A Journey into Improvisation

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Learning Objectives

❖ Participants will be able to differentiate between improvisation and clinical improvisation
❖ Participants will define and demonstrate at least 3 improvisation techniques discussed
❖ Participants will define and demonstrate at least 2 basic styles of music on piano, guitar, or percussion
❖ Participants will identify at least 2 clinical applications of improvisation techniques and/or musical styles.

Improvisation is when the client makes up music while playing or singing, extemporaneously creating a melody, rhythm, song or instrumental piece

Ken Bruscia - Defining Music Therapy (2nd Ed)

Clinical Improvisation is the process whereby the therapist and client(s) improvise together for the purposes of therapeutic assessment, treatment and/or evaluation. In clinical improvisation, client and therapist relate to one another through the music, and the improvisation results in a musical product that varies in aesthetic, expressive and interpersonal significance.

Susan Gardstrom - Music Therapy Improvisation for Groups: Essential Leadership Competencies
### Side by Side

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvisation</th>
<th>Clinical Improvisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client AND Therapist</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relating to one another</td>
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<td>for a SPECIFIC purpose in the therapeutic process</td>
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<td>Aesthetic quality may vary</td>
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- Client creating music spontaneously

### Improv as a Model

**Model** - comprehensive approach to assessment, treatment, and evaluation which includes theoretical principles, clinical indications, and contraindications, goals, methodological guidelines and specifications, and the characteristic use of certain procedural sequences and techniques (Bruscia, 1998).

### Improv as a Method

**Method** - a particular type of music experience used for assessment, treatment, and/or evaluation (Bruscia, 1998)

### Improvisation Techniques

**Technique** - A single operation or interaction that a therapist uses to elicit an immediate reaction from the client or to shape the ongoing, immediate experience of the client (Bruscia, 1998).
Clinical Techniques

- Techniques of Empathy
  - Imitating
  - Synchronizing
  - Incorporating
  - Pacing

- Structuring Techniques
- Techniques of Intimacy
- Elicitation Techniques
- Redirection Techniques

-Procedural Techniques
- Emotional Exploration Techniques
- Referential Techniques
- Discussion Techniques
- # Dialoguing Techniques

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Techniques of Empathy

- Imitating: The therapist echoes or reproduces a client's response, after the responses has been presented. Must be used selectively and carefully (in a way that does not convey mimicry).
- Synchronizing: The therapist does what the client does as the client is doing it, timing the process so that their actions coincide.
- Incorporating: When improvising with the client, the therapist takes a rhythmic or melodic motif presented by the client and makes it a theme in his/her own improvisation.
Techniques of Empathy

- **Pacing**: The therapist matches the client’s energy level, by using the same intensity and speed of effort as the client.
- **Reflecting**: The therapist expresses the same moods or feelings that the client is expressing. The chief modalities of reflection are music, lyrics, verbalization, and movement.
- **Exaggerating**: The therapists exaggerates something that is distinctive or unique about the client or what the client is doing.

- **Matching**: Improvising music that is compatible or fits in with the client’s style of playing while maintaining the same tempo, dynamic, texture, quality and complexity of other musical elements.
- **Marking**: Momentarily synchronizing with the music the client(s).
- **Mirroring**: Doing exactly what the client is doing musically, expressively and through body language at the same time the client is doing it.

Structuring Techniques

- **Rhythmic Grounding**
- **Tonal Grounding**
- **Shaping**
- **Metric Grounding**

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- **Harmonic Grounding**
- **Accompanying**
- **Reframing**
Structuring Techniques

- **Metric Grounding**: The client initiates play without suggesting a meter. The therapist experiments to find a distinct meter.
- **Harmonic Grounding**: The client initiates a melodic ostinato or melodic play. Therapist explores harmonic grounds.
- **Accompanying**: Playing that supports the client’s musical expressions.
- **Reframing**: Changing the musical background or musical environment to change the orientation of the client’s playing.

Elicitation Techniques

- **Repeating**: The therapist presents the same rhythm or melody several times, either in succession or with brief interludes.
- **Modeling**: The therapist presents or demonstrates a target behavior, quality, feeling, trait, etc, for the client to emulate.
- **Making Spaces**: The therapist improvises and provides frequent spaces within the structure of the improvisation for the client to respond or inject sounds.
- **Interjecting**: The therapist remains silent and improvises only when the client pauses, giving the client primary responsibility for the improvisation while also suggesting options for continuation.
- **Extending**: In a musical context, the therapist lengthens the client’s phrase.
- **Completing**: The therapist answers or completes the musical question presented by the client.
### Redirection Techniques

- **Introducing Change**: The therapist attempts to redirect the client's improvising by introducing new thematic material, and starting a new section in the improvisation.

- **Differentiating**: When improvising with the client, the therapist distinguishes and separates the two parts by playing rhythms, melodies, timbres, dynamics, registers, textural configurations, etc. that are very different from the client's yet compatible.

- **Modulating**: When improvising with the client, the therapist gradually changes meters or keys.

- **Calming**: When improvising with the client, the therapist relaxes the music by keeping the dynamics and tempo within a moderate range, keeping the rhythm and melody simple and repetitive, and shaping the phrases downward to release tension.

- **Intervening**: The therapist interrupts or redirects fixations, perseverations, or stereotypes, which are manifested in the client's music, movement, actions or verbalizations.

- **Contrasting**: Playing that is "opposite" and differentiated with regard to musical elements.
Techniques of Intimacy

❖ Sharing Instruments: the therapist and client play the same instrument either independently or interdependently.

❖ Giving: The therapist presents the client with a gift, such as a musical performance, an instrument, a score, a flower, food, or personal belongings.

❖ Bonding: the therapist and client develop a musical theme that symbolizes or becomes associated with their relationship.

❖ Soliloquies: Improvising a song as if talking to one’s self about one’s partner or a group member.

Procedural Techniques

❖ Enabling
❖ Shifting
❖ Pausing
❖ Receding
❖ Experimenting
❖ Conducting

❖ Rehearsing
❖ Performing
❖ Playing Back
❖ Reporting
❖ Reacting
❖ Analogizing
Referential Techniques

❖ Pairing
❖ Symbolizing
❖ Recollecting
❖ Free Association

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Emotional Exploration Techniques

❖ Holding
❖ Doubling
❖ Contrasting
❖ Making Transitions
❖ Sequencing

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Discussion techniques

❖ Connecting
❖ Probing
❖ Clarifying
❖ Summarizing
❖ Feedback

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Part II: Musicianship
Fact or Fiction: Improvisation

- Improvisation is free and unstructured!

Fact or Fiction: Improvisation

- Improvisation is whatever you feel like playing.

Fact or Fiction: Improvisation

- Improvisation must always sound beautiful
Fact or Fiction: Improvisation

- Improvisation must ALWAYS be fresh and new.

Fact or Fiction: Improvisation

- You **must** be a music theory expert to improvise.

Fact or Fiction: Improvisation

- Improvisation cannot be taught.

10 elements of music

- Notes
- Articulation
- Technique
- Feel
- Dynamics
- Rhythms
- Phrasing
- Space
- Tone
- Listening
### Play rules

- Play Slowly
- No pedal
- No Stopping
- No Turning Back
- No Apologies
- No Fear
- Keep it Simple

### Wigram’s rules for improvising

- 1-note, 2-note, 3-note and 4 note improvisation
- Improvising on a single chord
- Improvising with just one hand
- Melody improvisation alone
- Simple rhythmic dialogue

### Styles

- Pentatonic Children’s Tune
- Pentatonic Blues
- Organum
- Spanish
- Middle Eastern
- Blues in a Key
- Rock N Roll - Contemporary Chord Progressions

### Pentatonic Children’s tune

- 5 note scale - F# G# A# C# D#
- Start with 2 chords: F# (I); C# (V)
- Left Hand - Rocking Bass F# - C#
- Right Hand -
  - Tone Clusters
  - Chunks
  - Single Notes
Pentatonic Children’s Tune

- Variations:
  - Bass Patterns:
    - Rocking/Swinging Bass: 1 - 5 - 6 - 5
    - Chunked Bass
    - Experiment - Less Notes? Full Range of Keyboard?

Pentatonic Children’s Tune

- Clinical Applications
  1. Allows for meeting a child in his/her own music.
  2. Great for those who naturally play black keys
  3. Goes with a variety of instrumental work - reed horns, percussion, piano, & vocal work
  4. Good for setting up rhythm to allow you to focus on client.

Pentatonic Blues

- Characteristics:
  - Three Chords: Eb (I) - Ab (IV) - Bb (V)
  - Syncopation
  - 12 bar pattern
    - | I | I | I | I | IV | IV | I | I | V | IV | I (V)
  - Add A-natural to black keys for dissonance
  - Beginning Bass Pattern - Broken Octaves

Pentatonic Blues

- Variations:
  - Bass Patterns:
    - 1 - 7 - use different rhythms
    - Syncopated; sustained
    - 1-5-1 Rolled - for more grounded music
    - 1-5-7
    - Blocked 1-5 to 7
Pentatonic Blues

Clinical Applications

1. Like Pentatonic Children’s Tune but sounds darker and more sophisticated.
2. Works well with pitched instruments and rhythm work
3. Can open door for more challenging rhythm work
4. Vocal Work
5. Songwriting

Organum

Characteristics:

- Based in “D” – like dorian mode
- D E F G A C (Bb)
- Add a Bb to keep a P5 (or P4) (instead of raising F to F#)
- Syllabic, Neumatic vs. Melismatic
- Use:
  - Parallel motion (up & down) or just portions
  - Stepwise motion (occasional leap to a 3rd)
  - Unmetered vs. Metered
- Left Hand - Drone on 5ths or Octaves
- Right Hand - 5ths; Single Note Melodies

Organum

Variations:

- Move from pulsing ostinato
- Play with the 5th in parallel motions - not necessarily moving at the same time
- Try Contrary motion - 5ths and 4ths

Organum

Clinical Applications

1. Vocal Music
2. Vocal work for those without pitch focus
3. Can be used to modulate the musical environment
4. Can be used with un-pitched rhythmic work
Spanish

- Characteristics:
  - Starting on D
    - Major Chords
      - Tonal center (D major), 1/2 step up (Eb major), 1 whole step up (F major)
    - Rhythmic: Use articulations on different beats.
    - Duple, Triple or Quadruple Meter
  - Left Hand: Root of Chord in Octaves
  - Right hand: Chords in Root Positions

- Variations:
  - Broken Chords in the Right Hand
  - Accents on different beats
  - Melodic Right Hand:
    - D Eb F G A Bb C
  - Overlapping Triads
  - Latin Tango Feel
    - Right Hand: Sustain
      - Chords in Root
    - Left Hand: 1-5-1-5-1

Clinical Applications

1. Vocal Work
2. Instrumental Work with nonpitched instruments (clave, castanets)
3. Movement - Dancing, Clapping, Foot Stomping
4. Use musical turn around to cue a desired response

Middle Eastern

- Characteristics:
  - Major Chord and a Minor Chord (1 whole step down)
  - Right Hand Scale Tones: D Eb F# G A (C)
    - Can Use Chords
  - Left Hand: Drone (Octaves of P5s)
  - Free Meter
Middle Eastern

Variations:
- Left Hand Variations:
  - Rhythmic ostinato
- Right Hand Variations:
  - Melismatic vs. Syllabic melodies

Clinical Applications
1. Vocal Work
2. Non-pitched Instruments
3. Transitions

Blues in a Key

Clinical Applications
- Major Keys: I - IV - V
- Blues Scale: 1 2 b3 3 5 6 b7
- Blue Notes; Syncopation; Dissonance; Surprises
- 12 Bar Pattern
  - I I I I IV IV I I I V IV I
- Major/Minor 7ths
- Ex: F Maj (G, Ab, A, C, D, Eb)

RH: Blues Scale: 1 2 b3 3 5 6 b7
LH: 1-5
- Continue to play scale but add some syncopation
- Then play just parts of the scale
Blues in a Key

Variations:
- Barrel House Blues Bass Pattern
- Walking Bass Line
- Play with Tempo

Clinical Applications
1. Songwriting
2. Non-pitched Percussion
3. Pitched Instruments
4. Vocal Work

Chord Progressions

Characteristics:
- Popular Chord Progressions:
  - I - IV - vi - V
  - I - V - IV
  - I - vi - IV - V
  - I - iii - ii - V
- Left Hand - Root in 8ves
- Right Hand - Chords

Variations:
- Triplet accompaniment (I - vi - IV - V)
- 50's Rock 'N Roll/Do Wop
- Ballad Styles (I - vi - IV - V)
- Arpeggios and Suspended Chords
- Up Tempos Pop Songs (I - V - vi - IV)
  - More Syncopation
  - Octave bass lines
Chord Progressions

- Clinical Applications
  1. Songwriting
  2. Vocal Work
  3. Recreative Experiences

Resources

- Josh Massicot - Functional piano for music therapists and music educators: An exploration of styles

Practicing!

- Create a Clinical Scenario
- Practice with your clients in mind
- Practice for yourself
- Find a practice buddy
“Play like a child with an air guitar... A child playing an air guitar never plays a wrong note.”