THIS ISSUE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Working with young children and their families can be challenging. The personal and intense nature of our work often elicits strong emotions and reactions, especially when children and families are under stress. We must be able to understand and use our thoughts, values, and feelings if we are to build strong and supportive professional relationships that allow us to do our best work with infants, toddlers, and family members.

The supervisory relationship provides opportunities both to expand our knowledge base about very young children and to deepen our understanding about ourselves in relationship to those with whom we work. Supervision that invites regular reflection about one's work with infants and families, as well as the exploration of thoughts and feelings that are awakened in the presence of infants and families, promotes each professional's developing capacity to understand, support, and sustain effective relationships. Reflective supervision is critically important, if not essential, to best practice in the infant–family field.

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Despite consensus about the importance and general purpose of reflective supervision, questions remain about its specific nature and process. Program directors and administrators, experts from many disciplines, and practitioners in the field support reflective supervision, but at the same time raise important questions about the process. What does reflective supervision mean? What specific activities and attributes most effectively promote reflection? Are there rules that guide the practice of reflective supervision? Is it limited to mental health professionals or may non-mental health practitioners engage in the art of reflective supervision, too? Must reflective supervision be dialogue between two individuals or can it be done effectively in a group? Is it a discipline-specific or transdisciplinary practice?

The intent of this issue of the Journal is to explore the meaning of reflective supervision, to offer individual views and experiences about the process, and to raise consciousness about the effects of cultural, ethnic, and racial differences that influence our work and our relationships. Rather than providing definitive answers or directions, we offer ideas and experiences that are designed to extend and expand your consideration of a critically important element that is linked to competency and best practice in the infant and family field.

—Robert Weigand and Deborah Weatherston
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Reflective Supervision in Child Care

The Discoveries of an Accidental Tourist

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I stumbled accidentally on, and then into, reflective supervision. I had not been seeking it; in fact, I had no idea what I might be getting into. This accident has been the most helpful and meaningful aspect of my professional development. Reflection is a uniquely individual and personal process, and therefore so is what we call *reflective supervision*. For some it might involve a recollection and close inspection of "What I did" or "How I am." It might be an opportunity to safely say aloud *all* that one thinks and feels about a parent, child, or family. It might be a place to share the burden of responsibility that one inevitably bears when working intimately with children and families. For some, reflection is simply a sharing of hypotheses about a child's behavior, a parent's caregiving patterns, or a family's relationships and rituals; a thinking aloud or exchange of ideas about how to proceed. Whatever its aim and process, it must be freely chosen.

My initial experience with reflective supervision began a number of years ago when, early in my career as a preschool teacher and teacher educator, I had begun to reconsider the skills required to be a good teacher and caregiver of toddlers and preschool children. My struggles with the group I was teaching at that time—16 children who were 2 and 3 years old—compelled me to doubt the adequacy of many of the skills I thought I had mastered. One incident in particular provoked me to question the adequacy of my repertoire of management techniques, tricks, and gimmicks for helping children learn appropriate social behavior. It occurred very early in the school year when Amy, a slight, blond 3-year-old, was dropped off abruptly as her father dashed off to work. She stood silently just inside the door, her face impassive, but tears were just beginning to well up behind her plastic glasses. I bent close to her with my hand on my knees and cheerfully said good morning. She responded by kicking my right shin. Although taken aback, I managed a smile and advised, "It's not OK to kick at preschool." Her expression did not seem to change as she cocked her foot and kicked me a second time. I continued to "smile" and repeated in a somewhat less friendly voice, "Amy, it's *not* OK to kick." Her third kick was perfectly aimed.

I was paralyzed. I was overwhelmed with a simmering stew of emotions: anger, frustration at my incompetence and failure, and guilt and remorse for even *feeling* angry at a child so small and vulnerable looking. Fortunately, a classmate ran over to greet Amy and led her off to the play dough table. He rescued both of us from the next missteps I was likely to make.

Reflection is a uniquely individual and personal process . . .

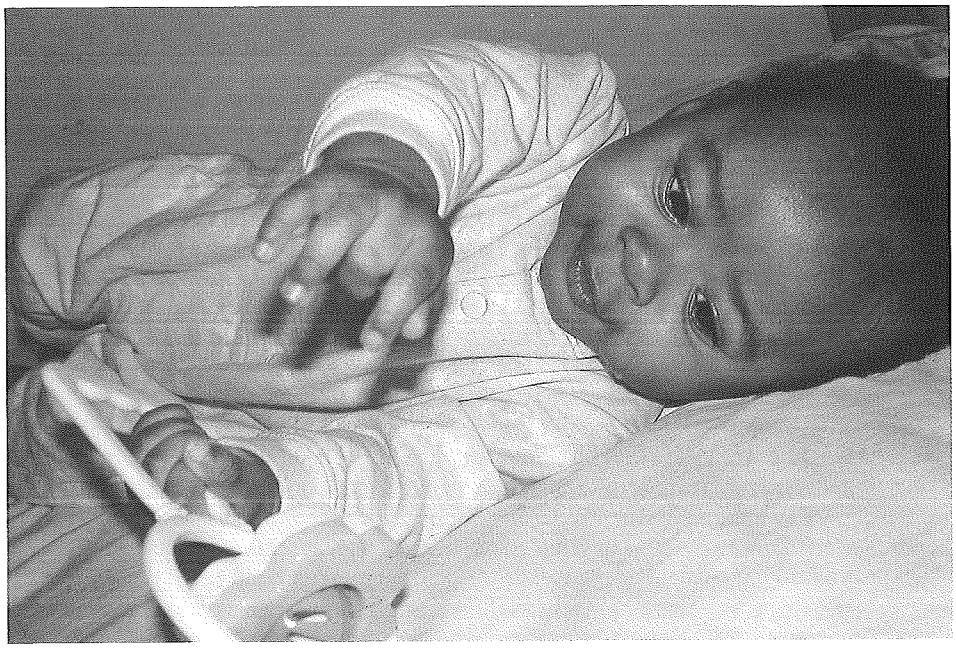
The emotions that these and various similar experiences evoke are typical for those working with young children. They ebbed and flowed regularly in my work with this group of 2- and 3-year-olds. I began to notice how they sometimes impaired my ability to see clearly the child before me, and to respond in a way that was appropriately sensitive to *this child* in *this moment*. Although the strategies and techniques I had learned and the advice and suggestions offered by my supervisor often proved effective in managing behavior, I had a growing and uncomfortable sense that these young children needed more or better than my "teaching and guiding" was providing. Something was missing from my repertoire of professional skills that would enable me to be more present and supportive.

I wondered if preschool teachers might use some of the same skills with young children that "helping professionals"—counselors, psychologists, and social workers—used with their clients. I learned that this idea was not new to the early childhood field (e.g., Rogers, 1983), but I nevertheless decided to create, at least for my own use, a catalog of "helping skills" for use with very young children and to solicit feedback on this list from appropriate members of the faculty at the university where I was teaching at the time. I wanted to be certain that my taxonomy was comprehensive. Most offered helpful suggestions, and I revised and refined my list of skills.

I was generally satisfied and pleased with my scheme when I visited CR, the last faculty member on my list. He studied the pages for a few minutes. "This category here that you call, 'self-awareness,' I wonder what that means to you," he said. "I see what you have

Abstract

Reflection is essential to the professional development of those working with young children and their parents. It is a deeply personal process that requires a commitment to and assurance of safety for the supervisee. This article recounts the author's personal and professional journey through reflective supervision he received as a teacher of toddlers in an early childhood center. He describes the reflective process and the qualities of the supervisory relationship that contributed to the professional growth that it supported.



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written here, but have you ever taken the time to consider what this is really about?" He suggested a shift from considering *knowing what to do* to *knowing how you are*. After some further discussion, I cautiously accepted his offer of regular meetings to explore this aspect of my work with young children. Not fully convinced of the importance of this endeavor, I intended to approach this as a sort of tourist—this would be a short trip just to get the idea.

Promoting and Supporting Reflection

WE BEGAN SUPERVISION with a general agreement that we would focus our work together on the effects of my feelings on my relationships with the toddlers in my care. This focus was similar to the supervisory work that CR had done with students preparing to be family therapists and consistent with the "self-awareness" groups he conducted for mental health professionals and teachers. He had a doctorate in counseling and training, and supervising therapists was a primary professional interest.

CR never set or followed a predetermined agenda. From the outset, a striking feature of our time together was that the process was essentially mine. Supervision was about me and my experience with my young clients. I was free to determine the general direction of our work and the specific tasks and focus for each session. He took few notes, but seemed to hold in mind where I had been and the questions and issues with which I seemed to be wrestling. His guidance consisted mostly of recollections from previous sessions, mirroring my immediate feelings, thoughts, and intentions in order to help me "hold my place"—that is, to recall for me where I had just been on this reflective journey and where it seemed I might be heading. He occasionally asked questions or offered tentative suggestions to help me sort through my own confusion or uncertainty. All of it felt supportive. His interest in learning more about my experience was genuine. My reflection was essentially a shared process in which he provided a safe and compassionate kind of mirroring. Although there was no predetermined structure to our process together, at least none that I could initially discern, in retrospect our work consisted of three fundamental reflective tasks: relating and reexperiencing emotionally significant events in my relationships with children; examining and evaluating the *meaning* of the feelings, thoughts, intentions, and actions evoked during those events; and considering how I might use this understanding for my professional growth and development.

Supervision was about me and my experience with my young clients.

Emotionally Significant Events

My description of specific relationship experiences with a child made up the initial substance of supervision. These were stories of events that elicited in me strong emotional reactions. They were typically about incidents with a child whose behavior challenged me; who kept me awake at night; or who brought to the fore my attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that I considered to be most unpleasant and unattractive. When with a child such as this, I felt ineffective and incompetent. I told these stories when I could muster the courage. Sometimes I dodged, hedged, glossed over, or deflected while CR waited patiently for me to settle in.

During this phase of supervision, I carefully reflected on exactly what happened during these episodes with children. The details were important: what specific behaviors occurred, when and under what circumstances did they occur, what preceded or precipitated the behavior, and what *exactly and specifically* each of us (the child and I) experienced.[1] CR's patient, engaged listening with sensitive, careful questions about specific details helped to elicit an increasingly rich and accurate story. The following brief excerpt offers a taste of how such a description began:

RW: *Michael was whining at me that his boot was stuck. It wasn't like he was scared or worried or even that frustrated. He just didn't feel like doing it himself. He's like that a lot. Nicole really needed help with her boots; they're tough and she's much younger. I had to help her instead, and told him he'd just have to wait. Of course, he whined even louder, and then threw his boot at me.*

CR: *That Michael must really be hard, especially during times when it seems he's whining for no good reason or when he gets aggressive. What does he do then, like with the boot? What happens exactly?*

RW: *Well, he gets frustrated easily, we all know that! And then he loses it, and is really hard to calm down because he won't listen at that point. I guess we all try to avoid him in those situations. Like with the boot thing I was thinking, "Oh great, here we go!"*

CR: *So, what's it like to be in that moment with him—that time with the boot?*

RW: *Frustrating, obviously. I mean, I guess I get a little mad, and the whining bugs everyone. I know he's going to whine and get upset, and I know nothing I do will help. In fact if I say or do anything, it will likely make it worse. No matter what, I'll end up looking like I'm mean, or like I'm a bully or something. Or incompetent—like "Why can't I make this kid calm down and behave?"*

CR: *He traps you. You can't escape feeling either like a bully or like a failure.*

RW: *Right! I shouldn't get mad. He is only 3, after all. No matter how it goes I end up feeling bad about myself.*

CR: *How do you protect yourself from that?*

Two aspects of this "phase" of our supervisory process are noteworthy. First, I was

[1]Daniel Stern (2004) describes at length the nature and clinical significance of examining the specific details of interactive moments.

very timid about self-disclosure of any kind. Remembering and narrating events, the "facts," as they occurred, seemed relatively nonthreatening. I could "feel out" my supervisor and his process, and proceed gradually and tentatively. It allowed us to get acquainted. He allowed me to set the agenda, to freely decide what story or experience to relate, and how intimately I wished to disclose the details. He allowed me to wander with no particular or apparent destination in mind. I was, after all, simply a tourist. This introduction helped to build my confidence in the security of our relationship and to muster the courage for whatever might lie ahead. It was a safe way to begin. During this phase of our work I gradually came to recognize and then trust his nonjudgmental stance and his commitment to our alliance.

Attending to the details of my experiences proved over and over again to be a rich source of information . . .

Second, attending to the details of my experiences proved over and over again to be a rich source of information about me and my work with children. Much happens inter- and intrapersonally during these interactions with children (Stern, 1995, 2004). Feelings, thoughts, and intentions erupt and subside. Some of these I act on consciously and with a clear sense of purpose. Some I quickly repress, especially when I fear their outward expression will cause harm either to others, as with an outward expression of anger, or to myself if my behavior might lead to unpleasant feelings such as mortifying embarrassment. Some emotions find their way to unconscious and subtle expression even as I struggle to repress the inappropriately negative feelings and potentially damaging intentions. Before any attempt to understand *why* specific feelings, thoughts, and intentions emerge, they must first be identified and acknowledged. Rather than a simple narrative history of the events that transpired, the careful and unhurried recounting of emotion-laden experiences with children can yield a richer "reexperiencing" of the interaction. Examining the emotions that were evoked, expressed, or suppressed can lead to a better understanding of the events that followed.

Understanding My Reactions

Reexperiencing emotionally significant interactions with children provided an opportunity to carefully examine the emotions, thoughts, and intentions that accompanied and motivated my behavior. Under gentle but careful scrutiny, the meaning of my interactions and reactions came to light. For example, Michael clearly needed assistance and support at least as much as Nicole, probably more so. I soon recognized that my "turn to" Nicole, was, in fact, more a "turn away" from Michael to avoid the risk of professional embarrassment that interactions with him often entailed. Attending to Nicole was a device, a gimmick I used to give myself permission to pass over a more difficult caregiving task. Nicole would typically cooperate and warmly smile her gratitude. With Michael, no matter how carefully I proceeded, there was always the risk of an unpleasant battle in which both he and I would sink into a power struggle, his cries of protest and discontent calling everyone's attention to my inability to manage his behavior. As long as Nicole needed help it was acceptable to rebuff Michael. I dismissed Michael covertly and gently so as to go unnoticed to all, including me. Michael, of course, noticed; but I was saved from the pain of embarrassment and frustration that accompanies professional failure—real or imagined.

Andrea Booher

But Michael was 3 years old. How much harm could he really cause me? How much damage could he do? Is it really he who would label me incompetent and judge me to be failing as a teacher? Despite episodes of noncompliance and assorted other struggles with Michael, I never truly believed that *he* did. Reflecting on these episodes with Michael exposed this paradox: I felt frustrated, inept, and humiliated by a small 3-year-old. My recognition of this paradox and of the full range and intensity of the emotions that this and similar episodes evoked prompted CR to ask, "If not he, then who? Who else, whether or not actually present, is in the moment with the two of you?" We came then to the point of exploring the why of my feelings during interactions: Why *this* feeling, *this* thought, with *this* child, at *this* moment? The lens through which I filtered these moment-to-moment experiences began to become apparent. It was made up of feelings, thoughts, and tendencies to react to others in certain characteristic ways that I had unconsciously carried forward from childhood experiences. Then and there the "ghosts" that Selma Fraiberg (Fraiberg, Adleson, & Shapiro, 1980) described so eloquently emerged from the shadows to make their presence, essence, and power apparent. These "visitors from the unremembered past," as Fraiberg described them, had faces. It was not any and all childhood experiences that influenced my interactions with children, it was experiences *with another* that I was carrying forward that mattered. It was my childhood *others*—or more accurately, my representations of their attitudes and behavior toward me and my emotional responses to them—who influenced my relationships with children. These were my ghosts, and together CR and I made their acquaintance.

Talking about my work in a relationship characterized by a sense of security promoted this careful and deeper exploration of my emotions and behaviors. More importantly, this kind of supervisory relationship invited careful reflection of even those feelings and reactions that I considered to be unattractive and had worked so hard to suppress. My experience was never judged to be good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. It simply was. CR actively listened but never offered advice nor gave directions. He never suggested that I would "do better next time"

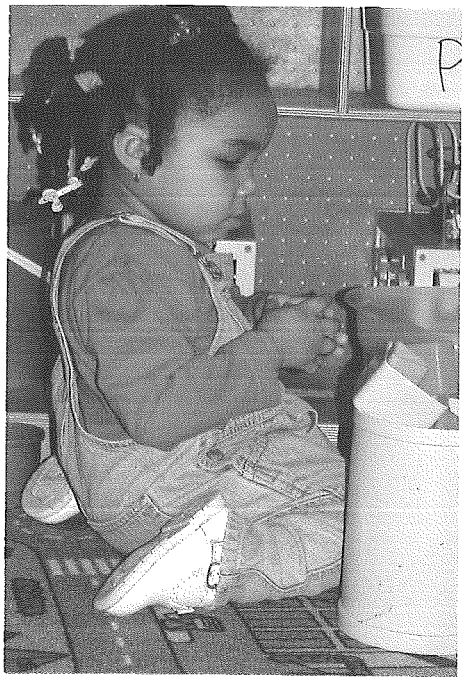

PHOTO: MARILYN NOLT

or that my experiences or feelings were common to others in my field.

The Possibility of Change

Acknowledging the existence and potential influence of my ghosts, or the experiences from my past that may be influencing my current relationships, marked the beginning of a third phase of supervision: a gentle invitation to know them better, to explore the full range and depth of their influence on my work, and to learn how to coexist peacefully and comfortably with their inevitable presence.

I characterize this phase of our process as "considering a possibility of change" because I was never made to feel that I was inadequate and therefore *should* change in any way. Reflecting on my interactions with children had helped me to become more attuned to children's reactions to me as a caregiver and, more importantly, to my own periodic feelings of fear, anger, inadequacy, and so forth. I realized that they did not simply act, they *reacted to me!* I then began to see more clearly and accurately how I was with children. I wanted to explore the possibility of change. I wanted to feel more comfortable and confident in my own work and to do better for the children entrusted to my care. Together CR and I recognized that we had come to a point in our work together when it was permissible for him to ask, "What (or who) keeps you from being the teacher you wish to be?" "What (or who) keeps you feeling inadequate or incompetent?" Who are these ghosts and what is the nature and effect of their hold on you?

Addressing these questions requires the most personal form of reflection and therefore the most intimate form of supervision. It can be uncomfortable at times, even scary. My initial reaction was ambivalence, despite the alliance we had forged and my admission that it was now appropriate and important to address these questions. I expressed this by periodically "needing" to cancel an appointment, or by bringing to supervision unrelated other "important" issues or events to discuss. During some sessions I delayed and dodged, using "small talk" that rambled on until our time ran out. I tried to forget about the ghosts. I tried telling myself that simply knowing they existed was sufficient, and they would now just leave me to my work. CR waited patiently. Eventually, but initially only periodically and very tentatively, I gathered my courage to advance. Each time I did so he was there waiting and accepted that I must have needed to leave or retreat, at least for a while. The process was mine after all.

Reflecting on my interactions with children had helped me to become more attuned to children's reactions . . .

Our approach to supervision required that we negotiate, and periodically renegotiate, the boundaries of our work together. At times, the boundaries that demarcate the line between supervision and therapy seemed flexible or appeared to blur. To me, my safety was far more important than specifying the exact nature and location of that boundary. Throughout our time together, my feeling safe was paramount to us both, and *that* determined the boundaries of our work.

In time we came to know something of these ghosts, their methods and their motives. These insights, and an eventual realization that the ghosts were human with ghosts of their own, helped me to begin to live a little more comfortably with their influence.

The Result of Reflective Supervision

I MUST ADMIT that change was inconsistent, variable, and sporadic. Some sessions yielded little or nothing in the way of personal or professional growth, at least that I was able to discern or feel. Periodically, though, what transpired during our time together rocked me to the core and offered a flood of insight. At such times I felt a veil lifted, allowing clarity of vision into who and how I was in my relationships with children, and a deepening understanding about why I am so. This new-found clarity and understanding spawned ideas and plans for trying to be different and better in my work. Perhaps most important, I began to better tolerate my own inevitable mistakes and shortcomings. This, in turn, precipitated a gradual increase in my tolerance for even the most exasperating characteristics of my young clients and an improved capacity to be calm, available, and supportive during the most difficult interpersonal episodes with them.

Several capacities relevant to my work as a caregiver of toddlers and preschool children began to change. I am referring here not to my ability to manage, change, or control children's behavior but instead to my ability to empathize with children.

For example, I became more sensitive to my own emotions evoked by specific behaviors and during interactions with children. I was more likely to recognize and label for myself these specific emotions, including those that were conspicuously aroused and obvious and those that were less apparent, more subconscious. I was more acutely aware of the feelings that would compel me to "turn away from" a child such as Michael. While these feelings often floated beneath the surface, they nevertheless always pushed for release or expression even if through subtle or covert behaviors. They were always present and operating. Now they were more visible and conscious. I also became more aware of and paid increased attention to the expression of those feelings: even subtle expressions such as increased muscle tension, small changes in posture, and slight changes in facial expression and tone of voice.

I was more conscious of what a child might be seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing from me, and better attuned to how that might affect their thoughts and feelings. I gradually became able to sense more fully what was transpiring between a child and me during an interaction and more attuned to my contributions to the interaction, even during episodes of noncompliance and conflict. I was able to better manage, if not completely control, the effect of my emotions on my responses to children and gradually their influence began to fade. My reactions became more appropriate to the real child before me.

I became more comfortable with my own limitations and imperfections as a teacher. Not that I didn't feel the need to learn and improve; rather I came to accept reality of the work as difficult and messy. Mistakes with 2-year-olds are an unavoidable fact of life. They *will* from time to time make me look and feel incompetent, ignorant, impotent, and silly. Even on my good days. I *will* misread them. I *will* do and say the wrong thing. There *will* be breaches in the harmony of even the best of my relationships with children. My interpretation of the seriousness and magnitude of such episodes became more legitimate, and the emotional burden that typically

accompanied missteps and mishaps became more commensurate with their actual consequences. I became less preoccupied by remorse and self-criticism over my mistakes and more tolerant of the inevitable unpredictability of children's behavior and of the ebb and flow our emotions and interactions.

I began to feel an improved ability and willingness to sense, recognize, and examine my more pervasive attitudes toward individual children. In every group there is at least one child, and often two or three, whom I find to be especially challenging. The behavior and affect of these children provoke in me feelings of frustration, aggravation, impotence, incompetence, rejection, and anxiety. The desire to disengage and drift away from these children can be a powerful force—one that if regularly acted on, leaves children to their own devices to struggle alone with the challenges of group care. My disengagement could be subtle and go unnoticed by everyone in the room—except that particular child. Strategies such as classroom housekeeping, attending more to "easier" or more gratifying children, or assigning supervision of a challenging child to an assistant enabled me to look and feel like a "good teacher" even as a child entrusted to my care struggled to connect. As I became more conscious of my impulses to avoid or dismiss a child while acknowledging the underlying feelings that drove those impulses, it became easier to muster the courage and energy necessary to engage the child.

I now have an unshakable belief in the importance of reflection as a key focus of professional development . . .

The most important change was my increasing ability to be psychologically present "in the moment" with a child. I became better able to focus more exclusively and clearly on what he was doing, feeling, intending, and thinking. Being present in this way, whether it is with a toddler as he explores a novel toy or with a child during episodes of purposeful noncompliance, is an essential teaching and caregiving function. The occasions when I can support such engagement and exploration without intruding are when I am best able to support a child's development. This is not simply a matter of accurately observing what a child is doing and correctly guessing what he might be thinking. It involves momentarily letting go of one's need to manage, control, or even teach. The capacity to appropriately let go of my needs and worries to simply be with the moment became more reliable.

Photo: Marilyn Nolt

Being present and available to a child in this way entails being simultaneously more present to myself—that is, being similarly aware of my own feelings, thoughts, intentions, and needs. In emotionally charged interactions with young children, caregivers must regulate and soothe both the child and themselves. It is inappropriate to expect a toddler to share responsibility for regulating the interaction. There is, then, no one else. For this to go well, the caregiver must be fully aware of both child and self and be sufficiently present to care for both.

What Sticks?

Although my initial experience of reflective supervision occurred many years ago, much from that experience sticks with me. I do, of course, remember some especially useful and poignant supervisory experiences and the most significant (for me) discoveries about "how I am" in my work. More importantly, I have carried forward attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about reflective practice and supervision.

The Necessity of Reflection

I now have an unshakable belief in the importance of reflection as a key focus of professional development for anyone working with children and parents. Using supervision as a mirror for self-reflection is invaluable. For me it is a necessity. My "ghosts" accompany me wherever I go in this work. They exert powerful influence over who I am and how I am. Knowing them better is helpful. The supervision I received enabled me to see that my feelings and reactions are not necessarily demons to be exorcised. They are tendencies to feel, think, and act in utterly human ways—albeit sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. Understanding my feelings helps me to see myself more clearly and thus more accurately sense a child's needs.

Reflection does not ensure that I consistently and effectively recognize and resist the untoward influence of my past experiences or that I always use them effectively. Sometimes I do; often I fail. Regular reflection helps me to recognize what has happened and its effect on those for whom I work.

Trepidation and Resistance

There have been times when the discoveries made in supervision were disconcerting, a few even painful. Some of my ghosts I don't at all like. Some of them are ugly and scary. I still resist acknowledging their existence and prefer to shy away from their presence. Most disquieting is how much they remind me of me, especially when I see them in my own reflection as I interact with toddlers, preschoolers, and their parents. I prefer to look away at those times. Therefore, I sometimes (often, in fact) prefer to busy myself with other duties in order to avoid the "mirror" that reflective supervision presents. "No time for this," I tell myself. So despite my recognition of the importance of reflective practice and supervision, I sometimes resist its intrusion into the comfort of my emotional and professional status quo. I settle into and enjoy the myopia. All the while, though, I'm trying to muster the courage to push forward to take another, closer look. Remembering the fortifying security that supervision provided in the past has often helped to quell my anxious reluctance just enough to return to the process.

Supervision Is Never Over

The feelings and tendencies to act in ways that I had come to understand and manage

Consumer's Guide to Reflective Supervision

When choosing a supervisory relationship for the purpose of reflection I consider four qualities: presence, commitment, reverence, and mutuality. All are essential, for without them my reflective work will certainly sputter and stall.

Presence. Reflection is a deeply personal process. It can get to the very core of who I am and its effect on my work. Sharing this process with another is most intimate and requires considerable trust. My supervisor must be fully present and engaged in this process with me and not distracted by his or her own personal or professional agenda. This is about me and my work, and I need full attention about what I am feeling and thinking (see Schafer, W., this issue, p. XX).

Commitment. Reflection is the most important aspect of my professional development. If it goes well, nothing will have a greater impact on my relationships with children and families and my capacity to help. If I am to venture into reflective supervision, then I expect to work hard at it, especially when the discoveries are painful or frightening. I will prepare myself for supervision and the work we will do together. I need a supervisor who will fully commit to this process as well. It must be a priority. Postponing, replacing, or interrupting reflective supervision with administrative tasks, "teaching," goal setting, or performance evaluations feels dismissive. Unless these tasks are left for another time and place, my reflective work will be guarded, tentative, and halfhearted.

Reverence. I look for a supervisor who has a profound respect for the intra- and interpersonal processes fundamental to the work of reflective supervision. Self-examination—looking inward—proceeds at a pace and in a manner that is unique to each individual. Neither of us really knows in advance what we will explore together or what we will discover. Change will not likely be linear or orderly with consistent and clearly identifiable markers of progress. My growth will proceed in fits and starts. I will occasionally become stuck. The *process* of my reflection must nevertheless be respected and supported. The relationship contract offered to me must therefore be "How can I help?" not "I know what you need and I have the expertise to bestow it."

Mutuality. My demands of a supervisor are high, and it's unreasonable to expect that anyone can meet them without fail: To err is inevitable. Breaches between us are likely, and our work together will surely provoke strong emotions. Mutuality in our relationship means first that my supervisor recognizes that reflective supervision is as necessary for him or her as it is for me. I am wary of the supervisor who is "above" supervision. Second, mutuality involves a willingness to own inevitable mistakes, acknowledge them, and work collaboratively, as equals, to resolve them.

years ago occasionally resurface, catching me by surprise. "I dealt with this!" I exclaim to myself when tied into the inevitable emotional knots that young children provoke. I have come to realize that whatever I had hoped to achieve through supervised reflection—personal and professional growth, mastery, self-awareness, self-acceptance—is fluid and elusive. It comes and goes. It is resilient in the face of some personal and professional circumstances but vulnerable to others. For me, the stability and vigor of what I think I have achieved requires ongoing support or it erodes. Sometimes a specific child will prove especially challenging; sometimes the dynamics of a particular group of children will overwhelm me. Reflection still does not come easily or feel natural. It has not become automatic. It requires practice still.

Quality Supervision

Reflection is a very personal and potentially difficult process, and we are likely to flourish only if we have a safe and trusting supervisory relationship. My supervisor provided a reliable alliance that gently encouraged me to take a careful and critical look at my relationships with children. He allowed me to proceed at my own pace. He occasionally offered his own vision and experience, though not as an expert or one with "superior vision," per se, but as one who had done some of this work himself. He was a companion who went with me, maybe a few steps ahead from time to time, but never pulling or pushing me along. His accompaniment was critical to my realization that my struggles were real, legitimate, and human. (See sidebar *Consumer's Guide to Reflective Supervision* for suggestions on choosing a supervisor for the purpose of reflection.)

Conclusion

My accidental encounter with an opportunity for reflective supervision led to personal and professional discoveries about the nature and importance of this process. My "tour" included a close inspection of my feelings and representations about myself as a caregiver and about the children I taught. Reflection offered an introduction to my own "ghosts in the nursery" and their influence on my relationships with the children and parents I served. My supervisor and I spent a considerable amount of time with these ghosts, and I gradually learned how to coexist more peacefully with their presence and even to use them for professional advantage. Through reflective supervision, I experienced the very sort of respectful, understanding, and supportive relationship I hoped to provide to children and their families. I experienced firsthand what a potent agent of change this kind of relationship can be.

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Center for Early Education and Development

www.education.umn.edu/ceed/

The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) is a resource and training center housed in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. CEED provides a variety of courses, workshops, and publications for professional serving young children and their parents. CEED offers monthly reflective practice groups for practitioners and supervisors.

The Center for Reflective Community Practice

www.crcp.mit.edu

The Center for Reflective Community Practice at the Massachusettes Institutue of Technology focuses its research and community development activities on the relationships among reflective practice, community development, and social change. Several brief articles offered by the Center provide useful information for supervisors on the nature and process of reflective practice. Joy Amulya's brief article, "What is Reflective Practice" is especially informative.

References

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