Frameworks for practice?
Ways of seeing what to do

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Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the recent background of interprofessionalism in children’s services in the UK. It is framed by the understanding that strategic directives for collaboration need to be worked through in interdisciplinary interactions between professionals. It is argued that those involved can find that the nature of interactions is uncertain, intangible and hard to quantify in comparison to the convenient visions offered by policy. It begins by discussing the recent policy context by relating it to theories of interprofessional working and learning. It explores the application of the Every Child Matters (DfES 2003) framework for practice and offers some conclusions for practitioners as the government agenda possibly shifts from this approach. It is argued that the recurring catastrophe of child deaths (such as addressed by Laming 2003, 2009), indicates that the intent of a systemic, procedural framework is confounded in the process of professional interactions that the agenda requires. It concludes by calling for deeper investigation into the lived experiences of interactions between professionals, offering suggestions for further reflection on the book’s theme of interprofessionalism.

The last decade or so has seen the introduction of challenging, unprecedented but largely welcomed policy initiatives for children, schools and family services in England. Arguably, these drives demanded a fundamental shift in the ways we think about how professionals practise and, most essentially, practise together. While certain aspects of this discussion are rooted in the policy directives of the previous New Labour UK government, the themes that arise offer explication for the ways we currently think about practising together for children and families. This chapter intends to chart these policy and practice initiatives with references to literature on interprofessional working. In doing so, there will be a need not only to present the policy drive and linked theories of working but to also provide some discussion of their usefulness for practitioners at the ‘front line’ of interprofessional working. The
challenges presented by a new coalition government intent on massive spending cuts in public services can be better met by practitioners who have a clear understanding of their own values about collaboration and how these equate with recent policy initiatives.

When the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) was immediately re-named post-election as the Department for Education, it was interpreted as signifying that holistic attention to the needs of children and families are not to be the focus of purely ‘educational’ provision. Regardless of whether the coalition government continues the push for collaboration or undermines the process, it should be recognized that collaboration happens as a naturally occurring process. It occurred prior to the previous regime and it will continue, as those practising for children and families see the need to collaborate for children and families. Initiatives such as those of Early Years pioneers Owen (1771–1858) and McMillan (1869–1931) (Pugh and Duffy 2006) and the collaboration between the sea captain Thomas Coram, the composer George Friedrich Handel and the artist William Hogarth (Douglas 2009) exemplify interprofessional working for children and families due to shared outrage at the plight of children.

The term ‘shared outrage’ is a useful way to think about how public recognition of significant issues for society such as child poverty, problematic parenting and child death due to abuse was a key factor in the changing nature of services for children (Baldock et al. 2009). It is this sense of outrage and reaction that has driven policy development for the ‘radical reform for all children, young people and families’ (DCSF 2010). Policy motivating collaboration was driven by and reacting to public consternation over serious case reviews of child deaths. The DoH (1999) guidelines laid out efforts to maintain an integrated interdisciplinary approach for child protection (MacLeod-Brudenell 2004). However, critical issues raised by the inquiry led by Lord Laming into the death of the child Victoria Climbié in 2002 led to conclusions that efforts made for collaboration so far had been largely ineffectual. Chapter 12 (Critical Issues) of the report of the inquiry, outlines a catalogue of errors that demanded improved collaboration. In the report, Laming makes a notable (possibly inadvertent) shift from ‘multi-agency’ to ‘multi-disciplinary’: ‘I am in no doubt that effective support for children and families cannot be achieved by a single agency acting alone. It depends on a number of agencies working well together. It is a multi-disciplinary task’ (Laming 2003: 6).

This rapid shift of the process from agencies working together to the actual task of interactions between the disciplines involved, disguises the enormity of the challenge. The apparently simple switch of terminology represents a common ‘thinking gap’ between the rhetoric of national policy (however well intended) and the personal challenges for professionals in enacting the ‘multi-disciplinary task’. From the privileged viewpoint of hindsight, it can be seen that it was intended that macro-level strategy would simply drive change at a personal, practitioner level.

In short, the creation of a strategic framework for multi-disciplinary practice was seen as a solution in itself. There were significant professional, structural and procedural barriers to successful partnership but ‘few conceptual frameworks or theoretical structures for exploring effective multi-agency work’ (Fitzgerald and Kay 2008: 3). Strategies described a vision for services which are shaped by and responsive to
children, young people and their families and not designed around professional boundaries (DCSF 2008a: 10). Fitzgerald and Kay concur with Frost’s (2005: 188) assertion that agencies and professionals had been ‘exhorted to initiate multi-agency work with little training or guidance’. It is this gap between the policy directives and the thinking on how interprofessionalism works that needs further exploration.

The recent policy context of interprofessionalism for UK children’s services

The directive to collaborate to improve the lives of children was founded on a vision of their needs and rights being inextricably bound up with the needs of parents and families within a community ecology, as will be discussed later. The Children Act 1989 enshrined the premise that the rights of children and parents needed to be more clearly recognized within the legislative process. The election of a New Labour government in 1997 saw a vision for improved and standardized provision, in particular regarding Early Years services (Clark and Waller 2007).

For now, the only over-arching vision in UK policy for professionals working collaboratively is that of the Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES 2003), although the whole theme is under review by the coalition at the time of writing. This agenda addressed governmental concerns regarding the shortfalls in national child protection processes and was also intended to achieve wider political objectives such as a commitment to eradicating child poverty and improving the well-being of children. The subsequent ECM programme instigated a government-backed drive for developing integrated practice in initiatives such as children’s centres (for Early Years services) or extended schools. Children’s Centres were intended as the hubs for ‘a multi-agency focus’ and extended schools were to be ‘no longer the sole site for, and provider for, learning but instead become a gateway to a network of learning opportunities’ (Cheminais 2006: 1). Key stakeholders within the child protection process ‘greeted the proposals with cautious enthusiasm’ (MacLeod-Brudenell 2004: 342) and many professionals broadly welcomed the multi-agency agenda, appreciating the prospect of taking a more holistic approach to the needs of children (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2007). The ECM programme has been described as the ‘biggest change since the introduction of the NHS’ (Edwards 2004), consisting of four broad themes:

- increasing the focus on supporting families and carers – the most critical influence on children’s lives;
- ensuring necessary intervention takes place before children reach crisis point and protecting children from falling through the net;
- addressing the underlying problems identified in the report into the death of Victoria Climbié – weak accountability and poor integration;
- ensuring that the people working with children are valued, rewarded and trained. (DCSF 2008b)

The Children Act 2004 served to provide the legislative backbone of this ambitious agenda set out in the National Framework document, Every Child Matters: Change for
Children (DfES 2004), outlining a commitment to develop a shared sense of responsibility across agencies responsible for working for children and families. This was intended to improve life chances of children and families through the achievement of five outcomes designed to empower every child to reach their potential:

- be healthy;
- stay safe;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution;
- achieve economic well-being.

The document and an accompanying array of online guidance encapsulate an ambitious attempt to draw together a whole gamut of services and professionals. The intent was to weave a safer and more supportive network of services and its visual conceptualization indicates a consistent dependence on frameworks and toolkits for practice.

**Early Years as the starting point**

Early Years provision can be seen as the initial hub of the interprofessional agenda for children’s services in the UK. For pre-school provision, health visitor intervention for families with young children inter-links with the developing need for child care and nursery education. This necessitated earlier interprofessional collaboration in comparison with the largely edu-centric domain of school-age provision. The advantages to be gained by this natural hybridity have been hard to realize due to the disparate nature of these services. This was due to the inherited philanthropic, private or charitable nature of Early Years provision for young children resulting in divided responsibility between the voluntary and state sectors (Rumbold 1990).

The Ten Year Childcare Strategy: Choice for Parents – The Best Start for Children (HMT 2004) followed the publication of the ECM with a call to standardize and professionalize the Early Years field while also developing flexibility and choice for parents. It can be seen that the direction of efforts to address fragmentation vacillated between objectives of preparing children for school or providing child care for working parents (Pugh and Duffy 2006). Furthermore, it can be said that the issue of where responsibility lies for the care and education of young children has never been fully debated and explored (Nurse 2007).

For the first wave of the government-designated Sure Start children’s centres in 2004, this complex agenda engendered practice settings that could encompass teams for social care, childcare, education, health provision, job centre services, parenting support, family learning and adult education. The range and breadth of the undertaking signify the massive paradigm shift that was being called for – a focus on the children and families rather than on the silos of professional services. For the first few years, the benefits of multi-agency working in children's centres proved hard to verify, due to the complexities in identifying why and how shared outcomes had been achieved (Easen et al. 2000). However, Sure Start guidance cited ‘considerable evidence that demonstrates the benefits of multi-agency working for staff, parents
and most importantly for children and their outcomes’ (DfES 2006: 16) and the National Evaluation of Sure Start report (Melhuish et al. 2008) indicated that children living in a Children’s Centre area exhibited greater independence and improved social behaviour.

However, the possible benefits were to come with considerable challenges and the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children’s Workforce (DfES 2005c) was intended to initiate some shared sense of the abilities that are required for the new agenda. Multi-agency working recommendations for professionals include having the ‘confidence to challenge situations by looking beyond your immediate role and asking considered questions’. Additionally, knowing ‘your role within different group situations and how you contribute to the overall group process, understanding the value of sharing how you approach your role with other professionals’ is also stipulated (DfES 2005c: 19). Anning’s paper ‘Knowing who I am and what I know: developing new versions of professional knowledge in integrated service settings’ (2001) offered welcome insights on these directives. Nevertheless, the recommendations of the Common Core can be seen in hindsight as too little too late as recognized in the 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy: ‘The Common Core is for many professions not on their horizons (the “Uncommon Core”) – to be effective it needs extending to every relevant profession, tailored to fit the inner or outer circle of professions. So, as well as gaps in content, there are gaps in reach’ (Expert Group Member; DCSF 2008a: 31).

The strategy strongly endorsed the belief that, by working together, professionals ‘can make a greater difference for children and young people, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged’. However, the review of the evidence identified a number of problems which indicated that integrated working was not always happening effectively, in the ways that children and young people need it to. These are:

- front-line workers not being clear about what is meant by integrated working, and how it relates to other concepts such as integrated services or early intervention;
- a lack of clear evidence and communication about the circumstances in which integrated working will make the most difference to outcomes, and make the best use of people and resources;
- capacity issues in some parts of the workforce, as well as concerns that professional colleagues in other services or sectors will not play a full role, or do not have the skills or capacity to do so; and
- practical barriers, including how teams are co-located and managed, challenges in rolling out common tools and systems and how workforce development is funded. (DCSF 2008)

While the now-defunct ECM website bristled with toolkits for shaping practice in terms of procedures and forms, there was some advice on working with people. The guidance document Championing Children: A Shared Set of Skills, Knowledge and Behaviours for Those Leading and Managing Integrated Children’s Services (DfES 2005a) addressed behaviours that were intended to facilitate interprofessional working. These recommendations can seem rather trite or superficial in their lack of
specificity, for example ‘managing the team in a way that encourages professionals constantly to seek service improvement and to act on good ideas’ (p. 11). The reader has to ask what this ‘way’ actually looks like as the detail is crucial for those working with new colleagues in new teams or networks. Nevertheless, the theme of Section 5, ‘Working with People’, denotes a crucial aspect of interprofessional working, and for the purposes of this discussion, its heart can be said to be in the right place. It extols behaviours that will produce real ‘collaborative advantage from the inter-agency team’ such as ‘visibly upholding esteem between professions’, nurturing development and involvement for all staff. Two crucial points stand out:

- **supporting individuals** who feel they are faced with contradictions between the demands of their parent organization or profession and those of the team;
- **fostering a learning culture** that encourages informal knowledge sharing and joint learning, so that integration adds further value

(DfES 2005a).

**Boundaries as guidance? Seeing the individuals within structural diagrams**

It is hard to see the processes for supporting individuals and fostering learning cultures within the ECM *Outcomes Framework* (DfES 2005d). Such strategic constructs or schematics were intended to frame and help visualize change. However, without in-depth practical direction or insights, these diagrams became thought of as solutions to very complex interactions between practitioners. Strategic meetings across the country resounded with presentation references to this framework for outcomes. This can be likened to the metaphor of a traveller mistaking the map for the road. Placing practice in a framework provides a convenient structure to represent strategic intent but does it help those practitioners walking the interprofessional road?

Much writing on the field of interprofessionalism in children’s services reveals a structural language that discusses boundaries, cores and inner or outer circles; either of teams for practice or as in conceptions of practice (e.g. the *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge*; DfES 2005c). This engenders curiosity as to whether these act as barriers or facilitators for thinking about practice. The original version of the *Children’s Workforce Strategy* confirmed that the intention was to ‘overcome the restrictive impact of professional and organisational boundaries’ (DfES 2005b). Anning (2001) noted a lack of research conducted into multi-professional working but the acceleration of the ECM agenda called for an exponential rise in thinking about the nature of interprofessional inquiry. The vision for ‘teams’ (McCullogh 2007) was to be a crucial focus as the task of working across professional boundaries required new levels of awareness for ‘increasingly integrated provision and people from a range of different professional and occupational backgrounds’ (DCSF 2008b: 14).

In contrast with the call for training, personal development and guidance to embed the strategic drive in practice, a multiplicity of theory perspectives applicable to different organizational scenarios began to grow (Robinson et al. 2008; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford 2009). Fitzgerald and Kay (2008) classify several layers of working: *multi-agency, intraprofessional within a professional group, interprofes-
sional, joined up, interagency, interdisciplinary and practitioners working in partnership. Likewise, Anning et al. (2006: 6) refer to Frost et al. (2005) in suggesting a ‘hierarchy of terms to characterise a continuum in partnership working’ as ranging from four levels of cooperation, collaboration, coordination and finally integration or merger. Anning et al. proceed to describe team types using Øvretveit’s (1993) typology for multi-disciplinary teams. These are described as: ‘fully managed’, ‘coordinated’, ‘core and extended’, ‘joint accountability’ and the ‘network association’ (Anning et al. 2006: 27). While this process of naming strata is helpful for those studying this emerging field, professionals struggling to practise within these new confines may need more than a typological approach. Robinson et al. (2008) define their review of integrated services research through criteria of structures, processes and the reach of partnerships. Figure 1.1 shows a model for a children’s trust based on DfES (2005a).

The personal dimensions within these layers, systems, structures and processes are difficult to discern. Anning et al. (2006) draw upon Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of child development. This model presents a hierarchical construct which nests systems at ‘micro’, ‘meso’, ‘exo’ and ‘macro’ levels. The purpose of this was to indicate the external layers of influence upon a setting at a micro-level which in turn influence the child within the practice-centre. Anning et al. then relate this structure to the NESS (National Evaluation of Sure Start) (Belsky et al. 2007: 125) evaluation model as it reflects ‘the importance of acknowledging the interrelated nature of influences on the child and family well being and development’.

The fact that different professionals hold different views on child development is certainly useful when considering their interactions, but it also problematizes the

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**Figure 1.1** ‘Onion diagram’: model of a children’s trust
*Source: DfES (2005a).*
visualization of the child and family at the centre of nested circles. It was recognized
that ‘professionals could be expected to construct “their” service users within
separate and perhaps, competing discourses’ and that these ‘become central to the
ways professionals work together – or indeed fail to do so’ (Anning et al. 2006: 51).
Anning (2005: 19) had previously noted that ‘policy had shifted to the concept of
welfare and attainments of the child being nested within the social context of family
and community’. This mode of presentation (the ‘nested’ centrality of child and
family) in interprofessional working appears to have become nationally attractive.
While it visually and ideally places the child within a comforting ring of support
networks, it is debatable as to whether it is borne out in actual practice.

This issue can be seen in the model for Children’s Trusts commonly termed as
the inter-agency ‘onion’ (see Figure 1.1). While this enables a convenient vision of the
levels of interaction necessary for children and families, its simplification denies the
complexity and bureaucracy of the undertaking. This depiction could be seen as a
kind of diagrammatic rhetoric that presented an image of the centrality of child and
family in the system to councillors, planners and strategists. Many families (and those
that worked with them) would not agree that their needs were at the core of holistic
service provision. Similar visual designs can be seen as manifestations of the classic
gap between what Argyris and Schön (1976) describe as ‘espoused theory’ and
‘theory in action’ as they offer no real exploration of what really needed to be en-
acted, in other words, the interaction between professionals practising in the circles.

When discussing the need for managerial support in times of change ‘policy
changes at the outer, macro level of systems can seem oppressive to those struggling
to implement them at the micro-level of their workplaces . . . practitioners need
support at critical times . . . to face up to and manage change’ (Anning and Edwards
who bemoans the approach of some local authorities in this respect: ‘Sadly most local
authorities will begin with structures and then spend several years trying to fit the
children, the evidence about need, the services and the ideas about outcomes into
those structures. And in the worst case scenarios thinking it will start and end with
structures.’

Worsley (2007: 147) agrees that Lumsden (2005) rightly argues ‘that an attrac-
tive ideology proposed by policy makers can disguise the underlying restrictive
barriers, so that practitioners who have the responsibility of translating policy into
practice may do little because they lack understanding’. She then confirms that the
‘rhetoric of multi-disciplinary work and joined up thinking . . . has re-conceptualised
the role of Early Years practitioners’ but confirmed ‘there needs to be time for the
in hand as being one where practitioners need to be working more fluidly and fluently
across these barriers, layers or boundaries. Also mentioned is the fact that there are
several issues for joining professional cultures that include ‘professional multi-
ingualism, fluid trusting interprofessional working, the capacity to make their expert-
ise explicit, the negotiation of broad local alliances and the co-construction of
 provision with service users’ (Edwards 2004: 5). She concludes that the necessary
learning will take time and for many practitioners it meant learning ‘on the job’,
through interactions.
Learning through interactions

Establishing a shared learning culture between professionals is vital for ensuring practitioners understand each other enough to work collaboratively. Before concluding that governance structures and multi-agency team checklists will move multi-professional practice forward, Anning et al. (2006) make valuable reference to theories about organizational learning and development. Their discussion offers an insightful account of various types of ‘multi-professional’ teams and how their ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991) develop. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger’s (1999) ‘communities of practice’ and Engeström’s (1999) ‘knotworking’ activity theories play essential parts in their theoretical framework.

Lave and Wenger (1991) used the phrase ‘community of practice’ to define learning through collaboration in everyday life. Wenger went on to define this further for organizational development in 1999. The concept (primarily focused on commercial practice) has resonance with thinking on learning as socially constructed through participation to negotiate and co-construct new forms of knowledge (e.g. Bandura 2001). Wenger’s thinking is particularly useful for the interprofessional agenda as it offers the notion that practitioners may be constructing new professional identities in their interactions. Whalley (2001) calls for the fostering of ‘learning communities’ for the development of Early Years teams and this ‘educational’ arena can be used as a focal hub for practice development.

Some groups of professionals may not work or see themselves as practising in a community as such. They may only come together or interact intermittently over certain key shared tasks. In contrast to Wenger, Engestrom et al. (1999) focus less on the community continuum where progress is steadily realized through interactions and take a view of interprofessional collaboration that focuses on processes of constant change. This is termed ‘knotworking’ where the idea of teamwork concentrates on situation-specific, object-orientated, distributed activities (Anning et al. 2006) rather than on the specific professionals involved. ‘The unstable knot itself needs to be made focus of the analysis’ (Engestrom et al. 1999: 347). Engestrom’s more recent work involves experiments carried out in what are described as ‘boundary crossing laboratories’ that are established in settings to study these knots. His techniques involved getting practitioners to ‘bring to the surface contradictions between their previous ways of working and proposed new ways of working within teams’. Anning et al. (2006: 84–5) conclude with several points that include:

- much knowledge in the workplace remains tacit, but professionals working in multi-agency teams are required to make it explicit for their colleagues;
- there are two types of knowledge – codified and personal – and professionals need to be trained to deploy both in the workplace;
- professionals generate theories about their work through daily situated experiences of and reflection on delivering services;
- there may be a tension between the desire to reach consensus (as in a community of practice model) and to confront conflict (as in a knotworking model).
There is a need to surface tacit knowledge because every discipline has its own, distinctive knowledge base (Polanyi and Sen 2009), crucial for negotiation to take place on what new shared knowledge can be constructed. This process could be one of the ways that interprofessionalism develops; its enactment is a way of being interprofessional. The idea of revealing the hidden indicates that practitioners need to reflect on what goes on underneath the immediate veneer of recorded professional interactions. As an alternative visual construct, Schratz and Walker’s (1995) use of the Freudian iceberg theory of the human mind is helpful in its indication that much more than meets the eye occurs beneath the visible surface of human interactions.

**Thinking about being interprofessional**

Professionals learn about their practice within the traditional routes of their own particular silos but then need to learn to work together upon qualification. The Venn diagram (Figure 1.2) indicates a version of the traditional tripartite of provision in UK Children’s Services, where the overlap areas indicate areas for collaboration. The importance of the voluntary and independent sectors (especially in early years) complicates this picture, as does the realization that each sector contains many separate professional disciplines. Furthermore, there is also the essential need to interact effectively with parents and communities with an understanding of the sensitivities involved. Practitioner guidance and reflection need to be focused within the zones of interaction between all these groups, professions or disciplines. Concern for how learning from interaction develops can be said to be the lynchpin for developing interprofessional work.

While Figure 1.2 presents an initially useful visualization, reflection needs to move away from an approach based on diagrams and structure-based constructs to explain the complex lived experience of interactions. Simplifying and categorizing practice can serve as a help and a hindrance to those struggling to work out what is really going on when professional relationships do not work well. Perhaps thinking on interprofessionalism needs to examine small details of the world as it actually is rather than referring to overviews or typologies that impose restrictive strategic visions.

![Figure 1.2 Some possible zones of interaction: an over-simplified version of the task](image-url)
Ways of seeing the interprofessional arena may not directly relate to ways of being interprofessional.

A focus on what it is like being interprofessional offers an alternative viewpoint on practice. This is the approach of ontological inquiry that explores experiences of those involved with a phenomenon (e.g. interprofessionalism). Heidegger (1927) described ontological inquiry as exploration of being itself. He saw this as opposite to an external approach concerned with ‘ontic’ knowledge which he defined as ways of quantifying, measuring and categorizing such as is presented by a framework for practice approach. An ontological approach could enable deeper insight into what it is like to ‘be’ a professional striving to work with other professionals, uncovering authentic accounts of interprofessional interaction.

An inquiry into being interprofessional will address how we come to think of ourselves or our professional identities as interprofessional. Anning et al. (2006: 11) assert that Wenger’s work can be ‘utilised to make the point that experienced professionals in multi-agency teams will have undergone different historic processes of both self-determination and social determination of their professional identity’. Ibarra (1999) discusses ‘provisional selves’ as being created during the adaptive techniques that professionals employ during transition to new roles. This discourse of identity links to an ontological approach in attempting to explore what it is like to ‘be’ a professional working with other professionals. If we are to accept the convenient visualization of the interprofessional agenda as an onion, its layers need to be more radically peeled to reveal what lies beneath – within the core. Heidegger’s view of ‘ontic’ categorizing and quantifying resonates with Wenger’s view of attempts to design learning or impose a framework on it:

Learning cannot be designed. Ultimately, it belongs to the realm of experience and practice. It follows the negotiation of meaning; it moves on its own terms. It slips through the cracks; it creates its own cracks. Learning happens, design or no design . . . By ‘design’ I mean a systematic, planned, and reflexive colonization of time and space in the service of an undertaking.

(Wenger 1999: 225–6)

So the drive to design, impose systems upon and quantify processes can lead to restrictive views of practice. It could even lead to painfully inhuman containers for those practising within so that professionals feel unnecessarily bounded by the overarching frameworks and standardization. As politicians and policymakers framed the process of collaboration to serve the political agenda, there was a drive to evaluate, categorize and benchmark real improvements for children and families. This way of rationalizing the world of practice extended to the drive for outcomes (DfES 2005d) for children and families. The evaluation of the Sure Start programme (Melhuish et al. 2008) rightly sought to define quantifiable ‘outcomes’ – real improvements in the lives of children and families. However, those working within this regulatory ‘gaze’ (Osgood 2006) or ‘framework’ (Miller 2008) found themselves driven in new directions: to share ‘outcomes’ with other professional disciplines in an increasingly complex environment that was fraught with uncertainty (Urban 2008). This approach led to systematizing and recording practice to the extent that activity under each
category needed to be formally recorded to prove that it had happened, ironically reducing the time for further activity.

**Summary, conclusion and reflection points**

Habermas (1981) critiqued what he saw as a biased modernization process led by the powers of economic and administrative rationalization. He highlighted a growing tendency of intervention by formal systems into the everyday sphere and linked this to the growth of the welfare state and corporate capitalism, describing a generalizing logic of efficiency and control. It could be that the ECM inter-agency onion enabled a sense of control while it could well have had little to do with actual practice, offering a false certainty around the undertaking. The way forward could be to ask practitioners to describe their experiences and then link these (in collaboration with the practitioners) to new ways of working towards being an interprofessional in very uncertain times.

It is worth considering Evans's (2008: 34) thinking on what needs to be done to reshape the professional identities in services for children and families:

> the best chance initiators have of attaining what they perceive as attitudinal development among professional groups is to recognise and incorporate into their required changes to a specific professionalism consideration of its individual-professionality-determined heterogeneity. This may involve flexibility and a degree of compromise, where expectations of uniformity and standardisation give way to acceptance that a broad working consensus may be the best that may realistically be hoped for.

Jarvis and Trodd (2008) stress the importance of exploring professional identity in learning for new professional teams. They describe techniques to use imagination as a lens for ‘other ways of seeing’ either other professionals or children. They cite Andrews’ (2007: 489) apt statement on research: ‘cross-cultural narrative research is predicated on narrative imagination . . . If we wish to access the frameworks of meaning for others, we must be willing and able to imagine a world other than the one we know’. This will involve engagement at a deep level, using research to uncover meaning in everyday experiences of professionals and families. This awareness will enable the growth of resilience in uncertain times, a personal capacity to reflect on the worth of our (collective) actions.

The essential element to provide resilience, in what will continue to be trying times for those working in children’s services, is **reflective practice** to develop awareness, such as championed by Schon (1983), Dewey (1933/1997) and Argyris and Schon (1976). In the challenging contemporary climate for public services, interprofessionals need to be encouraged by the collaborations they find themselves undertaking for children and families. Finding out more about how we experience and learn about these interactions will be the crucial focus of further research for interprofessionalism. Engaging more deeply with stories and accounts from practitioners and families could help develop future policy and practice away from mechanistic frameworks. It could help create clearer notions of processes for attitudinal development of professionals and educators in the field, inspiring them to work creatively.
REFLEXIVITY CHECK-IN POINT

Do any of the following affect you personally or professionally?
Potential ‘interprofessionals’ may care to consider the following issues and themes that will be discussed further in this publication:

- learning cultures and how you develop them (e.g. learning communities and communities of practice);
- how you and colleagues address competing notions of professional identity;
- how imagination can be utilized to help practitioners envisage each other’s roles;
- how you and colleagues work in uncertainty – is there a set of values and attitudes that can help?
- the emergence of interprofessionalism as a field or discipline – of thought and practice?

References


