

Book review

Interprofessional education and training (Better partnership working series)

John Carpenter, Helen Dickinson
Bristol: Policy Press, 2008, 131 pp
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Pressure is mounting in the UK to adopt interprofessional education (IPE) throughout health and social care in response to government policies, inquiry findings, professional requirements and, above all, the demands of practice. Yet many teachers and students confess themselves either ignorant of its aims and methods for lack of guidance, or confused by conflicting messages. Despite the proliferating interprofessional literature, accessible and affordable texts remain few. Carpenter and Dickinson come to the rescue.

IPE, they argue, is pre-requisite for partnership working, not only between organisations but also between professions. It is a means to overcome ignorance and prejudice, and to enhance mutual respect, applicable in fields as varied as child protection, mental health and the care of disabled and frail older people, and to promote teamwork in hospital and community settings. Originating in the 1960s, as the book explains, it has moved from the margins to the mainstream of education and practice accompanied by an accretion of expectations prompting attempts to distinguish between types of IPE, acknowledging that any one programme is the outcome of a series of trade-offs, negotiations and compromises between the interested parties.

It is against this background that Carpenter and Dickinson introduce coherence and consistency, distinguishing between interprofessional and multiprofessional education, introducing theory and grounding in evidence (explored more fully by Dickinson elsewhere in the series). Outcomes, they suggest, may helpfully be presented as a chain reaction from positive interaction between participants to improved patient care via six intervening steps to be addressed in successive inter-professional learning experiences.

Of the many unresolved issues, they focus on three: involving service users and carers; mainstreaming and sustaining IPE; and developing evaluation measures.

The last of these plays to Carpenter's strengths, drawing on his first hand experience and familiarity with other key sources, complemented by an indispensable summary of evaluative measures.

Recommendations follow for: policy makers, e.g. central government needs to be clear about what it expects IPE to deliver; education commissioners and managers—"IPE should be built into all professional courses and required for all students"; programme directors—"ignore the psychology of intergroup behaviour at your peril"; facilitators—"understand the principles behind the methods": and evaluators—"make sure you open the "black box".

One slim volume cannot capture IPE in all its diversity, but Carpenter and Dickinson have a go. They provide an introduction grounded in experience, evidence and scholarship with helpful pointers to dependable sources for further reading. Their focus is university-based, not work-based, interprofessional learning, with a bias towards pre-qualifying studies in line with the current emphasis in UK developments.

Targeting UK readers, much of the book may well prove helpful in other countries where IPE is taking hold. It is most likely to engage teachers, facilitators, researchers and post-qualifying rather than pre-qualifying students. The critical test will be whether it also reaches policy makers. Inclusion in a series on partnership working may help, building in a timely reminder that implementing new policies and reorganising services depends critically on the readiness of the professions to pull together, set aside differences and resist defensive tendencies, which IPE can do much to help.

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