

## II. Pedagogy

### Group Coaching as a Form of Support for Minority Group Leaders

Marek Podgórný / e-mail: m.podgorny@pedagogika.uni.wroc.pl  
Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, Poland

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*In the present study, the reader can get acquainted with the issue of group coaching as a form of support for minority group leaders. The author reflects on the reasons for the growing popularity of coaching as a support for the development. He also draws attention to minority groups, their characteristics and their individual types. Worth noticing are also the chapters devoted to the issue of minority group leaders, their roles and competencies. Finally, the author also mentions the need for education and training of leaders, he deals with the existing programs, approaches and expected effects.*

Key words: *education; coaching; leaders; minority*

#### Coaching in Furthering the Development of Adults

The popularity of coaching as a form of supporting development is constantly growing in adult learning contexts. This rise in popularity is explained not only by a current vogue but also by the increasingly often experienced efficacy of coaching interventions, which rely extensively on the learner's experience and skills and, thereby, best meet adults' expectations toward the learning process: *"Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths."*<sup>1</sup> The qualitatively distinct nature of adults' resources overlaps with their deep need of self-constitution and self-direction in life (therein also learning processes). Finally, adults display a greater readiness to learn: *"They learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes most effectively when they*

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<sup>1</sup> Knowles, M. – Holton, E. – Swanson, R. (2011). *The Adult Learner*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford and Burlington: Elsevier, p. 64.

are presented in the context of application to real-life situations.”<sup>2</sup> These observations sketch an image of the adult learner which diverges considerably from what we commonly perceive in child learners. Emphatically, the adult learner focuses on his/her situation in life and grounds education processes on it, in formulating expectations, setting goals, envisaging forms of work and, finally, investing in education. These considerations have rather straightforward implications for adult educators, who are obliged to search for such didactic methods which adequately respond to the adult learners’ expectations outlined above.

These expectations seem to be suitably met by coaching, which is distinctive for its strong emphasis on the freedom of the learning subject and the value it sets on the clients’ resources. The two characteristics are key components of most coaching definitions.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of our argument, we may define coaching as a process that targets the client’s personal and/or vocational goals and releases his/her potential through reflectivity training (self-reflection and reflection on the world) and acquisition of new skills and new behaviors. Such interventions addressed to adult learners best correspond to their needs and expectations, which consequently translates into enhanced effectiveness of the education process.

### Selected Issues in Minority Groups

A minority group (a subordinated cultural minority) is a social collective which the society it lives in perceives as strange and different because of some of its features, including for example, racial, ethnic or cultural characteristics. Members of a minority group feel distinct from the majority and often suffer various kinds of majority-inflicted discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

L. Wirth distinguishes the following minority types:

- Pluralistic minorities to be found in multicultural societies, seeking peaceful coexistence,
- Assimilationist minorities desiring assimilation into the dominant group (immigrants),
- Secessionist minorities manifesting their difference and aspirations to autonomy or independent statehood; militant minorities engaging in fight for their rights.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Podgórný, M. (2010). Coaching – nowa przestrzeń w edukacji dorosłych. In *Kultura jako przestrzeń edukacyjna*. Kraków, pp. 66–68.

<sup>4</sup> Olechnicki, K. – Załęcki, P. (1997). *Słownik socjologiczny*. Toruń: Graffiti BC, p. 73.

Social minorities are rarely singled out as a separate theme in handbooks of sociology or general introduction to sociological thought. However, the theme is, partly at least, addressed in discussions on such sociological categories as “a minority group,” “a cultural group,” or “an ethnic group” and “an ethnic (or national) minority.”

The fundamental questions in this research field are: How does a minority group perceive its difference? How does it define its social and cultural positioning? In what ways does it communicate with the social and cultural environment?

A group’s alterity does not have to consistently connote alienness (and, consequently, antagonism). The notions of “alterity” and “alienness” make sense only in a particular context in which relationships and interactions among groups are framed in particular ways. Before any conclusions are suggested, a series of questions must be investigated, including: How are minority groups perceived in society? What opportunities are there for a minority group to engage in activities for the good of the whole society? In what circumstances does “alterity” mutate into “alienness” and in what conditions does “different” not connote “strange”? What position does a leader take in such a group and, consequently, what is his/her role in it?

A minority group is always singled out on the basis of its peculiar features, predominantly racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics. Addressing particular details, we could point at appearance, behavior patterns, lifestyle, language, religion, organizational affiliations or historical legacy.

### **Role and Competencies of the Minority Group Leader**

Engaging in any action whatsoever, we perform attributions and formulate expectations, based on our self-image and ideas we have about our capacities and limitations. The system of beliefs and intimations about who we are and what we strive for is formed in the space of the public discourse. The public discourse not only creates our notions of the social world, defines problems and shapes normative structures, but also produces a belief that the assumptions are common to all (or at least most) members of the community. The belief importantly, if not crucially, grounds interactions in the real social space. Essentially, group images are generated much more powerfully by inter-group relationships than by inter-individual ones. *“Contrary to popular belief, intercultural contact among groups does not automatically breed mutual understanding. It usually confirms each group in its own identity. Members of the other*

*group are not perceived as individuals, but rather in a stereotyped fashion.(...) autosterotypes are fostered about members of one's own group."*<sup>5</sup>

Abundant experience of everyday social practice proves that if in our actions we are guided by stereotypes, rather than by understanding or trust, the actions always turn counterproductive. This seems unrelated to whether a given group lives in a collectivistic society or an individualistic one, all the more so as individual people may easily diverge from mean individualism indexes for given countries reported in statistics.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the responsibilities of a minority group leader include: independent view on and identification of the group's actual image, combating stereotypes and autosterotypes, and training the group members in effective social communication both on the inter-group level and on the inter-individual one. The tasks demand that a minority group leader be equipped with a set of competencies. The term competencies, simply speaking, denotes "*everything that a given person understands and can do relative to a particular situation.*"<sup>7</sup> Currently, the notion refers both to "soft" skills (behavioral competencies) and "hard" skills (functional competencies). The former describe *how people should behave* in order to perform a task effectively while the latter designate *what people must know* to do so. Reflection on competencies received a considerable boost from the concepts developed by Richard Boyatzis. Analyzing factors that determine successful performance on the job, Boyatzis distinguished the following personality qualities: motives, experience and behavioral characteristics. He also proposed to distinguish *threshold competencies*, that is basic competencies required in a given position, and *differentiating competencies*, that is competencies that differentiate between people who achieve better results and people who perform worse.<sup>8</sup>

As far as minority group leaders are concerned, we would certainly concentrate on such threshold competencies as:

- Ability to unite people
- Ability to set goals appealing to the group
- Ability to motivate and inspire others

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<sup>5</sup> Hofstede, G. J. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 387–388.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, s. 94.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.krk.org.pl/slownik-pojec>

<sup>8</sup> Armstrong, M. (2006). *A Handbook of Human Resources Management Practice*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. London and Philadelphia: Kogan Page, p. 160.

- Ability to manage the group's image
- Ability to manage communication within and outside the group.

Of course, in particular individual or contextual conditions the competence catalogue can be modified and/or expanded, but research on the leaders' function in groups implies that the above competencies are key to successful management of group processes.<sup>9</sup>

### Coaching for Leaders

Another important issue is education and training of leaders. The Polish program of education for leaders devised and implemented in 2004-2007 by Stowarzyszenie Szkoła Liderów ["School for Leaders" Society], was preceded by comparative analyses of equivalent projects in Europe and the USA. The analyses indicated that one feature all the programs shared was individualization of developmental processes grounded on the individual's self-awareness. They also had in common the situational focus, that is adjustment of curricula to particular learners' needs, and practical orientation, that is embedding development processes in real action.<sup>10</sup> Leaders' individual development, thus, is linked with personalized education. It means tailoring education forms to fit individual learning styles, which facilitates leaders' learning. This involves selecting suitable curriculum content and adjusting teaching methods and styles to leaders' individual needs and aptitudes. The personalized teaching, or rather education, process entails adaptation of the sender to the recipient and not the other way round – the recipient to the sender – which has been the prevalent practice so far.

In this approach, the central and leading role is ascribed to the learner. The learner defines the goals and sets the pace of work in compliance with his/her individual needs and prior experience both in leadership and in educational engagement. Learning is closely interwoven with analytical insights into and creative reflection on prior experience (knowledge and skills). As a result of such critical introspection, new ideas are developed, new plans are devised and new behavioral strategies are adopted. The methods of group work seem to be conducive to particularly enhanced outcomes. One reason for that is that they provide opportunities for sharing experience and having one's

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<sup>9</sup> Kaczorowska, B. (ed.) (2007). *Tutoring. W poszukiwaniu metody kształcenia liderów*. Warszawa, pp. 22–23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

ideas discussed from various points of view. We could legitimately assume that group coaching for leaders will be one of very interesting methods in this respect. Executed as a process aimed to support the group members in making changes in ways best suited to their needs and expectations and combined with help in achieving the desired effectiveness, group coaching will best foster the atmosphere of trust and satisfy individual educational needs.

Drawing on my observations and experience of running a Coaching for Students Program at the Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, over the last four years, I believe that the method can be expected to bring about the following effects:

- Acquisition and improvement of group leaders' social competencies,
- Exchange of experience and ideas among leaders,
- Meeting leaders' individual developmental and educational needs,
- Development of motivating and self-motivating methods,
- Upgrading of skills involved in constructing attractive group goals.

Coaching for leaders, which responds to their authentic needs, may effectively promote the development of their individual resources and leadership competencies.