



The Practice Teaching Award and Community Practice Teacher Programme

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What was the catalyst?

The Joint practice initiative supported by CCETSW and ENB starting 1989 Purpose There was a general consensus in that social workers and community nurses should be working together to break down professional boundaries and share common good practice in the supervision of students.

Desired outcomes

It was decided to offer a course that prepared the two separate professional groups candidates to practice teach/teach and assess students. The learning outcomes were based on CCETSW-initially the 14 requirements then the competency framework as the ENB were in the process of drawing their own up during most of the project's life.

Preparation and support

There was support in principle but in retrospect the whole question of the structure of the programme and its resourcing was not satisfactorily addressed. This was partly historical and reflected the initial make up of the programme. Social services agency staff had taught a large part of the CCETSW course over some years and their seconded staff made up the bulk of candidates for several years. The community nurse had previously run a well established and similar programme but over two years. Nurses initially made up only a small minority and one nurse lecturer was seen as sufficient to provide pathway leadership, specific nurse input and support. This meant that most modules were initially led by social workers, many from agency partners with a training background. Interestingly this situation was reversed in later years with nurses outnumbering social workers with similar problems arising when nurse tutors led groups. In response to student and teacher evaluations and the eventual withdrawal of agency trainers (in response to reducing numbers of secondees) we improved our joint planning and delivery with more satisfying results.

Development Issues

Candidates consistently rated the learning about each others roles as a strength of the programme. However it became clear that we were trying to meet the needs of two groups with very specific needs. All candidates needed urgent survival skills in navigating the complex placement arrangements that varied within as well as between the professional groups. They wanted specific and detailed guidance and support which was not available for all groups from all module leaders, given that joint teaching was not established from the start.

Differences in experience of practice teaching also caused difficulties. Nurse candidates are not allowed to practice teach prior to achieving the qualification. This led to a complex set of shadowing arrangements and the summative student assessment being carried out by another already qualified practice teacher. By contrast the social work programme recommended having a student before coming on the programme.

Educational standards and aspirations also varied. Many nurses had already achieved degree status and wanted the programme to be assessed at M level. Whilst some social workers had degrees the majority were at diploma level seeking to top up this with H level credits. We found as a general observation that the nurse candidates' research skills were more developed than the social workers but that when it came to anti-discriminatory practice differences in approach and language caused lots of problems. Of course, whilst uncomfortable at the time, many candidates later acknowledged the learning that had taken place.

Course in action

Inasmuch as the programme has now separated it might be thought that the experiment had not succeeded. However we did manage to address some of the difficulties during the programme's lifetime and learnt a great deal about how such ventures should be set up and supported.

Review/hindsight

- We managed to accommodate different academic aspirations by offering assessment at both M and H levels. Differing levels of academic experience and attainment did not prove problematic.
- We began the process of developing a common language and are still convinced that concentrating on the commonalities of the task of practice teaching is the right way forward.
- We learned a huge amount about our own prejudices and the way we are seen by others.
- We strongly feel that joint teaching, although resource intensive, was necessary to ensure the agendas of both groups were adequately addressed and that staff were not played off against each other! Time needs to be allocated to allow such staff to get to know and value reach other.
- A balance in the candidate intake is also important.
- Much more support was needed from outside the immediate teaching staff to support these candidates in their anxiety provoking new role. To some extent this role was present for some social services seconded staff as long as their agency staff were involved in delivering the programme. In retrospect, the role of nurse academic link tutors was crucial and we needed to have involved them more fully.
- Our essential learning is that it does not work to graft one programme onto another but professional body requirements did restrict us until we developed the capacity to use them creatively! We also need to ensure that those involved are enthusiasts!
- The communication skills necessary for such collaborative work should not be underestimated. We found the concept of parallel process invaluable in helping us to realise the extent to which inter-professional differences were reflected in relationships between students, staff and agencies.

What next?

Outside events tended to determine the fate of this joint initiative. The role of the community practice teacher for nurses is to disappear within a new education framework at postgraduate level. Modules from the original programme are retained within this and in theory are open to any student.

Meanwhile social work secondments decreased considerably due to reorganisation and severe service delivery pressures. In response to this an alternative programme was devised to meet the needs of social work candidates under the auspices of the ASSET programme which uses peer groups meeting less frequently. Again in time this route may suit some community nurses. In developing the M A in Learning and Teaching, staff planning a teaching portfolio module are consulting with Practice Teaching Award lecturers and using their wide experience of the requirements of teachers who are practice based. In addition we feel it is fair to say that the experience has contributed to the ongoing debate on inter-professional working within the school of studies.



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