

## SUPERVISION IN SCHOOLS: THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUPERVISORS

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**Abstract:** *The text presents the supervisors' view on the specifics of group supervision meetings with teachers. Supervision is a form of non-specific professional development that deepens understanding of complex pedagogical situations and, through that, strengthens the ability of (self) reflection, emotional regulation, communication, and cooperation with other teachers, etc. Through 20 interviews with supervisors working at schools, the specifics of teacher supervision groups, perceived obstacles on the part of teachers and schools, and professional dilemmas faced by the supervisors themselves were mapped out. The interviews show that supervisors believe the main challenge for teachers lies in the inadequate expectations surrounding supervision, which instils fear of control and evaluation among teachers. This concern stems from the lack of knowledge about supervision, as well as the isolated nature of teaching work and the prevalence of evaluation in schools. To ensure effective supervision, it is important to establish a safe environment in which teachers can identify their strengths and weaknesses and draw inspiration from the perspectives of others.*

**Keywords:** *Schools, teachers, professional development, supervision*

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### Introduction

The concept of supervision is gradually becoming established in the Czech education system. Schools can now receive financial support for supervision through ESF projects, and the offer is expanding to different types and levels of schools. Since 2010, there has been a Methodological Guideline of the Ministry of Education on the provision of supervision. Several professional associations, in particular the Czech Institute for Supervision and the Association of Supervisors of Helping Professions, bring together and train supervisors. The first specialized training for supervisors in education was offered in 2021. Over the past decade, four books and seven articles have been published in Czech peer-reviewed

journals on the topic of supervision in schools, five of which were published in the last four years.

This list shows that supervision is gaining both organizational and theoretical-research background. However, the percentage of schools and teachers engaging in supervision still remains low. In 2019, 4.5% of teachers out of a total sample of 2,377 reported direct experience with teaching staff supervision. This is compared to 3.4% two years earlier in a similarly sized research sample (Smetáčková et al., 2020). This low proportion is indicative of the existence of barriers to the introduction of supervision and engagement in it. Some of these barriers can be attributed to schools, others to individual teachers or even to the

supervisors themselves. The first two areas have been explored in earlier articles (e.g., Kaihoi et al., 2022; Wyiono et al., 2021; Břízová & Šlajsová, 2021; Smetáčková & Vozková, 2021; Lazarová, 2009). This article focuses on the third area and provides a qualitative analysis of supervisors' experience of conducting supervision in schools.

### **Definition of supervision**

Supervision is a form of collegial sharing of professional experience that occurs during regular meetings between supervisees and an external supervisor. It contributes to professional development (Baštecká, Čermáková & Kinkor, 2016). According to Hess (1980, p. 25), supervision is "pure interpersonal interaction, the general purpose of which is for one person, the supervisor, to meet with another person, the supervisee, in an effort to improve the supervisee's ability to help people effectively."

Due to its long tradition and psychological and psychotherapeutic roots, supervision has a sophisticated theory, and there is a body of research confirming its effectiveness in enhancing professional competence and reducing work stress (Hawkins & Shohet, 2016; Havrdová & Hajný, 2008). Supervision utilizes the effects of verbalizing emotions and structuring problem situations cognitively. It also builds on the principles of group dynamics, learning through experience, and peer feedback in a safe environment (Lee Harris & Anthony, 2001; McComb & Eather, 2017). These characteristics, combined with the strict requirements for supervisor qualifications, make supervision a relatively effective tool for professional development in a variety of work domains.

Supervision serves several functions. According to Hawkins and Shohet (2004, p. 60), these functions are formative, restorative, and normative. The formative function is related to education and involves deepening knowledge and skills that can help to better

understand problem situations. The restorative function provides support for supervisees to acknowledge and accept their emotions, including negative ones such as sadness, helplessness, or anger. The normative functions relate to the management and control of quality work performance, both by the supervisee, whose supervision aids in self-reflection and self-regulation, and by the organization, which assesses performance against its principles and standards. The rationale for the normative function is that "the primary purpose of supervision is to protect the best interests of the client" (Hawkins & Shohet, 2004, p. 59). However, supervision does not consist of the supervisor assigning tasks or punishing supervisees, nor does it consist of reporting to supervisors. The entire supervision process takes place within a framework of ethical rules that regulate both the meetings themselves and the interconnection of their purpose and process with the broader work context.

Supervision can take place either individually or in groups (Havrdová & Hajný, 2008). In this article, we focus exclusively on group supervision, the specific characteristic of which is the instrumental use of the dynamics of collegial relationships. In a group setting, individuals interact and assist each other in engaging in a deeper and more complex reflection of the experienced events through questions and comments. In terms of outcomes, group supervision is specific in that it leads not only to changes at the individual level but also within the supervision group and the entire work team from which the participants in supervision come (Harris & Anthony, 2001). When supervision takes place within a stable work team, it strengthens communication and cooperation. However, the establishment of a sufficiently positive climate is a prerequisite, as creating a safe atmosphere is essential for effective supervision.

### **Supervision in education**

Supervision is mainly utilized in psychotherapy, social work, and health care. However, it has also been recognized as a tool for the professional development of teachers and teaching staff (Lazarová & Cpinová, 2004). Current approaches to professional development in education emphasize its multifaceted nature and the importance of enhancing not only specific knowledge and skills but also cultivating broader personal and professional traits, as well as establishing connections between the individual and the group level. Avalos (2011, p. 10) defines teacher professional development as “a complex process that requires the cognitive and emotional engagement of the teacher individually and collectively, as well as requires the teacher’s capacity and willingness to explore where he or she stands, what his or her beliefs are, and to seek appropriate alternatives for improvement or change.”

Research on the effectiveness of teacher professional development confirms that positive outcomes primarily arise from the incorporation of the following five parameters in professional development activities: collaboration and feedback from colleagues; self-assessment and self-reflection; fostering positive changes in emotions, motivation, and attitudes; interaction and engaging personal experience; and the longevity and diversity of activities (Evans, 2002; McComb & Eather, 2017; Torff & Sessions, 2008). It is through supervision that these parameters are fulfilled, making it an appropriate part of professional development activities.

Supervision can be considered a form of non-specific professional development that focuses on the enhancement of general pedagogical competencies, in contrast to specific professional development that targets the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills. Non-specific professional development

aims to deepen self-reflection, promote self-knowledge, enhance understanding of complex situations in the school environment, and develop the ability to communicate more effectively in a group setting through improved communication, listening, and discussion with others. Consequently, teachers as supervised professionals are better equipped to monitor and address the interests of their clients or students (Lee Harris & Anthony, 2001; Hawkins & Shohet, 2004; Farrell & Jacobs, 2016).

Of these objectives, the development of the ability to reflect and self-reflect is particularly important. The ability to self-reflect has long been considered one of the central traits of professionalism (Schön, 1983). For example, Slavik and Siňor (1993) speak of reflective competence, which makes teachers prepared to reflect on and evaluate their own and others’ pedagogical actions. Thus, teachers with sufficient reflective competence can diagnose their actions and gain insights from them to positively influence their future pedagogical actions. Self-reflexivity is a set of cognitive and metacognitive processes wherein teachers subject their own professional behaviour, experience, and thinking to critical thinking (Svendsen, 2016). It is a mental effort to solve problem situations based on a critical approach to one’s own lived experiences (Marcos et al., 2011). Through this, new cognitive, emotional, and behavioural patterns are formed.

Collegial sharing is particularly effective when it takes place in a group, not just in a dyad consisting of one teacher and a supervisor. A greater effect has been shown for the development of self-reflection (Van Gyn, 1996). Engaging in group communication allows for a deeper focus on the experiences being described, helping individuals express themselves in a way that others can understand (Rodger, 2002). When teachers encounter differing attitudes and experiences,

tension is created that motivates professional learning (Simoncini et al., 2014). Švaříček et al. (2017) point out that sufficiently reflective conversations can lead to conflicts in the presented perspectives, inducing dissonance. Experiencing and overcoming dissonance is important as it allows for a deeper integration of change in professional development.

The greater effectiveness of group supervision compared to individual supervision has also been shown to reduce job stress (Kaihoi et al, 2022; Sasson & Somech, 2015). Groups provide stronger emotional encouragement and inspiration, along with concrete suggestions. This is also because supervision improves communication and collaboration among the teaching staff, enabling the entire team to better handle challenging situations and offer assistance to individuals under stress (Glazer et al., 2004; Birchak et al., 1998).

### **Characteristics of effective supervision**

The positive effects of supervision can only occur under certain circumstances. One of these is the qualifications and competence of supervisors. Supervisors must have the appropriate education and training and adhere to standards and ethical rules. For example, the Czech Institute for Supervision ([www.supervize.eu](http://www.supervize.eu)) outlines the following requirements for supervisors: a university degree in the humanities or medicine, a minimum of 15 years of experience in helping professions, experience in long-term supervision of individuals, completed training in self-experiential psychotherapy, and follow-up supervision training.

By the very nature of their profession, supervisors are expected to be guides assisting the supervised individual, team, group, or organization in perceiving and reflecting upon their work and relationships, enabling them to find new solutions to challenging situations. The role of the

supervisor is to create a safe environment and to promote peer sharing among teachers through specific strategies. Optimal guidance often takes the form of facilitation and moderation, where the supervisor takes a backseat in terms of talking and only intervenes to maintain the flow of discussion, upholds a safe atmosphere, highlights key aspects of the problem and draws conclusions (Baštecká, Čermáková & Kinkor, 2016).

Supervision meetings are conducted by external supervisors who have no employment relationship or other affiliation with the teachers or the school management. This is an important factor for the conduct of supervision for two reasons (Pavlas Martanová, 2020). Firstly, it ensures a safe atmosphere. Since the supervisor has no other relationships with the participants, they do not feel threatened by the supervisor. They find it easier to share even unpleasant experiences in front of the supervisor, and they are open to the supervisor's suggestions because they are not assuming any hidden agenda. Additionally, the supervisor is bound by confidentiality and is not allowed to discuss the topics discussed during the supervision session with anyone outside of it.

The supervisor's independence is also valuable because the supervisor possesses limited knowledge of the specific school environment. Consequently, teachers provide a more detailed account of the realities of the school, highlighting even seemingly ordinary aspects that teachers may overlook. The supervisor also asks their own questions that the 'insiders' are no longer asking. This stimulates cognitive conflict – bringing or reminding information that is cognitively challenging, encouraging constructive confrontation of different perspectives, and structuring the course of the supervisory encounter so that emerging tensions are exploited and cognitive restructuring occurs

as a result (Kaihoi et al., 2022; Simoncini et al., 2014).

A basic condition for effective supervision is to achieve a sense of security for all involved. Only when supervisees do not fear rejection and potential sanctions can they be sufficiently honest in sharing their experiences and open to change. Safety is established through various factors, primarily personal attitudes towards supervision and one's participation in the supervision session. It also involves having a mindset that enables communication of one's own experiences and active listening to the experiences and comments of others. Respect for all participants, including the supervisor, and adherence to established rules are also crucial (Rodger, 2002; Farrell & Jacobs, 2016). Some of these factors depend on how supervision is implemented in a particular school and communicated by the management, while others depend on the personalities of individual teachers and the composition of the group. The supervisor has only limited control over these factors (e.g., in how they agree on the contract with the management). However, other factors are closely tied to the supervisor's personality, approach to supervision, and working style.

This article presents a study that is part of a broader research project titled "Supervision – Prevention of Teacher Burnout" conducted by a team at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education, Charles University, with financial support from the Czech Technology Agency. The broader research aimed to investigate the various

forms of collegial sharing in schools and identify the perceived positives and negatives from the perspective of different actors. The qualitative sub-study focused on the experience of supervising professionals conducting supervision in schools, possibly in comparison to other areas where they provide supervision. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do supervisors/practitioners practice supervision and what do they actually do during supervision in schools?
- 2) How do supervisors/practitioners perceive their own role in the context of the education system and schools undergoing supervision?
- 3) How do supervisors/supervisors perceive teachers' attitudes towards supervision?

## **Methodology**

The study focused exclusively on supervisors providing group supervision to schools and educational institutions. A total of 20 supervisors, both male and female, were interviewed. Table 1 presents the structure of the research population according to five key criteria. The supervisors participating in the study were contacted through two methods: firstly those working in schools participating in the main research (7 individuals); secondly individuals randomly selected from the list of the Czech Association of Supervisors (10 individuals); with additional 3 participants identified through snowball sampling. The selected individuals were invited to participate in an interview and, if they agreed, they were asked to verbally confirm their informed consent at the beginning of the interview.

**Table 1: Composition of the research population**

<b>Respondent code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Length of supervisory experience</b>	<b>Length of supervisory experience in schools</b>	<b>Supervision in another field</b>
R1	Woman	64	16	2	Yes
R2	Woman	42	3	3	Yes
R3	Man	61	21	10	Yes
R4	Woman	51	22	15	Yes
R5	Woman	36	10	8	Yes
R6	Woman	40	7	3	Yes
R7	Woman	52	18	7	Yes
R8	Woman	40	5	2	Yes
R9	Woman	60	16	16	Yes
R10	Woman	50	15	15	Yes
R11	Man	62	15	8	Yes
R12	Woman	62	21	20	Yes
R13	Woman	42	15	10	Yes
R14	Woman	38	10	3	Yes
R15	Woman	40	10	5	Yes
R16	Woman	62	20	20	Yes
R17	Woman	46	12	10	Yes
R18	Man	47	10	5	Yes
R19	Man	42	15	7	Yes
R20	Woman	48	8	8	Yes

The study involved 16 female supervisors and 4 male supervisors, all of whom met the requirements of the Czech Association for Supervision. The respondents' ages ranged from 36 to 64 years, and their supervisory experience in schools ranged from 2 to 20 years. Most supervisors worked in Prague and the Central Bohemia region.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the respondents, focusing on their perspectives on group supervision in schools. The supervisors who participated in the research conduct supervision not only in schools but also in other areas such as social work, health, and commercial companies. This allows them to compare different settings and describe the specificities of supervision in schools. Each specific setting has its own characteristics, including

incentives, barriers to participation in supervision, communication practices, and established ways of presenting collegial sharing. The interview therefore explored the trajectory of supervision, the concept of supervision, specific supervision practices, and a comparison of supervision in and out of schools.

A thematic and content analysis was conducted based on the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mayiring, 2004). The themes and categories identified related to three areas (thematic units): 1) teachers' interpretations of supervision, 2) supervision practices, and 3) experiencing the supervisory role. Each area represents three levels of supervision (supervisory identity, supervisory practices, and perceived reactions/shows of supervised

teachers), which provide insights into the specifics of supervision in schools. The following chapters will introduce the different levels in turn.

## Results

### **Supervisors' perspective on teachers' attitudes toward supervision**

The analysis of interviews with supervisors shows that teachers' attitudes toward supervision are considered crucial for the subsequent course of group supervision, according to supervisors. When teachers have positive attitudes, supervisors do not have to overcome initial distrust or resistance and the supervision process proceeds smoothly. Conversely, when teachers initially have negative attitudes, supervisors need to address these issues first and the main focus of supervision is delayed.

Supervisors ascertain teachers' attitudes either by consulting the school management who contracted the supervision or directly from the participating teachers themselves, either by asking them directly or by inferring them from teachers' expressions and speeches. In any case, supervisors' perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward supervision form a starting point for them when deciding the content and mode of communication. The following themes were particularly prominent in teachers' attitudes, as perceived by supervisors: ignorance, expectations, individualism, self-work, and teacher overwhelm.

Regarding group supervision in schools and teachers' attitudes toward supervision, 16 (out of 20) supervisors mentioned that teachers have a lack of knowledge about supervision and little awareness of what supervision is and how it can benefit teachers. This is mainly because supervision is not yet widely implemented in schools (*R1: Most teachers have no experience; R2: Teachers do not know anything about*

*it, it is an unexplored territory; R1: They have no idea what supervision can be useful for; R1: Supervision is a big unknown for schools; R14: Teachers are not familiar with it. R8: Schools and kindergartens are largely unfamiliar with supervision and are still unsure not only about what supervision can do for them but also about what it is).* Therefore it is necessary to inform teachers about what they can expect from supervision and how it works at the beginning of the collaboration, not only at the start of the supervision sessions themselves but well in advance of them, so that teachers can show interest in the offer to participate in supervision in the first place. In the absence of knowledge about what supervision is, teachers logically do not respond positively to the offer of voluntary participation because they do not understand what is being offered and how it could benefit them.

Lack of knowledge exists before the introduction of any new tool. According to supervisors, it can be eliminated by increasing awareness within the pedagogical community, starting at the undergraduate level of training: *R1: The problem is that it is not taught at universities. During the study of social sciences, students experience supervision, then they go into practice with such experience; but not teachers, they have nothing like that at university.* Supervision is not part of the curriculum for teachers at universities. Occasionally, it may be encountered in elective courses or workshops, but it is not a mandatory part of the study programme. Supervisors mentioned that where teachers have prior experience with supervision from university studies, they are more motivated to participate. They have a better understanding of what supervision is and what to expect from it. They can then pass this knowledge on to the teaching staff, avoiding speculation and assumptions about the nature and purpose of supervision.

Related to the (lack of) knowledge about supervision are the expectations that teachers have towards it. According to half of the supervisors, teachers usually have inadequate expectations of supervision. However, it is teachers' expectations that play a key role in how supervision is ultimately perceived and received by teachers. Expectations can be shaped by one's own experiences, but also by received experiences. Supervisors agreed that the expectations of individual teachers need to be addressed and made aware of, preferably at the very beginning of the collaboration with the group.

One aspect of teachers' expectations, as mentioned by 8 supervisors, is the fear of inspection and evaluation of their work: *R2: Their job is to evaluate, it takes a long time to establish a trusting atmosphere. The supervisor is not an inspection and does not evaluate, does not advise, is not even a mentor. They often demand it from me, some teachers find it difficult to accept, they find it hard to understand what supervision can bring to them; R2: Teachers operate in a different communication set-up, not so pro-social, they expect control, advice, and evaluation; R18: They often take supervision as a form of control, that they have to do some work during supervision, they take it as completing a task, they are used to such an approach from their work.* This finding is supported by other findings from the wider research where, for example, in one school supervision was taking place but was referred to as 'chatting sessions' because the label 'supervision' evoked being controlled by experts and supervisors and was considered a 'bad word'.

The school environment is characterized by pervasive control and evaluation. This applies not only to pupils but also to teachers, making it difficult for them to break out of the mode of evaluation and control. According to supervisors, fear of direct

control or being judged against an ideal performance prevents teachers from opening up sufficiently. Therefore, supervisors work hard to elucidate the underlying expectation of scrutiny from the outset (including why teachers expect scrutiny and evaluation) and explain that supervision is neither evaluative nor controlling. The corrective experience of a non-evaluative environment is crucial for teachers.

Supervisors also mention another common but erroneous expectation that teachers have of group supervision, which is advice, guidance, and direction. *R1: They expect advice and guidance on how to deal with the relationship between children, and parents; R2: It takes a long time to establish a trusting atmosphere, to clarify that the supervisor is not an inspector and does not evaluate, does not advise; is not even a mentor. They often demand it from me, some teachers find it difficult to accept, they find it hard to understand what supervision can bring to them.* Supervisors need to clarify and explain that they are not providing advice and explicit guidance, nor are they leading the way. They provide teachers with a safe space where everyone can express themselves. Teachers can get new perspectives on the situation from colleagues or from the supervisor, and then decide for themselves how to deal with the information in practice or how the information and messages will affect their approach to their work as a teacher.

Control, combined with the desire for clear instructions, instils fear of failure and of being exposed for their mistakes in teachers. However, to some, it may also give hope that they might be able to correct their own mistakes through supervision. However, supervisors believe that such an expectation is misplaced. *R3: Teachers often see supervision as a method that highlights their mistakes, so there is little*

openness sometimes; R6: *Teachers themselves would not seek this out, they feel they are failing, they do not see it as prevention. They see it as an intervention, they see it as a threat and branding;* R10: *And I feel like they don't want to reveal too much about what's going on and what they're dealing with, that they might see it as incompetence if they talk about having a problem with something and that they're struggling with pupil relationships.* Fear of failure, according to half of the supervisors, may also be one of the reasons why teachers fear supervision and are uncomfortable with it in some ways.

The fear of failure is even more pronounced if the teacher is mentally fixed on the idea that she/he must be perfect. In order to detect mistakes in others, she/he must be flawless (such an approach is difficult to resist in the dominant discourse of the school). What is important in this case is the intimate shared space that the supervisor and supervisees create. This is supported by the supervision rules agreed upon by the teacher and supervisor at the start of the group meeting. This includes defining the topics that can be addressed in supervision, how communication takes place in supervision, and in what form attitudes, emotions, needs, etc. are communicated and expressed. Fear of failure (or fear of being seen to fail by others) is seen by supervisors as typical for the school environment. They expect it and see the need to gradually diminish this fear through the experience of well and safely conducted group supervision. It is therefore a time-consuming process.

At the outset, supervisors assess the current climate in the group and how it can be adjusted. If they determine that the participation in the group is threatening to the teacher, some try to negotiate with the school management to include an offer of individual supervision sessions. After experiencing individual supervision,

teachers may be encouraged to participate in group supervision. However, the ability to offer two supervision options is limited by the time available to supervisors and the financial capacity of schools. Furthermore, some principals may lack understanding of the nature of supervision.

Group and individual supervision often provides teachers with their first opportunity to experience a sense of intimate space and the opportunity to express themselves openly without being exposed to evaluation or criticism. According to supervisors, for many teachers, group supervision is also often the first and sometimes the only experience they have of working in a group. In school, teachers do not have opportunities for group activities. Instead, they typically work independently – they have their own timetable, classroom, and are responsible for a specific part of the teaching process. R2: *Teachers are not observed during their normal work. I perceive that teachers, for example at the lower grades, are like 5-10 lonely islands; each one works alone and they are only formally supervised. They are not used to consulting the entire group; instead they talk to whoever has a similar view on the issue, but confrontation and constructive criticism and things like that, they don't seek that out;* R6: *A teacher is a soldier in the field and is used to working alone;* R7: *Teamwork is not a common habit in education, they work as solitaires. Bonding with each other, uniting based on shared values is, I would say, in its infancy in education.* Based on their experiences with teachers, the supervisors' statements suggest that they perceive teaching as an individualistic and/or isolationist profession. There is not enough emphasis on developing a sense of collective consciousness and teamwork in schools.

The supervisors perceive the isolationism and individualism practiced in schools as characteristics that impact the group

supervision process. This results in a lack of interest and reluctance to share one's experiences with others. Supervisors need to take this into account both when formulating the assignment and when considering challenges during the actual process. Fundamental to them is the dilemma between group and team supervision. R6: *In primary school, everyone follows their own path, and supervision for them has never been team-based but rather group-based. I never perceived their need for teamwork. Everyone has their own agenda and their own class, and promoting teamwork was not their focus; R14: For example, the key thing that stands out for me is that they often organize supervision as a team, but when you inquire about how they work together and what the team is like, you find out that they are more like separate units, divided by subject. However, that is not quite teamwork in the true sense.*

The analysis of the interviews with supervisors showed that 16 supervisors interviewed during group supervision sessions with teachers encountered teachers who lacked developed skills in working with themselves. Supervisors reported that working with the self is inherent in helping professions. People in these professions undergo courses and training, and working with the inner self is often part of the university curriculum. However, teachers do not have such stepping stones because courses focused on self-development and working with one's own feelings are usually their personal choice and take place on an individual level rather than systemically. R1: *Their self-reflection is lacking; R7: In social services, people are more adept at working with themselves, with their feelings, and let's say personal values, whereas in education the prevailing attitude is still that I am an expert, that the teacher is trained in this and working with oneself as a tool is not common practice, it is not like that; R10: They do not care that much about the courses or training focused*

*on soft skills and some kind of support because they feel that they don't benefit from it or they can't do it anymore; R15: They will need to learn that they must take care of themselves not only on a professional level but also on a human level.*

Since supervision is completely new to most teachers and they are not familiar with the type of sharing taking place in supervision, the supervisor must talk about this fact to bring it to light and educate teachers in the area of self-development and working with their emotions and needs. Therefore, some supervisors choose to introduce the importance of sharing and its conditions at the beginning of the supervision process. However, this contradicts the principle of not advising or lecturing that they emphasized in other parts of the interview. In school, teachers focus on knowledge, whereas in the field of professional development, they then focus more on didactic practices than on personal development. However, based on the awareness of the benefits of soft skills for teachers and the impact that acquired skills have on students, teachers may be more motivated to develop in this area. This supervision work can also play a crucial role in preventing burnout syndrome in teachers and in helping teachers recognize their current mental state. It can also provide teachers with intervention if needed and refer them to other services that can be used if necessary. By understanding themselves, their needs, emotions, and motivations teachers can become better educators, so working with themselves not only has a positive effect on teachers but also on the children they teach.

The theme of self-work is related to the possibility of having sufficient space and time for personal development. Teachers have numerous courses, training programmes, and other things to attend as part of their education. According to most supervisors (13), teaching is time-consuming. R8: *Time,*

*they are just really very busy; R9: They are just very tired.* At the same time, however, the dilemma of teachers' working hours was also raised. The fact that some of their working hours and duties extend beyond the school sometimes gives the impression that everything beyond teaching and established duties is encroaching upon teachers' free time. *R15: They already have to participate in a lot of other training courses, both pedagogical and methodological, and supervision is seen as an extra burden; R2: Based on what the teachers say, I get this impression, for example, we have too much to deal with, we are overloaded, tired, exhausted, we have too much training, too much finishing, it's after our teaching hours; R10: They feel there should be some boundaries established, and they don't want to sacrifice any more to the school and they don't want to continue to dedicate more space and time.* So supervision becomes an additional commitment for them and a programme for which extra time needs to be set aside. It would be convenient if supervision could take place during regular working hours, eliminating the need for teachers to allocate extra time for it. Many supervisors keep this in mind and, when arranging supervision with the management, try to negotiate the time for supervision so that it does not add further burden to the teachers.

### **Supervisors' activities in schools**

During the interviews, supervisors talked about the specific activities and strategies they use when approaching supervision in schools. The topics primarily revolved around the introduction of supervision and introducing it to teachers. According to supervisors, their first point of contact is usually the school principal, who not only requests the supervision but also outlines the current situation in the school. How the principal perceives the supervision and his/her attitude towards it is important for the further course of supervision. It impacts

how supervision is introduced to the teaching staff and how it is implemented in the school. Many schools have no experience with supervision and, if they do decide to commission it, it is a completely new concept to them. The supervisors agree that introducing supervision in schools should not be underestimated and should go hand in hand with awareness raising and education. Many supervisors stress the importance of finding out whether or not the school has previous experience with supervision before they enter the school. If the school does not have any experience, the supervisor will offer (or make it a requirement) to conduct a presentation on supervision in the school so that teachers have adequate expectations before the first supervision session takes place. *R1: It is necessary to safely introduce supervision to teachers.*

The communication, both about what supervision entails and during the supervision process, is a crucial part of the supervision itself and has a significant impact on it, both positively and negatively. The approach of individual supervisors is influenced by various factors, including personal, institutional, and also reactive, i.e. how supervisees respond to the supervisor and the supervision itself, and vice versa. The job of the supervisor is to set up and build a trusting environment and space for supervision to take place. Safety was mentioned by supervisors in interviews from various perspectives, including in the context of how the supervisor handles it in supervision and the supervisor's role in implementing it. *R9: But basically, a lot of that communication is about allowing the person to relax in some way, asking them about what they're afraid of, asking them to name any concerns they may have. R14: Establishing a trusting environment in schools differs significantly from the process in social services.*

According to supervisors, in many schools, there is a sense of distance or outright rivalry between teachers, and therefore they perceive the supervisory environment as threatening and opening up to others as hurtful. The supervisor's role is to facilitate openness within the group, which is primarily achieved by creating a confidential space where certain rules apply. The supervisor takes charge of establishing these rules in collaboration with the teachers and this is one of the first activities they undertake. One common rule is that anything said, shared, or discussed in supervision must remain within the group and that individuals are not allowed to share it with those who did not attend the session or with management. If any information needs to be shared outside the supervision group, the form, recipient, and purpose of the communication must be agreed upon. These rules are in place to foster a confidential and personal space where individuals do not have to worry about information being passed on outside the group. Another rule is that individuals are encouraged to speak for themselves, express their feelings, opinions and emotions. However, by expressing them they are not evaluating others. They are simply sharing their own thoughts.

### **Supervisors' experience**

In the interviews, supervisors reported that, just like teachers, they also experience uncertainty, self-doubt, disappointment, frustration, responsibility, and many other emotions that arise during the implementation of supervision, preparation for supervision, and the process itself.

Frustration and the ensuing exhaustion come from the teachers' lack of knowledge of supervision. The introduction of a new tool is always a challenging activity, and if the school is not prepared for it and does not provide adequate conditions for teachers to implement the activity, the process

becomes longer, more complicated, and more difficult for the supervisor to communicate. The supervisor does not have adequate conditions for his/her work and is forced to create and communicate them himself/herself. In interviews, supervisors reported that it is often up to them to organize the entire implementation of supervision. Adequate conditions include, for example, conducting supervision during teachers' working hours, ensuring voluntary participation in supervision, providing suitable physical settings (a space large enough to accommodate a group of about 10 people who can remain seated undisturbed, with good ventilation and fresh air), securing funding for the possibility of implementing both group and individual supervision, cooperation between the management and the supervisor (the management should not only come up with the order to implement supervision but also participate in the implementation), etc.

Ensuring these conditions should not be the responsibility of the supervisor, but rather the school management. If these conditions are established before the supervisor's arrival, the actual implementation of supervision becomes less demanding. Otherwise, the supervisor will have to ensure suitable conditions for his/her work and make additional effort to establish them. Supervisors address the issue of lack of knowledge of supervision through the aforementioned introductory seminars or educational sessions. However, they see the difficulty mainly in the fact that bridging this knowledge gap often requires a significant amount of group time, sometimes even several supervision sessions. One supervisor shared an example where the issue of supervision ignorance was addressed with the teachers for one school year, but the principal failed to provide supervision the following year. As a result, the teachers missed out on the opportunity to experience

the benefits of group supervision and how it can enhance their work.

There was strong agreement in the supervisors' statements that introducing supervision in schools is more challenging than introducing supervision in other settings. The difficulty of implementation is reflected in the supervisors' experience – in schools, supervisors need to spend more time and energy on implementing supervision and also feel challenged more often, which they have to address during their supervision sessions. Supervisors reported that more extensive preparedness and achieving a wider range of goals are required of them. It's not just about setting up the supervision itself, but also about communication and openness to collaboration, which is often lacking in schools. In terms of professional satisfaction, supervisors felt the need to monitor the reasonableness of their expectations to avoid disappointment. Having knowledge of the specifics of the school system and the school itself helps them in this regard. It is not possible to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to all schools; each school needs to be considered as a separate system that requires knowledge and understanding. Supervisors emphasized the need for self-reflection, especially to avoid projections and evaluations of 'good schools' and their defence mechanisms. They stressed the desire to be open-minded and not to evaluate or even blame teachers or the school system. Applying these principles means greater demands on working on oneself, attending self-supervision, and working with one's own experience and emotions. This is of course true regardless of the field in which supervision is implemented, but in education, the importance of these professional principles is felt even more strongly by the supervisors interviewed.

Uncertainty, self-doubt, disappointment, and responsibility are also experienced by supervisors. Just like teachers, supervisors

also reflect on these emotions during supervision. According to supervisors, uncertainty is primarily experienced during the initial supervision sessions with the team. This feeling is common among both supervisors who have been in practice for a short time and those who have been in the field of supervision for a longer period of time.

Supervisors primarily associate their disappointment with seeing that supervision is inadequately handled in some schools and with the fact that some schools present supervision as mandatory rather than voluntary to their staff, which goes against one of the fundamental principles of supervision.

### **Study limitations**

One of the main limitations of our study is the small and gender-imbalanced research sample. For the purposes of the research, we conducted interviews with 20 individuals, primarily women. In the context of qualitative research, the selection of informants is always a crucial issue; we selected them based on a list of supervisors from ČIS, and interviews were conducted only with those who responded to the email invitation. Therefore, an even representation of supervisors across the Czech Republic and individual regions was not ensured. Expanding the sample size, including more male supervisors, and increasing regional variability would be desirable. It is likely that male supervisors and supervisors from regions not yet included, where education faces specific challenges, would bring new topics to the analysis.

The chosen interview structure and the conducted qualitative analysis, which reflect the subjectively specific perspectives of the authors, can be considered a potential limitation. These perspectives are legitimate within the qualitative approach, but it can be assumed that expanding the analytical team and potentially including other data

collection methods would lead to the identification of additional topics.

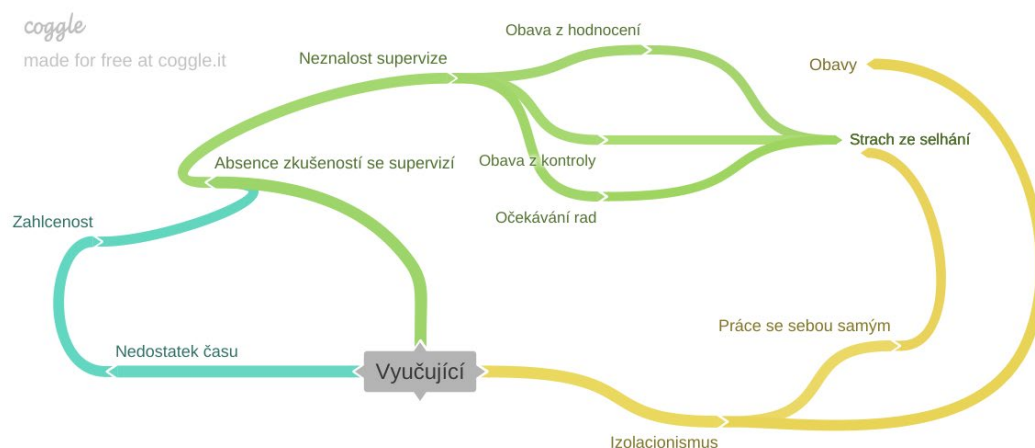
## Discussion

The study aimed to investigate how supervisors specifically perceive their work in schools, what factors cause stress or facilitate their work, and how they understand teachers' reluctance or inability to participate in supervision and benefit from it. Based on the interviews with supervisors, it is clear that they view supervision in schools as a

unique domain, distinct from other fields in its nature and entry requirements. From their statements, the following specific characteristics of education were identified as factors that supervisors believe influence the progress and effectiveness of supervision:

- 1) a perceived lack of time,
- 2) low importance placed on non-specific professional development,
- 3) an individualistic and isolationist conception of teaching.

### 5.1 Thematic map – specific characteristics of education



We will now provide a more detailed description of the different factors identified. According to supervisors, both male and female teachers feel under significant time pressure, which increases their work stress. Available studies (e.g. Kohoutek, 2011; Smetáčková, Štech et al., 2020) suggest that the experienced lack of time is due to the expanding work agenda, the need to keep up with new and accelerating trends, as well as the flexibility of job performance in terms of time and space. Indeed, indirect work, such as preparing for lessons, correcting pupils' work, or performing administrative tasks, which teachers do not have to do directly at school (as opposed to teaching and participating in necessary meetings), is often seen as their

free time. As a result, according to supervisors, teachers subjectively have less time to dedicate to professional and personal development activities such as supervision. They also resent any new activities that encroach on their "free time" and keep them at school. When teachers do engage in professional development, it usually involves specialized training in their subject areas' knowledge or didactics. This is supported, for example, by the study conducted by Michko (2016), according to which approximately 70% of teachers opt for simpler development activities that do not require collaboration with colleagues (e.g. self-study, one-day training, didactic materials), while only 10% utilize more complex methods like video recording and

analysis, visiting another schools, or participating in supervision.

Related to this is the fact that supervisors report little importance being placed on non-specific professional development in education, the aim of which is not to acquire specific subject-specific and didactic knowledge and skills, but rather to develop more general competencies, including the ability to self-reflect (Farrell & Jacobs, 2016). Additionally, there is often insufficient awareness among the teaching public about what non-specific professional development entails, how it is conducted, and what the benefits of supervision are. As a result, both schools and individual teachers have low motivation to participate in supervision. Supervisors believe that the low importance placed on non-specific professional development may be attributed to a lack of preparation for this area of training and the absence of experience with supervision in higher education.

Another specific characteristic is the individualistic and isolationist setting of teachers' work. Supervisors describe teachers as "separate islands" who do not interact much during teaching or preparation as they are dedicated to their own agendas. This practice is something that everyone is used to and is not challenged and it therefore leads teachers to believe that sharing experiences with colleagues is not important. Supervisors also note that teachers often see themselves as infallible authorities, making it difficult for them to admit their failures. According to Simoncini et al. (2004), such a setting prevents teachers from entering into a dialogue involving active listening and opening themselves up to the cognitive conflict that is a prerequisite for real professional change. Rodger (2002) supports this idea, particularly in relation to the development of self-reflection. The isolationist approach to teaching also has negative consequences

for the amount and effectiveness of communication and collaboration within the teaching staff. Collaboration and communication are not adequately prioritized and developed in mainstream school practice. Consequently, during supervision, some teachers may encounter an environment where communication is open, trusting and non-judgmental for the first time. They must therefore gradually learn this approach and style of communication, which becomes more challenging if the school culture opposes it.

The supervisors agreed that understanding the specifics of education is essential and should be the basis for their work with the teaching staff. It is also important to respect the boundaries within which teachers operate and set reasonable expectations. Automatically applying supervisory experience from other fields where the supervisor supervises is not effective. Likewise, relying solely on personal experience as a former student or parent of a student is insufficient. According to supervisors, having knowledge of the working conditions in education, from which everyday experiences are born, as well as the professional dilemmas and pressures that teachers face as part of their professional identity, helps make supervision in education effective. This is because, for reasons outlined above, teachers often approach supervision without knowledge of the subject matter, with scepticism or mistrust, and with little willingness or ability to open up to supervision immediately. This fragile initial set-up can collapse completely if the supervisor does not choose appropriate procedures when introducing supervision. This is not because he or she is not a good professional, but rather because he or she is not attuned to the specific conditions and needs of the school system. In relation to the role of the supervisor, it is important to note that, similar to the teachers, also supervisors experience

various feelings during supervision that they need to reflect on and process.

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