Reflective Supervision: Model of Accountability and Ethics in Working with Children and Families

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“Reflective Supervision is a relationship for learning.”
Emily Fenichel 1992, Rebecca Shahmoon-Shanok 2007

“A dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful.”
- Donald A. Schön, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action
Goals & Objectives

Integrate traditional supervision practice with relational – reflective principles

- Build skills specific to reflective practice
- Learn the basic tenets of reflective supervision
- Develop skills in augmenting reflective practice into supervisory relationship
- Observe and reflect on own supervisory skills and style

Goals & Objectives

Use reflective supervision/practice to strengthen skills related to ethical standards of practice

- Increase understanding the role reflective supervision can play in enhancing compliance with ethical requirements
- Develop skills to integrate ethical practice touchstones into supervision practice
- Develop skills to enhance supervisee’s skill set with ethical decision making
Outline of the Day

Session I
(1:45-3:00)
Dynamics At Play in Reflective Supervision
Reflective, Ethical Practices; Parallel Process

Session II
(3:30-4:45)
The Art of Reflective Supervision
Integrating New Dynamics into Traditional Supervision Model
Session I

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE
ETHICS
PARALLEL PROCESS

Start At The Beginning... Introductions
What We Have in Common

- Work with children that have families
  - Requires broadening our focus

- Work with parents that hope that they are good enough parents
  - Valuable assumption to hold onto in the face of behaviors that might indicate the contrary

- Work with parents that hope their child is going to be okay
  - Fundamental to remembering the state of despair and anxiety parents might be experiencing

What We Have in Common (etc...)

- Parents that have to live in the space between what they hope to be true and the reality that they are currently experiencing
  - We are seeing a moment in time that might have a lot of uncertainty

- Children and families with histories of love, attachment and connectedness
  - Children come with a lot of history

- Children and families with histories of unresolved separations, trauma, loss
  - There is a lot that can interfere with healthy development
What Else We Have In Common

We are living breathing humans that come to our work with a lifetime of experiences that will impact our work.

Practicing Reflective Practice

- Voice your thoughts about today’s learning
  - What are you most excited to take back to your agency?
  - How will you remember?
  - Who will you tell?
Reflective Practice

Reflective practice (RP) is critical and deliberate inquiry into professional practice in order to gain deeper understanding of oneself, others, and the meaning that is shared among individuals. This can happen during practice, after the fact, and can either be done alone or with others. 
Forrester, 2010; Peters, 1991; Schon, 1983

Reflective Thinking

- Short circuit reactivity
- Push past cheap, superficial understandings of what we are seeing, hearing and feeling
- Deepen our understanding of the contextual forces that affect our work
Reflective Practice

Process of stepping back from immediate experience to sort through thoughts and feelings about what one is observing and doing

“The value you will receive from reflective thinking will depend on the questions you ask yourself.”

John Maxwell
Remember to Reflect

Reflective Practice

Action!
- Consider the possible implications of interventions while in the midst of the work

- Slow down, filter thoughts, and more wisely choose actions and words

  Reflective Supervision and Leadership in Infant and Early Childhood Programs (2010)
Reflective Practice & Ethics

- Substantive knowledge related to ethics:
  - Do no harm
  - Fidelity and responsibility
  - Integrity
  - Justice
  - Boundaries
  - Confidentiality
  - Informed consent
  - Self determination

Reflective Practice

“A dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful.”

Reflective Practice

- Process by which we take care of ourselves
  - Learn what we need to bring our ‘A’ game to the work
  - Identify signals that we are feelings depleted or ‘burnt out’
  - Process by which we learn to balance personal and professional livelihoods

Supervision
5 Key Supervisory Roles

- Supporting staff member’s development
- Providing a “secure base” where staff can safely explore the meaning of their work
- Maintaining program and ethical standards, mission, quality assurance and safety
- Facilitate open communication and effective team functioning
- Providing program leadership

Reflective Supervision and Leadership
In Infant and Early Childhood Programs
Heffron and Murch (2010)

Find Your Theoretical Foundations

- Attachment theory, family systems theory, trauma- informed approaches, transactional model
- Babies exist in the context of their caregiving relationships and within the cultural context of their family
- Experiences during pregnancy and in the first three years lay the foundation for all future development
- Relationships are critical: best way to support babies is to support their parents/families to build/strengthen nurturing relationships with them
- There can be both ghosts and angels in the nursery that will impact the emerging attachment relationships
Parallel Process

Foundational aspect of relationship-based work

"...parallel process means the way in which the supervisor interacts with the supervisee models for the supervisee what he/she should do with his or her clients.”

(Shulman, l., 2008)
Parallel Process

- When staff experience positive workplace relationships, they are likely to build positive working relationships with parents.

- If staff experience being heard and respected while being reflective in supervision, they are prepared to offer that same process and respect to families.

“Do unto others as you would have others do unto others”

Jeree Pawl (2001)
Parallel Process

“Emphasis is on the practitioner’s ability to listen and wait to allow the child (parent or child/parent) to discover solutions, concepts, perceptions on their own without interruption from the practitioner.”

“Emphasis is on the supervisor’s ability to listen and wait to allow the supervisee to discover solutions, concepts, perceptions on their own without interruption from the supervisor.”

Session II

REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION PRACTICE

WHAT IS IS AND HOW TO DO IT
Traditional Supervision

- Focus on teaching
- Didactic
- Focus on discipline
- Maintain neutrality and objectivity

Traditional Supervision ... the downside...

- Impulse to find a solution immediately
  - Hydroplaning – skimming over the surface of an issue; promote a tendency for rapid action
  - Doesn’t allow for a healthy respect for the complexity of children and their families and communities

- Allows for avoiding or downplaying serious issues, troublesome feelings, conflicts, potential problems
  - Message is to keep the hard stuff out of the supervisory relationship
Downside continues...

- Little attention to the centrality of relationships
  - If you work with children, relationships must be in the forefront of our work
- Incongruence between supervisor’s theoretical perspective and supervisee’s actual clinical experience
  - Substantive practice and reflection-in-action practice
- Supervisee takes more passive role
  - Supervision must be an arena for developing confidence
  - Mastery and sense of agency requires practice

And Continues.....

- Ethics remains a stagnant, one dimensional
  - List of standards that resides in the ‘policy employee handbook’
- Avoids supervisee bringing their ‘worst work’ to be explored and understood
  - Harder to grow if we have to hide our mistakes and our worries about our professional selves
Downslide continues... (not a slip)

- **Focus tends to be on the client to the detriment of supervisee’s development.**
  - Missed opportunities for supervisee to learn about themselves, to grow and to wonder what they bring to the work and who are they in the work

- **Little attention paid to the emotional well being of the supervisee**
  - Cheerleading versus deeper look into what it feels like to do the work

"I would like you to be more self-reliant, show more initiative, and take greater personal responsibility — but check with me first!"
Reflective Supervision

“Reflective supervision builds the capacity of individuals, relationships, and organizations by cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities.”

Rebecca Shahmoon Shanok

Reflective Supervision

“I didn’t give her my thoughts.”

“What did you give her?”

“My time and attention”
Reflective Supervisory Practice

- **Balance between mentoring and monitoring**
  - R/S must attend to ethical, contractual, financial required of the supervisee

- **Integrating ethical dynamics into supervisory discussions**

- **Discipline**
  - Context of a collaborative relationship

Ethics and Reflective Supervision

- **A place in which ethical practice is developed and reinforced**
  - Model sound ethic and legal practice
  - Place for ethical issues to arise and be addressed
  - Place where ethical practice is translated from concept to a set of behaviors
  - Develop a skill based process of ethical decision-making that can be used throughout their work
Reflective Supervision

- A trusting relationship between supervisor and practitioner
  - Central to the work (think attachment)
- A process by which you slow down to attend to nuances and details – thus increasing opportunity of learning, understanding and integrating
  - *The art of ‘stepping back’ to examine what one is observing and doing,* – Alicia Lieberman (2002)
- A place to frame a child and family’s community and the relationships therein to give the family some cultural context
  - Practice the art of inquiry

Reflective Supervision

- Attention paid to parallel process
- Non-traditional ideas that often appear in reflective supervision
  - Containment
  - Holding in another’s mind
  - Issues of control
- Feelings matter
  - Place for intersubjective focus
  - Caretaking of supervisee
  - Place to start to explore the deeper meaning
Reflective Supervision

- **Strength Based**
  - Learn about supervisee’s strengths
  - Make them very relevant to professional development

- **Allow for conflict and anger to be expressed and processed**
  - Balance monitoring and mentoring
  - Demonstrate tact, diplomacy and grace under pressure
  - Interfere with the traditional either/or dynamic

- **Creates a space for honestly assessing the quality of one’s work**
  - Checking the boxes of completed paperwork doesn’t assess the quality of relational work with families
  - Conversely quality relational work without the completed paperwork won’t pay the bills

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All practitioners are taught how to observe – but what to look for is either “trained into – or out of – each discipline”

(Shahmoon–Shanok, Henderson, Grellong & Foley, 2006, p. 399 – 400)
Reflective Supervision Practice

Reflective Supervision Framework

- Regular
- Collaborative
- Reflective
Regularity

- Protect a time, place, and space
- Provide full availability without interruption
- Move toward calmer (regulated) providers, directors, and programs

Collaborative

- Supervisor to provide relational security
  - ...and be the boss
  - Transactional – pay attention to the supervisory ‘fit’
  - Model inter-subjectivity
- Move away from evaluation and correction
  - Ghosts of supervisors past
  - We will learn/explore together
  - Draws on the resources of both participants
- Shared power and relationship
  - Promoting a sense of agency and confidence
- Develop true sense of partnership
  - Shared investment in the work and in professional development
Bridge Between Collaboration and Reflection

“The collaborative approach to problem solving is really at the heart of reflective supervision, since the process, by which we stop, stand back, slow down and start to ask questions. In order for this process to be effective, it is essential to establish an atmosphere of trust, respect and safety.”

Implementing reflective supervision in non-clinical settings: Challenges to Practice, Judith Bertacchi and Trudi Norman-Murch

Reflective

- Develop and exercise supervisee’s capacities to reflect on her/his work
  - Question first impressions
  - Internal experiences have meaning

- Promote continuous conceptualization of what one is observing and doing in hopes of creating a clearer vision of the work in progress
  - Give full consideration to a multiple perspectives and possibilities
  - Reframe the ‘problem’
  - ‘Things are not always as they seem to be’
Reflective Supervisory Practice

- **Establish an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, safety, collegiality**
  - **Trust**
    - Do what you say you will do
    - Tell the truth; don't make promises you can't keep
    - Attunement – hear what is being said and not said
  - **Mutual respect**
    - Be on time
    - Respond empathically
  - **Safety**
    - Confidentiality
    - Be considerate and careful around vulnerabilities
  - **Collegiality**
    - Engaged, friendly, member of the same team

Reflective Supervision Practice

- **Contract with supervisee**
  - Say out loud what the supervision will entail
    - I will attend to both who you are in the work as well as how our supervision is going.

- **Remember, recall and make connections**
  - Look for patterns
  - Connect the dots
Reflective Supervisory Practice

- Supervisor cultivates an atmosphere of curiosity and openness
  - Discussions are imbued with questions, wondering, humor, warmth

- Supervisor brings sound and relevant knowledge and information
  - Good information is invaluable to the work – theoretical, policy related, developmental
  - Training – vital to success

Reflective Supervisory Practice

- Establish paradigm for problem solving

- How do you know where the problem lies?
  - Inside the system, the family, the person, the dyad
    - How to identify where to enter the system?
Reflective Supervisory Practice

- Developmental in nature
  - Both the supervisee/supervisor and the supervision will continue to grow and develop over time
  - Learning clinical skills has a beginning – but not an end
  - Needs to be tailored to the knowledge base, skills, experience, and assignment of each supervisee
  - Every supervision provides an opportunity to assess how supervisee sees and understands their work from a technical, discipline specific, relationship-based perspective

Developmental

"I'm sorry, this isn't working. Can't you just teach me some more old tricks?"
Reflective Supervisory Practice

- Allow for supervisee to see who they are in the work
  - Start with the basics
  - What experiences and relationships have you had that influence your work with infants and families?

- Explore and better understand their explicit and implicit biases
  - Complex; requires a safe/non-judgmental place to explore
  - Tunnel vision

Reflective Supervisory Practice

- Safe place to discuss the good, the bad and the ugly
  - Have to have the experience of looking at hard stuff if we want practitioners to help parents/children take the lid off of Pandora’s Box (parallel process)
  - What can be learned from mistakes
  - If we want staff to be curious about the mistakes, bad decisions they made, we must be the same way.
“Try not to be interesting, but rather to be interested.”

Mooli Lahad PhD

Supervisory Skills

- **Know yourself as a supervisor**
  - What do you love about your role as a supervisor?
  - What do you miss about your clinical work?
  - Tender spots – what are your reactive buttons?

- **What are your strengths a supervisor?**
  - What aspect of RS are you excited about?
  - What kind of learner are you?
## Reflective Supervisor

“Learning that our own feelings and behaviors are important sources of information and have a major impact upon interventions.” - Alicia Lieberman

- Both commit to remain emotionally present
- Teach/guide
- Nurture/support
- Apply the integration of emotion and reason

## Implementation

- **Agency support**
  - Bring colleagues on board
- **Form a group to talk about the work**
  - Supervisors within the agency
  - Supervisors from other agencies
- **Read**
  - Books and literature about reflective practice and reflective supervision
- **Write and journal**
  - Reflective work
How to implement

Practice

Practice

Practice

Expand your thinking:
What Tickles Your Imagination?

• Imagery
  ○ “annealing,” the act of heating something so that all its molecules dance around wildly and then slowly cooling it back down so that it assumes a new and more stable state.

• Metaphors and analogies
  ○ Tug boat bringing the tankers and cruise ships into safe harbor
Expand your thinking:
What Tickles Your Imagination?

Cog-wheeling

Current Events
- Proposed Presidential budget might make resources tight
  - Could impact tension between agencies that must collaborate on behalf of children and their families

Websites and/or blogs
- https://www.brainpickings.org

Mindfulness, Meditation, Exercise, Cooking
### Sayings

- People don’t care what you know until they know that you care  
  
  *Theodore Roosevelt or John Maxwell...*

- “Blues is easy to play but hard to feel.”

- “Knowledge speaks but wisdom listens.”  
  
  *Jimi Hendrix*

- A party without cake is just another meeting  
  
  *Anonymous*

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### Poetry

**To My American Gardener, With Love**  
E.B. White

Before the seed there comes the thought of bloom,  
The seedbed is the restless mind itself.  
Not sun, nor soil alone can bring to border -  
This rush of beauty and this sense of order.  
Flowers respond to something in the gardener’s face –  
Some secret in the heart, some special grace.  
Yours were the rains that made the roses grow,  
And that is why I love your garden so.