A guide for facilitators supporting inter-professional groups within the Blackboard VLE

As the group facilitator – moderator, you have at your disposal various techniques to positively encourage member participation. This document outlines some of these approaches and how you may implement them, particularly if you are new to this virtual learning environment (VLE).

1. A Group Welcome banner

2. Using Group emails

3. Adding your own comments to the Blogs

4. Summarising participation

1.   The Group Welcome Banner

This can demonstrate your involvement and commitment, if students see a friendly and personal welcome to the group.

- For instance, regarding the group's name – what is it and why – something inspirational, perhaps?

- Include an associated picture – it helps the students recognise easily where they are in the materials.

- Also, as participants introduce themselves in a multi-professional environment, why not build up a table of contributors and their professions?

The following paragraphs indicate how you may add these features to your groups' banners.

1.1   The Homepage is in effect Wiki – when you edit it the web page it becomes text, and you can add words, fonts, pictures and tables. When you save / submit it back to the VLE, it again becomes a web page for all to view. Hence this is YOUR practice at making a Wiki (though only you are editing it, not the whole group).

1.2   Start simple with a group title and welcome text... Within the left column My Groups, clicking on the Group Name should give 'File Exchange', 'Send Email' and 'Group Homepage'. Clicking on the latter takes you to the Homepage, just like all participants. However, you need be a bit more clever... With your BlackBoard facilitator Edit Mode set to ON, click upon the **right double-chevron '>>'** next to the groups name. This takes you again to the groups homepage, but this time with additional customisation and editing facilities...

1.3   What you are looking for is a **down double-chevron** next to the Group's name on the top row of the home page panel. Clicking on this down-chevron gives access to 'Edit' and 'Page Banner' options. 'Edit' allows changing of group members and the group name – please – DON'T go there! Press 'Cancel'! However, **'Page Banner'** is what you do want to edit:- click on this to see a panel that allows you to edit the 'Page Banner Content'. Add a line of title text repeating the name of the group. Highlight it and change it from Normal to Heading 2, say. Add a paragraph of text, welcoming participants to the group and introducing yourself as the facilitator. Mention your professional background, but indicate that this is a group of diverse professions with very different experience and expectations.

For example:-

Welcome to the LIP2 Skiddaw Group, named after one of the Munro mountains in Scotland.

I'm Gary Denby, your facilitator for this Learning Inter-Professionally course, for strand 2 students. Over the coming two weeks I will be hovering in the background, encouraging your group discussions about a quite complex family situation. Whilst I am a practising podiatrist (2 days weekly) and developing educational resources for the university, my experience and opinions on multi-disciplinary matters holds equal sway with your own opinions and experiences. This is a hands-on, experiential course, where everyone is encouraged to contribute (and I may chase those who are hiding in the wings!). Have fun – join-in - little and often is the key!

It is really important in the welcome that you let the students know when you will be online as they may be disappointed if they post a comment to you and you do not respond for several days – they may lose interest.

Press <SUBMIT> to save your text as a web page, for all your group members to see. Edit it again if you need to. When you switch your Edit Mode to off, the header probably displays as black on light blue, rather than black on dark grey (a reminder as to which mode you are in).

1.4   You can add a photograph to your Group Header, perhaps of the munroe your group is named after... Suitable pictures may be found at www.munromagic.com or any others, which you need to first download to your local computer (Right-click, Save Image As...). Then edit the 'Page Banner Content' as above and place the cursor at the start of a new paragraph, where you want the picture to be added. Now the clever bit... in the Wiki header area on the third row, there is a small 'picture frame' icon. If you wander your mouse cursor over the top of it, it should give the help text 'Attach Image'. Click this icon. [Note that as well as formatting text (the top line of the header area), inserting tables and hyperlinks to other web sites (the second line), the third line also allows attachment of files, images, sounds / mpeg, video / quicktime, other audio, animated clipart / flash, or mashups / flickr photos / slideshare presentations / Youtube video]. Click on 'Attach image' and browse to your JPG image and press SUBMIT to upload it to Blackboard, then press SUBMIT again to attach it to your Header (full width of screen by default – lots of detail). As a matter of good practice, you may wish to acknowledge the author and source.

1.4.1 Not for the faint-hearted, **optional...** You may think that the picture is too large! You CAN change its size, if you wish. Edit the 'Page Banner Content' again, as above. Click on the 'Toggle HTML Source Code' icon <> at the end of the second row, to change the picture into the web page codes that make it all happen. This is a peek beneath the bonnet, to see how things happen... You are looking for the Image code that specifies where the image is held and how to display it. By default it will look something like:-

To change the size of the picture, we simply insert a couple of instructions to tell it OUR preferred width and height – don't let the participant's computer guess! A good value is:

   width="'400'" height="300"

where the numbers relate to the number of colour dots in each direction, ie about 4” wide and 3” tall. Insert this width and height text as is (with the double quotes and single quotes (copy-paste!), into the gap between img and src, to give the result:

   .

You can press the <> icon again to see the results, press the <Centre> icon to put it in the middle of the page, then press SUBMIT again to publish it as a web site, for all to see. Don't panic if not quite right the first time around – press CANCEL if you think you've messed up. Daunting the first time around, but you can make some impressive changes to the Wiki this way, and clear out a lot of mess, when necessary.

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1.5   You may wish to add a table of group members and professions to the Group Header, or a Wiki. **It's optional...** Edit the 'Page Banner Content' again, as above, and place the cursor at the start of a new paragraph, where you want the table to be added. This time press the 'Create Table' icon half-way along the second row. The systems asks to specify the number of rows and columns: I suggest 10 rows and 4 columns to allow 20 participant names and their professions. As a caption you could type 'Group participants and their professions'. Press SUBMIT to add the table and its title. You will now see a table where you can add names etc. as required. Press SUBMIT when you're finished, to convert back to a web page for all to see.

2.   Using Group emails

When learning inter-professionally, emails are generally discouraged between participants, since we prefer them to be participating within the group discussion blogs, not having private conversations. However, it is a feature you can use to great affect:-

▪Encourage all of your group members to come on board with an introductory email as soon as the VLE site is opened to participants.

▪After a day or two send a private email to the students that have not been online, inviting them to participate and ask if there is any problem with them accessing the site.

▪After a day or two, advise the group who is on board, the mix of professions etc. Encourage group socialisation and for them to take time to get to know each other. It is important not to rush through the learning materials too quickly – little and often is best. Advise that some students may still have to join the discussions and to remember that some people are on practice and may have had limited time opportunity to join in during the first few days.

▪To help pace the group through the materials, suggest that by the end of week one they should all be reading and considering the family scenario materials, or perhaps over the mid-course weekend. By the start of the second week at the latest, the group needs to start on the week two materials

▪Encourage the final course reflections and for participants to email them through to you.

3.   Adding your own comments to the Blogs

Please be assured, none of us know even a half of what is available for Inter-Professional Education (IPE), such is the breadth of professions involved in health and social care. Your role is NOT to teach, or dictate, or specify best practice! Your role is to encourage the group to explore roles and issues that encourage or deter effective inter-professional working, to the benefit of client / patient / service user (the first stumbling block, already!).

We have a large number of adult nursing students and they will dominate the group membership. However we have tried to makes sure that each group has a mental health nurse, OT, social worker, podiatrist... and we have tried to equally mix the smaller professional groups. However, not all of them may be represented in your group. If you need any advice from a different professional perspective, please use the e-moderators forum.

This is an experiential course, where students and yourself can share your experiences and expectations of multi-disciplinary practice. Participants are encouraged to bring their personal and family experiences of complex care situations, also results of their investigations of current policies, charities involved etc. Thus LIP2 revolves around a family with multiple and complex needs, one that no single profession can resolve on their own.

As facilitator, you can interject your observations and encouragement into the Blogs. Please encourage the participants to think more broadly, about how the issues they raise might translate into broader practice. You do not have to supply the answers – this is not chalk & talk – even though some students may habitually expect you to take on the role of 'expert' (so they can be a 'sponge')!

The materials start very simply, but become quite contentious. For example, in deciding the most important person... gaining a group consensus.... editing the Wiki and so on. We've never seen actual fisticuffs in the Blogs, but students can sometimes forget the Ground Rules. As facilitator, please take advantage of this (or even stir up some contention if they are getting along too easily...), to raise 'innocent questions' as to why the different professions are having difficulty getting along. Might it be the jargon or assumptions they are making about each other? Might their contrasting value or belief systems be at the core? What is 'good evidence' and 'evidence based practice' anyway? Hence you can appreciate why inter-professional groups require the participation of quite distinct and different social-based and health-related professions.

4.   Summarising Participation

Towards the end of the course, you may wish to summarise participation in the discussion blogs. It is important to encourage those that have worked hard and contributed well. Those that did not contribute can know that this was noticed and missed. However, be careful not to assume they just did not bother to contribute, since this may further discourage reluctant students. There may be genuine reasons for their non-availability, or errors or omissions in the student lists supplied to the course. We will try to follow up non-attendance and with your support this will be much easier to do.

The nature of interprofessional learning is that some of the learning can seem irrelevant at times to individual professions. Therefore please encourage students in their final reflections, to consider what they can specifically take into their professional practice from this learning – they should all have something to say, either about communicating when you cannot fact to face, or about the use of technology in their healthcare practice, or professional issues...

Please encourage participants to complete an evaluation.