

Super... what !

by Anne-Marie Wulf

“Normally words like ‘super’ have a special meaning, - a supernova is a special star, - supersize is an extraordinarily large size, and a superman – well he really has extraordinary talents, only one kind of a man like that. So, when thinking about “super-vision”, one could image that it would be a ‘super’ kind of a ‘vision’, a special look into the future. Well, maybe when you’re using the SF-approach, but according to Wikipedia clinical ‘supervision’ has the purpose to “.. *assist the practitioner to learn from his or her experience and progress in expertise, as well as to ensure good service to the client or patient. Learning shall be applied to planning work as well as to diagnostic work and therapeutic work.*” So, from the construction of the word, supervision has to do with learning from experience and improving your professional skills, and you can do that in many ways.

One of my favorite things about SF-supervision is, that no matter what your professional background may be or what kind of job you may do, the Solution-focused approach unites and combines them all. I work with interdisciplinary groups containing social workers, psychologist, doctors, educators and others, and certainly a team like that can benefit from the use of SF-supervision. The reason is simple: SF-supervision puts a focus on high-light moments, resources, experiences of good practice, and on co-constructing solutions during the supervision process. Building on situations in which the supervisee experiences himself competent in daily professional work strengthens him in his work. I have often found that talking about what works in supervision groups creates energy and momentum when we share our 'success' stories.

In many workplaces people share 'the success story of yesterday' or 'positive spots from the week' - they're often put in place to remind us all that there is something positive in our work. But the impact of the good intentions are often absent, and the possibilities for professional development through recalling success stories are often not being taken advantage of, and even more, many see the presentation of a success story as another work related task to do. Part of the explanation may be that 'stories of success' have not been sufficiently unpacked for the individual to discover the actions he or she had taken that led to the success. Without recognition of the actions that led to success it is not possible to repeat the success and important knowledge may be lost. One way to unpack the story could be by putting a focus on micro descriptions of the actions that led to the success, and by repeating the question “what difference would that make in your working life?” It's easy, it's simple and it's possible for anyone to do.

As supervisor I have various ways to supervise. Of course the people I supervise are not alike and the settings aren't usually the same. Normally I begin every session with turn-taking about sharing “What focus do you have at the moment in your professional work and would there be any themes or clients that you would like to bring to supervision to day?” in order to get some reflections and ideas on matters that are stuck or how the supervisees have managed a certain success. We always find something to unpack and to put lights on for a while. I use to say I don't have a special way of working, but a special way of thinking, and all though that is true, I must confess, I do have special ways of supervising. The main part for me is to involve the members of the team/group, in order to create a co-constructed session of interaction between colleagues. The words to be said are not supposed to be mine, but the words of colleagues and that kind of a session creates a ‘super’ supervision.