



Health Sciences and Practice Mini-project September 2008

Summary - A virtual practice community for student learning and staff development in health and social work inter-professional education; changing practice through collaboration

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Interprofessional education (IPE) has been widely advocated and developed as a means to encourage effective collaboration in order to improve public sector services. An IPE curriculum was introduced at Bournemouth University from 2005 for all nursing branches, midwifery, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, operating department practice and social work students (n=600). Challenges of this ambitious and large scale project included facilitating meaningful interprofessional learning while balancing structural complexities of professional body requirements and the logistics of large student numbers and multi-site teaching. A web-based simulated community was created, known as Wessex Bay, as a learning resource to facilitate interprofessional learning around case scenarios.

An evaluation of student and staff experiences of IPE over two years, focusing principally on the use of technology in the education process was implemented. Student and staff data were collected via e-surveys, focus groups and open-ended questionnaires with additional feedback from external reviewers specifically on Wessex Bay. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Whilst the findings are not claimed to be representative, they provide a rich insight into student and staff experiences of technology enhanced learning in IPE.

The richness and complexity of data has led to a number of project outcomes with wide-ranging implications for interprofessional education. This research has led to the identification of three major territories of praxis in which individuals, both students and tutors, are operating in IPE, namely professional differences and identity, curriculum design and learning and teaching strategies, and technology enhanced learning. For the purposes of this report, we will discuss the findings related to student and staff experiences of technology enhanced learning in IPE.

The evaluation of the findings highlighted three issues; the level of student and staff knowledge and skill in using learning technologies impacted significantly on learning; there was a need to capitalise on the use of web-based learning resources by increasing interactivity within the scenarios; and

finally student and staff experiences of the learning resources was enhanced by a positive learning culture to facilitate creative use of materials.

All project aims and objectives were met, and whilst more focused staff and student development in using learning technology is required, a culture of working interprofessionally among students and academic staff has begun to develop, leading to the sharing of ideas about content and learning processes. Recommendations resulting from the project include the introduction of assessed development of student and staff learning technology skills; development of more interactive web-based learning embedded within the case scenarios; and streamlining of the scenarios to provide fewer, but more developed, cases.