



Special issue
**Music therapy in Europe:
 Paths of professional development**

in partnership with the
 European Music Therapy Confederation



Supervision During Music Therapy Training: An Interview with Two Swedish Supervisors

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ABSTRACT

Supervision has been a significant part of the music therapy programme at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm since it commenced in 1981. Supervisors in Sweden are most often academically trained and in this paper I discuss perspectives on supervision as part of a learning process through an interview with two supervisors. Ingrid Hammarlund and Sören Oscarsson have been supervising students from the music therapy programme in Stockholm since the 1990s and I present their reflections and experiences regarding topics such as the role of the supervisor, the role of music, the group format and the development of a professional identity.

KEYWORDS

supervision; music therapy training programme; professional development

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BACKGROUND

Supervision is seen by many music therapists in Sweden as the core of the music therapy training programme (EMTC 2015a), and a clear mark of the significance of this special form of professional learning are the criteria for the European Music Therapy Register (EMTR 2015b).

The music therapy programme at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm started in 1981 and supervision has been part of this programme since its inception. The introduction of supervision was influenced mainly by educational programmes for psychotherapists that are based on a psychoanalytical tradition. It is still a central part of the curriculum and students receive supervision for two hours on alternate weeks throughout the programme. The final year also includes a self-

experience process in the format of inter-therapy, where the students practise and observe individual music therapy in pairs with onsite supervision as described by Priestley (1994).

While in many countries supervision will generally be provided within training programmes pertaining to different professions, in Sweden it has primarily featured in the fields of psychotherapy and social work. Currently, it is a widespread tool for professional development that can be found in a variety of professions within healthcare and education. In order to maintain a high professional standard, supervision on supervision (meta-supervision) is also becoming more common (Näslund & Ögren 2010).

Along with the development of international research, supervisors in Sweden are most often academically trained within the music therapy

programmes. Similarly, psychotherapists and social workers require training and extensive experience in their respective field. Studies comprising at least 30 ECTS are today usually required to be assigned as a supervisor in public healthcare (Stockholms läns sjukvårdsområde 2015).

AN INTERVIEW WITH HAMMARLUND AND OSCARSSON

The music therapy programme was my first encounter with supervision. With many years of experience as a teacher in schools I very soon became intrigued by the way supervision made me think and reflect in a way that I realised could also be beneficial for other professional groups working with people. Eventually, this led me to become a trained supervisor and gain a career alongside my work as a music therapist. My assignments have mainly been focussed within schools and other pedagogical environments rather than the field of music therapy. When I was asked by the editors of *Approaches* to write an article about supervision within the music therapy programme in Stockholm, it seemed appropriate for me to contact Ingrid Hammarlund and Sören Oscarsson, who have been frequently consulted as supervisors by the training programme at the Royal College of Music for more than 20 years.

Ingrid Hammarlund (I.H.) was Senior Lecturer and Head of the Music Therapy Master's programme at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm for 20 years. She is now retired. She has an MA in literature, philosophy and drama from Stockholm University and is a trained music teacher, special educator, music therapist and supervisor. She has a therapeutic specialisation in drama, psychodynamic body-oriented psychotherapy and Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) as well as extensive clinical, supervisory and educational experience. Now working in private practice as a music therapist and supervisor, Hammarlund has been supervising music therapy students since 1990 and initiated and coordinated the two training courses for supervisors held at the Royal College of Music in 1997-98 and 2000-01. Apart from the training programme she also has experience of supervising students on the Expressive Arts programme as well as music therapists, occupational therapists and special teachers.

Sören Oscarsson (S.O.) who is a music teacher and music therapist, was connected to the training programme in Stockholm as a supervisor in 1997

and has been in regular consultation. In addition to supervising music therapy students he also supervises professional music therapists and other staff within healthcare, psychiatry and psychiatric rehabilitation. As a clinician Sören Oscarsson has extensive experience with child, youth and adult psychiatric outpatient care. He has specialised in music therapy with traumatised refugees and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing). He is currently employed at the Outpatient Clinic for Child Psychiatry in Västmanland County Council.

As trained supervisors, Hammarlund and Oscarsson have met many of the students at the Royal College of Music on their entry to the music therapy profession. I was curious to hear about their thoughts and experiences regarding topics such as the role of the supervisor, the role of music, the group format, and the development of a professional identity. In this interview the emphasis is on presenting their reflections rather than giving an academic analysis, hoping this can act as a contribution to the knowledge and discussion about supervision amongst music therapists.

SUPERVISION IS A CONCEPT REQUIRING CLARIFICATION

Similar to music therapy itself, the word *supervision* has almost as many interpretations as it has practitioners. The word may be synonymous to monitoring and control as well as to guidance and coaching. With its roots in psychoanalysis, supervision rests on the tradition of internship to acquire professional competence. This could imply that the supervisor is seen as an unquestionable expert or even guru, as well as a questioning colleague and travelling companion along the professional road (Handal 2007; Skovholt & Rönnestad 1995).

The Swedish word for supervision, "handledning" (guidance by hand), is used in both clinical and academic settings – e.g. for guiding PhD students through their dissertation work; this may seem to add further confusion. A relatively new concept is coaching which may be seen as a comparative concept. Coaching originates from sports training but today occurs both within public and private professions of all sectors (Skagen 2004).

Even though supervision has increasingly come to be used as a way to develop professional competencies, this does not mean that there is always a clearly defined purpose. In a study in the

field of pedagogy, Aberg (2009) suggested the aim of supervision is often unclear. She identified, however, three main objectives that could also apply to other professions. One purpose was to support the development of the overall activity at a workplace – e.g. to implement a new method. Another function was to establish a psychological support for employees in order to prevent burnout. The third objective was professional development where the aspect of voluntary participation and free choice of subject was a predominant factor (Aberg 2009).

Both Oscarsson and Hammarlund point out the importance of clarifying the purpose of supervision to students at an early stage. Hammarlund wishes to emphasise the students' learning processes and the pedagogical task of the supervisor. She addresses certain issues that need to be considered when meeting the music therapy students.

I.H.: It is important to make an inventory of the concept from the start. Today many students have a certain picture of supervision from their experiences in other contexts such as healthcare institutions, schools or in social services. Many expect mostly methodological advice and it can be necessary to sort this out in order to create a process of development. Through this process they will learn the difference between method-oriented and process-oriented supervision.

As a clinician Oscarsson considers the development of therapeutic craftsmanship and therapeutic thinking as the most important part of the training programme.

S.O.: It is not only about putting facts into the head of a student, or learning a method, but integrating music, theory and practice into a whole. Just as in therapy, supervision is a place, a laboratory, where it is allowed to consider alternative options of which some can be kept and used while others are not useful at the moment.

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

The training programme in Stockholm has a broad humanistic and psychodynamic approach with a focus on communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen 2008). It aims at integrating musical and therapeutic competences as well as the use of music for health promotion and therapy (EMTC 2015a).

I.H.: The use of supervision in a training programme helps to introduce the student to the philosophy and direction of the education. It is mainly an intersubjective, relational learning process within agreed professional frames, a space for explorative learning focussed on mutual emotional processes and integrating useful theoretical tools for understanding these experiences.

Oscarsson, emphasises the important of balance between methodology and building on the students' own resources.

S.O.: The student must learn to become independent, it is important not to give too much methodology as it will make the students accustomed to being fed, rather than promoting their own creativity. Music and therapy need to be connected to psychology and psychopathology, but the ability to reflect on one's personal feelings and at the same time keep a cognitive link to theory is crucial. As a therapist you need to be able to both feel and think at the same time in order to find out the needs of the patient.

An important function within a training programme is to successively introduce concepts connected to the profession. Hammarlund considers the concept of parallel process to be useful from the very beginning.

I.H.: Parallel process means the recognition that the relationship between the client and the therapist often is re-enacted between the supervisee and the supervisor in the supervision process. Improvisation, movement and artwork can often be especially useful tools to experience, become aware of, and understand the many layers of interpersonal emotional processes that the music therapy student, the client and the supervisor are involved in.

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL TOOLBOX

The student is required to integrate both musical and therapeutic competencies. Hammarlund and Oscarsson outline this progression further:

I.H.: As a supervisor it is important to highlight what works here and now, as well as developing a sense of timing, and the ability or confidence to wait and see.

S.O.: As a student you often have high expectations and ambitions. You wish to 'cure the world', but putting the goal too high can make you

lose sight of the person you meet as a therapist. Too much focus on being correct can make an unexperienced therapist see the patient as an object rather than a person. Being a music therapist means to use oneself as a tool with the ability to listen, have patience, wait and tolerate. Containment, transference and counter-transference are important concepts to become aware of and to explore. How to perceive and comprehend a patient is not just a matter of psychopathology, it also depends on personal experiences of the therapist. In order to offer change the therapist must have the capability to try the perspectives of the client. Supervision in the training programme is very often about making the student aware of those little, important things that happen on a daily basis. This includes helping the students to discover, acknowledge and explore their own resources, musically and as a human with the ability to meet others.

I.H.: Inner resources are something that cannot be taught, they must be discovered and experienced through actions and reflections.

THE ROLE OF MUSIC

Literature regarding music therapy supervision not only describes music as a metaphor and symbol, but also how music can be helpful in order to become aware of implicit motives. The possibilities to illuminate transference, countertransference and parallel processes are also explored and discussed. Some examples of authors who discuss such topics are Ahonen-Eerikainen (2002), Forinash (2001), Lahad (2000), Odell-Miller (2009), and Pedersen (2013, 2015). Hammarlund reflects on her experiences of how to explain the role of music:

I.H.: All those new concepts have importance for the supervision process in the same way as it has significance for the therapy. We obtain tools and concepts to describe these phenomena, which can make them clearer. When I first attended courses in music therapy in London in the early 1980s, we learned about psychoanalytical theory through Alvin and Priestley (Wigram, Nygaard-Pedersen & Bonde 2004) in combination with Winnicott's concept about playing and reality (Winnicott 1971) and the importance of understanding the intuitive and interactional aspects in music therapy. Today modern research has given us the concept of 'communicative musicality' (Malloch & Trevarthen 2008) and intersubjectivity (Stern 2010). As a supervisor you need to be familiar with the different perspectives and try to find out what can

be a helpful tool for the student with which to understand music therapy components.

Music is often perceived on an implicit level and cannot always be verbally expressed. The students need to train their ability to alternate between the explicit and implicit levels. Musical communication and interaction, especially improvisation, is an important tool in supervising music therapists and promotes a process of awareness of intersubjectivity experienced through music.

Oscarsson develops this argument further by pointing at how students acquire practice in how to describe, or 'communicate' the client to the members of the group. This can include both presenting the client's music, songs, recorded improvisations etc. as well as music played by the students to express their own experience of a situation or a client. The student then has the opportunity to process his or her own way of using music and to perceive music through bodily experiences as well as cognitive and symbolic means.

S.O.: Being able to stay in a symbolic, emotional and bodily perception of music is very helpful when processing countertransference and parallel processes. This way, the emotional and musical material from the therapist can be brought back to the therapy situation with new meaning and energy. With the help of music, parallel processes can be turned into a therapeutic tool and I feel that this is unique in music therapy. This also stresses the importance of making the student aware of his or her personal relationship to music. In my opinion this is essential for a music therapist, and implies that becoming a music therapist is not only about adding a method or a technique to already existing theories or professions.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND SPECIAL QUALITIES OF GROUP SUPERVISION?

While individual supervision was a standard approach in psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic training in Sweden, this eventually changed to an orientation towards groups (Boalt Boëthius & Ögren 2010). Initially, the group format in supervision may have been implemented for economic purposes. However, professionals are now becoming aware of the special qualities of group supervision that can enhance the learning process of the supervisee. Yet this requires the supervisor to have the group process in mind and therefore be mindful

of more challenges (Boalt Boëthius & Ögren 2010; Hawkins & Shoheit 1989).

For music therapy students in Sweden, the group has always been the predominant format. The supervisee group is usually made up of four students in a way that is aiming at creating as much heterogeneity as possible concerning gender, experience and clinical fields. It is important to note that the term 'group supervision' is distinct from (individual) supervision in a group where the supervisor is focussed on only one person while the other group members are listening (Aberg 2009).

S.O.: In group supervision the members of the group are seen as equally valuable co-supervisors. This is one of the real strengths of group supervision, as it makes all members active. Each member has not only the possibility, but is also expected to contribute with verbal and musical reflections. Then, similar to how a client in therapy is free to choose the most beneficial way to make use of music, the student can decide for him/herself the relevance of different musical and verbal perspectives given by the peer supervisees. The possibility to be open to the different nuances and interpretations of music, as well as to a variety of musical traditions and styles given by the group is another benefit. In addition, group supervision in the training programme allows diversity in the sense that you learn from the different clinical assignments represented by the members of the group. It is not possible for a student to try all fields within the frame of the training programme, and in this way they gain clinical knowledge even outside their own field of practice. In addition, the ability to work in a group is a part of the professional reality for many music therapists, and group supervision offers a possibility to understand and develop your group-self.

I.H.: The ability to work in a group is also a part of the professional reality for many music therapists, and raises questions connected to systemic thinking (Mogensen, Thorell Ekstrand & Löfmark 2010). In a training programme these aspects arise very early and should be worked through. The students often need to sort out the complications of integrating into an already existing team within the health system and at the same time be free to develop a personal identity as a music therapist. In the training programmes for supervisors it is important to develop specific knowledge about both individual and group supervision and why and when to choose which form. Music therapy training is *per se* a group learning process which is why it is important for a supervisor to have extensive practical and theoretical knowledge about group dynamics and systems.

Boalt Boëthius and Ögren (2012) discuss problems that may evolve in the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee within training programmes for psychotherapists. The most obvious example is when the supervisor has the authority to suspend a student from further training, but less extreme experiences can also cause the student to be cautious about what to expose. Hammarlund also stresses the concept of power within the learning process:

I.H. Individual supervision has a strong asymmetric power relation where the supervisee is more exposed to a master and student perspective, with the innate message to follow any advice from the supervisor. This can be very hard to resist for a student, preventing him or her to achieve trust in own reflections and decisions.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Hammarlund and Oscarsson both consider supervision as a tool to create professional identity that could be even more valuable than methodology. They also agree that creating a professional identity can sometimes be especially challenging for a music therapist. The wide professional field as well as the diverse ways to make use of music in health promoting or therapeutic settings makes it a subject that needs a lot of attention.

S.O.: You may walk into a situation where you are supposed to act as a singalong leader at an elderly care centre. If I once used to be a singalong leader – how can I now do it with the eyes of a music therapist? Instead of choosing one of the identities, I will instead hopefully be able to integrate my different professional identities under a 'music therapist umbrella'. It is about giving oneself the authority to think as a music therapist in different situations, in front of employers and colleagues.

I.H.: Music therapists need to find out in which aspects they are specialists in relation to other professions. This is where we talk about how a music therapist sees things – e.g. the importance of timing, repetition and attunement. How can singing a song be beneficial to another person? Sometimes I do not have the mandate to perform treatment, then it is necessary to find out how my competence can be best used by as many as possible in a special context. By choosing an approach in a given moment I will also learn how to set professional limits.

Ethical awareness is yet another aspect of becoming a professional and here Oscarsson refers to systemic theory and the way social work and work within healthcare can be divided into three domains: the domain of production, the domain of explanation and the domain of aesthetics (Lang, Little & Cronen 1990).

S.O.: In the domain of production you will find the well-established truths about science and social life. It is a linear process with a beginning and an end, laws and other instructions on how to behave belongs to this domain. The domain of explanation contains the therapeutic process where we try to create meaning and insight. Purpose and relations exists in this domain, together with discovery and a continuous co-creation of something new. This is a circular process. The domain of aesthetics stands as an umbrella over the first two and concerns respect for the patient and to create a space for change and development. It is important to be clear about rules and relations. The therapist has an ethical responsibility to make sure that both the therapist and the client know in which domain they are at each moment. To write a chart is production, to tell the client what we are going to write in the chart is ethics. In a similar way I mean that I as a supervisor am responsible for both student/therapist and the client. I have the responsibility to educate about laws such as confidentiality or if Child Protection Authorities should be contacted. Equally important is that the students learn about and follow those regulations that are applicable at their workplaces.

It is obvious that ethical awareness must be connected with the domain of explanation, and be highlighted through the whole training-supervision process. As a supervisor I must make sure that the student follows both ethical guidelines and general laws for healthcare.

Finally, Oscarsson adds another comment about the connection between ethics and aesthetics:

S.O.: Ethics versus aesthetics? In my view the ethical values reinforces the aesthetic. Furthermore, music itself offers aesthetical qualities that facilitate and reinforce the ethical – and aesthetical – values of the therapeutic relationship.

CONCLUSION

At the music therapy programme in Stockholm, supervision of students is an integrated part of the training course and learning process. The goal is

not only to integrate theory with clinical practice, but also to make use of each student's own pre-understanding.

The aim to build on the resources and capabilities of each student runs as a silver thread through the supervision of music therapy students in Stockholm and also motivates the small group format. The group members are encouraged to act as co-supervisors in order to promote their own thinking.

It is obvious that music plays an important part in the supervision of music therapists, and at the training programme in Stockholm it is being used both in active and receptive forms.

From this example I suggest that supervision plays an important part in the development of a professional identity. It is an area of knowledge that, similar to music therapy, is becoming increasingly explored. Research about supervision in general may contribute to the knowledge about music therapy supervision, but if well-trained music therapists require well-trained supervisors it means that it is a field that also needs to be specifically examined, discussed and further researched.

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Suggested citation:

Wallius, R. (2015). Supervision during music therapy training: An interview with two Swedish supervisors. *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education, Special Issue 7(1)*, 67-73.