Words and Pictures . . .:
A Rejoinder to VanderVen

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Twenty years ago, Whittaker (1979) noted the beginning shift from a psychoanalytically oriented therapy to the infusion of behavior modification into the milieu. He warned, however, that "behavioral interventions will not be effective unless they take into account the host of subtle but powerful interactions that occur between staff and children" (p. 12). We are still in search of a "unified theory of residential treatment" that considers not only the client, but also his or her environment and the relationship between them. Obviously this Modified Situational Leadership (MSL) model is not that theory, but it may help practitioners bear in mind the complexities of the context.

As I noted in the article, the revised version of my model has benefitted significantly from collegial feedback on previous drafts, including input from VanderVen. Understanding that the MSL is derived from other sources to begin with, I feel much less commitment to the terminology or even to the final form or implementation than to its potential to stimulate dialogue in a field of practice that appears hungry for a new perspective. Whether one calls it a model, an approach, an orientation, or a framework, my hope is that it will encourage practitioners to consider a different way of regarding what they do in their work and the children and youth with whom they do it.

As VanderVen points out, there is not always the neat fit between MSL and residential care that one might hope to see. In reviewing the source of my inspiration, I noted that Hersey and Blanchard (1982) asserted that other well-known management theories (e.g., Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene factors, McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, McClelland's achievement mo-
tive) and even frameworks from other fields (e.g., Transactional Analysis, Parent Effectiveness Training) could be integrated into their Situational Leadership model. They acknowledge that the relationships among these theories “are not necessarily absolute, direct correlations” but that they offer “integrative benchmarks for practitioners to use.” (This integration can be carried to a point of absurdity, of course.) The point I wish to make is that a synthesis of existing frameworks such as the one I offer (even when far from perfect), gives readers and practitioners the comforting possibility of incorporating earlier learning into a new approach without having to choose between them.

I have only a few additional remarks in response to VanderVen’s comments. As she notes, I have already acknowledged many of the limitations she points out, and I have no major disagreements with her critique.

I hear her concern about a prescribed absence of socioemotional support in Situation 1 and again in Situation 4. I do not believe that most children in residential care and treatment settings are suffering from an excess of staff empathy; perhaps we do need to incorporate more of that before we talk about restricting it. On the other hand, I think we need not to lose sight of our responsibility to assist children and youth—particularly new arrivals and those who are about to be discharged—in retaining or re-establishing meaningful sources of emotional support from significant others outside the program (although that discussion may fall outside this approach).

I agree with VanderVen that appropriate staff orientation and training are key to implementation. In fact, I believe that part of the allure of the original Hersey and Blanchard Situational Leadership model was the appealing nature of their workshops, which included clear, graphic representations of basic concepts, self-assessment tools for determining one’s “preferred style,” and exercises to enhance sensitivity to the changing needs of “followers.” All of these could be developed for MSL.

Some readers may find my article and these comments a convoluted way of saying what seems obvious: that children in care require both direction and support most of the time, that sometimes they need more of one than the other, and that practitioners ought to have the knowledge and skills to respond accordingly. If so, then there it is in one sentence.

I applaud VanderVen as she challenges us to rethink rigid and outdated practices and thank her for sharing her considerable insight with all of us.