

The Use of Expressive Arts in Graduate-Level Student Supervision

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Abstract

According to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), supervision is an integral part and requirement of training graduate counseling students (CACREP, 2024). Expressive arts are well defined in the play therapy literature (Green & Drewes, 2014; Perryman et. al, 2015; White & Davis, 2011) as interventions and enhancements to the counseling process with a variety of populations. University and site supervisors in graduate programs in counseling can utilize expressive arts interventions in supervision. The article will discuss how utilizing expressive arts in the supervision process also has direct clinical implication. The supervisor, in facilitating expressive art techniques during the supervision process, can assist the supervisee with the conceptualization of clients, transference and countertransference, and personal growth. The authors will showcase their personal anecdotal graduate school experiences with expressive arts in the supervision process as a means to showcase the effectiveness of infusing expressive arts in the graduate supervision process. Actual figures are included.

Keywords: expressive arts; graduate school; supervision

Introduction

According to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), supervision is an integral part and requirement of training graduate counseling students (CACREP, 2024). Counseling faculty and clinical site supervisors utilize various supervisory modalities to assist counseling graduate students in becoming effective clinicians. An emphasis on personal and professional growth is inherent to the process of supervision (Creaner, 2013). Expressive arts can be integrated within the supervision process to

provide a holistic supervision experience, develop advanced clinical skills, and client conceptualization skills (Purswell & Stulmaker, 2015).

Expressive arts are well-defined in the play therapy literature (Green & Drewes, 2014; Perryman et al., 2015; White & Davis, 2011) as interventions and/or enhancements to the counseling process with a variety of populations, including children and adolescents. Expressive arts represent a therapeutic modality that uses a primarily creative and non-verbal medium to facilitate deeper understanding of the underlying processes, which a client may be experiencing in relation to a variety of life circumstances. Expressive arts work primarily within the affective domain of the individual, as opposed to the cognitive and rational components. In particular, expressive arts can be utilized during the process of graduate-level supervision to incorporate a combination of toys and/or art materials. This modality can involve graduate students utilizing the expressive art materials either silently or combined with verbalization, and ends in processing of the counselor/client experience as the graduate student conceptualizes the presenting issues, appropriate theoretical orientation, and interventions (Purswell & Stulmaker, 2015). These techniques include but are not limited to drawing (Oaklander, 1988), painting, bibliotherapy (Kottman, 2015), clay (Bratton et al., 2012), and sandtray (Armstrong, 2008).

Graduate-level supervision is a process whereby the university supervisor oversees not only the clinical experiences, but also facilitates and encourages the student's growth by providing feedback and offering interventions to encourage the individual process of counselor know thyself (Hodges, 2016). Due to the nature and dynamics of the supervisory relationship, resistance in a new counselor is a common occurrence leading to potential barriers (Nellis et al., 2011). Due to this commonality, one of the supervisor's roles is to decrease this resistance and conflict to strengthen both the supervisor-supervisee relationship and promote growth in the supervisee, and most importantly to benefit the client (Nellis et al., 2011). Expressive arts can be a facilitative supervisory process with can reduce resistance and conflict. Both the supervisor and supervisee would need to recognize when the graduate student needs assistance with case conceptualization, theory integration, and effective interventions to be utilized with specific clients. The purpose for utilizing expressive arts in supervision for graduate students is twofold: to promote personal and professional growth by meeting the goals of supervision, and to enhance the services provided for the clients. Additionally, the use of expressive arts when working with counseling graduate students to provide supervision speaks to best practices in relation to the supervisory relationship.

Literature Review

According to Borders (2014), deliberate attention is given to the fostering of a safe and mutually trusting environment in which the graduate student feels comfortable to address any personal growth issues that will enhance professional development during the supervision process. Graduate students, during the supervision process, can exhibit a great deal of anxiety as well as resistance to feedback, which is considered normal and should be expected by the supervisor (Nellis et al., 2011). The utilization of expressive arts, such as the sand tray, bibliotherapy, and mandalas, can embrace these normal responses to challenge and ambiguity, in order to promote ongoing growth and development. Expressive arts mediums can also assist in productively resolving some level of conflict that will often occur during the supervisory relationship (Purswell & Stulmaker, 2015). The supervisor will select specific expressive art activities based on the developmental stage of the supervisee. The relationship between the graduate counseling student and the supervisor will also determine the selected expressive art activities. Expressive art activities can be utilized during the supervision process to create and develop the supervisory relationship with both the supervisor and graduate student participating in the activities.

The use of expressive arts during the supervision process for graduate counseling students provides a host of benefits for the student and supervisor. The counselor-in-training (CIT) is able to experientially integrate theory with practice through the use of different modalities that provide reflection and insight into their work with clients. Additionally, the use of expressive arts allows for a secure and strong supervisory relationship, which will allow the graduate counseling student to explore personal and professional goals, verbalize and conceptualize client issues, goals, effective interventions, and develop counselor-client relationships that allow the client to progress in the therapeutic process. Although not an exhaustive list, eco-maps, collages, mandalas, drawing, painting, sculpting, and mandalas will be explored as examples of how expressive arts can be utilized in the supervision process.

Expressive Arts Techniques in Supervision: Eco-maps

Multiple methods and strategies can be used to implement expressive arts into the supervision process. One method that is commonly used in counseling sessions is the creation of eco-maps. Eco-mapping is the process of creating a map that labels support systems in the client's world and identifies the proximity and strengths of these relationships in comparison to the client (Curry et al., 2008). Eco-mapping can also be utilized in the supervision process by allowing the

supervisee to identify a support system that will be supportive during the supervisee's journey to becoming a counselor. Eco-maps can be implemented in a variety of ways. A layout of thought bubbles, circle maps, or printable eco-map templates can be used to guide the supervisee. For example, a supervisor can bring cut-out circles to the supervision session so a supervisee can manipulate and arrange however the supervisee desires. Regardless of the exact eco-map provided, the supervisor instructs the supervisee to write people who would be supportive to him/her in becoming a counselor. The instructions can also vary based upon the supervisee's need. The supervisor can tailor the activity to labeling supports for specific times such as in the supervision process or can leave the activity unspecific by stating only for the client to write and identify supports (O'Brien, 2008).

The utilization of eco-mapping is appropriate for all developmental levels of supervision and can be adapted to fit any particular supervisee and supervision style (O'Brien, 2008). Eco-maps can as well be tailored to fit the development ability of the supervisee. This method of expressive arts allows for the supervisee to see their connections to others both in and outside of the counseling journey and can help the supervisee to feel surrounded by support despite the difficulty that comes with being a beginning counselor. This may also be used to help the supervisor assess the level of support that the supervisee has and determine if guidance is needed to help the supervisee identify a stronger support system. Additionally, this activity can be used multiple times in supervision in order to track the supervisee's support systems over time. Changes can be discussed and identified and the supervisor can continue to assess the level of support that the supervisee has over different points in the supervision process.

Collages

Another method of expressive arts is the implementation of collages in supervision (Purswell & Stulmaker, 2015). Collages are a mixture of different words and pictures to create an image. Supervisors can bring a variety of materials to the session for the supervisee to use in creating their own collage. Some materials can include, but are not limited to, magazines, books, photographs, construction paper, or printed out pictures. Collages can also be created on a computer by searching on the Internet for pictures or words and the supervisee can paste and arrange them into a Word document. Either on paper or on the computer, the supervisee is instructed to create a collage that depicts a certain situation, feeling, or thought. Supervisors can adjust the topics and materials of this activity to fit the specific supervisee and supervision process

that is occurring. Some examples of collage topics could include a collage of anxiety, a collage of the supervision process, a collage of a client the supervisee is struggling to understand or relate to, a collage of the presenting issue or family dynamics of the supervisee's clients, a collage of a positive supervisory relationship, or a collage of termination with clients. Collage topics can be professional or personal topics. If a supervisee is facing difficulties from personal issues that are impacting the supervisee's ability as a counselor with their clients, a collage can be created to demonstrate what is occurring in the supervisee's life to do this.

Collages are appropriate for all supervisees at various developmental levels. Collages depicting any of these topics allow for insight into the supervisee's worldview and perception of clients and presenting issues. Supervisors can use this as a way of understanding supervisees' thoughts while also allowing supervisees the opportunity to gain more insight into their own thought processes visually and kinesthetically by creating the collage. Supervisees can keep this visual and refer back to it at any time during both supervision and counseling sessions to help with future difficulties the supervisee may face. Supervisees can add or delete parts of collages that no longer fit with their thought processes on that specific topic. For example, a supervisee may create a collage when transference or countertransference is happening in session with a client (Smith-Adcock et. al, 2009). As the supervisee recognizes this transference and is better able to deal with this in session, the supervisee can add new concerns or take off parts of the collage that no longer impact the relationship. Changes made to collages can be used by supervisors and supervisees to assess the amount of growth and change that has occurred in the specific situation that the collage was originally designed for.

Painting, drawing, and sculpting

Painting, drawing, and sculpting can be implemented into the supervision process as well. Using these expressive techniques can allow for the supervisee to better conceptualize and visualize different issues being presented in counseling and the supervision process. Similar to the eco-mapping and collage methods above, painting, drawing, and sculpting can be utilized in a variety of different ways specific to the client problem being addressed, or conceptualized as well as the specific supervisee-supervisor relationship. Different mediums can be used to achieve these objectives such as using paints, crayons, markers, watercolors, clay, or play doh. An example could include drawing the client-counselor relationship, drawing the process of supervision, illustrating goals or change the supervisee wants to occur personally in supervision, drawing the supervisee's

worldview of the client versus the client's worldview, and many other possibilities. Supervisors or supervisees can be allowed to choose which medium fits with their own personal style or better match the purpose of the technique. Additionally, the supervisee could conceptualize the structure or dynamics of a family system by sculpting with clay or play doh (Haber, 2002). The supervisee could manipulate the clay to match the stance of each family member in the family and arrange the clay figures to best demonstrate the dysfunction in the family. Changes can be made to the structures in order to determine what goals need to be implemented in order to create a more functional family system and structure in sessions.

Biblio-therapy

Biblio-therapy is another technique that can be adapted to supervision. A comprehensive definition of traditional Bibliotherapy is, "a family of techniques for structuring interaction between a facilitator and a participant based on their mutual sharing of literature" (Shechtman, 2009, p.282). Biblio-supervision can also use fictional children's literature to support the development process of supervision. In any type of Bibliotherapy, there is a three-step process that occurs. This three-step process includes identification, catharsis, and insight. The first step, identification, is the process of identification with the characters and the story (Shechtman, 2009). Specifically, in supervision, the supervisee identifies with the characters in the literature provided in supervision and is able to relate to problems that the characters are facing. Catharsis occurs when "the reader becomes emotionally involved in the story and is able to release pent-up emotions under safe conditions" (Shechtman, 2009, p.282). Supervisees are able to identify with characters to the level that hidden or unconscious emotions dealt with similar problems in counseling or supervision are released while reading the literature. Lastly, insight is achieved where readers then are able to consciously recognize similar problems in his/her own lives and determine new solutions for the problems (Shechtman, 2009). In supervision, supervisees are potentially able to find better solutions to the same problems.

Discussions with reading the literature allow for the supervisee to reflect upon problems being experienced with clients or supervision as well as being able to explore client dynamics. Literature provides another outlet to communicate about these issues being experienced while discussing through the characters in the story first and then comparing the characters to the life of the supervisee in actual situations that are occurring. Beyond discussions, other extension activities can be used in conjunction with the readings assigned to create even further insight and exploration

(Shechtman, 2009). For example, supervisees can be instructed to rewrite different parts of the story, specifically the ending, in order to better fit his/her own personal experiences. This rewriting and narrating of the supervisee's own story can also increase the supervisees sense of control over his/her life and actions as well as the perception of what is happening in counseling relationships with clients. This process mirrors the non-pathologizing, empowering, and collaborative approach of Michael White and David Epston's Narrative Therapy as it assists the supervisee in identifying problems, framing the problems within a larger sociocultural context, and making room for other stories (*GoodTherapy*, 2019).

A book that is beneficial to beginning counselors in supervision is the book, *Where Do Balloons Go? An Uplifting Mystery* by Jamie Lee Curtis (2000). In this fictional children's literature book, the narrative is led by a boy imagining what happens to balloons if the owner was to let the balloon go. The boy wonders about the different places the balloon would go and the adventures it would possibly go on. At the end the boy realizes that the story of the balloons will always remain a mystery and he learns what happens to balloons that are let go, and he understands that sometimes you have to let go of the mysteries that you can never understand. As a supervisee and beginning counselor, there are many unknowns associated with counseling clients such as the potential for harming the client, being unconfident in their abilities as a counselor, fear about handling suicidal clients, and many more (Hodges, 2016). This book can be used to identify these fears and unknowns associated with counseling clients during supervision. Supervisees can discuss these mysteries by drawing a balloon and writing down all the unknowns that the supervisee has with counseling or the supervision process. These can then be described verbally in the supervision session. After discussion, the supervisee can use the balloon as a metaphor for releasing these mysteries as the boy in the story did by physically cutting up, stomping on, or throwing away the balloon that includes all of these unknowns. Doing this can have a cathartic effect on the supervisee by allowing for the release of these negative thoughts and insecurities from the start of the supervision process.

Sand Tray

Supervisors draw from their therapeutic toolboxes when working with supervisees. According to *Psychology Today* (2019), a popular play therapy approach is Sandplay therapy, or a nonverbal, therapeutic intervention style that makes use of a sandbox, toy figures, and sometimes water, to create scenes of miniature worlds that reflect a person's inner thoughts, struggles, and

concerns (*Psychology Today*, 2019). Sandplay therapy takes place in box-like containers referred to as “sand trays,” and it can involve a combination or spectrum of directive and nondirective activities. Similarly, the use of expressive arts during the supervision process for graduate counseling students can provide auditory, visual, and tactile learning styles to be integrated into the supervision process. For example, the sandtray, when used in supervision provides an example of how to tap into the aforementioned tactile learning style.

Sand tray activities typically reflect a person’s own life, and are therefore appropriate for supervisees in practicum, internship, and postgraduate settings. Participants are allowed the opportunity to express feelings or concerns, resolve conflicts, remove obstacles, explore possibilities and potential outcomes, and gain an acceptance of self. Though some participants may have a deep understanding of their created world, supervisors are encouraged to process and explore symbols and metaphors within the tray with their supervisees. Supervisors should act as witnesses and facilitators and should avoid interpretation of supervisees’ constructions.

Sand tray activities may be exceptionally beneficial to supervisees who are still forming their clinical language. When utilizing play therapy interventions, the play itself should be considered a language of its own. Supervisors should attend to nonverbal cues and energetic shifts when facilitating sand tray work, as supervisees are free to express themselves however they choose. Though the sandbox and toy figures serve as communication tools, this form of play therapy is often practiced in conjunction with talk therapy. While supervisees have the space to use their own language, supervisors may introduce clinical language through the reflection of feeling, content, and meaning.

The sand tray is an excellent place for a supervisee to explore their role as a counselor or clinician. A supervisor might instruct their supervisee to compare and contrast their role as a counselor to other roles the supervisee may play. This could lead the supervisee to explore relationships, responsibilities, and challenges as well as individual strengths. Supervisees may also use Sandplay therapy as a way to explore perceived transference or countertransference issues. Supervisors are able to conceptualize their supervisees’ issues more deeply when working with verbal, nonverbal, energetic, and visual explanations (Hartwig, et al., 2017)

The sand tray is also an appropriate tool for counselors or counselor interns having difficulty conceptualizing a client’s presenting issues. The sand tray allows the supervisee to create a visual of current context as well as past context, generating a more thorough or holistic case

conceptualization. The construct also provides a visual for the supervisor hoping to assist their supervisee in gaining insight, exploring potential therapeutic techniques, or creating a treatment plan for the client. Supervisors are able to work with graduate counseling students to integrate theory to practice by selecting specific theoretical orientations to demonstrate expressive arts. For example, a supervisor can utilize solution-focused supervision with the sandtray. Similar to solution-focused counseling, solution-focused supervision maintains that supervisees build upon successes for future insight and goal setting (Stark et al., 2011). “The modality of sandtray in supervision allows for supervisees to freely express and explore personal and professional growth as counselors” which models the insight and goal setting processes inherent within solution-focused supervision (Stark et al., 2011, p. 278). Hence, incorporating a solution-focused theoretical approach to supervision through the use of sandtray can model for the student how to utilize solution-focused counseling approaches with clients alike.

Supervisees may also benefit from Sandplay therapy when exploring their social support network. Supervisors may prompt their supervisees with activities designed to explore feelings and sources of support. Both supervisors and supervisees may gain insight from this approach as connections are constructed in the sand. By utilizing the sand tray, supervisors and supervisees can assess for counselor support and determine if there is adequate support or a need for additional support. The supervisor may assist the supervisee in identifying additional supports or resources. In a similar sense, supervisors and supervisees may use the sand tray as a tool for exploring how the supervisee is offering support to others, including their clients, their peers, and the counseling profession.

Sandplay therapy interventions such as the sand tray allow opportunities for increased awareness on behalf of both the supervisor and supervisee. The sand tray serves as a tool for exploring and explaining the cognitions, emotions, and reactions of the supervisee during the supervision process. In addition, this type of work also clearly displays the supervisees emotional and conceptual skills. Supervisors may benefit just as much as supervisees from this type of expressive play intervention.

Mandalas

Mandalas are a unique addition to expressive arts. In the Indian religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, a mandala is a spiritual and ritual symbol representing the universe (Violatti, 2013). It’s literal meaning, “circle” represents completeness and self-unity. In common

use, “mandala” has become a generic term for any diagram, chart, or geometric pattern that represents the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically. A mandala is considered a microcosm of the universe, and therefore can subsequently have implications for its use in the supervisory process.

Supervisors who incorporate mandala work in supervision relationships may benefit from a variety of geometric options. As much of mandala work is rooted in symbolism, it is important to allow supervisees opportunity to select a mandala that is shaped to represent the supervisee’s individual world or universe. Supervisors should note of the simplicity or complexity of the geometric pattern, as it may be relevant when processing the completed activity. Supervisors should encourage their supervisees to color their mandalas using crayons, colored pencils, or markers of their choice, and should also encourage their supervisees to be intentional in their selection of color. This expressive art activity not only regulates the supervisee, but it also generates a time for reflection and fosters an acceptance of reality.

When processing this expressive art activity, supervisors and supervisees should note the mandalas design and geometric pattern, the use of color and/ or empty space, and any patterns or designs that are reoccurring or inconsistent. The supervisor will gain insight related to how the supervisee perceives self and the world around them. The supervisor may also provide direction for the activity in order to reflect the supervisee’s perceived counselor role or the supervision experience.

Mandalas can be revisited over time, and they can even be recreated to reflect growth and change. Supervisors and supervisees are provided with a clear, visual display of consistency, growth, and/ or change when revisiting a mandala, and it can lead to a revelation of developed skills and strengths. Supervisors and supervisees are encouraged to tailor the use of mandalas to their individual supervision goals and experiences.

Method

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. In what ways does the incorporation of expressive arts techniques in graduate-level clinical supervision facilitate supervisee development in the areas of client conceptualization, transference, countertransference, and personal growth?

2. How do the lived anecdotal experiences of professional counselors who engaged in expressive arts-based supervision during graduate training illustrate the effectiveness of infusing expressive arts into the supervisory process?

This book chapter employed a qualitative, narrative inquiry approach to examine the role of expressive arts within the graduate-level supervision process. Rather than relying on experimental or quantitative measures, the authors drew upon the personal anecdotal accounts of two professional counselors who engaged in expressive arts-based supervision during their graduate training. These participants shared reflective narratives detailing how expressive arts techniques were introduced and facilitated by their supervisors, and how those experiences influenced their clinical development. Actual figures representing supervisee-created expressive work are included to provide concrete, visual examples of how such techniques can be meaningfully integrated into the supervisory relationship.

The data for this chapter was gathered through a process of reflective self-disclosure and professional retrospection, in which each contributor examined their graduate supervision experiences through the lens of clinical growth and personal development. Thematic areas explored included client conceptualization, the navigation of transference and countertransference, and broader dimensions of personal and professional identity formation. By centering the voices and lived experiences of practicing clinicians, this chapter aims to offer both a theoretical framework and practical illustration of how expressive arts supervision can serve as a transformative modality in graduate counselor training programs.

Findings

Now a professional counselor, one of the authors would like to take a look back and provide the readers with an overview of her experience in graduate school and how beneficial she found the utilization of expressive arts in supervision to be for her developmental process.

Expressive arts techniques in the supervision process are often utilized to foster growth and insight into a graduate student's counseling journey. One example is for an instructor to ask every student in an internship class to use a template provided to create an eco-map of major supports. No further explanation should be given. Oftentimes students will write names of people in their lives that they identify as supportive throughout the internship semester both personally and professionally. Then, students could be asked to divide into groups and share as much information as possible to other group members. Students can identify the structure of their eco-maps and

explore intentional and unintentional themes. If a student were to structure the eco-map to represent those closest to them as the main sources of support, and decided that their eco-map did not directly relate to the way they view their relationships, they could add lines to help to identify the strongest supports. Listening to other members also allows for the opportunity to add other supports to their eco-map that they had not considered previously. There can even be times even where a student's name appears on other member's maps which can give them the opportunity to realize that others do not only support them, but that they are relied upon to be a support for others as well.

Overall, the exercise mentioned above helped me gain a sense of strength with others that I could ask for guidance, gain a sense of a strong support system, and learn about how I conceptualize my own support system. I also no longer felt alone in internship, and even though I felt that I would make mistakes along the road, I would have a huge wall of support that would be there to guide me along the way. I posted my eco-map inside of my internship binder for the remainder of the semester and would look at it whenever I needed”(personal communication, Berry, November 12, 2020).

Another modality to incorporate in graduate level supervision involves the use of drawing using colors, markers, and colored pencils to explore different psychotheoretical orientations. Students oftentimes cannot express their cognitions verbally due to not fully understanding the process of clinical case conceptualization due to not knowing which theory they espouse. A way in which a supervisor can encourage exploration of client cases is to ask the student to draw out their thoughts, both those that are clear and those that are confusing. An example could be to ask the student to draw how they see the world through their eyes. They would be told to include values, morals, problem-solving techniques they have used in the past, and other ways of seeing how they think about people and problems. This exercise could be conduit for students understanding more about their theoretical orientation.

“Throughout my site supervision, there were other times where I was instructed to draw in order to help visualize my own thinking processes. Drawing used to be a source of strength for me as well as a relaxation technique. Once my supervisor determined this, my supervisor used various opportunities for me to use my love of drawing to also benefit myself personally in the supervision process. About a month

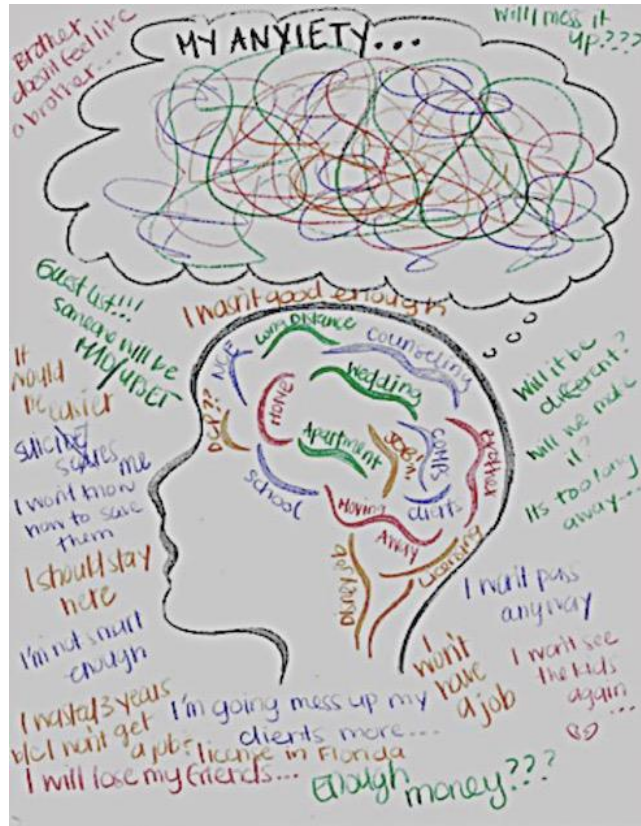
into my internship, I started to feel as though I could not identify a solid theory for my counseling. This was personally affecting my counseling because I was trying to relate what I was doing in counseling to one specific theory. I felt torn between multiple theories and could not truly identify what my beliefs were. In order to help understand how my counseling related to my theory, my supervisor instructed me to take the week and draw how different pieces of my counseling beliefs related to different theories. Then I was instructed to compile all of these pictures into one drawing that would create my own personal theory of counseling” (personal communication, Berry, November 12, 2020).

“At first, this was a struggle and I felt so jumbled about multiple theories that I did not know where to begin. However, I did as was suggested and drew different beliefs that really struck me in my counseling style. As the days went on, I was able to determine the connections between my different beliefs and found how they combined to produce my own counseling theory. I found out that my main theoretical orientation mirrored narrative therapy the most, but extended to other incorporations of cognitive-behavioral, structural, and person-centered approaches. By the time my next supervision session occurred, I felt more grounded in my beliefs and could adequately explain my thought processes related to my theories used in my counseling sessions. I felt a burden lift off my shoulders and felt more adequate as a counselor due to this activity” (personal communication, Berry, November 12, 2020).

“Later on in the semester, I was instructed to draw again but for personal issues outside of my counseling relationships (Figure 1). These personal issues were starting to harm my own mental health and I was unable to complete my own self-care that is extremely important to being a successful counselor. Despite this being an abnormal topic of conversation in my supervision, I discussed the problems I was facing outside of the supervision process with my supervisor. Again, my supervisor suggested that I should draw my emotions. However, I was instructed to draw my emotions and thoughts during the supervision session. Even though my

supervisor did not speak, I could constantly feel her presence during this activity and was able to release the negative thoughts that had been trapped in my mind for weeks” (personal communication, Berry, November 12, 2020).

“I began by drawing myself with my multiple responsibilities and thoughts inside of my own brain and then expanding to my negative thoughts surround these topics in my mind. I then drew all of these thoughts as random intertwining lines that I could not contain or control. Upon finishing the drawing, my supervisor asked me to add a title in which I titled the drawing, “My Anxiety.” I struggled with anxiety related to stress for years and in my own personal counseling, but had never drawn it out like I did in that session. My supervisor did not ask for any specific details of my drawing only asked me to describe how the process was for me and whether my anxiety had decreased any. This was the first time I never had to explain verbally my anxiety to someone and still feel a major release of trapped tension in my body. I described the process as euphoric and a major release of the weight I had been carrying for weeks. A process that finally allowed me to breathe and feel like I could move towards being the person as well as the counselor I had been previously. My anxiety decreased tremendously and I was able to add to the drawing anytime I felt any new anxiety start to increase based on negative thoughts. I used this through the end of the semester and plan to use it as a way of expressing my negative thoughts and emotions in a more positive way in the future” (personal communication, Berry, November 12, 2020). (Figure 1.)



“Overall, all of these expressive arts techniques had a positive effect on my growth as a beginning counselor. All the activities helped me to conceptualize my own thinking processes related not only to my clients, but to myself as well. I was able to better identify my support systems and was able to see my growth as I changed the activities throughout the semester. I continued to use the activities to help guide my own process outside of the supervision process and will continue to use these techniques to better advance myself personally and professionally” (personal communication, Berry, November 12, 2020).

Anecdotal Graduate Student Supervision: Example # 2

Currently a professional counselor, another author would like to take a look back and provide the readers with an overview of her rich experience in graduate school and how beneficial she also found the utilization of expressive arts in supervision to be for her developmental process.

“During my time as a counselor intern, I had the opportunity to work with several university and clinical supervisors skilled in play therapy and expressive arts. The majority of my supervision experiences involved the use of sand tray, drawing,

painting, sculpting, eco-mapping, or coloring. I believe those experiences have not only led me to advocate for the use of play therapy and expressive arts in supervision, but they have also helped me gain insight, explore significant personal and clinical challenges, and grow as a clinician” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“With nearly every supervisor that I worked with during my previous graduate training, I was able to explore and express myself through drawing activities. This is, in part, due to my said interest in this type of supervision, but it is also due to the success my supervisors and I have had in these activities. While some drawing activities were completely nondirective, others were prompted based on my supervisors’ individual interests or concerns. One of my most significant drawing exercises was not prompted by my supervisor but was processed in detail during supervision” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“On a day when I found myself having difficulty attuning to clients, I decided to use my supervision time to process my own internal conflict and intrusive thoughts. Some of my thoughts were multi-layered, and I did not have the language or even the insight to appropriately explain how I was feeling. I decided to draw my internal conflict, using a variety of colored markers and a plain sheet of white paper. When processing the activity with my supervisor, she noted the geometric shapes and colors used in my drawing. I was able to verbalize the meanings I had assigned to specific colors as well as the meaning assigned to empty space, and I was able to explain each realm of thought one drawing at a time. This exercise allowed a time for reflection, it encouraged me to be mindful, and it assisted me in emotionally regulating during the supervision session. In addition, I was able to use the drawing as a conversation piece and tool for communicating and explaining complex concepts to my supervisor” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“Another significant expressive arts activity involved drawing my theoretical orientation” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020). (Figure 2).



“As someone who takes an integrative approach to counseling, I struggled to define my theoretical orientation when completing classroom assignments, treatment plans, and applications for internship sites. Like many other young counselors, I felt as if I was ‘pulling from a bag of tricks’ instead of practicing empirically supported treatment interventions. Drawing my theory allowed me to conceptualize my personal perception of the counseling relationship, therapeutic goals, and client progress” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“When my supervisor asked me to draw my theory in supervision, she gave me the freedom to brainstorm ideas and continue the assignment between sessions. When I returned to supervision a week later, she had no idea what my drawing symbolized, but she knew I had carefully considered what I wanted to convey. I

believe my supervisor was proud of the work that I had done, and it corresponded to the pride I felt as I came to own my individual beliefs, ideas, and experiences. I spent the week exploring theories, considering treatment modalities, and being mindful of my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in and between sessions. As a result, I defined an individualized, integrated counseling approach rooted in Narrative Therapy, Feminist Theory, and trauma-informed treatment” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“Sand tray work has also proven to be beneficial to my supervision experience. I can recall several times in which my supervisor encouraged Sandplay therapy between sessions in order to emotionally regulate and become centered between sessions. When I attune to a client’s energy in session, whether positive or negative, it tends to have a lingering effect on me when they leave the room. Energy attunement cannot always be cognitively or even verbally processed, so I have found sandplay to be an essential part of regrouping and readying myself for the next session” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“Through supervision, I have also had the opportunity to color mandalas and compare them over time. I colored the first mandala midway through my practicum semester, and I was instructed by my supervisor to color my thoughts, feelings, and concerns related to my practicum experience. In doing so, I used only slight variations of the primary colors (red, blue, and yellow), and I grouped many of the colors together rather than highlighting the intricate, geometric shapes within the design. In processing the expressive art activity, I connected the intricate mandala layout to the vast number of opportunities, techniques, and tools available to counselors. The possibilities, at that time, felt overwhelming, as I was still trying to develop my most basic counseling skills. These basic skills are represented by the basic, primary colors, and the patterns of the colors represent me trying not to become overwhelmed by the counseling world I had just recently walked into” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“I colored the second mandala as a second semester intern, after accruing hundreds of direct client hours and indirect experiences. While the mandala layout is exactly the same, the colors I used are distinctly different. I paid more attention to the details of the mandala, and I honored many of the smaller, geometric shapes. This represents the array of skills I have developed over time, and the expansion of colors represents the growth I have achieved throughout my counselor education program. When I look at my second mandala activity, I see both growth and room for growth, and I look forward to completing another mandala activity in the future (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

“I have had the opportunity to participate in so many play therapy and expressive arts interventions, and I believe each activity served a me in its own, unique way. My supervisors allowed me the space to explore, meditate, and verbally process during my supervision sessions in conjunction with the play and expressive arts activities. I believe this helped strengthen the supervisor-supervisee relationship, and I believe it helped foster acceptance of self as well as self-efficacy. I have integrated play and expressive art activities into my own work with clients, and they have also become an essential component to my self-care and mindfulness routines” (personal communication, Armstrong, November 12, 2020).

The direct quotes above highlight the graduate students’ positive experiences with utilizing expressive arts techniques in their developmental journey throughout graduate school. It is evident that their experiences have helped to shape them into the strong clinicians they are today.

Discussion

The experiential findings shared by both authors illuminate the profound impact that expressive arts techniques can have on a supervisee's developmental journey throughout graduate-level counselor training. The eco-map exercise described in the first author's account demonstrates how a structured yet creatively open activity can organically surface themes related to support, connection, and self-perception that traditional verbal supervision may not as readily uncover. The second author's experiences further reinforce this sentiment, as her engagement with a wide range of expressive modalities including sand tray, drawing, painting, sculpting, and mandala coloring

across multiple supervisory relationships speaks to the breadth of creative tools available to supervisors. Both authors similarly identified drawing as a particularly impactful vehicle for exploring theoretical orientation, with each arriving at an integrated, personally meaningful counseling approach through the visual mapping of their beliefs and values. The second author's account of drawing her internal conflict on a day when she struggled to attune to clients is especially noteworthy, as it highlights how expressive arts can facilitate emotional regulation, mindfulness, and the articulation of complex internal experiences that defy verbal expression. These parallel narratives collectively affirm that expressive arts in supervision serve as a meaningful bridge between a supervisee's inner world and their emerging clinical identity.

Equally compelling are the findings related to personal growth, countertransference, and the deepening of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, themes that resonate powerfully across both authors' graduate experiences. The first author's use of drawing to externalize her anxiety within the supervisory space produced what she described as a euphoric and deeply physical release, one that years of verbal processing had never previously achieved. The second author's use of sand tray work between sessions as a tool for emotional regulation and energy attunement following client contact further underscores the unique capacity of expressive arts to address the somatic and affective dimensions of clinical work that traditional supervision may overlook. Her longitudinal comparison of two mandala drawings completed at different stages of her training offers a particularly vivid illustration of supervisee growth over time, with shifts in color complexity and attention to detail serving as tangible markers of expanding clinical competence and self-awareness. Both authors note that their supervisory experiences with expressive arts ultimately fostered greater self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and a genuine advocacy for these modalities in their own work with clients. Taken together, these findings strongly support the intentional infusion of expressive arts into graduate-level supervision as a transformative practice that honors the development of the whole counselor and, by extension, enriches the care extended to the clients they serve.

Conclusion

The supervisor-supervisee relationship can be significantly enhanced when the supervisor employs the use of expressive art techniques and interventions with their supervisees. The major premise of the supervisor-supervisee relationship is establishing a safe place for the supervisee to share issues both personally and professionally related to working with client populations.

Expressive art techniques and interventions can assist the supervisor in working with the supervisee to establish a safe and secure relationship. The supervisor can build empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness by selecting some of the expressive art techniques that enhance relationships building. The supervisor can facilitate growth in the supervisory relationship during the supervision process by continued use of expressive art techniques such as the sand tray, books, and other creative interventions.

As described in the anecdotal examples, the use of expressive art techniques and interventions has direct clinical implications for supervisees working with clients as well as the supervisees own personal and professional growth. The supervisor, in facilitating expressive art techniques during the supervision process, can assist the supervisee with the conceptualization of clients, transference and countertransference, and personal growth. As the supervisee is able to conceptualize the client more clearly, effective techniques and interventions can be facilitated in session with the client. The supervisee can learn, via supervision, how to facilitate some expressive art techniques and interventions with clients, which can enhance the overall course of treatment. The supervisee can experience personal growth via the use of expressive art techniques during the supervision process. Expressive art techniques and interventions are effective when the supervisee feels “stuck” or is experiencing some transference or countertransference during sessions with clients.

As the aforementioned examples discuss, the introduction of an expressive art technique can focus the supervisee on the personal impact that is felt by working with specific clients. The supervisee may be more apt to discuss the personal impact via an expressive art technique or intervention versus talking directly. Additionally, a visual summary of how the supervisee conceptualizes their personal development can be extremely impactful, specifically when the technique is utilized throughout the supervision process. Expressive art techniques and interventions can provide a visual example of personal and professional growth during the supervision process. This growth can be demonstrated throughout the entire supervision process and by the use of expressive art techniques and interventions a visual record can be compiled and shared with the supervisee throughout the process. The training of supervisors to incorporate expressive art techniques and interventions during the supervision process can be included during the supervision course required in doctoral programs. The different models of supervision can be

expanded to include some expressive art techniques and interventions that target different aspects of the models to enhance the supervision process.

Doctoral students and faculty can enhance the supervision process by discussing and introducing these specific interventions during the supervision process. Additionally, faculty can implement some expressive art techniques and interventions during the group supervision process for doctoral students who will be supervising master's level students. The supervisor should be open to experiencing personal reflection and growth via expressive art techniques and interventions to enhance the experience and process of supervision, and to build the supervisory relationship. In light of the aforementioned graduate student's experiences, it seems imperative that the body of research around new expressive art supervision models could be expanded to "investigate effectiveness of teaching approaches by incorporating data from multiple instructors or sections of students across programs" (Barrio-Minton, p. 11, 2018).

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