

A Seminar Series in Practice for Interprofessional Learning (IPL)

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Abstract

This case study reports the outcomes of an evaluation of the introduction of a practice based IPL seminar series open to all pre-registration students studying on the health and social care programmes at a UK University. Students were offered the option of attending one, two or all three interactive seminars. In total twenty-two students representing five different professions attended. All students were studying in the first year of their professional programme. The evaluation shows students learned from and with each other although the seminars were challenging as they were exploring their own values and beliefs whilst at the same time attempting to understand different perspectives. Limitations were identified around timing and location of the seminars. We conclude that the in-practice IPL seminar series was a success and it is worth considering as an option for future IPL delivery.

Introduction and background

An IPL experience is offered to all students studying on pre-registration health and social care programmes at University Campus Suffolk (UCS). The students enrolled on courses in diagnostic radiography, therapeutic radiography, nursing (adult, child and mental health), midwifery, social work and operating department practice.

Students study one IPL module each year: The Professional Person in year one, The Service User in year two and The Organisation in year three. The Professional Person module is all about becoming a professional and the communication skills required, The Service User module is about patient/client pathways and The Organisation module is about working in interprofessional teams within organisations.

The approach taken is to offer essential module content to mixed professional groups in face to face lecture sessions, and then to offer elective sessions allowing students to choose workshop sessions which have relevance for their learning. The aim of this on campus IPL provision is to create opportunities for students to discuss professional issues and share experiences.

Student and staff evaluation of the IPL programme showed that the students preferred the elective sessions, as they were, normally in smaller groups and they perceived the teaching material to be more directly linked to their practice. Although the students did break into smaller groups in the other IPL sessions, the learning experience was often difficult to manage and the optimum learning environment was not always achieved.

As a result, the course team considered ways in which interprofessional learning could be made more meaningful to the students. There was also a desire, from both the academic and practice staff to take interprofessional learning into the practice setting. It was decided that one way to do this was to provide a facilitated seminar series in the practice setting, as recommended by Howkins and Bray (2007). They suggest that small group learning within practice is beneficial to IPL, and that IPL should include both practice based and University campus based learning. Howkins and Bray (2007) also say that IPL needs to have a practical application and link theory and practice together. Barr et al. (2005) echo this in suggesting that campus based and the workplace offer different but complementary opportunities for IPL and both settings should be utilised.

The seminar series was a different delivery style, using facilitation by practice educators, very much student led, in small groups and in the practice environment.

The Interprofessional Seminars

Three optional IPL seminars were offered at the most local acute hospital site. This was chosen as most of the students from the different professional groups have placements there, and therefore could attend the sessions easily.

The seminars were held at three - four week intervals in April and May 2011, from 2-3:30pm. They were advertised on the UCS Virtual Learning Environment to students in all years. Students were asked to 'sign up' for the sessions so numbers were known in advance. Signing up was managed by practice educators to reduce the possibility of students feeling under pressure to participate (Roberts, 2007). Students could sign up for one, two or three sessions and the content for each stood alone so they did not need to attend every session.

Practice educators rather than University lecturers were facilitators, to assist with the creation of a practice-based focus (Howkins and Bray, 2007). Three practice educators were involved from nursing, radiotherapy and diagnostic radiography.

The sessions were interactive to facilitate student discussion of issues in small interprofessional groups. Materials from the Centre for Interprofessional E-Learning (CIPEL) online resource were used (www.cipel.ac.uk). Seminar one used 'The prisoner scenario' and seminar three used 'The vegetables scenario' (see Figure 1,

which outlines the content of each of the scenarios used). An outline of these two scenarios can be seen in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 here.

Evaluation Methods

The seminar series was evaluated in three different ways, using the same methods as Cooper et al. (2009). Before the first session, students were sent a questionnaire to ascertain their expectations of the session. After each session the students were asked to complete a short questionnaire about that session and after the final session a focus group was used to ascertain students' views on the whole seminar series. Data were analysed by the authors looking for consistent and diverse views within the group and identifying common themes (Cooper et al., 2009).

Results

Data were available for 22 students and Table 1 indicates the number of students who attended and the courses on which they were enrolled. Some students attended both sessions, and some only attended one session, so the student group was different for each session.

Insert Table 1 here.

As table 1 shows, only first year students attended, and only for seminars one and three. Seven professions were represented.

Unfortunately no students attended the second session, despite being reminded the week before. Students indicated that their non-attendance was due to work pressures and placement experience.

The results of the pre seminar questionnaire showed that the reasons why the students chose to attend and what they were expecting to learn were similar. Students indicated that they hoped to learn more about working as part of an interprofessional team; to learn more about themselves; to improve their communication skills and to learn more about other professions. This is congruent with findings from Barr and Low (2012).

Analysis of the post seminar questionnaire and focus group suggested that the students enjoyed learning from and with each other; that the scenarios were meaningful to them; and that the seminars provided the opportunity to explore both self and others.

Four themes emerged from the data

- The students enjoyed learning from and with each other
- The scenarios were meaningful to the students
- Exploration of self
- Exploration of others

The students enjoyed learning from and with each other.

One student commented:

'I enjoyed being in a group of different professionals and seeing the different ways the situation can be dealt with.'

Whilst another student commented that they liked:

'Looking at scenarios from different professional's perspectives.'

The students saw this as a good opportunity, to learn more about one another's roles. Reeves (2000) also reported this in his study of practice based IPL, stating that students enjoyed exploring their assumptions and ideas about one another's professions.

The scenarios were meaningful to the students.

The students said that the scenarios were:

'Relevant to everyone.'

They felt that the scenarios:

'Raised issues that we could encounter in practice.'

Exploration of self.

The students felt challenged about their own thoughts and behaviours in these situations. Students said that they were:

'Thinking about my own feelings and emotions faced with a situation such as the one we discussed.'

'Thinking about our own values and the way we treat people different from ourselves.'

'Thinking about what could be right and wrong.'

Exploration of others.

The students also felt challenged to consider the other people involved in each situation and how they might feel. Their comments included:

'Thinking about all of the people involved and who is most important.'

'Understanding the prisoner's point of view.'

'Seeing the perspectives of others.'

Discussion.

The findings from this evaluation are similar to other research in this area.

It is important in IPL to find teaching material that applies to all of the students so that they can all participate and learn from the experience. Howkins and Bray (2007) emphasise that IPL teaching material should be authentic, based on real life experiences and involve all of the learners. Barr and Low (2012) suggest that the use of appropriate and relevant learning resources is crucial to the delivery of effective IPL. In this study students commented that they felt the scenarios selected for the seminars were relevant to all professional groups and the issues that they encountered in practice.

The last two themes could be seen as challenges, however it can be seen that valuable learning had taken place as the students had been stimulated to think about themselves, their values and beliefs and importantly about those they were caring for. This is an essential quality for students who are training to become reflective professionals working within an interprofessional environment.

The focus group at the end of the last session identified that students considered an IPL experience to be more relevant when it was delivered in the practice setting than on campus. This was interesting as there was no interaction with patients or other practitioners during the sessions, but the students perceived the location to be different from being in University. Barr et al. (2005) comment on the location where IPL learning takes place, saying that students may see campus learning and workplace learning differently and prefer to learn with other professionals in practice. The students said that it was good to have facilitators from practice rather than university based lecturers, as they were more 'in touch' with what was going on.

Students also commented that the smaller groups enabled good discussions to take place, as it was less intimidating than the larger groups they were used to for IPL in the University setting. This allowed them to open up more and for them all to feel able to speak and to discuss the scenarios.

Approximately 150 students are located close to the acute trust chosen for the seminar series. 22 students chose to attend and this was probably because attendance at the sessions was voluntary. As highlighted by problems with attendance at the second seminar, workload and timing in relation to placement needs are potential problems to delivering IPL in the practice setting. This may also explain why there were no second or third year students present as they were more focussed on their placement experience. The second and third year students may also have thought that it was not relevant to them.

If seminars in practice were to be used more frequently, the timing and frequency would need to be considered in order to ensure that students were able to attend.

Conclusion

This case study presents an approach to delivering IPL in the practice setting. There were clear benefits with the students achieving a meaningful IPL experience. This was achieved through selecting scenarios which were applicable to students from all professional groups represented; allowing students to discuss the scenarios in small interprofessional groups, where they felt more able to contribute and students enjoyed having the seminars delivered by practitioners in the practice environment (Reeves, 2000).

Limitations to this approach were identified, these included timing and location of sessions. Not all the students are on placement at the same time and students are located in a variety of settings, and added to this our health and social care students are placed all over East Anglia. This makes it difficult to identify a time and location that will suit all students and their curricula requirements. This would be considered carefully if we were to implement a practice-based seminar series in the future.

In conclusion the delivery of the IPL seminar series was a success and it is worth considering this as an option for future IPL delivery.

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www.cipel.ac.uk

Figure 1 – An outline of the two scenarios used.

The prisoner scenario – used for seminar 1.

The students watch a short animated narration of the scenario.

‘A prisoner arrives for an outpatient appointment, two officers accompany the prisoner. One prisoner officer is handcuffed to the patient and accompanies them into the consultation room. It is expected that the prisoner and officers will wait in the main waiting room.’

Discussion points for the students:

- Should the prisoner be treated differently from other patients/clients/service users?
- Is it necessary to know why the prisoner is in custody, i.e. what offence has he committed?
- How would you feel having to deal with a patient/client/service user under these circumstances?
- Would this situation make you respond differently to the patient/client/service user in your care?
- Is the prisoner being dealt with in an anti-oppressive manner?
- How might the scenario be changed to improve the situation?

The vegetables scenario – used for seminar 3.

The characters in this scenario are cartoon vegetables, and the students watch a short animation.

‘You are on a placement as a student and with your supervisor/mentor. You are carrying out a procedure/treatment /assessment with a patient/client/service user. Part way through your mentor/supervisor receives an urgent phone message and suddenly leaves without any discussion or instructions. You have no access to

notes or previous records. You have seen the procedure/treatment/assessment demonstrated before but have not done it without permission. The patient/client is becoming rather distressed and wants the procedure/treatment/assessment to be completed as soon as possible.'

Questions for discussion amongst the students:

- What do you do next?
- On what do you base your decision?

Table 1 Academic year, profession and number of the participants for each seminar

	Profession	Year of study	Number of students attending
Seminar 1	Trainee assistant practitioner (nursing)		1
	Mental Health nursing	1	1
	Social work	1	2
	Radiotherapy	1	5
	Adult nursing	1	2
Total			11
Seminar 3	Social work	1	2
	Diagnostic radiography	1	6
	Radiotherapy	1	3
Total			11