Mutuality as a Supervision Tool for Struggling CSD Graduate Students

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Main Argument
Supervisor actions have been examined in the communication disorder field (Anderson, 1988; Saras & Post, 2004; Bobkoff Katz, Garr-Nunn, & Nunez, 2000). For example, Anderson (1998) reviewed a continuum of supervisory behaviors that moved from more evaluative feedback using a directive style to self-supervision and a consultative style. More incompetent students would be treated with the more directive style. Bobkoff Katz and colleagues (2000) looked specifically at comments that supervisors wrote to graduate students. These researchers suggested that it “required more than technical skills to reach expertise” (p. 176).

The present study was to assess written comments given to competent and less competent CSD students. I predicted that the written comments to struggling students would remain in the evaluation/feedback stage using a more directive style of writing.

Subject Information and Group Structure

The three supervisors were assigned to supervise twelve graduate CSD students who worked with 24 children who participated in a university language and literacy project in southern Louisiana.

Eleven graduate students (nine female) were all completing a final campus clinical assignment. Five of the students had self-identified themselves as struggling due to shyness (2); challenging client behaviors (1); lack of desire to work with children (1) and poor academic understanding (1). (The struggling graduate students were identified as part of a larger study previously conducted by the present investigator).

Supervision Notes and Journal Comments

The supervisors wrote supervision notes at least once a week to their assigned students. In addition, the supervisors wrote responses and comments to student questions and observations that were written in their reflection journals. The supervisors’ notes and comments were examined using qualitative research measures to assess the types of written comments that were given to the students.

Results
For each supervision note and reflection journal comment, supervisors’ comments were recorded individually and then categorized into broader categories to provide more concise results.

Supervisor efforts to collaborate with students were found in an analysis of the use of the pronouns “we” and “I” found in the supervision notes and journal comments. When the supervisors gave a suggestion, or even a directive, they often employed plural pronouns to suggest that the ongoing efforts were collaborative between the student and supervisor. Of course, this also tended to temper any comments and to make them more affiliative by the use of the plurals “we,” “us” and “our.”

This affiliative use of plural pronouns was identified as mutuality. Supervisors tended to use the collaborative pronoun “we” more with students that had previously been identified as struggling or when the student was experiencing some cognitive dissonance.

Comments from Supervisor Three:

“We are not doing a formal, miscue analysis—so it’s fine for you to model”

“We need to slow him down—model this”

“We need to spend the majority of her time reading”