

Ethics and Multicultural Supervision in Schools and Mental Health Settings

by AMCD 2019-2020 Ethics Committee Members:

Candice Crawford, Ph.D., LMHC

Zoricelis Davila, Ph.D., LPC-S, NCC

Jan Gay, LICSW, NCC

Jo-Ann Lipford Sanders, Ph.D., LPCC-S

Ebony E. White, Ph.D., LPC, NCC, ACS

There is a growing awareness of the need for multicultural supervision in the field of counseling as a result of the continued demographic change in the United States (Christiansen et al., 2011; Vespa et al., 2018; Clayton, 2011). Relevance in the field of counseling and supervision requires incorporating multicultural competencies into current techniques and adapting them within practice in both school and mental health supervisory experiences (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2010; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016). There is also an increased need to ensure that ethical guidelines are followed in the process of developing multicultural competencies in supervision in school and mental health settings for both the supervisor and supervisee (Tohidian & Quek, 2017). The key to providing ethical multicultural supervision lies with a supervisor who integrates cultural awareness and cultural humility as central factors of the supervisory process (Lipscomb & Ashley, 2017). Research supports that multiculturally competent supervision leads to multiculturally competent counseling practice in both school and mental health settings (Soheilian et al., 2014).

Multicultural competence should be seen as a prerequisite for counseling supervision and not an adjunct. Because the supervisor is in an evaluative role, it is important to gauge and track

supervisees' cultural competency throughout the supervisory relationship, i.e., from initiation to termination (Toporek et al., 2004). This not only establishes a baseline and provides a tool to illustrate growth, but also highlights cultural competence as central to professional identity. Regardless of the setting, supervisors have a responsibility to be informed about the population being served including strengths and obstacles that may be unique to the population and community (Ancis & Marshall, 2010).

Effective multiculturally competent supervisors recognize the impact of heterogeneous experiences on the supervisory working alliance. These supervisors will not be reluctant to recognize and broach the results of a triadic interaction between these experiences, the power dynamics in the supervisory relationship and their own biases, and lack of understanding and cultural background (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Inman, 2006).

Professional school counselors have an added responsibility in that they must understand and apply multicultural competence within institutional dynamics. With the rising disparities in education and disproportionate achievement gaps among marginalized students, it is important for professional school counselors to seek culturally competent supervision to foster professional growth, advocacy, and accountability supporting cultural variables. Cultural supervision can be a powerful vehicle for fostering the professional development of school counselors (Herlihy et al., 2002) and has been linked to student advocacy (Lee, 2001) and multicultural training experiences (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). Supervisors who attend to multicultural issues in supervision and have multicultural competence themselves may be successful in training students who are effective in working with culturally diverse clients (Constantine, 2001).

Developing Competencies

An important aspect of providing ethical supervision in any setting is an understanding of and dedication to multicultural competency for both the supervisor and the supervisee (American Counseling Association, 2014). In an effort to provide ethical priorities in multicultural supervision within various settings, the acronym of A.M.C.D. is offered:

Attitude – Multicultural references should be seen as multidimensional influences from contextual, societal, and practical perspectives. The interactions between these dimensions though hardy are unique. As the teacher/leader/guide, supervisors should be constantly aware of the influence of cultural and institutional assumptions, beliefs, bias or unfamiliarity that may silently inform attitudes within the supervisor-supervisee-client triad. Thus, awareness of multicultural attitudes toward these dimensions become critical in the development of multicultural competencies (Akkurt et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2017).

Models and Mentoring – the literature is ripe with models of supervision that have been designed to guide multicultural supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Inman & Kreider, 2013). Models can be useful in helping the supervisor and supervisee measure an assess learning. Information obtained from these models may also serve as a frame for the supervisor to provide mentoring since both variables have been identified as significant factors to influence multicultural competence (Davila, 2019).

Competencies as Skill – the first AMCD multicultural competencies submitted in 1992 used the model of awareness, knowledge and skill to discuss competencies. Since then the AMCD have updated the model to integrate actions, attitudes and beliefs along with other dimensions (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2015).

Delivery – Believing that competencies (awareness, knowledge and skill) blossom from application (Roysircar et al., 2003). Lastly, a supervisory relationship that integrates all multicultural competencies delivers effective and ethical multicultural supervision (Lipscomb & Ashley, 2017).

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Candice Crawford, Ph.D., LMHC, is an Assistant Professor of Counseling at Molloy College. E-mail: ccrawford2@molloy.edu

Zoricelis Davila, Ph.D., LPC-S, NCC is an Assistant Professor of Counseling at Dallas Baptist University. E-mail: zoricelis@gmail.com

Jan Gay, M.Ed., LICSW, NCC is a Doctoral Student pursuing a doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of Florida. E-mail: jan.gay@ufl.edu

Jo-Ann Lipford Sanders, Ph.D., LPCC-S is a retired Dean of Behavioral Science and Education, Emmanuel Training Centre at Heidelberg University. E-mail: joannlipfordsanders@yahoo.com

Ebony E. White, Ph.D., LPC, NCC, ACS is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Behavioral Health Counseling at Drexel University. E-mail: eeew54@drexel.edu