

TRAINEES' INTRAPSYCHIC ATTUNEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY TRAINING

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Abstract

Effective psychotherapy process neither relies solely on techniques employed, nor therapeutic alliance. Various, independently occurring, intrapsychic processes may significantly contribute to a therapist's attunement capacity. Attunement, with the perspective ranging from affective areas to the field of relational needs, goes beyond empathy. Such connections require therapists' emotional equilibrium and self-soothing capacities, that may be governed by emotional intelligence (EQ). By mechanisms within epigenetic interplay, and with an individual engagement in self-growth, activities intended on EQ increase may offer to expand their own „window of tolerance“. Psychotherapy educational programs represent an example of how emotional competencies may increase due to training requests, and frequent exposure to intensive self-growth processes, that go beyond acquiring necessary skills focused on the client. The aim of this paper is to, from a theoretical perspective, discuss the role of emotional intelligence in the intrapsychic attunement of trainees in the process of psychotherapy training.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, attunement, training, psychotherapy.

1. Introduction

In order to provide a solid basis of psychological healing capacity and consistent interpersonal contact within the psychotherapy process, demands of therapeutic attunement go beyond empathy; by enabling dedicated involvement in respectful inquiry and full presence in a way that will function in accordance with current developmental functioning and relationship needs of the client (Erskine, 1998). From the client's perspective, perceived feelings of connection with the therapist, encouragement of new relational experience, development of trust and safety mediated by therapist's acceptance, and empathic attunement (as the most important categories) were shown as significant contributors to a healing therapeutic relationship (Modic & Žvelc, 2015).

Within two interdependent categories of questions in modern psychotherapy, in order to produce better psychotherapeutic outcomes, one provides a more dynamic focus by referring to „how to be in therapy?“ than „how to do therapy?“; with a widening framework of what is considered as attunement throughout its multidimensional fields and integrations, as well as integrating the psychology of two individuals dimension, rather than only one. Beyond integrative psychotherapy methods of inquiry, attunement, and involvement, that support the relational method (e.g. formulating a relationship in which client expression is enabled, and in which new experiences are provided), it is also worth mentioning intrapsychic method (e.g. focus on functions of intrapsychic features of stability, identity, integrity and continuity functions within the client), that according to Erskine & Trautmann (1996) demand peculiar emphasis for consideration in psychotherapy.

Self-soothing capacity (e.g. a key competence in the emotional discomfort and strong affect management and regulation), is recognized as a recursive of relational and intrapsychic processes (Wright, 2009). Self-soothing involves the ability of an individual to, while expressing values, principles, or goals, maintain an emotional presence, remain nonreactive and engaged in emotionally charged circumstances, without an expectation that other individuals change, and without being turned off track or confounded by anxious reactions or disapproving (Wright, 2009). Capacity for self-soothing and emotional equilibrium may connect emotional intelligence as a mediative role within a psychotherapeutic framework. The paper aims to discuss the role of

emotional intelligence in the intrapsychic attunement of educants in the process of psychotherapy training, from the theoretical perspective.

2. Emotional Intelligence

“Emotions are our greatest friends and at times our worst enemies.”

Greenberg, 2012

In contemporary science, it is known that emotions are shown as human functioning adaptive components, and are not secondary to cognition; however, neither avoidance nor overregulation is equal to health, nor control of emotion is always wise (Greenberg, 2012). By various research models and definitions, emotional intelligence continuously arouses scientific interest for exploration, as in the interplay between inherited and acquired, with various epigenetic processes, and plays a major role in emotional regulation.

According to Kocijan Hercigonja (2020), the first school of learning emotional intelligence are early relationships within the family setting, depending on caregivers developmental experiences, beliefs, and cultural features; hence, psychotherapy that takes into account emotional intelligence may help clients to identify own uncounscious resistance, become aware of own needs and needs of others with respect and without neglection to own ones; considering the fact that initial step is to focus on the quest of improving the emotional competence of educants. Emotional intelligence refers to the knowledge of an individual toward own processes and other people, in specific environmental circumstances, of how they process, perceive, manage emotions, and facilitate thinking (Georgieva & Miloshev, 2020). Furthermore, this set of emotional skills contributes to the development and improvement of own's understanding and relationships, by accurate feelings selection and unconscious mechanisms, while contacting with others (i.e. emotional perception, evaluation, expression, understanding, cognization, and regulation) (Kocijan Hercigonja, 2020). Five domains of emotional intelligence (i.e. self-awareness and control, regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills) by Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso (2004) are explained in Table 1, as presented in a study of Parveen & Shafiq (2014).

Table 1

Explanation of emotional intelligence domains

Domain	Sub-Domain	Description
Self-Awareness	Emotional Awareness	The ability to recognize an emotion as it „happens“ is the key of EQ.
		The ability to recognize his/her own emotions and their effects.
Self-Regulation	Self-Confidence	Sureness about one's self- worth and capabilities.
	Self-Control	Managing disruptive impulses.
Regulation	Trustworthiness	Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity.
	Conscientiousness	Taking responsibility for your own performance.
	Innovation	Being open to new ideas.
	Adaptability	Handling change with flexibility.
Motivation	Achievement	To motivate oneself for any achievement requires clear goal.
	Drive	Individual constant striving to improve or to meet a standard for excellence.
	Commitment	Aligning with the goals of the group or organization.
	Initiative	Readying oneself to act on opportunities.
	Optimism	Pursuing goals persistently despite obstacles and setbacks.
Empathy	-	Individual's ability to recognize how people feel is important to his/her success and career development.
Social skills	-	„People skills“ are even more important now because one must possess a high EQ to better understand, empathize and negotiate with others in a global economy.

Considering the broad implications of emotional intelligence competencies, a study by Fauth & Williams (2005) educants in-session self-awareness levels were generally helpful rather than hindering from the perspective of educant and student-client. Over the context of psychotherapy training, an educant is passing the process of discovering and framing the sense of self, and own boundaries in realistic terms, while developing regulatory interpersonal mechanisms and maintaining all-encompassing emotional interactions, leading to overall alternations in relational skills and self-concept (Tilkidzhieva et al., 2019).

Known expressed educants motivators refer to desires to understand and help others; however, Barnett (2007) highlighted that educants often have minimum awareness of desires origins, whereas study showed that themes of narcissistic needs and early loss were quite common, hence there is high desirability of emphasizing of personal therapy for conducting effective and safe

therapy. A study by Beatty (2012), while exploring the main motivations of educants, refers to the desire for further education, positive experiences in personal therapy, personal development, altruism, interest in the subject, and desire for a career change. The vital training element is personal therapy as perceived from the perspective of educants (Hester, 2014).

The relevance of the empathy component may also be viewed in terms of physiological concordance and somatic underpinnings while confirming psychotherapeutic training's importance in clinical interaction management (Messina et al., 2013). In addition, Cooper et al. (2020) highlighted associations of mindfulness with some empathy aspects. Improvement and refining of educants' social skills are also relevant points within training, where a study by Schöttke et al. (2017) underscored therapists' and therapists-in-training interpersonal skills relevance, considering superior outcomes of trainees with positively evaluated interpersonal behaviours.

Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey (2016) added reasoning areas to a four-branch model of emotional intelligence, which refers to perceiving emotion (e.g. identifying emotions in alignment with own's feelings, thoughts, and physical states), facilitating thought using emotion (e.g. generate emotions as fostering memory and judgment), understanding emotions (e.g. label emotions and recognize their relations), and managing emotions (e.g. maintain openness to pleasant and unpleasant feelings). Any interpersonal communication has as a centre recognizing other individual emotions; however, especially in the psychotherapy process, it is essential for psychotherapists to identify and work with clients' emotional expressions in an accurate manner (Greenberg & Safran, 1989).

Therapeutic alliance and beneficial psychotherapeutic outcomes, among other sources, may originate from psychotherapists' emotional and empathetic competencies, by highlighting that for most psychotherapeutic directions and forms, an essential facet is working with the emotions of the client (Döllinger et al., 2023). By assisting clients to become aware and manage the emotions involved, counsellors and psychotherapists may provide healthier emotion addressing as well as integrating emotions in the experiencing framework to clients as valuable service (Daly, 2010).

3. Emotional Intelligence and psychotherapeutic education

Inevitably, we as human beings possess the feature of flexibility. Due to socialization demands, with divergent requests in different developmental milestones, our identity may experience various definitions, quests, and challenges. Especially, when we are referring to individuals in psychotherapeutic training, one's dedication to persistent initiation to focus on lifelong learning and self-growth undoubtedly leads to experiences of changing patterns in this longitudinal journey.

Psychotherapy is a quite peculiar pathway, eager to widen horizons way far from a comfort zone and ensure that the client benefits from such an approach. As in training, educants may come up with the cognization that having a psychotherapist role requires mindful awareness of processes at various levels at the same time.

A study by Stoajnovska Jo & Mancheva (2018) showed that, during the educational process of psychotherapy, emotional intelligence changed, referring to an increased ability to manage and regulate emotions after frequent attendance for one year in an educational group. While evaluating emotional intelligence by the effect of counselling training, a study by Pearson & Weinberg (2017) showed that emotional intelligence increased in the learning experiences offered by counselling training, unrelated to age and life experiences quantity.

Rieck & Callahan (2013) highlighted that emotional intelligence may facilitate healthy positive client change, is an important therapist factor, and may serve precious application in training programs; especially referring to results that showed improvement of emotional intelligence in a relatively short period of time with long- term stable effects. Moreover, emotional intelligence abilities may be enhanced and group training sessions are recommended aimed at emotions identifying, understanding, using, expressing, and managing; via lectures, homework, group discussions, and role plays (Nelis et al., 2009; Rieck & Callahan, 2013).

In the exploration of emotional intelligence among eastern and western (i.e. Thai and American) counsellor trainees, results showed associations of greater empathy and training length in both groups, whereas western trainees showed greater empathy, although in emotional intelligence no

difference was found among groups (Young Kaelber & Schwartz, 2014). Ashraf, Hameed, & Safdar (2022) spotlighted focus that trainees having high emotional intelligence experience less burnout (client-related and personal burnout), and perceive lower levels of pressure sensed due to training.

Psychotherapeutic interplay is enriched via both verbal and nonverbal social exchange channels in intricately interwoven influence within psychotherapeutic encounters, possibly providing potential difficulty for psychotherapists especially those in education, to identify, reflect, as well as experience clients' emotions, with various origins (e.g. empathic competencies, reflective functioning, mentalizing) (Döllinger et al., 2023). Psychotherapists' accuracy to detect and comprehend nonverbal displays provides relevant information regarding client affective states (Greenberg & Safran, 1989).

Beyond assessing positive therapist characteristics (e.g. reflective abilities, empathy, ability to repair ruptures in alliance), Döllinger et al. (2023) highlight the relevance of Emotion recognition accuracy (ERA) training within psychotherapeutic education, especially in individuals low in emotion recognition, and considering that it is doubtful whether psychotherapy education leads to ERA improvements, which is an essential part of various competencies within emotional intelligence, which may be observed as successful empathy prerequisite. Moreover, mentioned study showed that psychotherapist educants have superior ERA than the control group (e.g. better at detecting micro-expressions, emotions in multiple modalities, positive and negative valence, low and high arousal).

In a study by Daly (2010) exploring whether psychotherapeutic education may influence emotional intelligence, results showed that therapists in their final education year manifested higher global trait EQ scores than a control group, indicating that emotional intelligence developed throughout training while focusing on optimism, empathy, emotional expression; however, not in sub trait areas of emotion perception, regulation, and management.

To reach intrapsychic attunement, education requests are obtaining self-awareness focus and emotional development of educants, as involving sensing own feelings, tuning into feelings of others and capacity to convey that these feelings have been perceived in an accurate fashion

(Daly, 2010). The findings of Perez Diaz (2021) also point out the importance of emotional intelligence in psychotherapy as a therapist trait, due to the role of emotional intelligence in predicting variations of interpersonal relationships and overall outcome.

Considering the specific client needs, eclecticism could be perceived as an essential outlook in therapy practice, as well as the concept of integration indicating intentional and theoretically coherent most functional facets as reaching goals of psychological treatment (Pearson, 2012). From this context, coping with various adversities, development, and fostering resilience and EQ through education and support, showed the potential to enhance clinical outcomes in beneficiaries of mental health services (Edward & Warelow, 2005), and is compatible with integrative principles and eclecticism. The therapist's characteristic of empathy, as a facet of EQ, has been found as one of the most significant factors affecting psychotherapy outcomes across various approaches (Feinstein, Heiman, & Yager, 2015).

4. Discussion and conclusion

It is a complex challenge to be a psychotherapist, whereas psychotherapeutic training is even more compounded undertaking (Mahoney, 1998), due to most salient impact on shaping process of which kind of therapist educants will become (Orlinsky et al., 2023). Although relational skills and personal characteristics represent core facets of psychotherapeutic engagement, little is known in the psychotherapeutic training context (Tilkidzhieva et al., 2019). Moreover, one of the paramount facets is theoretical orientation choice, while deciding on psychotherapeutic training, considering the influence on professional career and performance, as well as personal well-being (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Plchová et al., 2016).

From the perspective of a client, or the therapist, mistakes happen. In therapeutic work, they are not just inevitable, but necessary (Žvelc, 2008). According to Schattner, Tishby, & Wiseman (2017), a relevant contributor to alliance formation is the extent to which disagreements are negotiated and stated openly which may enable or disable the therapist's flexible adaptation in order to meet the client's relational patterns. With the famous relational integrative psychotherapy premise that healing is in the relationship (Erskine, 1998), we may use mistakes to navigate corrective relational and emotional experiences, learn more regarding relational

schemas and underlying relation processes, improve alliance, deepen external and internal contact of the client, as well as enable integration among split parts of self (Žvelc, 2008).

This is salient because by embracing mistakes that may occur within the process of inquiry, attunement, and involvement, we are opening gates of improvement, reparations of contact, and alliance enhancement. In addition, by awareness of how much emotional intelligence may be significant within the intrapsychic attunement, the question of how therapists may help in the client's own efforts may improve the therapeutic outcome. It is significant to recognize that psychotherapists may gain from the learning process, prior to acquiring the necessary skills focused on the client, the ability to understand their own emotional processes, improve emotional competencies, correct negative processes, and support the good ones, in order to understand system of emotional processes with others (Stojanovska Jo & Mancheva, 2018).

Trainees in various psychotherapy educational programs may notice that within fulfilling the program requirements and engaging in the process of their own competencies increase, frustration triggers may diminish in their importance, gaining control over external reactive dispositions, as well as gaining the higher capability to maintain relationship stability. In addition, engagement in own psychotherapeutic process may contribute to identification of current emotional state indicators in higher awareness.

The integrity of personal identity tends to be more coherent, as well as awareness of own „window of tolerance“, resulting in a more attuned perception of self-concept, healthier and more adaptive management of stressful circumstances, as well as a higher capability to face uncertainty in various levels of different relationship dynamics. In such an integrated journey, emotional competence improvement may serve as a primary outcome, where establishing contact with own self and understanding the enrichment of connectivity among stimuli and interoceptive sensations, serve in an attunement role not only for the therapist herself/himself but also tremendously in contact with clients.

While exploring commonalities and variations in psychotherapeutic education in international context, Orlinsky et al. (2023) highlighted most consistency on relationship-based experiential understanding and learning commitment focus in programs that were highly diverse, while

focusing on applicants self-awareness, empathy, and mental health, supplemented by intellectual activities. Considering the empathy capacities and enlargement of today's client population, there is a supreme need to integrate a cultural competency curriculum for training psychotherapists, as a need for tension dynamics among therapists diversity openness and therapist knowledge of clients' cultures, while understanding empathy as a resource of cultural differences transcendence (Dyche & Zayas, 2001).

The limitation found while exploring the literature for this paper was the scarce amount of studies investigating associations and changes of emotional intelligence over the course of psychotherapy training, available studies were more focused on respective counsellor training programs. Future endeavours in an exploration of EQ impact within intrapsychic attunement may focus salience on various aspects of self-concepts in a way to comprehend complex processes and dimensions of the formation of integrated self within the training process (Tilkidzhieva et al., 2019). Suggestions for further exploration would be an assessment of individual beliefs of psychotherapy trainees via qualitative research design in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a prior assessment of educants life events, and inclusion of a control group of psychologists not participating in psychotherapy training.

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