Training a Rural Community Service Staff in Individualizing Program Planning for Severely Handicapped Vocational Clients

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By Robert Foz and Anthony F. Rotatori

In the last ten years, a number of alternatives (e.g., foster homes, group homes, half-way houses) to large public institutions have developed for providing services for severely handicapped individuals. This trend is partially the result of the normalization philosophy (Bank-Mikkelsen, 1976; Wolfensberger, 1972) and recent court decisions (Pennhurst, 1977) which favor the expedient release and moving of institutionalized handicapped individuals into the community. Frequently, these individuals have significant deficits in functional living and vocational skills which result in an early return to their former institutional residences. The latter may be prevented if communities develop service delivery systems which emphasize skill training in specific functional living and vocational areas required for successful transition and maintenance of these severely handicapped individuals in the community. Such a system must include training procedures such as individualized planning and behavior modification.

Currently, little research is available to guide the practitioner in developing and implementing training programs in behavior modification for the severely handicapped vocational client. Research has tended to examine the specific components of the teaching situation such as the differential effects of role playing, lectures (Garner, 1972), films, videotape feedback (Panyan & Patterson, 1973) and supervisors' feedback (Panyan, Boozer & Monis, 1978) on staff members' ability to acquire and apply the principles of learning. Also, many inservice programs include behavior modification (Panyan & Patterson, 1973). Integration of research within a staff training model, and the extension of such a model to a rural community setting has not been reported.

The present paper describes an intensive 12-week inservice program in Individualized Program Planning with 36 staff members from five day-care (nonmedical) programs which provide services for approximately 160 developmentally disabled adults. Although a range of individuals were represented in these programs, the majority were moderately to severely retarded (AAMD Classification; Grossman, 1973). Integration of research within a staff training model, and the extension of such a model to a rural community setting has not been reported.

The present paper describes an intensive 12-week inservice program in Individualized Program Planning with 36 staff members from five day-care (nonmedical) programs which provide services for approximately 160 developmentally disabled adults. Although a range of individuals were represented in these programs, the majority were moderately to severely retarded (AAMD Classification; Grossman, 1973). The living arrangements for these individuals included their parents' homes, adult foster care, group and nursing homes. Services provided by the day-care programs varied according to the individual needs of the community. However, content areas such as acquisition of work skills and on-the-job training, development of social and self-help skills, functional academics, community adjustment and leisure-time activity were represented in all of the programs. The five day care centers serve five counties, respectively, in northwestern Wisconsin. This is a rural region of 9,000 square miles and has a total population of approximately 100,000. Both administrative and contact staff were involved in this project. Attendance and participation in the inservice was requested by the regional Developmental Disabilities administrator and his Board of Directors. The training included teaching and on-site consultation.

Teaching

Three-hour class sessions were held each week on Friday mornings in the most centrally located program. Each participant received a copy of Whaley and Malott's book, Elementary principles of behavior. The content was divided into four areas: learning principles, functional analysis of behavior, teaching new behaviors and procedures for establishing Individualized Program Planning. Three weeks were devoted to each segment.

The first segment, learning principles, introduced the behavioral model which included defining behavior(s), identifying reinforcers, learning the basic behavioral procedures, i.e., positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment, extinction and time out from positive reinforcement. The second segment, functional analysis of behavior, covered measuring behavior, including various observational, recording and graphing methods and writing short/long-term behavioral objectives. The third segment, teaching new behavior, covered the following topics: shaping, forward/backward chaining, task analysis, modeling and instructional learning. The fourth segment, procedures for establishing Individualized program planning, provided a framework which enabled staff to select content objectives and task-appropriate instructional tactics for a given individual. The Minnesota Developmental Programming System was also introduced at this time to: (a) assist the staff in determining behavioral objectives for a given individual's individualized program planning and (b) provide the basis for program-wide accountability. Briefly, the system provides a manual of 18...
behavioral scales each developmentally sequenced along a continuum of dependence to independence. These scales generate specific information about functional skills, ranging from simple safety skills to more complex community orientation skills for the severely handicapped population. The items on the behavioral scales were designed to be used as behavioral objectives for individual planning. The system was especially useful in that it quickly pinpointed a client's deficits, was easy to administer and functioned as a measure of individual progress over time.

A variety of teaching modalities were employed during the inservice. An attempt was made to incorporate relevant research. For example, Gardner (1972) found that a lecture format was superior to role playing for teaching behavior modification principles while role playing was more effective for teaching application of skills. Consequently, the first segment of the course primarily used lectures. During the last three, role playing and other modeling experiences were emphasized. The use of modeling was especially helpful in teaching techniques of behavioral measurement and for demonstrating various applications of the learning principles.

Consultation
Nine hours of on-site consultation time was provided by a leader each week. This time was divided into three-hour periods. Thus, each of the five programs received three hours of consultation every two weeks. The consultations functioned as the generalization component of the inservice.

Initially, each participant selected one client to work with throughout the 12-week program. During the first segment, homework assignments were given to provide relatively immediate application. For example, early assignment required the participant to identify simple behaviors of their chosen client along with the learning principle(s) believed responsible for maintaining those behaviors. As the program progressed, each participant was required to design and implement an individualized program plan for their client. The plan included: (a) an overall assessment of the client's skills using the Minnesota Developmental Programming System, (b) identifying one behavior that needed change or a skill which was needed, (c) measuring the designated behavior to obtain a baseline, (d) writing an instructional plan including short and long-term objectives, (e) implementing the plan and (f) charting progress. At the end, an evaluation of the results and reasons for success or failure were required. To insure a good first experience with the training materials, the leader approved programs prior to implementation. Simple-behavioral change programs were favored over more elaborate ones. Typical programs developed by the participants included: reducing frequency of temper tantrum behavior, teaching number recognition and increasing 'time-on-task' behaviors, e.g., drill press operation, rug hooking. Time was allowed for participants to discuss their problems with the inservice materials. The individual IPPs and results of the class projects were presented by the participants during the last meeting.

Results
Cuff (1977) noted that although there was an increased frequency of short-term instructional courses in behavior modification, few had been evaluated with respect to their effectiveness. Three evaluation measures were used during this inservice project. Weekly quizzes were given at the end of each class session to determine the amount of immediate learning and to identify concepts to be clarified. These quizzes were usually composed of 18 objective questions which were corrected and returned the following week for discussion. The scores obtained on the quizzes did not enter into the final grade but were designed to give the participants a measure of progress.

Two comprehensive criterion-referenced exams were used to assess the effectiveness of the training. An 80% criterion was established for successful completion of the program. These examinations, given at the end of segment 1 and 4, were objective in nature. The results of these two evaluations are summarized in Table 1.

The third evaluative measure involved participants' presentations. The general consensus was that the projects had been a successful approach for helping the participants acquire practical experience with the classroom materials. Most participants indicated that their clients' behavior had changed in the desired direction, i.e., toward the objectives. These presentations generated discussion about problems associated with designing and implementing individualized program plans for the severely handicapped and suggestions for remediation.

Follow-up
The regional developmental disabilities administrator assigned two Ph.D. psychologists to consult to programs upon termination of the training. This consultation and monitoring of the system was conducted within each program on a monthly basis.

Sixteen months after initiation of the training, the regional administrator, the two consulting psychologists and four of the day-service administrators reviewed the status of the system and overall effects of the training upon functions.

The four administrators indicated that they were continuing to: (1) use the data collection method established during the training program to formulate and monitor individualized programs, (2) use the assessment tool to pinpoint skills which required training, and (3) educate new staff in individualized planning and the learning principles.

All four administrators felt that having the on-site consultation/training session coupled with
the presentations was an extremely important component in successful transfer of learned skills. A need for an intensive training package for new staff members was indicated.

Discussion
The in-service was well received by the participants. The on-site consultation sessions combined with the establishment of individual program plans and class projects appeared to be a crucial component of the in-service. These sessions provided an opportunity for the participants to challenge the learning materials and to experience with supervision, the plethora of problems involved in applying learning principles in the natural setting. Approving only simple class projects insured immediate success in applying the learning principles.

The MDPS provided an excellent format for developing a sound accountability system in programs previously lacking this quality. Other systems such as Developmental Pinpoints (Cohen, Gross & Haring, 1976), the TARC System (Sailor & Mix, 1975) and the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale (Nihira, Foster, Shellhaas & Leland, 1974) would also be useful for establishing IPPs for the severely handicapped vocational client. The duration of this in-service may be too long for many programs. However, the teaching model involving classroom, consultation and generalization experiences should be a useful strategy for staff training programs regardless of their intensity.

References


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