

# **INTERVIZIJA U SPECIJALNOJ EDUKACIJI**

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## **THE INTERVISION METHOD IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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## SAŽETAK

Stručni radnici specialne edukacije (kao i edukacije generalno) tokom radnog procesa ostvarujemo veliki broj interakcija sa različitim osobama. Prilikom pronalaženja adekvatne pomoći i osnaživanja pojedinca sa kojim radimo, možemo da osetimo zadovoljstvo i ispunjenje nas kao ličnosti, ali se takođe susrećemo i sa dilemama odnosno situacijama koje nas opterećuju. Pored socialnog faktora kao što su međuljudski odnosi, susrećemo se i sa drugim otežavajućim faktorima koji su vezani na radne uslove, uloge pojedinca na radnom mestu i mogućnosti za razvoj kariere te organizacione klime. Posledično, pojavljuje se potreba za profesionalnim rasterećenjem. U članku predstavljamo metodu intervizije kao jedan od oblika supervizije koja se fokusira na pronalaženje adekvatnog rešenja problema. Na praktičnom primeru prikazujemo karakteristike i ulogu intervizije prilikom razvoja profesionalne i lične kompetencije, definišemo vrline i mane klasičnog oblika intervizije te rezimiramo iskustvo sa procesom intervizije tokom pandemije covid-19.

**Ključne reči:** specijalna edukacija, profesionalno rasterećenje, rešavanje problema, intervizija

## ABSTRACT

Professionals in the field of special education and education in general enter into many interactions with different people within their work process on a daily basis. While being professionally oriented towards identifying potential sources of help and empowerment for the individual, we can find ourselves either in situations that have a positive impact on our professional satisfaction and growth, or that present themselves as problematic situations that burden us. In addition to social factors such as interpersonal relationships, we can also be stressed by other factors arising from work conditions: by the role of the individual in the workplace, by career development opportunities and also by the organisational climate. Therefore we may need the option of, or opportunity for, professional relief within a systematic problem-solving process. As an example of such a process, in this paper we present the intervision method as one form of supervision. With a practical example we point out the role and features of intervision, its impact on the professional development and personal competence of an individual. We also define the advantages and disadvantages of the classic form of intervision and summarise an experience of the intervision process during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Key words:** Special education, professional relief, problem solving process, intervision method

## **INTRODUCTION**

The work of the special pedagogue is primarily carried out in the field of education and/or in the health care system. In education we are often in the role of a teacher, counsellor or provider of additional professional assistance, and in the field of health care we usually engage in diagnostic evaluation and therapeutic work. The basis of both areas of work is daily direct contact with people, within which we offer various forms of help and support. However, we often receive too little constructive feedback about our work. The specificity of our work is also in the fact that we often carry it with us wherever we go, and think over our work assignments or problem situations in our private time. Indeed during the pandemic the dividing line between work and private life became even more blurred. The latter is just one of the stressors we are subject to. According to several pieces of research (Drobnič Vidic, 2014.), both health care and education represent sectors characterised by a high level of stress. Therefore it is important to consider different sources of professional support in solving problem situations. One of the options, which is unfortunately underused in our work sphere is the intervision method.

## **INTERVISION AS A FORM OF SUPERVISION PROCESS**

Supervision is a special method of learning that developed on the model of consultations, known from medical practice. Its useful value was recognised and adopted by the social work sector and later extended to other helping professions. Supervision is characterised by the promotion of self-reflection and a positive effect on the competencies of professionals in helping professions (Dekleva, 1995). It pursues the goal of relieving professionals and developing opportunities for their constructive coping with stressful situations. In reflecting on one's own professional behavior, the individual is guided by other experts with more knowledge and experience - supervisors (Milošević Arnold et al., 1999). Due to the involvement of an external expert, the organisation of supervision is associated with certain financial expenses. That can represent an obstacle to the establishment of a supervision group. Along with various forms of supervision, we therefore emphasise the role of intervision as a form of supervision process, which is relatively easy to organise in any work environment due to the structure and principles of its operation.

Intervision represents one of the formats that can be used in problem solving processes in a team, besides team meetings, case discussions and regular supervision. It is defined as an intercollegial learning process in which a small group of colleagues with a similar level of professional qualification and work experience discuss professional practice issues, that arise in their work environment, and are able to reflect and to communicate them, in a rational and autonomous way by following a specified

process (Staempfli, 2020 in Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2019; Franzenburg, 2009; Hanekamp 1992 in Milošević Arnold, 2007). In contrast to supervision it does not rely on an external expert acting as a facilitator, and none of the participants possess the permanent role of supervisor. Instead, the members of the group take turns in the roles and gain experience as experts for their problems and solutions (Franzenburg, 2009). They share responsibility for the process and for the consistency of the group.

Intervision method dynamics differs significantly from informal relief conversations with co-workers. Yet, due to the equality of the group members, the hazard of quickly slipping into regular, non-structured friend-to friend conversation during the intervision process exists.

It is recommended that the intervision group include individuals who already have prior experience with this form of problem-solving process or have been trained for it previously (Van Kessel, 2002). In cases where the group members don't have previous experience with this method, some authors (Van Kessel, 2002) suggest that the group be formed, and at least during early sessions monitored and led through the formal-organisational aspects of the process, by an external supervisor.

In order for the intervision group to maintain a constructive course and really enable a way of experiential learning, the process should follow certain guidelines and rules, including the following:

- Participation in the intervision process is voluntarily.
- It is advised that there be no hierarchical or other (kinship, partnership) relationship between the participants.
- The participants are employed and present a current/relevant, unsolved issue or problem.
- Information shared in the intervision process must be confidential.
- The participants conclude an intervision agreement (described below).

It is important that during the introductory session participants of each intervision group conclude an agreement, preferably in writing. This document obliges the participants to respect the reached agreements and abide by the principles of professional secrecy throughout the duration of the intervision. It specifies the organisation and structure of the intervision, its content, rules of conduct and goals (personal and group goals). It is especially important that each participant defines and writes down his own personal objective and goals, regarding which he can point out his expectations from the intervision process in the field of learning, support and personal and professional growth. Such an agreement contributes to ensuring a safe environment for each member of the group individually (Milošević Arnold, 2007).

In order to facilitate a safe, confidential and positive environment, it is important to also respect some basic rules of conduct, such as:

- Don't be judgemental and do not patronise. Avoid offering advice on what to do or how to approach a certain problem. Also try to avoid "Why" questions, instead invite people to clarify their arguments and motives (by "What and How").
- Listen carefully and pay attention to peoples emotions. In order to be sure that the presented situation/problem is understood correctly, use recapitulation.
- Treat other participants with respect.
- Do not take over responsibility for your colleagues' problems (show understanding and interest and try to motivate and support them in solving their own problems) (Trautmann, 2010).

An effective working relationship can only be established in an environment where members trust each other, where confidentiality reigns. The fact that the members of an intervision group are equal in terms of status, knowledge and experience also contributes significantly to confidentiality and a relaxed atmosphere, as well as to mutual understanding and effective learning from their own experiences and the experiences of others (Milošević Arnold, 2007). In such an environment the participants feel accepted and willing to show their weaknesses. Such a working relationship has a positive effect on the individual (personally and professionally) as well as on his work environment.

## **ROLES IN AN INTERVISION GROUP**

Different authors propose different numbers of members for an intervision group, the proposals range from 2-8 participants (Bellersen and Kohlmann, 2017; Milošević Arnold, 2007; Van Kessel, 2002). As the most optimal number of participants in relation to the chosen intervision process method, practice groups are usually formed from 4 to 6 members (Queensland Counsellors Association, 2009; Milošević Arnold, 2007). Roles in an intervision group are not permanent; group members switch between the following roles from session to session:

### **FACILITATOR**

The role of facilitator is to lead the intervision process and, in this context, to help the group member to define or reflect on his problem in a specific way. He must be careful not to rely on a sense of responsibility to solve the problem and also not to diminish the significance of the problem. It is important that he helps the member-intervisor to focus on what he or she can do in the situation in question (Milošević Arnold, 2007).

## **CASE PRESENTER**

An individual who acts as a case presenter describes his problem, which in practice really burdens him and to which he wants to find a potential solution. It is important that the presented issue is still unresolved during the meeting.

## **MEMBER OF A REFLECTING GROUP**

The role of a reflective member of a group is to listen and give a reflection on the problem question or situation and share constructive opinions and experiences (Bajrović Petek, 2020).

Some intervision methods also involve an observer member (Van Kessel, 2002) and/or note taker (Staempfli, 2019).

When in search of possible positive solutions to a problem, it is important that members, regardless of their role, completely rule out any evaluation of either the presented problem situation or possible solutions to the problem. For the latter, the most important is the amount of ideas.

It is recommended that an agreement on the division of roles is agreed before the start of the session. Our intervision group made such a distribution of roles already at the first, introductory meeting within the intervision agreement. In addition to that we also agreed that the member who is intended to take the role of case presenter communicates his problem in writing to the other members one week before the meeting.

## **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE FORMS AND METHODS OF WORK IN AN INTERVISION GROUP**

During my professional career I have met various forms of supervision - the classic form of supervision with an external expert; a form of 'internal' supervision, which includes only employees from our organisation, with the role of supervisor being performed by a colleague, psychologist and trained supervisor. Another form of supervision I have been involved in as a special educator is intervision.

The initiative to form our intervision group came from a colleague with extensive experience of various forms of supervision. She primarily took care of the organisational aspects of the group. The group consisted of five members, by profession pedagogues and special pedagogues, employed in various education and health care departments/institutions. Despite the suggestion from the literature to run between

24-28 intervison sessions, our group agreed on 12 meetings. The first meeting was planned as an introductory meeting, aimed at concluding an intervison agreement, which included:

- A list of participants.
- Dates and locations of meetings. We met once a month, dates were set six months in advance. Meetings were always scheduled at the same location and in the same room.
- Ways of informing group members in case of absence of a member.
- Ethics or rules of conduct in the intervison group with an emphasis on confidentiality.
- Agreement on the preparation of written reflections after each meeting, which the members were to exchange with each other before the next meeting.
- Personal and group objectives.

The introductory meeting was followed by ten meetings dedicated exclusively to the problem-solving process. The last, 12th meeting was dedicated to the evaluation of the course of work in the intervison sessions.

Like all forms of supervision in which I have participated, the intervison group was held as a direct, face-to-face meeting. This changed in March 2020, when the world found itself in the grip of a pandemic, and the new reality of most people, including (special) educators, became working from home via different online platforms.

The thought that the pandemic and measures taken in connection with it would only be short-lived led to a temporary suspension of many supervision and intervison groups. However, with the ever-increasing extension of measures and increased distress of different professionals, the clear need for the continuity of it soon became apparent.

The only option for carrying out supervisory forms of professional support was via online tools. Staempfli (2020) suggests two ways in which the Intervison method can be adapted to facilitate peer-group reflection online:

Videoconferencing as a form closest to the classic, face-to face intervison that anticipates live sessions with all the members present at the same time; the importance of following the ground rules of the Intervison method is emphasised, especially in order to provide everyone with an opportunity to speak in a respectful, non-judgmental and positive way.

Collaborative writing online. Written online intervison is very different from face-to-face peer group sessions. It may seem less suitable for the intervison process, but Staempfli emphasises that reflecting on "a challenge or situation through colla-



borative writing offers a great way to connect with each other and to engage in deep reflection, whereby the documenting of one thoughts is in itself an act of reflective learning." The steps of the intervision procedure follow the same sequence as in classic intervision. Group members can work on a single shared document simultaneously or complete each step of the process within a certain agreed timeframe.

Both described approaches could also be combined.

"Both (of) these online intervision approaches require facilitators to be familiar with the technology used in the process of intervision. As the attention of the facilitator is both, on the reflective discussion and on technological aspects, it helps if they only focus on these tasks and do not also take part in the actual case discussion" (Staempfli, 2020: 1). Therefore Staempfli (2020) suggests an additional facilitator whose role is solely technical support to members, in the specific use of the videoconferencing tools.

The members of our intervision group decided on a videoconferencing form of intervision. Since we had already had a few live meetings, the transition to the online platform did not make us feel uncomfortable. The only concern expressed was about the security of the information transmitted via the online platform. In regard to this, we chose a tool/application that was considered secure enough.

Regardless of how the intervision process is derived, there are several different methods for it, for example the Gossip method, Balint method, Learn from success method, etc. The key to choosing the method to be used, in addition to being appropriate for the presented case, is also the fact that the facilitator must know the chosen method well and use it appropriately. Our group mostly used the Incident method, which is one of the best known and common methods in Slovenian intervision practice. During the course of the videoconferencing intervision, we also used a method that supervision manuals mostly do not yet include, but has proven to be very effective. This is de Bono's Six Thinking Hats method.

## **THE SIX THINKING HATS METHOD**

In the usual reflection on a situation that burdens us, we may feel confused by a flood of thoughts, information and ideas. When trying to find a solution we may run in circles and find it difficult to keep our focus on we want to achieve. To help in the creative search for possible solutions to the problem situation, Edward de Bono developed the Six Thinking Hats method. It is described as a useful technique for helping groups to:

- Engage in developing and sharing ideas.
- Make better decisions about which ideas to progress.
- Align their thinking (it suggests the use of parallel, rather than confused or conflicted, thinking) (The Management Centre, 2015).

This technique is widely used today in both the business world and in the field of education. It is based on the idea of the existence of six imaginary hats. Each hat is a different colour and represents a different type of thinking. When members of a problem solving group "put on" a hat, they focus exclusively on a particular aspect of thinking. By changing from one hat to another the thinking mode also changes (The Management Centre, 2015).

In this way, creative thinking and critical evaluation of the presented ideas are encouraged, and at the same time it enables the analysis of the problem through various aspects of thinking, which enable a comprehensive overview of the problem situation and the search for positive solutions (Mulej, n.d.).

As stated above, the Six Thinking Hats method was used in our videoconference intervention meetings. The web application through which our meetings took place allowed us to write down thoughts and ideas within each of the aspects of thinking in a timely and transparent manner, so that they were simultaneously visible to all participants in the process.

In the introductory part of session the case presenter first described the facts and circumstances of the problem and formulated her intervention question. After each mode of thinking in the presented process below, the case presenter was invited to reflect on the ideas that she perceived as useful in solving the problem.

After that, the process facilitator invited all reflective members of the group, including the case presenter, to reflect under the white hat. This aspect of thinking is about factual, observable data (The Management Centre, 2015). It is crucial to present current data and facts without one's own interpretations and judgments; reflection runs in the direction of what we already know about the subject and what we don't yet know. The flow of thinking can also be focused on what information is still needed in order to potentially solve the problem. The members wrote down all the key data encouraged by the white hat on the electronic whiteboard - what we know about the cooperation so far between the people involved in the problem situation; the ways and course of cooperation between them, the positions taken by those involved (Dukić, 2020).

After this phase of reflection, we 'put on' the red hat. The facilitator invited the members of the group to become aware of their own feelings about the presented facts, to empathise with the feelings, premonitions and impressions of the case presenter. At this point, it is also advisable to focus on one's own intuition and on the possible emotional reactions of others to the presented facts and ideas. When all the emotions were written on the whiteboard the case presenter summed up the feelings which she recognised as hers.

The process continued under the green hat, which symbolises creative thinking and is usually the key to problem solving discussions (Dukić, 2020). This hat is characterised by thinking outside the box and finding different solutions to the problem. It is often used in a brainstorm to generate ideas (The Management Centre, 2015). It is important to be open to all different proposals, without evaluating them. We focused on new, alternative solutions to the problem; we tried to look at the problem situation from other perspectives. Again, after all the ideas had been written on a white board, the case presenter was invited to select three ideas as possible solutions, that could be effectively used in the presented problem situation.

Under the yellow hat the participants focused exclusively on the possible benefits and advantages of the previously selected ideas (The Management Centre, 2015). The opposite to the yellow hat thinking mode was later presented under the black hat, that represents critical thinking. In this stage members are encouraged to consciously consider factors that might represent an obstacle to the realisation of an idea. The focus is on possible pitfalls, challenges and problems that they may comprise. At the same time, it encourages consideration of alternatives that might come in handy if the original plan accidentally breaks down (Dukić, 2020).

At the end of our Six Thinking Hats intervision session the facilitator invited the case presenter to again consider the red hat. The case presenter (and later also the other reflective members) were encouraged to focus on the feelings about the process, content and outcomes.

According to de Bono, there is another aspect of thinking - the blue hat, that represents control, organisation, planning and guidance. It is usually 'worn' by one person - the meeting leader, or in the case of our presented intervision session, by the facilitator. The blue hat wearer defines the process and ensures everyone is wearing the right hat at the right time (The Management Centre, 2015, Dukić, 2020).

It is not necessary that in a problem solving process all the aspects of thinking are included; engaging in developing ideas may arise either from all thinking modes or can focus on finding separate solutions for individual hats. Regardless of this method's form of use, it certainly represents a highly valuable and productive approach for both the supervision and intervision learning processes.

## **BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE INTERVISION METHOD**

According to the literature and personal experience with the intervision method, there are not a lot of disadvantages to speak of. However, they can arise, especially if the structure of the process is not followed according to its regulations. Possible disadvantages are listed below:

- A combination of relaxed, positive environment, a sense of mutual trust and status equality among participants can lead to members focussing on expressing support and comforting each other rather than being actively involved in a constructive problem solving process.
- Equality between members can cause them to run in circles when looking for solutions and always list the same or similar solutions for different problem situations.
- The members can focus more on problems that are irrelevant for the process, such as organisational or technical issues and others (Milošević Arnold, 2007)
- Incomparably greater than the potential disadvantages, are the benefits of the intervision process. Below we list some of them:
- Feelings of trust, mutual support and success in problem solving established in the intervision process present a protective factor against occupational strain and negative stress.
- The method contributes to a collegial exchange of knowledge and encourages learning from the experiences of others.
- It improves the transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice and vice versa.
- It encourages insight into our own professional approach.
- From the organisational point of view, intervision offers effective and cost-effective professional training (Trautmann, 2010).

In addition to the abovementioned advantages of supervision, the members of our intervision group emphasised the importance of mindfulness in the process (remaining focused on the 'here and now'). Being mindful about the problem situation enables a person's critical reflection of his own personal and professional competence. We also pointed out the fondness for the personal, face-to-face form of intervision which gives the members a sense of closeness already from the beginning of the process. However, we also identified the positive aspects of online intervention, where we mainly recognised the time-saving aspect (no time for travelling to the meeting needed). By taking into account the benefits of intervision we can conclude that "Intervision has proven to be a powerful instrument to encourage multidisciplinary work, making use of the expertise and skills available in a team" (Trautmann, 2010: 7).

## CONCLUSION

Special education as a profession is characterised by a helping relationship and interpersonal interactions in confidence, and as such ranks among professions that are more prone to stress. Various available forms of professional support, which are especially widespread in the field of social work and psychotherapy, are unfortunately still significantly underdeveloped in special pedagogy. Despite its many advantages and the fact that it represents a form of learning, that is relatively easy to organise in almost any working sphere, the intervision method is relatively less commonly used in

our profession. We believe that such a method should be implemented in the study program of special education itself, as many findings show that various supervision methods are “very effective in the transition from the education system to the work environment” (Novak, 2020: 71). We suggest that departments and associations of special pedagogues shift the focal point to supervision and intervision, and systematically encourage the formation of such groups. In doing so, we recommend the preparation of a manual for intervision in special education, which should, besides the already established methods of problem solving, also include new forms such as the presented ‘Six Learning Hats’ method. To sum up, intervision does not focus solely on professional challenges and the promotion of special educators’ expert competences, it also influences lifelong learning.

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