

12-2022

## Taiwanese High School Counselors' Experiences in a Solution-Focused Supervision Training Program

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### Recommended Citation

Hsu, Wei-Su and Chen, Hsuan-Jung (2022) "Taiwanese High School Counselors' Experiences in a Solution-Focused Supervision Training Program," *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*: Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 11. Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/journalsfp/vol6/iss2/11>

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*ARTICLE***Taiwanese High School Counselors' Experiences in a Solution-Focused Supervision Training Program**

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### Introduction

#### School Counselors as Supervisors' Needs for Training in Taiwan

The importance of supervision for effective clinical services in the helping professions has long been clear (Kassan et al., 2015; Wrape et al., 2015); correspondingly, training school counselors' supervisors is critical. Supervision in school settings plays a vital role in multicultural and ethical practice (Kelly et al., 2019). Ideal school counseling supervisors should have an understanding of the unique dynamics and needs of professionals in the educational field through relevant experience and possessing an understanding of administrative systems. Supervisors need the ability to balance managerial responsibilities while maintaining administrative effectiveness (Tholstrup, 1999). Because school counseling supervisors must consider school counselors' diverse professional roles (Ke & Hsu, 2011) and the educational goals of education systems (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2003; Dahir, 2001), they need more comprehensive supervision than counseling supervisors working in other fields (Ke & Hsu, 2011). More concretely, Chu (2009) and Dunn (2004) stressed that characteristics of an ideal school counseling supervisor comprise three levels: First, an ideal supervisor is a professional counselor and a supervisor who is familiar with the characteristics of students and school cultures at all levels of schooling. Supervisors can give guidance regarding case management, crisis intervention, and systemic collaboration. Second, regarding supervising program management and professional development, an ideal supervisor is experienced in program design, execution, and evaluation. Supervisors can assist the supervisee in role identification and professional growth. Finally, an ideal supervisor can help with administrative supervision. The supervisors can also help supervisees effectively establish intra-professional relationships within the counseling department and inter-professional relationships with other school offices.

The supervisor development process is as a process of gaining "maturity," which includes job maturity (i.e., competence in the supervisor role) and psychological maturity (i.e., willingness, confidence, commitment, and motivation to enter the role), as Hersey and Blanchard (1969) described in their Situational Leadership Theory. Goodyear et al. (2014) stated that the process of supervisors' development involves gaining the abilities to (a) perceive and act on complex response opportunities, (b) think like a supervisor, (c) view one's self as a supervisor, (d) have confidence in one's competence as a supervisor, (e) have confidence in one's judgments about what constitutes effective counseling, (f) use reflection as a tool to monitor one's biases and impact on others, (g) be oneself, (h) have patience with the process of supervisee development, (i) have the courage to do the right thing in a gatekeeper role, and (j) understand and manage power. Alonso (1983) and Hess (1987) proposed similar models of supervisors' career development, comprised of three stages:

1. The novice/beginning stage: Supervisors have just begun to take on new levels of responsibility, and face the challenge of transitioning from supervisee to supervisor. They cope with anxiety, feel uncertain about their roles and technical abilities, and are sensitive to self-criticism and criticism from others. Therefore, they tend to use

more specific conceptual frameworks in their supervision work and are more focused on the client and on giving technical guidance.

2. The mid-career/exploration stage: As supervisors accumulate experience, their focus shifts from self to others. They gradually develop skills and confidence, start to internalize beliefs about the value of supervision, and can more accurately distinguish good from bad supervision and positive from negative influences. This growth and discernment help provide stronger guidance and facilitates supervisees' growth. However, common limitations at this stage include remaining within a strictly defined supervisor role, or imposition of theoretical perspectives and techniques.
3. The late-career/confirmation of the supervisor's identity stage: Supervisors have a stable professional identity. They can better appreciate supervisees' growth and respond to their learning needs. Supervisors have a more authentic relationship with supervisees. In this stage, supervisors' relations with the administrative structure have become an important theme, with implications for their ability to enjoy the status of experienced professionals and to exercise their wisdom and professionalism.

In Taiwan, school counselors were set up in the 1970s to teach guidance activity curriculum and provide counseling to students. In the interest of professionalizing school counseling work, Taiwan's Ministry of Education implemented the Student Guidance and Counseling Act in 2014. According to this law, school counselors shall provide and assist three-level counseling programs, including developmental counseling (such as a guidance program for promoting students' mental health), interventional counseling (such as case conference, consultation, or counseling), or treatment-based counseling (such as teamwork with other professionals). This law has also led to greater emphasis on the supervision of school counselors and the training of school counselors as supervisors. Due to insufficient institutionalization of supervision and appropriate professional training, Taiwan is currently experiencing a shortage of school counselor supervisors who can supervise counseling, administrate, manage programs, and understand diverse school environments (Peng & Hsu, 2013).

Training competent supervisors is challenging. Knowledge of the process of supervisors' professional role development is extremely helpful for educating supervisors-in-training, especially to understand their needs and the difficulties they face (Watkins, 2013). For fostering supervisors' holistic development, Watkins (2013) emphasized the importance of didactic learning and practical experience. This can include training programs, seminars, workshops, supervision practice, and supervision of supervision. Other professionals also point out that supervision training should emphasize both skill and knowledge acquisition under supervision and on-going feedback (Bernard & Goodyear 2014; Shyu & Huang 2007). Therefore, developing a school counselors' supervisor training program is of great value in Taiwan.

### **Characteristics of Solution-focused Supervision and Its Application on Campus**

Solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) is a client-centered, strengths-based, future-oriented approach grounded in social constructionism. Evidence for the effectiveness of SFBT is accumulating rapidly (Kim et al., 2019; Martenstyn & Grant, 2021; Zhang et al., 2018). The suitability of the solution-focused (SF) approach for school environments is also strongly supported by research and practical experience (Ajmal & Ratner, 2020; Chen et al., 2018; Gong & Xu, 2015; Kelly et al., 2008). Hsu and Chen's (2015) literature review suggested that the suitability of the SF approach in Taiwanese schools can be explained by its respectful and development-oriented view of human nature, its short-term focus and action orientation, and its strength in facilitating cooperation with various resources. The effectiveness of solution-focused supervision (SFS) with school counselors in Taiwan has also been supported and illustrated (Chien, 2012; Hsu, 2007; Hsu & Kuo, 2013; Kuo, 2012; Yang et al., 2009). Hsu and Tsai (2008) found numerous supervisory benefits of SFS for school counselors including resolving challenges in counseling, strengthening case conceptualization and sense of counseling efficacy, and high applicability to diverse professional responsibilities including counseling adolescents, school consultations, interdepartmental communication, crisis intervention, and outreach work. Hence, Ke (2009) concluded that SFS is a suitable approach for supervision of school counselors.

SFS, like all SF approaches, is based on the philosophical position that multiple truths exist and a rejection of the validity of a single absolute perspective. In SFS, supervisees are seen as future colleagues, and are assumed to possess growth potential, a baseline of professional competence, and problem-solving abilities (Hung, 2006). Like SFBT and SF coaching, supervisors do not take an authoritarian stance or attempt to convince supervisees to adopt certain viewpoints

(Hsu, 2014), but adopt a cooperative attitude and work actively to discover and build upon supervisees' talents while strengthening their autonomy, hopefulness, responsibility, and sense of control (Franklin et al., 2017; Grant & Gerrard, 2020; Martenstyn & Grant, 2021; Zhang et al., 2018), as well as facilitating reflection and critical thinking, and encouraging action (King et al., 2020). SFS is a model for educating, overseeing, supporting, and motivating supervisees, and emphasizes that influencing supervisees to “learn how to learn” helps supervisees naturally become familiar with SF thinking (de Jong & Berg, 2012; Thomas, 2013). SFS helps supervisees reduce anxiety, build confidence, and increase self-efficacy (Koob, 2002).

In a study of the elements of the SFS process, Hsu (2014) discovered seven components, which correspond to those found in previous research (Juhnke, 1996; Triantafillou, 1997; Wetchler, 1990). These seven components of the SFS process constitute a dynamic cycle which advances the supervision process in the direction of the supervisee's goals, including:

1. A positive opening and problem description, which includes establishing a positive atmosphere, description of the context of the problem, understanding the problem, and focusing on the interaction between the supervisee and the problems at hand
2. Identifying positive supervisory goals, which includes setting positive, concrete goals while taking into consideration the supervisee's professional growth and the client's point of view and goals for counseling
3. Exploring exceptions of supervisees and clients by, for example, exploring supervisees' instances of success or identifying the supervisee and client's resources
4. Developing other possibilities, for example by discussing alternate possible thinking, considering various hypothetical situations, or reflecting on the prospects for a range of further interventions
5. Giving positive feedback and clinical education, which can include validating the supervisee, giving direct instructions and demonstrations, or giving the supervisee learning tasks
6. Forming the first little step of experiments
7. Exploring and maintaining the effectiveness of new steps as well as further direction for actions

In SFS, the solution-focused reflecting team (SFRT) is a common form of peer supervision. It consists of six stages: preparation, presentation, clarification of problems, affirmation for the presenter, reflection on possible interventions, and closing. Because SFRT has a neutral standpoint and the contents of the reflections are not limited to the SF approach, SFRT is very appropriate for collaboration with diverse counseling approaches and teams, and it is therefore widely applicable and highly creative (Norman, 2003). Furthermore, supervisors' flexible use of SFS techniques can also serve as the basis for the supervisor's self-supervision (Thomas, 2013).

The SF approach is becoming widely accepted and has become one of the most commonly used approaches to counseling in schools in ethnic Chinese cultures, including Taiwan (Chen et al., 2018; Hsu, 2014; Hsu & Chen, 2015; Lin, 2014). Meanwhile, research on SFBT training (Hsu et al., 2017; Hsu & Wu, 2018; Stark et al., 2018) is developing. However, research on SFS training is still scarce.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goals of this study included: (a) to understand the subjective experiences of school counselors participating in a two-stage SFS training program, and to document any enduring changes after a one-year follow-up; and (b) to discover recommendations for improving training programs and research by better understanding the factors influencing trainees' professional development as SFS supervisors.

### **Methods**

#### **Procedure**

To achieve the aforementioned research purposes, the procedure of this research is described in Figure 1. The research team held an expert consultation meeting and invited four professors and three high school counselors, all of

whom have experience in school counseling, supervision, SFBT, and SFS. Two pilot studies were conducted by providing two separate training programs. The final training program consisted of two stages.

Research data were collected by focus group interviews, individual in-depth interviews, one-year follow-up interviews, and supplementary data. All the research data was analyzed by the thematic analysis method.

## **Study Participants**

### ***School Counselors as Trainees***

The trainees were invited through purposive sampling and convenience sampling. All the trainees met the criteria of at least three years of school counseling experience, participation in at least 12 hours of SFBT training, and identify with SF approaches.

Sixteen high school counselors in northern Taiwan participated in the study. There were 1 male and 15 female trainees, who possessed an average of 10 years of experience as high school counselors (ranging from 3 to 18 years). Two have bachelor's degrees and 14 have master's degrees. Eight of them were directors of their schools' counseling departments. Four of them had previously worked as supervisors. All participants had undergone SF training or supervision, with an average of 173 hours (ranging from 16 to 450 hours). Using a five-point Likert scale, all trainees indicated that they either "identify" (point four) or "strongly identify" (point five) with the SF approach.

### ***Trainer and the Facilitator of the Focus Group***

One of the authors was the trainer, the host of supervision meetings, and the facilitator of the focus group. She had twenty years of experience in practicing and conducting training in SFBT and SFS in ethnic Chinese areas.

### ***Interviewers and Data Analysts***

The other author and an assistant researcher conducted the individual interviews and analyzed the research data. Both were trained with SFBT and qualitative methods.

## **SFS Training Program for School Counselors**

The formal training program consisted of two stages: The supervision learning stage and supervised practice stage. Stage one involved 45 hours of training over 7.5 days. The main teaching methods included lecture, demonstration, real model cases, large- and small-group role-playing, and integrative discussion. In stage two, three meetings included discussion of trainees' thoughts and experiences as well as difficulties they encountered in their practice as supervisors in three months. This training program encompassed the following material (see Table 1).

Trainees attended the stage one of this training program for an average of 38 hours (ranging from 21 to 45 hours). They were asked to make up for unattended training periods by viewing video recordings of the training. In the stage two of this training program, every trainee practiced conducting supervision, did reflection assignments, and attended supervision of supervision meetings.



## **Research Tools**

To understand trainees' experience in the training four kinds of research data were collected: After completion of the stage one training program, one 3-hour focus group interview with 16 trainees was conducted. After stage two, 12 trainees were interviewed individually (per for 2 hours) and sixteen supervision reflection assignments were collected. After one year, five 1-2.5 hours follow-up individual interviews were conducted. The supplementary data included three supervision of supervision meeting records and all 16 trainees' written reflection about the experience using SFS.

The content of the focus group, personal interviews, and reflection outlines had three design goals: (a) to examine trainee growth in applying SFS in school settings, (b) to document common challenges trainees faced, and (c) to gather comments and suggestions about the training program itself.

Figure 1

*Research Flowchart*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Preparation stage</b>  | Conducted one expert consultation meeting<br>Conducted out two pilot studies<br>Created the final training program   |
|  |  |
| <b>Implementation and data collection stage</b>                                   | Sixteen trainees were recruited.<br>Carried out stage one of SFS training program: Learning stage<br>Conducted one focus group interview after stage one<br>Carried out stage two of SFS training program: Supervised practice for three months & held three supervision meetings<br>Collected 16 supervision reflection assignments after stage two<br>Conducted 12 individual in-depth interviews after stage two<br>Conducted 5 individual in-depth follow-up interviews, one |
|  |  |
| <b>Data analysis stage</b>  | Transcribed qualitative data and used thematic analysis to perform induction of common themes from open coding<br>Inspected data collected in interviews with trainees<br>Inspection by the research team  |

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis is one of the common analysis methods in interpretive phenomenology. Its purpose is to discover the themes contained in the text, and it is the process of discovering the imaginative space and meanings behind the words of the themes' naming. This study adopted the thematic analysis procedure and followed the conceptual framework of hermeneutic analysis: a "whole-part-whole" (p.163) cycle of understanding based on movement between the data and interpretation (Kao, 2008).

The data analysis was conducted according to the six-step thematic analysis process described by Kao (2008). These steps include transcribing and coding data, holistic reading of data, discovering the contexts of events and perspectives, re-reading the text as a whole, analyzing the structures of experiences, performing further reconstructions of meanings, and confirming common themes and reflecting. Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out that coding and forming sub-themes is a bottom-up process of continuous circling and progressing; research data is the basis for an inductive process of developing five levels of categories: small categories, medium categories, large categories, sub-themes, and individual themes. As the codebook developed, there were 4,743 initial codes, resulting in 1,468 small categories, 148 medium categories, 52 large categories, 22 sub-themes and ten individual themes; the last two categorical levels are shown as the subheadings of the findings section in this manuscript.

When analyzing and presenting research data, sixteen trainees were coded from A to N. All data was coded based on dialogue order or paragraph number, as well as according to the data source: FG for focus group, I for individual interviews, FI for the one-year follow-up interviews, G1 through G3 for the three "supervision of supervision" meetings in the supervised practice stage, and TSS for self-reflection. Throughout this process, the two data analysts consistently discussed the analysis with each other. At least 80% consensus was achieved for all items. In addition, trainees helped the researchers examine the accuracy of the data and to confirm that the themes correctly reflected the meanings they had intended to convey. Trainees all indicated that the accuracy of the data surpassed around 90%.

Table 1

*SFS Training Program Components for School Counselors*

| <b>Training Stage</b>                        | <b>Components</b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>Stage one: supervision learning stage</b> | <p>Overview of the training program (3 hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainee self-introductions</li> <li>• Discussion of trainees' hopes for the training and level of preparedness to do supervision.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Fundamental concepts of supervision (8.5 hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition, goals, responsibilities, and functions of supervision</li> <li>• Supervision relationship and techniques</li> <li>• Theories of supervision</li> <li>• Forms and tools of supervision</li> <li>• Supervisees' professional identity and development</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Dimensions for the supervision of school counselors (10 hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The unique characteristics of different roles, ethical and legal issues</li> <li>• Mandated cases</li> <li>• Crises and reporting</li> <li>• Principles of confidentiality</li> <li>• Team building and case management</li> <li>• Parent and teacher consultations</li> <li>• Guidance programs</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Introduction and practice of SFS (23.5 hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process and components of SFS</li> <li>• Individual supervision</li> <li>• Group supervision</li> <li>• Peer supervision as SFRT</li> <li>• Inter-departmental case conferences in schools</li> </ul> <hr/> |
| <b>Stage two: supervised practice stage</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve as supervisors at their workplaces.</li> <li>• Three "supervision of supervision" meetings in the three months following the supervision learning stage (with three to six weeks between meetings).</li> </ul>   |

**Findings**

The subjective experiences of school counselors participating in the two-stage SFS training program, and their transformations after a one-year follow-up were described as follows.

**Trainees' Growth and Outcomes in the Learning Stage of Training Program**

In the learning stage of this SFS training program, trainees' preparedness and competence to supervise school counselors was increased, especially for trainees being novice supervisors. They were also benefited by this training atmosphere, and their personal professional experience.

***Increasing Preparedness and Competence to Supervise School Counselors by Acquiring Knowledge and Reflecting Experience***

**Increasing the Preparedness of Becoming a Supervisor.** From the focus group interview, trainees indicated that the supervision learning stage training helped them learn the theories and functions of supervision and greatly improved their preparation to become supervisors. Meanwhile, most of the trainees began to identify common factors of helpful supervision, and to understand that supervisors must possess a relatively broad scope of awareness.

The supervision learning stage also prompted trainees to reflect on their personal experiences of receiving supervision and become more aware of the differences between supervisor and supervisee roles.

**Becoming a Competent Supervisor of School Counselors.** These trainees indicated that they gained a better understanding of the diverse aspects of school counselor supervision. Trainees also mentioned that the learning stage of this training greatly helped them reflect on their roles and responsibilities as school counselors, acknowledge and validate their professionalism and practical experience as school counselors, and believe that these experiences can help in the process of becoming supervisors of school counselors.

Now I think I am able to help these school counselors, who are feeling like their work is 'so busy and chaotic, and I have no idea what I'm doing'-- to help them understand that they are doing something very meaningful, and everything they do has importance; that kind of empowerment is actually very important (I-E-35-1).

### *Highly Validating the Benefit of SFS for Novice Supervisors in Schools*

**SFS Becomes a Trustworthy Guide for Novice Supervisors.** Over half of the trainees expressed that the first stage of training led them to have a better command of the functions and goals of SFS, and to understand the importance of grasping the spirit of SFS. Being appropriate for consultations with teachers, parents, and students in school, all trainees recognized that the SFS's seven components can help novice supervisors of school counselors feel less pressure while developing directions in supervision.

**An Attitude of Equality Reduces the Anxiety of Novice Supervisors and Increases Cooperation Efficiency in School Settings.** All trainees strongly affirmed that the positive, strengths-based approach of SFS can easily facilitate changes in supervisees. They also fully approved of the emphasis in SFS on respecting supervisees' contexts and regarding supervisors and supervisees as equals who are learning from each other. Thus, all trainees believed that this sort of "non-expert" thinking can significantly reduce the heavy feelings of responsibility that accompany the supervisor role in schools.

One thing about SFS I really like is that it strongly emphasizes the counselor's own way of thinking, the direction and goals he or she wants to move towards... So it seems to me that it is best to have an open mind about going together with the counselor, as if putting aside my own viewpoints... Every school has a different culture, so your understanding of that culture can really only come from the supervisee (I-I-41-3~I-I-41-4).

**Through SFS, Supervisees Could Learn SFBT and Improve Professional Effectiveness.** Most trainees were quite surprised by the effectiveness of SFRT in the training program. Trainees liked that SFRT creates a sense of inclusivity and contribution for all participants. They also found that supervisees could learn the spirit and technology of SFBT from SFRT, and then improve their professional abilities. All the trainees believed that SFRT is very valuable in schools, office discussions, and case conferences.

Besides, most trainees learned that in addition to using SF language in supervision, SFS supervisors can guide supervisees to increasingly use SFBT's thinking and skills and to enhance counseling efficacy.

**The Positive Influence of Training Atmosphere and Personal Professional Experience.** Trainees agreed that the SFS program created the warm atmosphere of the training process and enhanced the quality and quantity of their learning. In addition, those who felt they were better able to master what they learned had previous experience of being supervisors or significant amounts of experience using SFBT.

I feel ... after I gained a few years of experience doing individual counseling by using SFBT, as I need a transition into this new role [of supervisor], I can do it with a little more ease (FG-113-1~FG-113-3).

### **Trainees' Experience and Metamorphosis in the Supervised Practice Stage**

In the supervised practice stage of the training program, trainees kept growing as supervisors. They implemented SFS (including leading SFRT) in schools, maintained self-supervision, and transferred the experiences in other school counseling work. In addition, trainees' feedback and validation of the training program were mentioned.



### *On the Growth Track of Being a Supervisor in School*

**Positive Experiences Implementing SFS.** In the second stage, trainees provided supervision to intern school counselors, counseling psychologist interns, school volunteers, community volunteers, social workers, or colleagues.

Two-thirds of trainees interviewed had productive experiences using SFS, which highly encouraged trainees. Because SFS furnishes them with a specific structure, direction and techniques for interventions, and accommodates supervisees with diverse counseling approaches, the supervisees' experiences were positive. Due to the rapid effectiveness of SFS, many trainees confirmed that SFS is suitable for supervision work in school counseling.

**Challenges of Being a Supervisor in Schools.** Nevertheless, trainees encountered some challenges in this stage. When trainees were not supported by department heads or were not themselves department heads, they felt restrictions on practicing supervision in schools. Working in a counseling office with an unsupportive atmosphere or culture of insufficient discussion with colleagues was another negative factor.

Two-thirds of trainees mentioned their insufficient confidence with supervision and SFS, and challenges when working with supervisees who did not have a solid foundation in the SF approach.

However, one-third of trainees interviewed overcame their initial fears of using SFS as a supervisor and gained a sense of competence and confidence after successfully addressing challenges encountered in supervision practice.

**More Confirmation of the Future Direction of Continued Efforts.** Two-thirds of trainees interviewed indicated a willingness to continue using and promoting SFS in schools, including pursuing continuing education, and further mastery of SFS. Of course, many trainees still felt that they needed ongoing practice and training to be capable of responding to various types of challenges as supervisors.

I feel 80% prepared... I think I've done all the training I need, I just need to put it into practice now... Now all that's left is to go do it and then make corrections later (I-E-123-1~I-E-123-2)

### *Experiences Leading SFRT in Middle Schools*

**Affirmation That SFRT Is a Form of Peer Supervision Appropriate to the Campus Culture.** After leading SFRT in workplaces or supervision groups, all the trainees interviewed strongly agreed that SFRT was helpful for establishing and maintaining various types of cooperative relationships. SFRT helped establish a positive group atmosphere within counseling offices and with other school departments. SFRT's participants were willing to continue working together to help student-clients. Because SFRT's steps are clear, many trainees felt SFRT could help them reduce their initial anxiety about doing supervision. Thus, most of the trainees claimed that they would continue to use and promote SFRT more in schools.

**Challenges of Leading SFRT.** After gaining some experience, a few trainees made changes to the SFRT process. However, most trainees mentioned difficulties of applying SFRT that included: relationship dynamics among participants (e.g., alliances, competition, and personal conflicts), supervisees' differing levels of understanding of the SF approach and willingness to participate in SFRT, and supervisees' expectations that supervisors should be an expert.

### *Self-Supervision Experiences and Its Application Transference*

**Stimulate the Development of Self-Supervision.** From the supplementary data of this research, all trainees claimed that the clear steps of the SFS framework made for a very concrete and effective self-supervision process.

[After self-supervision] it seemed like now anything was possible, emotions became very tamable, and it became easier to generate the power to act (TSS-C-5-2~TSS-C-5-3).

However, there were still some practical limitations. For instance, when they used SFS for self-supervision, they still sometimes fell into negative thinking in the problem clarification, or often overlooked unfamiliar SFS concepts and techniques. Thus, trainees believed they still needed ongoing support from peers or supervisors to continue learning SFS.

**Application Transference to Other School Counseling Work.** Parallel to this, all trainees were inspired to begin transferring their experiences and self-supervision in their own school counseling work, such as by actively improving their application of SFBT on individual counseling, using the SFS spirit in all aspects of counseling administration, or making some changes to counseling forms (e.g. referral forms, intake forms or SF thinking examination charts). Through the components of SFS, they maintained self-supervision of their school counseling efforts, especially to empower themselves when they encountered difficulties.

### *Feedback and Validation of the Training Program*

**Feedback to the Structure of Training Program.** In addition to the trainer's humorous and pragmatic style, trainees also appreciated the comprehensiveness of stage one in this training program, particularly the inclusion of fundamental and advanced knowledge of SFS and general supervision of school counselors. Twelve trainees interviewed fully approved of the diversity of training methods which helped them practice thinking and responding as supervisors, including description of theoretical concepts, case discussions, role-playing, and demonstrations.

All the trainees felt that the practice and meetings in stage two facilitated them to integrate what they learned in the first stage, which enhanced their confidence in being SFS supervisors. They also felt supported by other trainees by sharing, reflecting, and getting concrete advice and positive feedback.

To have this kind of a meeting where we all can help each other integrate what we've learned, our reflections, our growth, and our feelings, I feel... very moved (I-N-29-4).

**Suggestion: Extended Training Time and Trainees' Background Requirements.** When the training was over, some trainees felt that supervision is "easier said than done" due to a lack of mastery of the SFS thinking style and spontaneity in responding to unexpected events in supervision. Some trainees felt that the training was too intensive, leaving them without sufficient time to digest and absorb what they learned. Half would have preferred to extend the training.

To gain the most from the training program, trainees suggested that potential trainees in the future should have some characteristics such as: experience being a school counselor and administrative leader, a higher willingness and a better preparation to be a supervisor, and more practical experience in SFBT.

### **One Year Post-Training Supervising Experience and Transformations**

One year after the completion of training, the five trainees interviewed reported greater proficiency and engagement as SFS supervisors and plentiful experience leading SFRT, despite some practical challenges in schools. Trainees proposed the same and new feedback and affirmations to the training program.

#### *Greater Proficiency and Engagement as SFS Supervisors Despite Challenges*

**Greater Proficiency as a Supervisor.** One year after the completion of training, the five trainees interviewed all reported that they gained experience practicing supervision in a broader range of practice sites and had significant improvements in their overall competence as supervisors, as well as increased confidence, proficiency, and flexibility. For example, trainees found that the focus of their post-supervision reflections shifted from concern about their own performance to reflections on the client or the supervision process. They also discovered that they had developed a stronger ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances and perceived a steady transition from a passive role of supervisor-in-training to the role of active supervisor. This more active role involved thinking more deeply about how to improve the effectiveness of the supervision as well as increased willingness to face difficulties and to develop their supervision competence.

**More Involvement in SFS.** Trainees interviewed were deeply impressed with the effectiveness of SFS techniques such as clarifying and confirming goals, complementing, one small step, scaling questions, and the exception framework. In addition to further emphasizing how the clear framework and non-professional stance of SFS helped them feel more stable in playing this new role of a supervisor, trainees felt both more relaxed and more highly

motivated as supervisors due to their familiarity with SFS and its helpfulness for supervisees. Gradually, trainees experienced stronger identification as helpers of school counselors and as advocates for SFS, and they also hoped to expand their knowledge of how to apply the SF approach in schools. Thus, trainees had become more engaged in the preparation and review of their supervision, reading SFS-related and supervision articles, and continuing to internalize SFS through self-supervision.

**Continuous Challenges.** However, trainees still felt some pressure when working with supervisees who didn't know or identify with the SF approach. Some trainees felt stressed when working with supervisees from different school levels or school cultures. Nonetheless, they kept SFS's emphasis on the supervisee's own practical knowledge and helped them reduce some of this pressure.

In addition, trainees who were busy in their role of school counselor really hoped to have more opportunities to do supervision and have better professional growth as a supervisor. Two trainees still had difficulty using parts of SFS questions (such as miracle questions and relationship questions), and believed they needed more learning and practice with SFS and SFBT.

### *Continuing to Have Plentiful Experience Leading SFRT Despite Challenges*

**Leading Sfirt Experience Is a Catalyst for Becoming a Skilled SFS Supervisor.** After a year of practical experience, the five trainees had all led several SFRT sessions and indicated that leading SFRT was an invaluable learning experience to strengthen their SFS practice. Trainees believed that they had a stronger capacity for leading and on-the-spot adjustments in response to unforeseen circumstances. However, some trainees still needed to learn how to face some challenges, such as supervisees who monopolized speaking time, were unwilling to participate, or did not agree with the SF approach.

**High Application Utility of SFRT in Schools.** All trainees affirmed SFRT's applicability to school systems because of its spirit, concreteness, and ease of use. According to their observations, SFRT can directly address supervision themes, give participants equal opportunities, receive diverse viewpoints, foster participants' increased engagement, reduce hostility, foster stronger cohesion among participants, and ease the psychological burden of participants.

When they cried, I was actually little surprised... and afterwards I was moved by the fact that the supervisees encouraged and supported each other, and the effect was cathartic... I think that it's really, really good that they could have this kind of peer cohesion and support in SFRT (FI-B-48-1~FI-B-48-4).

**Factors Influencing the Use of SFRT in Schools.** Trainees also discovered that the culture of schools or counseling offices had a significant influence on the SFRT process. SFRT's participants with good relationships in the same school were able to openly discuss how to help clients cooperatively, and their SFRT was usually smoother and more effective. SFRT sessions with participants from multiple schools were often less effective because they needed more time understanding clients' situations, and their performance anxiety negatively affected the supervisory process.

### *Feedback and Validation of the Training Program*

**Feedback on the Structure of the Training Program.** After one year, five trainees still confirmed the value of the first stage of this training program. The trainees agreed that the first stage was an important foundation for their courage to do supervision. While they had strong impressions of the ideas and techniques they learned right after the first stage, with time some aspects began to fade from memory.

All trainees confirmed that the second stage of training was well-designed. The supervision practice greatly aided their development of competence and stability. They believed there was a significant difference between the stages of training completion and actual supervision. Trainees still held the same positive attitudes towards the supervision of supervision meetings as before. For them, those discussions in meetings were great opportunities to remember and integrate what they had learned and to gain additional insights into strategies for resolving practical difficulties.

**Suggestions: More Training Topics on Supervisory Practice Issues and Background Requirements for Trainees.** Trainees suggested that adding some topics about challenging situations in the supervisory process would also strengthen their preparation, especially for when they work with resistant, interrupting, or indifferent supervisees. As some trainees strongly emphasized, the fastest way to improve their competence as supervisors was to continue practicing and returning to discuss supervisory experiences.

Trainees' feedback regarding conditions for selecting trainees in the future were similar to the previous interview, but more emphasized familiarity and passion for secondary schools, and a willingness to advance the professionalism of school counselors.

## Discussion

### Effect of the Training Program on Trainees' Professional Development as Supervisors

#### *Integration of Theory and Practice in the Training Program Contributed to Its Influence*

As Milne (2010) and Watkins (2012) mentioned, when novice supervisors in training undergo a supportive training experience which includes elements of didactic and practical learning, they can attain higher self-efficacy and levels of competence as supervisors. This SFS training program was designed to produce a similar effect through its two stages: a supervision learning stage and a supervision practice under supervision stage.

Regarding the supervision learning stage, similar to Peng's (2012) study of the training of supervisors of middle school counselors, trainees learned fundamental supervision concepts and knowledge and their experiences interacting with other trainees helped them encounter different ways of thinking. This stage helped them become aware of their attitudes towards supervision and to adjust when needed. Furthermore, as previous research has pointed out (Baker et al., 2002; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Rønnestad et al., 1997), practical experience and discussion of doing supervision helps supervisors discover methods to overcome challenges in supervision and increase awareness of themselves as supervisors (Desmond et al., 2011; Moore, 2008). In this stage, trainees shared their experiences and helped each other resolve the challenges they were currently addressing, leading to a reduction in anxiety (Peng, 2012). As a result, the trainees in this study particularly appreciated the effects of the supervised practice stage.

However, comparing the contents of this training program with Hawkins and Shohet's (2012) supervision sandwich plan helps identify a potential addition to future training programs. Their plan included three parts: (a) supervision learning, (b) practice and re-learning, and (c) continuing integration of supervision theory learning and practical work. The third part, as suggested by the trainees of this study, should be added to future training programs to better meet the expectations of the trainees.

#### *Trainees' Overall Professional Development Process*

Referring to the perspectives of Alonso (1983) and Hess (1987) can help clarify the process of trainees' development as supervisors in this study. In the beginning of the training, most trainees were in the novice stage. When they began training, many trainees were eager to begin working as supervisors and learn SFS, but they also felt it was a far-off goal and were concerned and afraid. During the supervised practice stage, most trainees had entered the exploration stage. Although they were still anxious about their competence as supervisors, their positive experiences as supervisors helped them gain confidence and make necessary adjustments to the supervisory process. Trainees also started to reflect on SFS, the supervisory process, supervision of school counselors, and became more willing to engage in preparing for the supervisor role and mastering SFS. One year after participating in the training program, the five trainees we interviewed clearly had moved to the exploration stage and had even started to display some characteristics of the confirmation of supervisor identity stage.

The transformations undergone by trainees in this study were similar to those reported by Nelson et al. (2006) and Rapisarda et al. (2011). Dimensions of this transformative process at least included: (a) willingness, confidence, competence, and identity as supervisors; (b) identification with mastery of SFS; (c) increased self-supervision ability and understanding of the importance of supervision of supervision; and (d) a desire to advocate for SFS. Obviously, the trainees' development encompassed cognitive (e.g. clarification of concepts), emotional (e.g. less anxiety and more joy in their supervision work), and behavioral (e.g. expanded range of supervisory strategies) dimensions, as Watkins (2012) claimed.

However, in the terms of Watkins's (2010) framework, most trainees remained at the becoming a supervisor stage without advancing to the being a supervisor stage. According to the suggestions of Hawkins and Shohet (2000) and the trainees in this study, future training programs should increase trainees' practical experience and supervision-of-

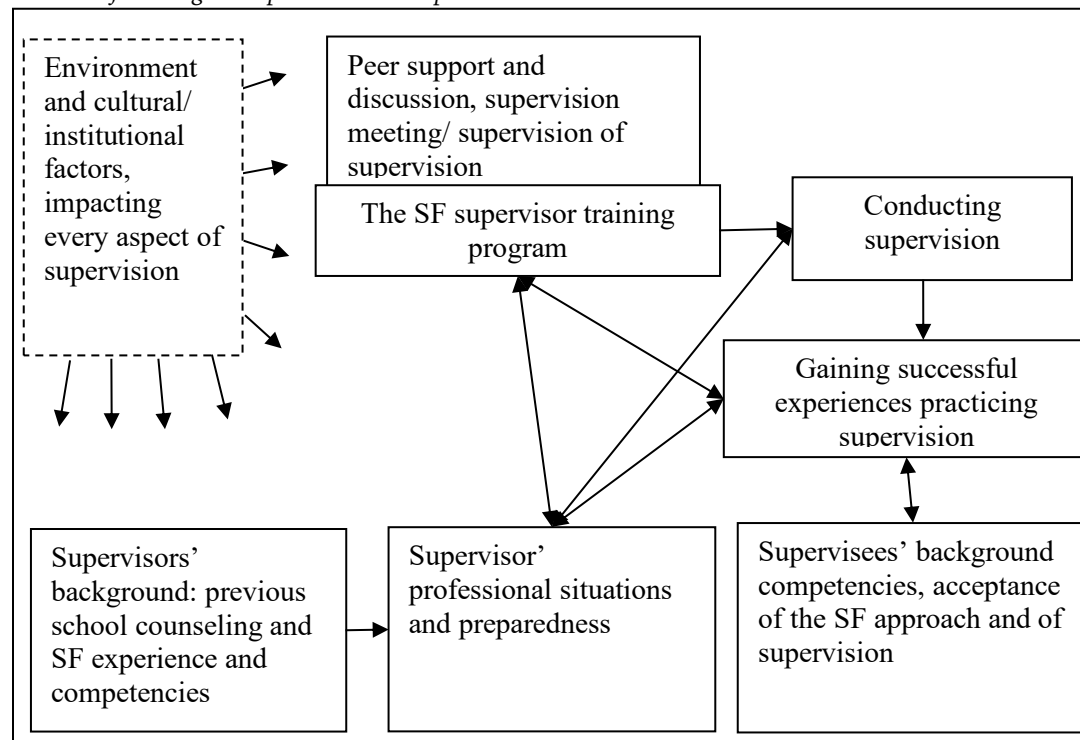
supervision to continue their professional reflection and development. Meanwhile, according to the ten significant changes experienced by supervisors in the process of their professional development described by Goodyear et al. (2014), only the first six clearly appeared in this study. Exploring how to better integrate the last four could be a direction for future supervisor training programs.

### Factors Influencing Trainees' Development and Practice

The findings of this study regarding factors influencing trainees' development and practice as supervisors (Figure 2) correspond to Bernard and Goodyear's (2014) conceptual model.

**Figure 2**

*Factors Influencing SF Supervisors' Development and Practice*



### *Interactions Among the Backgrounds, Preparedness, and Competence of School Counselors as Supervisors*

There was a reciprocal influence between trainees' degrees of competence-and-confidence and emotions-and-willingness as supervisors. Specifically, in the supervision learning stage of this study, trainees' familiarity with the SF approach and previous experience as supervisors affected their confidence in learning supervision and applying SFS. After gaining practical experience in the supervision supervised practice stage, many trainees gradually developed a stronger grasp of SFS, which helped them reduce their anxiety about beginning to practice supervision. This resulted in greater stability, peace of mind, ability to respond, and positive emotions, all of which facilitated trainees developing competence in their ability to flexibly use SFS and respond to various situations. Finally, trainees who had positive experiences became more interested in clearer self-identifications as SFS supervisors.

Trainees also emphasized that the experience of working as school counselors and doing administrative work both had a direct influence on their learning and development as supervisors of school counselors. As pointed out by professionals, supervisors' developmental changes are affected by their previous experience as practitioners (Baker et al., 2002; Bernard and Goodyear, 2014; Pelling, 2008, Rønnestad et al., 1997). This also underscores the validity of

Hawkins and Shohet's (2000) suggestion that supervisors of helping professionals who have previous experience in their supervisees' current roles can simultaneously work as both a practitioner and as a supervisor of practitioners. These points reinforce the earlier suggestion that competent, experienced school counselors or counseling department heads are the most suitable candidates for supervisors of school counselors (Peng & Hsu, 2013).

### ***Challenges Facing Novice Supervisors Due to Supervisees' Situations and Preparedness in Schools***

The findings of this study indicate that trainees believed that challenges involved in supervision practice include supervisees' knowledge of and openness to the SF approach and the degree of similarity between supervisors' and supervisees' work environments. Challenges related to leading SFRT included the differences between groups composed of supervisees from the same school vs. multiple schools, adjusting to diverse patterns of interaction among supervisees, the supportiveness of school offices, the interactions between individuals and the organizational culture, and supervisees' motivation to participate in supervision and consensus in helping clients. These challenges reflect the variability of supervision practice in school environments.

It is therefore most appropriate for novice supervisors to begin their practice of supervision in relatively uncomplicated contexts, such as one-on-one supervision in which supervisors and supervisees are both well-prepared, have the same approach to counseling, or work at the same school level. Once supervisors have a solid foundation, they will be better prepared to move on to more complex supervision arrangements. As Desmond et al. (2011) pointed out, the process of becoming a supervisor requires experience and time, and helping trainees identify and respond to potential difficulties involved in supervision can help trainees gain more confidence and knowledge in their roles as supervisors.

### ***Influence of the School System and Supervisors' Positions on Opportunities to Practice Supervision in Taiwan***

Because trainees were all employed as high school counselors, supervision was not their main professional responsibility. Unless their schools arranged consistent supervision or provided unique opportunities for supervision, trainees had limited opportunities to practice supervision. As Hawkins and Shohet (2000), Ke (2009), and Shyu and Huang (2007) point out, school counselors' time limitations are a significant barrier to giving and receiving supervision.

Meanwhile, supervision of school counselors in Taiwan is often limited to administrative oversight, and opportunities for formal, continuing supervision are rare. Because supervision is not seen as a priority, supervision and supervisor training are frequently unsatisfactory in Taiwan (Wang, 2018). It is therefore clear that the Taiwanese school system needs supportive laws or policies regarding supervision of school counselors.

### ***The Appropriateness of SFS for School Counselor Supervision Training Models***

The findings of this study support the user-friendliness of the SF approach (George, 2005), especially in school counseling (Hsu & Kuo, 2013; Hsu & Tsai, 2008). It also provides further confirmation that practicing SFS can contribute to trainees' development as supervisors of school counselors.

Trainees in this study confirmed these points, including: SFS' emphasis on equality assists supervisors in adopting a cooperative attitude of sharing with their supervisees, which lets them feel less pressure and more confidence in their role as supervisors; the clear framework and specific techniques of SFS guides them to have a clear sense of direction in the supervision process; SFS helps novice supervisors have a stronger feeling of competence because it is appropriate for school cultures, and often brings immediate results; SFS contributes to an atmosphere of supportiveness and cooperation among school participants or different offices of schools; and after they became clearer about the meaningfulness of promoting SFS in schools, they were more inspired to use SFS in self-supervision and a variety of supervisory tasks or administrative jobs.

This is especially true of SFRT, which means SFRT embodies many of the therapeutic factors of the peer supervision group process—including a sense of reassurance, validation, and belongingness—and can reduce the risk of burnout (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Hence, promoting SFRT's application in school counseling supervision and supervisors'

training should be a top priority. Of course, some of the challenges for trainees to lead SFRT in a school setting require further exploration and training.

### Limitations and Suggestions

Overall, trainees of this training program believed they gained a new understanding of SFS and made considerable progress in clarifying their doubts and blind spots. Trainees felt they had improved self-efficacy, empowerment, role definition, professional competencies, and motivation to continue as supervisors. Hence, this study once again supported SFS is suitable to be the training mode of supervisors of school counselors. However, several suggestions for future training and research are proposed.

According to the findings and discussion, future training programs should maintain or increase didactic learning, demonstrations, small-group discussions, and role-playing exercises to potentially boost training efficacy. Future studies could introduce more difficult supervision issues related to SFS in the school system and help trainees practice responding to these issues. Based on trainee feedback, future training programs should increase the duration of training programs while lengthening the time between training sessions. Particularly worth investigating how SFRT in schools can be a bridge to familiarity with SFS. This will allow for more opportunities to explore how to catalyze the progress of the trainees.

This research only adopts a qualitative research approach to collect and analyze the data of the trainees' subjective experience. Future research can also collect perceptions of multiple roles for triangulation, such as the types of supervisees served by the trainees, the feedback and experience data of the supervisees, the responses and feedback of the clients served by the supervisees, and the supervisors of the trainees' observations and evaluations. Meanwhile, developing relevant scales for the effectiveness or competencies of SF supervisors, the supervisees' self-supervision, and experience of receiving SFS are encouraged.

Trainees differed in duration and range of experience in school counseling, level of preparedness for the supervisor role, and practice with an SF approach; however, this study did not explore how these differences influenced trainees. Future studies can implement criteria for the eligibility of potential trainees, and these criteria may help to improve the effectiveness of training and promotion. Future research can further explore how differences in these background variables affect training outcome, either in the subjective perception of the trainees or compared to the control group.

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