Chapter 24

Mixing Students Mixing Methods:
Evaluating a Blended Approach to Interprofessional Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes an innovative interprofessional education (IPE) module delivered with a blended approach, incorporating face-face teaching and online problem based e-learning (PBeL) activities. This has been evaluated using qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative work provided an overall perspective on how students experienced IPE. The quantitative work demonstrated significant differences in how different professions experienced the same curriculum; it also provided a useful insight into attitudinal changes over the period of learning. The evaluation findings are presented here with discussion of their implications for future delivery of IPE. Key issues include: maximising student engagement by optimising the timing of the module, the development of IT skills and managing the professional ethnocentrism and differences in professional epistemology and philosophy, which impact on students expectations of, engagement with, and subsequently the delivery of IPE.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an account of an innovative interprofessional education (IPE) module developed in the School of Health Studies (SoHS), University of Bradford, in the North of England. It is a case study from which we can offer critical guidance on key IPE issues. A blended approach was taken to the module delivery, utilising face-face learning and e-learning with problem based (PBL) processes, thereby creating problem based interprofessional e-learning (PBIPEL). An evaluation, drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative data was undertaken and the outcomes have informed development of the programme. The findings are presented here with discussion related to their implications for the future delivery of IPE.

BACKGROUND

In September 2005 a new module was introduced within the SoHS enabling approximately 350 pre-registration students from Midwifery (MW), Nursing (Nu), Occupational Therapy (OT), Physiotherapy (PT) and Radiography (RT) to come together to learn with, from and about each other (CAIPE, 2002). This module was the first of two specific IPE modules that students were to take and was delivered in semester one, year one, of their respective programmes.

Moving towards curricula that includes the principles of IPE has required a paradigm shift in thinking, away from the traditional health and social care pre-registration programmes (Colyer et al., 2005). Traditionally, emphasis has been on creating individuals able to practice in their individual, chosen profession. Students would become immersed in the particular customs and traits associated with that profession without appreciation, or examination of, what those traditions actually were (Dall'Alba, 2009).

Today's health service, however, requires individuals capable of working with colleagues across different professional backgrounds. This requires them to have an appreciation of other professionals' skills, values and knowledge base; to be capable of team working and to be able to work collaboratively in order to provide a joined-up package of care. Pre-registration health care curricula therefore, need to re-focus and enable students to learn skills that will enable them to work in this way. These include the ability to reflect on their own working practices, as well as having an appreciation of others (Martin, 2005).

The definition of IPE most commonly cited, for example by Barr et al. (2005), Colyer et al. (2005) and Freeth et al. (2005), is that of CAIPE (2002): 'occasions when two or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care'. Fundamental to this is the underpinning aim to break down negative stereotypes and promote an ethic of practice that is both patient-centred and mutually supportive of (interprofessional) team members (Hammick et al., 2009). IPE therefore is very different to multi-professional learning (MPL), whereby students are simply placed together, perhaps in a large lecture theatre, with little focus on interaction.

Student professionals are known to hold potentially harmful stereotypes of other professional groups even prior to commencing their professional programmes (Piertroni, 1991); the aims of IPE therefore, must be to eradicate these stereotypical images and create a respect for others' skills and knowledge (Hammick et al., 2009). Whilst MPL does not necessarily prohibit IPE, which can occur informally, for example, when sharing coffee outside of the formal learning environment (Owens et al., 2007), IPE is considered most effective when it is specifically planned, supports reflectivity, is group focused and based on principles of adult learning theories (Barr et al., 2005).

Achieving this can be both complex and challenging. Providing IPE within the university setting generally involves large numbers of students

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