

(Extract)

Functionality of Supervision

Functional supervision in the education of psychosocial workers

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In this article - based on a series of lectures for supervision students - the author presents the thesis that supervision in the psychosocial field should be functional on four different, yet interrelated dimensions: as integral part of the educational curriculum, the wellbeing of the clients of the supervisee, the organisational dimension of psychosocial work, and, finally, the personal and professional development of the supervisee him or herself.

The author argues his case along four lines, organised in corresponding paragraphs. To start with he points out that wherever the neoliberal market ideology has penetrated the management of higher education, supervisors are under heavy pressure to 'produce measurable results in as short a time as possible'. Supervision should be 'productive against low costs.' This development confronts supervisors with a heavy threat to their usual modus operandi: attentive, patient, relationally oriented, supportive.

Secondly, the author points out that the supervisory concept and the basic methodical structure commonly used in The Netherlands offer insufficient protection against this commercially oriented pressure. The reasons for this failure are threefold. One: the wording of the concept is ambiguous and leaves room for different interpretations. Two: the basic structure as defined in Dutch supervision literature limits itself too much to the micro level of the relations between supervisor and supervisees. And three: there is a marked difference between the concept and what supervisors are really doing in practice. To enhance clarity he concludes this paragraph with a definition of the term 'functionality'.

Thirdly it is argued that - in so far supervision helps trainees to prepare for a psychosocial profession - the idea of a well defined profession is under heavy pressure, too. Professions are broken up in parts, reshuffled, and top down redefined by managers. Professionals find their freedom to act along their own professional standards taken away from them and have to comply with protocols that are forced upon them from the outside in.

Fourthly the author asks himself how to this potentially destructive development should be countered. He argues that this is possible only if supervisors consciously endeavour to be functional to the education of the supervisee, to the his or her clients, to the institutional setting where the supervisee is employed, and to the supervisee as a learning and labouring subject. In the course of his argument he presents a number of examples, and attempts to show the links between these dimensions.

The article is expanded by notes, including an overview of consulted literature.