



Multicultural issues encountered in the supervision of music therapy internships in the United States and Canada

Laurel Young, MMT, MTA*

Temple University, 2001 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122, United States

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which multicultural issues are being addressed in music therapy internships in the United States and Canada. Internships are pre-professional, supervised clinical training programs required for certification or accreditation as a music therapist. Music therapy internship supervisors ($N = 104$) completed an online survey on demographics, multicultural training and experiences, cross-cultural issues encountered in internship supervision, and the extent to which multicultural issues are addressed with interns. Analysis of the data revealed that although the majority of supervisors had supervised interns from diverse cultural backgrounds, many had little or no formalized training in multicultural music therapy. It was also found that multicultural issues were not being consistently addressed within the context of music therapy internship supervision. Implications for supervisor training, music therapy internship supervision practices, and further research are discussed.

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Introduction

As cultural diversity in the United States and Canada continues to grow, music therapists are working with an increasing number of clients whose worldviews, cultural values, and experiences may be markedly different from their own. The same holds true for music therapy supervisors who supervise interns from a variety of cultural backgrounds who are in turn working with diverse clients. Some of these interns may be international students, who upon completion of their training return to their home countries to practice (Brotons et al., 1997). The myriad of multicultural issues involved in supervisory relationships can be complex and challenging for all concerned. It is ultimately the supervisor's responsibility to strive to create a productive working alliance with interns so that they develop the necessary clinical and professional skills. An essential part of this process is identifying and openly addressing multicultural issues that may arise within both supervisor-supervisee and client-therapist relationships. A review of the music therapy literature revealed that very little is known about multicultural issues in supervision. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which these issues are being addressed in music therapy internship programs in the United States and Canada.

Related literature

Although the literature often focuses on specific cultural groups that experience diminished power and privilege, multiculturalism is actually an inclusive term that takes many significant reference groups into account, including those related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, and socioeconomic status. Sue and Sue (2003) state that "...an effective multicultural helper requires cultural competence...the ability to engage in actions or create conditions that maximize the optimal development of client and client systems" (p. 21). Components of cultural competence include: (a) the therapist's awareness of his or her own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations, etc.; (b) active efforts by the therapist to understand the worldviews (values, biases, assumptions, etc.) of culturally different clients; and (c) the therapist's ongoing development and practice of appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and skills when working with culturally different clients (Sue & Sue, 2003).

While the idea of utilizing music specific to a client's culture is not new to music therapy practice (Darrow & Molloy, 1998), the need for music therapy to be placed within a multicultural context was first introduced by Moreno (1988), who stressed not only the need for music therapists to have a basic working knowledge of world music genres, but also an understanding of the cultural implications of musical traditions. Other publications, including Bright (1993), Moreno (1995), Ruud (1998), Kenny and Stige (2002), Stige (2002), Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2004), and Shapiro (2005), have also addressed a variety of ethnomusicological matters relevant to

* 15 Gamble Avenue #201 Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4K 2H3.
Tel.: +1 416 421 7694/480 5841.

E-mail addresses: rlyoung@temple.edu, laurel.young@sunnybrook.ca.

music therapy. It is important to note however, that a multicultural approach to music therapy encompasses a vast array of cultural issues in addition to musical considerations.

As interest in multicultural issues began to increase, researchers began to gather relevant information about music therapy training and practice through surveys. [Topozada \(1995\)](#) examined the knowledge and attitudes of music therapists in the United States toward multicultural issues. Although results indicated overall support for cultural awareness in music therapy, the survey did not show how therapists integrated cultural knowledge into their sessions. Support was also indicated for multicultural training of students, but specific areas of need could not be identified as there was a lack of agreement among the respondents. Finally, statements utilized in the survey were somewhat leading, and respondents may have felt obligated to reply in a manner that was socially acceptable rather than fully truthful.

[Sloss \(1996\)](#) examined the nature of cross-cultural music therapy (i.e., wherein differences exist between the therapist's and clients' cultural backgrounds) in Canada. Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents considered cultural knowledge to be "important" or "very important" to their work as music therapists. Sixty-three and a half percent felt that their training in ethnic music was "not adequate." Also, 90% felt that an ethnic music course was "somewhat important" to "very important" for music therapy students. The strongest correlation was found between respondents who insisted on the need for a cross-cultural therapy course and an ethnic music course ($r = +.75$). It is interesting to note that the term "ethnic" is utilized in a manner that implies "multicultural" or "cross-cultural," indicating that some music therapists may not be differentiating among these terms, although each does have its own distinct meaning.

[Darrow and Molloy \(1998\)](#) looked at demographic and multicultural information gathered from professional and student music therapists practicing in culturally diverse areas of the United States. They also examined twenty-five randomly selected training programs. They found that multicultural education was primarily addressed through general education classes and electives rather than through music therapy coursework. Survey results indicated that 62% of respondents felt that coursework in multicultural music was either "very necessary" or "somewhat necessary." Only 13% felt that university training in multicultural issues was adequate, whereas 75% felt very familiar with multicultural music. Fifty percent felt that the use of multicultural music and knowledge of cultural differences were important in their own clinical work.

A survey conducted by [Valentino \(2006\)](#) assessed levels of cross-cultural empathy among music therapists in the United States and Australia. A significant relationship was found between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural empathy scores (i.e., those with cross-cultural training demonstrated higher levels of empathy). Degree level, country of residence, and years of clinical experience of respondents had no significant relationship to cross-cultural empathy scores. These results suggest that all music therapists have the potential to increase cross-cultural empathy if given the opportunity to receive cross-cultural training.

Multicultural issues in music therapy have also been addressed in position papers and books. [Bradt \(1997\)](#) published an article in which she described multicultural issues in counseling and music therapy from an ethical perspective. She identified a need for increased attention to multicultural practice in training programs and suggested that this could be done in conjunction with courses in ethics and ethnomusicology. In her book, *Ethical thinking in music therapy*, [Dileo \(2000\)](#) included a chapter on multicultural perspectives in which she made recommendations for education and training. These included the integration of multicultural issues into the music therapy undergraduate and graduate curricula, and providing students with opportunities to have practicum experiences

with diverse cultures. She also stressed the need for music therapy faculty and internship supervisors to be culturally aware and competent. [Brown \(2001\)](#) wrote an article in support of culturally centered music therapy practice and advocated for the inclusion of multicultural material in training programs. She suggested that this be achieved through the development of first order (ability to communicate in a culturally appropriate manner) and second order (appropriate therapeutic intervention in a cultural context) skills. [Yehuda \(2002\)](#) collected information on how music therapists cope and what they perceive when treating clients from different and/or foreign musical cultures. She proposed that seeking out subtle common features of human experiences and their relationship to music can help to overcome musical barriers in multicultural music therapy relationships. In his book, *Culture-centered music therapy* (2002), [Stige](#) encouraged music therapists to examine the cultural components of all aspects of practice, including procedures, relationships, theories, and therapeutic frameworks. He proposed that this would help to formulate new directions in the field and promote needed changes in how clinicians think about current practices. [Dos Santos \(2005\)](#) described how group music therapy in South Africa can be defined by the inherent cultural levels contained in a community music therapy model of practice (i.e., individual in context, group member, community member, member of society, and groups of societies, [Stige, 2002](#)) and stated that music therapists must broaden their understanding in terms of what music therapy is if utilizing this model. Finally, [Vaillancourt \(2007\)](#) made a case for utilizing the practice of multicultural music therapy as a creative approach to humanistic leadership and social justice. Overall, these publications have indicated a need for increased attention to multicultural issues in music therapy training and practice, but there is little evidence to suggest how or even if any of the issues raised are actually being addressed.

[Chase \(2003a\)](#) conducted a literature review regarding multicultural music therapy practices in the United States and Canada. She concluded that music therapy professionals express strong interest and have a high level of comfort in providing multicultural music therapy, but feel ill-prepared by their undergraduate training programs. There is no information to indicate how this "high level of comfort" was achieved. [Chase also published the *Multicultural music therapy handbook* \(2003b\)](#) which provides introductory, but nevertheless fundamental, information to assist music therapy educators in their instruction of cultural issues. She also suggested that it can be used by clinicians "as a means to enhance current practice" (p. 5).

Only two sources were found that focused exclusively on multicultural issues in music therapy supervision. [Estrella \(2001\)](#) analyzed the multicultural music therapy literature as it relates to the practice of clinical supervision in order to assist supervisors in understanding the development of professional cultural competencies, and to enable them to provide culturally sensitive supervision. Issues in multicultural training in counseling and music therapy education were also reviewed. Ultimately, [Estrella](#) concluded that while counseling has taken great strides in the area of multicultural supervision, music therapy lacks formal resources. She also stated that music therapy supervisors must assume responsibility for the cultural competence of interns because most music therapy programs do not provide extensive training in this area. [Kim \(2008\)](#) conducted a phenomenological study to better understand supervisees' experiences of being misunderstood and understood within the context of cross-cultural supervision (i.e., wherein differences exist between the supervisor's and supervisee's cultural backgrounds). Supervisees were interviewed, and essential themes from their experiences were extracted. Results indicated that current music therapy training does not provide enough multicultural education for supervisors, particularly with regard to cross-cultural music therapy supervision.

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