

ISSUES IN THE PRODUCTION OF STAFF TRAINING MEDIA

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The world wide trend towards deinstitutionalization and community integration of people with intellectual handicaps is posing new challenges for staff educators. Formerly, preservice, inservice, and post graduate training programs were linked to institutions or hospitals. On-site training programs offered many advantages — proximity of students to relatively well resourced facilities, availability of full time staff educators, access to specialists and consultants from a variety of disciplines, experience with a large number of residents having different abilities, and access to a range of educational and therapeutic programs.

The relocation of institutionalized people to community residences in their former towns has resulted in a much more decentralized system. Community alternatives to institutional care may now be isolated from training facilities, expert consultation and support. Often the essential, complementary services are unavailable (Lakin & Bruininks, 1985). Furthermore, many of the staff are untrained and inexperienced (Shaddock, 1988) and may have little contact with their peers or access to inservice programs or staff development (Searl, 1987).

In a climate in which the community is somewhat ambivalent about the integration movement, it is essential that residents and staff are not placed in situations where failure is likely. Obviously many factors are involved, but for staff, crucial issues are their level of knowledge and skills, the degree of backup and support, and the confidence with which they go about their job.

There have been frequent calls for the application of available technology to overcome the problems of distance and isolation in the area of staff training (Sanche, 1987). Educators are beginning to use a range of technology such as teleconferencing (Shaddock & Edwards, 1984; Bramston & Lundin, 1987), interactive radio, (Arger, 1988), audio cassette packages (Sanford, 1977) and video packages (Le Breton, 1985; Levy, 1986; Shaddock, 1988).

Video has been proposed as a medium which offers distinct advantages in staff training.

Video cassettes are inexpensive and portable and can be used in urban, rural and remote areas;

Video playback equipment is readily available;

Sequences of instruction can be retaped and edited to produce consistent, high quality presentations;

Video tapes can be stopped for discussion and replayed as often as necessary;

No outside presenter is required and learners have control over their own in-service experience.

(Adapted from Sanche, 1987)

Australian surveys show that residential staff are quite supportive of inservice programs in which videos are a feature (Searl, 1987; Shaddock, 1988). Furthermore because videos and video packages can be successfully used by individual staff, e.g., when on night duty, they are compatible with the general organization of community residences. So, whether used by individuals or groups, training videos offer many advantages particularly when they aim to capitalize on viewers' experience, make them cognizant of their own values and encourage them to make their practice consistent with their values (Ingvarson, 1987). When used by individuals they are a source of empowerment because they offer some control over the inservice program. When used by groups they may also assist in the development of team cohesion and support.

LEARNING FROM VIDEO

In addition to the advantages listed by Sanche, such as the access and control characteristics of audio-visual media, Bates (1982) draws attention to the unique symbolic characteristics of video. Drawing on the work of Olson and Bruner (1974), Bates suggests that the acquisition of mental skills or the ability to use skills is likely to be promoted by audio-visual media. Video that is more than "talking-heads" involves the demonstration of facts and ideas. In exemplifying and illustrating general principles, video establishes links between values, theory and practice.

The audio-visual demonstration of a general principle is not without its difficulties — a point discussed elsewhere in this paper. However, the advantage to the learner is that concrete and objective footage is used in presenting that general idea. For example, a video explanation of the principle of normalization portrays certain individuals, in a definite context, acting in particular ways.

The use of video becomes more problematic when attempts are made to teach complex procedures for which the learner may not have the necessary sub-skills. It is obvious that the acquisition of novel and complex skills requires practice, supervision and feedback. It would be simplistic and dangerous to suggest that complex procedures could be learned from video alone. However video does have a role to play as an adjunct to more direct training and permits more efficient use of resources.

These advantages of video may be to some extent offset by the tendency for viewers to be passive, at least when viewing non-interactive programs. While it is relatively easy for a reader to actively scan, peruse, revise, etc., the viewer is more dependent on the structure provided by the producer.

It appears that the video format, although appreciated, does encourage a more passive learner response. Viewers are less likely to do exercises inserted in a video than in printed material (Shaddock, 1987). A sample of residential staff working on a video package reported that they completed, on average 96% of the exercises in the printed manual, and on average only 78% of the exercises inserted in an accompanying video.

DUAL AGENDA IN VIDEOS

Wolfensberger (in Flynn and Nitsch, 1980) argues that "deviancy is socially, subjectively and variably defined and varies from culture to culture and time to time" (p.13). In arguing against the clinical system perspective which has dominated approaches to disability until recently, Wolfensberger suggests that deviancy does not reside within the person but is more related to the way society perceives and responds to individual differences.

According to the social system perspective, people labelled as intellectually handicapped acquire that status because of the evaluation that a particular society makes of their characteristic behaviour (Manion and Bersani, 1987). In discussing possible societal responses to deviance, Wolfensberger suggests two types of strategies, (a) attempts to change the perceptions and judgements of the perceiver; and (b) attempts to minimize the difference that led to the societal judgement in the first place. These major approaches are both important, and both need to be a part of any inservice program.

Philosophy, values and attitudes

In the last ten years there have been numerous attempts to use film and video to change societal attitudes toward people with handicaps. This public awareness programming has tended to focus on community and educational integration, consumer rights and participation, advocacy and similar issues. These programmes are usually critical of the past and the status quo, and suggest how a new status for people with handicaps will lead to improved opportunities and services.

These videos often rely on people with handicaps (or their advocates) speaking for themselves. They are shown in valued settings and in situations from which they were once segregated. Quality of life and personal satisfaction are emphasised. The essential humanness of people with disabilities is depicted in a way that challenges negative stereotypes. The implication is that there must be a better way; that people's identity should not be defined in terms of difference; nor should their opportunities be restricted. These programs have a "political" agenda . . . they focus on values, attitudes and ideology rather than on specific, directly applicable strategies. They are important and necessary components of staff training, but more is needed.

Specific skills training

Citing evidence from several U.S. states, Bock and Joiner (1982) point out that progressive philosophies and professional commitment are inadequate in themselves to ensure successful community integration. Specific skills training is required, and researchers, administrators and direct service personnel are remarkably consistent in their recommendations for the curriculum of training programs for residential staff (Fiorelli, et al. 1982; Slater & Bunyard, 1983; Knowles & Landesman, 1986; Shaddock, et al. 1986).

Inservice and preservice courses usually emphasise competency-based programs and recommend that residential workers acquire skills that will have a direct impact on the quality of life of consumers. In recognition of the fact that this job is skilled work, several authors have argued for more advanced skills training and increased status for residential staff (Fiorelli et al. 1982; Shaddock, 1988).

IDEOLOGY, THEORY AND PRACTICE: COALITION OR COLLISION?

Huxley (1952) poses an intriguing question about moral education when he asks "how can we inculcate right conduct without at the same time inductively inculcating the wrong conduct which is its opposite?" (p. 36). Staff educators are faced with a similar dilemma . . . they must teach the special skills required by those who work with people with intellectual handicaps without reinforcing a view that people with handicaps are mainly people with problems. While it is easy enough to talk about this dilemma in general terms — and be relatively convincing — these different agenda pose a serious challenge for the producers of training media.

Experienced residential staff sometimes react antagonistically to videos that are aimed solely at enhancing perceptions of people with handicaps. Although they may be sensitively and expertly produced, these videos run the risk of being dismissed as 'propaganda' by staff who need more concrete assistance in translating philosophy into practice.

The production of training media tends to highlight existing gaps between philosophy, theory and practice. For example, policies on intrusive interventions are progressive (Blunden & Allen, 1987), and we demand socially acceptable and ecologically valid interventions (Evans & Meyer, 1985). Unfortunately our knowledge of the factors that cause and maintain challenging and difficult behaviours is inadequate (Schroeder, et al. 1982) and our research cannot recommend universally acceptable and successful interventions. Flynn & Nitsch (1980) have described this "theory-practice" gap as possibly the greatest challenge facing normalization.

Obviously, these problems affect all training programs, not only those relying on video and film. However the production of a video — unless it is merely one which uses a 'talking head/discussion-by-experts' format — demands a synthesis of philosophy, theory and practice because the images are specific, explicit, and fixed in time.

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

The process of video production is a team effort in which cohesion is needed, otherwise inconsistencies emerge in subtle ways. Intra-team differences result in incongruent messages being conveyed, thus undermining the overall intent of the video.

As part of a series on intellectual handicaps, I once produced a twenty minutes video to accompany a manual on "Creating a Homely Atmosphere". The video was not released because it unintentionally and implicitly conveyed values and modelled behaviours directly opposite to those intended. Some brief examples will illustrate the point.

A 'presenter' was used to link the various segments. To add interest and visual appeal, she sometimes stood and spoke "to camera" while a group of people with handicaps sat in the background, engaged in an activity. Although the strategy looked fine in the script, the production was criticized on several grounds. Were we intimating that it is acceptable to talk about consumers in their presence? Are they "exhibits" to be commented on in this manner? Is the place for people with handicaps "in the background" while non-handicapped people occupy the foreground? Is it mandatory that people with handicaps should always appear in groups.

In this production a voice-over commented on ways to improve the physical and psychological environment, while the visuals depicted the baking of cakes in the kitchen of the community residence. Unfortunately, the script did not specify who should handle the hot oven tray and it was the staff member (actor) who handled the tray giving an implicit message that (despite the words) we were not supportive of the principles of 'dignity of risk', autonomy and independence.

There are several implications here. Scripting needs to be 'tight', and if this is not possible, the precise ways in which values are to be demonstrated should be specified. The whole team needs training in normalization — not only the writer and editor. Camera angles, sound, lighting etc. can also convey impressions that are in disagreement with the intent of the production.

It is essential that producers identify their audience and tailor productions specifically to their needs. Direct service personnel should be involved in the intended audience is generally unimpressed with the result, then the production has obviously missed its mark.

The aims of the videos must also be clearly understood and agreed to by the production team. A video may focus on values and/or attitudes, and/or knowledge and/or skills. It was proposed earlier that videos that only deal with consciousness-raising can be counterproductive when staff are not also taught the skills to improve their performance. Lesage (1974) argues that "a change of consciousness should be accompanied by a picture of how things can be changed, which is a necessary precondition for the audience acting in a new way after the film is over" (p. 15).

If it is important for values and aims to be explicitly stated so should the directions for actors. The producer needs to state what sort of voice-over (if any) would be most successful. Should the actor be asked for an authoritative, documentary style (which may be misconstrued by some viewers as condescending) or would the objectives of the video be achieved by a more friendly, colleague to colleague "dialogue" in which the impression is given that "this really isn't new but let us remind ourselves of its importance"?

When actors are employed to act the part of people with handicaps precise direction is essential. Actors expect direction, and if it is not provided, may merely act out their own or societal stereotypes about people with handicaps (Longmore, 1986). An essential pre-filming activity is for actors to get to know people with handicaps as individuals.

People with handicaps themselves add to the authenticity of productions when they are involved directly. Obviously an important first step is the gaining of the informed consent. This is usually given readily when it is explained that the point of the production is to teach the staff how to be better at their job.

Even when informed consent is gained, the filming of consumers raises issues about privacy and rights. In a recent production, a wedding ceremony was filmed and, despite the consent of the couple and the support of their parents, staff were unhappy about the potential invasion of personal life. Such issues highlight the competing equities involved in the production of training programs.

Those consumers who have been involved in videos appear to gain personally from the experience. Generally they have been relaxed on camera, more tolerant of the need for "re-takes", and interested in the overall process.

I have argued that a strength of video is its potential for demonstrating "good" role models. What has not been addressed is how difficult it is to film exemplary behaviour. Unfortunately, reality rarely matches rhetoric; specific images tend to fall short of the ideal. Therefore, it is essential that a T.V. monitor be available on location so that footage can be viewed on site, and scenes reshot if they do not meet the producer's specifications. An example will illustrate the point.

In a production on managing non-compliant behaviour the script contained a brief scene in which a residential worker taught a task to a young man who was severely handicapped, very disruptive and active. The person selected to play the role of residential worker was experienced, and competent in behaviour modification. Her task was to work with the man at a table and teach an assembly task. The residential worker appeared to be doing a 'text book' performance, but closer examination of the footage revealed several instances of her inadvertently reinforcing inappropriate behaviour.

Quite clearly, to include such footage in a training film would have been counter-productive and in this instance, it was easily edited. The residential worker knew perfectly what she should have done. Unfortunately, practice happens to be not always perfect and exemplary practice, while easy enough to give lectures about, is rare, and hard to capture.

It is difficult but possible, to avoid disabilist and negative imaging of people with disabilities when one is producing videos which respond to staff's needs for specific training. For example, if a video must deal with topics such as ways of responding to aggressive or self-injurious behaviour, the footage should be balanced so that the impression is not conveyed that the person's identity is defined solely in terms of atypical behaviour. It is not a waste of footage to show the person behaving appropriately also, and in valued surroundings. Such strategies help to eliminate "negative deviancy image juxtaposition" (Wolfensberger, in Flynn & Nitsch, 1980, p. 19).

There are other strategies which permit an honest response to staff's request for training without the unintended effect of reinforcing negative stereotypes. For example, implication can sometimes be more powerful and provocative than demonstration, and the juxtaposition of contrary images, attitudes or behaviour — without comment — can provoke an active response from the viewer.

SUMMARY

Staff training programs — and the video programs used in them, must attempt to elevate staff's perceptions of consumers and provide them with necessary skills. I have argued that a preoccupation with either of these aims is inadequate and could be counterproductive. Moreover, their simultaneous attainment is complicated because they are, to some extent, in competition. However, educational videos can respond to these agenda and acquaint staff with the state-of-the-art in linking ideology, theory and practice.

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