EMOTIONS, SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND SUPERVISION: AN UNEASY ALLIANCE?

This paper examines the place of emotions within social work practice. The perceived tensions between emotions and rational decision making are explored and it is argued that their relationship is compatible and necessary. A model for the co-creation of emotionally intelligent supervision is developed to support this vision of practice.

Keywords emotions; social work; supervision; relationships

Introduction

The role of emotions within social work practice may at first glance appear to be intuitively obvious and incontestable. Indeed, Howe (2008, p. 13) described the day of a social worker as 'suffused with emotional content'. Munro (2011) highlighted the centrality of the social work relationship and acknowledged the importance of workers being able to identify their own emotional responses and those of service users in achieving positive relationships. The role of emotions is at the core of literature regarding relationship-based practice and the separation of feelings from professionalism can be seen as an anathema in an interpersonal profession (Hennessey, 2011).

It is possibly around the concept of professionalism that we begin to get into less certain territory when speaking about the role of emotions in social work practice. Munro (2011) recognised the tensions between proceduralist approaches to practice and the desirability that social workers should be able to exercise greater autonomy in their practice and decision making. The attractiveness of seeking a conceptualisation of the profession as one being underpinned by concrete knowledge and explanation is understandable. Hennessey (2011) suggested, however, that if one does separate off one's emotions from practice, then one is essentially separating the relationship with the service user from the practice. Ferguson (2005) vividly highlighted the potential for social workers to suppress and 'remove' emotions from the presentation and recording of their practice and, in turn, act in ways that do not make use of their emotions and feelings relating to their practice. It is the debate around the presence, use, suppression and/or removal of emotions that underpins this paper and a model for emotionally inclusive supervision is proposed.

The place of emotions – setting the scene

This paper intends to view the emotional elements of social work practice as being something which has a significant impact on the content, direction and experience of practice. The concept of emotional intelligence sits comfortably with a conscious and proactive awareness and use of emotions within a social work relationship. Alongside this conceptual framework of emotions, I will also take cognisance of the unconscious and potentially repressed aspects of emotions that if left unexplored can impact on the actions and behaviours of social workers in practice (Jopling, 2000; Ferguson, 2005).

The concept of emotional intelligence places emphasis on the ability of an individual to identify, understand and manage the emotional content of their interactions and experiences (Goleman, 1995). Similarly, it has been proposed that emotional intelligence involves an individual's ability to be aware of their own emotional reactions in differing situations and their abilities to manage their responses accordingly (Mayer *et al.*, 1990). They suggested that this balance of awareness and control allows individuals to make more appropriate and confident decisions. In addition to this self-regulation and awareness, they suggested that an ability to identify emotional responses in others is a key aspect of emotional intelligence. These abilities are further linked to an individual's ability for empathic understanding and their skills in communication. Ingram (2012) forged links between the aforementioned qualities associated with emotional intelligence and the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with service users in social work practice. The core argument from Ingram (2012) being that emotional attunement and empathy are the foundations of establishing an open and trusting relationship, and are also congruent with the service user literature in terms of the qualities most valued in social workers (Harding & Beresford, 1996).

It is important to examine and define what we understand by the term 'emotion' in order to lend greater clarity to what we mean by emotional intelligence.

Lazarus and Lazarus (1994, p. 151) stated that

an emotion is a personal life drama, which has to do with the fate of our goals in a particular encounter and our beliefs about ourselves and the world we live in. It is aroused by an appraisal of the personal significance or meaning of what is happening in that encounter.

This fundamental centrality to human experience suggests that emotions are purposeful and operant (Davidson, 1994; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). Emotions are aroused when a person perceives that something they desire comes to fruition or is compromised. The emotional response will, in turn, be dependent on how we assess the potential impact of a circumstance on our perceived goals. This goal-orientated view of emotions is echoed by Goleman (1995), who makes explicit links between goal attainment and emotional awareness and regulation. To purely focus on goals runs the risk of overlooking key processes involved. For example, if a social worker is running late when travelling to an initial home visit to a family, it is the process of a delayed journey that arouses an emotional reaction rather than the *goal* which is the home visit. This illustrates that there may be implicit and explicit variables at play when emotional reactions are experienced.

Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) stated that our ego or self-identity is developed through experience and the associated emotional reactions to these experiences. They described ego as being at the core of an individual's personal view of the world, and, as such, emotional responses arise from events and circumstances that impact upon it. Clearly, this suggests there is a cognitive process at play which helps us determine what elements of an event are important and, in turn, what is potentially at stake. This appraisal of events will, in turn, feed into decisions about subsequent actions. To return to the example of the social work home visit, the worker may hold a strong belief about the importance of reliability and the development of trust with service users (Lishman, 2009). It is this aspect of their professional identity and their appraisal of its importance that may guide their emotional response and subsequent actions.

The personal meaning that we then attach to the circumstances will drive our decision making at this point. Davidson (1994) noted that emotional responses occur within the context of *moods*. He argued that emotions are adaptive responses to a current event, while moods are a longer-term cognitive state. It is argued that moods impact on the aforementioned *appraisal* of events and dictate what aspects we are likely to focus on. For example, the worker may angrily phone their office to complain about the impact their workload is having on their ability to keep to timescales or, perhaps, they will contact the service user to apologise for the delay and negotiate a change to the meeting. The selection of response to the emotional reaction to being late will be in part controlled by an existing mood state. If we accept that emotions are associated with actions and consequences, then it could be argued that the former response may provide short-term relief by 'letting off steam' while the latter response may have a longer-lasting impact on the quality of the worker's relationship with the family. This apparently simple example will be influenced by a succession of previous experiences and responses and may have an ongoing impact on behaviour during the home visit.

A key issue that underpins such decision making is the degree of self-knowledge at play (Hennessey, 2011). Where this is lacking, unconscious emotional drivers may have a significant impact on the course of events. For example, if we consider that the avoidant behaviours of social workers apparent in the Victoria Climbié case (Ferguson, 2005) were associated with repressed and/or unexplored feelings of fear and anxiety, we can begin to add to the complexity of what might be happening in the example of lateness above. Rustin (2005) further explored the Victoria Climbié case and suggested that the repression of gut feelings and emotion on the part of social workers led to confusion and indecisiveness about what actions to take and what information was pertinent to them. Applied to our example, it is possible to envisage the worker's lateness and reactions to it being influenced by unconscious factors such as fear and anxiety, rather than purely the conscious practical issues such as poor timekeeping. The crucial issue here is that without opportunities and permissions to explore such emotional depth, such drivers are likely to remain less visible but no less significant. I will explore the potential role of supervision later in this paper.

Emotions and decision making: exploring their relationship

The role of emotions and the impact that they may have on practice is a contentious one. The relationship between rational thought and emotions is often depicted as an

uneasy alliance. Popular aphorisms such as ‘don’t let your heart rule your head’ can be traced back to the work of Plato (Forgas, 2001). Howe (2009) suggested that emotions have been viewed as wayward and crude by Western philosophers such as Kant and Descartes, and that the clarity of rational thought is compromised by their existence. This view was countered by enlightenment philosophers such as David Hume who stated that emotions and reason should work in harmony (Howe, 2009). Mayer *et al.* (2000) suggested that emergent themes of social justice, anti-war movements and equality from the 1960s onwards reflect a challenge to the aforementioned paradigm. They go on to suggest that the humanist movement within psychology began to reflect this. For example, Maslow (1943) emphasised the importance of individuals feeling satisfied and that consideration of emotions was central to this.

It is useful to consider what we mean by rationality in order to clarify where emotions may sit in relation to it. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) suggested that the common view of rationality is concerned with maximising chances of success and minimising chances of loss, and the focus is on logic and factual evidence. This would appear to overlook other factors such as kindness, justice, equality and fairness. They suggested that this then leads to the potential for considerable disagreement about what the rationally ‘right’ thing to do would be from one individual to the next. This has direct links with the aforementioned debate about whether practice can be purely evidence based. This they suggested opens the door for needing to explore *why* people make the decisions they do. They propose a model called ‘the implacable logic of emotions’ (ibid., p. 214) which takes steps towards meshing rationality and emotions together. Figure 1 is based on this model and is intended to illustrate a cyclical process which links well with the concept of emotional intelligence and, in turn, has a resonance for social work practice.

Figure 1 illustrates that there is a relationship between an event, the associated emotions and the processes of decision making that ensue. A key element is that if we accept the aforementioned definition of rationalism, then the choices made through examination of the emotional response will be, by definition, rational. By this I mean that they will be goal orientated and bespoke to our individual wants and beliefs. Another important element here is that if an individual undertakes this process, their ability to understand and reflect upon emotional cues and processes will help them interpret how others may feel. It is clear that this model sits comfortably within the concept of emotional intelligence in terms of the notion of choice, regulation and empathy.

Damasio (1994) undertook a study examining the decision making of individuals with damage to their amygdala which provides a useful and persuasive underpinning to

FIGURE 1 The implacable logic of emotions – based on Lazarus and Lazarus (1994).

the claim that emotions contribute to and aid decision making. Damasio proposed that the amygdala is the central emotional hub of the brain, based on the observation that individuals who experience damage to this part of the brain display significantly impaired emotional responses. Damasio suggested that damage to the amygdala led to individuals losing prior emotional learning (i.e. impact of behaviour on others) and, in turn, making decisions in their lives that led to negative outcomes (i.e. relationship breakdown). This suggests that decisions made by workers in practice will similarly be infused and informed by emotional learning and that these emotions are a prerequisite for making sense of the complex information and circumstances that a social worker is required to make sense of. This emotional information stream is recognised by Munro (2011) as being a crucial and valued part of a social worker's toolkit.

This view that emotions and thought are compatible and intrinsically linked is developed further within the context of social work practice by Morrison (2007). Morrison noted that our emotions result from an appraisal of a situation in practice. Hence, the creation of an emotional response is in itself a process of *thought*. This is echoed by Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) who suggested that if emotions arise from our own personal meanings and identity, then emotions cannot exist without thought. They emphasised that emotions give rise to choices about actions. These choices may at times appear to be unreasonable or ill-advised, but are the product of a cognitive process. Goleman (1995) concurred with this view and suggested that if an individual lacks emotional intelligence, they will find it harder to assign values to the choices they are presented with, and, in turn, will find decision making more difficult. In a sense, this is the polar opposite to the familiar paradigm that emotions cloud thought. Simply put, the presence and use of emotion *clarifies* rather than clouds judgement. If we accept that there is a role, whether positive or at least unavoidable, for emotions in decision making, then we can begin to establish strong links with the notion of relationship-based practice (Hennessey, 2011). If we then consider that service users highlight empathy, genuineness and warmth as key qualities in social workers, we can begin also to see a positive use of emotions.

The notion that emotions and the thought process are compatible and have a function is not confined to the literature regarding emotions and emotional intelligence. The concept of social competence has much in common with emotional intelligence (Topping *et al.*, 2000). They described social intelligence as being 'the ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaviour to achieve social tasks and outcomes valued in the host context and culture' (ibid., p. 32). This concept has much greater emphasis on the influence of collective and cultural factors which determine how an individual behaves. The key element in common with emotional intelligence would appear to be that there is a thought process involved that recognises the role of feelings and that serves a function. Averill (1994) pushed this idea further by suggesting that if we accept that emotions have a function, then to suppress or sideline emotions is *dysfunctional*. Hennessey (2011) concurred with this view by emphasising that to have an emotional response to any given situation does not preclude an *informed* response. He goes on to rank emotions as an equal partner alongside theory and skill, and notes that there is an interaction between these elements. For example, it is suggested that the selection of which theoretical models to apply and/or prioritise in social work practice is affected by the emotional response to both the presenting situation and the knowledge base itself. Myers (2008) echoed this view when he acknowledged the

attractiveness of seeking a ‘diagnosis’ in social work and highlighted the role that emotions and values may play in the choices we make in this process.

Houston (2011) builds on the care ethics work of Sevenhuijsen (1998) by marrying the rational/cerebral (head) aspects of relationship-based ethics with the emotional and empathetic (heart) elements. In addition to these two elements, he adds the practical approaches adopted by social workers (hands) and the motivation that workers have to care (feet). In a recent interview I conducted with a criminal justice social worker as part of a wider study of emotions and practice, the following example was provided that helps to illustrate the active awareness, management and use of emotion in practice. The worker provided an account of the internal ethical struggle he manages when working with a sex offender who does not take responsibility for their offences. He acknowledged feelings of anger and the potential this can have for him to misuse his power. This tension is resolved for him by adopting an approach that recognises the service user holistically and considers the motivations for defensiveness on the part of the service user as being based on the past and present experiences of social work interventions. This led to an active management of his emotions and drove his decision to draw on his knowledge of motivational interviewing and role modelling to positively engage with the service user. The worker reported the importance of supervision in allowing him space to develop his awareness and ability to deconstruct the emotional triggers in a way that not only manages them but also funnels them into an active part of his practice. Table 1 helps to illustrate this process further.

TABLE 1 Head, heart and hands in practice

Head – ability to draw on knowledge (motivational interviewing) and policy (holistic practice) to contextualise his feelings and to consider issues of power
Heart – a willingness to manage his emotions and establish a relationship that values the views and perspectives of the service user
Hands – the use of motivational interviewing and role modelling in his practice
Feet – using the recognition of his professional value base as a motivation to persevere and treat his service user with respect

Table 1 helpfully pulls together the active goal-orientated aspects of emotional intelligence with potentially unconscious or repressed emotions such as anger to produce a piece of practice that reflects the management and *use* of emotions.

Professionalism, proceduralism and accountability

The uneasy relationship between the recognition of emotions and the pursuit of rational decision making is further played out when we consider the emergence of the professionalisation of social work. Social work has struggled to lay claim to a coherent vision of itself as a profession for a range of reasons. One issue is that the underpinning knowledge base of the profession is disparate (Dominelli, 2009) and draws from a range of sources such as psychology, sociology, moral philosophy and law. Munro (2011) highlighted the need for social work to grapple with the organisational and individual contexts of social work to achieve a coherent and realistic vision of the profession. The notion of relationship-based social work suggested by Hennessey (2011) is

persuasive but is often pitted against more bureaucratic professional narratives rather than being seen to co-exist.

There is an existing tension with the notion of social work as a profession that has its roots in the radical social work movement. The radical social work movement emerged in the late 1960s and expressed a view that social work should not seek to be viewed as a profession. This was due to the proposition that social work was a political activity and one which should focus on challenging the social structures and the system which impinge on service users (Bailey & Brake, 1976). The notion of professionalism was seen to reflect an elitist and paternalistic view of social work. An enduring outcome associated with radical social work was the emergence of anti-discriminatory practice (Pease & Fook, 1999) and its synthesis with the psychosocial aspects of social work practice. One of the key aspects of this historical debate around professionalism is the constant presence of the relational nature of social work practice. A pragmatic and responsive view of the profession of social work emerges in the *Changing Lives* document (Scottish Executive, 2006) which incorporates the need for a robust knowledge base, clear professional value base and an emphasis on partnership and collaboration with service users and wider multidisciplinary colleagues. With the registration of social workers and the associated responsibilities and accountabilities, the issue of professionalism has never been more cogent.

Myers (2008) noted that a 'non-emotional' approach to social work could be seen to sit comfortably with the notion that social workers should be non-judgemental in their interactions and assessments of service users. Myers countered this view by questioning whether a purely non-judgemental is achievable, and whether the best way to approach it is to allow for an awareness and acknowledgement of emotions and values in order to reach non-judgemental outcomes. For example, if a worker is to become involved in working with a service user who is aggressive and uncooperative, it is important that the emotional responses of the worker are considered and explored so that a non-judgemental approach to the work can be achieved. To avoid such a process may well lead to an illusion of non-judgmentalism but runs the risk of producing uncritical and repressed practice. This was echoed by NSPCC (2008) with their suggestion that social workers often feel that their role is to focus on the strengths of service users and carers and to adopt an optimistic approach to their practice. They go on to argue that this approach appears to avoid significant reflection and analysis and may be a barrier to required action in child protection cases.

Mattison (2000) suggested that there is an increasing emphasis on social workers to 'act correctly'. This inevitably leads workers to seek reliable and legitimate procedures and guidance to ensure their practice is 'correct'. Mattison noted that this approach overlooks another associated aspect of defensible decision making which is that workers must be able to understand and articulate the process of decision making as well as the actual decision itself. Munro (2011) and Howarth (2007) both warned against relying on a proceduralist approach to practice. The argument being that no matter how thorough procedures are, they are ultimately liable to the subjective choices and decisions of a worker. Given the preceding discussion about potential unconscious and unexplored emotions, the pressure to present one's practice as 'correct' becomes increasingly superficial. Howarth (2007) discussed the limitations of holistic assessment models which are intended to give workers a clear framework to ensure decisions are well founded. Howarth (2007) suggested that such tools do not encourage or provide

signposts for practitioners to consider their own role in the choices and priorities that they make in relation to such tools. Howarth calls for a reclaiming of the 'professional domain' within procedures. It might be useful to describe this as the *interpretative gap* between procedures and their actual use in practice. It is within this gap that workers bring their values, emotions, experience, knowledge and context to bear on their decision making. Holland (1999) found that many workers preferred to present themselves as neutral observers who could use quantifiable 'scientific' measurements to explain their decision making in practice. If we accept that emotions and values impact on our decision making and that genuinely holistic practice involves a 'head, hands and heart' approach (Petrie *et al.*, 2009), then the need for emotional awareness and intelligence would seem to be a logical aspect of this. Mattison (2000, p. 207) provided a persuasive argument for this when she states that 'there is general agreement in the literature that the ultimate decision for resolving an ethical dilemma lies in the circumstances and the value system or preferences of the decision maker'.

Barlow and Hall (2007) reported that social work students felt anxious when there was a disparity between their 'public action' and their internal feelings. This could reasonably be applied to qualified practitioners and, again, suggests that workers would benefit from a forum to explore these issues. This clearly has links to the above example and suggests that social workers may need a forum to consider emotional responses. The role that supervision may play in this process will be discussed in the '*Supervision and the exploration of emotions*' section. These issues are very pertinent when one considers the messages in the Munro Report (Munro, 2011) relating to professional autonomy and highlighting the need for an infrastructure that facilitates and supports social workers to achieve this.

Supervision and the exploration of emotions

The preceding discussion makes a strong argument for social workers engaging in a significant degree of reflection about their practice and that this process could and should encompass emotions and feelings. This is coupled with the case that has been made to incorporate emotional intelligence in social work practice and decision making and the need to allow space and permissions to explore the unconscious emotional drivers and responses within practice. There are a range of forums where the emotional content of social work could be expressed. These include reports, assessments, contracts, interactions with service users and multidisciplinary networks. The ability of workers to express the emotional content of their work in these forums will be dependent on workers feeling that it is valid and desirable to do so. A key support for social workers is the process of supervision. This provides workers with a forum to discuss their practice with another practitioner (usually a senior colleague) and explore the functional aspects of their practice but also potentially to critically reflect upon the content of the practice. Fook and Gardner (2007) made explicit reference to the emotional aspects of critical reflection and suggested that this can have a therapeutic aspect to it while also directly feeding into ongoing practice and decision making. The importance of supervision is noted by England (1986) who suggested that social workers must be engaged in deep analysis of their practice and be clear about their own perceptions and those of others. This clearly has links to emotional intelligence and

locates it within the supervisory relationship. This was echoed by the Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools & Families, 2009) with the recognition that supervision and management needed to resist restrictive and prescriptive conceptions of practice, and to aspire to a system that recognises the fluid and unpredictable relationship-based aspects of practice.

The important role that supervision may play in promoting safe and positive social work practice was a key recommendation by NSPCC (2008) in their evidence submitted as part of Lord Laming's review of child protection. The central plank of the argument was that 'working with manipulative, violent, and possibly sadistic adults is emotionally draining not to mention frightening. To defend oneself it is common to put up protective emotional barriers' (NSPCC, 2008, p. 8). It has been reported by NSPCC (2008) that in the face of such challenging work that supervision was often of low quality. The 'quality' that has been reported to be missing was the opportunity for workers to reflect upon their feelings and their practice. This was echoed in a study of decision making in child protection by Holland (1999) who found that social workers had an underdeveloped 'language' when it came to describing feelings and felt more comfortable when discussing their work in a technicist manner. It was argued that this was in part due to there being a lack of legitimacy in discussing practice in terms of feelings. Supervision could provide a vehicle for this perception to be addressed and, in turn, the development of a 'language' to support it.

Hawkins and Shohet (2000, p. 3) provided a useful description of the emotional element within a social work supervisory relationship:

the supervisors role is not just to reassure the worker, but to allow the emotional disturbance to be felt within the safer setting of the supervisory relationship, where it can be survived, reflected and learned from.

They go on to note the importance of allowing social workers to stand back from their practice so that they do not internalise all their emotional responses. Fineman (1985) noted the relationship between lack of supervision and stress among workers. There is an acknowledgement that supervision operates within a wider context and there are other factors which may impact on the nature and focus of the supervisory relationship. Hawkins and Shohet (2000) recognised that there is a potential tension between manager and educator roles that a supervisor may inhabit. They suggested that both partners in the supervisory relationship should construct a contract that acknowledges and clarifies the parameters of supervision. Hughes and Pengelly (1997) emphasised the need for clarity about confidentiality when constructing supervisory contracts. Hawkins and Shohet (2000) also noted that the procedural focus that is evident in many social work supervisory relationships is often driven by resources and the need to cover the practical elements of a caseload. This also needs to be considered and included within the contract. Collins (2007) approached this point from a different angle and noted that the 'emotional labour' of social work continues regardless of the emphasis on procedures. Collins goes on to note that positive emotions are often overlooked in the literature around emotions in social work. This is an important point in that supervision should allow for the exploration of feelings such as joy and contentment with particular cases. This can act as an emotional buffer to cope with negative emotions as well as allowing for reflection on why positive emotions are being elicited.

Cadman and Brewer (2001) considered the need for role models in nursing who demonstrate emotionally intelligent approaches to practice. This is a helpful contribution to potential roles for a social work supervisor where emotional intelligence (and emotion more broadly) could be modelled within the supervisory relationship and be promoted from a 'top down' perspective (from supervisor to worker) as well as a 'bottom up' perspective (the worker engaging in reflection within supervision). This was echoed by Cole *et al.* (2006) who explored the impact of supervisory styles in industry and found that supervisors who actively explored emotions within supervision produced positive emotions in their workers and, in turn, heightened performance. Tsang (2006) suggested that a social work educator (supervisor) should swing between an emphasis on cognition and emotion to allow social workers to consider the often contradictory demands on them. For example, the tension between potential controlling aspects of the social work role and therapeutic roles requires consideration of the emotional impact of this tension, not just a cognitive awareness of it. Tsang talks vividly about the need for supervision to have a nourishing and replenishing function. This links helpfully with the aforementioned emphasis that Collins (2007) gives to exploration of the positive aspects of practice.

Barlow and Hall (2007) studied the views of social work students on practice learning placements. They found that students reported feeling under stress when their individual emotional experiences in practice were incongruent with what they perceived to be the required 'public face' in supervision. The conclusion was a call for supervision to provide a forum for discussing emotional responses in practice. The role of supervision is not just a therapeutic and supportive one. It could be argued that this style of supervision would also promote informed and reflective practice.

A partnership model and tool for supervision

The preceding discussion about the important role that supervision can play in relation to the exploration, management and use of the emotional elements of practice presents social work with an organisational challenge. This challenge is noted by the Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools & Families, 2009) but, at an operational level, may be subject to competing pressures and agendas which may lead to the perpetuation of performance indicator-led approaches (Ruch, 2011). The model proposed here intends to place the supervisory relationship itself at the heart of the realisation of the aforementioned challenge.

Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2012) developed a model of supervision for international doctoral students that sought to encourage and facilitate a partnership approach to supervision which allowed both parties to clarify the balance and nature of the expected supervision relationship and, in turn, adjust and modify it accordingly. I wish to take this model as a starting point and develop it further within the context of social work supervision, and give particular focus to the place that the articulation of emotions has within it.

Figure 2 is a visual illustration of where the balance of supervision can be negotiated and also as a *tool* for co-constructing and reviewing the balance and content of supervision. This dual function of the model is crucial in terms of its application, as it acknowledges the dynamic and fluid nature of supervisory relationships. It should also be

FIGURE 2 Supervision remit compatibility (SuReCom) model for supervision.

noted at this point that the model is adaptable across a range of supervisory debates. I have chosen the balance between the practical and emotional aspects of casework, but equally it could be about a balance between reflective approaches and a technical/rational approach. One can plot the degree to which a facet of supervision is relevant at any point on both axes. This allows for both parties to plot their own expectations and aspirations in terms of supervision. There are four key aspects to this model:

- *Aspiration.* The use of this model would allow for each party to plot where they would hope the balance of supervision would lie.
- *Negotiation.* Having plotted the aspirational balance, any divergence in view can be explored and discussed.
- *Agreement.* The model can then be used to reach an agreed balance, which can be linked to organisational and national perspectives.
- *Review.* The model can be revisited at any stage to consider whether the agreement is still valid or requires adjustment.

In Figure 2, we can see that quadrant A depicts a supervisory relationship that focuses on the emotional aspects of practice but with less of a focus on practical casework. Quadrant B represents a balance between the emotional and practical elements of casework and would reflect a supervisory relationship where both elements are seen as valid and appropriate. Quadrant C depicts a supervisory relationship where the practical elements of casework take centre stage, as reflected in much of the discussion above. Finally, quadrant D shows a supervisory relationship which does not focus on the practical nor on the emotional aspects of practice. It is difficult to envisage such a supervisory approach, although this would reflect a lack of supervisory support.

Figure 3 clarifies the potential use of this model further by illustrating where a supervisor and a supervisee may differ in their expectations.

It is clear from Figure 3 that the supervisee seeks an integration of the emotional and practical elements of the caseload, while the supervisor favours a practical focus. What is also useful about this model is the flexibility allowed in terms of plotting at any point on

FIGURE 3 Example of a mismatch in expectations between a supervisor and a supervisee.

an axis to indicate the intensity anticipated. In the case of the supervisor, their lack of willingness to engage in the emotional aspects of practice is less than their enthusiasm for the practical elements. This lends further information to any ensuing discussion. It reflects vividly the 'uneasy alliance' at the heart of this paper, namely the balance between the rational and technical aspects of practice and how they sit next to the relationship-based aspects of practice and the emotional responses (both conscious and unconscious) of the social worker. The model requires the participants in the supervisory relationship to be explicit (rather than passive) about the content and focus supervision. A crucial aspect of this is the 'next steps' element of the diagram that directs the participant's to supportive sources of guidance such as professional codes and national documents such as the aforementioned report from the Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools & Families, 2009). This places the uneasy balance in a wider context (rather than being left to the subjectivities of the participants) and is intended to reduce the apparent disjuncture between the procedural and emotional aspects of practice.

If we return to our previous practice example of the social worker who used his emotional response of anger as the starting point to engage in useful reflection and, in turn, as a key information stream that linked to subsequent actions, it is clear to see how this model could be utilised. The worker involved in the example highlighted the importance of supervision in the process. If this had not been available, then the use of this model would allow for an active discussion about where the balance of supervision lay and, in turn, allow the worker to seek the quality of supervision to enable them to engage in positively and emotionally informed practice. It is important to note that this model encourages a co-created approach to supervision, and it provides the supervisor with a means to explore emotionally repressed practice and reflection and provide a basis for countering the potential for negative projection of anxieties within the supervision relationship that arise from anxieties relating to practice (Ruch, 2011).

Conclusion – recognising and managing the ‘uneasy alliance’

In this paper I have considered the complex position of emotions within social work practice and supervision. If we consider emotions through the lens of relationship-based social work and recognise that emotions are inextricably linked to social work decision making, then we can establish a conception of the social work profession that must embrace the emotional elements of practice. It is recognised that relationship-based conceptions of practice sit within a wider context of processes, statutory responsibilities, professional knowledge and power. I would argue that the perceived tension between technicist approaches and relationship-based approaches to practice can be ameliorated by establishing a cultural shift in terms of the role of supervision. The proposed model allows for transparency and partnership in the construction of the essential supervisory relationship which seeks to place the emotional elements of practice at the core of practice rather than leaving them potentially marginalised. What is particularly heartening is that recent narratives concerning the profession (Scottish Executive, 2006; Department of Children, Schools & Families, 2009; Munro, 2011) recognise the tensions discussed above, and this paper is intended to contribute to the understanding of these tensions and a supervisory model to support the cultural shift required.

References

- Averill, J. (1994) ‘Emotions are many splendoured things’, in *The Nature of Emotion*, eds P. Ekman & R. Davidson, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 99–103.
- Bailey, R. & Brake, M. (1976) *Radical Social Work*, Pantheon, New York.
- Barlow, C. & Hall, B. (2007) ‘What about feelings?: a study of emotion and tension in social work field education’, *Social Work Education*, vol. 26, pp. 399–413.
- Cadman, C. & Brewer, J. (2001) ‘Emotional intelligence: a vital pre-requisite for recruitment in nursing’, *Journal of Nursing Management*, vol. 9, pp. 321–324.
- Cole, M., Bruch, H. & Vogel, B. (2006) ‘Emotions as mediators of the relations between perceived supervisor support and psychological hardiness on employee cynicism’, *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, vol. 27, pp. 463–484.
- Collins, S. (2007) ‘Social workers, resilience, positive emotions and optimism’, *Practice*, vol. 19, pp. 255–269.
- Damasio, A. (1994) *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, Putnam, New York.
- Davidson, R. (1994) ‘On emotion, mood and related affective constructs’, in *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*, eds P. Ekman & R. Davidson, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Department of Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Building a Safe, Confident Future: The Final Report of the Social Work Task Force*, Department of Children, Schools and Families, London.
- Dominelli, L. (2009) *Introducing Social Work*, Polity, Cambridge.
- England, H. (1986) *Social Work as Art*, Allen and Unwin, London.
- Ferguson, H. (2005) ‘Working with violence, the emotions and the psycho-social dynamics of child protection: reflections on the Victoria Climbié case’, *Social Work Education*, vol. 24, pp. 781–795.
- Fineman, S. (1985) *Social work stress and intervention*. Gower, Aldershot.

- Fook, J. & Gardner, F. (2007) *Practising Critical Reflection*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Forgas, J. (2001) *Handbook of Affect and Social Cognition*, Guildford Press, New York.
- Goleman, D. (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Harding, T. & Beresford, P. (1996) *The standards we expect: what service users and carers want from social workers*, National Institute of Social Work, London.
- Hawkins, P. & Shohet, R. (2000) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Hennessey, R. (2011) *Relationship Skills in Social Work*, Sage, London.
- Holland, S. (1999) 'Discourses of decision making in child protection: conducting comprehensive assessments in Britain', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, vol. 8, pp. 276–286.
- Houston, S. (2011) 'Engaging with the crooked timber of humanity: value pluralism and social work', *British Journal of Social Work Advance Access*, vol. 44, pp. 652–668.
- Howarth, J. (2007) *Child Neglect: Identification and Assessment*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Howe, D. (2008) *The Emotionally Intelligent Social Worker*, Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Hughes, L. & Pengelly, P. (1997) *Staff Supervision in a Turbulent Environment*, Jessica Kingsley, London.
- Ingram, R. (2012) 'Locating emotional intelligence at the heart of social work practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcs029.
- Jindal-Snape, D. & Ingram, R. (2012) 'International doctoral students and transitions', (Under Review – November 2012).
- Jopling, D. (2000) *Self Knowledge and the Self*, Routledge, London.
- Lazarus, R. & Lazarus, B. (1994) *Passion and Reason*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Lishman, J. (2009) *Communication in Social Work*, Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Maslow, A. (1943) 'A theory of human motivation', *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, pp. 370–396.
- Mattison, M. (2000) 'Ethical decision making: the person in the process', *Social Work*, vol. 45, pp. 201–211.
- Mayer, J. D., DiPaolo, M. T. & Salovey, P. (1990) 'Perceiving affective content in ambiguous visual stimuli: a component of emotional intelligence', *Journal of Personality Assessment*, vol. 54, pp. 772–781.
- Mayer, J., Salovey, P. & Caruso, D. (2000) 'Emotional intelligence as zeitgeist, as personality and as mental ability', in *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*, eds R. Bar-On & J. Parker, Jossey Boss, San Francisco, CA.
- Morrison, T. (2007) 'Emotional intelligence, emotion and social work: context, characteristics, complications and contribution', *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 37, pp. 245–263.
- Munro, E. R. (2011) *Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child Centred System*, Crown Copyright, Norwich.
- Myers, S. (2008) 'Revisiting Lancaster: more things that every social work student should know', *Social Work Education*, vol. 27, pp. 203–211.
- NSPCC (2008) *Evidence to Lord Laming's Review of Child Protection*, NSPCC, London.
- Pease, B. & Fook, J. (1999) *Transforming Social Work Practice: Postmodern Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, London.

- Petrie, P., Boddy, J., Cameron, C., Heptinstall, E., McQuail, S., Simon, A. & Wigfall, V. (2009) *Pedagogy – A Holistic, Personal Approach to Work with Children and Young People Across Services*, Thomas Cram Research Unit, London.
- Ruch, G. (2011) 'Where have all the feelings gone? Developing reflective relationship-based management in child-care social work', *British Journal of Social Work*, doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcr134.
- Rustin, M. (2005) 'Conceptual analysis of critical moments in Victoria Climbié's life', *Child and Family Social Work*, vol. 10, pp. 11–19.
- Scottish Executive (2006) *Changing Lives*, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh.
- Sevenhuijsen, S. (1998) *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics*, Routledge, London.
- Topping, K., Bremner, W. & Holmes, E. (2000) 'Social competence: the social construction of the concept', in *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*, eds R. Bar-On & J. Parker, Jossey Boss, San Francisco, CA.
- Tsang, N. (2006) 'The art of teaching and learning in social work education', *Social Work Education*, vol. 25, pp. 265–278.

Richard Ingram Address: School of Education, Social Work and Community Education, University of Dundee, Nethergate, Dundee DD1 4HN, UK [e-mail: r.d.ingram@dundee.ac.uk]