

The role of the educational psychologist in promoting effective multi-agency collaborations

Paper 1: New directions for the educational psychologist

Paper 2: Self-Organised Learning as a development tool

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Paper I Abstract

Service integration is central to current government strategy for promoting positive outcomes for young people with educational and additional needs, yet evidence to support the efficacy of this strategy remains elusive. A review of the literature finds that many of the facilitators of successful multi-agency working are at the intra-group level. These barriers and facilitating factors are organised into an Eco-systemic Model of Multi-Agency Working (EMMA) which addresses leadership processes, group-level interactions and problem-solving processes.

The first stage of the study generates data for intervention materials to be used in the second stage. This is achieved by comparing the purposes and practices of each group at different systemic levels. This stage of the study also provides baseline questionnaire data for the second stage of the study. Consideration is given to the sources of conflict within each group, the strategies used to resolve these conflicts and the levels of hierarchical and systemic thinking within the participating multi-agency groups. The resulting analysis is found to fit well within the EMMA model and the distinctiveness of each of the systemic levels as well as their interdependence is discussed. Suggestions are made for improved multi-agency practices and new directions for the educational psychologist in facilitating improved practice are explored.

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Paper II Abstract

In the first phase of this two-stage study, self-organised learning principles were proposed as a useful knowledge base upon which to draw when facilitating change in multi-agency groups. In this second phase, this hypothesis is put to the test. Data from the first phase is used in combination with wider research findings to design feedback materials for participating groups. Evidence gathered from ensuing meeting transcripts, interviews and questionnaire data is compared with baseline data gathered in the first phase to assess the impact of this intervention on group functioning.

Evidence is presented of improved clarity of purpose, improved group functioning and early signs of improved outcomes, though results are highly variable between groups. Different levels of group functioning were found to be inter-dependent, lending support to an eco-systemic model of multi-agency working. Trait-based models of leadership and conflict resolution are challenged. It is argued that improving outcomes for young people is dependent upon the healthy functioning of multi-agency groups and that investing resources in reflective learning in multi-agency groups is a worthwhile step towards securing better outcomes for young people.

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