# The Reflective Model of Triadic Supervision: Defining an Emerging Modality

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Current Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Eduational Programs (CACREP; 2001) standards promote the use of triadic supervision by counselor educators and supervisors. However, conceptual models of triadic supervision do not presently exist in the supervision literature. This article describes the process and structure of 1 model of triadic supervision (D. M. Kleist & N. R. Hill, 2003). This model provides a vehicle for implementing triadic supervision in response to changes in the CACREP standards and adds to the literature on triadic supervision. Implications for counselor educators and supervisors, as well as future research, are conceptualized.

Counselor education is an academic discipline focusing on promoting the educational and professional development of counselors. Professional education and development of counselors involves two fundamental tasks: acquiring knowledge of formal theories and acquiring knowledge and related skills accumulated through professional experiences (Schön, 1983). An integral component of the educational experience is clinical supervision. Bernard and Goodyear (1998) asserted that clinical supervision is the "crucible" that addresses both of these domains and serves as a catalyst for counselor trainees to integrate this knowledge into their own counseling framework.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2001) articulated standards that promote and ensure the quality of training programs. Section III of the 2001 Standards clearly outlines the clinical instruction requirements for program faculty, site supervisors, the instructional environment, as well as supervision. More specifically, the CACREP 2001 Standards expand the delivery of clinical supervision to include both individual and triadic supervision. Previous standards did not include triadic supervision and focused on individual supervision as the only possible modality for conducting clinical supervision with students outside of group supervision. The CACREP 2001 Standards are currently being revised in the hopes of instituting a new set of guiding accrediting principles by 2008. Within the proposed CACREP 2008 Standards (see http://www.cacrep.org/StandardsRevisionText.html), there is no clarification or elaboration regarding the use of triadic supervision. As counselor education programs respond to the new CACREP standards, it is necessary to explore how to structure and implement triadic supervision in counselor education training programs.

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In addition to the changing standards, counseling departments grow, more students enter the counseling profession, and, ultimately, more students will be taking practicum and internship courses in fulfillment of their professional counseling degrees. Since its inception 20 years ago, "CACREP has accredited programs in 188 institutions" (J. Gunderman, personal communication, June 8, 2005). Since 1999, CACREP has increased its institutional accreditation from 124 programs to 188 programs (2004 statistics), which is indicative of a 52% increase (J. Gunderman, personal communication, June 8, 2005).

Faculty engaging in supervision may find themselves with more students and less time for supervision. In their best efforts to meet the needs of both the program and the students, as well to adhere to the CACREP 2001 standards, faculty may use triadic supervision: seeing two students together for supervision and using the same format as for individual supervision. Potentially, the only change in logistics might be the fact that there are two students versus one in supervision.

The structure and implementation of triadic supervision has been left to the faculty supervisor, with no guidance from the accrediting body. Given academic freedom to interpret the standards, one is left with little support in the literature. The research on clinical supervision is limited for all modalities. There is a dearth of literature that explores the nature and effectiveness of individual, group, live, and triadic supervision. Although there is a small number of empirical studies of individual, group, and live supervision, there is no current research on triadic supervision within the counselor education literature (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). The only pertinent study in the counselor education literature conceptualized triadic supervision as consisting of three students who engaged in a supervisory relationship by being responsible for distinct roles (Spice & Spice, 1976). A faculty member was involved in the process initially to facilitate the students' assuming specified roles. The current model presented by CACREP (2001) involves a faculty member as a primary component of the triadic supervision. There is no literature that addresses triadic supervision as currently conceptualized by CACREP, and there are no specific models on how to conduct it.

This article proposes an emergent model for conducting triadic supervision titled the reflective model of triadic supervision (RMTS; Kleist & Hill, 2003). The model is based on the therapeutic processes associated with the reflective process (Andersen, 1987) and outlines a conceptual framework for providing triadic supervision within counselor education programs. Research on reflecting teams, which is grounded in the reflective process, has shown utility in therapeutic (Caesar, 1993) and counselor education contexts (Landis & Young, 1994). During supervision, the reflective process creates the space and climate for supervisees to reflect on feedback in a manner that is formative (i.e., facilitates the professional development of the counselor-in-training) and generative of multiple perspective taking. Thus, the reflective process is relevant to the supervision experience, especially given the salience of learning that emerges during reflection.

The current literature on reflecting teams emphasizes its utility in therapeutic and academic contexts (Landis & Young, 1994; Smith, Sells, & Clevenger, 1994). Such usefulness holds promise for integrating the reflecting process into triadic supervision. Developing a model of triadic supervision provides a starting point for conversation and development of triadic supervision as a legitimate form of clinical counseling supervision. The article addresses the implications for counselor educators, supervisors, and students as well as provides future research possibilities.

#### The Reflective Process

The reflective process encourages individuals to encounter both inner and outer dialogues (Andersen, 1987). Outer dialogues occur when individuals are actively engaged with one another in the production of meaning. Contrastingly, inner dialogues occur only within oneself, informed by the ideas constructed while engaging in or listening to outer dialogues. In today's society, people typically rely heavily on outer discourse while conversing with others. There is minimal, if any, opportunity to reflect on what a speaker has stated before a person formulates and provides a response. Such a conversational pace hinders people's ability to engage in inner dialogue that is reflective and formative.

Societal mores on communication also affect the supervision process in which supervisees may rely primarily on outer dialogue and not engage in inner dialogue. Within the context of triadic supervision, the supervisee who is listening to feedback from the supervisor and peer supervisee might be expected to respond immediately without the opportunity to reflect on what is being provided as feedback and to consider its relevance to the supervisee's counseling process and learning. Integrating the reflective process into triadic supervision encourages the presence of inner dialogue and the associated learning that accompanies reflection.

Tom Andersen (1987) introduced the reflecting team to the family therapy field. The development and use of reflecting teams emerged from Andersen's clinical work with families in Norway and his interactions with the ideas of Hemberto Maturana; Gregory Bateson; and clinical family therapy teams in Milan, Italy, at the Ackerman Institute in New York, and at the Galveston Family Institute in Texas. (For a detailed description of these teams' and individuals' influence on Tom Andersen's conception of reflecting teams, please see Andersen, 1987.) Use of reflecting teams has varied across settings (mental health settings [e.g., Eubanks, 2002; Lax, 1989; Shilts, Rudes, & Madigan, 1993], medical facilities [e.g., Griffith, Griffith, & Slovik, 1990; Seikkula et al., 1995; Watson, & Lee, 1993], schools [e.g., Swim, 1995], and counselor training [e.g., Cox, Bañez, & Hawley, 2003; Landis & Young, 1994]) and clinical issues (family violence [e.g., Kjellberg, Edwardsson, Niemela, & Oberg, 1995; Robinson, 1994], substance abuse [e.g., Lussardi & Miller, 1993; Nevels, 1997], psychosis [e.g., Seikkula et al., 1995], and couple and family conflict [e.g., Caesar, 1993; Reimers, 2001]). Reflecting teams appear to be quite commonplace within family and couple counseling/therapy and training contexts. Andersen (1995) has since written less of reflecting teams and more of the underlying reflecting process, because it is the process, and not the mere team, that holds therapeutic power and influence. What follows is a summary of the reflective process as understood by the authors.

The reflective process embraces the importance of being present to, not only in, conversation as a means to increase understanding. For Andersen (e.g., 1987, 1991, 1995), being in conversation with another provides access to another's effort to communicate meaning. However, social sanctions commonly do not allow the listener to take in and more fully understand the communicated meaning of the other. Instead, common rules of social discourse require an immediate response from the listener to indicate just that he or she is listening. Such a response, as the rules of social discourse suggest for Andersen, allows the speaker to experience being listened to, which facilitates further expression; and the process continues. However, in doing so, the listener loses the opportunity for deeper understanding as his or her role shifts back to listening.

During counseling sessions using reflecting teams and the reflecting process, clients engage in direct conversation with a counselor (outer dialogue) and moments of reflection on conversation (inner dialogue) when observing a counselor conversing with an observing team, the conversations among observing team members, or even the counselor engaging in a conversation with the observing team (Wangberg, 1991) about what transpired so far in the session. For Andersen (1987), it is the time during inner dialogue where significant opportunity exists for greater understanding and, thus, for change. Kleist (1999) reviewed available research to date on the use of reflecting teams and process and concluded that "the reflecting process can be a powerful means of creating a strong therapeutic alliance that facilitates the development of multiple perspectives in such a way that allows clients a different means to hear such perspectives" (p. 274). Recent research on the reflecting process supports this conclusion (e.g., Selekman & King, 2001). This understanding of reflecting teams and the reflective process formed the conceptual foundation for our model of triadic supervision.

#### RMTS

The RMTS (Kleist & Hill, 2003) emerged from the existing literature on reflecting teams in family therapy (Andersen, 1987; Kleist, 1999). Logistically, the RMTS involves a faculty supervisor meeting with two supervisees for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours per week of the 15-week academic term. The overarching structure provides flexibility for supervisees to process immediate clinical issues before observing videotapes of counseling from the past week. Each supervisory session rotates which supervisee has the opportunity to introduce and show his or her tape first. The reflecting process is an integral component of the model, and, subsequently, the supervisees engage in three fundamental roles that engender and value both inner and outer dialogue. These roles are the supervisee role, the reflective role, and the observer-reflector role.

At the beginning of the RMTS, the supervisor is responsible for outlining the format, structure, and process of supervision. Given the unique nature of triadic supervision, it is imperative that certain elements of the initial supervision meeting are emphasized, discussed, and contracted. For example, the three specific roles and related functions of the RMTS need to be clearly explained, and a rationale for the importance of the reflective process needs to be provided. The supervisor needs to differentiate between inner and outer dialogue and provide examples of how that may manifest within the supervision experience across the academic term. Because a peer and the supervisor are present during supervision, the matters of confidentiality and disclosure are especially important to address. The supervisor explains that he or she is available to meet individually with supervisees if a supervise pperceives something to be too personal to be disclosed during triadic supervision. Furthermore, the supervisor is responsible for inviting discussion on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the RMTS so that supervisees have an opportunity to process and explore the unique challenges and benefits of sharing supervision with a peer. These issues encompass the initial supervision contract that is discussed and agreed upon during the first supervision session. It is important that the supervisors provide ongoing opportunities across the academic term for supervisees to engage in outer dialogue about their experiences and reactions within triadic supervision. The uniqueness of the three roles in the RMTS requires supervisors to be especially cognizant of how supervisees are experiencing the inner and outer dialogues and vicariously learning with a peer.

## The Supervisee Role

The supervisee role of the RMTS is consistent with what is traditionally defined in the literature as a counselor trainee receiving supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). This role involves the introduction of a videotaped counseling session and the receipt of direct supervision lasting approximately 20 minutes. The supervisee conceptualizes the client and counseling session. The supervisee frames what the videotape would be demonstrating and what skills would be present. As the videotape plays, the supervisee role involves the faculty supervisor and the supervisee discussing the counseling session and counseling skills. Upon completion of this feedback loop between supervisee and supervisor, the supervisee shifts to the reflective role. Simultaneously, the peer supervisee (Supervisee 2) is actively engaged in the observer-reflector role, which is described later. Please refer to Figure 1 for a framework for how these two roles interact.

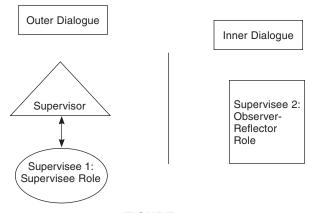


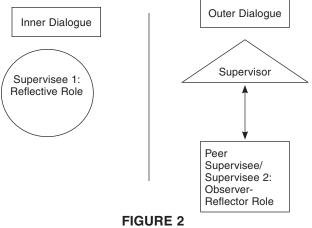
FIGURE 1 Supervisee and Observer-Reflector Roles in Triadic Supervision

# The Reflective Role

Within the reflective role, the supervise observes and listens to the peer supervisee and faculty supervisor's discussion of the tape shown and direct supervision just provided. The faculty supervisor and peer supervisee physically shift their seating so that their dialogue is completely separate from the interaction with the other supervisee who just presented his or her counseling tape. Such a direct and distinct shift creates an opportunity for the supervisee to experience the reflective role without experiencing demands to verbally respond to the conversation occurring between the peer supervisee and the supervisor or to defend his or her choice of interventions or conceptualization. Thus, the supervisee in the reflective role engages only in an inner dialogue (Andersen, 1987), which continues for approximately 10 minutes, after which the supervisor, in just the reflective role, physically turns back toward the supervisee in order to process the inner dialogue of the supervisee. Reactions to the conversation just observed and listened to, as well as to what was learned from the observing and inner dialogue, are explored. Such processing of the reflective role allows the supervisor access to the supervisee's unique process of inner dialogue. Numerous possibilities exist, ranging from hearing the supervisee become aware of new strengths or assets, to hearing the supervisee acknowledge roadblocks or personalization issues. To review a diagram of the reflective role, please refer to Figure 2.

# The Observer-Reflector Role

The observer-reflector role of the RMTS (Kleist & Hill, 2003) is two-dimensional in that it includes observing (inner dialogue of watching the peer engage in direct supervision) and sharing thoughts from this inner dialogue, thus shifting to the outer dialogue. This



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role encompasses observing the faculty supervisor and peer supervisee engage in the direct feedback exchange present in the supervisee role. It provides an opportunity for the supervisee to have an inner dialogue about the skills and process that are emerging in the peer supervisee's counseling session. It then culminates with the supervisee discussing with the faculty supervisor his or her clinical impressions and tentative hypotheses about personalization, skill development, and case conceptualization in relation to the peer supervisee's videotape.

The RMTS (Kleist & Hill, 2003) provides a framework for conducting triadic supervision that encourages an inner and outer dialogue among supervisees and that creates supervision opportunities for the supervisee to reflect on his or her experiences and clinical learning. The RMTS responds to the lack of triadic supervision models within supervision literature, and it creates an innovative method of supervision that structures time and opportunity for supervisees to "be with" reactions, thoughts, and feelings. The emphasis on the reflection process facilitates deeper meaning-making and counteracts the social obligation to "speak back" in supervision without allowing reflection.

# Preliminary Research on Experience of RMTS by Supervisees: Evaluating the Method

The authors have initiated a grounded theory qualitative study on the process and experience of RMTS. We have completed two rounds of interviews with 10 supervisees who recently engaged in this form of supervision and are presently finishing second-round coding in preparation for a third round of interviews. Initial coding of the first two rounds of interviews has produced useful preliminary findings. Overall, RMTS has affected students' professional and personal development. Supervisees described being in the reflective role as

allowing them to "hear feedback more thoroughly" and as "freeing" because there is "one less layer of interacting." Supervisees have stated that this role provides freedom from interacting in the conversation, which allows them to take the feedback and consider its usefulness with the client tape being discussed as well as transferring the feedback to other client relationships. Supervisees also described being in the reflective role as allowing them to "take more time to . . . look at it . . . without getting defensive." Hearing feedback with no obligation to speak to the feedback has allowed supervisees to experience "an overall increase in their self awareness." As with so much of the research on reflecting teams (Reimers, 2001; Smith et al., 1994; Smith, Winton, & Yoshioka, 1992), supervisees enjoy hearing "multiple perspectives" as if "they have two supervisors." Receiving multiple perspectives has led some supervisees to prefer triadic supervision over individual and group supervision. Other supervisees have indicated a preference for triadic supervision over group supervision because "it's overwhelming with so many people." Seemingly, trust develops and can be managed more efficiently with only two other people in the room, as compared with six to eight others as in group supervision.

Initial findings indicate that the observer role facilitates professional development by enhancing conceptualization skills. "By observing and picking out the skills in someone else's work" students learned vicariously and used time in the observer role to "find ways that I could use that skill in my sessions." The observer role additionally allowed the supervisees to learn supervisory skills and the means to deliver feedback in respectful ways.

Despite overall support for the RMTS, supervisees indicated some challenges to the process. During the reflective role, students reported feeling "left out" and "isolated" from the conversation. The experience of being "spoken about" versus being "spoken to" contributes to this odd feeling of being left out. Giving feedback directly is the dominant model in our department, so speaking indirectly about someone who is present "seems odd." Likewise, when providing feedback in the observer role, some supervisees believed they had "jumped ship" and betrayed their peer by being seen in a supervisory role.

Initial results are intriguing, with many positive attributes of the process being described along with some challenges. Continued use of the RMTS by the authors provides additional anecdotal evidence of these positive attributes and challenges. Initial findings led the third author to add an important factor to the process: providing a description of the RMTS to students prior to the semester, highlighting the challenges, and asking them to pair only with those individuals where a positive preexisting relationship is present. The RMTS has been used with supervise pairs who did not have a preexisting relationship, and with success; yet, in such a case, more time is initially spent on developing a trusting environment.

The creation of the RMTS provides multiple implications for counselor educators, supervisors, and students. The most obvious implication is the creation and description of a model of triadic supervision. For years, counselor educators may have been implementing triadic supervision, per the guidelines of CACREP (2001), without a clear model or research to inform their practice of triadic supervision. To date, no model for triadic supervision exists in the counselor education literature. This emergent model provides a framework for structuring and conducting triadic supervision.

Specifically, the introduction of the RMTS provides faculty and supervisors the opportunity to provide intentional structure and a foundation to this process, and, at the same time, maximizes student involvement and development. The structure affords each participant a role within supervision, allowing each student to learn and grow throughout the process. For example, a student in the reflective role is potentially learning about self as a counselor and skill development. The student in the observer-reflector role is actively involved in the supervision and is not just present, listening in on a peer's supervision. The observer-reflector is attending to the other student's work in preparation to at least engage in dialogue with the supervisor to provide feedback to the peer. The student in the reflective role has the opportunity to hear feedback about self as counselor, whereas the student in the observer-reflector role has an opportunity to identify counseling skills and share this feedback with the other student.

The faculty supervisor can facilitate a vicarious learning experience for students using triadic supervision. Even though each student's work is discussed separately, the supervisor can use the experience as a teachable moment for both students. For example, one student presents a tape where a client reports being sexually abused by a third person. If the student in the observer role has not experienced a report of abuse while in the professional role as counselor, the faculty supervisor can use this opportunity to discuss what the student counselor specifically did and said in this role, as well as add, if necessary, information that each student could benefit from by hearing. The dynamic and potent impact of the reflective process is also a unique feature of this emerging model. The reflective process encourages an active inner discourse that forms the supervisee's counselor identity and informs the outer dialogue in supervision (Andersen, 1987). These processes also engender vicarious and multifaceted learning.

Student evaluation is another aspect of supervision, regardless of supervision model or format. In triadic supervision, the supervisor has the opportunity to assess each student's skill level, development, and ability to conceptualize client cases. Triadic supervision potentially augments the supervisor's ability to assess student performance not only because of the process of self-evaluation and conceptualization but also because of the opportunity to conceptualize the peer and his or her client while in the observer-reflector role. Furthermore, a supervisee may seem to struggle with conceptualizing his or her own clients and yet may be able to engage in active conceptualization of the peer's clients. The supervisor then has access to more complex information in order to conduct more thorough assessments of clinical competence.

A final implication for counselor educators concerns the initial setup and formation of the triadic relationship. Students are given the opportunity to participate in triadic supervision or individual supervision. It is important for students to have input in their involvement and to make decisions that will meet their needs. Students are provided the opportunity to choose whom they want to have as a partner in the triadic relationship. Students can maintain a sense of safety while under triadic supervision because they will have a preexisting relationship with the other person or classmate. In allowing the students the flexibility and freedom to help structure their experience, a relationship is cultivated that can become a foundation throughout the triadic supervision experience.

### **Implications for Research**

Research is needed to explore the potential experiences of supervisees and supervisors within the RMTS and to examine the potential benefits of such a model of supervision. As previously mentioned, we are presently engaged in a qualitative study of students' experiences of participation in the RMTS. It is imperative for counselor educators and counseling students that research on the RMTS be conducted, because this process of supervision is still emerging in the field. Comparison studies between traditional forms of individual supervision and the emerging format of triadic supervision could shed light on the development of case conceptualization skills and skill development. Ongoing dialogue in the counseling field is necessary to inform our supervision practices and to ensure that we are facilitating the optimal growth and development of counselor trainees. This article has presented an overview of one emerging model of triadic supervision in the hopes of stimulating scholarly discourse as well as providing the impetus for the development of additional models beyond the RMTS.

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