Making the connections: A practice model for reflective supervision

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Over several decades, social work in Aotearoa New Zealand has undergone major alterations in service delivery in response to the management of risk and surveillance of practice within the neoliberal government agenda. Working in such an environment, social workers struggle to critically explore their position and professionally develop their practice. To support current professional practice in social work, reflective supervision has become a necessity for analysing and amplifying positive practice outcomes that benefit practitioners and service users.

METHOD: A four-layered practice model of reflective supervision has been developed by the researcher from a theoretical analysis of a study involving key informant and supervisory dyads. The purpose of the reflective supervision model is to support the agenda, task and process in the supervisory relationship towards critical reflection of practice.

FINDINGS: The four-layered practice model highlights the interrelationship between the social worker, the organisation, relationships with others, and the systemic contexts where practice occurs. The supervisee and supervisor have vital roles in order for reflection to occur in each supervision session.

CONCLUSIONS: Reflective supervision is seen as a co-constructed partnership between the supervisor and supervisee and the four-layered practice model assists in providing a structure for the session. The four-layered model supports critical thinking in the socio-political and socio-cultural environment, promotes social justice strategies and has versatility within a number of practice settings.

KEYWORDS: supervision; reflection; social work; social justice

The social work profession is in the midst of a challenging period of welfare austerity (Baines & van den Broek, 2016). Globally, neoliberalism and its accompanying managerialism have altered social work organisations and the way social workers work with service users (Gray & Webb, 2013). The socio-political and socio-cultural environment is now dominated by risk management, organisational accountability and government expectations to meet standards driven by compliance-focused agendas (Beddoe, 2010). The impact of managerialism in social work has eroded a professional identity that values relationships, social justice and critical reflection. Social workers face a quality-versus-quantity dilemma between providing professional, accountable, ethical processes and an auditing, fiscal surveillance of activities (Beddoe & Maidment, 2009). As a profession moving forward, social work requires critical thinking, clear ethical codes, values and skills in order to change society for the better (Gray & Webb, 2013).

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In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a professional commitment to bi-cultural practice, conduct and ethics related to working with Māori (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), 2008; Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), 2016). However, within the current realities of dominant Western Pākehā practices and organisational accountabilities to meet service targets, social workers struggle to support such professional obligations. The current environment threatens the values of the profession as it contributes to practitioner disillusionment.

The opportunities for social workers to reflect on their practice development and decision making has become crucial in a neoliberal environment. One such space can be found within supervision. Supervision can contribute to organisational learning and develop innovative processes within agencies (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012; Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004). Further, a reflective supervision experience provides the opportunity for the social worker to maintain a level of self-awareness, to examine power relationships within and between agencies, disadvantaged groups and statutory structures promoting the best interests of service users; and to critically develop an understanding of the wider socio-cultural and political factors impacting on practice. Literature relating to social work supervision has tended to focus on tensions in balancing organisational and professional accountabilities but there is a lack of examination of actual supervision practice and what reflective supervision "needs to do" (Beddoe, Karvinen-Niinikoski, Ruch, & Tsui, 2015; O'Donoghue, 2015). In order for supervision to be used as a space for critical thinking and action, supervisors and supervisees need to become more conscious of their own experiences and identify gaps between theoretical concepts and their application in practice (Fook & Gardner, 2007).

Drawing on literature and analysis of key informant and supervisory dyads' data in a previous study (Rankine, 2017), a four-layered practice model of reflective supervision has been developed that can be applied in the current practice environment. Systemic and holistic frameworks provide the social work profession with valuable information regarding the relationship individuals have with their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The four-layered practice model of reflective supervision (see Figure 1 and Table 1) connects the social worker to the structural and wider influences on practice. Fundamental to the model is the importance of critical thinking and, at its centre, professional social work. The model is a multi-layered framework to enable critical exploration and the interrelationship of each layer in supervision and how transformative action can then be transported into practice.

Reflective supervision

Supervision has become essential to social work fulfilling the professional and organisational aspects of practice. Traditionally, the functions of supervision (administrative, educative, supportive) have provided a framework for the session where a balance is sought between each function (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

Reflective supervision differs from traditional functions of supervision in that it moves beyond a prescriptive lens and provides a blueprint for how a session between the supervisor and supervisee is constructed (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Wilkins, Forrester, & Grant, 2016). Being reflective in supervision emphasises the learning process that takes place in the session. Fundamental to understanding this is the process of adult learning. Adult learning has been described as cyclic (Kolb, 1984) and that it requires reflection on an activity, consideration of other alternatives and then how action is taken. Experiential learning and how this process is linked to supervision has been previously described in the Reflective Learning model for supervision (Davys & Beddoe, 2010); this model traverses the

stages of a reflective learning cycle where the supervisor's role is to facilitate learning for the supervisee through different elements of their practice and to promote decision making. Reflective supervision has also been described as a layered process that takes reflective practice towards transformational changes in thinking and behaviour for the practitioner, both personally and professionally (Carroll, 2010). Also, the learning in supervision is not a "one way street" and, equally, the supervisor learns from the reflective exploration of the supervisee's issues in sessions (Weld, 2012).

Over the last few decades, reflective supervision has been increasingly influenced by postmodernism and critical theory. Postmodern thinking considers multiple narratives relating to the construction of knowledge and highlights dominant discourses of knowledge and power (Fook & Gardner, 2007). The exploration of multiple perspectives in supervision assists social workers to explore the value of individual knowledge, culture and language in practice (Hernández & McDowell, 2010). O'Donoghue (2003) has previously argued that dominant discourses have influenced supervision practices and that local knowledge, particularly from indigenous perspectives, needs to be utilised. Reflective supervision adopts social constructionist concepts in exploring how knowledge is constructed by individuals through human interaction within different contexts (Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009). Therefore, multiple cultural identities (such as ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation) and shared meanings between the supervisor and supervisee become pivotal to explore in reflective supervision.

Critical theory identifies the domination and subordination of people that operate at individual and structural levels (Gray & Webb, 2013). Critical approaches recognise the causal impact of social structures on social workers and the importance of understanding wider socio-political and socio-cultural factors when developing social justice informed strategies at a practice level.

Critical theory thus provides an important supervisory lens in which assumptions, contradictions and tensions of practice can be explored in supervision (Johnston, Noble, & Gray, 2016). Within these reflective supervisory approaches, supervisors are required to be transparent about their position and to adopt critical thinking in mutual conversations with supervisees relating to organisational procedures, power, authority and privilege within practice (Hair, 2014). These conversations between the supervisor and supervisee contribute to the development of anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive and strengths-based practice (Baines, 2017; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009).

In a changing practice environment, there is a need for supervisors to engage supervisees in critically reflective conversations and the many aspects of social justice within social work organisations (Hair, 2015; Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004). For critical conversations to occur in reflective supervision within different contexts, appropriate frameworks need to be developed in practice. The four-layered practice model of reflective supervision draws on concepts from postmodernism and critical theory to provide supervisory dyads with a structure to critically analyse the different contextual layers of social work practice and develop social justice strategies.

The four-layered practice model of reflective supervision

The four-layered practice model has been developed by the author from findings in a research thesis involving key informants and supervisory dyads working in community-based child welfare social work in Aotearoa New Zealand (Rankine, 2017). While this article does not specifically report on the research, the study was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. A critical analysis of the findings revealed that reflective supervision within community-based child welfare social work needed to develop the social worker's self-awareness; identify their

professional relationships and associated power dynamics; and explore the state's influence and the uncertainty associated with community-based child welfare social work (Rankine, 2017). The findings identified particular themes that support the development of social justice informed strategies by social workers within reflective supervision including: socio-cultural and socio-political influences on practice, power relationships and self-awareness (Rankine, 2017).

In order for reflective supervision to support critical analysis, the agenda, task and process for each supervisory dyad needs clarification; equally, the supervisee and supervisor have essential roles in the session to promote reflection (see Table 1). The supervisee has the primary responsibility for agenda setting and needs to commit to bringing items to supervision

for further discussion and reflection (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). The supervisor has responsibility for facilitating the session, contributing to the agenda setting related to the supervisee's needs and to co-ordinate reflective questioning related to the agenda. Supervisor questioning can assist with highlighting assumptions and promote collaborative exploration of language and meaning (Hair, 2015). Examples of particular questions raised by the supervisor that assist the supervisee's reflection on the agenda item are illustrated in Table 1. The supervisor's curiosity and inquiry are crucial skills in this facilitation. The supervisor's role allows for critical analysis and social justice informed strategies to emerge in the discussion. The supervisor maintains a *helicopter* view in terms of the agenda items and ensures the supervision discussion operates at different levels.

Table 1. The Four-layered Practice Model of Reflective Supervision

Layer	Supervisee's and supervisor's agenda	Supervisor questions
Layer 1: Self and role	Self-care Feelings Cultural identity and reflexivity Role clarity	• What self-care strategies need to be implemented? • What feelings does this issue raise for you? Where do these feelings come from? • How do personal experiences and/or triggers connect to this issue? • How do your cultural values, beliefs, assumptions impact on the situation? How do these connect with your role? How could you respond differently? • What are the parameters of your role?
Layer 2: The organisation	Function and purpose Funding Resources Meeting criteria Organisational culture Understanding tensions	• What is the purpose and function of the organisation? • What are the parameters of the service? How is the service funded? What other resources are available? Who else may assist? • What are the protocols and policies of the organisation? How do they impact on the issue? • What are the taken for granted meanings/assumptions/ power dynamics within the organisation? How could they be different? • What can you do to contribute towards changes being implemented in the organisation? How can you be the facilitator of change?
Layer 3: Relationships with others	Discussion of supervisory process The use of supervision – internal and external Work with clients Work with professionals Work with colleagues Exploration of power, difference and cross-cultural identities	• What accountabilities/responsibilities do we have to the supervision process? What are the parameters/ power issues? How can we build a more effective relationship? • What are the power issues/ assumptions/tensions/successes (in the identified relationship)? How do you think others perceive you? How do you engage with others? • How do your personal experiences/beliefs impact on this relationship? What changes in the relationship could be made?

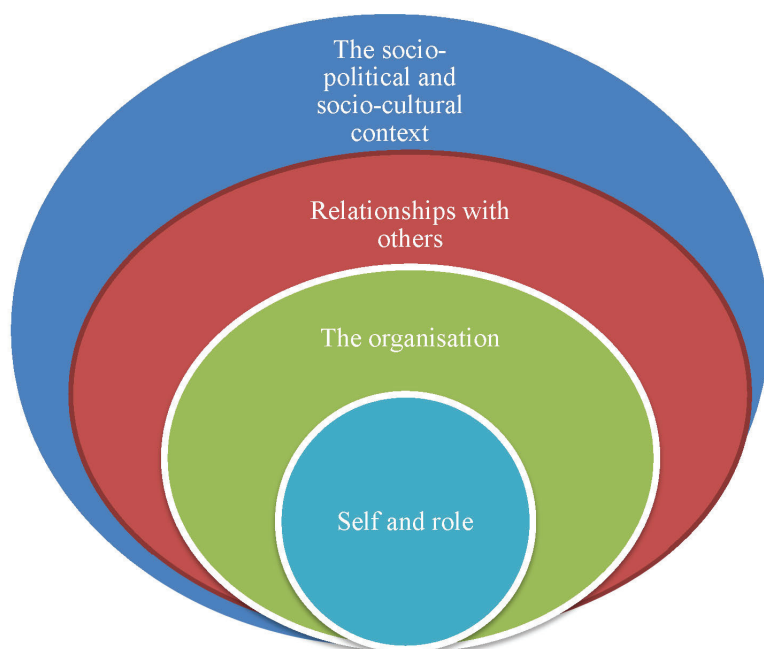| Layer 4: The socio-political and socio-cultural context	Public perception Power of social worker Socio-political and socio-cultural context Examination of dominant discourses and their impact on wider discourses Bi-culturalism Social justice Human rights	• What perspectives are you using when you consider this issue? What other perspectives are missing? How do these perspectives impact on your role? What would you want to change? • What are the social/cultural/political contexts related to this issue? How do these broader contexts impact? • What needs to be considered from an (indigenous) Aotearoa New Zealand/ bi-cultural perspective? • What social work theories/standards/ethics/research/protocols need to be considered? • What is the impact of dominant discourses and structures on this issue? What other discourses need to be considered? How can you support other discourses being heard? • What wider assumptions have been made and by whom? Where do these assumptions come from? What alternative actions can be considered?

Figure 1: The Four-layered Practice Model of Reflective Supervision

The four-layered practice model of reflective supervision (see Figure 1) provides connection between the social worker, the organisation, relationships with others, and the systemic contexts where practice occurs. The reflective supervision model proposes that each layer is explored sequentially (from layer one) with each layer offering a unique perspective in relation to the supervision issue. To varying degrees, elements identified at each layer also interconnect with the other layers in the

model, for example, the taken-for-granted assumptions operating at each layer of the reflective supervision model. Each layer of the reflective supervision practice model and its significance will now be discussed in more detail.

Layer One: Self and role

The first layer of the reflective supervision model relates to the social worker's use of self and her/his role within their particular agency. The development of a social worker's self-awareness is an ongoing reflective process that recognises the personal links with professional practice (Adamovich, Kuwee Kumsa, Rego, Stoddart, & Vito, 2014). The supervisor needs to provide the opportunity within the supervision context to support the supervisee's self-care, build their resilience and develop strategies that enhance well-being (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). In particular, the strengths of the social worker need to be illuminated as a positive way forward in tackling a demanding practice setting (Engelbrecht, 2010).

The development of strategies to improve coping, manage stress, and maintain positive self-esteem are essential so that the social worker is in a position to effect change and advocate for the vulnerable populations that they work with. As part of this layer of reflective supervision, the supervisee should regularly place their own self-care

on their supervision agenda. The supervisor needs to offer support, be aware of the supervisee's patterns of stress and enquire about self-care strategies that promote resilient ways of working for the supervisee. For some supervisors, safe exploration of the supervisee's self-care may present a tension with other conflicting demands on the supervision space. For example, the internal supervisor has managerial oversight of the supervisee's practice and needs to ensure organisational targets are met. The supervisor's position requires ongoing review and transparency with the supervisee to ensure self-care is a dedicated aspect of the session.

Due to working with disadvantaged populations in society, social workers are often susceptible to trauma and emotions can be triggered by their own personal histories of disadvantage. Feelings of being overwhelmed are prominent and the unpacking of strong emotions assists the social worker to develop capacity and overcome obstacles (Ferguson, 2011). Reflective supervision provides the basis for the safe expression of the social worker's emotions without judgement by the supervisor (Beddoe, Davys, & Adamson, 2014). Both the supervisor and the supervisee have a dual responsibility towards developing an awareness of emotion so they can be explored more closely in the session (Davys & Beddoe, 2010). In a supervision context where emotions are not discussed, the social worker learns to suppress these experiences – such suppression leads to a detachment from experiences within practice (Ferguson, 2011) and eventual burnout. Supervision, as a safe space to reflect upon emotion, is essential to a social worker's longevity in their role (Vito, 2015).

An ongoing awareness of a social worker's knowledge and values and how they impact on practice is crucial. This reflexivity provides information regarding the affective and performative elements for a social worker's development (Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012). Reflective

supervision provides the supervisee with the opportunity to critically examine aspects of culture and diversity (such as race, sexual orientation, spiritual and political beliefs) in the session and this can pose both challenges and insights. Working to interrogate assumptions and expectations is part of practice and critical for the conversations held in supervision (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). This level of examination is paramount to understanding how attitudes, values and social systems can influence and reproduce oppression and how social justice principles can be developed in the social worker's practice. The supervisee is responsible for developing their own reflexivity and understanding of cultural identity in supervision. The supervisor's task is to assist the supervisee to understand the connection between their cultural identity and their professional role by asking questions such as: How do your cultural values, beliefs, assumptions impact on the situation? How do these connect with your role? How could you act differently?

Layer one of the reflective supervision practice model also addresses the role of the social worker. In order to effectively work with diverse groups, social workers need to have a clear understanding of their professional position. The changes in the operationalisation of social work services (and the social work position) have led to tighter accountabilities associated with assessing risk and meeting specific criteria of service provision for service users. These current realities require social workers to re-think and re-define their professional practices. Recent research has reported that supervision has huge significance in developing and sustaining a social worker's professional identity and their role (Saltiel, 2016). Through reflective supervision, the social worker can develop confidence through critical examination and manage the contradictions and complexity associated with their professional position.

Layer Two: The organisation

The second layer of the four-layered practice model connects the social worker to the organisation where they work. The organisational environment is influential on the social worker's capacity to grow and learn and it governs how professional interactions take place. For supervision to be reflective, learning needs to be embedded within organisational practices (Tsui, 2005). Organisations must foster innovation and a deeper understanding of professional knowledge within reflective supervision (Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004). Commonplace within social work services are highly bureaucratic systems to measure risk, provide assessment tools and regimented criteria for service provision (Beddoe, 2010). The impact of the organisational structure on professional social work and the practice of supervision requires critical exploration. In order for reflective supervision to occur, the supervisee needs to articulate the function and purpose of the service in the session. The supervisor's role is to assist the supervisee to locate the context of the service, and the criteria and parameters for service provision. Such exploration in supervision assists the social worker to understand his/her position related to the range of services or programmes offered, the practice methods employed, service user and professional interaction and the identification of specific local service needs.

The supervisor also encourages the supervisee to critically consider the policies and protocols of their organisation (Hair, 2015); thus the associated tensions between social work practice and organisational policy can then be identified against other possible solutions. For example: How do organisational protocols impact on the issue? What other resources are available? Who else may assist? Reflective supervision offers the opportunity to consider different perspectives when working with service users and the navigation of complex organisational systems (Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004).

The culture that exists within an organisation has a major impact on learning and the effectiveness of supervision for social workers in the workplace (Davys & Beddoe, 2010). Reflective supervision provides critical examination of risk-averse cultures that have permeated practice, policy and the supervision of practitioners. For many social workers, supervision has been often used to discuss auditing expectations and meeting targets for service delivery (Beddoe, 2010). This organisational culture does not develop critical skills or the ability to manage complex situations for social work practitioners – instead, an exchange of information occurs in supervision and the social worker is merely "told what to do next" by their supervisor.

Hawkins and Shohet (2012) identify that developing awareness and understanding is the first step to changing an organisation's culture. The supervisee needs to be prepared, in layer two of the reflective supervision practice model, to discuss the organisational culture at their work as a topic for deeper reflection. The supervisor has an important task to identify and explore the impact of organisational culture on learning through the use of questions such as: What are the taken-for-granted assumptions within the organisation?; How could they be different? Related to this, the supervisor's role assists the supervisee in their generative learning from the supervision session (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012) and, as a result, reflective supervision assists the supervisee to develop healthier ways of learning in their organisation.

Discussing the impact of organisational change, lack of funding and loss of resources is necessary in reflective supervision to maintain a strong and resilient level of functioning within the organisation. However, ongoing negative discussions relating to despondency, deficit-based thinking and distance from decision making can be corrosive to practice over time and, in turn, hampers critical thinking in reflective supervision (Beddoe, 2010). Supervision

too, can then replicate an organisation's deficit-based culture that the supervisor and supervisee can unwittingly be co-conspirators in. Strengths based exploration in the session can assist in the removal of barriers to practice (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). A commitment from supervisors to explore solutions related to lack of resourcing and restrictions on organisations provides supervisees with valuable theoretical and ethical ways to practise with others and how to respond best to service user needs. Supervisors and supervisees need to critically explore the tensions inherent in working within social service organisations so that strategies and alternatives in practice can be identified.

Layer Three: Relationships with others

The third layer of the four-layered practice model highlights the relationships that the social worker has with others. Maintaining professional relationships is core to social work and the supervision space reveals contested and competing narratives from the supervisor, supervisee, service users, and other professionals (Saltiel, 2016). An open discussion and exploration of the social worker's professional relationships are central to reflective supervision. Such discussions provide a wider understanding of competing organisational and professional pressures on the practitioner.

A fundamental "building block" for the social worker's relationships with others begins with the supervisory relationship itself. The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is an important structured and socialising process that determines how the social worker develops other professional working relationships. According to Beddoe and Davys (2016) and Westergaard (2013), the isomorphic nature of supervision needs to parallel how the supervisee builds other relationships with service users and professionals. Reflective supervision needs to therefore promote the importance of culture, values and relationships in social work.

Establishing and maintaining the relationship through trust, honesty and openness is a key requirement of the supervisor. These attributes require the supervisor to possess certain skills built on empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence (Westergaard, 2013) in order to build a positive and successful relationship with the supervisee. The supervisor requires a range of facilitative skills so that the supervisee feels comfortable in reflecting upon their work (Bond & Holland, 2010); these include: the supervisor's confidence to ask critical questions, a willingness to explore different perspectives and encourage the supervisee to find solutions. In addition, supervisors need to have prior training, to understand the purpose of reflective supervision, to have an awareness of adult learning and maintain appropriate and ethical boundaries with the supervisee. Finally, the supervisor needs to have an awareness of their own social and cultural context and the impact of this on the supervisory relationship. The supervisor's reflexivity (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012) and cultural experiences and knowledge (Hernández & McDowell, 2010) become critical elements for the interaction with the supervisee and the wider systemic influences on the relationship. The negotiation and review of the supervision contract and the importance of feedback are important processes that the supervisor can develop with the supervisee (Davys & Beddoe, 2010).

Power, as part of the supervisory relationship, requires critical exploration. The supervisor's position (as external or internal supervisor) is a determining factor in how the supervisee will utilise the supervisory relationship. The supervisor may unwittingly or purposefully utilise their position and/ or expertise to ensure organisational objectives are met (Tsui, 2005) and subsequently, supervisees will be reluctant to engage in reflection. Splitting different aspects of supervision has become useful for addressing the different and, at times, competing, professional and

organisational agendas (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). External supervision has become an important option for many social workers to enhance a professional discourse in their practice. External supervision allows the social worker to choose their supervisor, promotes professional growth, reflect on practice and on relationships outside of their organisation (Beddoe, 2011) whereas, internal supervision has added emphasis on accountabilities to organisation policies. The tendency of internal supervision is to focus on casework and meeting organisational targets (Bradley, Engelbrecht, & Höjer, 2010). Irrespective of the supervisory relationship being internal or external to the organisation, transparency, consistency and ongoing review in the relationship are needed in order for reflective supervision to occur (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). The acknowledgement of power differences in the supervisory relationship and how this influences agenda setting, planning for risk and managing professional work require ongoing conversations. Both the supervisee and supervisor have a responsibility to discuss the parameters of their working relationship, accountabilities, and how a reflective process is maintained.

Social work provides opportunities to work with service users creatively and to promote social justice – an area often overlooked in practice due to other organisational pressures on the practitioner. Reflective supervision offers the opportunity for the social worker to examine a service user's situation more comprehensively and find solutions to their intervention planning. This level of reflection assists the social worker to build stronger networks and positive relationships with service users and their community. Hair and O'Donoghue (2009) reinforce the importance of discovering alternative discourses when working with complexity in supervision. Reflective supervision is the opportunity for the supervisee and supervisor to discover the voice of service users often silenced by more dominant agendas.

The power relationships associated with working alongside other colleagues and professional groups is another important area to consider within supervision in layer three of the four-layered model. The organisational culture (as discussed in layer two) creates power dynamics and hierarchies within the organisation itself. These relational dynamics reproduce dominant discourses that privilege some staff, and disadvantage others, according to their role and position. Liaison with other professionals, understanding of specific responsibilities and balancing discourses also present common challenges. Reflective supervision provides an essential space for raising challenging relationships the social worker might have with other professionals and seeks to validate more collaborative working relationships.

The task of the supervisor is to encourage the supervisee to critically examine power and tensions within their working relationships and develop a deeper understanding of systems that impact on their role. The supervisor might ask critical questions like: What are the power issues and associated tensions (in the identified relationship)?; What changes in the relationship could be made? Areas of diversity and cross-cultural interactions are also key factors that need consideration and the influence these have on relationships. Practice within supervision that addresses cultural competence is becoming more prominent in literature (Tsui, O'Donoghue, & Ng, 2014). Hair and O'Donoghue (2009) suggest that the supervisor adopt a curious and questioning stance with the supervisee —one that does not assume expert knowledge. What becomes important in the supervisory conversation are similarities and differences in power and privilege which, in turn, support greater understandings of equity and justice in social work practice (Hernández & McDowell, 2010).

Layer Four: The socio-cultural and socio-political context

The final layer of the four-layered practice model of reflective supervision is the

socio-cultural and socio-political context of social work practice. Rankine (2017) identified the need for social workers to critically consider the wider structural factors related to their work in reflective supervision. Central social work values relating to social justice appear to be sidelined by neoliberal-agenda-driven structural, political and cultural factors (Hair, 2015). Reflective supervision needs to include a critical analysis of the wider systemic influences on professional social work and integrate this importance to the issues discussed in the session. Moreover, this exploration assists the social worker to develop appropriate strategies for action and change.

The socio-political and socio-cultural context of social work needs to be part of an ongoing discussion by the supervisee and supervisor. Social work as a profession has changed within a neoliberal and managerial environment. It has been long associated with supporting disadvantaged groups in society but also, paradoxically, acting as an agent of the state's policies. It is understandable that many social workers feel uncertain and disillusioned within this current climate (Rankine, 2017). Managerialism has resulted in changes in social work services that focus on managing risk and surveillance (Beddoe, 2010) and social workers operate in a climate of fear and risk-averse interventions with service users. For example, within failed child welfare cases, the media's public shaming of social work services professionals have contributed to negative discourses surrounding the effectiveness of the social work profession (Ferguson, 2004). The supervisor's task is to enable the supervisee to critically reflect on the broader social, cultural and political contexts of practice. A critical examination of these contexts provides the social worker with crucial connections regarding the relationship that people have with their environment as well as how dominant discourses are maintained in society.

Reflective supervision needs to remind social workers of their core values,

knowledge, theories and connection with disadvantaged groups; these values are integral to social work and the principles of social justice, equality and freedom. Within the current neoliberal and managerial environment, critical thinking in social work needs to be prioritised in order to move the profession forward and provide quality services to service users (Gray & Webb, 2013). The supervisor has a vital role in engaging the supervisee with critical conversations related to socio-cultural and structural factors impacting on individuals. Supervisors can facilitate questions such as: What is the impact of dominant discourses and structures on this issue?; What other discourses need to be considered?; How can you support other discourses being heard? These critical conversations are significant in the exploration of embedded and taken-for-granted socio-cultural factors and in how social workers continue to support the interests of marginalised groups.

Layer four of the practice model of reflective supervision provides exploration by the supervisee and supervisor of diverse discourses and cultural narratives. Significant to Aotearoa New Zealand is the importance of bi-culturalism in challenging oppressive structures and dominant discourses (Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2006). The relevance of discussing cultural histories and colonising processes in supervision assists in the understanding of privilege and oppression in society (Hernández & McDowell, 2010). Issues relating to Māori, bi-culturalism and all other notions relating to culture should regularly feature as part of the supervision conversations.

Professional social work in Aotearoa New Zealand has a commitment to bi-cultural practice, ethics, and responsibilities towards supporting marginalised groups (ANZASW, 2008; SWRB, 2016). The supervisee has a responsibility to revisit such commitments as part of their supervision agenda. In turn, the supervisor is accountable to ensure

these conversations occur regularly in the session and that the supervisee's competence in these areas is evaluated and developed. For example, the supervisor might ask, related to the issue raised for discussion: What particular social work standards and ethics require further reflection?; What needs to be considered from an indigenous/bi-cultural perspective? Supervisors need to acknowledge indigenous discourses, beliefs and the value of traditional knowledge separate from dominant cultural norms (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). The exploration of culture and diversity within supervision demonstrates culturally sensitive practice and also assists with the identification of alternative strategies in practice.

Discussion and recommendations

Internationally, and within Aotearoa New Zealand, social work practice is buffeted about by economic, social and cultural forces influenced by neoliberalism. Supervision is similarly impacted by such factors and requires adaptation in order to respond to such challenges and maintain learning. Reflective supervision is essential to professional social work and further research is needed regarding the connection supervision has to improving practice and outcomes for service users (Beddoe et al., 2015; Wilkins et al., 2016). The four-layered practice model of reflective supervision enables supervisees and supervisors to critically examine the interrelationship of numerous factors impacting on practice and also supports social work values.

The four-layered practice model is multi-dimensional in that it explicitly connects the social worker with the organisation they work for, relationships with others and the wider systemic context of practice. Each layer of the model offers a unique perspective and critical consideration in relation to the supervision issue. Reflective supervision models offer scope for practitioners to refine skills in the ever-changing context of practice (Davys & Beddoe, 2010). The supervisee is encouraged to participate with the

supervisor in critical analysis and to explore alternatives to practice. Although the four-layered practice model has been developed by the author from a previous study related to community-based child welfare services, the model has potential applicability to a number of other social work fields of practice. The critical exploration of context and the interrelationship each layer has to the supervision discussion are key aspects of the model that provide transformative action to take place in practice. The four-layered practice model also has synergies with other approaches used in supervision by the supervisor (for example, developmental and group approaches). Future research regarding the application of the model in different practice settings (such as health, education and corrections) and its compatibility alongside other models of supervision requires further investigation.

Reflective supervision is an essential part of social work development; one that combats the contradictory structural and neoliberal agendas which indirectly dominate the supervision session. In order to realise the full potential of reflective supervision, supervisees and supervisors need to understand its purpose and their role within the supervision process. Reflective models such as the four-layered practice model recognise the supervisory relationship as a co-constructed endeavour where the supervisor and supervisee have equal responsibilities. Supervisors need to respectfully acknowledge power, their accountabilities to organisational and professional protocols, as well as engage in a mutually dynamic and positive interrelationship with the supervisee (Hair, 2014). For the partnership to be successful, the four-layered practice model highlights the agenda, task and process for supervision—for the supervisee, knowing what they want from their supervision (Davys, 2007) and being responsible for their session agenda. Equally, the role of the supervisor in this model is less of an expert or authority figure, and more responsible for facilitating a reflective

process through critical questioning so that learning can be achieved (Davys & Beddoe, 2010). Reflective models in supervision need to be developed by both parties and be seen as instrumental in a social worker's professional development.

Due to the impact of managerialism and neoliberalism on social work practice, supervision tends to focus on surveillance and risk-averse practices. Rankine (2017) identified the lack of critical conversations in supervision relating to the socio-political and socio-cultural environment of Aotearoa New Zealand. Supervisors are required to exhibit "critical social awareness and cultural humility" (Hernández & McDowell, 2010, p. 29) and foster with the supervisee an exploration of power dynamics, relationships and wider environmental considerations. Reflective supervision provides the foundation for the exploration of indigenous approaches and cultural identities that are fundamental to social work codes of practice. The four-layered practice model of reflective supervision supports critical reflection, innovation and social justice strategies within social work. Further models that are context-specific and stimulate wider exploration of socio-political and socio-cultural factors impacting on service users necessitate amplification in supervision and social work services.

Conclusion

Reflective supervision is recognised as essential for the social worker to explore and professionally develop their practice. The four-layered practice model presented the importance of the supervisor and supervisee navigating the interrelationship between self, organisation, professional relationships and the wider environmental factors affecting practice. Within a neoliberal environment, it is crucial for social workers to develop reflective models in supervision that support critical analysis of practice and the promotion of social justice strategies with service users.

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