

Multidisciplinary Approach in the Field of Helping Professions

Ana Eslava Lahoz

*Spanish student from the University of Navarra, currently studying in Jan Amos Komensky university in Prague.
Student of Early Childhood Education and Pedagogy.*

Abstract: The present article discusses the importance of working in an interdisciplinary way in the context of helping professions. In particular, the main roles of the following professionals will be described: social worker, psychologist, special pedagogue and counsellor. The relationship between the main functions of the above-mentioned professionals will be analysed to justify the importance of multidisciplinary team work for the achievement of the objectives envisaged.

The method followed for the realization of this paper is based on the approach of an intervention situation in the context of the mentioned helping professions. From there, the roles of each professional will be analysed, reflecting on the importance of working in a multidisciplinary way. Therefore, advantages and disadvantages of the mentioned kind of work will be exposed in order to find the barriers to be faced and how to make the most of the multidisciplinary approach. In this point the importance of develop a wide range of skills will be mentioned.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, multidisciplinary is the main topic that will be examined in relation with the context of helping professions. It is a well-known fact that working as a team has a huge impact in getting the best out of each group member, and so that this approach should be taken into account when planning an actuation in the field of helping professions. Nevertheless, there are not only advantages but also disadvantages or obstacles related to multidisciplinary work that have to be taken into consideration in order to reduce the negative effects.

In the context of helping professions, social work, counselling, psychology and special pedagogy will be analysed relying on the main characteristic functions and duties each professional has. Upon the description and analysis of each profession individually, a connection between all of them will be done regarding the importance of working in a network, having shared goals that allows professionals to coordinate their efforts and work together.

The positive influence of multidisciplinary approach will be analysed in two different contexts; first of all, related to undergraduate education of a special pedagogue and afterwards, in the specific labour context of helping professions.

Keywords: Multidisciplinary, helping professions, social work, counselling, psychology, special pedagogy.

II. THEORETICAL PART

As mentioned, the key aspect to be addressed in this essay is the concept of multidisciplinary, and therefore I would like to start setting a theoretical framework on the meaning of this term and the implications this approach involve.

First of all, multidisciplinary is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “*combining or involving several academic disciplines or professional specializations in an approach to a topic or problem*”. Indeed, a multidisciplinary approach involves drawing appropriately from multiple disciplines to redefine problems outside of normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations (definition extracted from www.definitions.net).

Once the definition of this concept has been given, it will be necessary to make a difference between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity in order to clarify both concepts. While, **multidisciplinary** draws on knowledge from different disciplines but stays within their boundaries, **interdisciplinarity** analyses, synthesizes and harmonizes links between disciplines into a coordinated and coherent whole.¹

Broadly speaking, a multidisciplinary team approach brings professionals with different skills and expertise together to solve a problem. Particularly in social and helping professions this approach becomes especially important in order to ensure the best possible outcome for the person being helped. By working as a multidisciplinary team, each professional brings a unique lens, specialization and perspective and by combining all the knowledge and expertise, the most of the helping situation can be made.

In the present essay, the concept of multidisciplinary will be exposed in relation with the system of helping professions, defined as a professional interaction between a helping expert and a client, initiated to nurture the growth of, or address the problems of a person’s physical, psychological, intellectual or emotional constitution, including medicine, nursing, psychotherapy, psychological counselling, social work, education or coaching.

In fact, helping professions deal with “the provision of human and social services”, being constituted in and through the particular verbal and non-verbal interaction that transpires between the participants.² Professionals working in the field of helping professions base their professional activity on working together with different multidisciplinary teams, which ones follow certain phases/ steps for their constitution.

¹ Sanganyado, Edmond. (2017). Re: What is the difference between interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research

² Graf, E.-A., Sator, M., & Spranz-Fogasy, T. (2014). Discourses of helping professions Concepts and contextualization. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83653143.pdf>

According to new research, in term of starting multidisciplinary team is important to take several steps. The first step is assigning the purpose of the team. Further is important to write a protocol, a document where is described the purpose of the team. There should be present the common values, believes, and rules which are respected by every member. Therefore, meeting the goals should in accordance with this protocol. Finally, the last step is the decision about who and when is contributing to the cooperation(Stàrek, 2021).

Specially, in the field of education and pedagogy, the analysis will be focused on the multidisciplinary team set up by the following helping professions: social work, counselling, psychology and special pedagogy. The analysis of those ones will be done bearing in mind the multidisciplinary working approach that just have been mentioned.

To explain briefly the main aspects of each profession it will be exposed in the following paragraphs the key principles that define the functions, duties and competences each helping profession has.

Chapter 1: Social work

Firstly, social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline founded on theories of social work, social science, and humanities. This discipline focuses on the person within their environment and recognizes the importance of family, community, culture, legal, social, and economic influences that impact the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities.

The main objective of social work is engaged people and communities to address life challenges and traumatic events, to create change, and build resiliency. Social work also collaborates with other professionals, communities, and organizations to provide services, improve conditions, and create opportunities for growth, recovery, and personal development.

A special mention has to be done in relation to the main functions of a social worker, which ones vary depending on the settings in which they work. Social workers provide services as members of a multidisciplinary team or on a one-to-one basis with the client.

The main contexts in which they performed their duties are the following ones:

- When employed by child welfare agencies, these professionals have the purpose of recruiting foster parents or supervise the placement of children in protective care.
- In the school environment, they help students, parents and teachers to deal with educational problems.
- In health and community services centres, social workers are involved in the provision of counselling to individuals or families and in providing services to seniors.
- In the correctional context, their duties involve being part of a team concerned with the social rehabilitation of young or adult offenders.

Chapter 2: Counselling

In a broad sense, the definition of counselling refers to guidance or advice provided to help someone resolve difficulties or decide issues. The core of this profession lies to the providence of guidance to help people deal life's challenges. Counselling professionals has the duty to empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.

Specially in the educational field counselling takes an important place due to the fact that this discipline makes them more aware about their choices and goals, helping children and students in general to understand themselves better. *“The foremost objective of counselling is to bring about a voluntary transformation in the student's life. “*

People known as counsellors or therapists, carry out the counselling process. There are various types of counsellors depending on their field of specialization, this section will focus on counselling in the educational field. The main functions and competences to be pointed out are the following ones:

- Counsellor should help the client, in this case the students, to make their own decisions, providing for this purpose various types of information and tools so that the counselee could get insight to make a decision.
- These professionals encourage learners' academic, communal, emotional as well as personal growth. Helping them to understand themselves and their wants, resolve their complications, make accurate choices, improving their capabilities and skills.
- It is also significant in this context consultation with parents. Teachers, counsellors as well as parents, all work together to generate a safe and helpful environment for learners in and out of the school.

Chapter 3: Psychology

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behaviour. Psychologists are actively involved in studying and understanding mental processes, brain functions, and behaviour. The field of psychology is considered a "Hub Science" with strong connections to the medical sciences, social sciences, and education (Boyack, Klavans, & Borner, 2005).³

Specifically, I would like to mention educational psychology which involves the study of how people learn, including teaching methods, instructional processes, and individual differences in learning. This branch of psychology involves not only the learning process of early childhood and adolescence but it also includes the social, emotional, and cognitive processes that are involved in learning.

The educational psychologist accomplishes a significant assessment in the educational process that is sometimes forgotten. The duties and competences to be pointed out are:

- Is a specialist who has the theoretical and practical knowledge to solve educational problems that implicate both teachers and students, due to the fact that has commands of the cognitive, social and psychological development of the child's evolutionary stage.
- These professionals play an important role in the task of designing educational programmes, strengthening student's learning tools and promoting educational quality, among others functions.
- Carry out investigations in order to figure it out the knowledge and information necessary to effectively teach diverse groups of learners and to present a process by which this knowledge can be effectively implemented in the classroom.

³ The Ohio State University. (n.d.). What is psychology? Department of Psychology. Retrieved November 5, 2021, from <https://psychology.osu.edu/about/what-psychology>.

Chapter 4: Special education/pedagogy

Last but not least, it will be explained the special pedagogue professional that is closely connected to special education teachers. In a broad term, special education or special needs education is the education of students with special needs in a way that addresses the student's individual differences and needs.

Particularly, special education teachers work with students who have learning, mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. They adapt general education lessons and teach various subjects to students with mild to moderate disabilities. They also teach basic skills to students with severe disabilities⁴.

The main duty to be done by special education teachers is gathering information about a student in order both to identify the strengths of the student, and to decide what special educational support the student may need. From this point, it will be possible to programme educational programs taking into account not only the weakness and working areas but also the strengths and student's interest.

Additionally, these professionals have three core responsibilities to be accomplished. The first duty is to provide alternative methods of assessment for students with disabilities; the second is to arrange a learning environment that is as normal or as "least restrictive" as possible; and the third is to participate in creating individual educational plans for students with disabilities.⁵

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics. (2021, September 8). Special Education Teachers: Occupational Outlook Handbook. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/special-education-teachers.htm>

⁵ Sutton, K. S. A. R. (n.d.). Responsibilities of teachers for students with disabilities | Educational Psychology. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/educationalpsychology/chapter/responsibilities-of-teachers-for-students-with-disabilities/>

III. ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT

Undergraduate education of special pedagogues will be the first topic to be addressed in the present section. When it comes to academic training, the concept of multidisciplinary approach applied to the educational curriculum allows to have a single topic studied from the view of more than one discipline.

Having a multidisciplinary team of teachers provides the special pedagogy student the opportunity to integrate their training into a comprehensive unit instead of having to struggle to make significant connections between unconnected parts of the different subjects. I hardly believe that having professors from different departments and specialist in distinct professional fields, empower the student to figure it out correlations across subject that will lead up to significant learnings really useful for their professional future.

In fact, I would like to highlight the main advantages that having a multidisciplinary curriculum involves. First of all, it allows a holistic understanding and a real-world approach to be applied to theoretical content. Besides, collaboration skills will be developed by noticing the kind of team work teachers made and the type of collaborative works/tasks they propose.

All in all, students would benefit from this learning standpoint by being able to achieve multidisciplinary knowledge; besides not only students would take advantage, academics will also benefit from the mentioned approach, due to the wide variety of experiences, researches, theories, ways of work, etc they may share within the group of interdisciplinary professionals. So that, a learning community would be built strengthening the collaborative dimension of education.

The concept of multidisciplinary will also be analysed in the professional field, in particular of the helping professions. It has to be noticed that if college students, and in this concrete case those in helping careers, have a multidisciplinary teachers team it would have a positive backwash in their future job performance, especially in the way they will collaborate with other professionals in order to achieve successful results.

In earlier paragraphs four helping professions have been explained, detailing the core functions, competences and duties that defined those labour fields (social work, counselling, psychology and special education/pedagogy). In the present section I would like to seek and reflect about significant connection between those professions in order to explain the relevance of them working as a team.

When having an educational or a support problem to deal with, the field of social work and its practitioners give special importance to family, community, legal, social and economic influences in a person's life. For that reason, a social worker provides the environmental vision to the educational problem, focusing on the human dimension.

It should be taken into account that these professionals often collaborate with others professionals, with social communities and with various organizations with the purpose of engaging people to face life challenges, to create change in their lives and to achieve personal development.

Moving to the field of counselling, in the context of an educational/helping situations, its practitioners provide guidance to help people deal with life's challenges. Rather than social workers, a counsellor helps people more individually, helping them to make their own decisions by providing the necessary tools and information that enable them to make a voluntary change in their lives. Nevertheless, this professional field needs to gather information about the counsellee's environment in order to plan a personal counselling programme.

It is a well-known fact that a wide range of researches and investigations should be carried out in order to find out new data, information, innovative theories, etc. Psychology is the field that brings the necessary data and psychological theories to improve the learning and helping process. Besides, psychology can explain why people act the way they do what can be used to understand and interpret human's behaviour in the context of the helping situation.

With regard to the field of special pedagogy or especial education, it is a scope specially focused on special educational needs. For that task to be done, professionals need all the information, psychology theories, counselling tools, details about how the environment influence in student's life, etc. All the sought data will be used to create individualized education plans in which the educational and development goals have been set.

Analysing all the information above, a wide range of significative connections could be done between helping professions what justifies the need of working as a multidisciplinary team. However, it has to be taken into account the barriers that could hold up this kind of work. Specially I would like to highlight a poor professional relationships and lack of trust and confidence in the abilities of other professionals.

In order to face the mentioned barriers, a literature review was undertaken to explore some of the facilitators to achieve an effective multidisciplinary team working. In the framework of this subject, I would like to mention the importance of develop skills that would facilitate this group work, whereas: effective and open communication, active listening, respect, cooperating, recognize the worth of other professional's contribution and shared decision- making.

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is common knowledge that human beings are a social species and therefore have a fundamental need to relate. The fact of being social by nature involves a cooperative dimension in all kinds of human actuation. Taking this affirmation into account, the importance of multidisciplinary make sense as a crucial way of organizing a team work situation.

Specially in the field of helping professions, the situations these professionals have to deal with request complementary backgrounds and skills in order to plan and evaluate "patient" care. An interconnected work approach based on the concept of multidisciplinary can unify the specific knowledge each professional can bring, turning into a working network.

As far as I am concerned, the multidisciplinary approach is a way of improving the effectiveness of the helping professions. When working as a team, all the professionals involve in the project share goals and objectives aimed at the personal development of the person to be helped. So that, all the professionals should have as an ultimate goal the well-being of the "patient", combining their knowledge and specific skills to achieve it. In order to accomplish this task an interdependent collaboration, open communication and shared decision-making should be carried out.

However, it is necessary to add that a previous planning and organization must be carried out in order for multidisciplinary team work achieve the proposed goals. In this way, each professional will know his or her role in the group, identifying the functions that each of them will fulfil. Furthermore, weekly meetings should be held to share progress, modify objectives, if necessary, share impressions and feedback. I consider that a clear and effective communication process is crucial.

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