Reflection as a tool to encourage student engagement and collaboration in interdisciplinary and cross-professional activities.

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Hypothesis

The students (see Fig. 1) primary task in the 10 weeks interprofessional (IP) module in Maternal and Child Health theme was a wiki project. A wiki is an editable website that is created by multiple authors. A platform where students were confronted with complex interprofessional (IP) situations such as misunderstandings or conflicts over the roles and responsibilities of the other team members and over their professional boundaries. The hypothesis was that this might impede the IP group work5, but that reflection as a developmental6 and systematic approach to thinking about experiences would lead to both in-depth learning and change of actions. Hence, reflection should challenge students understanding of themselves, their attitudes and engagement so that biases are disclosed, and students are allowed to be more critical about, their interpretation of their own professional and IP practice7. This was thought to result in individual and professional development and improvement of the students learning8. Therefore, reflection could be a learning tool helping students analyze and evaluate simple complex IP relationships and enhance collaborative team work as well as encourage innovative thinking9.

The Wiki was proposed to be a self-initiated platform for the students to explore, reflect and to design a project based on practical investigations, which is supported by an interface inviting teachers to guide and follow the progress of the project during the course of the module.

The study aim and design:

The aim of the study:

It is a challenge for students to be involved in IP education. Reflection upon their experiences during involvement in an IP group work while creating a Wiki may enhance and improve the IP relationships and so empower the group work.

A pilot study was designed to investigate the reflection methodology in improving student engagement in self-initiated activity in IP group work. Two groups out of fifteen were introduced to the reflection methodology and followed up upon through the course of 10 Weeks (See Fig 2).

The investigation methodology of this study included:

Ethnographic approach:
1. Guided field notes written by the lecturers
2. Interactive observation of group-work
3. Short interviews after each group-work observation
4. Focus group interviews near the end of the module

Online survey approach:
1. Post-course evaluation questionnaire at the end of the module for all the students
2. Focus group interviews near the end of the module
3. Short interviews after each group-work observation
4. Group interview near the end of the module

Results & Discussion:

Student Perceptions of the Wiki project as a learning tool:

In the survey intervention groups emphasized the wiki as a major contribution in achieving a high learning outcome of the module which was 91% for the intervention groups compared to a mere 66% for the rest of the groups (see Fig 3).

Students perspective is an important part of the learning process10. Extracts from the interviews present how students participating in the intervention groups recommended modification of the Wiki structure to a less structured and more flexible frame so it would allow them to be more innovative. Furthermore group 2 underlined that “The wiki checklist limit our imagination and innovative ability”.

Reflection, Wiki project and group work engagement

As seen in Fig 3 the students reported that the reflection questions and models helped them to get rich and in-depth knowledge of interprofessional collaboration (IPC) and prepared them for future collaboration with other professions. Moreover, the survey results revealed that the intervention groups have a better understanding of their own professional role and the role of other professions which strengthened their own professional identity in comparison to the control.

Conclusion

The reflection methodology inspired outstanding engagement of the students during the self-initiated wiki project. Furthermore the ability to analyze IP situations and conflicts through reflection and conducting interviews and focus group interviews allowed the students to reach second order reflection. This facilitate the IP group work and allowed a better understanding of IP concepts and theories. Hence a satisfying outcome for the pilot project.