

Embedding Reflective Practice in a Dementia Intervention



Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, Beth Spencer, Sojung Park & Minyoung Kwak,
School of Social Work, University of Michigan

“As an interventionist and a therapist, you have the opportunity to reflect back the best of who they are and have been.”

Quote from a student interventionist

The Couples Life Story Project (CLSP)

- An intervention with couples where one person has memory loss.
- Goals of intervention include:
 - To increase meaningful engagement between the members of the couple.
 - To help them remember and recognize their strengths as a couple.
 - To enhance the couple’s communication.
- Intervention comprised of:
 - Five home visits by an interventionist, in addition to pre-test and post-test sessions.
 - Communication tips introduced each week.
 - Structured life review of their history as a couple.
- Meeting with interventionist to develop a Couple Life Story Book. Weekly home practice assignments include finding photos or mementoes from periods of their life together.
- At the end of the project the book is given to the couple.

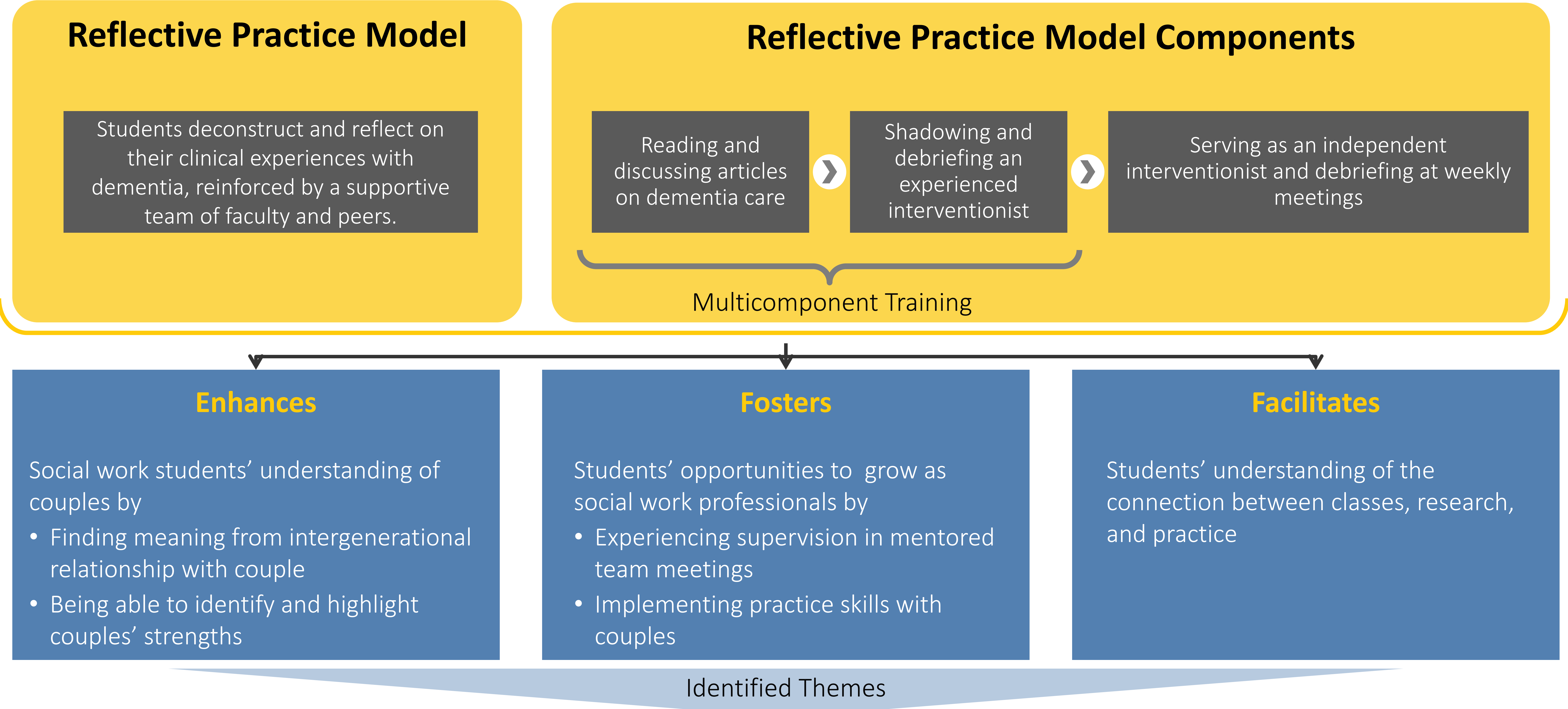
Student involvement in the CLSP

- Students participate as research assistants taking on many different kinds of tasks, including participating as interventionists, administrative tasks, data entry, recruitment, creating the Couple Life Story Books, and attending weekly debriefing team meetings.
- 14 MSW and PhD students have participated over the past 4 years

Data sources / Method

Content analysis of data sources to identify themes:

- Process notes following each intervention session.
- Exit interviews with graduating students.
- Follow-up interviews with students several months later.



Intergenerational Relationships with Couples

[Most valuable to me was] “hearing their love story from the old couple who have been together for 60+ years.” [It was] “really inspiring, rejuvenating. Their commitment to one another helps me think about what I am looking for in a relationship down the road, the quality of the relationship I am thinking [about in] a partner.”

“Despite his memory loss, we felt really connected. Also, with the caregiver, their children were my age, so they [the couple] were interested in me, I was interested in them. Some of the stories and lessons some couples told me really helped me.”

Highlighting Strengths in Couples

“I discussed with them my observations of positive interactions I've observed between them throughout our time together. I mentioned that they frequently compliment each other and that they are patient with each other. Both seemed pleased that I noticed. I also affirmed them for blending two families and creating a life together.”

Participation in Mentored Team Meetings

“I particularly valued the support of the team. This felt like genuine mentorship – for life, for classes, for field. A place where we could discuss all of those things. [It] really helped with facilitating my experiences as a shy person.”

“This project gave me a supportive, safe place to fail. Getting to know [faculty] outside of the classroom and in a different way was incredibly valuable. [It] gave me space to talk to [them] about things like field placements. It was very grounding. How wonderful team work can be.”

Helping Couples to Engage and Communicate

“The conversation concerning how the couple met and what attracted them went really well. I was able to engage the caregiver and care receiver an equal amount and they affirmed one another.”

Linkages between Classes, Research and Practice

“It was a huge thing to see how research works and to learn about recruitment. I have a better depth of understanding now about research, absolutely! Ideally I would like a project like this where I can do research and direct care both. I want to do both of these. I came to really understand the importance of research.”

“I learned that I could use therapeutic skills in a research study. It complemented other social work studies [and] gave me a place to incorporate and practice clinical skills. Made school much more meaningful.”

[The most meaningful part of CLSP was] “being an interventionist and being trusted with that responsibility. This project really lets you try social work in a way that field doesn’t.”