



# Improving Interprofessional Communication and Working

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## Course details

**Course title** Masters in Social Work

**Level** postgraduate

**Year** 2

**Module title** Interprofessional Studies for Social Work

**Discipline/Subject areas** Interprofessional working

## Activity details

### What I did

I used a report into the death of a young child as a means of examining interprofessional communication and working with students.

### Why I did it

The report chosen was one of a number of similar enquiries into social work failings. It revealed, amongst other concerns a lack of communication between professions, assumptions about what organisations did, or were expected to do, and how this situation might lead to a tragic set of consequences.

Social work is marked by failures such as this, and if the situation is to improve, what lessons might be learned for the future?

I used the report as a means of enabling students to identify poor interprofessional or inter-agency working, and from there how examples of good collaborative practice might be used to improve child protection.

### What I wanted to achieve

I wanted the students to gain a sense of the failings of the situation, the lack of effective communication between professionals, and also how the different professions saw their role and that of others. It generated intense discussion about how the failings should be overcome to create a framework for improved child protection procedures.

### **A short description of what I did**

Students were divided into four different groups, each group looking at a different profession's role in the case. The groups read the report from the perspective of their allocated profession and formed an opinion of the work of the profession in the case study. From there, the students then developed procedures for the appropriate exchange of information between organisations, and a structure for how information was managed.

The groups were allocated different reports in consecutive weeks and looked at the roles of professions, and what lessons could be learned from the event. It enabled students to gain a clearer understanding of the failings of interprofessional communication in this case, and the consequences. It also allowed the student cohort to consider how to use examples of good practice, and how they might have led to a more effective response by the professionals involved in the report, and how these models might be used to further develop good practice.

### **What worked well**

- Student understanding of professional roles
- Their recognition of the impact of communication failures
- The students used examples of good inter-agency practice to develop clear protocols for improved inter-agency child protection practice
- The students worked well together
- The outcomes revealed greater confidence in recognising the need to clarify, challenge and confirm roles and responsibilities, rather than make assumptions

### **Problems and/or issues**

- Use more than one case study – allocate one to each group
- Do not overload the students with written tasks – they are busy
- Give students enough time to read reports and discuss responses with colleagues
- Be clear about required outcomes

### **What students thought about it**

- Students found the exercise useful
- It deepened their understanding of inter-agency failings
- It allowed students to develop ideas about good interagency practice and the need to develop effective communication strategies between bodies which is vital in child protection work
- Students felt there was not enough time to do justice to the work

### **Key messages**

- Plan the work carefully, and be clear about goals and guidance
- Consider using distance learning discussion boards for students to exchange information with each other
- Have enough time for the students to discuss

### **Related documents or links**

The Caleb Ness enquiry report may be accessed on

[www.edinburgh.gov.uk](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk)

### **Any other comments**

Other case studies work equally well, and may be chosen for other service user groups, or to reflect e.g. English legislation or policy development.

Many thanks to Janice West for her expertise in developing the ideas that went into this model.

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