



## Distance supervision: Research, findings, and considerations for art therapy

Penelope P. Orr, Ph.D., ATR-BC

Edinboro University, 215 Meadville Street, Edinboro, PA 16444, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**  
Art therapy  
Supervision  
Distance supervision  
Technology

### ABSTRACT

Art therapy internships are arguably one of the most important aspects in the training of future professionals in the field. Many counselors and educators have written about the need for greater links between universities and fieldwork placements (Howey, 1996; Imig & Switzer, 1996; Ishler, Edens, & Berry, 1996; Khamis, 2000; Perraton, 2000; Rahman et al., 2006). Most of the current research on providing distance supervision has been written in education and general counseling journals and usually are examining international uses of supervision (Rahman et al., 2006; Roland et al., 2006). In both education and counseling fields, as in art therapy, the use of the Internet to provide supervision has the similar issues of confidentiality of the clients or students, the ability to observe and provide feedback, and the need to see the student or beginning professional conducting sessions, and the sharing of the session/class products for assessment and review (Burak, 2008; Simpson, 2006; Szeftel et al., 2008). In the art therapy field, there have been presentations at national conferences on techniques for distance supervision, but there has yet to be a written research study on the topic. Therefore, this paper will investigate what has been researched and written about in the general counseling and education fields in order to provide a framework of understanding to work within.

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### Introduction

Upon graduating from an American Art Therapy approved program in 1991, my plan was to return to my home state of South Carolina, start an art therapy in the public schools program, and work on attaining my Art Therapy credentials. However, when I arrived in my home state I ran into a few hurdles. The most critical hurdle was that I was not able to find a registered art therapist within my area. The closest registered art therapist who could provide me with supervision was 3 h away and mostly worked in a medical setting with adults. I found that upon graduation, I did not have easy access to supervision and in particular did not have access to a supervisor who had actually worked with the clientele I was interested, or in the setting in which my population existed. I solved my problem by getting a job as an art therapist in a hospital and putting off my work in the school system for several years.

Since the early 1990s when I was starting out, art therapy has grown substantially, making the task of finding a qualified art therapy supervisor a little easier; however, gaining access to appropriate and quality supervision is still an issue in the following cases. First, each year art therapy programs around the United States graduate a number of international students who may wish to return to

their home countries upon graduation where art therapists are in short supply. These students may need continued support, supervision, and coaching when returning to their home countries. Second, the increased breadth of the possibilities for art therapy placements, populations, or procedures also has created sub-specialties in art therapy. There are art therapists who are well known for their use of phototherapy, work with veterans, trauma, crisis intervention and many other areas. Access to supervision with a person who has specialized knowledge of a particular population, media or placement may be needed and would provide more appropriate supervision. Third, Feinber (1993, p. 109) made the point that “the quality of clinical supervision varies tremendously in the field of art therapy, yet it is difficult to overstate the importance of good supervision in the development of skilled art therapists.” Good supervision is dependent on the quality of the skills of the supervisor, and should not be dependent upon simple proximity to the supervisee. And finally, as members of a helping profession, it is our obligation to make sure that we provide access to our services, including supervision, in a safe and ethical manner, but also in a manner that includes all persons and reduces unintentional barriers. We need to find solutions to address the barriers to quality supervision that exist today.

As a person who specializes in the use of technology in art therapy, it seemed logical to me that current advances in online meeting capabilities would make it possible for art therapy supervision to occur at a distance in a simple, barrier-free way. However, as a person who looks at using technology in a confidential manner in a

E-mail address: [porr@edinboro.edu](mailto:porr@edinboro.edu).

creative field, I was unsure about how this would work and what issues were involved. As a result, I started to research the literature on what has already been accomplished in art therapy and related fields so that I could develop a protocol of best practices for developing an initial trial distance supervision with some of my art education students, to be followed later by a trial with recently graduated art therapists.

This paper will investigate what has been researched and written about in the general counseling and education fields in order to provide a framework for understanding potential distance supervision issues and benefits for the field of art therapy. Technological applications are rapidly evolving as a near-normative vehicle for a variety of medical and psychological interventions. These applications are gaining acceptance through more widespread usage, rules, regulations, and reimbursement mechanisms. We are beginning to acknowledge and incorporate telehealth and distance applications into policy and procedure. As an example, changes in reimbursement codes, e.g., CPT code 0074T, by the American Medical Association (Kraus, Zack, & Stricker, 2004) in the U.S. now allow for billing of certain online consultations. Ethical and professional issues when using the Internet in counseling are addressed by regulatory bodies such as NBCC (2009) and ACA (2005) and the ATCB (2009), which shows the viability of distance communications where confidentiality is necessary and people are working across traditional borders. Also the Center for Credentialing and Education, the newest credentialing arm of the NBCC, has established a Distanced Credentialed Counselor certification (CCE, 2009). This credential was developed to ensure standardization of online and distance counseling practices as well as to assure the public that counselors who use distance technologies adhere to a specialized set of ethical and practice codes. As solutions to the issues surrounding the transmission of information via the Internet (whether in counseling or as a part of supervision) is refined, the potential and need for distance supervision of internships and practica will grow in importance.

Art therapy internships are arguably one of the most important aspects in the training of future professionals in the field. Many counselors and educators have written about the need for greater links between supervisors and fieldwork placements (Howey, 1996; Imig & Switzer, 1996; Ishler et al., 1996; Khamis, 2000; Perraton, 2000; Rahman et al., 2006). During art therapy fieldwork, students and new professionals begin to combine the theory and content knowledge that they have learned in their art therapy classes with hands-on practice working with clients. Students need feedback on counseling techniques and interventions, processing of sessions and artwork, and evaluation of assessment techniques and results.

Research has shown that supervision has the strongest instructional impact when it occurs early and often during the fieldwork experience (Zahorik, 1988). However, supervisors are often limited in the timing and frequency of in-person supervision because of distance and scheduling issues, which reduces the impact of that supervision (Casey, 1994) as well as the above-mentioned list of potential barriers.

Most of the current research on providing distance supervision has been written in education and general counseling journals (Rahim et al., 2006; Roland, Jones, & Birmingham, 2006). In both the education and counseling fields, the use of the Internet to provide supervision imposes similar problems of confidentiality of the clients or students, the ability to observe and provide feedback, the need to see the student or beginning professional conducting sessions, and the sharing of the session/class products for assessment and review (Burrak, 2008; Simpson, 2006; Szeftel et al., 2008). In the art therapy field, there have been presentations at national conferences on techniques for distance supervision, but there has yet to be a written research study on the topic.

## Literature review

### *Distance supervision in education*

In the education field, supervision is used to help train pre-service teachers. The goal of this type of supervision is to help students gain an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses by providing feedback of observations of students in the teaching environment. It is also to help students gain an understanding of their interaction style with their own students, review lesson plans for compliance with education standards for the location in which each student is working, and to help them make connections between theory and practice. Supervision in this field allows students and supervisors the opportunity to review taught classes, to discuss what worked well and what didn't, and to help with planning the next class. Each supervisor is also given the opportunity to assess the competence of each student prior to graduation to make sure that no one who may possibly cause harm gets a teaching certificate.

Ideally, a student teacher will have two supervisors. One supervisor will be a field teacher who works at the site where the student is completing his or her student teaching, and one supervisor works for the university or other body that is granting the teaching credential. The university supervisor visits the site where the student teacher is working several times during the period they are placed there to observe and meet with the student and the field teacher supervisor. However, there are many instances in which this ideal set-up for the student teaching experience and supervision is not possible due to circumstance, environment, resources, and distance. As a result, distance supervision of student teachers has been happening for many years, and the education field is grappling with the same issues as the counseling fields on how to provide quality distance supervision ethically and professionally.

Simpson (2006) compiled a review of attempts by universities internationally to meet the challenges of training teachers in environments that were not conducive to a campus or central training environment. She focused primarily on the difficulties of conducting and supervising the field experiences of student teachers.

“Field experience is a core element in an initial or pre-service teacher education programme. It allows students to enact and reflect on their developing philosophies of teaching and is the “testing ground” for theory/practice links. Educational theorists and programme planners in distance delivered teacher education programmes acknowledge the centrality of field experience. Yet for distance education students, that experience is often minimized because of administrative costs and a range of supervision factors.” (Simpson, 2006, p. 241)

Simpson acknowledged that at the time of her review, the information on distance education for the field experience aspect of teacher training was sparse. She was able to identify and review 12 programs in New Zealand, Australia, Zimbabwe, North America, and England whose creators had written about providing supervision for distant field experiences. In these instances, supervision was handled through training in-field teachers to complete the supervision, placing student teachers at one school to provide supervision to each other in addition to the teachers at that site, or using online chat environments to provide three-way discussions among the university supervisor, the student teacher, and the field teacher.

Her findings from this review were that distance supervision for student teachers is needed throughout the world; that universities have developed micro- and macrosolutions to meet this need; and that these practices are still developing. She stressed that when developing such programs, educators need to remember to blend

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