



SPOŁECZEŃSTWO
EDUKACJA
JĘZYK

Tom 16/2022, ss. 169-182

ISSN 2353-1266

e-ISSN 2449-7983

DOI: 10.19251/sej/2022.16(13)

www.sej.mazowiecka.edu.pl

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LEADERSHIP-FOCUSED COACHING (LFC) AND SUPERVISION AS AN APPROACH OF EDUCATIONAL STAFF – ETHNOGRAPHICAL COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

COACHING SKONCENTROWANY NA PRZYWÓDZTWIE
(LFC) I SUPERWIZJA JAKO PODEJŚCIE PRACOWNIKÓW
OŚWIATOWYCH – ETNOGRAFICZNE PORÓWNAWCZE
STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

Abstrakt

Niniejsze opracowanie opisuje podejście LFC Leadership-Focused Coaching oraz superwizję jako metodę ewaluacji wśród pracowników oświaty. Celem analizy jest zwrócenie uwagi na pojęcie refleksyjności, odwołanie się do idei partnerstwa oraz do równomiernego wspierania kadry dydaktycznej i zarządzającej w życiu zawodowym. Tym samym poprzez badania etnograficzne poparte doświadczeniem

Abstract

This study describes the LFC Leadership-Focused Coaching approach and supervision as a method of evaluation among educational staff. The aim of the analysis is to draw attention to the concept of reflexivity, to refer to the idea of partnership and to support teaching and management staff equally in their professional life. This ethnographic research was supported by experience

na przykładzie comparative case study w trzech różnych sytuacjach edukacyjnych nastąpiło porównanie tych metod. Wyodrębnione podobieństwa oraz różnice pomogły wskazać szanse oraz wyłonić nowe założenia do pracy refleksyjnej na podstawie obserwacji badawczych jak i analizy teoretycznej pojęć. Wnioski przeprowadzonych badań zwróciły uwagę na rolę wsparcia grupowego, znaczenie mentoringu jak i ukazały potrzeby rozwoju osobistego, emocjonalnego oraz poszerzyły zakres wsparcia o grupę liderów i studentów. Obydwie formy ewaluacji okazały się mieć wiele podobieństw, dzięki czemu badania pomogły ustalić, że integrują one zdobytą wiedzę dzięki funkcji refleksyjnej. Kolejne wnioski i podejścia zamknęły obszar badań w konkluzjach, iż przywództwo edukacyjne także wymaga facylitacji, natomiast współpraca grupowa stanowi dodatkowe narzędzie ewaluacji. Opracowanie to przyczynia się tym samym do wyeksponowania znaczenia superwizji refleksyjnej jak i LFC w kształtowaniu nowoczesnej kadry dydaktycznej i zarządzającej w kontekście troski o szacunek, wsparcie jak i mentorską facylitację.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

coaching, facylitacja, partnerstwo, superwizja

on the example of a comparative case study in three different educational situations. Identified similarities and differences helped to identify opportunities and new assumptions for reflective work on the basis of research observations and theoretical analysis of concepts. Conclusions of the research drew attention to the role of group support, the importance of mentoring and showed the need for personal and emotional development. Both forms of evaluation were found to have many similarities, whereby the research helped to establish that they integrate the acquired knowledge through a reflective function. Subsequent approaches closed the research area in the conclusion that educational leadership also requires facilitation, while group collaboration provides an additional evaluation tool. This study contributes to highlighting the importance of reflective supervision and LFC in the formation of modern education in the context of concern for respect, support and mentoring facilitation.

KEYWORDS

coaching, facilitation, partnership, supervision

1. Introduction

This study aims to introduce the idea of supervision and LFC coaching as a method of evaluation and reflection on professional practice of management and teaching staff in education. In order to know what possibilities these forms of facilitation offer, it is useful to know the contexts of both forms.

Different perspectives are taken in the facilitation process. Everything depends on the starting point chosen by the supervisor for the collaboration, whether it is the official, administrative and institutional (authoritarian) level or the partnership, collegial and collaborative through process.

Supervision tends to be defined differently, depending on the discipline and branch of research. Frank Fisher and Carmen Sirianni define supervision as a feature indicating managerial skills, as important as the ability to communicate (Fisher, Sirianni, 1984:254). In the field of social work the role of individual practice and professional work is emphasised (Walter, Young, 1999). Critical supervision has a special role as a tool for practical improvement in the social work sector, where Fook and Gardner's model has been an object of inspiration (Fook, Gardner, 2007; Hickson, 2011; Fook, Gardner, 2012). The main research area here is to work on multiple perspectives of action, both from the theoretical and practical side. Mezirow in 1990 described critical reflection as an area of change, transformation and the constitution of new theories in place of old patterns of meaning (Mezirow, 1990).

A supervisor in the role of a manager or a representative of an institution/external company has the task to define the rules of work, to discuss its specificity and scope, as well as to provide factual or mentoring support and emotional support in relation to the function. Similar tasks can be found in LFC, where mentoring is an important foundation of the work. This model differs from traditional forms of coaching, as it involves university teachers in a partnership as well as mentoring in practice situations and the students' work environment at school, i.e. "in action". Thus, there is a return to the ethnographic experience, where in LFC cooperation on many levels - institutional, academic, partnership and mentoring - takes place at the same time. We can call this form also field coaching with support on the mentoring level. The juxtaposition of these methods is intended to give an insight into their characteristics in order to integrate the features of reflective evaluation and to deepen the teachers' methodological workshop with opportunities for development in the light of constructive reflection.

2. Theoretical background of supervision conception

Educational supervision has been defined by Virginia Robinson (Robinson, 1949) as a process in which a person with professional experience and knowledge teaches the person who is acquiring this knowledge. An important area is the importance of interpreting and learning from mistakes made in order to make a correct, critical, but also objective assessment of the knowledge that has been acquired (Cell, 1984; Mezirow, 1990). Correcting mistakes and the importance of learning from the supervisor's experience is an important step to repair the quality of the work in the future (Hickson, 2011).

Reflective supervision is based on 3 pillars within which we distinguish between professional, emotional and managerial support (Wilkins, 2017:12). Support can also be a form of moral practice that seeks to indicate most simply what is right and what is wrong (Afdal, 2012). The relationship between supervisor and supervisee in this case is two-way, based on ethics, support in specific contexts, learning and positive transformation (Hawkins, Shohet, 2012:8).

Similarly in pedagogical science, however, much attention is paid to the aspect of evaluation, feedback in terms of didactics and quality of education. Supervision may be related to performance appraisal as well as counselling, but in the case of education, it is often institutionalised.

Thus, key models and functions of supervision in interdisciplinary sciences have been identified, using Proctor's clinical work as an example - normative (role definition, work evaluation), renewable (personal development, work value support) and administrative- formal (knowledge, development), where the supervisor's role, work ethic and work rules are defined (Proctor, 1987; Kilminster, Sue Margareth, Brian Clark Jolly, 2000; Jackson, Peter, 2008). In the case of institutionalisation of supervision in the administrative aspect, it is worth recalling the view of Edward Cell, who draws attention to the role of institutions in shaping a person's sense of agency and even worth. According to him, they may influence the self-assessment of one's own person, one's work in relation to oneself, as well as be the subject of evaluation by others (Cell, 1984: 6).

A new form of supervision is the form of peer evaluation and feedback, generally taking place on an academic or professional level in the workplace. In the medical field, an example of collegial evaluation was described by Thompson, who pointed to 'Schwartz rounds' as professional colleges that consisted of mutual support, reflection on discussed experiences, cases as well as individual emotions. Each member had the right to express his or her opinion and the meetings were chaired by a designated facilitator, who could be any engaged member of the community (Thompson, 2013). Michelle Lucas and Carol Whitaker (Lucas, Whitaker, 2014: 11) detailed the foundations of group supervision as co-facilitation followed by task management, management of the relationship between facilitators and the importance of partnership (Bachkirova, Jackson, Hennig, Moral, 2020). Additional forms and typologies have also emerged from group supervision. An example is the institutionalized form on the academic level, namely supervision body governance, which deals strictly with university structures and their quality control (Boer, Huisman, Meister-Scheytt, 2010). It is also worth mentioning the typology according to Eric Berne, which assumes certain types of supervision:

- authoritative - oriented towards control;
- participative - based on participation and mutual experience,
- co-operative - based on cooperation;
- peer - based on partnership and relationship (Proctor, B. 2000).

Mostly studies point out the aspect of the relationship with the supervisee and the possibility to gain new competences as an added value of group supervision. Critical reflection and collaboration with the supervisor, can integrate knowledge in a professional yet collaborative way (McMahon, 2014). It is increasingly pointed out that peer and colleague supervision develops the method of traditional supervision, as it broadens the transfer of mutual knowledge to fit specific needs and areas of knowledge. At the level of peer and reflective supervision, there is no space for exposing mistakes, instead there is space for sharing experience and collegial knowledge.

3. Methods of research on the way of new approach LFC through the practical experience

This analysis, as an ethnographic study based on a comparative case study, focuses on the practical experience of the phenomenon of supervision and coaching. Monika Kostera points out in her studies that ethnography is based on a naturalistic approach, focuses on important phenomena, and thus through the case study method allows to find necessary patterns using comparative analysis (Kostera, 2008:25; Miles, Huberman, 2000). Comparing the separate forms of supervision and coaching from an experiential perspective, described in narrative form, allows new assumptions to be formulated and common points to be seen for these forms of evaluation, both on a personal level and within the group, institution and academic level.

The focus on the importance of experience from an ethnographic perspective can be traced back to the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the rise of academic staff development, where evaluation and experience became common practice. Richardson is the first to point out that the emergence of the Personal Practical Theory (PPT) paradigm shaped a new trend of teacher as researcher (TAR), which influenced the emergence of coaching as well as partner and reflective supervision (Richardson, 2001; Yang, Huang, Li, Li, 2021). At that time, special attention was paid to the role of professional practice as the most important factor conditioning the learning of the specific work and the integration of knowledge. Sometimes practical knowledge was seen as equivalent to having a degree, or it was considered an important pillar to complement knowledge during studies. Undoubtedly, supervision began to evolve to a level of partnership on a practical level, which became the foundation for modern coaching.

The practice of PPT was followed by a similar form, the PAR project - Participatory Action Research in 2014, carried out mainly in the USA on the premises of four collaborating schools, where students and teachers carried out collaborative ethnographic research entering the role of exploratory researchers in action on the notion of equality in the face of multiculturalism (Beach, Bagley, Silva, 2018). However, this project only provided hands-on field research and group collaboration between teachers and students. The following years indicated a further development of the idea of supervision and a return to expert support along the developmental path.

This is how the inspiration and transfer of supervision to a new form appeared - LFC-Leadership Focused Coaching. It is a compilation of previous methods, based on supervised internship among students of educational leadership - supervised intership - consisting of practical leadership coaching and mentoring. A significant amount of practice is individualised here, based on goals and personal feedback (Gray, 2018). This method was initiated at Stanford University and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) to further promote and foster the idea of LFC. Students in this method are placed in leadership positions in institutions, while their mentors are university lecturers.

This programme draws attention to management practices, as evidenced by the fact that mentors (directors) from a particular district are selected for their similarity to the LFC student. Points of contact are, for example, similar working patterns or personalities, and the right match is intended to increase the chance of successful coaching. (Gray, 2018). Through this concept of supervised internship, the student can learn about the specifics of their work at the institution while still being a student and attending classes at the same time, additionally they can receive professional support while only being at university level.

4. Comparative case study: how reflective supervision relates to leadership-focused coaching?

I carried out the comparative (multiple) case study using the ex post method, i.e. I analysed the cases after the phenomena under study had ceased, between 2013 and 2020. Due to the specificity of ethnographic research, I compared 2 types of evaluation methods - reflective supervision and LFC coaching on the example of 3 cases, taking place at different times, but aimed at comparing the same phenomenon, according to the premise of the comparative case study according to Beach, Bagley and Silva's theory (Beach, Bagley, Silva, 2018: 162). I thus used the method of theoretical triangulation, basing my research on participant observation and the literature as well as on distinct paradigms. The cases described are part of my autobiographical experience. *Case study 1* and *case study 2* refer to the interpretative social science paradigm, so they are based on group assumptions and interpretations, mutual search for meaning and points of view, illustrate movement and focus on the descriptive form of the process, as Kostera and Czakon have mentioned more than once (Kostera, 2003; Czakon, 2016). *Case study 3*, on the other hand, refers to the paradigm of radical humanism, in which new developments and changes in the adopted perspective are described from the subjective point of view of the researcher.

4.1. Case study 1

During my one-year internship I worked as a teacher in a kindergarten and primary school, which organised didactic training for its staff. All forms of support were a form of group training supervision, and in dealing with the particular needs and questions of us as trainee teachers, we could count on individual collegial support in the case of training organised by senior colleagues. As teachers, trainees and qualified teachers, we were all part of this project, which lasted a whole school year, to motivate teachers, prevent professional burnout and develop professional competences. Some of the trainings were led by mentors - principals - and some by willing teachers themselves, specialised in the field. The trainings were purely practical, reflective and focused on illustrative presentation of ways and methods of working through direct role-playing

and guided activities between participants, without the presence of children. The number of participants at each meeting was between 20 and 30 people. Selected examples were related to aspects of everyday work in line with the core curriculum areas: music workshops, drama workshops, working with difficult pupils (special education), art workshops (decoupage). The revision training was aimed at personal experience of selected methods of teacher work through group participation and training of given methods of professional work on concrete examples. As participants we could count on the support of a mentor as a group, we could also count on the support and guidance among ourselves, as we worked in different departments of the same organisation.

In *case study 1* there were both elements of supervision and LFC. There were many similar forms, such as reflective, collegial or cooperative supervision, as well as LFC coaching based on collaboration and group mentoring. The examples of both forms in *case study 1* refer to the idea of partnership, the practice-oriented concept of the research, while the place of research was the organisation. There was a lack of control or leadership, the only difference to these forms was the lack of individual mentoring in the context of case supervision, and the lack of academic collaboration in the context of LFC. However, I was able to count on collegial support and a *peer support* relationship when I needed support, from a supervision perspective.

Table 1. Comparison of supervision and LFC in terms of evaluation criteria *case study 1*.

Case study I	Supervision	LFC
Type of evaluation form Criteria	collegial	mentoring (collective)
	participating	supervised intenship
	cooperative	cooperation
	reflective	coaching
conception	practice	practice
research	field	field
range	local	local
monitoring	-	-
partnership	yes	yes
colleagueship	no	yes
character	collective	individual
feedback	yes	yes
institution	yes	yes
leadership	-	-
emotional support	-	-
remarks	no individual mentoring	lack of academic coopera- tion

4.2. Case study 2

Many years later, after my first professional placement, I took part in individual and group coaching for 3 weeks among a group of about 8 teachers (5 groups), who were both students and qualified teachers, which was a compilation of advice, observations and conclusions on my professional path in the kindergarten. The coaching was carried out by an external company, on an individual basis as well as on a group basis in the form of observations during practical work with the support of a coach. This is a rather rare form of supervision in a kindergarten. The area of evaluation was awareness of how to deal with given situations - stressful, working with gifted/difficult children/ from dysfunctional families/ disordered children, as well as elements of personal development. Coaching also included mentoring and extensive emotional support. The final outcome was to conduct the presentation class as an individual reflective supervision to make me aware of progress as well as further challenges. I had to learn with each meeting as well as draw conclusions on the path of my professional development.

In *case study 2* there were many similarities in terms of LFC and supervision, where collaboration and partnership are key buzzwords of these concepts. In this case, there was much more emotional support in the context of LFC, which, while mentoring each participant individually, offered great help in personal development and integration of the whole process. There was no increase in academic knowledge, but there was emotional support for the first time, which, however, was not related to collegial support. In the context of reflective supervision I observed an increase of personal development through individual support, whereas in the aspect of LFC strong feedback occurred through personal mentoring and coaching. An additional aspect was also the mentoring support of the head teacher regarding his challenges as well as problems on his professional path.

Table 2. Comparison of supervision and LFC in terms of evaluation criteria *case study II*.

Case study II	Supervision	LFC
<div> <div>Type of evaluation form</div> <div>Criteria</div> </div>		mentoring (individual)
	participating	supervised intenship
	cooperative	cooperation
	reflective	coaching
conception	practice	practice
research	field	field
range	local	local
monitoring	-	-
partnership	yes	yes
colleagueship	no	yes
character	collective and individual	individual
feedback	yes	yes

institution	yes	yes
leadership	no	yes
emotional support	yes	yes
remarks	personal development	lack of academic cooperation

4.3. Case study 3

It was a new experience for me to illustrate my previous experience as a director. When I was managing a nursery, even though it was not subject to the educational system in Poland, I decided to organise a series of trainings for employees - carers of children under 3. The duration of the training cycle was about 3 months, among a group of 5 carers. All trainings concerned the methodology of work, psychology of a small child, including the aspect of understanding needs, as well as forms of suggestions for organising play. These trainings took place in a group workshop, in the form of play, in which the children also participated. However, the theoretical information was additionally distributed by me for individual learning for each participant. The participants were able to ask questions at any time during the process, both individually and in groups, on topics related to the subject of the training.

Table 3. Comparison of supervision and LFC in terms of evaluation criteria *case study III*.

Case study III	Supervision	LFC
<div>Type of evaluation form</div> <div>Criteria</div>	-	mentoring
	participating	supervised internship
	cooperative	cooperation
	reflective	-
conception	practice	practice
research	field	field
range	local	local
monitoring	-	-
partnership	yes	yes
colleagueship	no	no
character	collective and individual	collective and individual
feedback	yes	yes
institution	yes	yes
leadership	no	no
emotional support	no	no
remarks	activities with participation of children, without an educational framework	lack of coaching, academic cooperation

In *Case Study III* there were many elements common to both reflective supervision and LFC. Examples of both forms are collective and individual. In the context of LFC there was no academic collaboration, whereas in the aspect of reflective supervision the nature of the workshop was stripped of its educational framework, allowing children to be freely involved in the area of proposed play. The example did not provide emotional support or observation of the progress of method implementation through coaching. Collaboration took place “here and now” on the basis of inclusion in learning in the form of joint play.

5. What should be new ethnographical assumptions of educational team members?

The indicated examples of reflective supervision initially draw attention to the function of constructive advice, criticism by way of partnership, peer cooperation with the application of all ethical principles as well as the use of feedback. Similarly, in the case of coaching, the growing importance of personal development and individual support through the training process can be pointed out. Both forms therefore have the potential to transform the working model into a reflective one with visible effects. On this basis old assumptions can be distinguished as well as new ones like the results of the research verification.

Old assumption: Supervision and coaching are two different forms of educational supervision.

New assumption: Supervision and coaching integrate the development of the teacher in a cooperative way.

Supervision in its initial form did not refer to the provision of mentoring support to the management, but was mainly limited to administration and content-related feedback. Over time, supervision began to constitute activities for deepening professional development, including the prevention of burnout or confronting one’s own behaviour. For example, deeply hidden aggression, frustration resulting from professional tensions in educational leadership or destructive abuses of power, under the influence of supervision can be shown, worked on and remodelled into correct management models (Fisher, Sirianni, 1984:323). Coaching in educational leadership, on the other hand, serves individual assessment as well as motivation and facilitation in light of leadership challenges (Bachkirova, et al. : 2020). Based on the case study analysis it is possible to distinguish between content - related, emotional and mentoring support, which implemented at managerial level can have an indirect impact on the whole structure of an educational institution. The presented cases showed a one-time mentoring support among managers, which influenced the cognitive development of the whole group and drew attention to the needs and this sector.

Old assumption: Leadership in education does not require reflection on personal development.

New assumption: The role of educational leadership is subject to continuous facilitation and support.

Group, peer and peer supervision correspond to group coaching, where the aim is not only to integrate the group, but above all to review working methods as well as professional experiences. The presence of peers or a group of academic experts is intended to enlarge the platform of experience. The indicated cases have drawn attention to the role of partnership as an integrating element of the evaluation process, which affects the progressiveness of its methods.

Old assumption: Group evaluation mainly serves the purpose of socialisation.

New assumption: Group evaluation corresponds to the partnership integration of methods and experiences.

6. Results and discussion of comparisons

The case study comprises an overview of individual experiences with supervision and coaching in kindergarten and nursery schools. All these cases implemented the evaluation in a partnership as well as in an individual way, depending on the needs and the specificities and initial assumptions. *Case study I and II* represented activities conducted without the participation of children, while *Case study III* represented a convention of joint play. In addition, *Case study II* was the only case that also included personal development, emotional support and one-to-one mentoring, which was missing from the other examples. All the cases represented both LFC and supervision in a reflective way, serving as a constructive evaluation of the teacher's skills. In addition, new assumptions from the ethnographic research highlight the effectiveness of evaluation in the group aspect as well as among managers. It is also worth noting the issue of emotional support and mentoring provided by the supervisor and coach, the mere presence and empathic approach being an increasingly common tool in the practices of reflective supervision (McMahon, 2014:8).

However, academic collaboration was lacking in the above-mentioned forms, which may be a conclusion for further work to implement evaluation projects also in collaboration with partner universities or academic mentors. At the same time, *Case study II* used a form of coaching implemented by a mentor from an external company, which was already an innovation in terms of institutional perception of the concept of supervision.

Both forms of supervision and LFC showed many similarities in the way the process was carried out. Partnership, reflexivity, individual, group forms, possibility of personal support in the form of mentoring, feedback, emphasis on action "in motion"

and on practical aspects of professional work. Both methods serve to integrate didactical knowledge and development in a way, which are adapter.

Conclusions for further work include, in addition to academic cooperation, making coaching and reflective supervision available to students of pedagogy, not only to staff and trainees in the institutions. The research illustrated also shows to what extent reflexive forms of supervision accompany teachers at different stages of their work. Moreover, these solutions are not about administrative quality control, but focus on support and development, which points to a new trend in the management of contemporary education.

7. Conclusion

The research shows that forms of reflective supervision and LFC in pre-schools and even in day nurseries serve to integrate knowledge and support without stigmatising or judging the employee. This kind of solutions are spreading worldwide in different fields, increasingly also in the form of coaching. There is also a trend to extend such forms to academic environments, where the role of authorities and mentors is used more and more often. The common goal for such activities is to improve the quality of work and to benefit from the experience of the coach or supervisor. Mutual transfer of knowledge is also gaining importance in the aspect of group and peer coaching, where mutual cooperation, devoid of rivalry, focuses exclusively on the common goals of deepening practical knowledge. The study thus points to a new quality of educational management, where partnership, respect and support are the foundation of professional work.

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