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| **Reflective Supervision**ZERO TO THREE’s work over the last quarter-century has found that reflective supervision promotes and supports the development of a relationship-based organization.  This approach expands on the idea that supervision is a context for learning and professional development.  The three building blocks of reflective supervision—reflection, collaboration, and regularity—are outlined below.  **Reflection**Reflection means stepping back from the immediate, intense experience of hands-on work and taking the time to wonder what the experience really means.  What does it tell us about the family?  About ourselves?  Through reflection, we can examine our thoughts and feelings about the experience and identify the interventions that best meet the family’s goals for self-sufficiency, growth and development. Reflection in a supervisory relationship requires a foundation of honesty and trust.  The goal is to create an environment in which people do their best thinking—one characterized by safety, calmness and support.  Generally, supervisees meet with supervisors on a regular basis, providing material (like notes from visits with families, videos, verbal reports, etc.) that will help stimulate a dialogue about the work.  As a team, supervisor and supervisee explore the range of emotions (positive and negative) related to the families and issues the supervisee is managing.  As a team, they work to understand and identify appropriate next steps.  Reflective supervision is not therapy.  It is focused on experiences, thoughts and feelings directly connected with the work.  Reflective supervision is characterized by active listening and thoughtful questioning by both parties. The role of the supervisor is to help the supervisee to answer her own questions, and to provide the support and knowledge necessary to guide decision-making.  In addition, the supervisor provides an empathetic, nonjudgmental ear to the supervisee.  Working through complex emotions in a “safe place” allows the supervisee to manage the stress she experiences on the job.  It also allows the staff person to experience the very sort of relationship that she is expected to provide for infants, toddlers and families.Supervisors can also support staff’s professional development by using supervisory meetings as an opportunity to scaffold, or support the acquisition of, new knowledge.  One way of doing this is to encourage supervisees to analyze their own work and its implications.  Reflection is important because it empowers staff to assess their own performance.  Awareness of one’s strengths, as well as one’s limits and vulnerabilities, allows individuals to make mid-course corrections in work performance that feel natural, unforced, and generated from within.  **Collaboration**The concept of collaboration (or teamwork) emphasizes sharing the responsibility and control of power.  Power in an infant/family program is derived from many sources, among them position in the organization, ability to lead and inspire, sphere of influence and network of colleagues.  But most of all, power is derived from knowledge—about children and families, the field, and oneself in the work.  While sharing power is the goal of collaboration, it does not exempt supervisors from setting limits or exercising authority.  These responsibilities remain firmly within the supervisor’s domain.  Collaboration does, however, allow for a dialogue to occur on issues affecting the staff person and the program.  Collaboration allows staff to express interest in taking on new tasks and challenges, as well as to exercise some control over the terms and conditions of their work.  It offers supervisors and mentors a chance to learn from, as well as teach, staff.  Collaboration also allows supervisors to recognize opportunities to share responsibility and decision-making and, in so doing, cultivate leadership talent from within.Collaborative supervisory relationships are characterized by a clear understanding of the reciprocal expectations of each partner.  This “contract” is jointly developed and agreed upon by the supervisor and supervisee, and will vary in frequency, intensity and focus across the organization.  Key issues that should always be addressed, however, include logistical issues, such as when and where supervisory meetings will take place, and what will be discussed.  Finally, true collaboration requires open communication, flowing freely in both directions, and protected from “outsiders.”  Both partners assume the best about each other.  The supervisory relationship is one characterized by a feeling of trust and safety, where difficult issues can be discussed without fear of judgment, disclosure, or ridicule.  Open communication implies curiosity and active listening.  Either partner can ask “What were you thinking when you did that?” as a means of learning more about the motivations and thoughts of the other.  **Regularity**Neither reflection nor collaboration will occur without regularity of interactions.  Supervision should take place on a reliable schedule, and sufficient time must be allocated to its practice.  This time, while precious and hard to come by, should be protected from cancellation, rescheduling, or procrastination.  That said, everyone working in infant/family programs knows that there are times when scheduling conflicts or emergencies arise, making it necessary to reschedule supervision meetings.  When this happens, set another time to meet as soon as possible.  If the need to reschedule arises frequently, it makes sense to consider why this is happening.  Is the selected time an inconvenient one?  Is the supervisor or the staff member overburdened, or is either having difficulty with time management skills?  Is there some tension in the staff/supervisory relationship prompting either party to postpone their meeting?It takes time to build a trusting relationship, to collaborate, and to share ideas, thoughts, and emotions.  Supervisory meetings are an investment in the professional development of staff and in the future of the infant/family program.  Staff will take their cues from leaders:  do program directors make time for supervision?  Do the program’s leaders “walk the talk”?Excerpted from Parlakian, R. (2001). Look, listen, and learn:  Reflective supervision and relationship-based work.  Washington, D.C:  ZERO TO THREE. |
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**What is Reflective Leadership?**

Think for a moment about the words or phrases you might use to describe an effective leader. Chances are, the characteristics are not specific to the infant-family field but encompass more general qualities, such as “open to new ideas,” “thoughtful,” and “compassionate.”  The leadership traits listed below, which were generated by a group of early intervention professionals, represent the skills and abilities that most people believe leaders should possess.

Did any of these qualities appear on your list?

* Communicates a shared vision
* Is confident
* Exhibits a can-do attitude
* Facilitates and compromises; looks for “win-win” solutions
* Involves staff; uses a team-based approach
* Is flexible, adaptive
* Listens attentively
* Motivates staff
* Provides support and encouragement
* Respects staff and their thoughts, opinions, and feedback
* Sets clear goals
* Shares achievements
* Trusts employees
* Uses humor

Almost all of the qualities above refer to how effective the leader is at managing her interactions with others.  Simply put, we lead through relationships. How we lead is important: How we treat others, how we interact, how we resolve conflict, and how we provide feedback all directly influence our staff members—experience of the work.

Although effectiveness as a leader is often measured in quantitative outcomes—increasing school readiness, decreasing incidences of abuse and neglect, increasing vaccination rates—it is our ability to reflect on, and optimize, our relationships that makes these goals achievable. It is our skill in connecting with others, guiding and mentoring them, that makes—good numbers—a natural outgrowth of good relationships. In other words, our accomplishments are a reflection of what our relationships have allowed us to achieve.That fundamental truth inspired this publication: Leadership takes place in the context of relationships, and quality relationships are crucial to good outcomes.

**Reflective Leadership in Infant-Family Programs**
Leaders in the infant-family field hope that their program is one in which quality relationships characterized by trust, support, and growth exist among supervisors, staff, parents and children.  These relationships form the foundation for all the work that is done.  Workplaces based on these beliefs and values can be thought of as relationship-based organizations.

Reflective leadership is the key to creating a relationship-based organization.  It is characterized by three important skills: self-awareness, careful observation, and flexible response.

Self-awareness refers to a leader’s ability to know herself, her strengths, and her limitations.  It implies that a leader is interested in, and committed to, examining her own reactions, thoughts, and feelings about the work.

Careful observation means that leaders are skilled at deciphering the meaning of what they are seeing and hearing.  Leaders wonder about the meaning of their own and others’ behavior, tones of voice, body language, or reactions.  They ask themselves, “Why might this be happening?” and solicit more information.

Flexible responses require that leaders know their staff—what their personal styles are, how they work best, what motivates them.  Leaders can then approach each professional in a way that reflects that particular staff member’s needs, strengths, and areas for development.  Flexible responses are the most basic—and sometimes most difficult—expression of mutual respect in our relationships with staff members.

Excerpted from Parlakian, R. & Seibel, N. (2001). Being in charge:  Reflective leadership in infant-family programs. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE

**Reflective Practice Model and Organizational
Change in Infant-Family Programs**

The Portage Project in Portage, Wisc., created a Reflective Practice Model that includes three prerequisites, or key elements.  They are:

* A commitment to develop and maintain trust and security within the group;
* Allocation of time and place for regularly scheduled staff meetings; and
* Support for activities that encourage and teach ways to reflect on the work at all levels of the organization.

These elements are to be integrated into the program’s existing daily routines and carried out by existing staff.  These core perspectives act as a lens through which ideas, actions, and feelings are explored.  They provide a filter for the dialogue that occurs during group and individual interactions.  They include being family-centered, thinking ecologically, using a strengths-based approach, having a relational focus, and being reflective.  They guide observation, listening, and inquiry, helping staff to consider their relationships from multiple perspectives.  The development and assimilation of reflective practice methodology occurs through the Discovery, Engagement, and Integration phases of the Reflective Practice Model.

**Organizational Issues in Establishing Reflective Practice**

**Commitment**As the principle of parallel process would suggest, clear evidence of commitment at the leadership level is an important first step in laying the foundation for a relationship-based organization and implementation of a reflective practice model.  This can be demonstrated in many ways, including the personal interactions of program directors with staff, the decision-making processes in evidence at the agency level, uniform accountability to a standard of regular supervisory contact, and frequent opportunities for open-ended discussion of the work.

**Attention to all levels of the organization**While the first priority may be to get buy-in from a core management group, training and support need to be given to support staff, direct services staff, and middle management as well.  Everyone should be provided with a clear explanation of reflective supervision (and an understanding of how it relates to relationship-based work) as well as regular opportunities to receive it.

**Time management**
When reflective practice and supervision are first presented, a common reaction is “that sounds great, but we would never have enough time to do it.” While it may not always be possible, or even desirable, to institute new, separate meetings for in-depth case discussions, the times that staff already meet together can be restructured so as to reflect different priorities.

**Clarification of the organizational/supervisory structure**If we believe that all staff need and deserve supervisory support, it is important for every person to clearly understand who their supervisor and what the nature of the relationship is.  If we understand supervision to be a “relationship for learning,” with the opportunity for regular, collaborative reflection, then we must consider what is reasonable with respect to the number of staff than an individual supervisor can meaningfully support.

Use of the interview, job description, staff orientation, and performance review
The hiring process itself presents several opportunities for clear articulation of agency values and philosophy, which can then be reinforced through orientation activities and the annual performance review.

Excerpted from Norman-Murch, T. and Ward, G. (2001). First steps in establishing reflective practice and supervision: Organizational issues and strategies. *Zero to Three* *20*(1).

Jeree Pawl on Reflective Supervision

Definition by Jeree Pawl, former director of the Infant-Family Program, San Francisco General Hospital

Supervision exists to provide a respectful, understanding and thoughtful atmosphere where exchanges of information, thoughts, and feelings about the things that arise around one’s work can occur. The focus is on the families involved and on the experience of the supervisee.  Depending on discipline, content may vary enormously, but it is not possible to work on behalf of human beings to try to help them without having powerful feelings aroused in yourself…I have coined a shorthand platinum rule to supplement the golden one in order to quickly convey a sense of this parallel process “Do unto others as you would have others do unto others.”  This is an essential aspect of the supervisory relationship to appreciate.  The relationship between supervisor and supervisee sets a major tone that reverberates throughout the system, whether it does so for good or for ill.  When it is positive, it can hasten exponentially the process of what the supervisee learns through experience and self-reflection.  The practitioner’s experience in supervision directly affects the interactions he has with the child and the family.  It is this complex nest of relationships that we care about. Leadership

As a Way of Thinking

Leadership can be viewed from three perspectives:

The exercise of influenceMost early childhood and family service administrators readily accept the notion that an essential part of leadership is one’s ability to inspire, motivate, and affect the feelings and actions of others. But when the conversation expands to include a discussion of authority and the exercise of power, many in our ranks feel uncomfortable, believing that these terms carry negative connotations. This is unfortunate because the way in which leaders view the authority and power relationships inherent in their organizations has everything to do with their ability to achieve their programs’ missions.

Rethinking personal conceptions of power and moving to a model of facilitative leadership means rethinking the specifics of how you as a leader can create partnerships in every facet of your organization’s operations.

An expression of values
Our personal values shape our beliefs about what is important to pursue, how we treat others, and how we choose to spend our time… A belief is different from a value…Our core values cut across all aspects of our lives.  They serve as a point of reference, a moral compass for making daily decisions.  They give rise to our fundamental commitments, the things in life that we consider worthy for their own sake…What does this mean in your day-to-day life as an administrator?

A statement of hopes and dreams
Rare is the early childhood director who does not feel caught in a whirlwind of activity created by the daily demands of the administrative role. The nitty gritty of the director’s job leaves precious little time to stand back and envision the future. Directors who dare to dream big, who have a compelling sense of purpose and vision for their programs, are indeed rare in our profession.  This is understandable. But how is it that some early childhood and family service administrators seem undaunted by the limiting realities of the early childhood field?  Despite the same obstacles, they create organizations that achieve extraordinary outcomes for children and families. These directors see themselves as agents of change whose calling is to connect the dots of values, mission, and vision.

Excerpted from Bloom, P.J. (2004).  Leadership as a way of thinking. Zero to Three, (25)2.

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| **Thinking about Reflection**

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| **Southern Oregon Early Head Start Program** **Where:** Central Point, Oregon**Mission:** To provide opportunities for children and parents to achieve success with dignity.  **Target population:** Children aged 0-5 who are low-income or have a disability, and their families**Program Model:**  National child development program with center- and home-based components**Introduced Reflective Supervision:** 1995**Catalyst for Change:** Start-up program seeking to implement best  |

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| **Southern OregonEarly Head Start** In 1994, the federal Early Head Start program was created by the U.S. Congress as part of the reauthorization of the Head Start Act. Oregon’s two Early Head Start sites were among the first programs established. Early Head Start is a comprehensive child development program with both center-based and home-based components. Its primary objectives are the promotion of healthy parent-child relationships, and the provision of other individualized services including education and early childhood development and medical, dental, mental health, and nutrition services. Oregon Early Head Start’s philosophy is that healthy development is best promoted within the context of nurturing relationships with a primary caregiver who is responsive to the child’s needs. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, are included as full partners in all OEHS service areas. |

Talley Dunn, program coordinator, notes, “Being [in the first wave of Early Head Start programs], we were really seeking the best possible things to do in setting up our program.  I started to get a sense that strong parent-child relationships and sincere relationships between supervisors and staff, and staff and families formed a continuous circle.  EHS put a name to it:  reflective supervision.”  Dunn sought more information about reflective supervision and ultimately decided to integrate elements of reflection and relationship-based work into the Oregon Early Head Start (OEHS) culture. She remembers:  “As a manager setting up two centers, the reason we decided to use reflective supervision was to provide high quality services to infants, toddlers and their parents.  Over time, we’ve been able to see a parallel—that reflective supervision supports staff, staff support parents, and that parents support their children.  It might sound idealistic, but that’s what we’re hoping for, and that’s what we’re seeing in our program.”Dunn’s mentor, Mary Foltz, an infant/toddler specialist at Portland State University, assisted her with the introduction of reflective supervision.  In the planning phases, this mentorship included twice-monthly conference calls to discuss key articles and questions related to reflective supervisory practices.  Foltz was then available later in the process to debrief with Dunn after she began providing her staff with supervision.**Recruitment, Selection, and Staff Orientation** Having established the program from the ground-up, Dunn sought to hire staff members who were open to the reflective culture she was working to establish at OEHS.  As most job candidates then and now are not familiar with the concept of reflective supervision, Dunn and her team use specific interview questions to assess job candidates’ ability to be reflective about themselves and the work.  Examples include:* Do you work best independently or in teams?
* If you had a conflict with your supervisor, what would you do?
* How do you like your supervisor to approach you?

Once on site, new employees meet with their supervisors to learn more about the twice-monthly supervisory meetings for direct service staff, as well as to answer any specific questions they may have about the process of reflective supervision.  Supervisory relationships develop at the staff member’s pace and comfort level.  “There’s no rushing this process,” says site supervisor Lauren Bell, who reports to Dunn. New staff members typically become involved in a supervisory relationship easily because “they see that there’s not one way of communicating inside my office and another way outside,” says Bell.  Through open, supportive interactions with both peers and supervisors, new employees soon realize that reflective supervision is not a specific event, but a way of being and communicating throughout the organization. The goal for supervisors is to establish a collaborative relationship with each staff member in which reflective supervision “is as an ongoing dialogue from the day they start until the day they leave,” says Bell.In the early years of the program, Dunn supplemented her targeted recruitment efforts with on-the-job training provided by Victor Bernstein, Ph.D. from the Chicago, Illinois-based Ounce of Prevention Fund.  Its purpose was to promote better understanding of reflective approaches among the new staff at Oregon Early Head Start.  Bernstein conducted two full-day training sessions on strengthening the family through strengthening the parent-child relationship.   This training, which took place in 1996 and 1997, also addressed observation techniques and the use of videotape to observe family interactions.  **Meetings Contribute to the Creation of a Reflective Culture** Weekly staff meetings, a group venue to encourage information-sharing and collegial support, have become integral to the OEHS program.  The value of these regular meetings is two-fold: They encourage collaboration, and they build a sense of commitment to one another and to the work.  Each person realizes that, while the work is challenging, they are not in it alone.  Bell remembers that her expectations about staff meetings, initially focused on administrative tasks and program-centered issues, changed over time:  “[I began to] recognize that the need is for us to connect as people, not only as workers.”  Each meeting now includes a discussion of emerging work-related issues as well as “check-ins” in which each staff members updates the others on the previous week.  Topics raised may be either professional or personal.  Oregon Early Head Start also uses the following meetings as a way to maximize opportunities for staff collaboration, support, and supervision. * **Debriefs**—Staff meet following parent/child interaction groups and discuss their immediate observations of interactions, children’s growth and development, and the effectiveness of the curriculum plans.  Peers listen, support, and encourage one another.  Adaptation and revision of curriculum plans takes place at this time.
* **Specialist Support Groups**—Staff working with children and families discuss overall job-related issues and their feelings about the work at these bimonthly meetings.  The specialists, all managing similar caseloads and responsibilities, provide empathy, support, and encouragement to one another.

**Challenges to Implementing Reflective Supervision****Finding the Time**Dunn notes that, hands down, the toughest part of using reflective supervision is “always having to make it a priority, [realizing it’s slipping and] then bringing it back to the fore.”  Says Dunn:  “There are always planning sessions, staff hirings, etc., that supervisory schedules have to accommodate.  To [find a balance], supervisors must be convinced of the value of the reflective, collaborative approach, not only for staff but for the well-being of families as well.  We need to make it a supervisory priority, creating the time and space for this effort.”Bell agrees, “Reflective supervision is a unique opportunity in the human services field, where outcomes are not always in direct relationship to staff’s contribution.  [Sometimes it can be hard for staff to tell] if they’re doing their job well or effectively.  The family situation is often an unstable measure.  By giving staff an opportunity to discuss their work, they can begin to understand their impact.”**Responding to Turnover**Turnover, though low at OEHS, is a tremendous challenge for this relationship-based model of supervision.  When staff members leave, “you start the relationship anew.  You can’t rush it.  You just need to wait patiently until trust is established,” says Dunn. **Learning and Applying the Concepts**While Bell agrees that finding the time for reflective supervision is difficult, she does wonder:“Whether time was ever really the issue for me since I’m as busy now as I was during start-up.  In the beginning, I thought, ‘There’s no way I can do that.’  During Year 1, there was little time and I was very uncomfortable with [reflective supervision]…  I thought I should be all-knowing, like my staff were supposed to come in and for one hour would tell me all their problems and I would give them all the answers.  Not surprisingly, I felt some anxiety about ‘what if I don’t have all the answers?’  [But] Ihad misunderstood what reflective supervision was supposed to be.”  By meeting regularly with Dunn (her supervisor), Bell grew more comfortable with the concepts of reflective supervision as time went on.  “I was looking for a technique, but really reflective supervision was about the relationship between Talley and me.  It was Year 3 before I looked forward to supervising staff because I let go of having all the answers.  Talley let me experience this in supervision.  She would say, ‘Tell me about what’s happening,’ not ‘What are all your problems?’ I understood how reflective supervision impacted others’ work by understanding how it affected me.”  In addition, Bell began to realize that all her daily interactions with staff were an opportunity to encourage reflective practice.  She observes, “[Realizing that] takes the pressure off of something big happening in the one-on-one meetings.”  Now, supervisors use groups, lunches, and casual discussions to learn from, share with, and support supervisees.  Reflective supervision, says Bell, “is the way in which we have relationships with staff, talk to staff, listen to staff.” **Outcomes of Reflective Supervision**One powerful outcome measure tracked by OEHS is its very low turnover—the highest level since 1994 has been only about 12 percent.  This compares to an average rate of 30 percent for the field (Whitebook & Bellm, 5).  In addition, the program has achieved a number of important staff development outcomes (listed below).  * **Staff display increased effectiveness in working with families**—e.g., watching for subtleties, wondering what families might (or might not) do, finding deeper meaning in their work. Bell notes that, as staff members begin to internalize the concepts of reflection and inquiry, their interactions with families change:  “New home visitors are focused on doing, doing, doing.  Experienced home visitors, on the other hand, are listening, listening, listening.”
* **Staff better understand how to integrate techniques used in training in their work**—e.g., using inquiry and critical thinking skills on the job.  By using these techniques to solicit more information about the parents and children with whom they work, staff can better individualize their responses and interventions to reflect families’ needs.
* **Staff better understand boundary issues**—e.g., are more open and cognizant of how they are affected by families, and vice versa.

Oregon Head Start has also observed positive outcomes for families as a result of using reflective supervision.  Dunn states that parents’ problem-solving skills have increased across time, as supportive relationships with staff help them to experiment with new parenting techniques and approaches. Lastly, Dunn observes that staff themselves no longer feel alone in difficult situations.  “They know that their supervisors will go with them to a home visit or court proceedings.  It’s letting them know they have a supervisor and colleagues who support them.”  This level of collaboration ensures that the most difficult questions receive the most comprehensive answers; the most emotionally intense interactions receive the greatest support. Oregon Early Head Start has found that the greatest benefit of reflective supervision lies in the fact that, says Dunn, it “gives everyone an opportunity to step back, observe, and learn from relationships:  with supervisors, staff, parents and children.” **Oregon Early Head Start Staff:**Talley Dunn, Program CoordinatorLauren Bell, Site SupervisorLaura Bellah, Family SpecialistExcerpted from Parlakian, R. (Ed.). (2002).  *Reflective supervision in practice:  Stories from the field.*  Washington, DC:  ZERO TO THREE |

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 **The Collaborative Peer Supervision Group (CPSG) Project**

The Collaborative Peer Supervision Group (CPSG) Project

This model, developed and implemented in Columbus, OH, was derived from three primary sources:

* A relationship-based infant mental health approach;
* A peer supervision framework developed for nurses; and
* A Continuing Education-Collaborative Office Rounds initiative designed to improve communication between pediatricians and child psychiatrists

A typical Collaborative Peer Supervision Group consists of two co-moderators one of whom has infant mental health expertise and anywhere from 8 to 15 participants.  Members are drawn from a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to, child and adolescent psychiatry, child psychology, early intervention, nursing, pediatrics, and social work.  Meetings are held at least once a month for approximately 1 hour.  Both food and continuing education credits are provided.  All members take turns presenting a case or topic, while the remaining members become peer consultants, modeling mutual respect and support for the presenter. The structure of the model can accommodate a wide variety of presentation formats, including a blend of case history, a written case summary supplemented by a video clip, etc.