

## Managing Small Groups, Interprofessional Education Facilitation

In this section we will consider facilitation for small group learning. The UK Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education has contributed a great deal to this issue and we would recommend you go to their website ([www.caipe.org.uk](http://www.caipe.org.uk)).

### What can possibly go wrong?

If you are unfamiliar with IPE you may be wondering what can possibly go wrong when you bring together professional students for interactive learning. Those of you with experience will have many stories to tell.

These are some of the episodes we have witnessed:

- Poor motivation for IPE: example e.g. *"I want to be a surgeon"*, *"I want to be a critical care nurse"*, *"I want to be a sports physio"*...etc, I am wasting precious time for learning on my professional competence to give time to interprofessional learning
- Students bringing stereotypical views of others to the session which can be seen in their behaviour, for example, in body language, and a lack of engagement
- Students who have done this before and are more advanced either because they are graduates or they have come from a prior health and social care profession and may lack motivation to reflect and engage with the learning
- Confident, maybe mature students with a wealth of life experience, confident high achieving students, who take over groups and with an over confident manner become dismissive of those who lack their insights
- Students who believe this is only about taking on their own professional perceptions of any situation and cannot see the point in looking at the issue through the lens of another professional view point
- Jokers or students who given the freedom to shape their learning, enjoy a little too much humour
- Those who feel so overwhelmed they are quiet and appear shy and timid
- Students who come with views that some students are more academic than they are and might make them feel inadequate and vice versa, for example, students from high achieving academic backgrounds who do not want to be made to feel special
- Students who show a lack of respect towards facilitators who are not of their profession
- Students who are quite happy picking fault and presenting a quarrelsome nature
- Graduates who change profession, especially into medicine and want to move away from their previous work, *"I was a nurse"*, *"I was a physiotherapist"* and when placed

to learn alongside students professions they have left, become authoritative from their new stance

- Unless the event has a clear assessment that matters some students are dismissive as *'it does not matter'...* *'I do not need to work hard at this'*
- And much more..... .

Ultimately an IPE facilitator needs to manage student diversity and to do this must understand something of team dynamics. However a facilitator cannot rescue:

- a) Poor alignment to the IPE curriculum within the professional training
- b) Poor and inadequate materials which fail to engage and stimulate learning
- c) Inadequate preparation for the IPE event they are leading.

### ***Managing Group Dynamics: Our TIPS***

#### ***a) Things to consider before taking on the teaching***

- Ensure students have been prepared for the IPE event you are leading prior to the event
- Ensure the materials have been evaluated and are subject to quality assurance purposes
- Meet with your co-facilitator and ensure you are familiar with what you are teaching and agree how you will work together to enable learning to take place.

#### ***b) Things to do during the teaching session***

- Promote team working by setting an example of how you work with your co-facilitator
- Ensure you enable the student small groups to get to know one another- LINK TIPS ON STARTING AN IPE SESSION-ground rules
- Constantly watch your groups and look out for:
  - Students whose body language tells you they are disengaging
  - Students who never seem to speak
  - Students who are speaking too much
  - Students with a joker in the pack who are being led off the learning materials or who are seeing the materials as simply a time to have a good laugh
  - Students who are working so well together they fail to watch the time and are not likely to achieve their goals in the time limit as they are such good negotiators and listen to every point
  - Students who fail to agree on anything

### c) Managing those difficult moments

**Use the student ground rules.** These are your most powerful source of support.

Approach the student group and ask them to reflect for one moment on whether they feel they are working well as a team and using the ground rules they set to help them along. If you feel they are in some ways allowing some members of the group to take on roles of dominance, the clown, etc, then check to see if their ground rules have the words that might help them spot these diversions to positive inclusive group debate and discussion and suggest they add them. Stand back watch and wait. Consider this recent student view on ground rules:

*“In reference to writing rules task, I found it to be a patronising task set for students who are now considered adults at University and have been brought up well enough to have common courtesy to converse without dispute and needing to write a list of basic manners. I especially found this degrading for the nurse who had grown up daughters. Members of my group said this was pointless. Then I reconsidered my approach to the task by making it light hearted and pointed out it is good to have rules...because there are often domineering personalities in the work place, hence I ended up benefiting from the task”.*

**Setting the tone for the session:** As a facilitator you can reflect with the entire cohort before the discussions begin on individual differences and ensuring equal contributions during the discussions. For example if you are skilled you may feel able to state with a little humour that we are all different and what it feels like to be an extravert as opposed to an introvert when participating in discussions. Also that you are available should any students want to talk to you during the session.

**Suggest the groups allocate tasks and roles for one another:** These can be helpful and ensure a sense of participation for every group member. Roles might include the following:

**Scribe:** Listens and records contributions and organises information on any poster, or white board encouraging everyone to contribute

**Discussion:** Ensures that every member has contributed and taken part

**Recorder:** Summarises the information to be recorded and helps the scribe

**Researcher:** Looks for information for the group maybe has to go and ask the facilitator if they get stuck, or access a resource for the group

**Time keeper:** Ensures the group meet its goals and do not fail to complete the work within the set time frame.

Roles can be rotated where students work together over several days.

**Where individuals continue to behave inappropriately:**

- **The dominant group member:** Approach and listen for a while. Engage with this persons point and thank them for their contribution and then ask the

others what they think. Stay long enough to ensure others are listened to and suggest that this monopoliser maybe summaries at the end of this debate as they have contributed their perspective. Return in cycles to check this is happening.

- **The joker:** Again after observing and drawing near engage with the groups and ask directly about the humour. Then reflect with a more serious approach and stay long enough to reward students who now offer a serious and important point to the discussions. Return and check.
- **The quiet non-contributors:** This might simply be the need to stop group members from monopolising the talking but try and help the shy people by asking simple questions that get their voice heard. Often when the group see the facilitator positively engaging with this student, then the group will naturally continue as you leave.
- **Those who like an argument:** IPE is all about celebrating difference. Those who are passionate about their point of view often get animated and speak loudly. Your approach must be softer and more reflective opening up the issue by showing the many different ways of perceiving the issue. It is important to acknowledge the persons point of view as valid within the range you now present.

***All advances to any group should follow the following rules***

- **Be non-judgemental**
  - Show no alliance to any student profession
  - Do not demonstrate stereotypical behaviour e.g. avoid stating and thinking *'this is a typical physio student because...'*
  - Remain calm and reflective listening to the groups debates and interjecting only when required
  - Never single out any student.
- **Deal with issues:**
  - Go to those students who are obviously disengaged and re-instate them into the group either by pulling their chair in, or asking them open questions to bring them into the session positively
  - Rescue groups with different individual characteristics of the groups that are causing problems.
- **Ask empowering questions:** These should encourage debate and discussion e.g. *'What other community organisations could help in this case?'*
  - Avoid profession specific terms and always consider the different terms used by different professions when addressing the whole group

- Discern those groups where corrupting factors are taking place within their group personalities
- Promote reflection and approaching situations from new perspectives.
- **Motivate the group.** What are their strengths? You may feel that you need to motivate the teams by setting up the small groups in some type of competition.
  - Energise the group to stretch their thinking
  - Give feedback
  - Where possible use patient/service users in your teaching.

### **Learning activities for preparing facilitators**

Advanced Facilitation Skills; *Reflective exercises, for class-room and practice based IPE*

#### **Scenario 1**

Prior to the group arriving to start an interprofessional activity you have gone through the class register to allocate students to groups. You have tried to ensure a good mix in terms of their gender, ethnicity and professions. Whilst people are getting seated you have to step outside the classroom to deal with another matter. You are distracted for a while, so when you return to start the morning session, you are very conscious of the valuable lost time within a tight programme. As you stand and begin your introductory welcome you notice that one group is made up of all males, another group is composed of entirely medical students and only two groups clearly represent any degree of ethnic diversity. You aren't sure if people have sneakily moved groups to be with their friends, or if you made mistakes when trying to originally construct the groups using the register

#### ***Discussion Points:***

Is it best to leave the groups as they are - they may have already started to 'bond' and you can't afford to waste any more time?

If you re-allocate the groups describe the process you would use?

In the future how might you manage this situation differently to ensure the group mix is right from the very beginning of the session?

**Scenario 2:**

An interprofessional group has just returned from a patient interview and are at the stage of discussing their findings. You are trying to unobtrusively listen to make sure they are on the right track. Each time you get within ear-shot all you can hear is Jimmy (a mature, male, social work student) dominating the discussion. His manner is loud and sarcastic and you are concerned his colleagues are being intimidated. In fact they are displaying their feelings of anger non-verbally. This is not turning out to be a team activity, as Jimmy is not listening to anybody else and he is not permitting others to make contributions to what is meant to be a shared decision making process.

***Discussion Points:***

How would you deal with Jimmy?

Later Jimmy comes to see you; he says he has taken charge because the rest of the group were so 'wet'. He suggests they need to be spoken to because passivity is not a behaviour conducive with professional practice. Is he right?

Would you address this issue with the other members of the group?

How will you now manage the entire group?

**Scenario 3:**

You are introducing an interprofessional session. A particular student keeps disrupting the class by talking to her neighbour. You have politely asked her twice to stop. She is now talking again for the third time, but this has made you feel really angry because she is talking to someone on her mobile phone.

***Discussion Points:***

How would you deal with her?

What are the pros and cons of a firm reprimand in front of the class?

What are the pros and cons of ignoring her?

Were you in control of the group from the outset?

What could you have done to avoid the issue in the first place?

**Scenario 4:**

You are facilitating interprofessional group work and can't help noticing some very negative body language. One of the graduate medical students moves her chair to ensure her back is facing a young looking nurse in the group. You continue to observe in the hope the situation will naturally resolve, but it doesn't, as the same medical student crosses her arms and looks completely bored and disinterested every time the nurse speaks.

**Discussion Points:**

What action would you take immediately to try to re-establish effective team working and communication?

If you asked the medical student to come and see you after the class, what would you say to her?

The medical student's response is to insist she wasn't doing anything negative on purpose, as surely *you* must realise body language is usually an unconscious form of communication.

How would you reply to this?

**Scenario 5:**

An interprofessional group of students have just returned from a home visit to interview a patient. You are happy with the progress they are making in evaluating the patient's circumstances. Shortly before you intend to dismiss the class, one of the group calls you aside for a quiet word. She confides in you that she felt very uncomfortable during the home visit because some of her colleagues were openly critical, in front of the patient, about his care package and the quality of care being provided by the GP and district nurse. To make matters worse, the students proposed to be experts and offered advice to the patient.

**Discussion Points:**

How would you deal with this situation?

How would you respond if asked directly by one of the students "Who told you we said those things?"

Would you feel it was necessary to speak to the patient, the GP or the district nurse to discuss and resolve the incident?

## **PIPE Project**

A funded research project to assess facilitator skills for effective interprofessional learning in the UK which was funded by the Higher Education Academy Council of England, the collaboration being within and across five Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in the Thames Valley of the UK (Howkins and Bray 2008).

## **Additional Reading**

Brockbank, A. & McGill, I. (2007). *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education*. Second Edition. New York; Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Howkins, E. & Bray, J. (2008). *Preparing for Interprofessional Teaching. Theory and Practice*. Oxon; Radcliffe.

Jaques, D. & Salmon, G. (2008). *Learning in Groups. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. A Handbook for face-to-face and online environments*. Oxon; Routledge.