

Pathways 6 Conference 2002
Professional collaboration to ensure student-centered practice:
An interactive workshop

Facilitator: Jo Wilkins

Massey University, Albany Campus, Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Disability Co-ordinators come from a diverse range of professional backgrounds that include teaching, counselling, nursing, rehabilitation and social work. Whilst this diversity provides a valuable source of expertise in the sector, it can cause tensions. Service provision for students can differ in each educational institution based on the professional background and interests of the Disability Co-ordinator and Disability Co-ordinators and other disability support staff may find themselves working in a non-traditional place of practice usual for their professional background.

These tensions can be reduced when disability support staff have a clear foundation on which they practice and when educational institutions give recognition to the varying professional backgrounds of staff and allow flexibility in their roles.

An understanding and respect of all professional approaches, and an openness to the knowledge and skills other professions contribute, can add to and improve the quality of our own practice. Professionals working together can therefore ensure 'best practice' for students that focuses on a student –centered model of practice that emphasises collaborative partnerships for service provision.

This interactive workshop will draw on research from disability support staff in New Zealand and explore how differing professions operate within an educational setting and how professional values, ethics, theories and models of practice are applied. Participants will then identify the similarities and differences that each profession brings to the disability sector. Once identified, participants will use new knowledge to begin to develop their own unique model of practice, that is fundamentally student centered and brings about change at both a micro and macro level.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Disability Co-ordinators come from a diverse range of professional backgrounds that include teaching, counselling, nursing, rehabilitation and social work. Research from New Zealand shows there is no one profession that dominates the field.

A study by Poutu (1999) found that disability support staff had a high level of diverse skills and argues that they could easily transfer into any area of management. With this diversity, service provision for students may differ in each educational institution based on the professional background and interests of the Disability Co-ordinator. This view is supported by Hill and Tinklin (1998), who found students' experiences depend to a large extent on the attitudes, levels of experience and knowledge of staff. Whilst this diversity provides a valuable source of

expertise in the sector, it can cause tensions as Disability Co-ordinators and other disability support staff find themselves working in a non-traditional place of practice usual for their professional background and a lack of support for their role. These tensions can be reduced when disability support staff have a clear foundation on which they practice and have the opportunity for role flexibility within the institution.

The New Zealand research highlighted the strong influence of training on delivery of services and the importance of professional collaboration in order to strengthen and promote the value and position of disability issues.

An understanding and respect of all professional approaches, and an openness to the knowledge and skills other professions contribute can add to and improve the quality of our practice, as we interact and are open to incorporating other perspectives into our work. Hall and Tinklin (1998) argue for the need for support staff to increase their awareness and spread their own knowledge more widely. This should prevent criticism of professionals working in this area of disability against what Tyrona and Vincent (1996) term an ‘ideology of expertism’ that includes a culture of professionalism, including specialist training, its own esoteric language and its own claims to expert practice

(Tomlinson, 1996).

Professionals working together, rather than exclusively, will ensure collaborative partnerships for service provision which is transparent and works at a micro level to ensure a student –centered model of practice as well as change at the macro level.

The interactive workshop will be an opportunity for participants to work together to:

- Discuss differing perspectives and the contribution these make to working with students with disability and then:
- Draw on these differing perspectives from within the group in order to facilitate a personal analysis of their practice. The objective being to identify specific concepts, ideas or practices from others in order to improve their practice to ensure positive changes for students.

1.1 Part one: (10 mins)

Participants will break into small groups. These groups will be based on either professional training/work experience/lived experience. If participants identify with more than one background, they will need to decide which one has had the most influence on their practice.

1.1.1. Suggested groups are;

- Social work and counselling
- Teaching
- Occupational therapy, nursing, rehabilitation and physiotherapy
- Administration and management
- Student advisors
- Other

A facilitator will be appointed in each group (where groups exceed 15 participants, the facilitator will break numbers into smaller groups).

1.2 Part two: (15 mins)

This part of the workshop is to explore how differing professions operate within an educational setting and how professional values, ethics, theories and models of practice are applied.

Each group will be asked to:

1. Identify the strengths of their professional training/ work experience/lived experience
2. Report how this training, work and/or lived experience benefits students
3. Identify what strategies have been particularly successful in creating change at both a micro and macro level.

1.3 Part three: (5 mins)

These points will be fed back to the large group. Participants will then be able to identify and reflect for themselves the similarities and differences that each profession brings to the disability sector.

1.4 Part four: (10 mins)

Once identified, participants will then begin to develop their own unique model of that student centered practice based on new knowledge and successful strategies, they will be asked to take something from each group and reflect on how they can incorporate it into their own practice.

Focusing on the identified differences, participants will then be required to identify concepts that they can incorporate into their own practice. This will be done on a handout.

1.4.1. Questions:

- What concepts and strategies are new to me?
- How can I incorporate these into my practice?
- How will it benefit students? (ie the micro level)
- How will these help to change the institutional barriers?(ie the macro level)
- Is there now anything in my job description/practice/role within the university that I wish to add or change?

If time permits, this completed handout will be discussed in pairs.

2. REFERENCES

Hall, J. and Tinklin, T., 1998, *Students first: The experiences of disabled students in higher education* (The Scottish Council for Research in Education, Edinburgh).

Poutu, R., 1999, 'The border riders of tertiary institutions'. A paper given at the Disability in Education Conference. Otago University, Dunedin, 1999.

Tomlinson,S., 1996, 'Conflicts and dilemmas for professionals in special education' in Christensen, C. and Rizvi, F. (eds.) *Disability and the dilemmas of education and justice*. (Open University Press, Buckingham).

Tyrone,B. and Vincent,C., 1996, 'The ideology of expertism': the framing of special education and racial equality policies in the local state' in Christensen, C. and Rizvi, F. (eds.) *Disability and the dilemmas of education and justice* (Open University Press, Buckingham).