

From Old School to the Use of ICT in Supervision of Counsellor Trainees in Nigeria

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Abstract

Things are changing. Better ways of doing things are been thought out and employed. Counsellor education and supervision is not left out in this wind of change. This paper specifically acknowledges this in the area of supervision of students on counselling practicum exercise. In Nigeria, counselling is taught from first degree to Ph.D. level. During the course of training of the counsellors at the first degree level, trainees are exposed to a two six-weeks practicum exercise. At the end of each of the practicum exercise, the trainee counsellors are assessed. Most times, the assessment is done post mortem from the review of tapes and reports. This paper submits that such exercises can be improved by employing the use of some ICT techniques for enhanced and more accurate assessment of trainee counsellors practicum experiences, hence the call for a shift from the old school to the use of ICT in supervision of trainee counsellors in Nigeria.

Introduction

The ways of doing things change from time to time in the face of emerging and prevailing circumstances. These ways of doing things which give way to new ways are in the parlance of the youth regarded as "Old School". They are called 'Old School' because it is thought to belong to older and fading generation. The ways of teaching in counsellor education are changing. They are accommodating new ways. One of the ways is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The same can be said of supervision in counsellor education.

Counselling has long been seen as a face to face professional and ethical relationship between a counsellor and a client. This concept of counselling has long given way to modern definitions. The modern definition accommodates the fact that counselling can be done from a distance and via the use of technology by not restricting it to face to face interaction. ACA

(2010) defined counselling as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals.

In counsellor education, the training is made up of two component parts. One is the theoretical part while the second has to do with fieldwork experience called counselling practicum. As with the practice in Nigeria, trainee counsellors are sent out twice on counselling practicum during the entire course of their counsellor training at the first degree level. Each outing lasts for six weeks but the trainees go out for the practicum exercise twice a week. This is grossly inadequate for them to gain sufficiently from the exposure. One full term exposure for counselling practicum exercise is advocated. It allows for continuity and building up of experiences.

Presently, as is the practice, after the six weeks practicum exercise, the materials used for the exercise are submitted for assessment. The materials usually submitted include counselling report forms, used psychological tests, psychological test reports, information files, cassettes etc. It is the cassettes that are reviewed with students to infer from their voices how counselling skills were put to use. Presently, it is ICT that is very popular with counsellor education. Beside this ICT, there are others that could be use. A highlighting of some of these ICTs is the focus of this paper.

ICT and Supervision of Counselling Process

ICT is an acronym for information and communication technologies. It is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing radio, television, cellular phones, computers and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on; as well as the various services and applications associated with them (searchciomidmarket.techtarget.com/definition/ICT retrieved 30/6/12). ICT also refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications ICT can also be said to be “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information” (Blurton, 2001 p.19).

ICT has been popular in teaching and learning including counsellor education. Not much is said in favour of using ICT in supervising trainee counsellors' counselling practicum exercise and experience. This paper has identified some ICTs that can be used in face to face supervision, remote and live supervisions. The ICTs that can be used in face to face counselling supervision include audio recordings, video recordings, and digital analysis software while those used in remote supervision include email, course management system and skype. For live supervision, the ICTs that can be used for supervision of counselling process during practicum include telephone, bug in the ear, and bug in the eye. Some of these ICTs will be highlighted for their use in supervision in counselling.

Face to face Supervision

This includes the use of audio recording, video recordings and digital analysis software. This is the supervision of the counselling practicum exercise usually held some weeks after the exercise. Trainee counsellors are usually required to submit their counselling reports which include the used and unused psychological tests and psychological reports, counselling report forms, logbooks and tape recorded counselling sessions. On submission, the supervisor reviews the materials so submitted. The taped recorded counselling sessions are played and reviewed. This practice is very popular amongst counsellor education institutions in Nigeria.

Audio Recordings: This involves the use of audio-tapes used by trainee counsellors to record counselling sessions. The use of this technology is prevalent and popularly used in clinical supervision of counselling practicum. It is used, like other technologies in face to face supervision, to glean clinical data from audio recordings of actual counselling sessions. The use of audio recording dates back to 1940's (Buono, Vellendahi, Guth and Dandeneau, 2011). It avails trainee counsellors and their supervisors the opportunity to review the recordings of the trainees during the fieldwork experience. (Bernard and Goodyear, 2009). The review of used counselling taped are reviewed by both supervisor and trainee counsellors. They are encouraged to be objective in their critique. This is commonly share by all who are participating in the exercise. Its use to review choice sessions is usually done at the end of counselling practicum exercise and therefore has minimal effects on the counselling process which had earlier been terminated. Apart from this, the use of audio recording in supervision of counselling practicum is only restricted to only sound which, many a time, is of poor quality.

Video Recording: The supervision of counselling has been enhanced by the use of video recording since the 1960 (Hyhra, Yamokoski-Maynhart and Prieto, 2008). This is because of the addition of visual images of the counsellor, supervisee and client. In video recording, the Video Tape Recorders (VTR) should be employed. The camera should be positioned in such a way that it will capture the supervisee and the client when they enter into a counselling relationship. The camera will be operated from a place that is not visible to the supervisee and client. After the session, the supervisor and supervisee can review the tape. The video recording of counselling session for supervision purpose raises an ethical issue on confidentiality. It is therefore suggested that both the supervisee and client should be informed that their session will be videoed and their consent got either orally or in writing before the session begins. Again, informing them that their session will be videoed may induce some anxiety in the supervisee and inhibition on the part of the client. To overcome this, the purpose of the video of their counselling session should be explicitly made known to them.

REMOTE SUPERVISION

Email: Emails can be used in supervision of counselling practicum exercise. This comes to be when supervisors and supervisees email their thoughts, questions and issues between scheduled face to face counselling sessions. According to Graft and Stebnicki (2002) and Stebnicki and Glover (2001) supervisees have reported positively on the increased level of support they got from such communication. The use of email is asynchronous in nature. In the use of emails in supervision of counselling practicum, it requires that both the supervisor and the supervisee should have access to internet facilities as well as functional email address. The email addresses should be expressly and ethically exchanged. If the emailing is done during the process of counselling, it has the potency of slowing it down and even bring doubting thoughts on the mind of client. In view of this, the client should be informed early before the session starts.

Skype: This is another technology that could be employed in supervision of counselling process. Skype is also referred to as voice over internet protocol. It is a freeware tool that provides visual and aural communication between two computers (Woo, 2006; Buono, Vellendahi, Guth and Dandeneau, 2011). One can sign up and download the freeware from www.skype.com. With Skype, a supervisor can talk to, send instant messages or make free

video calls to a supervisee who is at a counselling practicum site. In using the skype, the computer used at both ends by the supervisor and trainee should have internet facility and webcams to convey the visual components in the communication. It could be used to video call supervisees either for individual or group supervision after setting up a contact list of the group. Pan and Sullivan (2005) assert that a study of graduate students taking on-online class suggest that the use of skype in counselling supervision is an effective tool to build synchronous interaction and that it can provide just-in-time clarification and information. This calls for its use in counsellor supervision.

LIVE SUPERVISION

In this type of supervision, it involves the use of telephone, bug in the ear and use of in-room computer where the supervisor views and/or interacts with the supervisee while the counselling session is on going. This type of supervision is undertaken to help the trainee counsellor to bring vividly the picture of the going-ons to the fore of the trainee counsellor and supervisor. This type of supervision helps trainee counsellors to take in the moment awareness and to apply it to counselling almost immediately. Note that, by this, the supervisee becomes “the puppet” who gives voice to the clinical pseudo-commands of the supervisor (Buono, Vellendahi, Guth and Dandeneau, 2011).

Telephone: Telephone as an ICT can be used when supervising students during counselling practicum. According to Bernard and Goodyear (2009) and Wetchler, Trepper, Mccollum and Nelson (1993) telephone has been used severally in live clinical supervision during fieldwork practicum exercise. In using it, the supervisor phones in to a supervisee when the supervisee is in session in order to provide immediate feedback to the supervisee. Before telephone is used in clinical counselling supervision, it will be agreed upon that supervisee should call the supervisor whenever his immediate attention is needed when a counselling session is in progress. Again, the supervisor should have agreed with the supervisee when he, the supervisee will be in session so that the supervisor can phone in. There is the possibility that, in this later scenario, the supervisor may phone in at a time when the session has not started or reached a point when his expertise will be needed due to late take off of the counselling session. Although the use of this technology is being advocated, it may have an intruding influence into the on-going session and consequently heralded inhibition on the part of the client in session. To forestall this, the client-in-session should be briefed prior to the call, possibly at the beginning of the session. The information should be communicated to the client that the phone-in will be an additional resource to the issue being handled in the counselling session. This may have the potency of making the client to tolerate the phone-in from the supervisor.

Bug in the Ear: This technology uses headphones. In using it, both the supervisor and supervisee put on head phones which is called ear bud. It has the capacity to receive messages as well as having a small microphone. The venue where this could be used should be such that the antenna in the headphone can receive. The supervisor should know when the counselling session will be on and both the supervisor and supervisee should put it on then. Bernard and Goodayear (2009) opined that with the use of bug in the ear, a supervisor can offer positive and constructive feedback to supervisees with minimal disruption to the counselling session (Buono, Vellendahi, Guth and Dandeneau, 2011).

In-Room Computer: This technology uses computer system which is hung over the head of a client in the counselling room. The computer should have connectivity to that of the supervisor and the supervisor should position self where he can hear and possibly see the supervisee and his/her client. This can be done through a one-way screened counselling office with aids that facilitates the hearing of the goings-on by the supervisor. In the event of noticing anything, the supervisor can make input in writing in his/her own computer and send across to the supervisee who reads the input/feedback (Klitze and Lombardo, 1991). The effectiveness of using bug in the eye (In room computer) has been attested to by Miller, Miller and Evans (2002) who found that this technology improved supervisee's counselling effectiveness as influenced by the immediate feedback they receive from their supervisor. The immediate feedback from supervisee's supervisor helps the supervisee to correct any mistakes so identified in the counselling process.

ADVANTAGES OF APPLYING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPERVISION

Given the earlier definitions and nature of counselling, counsellor education and supervision, there are thoughts that ICT is not apt for use in supervision of counselling practicum exercise. Their thoughts hold for them but it still stands that the use of ICT in counsellor supervision has its merits. Each of the ICT facility suggested in this paper for use in counsellor education in Nigeria has its own unique advantage. An example will suffice here. Video recordings of counselling sessions when used for supervision are reviewed with supervisees either individually or in group. The review allows for moment by-moment analysis, clinical hypothesis building, - intervention planning and – supervisee's self reflection and self-evaluation.

From the above, the supervisor and supervisee have the opportunity to make sense of the data from the video recording as they share personal and professional experiences. The advantages of any ICT lie in its correct and appropriate usage. This implies that the advantages of ICT in counsellor supervision can best be harvested when they are appropriately used to enhance the supervision process.

ETHICAL ISSUE OF CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE USE OF ICT IN TRAINEE COUNSELLOR SUPERVISION

A thought on confidentiality is proper here. This is because the supervisor having access to the sessions may be viewed as violation of confidentiality. Confidentiality, according to Akinade (2005,p.34) is "the ethical duty of counsellors to fulfil a contract or promise to clients that the information revealed during therapy will be protected from unauthorised disclosure". Welfel (2010,p.116) sees confidentiality as "an ethical duty to keep client's identity and disclosures secret". Confidentiality means that counsellors do not share information about clients without their consent (Cromier and Hackney, 2012). Confidentiality pertains to safeguarding the communications in client's interaction with the counsellor. The safeguarding pertains to face to face interactions, electronic communications and transmission of information while the client is alive or deceased (Cromies and Hackney, 2012). Given the above, a question as to the supervisor having access to the transactions between trainee counsellor and client could be raise as unethical. It may be viewed as such especially as the interaction between the counsellor and client filters to the supervisor. To illustrate, the bug in the ear, when used in supervision of trainee counsellor's session with client, the supervisor listens to the session in order to make his input during the counselling process. This could be viewed as invasion of auditory privacy and default of confidentiality promise.

One of the major functions of confidentiality which counsellors promise their clients during sessions is to make clients build trust, feel relaxed and be able to sincerely talk with the counsellor. These benefits may not come to be if not properly handled. In view of this, the way out is to discuss, as early as possible, usually at the beginning of the helping process during the initial interview that technology will be used. The trainee counsellor should inform the client about the technology to be used, person using it and how it will be used. Doing it this way, will “give clients enough upfront information to help them become informed about the consent to the conditions under which counselling occurs” (Cromier and Hackney, 2012,p.71). Clients consent should be sought and obtained whenever technology is to be used in counsellor supervision especially, in live supervision.

IMPLICATIONS OF USE OF ICT IN TRAINEE COUNSELLOR IS SUPERVISION

Advocating for the use of ICT in supervising trainee counsellor have some implications for the Nigerian counsellor educator. The implications are predicted by the newness of technology in counselling supervision. In this section of the paper, some of the implications derivable from the use of ICT highlighted herein will be mentioned. Given the present scenario that in supervision of trainee counsellor, the tape recorders are used, the condition of the tape recorders, and the extent to which they are used efficiently may not go without a question. It will not be out of place to observe that some departments don't even have tape recorders to use for the review of trainee counsellors' counselling tapes. The counsellor educators borrow from their students. This influences the use, hence, at times some counsellors don't do the real post mortem review of counselling sessions via the tapes.

Some of the ICT mentioned in this paper are known as possessed by counsellor educator, for example, tape recorders, email facilities and telephone. At best, they use these facilities purely for private purposes. Since they possess these, it therefore implies that an orientation as to how to use them in supervision of trainee counsellor's practicum exercises should be organized for them. They also need to be introduced and oriented to other ICT that can be used in counsellor's supervision. The trainee counsellors who are to be supervised should not be left out in this orientation. To organize the orientation, experts in ICT and experienced counsellor educators who are interested in the use of ICT in counsellor education and supervision should work together to organize such trainings and orientation to faculty staff.

All in all, given the above scenarios, the implications of using ICT in supervision of trainee counsellors' practicum exercise can be capsuled to hinge on the following:

- (a) Procurement of functional tape recorders, video recorders, computers, internet facilities, telephones, facilities for bug in the ear and eye.
- (b) There should be workshops in the uses of the ICT facilities as it relates to supervision in counselling practicum. The workshops should be systematic and comprehensive in nature for both counsellor educators and trainee counsellors.
- (c) Counsellor educators and their trainees should try-out the use of ICT facilities in counsellor supervision during their micro-counselling classes before implementing its use. This will help them to be acquainted to their uses.
- (d) There should be functional counselling laboratory with facilities, for example, one-way screen/mirror.
- (e) The use of ICT requires power. It follows that for ICT to be used in supervision of trainee counsellors practicum exercise, there should be power (electricity). The

outage of power should be anticipated and alternative steps should be put in place and used from the start as the power outage will interrupt the supervision process.

A change in mind set is called for if ICTs are to be used in counsellor supervision. The fact remains that the use of ICTs in supervision of counselling practicum exercises have merits and these merits should be harvested.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to make a case for the use of more ICT facilities in the supervision of trainee counsellors fieldwork experience because of their potential merits. The use of such facilities have their challenges with attendant implications. Blended supervision is advocated where supervision models of the traditional type are married with e-supervision in counselling practicum. The use of ICT in business is the order of the day, counselling should not be left out.

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