



Short Communication

Interprofessional communication and practice for development: Can the university be a scaffolding?

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With advancement of human civilizations, we have also developed new fields / disciplines / professions. A common problem with such specialization is that sometimes we fail to see the larger picture or picture from a different perspective. Whenever I can think of a developmental issue that faces India, I see that the solutions cannot be offered by a single discipline or profession in isolation. As I am coming from the specialty of public health, I observe that we need to talk to experts in technology to that we can help reach preventive health education to the masses, social scientists to be able to have a deeper understanding of the non-medical aspects affecting health of people, specialist in economics to understand the health economics, the experts at management to help in hospital management. It is in this backdrop that I see a role of Interprofessional communication and Interprofessional practice to find the solutions to our problems.

Currently, India is at a very opportune moment in history where the youth 15-29 years of age forms 27% proportion of the population.¹ Another opportunity with this age group is that they are more open to join hands with students from other professions.

Interprofessional education can be a good start for interprofessional practice. One would observe that during the school years the student passes through multidisciplinary education that s/he would lean the

science, mathematics and humanities as well at the same grade. For the sake of depth of studies, the paths diversify in higher education and one is required to choose a stream of preference. Hence we have multiple disciplines of study at university level such as social sciences, law, management, medicine, engineering, mass media and communication, fine arts and performing arts, environment, family and community sciences, science, education and psychology and so on. A student of medicine may wish to develop a mobile-based application to promote healthy eating among children. The current system of medicine does not provide any formal avenues for such a student for learning the computer science even if s/he has a curiosity and commitment.

I feel that if we can generate a platform for Interprofessional communication at the level of university education it can holds scope. We need to create avenues in our higher education system for interprofessional communication and joint efforts. We have schemes for promoting research among medical students.² Such scheme for other disciplines would also be there. I feel that it is time we should formally recognise collaborative research through such schemes. Currently, only one guide from the same college is formally recognised as guide in this scheme. Can we think of formally recognizing faculty from other disciplines as co-guides?

Similarly, the postgraduate studies in medicine require the student to undertake research work in form of a thesis.³

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The primary purpose being to inculcate a spirit of enquiry in the student. This regulation also recognises only one guide from the same specialty in which student is studying.

Increasingly we observe the faculty lamenting that they run out of novel topics to give as thesis topics to students as the number of postgraduate seats are increasing. As the specialties saturate the knowledge within core domain the scope lies at the periphery of the subject domain where it meets another subject or discipline. If a student-faculty duo attempts to explore at the boundaries of one subject where it meets another, they would find many such opportunities to explore the curiosity with scientific rigour in form of formal research. It is time that the regulatory body and universities start promoting inter-disciplinary collaborations at postgraduate thesis level. Similar efforts would be required in all higher education disciplines. A postgraduate student in architecture would wish to study how housing design can be best optimised for a pandemic prone world. S/he stands to gain by having a public health discipline person in the team.

Similarly, innovations and start-ups are currently being promoted in schools both by the central and many state governments.⁴ They are aimed at solving the problems faced by people. Many problems require multidisciplinary input for their solutions. Hence, success of such programs would also require inter-disciplinary collaboration.

It is heartening to note that the National Education Policy has already taken a note and refers to promoting multidisciplinary universities and cross-disciplinary interaction.⁵ It is a call for all involved in higher education to start talking to colleagues from relevant disciplines.

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