

Chapter 3

Enhancing Professionals’ Interdisciplinary Competencies: Meeting the Needs of Children With Disabilities From Diverse Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces interprofessional competencies and an assessment that can guide preparation and impact competency of interdisciplinary professionals working in special education to meet the needs of children with disabilities and families from diverse communities. Additionally, this chapter highlights examples of integrated preparation approaches that allow interdisciplinary professionals to learn about each other’s discipline to advance their knowledge and skills to meet the needs of young children with disabilities from multicultural communities. These practices include: (a) virtual learning communities; (b) professional development micro credentials awarded by digital badges; (c) subject matter expert panels; and (d) combined field experiences.

Interprofessional education occurs “when two or more professions learn with, from, and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care” (Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education, 2006, p. 1). Interprofessional or interdisciplinary competencies can guide practitioners across multiple fields about effective ways to work together and integrate knowledge and experience. In this chapter, we introduce interprofessional competencies that guide the preparation of interdisciplinary professionals working to meet the needs of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays

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or disabilities. While this chapter focuses on supporting pre-service professionals working with young children with disabilities, this framework is applicable to any special education population. Working with children with disabilities requires input from professionals in multiple fields, but the need to collaborate intensifies when providing support and services to young children and their families from diverse communities (Cook & Friend, 2010). Thus, we provide examples of integrated preparation approaches that allow interdisciplinary professionals to learn about each other's discipline and advance their knowledge and skills to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and their families, specifically from immigrant and refugee communities. We highlight vignettes with distinct examples and lessons learned from engaging in interdisciplinary preparation between early childhood special education and social work.

INTERPROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

Federal regulations, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), established the necessity of multidisciplinary collaboration to support the growth and development of children and their families. Likewise, the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Division of Early Childhood's (DEC) recommended practices highlight teaming and collaboration for practitioners as an effective way to improve the development of young children with delays or disabilities. The siloed services initially offered by early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE) professionals have evolved to a recognition that multiple people with varied perspectives must be mobilized to provide optimal services to young children and their families (Bricker et al., 2022).

To support EI/ECSE interprofessional work, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Early Childhood Personnel Center was tasked with developing interprofessional competencies. Using a sampling of seven EI/ECSE service provider professional standards, the group developed four common training competencies, which include (1) coordination and collaboration; (2) family-centered practice; (3) evidence-based intervention; and (4) professionalism (Bruder et al., 2019; Early Childhood Personnel Center, 2020). Although these competencies mention coordination and collaboration and represent areas of consistent knowledge, skills, and dispositions, they do not provide specific "interdisciplinary" competencies.

Due to a lack of interdisciplinary competencies, the EI/ECSE literature suggests that preparation programs turn to interprofessional competencies and practices developed in health education as a model for interdisciplinary education (Bricker et al., 2022). The Institute of Medicine's (2001) recognition of the need to develop skills to effectively communicate and coordinate care led to the formation of the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC). In 2016, due to a lack of clarity about outcomes in interdisciplinary education, a consortium of U.S. professional associations representing six disciplines created Interprofessional Education Collaborative core competencies.

With the vision of enhanced interprofessional collaborative practice, the IPEC competencies serve to frame dialogue for interprofessional education and collaborative practice. These competencies support team-based care and provide direction for professional schools of health care. These competencies are a catalyst to improve service provision and enhance outcomes. After publishing the original competencies, IPEC (2021) convened multidisciplinary working groups to review and update these competencies to provide the best available evidence and research related to interdisciplinary education and collaborative practice; review common definitions for competence and competency; and ensure the competency framework accurately reflects the most up to date research, policy, and practice.

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