

Chapter 15

Overcoming the Barriers to Promoting Online Interprofessional Education

Dawn Forman

University of Chichester, UK & Curtin University, Australia & Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand

Marion Jones

Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand

ABSTRACT

It is not always transparent how e-learning can facilitate the interaction necessary for individuals to learn with, from and about each other as advocated by CAIPE (2002). This chapter emphasises the critical importance of facilitators acquiring new techniques to enable learners to make optimum use of the opportunities provided by Electronic Interprofessional Education (EIPE). To understand how barriers to online interprofessional education can be overcome, it is necessary to understand approaches to the development of positive e-learning environments. With this understanding, e-learning in supporting Interprofessional Education can be implemented more smoothly for both academic staff and students.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the cultural changes within higher education institutions that can facilitate the development of e-learning for interprofessional education. The chapter identifies processes essential to the development of e-learning materials that are flexible, user friendly and motivating for the user. Interprofessional working requires commitment and willingness to value diversity in working together to set goals and meet outcomes.

In healthcare there is a long history of concern over poor communication and rivalry between different disciplines and competing professionals (Cleak & Williamson, 2007). Learning to work collaboratively requires education, adaptation, a creative attitude to change and a commitment to functioning effectively in teams. It is arguable that e-learning prepares professionals for practice that overcomes barriers perceived in relation to learning together. Specific considerations for developing e-learning resources for interprofessional education and overcoming the barriers to their use by both academic staff and students will

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be outlined. Attention is also given to the challenges of exploiting first e-learning and then EIPe in order to support today's learners, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

BACKGROUND

With the publication of the World Health Organisation's (2009) new Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice, the world is again being encouraged to get to grips with interprofessional education and the ways it shapes practice. There is a need to provide convenient, accessible and flexible education that supports collaborative practice (MacDonald, Stodel, & Chambers, 2008). Any approach adopted must underpin the principles of teaching and learning so that, during the learning journey, the learner progresses at their own pace whether they are new to higher education, working on an undergraduate degree programme, or bringing experience from practice into a postgraduate learning context.

At the same time, the E-prefix is ever-present these days, from ecommerce to e-learning. Technologies such as Facebook, IPODs, Wikis, portals and virtual worlds are likely to be familiar to today's learners, so learning providers need a high level of awareness of them and to incorporate them where effective. Research by Huws, Jagger and Bates (2001) reports that the creation of 'E-Indicators' has resulted in a database covering 204 countries and including 171 variables. This proliferation reinforces the need to incorporate information and communication technologies in any education provision.

This learning journey needs therefore to bring together the benefits of interprofessional education and e-learning to address the needs of the health care student. First, however, the perceived barriers to IPEL must be understood and overcome. Biggs (2003, p. 213) stresses that the globalisation of education has coincided with the development of

information technology, so there are enormous pressures on teachers to get to understand and harness this technology, not only to improve their teaching but also to enable their university to sell their learning wares across the world.

However, quality management systems must not be compromised by an assumption that e-learning is a default solution in every learning context. The alignment of course objectives, assessments and learning strategies is critical to engage learners in multiple learning activities. These must be interactive and lead to assessment and quality teaching that considers different learning styles. If this is ignored, the e-learning process itself can become a barrier to learning.

Perceived Barriers

Pollard and Hillage (2001) outline the advantages of technology supported learning and show how this can be customised to suit learner needs. Their research highlights the following barriers to e-learning, which are similar to those identified earlier by Roberts (1998) who interviewed learners about their on line learning experience. Figure 1 outlines those similarities.

From the comparisons in Figure 1, it can be seen that Roberts focuses more on learning and teaching, while Pollard and Hillage focus more on change management, so the two complement each other. Change management is the focus of this chapter, which explores the conditions associated with the successful use of e-learning in interprofessional education. While e-learning is convenient, unfamiliarity with its methods and technologies can be a barrier to learning, especially where no consideration is taken of the fact that people learn differently and at different rates.

A study of online interprofessional learning by Miers et al. (2007) found that many students were apprehensive about online learning, concerned about their lack of IT expertise and anxious they would miss out on important learning. Professional cultures feed into the barriers especially

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