

■ PCA

WORKING WITHIN A TEAM

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cepec

CONDUCTIVE EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATION GROUP

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PROFESSIONAL CONDUCTORS
ASSOCIATION (UK)

■ OBJECTIVE

This document is based upon the personal experiences of the authors and has benefitted from contributions from PCA members. It offers conductors a perspective on team working in a bid to increase confidence and understanding of ourselves and other professions. It also gives opportunity for ongoing CPD with questions at the end to facilitate reflection.

Conductors can not work alone and CE philosophy is based upon the unique potential held within the group. To work with others is essential, however to be successful requires thought and discussion. At a personal level, reflection on our thoughts and actions may help impact on our inter-personal skills. At the professional level, re-consideration of the philosophy and methodology of CE may help us define our practice and our role within the team more clearly.

■ BACKGROUND

Traditionally conductors were trained to work within conductor-only teams. However in the worlds of rehabilitation and education today, there is far more emphasis on communication and collaboration amongst disciplines and many changes are now impacting service delivery. There are many examples of different types of teams, and conductors are finding themselves more frequently working with other professionals. This further increases the need for conductors to be confident in what they are doing whilst recognising that their perception may well be different from those other professionals.

There is a freedom of working within a conductor-only team that may not be experienced by those working within a multi-professional one. Equally there is the potential for a sharing of information and perspectives within a multi-professional team that may be lacking from a conductor-only team. No one way is perfect and regardless of the team, each individual conductor has to find an effective way of functioning within it. Equally each team has to find a way to ensure participants achieve goals as a result of productive collaboration.

■ UNDERSTANDING A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The medical model of health and disability considers the individual to have a 'deficit', i.e. to be missing some factor that prevents them being 'fully healthy'. The professional often focuses their observation upon the individual's disability, not their ability. They are equipped to assess, to give instruction and to prescribe equipment or exercise. The purpose of their intervention is to give treatment to the individual, guiding them towards 'health'. As with CE, observations link to the perceived solutions. The philosophy behind CE however gives rise to different solutions.

CE perceives disability as a problem of learning. The focus is upon the professional to facilitate the active learning of the individual towards 'orthofunction'. The solutions that the conductor perceives are therefore inevitably different from those of a physio or OT working within the medical model. The conductors' understanding of the individual and what is possible are fundamentally different because the perceived solutions are linked to different philosophies.

Those individuals working within a multi-professional team will need to recognise and accept these differences whilst trying to find common ground on both a personal and professional level. These are not easy situations and as conductors, we often feel that we are having to compromise in order to make a situation work. This article aims to help us define for ourselves the differences between CE philosophy and CE methodology. This is important not just for those working in teams, but for conductors everywhere to reflect on their practice.

Diagram 1 reflects the need to have a common philosophy within the team. As professionals we may have different methodologies, but our understanding of the philosophy and its impact upon aims and expectations must be similar. If, for example, one person believes the individual will achieve nothing and learn nothing, then their interaction with them and their expectations of them will reflect that belief. This will be different from the individual who believes that they can learn and believes their role as a professional is to find a way to teach them and enable them to achieve. Feuerstein (2008) recognises the significance of 'belief' and its link with the need to find a solution to the difficulty as experienced by the individual. This belief system is an inherent part of CE philosophy and the methodology is the means by which the conductor is able to actualise the solution.

Difference should always be seen as a positive. You may very well be seeing something in the individual or the situation that others will not. As our observation as conductors is different so our intervention will be different. This ability to observe and intervene differently is a strength, however it may be considered by others as a threat. Equally we may feel vulnerable if our perceptions are disregarded. Our way may not always be the 'right' one, or indeed the only one, and we do not have to agree with different perspectives. In order to be successful as a team, however, we do have to accept that differences exist and find a way to work together.



Diagram 1. Brown (2010)

TEAM WORKING

The purpose of any team is to work together for the good of the individual, regardless of the team or the professionals within it. This is not a straightforward process and many multi-professional teams regardless of the setting have problems achieving this (Hall, 2001). Putting a conductor within such a team will only serve to increase communication challenges, not reduce them.

As conductors we need to be sensitive to these challenges and recognise which are professional issues, and which are the personal ones. The team is not an arena for the airing of personal insecurities or the defence of professional boundaries. Teams with greater success will aim to break down the barriers, not create them. Sharing a vision and having a common philosophy as in diagram 1 may be the most effective way to achieving this. Differences may need to be solved within the context of the organisation itself, or at a personal level. Respect for each other as individuals and professionals is essential however, if the team is to be open and able to share ideas.

Working within a group and being a positive team member are fundamental aspects of CE practice but ones that continuously need to be considered. Whatever the team we as conductors choose to work in, there will always be a need to find a way to work more effectively within it. Working in a team where there is a mix of professionals will always have specific issues regardless of the professions included. A conductor-only team is in reality no different. Although we may all have had a similar training, it is as much our personalities as our application of skills and knowledge which make a team successful.

We have developed skills in relation to creating a group and maintaining group cohesion, but if we only consider these skills in relation to participants (and not ourselves) then we may experience some difficulty. Whatever the team, we need to be able to deal with differences and feel happy that our aims match the aims of the organisation and that we are all working towards the same goals.

Within stroke rehabilitation there is a recognition that the way in which a team functions affects the outcomes. Gibbon et al (2002), looked at the use of a common therapeutic plan, however, found that this alone was not in itself enough to develop team working. An ability to communicate, to share, and to see the same situation from different perspectives were however important features of an effective team. Only by developing these skills can we begin to understand different professional understandings. Recognition by all that 'no one profession has all the answers to a particular situation' is essential if any kind of team work is to be effective.

It is no secret that team working is challenging and that a 'perceived loss of autonomy and threat to professional status' are not uncommon feelings (Gibbon et al, 2002). It is essential to find a way of working towards a common goal, leaving professional and individual insecurities behind. Hall (2001) recognises that it is essential to the development of the team that others are not judged either as inherently superior or inferior, and that there has to be recognition of difference in relation to skills and education. This undoubtedly impacts upon the way individuals work within the team. This is as relevant in a 'conductor-only team' as it is in a multi-professional one.

Bearing this in mind, it is crucial to how conductors work that the environment, both physical and interpersonal, is conducive to developing a positive relationship between all members. With a positive environment anything can be achieved; potential can be developed, skills can be taught and confidence enabled. Along with the environment, however, go the interpersonal skills that enable team sharing and working. The use of both verbal and non-verbal skills is considered essential in transmitting this positivity and creativity. Remember, we may say the right things, but if we do not believe what we are saying, or do not communicate positively using our voice and body language, then the words may be mis-interpreted.

■ LEADERSHIP

Teams need effective leadership in order to work towards a shared vision (Gibbons et al, 2002). In situations where leadership is less clear, it may be necessary to consider what is possible to change and what is not; what each conductor can set out to achieve as an individual, and as part of a team. Within an educational setting, Wilson and Pirrie (2000), found that a 'hands-on' leadership approach not only demonstrated good practice and developed a climate of learning, but the sharing of common organisational goals was enhanced. This may not always be possible, but when considering the team you want to work in, be aware there are different styles of leadership and consider the environment in which you work best. For example, you may want to work in a specific location, but if you are unsure that your goals are the same as the organisations', or you think working in a particular team may not be constructive for you, you may need to reconsider your ambition.

THE RANGE OF INTEGRATED TEAM WORKING

Within a multi-professional setting there are a number of options for working. Although there are similarities, the ways in which teams incorporate the philosophy and methodology of each profession will be different.

Conductor-only teams

These are teams where only conductors are employed, although there may also be assistants, volunteers and students. Essentially all team members will have a common basic knowledge and understanding of CE and its potential for impact upon the individual and their family. In practice, conductors will have common thoughts and perceptions, however, interpretation of these understandings will be unique to each conductor. Differences will exist in spite of a common philosophy, and application of the methodology will, to a large extent, depend upon the individuals' experiences, creativity and belief in the individual and themselves.

Multi-disciplinary

A Multi-disciplinary team is where two or more disciplines deliver intervention without integration. Each discipline yields discipline-specific results (own professional goals), yet they work together towards a general common goal.

Inter-disciplinary

An Inter-disciplinary team consists of several interacting disciplines that perform tasks independently but co-ordinate efforts to maximize benefits. They engage in creating and applying new knowledge as they work together towards a common goal. It involves attacking a goal from various angles and methods, eventually cutting across disciplines and forming a new method for understanding.

Trans-disciplinary

A Trans-disciplinary team is where disciplines from different backgrounds join to deliver intervention together. This team performs tasks collaboratively, by not only sharing information but also roles, uniting knowledge beyond disciplines and dissolving boundaries with the purpose of achieving new insight, expanding discipline, resources and knowledge. Mutually agreed goals are developed and information, knowledge and skills are transferred across disciplinary boundaries.

One concern of this approach is that CE could be 'diluted' as a result, however this approach is considered a positive one if professionals are to work together (Wilson and Pirrie, 2000).

These are the thoughts of one conductor with experience of this type of team working;
“It is important to remain true to your core beliefs in order to ensure you bring that through in your daily practice.”

She then goes on to say...

“The team I am part of all have the same goals and understanding of what we want each individual to achieve. It may just be we would work on achieving these things using a different method. The most important thing when working in a trans-disciplinary team is communication and co-operation. That does not mean that you have to compromise your beliefs ... When working in the way I do with my team, it is about working out for each individual what is best for them and at what time of the day based on their abilities, their potential and your expectations.”

If this approach is considered in the light of diagram 1 then there is potential for success, with the participant 'protected' by CE philosophy. As with all the above, the underlying goals of the organisation will dictate the way in which the team functions. For teams to work effectively there has to be trust, tolerance and a willingness to share responsibility (Nolan, 1995).

■ CE PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

There is a need to consider the differences between philosophy and methodology within CE. This discussion is essential for conductors in all situations ... 'how do we know what we can change, and what we cannot'?

As CE develops, both nationally and internationally, and conductors are employed in an ever increasing range of situations, what guidelines can we use to facilitate this development without losing fundamental aspects of CE philosophy and practice?

Brown first articulated the need to consider the differences in 2010. She outlined the philosophical aspects and the belief system behind our practice. This covers our understanding of 'how' we perceive each individual, how our understanding of what we believe is possible and what our role as professionals is in facilitating this achievement.

The methodology is that which enables the philosophy to become real. The methodology is the tool which brings the philosophy alive. Within CE, the methodology relates to the practice; our observation, our use of facilitation, the daily routine, equipment etc.

By separating the philosophy from the methodology it then becomes possible to prioritise within each situation what has to be kept and what can be given up. For example rhythmical intention, as part of our philosophy, is a key facilitation technique. How we bring it to life methodologically will be specific to the group, the individuals within it and the conductive aims. Our understanding of what we are doing and how we are doing it will develop with experience and part of that experience will be developed as a consequence of working with others.

■ THE GROUP

Conductive Education is primarily focused upon the group and the individuals within it. The way in which the group is created and developed is a key part of the conductor's role and the focus upon the group will have an impact upon multi-professional team working.

Conductive Education is not a mechanical process; therefore the rhythm, the tasks and the presence of a conductor do not make for a conductive education session in themselves. Hari and Akos (1988) recognise that CE is a 'unified system' and that the concepts held within it form the whole. Some of the difficulties when working within a multi-professional team may be created when conductors do not feel that they are able to keep the 'whole'. In these situations the whole becomes fragmented and the parts remain detached.

Within UK culture, the group is often perceived as no more than a collection of individuals within a room. Within Conductive Education the group is the central component through which interpersonal relations develop (Hari and Akos, 1988). Of all the aspects of Conductive Education that may become 'threatened' within a multi-professional team, this perhaps, is the most significant.

The role of the conductor is multi-varied, however, the ability to form a group with strong interpersonal links both individually and at a group level is possibly the most challenging to achieve and even harder to describe. The personality of the conductor is central to the development of the group, so whatever the group, the conductor must be able to feel that they can influence the group in the way most conducive to developing orthofunction. When working towards common goals, the influence of the learning environment must be recognised by those involved, and the conductor must be able to find a way in which to develop their personality for the good of the group and for their own learning.

The group is seen as a positive learning environment within the world of rehabilitation and education. The way in which the conductor nurtures and develops the group, however, is unique. This relates not only to the underpinning philosophy of CE, but also to the individual conductor and their ability to link understanding of the philosophy to the methodology. For example, each conductor will have a different understanding of themselves and the group. How they use their personality to create and generate activity through the group will depend on how they use their knowledge and the personalities within the group to actualise potential.

How CE is delivered is unique to each conductor, but fundamentally all action must link back to both the philosophy and the methodology of CE. CE is not a mechanical process (Kozma, 1995), however the mechanics of it must be set in the context of the underpinning philosophy.

FACTORS THAT MAY HELP TEAM COHESION

Ruddy & Rhee (2005) identified factors that may help to create successful team working.

A common ethos and vision

Wilson and Pirrie (200) found that teams, where a strong vision was evident, had increased confidence and inspiration. This links to the need to have a common CE philosophy as mentioned above.

Institutional understanding and support

Whichever type of team working an organisation decides to employ or develop, there needs to be a commitment and thorough understanding of what that actually is and how it will work in practice on a day-to-day level. This needs to be supported by the organisation and decisions made should reflect this way of working. Wilson and Pirrie (2000) also felt that 'hands on' leadership helped to spread the aims of the organisation throughout the organisation.

Adequate training

Because these ways of working can be challenging to achieve it is vital that training be provided to share techniques which may facilitate learning.

Careful selection of team members

To work effectively in a team with different professions, a conductor needs to have a certain level of experience and security of their own professional knowledge. If a newly qualified conductor, or one with only a few years experience, enters into a team with other professionals, it is vital that they receive an appropriate level of support and supervision. All members in a team like this need to have an open mind, willingness to challenge and be able to critically analyse their own understanding of the methodology and practice of CE.

Clearly defined and common goals

Common goals along with a common language are important in order to ensure that all members are effectively working towards the same objective in a similar way. There is suggestion from the Intercollegiate Stroke Working Party (2004) that certain factors may facilitate successful team work. These include the use of a common language and ICF terminology, as well as an understanding by each team member of their own role within it. These are factors for each team to consider. It must be remembered however, that whatever the tool used, there has to be the personal link between individuals in order for it to be effective.

Working in a team requires confidence and a desire to work with others. For the conductor, working in a team with other professions requires a solid understanding of CE philosophy and its methodology. Conductors have unique observation skills, and as a consequence unique solutions to working with individuals within a group setting. The use of tools such as ICF and GAS may facilitate the blending of skills, and professions within the team, but it is only the sharing of a common philosophy that will generate a cohesive team.

CONCLUSION

Working with others in a team has benefits and challenges. There are no 'absolutes' and CE presents an approach to working with individuals with neurological problems that is unique. CE however is not the only approach. There is much to be shared from what we know, and working within a team setting has the potential to strengthen what we know by challenging it! These challenges can come from outside ourselves, when observations and goals are different. By reflecting upon our practice and our understanding of both the philosophy and methodology of CE, our ability to work positively within the team may develop. In order for practice to develop however, leadership within the organisation must be strong and a safe environment created to enable sharing and challenging to take place.

When working within a multi-professional setting with CE as its philosophical basis, conductors may need to consider...

- How they function as an active, positive team member.
- How they share with team members their understanding of CE (philosophy, methodology and practice within the group), whilst being open to others perceptions.
- Do they 'live the life you talk'. What they believe about the participant, and themselves will be demonstrated in their language and behaviour?
- Their ability to take responsibility for their own development and learning, both professionally and personally.

CPD. You may want to consider the following questions in relation to your ongoing CE practice and development:

1. How would you best describe your team?
2. Why are you working in this team?
3. What are its strengths and weaknesses?
4. What kind of a team player are you?
5. What are your strengths and weakness?
6. What challenges do you face in relation to your application of the philosophy of CE?
7. What challenges do you face in relation to your use of the methodology of CE?
8. What might you want to change to improve team working in your organisation?
9. What part could you play in this change process?

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The logo for CEPEG features the letters 'cepeg' in a lowercase, bold, sans-serif font. The 'c' and 'e' are connected, and the 'p' has a distinctive shape with a curved bottom.

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The logo for PCA features the letters 'pca' in a lowercase, bold, sans-serif font. The 'p' is lowercase, while 'c' and 'a' are lowercase. The 'c' and 'a' are connected.

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