

FACILITATING STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN IMPLEMENTING APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS*

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Abstract

The need for a Learning Facilitation Team is described which cooperatively works to find solutions for the problems presented by specific students. The team is also charged with the responsibility of encouraging total staff involvement by directing their attention to a series of questions in the four major areas available to schools to help students: Developing Academic/Intellectual Skills, Utilizing Corrective/Remedial Interventions, Developing Life Skills, and Utilizing Corrective/Therapeutic Interventions. Based on this information the team is encouraged to build a total school plan for helping students based on: the interpersonal relations of the staff, the availability of manpower needed to get the job done, and the procedures established to work with students with special needs.

Résumé

On décrit le besoin de mettre sur pied des équipes pour faciliter l'apprentissage. Une telle équipe travaillerait à résoudre les problèmes que des élèves spécifiques lui présenteraient. Elle aurait la responsabilité d'encourager la participation de tout le personnel en attirant son attention à une série de questions relatives aux principaux domaines dont dispose une école pour aider les élèves: le développement d'habiletés académiques/intellectuelles, l'utilisation d'interventions correctives/thérapeutiques et le développement d'habiletés de vie. Compte tenu de cette information, on encourage l'équipe à élaborer un plan global pour aider les élèves. Ce plan serait sur les rapports interpersonnels des enseignants, le main d'oeuvre disponible pour accomplir le travail et les procédures établies pour travailler avec les étudiants qui ont des besoins spéciaux.

The process of finding interventions to help students is typically envisioned as too narrow a task, to be performed by too few people. Finding effective strategies in certain schools is extremely difficult because the total climate is not receptive to helping certain kinds of students. Too often specialists such as psychologists, counsellors, and vice-principals are primarily called in to find some way to remove the students from the school. Most educators, assigned full-time to a single school, have little opportunity to appreciate the extreme differences between school staffs in their willingness to try to find solutions for specific problems.

Each school is encouraged to form a Learning Facilitation Team both to work on the process of helping specific students and to help involve the total staff in evaluating its program and in improving its full range of strategies for helping all students. At the elementary level, this team will typically be made up of the student's teacher (who usually knows the child best), the principal (who has the broadest view of the school's resources to

help), the school psychologist (who frequently has the highest level of training in the assessment of behavior), the elementary counsellor (who is in the best position to assist in implementing the strategies which are selected), the school social worker (who is the primary resource person when help is needed from an outside agency), and the school nurse (who is the best person to provide follow-through in the area of physical/medical problems).

At the secondary level the team will ordinarily be made up of the teacher who referred the student as well as the counsellor, who ordinarily takes the major role in scheduling and providing the necessary follow-through for the Learning Facilitation Team. The counsellor is also often responsible for collecting information from the student's other teachers. The vice-principal (with or without the principal) should typically also be involved as one way of helping him/her to become involved in the total process of helping students, rather than restricting him/her to the narrow role of the disciplinarian which he/she is frequently expected to fulfill (Chamberlin & Carnot, 1974). Once on the team, however, all members should be encouraged to drop their traditional professional roles and try to contribute as openly, creatively, and productively as possible.

Footnote

*This material has been adapted from a forthcoming book by Catterall, C.D. and Gazda, G.M., *Strategies for Helping Students*. Springfield, Ill.: Charles Thomas (in Press).

When the team is working on the problems of a specific student it is also often wise to try to involve the parent in the team process. Whereas this has been done more frequently at the elementary level than at the secondary, the assumption that parents of older students aren't interested or won't be helpful is currently being strongly challenged. The parents are needed not only for their valuable input (especially in describing what the student's behavior is like out of the school situation) and because they are unquestionably critically important in the implementation of any long-range plan to help the student. At the same time we must find effective ways to involve older students in the process of finding appropriate strategies to *assist themselves* in overcoming their deficits and in achieving their goals. These students have much to contribute (if we can find appropriate ways to bring it out) and certainly more to gain or lose by the process than anyone else.

However, before the Learning Facilitation Team "rushes in" to find the best interventions or strategies for helping a student, it is wise for them to stop and take a look at the entire educational setting in which the process is taking place. It is hard to imagine any bit of behavior that could be identified as a "problem" in one setting which would not be either extremely normal and perhaps even exemplary in another. Remembering this helps us to become more aware that the social setting is largely responsible for determining what is going to be called "normal" as opposed to that which is "abnormal" or "strange" or "crazy" (or any other label). This points clearly to the need of the Learning Facilitation Team to help involve the total school faculty and community in the larger process of choosing strategies for helping all students. When used in this way, the team can involve either all of the teachers, a representative sample, or (in secondary schools) the heads of the various departments. Another approach would be to turn the questions into a simple rating scale and ask all staff members to respond. The questions below have been organized around the four major ways available to schools to help students. They are designed to help facilitate total staff involvement in the process of finding interventions to help all students.

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC/ INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

1. How narrowly has the school defined what constitutes a "good student"?
2. How flexible is the school system in meeting individual needs?
3. Are there alternative ways of helping students learn what they need to know, both inside and outside the classroom?
4. How relevant is what goes on in the schools in the

everyday lives of the students? How relevant will it be in their future?

5. How open is the school to effective change?
6. How much attention is given to the rights of students; of parents?
7. How well is the development of each student monitored or followed to see if their academic/intellectual needs are being met?
8. Is there a problem-solving approach prevailing among the staff, or does it tend to "sweep problems under the rug"?

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE UTILIZATION OF CORRECTIVE/ REMEDIAL INTERVENTIONS

1. How full is the range of corrective/remedial interventions available to students?
2. How many resources outside the school are being used to help students (volunteers, parents, agencies, real-life experiences, etc.)?
3. How much of a "person-to-person" climate has been created throughout the school?
4. What alternatives to the standard, formal education have been developed?
5. Is there a climate of administrative/total-faculty support for going out of one's way to help students?
6. What helping specialists (psychologists, counsellors, social workers, etc.) have been employed; are they available in sufficient quantity to be useful?
7. Are students/parents involved in the making of plans and/or informed as plans develop?
8. Are special needs provided for in as normal a setting as possible?

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

1. Do students and teachers feel as though they should "check their emotions at the door" as they enter school?
2. Is there systematic thought and effort given to the *affective* growth of each child?
3. What is the "gripe level" of the school coming from both the teachers and the students? Is there more focus on the negative than on the positive?
4. What effort is being made to help both teachers and the students to find ways to renew themselves? (The need for nurture is critically important to everyone.)
5. Are there sound provisions for a solidly based human, skill-development program?
6. Is there some program/activity/person within the school with which each student can become involved or identified; i.e., to become "turned on to"?
7. Is there a reasonable balance between the teaching of "facts" of the culture (cognitive education) with the personal realities that make those "facts" important (humanistic education)?
8. Is the school making use of the students' "real-life" feelings and situations to help them to develop and to practice the use of life-skills?

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE UTILIZATION OF CORRECTIVE/THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

1. Is there an "active sense of outrage" at the system's or society's inhumanity to students?
2. Is everyone working to make the path of "normalcy" so wide that almost everyone can walk down it (i.e., be considered essentially normal)?
3. Is everyone trying to de-emphasize the fancy labels that so often tend to cut students out and to emphasize the human understandings that tend to keep them involved?
4. Is everyone using a full range of people (i.e., other students, volunteers, aides, professionals, etc.) in the task of helping students with unique personal growth problems?
5. Are the specialists who have been brought into the school integrated into the total program, or are they peripheral window-dressing?
6. Is there a functional child advocate or ombudsman concept, i.e., someone who has the responsibility to see that the child gets a fair chance?
7. Is there a prevailing atmosphere of "people helping people" in which everyone is valued and prized according to their attempts and their ability to help?
8. Is there an effective utilization of the total school climate to help students/teachers grow, as opposed to the pull-them-out, one-to-one approach?

These questions will, in most instances, help to identify the need for a plan of action. Whereas different schools will obviously need different plans, some things need to be considered such as the factors listed below:

FACTORS AFFECTING THE FORMULATION OF THE SCHOOL PLAN

1. Take the "pulse" of the school. Identify specific problems that need solutions. Be especially alert to the types of students who have been "rejected" (both academically and socially) by the school. Establish a climate of bringing the problems out into the open and working on them.
2. Help to identify in the plan the role of every person in the school. Work closely with the principal but do not expect him/her to engineer the climate that makes this possible; that has to come from all the members of the faculty. Try to find some ways to make the necessary "administrativa" of the school less cumbersome and time-consuming so more people (but especially the principal) will have more energy left over to work on the creative, problem-solving approach.
3. Build a bulletin board or other visual centre which will help to bring into the program long-range, developmental academic/intellectual and life-skill activities. Be alert to the problems that currently exist and to the holes that will appear in the developing plan. Encourage everyone to use the problem-solving approach to find solutions to these problems.
4. Build a plan that involves everyone in the local school unit. Although one can use good ideas wherever they are, do not wait for leadership from other schools or the district office. Change at this

level has to come essentially from the working unit of the local school.

FACTORS AFFECTING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE STAFF

1. Encourage all staff members to take stock of themselves. Help them to assess whether or not they are doing all they can to help students. Identify the "blind spots" which are keeping everyone from reaching certain kinds of students.
2. Look at the interrelatedness of the faculty. Are there cliques? If so, is there respect shown by members of each group for the other group members, or is there an active one-upmanship going on? Encourage the staff to be aware of how they handle disagreement, hostility, or individual differences, etc., with each other.
3. Plan to develop some activities/projects which will help to build a working team. All members do not need to be alike or even to socialize together, but when working as a team to help students, they should have sufficient feeling or relatedness that they are able to work for the common good.
4. It will be essential that some method be used to educate parents, central administration, school board members, and others about what is being done and to enlist their help and support. The job is too big to be done alone; it will require the understanding and support of many others.

MARSHALLING THE MANPOWER TO GET THE JOB DONE

1. A process should be initiated of helping students to become more responsible for their own activities, where they may freely offer to help other students who need it, and to seek help freely when they need it themselves.
2. As part of the regular curriculum process in the school, every student should be involved in the process of systematically using and sharing what they have learned. In this process of "cycle teaching", every student will help one or more other students learn in one or more areas the things they themselves have previously learned. This will provide a ready source of individualized assistance for students learning something for the first time and will tend to help the student who has served as a tutor to forget less rapidly because they now have a practical application for the material.
3. Use a wide spectrum of people in the process of helping, both in the implementation of the regular curriculum and also in the tutoring process (other students, parents, agency personnel, residents from the community, business people, college students, and personnel).
4. Demand the support of student service specialists (counsellors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, etc.) in sufficient strength that they can do more than provide for the "student trivia." Demand that they not become isolated and that in addition to their work with individuals that they use their specialized training to work with teachers on the total school learning process. Encourage them to utilize a broader range of strategies for helping students than their professional role usually dictates.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT WORKING
WITH STUDENTS WITH
SPECIALIZED NEEDS

1. Develop a procedure which keeps track of all students to make sure that there is some part of the school experience that is essentially meaningful for them. Identify and do something about those students who have specialized needs before they develop such enormous problems that they are easily recognized by others as being "different".
2. Develop and utilize a learning facilitation team to plan appropriate strategies for the total school and for students with special needs. Seek out multiple strategies which can be used to intervene in the life space of these students in the most effective way possible. Provide specialized services as close to the mainstream as possible.
3. Encourage each staff member to "adopt" one or more of these special-need students (they may or may not have been assigned to that teacher for

academic work), to seek out and provide positive acceptance to them, and to organize their teaching in such a way as to free them (as much as possible) for more individual work with these students.

4. Actively seek the support of all in the plan. Find and use techniques for recognizing/praising effort and progress, both for those who are helping and for those who are being helped. Assume that there will be resistance change and problems in the plan, but keep the problem-solving process going.

This type of facilitative process involving total staff should broaden the base for finding appropriate interventions and make the procedure materially more effective.

References

- Chamberlin, L.J. & Carnot, J.B. *Improving school discipline*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1974.