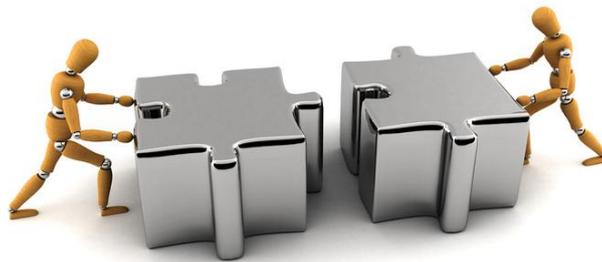


Leading Effective Collaborative Practice



By Laura Irving

May 2011

Leading Effective Collaborative Practice

Laura Irving

June 2011

BA Childhood Practice

BA 30080 Professional Project Report - Level Nine



About me

My name is Laura Irving. I am 31 years old and currently employed as a Senior Early Years Officer in a local authority nursery. Previous to this position I was employed for ten years as a nursery nurse in a private nursery. Whilst in this job I decided to complete my BA Childhood Practice as I was keen to study and to gain a recognised qualification which would allow me to do management.

Although my BA was not required for my senior role I have found it to be beneficial. It has allowed me to put the new learning from my studies into my professional practice which benefits all the service users. Now that I have achieved my BA, I aim to gain more supervisory and leadership experience and then I intend on progressing onto management level.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to this project and I gratefully acknowledge this. My nursery manager Valerie Harrow has supported me through my studies through all of level nine. Without her permission and support I would have been unable to put my newly gained knowledge and understanding into my professional practice.

I would also like to thank the Speech and Language Department who have supported and collaborated with me through this very worthwhile project. Our collaboration and devotion on children's behalf will give them the best start in life.

Finally, I am very grateful to the Speech and Language Focus Group participants. The children and parents of my nursery have kindly allowed me to support their families through professional collaboration. Everyone's time is precious and limited. The parents have attended my session, completed paperwork and evaluations which has allowed me to complete this project.

The children, parents and professionals have worked closely as a team to benefit the children in my setting. I acknowledge their contribution and thank them for their encouragement and support. I could not have completed this report without them. I hope that this report will encourage others to develop and experience good collaborative relationships.

Contents Table

Page Number	Contents
1	Front Cover
2	Title Page
3	Acknowledgements
4	Contents Table
5	Appendices Table
6	Learning Outcomes Statement
7	Chapter 1 - Introduction
8	Chapter 1 - Continued
9	Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature
10	Chapter 2 - Continued
11	Chapter 3 -The Research Question
12	Chapter 3 - Continued
13	Chapter 4 - Investigative Design
14	Chapter 4 - Continued
15	Chapter 5 - Implementation
16	Chapter 5 - Continued
17	Chapter 6 - Findings
18	Chapter 6 - Continued
19	Chapter 7 – Discussion of The Findings
20	Chapter 7 - Continued
21	Chapter 8 - Implications
22	Chapter 9 - Conclusions
23	References & Bibliography
24	Appendices Sheet

Appendices Table

Appendix Number	Appendix Title
1	Completed Ethics Approval Form
2	Project Proposal
3	Observation / Reflection Document
4	My Invitation letter to Parents
5	CHAT Invitation Letter to Parents
6	Record of Consultation for Pre-Session Meeting
7 (a,b,c,d)	Four Completed Parent's Questionnaire's for CHAT Sessions
8	Time Table for Project
9 (a,b,c)	Completed Staff Member's Evaluation Sheet

Learning Outcomes Statement

For this report I have focused on Learning Outcomes:

4.1 - Co-ordinate and Lead the provision of environments that are safe, secure, caring, nurturing and inclusive

4.6 - Lead and support team work and collaboration

4.8 - Lead and support collaboration with other agencies and other children Services to build capacity and develop services



Chapter 1- Introduction

I am currently employed as a Senior Early Years Officer in a local authority day nursery. We provide a wrap around service for children aged two to five years old. There are fourteen staff members including management, early year's officers and support for learning Assistants.

My Chosen Topic:

The topic area I decide to focus on is 'Professional Collaboration and Parental Involvement'. I felt this was a worthwhile topic as I had previously focused on it through my studies and recognised the importance of it. (Appendix 3) Through research I had developed new knowledge about the focus on parental involvement within educational settings and I was keen to put my knowledge into my professional practice. More importantly, through informal conversations with parents in my nursery I observed that they felt anxious about recent referrals made for their children to the Speech and Language Therapy Department. (Appendix 3). I communicated with them to reassure them and offered them information leaflets. As I reflected on these conversations I felt it would be beneficial for my own professional development to attend the basic Speech and Language training through the CHAT team (Communication Help and Awareness team). This would allow me to give more advice to parents on the processes the parents and children would go through.

The Reasons for My Topic:

After completing the training I was aware that the CHAT team could come to the nursery and deliver informal sessions on language and social development. I felt this would be beneficial and hoped this would allow parents to feel less anxious about their child's referral. This would also allow us to put in place the support that was necessary for children's individual learning needs and collaborate with other professionals. I discussed my intentions with my manager and with her permission I arranged for the CHAT team to come to my setting.

The chapters in my report will describe the processes I have been through to decide my topic and describes how I lead parental involvement and professional collaboration in my setting which benefited the children and families.

Chapter 1 – Continued:

My practice can be linked to Family/ Professional Collaboration with Children with Special Health Needs and Their Families (1993:11) '*Collaboration is about children and families. It is for children, family members and professionals. We are working to develop collaboration because we want to improve the quality of life and the health of children and their families*'.

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

By carrying out a literature review I wanted to gain a clear understanding of other writer's views on my chosen topic. I researched both subjects using a variety of sources, over a long period of time. My professional project gave me the opportunity to link in parental involvement and professional collaboration.

Related Literature on Parental Involvement and Collaborative Practice:

As a result of my reading and research I have identified that writers in the areas recognise that parental involvement and professional collaboration are important. For example, Working Together in Children's Services (2010), Improving Parents Involvement in Schools (2005) and Family/ Professional Collaboration (1994) agree that the key aspects of parental involvement and professional collaboration are that parents and professionals are partners in the education process. Parents should have an integral voice in the implementation of services for their children. Parental involvement is vital as it allows parents to feel they are involved in their child's education, parents are kept up to date, actively listened to and their views are taken into account. Collaboration is necessary as it is an opportunity for professionals to share workloads, communicate and provide mutual support which benefits staff, parents and the children. As I compared the literature I have read, the sources all agree that parental involvement and professional collaboration is beneficial.

My practice can be linked to the World Health Organisation – Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (2010:13) '*Collaborative*

Practice in health care occurs when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds provide comprehensive services by working with patients, their families, careers and communities to deliver the highest quality of care across settings'.

What Does The Literature Highlight?

Writers in the areas recognise and agree that if professionals collaborate and involve parents this will meet children's individual learning needs and give them the best start in life. For example, The Early Years Framework (2008), Integrated Strategy for The Early Years (2003) and For Scotland's Children (2001) all discuss the importance of

Chapter 2 – Continued

providing a supportive environment for children and their families by identifying any additional support which may be required. By providing supportive environments for children and their families, professionals have the opportunity to work in partnership to ensure an efficient response to the needs of the individual and their family.

Professionals also have the ability to share information in a coherent and efficient way and be supportive to one another as the work load is shared and duplicating assessments and visits is minimised.

The above documents recognise that a more effective service will be delivered through joint up working between professionals which will achieve the best outcomes for children. As I carried out my research I was glad to see that The Scottish Government is aware of the importance of encouraging parental involvement and professional collaboration. My view is that government are working positively for Scotland's Children and aiming to give them the best start in life by meeting their individual needs.

The content of the writing I have read links well with my topic and to collaborative professional practice. My literature review gave me clarification that my chosen topic was beneficial for my studies, my setting, my employer and most importantly the service users. My topic has built on the existing knowledge and understanding of others.

The research I have undertaken has confirmed the importance of professional collaboration and parental involvement. The research highlights that developing a positive relationship between family members and professionals will ensure the best services for children and their families. Together we bring knowledge, skills, experience and a mutual commitment to children to meet their individual needs. The research I have completed has given me a wealth of new understanding of my topics. This will allow me to meet the aims and objectives of my Project Proposal (Appendix 2) which were to lead and provide effective collaboration between parents and professionals to benefit children's development.

Chapter 3 – The Research Question

What will I Investigate? :

How can we provide more effective collaborative practice between the setting, parents and other agencies to improve the quality of intervention and benefit children's development?

Below I have broken-down my research question into three subsidiary questions. The separate questions are more focused on individual areas.

How Do We Promote Collaborative Partnerships with the Setting and Parents: (Subsidiary Question 1)

Myself and the CHAT team invited the parents to attend an informal Speech and Language session in my nursery. (Appendices 4 & 5). I focused on the Anti pre – school age children in my nursery as there were numerous children in this particular age group who would benefit from the support from the CHAT team.

I felt that inviting the parents to the session in the nursery would make them feel less anxious as themselves and their children were in an environment that they were familiar and comfortable with. Parent's attendance at the sessions allows them to reinforce the content of the session at home. I received a positive response to our invitation. Four of the parents were able to attend with their children and the other four parents were unable but gave permission for their children to take part to develop their language and social skills.

My practice can be linked to Making The Difference- Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools (2005:1) which states *'We are looking to education authorities and schools to do more than just provide better information to parents, we want them to listen to parents and involve them in their children's learning more'*

How Do We Collaborate With Professionals: (Subsidiary Question 2)

After receiving permission from my manager to arrange the CHAT team to come. I contacted a Speech and Language Therapist from my Local Authority who agreed to hold a CHAT session in my nursery. I discussed my observation regarding the parents and she agreed that the sessions would be beneficial. I arranged a Pre – Session Meeting with the speech and language therapist to ensure I knew what Chapter 3 - Continued:

would be involved in the session to organise any necessary resources and to be clear on what my role involved. (Appendix 6). I was then sent an invitation letter to distribute to our parents. (Appendix 5).

My practice can be linked to HMIE - Improving Scottish Education (2009:18) which suggests *'Working in Partnership with others is a fundamental way for educational establishments and services to help practitioners act in ways that make a positive difference for children'*.

How Will Parental Involvement, Professional Collaboration and intervention Benefit The Children? (Subsidiary Question 3):

Our Professional Collaboration will benefit the children as professionals we have collective skills, experience and expertise. By working together to benefit we have a shared responsibility to achieve goals which ensure the best services are provided for children. The parents input are equally valuable as they know their child best. The aims of CHAT sessions are to maximise children's language and social development which in turn should have a positive effect on literacy and communication development. As myself and Speech and Language are employed by a local authority we have a responsibility to the service users.

Our professional collaboration is in accordance with Falkirk Council - Learning to Achieve - A Strategy for Raising Achievement (Date Unknown) states *'Providing a*

range of services and support which are planned to meet the needs of individuals and provide a coherent, balanced and progressive education for everyone'

Chapter 4 – Investigative Design

Research Techniques/ Methods:

Action Research:

My research technique for my project will be 'Small Scale Action Research'. It is situational as the aim of my research is to solve a problem and improve an area in my work setting. It is also collaborative as it involves a variety of participants. My continuous evaluation and modification leads to improvement in current practice. My practice can be linked to McNiff (2002:5) Action research for professional development concise advice for new action researchers states '*The basic principle underpinning action research is it involves identifying a problematic issue, imagining a possible solution, trying it out, evaluating it (did it work?) and changing practice in the light of the evaluation*'.

My approach is a short term systematic enquiry. It has a 'Qualitative' approach as the purpose is to understand social life and will describe reality as it is. I will write in a personal and informal style. I felt this approach was beneficial as my values on parental involvement and my respect for parents form an important part of my project. My practice can be linked to McNiff (2002:8) Action research for professional development concise advice for new action researcher's states '*Action Research Begins with values*'

A qualitative approach allows me to build on the theory that parental involvement and professional collaboration are vital in an educational setting to benefit the children. My research process is flexible and will be influenced by the participants.

Data Collection Methods:

Observation Records:

I have made professional observations which affected my decision on what area to focus on for my professional practice. (Appendix 3). These observations have been naturalistic. I will also make observations throughout the CHAT sessions which will allow me to form my opinion and evaluate the effectiveness of the sessions. Staff

Chapter 4 - Continued

who participate in my setting will also be asked to write an evaluation on the session as I feel it is worthwhile collecting a variety of views. This data collection method allowed me to gain the answers to my first sub question 'How Do We Promote Collaborative Partnerships with the Setting and Parents'? (See Chapter 3 for Subsidiary Questions)

Focus Group:

I felt a focus group would be effective in my aim to support parents and promote professional collaboration. The focus group will involve the stake holders (children & parents), a speech therapist, an early year's officer and a senior early year's officer. The focus group allows me to bring all the stakeholders together to benefit the children who use our service. The speech and language therapist advised me to have between five and eight children at the sessions and encouraged the parents to attend alongside their children. The speech therapist would lead the sessions and we agreed I would deliver two of the sessions. I also arranged for the early years officer from the children's room to attend as this promotes collaborative practice and would allow her to carry out the work of the session with the children during their time at nursery. This data collection method has allowed me to gain the answers to my second sub question 'How Do We Collaborate with Professionals'?

Questionnaires:

I decided to create and provide questionnaires to evaluate the chat sessions (Appendices 7,a,b,c,d). I will distribute these to the parents who attend the 'CHAT' focus group and to the staff in attendance. The questionnaires will allow me to collect information from the respondents of my focus group and will gain the participants opinion on the CHAT sessions without interference from me. The data collected will be qualitative as it is important for my report but cannot be measured easily as it includes people's opinions and reflections. As I reflected, I identified that it was necessary to change the questions numerous times. I wanted to gain a true understanding of the effectiveness of the session and to ensure the questionnaires were relevant for the people I was designing them for. This data collection method has allowed me to gain the answer to my third sub question 'How Will Parental Involvement, Professional Collaboration and Intervention Benefit the Children'?

Chapter 5 – Implementation

Necessary Planning:

To implement my plans for the arranged CHAT sessions I had to ensure I was organised and managed my time well. I had to arrange sessions during a time that suited me, my nursery, the parents and the speech and language department. By arranging a pre session meeting with the speech and language therapist I developed my knowledge of the aims of the CHAT session, developed my awareness of my role in the sessions and collected any necessary paperwork. (Appendix 6). I am fortunate that my manager supports my studies as I have to take time off from working on the floor to attend meetings I have arranged. The implication of this is that another member of our team has to cover me to ensure we are maintaining our ratios.

Special Arrangements That Were Made:

I arranged the CHAT sessions in my nursery and all the necessary stakeholders attended as previously arranged. In total we had eight children, four parents and three professionals. The sessions lasted twenty five minutes and ran smoothly due to a team effort and through effective planning and communication. (Appendix 6). By arranging the sessions my professional practice links to Happy, Safe and Achieving Their Potential – Scottish Executive (2005:12) *'Teachers must be able to support children, young people and their families to resolve complex problems. This requires*

the development of a close and trusting relationship with the child and family and a sound knowledge of the potential role of other specialists and agencies’.

Unexpected Difficulties:

A difficulty I came across was time implications. I wanted to arrange the sessions as soon as possible to support the children and parents and as I had a timescale for my studies. One difficulty I had was making suitable arrangements for the CHAT team to come. This led to changes with my original time scale. (Appendix 8).

The CHAT team have demanding work schedules and my nursery had to wait for a convenient date from Speech and language. The speech and language therapist who I was working alongside was particularly helpful and was keen to ensure I held the sessions in accordance with my timescale. Although the processes of my project ran smoothly I was well aware of the difficulties I could potentially have come across. (i.e.

Chapter 5 - Continued

there was not enough time or no one attended the planned CHAT sessions). My project was supported by my manager, the speech and language therapist and the parents in my setting. Their commitment allowed me to arrange and implement the CHAT sessions and to fully evaluate the effectiveness of them as parents completed written evaluations. (Appendices 7a,b,c,d).

Chapter 6 – Findings

From the data I have gathered I will present, analyse and interpret my findings in relation to my subsidiary headings.

How Do We Promote Collaborative Partnerships with the Setting, Parents and Professionals?

Links to Subsidiary Question's - 1 & 2

Links to Data Collection Method - Observation's, Focus Group & Evaluation Questionnaires

I communicated with the staff who participated in the sessions and they agreed that the sessions delivered by the speech and language therapist gave them an opportunity to support parents. They also formed new professional relationships and learned new skills which can support the children in their care. Our teams practice can be linked to Working Together in Children's Services (2010:10) *'Effective partnerships in working with parents can be equally effective for forming partnerships between practitioners and between services'*

I communicated with relevant staff members to ensure they are aware of their responsibility to use the same strategies to ensure continuity. I will know if the

approaches are being used through my role as a senior, my observation skills and through communication with staff. If the approaches are being used consistently with the children all staff should notice a positive change in the children's behaviour.

By analyzing the data collected (parent's evaluation questionnaires). The evaluation sheets confirmed that all the parents who attended, found the focus group beneficial. Parents felt the sessions were informal with a relaxed atmosphere, increased their knowledge of ways that they can interact with their child through play to develop skills and all parents agreed that if professionals work together it will benefit children and families. (Appendix 7a,b,c,d). I also spent time communicating with each parent who attended the session. They stated that they will practice the strategies at home with all of the children in their family. I felt I had to communicate verbally as it would give me a better understanding on the parent's opinions. This was worthwhile as they were keen to give their opinion on the focus group.

Chapter 6 – Continued:

How Will Parental Involvement, Professional Collaboration and intervention Benefit the Children?

Links to Subsidiary Question: - 3

Links to Data Collection Method - Observation's, Focus Group & Evaluation
Questionnaires

By gathering naturalistic observations from the focus group's I have identified that as our sessions have progressed the children are benefiting from them. I have observed that the children are gaining the skills that the speech and language therapist discussed in our Pre-Session Meeting (Appendix 6). During 'Session One' (Appendix 9 a & b) particular children had a short attention span and found it difficult to take turns. By 'Session Three' all the children had improved their listening skills, developed their ability to following simple instructions and contributed more to the sessions. (Appendix 9c). Reinforcing the children's positive behaviour during the sessions led to a positive contribution from them. From my observations it is evident that the children are developing the skills we hoped for. Myself and the speech and language therapist also agreed that the children responded better to the sessions

when their parents did not attend. The children were more focused, happy to contribute and displayed positive behaviour.

Chapter 7- Discussion of the Findings

By Analysing my Data Collection Methods Through My Sub Questions I Have Answered my Research Question Which Was:

'How can we provide more effective collaborative practice between the setting, parents and other agencies to improve the quality of intervention and benefit children's development'?

I feel we have answered the research question fully, as we can provide more effective collaboration between the setting and parents. As professionals we have identified a need to arrange support for the parents by communicating with them. By inviting the speech and language team into our setting we have arranged an informal focus group that involves the parents and educates them in how they can support their children. By arranging the focus group in our nursery this provided a familiar environment with familiar faces to make the parents and children feel at ease. My setting has promoted collaborative practice as we have developed new professional relationships. Staff learned methods from the speech and language therapist to develop skills in children that both staff and speech and language aimed to improve. The speech and language sessions will improve the quality of intervention and benefit children's development. It is evident from my observations and evaluations

that the children are benefiting from the intervention. As our sessions progressed the children were keen to take part and communicate, happy to contribute to the focus group, took turns and listened better. The sessions were beneficial to the children as we had observed that particular children's language was unclear at times, we were keen to observe what their understanding was. After each session the staff who attended had an informal conversation with the therapist as communication is vital in professional collaboration. The children were also being closely monitored by the therapist as she was aware of particular children we felt may need their support. The session gave the therapist an opportunity to observe these children to make a judgement if a speech and language referral was necessary. Our professional practice can be linked to Integrated Strategy for the Early Years (2003:6) *Through universal services such as childcare, health and pre school provision, we can secure the best start in life for all of our children, and provide a strong foundation for future health, learning and personal and social development of our youngest citizens*

Chapter 7 – Continued:

My findings of the Data and how it Links to My Literature Review:

My findings have linked well to the literature I have read. My view of the findings supports what previous writers have stated. Writers in the area recognise and agree that if professionals collaborate involve parents and intervene this will meet the children's individual learning needs and give them the best start in life. By reviewing the data I have collected and undertaking a literature review it confirms the importance of parental involvement and professional collaboration.

Chapter 8 – Implications

To allow me gain a real depth of the implications of my professional project I have reflected on the processes I have been through since the start of my module. My reflective practice can be linked to Developing Reflective Practice in the Early Years (2009:12) *By engaging in reflective practice, we effectively become researchers of our working world.*

I have taken time to reflect on my professional journal, record of consultations, conversations with parents and professionals, observations, my project proposal and all the questionnaires and evaluations I have gathered. A lot of time, effort and commitment from all involved is evident. I genuinely feel every step has been worthwhile. By being well organised and having in depth knowledge on my topic there are positive implications for the children, parents, the nursery, staff and the speech and language department. The implications of my project have made a significant contribution to my professional development. My reflective practice can be linked to Developing Reflective Practice in the Early Years (2009:12) *The ways in which interpret our practice are also framed by our current views of practice as well as our awareness of relevant literature, or theories or case studies and research data related to a variety of early years settings.*

I can support the children more effectively, have underpinning knowledge of my topic and greater awareness of how my professional practice can be linked to the aims of local, national and international initiatives. My project allows me to feel confident in arranging the CHAT Focus Group in the future as I have developed a positive working relationship with the Speech and Language Department. I feel I have taken on a project that is important to me and has contributed to more effective practice. I will continue the approaches learned from the speech and language therapist to benefit the children in my care. The implications of my project may be beneficial if shared with other childcare settings. It provides evidence of the positive outcomes of collaborative practice to benefit the children. They could reproduce the processes I have been through to support the children in their setting.

Chapter 9 – Conclusions

As I evaluated my personal involvement in my project I am aware that I had an important role to play in leading professional collaboration to benefit the children and parents in my setting. I have had the opportunity to share my findings with our staff the speech and Language Team and the parents. There has been a tremendous amount of planning involved with this project and it has been a success due to the commitment of all involved. By taking time to think about the research approaches and data collection methods I feel they led me to effectively answering my research question and to meet my aims and objectives.

As I reflected on my processes, I identified that if I carried out research using evaluation questionnaires from participants in the future I would add more relevant questions. This would allow me to gain a clearer understanding of their views. I would also ask the children to evaluate the sessions through child friendly evaluations forms. By observing I have identified that children contributed more effectively to the session when their parents were not there. This was a problem as we are keen to promote parental participation to teach parents the methods. But their children would gain more from the sessions if their parents did not attend. I believe this problem could be solved by having a short informal meeting with the parents before the session. We would explain what the sessions hoped to achieve and teach them how

they use the methods as a parent and then continue with the sessions with the children alone. To ensure the parents were involved we could communicate with them after each session to update them on their child's progress.

To continue my study on my selected area I have arranged to attend a two day training course. This will be delivered by the Speech a language Department and will teach me to identify children who may need a referral to the speech and language department. By completing my project I have proved that working collaboratively with agencies makes a positive difference.

I verify that this submission is entirely my own work and that individuals or their representatives have given permission for information obtained in the course of this study to be used as evidence or quoted in the text of this assignment.

References & Bibliography

Bishop K, K, Woll, J, & Arango P. (1993). *Family/Professional Collaboration for Children with Special Health Needs and their Families*. USA: Family Professional Collaboration Project.

Falkirk Council. (Date Unknown) *Learning to Achieve - A Strategy for Raising Achievement*. Falkirk: Falkirk Council Education Services.

Fitzgerald F & Kay J. (2010). *Working Together In Children's Services*. Oxon: Rutledge.

HMIE. (2009). *Improving Scottish Education*. Livingstone: HMIE

McNiff J. (2002). *Action Research for Professional Development, Concise Advice for New Action Researchers*: Copyright Jean McNiff

Murphy, W, T & DeChillo N, K (1994). *Family/ Professional Collaboration: The Perspective of Those Who Have Tried*. Portland: Portland State University.

Scottish Executive. (2005). *Making the Difference – Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

Scottish Executive. (2001). *For Scotland's Children, Better Integrated Children's Services*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

Scottish Executive. (2005). *Happy, Safe and Achieving Their Potential. A Standard of Support for Children and Young People in Scottish Schools*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

Scottish Government. (2003). *Integrated Strategy for the Early Years*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Government. (2008). *The Early Years Framework*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Smith A, P & Craft A. (2009). *Developing Reflective Practice in the Early Years*. England: Open University Press

World Health Organization. (2010). *Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education & Collaborative Practice*. Switzerland: Health Professions Networks, Nursing & Midwifery.

Appendices



