

Teachers as Case Managers: Opportunities for Social Scientists to Introduce New Models of Education

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KEY WORDS: Case management; schools; alternative models

ABSTRACT Social scientists often become aware of alternative models or ways of doing things, both from theoretical work and from practical experiences. This knowledge can lead to the introduction of such differences in varied settings. One such example concerns the use of case management techniques, an idea stemming from the fields of rehabilitation and business that has spread into the health sector as management systems. Case management techniques may fit into modern schools as another way to organize and manage. Advantages include individualization of services coupled with better control of information.

As class sizes become larger, as information sources virtually explode in scope and depth, and as the range of student needs and diversity increases, teachers are falling under the weight of trying to be everything to everyone. They are pressured to become far more than just teachers, for they serve as role models, support personnel, linking agents to community agencies, media and computer managers, counselors, technical specialists, monitors, evaluators, disciplinarians, and co-ordinators of environmental influences on their students.

Teachers are constantly being called upon to be even more than they currently are, and to play enhanced roles within the school setting. Because of this, the lecture, discussion, demonstration and laboratory teaching methods of the past are becoming less and less appropriate, by themselves. New approaches are needed.

Case management was used as a means to individualize attention and services for clients with severe disabilities in the rehabilitation field. Business has used a variety of management techniques to control information flows, personnel, and inventories. A variety of competing theories, ideas, and practices stimulated the emergence of what has become a

new field of study, case management and systems service management. Now, adopted from the human services field (Weil and Karls, 1985), the "Case Management" model offers an intriguing system for co-ordination and linking of resources to specific individuals in appropriate, timely, sequences to promote well-being, to set and ensure achievement of specified goals, and to assure that resources match needs. This article discusses the case management model as a potential framework for a reconceptualization of the teaching role.

CONTEMPORARY TEACHING

Teaching, whether at primary, secondary or tertiary levels, is no picnic - class sizes have grown, particularly under the financial, social and political duress encountered by the educational system in almost every country. It is not necessarily the case that student numbers and needs have increased, sometimes the numbers of teachers have declined, or their duties have expanded, or the students have more and new problems. In any case, the roles and range of responsibilities for teachers has grown dramatically. Pressures upon each and every teacher to be available for support are increasing, for example, in the absence of parents, or when students come to school without having eaten, or when students have no funds for food, or when disciplinary problems arise, or when trauma occurs, and so on. The list of needs is long and diverse. Given that more students arrive at educational institutions with less parental supervision in their formative years, the onus is on teachers to provide more informational facts, greater understanding, and sadly, more entertainment (one effect, presumably, of television).

With increasing immigration and refugees or other travellers arriving from countries around

the world, greater sensitivity to needs of people from other cultures and language backgrounds, and an increase in mainstreaming efforts, many schools are changing in student composition and "atmosphere." Awareness of the social impacts and effects of this diversity, coupled with the explosion of information available via media, the Internet, and the rapid advance of revolutions in knowledge: science, research, and technology, the teacher is faced with an ever expanding, open ended task of selecting, organizing, and presenting pertinent and relevant educational materials through meaningful processes. Add in the requirements of various "powers-that-be," paperwork, and increasing evaluations, teachers feel besieged.

Given this situation, the contemporary teacher is faced with problems in maintaining the roles they have been taught, the roles that have evolved from traditions, and the roles "expected by the system. New roles, tasks, styles, and methods, are required.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Case management arose in the human service field and specifically the discipline of rehabilitation as a result of cost cutting, failure of traditional roles in health and welfare services, and greater complexity of cases (Fisher and Weisman, 1988; Intagliata and Willer, 1984). Case management arose also when the range of community services widened and as the chaotic nature of existing service delivery became clear (Gregory, 1996). What case management accomplishes is varied, but the focus is on meeting with, planning with, and enabling individual clients to obtain the best sequence and range of services at the least cost to obtain the greatest possible result (Roberts-DeGennaro, 1987). Case managers typically work with around 20 to 40 active clients at a time, and much of their effort is spent on planning and enabling these clients to obtain desired results. Of course, empathy is an essential first step, but once rapport is gained, evaluations and assessment and active engagement with meaningful activities can follow.

The heart of the process is planning, and written, individualized plans are drawn up in which duties and responsibilities of both person and manager and members of the treatment

program such as community agencies and professionals, are spelled out. The available range of services, at least those known to the case manager, is scanned, and a monitored sequence of resources are sought over a given time period. The case manager operates as an information broker, responsible to the client, as well as linked to the resources and the powers-that-be.

TEACHERS AS CASE MANAGERS

Teachers can become case managers or use the model within their own school systems. With interviews, discussions, and initial aptitude and achievement testing of students, a teacher can work out individualized learning plans and thereby become a case manager. Through meetings with each student, teachers can become aware of that individual's range of abilities and interests, explore the life and home situation and understand some of that person's life. Then, given the teachers knowledge of learning resources within the classroom, the school and its facilities, libraries and media collections, and computer data banks, and within the local community, the teacher could work with the student to chart self-directed learning tasks that would lead to specified goals, results and skills. The teacher can serve as a resource to fill the gaps when needed, but would not operate in a traditional or dictatorial role.

What is the reality of shifting from the traditional teaching role to this new scheme? The reality is that such changes are already happening. Certainly, any teacher who notes a student who has gone without breakfast and/or lunch, perhaps for several days or weeks, will sort out potential sources of food, alert the student and the system to such sources, and enable the student to get something to eat. Similarly teachers seek to help with regard to urgent medical care, psychological needs and counseling help, disciplinary needs, and so on. Teachers are already using many ideas from case management, often informally, and sometimes in conflict rather than in harmony with the existing role structures.

The model could be promoted, advocated for, and advanced so that more teachers become aware, adopt, and practice. Social scientists in particular, have an opportunity to introduce ideas

such as this from one setting to another, when the appropriate conditions are met. Sorting out these conditions can be managed by social scientists, particularly those who are familiar with a variety of settings within a community, and who have had some experiences with social change and the introduction of new ways to perform.

The costs and benefits of such a change will be hard to evaluate, but the case management system has been adopted by many health and welfare systems and generally, has been found to be cost effective and beneficial to all involved. That is, clients are more likely to obtain needed services at reasonable costs. Taxpayers and decision-makers are generally pleased with such systems and a summary of surveys (Bailey, 1989) demonstrates this positive regard.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The case management model offers a new approach to and new opportunities for teaching. Rather than continue with the traditional model of the teacher imparting information to a student body sitting formally in a classroom or lecture theater, the case manager works with individuals to establish specific goals and tasks, identifying resources and steps along the way, and facilitating self directed learning. Students could

become more acquainted and in touch with community and library and information resources, use them more effectively, and participate in directing their own education to a far greater degree than currently. The results could and should be positive to all concerned.

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