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Training students as interprofessional learning facilitators: An exploratory study highlighting the need to build confidence

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ABSTRACT

Interprofessional learning (IPL) aims to equip students for future interprofessional and collaborative practice. Involving students as IPL facilitators is becoming increasingly commonplace as an attempt to catalyse the necessary transformation of our workforce needed to deliver truly integrated and person-centred care. Evidence in the literature highlights the key role of trained facilitators in reaching successful IPL outcomes. Some guidelines are available as to how we train staff facilitators, but little evidence is available that describes how to appropriately prepare student IPL facilitators. The aim of this exploratory study was to investigate whether student IPL facilitators felt that they were sufficiently prepared for their role. Data in the form of open-ended text-based responses from student facilitators (n = 9) were collated after an intervention where student facilitators had been given the role of supporting IPL. Data were analysed using principles of thematic analysis. Three main themes emerged: i) building confidence; ii) purpose of IPL; iii) learning moments. Student IPL facilitators who took part in this study felt that they were adequately prepared for their role. Findings show that preparing students for IPL facilitation has similar, yet unique, components compared to the training staff. In particular, this study highlighted a need for student facilitators to receive further preparation to help build their confidence. Involving students as IPL facilitators has great potential in staff and students joining forces to equip students for future interprofessional and collaborative practice that can deliver high-quality care.

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Introduction

As part of health and social care education in the United Kingdom (UK), students are required to develop skills that will help them work together effectively in practice in order to provide high quality and safe care (GMC, 2012; HCPC, 2016; NMC, 2015). This is in response to the UK National Health Service (NHS) expectation to recruit skilled and well-rounded graduates who are prepared to work together efficiently with peers from their own and others' professions (NHS, 2016). Interprofessional education (IPE), which occurs when two or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaborative practice and quality of care (CAIPE, 2006), is thought to promote the development of the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviour that underpin such collaborative working. Indeed, empirical evidence is now starting to accumulate in the literature to support the anticipated outcomes of IPE (Brandt, Luftiyya, King, & Chioreso, 2014; Reeves et al., 2016a). However, there is still considerable work to be done in order for educators to understand how best to equip students for their future role as collaborative practitioners.

A number of key elements have shown to be essential ingredients for successful interprofessional learning (IPL) (CAIPE, 2016; Reeves et al., 2016b), including the importance of appropriate facilitation of IPL. Training of IPL facilitators is important to ensure IPL outcomes are successfully achieved (Anderson, Cox, & Thorpe, 2009; Freeman, Wright, & Lindqvist, 2010; Hanna et al., 2013; Ruiz, Ezer, & Purden, 2013). However, despite training, IPL facilitation is considered a complex task (Egan-Lee et al., 2011; Evans, Knight, Sønderlund, & Tooley, 2014) and even the most experienced educators may find facilitation of IPL a challenging experience (Freeman et al., 2010; Lindqvist & Reeves, 2007; Rees & Johnson, 2007). The main reason for this is that most educators are accustomed to teaching students from their own, or at least just one profession rather than an interprofessional group with inherent diversity (Lindqvist & Reeves, 2007; Ruiz et al., 2013). Therefore, facilitators need to be able to create a 'safe environment' in which learners can—explicitly or implicitly—explore their professional identities without descending into conflict, or 'professional tribalism' (Hawkes, Nunney, & Lindqvist, 2013; Carpenter and Dickinson, 2011). Indeed, discussions around professional identities are likely to exacerbate facilitators' uncertainty about when to interject and how best to deal with potential disagreements within the group (Freeth & Reeves, 2004; Hammick, Freeth, Koppel, Reeves, & Barr, 2007; LeGros, Amerongen, Cooley, Ernest & Schloss, 2015; Lindqvist & Reeves, 2007).

The complexity of facilitation emphasises the need for appropriate preparation of facilitators. In fact, evidence shows that the success of IPL can be undermined by using unskilled, or unprepared, facilitators (LeGros et al., 2015; Milot, Museux, & Careau, 2017). Instead of nurturing a culture of learning and working together, students may leave a

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poorly facilitated IPL session feeling discouraged from working with others, or a particular profession. Poor facilitation may be linked to a lack of self-awareness of facilitators' own collaborative behaviour and biases towards some professions, or a lack of empathy for what students find challenging when engaging with IPL (LeGros et al., 2015; Milot et al., 2017).

Despite the obvious complexities linked to facilitation, evidence also shows that involving students as facilitators can have a uniquely positive impact on the process of fostering a cultural change towards collaborative working (Lehrer et al., 2015). This is a notion also supported by Brewer, Flavell, Trede, and Smith (2017) who propose that students have the potential to contribute to the necessary transformation of the workforce, possibly by joining what Kotter (2014) describes as the "volunteer army" of individuals needed for the transformational change. Student facilitators are likely to more easily show empathy for what students may struggle with during IPL, not only in relation to the process itself but also with the rationale for why IPL is needed as part of their course. By having this empathy, many student facilitators may be able to support the students' learning more effectively.

Involving students as facilitators of learning amongst peers who are in their earlier stages of education is becoming increasingly commonplace during higher education (HE) (Havnes, Christiansen, Bjørk, & Hessevaagbakke, 2016; Keenan, 2014). Peer assisted learning has been shown to have a number of positive outcomes, both for the student facilitators and learners (Marvell, Simm, Schaaf, & Harper, 2013; Snyder, Carter, & Wiles, 2015), Examples in the literature include: student attainment (Marvell et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2015); consolidation of learning (Bene & Bergus, 2014; Williams & Reddy, 2016); increased confidence in learning (Keenan, 2014); and enhanced awareness of professional role identity (Dunleavy, Galen, Reid, Dhar, & DiZazzo-Miller, 2017). To date, most peer-assisted learning has taken place within students' individual courses where students teach peers from their own profession.

As educators consider involving students as IPL facilitators, it is important to review current training models, to ensure that students' preparation is appropriate for their needs. This is especially important since it is recognised that students are likely to require additional support and guidance when facilitating mixed groups of students compared to uni-professional groups (O'Brien et al., 2017). While there is a general consensus about the importance of having trained facilitators supporting IPL, there are limited accounts in the literature about how best to prepare students for this role and clarity around what additional support they need (LeGros et al., 2015; Pittenger, Fierke, Kostka, & Jardine, 2016; Reeves et al., 2016b). At an HE institution (HEI) in the UK, the facilitator training model presented by Freeman et al. (2010) has underpinned the preparation of all IPL facilitators to date. However, since this model was developed at a time when all facilitators were staff, the inclusion of students as part of the team called for an exploratory study to investigate if the student IPL facilitators at this HEI felt they were adequately prepared for their role, or whether the training needed further development to include student specific elements.

The aim of this paper is to (i) present findings from data collected from a group of students who had completed their IPL facilitation, to help identify how best to prepare students; and (ii) in light of these findings, adapt the current training package as applicable.

Background

A facilitator training model

Freeman et al. (2010) developed a model for facilitator training comprising eight components designed to accommodate different learning styles and training needs. Whilst recognising the debates around different learning styles (Coffield, Moseley, Hall, & Ecclestone, 2004; Honey & Mumford, 1982; Kolb & Fry, 1975; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012), the purpose of this model was to provide a framework for facilitator training that ensured all students had equal opportunities to achieve the intended IPL outcomes within a safe and supportive environment.

Overview of IPL currently facilitated by students

This UK HEI has, since 2002, developed a number of IPL opportunities that are currently offered to 3000 students from twelve different courses every year. Students are introduced to the first level of IPL (IPL1) very early in their course. IPL1 comprises different components including preparatory work; one face-to-face two-hour teamworking session; independent online assignments. IPL facilitators are involved in the face-to-face session. Student learners work together in small mixed-professional groups to explore how individual behaviour can impact on teamworking and a number of challenges linked to communication. To generate discussions, students use a set of trigger material and gain support from their facilitator who will be either a member of staff, or a student who is in year two, or above.

Since 2013, students in year two and above have been offered opportunities to facilitate IPL to peers who are in the earlier stages of their courses. So far, 20 second-year students have facilitated IPL to first-year students (IPL1) and another 19 third- or final-year students have facilitated IPL involving second-year students (IPL2). Every year, there is an increased interest from students to become IPL facilitators. This paper will focus on IPL1 student facilitators.

IPL1 student facilitators

All students who had completed and passed IPL1 were invited to apply for the role of IPL1 facilitator. The invitation was sent out over email. Applicants were expected to provide a brief rationale for their interest in becoming IPL1 facilitators, receive permission from their respective school and, once approved, attend two three-hour facilitator training sessions. The aim was to recruit a purposive sample of student facilitators from a range of professions and to keep a 50:50 student-staff facilitator ratio.

IPL1 facilitator training

All IPL facilitators need to complete training. Although the content of IPL1, and thus the facilitator training, has evolved during the period since 2010, the overall format still adheres to the Freeman et al. (2010) model to accommodate different learning styles. The main and significant difference between the training currently provided to the one presented in 2010 is that it now includes six face-to-to face hours, and runs over one day—rather than four three-hour face-to-face sessions running across three weeks. In addition to the six hours, facilitators are given material to read through before the face-to-face session and that is also accessible during the time they facilitate and then they will always be able to attend the one-hour face-to-face debrief meetings after each event.

The reason for shortening the training offered prior to IPL1, was staff feeding forward that they preferred to do it all in one go, due to competing commitments. Furthermore, whilst Milot et al. (2017) and Anderson et al. (2009) advocate a more extended training period, including a mentoring/shadowing component, the training discussed in this paper is designed for a lower level of facilitation (IPL1), which requires less complex input from the facilitator over the course of a two-hour workshop attended by first-year students.

The first three hours of the training outlines the rationale and context of IPL facilitation including the: philosophy and theoretical underpinning of IPL; role, skills, and attributes required of an IPL facilitator; challenges related to the role and how to deal with them; how to access resources and support available. Table 1 outlines the role and skills presented by Freeman et al. (2010) and an updated version of the role and skills expected of the facilitators completing the training in 2015–16, formulated by participants who have completed the facilitator training over the years.

As shown in Table 1, the role and skills of the IPL facilitator are now more defined, as a result from years of staff, and since 2013 also student facilitators, developing these to ensure that we are clear on what we actually need to prepare facilitators for, and hence include in the training.

The second part of the training is specifically tailored to IPL1, enabling participants to experience the activities they will be facilitating and to discuss ways to enhance student learning. At the end of this session, participants have time set aside to direct questions to a panel of experienced facilitators.

Facilitators involved in higher levels of IPL complete additional training tailored to the respective IPL intervention.

Commitment

Once trained, facilitators sign up for one, two or three IPL1 teamworking sessions scheduled for the first semester. Every session is attended by approximately 300 students divided into 36 groups, each comprising seven to nine students from four or five different professions—all situated in one very large room. During each session, nine staff and nine student facilitators oversee the activities of two groups.

Support

Students are not co-facilitating during IPL1 but are instead co-located in such way that they can facilitate independently, yet access immediate support from experienced student and/or staff facilitators if needed during the actual session.

Following each event, all facilitators are invited to attend a debrief meeting where they can share experiences and discuss any challenges they may have encountered in a safe environment. Ongoing support and additional resources are provided

Table 1. Trainee facilitators' perceptions of the role, skills, and attributes required of an IPL facilitator, comparing perceptions before and after the student-facilitator initiative began in 2013.

2003–2012 The role of the IPL facilitator is to:	2013-present The role of the IPL facilitator is to facilitate the learning process by:
• promote the benefits of interprofessional learning for teamwork and patient care; • provide direction and focus towards the learning objectives without making decisions for the group; • encourage interaction and collaboration; • foster the knowledge and skills necessary for good interprofessional teamworking, such as mutual respect and flexibility; • provide encouragement and support throughout the programme.	• highlighting the benefits & challenges associated with interprofessional collaboration & the implications for them as professionals - as well as the care they deliver; • providing direction and focus towards the learning outcomes for each respective module; • encouraging interaction and collaboration between members of their respective IPL groups; • fostering knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviour that enable effective interprofessional collaboration; • providing encouragement and support; • providing a safe learning environment; • helping the students make links between theory and practice; • acting as an ambassador for interprofessional practice.
The skills required to be an IPL facilitator include to:	The skills and attributes of the facilitator include being able to:
• be professionally neutral; • motivate, encourage and support the process of IPL; • listen actively; • understand and respond to group dynamics; • encourage diplomacy; • encourage diversity; • be flexible; • chair a meeting; • observe, reflect and summarise.	• remain professionally neutral; • show enthusiasm and commitment; • actively listen and be "present"; • understand and respond to group dynamics; • demonstrate diplomacy; • cultivate diversity and open-mindedness; • be flexible; • observe, reflect and summarise; • question students - when appropriate; • allow students to learn from mistakes; • suggest ways of making decisions and resolving conflict; • address and solve difficult situations.

via a dedicated intranet site and by direct access to individual support, both before and after the teamworking session.

Methods

The study employed a post-intervention design to gather open-ended text-based survey responses.

Sample

Fourteen students facilitated IPL1 in the academic year 2015–16 who studied: medicine in year two (n = 2) or year three (n = 3); paramedic science in year two (n = 1); nursing in year two (n = 3); pharmacy in year two (n = 3) or year three (n = 1); physiotherapy in year two (n = 1). These 14 students together facilitated 432 first-year students. Some facilitated two groups for one teamworking session, whereas others returned to facilitate two new groups for a further one or two sessions.

Data collection

Data were collected from student facilitators during the academic year 2015–16 after the three IPL1 teamworking sessions were completed. Student facilitators were asked, via email, to complete a questionnaire with six open-ended questions aimed at capturing the experience of facilitating IPL1 including the extent to which they had felt prepared and supported; what they had learnt; what challenges they had encountered; and how the training could be further improved.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using principles of thematic analysis described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) to elicit themes and sub-themes. Data were collated and analysed independently by the first two authors of this paper, adopting principles of thematic analysis, as described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). Each of the open-ended answers was read through, key phrases highlighted, and a code given to each phrase. Codes were grouped together to form preliminary themes that were then discussed and compared by the two authors who agreed on three main themes.

Ethical considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the programme lead for the Masters of Higher Education Practice based at this HEI. Participants were issued with informed consent forms ensuring that all data provided would be kept confidential and that findings would be reported anonymously. To encourage students to feed forward their honest views, participants were invited to return questionnaires via the university's internal mail system, rather than by email.

Results

Nine of the 14 student facilitators completed the six questions about their role in IPL1. Three main themes emerged from the data: 'Building Confidence'; 'Purpose of IPL'; and 'Learning Moments'. Each theme is described below, with representative quotes included to aid interpretation of data.

Building confidence

Student facilitators saw this experience as an opportunity for academic and personal growth, professional development and confidence building:

> …it gave me more confidence and helped me see how I have developed over the course. (Student Facilitator 5)
> …it was enjoyable, informative and an enlightening experience that didn't take much of your time, but really contributed to my professional development. (Student Facilitator 6)

Generally, student IPL facilitators felt prepared for their role. They appreciated that the training allowed them to work through the exercises and tasks they would facilitate during IPL1. In particular, they valued the opportunity to ask questions to a panel of experienced facilitators, which helped the student facilitators understand how to deal with different situations and thus to build their confidence:

> The training session took us through the scenarios meticulously and many opportunities were there for us to ask questions and clarify possible uncomfortable situations that may arise. (Student Facilitator 3)

> The training helped me develop a bit of confidence in dealing with challenging situations. (Student Facilitator 5)

Students were realistic, however, about how much could be achieved during the six-hour training provided prior to IPL1, acknowledging that it would be impossible to be prepared for every scenario that might arise during the actual IPL1 teamworking session:

> During your IPL you meet so many people and you face so many new situations. It is impossible to cover all the scenarios beforehand. (Student Facilitator 7)

A student who opted to facilitate an IPL session that took place later in the semester mentioned the time-lag between the training and their first facilitation and that they had been feeling worried as they arrived:

> There was a bit of time before the first facilitation… when I arrived at the session I was worried. (Student Facilitator 9)

Student facilitators highlighted the importance of communication channels being open and clear to them so that they knew where to get further help. They appreciated the trainers' support, as and when it was needed, and that questions could be asked, or concerns raised, at any time. Further to having this chance to ask questions before and after, student facilitators were also reassured by the presence of experienced facilitators during the actual teamworking sessions—should they need to ask for advice, or help:

> Constant email contact made me feel as though if I had any questions, or queries, they would get dealt with quickly. (Student Facilitator 3)

> Having other IPL facilitators around me was reassuring. I knew if I needed help, I could always ask. (Student Facilitator 4)

Student facilitators valued the debrief meetings that took place immediately after each IPL1 session, where both staff and student facilitators were encouraged to discuss their thoughts or concerns. Here, they could together share the best practice and ideas on how best to overcome a challenging situation that may have arisen. Some students expressed reassurance about the very fact that even experienced facilitators did not always know what to do, which helped reduce anxiety as they realised that facilitators are not expected to provide all the answers:

> …calmed me down and made me aware that I did not need to know everything. (Student Facilitator 1)

Purpose of IPL

Student facilitators felt that being IPL1 facilitators had contributed to their understanding of IPE, and consolidated their own understanding of the importance of interprofessional teamworking as they were supporting the learning process of others:

> …when I initially did IPL1, I did not understand the aims of IPL and could not comprehend why I had to do IPL when I was only in my first year of university. However, having been an IPL facilitator I am more aware of the aims of IPL. (Student Facilitator 4)

Some student facilitators highlighted the challenge of dealing with students' resistance to engage in IPL, a phenomenon known to them—having shared a similar experience of IPL1 in recent times. Student facilitators said that they were now able to empathise with the learners, as with the facilitators. One student facilitator admitted that they had found it difficult to keep their groups focused on the IPL outcomes. Indeed, the data revealed that student facilitators were aware of some students resisting IPL, possibly due to lack of understanding of its purpose:

> Students usually come into their first IPL sessions having preconceived ideas of what it may be like… as a facilitator it is something you directly feel as they project their feelings mainly towards you as someone who is making them do something they do not necessarily want to do.
> (Student Facilitator 3)

> Sometimes it is a real struggle to ensure that students collaborate in a teamworking sense, remain focussed and above all – make sure that students realise the importance of IPL. (Student Facilitator 3)

Learning moments

Students enjoyed having a different role to play in IPL and were motivated by the opportunity to see things from the facilitator's perspective. One student facilitator felt that they have a unique role and that they can use this to help students make the best use of moments where learning can take place:

> I feel that with sharing your own experience and because I am a student myself, I was able to relate to the students. (Student Facilitator 3)

> [Student facilitators] can also put other students at ease knowing they can ask what they might fear to ask a lecturer. (Student Facilitator 8)

Some student facilitators found it difficult to judge when to intervene with the group activity or discussion, and when to stand back. One describes their dilemma:

> It's actually quite difficult [to judge] when to butt in…I often want to add my opinion, but sometimes standing back, listening and then adding input may be the best way forward. (Student Facilitator 6)

In some cases, student facilitators felt they needed to provide a lot of support in order for students in their groups to engage with each other effectively so they could learn from and about each other. A range of examples of how to stimulate learning were described, such as how they had encouraged a group to 'gel' and supported individual students to fulfil a given task such as, for example, being 'the chair'. However, one student facilitator reported that they had not successfully been able to engage one of their groups and therefore felt that the students may have lost a learning opportunity:

> One of my groups did not speak to each other and were just completing tasks independently… (Student Facilitator 9)

Discussion

Findings from this study offer some insights into how a group of students viewed their experience of facilitating the first level of interprofessional learning (IPL1). This study supports earlier findings presented by Clouder, Davies, Sams, and McFarland (2012) suggesting that the benefits to students who facilitate IPL are significant—including academic and personal growth and strengthening of professional and interprofessional identities. Student facilitators taking part in this study say that it helped them develop skills that they believe will be helpful to them as future healthcare professionals. A common thread linking data collated from student facilitators is that of 'building confidence'. As reported here, and also by Clouder and colleagues (2012), students are clearly motivated by a chance to see things from the teaching perspective—providing educators with a chance to capitalise on this exciting opportunity to engage students in IPL. However, is clear from students who were part of this study that the quality of the training package available is vital. Looking at the data presented in this paper, a key component that enables students to build confidence is the different ways in which more experienced facilitators can support student facilitators—from the outset and throughout, by creating a safe environment.

Offering ongoing support for IPL facilitators is indeed one of the components highlighted by Freeman and colleagues (2010). And, although staff have also expressed anxieties in relation to IPL facilitation (Lindqvist & Reeves, 2007; Rees & Johnson, 2007), this study suggests that student facilitators need even more reassurance in order to confidently fulfil their role. There are several possible explanations for this, for example: student facilitators may have no previous teaching experience; they may feel uncomfortable facilitating peers from other professions; or they may be apprehensive about

how best to deal with students who resist engaging with the process of IPL.

Some resistance amongst learners is recognised by student facilitators—either when they actually facilitated IPL1, or from when they themselves participated in IPL1 a year or two earlier. Student facilitators interpret this resistance as some learners lacking understanding of the purpose of IPL—emphasising the need to foster an interprofessional team spirit, as alluded to by Anderson et al. (2009). Hence, it is essential to help all IPL facilitators develop their role as ambassadors for interprofessional learning and practice (see Table 1). This needs to be addressed as part of the training, by allowing them to experience the actual intervention so that they can identify moments where they can role model best practice, as discussed by LeGros and colleagues (2015). Milot et al. (2017) identify another aim of this experiential approach, which is to develop facilitators' empathy towards the students they will be facilitating by putting themselves in their shoes. However, as shown in this study, one student facilitator feels that they are in a unique position to support learning, as they have recently been on the receiving end and can, therefore, more easily empathise with the challenges learners may experience.

One thing to consider when preparing students for their facilitator role, from experience at this HEI, is to not only build but also to manage confidence gained from experiencing the facilitator role so that it does not impact negatively when the student returns to the learner role in an IPL context. It is therefore important that the facilitator training includes opportunities for discussion and reflection to help students develop an awareness and sensitivity around this issue. Another challenge amongst IPL facilitators is the request for them to remain professionally neutral.

As discussed by Howkins and Bray (2008) and Anderson et al. (2009) IPL facilitators need to remain clinically neutral. However, in contrast to this being a challenge for staff facilitators, this study did not pick up any concerns about this from student facilitators, suggesting that they do not see this as something difficult. Perhaps this is due to the very fact that they are still developing their professional identity, which for the authors of this paper emphasises the importance of getting students together early on during their course. By involving students in IPL and as student facilitators of this learning, the impact is likely to be greater if students are supported adequately and appropriately, especially in relation to the things that students worry about.

Something that student facilitators in this study do worry about is linked to the role of providing direction and focus—knowing when and how best to encourage interaction and collaboration. This implies that student facilitators need to develop skills linked to how to identify and optimise learning moments. However, this phenomenon is not atypical to our student facilitators, but something they have in common with many staff facilitators too as shown by Lindqvist and Reeves (2007). The question of when and how to give guidance to student groups and when to take a back seat has been discussed in the literature (Hammick et al., 2007; LeGros et al., 2015; Lindqvist & Reeves, 2007). Whilst too much intervention can inhibit a group's independence (LeGros et al., 2015), particularly in the 'forming' stage (Tuckman, 1965), standing back at crucial points can also prove problematic, especially if the group is experiencing negative stereotyping, or if some members are not engaging in the process. One might speculate that student facilitators are particularly sensitive to this from their own experiences as students. Or, as suggested by one student facilitator in an informal discussion, it might be to do with students' confidence, particularly when facilitating groups with students who are older than them. Either way, the best way forward in terms of making sure all facilitators feel supported and can develop as they go along is to offer training, before, during and after any given IPL event.

According to Hall and Zierler (2015), it is equally important to offer training following IPL. These authors advocate debrief opportunities that allow facilitators to share their thoughts about what it has been like to facilitate IPL, describing such catch-up sessions as opportunities for 'group reflection'. Milot et al. (2017) echo this as it allows facilitators to share instances when they have felt 'at a loss'. In this study, it was clear that debrief sessions, whilst not as structured as those advocated by Milot et al. (2017), offered a chance for student facilitators to realise that experienced facilitators can also feel insecure, thereby normalising their experience and together discuss and explore appropriate strategies to support student groups more effectively. As outlined in Table 1 – for trainers based at this HEI—the role and skills of the facilitator is a dynamic concept. It is important therefore to review this on an annual and ongoing basis together with new and experienced IPL facilitators to optimise learning for everyone involved.

Findings of this study highlight that a key challenge for student facilitators is to manage different group dynamics. At this HEI, this was previously addressed by demonstrating common situations in a role-play with experienced facilitators, which was paused at key points in order to invite discussion and questions from the audience. Despite being a highly valued component of the training, the role-play was removed due to time constraints of previous facilitators. In response to the findings presented here and suggestions made informally by some student facilitators, student and staff facilitators will together develop a video showcasing different scenarios, which will be available on a site accessible to facilitators and linked to a discussion board where everyone can share thoughts and suggest ways to handle different situations.

One of the known tensions and sometimes barriers linked to different professions learning and working together are the preconceived ideas between different professions that often exist even among students at this early stage (Hawkes et al., 2013; Lindqvist, Duncan, Shepstone, Watts, & Pearce, 2005). Effective and supportive facilitation of negative stereotyping within an IPL environment is described by Derbyshire, Machin, and Crozier (2015) as an important skill. Conversely, unskilled facilitation can exacerbate negative stereotypes, as discussed by LeGros et al. (2015). It is therefore vital that the facilitator training allows for such possible tensions to be addressed.

Due to the face-to-face components of the facilitator training at this HEI being much shorter now than it was years ago, some small group activities have changed, but key activities remain to ensure a common understanding of effective

interprofessional teamworking, how it impacts on high-quality care, and to prepare facilitators for their role in this process. However, this study highlights some areas where more explicit training would be beneficial for student facilitators, such as developing the video mentioned above. Another example is to further prepare facilitators in how to recognise and deal with learning moments, which was also discussed by (LeGros et al., 2015) so that they can help learners make sense of the activities, achieve the learning outcomes, and make links to the practice setting. Although the facilitator training at this HEI is currently constrained by limited resources, opportunities for new facilitators to shadow and be mentored by more experienced colleagues as advocated by Milot and colleagues would allow further development of their IPL facilitation skills. A consultation with student and staff facilitators will be held in order to determine the most effective way to take this forward.

Students are, by virtue of their student status and having participated in IPL themselves, in a unique position to bring an additional and valuable dimension to the facilitator training, where students and academic staff are preparing alongside each other. This way, they are able to relate to and share with academic facilitators how their peers might be feeling about participating in IPL. This 'insider' perspective, if shared in the context of a facilitator training session, can help the process of reflection about the facilitator role. Certainly, in this case, involving students as IPL facilitators, and training them alongside staff, has had a positive impact on the training for all participants. Furthermore, findings presented here support those presented by Lehrer et al. (2015) positioning students as core drivers of nurturing and leading a culture of transformational change that embraces interprofessional learning and working.

This study has a number of limitations. The main limitation being its small size, as it only presents data from nine student facilitators. Also, data provided were collected through open-ended, text-based surveys, rather than qualitative methods, which would probably have given a more in-depth insight. Further studies would benefit from a combination of methods, as recommended by Ruiz et al. (2013) such as observations of group interactions during facilitation, self-report methods using diaries, and/or interviews with individual participants, or focus groups. It would also be beneficial to base future questionnaires on Sargeant and colleagues' (2010) Interprofessional Facilitation Scale (IPFS) in order to assess facilitators' skills, which may highlight gaps in our current facilitator training.

Concluding comments

Transformation of current practice needs an 'all hands on deck' approach. The much-needed culture change must start at the earliest opportunity. At HEIs, students can start this process by taking part in IPL opportunities that are supported by trained facilitators. This study shows us that following successful completion of IPL students can also act as facilitators. Student IPL facilitators who took part in this study fed forward that they truly enjoyed the experience, that it has helped them personally and professionally and that they felt they had a positive impact on the learners during their first level of IPL.

This paper emphasises the importance of preparing students for their role as facilitators of IPL and providing ongoing support—with the aim of building their confidence, increasing understanding of the purpose of IPL and helping them identify and optimise learning moments. It has also helped to identify certain areas to ensure that all student facilitators feel adequately prepared for and confident in their role from the outset. Only then, will they get the most out of this experience and be able to actively contribute to leading transformational change in relation to enhancing interprofessional education and practice.

This innovation has the potential for staff and students to learn and work together—further preparing students for their future career in a workplace that requires every member of the team to function at an optimal level as they collaborate within and across professions to provide the care people expect.

Declaration of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the article.

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