



Does working together actually work?

Elsbeth McCartney

University of Strathclyde

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Oh dear!

- It is rather daunting to be here raising worries about terminology and the effectiveness of co-professional working.
- This conference is called '*Working together to get it right for every child: Transdisciplinary working for children and young people with a communication disability*'.
- Which rather suggests two things:
 - that working together is the best way to '*get it right*',
 - and that *trans-disciplinary* working is the best way to do that.

This talk

- I would like to unpack both of these suppositions a little more.
- I want to consider the variety of models of co-professional working available, and to clarify terms.
- I want to review the evidence that working together does improve services and outcomes for children and young people.
- And I want to suggest that a variety of approaches may be helpful in different circumstances.

Terms are terrible

- Terms for co-professional working are not agreed.
- A helpful start might be to keep the term 'co-working' as a 'neutral' term to cover any instance where two or more staff work together.
- A neutral term is needed - terms vary a lot.

Example: multi-disciplinary

- In 'For Scotland's Children' ¹ this means different professions working together, such as:
 - education, social work and health staff (p. 74)
 - community education, mental health and housing management staff (p. 85).
- In 'Every Child Matters' ² this means much the same:
 - education, social care and health services (p. 60),
 - health visitors, nursery nurses and community development workers (p. 93).

Example: multi-disciplinary contd.

- This is probably how most people would use the term.
- But in ‘Supporting Children’s Learning: the Code of Practice’³ it means instances where professionals from different disciplines *within the same agency* work together, such as an SLT with a Health visitor.
- Where the professionals come from different agencies the term ‘*inter-agency*’ is used.
- So a teacher and SLT working together move from *multi-disciplinary* to *inter-agency* across Scottish policy documents.

Example: collaboration

- Some writers (e.g. Williams & Salmon 2002 ⁴) use *collaboration* generically for all aspects and styles co-working.
- But Kersner (1996 ⁵) follows Conoley & Conoley (1982 ⁶) using ‘collaboration’ where individuals join in an *egalitarian partnership* to achieve *mutually determined* goals.
- Marvin (1990 ⁷) uses collaboration for *informal networking* amongst those with *shared responsibility* for clients.
- DiMeo et al. (1998 ⁸) use collaboration only where there is *trust, mutual respect and personal support, free and honest discussion* and *shared responsibility for planning*.

Another 'Oh Dear'!

- Where terms in common use are used differently it is unlikely their meanings can now be tied down.
- Document-specific definitions and glossaries are probably the best that can be expected.
- However, it is worth attempting a classification, and perhaps possible to do so using some of the underlying concepts which occur throughout the literature.

Four constructs

- Writers often use four underlying constructs:
 1. who *works with a client* and carries out planned activities (usually activities designed to meet health or learning targets)
 2. how *egalitarian* are staff relationships
 3. who *agrees targets* (here shorthand for any agreed end or change point), and
 4. how *supportive* are staff relationships.

Who works with the client

- Professionals themselves (directly, from the professional's point of view)
- Others (indirectly), such as other professionals or assistants.
- Where indirect work is through an assistant some professional retains responsibility and accountability for the assistant's performance.
- Where indirect work is through another professional much responsibility for implementation lies with the professional undertaking the activities.

Egalitarian relationships

- Some inequalities are formalised in job titles:
 - *professional* and *assistant*
 - *professional* and *manager*.
- Good relationships can be formed here, but by definition *not egalitarian* relationships.
- Co-professional work often involves professionals of *nominally equal* status.
- Neither is 'the boss of' the other in formal employment terms.

Egalitarian relationships contd.

- Each has their own area of knowledge and expertise to share.
- Here working equality should be a key feature.
- In practice some may prove more equal than others!

Who sets targets

- In nominally equal professional relationships, ways of setting targets have been used to distinguish models of working added to who works with the client.
- McGrath & Davis (1992⁹) distinguish:
 - ‘multi-disciplinary’ models that involve professionals setting targets *independently* from
 - ‘inter-disciplinary’ models where targets are set and agreed *jointly*.
- In both cases learning activities are often delivered by professionals directly but separately.

Who sets targets contd.

- Mackey & McQueen (1998 ¹⁰) use ‘trans-disciplinary’ to mean *joint goal setting* where the resulting learning activities are *delivered by professionals together*, with considerable *role-release* as every member of the team contributes to holistic learning experiences as the need arises.
- RCSLT (Gascoigne 2006 p. 16 ¹¹) regard trans-disciplinary models as central to work with children within integrated teams, and it is sometimes seen as the ‘best’ model (hence the conference title?)

Supportive relationships

- *Supportive* and *trusting* relationships and *mutual respect* can arise or not irrespective of how egalitarian is a relationship.
- It is possible to trust, respect and receive support from an assistant or boss and to mistrust an equal.
- This dimension is concerned with inter-personal comfort and rapport, and is difficult to predict or insist upon .

Putting it together

- It is possible to combine three of these factors into 'named varieties' as described in the literature.
- The three factors are *agreeing* targets, *delivering* activities, and *egalitarian* relationships.
- Combining these three gives the following chart ¹² :



Targets set jointly	Activities delivered by	Nominally egalitarian	Named variety
No	Professionals separately	Yes	Multi-disciplinary
Yes	Professionals separately	Yes	Inter-disciplinary
Yes	Professionals together	Yes	Trans-disciplinary
No	Professionals together	Yes	Co-teaching
No	Assistant	No	Transfer
No	Another professional	Yes	Consultancy
Yes	Another professional	Yes	Co-operation

The 4th factor

- The fourth factor concerning *supportive relationships* can be added to *inter-disciplinary* and *trans-disciplinary* working to meet many definitions of collaborative work.
- DeMeo ⁸describes this as 'professional friendship', which cannot be expected amongst all co-working staff.

And a 5th?

- To accommodate terms such as *inter-agency* we would have to refer to agency *structures* and decide if terms could be used across agencies, and indeed service *integration*, where management structures might change.

Costs of working together

- Models have different costs, some involve more non-client time than others to set up.
- Monetary costs can involve training costs, monitoring delivery, updating staff, and lots of meetings to learn to work together and to implement change.
- Other costs can be the pressures of working amongst staff who may not be personally compatible ('Factor 4'), and of rapid changes and re-organisations.
- Services must be mindful of these, and look at benefits versus costs.

Some models fit some settings

- There are also differences in settings which influence models of co-working.
- I mostly read examples of trans-disciplinary work from in specialist settings or projects, with stable teams of staff who learn skills from each other; who are egalitarian in job description and outlook; and who often find supportive relationships with compatible staff.
- It is harder to see how this model could fit into a community based SLT service working in mainstream schools, with the variety of staff, children and learning activities involved.



Some models fit some settings contd.

- Pending service integration, it may be that we have to look at other models of co-working.

Does co-working benefit clients?

- Most of the literature on co-working describes the process, from professionals celebrating the achievement of closer working relationships in terms of professional satisfaction ¹³.
- However, there is very little research on any benefits of closer working relationships for clients, despite a common (and common-sense) assumption that they exist ¹⁴.
- Some fairly major service integration policies are launched on the assumption of benefits, and criticism of a current situation, rather than evidence that change would improve service ¹⁵.

Two recent studies

- To add to the evidence base concerning costs and effectiveness of models, I can report on two recent studies.
- The first, the NCCHTA trial ¹⁶, used a predominantly *transfer* model, with SLTs training SLT assistants to deliver language intervention to primary school children with language impairment, using a therapy manual.
- The language outcomes suggested that the assistants were as effective as the SLTs, working individually or with groups of children.

Two recent studies contd.

- The children who received intervention improved their expressive language skills more than control children who received ongoing therapy.
- Children were seen in school, but mostly extracted from their classrooms, with advice and information given to teachers and parents.

Two recent studies contd.

- The second study ¹⁷ attempted to deliver the same therapy activities to comparable children, but via classroom staff (an indirect, *consultancy* model).
- Activities were delivered by classroom teachers, classroom assistants (i.e. employed by education services) and learning support teachers.
- We did not get similar language gains, and indeed the classroom staff were much less consistent in delivering language activities: many children probably got fewer hours of language work.

Costs?

- The short - run economic analysis ¹⁶ suggested that the SLT assistants in the first trial were an economic option, but had extra preparation and supervision time compared with SLTs.
- This meant that for group therapy conditions there was very little difference in cost between assistants and SLTs, with SLTs achieving slightly (but not significantly) better short-term outcomes for expressive language.

May not be typical?

- It would not be sensible to translate these figures into clinical use - they were project-specific costs.
- It would also be simplistic to state that a *transfer* model was more effective than a *consultancy* model, as used in the second study.
- However, the fact that SLTs could supervise their assistants' work meant that language activities were delivered as per a research schedule.
- This was hard to organise in a school context, where more was being expected of busy classroom staff.
- The *transfer* model did appear to fit the situation.

Conclusions

- To end this presentation, and to kick off discussion for the rest of the day, I would like to summarise the points.
- There are a variety of models, with associated costs, and no 'best' model.
- Our conference model, *trans-disciplinary*, perhaps represents the peak of co-working good practice.
- It may be hard to sustain in current working climates, and may have high transaction costs, to get teams up to speed.

Conclusions contd.

- We should not ‘beat ourselves up’ about accepting ‘lower’ levels of co-working practice.
- They might be just as effective for clients.
- They might be cheaper to implement, and allow clients more contact with services.
- But we don’t know.
- And we should find that out, as we move improve our co-working practices.

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