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Professional Supervision in a Community of Practice

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Psychology

Massey University, Albany Campus, Auckland
New Zealand

Jean Annan
2005

Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work except where due acknowledgement is made and that this material has not been included in a thesis or report submitted to Massey University or any other university for a degree or other qualification.

.....

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Abstract

Previous research of supervision in educational psychology has regularly reported low rates of participation and dissatisfaction with the adequacy of supervisory arrangements. Most studies to date have been conducted on the assumption that supervision is a formalised, often one-to-one relationship. However, this view of supervision is incongruent with the ecological theories of human development that currently guide educational psychologists' work. The present study sought to develop understanding of the nature and contexts of supervision for a group of educational psychologists through examination of the actions they took to meet the goals of supervision. A situational analysis research method was used to examine the supervisory actions, in relation to the theories underlying current field practice, of 38 educational psychologists. This collaborative method of inquiry reflected the procedures of the psychologists' professional practice and enabled the understanding of supervision to be constructed using the participants' own sense-making processes. Results of the study indicated that the psychologists pursued the goals of supervision through the multiple interactions that took place within the regular activity of their community of practice. Supervision included a combination of formal, informal and situated interactions. It was concerned with connectedness to the professional community and comprised a range of integrated activities. The psychologists demonstrated that their supervision-in-action was guided by the same ecological principles that guided their professional practice. When supervision was conceptualised as a practice that included formal, informal and situated interactions intended to meet the goals of supervision, the participants reported high levels of satisfaction with current supervisory arrangements and participation in the practice. This thesis proposes an extended view of supervision that depicts supervision as activity situated within the interaction of a community of practice. It suggests that ecologically valid evaluations of supervision activity and the development of applicable systems of supervision must consider a wide range of supervision activities and contexts of practice.

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