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ORIGINAL PAPER

Reflective Supervision for Social Work Field Instructors: Lessons Learned from Infant Mental Health

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Abstract

Reflective supervision is a specialized approach to supervision essential to infant mental health (IMH) practice, a relationship-based approach to working with infant and toddlers and their families. This unique approach to supervision is rooted in reflective practice, which has been cited as an important component of social work field and practice education (CSWE in Educational policy and accreditation standards, https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS/2015EPASandGlossary.pdf.aspx, 2015; Bogo in Clin Soc Work J 43:317–324, 2015; Franklin in Clin Superv 30(2):204–214, 2011; Hendricks et al. in Learning to teach: teaching to learn, Council on Social Work Education Press, Alexandria, 2013). Borne out of the findings from a reflective practice training series for social work field instructors, a 9-month reflective supervision group was piloted for field instructors with a goal of enhancing the field instructors' capacities for engaging their student interns in reflective practice. This reflective supervision group provided field instructors opportunities to engage in process-oriented group supervision, facilitated by a field director with a background in IMH, and focused on the field instructors' supervision of social work interns. This paper describes how this unique field instructor supervision group supports field instructors' use of the reflective practice capacities of curiosity, self-awareness, and use of parallel process. Specifically, an example of a field instructor's use of the reflective supervision group to address a challenging field supervision experience illustrates the powerful role of reflective practice in enhancing and expanding a field instructor's capacity to more fully support a social work intern's professional development.

Keywords Reflective practice · Reflective supervision · Field education · Field instruction · Supervision

"Reflection" is a practice competency featured in the Council on Social Work Education's 2015 Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (p. 7; p. 9); however, it has remained unclear how social work education can insure a structured means of addressing this competency given the experiential nature of learning about reflective practice (Shea, accepted for publication; Hendricks et al. 2013; Schön 1983). Field instructors are particularly well situated to support social work interns' development of reflective practice skills as they engage students in real professional practice as opposed to simulated, and therefore controlled, classroom practice exercises. However, field instructors must be prepared to engage in a supervisory approach that will purposefully target the skill of reflection and support interns' capacities for reflective practice. The field of infant mental health (IMH) provides valuable lessons regarding the use of supervision to support capacities for reflection.

Reflective supervision is a specialized approach to supervision essential to (IMH) practice, a relationship-based approach to working with infant and toddlers and their families. Since the early 1990s, the field of IMH has identified reflective supervision as one of the primary means of supporting IMH workforce's capacity for reflective practice, both at the direct service and supervisory levels (Tomlin and Heller 2016). The IMH model of reflective supervision is defined as:

> the shared exploration [by supervisee and supervisor] of the emotional content of work with infants/toddlers and parents….This exploration occurs within the context of a trusting supervisory relationship that highlights the [supervisee's] strengths and vulnerabilities and invites attention to the awakening of thoughts and feelings that occur in the presence of infants/toddlers

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> and parents. The discussion leads [the supervisee] to introspection and deeper understanding of herself and of the work she performs with families (Weatherston and Tableman 2015, p. 370).

Reflective supervision is now a well-integrated and often required component of IMH practice (Shea et al. 2016; Shea and Goldberg 2016; Gilkerson and Imberger 2016; Lieberman and Van Horn 2005; Tomlin and Heller 2016; Tomlin et al. 2014; Watson et al. 2014; Weatherston and Barron 2009; Weatherston et al. 2009, 2010). The use of reflective supervision has expanded to early childhood education and other early childhood based services (Emde 2009; Harrison 2016; Heller and Ash 2016; Watson et al. 2014). There is a growing body of theoretical understanding and empirical evidence (i.e. case study, quantitative, and qualitative research) suggesting that reflective supervision increases practitioners' capacities for reflection and insightfulness and provides the necessary emotional containment to reduce risk of burnout (Shea and Goldberg 2016; O'Rourke 2011; Heffron et al. 2016; Heller and Ash 2016; Osofsky 2009; Virmani and Ontai 2010). More recently, Frosch et al. (2018) examined the reflective supervision experiences of 40 early childhood interventionists and found that the vast majority of the sample identified that reflective supervision helped them to be able to: "effectively cope with job related stress," "manage their own emotional responses to infant and family conflict," and with "overall professional development," "overall job satisfaction," and "overall job performance" (p. 391).

This unique approach to supervision is rooted in reflective practice, which has been cited as an important component of social work field and practice education (CSWE 2015; Bogo 2015; Franklin 2011; Hendricks et al. 2013), suggesting that this model of supervision may have value in social work field instruction. In response to the need for more structured support for social work students' reflective practice skill development, a new 9-month reflective supervision group was piloted for social work field instructors with a goal of enhancing the field instructors' capacities for engaging their student interns in reflective practice. This paper describes the implementation of this unique reflective supervision group for social work field instructors, a translational effort to utilize the IMH model of reflective supervision with social work field instructors in the field education context. The University's Field Director, with expertise in the IMH reflective supervision model, served as a reflective supervision consultant providing group reflective supervision to field instructors specific to their supervision of social work interns. Such a group differs from a training model where a trainer provides didactic instruction. This paper details how this unique field instructor supervision group supported field instructors' use of the reflective practice capacities of curiosity, self-awareness, and use of parallel process. Specifically, an example of a field instructor's use of the reflective supervision group to address a challenging field supervision experience illustrates the powerful role of reflective practice in enhancing and expanding a field instructor's capacity to more fully support a social work intern's professional development.

Infant Mental Health and Reflective Supervision

The IMH field provides an example of a professional cadre in which reflective practice is a central focus of the work. Reflective practice has been identified in IMH as a core competency and this approach lays the foundation for IMH practice, a field that operates with the assumption that the relationship between parent and child is the target of the intervention and the relationship experience offered by the practitioner is the intervention (Weatherston and Tableman 2015). "Do unto others as you would have others do unto others," (Pawl and St. John 1998, p. 7) is a guiding principle of IMH practice whereby the parent's experience of a supportive, consistent, compassionate, and regulating relationship experience with the practitioner allows the parent to offer the same relationship experience to their infant or toddler (Pawl and St. John 1998). This approach, first modeled by Selma Fraiberg in her pioneering home-based work with at-risk parents and infants and toddlers requires that the practitioner, rooted in attachment, psychodynamic, and systems theories, is aware of the parent's relational history, observant of the current reciprocal parent–child relationship, actively seeking to establish a relationship with the parent and infant, and attentive to her own emotional responses to the parent and infant (Fraiberg et al. 1975; Weatherston and Tableman 2015).

The "Reflection" competencies associated with IMH practice and endorsement include: "contemplation, curiosity, self-awareness, professional/personal development, emotional response, and parallel process" (Weatherston et al. 2009, p. 653). In order to foster and support these reflective practice competencies, IMH practitioners receive reflective supervision, a specialized approach to supervision that involves "a partnership formed for learning and for developing a deeper awareness about all aspects of a clinical 'case,' especially the social, emotional, and overall interrelated complexity of developmental domains" (Shahmoon-Shanok 2006, p. 344). The reflective supervisory relationship in IMH is a collaborative one in which the supervisor follows the supervisee's lead, remains largely non-directive, and explores the supervisee's emotional response to the work (Tomlin et al. 2014; Watson et al. 2014; Weatherston and Barron 2009; Weatherston et al.

2009, 2010). The supervisor is also attentive to their own emotional responses to the supervisory experience and the case content, at times making connections between the parallel process that can be experienced when the supervisor, supervisee, and family share similar emotional responses (Shea et al. 2016; Weatherston and Barron 2009; Weatherston et al. 2009). The goal of the reflective supervision experience is to "allow[s] providers the opportunity to experience the same type of support that they intend to provide to families, while they are learning to problem-solve about the challenges they have encountered in their work with young children and their families" (Watson et al. 2014, p. 4). The parallel is clear; the supervisor does unto the supervisee so that the supervisee will do unto the parent who will then do unto the infant (Harrison 2016; Many et al. 2016; Pawl and St. John 1998; Schafer 2007). The efforts to conduct research on the implementation of reflective supervision in the early childhood field are steadily growing with concentrated attention to the identification of the core components of reflective supervision (Tomlin et al. 2014; Watson et al. 2016) and the creation of tools designed to measure reflective supervision experience (Shea et al. 2016; Finello et al. 2016; Frosch et al. 2018; Gallen et al. 2016; Heller and Ash 2016; Tomlin and Heller 2016; Watson et al. 2016).

Reflective Practice and Social Work Field Education

While in field placement, social work students are practicing the skills, engaging the theoretical concepts, and negotiating the policies they have studied in their coursework (Bogo 2015; CSWE 2015; Dalton et al. 2011; Hendricks et al. 2013; Papouli 2014). The goal of the field instructor, via supervision, is to provide "instruction based on students' practice, which generally consists of *mutual reflective* dialogues, provision of feedback and coaching, and future planning" (Bogo 2015, p. 320). The social work intern's optimal learning trajectory involves an evolution to a more autonomous practitioner with an increased capacity to integrate classroom-based learning with practice-based experiences (CSWE 2015; Hendricks et al. 2013). Social work education has an imperative to include the practice competency of "reflection" (CSWE 2015, p. 7; p. 9) in its curriculum, and the field placement experience provides the most organic means of supporting this practice competency given field placement's unscripted learning environment.

A reflective practice approach in field education privileges multiple forms of knowledge, including sensory, emotional, and relational data, with a perspective that each new case or project is unique and cannot be bound by assumptions or expectations. Schön (1983) defined reflective practice as including "reflection-in-action" and "reflection on action," both of which require a practitioner to "experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion" in the face of uncertainty and to "become a researcher in the practice context," willing to conduct experiments in order to test out new ideas or theories in an effort to develop understanding (p. 68). A reflective practice approach combats the hyper-standardization of technique and challenges the social work intern to not only remain open and curious about the task, problem, or case in the moment, but also to reflect on their actions in the post-mortem in order to enhance their ability to engage in similar situations or experiences in the future (Schön 1983). As articulated in Schön's (1983) efforts to redefine professional mastery and competence, reflective practice approaches provide the social work intern with opportunities to discover new phenomena and avoid implementing routinized interventions that cannot possibly address the unique nature of each case scenario. Reflective practice skills, by their very nature, must be practiced in order to be understood and integrated, suggesting that social work field education should include a focus on enhancing social work students' reflective capacities (Bogo 2015; Hendricks et al. 2013).

Applicability of the IMH Model of Reflective Supervision to Social Work Field Education

The use of the IMH model of reflective supervision in social work field instruction is supported by the alignment between the previously described reflective practice skills fostered by IMH reflective supervision and the skills which social work education seeks to develop in social work students (Davys and Beddoe 2009; Franklin 2011; Hendricks et al. 2013). Social work literature has emphasized the importance of field instruction in the student's development of reflective practice skills. Davys and Beddoe (2009) suggest, "supervision is a forum for learning and the main vehicle for learning is reflection" (p. 920). The IMH model of reflective supervision lends itself to translation to social work field instruction because it can be tailored to the novice social worker. Reflection is a skill that evolves over time but as Franklin (2011) argues, it is essential to "reflect…on practice-in-action from the very beginning of supervision" (p. 208), suggesting that it is important to utilize a reflective approach to supervision with social workers in the earliest moments of their professional development. Furthermore, the IMH reflective supervision model that includes attention to the need for guidance or teaching to support the growth of reflective practice skills (Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health (MI-AIMH) 2015), respects the social work intern's early developmental stage with regard to reflection (Davys and Beddoe 2009). Additionally, given that social work interns may be at higher risk for burnout when compared to the risk for helping professionals and may also experience the same level of risk

for compassion fatigue as that of more experienced helping professionals (Harr and Moore 2011), IMH reflective supervision, which has been deemed useful for reducing burnout (Watson and Gatti 2012) and for trauma work (Osofsky 2009) reinforces the fit of the model for pre-professional social work students.

When considering other potential models of supervision that might be adapted for the field instruction experience as a means of enhancing social work interns' reflective practice skills, it becomes clear that reflective supervision demonstrates the greatest potential for supporting students' learning in a variety of field placement settings. More traditional clinical approaches to supervision require the supervisor to be directive, function in the role of teacher or manager, refrain from self-disclosure, and focus on case content rather than emotional or personal responses to the work (Orenstein and Moses 2010; Tomlin and Heller 2016; Tomlin et al. 2014). Relational approaches to supervision, an outgrowth of relational psychodynamic approaches to treatment, are more closely aligned with the IMH reflective supervision model in their emphasis on the supervisory characteristics of "mutuality, shared and authorized power, and the co-construction of knowledge" (Orenstein and Moses 2010, p. 103).

A central theme of relational supervision is to use the supervisory relationship to uncover or illuminate relational processes that are relevant to the supervisee-consumer dyad (Frølund and Nielsen 2009; Miehls 2010; Orenstein and Moses 2010). In many instances, social work interns may be in macro settings or may not have caseloads and may instead shadow other professionals and therefore this relational approach would not fit their scope of practice. However, the IMH model of reflective supervision's additional explicit focus on the supervisor-supervisee dyad's shared experience of reflection (Shea et al. 2016; O'Rourke 2011; Shahmoon-Shanok 2006; Weatherston and Barron 2009; Weatherston et al. 2009), can provide opportunities for all social work interns, regardless of placement context or role, to experience the supervisory relationship itself as a source of data, "an object of mutual reflection," (Schön 1983, p. 126), something to be examined and understood in order to support the supervisee's understanding of their work (Bogo 2015; Hendricks et al. 2013).

An Example of the Translation of the IMH Model of Reflective Supervision to Social Work Field Instruction

In order to train social work field instructors to provide reflective supervision using the IMH model, field instructors must receive reflective supervision themselves (Shea, accepted for publication). In the IMH model, best practice standards indicate that reflective supervisors should receive reflective supervision regarding their supervisory work (MI-AIMH 2015) because, "Relationship-based reflection is never solitary, for its very essence is that it is always shared" (Schafer 2007, p. 13). Even highly skilled IMH reflective supervisors recognize the need to reconnect with their reflective capacities, which speaks to the fact that honing reflective capacities is a life long endeavor (Shea and Goldberg 2016). MI-AIMH's *Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision/Consultation* (2015) are all relational in nature: "Form a trusting relationship between supervisor and practitioner; Establish consistent and predictable meetings and times; Ask questions that encourage details about the infant, parent and emerging relationship; Listen; Remain emotionally present; Teach/guide; Nurture/support; Integrate emotion and reason; Foster the reflective process to be internalized by the supervisee; Explore the parallel process and allow time for personal reflection; and Attend to how reactions to the content affect the reflective process" (p. 2). These elements are closely related to what Knowles described as the components of "an environment conducive to adult learning," where "authenticity, trust, non-defensiveness, and curiosity" are essential (Hendricks et al. 2013, p. 115), suggesting that reflective supervision provides an environment that is well suited to support field instructors' learning about reflective practice in the context of field instruction.

In response to social work field instructors' qualitative feedback that indicated a need for more practice in reflection following participation in an IMH-based reflective practice training series (Shea, accepted for publication), a unique 9-month reflective supervision group was created for field instructors providing social work supervision to BSW and MSW interns. Aligned with the IMH reflective supervision model, the group supported the field instructors' exploration of their emotional resonance with supervision experiences and called upon field instructors' capacities for "contemplation, curiosity, self-awareness, professional/personal development, emotional response, and parallel process" (Weatherston et al. 2009, p. 653). These skills and capacities have been identified by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health (MI-AIMH) to describe reflection, one of the areas featured in the *Competency Guidelines*® featured in the Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Based Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health®, a credentialing system founded by MI-AIMH and now represented in 29 US states and 2 international associations under the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health (Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health 2018).

Potential participants were invited to join the group with the understanding that they would commit to attending the group on a consistent basis. Participants were eligible if they were supervising BSW or MSW social work interns

at Eastern Michigan University. Based on the recommendation for IMH reflective supervision groups, the number of participants was purposefully small in order to foster greater opportunities for in-depth discussions and group cohesion (Heffron et al. 2016). In addition, participants signed up in advance to present, with each group supervision divided into two 1-h presentations/consultations that involved informal descriptions of the supervisory issue/challenge and questions for the group to consider. Each group session began with a ritual of 2 min of silence during which time participants were encouraged to enter into a contemplative state so as to be fully present with the group (Gilkerson 2004). Eastern Michigan University's Institutional Review Board approval was received to collect data about this group in order to better understand its impacts on supervision of social work interns; all participants provided informed consent to participate in this data collection.

As Field Director, the reflective supervision consultant was explicit about her administrative role within the University. The Field Director contracted with the group members to maintain confidentiality about the content discussed in the group with the understanding that typical guidelines regarding breaking confidentiality to insure safety would be honored. In addition, given the parameters of the Field Director's role to provide support to field instructors providing supervision to the University's social work interns, the reflective supervision group was limited to discussion about field instructors' supervision of social work interns and did not include discussion of participants' practice with consumers or supervision of other staff. Because this particular field program is housed at a large university with approximately 700 BSW and 200 MSW students, the Field Director did not know the particular names/identifies of student interns associated with the field instructors and intern names were not used in the group. The Field Director did not take action on any content presented in this reflective supervision group and did not disclose any content associated with the reflective supervision group when interacting with seminar instructors and students. It should be noted that this dual role could potentially pose some challenges in a smaller university where it would be impossible to maintain intern anonymity in the group; however, it seems that these challenges could be managed in ways similar to the boundaries established in IMH settings where the reflective supervisor is also the administrative supervisor. Such boundaries require thoughtful attention and full disclosure at the outset of the reflective supervision process.

In terms of particular supervisory behaviors, recent research suggests that "remaining attentive, engaged, thoughtful, and being self-aware and curious" are some of the key supervisory behaviors specific to reflective supervision (Tomlin et al. 2014, p. 74). Therefore, aligned with the IMH model, the reflective supervision consultant for this field instructor group used a less directional and more collaborative stance when compared to other types of supervision models (Schafer 2007; Weatherston and Barron 2009). Key features of reflective supervision are consistent meetings and a space that allows for privacy (Tomlin et al. 2014). All of the sessions were held at the same time on the same day of the month. In addition, the sessions were held in a quiet, private, and consistent meeting space. Similar to other group supervisors, the reflective supervision consultant took notes during the group sessions so as to be able to track and revisit specific themes and occasionally noted specific quotes from group participants.

Participants

There were initially six participants in this reflective supervision consultation group with five participants consistently attending the 9-month group, meaning that they missed 0–2 sessions. The sixth participant discontinued attending after the first 2 sessions and is not included in the following demographics. All of the participants were social work field instructors providing supervision to social work interns enrolled at a large statewide university. The field instructors, none of whom provide IMH services or receive reflective supervision in their agency settings, were employed in a variety of social work practice agency settings. All of the participants identified as woman or female. More than half of the participants (60%, n = 3) were between the ages of 30–39; one participant was between the ages of 22–29 and one participant was between the ages of 50–59. The vast majority of the group (80%, n = 4) identified their race as White, non-Hispanic and one participant identified as Native American. All of the participants had an MSW degree. The majority of participants (80%, n = 4) had attended at least one hour of training in reflective practice content. With regard to supervisory experience, the group was composed of relatively new field instructors; 40% (n = 2) were supervising student interns for the first time; the same number (40%, n = 2) had supervised social work interns for 1–5 years and one participant had supervised social work interns for 6–10 years. This description of the group's field instruction experience is similar to the group's professional social work supervision experience; 40% (n = 2) of the group had never provided professional social work supervision, the same number (40%, n = 2) had 1–5 years of professional supervisory experience and one participant had 11–15 years of professional social work supervisory experience. In terms of placement settings, participants represented community mental health, health or healthcare, child welfare, and disabilities services agencies.

The Reflective Supervision Group for Field Instructors: Reflection Guides Next Steps

The goal of the monthly reflective supervision group was, in accordance with the IMH model, to provide the field instructors with reflective supervision so that they could offer elements of this type of supervision to their social work interns. The group's tendency was often to engage in problem solving when they would give the presenter a myriad of suggestions about how they might negotiate a particular challenge with a social work intern. This is a common tendency in other supervision models (Schafer 2007), but engaging in this directive approach inhibits the use of reflection and often shifts the direction of the discussion so that the presenter is not able to fully engage with their emotional resonance with the presentation (Weatherston and Barron 2009). The reflective supervision consultant guided the field instructors in this focus on process rather than content by modeling and encouraging the use of curiosity, self-awareness, and the use of parallel process so that by the end of the 9-month reflective supervision consultation experience, the group members were engaging in these reflective capacities in a more organic way, with less prompting. A case example will be used to illustrate this group experience. All group participants granted their permission for use of this case vignette as a means of illustrating the group experience and its impact on supervision.

Curiosity

Curiosity is a core component of reflective practice and plays a central role in differentiating reflective supervision from other types of supervision. Curiosity requires remaining inquisitive and being comfortable with uncertainty; curiosity relieves one of having to define a problem and solve it; rather, the focus is on understanding (Heffron et al. 2016; O'Rourke 2011; Schön 1983; Weatherston and Barron 2009). A reflective supervisor fosters curiosity by "remain[ing] attentive, inquisitive, and open to what the supervisee says, exploring possibilities, while staying grounded in what the facts are" (Weatherston and Barron 2009, p. 65). This approach challenges more typical frameworks in that the supervisor is not positioned to provide or instruct the supervisees on what is happening and what to do next (Heffron et al. 2016; O'Rourke 2011; Schön 1983; Weatherston and Barron 2009). Such an approach can be challenging to use with social work interns who are so new to the field and are, in many instances, asking for such directive mandates (Franklin 2011).

The use of curiosity in this group was a deliberate effort to encourage supervisors to refrain from engaging in this pressure to "have the answers" and instead to wonder with their fellow group members in a meaningful way about what might be transpiring in their interns' experiences of the field placement so that they might utilize this same curious stance with their supervisees. Some examples of questions or prompts that were used to model and encourage curiosity in the group supervision experience include, "I wonder what is it like for the student to be supervised by the director of the agency? What is it like for the student to be the only person of color in your agency? I wonder what it was like for the student intern to sit in on that assessment? How did the student respond to that assignment?" Asking these kinds of questions prompted the participants to discuss rather than define, opening the space for new possibilities about next steps. In the first few group sessions, the members would often temporarily entertain this curious stance only to quickly revert back to more directive and solution focused discussion.

"Where is Mellie?"

For example, during one of the field instructor's presentations, the field instructor described her concern about a student intern, Mellie, who did not seem to be completing the tasks assigned to her and despite multiple efforts on the part of the field instructor, the student continued to struggle to meet the field placement learning outcomes. The reflective supervision consultant provided prompts such as, "I wonder what the student might think about her performance in field?" While the group would initially respond to this query by discussing how Mellie's previous retail work experience might inform her current response to a professional social work setting, they ultimately reverted to a problem-solving focus by postulating that the student is perhaps a visual learner and has not been able to be receptive to the verbal descriptions of tasks, providing the field instructor with various websites that contain resources for visual learners. The movement away from wondering about the student's response to the agency, to the supervisory relationship, to the field of social work altered the discourse of the group.

Upon return to the group the next month, the field instructor reported that despite her best efforts to implement all of these instructional strategies, there had been no change. The reflective supervision consultant used this new report as an opportunity to suggest that perhaps it was not about finding a better organizational tool because the group had already identified a variety of creative and useful tools. The consultant asked questions about how the student responds to the field instructor when she arrives to supervision empty handed without having completed any of her assignments. The field instructor responded that the student appears calm and friendly during these meetings and simply says that she did not go to the meeting or fill out the forms or do

the readings. The field instructor added that the intern is actually quite likeable. The consultant summarized the field instructor's description of the intern including her professed interest in becoming a professional social worker, consistent attendance, expressed willingness to complete various tasks, her subsequent failure to produce any results, a lack of tension or anxiety about this failure, all the while maintaining a friendly and overall likeable presentation.

The reflective supervision consultant then suggested that she could not envision a picture of this student, who seems to want to remain unnoticed in the perimeter of the room during staff meetings, rather than fully engaging with group discussions. The description resonated with the field instructor who expressed her exasperation about the student being present and simultaneously being unavailable. The discussion sparked a memory for the field instructor of one of their first supervision sessions in which the intern reported to the field instructor that she had to unexpectedly move after a recent loss. Upon further reflection, the field instructor said that she had remembered that the intern had reported that her support system lived quite a distance from the University and that she had a very close relationship with her family. She wondered what it might be like for the student to be away from her supports, to be experiencing a loss and a sudden life change at this point in her college career and what her baseline functioning had been. With engagement in this curiosity about what it might be like to be the intern in this new field placement experience, the group expressed a newfound empathy for the student. The field instructor wondered how the supervisee might respond to the field instructor revisiting the subject. The field instructor agreed that she needed to do this, suggesting she had not thought about these circumstances because Mellie had not talked about the life changes since her initial disclosure at the beginning of placement. The field instructor and group moved out of a state of problem-solving and created a culture of curiosity that opened up the space for the field instructor to gain some clarity on some next action steps in her supervisory approach.

Self-awareness

Reflection necessitates self-awareness so that "the diversity of emotional responses and reactions to the clinical material can be utilized in the service [of next steps]" (Heffron et al. 2016, p. 632). In order to engage in reflective practice, one must be able to think critically about one's own reaction, thoughts, and feelings in relation to another (Bertacchi and Gilkerson 2009). Engaging in reflection-on-action without considering one's contributions to the action would limit the reflection to a superficial exercise that inherently sets the stage for repetition rather than innovation, moving further away from new insights and identification of next steps to address challenges (Gates and Sendiack 2017; Gilkerson 2004; Schön 1983). Self-awareness is particularly key for field instructors who are charged with introducing social work interns to a supervisory relationship that is likely unique and unfamiliar given their lack of professional social work experience (Franklin 2011). Social work interns may have had previous employment experience, but it is likely that their interface with supervision was primarily a hierarchical model predominated by administrative reports rather than a collaborative endeavor designed to further the student's professional and personal development. Therefore, given this role, field instructors must be attuned to how they might impact their student intern and to consider what it might be like for their student intern to engage in this new kind of relationship (Gilkerson 2004).

Thus, the field instructor must be aware of what they contribute to the supervisory relationship and be willing to explore what it is like for them to sit with their social work intern; asking themselves the question: How do I feel during supervision sessions with my social work intern? The capacity for self-awareness is highly correlated with the skill of curiosity because one must disengage from judgment and pre-determined expectations in order to authentically explore one's own reactions to the supervisory experience and avoid the sense of defensiveness that might accompany such self-inquiry. The reflective supervision consultant can model and support the practice of self-awareness by utilizing thoughtful self-disclosure during the group sessions to highlight instances of emotional resonance. Self-disclosure, in the context of personal responses to the supervisory experience, can be used to further the supervision alliance (Mehr et al. 2015).

"What Is It Like for Mellie to Be Supervised by You?"

During the discussions regarding Mellie, the field instructor often stated that social work students earn their degrees to become leaders in the field. She spoke of her own experience of having returned to graduate school to earn her MSW as a second career and how she entered school with a sense of confidence about her next steps. She described a sense of frustration about Mellie's apparent lack of passion, suggesting, "Why does she even want to be here?" As the executive director of her agency, the field instructor described her high expectations of herself and her staff to demonstrate outcomes, her hard work ethic, and her attention to detail and organization. In addition, during these supervision group sessions, the field instructor described her own field placement experience, which she identified as having been extremely unfulfilling, with limited learning opportunities and a lack of investment in the intern experience. The group resonated with the field instructor's wish to provide a different placement experience from that which she had received

and other group members echoed having had problematic field placement experiences and feeling concerned that their students would walk away from their placement not having received the experience they wanted. The consultant suggested that the field instructor really had a lot invested in providing a "good" placement experience for the intern and had certainly put significant effort into creating learning opportunities; however, there continued to be a disconnect as the student has not taken advantage of these opportunities.

The consultant used self-disclosure to describe her own response of feeling frustrated regarding the student's apparent lack of concern about not completing her work. The consultant then asked the field instructor what it is like for her to sit with the intern in supervision. The field instructor responded with her own frustration, "It's all right here and she won't grab hold of it and take it!" The field instructor expressed doubts about the student's ability to be a leader. The consultant suggested to the field instructor that she has certainly thrived as a leader and expressed curiosity about what it must be like for a student who seems to shy away from leadership and now has *the* leader as her supervisor. The field instructor responded that it might be intimidating for the student. The group agreed, suggesting that the field instructor is quite accomplished and is not only in the role of evaluating the student but also is responsible for evaluating all staff and running the agency. The field instructor then suggested, "Maybe not everyone needs to be a leader. I mean…Where would we be if everyone was a leader? I guess that wouldn't really work!"

The field instructor was able to grapple with her own sense of self and how that might impact the field instructor-intern relationship. While still retaining a sense of the intern's ownership of her failure to complete her internship tasks and responsibilities, she acknowledged that she had contributed to the dynamics. Simply acknowledging the high value she places on leadership provided the field instructor an increased capacity to consider the perspective of the intern who perhaps does not share the same aspirations. In addition, the field instructor's increased self-awareness about her own bias for the importance of a specific kind of leadership in social work education allowed her to engage the intern in a discussion about what the intern wanted from this placement experience using a more open and curious stance. The field instructor acknowledged that perhaps it could be difficult for this particular intern to be supervised by her simply because of their differences in learning approaches and emphasis on administrative leadership. The field instructor was also more able to consider the student's strengths and the ways in which she might contribute to the social work profession. At the conclusion of this particular group session during which the field instructor grappled with this increased self-awareness, the field instructor stated, "I'm learning so much about myself!" acknowledging that the shift in her self-awareness created a shift in her approach to field instruction.

Parallel Process

Parallel process was originally defined by Searles (1955) as the manifestation of the consumer's emotional experience in the supervisory context resulting in the supervisor experiencing emotions representative of a specific dynamic present in the clinician-consumer relationship and/or an aspect of the consumer's emotional world. Contemporary definitions of parallel process include that which is used in the field of IMH, whereby parallel process is understood as "the reverberations of relationship experiences" (Emde 2009, p. 668) among systems, supervisor, supervisee, parent, and infant (Shea et al. 2016; Emde 2009; Harrison 2016; O'Rourke 2011; Schafer 2007; Watson et al. 2014; Weatherston 2007; Weatherston and Barron 2009; Weatherston and Tableman 2015). In this context, parallel process has multiple functions because in addition to providing important information about the emotional worlds of consumers, parallel process can be used as a relational intervention whereby clinicians offer parents the same relationship experiences that parents can then offer their infants (Harrison 2016; Heffron et al. 2016; Schafer 2007). The power to utilize such parallels to further relationship-based work is extended when the supervisor provides the supervisee with these essential relational elements so that the supervisee is well equipped to offer the same relationship to parents who can then offer it to their infants (Harrison 2016; Many et al. 2016).

The use of parallel process in reflective supervision then serves a dual purpose. The first is to "teach" relationship through participation in a real relationship (supervisor-supervisee); the second is to use the parallel process to explore the experiences of consumers, or in the case of a reflective supervision group for supervisors, to explore the experiences of supervisees (Harrison 2016; Many et al. 2016; Schafer 2007; Shea, accepted for publication). In this second purpose, identification of the parallel process is a necessity because one cannot interpret the forces driving the parallel process without first noticing its existence. Such identification requires a high degree of curiosity and self-awareness; one must be willing to engage with and wonder about their own thoughts and feelings in order to understand the thoughts and feelings of another. Gilkerson (2004) suggests that when engaged in reflective practice, one must ask, "What did you do and most importantly, how did you feel about what you did?" (p. 428). Responses to this essential question provide important information because what one feels about what they did gives some indication about what the other may have felt during that same interaction.

"I Can Finally See Her"

As the field instructor became more curious about the intern's experience and how their personal life might be intersecting with the placement experience as well as more self-aware about how her own values and professional development contribute to the intern's experience of the placement, the field instructor was also increasingly able to authentically connect with the intern. This took the form of an important supervision session between the field instructor and intern, which the field instructor described for the group. During that individual supervision, the field instructor raised the issue of all of the major life changes including the loss experienced by the student at the outset of the placement experience. The field instructor expressed curiosity about how the intern has negotiated these life changes while also navigating her field placement experience. The field instructor reported to the group that at that point the student began to cry and described feeling lost, alone, and uncertain about her future. The field instructor shared with the group that as a parent, she felt a great sense of empathy for the young woman, recognizing that at this pivotal moment in the intern's life, she needed to feel grounded and attached. Given that the intern had previously disclosed having a very close relationship with her family with whom she would be spending the semester break, the field instructor suggested to the student that perhaps this break would be an important time for her to get what she needs and perhaps feel more connected. The field instructor then suggested that upon the student's return from break, they could start the new semester together developing a learning plan that would meet the student's needs/interests and also fulfill the field placement learning outcomes; and the intern agreed to this proposal. The field instructor reported to the group that in this moment, she felt hopeful for the first time that the student would be able to follow through and she also felt confident that if the student could not meet the placement requirements, she had offered the best opportunities to do so. The field instructor suggested, "I could finally see her." The field instructor reported in subsequent group supervisions that the student had returned from break "a different person," actively participating in developing a learning plan that included quite a bit of accountability on the student's part in terms of weekly reports about her progress and various independent projects. The field instructor recognized the student's strong capacities to connect with consumers and work on outreach efforts with community organizations, strengths she had not previously observed.

Towards the end of the reflective supervision group experience, this field instructor stated, "I would have never gone there with this intern without having participated in this group; I would have just pushed through and kept it going the way it was going." The parallel was striking because the student, without having that important supervision session with her field instructor, also likely would not have "gone there" and might have just pushed through, meeting the bare minimum requirements or potentially not even earning a passing grade. However, as the field instructor was able to grow to truly see herself as not only a leader and a high achiever with very high expectations, but also as a parent and someone who has also experienced loss, she was also able to more fully see the student as someone who has strengths and capacities that might look different from the field instructor's expectations. In addition, it seems likely that the student also began to truly see the field instructor in a more multi-dimensional capacity given that the field instructor was able to demonstrate her empathy, compassion, and wisdom that stands to complement her accomplished success.

The parallel process was evident; the consultant modeled the relational experience in the group that the field instructor was then able to offer the student, one of authenticity and collaboration and framed by curiosity and use of self-awareness. In addition, the transformation of the group's response to the field instructor's presentation of the challenges experienced with Mellie parallels the transformation of the relationship between Mellie and the field instructor. As the group began to more fully see Mellie who previously had been hard to envision, present but absent, the field instructor was more able to see herself, allow Mellie to see her, and allow Mellie to be seen. The field instructor therefore "mirror[ed] the supervisee back to herself—minus the value judgments and agenda-driven imperatives to be, to do, or to feel something other that what she is, in fact, experiencing" (Schafer 2007, p. 13). The resulting field instructor-intern relationship was one of greater authenticity and yet still marked by boundaries as the field instructor was not in the role of therapist, but rather mentor, guiding the intern to seek her personal supports so as to be able to flourish professionally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in order for field instructors to be able to effectively provide such reflective supervision experiences, they will need to receive it. This pilot of a reflective supervision consultation group provides preliminary evidence that such a group supervision model can be effective in supporting field instructors' reflective skills with regard to curiosity, self-awareness, and use of parallel process. Such skills cannot be developed in a vacuum; rather they develop in a relational context, which the reflective supervision group provides. The case example provides one illustration of how the development of such skills can impact the field instruction experience and ultimately inform the learning trajectory for

social work interns, who through experience of the reflective practice based relationship with their supervisor, are able to develop these important reflective skills to use in their social work practice. The applicability of this model to social work field instruction is further supported by its utility across fields of practice. The use of the relationship with the field instructor to enhance students' reflection skills supports students' capacities to critically examine not only clinical work, but also interaction among systems, agency culture, inter-professional collaborations, and community dynamics.

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