



Canvas of connection: An Expressive Therapies Continuum arts-based supervision approach

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ABSTRACT

The demand to cover extensive instructional material in art therapy supervision can affect the self-efficacy of a supervisee and supervisor. Co-creating and art-making in art therapy supervision can enhance the effectiveness, growth and depth of the supervisory relationship. We propose a novel art-based model of supervision rooted in the Expressive Therapies Continuum, which we have been using and teaching for the past several years. The supervisory approach involves mastering the Expressive Therapy Continuum model, creating artwork with the supervisee, exploring artistic preferences and aversions, and strengthening supervisory alliances. The Expressive Therapies Continuum supervision process begins with the development of a collaborative plan in which the supervisor and supervisee jointly establish goals to support professional growth. It continues with mastery of the Expressive Therapies Continuum model, including gaining an in-depth understanding of the media dimension variables and their likely impact on the therapeutic process. Finally, the model uses Expressive Therapist Self-Inquiry to support an examination of artistic preferences and aversions and their possible influences on the art therapy process and the development of professional identity. This article presents multiple practical examples of the Expressive Therapies Continuum supervisory model, including a case vignette that illustrates its application.

Introduction

Although the use of the arts in supervision may enhance students' learning experiences, it is not always included in supervision (Fish, 2008). In fact, there seems to be a division between art-based supervision and standard supervision (Fish, 2008; Gavron & Orkibi, 2021). Integrating art into supervision can be demanding because of the pressure to cover required instructional content and the need to understand how to engage with clients. However, we have found that the intentional use of art-making during supervision can encourage students to shift from thoughts of "what do I do?" to those of "how do I feel?" Focusing on emotion in supervision has significant effects on developing professional

identity and skills (Feldman et al., 2024; Follette & Batten, 2000). Art-making also can help student therapists better understand their clients' experiences in therapy and provide an avenue for self-reflexivity and cultural humility (Jackson, 2020). This article explores how the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) can structure an integrative model of supervision that incorporates the varied and effective uses of art-making in arts-based supervision, as well as the various roles and responsibilities of the supervisor in supporting the supervisee's professional growth.

The ETC is a theoretical framework for understanding information processing during image formation which was introduced by art therapists Sandra Kagin and Vija Lusebrink based on the integration of their

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combined experiences with the development of visual imagery and clients' experiences of material interaction (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978). Lusebrink and later Lusebrink and Hinz further explored the application of the model to explaining the neurological foundation of art therapy (Hinz & Lusebrink, 2024; Lusebrink & Hinz, 2020) and Hinz applied the model to life enrichment (Hinz, 2018). The model is relevant to all creative arts therapies (Lusebrink, 1991); however, it has been predominantly used with art therapy.

Individuals constantly take in and process information as they experience it. The ETC model suggests that the ways in which individuals process information through art-making mirror the ways in which they do so in life. As shown in Fig. 1, the ETC framework can help structure our thinking about how information processing occurs during clients' interactions with art-making and other creative arts experiences. It can occur predominantly throughout the body at the Kinesthetic/Sensory level, with awareness and use of muscle movement and sensory stimulation or soothing. Information processing occurs through perceptions of the external environment and internal emotional responses at the Perceptual/Affective level using formal artistic elements such as line, shape and color. The Cognitive/Symbolic level encompasses information processing that occurs through thoughts, either via logical, linear, and linguistically oriented thinking on the Cognitive side or through intuitive, holistic, and metaphorical thought on the Symbolic side. The Creative dimension, which vertically bisects the ETC diagram, represents the possibility of integrating and activating flow during art-making. The ETC is a systems model in which experience with one component influences adjacent components, and this systematic operation guides art therapy interventions (Lusebrink, 1991). Each ETC component has an emergent function which arises as a from this systemic influence; for example, when the sensory component is engaged and clients are immersed in the sensual aspects of materials, it is likely that emotion will be stimulated, and thus the Affective component is the emergent function (Hinz, 2020). This integrative model of supervision encourages supervisees to apply the principles of art-based discovery in their use of art. Art therapy trainees are encouraged to experience for themselves how one function arises from another because of their using diverse materials and processes in their creative endeavours. They experience the cognitively evocative effects of working with complex processes such as learning a new dance sequence or musical piece or the emotionally engaging effects of using unstructured processes such as improvisation (Lusebrink, 1991).

The proposed ETC supervision model is an active, art-based approach. When supervisees comprehend how to identify information processing strategies and systematic influences, the possibility of therapeutic entrainment, isomorphism, and resonance with clients increases (VanMeter & Hinz, 2024). In this approach, several factors intentionally used in ETC-based supervision, enhance art therapy practices.

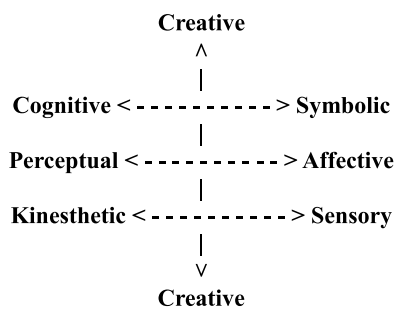


Fig. 1. The Expressive Therapies Continuum. The picture depicts the Expressive Therapies Continuum Diagram with its three levels (Cognitive/Symbolic; Perceptual/ Affective; Kinesthetic/Sensory) and the Creative Dimension.

The ETC supervisory approach

The ETC supervisory approach includes two major goals: first, to facilitate supervisees' mastery of the ETC model; and second, to use the ETC model to create and enhance the supervisory alliance through joint art-making with supervisees and exploring preferences and aversions at various ETC levels. The latter forms the basis of a safe, supportive, and constructive supervision process (Bordin, 1983). Inspired by the integrative supervision model of Bernard (1979), as shown in Table 1, three primary dimensions are highlighted in the ETC supervisory model: formulating a collaborative supervisory plan; understanding and creating art therapy interventions based on the Media Dimensions Variables (MDV); and supporting the artistic-supervisee identity, which can be revealed through work with the Expressive Therapist Self-Inquiry (Riccardi et al., 2025). These elements interact with supervisor roles, including mentor, educator, evaluator, and supporter.

The ETC supervisory approach has the advantage of viewing the supervisee through these multidimensional aspects, with a focus on being present with the client to enhance entrainment, isomorphism, and resonance. Bernard and Goodyear (2019) encouraged supervisors to vary their techniques with supervisees and to step out of their comfort zones to help supervisees see different facets of themselves. Moreover, Awais and Blausey (2021) recognized that supervisees' multiple professional and personal identities influence supervisory and therapeutic relationships. In this case, self-reflexivity through art-making becomes central to the supervision process, helping the supervisee understand the intersection of their identities and balance them. Through art-making, supervisors and supervisees can become aware of their creative processes in a learning environment that fosters growth and care.

The primary canvas: mastery of the ETC model

We must ensure that supervision boundaries are clearly defined so that supervisees feel safe when disclosing personal and professional concerns. However, there is a delicate balance in supervision between educational self-exploration and therapy (Follette & Batten, 2000). Focusing on supervisee mastery of the ETC model through art-making can help prevent the blurring of supervision into therapy. The ETC provides a framework for the supervisor to organize therapeutic assessments, goals, and interventions, and for the supervisee to gain insight through art-making. Moon (2002) stated that the fundamental aspects of being both an artist and an art therapist are rooted in the same core principles. Therefore, supervisors using the ETC framework fulfill various roles as mentors, navigating art modalities and models, encouraging their supervisees to do the same. As educators, they teach the ETC; as evaluators, they assess creative therapeutic knowledge and interventions; and as supporters, they encourage professional growth.

The images created under supervision mirror the supervisees' thoughts and feelings, allowing them to gain awareness of how they

Table 1
The ETC supervisory model.

FUNDAMENTALS ELEMENTS			
Mastering the ETC Model	Creating Artwork with Supervisees	Exploring Preferences and Aversions	Building the Supervisory Alliance
SUPERVISION DIMENSIONS			
Collaborative Supervisory Plan	Implementation of Art-Based Experiences based on the MDV	Development of the Artistic-therapist Supervisee Identity through Artmaking (ETSI)	
SUPERVISOR'S ROLES			
Mentor	Educator	Evaluator	Supporter
Navigating Art Modalities	Teaching the ETC	Assessing Art Therapeutic Knowledge	Supporting Creative Growth

Note. ETC = Expressive Therapies Continuum; MDV=Media Dimension Variables; ETSI (Expressive Therapist Self-Inquiry).

work and who they are. The ETC provides a framework for the supervisor to organize therapeutic assessments and interventions tailored to client needs, thereby influencing both the process and the outcome. This is also a significant framework for providing alternative media and methods to lay the groundwork for adjusting treatment plans and therapeutic objectives related to the various populations served. Mastery of the ETC model is demonstrated through supervisees' increasing ability to identify through assessment underused, over used or blocked ETC functions and suggest MDV most likely to activate the desired therapeutic results (Hinz, 2020). Creating art during supervision can help supervisees cultivate a sense of self-confidence by engaging with the images produced.

The shared canvas: creating artwork in tandem

By creating artwork with supervisees, supervisors model art-making as a method of attuning to the energy, thoughts, and emotions present in the session. Creating art together with a supervisee can be a way to regroup or recenter supervisory relationships. The Expressive Therapist Self-Inquiry (ETSI) can be used as part of a supervision framework to foster learning and self-awareness. The ETSI assessment form (available at: <https://imagesetc.ca/expressive-therapist-self-inquiry-for-self-care-and-community-care/?lang=en>) is a reflective questionnaire grounded in the ETC model, which assesses a holistic view of the individual and their artistic experience (Riccardi et al., 2025). Self-inquiry refers to a therapist's ongoing exploration of their feelings, attitudes, and reactions in relation to their work with clients. The ETSI requires the creation of artwork combined with reflexive self-inquiry, which becomes an internal representation of the therapeutic process. This type of self-inquiry also helps supervisees demonstrate their mastery of the ETC model in its application to themselves in supervision.

Reflecting on the art-making process during supervision supports self-awareness and humility. Therefore, it is recommended that the supervision dyad undertake the ETSI, allowing the pair to become aware of their preferences and aversions, as well as to recognize their creative experiences and potential personal biases. This kind of structured art process can support reflection and action on sensitive cultural or social topics, such as the management of power dynamics, and is crucial for repair when ruptures occur in either the supervisory or therapeutic alliance (Jackson, 2020; Riccardi et al., 2025). It is important for supervisors to gain a deep awareness of how they think, feel, and act in relation to their supervisees, as this can serve as a strong and individualized foundation for the supervisory alliance.

Supervisees can be encouraged to perform self-evaluation through art-making at various intervals to gauge their progress toward established supervisory goals. Through the lens of the ETC, it might be possible to determine whether there is over- or under-functioning of any ETC component that might influence students' work as art therapist trainees. Student evaluation through the arts can also encourage supervisees to take care of their physical, emotional, and mental health (Hinz, 2018). In addition, creating art can help student therapists explore appropriate professional boundaries and reinforce work-life balance (Hinz, 2018). Students can be encouraged to create art in response to evaluator feedback, which may be enhanced by the supervisor providing a strength-based image of the student. Finally, engaging in a regular art-making practice can serve as a preventive factor for art therapists by increasing feelings of well-being, life satisfaction, life enrichment, and happiness (Hinz, 2018; Jue, 2023).

Applying tools to the canvas: exploration of preferences and aversions

Art therapy supervisors can model both the maintenance of a personal artistic practice and the use of art for self-evaluation regarding how their preferences and aversions to materials and processes might influence art therapy (Phang, 2025; Riccardi et al., 2025). Guided expressive experiences can help supervisees address their personal

preferences and aversions. In addition, reflective art-making experiences during supervision can give supervisees the courage to participate in their own creative processes and engage with their art in ways that reveal their professional growth and development. In the ETC supervisory approach, supervisees are encouraged to explore the full range of artistic media and to refrain from offering client materials or processes that they have not fully experienced. They are encouraged to be aware that their aversion to processes, materials, and ways of interacting with them can unintentionally limit their clients' experiences in art therapy (Hinz, 2020).

An important aspect of ETC supervision is immersion in art materials and processes to teach the influence of MDV, including task structure, task complexity, and media properties (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978) on the therapeutic process. Task structure refers to the therapist instructing the client on artistic outcomes. High-task structure provides clear guidelines for art products, whereas low-task structure allows for greater artistic freedom. Task complexity refers to the number of steps required to complete a task. The greater the number of steps, the more likely it is that an artistic process will evoke cognition, as more information must be kept in working memory to perform the task. Low-task complexity entails fewer steps to be kept in mind and can lead to a more affective artistic process (VanMeter & Hinz, 2024). Finally, media properties describe the inherent nature of art materials, which range from fluid to resistive (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978). In general, fluid materials are more likely to evoke emotions, while resistive materials are more likely to engage cognition.

Supervisees can be encouraged to assess their preferred level of ETC functioning as they interact with various art media and create images to understand the effects of MDV. Through this embodied knowledge, supervisees are more likely to allow their clients to explore the use of diverse media, thus supporting the expression of inner and outer sensations (Hinz, 2020). Further, VanMeter and Hinz (2024) emphasized that adjusting the MDV when building interventions engages the Creative dimension. In addition, investigating artistic preferences and aversions provides valuable insight into the supervisee's capacity for humility, a foundational factor in the development of reflective practice (Jackson, 2020; Watkins et al., 2019). Recognizing biases and actively working to address them is a key component of cultural humility, which leads to stronger therapeutic relationships (Riccardi et al., 2023; Snir & Gavron, 2023).

Self-reflectivity in the context of art-making in supervision may lead to frustration with the chosen art materials, moments of tension with emerging skills, inner dialogue with evolving metaphors, meta-verbal communication, and engagement with the flow of creative expression. Thus, intentional self-reflexivity through art-making can support developing therapists by ensuring that they provide interventions based on client needs rather than their own reactions and potential biases (Gavron & Orkibi, 2021; Riccardi et al., 2025). Student therapists can feel the power of self-reflexivity as they create and discuss art-work in supervision sessions.

The parallel canvas: supervisory alliance

Art-making can enrich supervision and foster the development of supervisory alliances. Bernard (1979) provided an understanding of the mechanisms underlying the formation of client-therapist relational dynamics; specifically, these involve therapeutic goals, tasks, and bonds. Bordin (1983) extended this concept to describe supervisory alliances. Developing this perspective, Poon (2017) asserted that the properties of art materials are an essential part of the therapeutic alliance, providing support and containment. According to Poon (2017), art can support the well-being of both therapists and clients. Fig. 2 describes the supervisory alliance, inspired by Bordin's model (1983), which is founded on an evolving collaborative supervisory plan and established through art-based experiences (MDV) within and revealed by a structured parallel art-making process (ETSI).

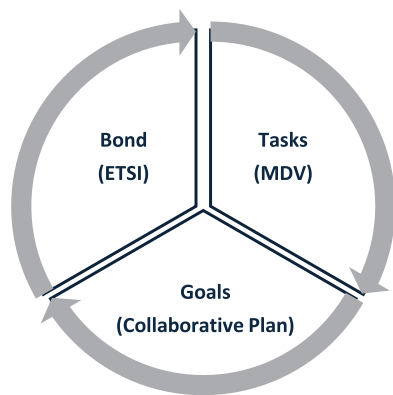


Fig. 2. Key components of supervisory alliance. The image depicts a circular form describing the key components of the supervisory alliance: Bond (ETSI), Tasks (MDV) and Goals (Collaborative Plan).

Bordin (1983) emphasized that the goals set during supervision primarily focus on the professional growth and development of supervisees concerning clinical competencies and overcoming challenges. Within the ETC framework, evaluations are conducted collaboratively and become part of the goals set for supervision. According to this model, the objectives of the supervisory plan focus on reaffirming the artistic-supervisee professional identity, meeting the requirements of the art therapy profession, improving the ability to care for clients, and developing the supervisees' field of expertise within a humble posture. Thus, through the exploration of art materials, processes, and products, supervisors and supervisees develop an agreement and a shared understanding by formulating a collaborative plan based on the goals established in supervision.

The same author stated that the tasks in supervision refer to the interventions chosen to achieve supervisory goals (Bordin, 1983). Consequently, we discuss with our supervisees which components of the ETC we are enacting through our instructions and which MDV are intentionally employed to enhance the therapeutic experience. Our rationale is to model and support students in learning and applying the ETC framework. Overall, we used structured experiences with beginners to promote a sense of safety and control. As students become familiar with us and the supervisory process, we offer more unstructured experiences to encourage investment in personal and emotional material (Hinz, 2020).

The therapeutic bond is characterized by trust and confidence in the supervisor's expertise within a safe environment. Therefore, the key elements of the bond in supervision are defined by the supervisor-supervisee relationship, art materials and processes, and art products, emphasizing the interconnectedness and dynamic interactions among these elements. The ETSI helps develop the artistic-therapist supervisee identity through art-making, where the dyad creates and reflects on their art-making processes (Riccardi et al., 2025). Within this framework, cultural humility involves recognizing that supervisors are not the sole experts. Instead, they value the lived experiences and insights of supervisees as they co-construct meaning (Kapitan, 2023). This approach fosters trust, encourages open dialogue, and leads to meaningful and sustainable outcomes for the supervisory dyad. However, despite our efforts to create a supportive supervisory bond, tensions can occur.

The torn canvas: ruptures in the supervisory alliance

Tension inherently exists in the supervisory relationship due to the different statuses and roles of the two parties (Cook et al., 2018). The intentional use of art-making with various ETC components can restore and strengthen communication between supervisors and supervisees, especially when opinions differ or conflicts arise.

Because time in supervision sessions is limited, the supervisor may not be able to grasp or notice all the essential information the supervisee has gathered, such as progress and issues in handling the case. Therefore, the collaborative model is vital. Visual communication regarding complicated case scenarios can occur through diagrams, tables, graphs, and charts, along with active brainstorming, to confirm concrete ideas and clarify vague concepts during the review process with clients. Research conducted by Lotfi et al. (2025) demonstrated that the use of collaborative concept maps effectively aided knowledge retention and facilitated the organization of procedures in clinical cases. Visual images can enhance the supervisee's organized understanding of the details involved in handling cases within a limited supervision timeframe. In addition, this type of intense exchange using the Cognitive component can provide comprehensive and creative advice that can be easily integrated into case management.

The advantage of verbal communication in supervision is that it is fast, directed toward problem-solving, and can accurately express ideas. However, words alone can fall short when an in-depth exploration of obscure issues is required or when issues are still developing. Thus, alternating between talking and drawing to cultivate unclear ideas and hidden issues by creating symbols can prevent premature judgments. The creation of symbols can aid in concretizing complex or interlocking ideas, gut feelings, or queries that are concealed at the unconscious level (Nan & Wong, 2020). Over time, the fragmented ideas contained in symbols may become comprehensible as a holistic view of a client's core problems and dilemmas.

Parallel to all other intimate relationships, supervisory relationships may not always be smooth (Nan et al., 2024). The supervisee may not share the same perspective as the supervisor and may even hold an opposing view. As the supervisor must assess and evaluate the supervisee, they may feel threatened if they hold an opinion that opposes the supervisor. The supervisee may choose to withhold their opinions, which will prevent the supervisor from adequately understanding the supervisee's concerns and limitations in analyzing clinical issues. This type of withdrawal posture in relation to rupture will eventually affect mutual trust (Riccardi et al., 2025). Distrust and misunderstandings may accumulate over time, leading to conflict.

Instilling Perceptual elements in a supervisory relationship can aid in representational diversity, or the ability to see something from another person's point of view (Hinz, 2018). When gazing at the same canvas, one person may focus on the structure of the painting, while another may be attracted to the vibrant colors or the strength of the lines. Both views are valid and can be recognized and respected. Potash et al. (2018) proposed a relational art viewing process that can ease tension, enhance mutual understanding, and avoid conflict. Perceptual processes can enhance respect for diverse views and emphasize the agency of supervisees.

Respect for different views does not always develop; distrust and discontent over various issues can intensify the conflict between the supervisor and supervisee due to a lack of understanding or recognition of each other's emotions (Nan et al., 2024). Thus, it is essential to move away from the "how to do" of a case to contemplate the emotions evoked regarding how to handle them (Feldman et al., 2024; Follette & Batten, 2000). The supervisor should engage in empathetic listening to empower the supervisee, strengthen the supervisory relationship, and facilitate the release of attachment to one's opinions. Emphasizing supervisee agency is important, as the supervisee is going through an important transition period and is under a great deal of pressure as a developing therapist. Thus, emotional communication is a vital component of the ETC supervision model.

The following case illustrates how the ETC Supervisory Model emphasizes the enhancement of the supervisee's competencies and the supervisory alliance, both of which are central objectives within the supervision process. Additionally, it demonstrates the integration of art-based supervision offering explicit guidelines for the professional development of the supervisee.

The dynamic canvas: moving from theory to practice

Nev was a 39-year-old Métis student studying art therapy from Manitoba. Nev's first internship involved conducting group art therapy in elementary schools, with ten supervision sessions held via video-conferencing platform. The case vignette was derived from an authentic supervision process. Informed consent and confidentiality were ensured, and a pseudonym was used to protect the participant's identity. Case study received approval from the University UQAT IRB Committee (No: 2024-01).

The preliminary sketch: co-creating the supervisory alliance

In the ETC supervisory model, the supervisory alliance was established at the onset of the process as a foundational element, emphasizing a strength-based approach (Hinz, 2020). Without a strong supervisory alliance, effective and successful supervision is not possible (Watkins, 2014). In addition, establishing supervision goals is a key component of building the supervisory alliance (Bordin, 1983; Watkins, 2014). Thus, using visual arts for reflection, Nev identified the objectives she aimed to achieve during supervision. We included the following objectives after discussing them with the supervisor during the first session: 1. Expanding competence in treatment documentation related to the therapeutic ETC framework in art therapy; 2. boosting confidence in identifying and applying assessments and interventions; and 3. developing clinical skills to support participants while facilitating the group art therapy process.

To achieve these goals, a collaborative supervisory plan was created and implemented. The initial phase of the supervisory plan required structure and enlisted the Perceptual and Cognitive components of the ETC (Hinz, 2020), as considerable hands-on instruction was essential. The beginning phase aimed to establish a therapeutic framework, which included demonstrating necessary documentation to build a clear and ethical communication with the parents, school personnel, and students. This involved reviewing consent forms, the art therapy goals, themes, and interventions for the groups, configuring the new online platform, and creating online note-taking templates.

Mounting the frame: exploring preferences and aversions

During the first phase, the supervisor and Nev completed the ETSI to support the supervisee in assessing and understanding how her personal preferences and aversions for materials and processes might affect clients and supervision. This self-examination illuminated personal artistic aptitudes and potential biases. Therefore, the dyad discovered they shared similar preferences and aversions. Specifically, the perceptual and cognitive tasks associated with administrative work and technology were their common aversions, and the Affective and Symbolic components were their mutual preferences. This was evident in the first art responses following the initial supervision session. Nev created an interminable to-do list and expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and disheartened, while the supervisor similarly conveyed her overwhelming sense of apprehension with the new online platform (see Figs. 3 and 4). The images that were created highlighted the Perceptual component, characterized by the integration of lines, patterns, and forms into the artworks. The emphasis on words and patterns demonstrated the Cognitive component. Additionally, resistive materials, like colored pencils and pens, were also utilized and appeared to aid both supervisee and supervisor in sustaining a sense of agency during new challenges. The latter enhanced their ability to perceive another's point of view, consequently increasing empathic understanding of the dyad. Hinz (2020) described that such materials can promote feelings of confidence and mastery.

The supervisor's congruence in preferences and aversions with the supervisee helped cultivate a therapeutic bond (Riccardi et al., 2025), allowing the supervisor to effectively empathize with Nev. Nevertheless,



Fig. 3. Nev's first response art: never ending to-do list. The image depicts the drawing of on a never ending to-do list created with blue and red pen.



Fig. 4. Supervisor's first response art: overwhelmed by Jane the online platform. The image depicts two characters made of crayons. One character has a head that is shaped like a computer screen labeled "Hi I'm Jane." The other character, smaller and leaning backwards, has long hair and responds with "OMG!! Hi Jane..." in a speech bubble. The background has wavy, colorful lines.

having similar aversions, the supervisor recognized her responsibilities as a mentor and role model, which necessitated ensuring the continuation of a constructive problem-solving approach to the technical challenges of revising and moving paper-based supervision documents to an online system. As an educator, the supervisor addressed the disequilibrium between aversive Cognitive and Perceptual components and Nev's preferred Symbolic and Affective components. Stepping into the role of the supporter, the supervisor validated Nev's feelings of frustration and encouraged art-making for self-care. Brien et al. (2025) emphasized the need for supervisors to integrate their personal experience to adequately support their supervisee; Nev's supervisor also participated in art-making and her own supervisory process.

After the first three sessions, a rupture occurred in the supervisory alliance, and Nev contemplated pausing her internship when the

supervisor indicated that Nev needed to revise her clinical notes. Bordin (1983) stated that in the supervisory context, the therapeutic bond is also influenced by the fact that the supervisee is evaluated throughout the process. The rupture Nev experienced was accompanied by profound frustration regarding the task at hand. The resolution transpired when the supervisor validated Nev's feelings and acknowledged her shared responsibility for not supporting Nev earlier in the note-writing process. The supervisor endorsing the evaluator's role opened a discussion about the rupture (Watkins et al., 2019) by using the metaphor of eating an elephant one bite at a time, breaking down the task at hand into small achievable steps, and assuring the supervisee of her unwavering support. The creation of a shared symbol supported Nev's confidence (Nan & Wong, 2020). As the weeks progressed, Nev reaped the rewards of her efforts, wrote client notes more effectively. The supervisor also became more proficient with the online clinical platform. Intentional self-reflexivity helped the supervisor ensure that the interventions were based on Nev's needs rather than the supervisor's biases (Gavron & Orkibi, 2021). For both parties, what initially manifested as aversions transformed into a sense of pride.

Setting the studio: theory into action

During the intermediate supervision sessions, Nev focused on her second and third goals: increasing confidence in assessment and interventions and deepening her clinical skills. Nev had a solid grasp of the ETC model (Hinz, 2020), as it was an integral part of her studies. She was now deepening her understanding by integrating theory into practice. Nev presented well-structured art therapy group programs. The interventions aligned with the model's principles were age-appropriate and well-paced. However, while assessing the groups, Nev discovered that many children had varying skill sets; some children had special needs, and their preferences and aversions differed. Nev's strengths were not limited to her diligent preparation of sessions; they also included her adaptability and willingness to adjust her approach to accommodate the group's present needs. With the supervisor's guidance, Nev explored how to tailor her interventions to better support the children in the group. She learned how to use the MDV (Hinz, 2020; Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978) to adapt task complexity when necessary, explored different media, from fluid to resistive, for the same intervention, and identified whether children needed structured or unstructured tasks. This facilitated movement along the levels of the ETC through the prescriptive use of art therapy materials and interventions (Graves-Alcorn & Kagin, 2017). Learning how to use the core principles of the MDV enabled Nev to adjust her interventions without having to develop a whole new program. Nev's strengths included her creativity while keeping the theoretical underpinnings and therapeutic goals in mind, balancing structure and flexibility required in a school context, and being attuned to the group's children.

In the response art after the 6th session, the dyad spontaneously used the same materials and symbolism, with dry pastel employed to depict flowers (see Figs. 5 and 6). Without the use of mediators, involvement became immediate and absorbing, helping the supervisor embody Nev's experience (Hinz, 2020). The supervisee created an image of a flower (see Fig. 5) that incorporated elements of the Franco-Manitoban flag and reflected the colors of the schools where she was completing her practicum. Materials that allow more fluidity prompted emotional responses (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978). Nev's gradual transformation evolved through sensory information (Lusebrink, 1991). She wrote, "I enjoyed the feeling of the pastel on the paper. I added wheat growing and reaching out like a vine." This art piece shows me where I'm starting and how I'm growing." The supervisee incorporated more colors, reflecting greater emotional engagement. She created a progressive representation, corroborating Hinz, (2020) assertion that the implementation of progressive symbols promotes positive psychological growth since they are building blocks towards future goals. The supervisor was attuned to Nev's progression, which is portrayed by the new image created (Fig. 6),



Fig. 5. Nev's second response art: flower of growth. The image depicts a symmetrical floral pattern design made of dry pastel. It includes colors such as deep red, yellow, and green. The design's center radiates outward with wavy strands of green and purple wheat.



Fig. 6. Supervisor's second response art: field of possibilities. A field of flowers and a blue sky are depicted using dry pastels. The flowers are pink, orange, yellow, and purple, with green stems and leaves.

titled *Field of Possibilities*, in which the Affective/Perceptual level is portrayed by impending healing elements of formal qualities of art materials in relation to perception and emotion (Lusebrink, 1991). The Symbolic component was also emphasized, which represented that everything is possible with perseverance and dedication.

During the final sessions, the supervisor and supervisee discussed the supervision journey, celebrating the milestones, and conducting an art-based assessment of her current strengths and challenges. Nev's difficulty in solidifying her professional identity as an art therapist was identified as an important challenge with the ETSI, which relates to the Supervision Dimension (see Table 1). While this is a common experience for student art therapists, Schubert et al. (2023) discussed that the development of professional identity is intertwined with personal identity and is a process that evolves throughout one's career. Cultivating a clear sense of professional self can enhance self-confidence and deepen personal fulfillment (Sun et al., 2025). Nev is a bright and talented art therapy student, possessing the creativity, perseverance, and rigor to bring her aspirations to life.

Creating meaning: a reflective experience

Art-making as a reflective experience between sessions allowed the dyad to process emotional or cognitive material that may arise in supervision. However, the dyad recognized that art in supervision was not created by the seventh session. To address this, Nev engaged in a reflective process exploring her core values, ethics, self-perception, social identity, experiences, skills, and future professional goals. The ETSI was used to offer a structured approach for examining the dyad's reactions to and feelings regarding art materials and processes (Hinz et al., 2022). The supervisor recognized that Nev was overwhelmed with clinical work, studies, and personal life—making it difficult to prioritize creative tasks in sessions. Thus, the dyad made a conscious decision to incorporate art-making into the remaining sessions. Therefore, during the session, Nev depicted an image (see Fig. 7) inspired by these reflections. Using black markers, she drew a flower at the center of the page symbolizing her core values, decorated with motifs inherited from her grandfather, a skilled woodworker who taught her craftsmanship. Radiating from the center were wave-like lines representing different facets of herself: as a mother, a nature lover, a Métis woman, an artist, and an art therapist, as well as her varied experiences working with groups and individuals. Nev described her identity as fluid and eclectic yet firmly rooted in her humanistic values. Witnessing Nev's creation process provided the supervisor with new insight into how she engages in her professional work. According to Hinz (2020), "... the way in which clients interact with materials to create art products helps art therapists describe aspects of clients' personality characteristics" (p. 29). Nev interacted with assurance and confidence while selecting materials, and her lines were intentional and bold. Creating art during the session allowed for the transformation of clinical exchanges into a life-learning situation (Gavron & Orkibi, 2021).

Her image and creative process shifted toward the Cognitive/Symbolic level, as well as the Creative dimension serving as an integrative function (Lusebrink, 1991). As Hinz (2020) stated, symbols are often unconscious, mysterious, and intuitive. Nev mentioned that the flower at the center of her creation was a recurring symbol in her artwork, despite not fully understand its meaning. She knew, however, that it is an important symbol representing her relationship with her grandfather. The cognitive information processing enabled Nev to explain the meaning of her creation in great depth and transpose the information to her future goals as an art therapist. The Creative dimension reflected the beginning of a feeling of wholeness for Nev, bringing her closer to her authentic self by expressing her dreams related to her professional identity. Gavron and Orkibi (2021) suggested that the art-based experiences in a supervision course brought their students' artistic identity to



Fig. 7. Nev's work during the end of the sessions exploring her professional identity. This picture depicts a black ink drawing of an abstract flowing design. The composition features swirling and curved lines that vary in thickness radiating from a central point which is a flower.

a new level by introducing a deeper meaning and authenticity in the relationship.

In response to what Nev shared, the supervisor created an image (see Fig. 8), during the session, of a warm, inviting house that symbolized a space where individuals and groups can experience art therapy. Humanistic and eco-art therapy principles inspired the image (Gulbe et al., 2025), which features a van to represent travel, exploration, and new adventures. The supervisor envisioned a vibrant art therapy center where Nev could merge her entrepreneurial spirit and her work with groups and individuals, stay connected to the land, and nurture her artistic pursuits. When the supervisor showed Nev the image, she remarked that the supervisor's house resembled her own home, surrounded by nature, and recalled having previously envisioned a traveling van providing art therapy services. At the end of the 10th session, Nev shared that her journey of exploring her professional identity is ongoing, but she felt she had established a stronger and more promising foundation. In continuation of the example discussed previously, the next section presents a summary and explores the limitations of the proposed model.

Summary and implications

In summary, after the ten supervision sessions, Nev showed competence in treatment documentation related to the therapeutic ETC framework. She demonstrated confidence in conducting assessments and interventions. She was also able to develop clinical skills while



Fig. 8. Supervisor's work during the session responding to what Nev shared concerning her professional identity. The picture depicts a house labeled "Casa Nev Art-Therapy Space" created with a combination of drawings and embellishments. The house is outlined with small, shiny beads, with a pathway leading up to it. Neighboring the house are trees, clouds, a vehicle and a fire pit which is surrounded by logs drawn with markers.

facilitating the group art therapy process. The supervisor and supervisee during the different phases of supervision functioned on the same levels of the ETC, which supported a mutual understanding and strengthened the alliance. During the process, the supervisor referred to the ETC Supervision Model to ensure that the fundamental elements, supervision dimensions, and supervisor roles were adequately addressed, aiming to provide an in-depth and comprehensive supervision experience. As with the components and levels of the ETC, supervisors also have preferences and aversions related to certain aspects of the supervisory model; therefore, it is valuable to continually assess what has been deeply explored and what may have been overlooked or set aside. Incorporating art in the sessions deepened the supervisory alliance, as both supervisee and supervisor revealed more of themselves in imagery-initiated conversations that might not have occurred otherwise. This significant positive change in the relationship is hypothesized to be a byproduct of parallel art-making as it contributed to providing a more supportive holding space (Poon, 2017) for the Affective component to safely emerge in the alliance.

In our experience, the proposed model has many benefits but it also has limitations. Students and new graduates who need extra guidance could express concern that art-making and focusing on feelings detract from learning necessary skills. The supervisor must be firm in their commitment to the model so as not to be drawn into the “what do I do” question but keep focused on “how does it feel?” The model necessitates competence in the ETC and in multiple art media, which may lengthen training. Working with professionals in other fields may be hindered by unclear roles and limited awareness of each other's cultures and viewpoints. It is advisable to approach these situations with openness and humility. We acknowledge the limitations of adopting a new model that is not yet supported by research and, we hope that future studies on the ETC will consider the importance of using a supervisory framework that allows the co-construction of learning. The use of the multifaceted approach described in this article requires a rigorous examination of suppositions and biases, and these considerations promote understanding of the clinical and supervisory impact of art-based interventions.

Conclusion

The ETC Supervisory Model is a framework for arts-based supervision rooted in mastery of the ETC and its application through use of the MDV. It supports both supervisor and supervisee in their professional development and growth by providing a structured and flexible framework grounded in a strong arts-based supervisory alliance. Through collaborative art-making exploring artistic preferences and aversions and engaging in art-based self-inquiry (ETSI), supervisees enhance their clinical skills, gain authentic self-awareness and develop deeper insight into their personal and professional identities. The model emphasizes balancing educational mastery with emotional reflection and art-making, ensuring supervision remains both supportive and ethically grounded as well as aligned with art therapy practices. The proposed model advances supervisee development by integrating art-based practices within the supervisory framework, thereby establishing a safe and encouraging setting conducive to professional growth. The supervisor tailors their approach to address the specific training requirements of each trainee. Unlike traditional supervision methods, the ETC supervisory model emphasises collaborative planning and gives considerable attention to the supervisee's artistic identity, fostered through collective art-making and supervisory interactions.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Nan Joshua Kin-man: Writing – original draft, Validation. **Kathy Gotshall:** Writing – review & editing. **Lisa D. Hinz:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Conceptualization. **Gabrielle Gingras:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources. **Riccardi Maria:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original

draft, Visualization, Project administration, Conceptualization.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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