Methodology of leading a professional community

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I.   Introduction

Creating professional communities under project ??? is an important step in the process of applying the resilience approach in the work on prevention of violence against children. Creating professional communities/groups of professionals is aimed at stimulating the professional development of its members through the experience in a small group. The idea is to be supported the understanding and assessment of the resilience approach and to be invented specific ways of its implementation in relation to the professional role or the specific place. The idea is to be created a certain location where after the training trainers and trained to discuss the taken study material and together to look for the ways and fields of its implementation.

On first place for such communities it's important:

- to rationalize what the participants have learned during the training;
- to integrate the new experience in the professional and life experience of the participants in the training;
- to develop and deepen the knowledge;
- to discuss, offer and plan activities for applying the learned material in practice

Achieving such aims must be main care of the community itself, which means to be presented and discussed among its members and also to be monitored and watched their achieving.

On second place, the implementation of resilience in the work of teachers, social workers, tutors and psychologists presupposes:

- changing the attitude, e.g. treating the problem while concentrating on the strong sides and resources;
- changing the approach to kids as to subjects and working for developing the strong sides every child has, not so much concentrating on his or her difficulties;
- changing the attitude to children in risk and special efforts in ascertaining strong sides and protective factors;
- establishing a good treating of such children at school or in the social service.

The methodology we offer you will help in the realization of this basic project activity.

2. Essence of the professional community/group

The professional community perceives the group as an environment for mutual support and teaching. The growth and change in each specialist is helped by the interaction between members of the group. Teachers, tutors and social workers don't work in isolation, but together. Thus the group becomes a natural format stimulating "professional socialization" and intensifying the studying in an environment which

allows a multitude of people to get from the experience of the individual specialist. Forming professional groups enables the participants to feel mutual support, to share mutual experiences, to solve complicated problems, to master new behaviors, to participate in training of skills, to increase their mutual skills and oftener to obtain some form of insight. (MacKenzie, 1990)[1].

Professional groups are a type of inter-vision groups with numerous advantages as a place for professional development. The inter-vision groups are of equally set professionals who voluntarily unite for support around a topic, problem, any kind of necessity. Inter-vision groups may consist of the same specialists, e.g. only tutors or only social workers, or only psychologists. They also may be mixed, reunited by a common professional field or another common feature.

The effect of the groups can be seen in the mutual training through common experiences, in an atmosphere where the individual participant learns how to work with his peers in a way that encourages personal responsibility and increases the reciprocity. **(Gainor & Constantin, 2002). Bernard и Goodyear (2004)** note that obtaining a feedback from your colleagues and hearing the feedback provided for others, have a positive influence over the members of the group.

The professional inter-vision groups are based on the resource of the group itself, of its development which allows reaching a specific helping environment in it, unlocking the potential of every participant. The support is more of an effect out of a well structured and well led dynamic group process, creating conditions and respecting a maximum participation of members of the group, the confidence between them and the atmosphere of accepting, empathy, tolerance and mutual respect.

3. Structure of the professional community/inter-vision group

The inter-vision group is a small one (with 8-12 participants) taking part voluntarily in it. It's a permanent one, rather closed, e.g. its members are a constant number, a new one is admitted under very special conditions set by the group itself. The constant number of participants is a condition for conveying common professional interests and for building up of climate of confidence between the participants. The group may also consist of specialists from one profession or from similar professions, depending on the specifics of the aims. In our case homogenous and heterogeneous groups, e.g. only out of teachers, only out of social workers, out of psychologists, of doctors, but also combined. Setting the topic for resilience is a good basis for the mixed groups.

● development of trust and security within the group
● leaning on the group interaction
● leaning on the communication and especially on the feedback within the group

The role of the leader is more of a leader of a group than of an expert. He facilitates and moderates the group process, makes a group agreement, follows for its abiding, organizes the time, moderates the interaction around previously approved work methodology. Very often the leading role is taken by different participants. This

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[1] MacKenzie, K. R. (1990). Introduction to time-limited group therapy. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

encourages[2] professionals to take a bigger responsibility within the group, and the feedback is offered by different points of view. Such model of professional community has a serious impact on the professional development through direct learning and through the personal experience in the group.

The format of professional community demands by the group leaders to be competent and focused on the leading of the group, e.g. to understand the meaning of the group parameters as a staff, purposes, history, size etc.; to watch the processes of group dynamics; to interfere mainly regarding the development of group autonomy, its solidarity, atmosphere, productivity, rules, solutions etc. The leader is more of a group leader and he should adjust his interference to the needs of the group.

To illustrate this approach can be used the methodology for Partner Support[3], Six Thinking Hats[4] etc.

On first place these are structure methodologies which strictly follow specific conditions from the point of view of the group work. Their authors point out the necessity of small groups with close level of competence, to gather regularly etc. These methodologies also follow certain phases which actually help time management, the process and participation of people - they can be three, six or ten. The most important is that they structure the process, give security to people and prevent the option the discussion to become a talking shop. Without such structure there's a risk to focus more on one element of the discussion and to have no time for another.

Group support has this ability – it absorbs the negative emotions, but in condition of clear professional rules.

4. Phases of work of the professional community

Defining the participants in the group

The individuals the group consists of are defined by the participants, out of their suggestion. Very often one or two are initiators and around them join more people. In the groups for integration of the resilience approach by school and the community, the initiative and the first meetings can come out of the coordinator or out of the trainers.

Phase of agreement

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[2] Borders, L. D. (1991). A systematic approach to peer group supervision. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 69, 248-252.

[3] 2002-2012 Dr. Kim-Oliver Tietze, Hamburg, Germany. info (aet) peer-supervision.com

[4] **Six Thinking Hats for Group Supervision with Counselor Interns** Chi-Sing Li, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Group leadership and Counseling, Sam Houston State University Daniel G. Eckstein, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Group leadership and Counseling, Sam Houston State University Sheryl Serres, Clinical Professor, Department of Educational Group leadership and Counseling, Sam Houston State University, Yu-Fen Lin, Doctoral Fellow, Department of Educational Group leadership and Counseling, Sam Houston State University

The most important agreement is regarding the purposes of the group. Here the work of the coordinator and of the trainers is of great importance, because they have to explain the meaning, but also to enthuse and to inspire the group. When people don't have experience in groups for professional support, they may be reluctant and to have expectations for estimation, for guidance etc. That's why it's very important to prepare very seriously for the first meeting and to follow the methodology for the first meeting of a group.

On second place it's important to be established rules for work and communication. With group support there's a risk of posing qualifying and accusing questions which most often express certain group processes and that's why it's important while setting the agreement the group leader to put an accent on the rules of tolerance, here and now, of a support centered on the colleague. Of course, the most important factor is the very model of attitude he follows. *A very useful rule in such community is "Everyone to share his/her opinion without making comments on the opinion/the position or the recommendation of another participant".* Thus everyone thinks it is his/her own contribution and doesn't argue about someone else's propositions.

This phase also presupposes defining the place of gathering, the time of discussions, the regularity of meetings, the rules of participation, the rules of a new member of the group, the rules of discussion etc. It's very well the location to be certain, to be set regular meetings at least every 3-4 months and also it's good this to be clear in advance. Usually, the time is around 2 hours, when the first half an hour is for drinking of coffee and informal talks, while the next 90 minutes of work are without interruption.

Apart from these elements the agreement also includes appointment of a moderator or facilitator[5]. The elected persons are different at every meeting of the group which guarantees rotation of the participants, e.g. their equality is duly respected.

If the meeting envisages more time, at the different sessions the group leaders of the group also change. Thus every one of the participants becomes a group leader which allows him/her to develop new professional experience and competence. To facilitate the performance of this role, usually the group leader doesn't interfere quite often. This is another reason for the necessity of rotation, since the restraint from a frequent interference develops the skills for leading of a group, but actually it deprives the participant from the opportunity to contribute for the actual essence of the meeting.

Choice of the topic/case of discussion

The approach to the choice of a topic must be different. For example, it is chosen for a whole "school year" or for each meeting is chosen a topic, case or a problem for discussion regarding which the group will give its support to one of the participants. Since the common topic for the professional groups is rationalizing of practice through the knowledge of resilience with people and of the resilience approach, the specific topics can be defined at every meeting. The approving of a certain topic at

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[5] With the professional resilience groups it's better the group leaders first to have attended a resilience training and to moderate the discussion through the knowledge of this approach – author's note

every meeting suggests a more flexible addressing to the needs of the group. It's better the topics of discussion to be connected to the training topics or to come out of it. It's very important to hold on this, because there's a risk the discussion to be too general, not enough rationalizing a new knowledge. For example, the topic for child aggression follows to be concretized through the topics of training as to how to be understood the aggression, the factors for coping with it, the role of professionals – how to interfere leaning on knowledge.

Under case we usually understand an individual child or family that has been worked with for a long time where questions or difficulties have arisen regarding the specialists' hypothesis trying to understand the inner, the invisible, the reasons and factors. Sometimes may be proposed a certain situation that hasn't been handled out. Or the way of reaction doesn't satisfy the specialist and he has questions regarding it. It's possible also to be asked for support regarding a specific problem in work, for example "*when children speak and don't pay attention, I start yelling and I can't make myself act in a different way*", or "*I feel angry when a parent accuses me that his/her child isn't good at my subject and lacks knowledge about it…*"
And with cases, situations or a problem it's necessary to be made a connection with the learned for resilience approach.
Usually, the choice criteria are defined by the group itself and among them are:

● significance of the topic for more participants;
● connection of the topic with the theme for resilience;
● urgency of the case, the problem;
● sequence (who first has declared or other formal sign);
● something else

Introducing the case/problem/situation

Sometimes certain meeting may be entirely dedicated on a discussion of a new text, read by all participants or on introducing a new knowledge from a new text prepared by one ore more participants.

The person introducing the theme ought to show his/her understanding of it, the difficulties he/she has and the specific questions that has arisen while realizing them in practice. If he/she has read additional literature on resilience it is better to say and share what wasn't well understood of it.

Usually, there isn't a strict format of presentation - it's left on the choice of the one presenting the case or the problem. The preliminary demands concern the information – to be full, with a real significance, on the subject, oriented more to data and facts and the duration – usually from 6 to 10 minutes.

During this phase the presenter mustn't be interrupted. He's expected to end his presentation drawing his/her question/s to the audience.

Drawing a specific question/problem that must be worked on

Often in the work of these groups happens the one presenting a topic/case/problem to meet difficulties doing it. In such cases may be taken a few minutes for

reformulating the problem as it was heard by the other participants. On the one hand help for the exact drawing of the subject can be given not only by the supervisor, but by a group of consultants – the participants in the group. On the other hand, one of the most important impacts of learning, both for the one that has been supervised and for the participants, is that rationalizing and posing of such question is a tough process for everyone presenting a case and that it can be realized through discussions, thinking over etc.

It is possible, during and right after the presentation of the topic/case/problem, all participants to write down their associations, feelings and experiences in order to be able to get back to them later, when they give their contribution for the consulting of the case. Thus they can preserve their authentic thoughts, ideas and feelings, their authentic reaction to the shared which might be lost, forgotten are changed influenced by the discussion, the group and the other participants.

Then follow the questions of the participants in the group which as with individual support might be directed to data and facts on the case or to the experiences of the supervised one. While posing the questions, different techniques are used - everyone has the right to pose not more than three questions or to do the round questioning. After presenting the case, the group leader gives opportunity to everyone to pose or not to pose a question, but every person has his own time for this. While using a special technique introducing rules for posing questions, it's important again to "work with the group", to respect and stimulate its development through introducing the message of the group leader, that everyone is important, everyone's opinion is important and that he/she has a certain place and opportunity to express it or not. This way is avoided the risk only certain participants to ask and take the whole time. Avoided is also the difficulty for the group leader to stop such participants which opposes them to him and threatens the good atmosphere of the group.

Sometimes after asking questions the key question of the supervised one is changed, since right at that stage the group sees and "hears" the problem of his/her colleague in a different way.

An example from practice – a group for self-support of professionals working with teenagers

The tutor presents a case of his individual support for an adolescent with difficulties in his behavior – runaways from school, threats against other children, verbal aggression even against adults. The tutor doesn't know what to do because of impossibility to talk with this youngster who either doesn't attend the meetings or behaves in a different way every time. The tutor poses his question to the other participants in the group support and formulates it as "How to continue working with a person who doesn't want help and doesn't think he has a problem? After a long discussion on the subject, sharing by each participant what he/she has "heard" and how he/she has understood the question of the colleague, they reach to a completely new question "How to share with the adolescent his worries about him and redefines his help to him".

The method for support is chosen out of the methods for group work and "adapts" itself both to the needs of the group and to those of the support. Associations,

suggestions, comments, feelings of the participants in the group and of the supervisor regarding the heard; very often the change in the understanding and the estimation of the situation has come even in the phase of posing questions. Nonetheless, this phase is extremely important, because it gives abundance of different ideas and possible points of view. In group support it's a phase of creativity in help for the colleague and it's important to put barriers and embarrassment away while sharing the information.

The needs of the support are most of all in the sphere of thinking, understanding, of conceptualization and that's why most often are offered techniques of free and structured discussion, brain attack in different variants, absorbing in the situation, role games etc.

An example from practice – a group of self-support of professionals working with teenagers – continuing from the example presented above

After the mutual formulating of the key question as to "How to share with the youngster G. my worries and to redefine my help to him?" the participants in the group picked up as the most suitable technique "The empty chair" (look in Appendix #1). Every participant sits on the tutor's chair against the empty chair of the adolescent G.

"G, I thought a lot after our last meeting and I'd like to tell you that I'm worried about you. I understand that often someone provokes you and you react to this. I'm asking myself whether we both could think how eventually you not to be sent to the principal of the school?"

"G., first I'd like to thank you for your trust and that not every time, but at least sometimes you share your experiences… with me. I feel I'm getting them well and I think they're important and we can use them in our communication. My opinion is that if a young man asks himself questions, this can be very useful, since he's been looking for different answers and thus increases the chance to find the best form him. I'd like to ask yourself, what exactly makes you loose your temper at certain moments?"

"G., last time you didn't talk to me. I thought a lot about that and I suggest we stay silent today."

"G., I'm very angry I didn't manage to tell you how worried I am about you and how much I wish you to be spared of something even worse. Now you're at a crossroad and it's important which way you'd take. May I help you in the choice you're making?"

The presenter of the case, the supervised supervisor shared that his colleagues really redirected his point of view, that they helped him to realize that the feelings he had wrapped the case with, are most of all a resonance of his own feelings to the situation and that the emotional authenticity to the teenagers could be useful for establishing a contact.

By using this technique the participants could directly say what they would say if they were on their friend's place and they also expressed their positive feelings, although

they shared that facing the empty chair, right in front of the others, it wasn't easy at all.

The questions by the support are very powerful instrument for giving help to the supervised person. In many cases the understanding of the situation in a different way (which is a main purpose in the support as consulting) occurs even at that stage, through the answer of the posed questions.

The comment is done by the supervisor who at some rate gives the feedback to every member of the group and thus stimulates "the effect of learning". The decision for usefulness and choice of the ideas is taken by the supervised.

An example from the practice of inter-vision – Laboratory "What tell us the youngsters called delinquent?"

The Laboratory was created with the support of "Freud's Field", France and was organized by SAPI. Most of the time it's been functioning as inter-visionary group, e.g. a group of equals trying to help each other. The participation is optional. Usually, there participate social workers, psychologists, pedagogic counselors, different kind of tutors from different organizations and structures. The group gathers every first Monday of the month at 6 p.m., during the whole school year.

The request for help is given either in advance or during the meeting. Usually, people come half an hour earlier in order to participate in coffee drinking and in free talks. Every meetings lasts for hour and a half. Discussed are both cases and specific professional issues. After the first year it became a practice to come and give their services and aid colleagues from other towns – from Shumen, Pernik or Gabrovo. Later such laboratories were also established in those towns, again with the help of SAPI. Once, the help of the laboratory was asked by a theatrical crew – director and two actors. The request was to help to "give flesh" to the featured characters of a play for two young girls drug addicted who behave in a conflict with the law. This meeting of the group was one of the most exciting. The group existed for nearly four months.

The accent with such type of groups is the implementation of a generally acquired knowledge about applying it in practice. Since it's needed with them also to be provided a certain kind of support from a higher level of expertise, they'd sooner be added to the third model of professional community.

5. Models of professional community both focused on the support and on the group

With these models the group is led by a supervisor/expert, who performs two roles – of a leader of the group and of supervisor. In this sense these are not groups of equals, because there's a supervisor/expert, but on the other side is respected the equality of the others – e.g. they aren't hierarchically structured groups neither regarding the held position, nor regarding the privileged place of a supportive profession on account of another.

Interactive techniques of supervision

During the recent years[6] ever more often is commented the issue about using techniques from the expressive arts in the help of tutors and social workers. Commented are also the ways through which they can be integrated in the support itself. Even Wilkins (1995) describes the creative model of a professional community where psycho drama and art are used in order the supervised to be aided in the growth of their self-confidence and self-understanding.[7]

Psycho-dramatic techniques are used in support of self-understanding and the understanding of the other, most of all in the context of individual and professional relations. Of course, it's very important the supervisor to know and use such techniques by which he can "hold" the group at rational level, respecting the emotions and experiences. It's important not to incline to therapeutic healing on the one side and thus to be neglected the power of these techniques and their possible consequences for the participants.

A case for the practice of support

In a professional community of foster parents was asked the question about the disobedience of children, the difficulties foster parents meet trying to put some limits, "to make them listen and study". The group regularly gathered for support, they also functioned as a group for mutual help. Within it there was atmosphere of confidence and sharing. I asked the foster parents to try to present themselves with a few words by name of the child they have accepted. Most of the participants succeeded and it was a discovery for them to realize many things, to understand the children and their mutual difficulties. To some of them it wasn't easy to do it, all the time they continued speaking by their own name. The benign, but authentic feedback of the group made them think over the reason they didn't have success. Some of them looked for individual support.

Greek mythology is also a good approach where art integrates in the support. Quite proper, for example, is the myth about Oedipus for rationalizing the situation of the adopted child to whom its own adoption wasn't revealed.

Ever more often we use the so called *technique of photo-language* allowing the group to express better its experiences, to stimulate their sharing. This is a needed condition for a good professional community and often isn't easy to be achieved due to different reasons, including cultural. Photo-language is a narrative through photos allowing talking about difficult matters by a mediator - a photo. In our training for support we stimulate the creation of a photo file where pictures can be thematically grouped. As every technique this one gives many different options and depends on the aims and abilities of the supervisor to use it.

Although expressive art techniques may be used in the individual support, exactly in the group one they can be estimated as a contribution for the supervised to have the

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[6] Debbi W.Newsome, Donna Henderson, Laura J.Veach Using Expressive Arts in Group Supervision to Enhance Awareness and Foster Cohesion Journal of HUMANISTIC COUNSELING, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT • Fall 2005 • Volume 44 145

[7] Thanks to a training from Orthodoxy Salomon, a clinical psychologist, a system and ethno psychotherapeutic expert from France, who is our colleague and friend for more than two years and to whom the staff of SAPI owes a lot.

opportunity to learn more about themselves through their relations with the others. Integrating of expressive arts in group support may be one of the ways the efficiency between the supervisor and members of the group to be facilitated. The universal language of art, of art expression, helps people to perceive themselves mutually and together in the group. This can diminish the resist and facilitate the building of relations (Gladding, 2005)[8]. Expressive arts offer unique opportunities to help the supervised in recognizing their own values and advantages and in sharing their discoveries with the others in the group.

Self-knowledge through group is one of the important aspects of group support which contributes to individual personal development of the supervised as part of their professional development. Support in general has functions regarding the development. Here we speak both about development of professional functions, self-development and self-estimation. In the group these processes lean on the insight a person makes for himself through the relation and interaction with the other participants and the supervisor. Ever more in the supervisor's competence, together with his skills to conceptualize, to intervene in a group, is accented on his abilities to support the personal development of the individual participant in the group. The support for personal development of the supervised includes development at a level of self-understanding, e.g. rationalizing personal feelings, values and attitudes.[9]

The attitudes for usage of expressive arts in support outline their usefulness as a mean for increasing the personal skills of the supervised for creativity, for expression of thoughts and emotions in ways that differ from the traditional rational, linear attitudes[10]. As Gladding points out, the techniques of expressive arts can help "self-conscious to express itself in a symbolic way"[11]. The conditions of creativity we find in these techniques allow people to express themselves in different ways, which leads to a higher level of self-understanding and of understanding the world.

A key factor for an effective professional community is the development of the groups, the atmosphere, the relations and most of all, the group cohesion. It is characterized with members of the group who feel care and comfort; a feeling of belonging and also that they're estimated and accepted. Theoretically, the cohesiveness increases with time as a result of getting known, trust development, sharing of successes and difficulties, of personal experiences, with diminishing of the primary anxiety. Cohesion reveals when the members of the group start more strongly identifying with each other and with the group as a whole[12]. Group cohesion is a condition for the fact that the supervised will share his difficulties authentically,

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[8] Gladding, S. T. (2005). Counseling as an art: The creative arts in counseling (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

[9] Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2004). Fundamentals of clinical supervision (3rd ed.).Boston: Pearson Education.

[10] Gladding, S. T. (2005). Counseling as an art: The creative arts in counseling (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

[11] Пак там, стр.10

[12] Corey, G. (2004). Theory and practice of group counseling (with infoTrac) (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

will be sincere and calm that he'll be able to share without being afraid of direct or not acts of criticism, of mocking etc. Expressive arts offer a way of revealing and of knowing these worries and possibilities for connection with the other members of the group in a non manipulative, non treating way, even in a playful manner. Expressive arts techniques influence and help the convergence through encouraging the supervised to take risks through giving options for feedback between the members of the group and help them to integrate and consolidate what is learned in the group[13]. Sharing common symbols or experience this way helps the improvement of communication in the group.

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[13] Haynes, R., Corey, G., & Moulton, P. (2003). Clinical supervision in the helping professions:A practical guide. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole-Thomson Learning.