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Please cite this paper as:

Testa, D. (2012). *Teachers and cross-disciplinary collaboration: the challenges*. Refereed paper presented at 'Going for gold! Reshaping teacher education for the future', the annual conference of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA), Adelaide, 1–4 July.

Published by: Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA)

Available via stable URL: https://atea.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2012_testa.pdf

Review status: Refereed—abstract and full paper blind peer-reviewed

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TITLE: TEACHERS AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION: THE CHALLENGES

AUTHOR: Dr. Doris testa

AFFILIATION: Victoria University, Melbourne, Social Work Unit, School of Social Sciences, and Psychology

AUTHOR NOTE: DR.Doris Testa, with dual qualifications in social work and teaching and having been a school principal, currently teaches in the social work program at Victoria University in the Western suburbs of Melbourne.

ADDRESS: Victoria University, Footscray Park Campus, Ballarat Road, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, Vic, 8001

ABSTRACT

Teachers are compelled to develop health promoting school environments that are empowering, collaborative, participative, multi disciplinary, capacity building and equitable (Black, 2006; DEEWR, 2008). Teachers can work with school social workers to create health promoting environments by developing effective cross disciplinary collaborations (AASW, 2006). However, effective cross-disciplinary collaboration school's formal and professional structures that can either enable or hinder cross disciplinary collaboration.

This article examines the challenges that faced teacher and social worker cross-disciplinary collaboration. Using a descriptive, explanatory, case study methodology, a particular model of health promotion designed and developed by Dr Doris Testa, in one of Melbourne's western suburbs primary school, the St Paul's Model ('the Model') was researched. This article argues that social workers have a place in the school context but to have legitimacy, purpose, and ultimate success in contributing to health promotion, cross-disciplinary approaches must be clearly embedded, articulated, and profiled in school processes and policies.

KEY WORDS: *welfare, wellbeing, health promotion, cross-disciplinary, collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

Supported by a corpus of health promoting school (HPS) literature emphasising the impact of student wellbeing to student achievement, teachers and schools are mandated to develop and promote wellbeing processes and structures (Department of Education Science and Technology, 2005; Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Programs Branch, 2008; WHO, 1986; Wynn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling & Carson 2000). To this end terms like '*social inclusion*', '*student wellbeing*', '*restorative practices*', '*safe schools*' and '*health promotion*' accompany the emphasis placed on the participatory/productivity mandates of OBE (Department of Employment, 2008; Mowbray, 2004). The underlying assumption of both the OBE and HPS discourses is that teachers can balance these dual roles and that they are equipped with resources – capital and human – to introduce a spectrum of student wellbeing and health promoting activities and initiatives that sustain health promoting cultures. Australian research challenges this view and highlights the struggle that teachers are having in balancing the dual responsibilities. For example Ball (1999), Linden (2007), Mackey and Greif (1994) and Wheatley (2001) implicate OBE's focus on student achievement in the difficulties that teachers have in attending to student wellbeing. Teachers though need not face this challenge alone.

SOCIAL WORK IN SCHOOLS

There is no shortage of literature dedicated to the contribution and practice of social work in various settings from hospital to Government organisations and small community-based centres (Alston & McKinnon, 2001; Fook, 2002). Nor is there a shortage of literature addressing the roles of social workers, ranging from individual casework to group and community work, to research and policy analysis to program development, from management to advising government ministers (Alston & McKinnon, 2001). That education and social work share a concern for the social problems that confront children and families creates opportunities to forward the social justice agenda (AASW, 2006; Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008; Le Bon & Boddy, 2010). The efficacy of school social work practice lies in its ability to see school staff, students and parents in the context of her/his local community. The importance of working not just with the student but also with students in her/his local environment highlights the differences between school social workers and other professionals that may be engaged in schools. Whereas other health professionals may be concerned more with one element of a student's personal life, e.g., education, health, housing, or income, school social workers are committed to working with the whole person and addressing the interrelatedness of the different elements. That is, with the social, emotional, political, economic and structural elements that impact on student wellbeing and student achievement (Hands, 2010)

Grounded in the ideological principle of equity and taking their direction from the Australian Association of Social Work's (2006), '*Practice Guidelines for School Social Workers*' school social workers intervene at the interface of personal, family, social, political economic factors with a dual focus of analysis: individual and systemic, private and public school. School social workers can employ early intervention, prevention and intervention strategies in areas such as networking, counselling, home and school liaison, and in facilitating and advocating the use by families of school community resources, preventative programs, professional and administrative tasks, leadership and policy-making and supervision (AASW, 2006; Rowling, 2009). In this way, they enable schools to meet their academic mission of educating students while helping to facilitate the 'relief and removal of barriers and inequities' (AASW 2006, pp 6).

However, as argued in this article, social work and teacher collaboration is not without its difficulty. As the following sections report, there are factors that both enable or hinder cross-disciplinary collaboration and that must be addressed if teacher and social work collaboration is to effectively address health promotion.

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

The research reported in this paper was part of a larger research into the contribution of social work to student wellbeing programs in a Victorian Catholic Primary School. The Model, developed by the dually social work/teacher qualified Principal, is an organically developed student wellbeing model, which, over twelve years, included the participation of seventy-nine social work students from six Victorian Schools of Social Work. While results of the broader research are explored elsewhere¹, the focus here is on one aspect of the research i.e. the cross disciplinary collaboration between social work students and teachers.

The methodology used a descriptive, explanatory case study analysis. The choice of case study as a method was chosen since, as scholars argue, case studies strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of actions, and give the researcher a method for retaining the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events. Case studies also offer a more intuitive, empirically grounded and naturalistic method for facilitating an understanding of a phenomenon (Schram, 2006; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). Thus, the case method conformed to the research aim of understanding the phenomenon of the Model in its own natural setting, the school site.

The case study method used data gathering, combined qualitative, i.e. questionnaire and quantitative data, i.e. documentation, archival records, surveys, and physical artefacts collection methods. Qualitative data was used to understand, describe, and map the participant's experiences. Quantitative data was used to supplement and validate the qualitative data (Creswell, 1994; Sarantakos, 2005; Yin, 2009). Qualitative data was used to understand, describe, and map the participants' experiences. Quantitative data provided patterns and frequency distributions thus providing a context for the qualitative data, supplemented, and validated the qualitative data. For example a student's comment '*[The Breakfast Club is] cool, it good for making friends. (Student S)*' was confirmed by the quantitative result of twenty students '*really, really agree*', or '*agree*' that social work students assisted teachers to attend to their task of teaching (Creswell 1994; Yin 2009). Purposive sampling was used to recruit seventy-two participants whose participation was bounded by *place*, St Paul's school pupils, school teachers, Parent Partnership Team members, Victoria University social work students and Field Education Co ordinators; *time*, 1994 to 2005, the time that that social work supervisor/principal was employed at the school; and *experience*, participants who had been involved in or who had knowledge of the St Paul's Model from 1994 to 2005. Using these criteria, twenty teachers, twenty primary school aged students, ten Parent Partnership Team members, eighteen social work students, and four Social Work University Field Education Coordinators chose to participate in the research.

¹ The research is contained in the PhD, "*Silos to symphonies: the contribution of social work to student wellbeing programs in a Victorian Catholic School*"

Following ethical approval from the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, St Paul's School, and Victoria University, the participants were each sent Information Packs inviting the completion and return of the Consent Form and survey. The ethics committees from both Victoria University and the Catholic Education Office, the principal of the school and the potential participants were aware that while the name and location of the school would be identified all survey material would be deidentified. Participants in the research, and thus the focus group, were also informed that while their input would be deidentified they may be identified in the results of research even though identifiers had been removed from the final report. This qualification was made in line with National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, guideline 3.1.1.(National and Medical Research Council, 2007)

Teachers, school aged students and Parent Partnership Team members were invited to participate in specially scheduled and separate focus group meetings. Eighteen teachers, twenty school aged students and ten Parent Partnership Team members chose to attend their respective focus groups sessions.

Surveys for each cohort group had commonalties but also group specific questions. For example, the section on Field Education theory and practice was specific to the social work students and field education coordinators. Commonalties included mirror questions inviting responses, by using a 1– to- 5 Likert Scale, concerning participation in, satisfaction with, and effectiveness of the Model.

In line with the case study design and in order to construct a multifaceted understanding of the data, survey results and focus group findings were added to the secondary data sources, that is, documentation, archival records and the physical artefacts collected during the research phase (Yin 2009). SPSS^X was used to convert all raw quantitative data. Coding comprised of two steps: codes that profiled research participants and Likert scale codes of each group participant's rating of the effectiveness of and satisfaction with the Model. The Likert variables were analysed using frequency distributions (Creswell, 1994). This provided generalised patterns of participation in and satisfaction with the Model.

Focus group findings were arranged into themes, coded and analysed (Creswell, 1994). Consistent with an iterative approach, qualitative data analysis occurred throughout the case study research process. Multiple approaches were employed to distil the qualitative data collected during the research: electronic files, assembling boxes containing 'themed' data, transcribing focus group recordings in long hand that had the added advantage of keeping the researcher 'close to the data', listening and re listening to the recordings, reading and rereading transcripts and surveys. Memos and notes were kept in a number of exercise books and concept maps were drawn as ideas, themes and category codes emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Throughout the data reduction phase themes emerged and codes and clusters of codes (that is, subdivisions in the code) became apparent (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994).

Of particular importance was how I positioned myself in the research since I had both designed and implemented the program. To ensure that my historical links would not contaminate the research and negatively impact on the validity and trustworthiness of the research, an external 'expert' monitored each research stage. Additionally two experienced social workers and one teacher agreed to meet with me bimonthly to review data, data analysis, provide feedback, challenge my assumptions and conclusions, and suggest future analysis considerations. The recruitment of St Paul's school participants and the facilitation of the three focus groups were delegated to the school based student wellbeing co ordinator

who agreed to meet with me on a weekly basis to review the data collection. Such an approach addressed the internal validity of the data while also returning data on the Model's transferability to other school settings thus addressing the external validity of the data.

RESULTS

From the above process themes emerged regarding factors that participants viewed as enabling/empowering or hindering/constraining the cross disciplinary collaboration

When data was arranged using cluster coding, initially by enabling/empowering theme, three sub themes emerged: cross-disciplinary relationships, social work expert knowledge and skill and the availability of human and material resources. Table 1 below lists the themes and sub theme attributes.

Table 1: Factors that enabled/empowered social work contribution ($N=32$)

Enabling/empowering themes	Combined frequency
Cross-disciplinary collaboration Community development skills were brought to the program Freed teachers to teach Positive relationships between teachers and social workers social work contribution was non-stigmatising Social work students had good rapport with children	25
Social work expert knowledge Social workers brought social work expertise to programs Social work students could bring different insights to program	3
Increased availability of human, material resources Access to agency contacts not otherwise known to school Increased capacity to apply for funding Introduction of programs otherwise not available to students	4

Source: Teacher, social work student, Parent Partnership Team, field education coordinator surveys

When data was arranged using cluster coding, initially by enabling/empowering theme, three sub themes emerged: cross-disciplinary relationships, social work expert knowledge and skill and the availability of human and material resources: cross-disciplinary relationships, program delivery and the fear of stigmatisation. Table 2 below lists the themes and theme attributes.

Table 2: Factors that constrained/hindered social work contribution ($N=28$)

Constraining/hindering themes	Combined frequency
Cross-disciplinary collaboration Different understandings about program goals, components Inconsistency, lack of clarity and goals of social work input Isolation of social work students No time to meet School culture intimidating for some social work students	15
Program delivery inconsistency of performance and competence in social work students input of social work program contribution too short	8
Stigmatisation Fear of stigmatisation of children and their families	5

Source: Teacher, social work student, Parent Partnership, field education coordinator surveys

Additionally Table 3 below summarises focus group and survey qualitative data. When cluster coding this data it was possible to extract the main themes that emerged reflecting the

HPS framework as well the positive and negative attributes of the Model as to these positive and negative attributes that impacted on the different aspects of the HPS framework.

As Table 3 below shows, while the Model positively included all aspects of the HPS framework and had programs that addressed the socio-ecological determinants of health, the Model was also negatively represented.

Table 3: Cluster coding and thematic arrangement of data using HPS framework

Source: Student, teacher, Parent Partnership surveys and focus group data, field education coordinator

Organisation, ethos and environment	Curriculum, teaching and learning	Partnerships and services
<i>Positives</i>		
Addressed social, economic, cultural disadvantage Built social and cultural capital amongst stakeholder groups Safe environment Non discriminatory Inclusive	Addressed social, emotional and educational issues Enabling, empowering leadership Student focussed Students able to attend to learning Extra support for teachers Access to skills and knowledge outside the teaching discourse Evidence Based Practice	Inclusive of parent and carers Formed partnerships across time Reliant on wider community Accessed resources available in wider community
<i>Negatives</i>		
Difficult culture for social work students to negotiate Professional boundaries	Unfamiliarity of Model purpose and program goals Time limited, inconsistent or contested interventions Rigid interdisciplinary boundaries and expectations Fear of stigmatisation	School had to source social, cultural and economic resources Sponsorship for some programs was time limited

and social work student surveys.

The next section discusses the use of case study and summarises the findings.

DISCUSSION

Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the case study returned thick descriptions of how the cross-disciplinary collaboration influenced the School's student wellbeing programs. In doing so this data found that the Model's effectiveness, while addressing the social, emotional and cultural aspects of student wellbeing, was judged differently by the different stakeholders. Data indicated that this judgment was referenced within stakeholder position, professional boundaries, and expectations:

1. Students identified programs as contributing to their social and emotional wellbeing and the requirements of their learning programs by addressing some aspects of their socioeconomic disadvantage.
2. Teachers named the social work contribution to early intervention and intervention programs as more acceptable than intervention that they perceived as belonging to the teaching discourse. Teachers were also found to enforce strict professional boundaries and expectations, clearly delineating between teaching and social work tasks.
3. Social work students could apply a critical perspective lens to the Model's agency and articulate the Model's attempts to address and redress socioeconomic, educational and

cultural disadvantage and could also see the benefits of their contribution to the social, economic and cultural disadvantage of the school community.

4. The Parent Partnership Team, while appreciating the support that Model offered time poor teachers, worried about the stigmatising effect that social workers may have on some sections of the school population.
5. Field education coordinators, who considered the Model as offering a non stigmatising, community development contribution to the Model,

Notwithstanding the disparate views, the contribution of social work to the Model and the cross-disciplinary approach adopted in the Model, had structures that impacted both positively and negatively on its effectiveness. Positively, by virtue of their unique position in the school, social workers used their skills in advocacy, direct casework, research and community development to contribute to school policy and practice. In focussing on collective, as well as individual issues, through, for example, bullying audits, homework programs and school theatrical productions, the social work contribution could be framed around the socio-ecological determinants of health, adding their efforts to the reduction of social disadvantage among St Paul's school students, families, and school communities.

Negatively, data indicated that while teachers worked alongside social work students, the Model lacked elements of cross-disciplinary collaboration: interdependence, group processing and interaction. While this research indicated that it is possible to develop student wellbeing programs alongside student learning programs and that student wellbeing programs can be underpinned by health promoting school principles and frameworks, the research also indicated the cross-disciplinary collaboration was not embedded in school culture.

Ultimately, the future effectiveness of student wellbeing models such as the St Paul's Model depend on how such Model are embedded in the formal and professional structures of school operations. Specifically the links between the socio-ecological discourse underpinning student wellbeing approaches need to be strengthened and made more explicit. Thus the implication of this research is that an effective cross-disciplinary collaboration requires a shift in the organisational culture from one that keeps the disciplines working in parallel to one that articulates and promotes the collaborative endeavours of both disciplines.

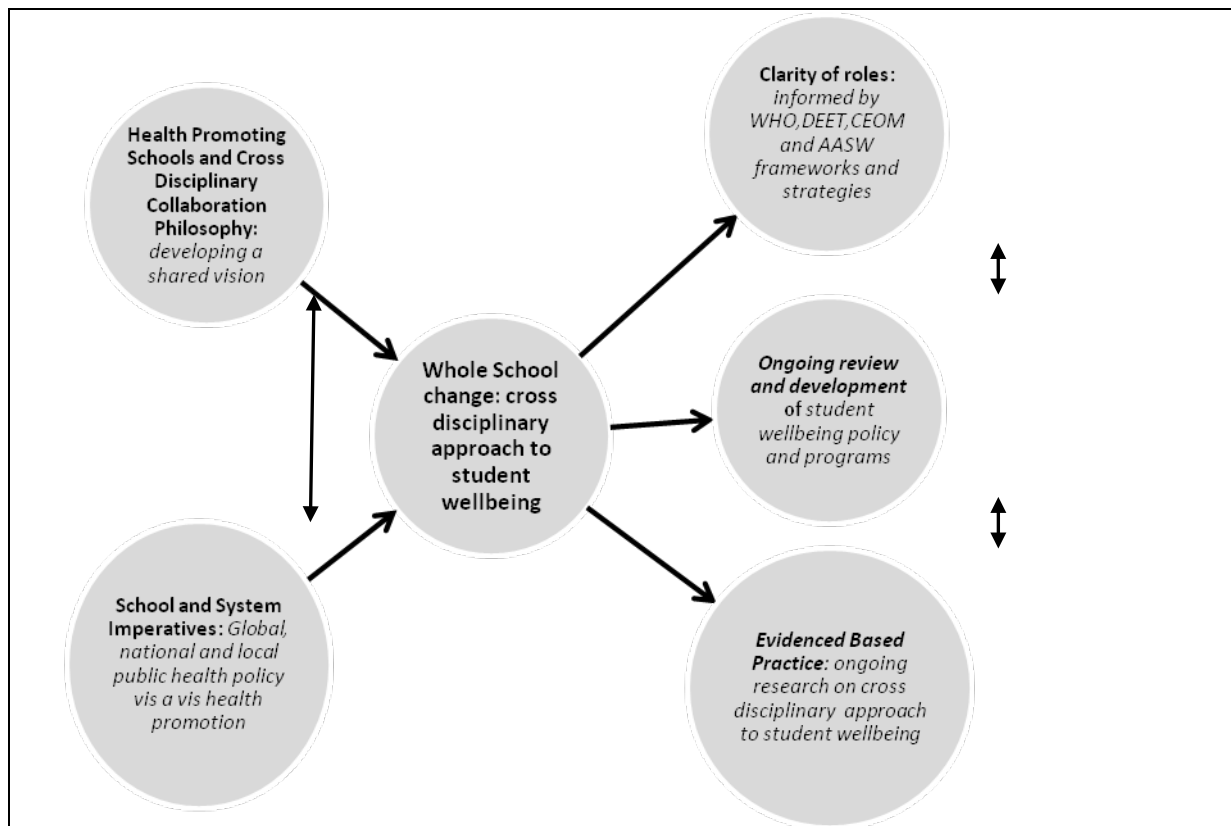
Cultural change though is not easy to implement. Lee (2004) argues that changing cultures challenges stakeholders in ways that may be perceived as professionally and personally threatening and also takes time. Kouzes and Posner (1997) give some direction as to how the St Paul's Model's cross disciplinary collaboration, and indeed any model based on the St Paul's Model, can be revisited to become more effective. They suggest five fundamental principles to consider when working to change organisational cultures:

1. Making a case for change
2. Developing a shared vision
3. Developing effective and responsive practice
4. Modelling the way
5. Encouraging practise

Using Kouzes and Posner's principles, I argue that a cross-disciplinary approach to student wellbeing practice could be enhanced if schools adopt processes and practices that change and challenge the school culture to more accurately reflect both an understanding of the

health promoting discourse and an understanding of how cross-disciplinary collaboration can establish and sustain a health promoting school. To this end I propose a framework, illustrated in Figure 1 below, that schools can use when developing a cross-disciplinary approach to student wellbeing.

Figure 1: Health promotion and cross-disciplinary collaboration: Changing school culture



At the micro level, as indicated in Figure 1, a framework that would embed a cross-disciplinary approach in a school's formal and professional student wellbeing structures:

1. Strategically and purposefully makes the case for health promotion that is, develops a familiarity with and understanding of the global, national and local health promotion discourses.
2. Explores and develops an understanding of cross-disciplinary collaborations and how such collaborations can be used effectively in student wellbeing programs and practices.
3. Defines and clarifies discipline skills and expertise and maps how each discipline contributes to student wellbeing programs.
4. Commits to ongoing-evidenced based research and reviews the cross-disciplinary collaboration in light of the emerging research evidence.

At the macro level what is needed for HPS cross-disciplinary collaborations to be successful are guaranteed resources and funding streams to provide for health promotion as well as for the professional development of teachers and social workers. Such professional development would focus on why and how health actions and health promotion are linked in global, national, state, and local economic and public health policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings, although significant for understanding the St Paul's Model, have some limitations. One of these limitations was that the research focussed on one Victorian Catholic primary school. Future research could map the transferability of the Model to another such school to see if the social work contribution, adjusted to incorporate the research findings, was successful.

A second limitation was that the Model relied on the principal's leadership and her social work knowledge and skill. Future research could pursue the effectiveness of the Model when transferred to another Victorian Catholic primary school, with an onsite or an offsite social worker who was part of the student wellbeing core team and worked with or without social work students. Such research would return data on the importance of having a qualified social worker rather than a qualified teacher to implement student wellbeing programs and the influence of the positional power of the principal on the development of the model. This research would also return evidence of how Universities could continue to engage schools in the training of social workers.

Further, research could gather data on the effectiveness or otherwise of implementing the *'Health Promotion and cross-disciplinary Collaboration: Changing School Culture'* framework that I articulated at the conclusion of this research. Finally, future research programs and formal and professional structures that could move the programs closer to the classroom and away from the margins into the mainstream of schooling.

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