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Supervising the supervisor: The use of live music and identification of parallel processes

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a music therapy professor's and PhD student's experiences as "supervisor–supervisee" within the context of the teaching apprenticeship training program at Temple University. A brief overview on the use of live music-making in supervision is offered along with relevant autobiographical information and examples of how live music-making was used to address supervisory issues. The authors identify parallel processes that emerged between the supervisee and her students, and the supervisee and her supervisor. The authors conclude that the practice of live music-making in supervisory contexts is beneficial on many levels. They hope that this publication will expand the ways in which practitioners and supervisors think about the roles of live music and parallel processes within supervisory contexts and that this will translate into supervisory practices.

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It is perhaps puzzling that very little has been written on the use of live music-making in music therapy supervision, unless it reflects the fact that music therapy supervisors, on the whole, tend not to use this tool. Until the publication of Forinash's (2001) edited collection on music therapy supervision and, more recently, Odell-Miller and Richards's (2009) edited handbook, there was very little written on the subject, with publications by Stephens (1984, 1987) and Turry (1998) existing as notable exceptions. Similarly, there is not a great deal published on the use of parallel processes in supervision, with an article by Edwards and Daveson (2004) and a case study by Odell-Miller and Krueckeberg (2009) being two that address this topic.

The present article addresses a unique constellation of issues in detailing the use of live, improvised music and the examination of parallel processes in the supervision of a supervisor-in-training. It is written from the perspectives of the two authors who were the participants in the process. Laurel was the PhD student who was leading a supervision seminar comprised of undergraduate and graduate students in clinical placements—she is referred to as the apprentice supervisor in the text; Ken was the faculty supervisor overseeing Laurel's work and he is described as the faculty supervisor in the text. Although Laurel was both an experienced clinician and supervisor of individual therapists in training, what was new for her was the process of managing a group seminar of therapists in training, the various tasks of which are described in detail in the present article.

The article is structured in the following way: in order to provide context, a brief overview of literature on the use of live music-making in supervision is offered. This is followed by a description of the educational program in which the supervision process described in this article took place and some material on how this project evolved and was carried out. Further context is provided with each co-author providing autobiographical information relevant to understanding the supervisory process.

This contextual material is followed by a description of four episodes in which music was used to address supervisory issues. The four episodes are described separately by the two participants in the process so that the reader can be exposed to both perspectives independently. While the article is co-written, no attempt was made to synthesize these two perspectives as the authors believe that there is value in reading these independent perceptions of what occurred in the music and how they were significant for the supervision process. Additionally, audio files of the music described in the article can be found by accessing the links noted throughout. The authors strongly encourage readers of this article to listen to the music described in the text because the written descriptions of the music cannot fully capture what is salient about it from a supervisory perspective.

The article concludes with a summary of the parallel processes that emerged between the apprentice supervisor and the students she supervised, and the apprentice supervisor and her faculty supervisor.

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Rationales for the use of live music in supervision

There are writings on the use of live music in clinical supervision from a variety of perspectives. These include Analytical Music Therapy (AMT) (Scheiby, 2001) and other psychodynamic perspectives (Austin & Dvorkin, 2001; Pedersen, 2009), multiperspective approaches (Frohne-Hagemann, 2001), music-centered models such as Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy (NRMT) (Turry, 1998, 2001) and Aesthetic Music Therapy (AeMT) (Lee & Khare, 2001), as well as other eclectic music-centered models (Stephens, 2001). We have identified five primary themes or rationales that characterize how music is used in supervision and these themes frame the following discussion. None of these related publications, however, address the supervision of clinical supervisors.

Use of music to examine transference and countertransference

Turry (1998) uses live music-making in the context of NRMT supervision to assist in a careful examination of the supervisee's musical tendencies. These tendencies can either be clinically appropriate, reflective of countertransference when used habitually, or otherwise connected to an emotional block. In this approach, each aspect of music is considered in relation to its clinical function and the corresponding potential for being reflective of countertransference. For example, the use of a fixed tempo can be safe and grounding but can also mask the therapist's anxiety or function to avoid contact with the client; the use of rhythmic patterns/structures can help organize a client's musical expression but can also reflect underlying issues in the therapist related to control, spontaneity, or vulnerability; and dissonance can stimulate, challenge, or energize a client, but a reluctance to use it on the part of the therapist can indicate difficulties in managing conflict or tension.

The NRMT supervision process can involve role-playing in which the supervisee takes on the musical identity of a client in order to generate an empathic understanding of the client when he/she is feeling blocked. The supervisor's role is to work with the musical expression. The supervisee plays music in a way that is typical of how he/she plays for the client. The supervisee then moves into the client role and the supervisor begins playing in a way that reflects the music the supervisee provides for the client. The supervisor gradually enriches the musical experience by adding the expressive elements that the countertransference prevented the supervisee from using. Through this experience, the supervisee can identify the emotions being repressed by the original client as well as the supervisee's own reaction and avoidance of the suppressed feelings. The result is that the supervisee is freer to provide a more potent clinical-musical support to the client, uncolored by blocks and fears.

In contrast to Turry's (1998) focus on music, Austin and Dvorkin (2001) present their model for a peer supervision group format where the focus is primarily on the client. In their model, a group member would typically begin with a verbal presentation of work with a particular client which would then be followed by one of two approaches: In the first approach, the working group member would be asked the question: Can you play the client or can you play your feelings about the client? When the working group member chose to play the client, another group member would take the role of therapist. In the second approach, one group member would play the client so that the group member who was presenting the client could play him/herself in relation to the client. After the music, verbal processing would follow in which the working group member would try to identify the feelings that arose in relation to the client, in this way detecting the presence of countertransference.

Use of music for skill development

In another publication, Turry (2001) states that live music is not only for intellectual insight about intrapersonal dynamics or catharsis but to allow the supervisee to envision new musical directions that can lead clients on a growth path. He believes that it is important for supervision meetings to take place in a room with a piano and other instruments. In this way, live music-making can be an option regardless of whether there is a pre-determined agenda to play. In fact, he suggests that sometimes the supervisor can suggest playing without an agenda.

Role play is used Turry's approach and can be effective in various configurations. A supervisee can play in the manner of a particular client and the supervisor then plays as the supervisee did for that client. This can give the supervisee insight into how his/her music is experienced, but equally importantly, it gives the supervisor an opportunity to expand the dimensions of music. This, in turn, opens up new avenues for the supervisee to explore in the therapy process with that client.

Alternatively, the supervisee can maintain the position as therapist and the supervisor can play the client. When doing this, the supervisor can bring out parts of the client's expression to help the supervisee become more cognizant of them. The supervisor can evoke dormant qualities in the supervisee's music, such as introducing a crescendo to a trainee who tends to play quietly or timidly. This leads the supervisee into new ways of being with the client, rather than just talking about them.

Use of music to enhance supervisory relationships

Music can also be used to enhance supervisory relationships. Scheiby (2001) discusses this in relation to her training in AMT. She believes that live music-making can enhance the relationship between supervisee and supervisor, especially if this is blocked or unclear. Austin and Dvorkin (2001) also note that shared music-making helps to establish cohesiveness in a supervision group and can ease the transition of new members into an existing group.

Use of music to facilitate the process of a supervision session

Bird, Merrill, Mohan, Summers, and Woodward (1999) offer individual narratives and group perspectives on their four-year experience with ongoing music-centered peer supervision. In their approach, supervision sessions occurred within a structured group framework where techniques such as improvisation, reflection, holding, elaborating qualities in the music, gestalt musical dialogue, and/or imaging to music were used to facilitate the process. Ultimately, the group concluded that "the opportunity to explore the personal/professional interface in a musical milieu through improvisation with other music therapists. . .deepened [the] group's connection to their work, . . .lessened feelings of frustration and isolation, and. . .allowed for exploration of clinical issues in a nonverbal medium" (p. 64).

Scheiby (2001) outlines a number of steps in the supervision session in which live music-making plays an essential role. As a supervisor in her training method of AMT, she observes a session and then provides supervision immediately after the session ends. The supervisee is asked to identify verbal and/or musical phenomena that were difficult to manage in the session and these elements provide the issues on which the participants will work. There follows a stage of working through the issue, preferably using music in a variety of ways. Following musical improvisation, there is a stage of verbal integration and clarification that ends with the identification of parallel processes as supervisor and supervisee determine if what occurred in the therapy session was repeated in the supervision.

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