BACKWARD DESIGN IN-SERVICE TRAINING BLENDED CURRICULUM TO PRACTITIONERS IN SOCIAL WORK AS COACH IN THE P.I.P.P.I. PROGRAM

Diego Di Masi
Paola Milani

LabRIEF (Lab of Research and Action on Family Education), Dept FISPPA, University of Padova, Italy

The paper presents the initial training addressed to practitioners in social work involved in P.I.P.P.I., a national program aiming at preventing out-of-home child placement. The course adopts a blended approach and flipped classroom methodology to train social workers, phycologists and educators to act as coaches while implementing the P.I.P.P.I. program in their work with neglecting families. The initial course has been planned following the backward design model and using the Moodle platform as learning environment.

1 Introduction

P.I.P.P.I. (in Italian Programma di Intervento per la Prevenzione dell'Istituzionalizzazione) is an intervention-research-training program founded by the Italian Welfare Ministry and carried out by the LabRIEF Scientific Group (SG) of the University of Padova in collaboration with health and social services, cooperatives, associations and schools based in the cities involved in the program.

P.I.P.P.I. aims at preventing out-of-home child placement by balancing risk and protective factors and responding to problems connected to poor parenting, which produces child neglect, defined as a significant deficiency or a failure to respond to the needs of a child recognised as fundamental on the grounds of current scientific knowledge (Lacharité *et al.*, 2006; Dubowitz, 1999). Child neglect is a complex social problem, which should not be defined solely through the description of parental behaviour (Horwarth, 2010; Lacharité *et al.*, *op. cit.*). Child neglect focuses on child needs, and the intervention must consider, indeed, not only individual actions, but also a shared responsibility. To respond to the needs of a child a collective action is required that is able to meet the difficulties related to all these functions. So, the P.I.P.P.I. program considers that to promote child wellbeing it is necessary to blend the field of care protection system with the field of parenting support, working with all the people involved in the child's world, in accordance with the bio-ecology of human development by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986), which provides the theoretical framework for the whole program.

Particular focus is placed on method and tools supporting the intervention process within a participatory and transformative evaluation approach. In P.I.P.P.I. the team around the child (multidisciplinary team, MdT) use tools with children and parents in order to give them voice, to collect their story and their points of view on "World of the child" in terms of strengths and needs, and therefore to develop a shared care plan where everyone is a main character of the intervention.

The "World of the child" bases on the Italian adaptation of the triangular models of the Assessment Framework developed in the UK. In the '90s the English Government launched a program called Looking After Children to improve the effectiveness of social service interventions and foster the development of the children looked after (Parker *et al.*, 1991; Ward, 1995).

The "World of the child" supports social operators in achieving a holistic understanding of the needs and potential of every child and every family. It covers the 3 dimensions of child's need, parental responses to those needs and environment, and it can be used with children and/or with parents in individual, familiar or group settings, and in several active ways according to the creativity

of professionals, children and parents (Milani *et al.*, 2014).

The "World of the child" offers a rigorous and systematic formulation of the accurate analysis of the situation as it presents itself here and now (assessment), so to identify the actions to be put in place and track possible improvements (micro-planning) co-built together with the family using a SMART language: simple, measurable, attractive, realistic and temporalized (Serbati & Milani, 2013).

The first implementation of P.I.P.P.I. in 10 cities (2011-2012) involved 122 children 0-11 years old (89 families); the second one (2013-2014) involved 241 children (166 families), the third one (2014-2015), as the first national scaling up of the program, involved 600 children (453 families) in 50 cities of 19 out 20 Italians Regions.

2 The coach in the P.I.P.P.I. program

A coach is a practitioner (a social worker, a psychologist, or an educator) expert on the methodology and tools of intervention of the P.I.P.P.I. program. His/her main function is to facilitate the professionals involved in the multidisciplinary teams (MdT) in acquiring the theoretical framework and methodology of the program. He/she supports practitioners through both individual and collective meetings. A coach plays a critical task as he/she is the link between the Scientific Group (SG) and the MdT of the territories in which P.I.P.P.I. is being implemented.

Coaches have been introduced to facilitate the practitioners involved into P.I.P.P.I. to learn its contents, thus guaranteeing the sustainability of the program itself. The coach mediates among the program, the local authorities where each team works and the specific characteristics (in terms of needs and resources) of each family participating in the program.

The coach plays a scaffolding role (Wood, Bruner & Roos, 1976), as in the metaphor created by Vygotsky (1978) to describe the ongoing support provided to a learner by an expert in making a task, solving a problem or achieving a goal (zone of proximal development). Being a colleague of the learners, his/her function is based on reliability, frequent interactions and proximity, bound together with technical knowledge, which the coach will transfer to the MdT. The relationship between the coach and the members of the MdT reflects the relationship between the MdT and families, confirming the principles of interdependence and integration shaping the global eco-system of P.I.P.P.I. (Zanon *et al.*, 2015).

In the last five years, P.I.P.P.I. has seen a gradual increase in terms of participation. A few training issues have emerged since, due to the complexity of the program and the large number (more than 4000) of professionals involved.

To face with the P.I.P.P.I. program challenges the SG develops a coach blended training over the entire implementation time (18 months). After an initial blended course, the coach training follows through macro regional coach tutoring meetings (North East, North West, Centre, South) with the supervision of the SG.

The initial training course presented in this paper is divided into four phases:

1. two online Moodle sessions (10 hours) with video-slides and documents concerning the governance, the support system, the theory and the methodology in the P.I.P.P.I. program;
2. residential sessions (three days) with group activities and discussion about: parenting and neglect families; participative and transformative assessment; multidisciplinary team;
3. an online peer-to-peer evaluation and two online sessions with video-slides and documents concerning intervention activities and tools in P.I.P.P.I. (10 hours);
4. residential sessions (three days) with group activities and discussion on intervention activities and tools in P.I.P.P.I.

The initial course ends with a training questionnaire satisfaction evaluation. At the end each participant receives a coach certificate.

3 Backward design in P.I.P.P.I.'s coach initial training

The backward design is a curriculum design model to develop meaningful assessments and learning plans (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004). It is called *backward* because it inverts the logic of conventional curriculum at two levels. First, instead of designing the curriculum from the taught curriculum (Chevallard, 1985; Perrenoud, 1998; McCowan, 2008; Di Masi, 2012), based on textbooks or favoured lessons, the backward designer "derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances) called for by the standard and the teaching needed to equip the students to perform" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004). Secondly, the backward designer develops assessment tools and strategies before planning learning experiences: "backward design calls for us to operationalize our goals or standards in terms of assessment evidence as we begin to plan a unit or course" (*Ibidem*).

The backward design was chosen to design P.I.P.P.I.'s coach training because it may be thought of as purposeful task analysis: given a coach task to be accomplished, how do we get there? What kind of lessons and practices are needed to master performances?

According to Wiggins and McTighe (*Ibidem*), three different stages are needed to design a curriculum: identifying desired results; determining

acceptable evidence; planning learning experiences.

3.1 Identifying desired results

Teachers and trainers, as other design professions such as architecture or engineering, shape their work on standards that provide a guide to identify teaching and learning priorities or desired results. Standards can be external, such as national, internal, professional or institutional standards: students' interests, developmental levels and previous achievements. In P.I.P.P.I.'s coach training external standards are defined by the theoretical and methodological program framework (Milani *et al.*, 2014) and international standards for social workers (Health and Care Professional Council, 2012; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2013). Given the professional profile of practitioners involved in the training (social workers, phycologists and educators involved in the previous P.I.P.P.I. editions) and the role of the coach in P.I.P.P.I., the SG identified as priorities the following training goals:

• being able to work with service users and carers to enable them to assess and make informed decisions about their needs, circumstances, risks, preferred options and resources

- being able to support the development of networks, groups and communities to meet needs and outcomes
- being able to contribute effectively to the work of a multi-disciplinary team
- fostering parents' and children's participation in decision-making processes
- understanding the value of critical and reflective thinking on practice
- recognising the value of tutoring, case reviews and other methods of reflection and review.

The SG curriculum designers elaborate an essential question for every dimension of understanding to define an endure understandings: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004). Table 1 summarizes the first stages of backward design, including contents and abilities.

Table 1
DESIDERED RESULTS

Stage 1: identifying desired results	
Goals being able to support, to work with others and to reflect on and review practice coherently with P.I.P.P.I. theory, method and tools	
Understanding The coach has a mediation function. His/her role consists in adapting the program to the local social service system and supporting the multidisciplinary team during the implementation of the program.	**Essential questions** *Explanation*: How can the mediation function of the coach be described? Interpretation: How can I help my colleagues to reflect about the work they have done with the families? *Application*: Which strategies can I use to foster the decision-making process? *Perspective*: How can I adapt PIPPI program to my work context? *Empathy*: Which resources and difficulties does the professional perspective of my colleagues best highlights? *Self-Knowledge*: How do my experiences, values, believes and knowledge affect the decision-making process?
Coaches will know (contents)	**Coaches will able to (abilities)**
• Meanings of neglecting families • Multidimensional approach to parenting • P.I.P.PI. program governance and support system • The assessment framework and "World of the child" • Risk and protective factors in care work • Participative and transformative evaluation • Microplanning smart rules • Multidisciplinary team • Critical events in social work • P.I.P.PI. intervention activities: home-care, school, parents' group, supporting families • PIPPI tools: preassessment, questionnaires, ecomaps, critical event matrix, RPM, Moodle • Work plan	• Support the MdT in selecting families through a preassessment • Elaborate with families and other professionals an accurate and participative assessment using "World of the child" • Co-design a microplanning following smart rules • Apply a critical event matrix in critical events • Use qualitative and quantitative data to understand the care process • Organize and facilitate a tutoring meeting with a multidisciplinary team. • Choose strategies and tools to foster family participation • Collaborate with other professionals to carry out the PIPPI program in local social service systems

3.2 Determining acceptable evidence

The backward approach suggests to design assessment before planning learning experiences. To answer the question: how do we know whether the coach has achieved the desired results? The SG designs a performance task (table 2) using the G.R.A.S.P. model (Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Product, Standards and Criteria). The performance is an online activity in Moodle (workshop) and consists in elaborating a microplanning and realizing a peer-

to-peer microplanning evaluation. The task performed, especially the peer-to-peer assessment, represents an authentic performance, because it could be a real situation that the coaches will meet in their tutoring with multidisciplinary teams. Furthermore, every coach receives a blind review of his microplanning with feedback. So, they have an opportunity to familiarize with smart rules and discuss some problem-solving strategies with their colleagues. In addition to performance task a more traditional questionnaire has been included.

Table 2
EVIDENCE

Stage 2: determining acceptable evidence
Performance
You are a coach working with three different multidisciplinary teams (Role). The first one (Audience) calls you to help them in elaborating a microplanning (Situation). Starting from the preassessment and assessment prepared by the MdT, design a microplanning using the smart rules (Goal). The other two multidisciplinary teams (Audience) ask you to evaluate their microplanning (Situation). Analyse their work and, if necessary, suggest them how to modify their microplanning according to the smart rules (Goal).
Product
A microplanning and two blinded evaluations
Criteria
• descriptive goals • coherence among assessment, goals and expected results • measurable expected results • concrete and well-defined actions • clear definition of responsibilities for every action • precise, unambiguous language
Other evidence
• Quiz with 10 questions for every video-slide

3.3 Planning learning experiences and instruction

In order to promote discussion and reflective activities with practitioners (Schön, 2006) during residential training, the SG has adopted the flipped classroom technique (Bergmann & Sams, 2007). Practitioners are provided with an introduction to the material through P.I.P.P.I.'s guidelines before engaging in a critical discussion. The guideline and the video-slides on the main concepts are in the Moodle platform. Their aim is giving an overview on the principal ideas of P.I.P.P.I. before the residential course starts. Reversing the traditional order on learning event – "events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and viceversa" (Lage *et al.*, 2000, p. 32) – guarantees more opportunities for active and student-

centred learning experiences. After identifying desired results and determining acceptable evidence, the backward design suggests to plan the learning experiences needed to accomplish the performance goals. The activities planned and carried out during the residential course have been developed taking in account the principles embedded in the acronym W.H.E.R.E.T.O.: Where; Hook; Explore; Reflect; Exhibit; Tailored; Organized (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Table 3 describes the activities planned for the first three residential modules: parenting and neglect families; participative and transformative assessment; multidisciplinary teams.

Table 3
LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Stage 3: planning learning experiences
Activities
1. Participants introduce themselves to each other.
2. Vision of movie scenes to introduce parenting concept (first part).
3. Individual activity (IA): assessing the parent's view in the movie, describing which elements you took into account to elaborate your assessment.
4. Group activity (GA): discuss the assessment with your colleagues and talk about the ideas about good or neglected families arising from it.
5. Vision of movie scenes (second part).
6. IA: Has your family assessment changed? Which elements have changed your assessment?
7. GA: discuss with your colleagues the new assessment and try to put the elements identified in the "World of the Child".
8. Results of pre and post assessment in previous P.I.P.P.I. editions.
9. GA: introduce a real case and describe risk and protective factors.
10. Put the risk and protective factors identified in the "World of the child".
11. Role play in small groups: multidisciplinary team simulation. Fill in the preassessment of a real case.
12. Preassessment comparison and discussion focused on professional negotiation and coaching strategies to facilitate the decision-making process.
13. GA: choose a sub-dimension of "World of the child" and define indicators and questions to describe it.
14. Compare and discuss indicators and questions identified.
15. Role play in small groups: multidisciplinary team simulation with parents. Fill in the assessment of a real case.
16. Compare assessments and discuss how parents' participation changes the professional assessment.
17. Role play in small groups: multidisciplinary team simulation with parents. Fill in the microplanning of a real case using smart rules.
18. Compare and discuss microplanning taking in account smart rules.
19. GA: rewrite the microplanning according to the reflections arisen during the discussion.
20. Video of a real meeting between a multidisciplinary team and a family.
21. GA: analysis of multidisciplinary team functioning.
22. Discuss which elements facilitate or obstacle the communication among participants.
23. Tools to organize and coordinate a multidisciplinary team in P.I.P.P.I.
24. Introduction to critical event technique and to critical event matrix.
25. GA: apply the critical event matrix to a real case.
26. Comparison and discussion.

Conclusion

In the fourth P.I.P.P.I. edition 108 practitioners, two for each new city involved (54), were enrolled in the coach training, 91 of them (84%) completed all the activities of the initial blended training program. The satisfaction questionnaire results show that 61% of coaches consider 'excellent' the quality of the didactic activities, which was 'good' for the remaining 39%.

Designing a flexible and interactive course via a Moodle platform produced a high score in terms of satisfaction among coaches. Moreover, shifting from a teacher-centred model to a learner-centred one turned out to be a learning opportunity also for the SG.

Adopting the backward design was useful to identify an endure understanding about the role and the function of the coach, and consequently defines the new professional profile introduced in the program to support the MdT in their work. Furthermore, focusing on task analysis helps to determine contents, skills, lessons and practices needed to master the performances required. Finally, applying a flipped classroom approach gives more opportunities to develop learners' autonomy through an active and experiential learning and critical and reflexive discussions among professionals coming from different services and territories.

A few difficulties remain: Moodle platform is still little known in the social service system and a period of familiarization is needed. Furthermore, often the technological equipment is inadequate and obsolete, which has been an obstacle to participation in the program.

In the last years materials and activities have been structured better, expert coaches support the SG in the residential training and social workers professional association now recognize P.I.P.P.I. training, but it is necessary to plan a research design to understand the effect of practitioners' training on neglect families wellbeing.

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