNeill, 1996). Relevant to this, supervision experience also provides an opportunity for supervisees to moderate their work-related stressors (Sternier, 2009).

The studies above (Hilton et al. 1995; Worthen and McNeill, 1996; Sterner, 2009) indicate that support from the supervisor has an impact on the development of trainees. The question is, which elements of support promote development of trainees? In an attempt to understand the nature of this support, Ladany, Ellis, and Friedlander (1999) explored the supervisory alliance between supervisors and counsellor trainees. According to the authors, the supervisory working alliance is an agreement on the goals of supervision, the tasks of supervision and an emotional bond. The study indicates that the emotional bond has a direct impact on satisfaction derived from the experience by the trainees during supervision. Consistent to this, a study on supervision and its influence on work satisfaction among professional counsellors indicated similar findings. Supervisees who were more satisfied with the supervision relationship were more satisfied with their work (Sterner, 2009). According to earlier authors (Ladany et al., 1999) when the emotional bond was viewed as becoming stronger over time, trainees also perceived their supervisors' personal qualities and performance more positively, and they were relatively more comfortable in supervision. The authors add that a stronger emotional bond is related to self-disclosing by trainees. This means that the emotional bond between the trainees and the supervisors is a key feature in their relationship, which has a significant impact on their development as counsellors.

In contrast, some supervisors do not understand their role in the relationship with trainees. Clarkson and Aviram (1995) found that the supervisors had different interpretations of their role, and most of them perceived their role as mainly that of a teacher during supervision with trainees. The implication of this research is that supervisors enter the supervision sessions with different interpretations about the sessions, and these differences might impact on how they perform their role with the trainees. Despite different interpretations, this relationship will affect a trainee and a supervisor during the counselling practicum. It is possible that this relationship will change after both a trainee and supervisor experience the impact of this relationship. The changes in this relationship relate to the concept of building and repair of the working alliance (Bordin, 1983). Based on Bordin's idea, Gray, Ladany, Walker, and Ancis (2001) note that the relationship between the trainees and the supervisors is not a straightforward process. Willingness from both the trainees and the supervisors to cooperate in the process of building and repairing this relationship may explain collaboration, cooperation and mutuality.

As discussed earlier in this section, a trainee and a supervisor enter into their relationship with expectations. Relevant to this, a person faces role conflict when he or she encounters incompatible role expectations. Olk and Friedlander (1992) suggest that 'role conflict can arise because the trainee is expected to simultaneously reveal areas of weakness and present competencies and strengths' (p.389). In relation to trainees, experience of role conflict contributes to disturbance of their psychological well-being. In an attempt to understand these issues, Olk and Friedlander (1992) investigated role conflict and role ambiguity in counselling supervision. The writers found that role ambiguity involves uncertainty about supervisory expectations and the process of evaluation, and role conflict results when trainees are required to engage in behaviours that are incongruent with their personal judgement or to engage in multiple roles that require opposing behaviours, such as the role of student, counsellor or colleague. In the role of student, trainees are expected to follow all directives and recommendations, but in the role of counsellor and colleague, trainees are expected to demonstrate a capacity for decision-making.

This study shows also that role ambiguity is more common than role conflict, but issues of role ambiguity diminish with increasing experience. Role conflict seems more common among experienced trainees, who experience little role ambiguity. The key points that can be highlighted from this study are, firstly, that counsellor trainees experience role ambiguity during the learning journey because of their limited experience. Secondly, role ambiguity will disturb the trainees' learning experience during the counselling practicum, because this contributes to unclear goals and motives. Trainees are likely to experience role conflict in their relationship with the supervisors, especially when they experience unclear expectations. Olk and Friedlander (1992) argue that supervisors are in a similar position, because they are in conflict about how to handle the welfare of trainees and trainees' clients. The writers note that the supervisor creates an open and nonjudgemental atmosphere to enable the trainee to discuss personal reactions. In so doing, the supervisor may become convinced that the trainee is emotionally impaired to a significant degree. In other words, both the trainees and the supervisors are likely to experience role conflict, because of expectations and power relations involved in this relationship. Understanding of roles and expectations can make a difference in relationships experienced by a counsellor trainee. Hazler (1998) argues books and instructors explained how the roles of counsellors, teachers, administrators, community members and many more were all designed to form an efficient working team.

According to the author, a few days on the job made it clear that such a “team” is not easily created, strengthened, or maintained – no matter what the books said.

As discussed previously, an emotional bond between a trainee and a supervisor promotes the development of counsellor trainees. Relevant to this, Ladany and Friedlander (1995) found that trainees tended to experience less role conflict and ambiguity when they perceived their supervisory working alliance as stronger and at the same time they had clear goals and task components. Also, trainees experienced less conflict when they felt a stronger emotional bond. The findings also revealed that counsellor trainees experienced more role conflict when the goals and tasks of supervision were not agreed on with the supervisor, regardless of the strength of their emotional bond. Role conflict affects the learning experience of the trainees during the counselling practicum. Nelson and Friedlander (2001) indicate that most trainees experienced deep hurt and confusion in their relationship with the supervisor. They experienced a power struggle with the supervisors, and the authors note that a power struggle between supervisor and supervisee may reflect role conflict on the part of either or both parties. As a result of the imbalance of power, most trainees in the study experienced a loss of trust in their supervisors, felt unsafe, pulled back from the relationship, and maintained a guarded stance in supervision. Some trainees perceived that their life experiences, skills, or differences were not valued by their supervisors. In consequence, some trainees experienced extreme stress. Despite those experiences, many trainees looked for support from peers or partners, and also consulted with other people, who were able to understand the situation. Some trainees indicated that they tried to go along with things in the hope that doing so would prevent further hurt or misunderstanding.

In relation, it evidenced that an individual depends on other people for fulfilling their needs. This means that a relationship with other people is very important in life of every individual (Tudor, Keemar, Tudor, Valentine, and Worrall, 2004). Idea of Tudor et al. is related to the relationship between the counsellor trainee and the university supervisor. In this regard, Tudor et al. (2004) assert the importance of relationship as highlighted by Carl Rogers. According to Tudor et al., Rogers views of human development as an ongoing process of differentiation, and it depends on our being in relationship. We cannot be fully human without being in relationship. Just as the organism cannot be understood apart from its environment and the individual cannot be known outside of his social context. The writers put forward three important points. Firstly, the uniqueness of an individual is partly related to his or her being in relationship. Secondly, an individual gains better understanding of his or her self through participating in a relationship. Thirdly, relationship is a part of the wholeness of the individual.

The relationship between a trainee and a supervisor during the counselling practicum requires collaboration, cooperation and mutuality (Bordin, 1979; Kivlighan and Shaughnessy, 2000). This relationship promotes development of trainees, which partly related to support from the supervisors (Hilton et al. 1995; Worthen and McNeill, 1996; Ladany et al., 1999). Despite this, this relationship involves power (Kaiser, 1997). A key feature in the relationship between the trainee and the supervisor is an emotional bond (Ladany et al. (1999). However, trainees need to experience clear goals and tasks in order to avoid differences in this relationship. On the other hand, an individual gains better understanding of his or her self through participating in a relationship (Tudor et al., 2004). Therefore, how do the trainees experience supervisory relationship while performing the counselling practicum?

Methodology

This study aims to explore the experience of supervisory relationship among the counsellor trainees during the counselling practicum. The focus of this research is not to search for objective facts and truth about the supervisory relationship, but the main interest lies in the subjective experience captured in the individual stories of trainees. The counsellor trainees are in the real environment during the counselling practicum. They are in a natural setting during the process of applying their theoretical knowledge. This study aimed to gain a greater understanding about how they make sense of themselves, and of their supervisory relationship experience during the counselling practicum. The qualitative approach is most appropriate choice because qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). According to Patton (2002), ‘the data for qualitative analysis typically come from fieldwork. ... the qualitative researcher talks with people about their experiences and perceptions’ (p.5) In other words, this study aimed to gain greater understanding about how they make sense of their relationship with the university supervisor. This research involved 10 trainees and different types of data, which includes a series of interview, observation and written documents.

The major data gathering process in this study was a series of in-depth interviews. The interviewing process allows the researcher to enter into the experience of the person and uncover their thoughts and feelings (Patton, 2002). Kvale (1996) suggests that the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee will be a strong point of qualitative research because of their reciprocal influence on another person's cognitive and emotional level. The interviews were conducted during the twelve weeks that the participants performed their counselling practicum. Each of the participants took part in three interviews, at the beginning, the middle and the end of their practicum, each interview building upon the previous ones. The first interview was conducted during weeks 2 and 3, the second one during weeks 6 and 7, and the third interview during weeks 10 and 11. Each interview was allowed up to one and a half hours. This included time for 'warming up', the interviewing phase, and time for 'cooling down' at the end of the interview.

The participants also needed to write their journal on a weekly basis and they started this a week prior to their practicum. Their first journal is a narration about their personal expectations of what they hoped to gain from their practicum experience and their weekly story was to be based on: (i) the most significant experience, (ii) the worst experience, and (iii) what they had learned from the experience. The participants were to keep this journal until the end of their practicum, then hand it in to the researcher, during week twelve of their practicum. The rationale for this was that writing about their own experiences would help the trainees to think critically and develop insights into their assumptions and beliefs (Griffith and Frieden, 2000). Poirier (1992) mentions that journal writing during her practicum provided her with the feeling of strength, ability to communicate her voice, and empowerment.

Observation is a part of the data in this study. The physical layout as well as atmosphere of the counselling centre, and facilities provided for counselling activities were observed during the visits to the participated places. Patton (2002) notes that the purposes of observational data are to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and that it is a most powerful source of validation (Adler and Alder, 1994). In other words, observations are essential in gaining a holistic perspective of the individual because it captures the context in which people interact. The context is fundamental in providing meaning to the reader, because it gives the reader a sense of 'being there' (Stake, 1995). Analysing stories of the participants started immediately after completing the first interview. I listened to the interview and read the transcript before engaging in the next interview. During this phase, I tried to make sense of the experiences of the trainees and noted down any themes emerging in their stories. I drew on these six steps (McLeod, 2001) as a guideline in conducting analysis on stories of the counsellor trainees. According to the author, all these six steps were based on work from previous writers (Colaizzi, 1978; Bullington and Karlsson, 1984; Wertz, 1984; Hycner, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1989; and Moustakas, 1994).

Findings

The trainees indicated that the relationship with the university supervisors was a significant feature during the counselling practicum. The university supervisor was not part of community in the setting that the trainee performs their counselling practicum; however, he or she was responsible in guiding and assessing performance of the trainees during that particular period. Table 1 shows a summary of the relationship between the trainees and the university supervisors.

Trainees	Experience during the counselling practicum		
	Beginning	Middle	End
Meilin	Difficult	Difficult	Difficult
Jamil	Difficult	Difficult	Difficult
Nadia	Difficult	Moderate	Moderate
Maria	Difficult	Good	Good
Sheila	Difficult	Good	Good
Ahmad	Moderate	Difficult	Difficult
Chan	Moderate	Difficult	Difficult
Chew	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Zana	Good	Good	Good
Mala	Good	Good	Good

Table 1 indicates that the relationships between the trainees and the university supervisor varied. Some trainees encountered a difficult relationship from the beginning to the end of the counselling practicum. They had to work hard to gain explanations from the supervisor about the requirements that needed to be completed. Other trainees experienced a good relationship with the university supervisors. They experienced guidance and support from the supervisors. As described earlier, this relationship was categorised at three levels, which were good, moderate and difficult. A good relationship indicates acceptance, a difficult relationship illustrates rejection and a moderate relationship combines both acceptance and rejection.

Every trainee had his or her own story in this relationship. In order to understand their experience, stories of Mala, Sheila and Jamil will be presented in detail. These three stories were chosen because they show differences and similarities. Below is the sequence of Mala's positive relationship with the university supervisor.

Story of Mala

Mala began her learning journey with happy feelings. As she noted, 'After that general briefing, my supervisor conducted another briefing session, but I could not attend that session. I had another session with her, and this was only the two of us, she and me. She explained to me about many things, such as how she would do the assessment, how to write the counselling reports. We also discussed how I could fulfil the required tasks during this period. She suggested that I needed to have at least one individual session in a day.'

Mala continued, 'I feel very happy with our discussion, because she is willing to listen to me. I asked about many things, and I managed to get much information from her. I gained a better understanding about the counselling practicum. I knew what to do and how to do this thing at the school'.

Mala had a positive relationship with the supervisor from the beginning to the end of the practicum, which contributes to her learning journey. She noted at the middle of the practicum, 'I already had a first session with the supervisor. She gave a constructive feedback about my performance. According to her, I had no problem in understanding the client's issues, and I conducted that session very well. I feel very happy with her feedback, because I know that I always have problems in exploring the clients' issues.' Being able to experience a positive relationship from the beginning of the practicum made Mala have a positive perspective about supervision with the supervisor.

Story of Sheila

Sheila is a trained teacher and in her late twenties. She chose to join this counselling training programme after working as a primary school teacher for three years. In addition, she also worked as an untrained teacher prior to her teacher training.

She began her learning journey with confusion. According to her, 'I felt confused, how to prepare that report. What the university supervisor wants in that report. I'm not sure what he expects us to write in that report.' She continued, 'The university supervisor mentioned that his report format is quite different to other supervisors. He wanted to give that format tomorrow. The next day, I waited for ages but he did not turn up. Until now, I don't have his format. I have tried to call him but I failed to get him.' Her dissatisfaction towards the supervisor was very strong, especially when she said, 'He never discussed about the assessment process, I'm not sure on how he is going to conduct that, I don't know what are the things that involved in that process'.

Sheila managed to get an explanation from the university supervisor about the required tasks after she chased for the information. She noted, 'starting from there, I managed to write my report and I felt relieved because I can do what is required'.

Sheila expressed her feelings at the end of the counselling practicum saying, 'I feel very happy because I'm almost finished with this practicum. I have been thinking about where my job will be. ... I feel very happy because my practicum is almost completed. I have learned a lot here. Every week we have our activities. ... I feel more confident. I have my confidence, especially about how to conduct sessions.'

Story of Jamil

Jamil started his relationship with the supervisor with unhappy feelings. As he noted, 'I did not feel happy when I knew that he would be my supervisor. I felt that I could not get along with him.' His unhappy feelings were related to his initial experience with the supervisor. Jamil said, 'our group did not have any meeting with him before coming to the school. I don't think that I'm interested to meet with him. Actually, my friend, we were in the same group, told me that she asked him about a meeting, but he said no because he would see us at the school.' Jamil added, 'I would like to have a briefing session with him before coming to the school, I would prefer to have it in a group, because I don't feel that I know what is supposed to be done in the school.'

Jamil had another uncomfortable experience with the supervisor, which confirmed his negative perception of the supervisor. He reported, 'I met with him once, and it was unplanned. I asked him about the counselling reports. He said, "never mind, I will explain it during my visit to your place." When I asked him another question, he said, "You can get that information from that place." I did not have any interest in seeing him anymore after that, because he did not offer much help.' He began his learning experience with uncomfortable feelings towards the supervisor.

Being unable to get an explanation of the required tasks, and his role, was a difficult experience for Jamil. As he noted, 'now, I feel unsure about many things, especially how to prepare the counselling reports. Because of this, I did not write any report. I just waited for my friends, to discuss with them how to do this.' Being able to discuss with a trusted friend alleviated his struggle in fulfilling the required tasks.

Jamil kept on experiencing powerlessness in his relationship with the supervisor. As he noted, 'I don't feel happy with my counselling supervision. I tried my best during that session, but for sure I have many weaknesses. Although I'm not satisfied with my performance, I feel relieved after that session.' His dissatisfaction with his performance was very much related to the supervisor's approach. He believed that the supervisor was not interested in providing guidance during his learning experience. As he noted, 'the supervisor came without any notification. By that time, I had almost finished a group session. After I finished with that group, I went and met him, and he said he wanted to observe an individual session. I had no choice at that time, and I asked one of the group members to be my client in the individual session.'

His experience during supervision created another feeling of powerlessness. Jamil said, 'I'm not satisfied with his supervision. He did not observe a whole session. How could he get an idea of my skills when he watches only a bit of the whole process?' He adds, 'I also found out that he did a different thing with another friend. He observed the whole process of her session. I feel unhappy with his different treatment of us. Another thing is, he discussed many things with my friend, especially the skills and techniques, but he did not do that with me. I'm not satisfied with him.' Being aware of the different treatment by the supervisor became another setback in his experience. As a result of his experience with the supervisor, Jamil noted, 'I'm not satisfied with the process of counselling supervision. For me now, I will do whatever I can. I don't have a high expectation of his grading on my performance. I think he did not perform his job professionally.'

Discussion

Supervisory relationship and trainees' satisfaction were clearly evidenced in the story of Mala. Relevant to Mala is related to Ladany et al. (1999) that the emotional bond, which is a component of the supervisory relationship, was significantly related to satisfaction. When the emotional bond was viewed as becoming stronger over time, trainees also perceived their supervisors' personal qualities and performance more positively, and they were relatively more comfortable in supervision. Referring to Mala, it is possible her emotional bond with the supervisor started from their briefing session, which took place before the counselling practicum. Mala is an Indian girl and she was very anxious because she needed to perform the counselling practicum in a Malay-populated setting. The opportunity to discuss her anxiety with the supervisor might have contributed to her emotional bond with the supervisor.

Many theorists have long viewed the relationship between the supervisors and the trainees as significant in enhancing the professional development of trainees (Hilton et al. 1995; Worthen and McNeill, 1996; Ladany et al., 1999), and the quality of the relationship is seen as essential to positive outcomes in supervision (Holloway, 1995). In relation to Mala, her story in her relationship with the university supervisor supports the previous writings (Hilton et al. 1995; Worthen and McNeill, 1996; Ladany et al., 1999; Holloway, 1995). Her positive relationship had a significant impact on her learning journey towards becoming a school counsellor. It is possible that the relationship with her supervisor helped Mala in normalizing her struggles, particularly in fulfilling the required tasks, as well as adjusting in the new school environment.

Story of Sheila shows a different experience. In this matter, Sheila did not experience much support from the supervisor at the beginning of the counselling practicum. As described earlier, Sheila began the counselling practicum with insufficient information about the required tasks, which was how to prepare counselling reports. She failed to gain information about this task, although she tried a few times to meet with the supervisor. However, she experienced changes in the middle of the practicum, after exerting more efforts. She perceived the supervisor as more helpful after this experience. Being able to gain clearer information about counselling reports changed her relationship with the supervisor.

The story from Sheila shows that she could not concentrate on her role as a counsellor when she experienced poor support from the supervisor. Her experience also indicates that uncertainty about the required tasks disturbed her learning journey towards becoming a counsellor. Her experience with the supervisor also illustrates another key point. She did not have negative perceptions about the supervisor, despite her experience with him. It is possible that her experience as a trained teacher made her have a positive perspective about her experience, and be more determined in getting information about the required tasks. Furthermore her goals were to fulfil the university requirements and to work as a counsellor.

Relevant to Sheila, Holloway (1995) describes the relationship between a supervisor and a trainee as a very subjective process, because both of them enter into their relationship with their own uniqueness, such as their previous experience, as well as expectations about the new experience. Referring back to Sheila, she expected to gain guidance and support from the supervisor during this period. Her experience indicated that she worked hard in the process of gaining these from the supervisor. This situation shows that Sheila and the supervisor entered the counselling practicum with different ideas. Sheila was very concerned about fulfilling the required tasks; however, the supervisor did not pay much attention to this matter. The experience described by Sheila supports the findings by Clarkson and Aviram (1995). The writers found that the supervisors had different interpretations of their role during supervision with the trainees. In relation to Sheila, she worked hard to build this relationship, because of their differences. This situation shows that building up a relationship with the university supervisor is not an easy process for the trainees, although both parties are aware of their responsibilities in this relationship.

Relationship with a university supervisor is very important and being unable to have a positive relationship with the supervisor affected their learning journey towards becoming a counsellor. As an example, Jamil encountered a difficult relationship with the university supervisor from the beginning to the end of the counselling practicum. It is clear that the concept of cooperation, mutuality and collaboration was absent in their relationship. His story illustrates that the trainees and the supervisors are both responsible for creating a positive relationship. In addition, supervisors need to be aware that their guidance is very significant to the trainees. The guidance of supervisor has a significant impact on clients, although clients are in a relationship with trainees. Trainees might feel more confident in helping clients with guidance of supervisors. As other writers (Pearson 2000; Bernard and Goodyear, 2004) suggest that although the focus of the relationship is on the professional growth and welfare of the counsellor trainees, it must always be balanced with the welfare and protection of the client.

Jamil also illustrates the importance of trust in his relationship with the supervisor. Relevant to this, Kaiser (1997) suggests that trust is one of the important elements in the relationship between the trainees and the supervisors, particularly from the supervisors towards the trainees. However, Jamil indicated that the issue is not only one of trust from the supervisors towards the trainees; it is also about trust of the trainees towards the supervisors, especially in providing them with guidance during the process of applying their knowledge. Being unable to trust his supervisor made him withdraw from this relationship. Another important point in the experience of Jamil is the feeling of powerlessness (Kaiser, 1997; Nelson and Friedlander, 2001).

These feelings had a significant impact on his learning journey to become a counsellor. In this matter, Kaiser (1997) indicates that the relationship between the supervisor and the trainee is hierarchical; however, a fair and genuine approach, plus mutual give and take are the centre of the appropriate use of power and authority. An effective supervisory process involves contributions from both parties and the understanding of the use of power and authority in their relationship (Kaiser, 1997; Bernard and Goodyear, 2004). On the other hand, the feeling of powerlessness in the relationship with the supervisor was not helped by Jamil's timid style. Although he felt unclear about his required tasks, as well as dissatisfied with the supervisor's approach, he was not willing to discuss his unhappy feelings. Relevant to this, Worthen and McNeill (1996) found that the learning and acquisition of professional skills and identity may be delayed, hampered, or not fully developed outside the context of an effective supervisory relationship. In relation to Jamil, he had a challenging learning journey during the counselling practicum. However, Jamil managed to complete the counselling practicum, and make sense of his learning journey towards becoming a counsellor, although he did not experience a positive relationship with the supervisor.

Nelson and Friedlander (2001) indicate that many trainees felt deeply hurt and confused by their experiences in supervision. However, some were strengthened personally and professionally through these experiences. In relation to Jamil, how he managed to search for a way out from his difficult relationship may be related to the idea of Ladany et al. (1999), about the presence of unknown variables, such as peer relationships, in helping trainees during their learning to become counsellors.

A key point in the relationship between the trainees and the supervisor is clarity. As Holloway (1995) describes, this relationship involves plenty of expectations. The trainees expected guidance and support from the supervisors. On the other hand, the supervisors expected the trainees to perform certain tasks. In this regard, Ladany and Friedlander (1995) discuss the impact of role ambiguity on the beginner school counsellor. According to the authors, trainees experienced less role ambiguity when their expectations for supervision were made explicit by the supervisors. It is evidenced that the trainees experienced a positive relationship with the supervisor when they participated in a briefing session before starting the counselling practicum. This session prepared the trainees mentally and emotionally before engaging in their new role. This session also served as a starter to their positive emotional bond.

Conclusion

The relationship between the trainees and the supervisor is varied. Sometimes, this relationship contributes to the initial vulnerability faced by the trainees because of unclear tasks that needed to be completed. However, the relationship between the trainees and the supervisors requires a reciprocal effort; both parties are responsible in building this relationship. The trainees demonstrated that they experienced a positive relationship when they worked to build it. The positive relationship with the supervisor contributes partly to the positive learning journey in the real setting.

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