

# Effective Multi-Agency Partnerships

Putting Every Child Matters into Practice



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electronic  
resources

Rita Cheminais



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Matters into Practice

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Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore • Washington DC

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# About the author

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# Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my late mother, Joan Cheminais, who during the last months of her life continued to ask me about the progress of my writing. She never failed to support, encourage and inspire me throughout my working career. Life will never be the same without her, and whatever the future may bring, I am truly indebted to my mother for giving me the benefit of her infinite wisdom over the many happy years we spent together.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank Jude Bowen, Senior Commissioning Editor and Amy Jarrold, Editorial Assistant at Sage Publications, for their support, advice and guidance in making my initial book proposal become a reality.

# Introduction

This book is for all those senior leaders and managers, teaching and support staff, including multi-agency front-line practitioners from health, social care, education and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organizations, working in partnership within a range of educational settings and children's centres, to improve the Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people. The key message of this book is that multi-agency partnership working will not be effective unless it is based on trust and mutual respect between each children's workforce practitioner, who is clear about their role and the value they add in improving children's well-being.

'Partnership' as a term means different things to different people, working in different contexts. In relation to multi-agency partnership working it is about different services joining together in order to prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

Of all the different professional working partnerships in existence, multi-agency partnership working is the most complex and challenging process to manage and co-ordinate, within an educational setting, as evident in this comment by a full service extended schools (FSES) co-ordinator: 'It's hard work. It is constantly talking, emailing, communicating with them, being positive, keeping them involved, making sure they're happy, that they've got their office space, and their time slot. It's time consuming' (CfBT, 2007: 93).

The dynamics and outcomes of multi-agency partnerships can be unpredictable, unique and sometimes unknown, due to them being organic and continually evolving. Educational organizations from early years settings, Children's Centres, mainstream schools, academies, special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs), through to further education (FE) and sixth form colleges have numerous partnerships with external agencies, that is, anything from 50 to 150 different partnerships in a full service extended school.

Implementing effective multi-agency collaborative partnership working in any setting, as an aspect of the Every Child Matters Change for Children initiative, takes considerable time, and is not without its problems in removing cross-service barriers and redrawing boundaries. The practicalities of adopting a multi-agency approach can be problematic initially, as illustrated by this Sure Start project manager's comment:

The availability of teaching staff is often different to the availability of social services staff, which is often different to the availability of health staff because of the demands that these professions have at different times of the day. It's about breaking down the behaviours that we have known for a long time. (Coleman, 2006: 27)

On a more optimistic note about multi-agency working, a behaviour support worker commented: 'The multi-agency approach means that we can look more holistically at the problem and talk as a team holistically about the problem ...' (DfES, 2005: 55).



A director of a children's centre in Thanet also remarked: 'When you can hear a community worker, play worker and health visitor discussing plans for a child – no hours on the phone or reams of paperwork – you think, "Yes", this is the model of practice for the 21st century' (Sure Start, 2006: 13).

This book will enable busy practising, and aspiring, practitioners from education, health, social care, voluntary and community organizations to adopt a solution focused approach to multi-agency partnership working in order to:

- understand and value the different contributions each agency brings
- know how best to work collaboratively together
- know how to evaluate the impact of interventions and partnership working in relation to improving the Every Child Matters outcomes.

There are a number of detailed guidance documents and tool kits available on multi-agency partnership working, which can be downloaded from the government's Every Child Matters website ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)).

This book will appeal to practising and aspiring front-line children's workforce practitioners as it brings together in one concise volume a wealth of information and good practice, and presents this in a no nonsense, at-a-glance, user-friendly format, which makes sense of multi-agency partnership working in an educational setting.

What matters to every children's workforce practitioner is knowing, through telling evidence, that their collaborative support and interventions really do make a difference to the lives and well-being of children and young people. Enjoy using this practical resource to guide and inform your collaborative working practice, in securing better Every Child Matters outcomes.

# How to use this book

The Every Child Matters change for children initiative is a huge agenda, and is still evolving, after it was first introduced by the government in its Green Paper *Every Child Matters* in September 2003. There is an overwhelming amount of information about Every Child Matters, with 600 documents available on the government's website. This book aims to demystify inter-professional working by helping all those practising and aspiring children's workforce practitioners involved in removing barriers to learning and improving children's well-being, to understand the principles, practice and expected outcomes from effective joined-up collaborative multi-agency partnership working, within a range of educational settings and children's centres.

The book considers the developments in multi-agency partnership working, providing a brief overview of the origin, concept and principles in Chapter 1. It looks at the benefits and challenges of multi-agency partnership working in an educational setting in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on the practicalities of operating and managing productive multi-agency working, and offers useful strategies for sustaining successful partnerships. Chapter 4 takes a closer look at the Team Around the Child aspect of Every Child Matters, and the implications for settings. The features of good practice in multi-agency partnership working is covered in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides advice and offers useful tools for evaluating the impact and outcomes of multi-agency provision and partnership working.

The format for each chapter is similar:

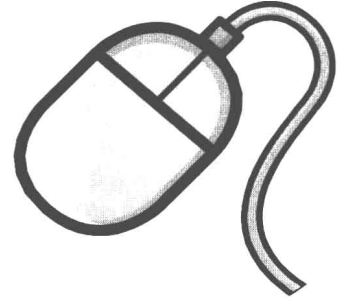
- The main points of the chapter are highlighted at the beginning.
- A checklist of practical tips for best practice is provided.
- Exemplar resources and materials for inter-professional development work are included.
- Signposting to further information, resources and websites are offered.
- Points to remember at the end of the chapter are provided as prompts.
- Further activities provide questions for reflection and future inter-professional multi-agency development work, which are appropriate for those who are trainee and practising children's workforce practitioners.

All chapters include photocopiable resources, which provide a useful starting point for inter-professional discussion and further development work. These resources can be customized and adapted to suit the context of the educational setting, where multi-agency practitioners are working in partnership.

I hope the book will give all those practising and aspiring children's workforce practitioners involved in improving children and young people's Every Child Matters well-being outcomes the confidence to understand the complexities of multi-agency partnership working, by enabling them to make informed choices about the best collaborative approaches to adopt in the particular educational setting they are working in.

# Downloadable materials

Downloadable materials for this book can be found at [www.sagepub.co.uk/cheminais](http://www.sagepub.co.uk/cheminais) for use in your setting. For a full list please see below.



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Table 1.3 Joint inter-professional visioning and development activity

Table 1.4 Common core of skills and knowledge for multi-agency working

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# Key for icons

Chapter objectives



Further activities



Further information



Photocopiables



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# 1

## The Origin, Concept and Principles of Multi-Agency Partnership Working

This chapter explains:

- Where multi-agency partnership working originated from
- The current terminology relating to multi-agency partnership working
- The key principles of effective multi-agency partnership working in educational settings and children's centres
- The skills and knowledge required by practitioners in the children's workforce for multi-agency working



This chapter is useful to those who work directly with children/young people.

### The origin of multi-agency partnership working

Multi-agency partnership working is not a new development. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, health and social services were working together to endeavour to reduce poverty in England. It wasn't really until the 1980s, during the Thatcher government years, that the foundations of multi-agency partnership working were laid. The Children Act 1989 established the statutory requirement for inter-agency collaboration and joint working in relation to children and young people, requiring professionals to 'work together better'.

The 1990s saw the development of multilateral partnerships where public, private and voluntary sector organizations joined together to tackle cross-cutting issues, such as social exclusion, community safety and neighbourhood regeneration. Partnership overload and fatigue began to occur, resulting in the need for practitioners from multi-agencies to begin to reflect upon where and when the partnership 'bandwagon' should stop.

The last two decades have seen several government-funded initiatives aimed at promoting integrated services and more co-ordinated partnership working. For example, Sure Start, Children's Fund, Youth Offending Teams, BEST and Connexions, have all promoted multi-agency working.

Despite the introduction of government legislation and initiatives during this time to promote closer multi-agency partnership working, there existed:

- a lack of information sharing across agencies and services
- duplicated assessments to identify needs and subsequent provision
- poorly co-ordinated integrated activities across agencies
- too much 'buck passing' and referring on of clients between agencies
- a lack of continuity and inconsistent levels of service provision
- unclear accountability.

As part of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003), the Children Act 2004 strengthened the requirement for agencies to work together more closely in multidisciplinary teams in order to improve the five Every Child Matters well-being outcomes for children and young people. This important piece of legislation responded to the Lord Laming inquiry into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, which was the result of poor co-ordination and the failure of inter-agency communication in sharing information across agencies.

In relation to multi-agency partnership working, the Children Act 2004 required local authorities (LAs) partnership arrangements, via Children's Trusts to:

- identify the needs, circumstances and aspirations of children and young people
- agree the contribution each agency will make to meeting the Every Child Matters outcomes
- improve information sharing between agencies
- oversee arrangements for agencies to work collaboratively in the commissioning, delivery and integration of services.

In terms of schools' engagement with multi-agency partnership working, it was largely community schools, full service extended schools, and special schools that had well-established practice. In mainstream schools it was variable, according to the context and complexity of the needs of their pupil populations, for example, looked after children (LAC), special educational needs/learning difficulties and disabilities (SEN/LDD) and other vulnerable 'at risk' groups. The government's recent extended school and children's centre initiative which builds on this existing good practice, are considered to make a significant contribution in responding to the Every Child Matters agenda, by acting as service 'hubs' for the local community: 'An extended school is a school that recognises that it cannot work alone in helping children and young people to achieve their potential, and therefore decides to work in partnership with other agencies that have an interest in outcomes for children and young people, and with the local community' (Piper, 2005: 2).



The government acknowledged the value of multi-agency partnership working with extended schools to address children and young people's problems: 'Having key professionals such as health workers, psychologists and youth workers based on school sites and working closely alongside teachers means that children's problems can be addressed more effectively, with less disruption to their learning' (DfES, 2002: 4).

Extended schools and children's centres enable professional boundaries to be redrawn through the adoption of greater interdependence between teachers and multi-agency front-line workers, where mutual respect, trust and collaborative team effort become regular practice.

One extended school co-ordinator commented: 'Without ECM, there is little that the services would have in common. Everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet and ECM has broadened their outlook. If it wasn't for the agenda it would have been a real struggle' (Wilkin et al., 2008: 9).

## Children's centres

Sure Start children's centres are multi-purpose centres that bring together childcare, early education, health, employment and support services for pre-school children and families. Children's centres aim to help children, and particularly disadvantaged children, to improve their life chances through better educational achievement and healthy living, and to support families and help parents to return to work or find better employment opportunities. Public, private and voluntary providers work together in a children's centre. The services they provide include:

- integrated early education and childcare, available 10 hours a day, five days a week, and 48 weeks a year
- baby weighing and health visitors
- health checks
- links to Jobcentre Plus
- crèche
- antenatal and post-natal services
- speech and language development
- training sessions
- support networks for childminders
- play sessions
- baby massage