

TEACHING NOTE

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The Story of Mária – Recognising and Responding to Clients' Diverse Needs

Competence: Recognise and Respond to Clients' Diverse Needs

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Keywords

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The Competence:

Recognise and Respond to Clients' Diverse Needs

Guidance practitioners meet many different kinds of people during their daily work. They meet clients with different cultural, ethnic and religion backgrounds and from different minorities, with different communication skills, education and abilities. These different clients have diverse needs, and guidance practitioners have to select their main needs and find the right ways of helping them. Sometimes during this process they encounter equal opportunity related problems and sometimes they have to fight against their own prejudices.

The Purpose of the Case Study and Workshop

The goal of this case study and related workshop is to improve participant's ability in recognising the diversity of client needs and managing their varied issues/problems. Through the use of this case study the participants

are made aware of possible prejudices against minority groups. Furthermore, it is hoped that it will also help to increase their knowledge of minorities and their ability to communicate with them.

Synopsis of the Case Study

This case study involves the story of Mária, a Roma woman seeking employment. This single woman lived in a women's shelter with her two children. Due to her lack of education she was not able to find permanent employment. For this reason she applied for a project in which she was given the opportunity to learn a trade and get experience in it. In addition, this project provided personal skills development training and advice on seeking employment.

Mária started the project with good motivation; her minor learning difficulties were successfully dealt with. Helping to resolve an argument between the teacher and the group meant she soon became a dominant figure, and this strengthened her self-confidence.

However, following this she had problems finding a job due to prejudice against her Roma descent and the inadequate coping strategies which she had developed as a consequence of permanently experiencing prejudice.

Throughout the project, Mária experienced several crises in her private life: her residence permit expired, so that she and her two children had to leave the shelter. From this time on the residential circumstances of the family

became very uncertain. This uncertainty took its toll on the children as well – the older of the two, the 15-year-old son, began spending time on the street, and this led to problems at school as well. Mária's uncertainty was also increased by the fact that she had been raised in an institution from her early childhood, and she could at most get very limited help from her family; also did she trust her own mothering capabilities.

This case study is about how a guidance practitioner dealt with this difficult situation including, how he analysed and prioritised the client's needs, and how he made the client aware of the order of these priorities – in other words: how he identified the various needs of the client, and how he dealt with them. The case study touches upon the diversity of clients; it deals with the unique problems of clients coming from a minority group; and also with the possible ways to recognise and deal with these unique problems.

Problem Focus

The competency dealt with in the case study involves the following:

- › It means identifying clients' real needs from their many problems, and finding the adequate solutions for them.
- › It also means prioritising the problems to be solved, taking into account different practical aspects.

- › Practitioners have to work together with clients coming from various cultural environments and minority groups. These clients often have unique needs and practitioners must be able to recognise and respond to these unique needs effectively.

Improved Fields of Competence (abilities)

For practitioners to improve their ability to recognise and respond to the diversity of client needs they need to do/ have the following:

- › Raise awareness of one's own attitude towards cultural differences, discrimination and stereotypes, and improve one's ability to obtain knowledge on these.
- › Obtain knowledge of the regulations and practices of equal opportunity, and have respect towards different values and world-views.
- › Develop confidence-building techniques and the techniques of communicating and cooperating with clients in unique situations.
- › Identify the main issue(s): the ability to collect, filter and prioritise (separating essential problems from the non-essential ones) pieces of information.
- › The abilities and skills to recognise, analyse and solve multilevel problems; creativity and proactivity in problem-solving.
- › The ability to work within a multicultural environment (with members of national, ethnic, racial or other minority groups).

Suggested Target Group

Welfare experts, employees in helping professions; (middle level) managers working in helping professions, professional coordinators.

Methodological Suggestions and Questions

1. Preparation for the training

Reading the case study: if it is possible, ask the workshop participants to read the case study in advance of the workshop. It is useful if they know a little about the main story before the workshop, but they don't have to remember all the details. They should just read the story! However they should think about the competence – recognising and responding to clients' diverse needs (in terms of filtering and prioritising) – during the analysis of the case study as they won't need all the information given!!

2. At the beginning of the training

There can be a short discussion on the themes of the case: equal opportunity, cultural differences and how these things link to client needs and communication with clients. The participants can be asked about their own experiences! (for no longer than 15 minutes) After it is useful to read (or read out) the summary of the case study (takes 5 minutes)

3. Working on the case study

Suggested methods on working with the case study:

METHOD 1:

There are 6 parts in the case study. Work with parts 1–5 of the case study in groups of at least 3 members. A traditional group-work structure can be used, where each group works with only one part of the case, using the following questions:

1st (Basic situation):

- › What potential problems are involved in the basic situation? Draw up a list of the needs, potential problems and identify the priorities!
- › How the mentor can solve these? Draw up a list of tools that could help in responding to the client's needs and problems.

2nd (The first half-year term/1):

- › What is the focus of the problem(s) and needs of the clients in the first part of the first half-year term?
- › List the people whose cooperation was needed to solve the problem with the math-teacher!
- › What moving options did the client have? How could the mentor help in the decision?
- › As a result of the fight with her father what future problems and needs, do you think, Mária will have with her children and her residence?

3rd (The first half-year term/2):

- › What is the focus of the problem(s) and needs of the clients in the second part of the first half-year term?
- › What do you think of level and method of communication between Mária-the school-her mentor-the family support service? What is the mentor's role in this?
- › What moving options did the client have? How can the mentor help the client move, taking the family situation into account?
- › What further financial/residential problems may the client have?

4th (The second half-year term):

- › What is the focus of the problem(s) and needs of the clients in the second half-year term?
- › What moving possibilities could the client have? What financial/residential problems and related needs may the client have? What solutions could the mentor offer for them?
- › What would you do as a mentor if your client called you complaining about jobs that had been filled and explaining her/his understanding of the situation as Mária did? How can you check whether discrimination has or has not taken place? What would you do if it has?

5th (The third half-year term):

- › What is the focus of the problem(s) and needs of the clients in the third half-year term?
- › Consider what factors might have contributed to the loss of the first job. How would you discuss this with the client? How and in what way would you improve her/his ability to retain a job? What can the mentor do? (Make a list). If you were her mentor how would you argue that Mária should report the case of discrimination? What groups (and for what characteristics) may be affected by discrimination? Make a list of these groups! Who can people in your country turn to for help in the case of possible discrimination?

METHOD 2:

This method also involves working in groups, but each group works with the whole case. It is best to organise the group-session as a table topics session (world café). The group is split into 3 to 5 tables with each table having 3 to 5 people. Each table has to discuss and answer questions on the whole case related to a particular theme. The themes and questions are as follows:

Needs Group:

- › What are Mária's needs? List and prioritise them!
- › Try to identify her real needs and the type of the need (like education-need etc.)!
- › How and in what way can you perceive your client's needs when working with them?
- › How can the mentor identify and prioritise the needs of the client?
- › Identify the tools that can respond to these needs! Which tools were used by the mentor in the case study?

Problems Group:

- › What are Mária's personal problems? List and prioritise them!
- › Has she got any hidden problems? What kind of problems are they? How can the mentor recognise these kinds of problems and what she can do?
- › Which problems are a result of her origin and life-story?
- › How and in what way can you perceive your client's problems when working with them?
- › How can the mentor identify and prioritise the problems of the client?

Circumstances Group:

- › How does Mária's background influence her needs and her perception of them?

- › How does a client's background influence a mentor's / practitioners choice of communication methods/techniques used? How does it influence her motivation and the motivation methods / techniques used by a practitioner / mentor?
- › How does it influence her cooperation?
- › What can the mentor do regarding this to increase efficiency?

Main Storyline Group:

- › As regards the client's house-hunting, what are her needs and problems? What kinds of tools were used? What you would use in this situation?
- › As regards education, what are her needs and problems? What kinds of tools were used? What you would use in this situation?
- › As regards family history, what are her needs and problems? What kinds of tools were used? What you would use in this situation?
- › What do you think about the question of equal opportunity in the story? How can you find out if discrimination did occur? What kinds of tools were used in this case study? What would you do or what tools would you use in this situation?

Sub Storyline Group:

- › How can the mentor motivate and help the client to understand his / her own needs adequately, and to separate his / her real needs from his/her unrealistic desires, personal problems and background circumstances?
- › How and in what ways can we respond to the problems and needs described in the case study? What can a mentor do independently and when does a mentor need to involve other organisations (authorities, institutions, service providers)? How does / can the client and his/her mentor cooperate in the process?

If you have only have 3 tables, it is suggested that only the first three themes are used. If you don't have 90 minutes for the group work and discussion, it is suggested that fewer questions are asked under each theme.

4. Finishing the process, frontal work:

For both of the methods each group should then share their answers to the questions above, and then the whole group has a discussion. At this point the whole group could be asked the following questions: Have you ever had a similar case? What did you do? What would you do the same and different to solve the problem? (This should take approximately 30–60 minutes – depending on the numbers of groups).

Testing Experience

This case study has been tested twice in Spain with groups of guidance practitioners, trainers and social workers working in different fields and with different levels of work experience. The first session involved a group of twelve people, while in the second one there were eight people. The sessions took place in a room with a big round table. This format was decided because it is less informal than a classroom setting and helps create a friendlier atmosphere.

They were both half-day sessions and the following structure was followed: first of all, the facilitator presented the aims of the sessions and the abstract of the case study. As an icebreaker, she asked participants to share their professional experiences related to the issues in the case study. After that, she asked participants to re-read the case study (it had been sent in advance and the majority of attendees had already read it); they were asked to underline the client's needs and problems in the text as well as mentor's actions. Then, the facilitator followed the second method proposed in this teaching note. The facilitator decided to form up 3 groups of 4 people each (first session). Group 1 had to focus on client's needs, group 2 had to focus on client's problems, and group 3 had to focus on the main storyline. As in the second session there were fewer participants, only two working groups were formed up (they used the themes of client's needs and client's problems). Once each group had answered their questions, the facilitator asked them to talk about the client's circumstances (which is the third theme in the teaching note). Then, the answers of each group were presented to the rest of participants and written down on a flipchart. There was a discussion to conclude. In this conclusion, the final questions included in this teaching note were asked.

THE GUIDE

PROJECT

GUIDE was realized by MetropolisNet and its network. This network is made up of organisations working in metropolitan areas to promote social inclusion, employment and urban development.

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