



Promoting interprofessional learning and enhancing the pre-registration student experience through reciprocal cross professional peer tutoring

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ABSTRACT

Background: To improve collaboration and the quality of care, healthcare programmes are increasingly promoting interprofessional education thereby enabling students to learn with, from and about each other. A reciprocal peer learning model has developed among pre-registration physiotherapy and adult nursing students at Plymouth University, England. Embedded within the curriculum, it provides voluntary opportunities for year two students to become cross professional peer tutors to year one students while enhancing interprofessional understanding and skills acquisition.

Aim: To explore participant experiences of two cross professional peer tutored clinical skills workshops delivered to a cohort of nursing ($n = 67$) and physiotherapy ($n = 53$) students in 2015.

Design: A mixed methods approach generated qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was gathered via focus groups and individual interviews of peer tutors and learners ($n = 27$). These were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale questionnaire ($n = 84$) was completed before and after the workshops to consider any influence on students' attitudes towards interprofessional learning.

Results: Four themes evolved from thematic analysis; benefits of cross professional peer tutoring, interprofessional teamwork, quality of care and factors influencing the delivery of the workshops. Data showed students felt they developed greater understanding of interprofessional roles and acquired new skills. Peer tutors developed confidence in representing their profession while appearing to inspire early stage students. The Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale questionnaire data identified very positive attitudes towards interprofessional learning among the majority of students in both cohorts before and after the workshop.

Conclusion: This study endorses the utility of enhancing the Higher Education experience by offering voluntary peer tutoring opportunities. Participating students build confidence in representing their profession, while potentially inspiring early stage students and supplementing interprofessional learning across a cohort.

1. Introduction

Interprofessional education (IPE) is a requirement of healthcare programmes in the UK (NMC, 2010; HCPC, 2017) and is embedded within the nursing and physiotherapy curricula at Plymouth University. While a considerable amount of face to face interprofessional education occurs among allied health professional (AHP) students, opportunities for this to occur among nursing and physiotherapy students are limited. Reciprocal cross professional peer tutoring, timetabled within the curriculum, has developed over the last three years offering nursing and physiotherapy students' personal development opportunities while promoting interdisciplinary collaboration. This research explores students' experiences of two peer tutored practical workshops designed to

enhance clinical skills and interprofessional understanding. Cross professional peer teaching has been reported elsewhere (Joseph et al., 2011; McLelland et al., 2013) but little reciprocal cross professional peer tutoring has been documented in the literature from the UK.

2. Background

Peer learning strategies have an established place in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Higher Education Institutes (HEI) (Keenan, 2014). A range of benefits such as improved confidence and self-esteem is documented for peer leaders, while learners gain greater social support and facilitated learning (Hammond et al., 2010; Keenan, 2014). However, our understanding of how best to promote

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interprofessional learning (IPL) among pre-registration students continues to evolve (Hammick et al., 2007; Sunguya et al., 2014). One focus of IPL is the development of role understanding; a competence established as key to collaborative practice (Suter et al., 2009; McDonald et al., 2010). Cross professional peer assisted learning (PAL) has been reported to achieve this, with participants developing a greater understanding of each other's discipline (McLelland et al., 2013).

Pedagogy associated with peer learning is expansive. Reciprocal peer tutoring has been described as “a form of collaborative learning that involves students of similar academic backgrounds experiencing interchanging roles of tutor and learner” (Gazula et al., 2017, p1). It is proposed that the timing of the change in roles should occur at strategic moments (Topping, 2005), although this commonly occurs within the same year group (Gazula et al., 2017). This project utilises a reciprocal peer tutoring relationship where each programme invites second year students to volunteer to tutor first year students from the other profession. The following year, the cohorts that have been learners are invited to become tutors. Therefore, reciprocal cross professional peer tutoring is the term adopted.

2.1. Interprofessional Learning

IPL ultimately aims to produce a “collaborative practice-ready workforce” (WHO, 2010). The timing of IPL within curricula has been informed by longitudinal studies that identify openness of students to IPL is highest at entry to a programme and, for the majority of professional groups, declines over time (McFadyen et al., 2010; Pollard and Miers, 2008). One UK longitudinal study showed nursing students did not follow this trend, maintaining a positive attitude to IPL throughout the programme (Coster et al., 2008). It has been suggested that the changes in attitudes towards IPL may be due to a “reality check” with initial evaluations identifying an unrealistically elevated attitude (McFadyen et al., 2010). Research has established that students entering both nursing and physiotherapy programmes already identify strongly with their professional group (Hind et al., 2003), yet students' understanding of their professional roles at this early stage is limited. It appears that while establishing IPL from the outset may take advantage of this readiness to collaborate, a challenge is nascent understanding by students of professional roles, potentially causing insecurity when advocating for their profession.

The timing of these workshops was strategic; aiming to take advantage of the openness to collaboration in year one but ensure tutors were advanced enough to have confidence in their professional roles. In 2013, an invitation was extended to second year physiotherapy students to deliver a practical seminar to first year nursing students. The following year the invitation was reciprocated. The workshops have evolved into two profession-specific practical sessions each 2 h long containing four separate skills sections. The physiotherapy students tutor skills associated with locomotion. The nursing students tutor skills associated with observations, nutrition, pressure care and mobility. Case scenarios are used to relate the skills to practice.

3. Aim

To explore the experiences of nursing and physiotherapy students involved in two peer tutored workshops designed to enhance clinical skills and interprofessional understanding.

4. Methods

To enable an in depth exploration, the study adopted a mixed methods approach. Focus groups and individual interviews explored the experiences of nursing and physiotherapy students. The Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale (RIPLS) questionnaire was administered before and after the workshops, aiming to identify student

attitudes towards IPL during the study period.

4.1. Setting and Participants

Participants were students on a BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy programme and BSc (Hons) Adult Nursing programme. Learners were first year cohorts of physiotherapy and nursing students. Peer tutors were student volunteers primarily from year 2 of both programmes, with one year 3 physiotherapy student. A total of four physiotherapy and seven nursing tutors delivered the workshops.

4.2. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was gained from the faculty ethics committee. A research assistant recruited from outside the faculty gathered all data. This was to encourage open and honest discussion within the focus groups, emphasise voluntary participation and minimise social desirability bias. Enabling anonymity was felt to be important as the authors were involved with student teaching and assessment. Informed consent was gained for the study by the research assistant following a routine teaching session.

5. Data Collection

5.1. Qualitative Data

All peer tutors, and a random sample of first year physiotherapy and nursing students, were invited to participate in profession-specific focus groups following the workshops. Data was generated through semi-structured in-depth individual interviews and focus group interviews. These were audio recorded then transcribed. Focus group interviews are a valid and potentially rich source of qualitative data; using group interaction to explore personal experiences, beliefs and attitudes (McLafferty, 2004). Discussion focused on individuals' experience of the workshop, learning from and teaching students of another profession and future use of the peer tutoring model. All data collection from learners occurred within six weeks of the workshop, while data collected from tutors occurred between three and six months after the workshops due to difficulties accessing tutors while they were on placement.

5.2. Quantitative Data

Questionnaires were distributed following a routine teaching session. Participating student learners and peer tutors completed a questionnaire, before and after the tutored workshop. There were three weeks between baseline and repeat data collection. Each student was allocated a unique identifying number to enable questionnaires to be matched while ensuring anonymity. The questionnaire comprised a brief demographic section that identified the participant's age, gender and any involvement with the universities PAL programme and a version of the RIPLS adapted for use in the clinical skills setting (Joseph et al., 2011).

RIPLS is commonly used to assess student's attitudes towards IPL. It contains 19 items, broken into 4 subscales: teamwork and collaboration, roles and responsibilities, positive professional identity and negative professional identity, and uses a five point Likert scale to determine a students' level of agreement with the range of statements. Content validity was originally established involving junior learners across eight health professions, including nursing and physiotherapy (Parsell and Bligh, 1999).

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