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INTERPROFESSIONAL LEARNING: EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING STUDENTS IN ONLINE PEER MENTORING*

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Abstract

This report disseminates the findings of research which was conducted under the auspices of the Health Science and Practice Subject Centre, Higher Education Academy with the aim of exploring the benefits of engaging students in online peer mentoring within an interprofessional learning initiative. The project aimed to explore how student engagement in learning is optimised by peer mentoring and to determine what the mentors gained from the experience. The relationship between student engagement and peer mentoring is under researched and is widely applicable across all institutions and disciplines. The project involved twelve Year 3 students taking responsibility for facilitating online interprofessional discussion forums for a proportion of Year 1 and 2 students in the context of the Interprofessional Learning Pathway at Coventry University. The aim was to discover how effective Year 3 students were in facilitating online discussion forums promoting interprofessional learning (IPL) of Year 1 and 2 students and to explore the impact of facilitating online forums on student facilitators [U+201F] cognitive, personal and instrumental development. The objectives of the project also included an evaluation of a facilitation training course adapted for the student facilitators and identifying key factors in provision of optimal support for peer mentors.

1 Executive Summary

This report disseminates the findings of research which was conducted under the auspices of the Health Science and Practice Subject Centre, Higher Education Academy with the aim of exploring the benefits of engaging students in online peer mentoring within an interprofessional learning initiative. The project aimed to explore how student engagement in learning is optimised by peer mentoring and to determine what the mentors gained from the experience. The relationship between student engagement and peer mentoring is under researched and is widely applicable across all institutions and disciplines. The project involved twelve Year 3 students taking responsibility for facilitating online interprofessional discussion forums for a proportion of Year 1 and 2 students in the context of the Interprofessional Learning Pathway at Coventry University. The aim was to discover how effective Year 3 students were in facilitating online discussion forums

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promoting interprofessional learning (IPL) of Year 1 and 2 students and to explore the impact of facilitating online forums on student facilitators' cognitive, personal and instrumental development. The objectives of the project also included an evaluation of a facilitation training course adapted for the student facilitators and identifying key factors in provision of optimal support for peer mentors.

The project findings suggest that student facilitators are effective in the online facilitation role. Their input was highly appreciated by the Year 1 and 2 students and in some respects they brought added bonuses over academic staff to the role. For example, the student facilitators had been through the same process and were aware of time pressures, workload and other sources of stress, therefore could identify with the demands placed on the student they were facilitating. Student facilitators appeared to be well positioned to be able to empathise and connect with students and were enthusiastic, motivating students to engage. Their presence in the place of staff facilitators appeared to result in a diffusion of status in the student facilitated forums, which were perceived to be less hierarchical than the staff facilitated groups because students found the student facilitators to be more approachable.

In terms of benefit of peer mentoring to the student facilitators, findings seem to support the limited literature. Students perceived that they had enjoyed intellectual, personal and instrumental benefit from the opportunity. They had developed new profession specific knowledge through the sharing of ideas that occurred in their student groups and experienced increased confidence in articulating their personal knowledge. Perhaps most importantly they had experienced a new take on interprofessional learning that had not been apparent when going through the learning process themselves as Year 1 or 2 students. In other words, their facilitation experience had helped to consolidate their understandings of interprofessional issues. Aside from the practical skills of facilitating dialogue the students had gained leadership skills and had enhanced their personal communication skills. Most students identified potential instrumental gains from their involvement in the project such as the enhancement of their cv's or improved employment prospects and in some cases the experience strengthened future plans to want to teach.

The online facilitator training course adapted for the student facilitators evaluated well. Findings suggested that it prepared students for their role and that students felt well supported as a result. Key factors in the provision of optimal support for peer mentors were identified and these have been incorporated into an online resource entitled 'Online Peer Facilitation Good Practice Guide', which will be freely available to other institutions as part of the outputs to this project. It is intended as a practical resource, which will take its users through a simple, step by step process to enable them to think about what is required to successfully adopt student led online facilitation.

Project Leader: Dr Lynn Clouder

Project Partners

- Marie Krumins
- Bernie Davies

Completed: February 2010

Category: IPE

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NOTE: [View/Download Full report - PDF¹](#)

Health Sciences and Practice Subject Centre mini-project final report

¹See the file at <http://repos.hsap.kcl.ac.uk/content/m10227/latest/10-59_lynncouder.pdf>