

HAKOMI THERAPY SUPERVISION VERBATIM

Edited by Sheela Lambert

Sheela Lambert is a social worker in New York City and has a holistic private practice combining Hakomi-style psychotherapy, nutrition and herbs. In this article she offers some valuable transcribing and editing of a supervision workshop led by Hakomi Trainers Jon Eisman and Dyrian Benz. The article serves as a glimpse into group, video tape supervision as well as providing insights into particular issues in therapy.

This article is composed of verbatim supervision commentary from a workshop with Hakomi trainers Jon Eisman and Dyrian Benz. It was transcribed from video-tape and then edited with a view to usefulness for a wider audience. In this workshop, therapists showed segments of video-taped therapy sessions and the trainers gave feedback and made suggestions. The material in this article consists solely of supervision commentary by the trainers and their discussions with the therapists. The therapy sessions themselves are not included (to protect the privacy of the clients) although references to the sessions are made. Clients' names are not mentioned unless they were a workshop member. The suggestions in this article are general enough that they can stand alone with minimal contextual reference. Please note that these suggestions can only be regarded as pieces of the puzzle and are not complete responses to the issues raised.

Jon: I have a model I use which I call the meaning/experience interface. I think of it like a fence. There's this fence between the two, or a river or something. Let's call it a river; it's a nicer image. There's a river between the two. And your job as therapist is shepherding on both sides of the river. But the river separates the herd and you have to keep crossing back and forth over the river in order to keep the whole herd together. Some are on this side, some are on that side. Okay?

So you tended in my estimation to stay on the meaning side of things with the meaning flock. You'd get some meaning and then instead of going back and grounding that in experience again, you'd get another thing about meaning. So you kind of stayed on one side of the river for a while instead of crossing back and forth all the time. And in the meantime the experience sheep wandered away.

I just feel like the whole process is smoother, it's more complete, you're less likely to get lost when you cross back and forth over that interface between meaning and experience. If I ask you for the meaning about something — like if you're crying — I say, "What's the sadness about?" — you tell me about it, "Well, I'm not sure it's worth being alive." The next thing I want to do is go right back to experience, right? — "Can you feel the part of you that doesn't want to be alive? How do you feel that right now?" And you get some experience from that. They say, "Yeah it's in my chest and there are these words in my head," and whatever experience they have, then I go for meaning with that again, "So, what's it like living in a world where your chest is tight and you don't want to live and you hear these voices?" You know that's meaning again. They give me that, I go back to experience.

Rosie: Sometimes I can stay more with feeling and I don't know why I didn't this time. But then again, I experienced this as not going away from feeling.

Jon: No, you're not afraid of feeling. My guess would be that it's a pressure inside of yourself to organize around intensity in a certain way, that you like to gather information to feel safe in yourself. — You smiled just now, so you recognized something. Whether it was what I said or not, what did you recognize?

Rosie: Maybe it does make me feel safe in myself. I can feel more grounded working with people.

Jon: So in a way, you're making the process serve you first, and then you're willing to serve the process. That's not bad, but let's not have it be covert. If it's something you need to have in order to feel effective as a therapist, state it. Like, "I can see there's

a lot of feeling here and I just want to get exactly clear about what you're talking about so that we can really work on it in a precise kind of way." I'd rather you'd said that, than that you kind of steer the process towards meaning a lot.

Rosie: So you're saying I should name my system and also acknowledge that there's a lot of feeling there.

Jon: Yeah, I think you can do both at the same time.

Dyrian: You see, the danger is that you probably think that's what she needs. If you don't name it you think that she needs to understand it, whereas if you recognize that it's your need to understand it, then you can let go of projecting it onto her.

Rosie: And you can just say that?

Dyrian: Yeah, naming it is better than just letting it run. Always.

Jon: I always use "we"; that solves it. "Let's really understand this, I want to really understand this so that we can work with the process better." Then the person doesn't feel like it's some lack in you that they need to satisfy. Otherwise you get this thing like, "I'm paying all this money, why are we taking care of your needs?" They don't necessarily know that this is a system that's happening.

Rosie: Well, it is really "we" because the only way that it can work is if we both have our needs met. It's like the unity principle.

Jon: Right, right. So that's a key thing. And that didn't happen in your family. Right? Your brothers were antagonistic. So you don't have that sense of working together on it.

Rosie: I guess I'm afraid of naming that I have a need, you know. Because...

Jon: You got mocked and teased and tortured for it.

Jim asked for help with accessing, engaging and conversing with the child.

Jon: I need to ask a question. Is your intention to be a Hakomi therapist, or work for the district attorney's office? (laughter) And I want an answer now buddy! (more laughter) Yeah. You're asking a lot of questions. Four questions in a row. Don't ask the kid so many questions. The kid starts feeling interrogated. It's like you're sitting in the principal's office, do you know what I mean? — "How old are you? Who's your home room teacher?"

Jim: I don't think she's quite in touch with her child yet.

Jon: I'm saying if you want to access the child more fully, don't ask so many questions. You can use more contact statements, make guesses about it, assume the child's present, that kind of stuff. Instead of saying "Do you feel younger now?" I would just state it. You're sensing that she feels younger, right? So make a statement about that. "So you're a little younger now, huh?" or "So there's another Joanna here now, huh?", "A younger part of you is here now", "Oh, good, I'm happy that you came!" Talk to the kid a little bit, okay? It's okay to ask some questions, and even those you can phrase in a way that the kid doesn't feel interrogated. Like, "I'm wondering how young you really are." That's a statement, but they're gonna answer that like it's a question, right?... "Oh, I'm about five." So if you want feedback about work-ing with the child, don't ask so many questions — okay?

Dyrian: Keep contacting her child world.

Jon: I'm gonna talk specifically about contact. You said, "It's a little bit touching to know you did it so good." Now, which part of Joanna do you think that addresses?

Jim: Yeah, it's definitely the adult part.

Jon: And she comes back and says "And then there's this older part of me that remembers how he kept it for years." So, whoever you're gonna talk to, they're gonna answer you, okay? I'm not saying what you did was wrong. She's in both the child and the adult, both are present very clearly. So you can talk to the adult and you can talk to the child, I'm not questioning your judgment about that. However, I think it was automatic on your part, I don't think you knew how to contact the child right there. If you want to talk to the child, talk to the child. If you want to talk to the adult, talk to the adult. And your language, your voice, your intention, the subject matter, what aspect of their experience you contact, those would all be determining factors in which way you go. So I wouldn't say to a child, "it's kind of touching to know how good you did it." I would say something like, "You really like the way you made it, huh?"; that would talk to the child. Or, "It's so exciting to make something that good, isn't it?" The child, then, is gonna answer me. Then, when I get into the flow of talking to the child, I stop thinking about who I want to talk to unless strategically that comes up. "Oh, I guess I better talk to the grown up part, he's in the way," or something. You need to train yourself that

you talk differently with different folks. The voice of the Magical Stranger is different than the voice of the therapist. And you have to shift roles, it's a choice you have to make about yourself. I would suggest that if it feels like unknown territory, like you don't quite know how to talk to kids, that you go hang out with kids a little bit; spend an afternoon a week at a day care center.

Rosie and Sheela: Come over to my house!

Jon: Babysit. Yeah, go over to their house and take the kids to the park for the afternoon. I would suggest that you start by watching the people who are good with kids, be with kids. Like go to the day care center and watch how those people work with kids. Or watch these guys with their own kids.

Rosie: Actually, Jim is very good with children.

Jon: Not when he's a therapist, though. See, Jim, you think being a therapist means you have to be grown up. And that's why you get confused about being wild and spontaneous. And the truth of the matter is that you haven't seen me act very mature the whole time I've been here, and I'm a pretty successful therapist! I believe that you'd be good with the child because I know that when your child and my child play, it's very easy for you.

Jim: I feel like my little kid is actually in one way really accessible to me. I feel like I can be a child really easily.

Jon: You don't trust that your child can be a good therapist. You've got this message that being grown up is different than...

Jim: Somehow I feel that to be a good therapist, my belief is, I have to be adult.

Jon: Yeah, right. This is not true. To be a good therapist you have to be yourself. And if part of yourself is your child part, then you have to include little Jimmy as the therapist.

Let your kid inform you about what is needed here. I'll tell you about an experiment I did at the Heidelberg Advanced Training last year. This woman had the same thing as you, very in touch with her child but there was no permission to have faith that the child had any contribution except for making a mess. So I had her work with somebody else, somebody else was the therapist. Say you, me and Dyrian worked. Dyrian was working on me and you'd be little Jimmy and whenever you had something you knew about you'd whisper in Dyrian's ear "Forget about all that stuff; he's really sad," whatever you

picked up. Or "This is boring, let's play," it could be anything at all, didn't have to be Hakomi, just whatever little Jimmy wanted to say and Dyrian would take that in and use that as part of the intervention. He might agree with it or disagree with it but he made an effort to include it somehow, just to test out whether Jimmy's input was right.

When Concetta presented her piece she said, "My intention was to keep Gunilla in present experience and to monitor mindfulness both in herself and in me."

Jon: You did real well. The expectation is when they open the chute and you come out on the bucking bronco that there's just one horse. She keeps sending more horses out there. So you have to keep jumping onto different horses. That's tough. She keeps surprising you, "Oh, there's another horse." Every time you start to settle in with something she comes up with another voice. She's got a little commune in there that's meeting.

I like your use of contact. You're not asking her questions; whatever she's throwing at you, you're just naming it. I think you could name the process that she's in as well as contacting the momentary experience in content. So I would just say to her, "You talk to yourself, huh?" or, "When one voice comes up, another voice comes up." So you start to talk about how she's organizing, contacting how she's organizing and not just what's being organized. I think that's the best way to get back in control of the process. If you're contacting the process then you have this container that all of her running around can fit in. If you try to keep up with each part as it runs around you'll get out of breath.

I think that, like you say, you wanted to try and keep her in present experience. She's keeping herself in present experience very well. She starts to say something and notices her present experience is, "Oh, here's another voice." So she's very good at doing that. She's also leaving you out of the process. So you have to get back in control of the process by having a container for all of that stuff. To me that would be naming what she's doing. "So there's a whole committee meeting going on," right? or, "Every time one voice comes up there's another voice that wants to comment." It may be getting her to start working with that by suggesting things like, "Why don't we take our time and see if we can get a list of all the Gunillas that want to talk right now." So something like that, then she's working for you a little bit. It becomes a little more balanced there. At the same time, that's really what she's coming for in therapy. Does this make sense? It's not like you were doing anything wrong there. It's required that you jump in

or crank up in some way or shift over. You can't just rely on, "I'll make contact statements you've got to manage the process."

Dyrian: We're talking about the shift that has to happen at some point, from following to including leading. It usually comes with picking an access route, but that's the kind of shift that he's talking about. Following long enough, staying with the pieces of the puzzle long enough until you begin to have some idea of what kind of picture this is. Even if you just know it's an abstract painting or if it's gonna be a landscape, but some sense of the bigger picture and then that gives you the power to steer a little, to bring in some of your own pieces.

Jon on sensitive/withdrawn issues

Jon: I would phrase to yourself the question, "Do I feel I can shape the world the way I want it, or not? Do I have power to create the world?" That's what I'd ask you to consider. I see that as a classic sensitive withdrawn issue, along with this, "Is it worth being alive?" Many times in birth processes with clients, with a person in the birth process, the only thing that allows them to come out — when they get in there and they don't want to come out? The only thing I've found that often will allow them to come out is telling them that they get to make up the rules. It's classic in the sensitive process that we think that there's a rule book out there and nobody gave us a copy. In fact, it turns out that the rules are constantly being made by whoever is having the experience. But we never got that message that we have the power to create things. We immediately got this message that the world is a certain way, it will impact on us and there's nothing we can do about it. Like, you can't make the noisy truck stop outside. There's nothing I can do about that. And we give up that sense of creativity. Actually, we withdraw into a world of creativity of some sort, and we create over here on the canvas or the piano or our notebook, but we don't have faith we could change the world. We don't feel like god, that we could create the world; the opposite of the psychopathic reaction. It's real essential to get that idea in terms of regaining your sense of balance, if you're in that process. That you start getting some kind of sense that "Yeah, I have some power over how the world is. I make up the rules here." And then it will feel like it's worth being here, being alive in this world.

Platt stated that she was working on therapeutic relationship and a hesitancy/control issue.

Platt: He closed his eyes real fast and I wanted him to notice what happened slowly, but I didn't correct that.

Dyrian: I'm not sure if this is part of your hesitancy, but it would have been perfectly alright to say "Let's do that again and let me be a little more specific about it, obviously I didn't quite tell you enough about it." Just re-set it up. You definitely can do that.

Jon: (joking) You're supposed to do that.

Dyrian: And you didn't. So let's go on to the next tape! (general laughter) Is that part of your hesitancy? No. Just kidding.

Platt: Is it?

Jon: I mean, I'm asking you. Of just stopping him and saying, "Oh stop, let me make that clear to you what I really meant. Open your eyes again."

Platt: I guess it is, yes. Because my intention was for him to notice that edge of what it was like between closed eyes and open eyes.

Jon: Which is a perfect edge to watch. So, yes, you can definitely interrupt and say, "Let's just do this again."

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Platt: Right here at this point he was talking about boundaries. I wondered whether that was something that we needed to, you know, where we needed to stop it. It seemed like a place that would have a lot of room to work at, that there would be boundary stuff there. But we only had half an hour, should we get into that?

Jon: That's what you're thinking at this point?

Platt: So I censored that impulse...

Jon: Wait, wait, wait. I want to hear more about your process. Like that comes up and you decide not to go for it?

Platt: Uh huh.

Jon: So how did that happen? There's an option and then there's the decision not to do it, and what's in between those?

Platt: Would it be sort of jarring to him to have me stop him in the middle of what he's saying; how would I do that without jarring him? I feel like I might be pouncing on something and it would be...

Dyrian: It would be kind of overdirecting him, because it juices you up, and how do you know it's really right for him.

Jon: Let me ask you this then. In your heart do you have the sense that yeah, that's it, that's what we should be working on, or is it just that it's available so you could do it?

Platt: It felt like a real issue. (looks over toward Jim)

Jon: You want confirmation from him now, huh? I don't want to hear from him, I want to hear from you.

Platt: It seemed like a very big issue, that in only half an hour it wouldn't be fair to bring it up.

Jon: Aside from that, cause that's...

Platt: - and then a little bit of - if it did come up could I handle it?

Jon: I think the first thing that needs to happen for you is that you have to agree with yourself that when you know something, you know something.

Platt: I don't have to check it from the outside.

Jon: Yeah, if you're sure about it then — I'm not saying it's not a good idea to check it with the outside, I always check with the client, for example, since they know more than I do. But what I see is that there's a way in which some part of you says, "The sky is blue," and another part of you says, "Nah, couldn't be, you couldn't possibly know that." And that feels like the most basic level here of hesitation that you have. You know something, and then you tell yourself, maybe I don't know something.

Platt: I don't know how to get out of it either.

Jon: You need to work on that. I'm guessing it's a childhood kind of thing and you need some way of having self-confirmation, so I'm a little hesitant to continue with us trying to confirm your opinion when I see that it's playing into the strategy.

I think you're doing fine there. It's a little like what we watched with Concetta this morning. When there's lots of different parts, you have to contact the process that's happening. So it's good, you said, "There's lots of different parts now." Here you see, in my opinion, Jim's character coming up a little bit. You make a contact statement and he pats you on the head and then continues on with what he's thinking about. He's not really that open to your input, so you'll have to work a little bit to make sure you're included in the system. Which means hesitating is the last thing that's going to work. I still think the most important thing is what we talked about before: trusting yourself.

David asked for tips on working with the child.

Dyrian: I just want to check with you Jon. The way that I, usually when I give the child a probe, I want to check and see if the child is available to respond to a probe. I guess talking to the child, I usually don't take the precautions so much. When I say a probe to the child, I would usually follow it up or precede it with something like, "Can I say something to you?" or "Is little (client's name) ready to hear that and give me a response?" I set it up directly like that. And I wanted to know, is that something you also do?

Jon: Yeah. I think it's definitely technically correct to do that, to establish the presence of the child. So if I was to say something like, "Could little so and so hear me?" that kind of thing. Usually I get a "yes" or a "no"; usually I get a "yes" actually.

One more thing as long as we're stopped. I would probably say, "I know you're a good girl" instead of "You're a good girl," because the child is looking for interpersonal contact, it's looking for something interpersonal. And the paradox is that the child is also very nondenominational. Like, any adult will do, but they want it to be personal as long as it's there, you know what I mean? It's not so much that it's David, right? It could be Rosie just as well, but if it's going to be one of you, you better be personal with the child and not just general. So if you're really trying to talk to the child, then I think it's better to give that kind of acknowledgement statement, "I know you're a good girl," and that makes the child trust you, in a way, like, "Oh, this guy knows." Right? They want to know that you know.

David: That's really useful because I'm used to trying to do probes the other way, where you depersonalize it.

Jon: Yeah, it's different. A regular probe at the accessing stage you do want to depersonalize it but with the child I go a little more personally, especially the very first thing I'm going to say to the child because I need to establish that I'm one of the good guys. See, she may have been told that she was a good girl, and then they beat her anyway. So just saying that might bring up stuff but it might bring up stuff about you too.

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Jon: Contact first and then ask questions. Or else you'll end up with Jim in the DA's office. Let me elaborate on that and why that's a good idea instead of the questions. You give a question, she's got to answer your question. You make a contact statement,

something like, "So things happen that tell you that you're not so good," and it invites her to tell you about those things and to go stay in the memory. You'll actually get more information by not asking the question, because you interrupt the relationship by asking the question. The contact statement maintains the relationship and invites her. You know, it's just like when you say to somebody, "You look pretty tired," they tell you all about what a rough day they've had, whereas if I say, "Are you tired?" they say, "No I'm okay, a little tired." It shuts things down. So you can really work more with the child by contacting her than grilling her.

Dyrian: And I think you saw how you lost the present, right then and there; when you asked the question she went into an explanation of the past.

Jon: It's going fine too. These are little fine tuners.

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Jon: You're jumping in to nourish too soon.

David: When you say I'm giving nourishment too soon, I'm, in that situation, very aware of the time, the need to bring something to closure and pressing for some transformation, for some new belief. That's what I was trying to do.

Jon: You're not going to get it that way. I don't think so.

David: I think I did pretty good.

Jon: I think what you did was pretty good and I think you also have much more opportunity to knock her socks off here. None of what I'm saying is saying that what you did was bad. I'm talking about efficiency and effectiveness. Let's make that clear. I think it's going fine. I'm sure she had a good session. I'm not worried about that.

David: I'm really curious, because part of me wants to go for the knock your socks off, the long touch-down pass type of thing and part of me is feeling that what I was doing here with her was very right. But I'm real curious. This is going to be new information, it's going to knock my socks off.

Jon: I think you're trying to knock her socks off. I think you try to change her with your little talk here.

David: That's true.

Jon: And I don't think the parts of her that have control over changing are fully available yet. I don't think she's fully in the child. She has the child there,

but she's also talking about the child. Everything you give her she's going to have to translate to another state of consciousness. It'll be much more powerful when you get her fully in that state of consciousness and then talk to her about it.

David: Deepen the child?

Jon: Yeah, I would deepen the child first. Before I'm going to tell her how things could be, I want her to tell me how she believes things are. I want her in the felt sense of "things are fucked up." Not just, "I did something funny and they didn't think it was so funny and I got punished." I want her to be in the pain of punishment. I want her to be feeling "this is terrible, they shouldn't be doing that to me!" and that's where she's available to really change. On that spectrum of availability, she's closer than when she first sat down, but she's not as close to it as she could be with just a few, like you said, accessing and deepening the child things. I think it would only take you another few minutes, and then that speech would really hit her. This way she's going to have to filter it and translate it. Big thing for her — and you're only a couple minutes away from a really big thing.

David: I guess I had kind of given up on getting her into any deep place of feeling at this point. I just thought that wasn't coming.

Jon: Do you think that in this moment we were just watching that she's closer than she was at the beginning?

David: Ah, yeah.

Jon: So you're actually doing that. You're actually getting her to that deep feeling state. You're just a little impatient. You're looking for the big bang, and you're not respecting the process fully. You're giving her your best shot before she's really ready for it.

David: This is something I realized when I looked this thing over again, that I gave a real long lecture to a kid.

Jon: I think that's related, too. It's like there's not an exchange happening. She's not telling you what she needs and you're responding from that, you're just making it up.

David: I got some sense of it, though, from what she's told me before.

Jon: Oh, yeah, I'm sure you're dead on right. It's a question of managing consciousness.