

## **Creating an Interprofessional Education Experience for Pre-service Education and Pk-12 Schools**

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**Abstract:** *As educators of pre-service school librarians, we focus on facilitating collaboration with the entire school community. Other helping professions have a similar focus, often termed interprofessional practice. Pre-service educators and other health and human resources professionals need to be taught how to work as part of an interprofessional collaborative team. The Interprofessional Education team at Longwood University developed a model for interprofessional education at Longwood University. Background information, specific steps, and tips for success are shared for institutions or PK-12 schools interested in implementing a similar experience.*

**Keywords:** *Interprofessional education, collaboration, interdisciplinary, pre-service educator preparation*

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## ***Introduction***

The World Health Organization defines interprofessional education (IPE) and collaborative practice as “occasions when two or more professionals learn with, from, and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care” (World Health Organization, 2010, p. 13). The importance of improving collaboration among professionals in healthcare and other settings has received significant attention in the last few decades. Although concepts of interprofessional practice are rooted in the medical professions, collaboration is not restricted to healthcare professionals. Several researchers and educators have called for more interprofessional collaboration in professional educational practice as schools are recognized as being equal participants in providing health and human services to school-age populations (Brown and Bolen, 2003). Furthermore, school psychology, speech-language pathology, social work, and special education now include IPE in their current standards and guidelines and other professions include requirements related to similar topics such as interdisciplinary collaboration (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2022; Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology [CAA], 2020; American Nurses Association [ANA], 2001; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1999; Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2012; Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016; Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2022; National Commission for the Accreditation of Special Education Services [NCASES], 2021). However, this recognition also comes with acknowledgement that explicit IPE training is needed regarding roles and responsibilities of the variety of professionals within a school community. Baerg, Lake, and Paslawski (2012) best summarized this notion when they stated “effective interprofessional collaboration (IPC) does not spontaneously emerge when trainees or professionals from different disciplines are merely grouped together” (p. 187).

One of the Shared Foundations of the AASL National School Library Standards (American Association of School Librarians [AASL], 2018) is Collaborate. The idea of collaboration spans across the three sets of standards and highlights the importance of teaching students to collaborate but also facilitating collaboration among professionals and other members of the school community. From “facilitating diverse social and intellectual learner networks” to “creating and maintaining a learning environment that supports and stimulates discussion from all members of the school community,” (AASL, 2018, p. 61) the AASL National School Library Standards clearly cover the importance of the school librarian spearheading a collaborative environment in the school community.

According to Pihl (2012, p. 87), “One of the great challenges in schools is to develop systematic collaboration between teachers and librarians.” Stewart and Oniel Deans (2021)

suggest that one of the biggest barriers to effective collaboration between the school librarian and teachers is a lack of understanding of the role of the librarian. It is imperative for the school librarian to build trust with colleagues before effective collaboration can occur (Soulen, 2020; Stewart & Oniel Deans, 2021). Participating in an IPE event builds trust and understanding between people in various professions by addressing stereotypes and opening communication. As participants learn from, with, and about each other, they learn to trust each other so future collaboration will be possible.

While much of the research about collaboration with a school librarian examines collaboration between librarians and classroom teachers, Loertscher and Koechlin (2015) posit that the same benefits would hold true for collaborations involving other specialists in the school. Loertscher and Koechlin developed a conceptual framework for collaboration and co-teaching which could be further developed to include various specialists. This is very similar to what is done in the group sessions of the IPE event described below. The school librarian plays a key role in initiating collaboration throughout the school (Stewart & Dean, 2021), but all professionals involved should have major roles in the collaborative relationship. All parties are involved, but the school librarian can and should lead the way as an instructional partner with other school specialists and teachers.

As research continues regarding IPE, there is increasing recognition that collaborative service delivery requires new forms of training for candidates entering education and human service professions and on a continuing basis throughout their professional lives. (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000) Therefore, it is clear university programs need to transition beyond traditional classroom experiences to appropriately prepare students for this part of their professional roles. It is imperative that collaborative learning opportunities be incorporated into the curriculums of pre-service programs and school library preparation programs are uniquely positioned to lead these collaborative opportunities.

### ***IPE in Practice:***

Interprofessional education at Longwood developed over the course of three years. The IPE team began with a few graduate faculty who were intrigued by the idea and sought opportunities to know more. After talking with other universities with similar activities and visiting IPE events in action, the team was committed to bringing IPE to Longwood, beginning with the College of Education, Health, and Human Services. Longwood IPE team developed a plan for approaching IPE, beginning with defining the vision and goals. In keeping with the university mission which includes “the development of citizen leaders who are prepared to make positive contributions to the common good of society,” (Longwood University, 2016) Longwood’s vision for IPE became “to equip citizen leaders to

skillfully contribute as productive members of interprofessional teams which consolidate resources to provide more fiscally responsible care and services to clients/students.” The goals of IPE are:

1. Provide more lenses than students currently have within their own discipline;
  - a. Build awareness of different disciplines and what those disciplines do;
  - b. Break down barriers set by stereotypical thoughts about various professions.
2. Acknowledge that we can’t do it all alone.
3. Develop skills for working as teams to provide services to students/clients.
4. Identify the many hats worn by education and human services professionals.
5. Equip students with a toolkit to provide holistic care for everyone they may encounter.

With the vision and goals in mind, the team worked towards the first IPE student event at Longwood which was held in April 2021 and the second event held in April 2022. The team learned some valuable tips along the way, which are outlined here for those who might be interested in implementing a similar event at another institution.

### ***IPE @ Longwood Steps to Success***

#### **Step 1:** Examine other programs.

It is important to start by examining what is already in practice in other places. Before the Longwood team started planning an event, we first talked to faculty at other institutions who were experienced in these events. We were able to connect with faculty at other institutions in our state to learn about their events and to observe them in action. With its beginnings in health and human services professions, it stands to reason that the vast majority of IPE events for pre-service professionals focus on health topics and professions. However, with simple changes to the case studies, education majors can find a place in IPE events. One university we visited held two IPE events each year; one event focused on adult health-related cases, and the other on pediatric cases that allowed greater involvement from education majors. Another university works Special Education majors into their IPE event each year.

#### **Step 2:** Determine the needs of your university.

Begin with an analysis of the programs at your institution that might be involved in an IPE event. At Longwood, we have undergraduate and graduate programs within the College of Health and Human Services. This college includes majors in education (elementary and

middle/secondary classroom teaching), educational leadership, special education, reading literacy and learning, health/PE, kinesiology, athletic training, nursing, communication sciences and disorders, counseling, social work, and school librarianship. Some of the programs, such as Communication Sciences and Disorders, include a professional expectation that students learn about interprofessional practice. Others, such as School Librarianship, focus on collaboration within schools. The undergraduate programs at Longwood are residential, on-campus programs but the graduate programs include on-campus, hybrid, and fully online programs. Graduate students might live near campus or might be at another location in the state or beyond. In order to include all programs and have a well-rounded IPE event, it was important to build in flexibility and allow students to participate either in person or virtually. This meant more logistical work, but allowed for a broader range of professions represented at the event and a richer learning experience for all.

When members of the IPE team visited other institutions, we all returned with the same feeling – we were energized by the power of the event in a way that was only possible after seeing it in action. We knew there would be greater buy-in from our faculty if they had the chance to experience the event themselves. We developed a faculty IPE event to increase awareness of and interest in IPE. This experience not only demonstrated the power of the event but also identified some faculty who would be willing to serve as group moderators at the student event.

### **Step 3: Plan and implement the student IPE event.**

Once you have determined what your institution needs and gathered a team, it is time to plan the main IPE student event. After a successful faculty event at Longwood, establishing the student IPE event as an integral annual event within the college was the team's main goal. This is the main part of IPE and takes the most planning and participation so we wanted to get it right. It is imperative that you have a diverse team of people who are dedicated to the success of the event. Our main team included teaching faculty from four different programs and one of the university librarians. We solicited additional help from faculty across the college who were willing to serve as group facilitators. We went back to the faculty from other institutions for their guidance and support, especially in training our group moderators. It is important for the students to have similar experiences at the event, so training for the breakout room moderators was paramount.

Our event consisted of three parts: group overview, small group breakout sessions, and debriefing/dinner. It is important to note that the first student event at Longwood was held in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. Students were given the option to participate in person or virtually. This option continued during the second year to

accommodate students who lived at a distance from campus. Planning for both in-person and virtual participants adds an additional layer, so having technical support is vital to success.

### ***Event – Group Overview***

The student event began with all students together in one room or virtually using an online platform. The IPE team coordinator welcomed all in attendance. Since we were gathering data to inform future practice and for research purposes, the coordinator instructed all participants to complete the pre-test survey using their personal devices. The coordinator described the purpose of the event and explained the structure, then students were sent to their breakout session rooms. Room assignments were emailed to participants ahead of time, but team members were on hand to guide students as needed.

### ***Event – Breakout Sessions***

Breakout groups were strategically set up in advance so each room had as many different professions represented as possible. Since some programs at Longwood are fully online with students from a distance, some students participated virtually. While it is not ideal to have in-person and virtual participants in the same room, it allowed all of the rooms to have broader representation of professions. For example, our School Librarianship program is taught in a hybrid model and the majority of students in the program live more than an hour away from campus. Most of the School Librarianship students joined virtually. Had we kept all virtual participants in a room together, most other rooms would miss out on the benefit of hearing the perspective of the librarian.

After a brief introduction of everyone in the breakout room, and group expectations for participation were reviewed, the moderator led the group through an assumptions exercise. The point of this exercise is to lay on the table various stereotypes and assumptions of each profession, then to allow the pre-service professionals the opportunity to debunk myths or confirm accurate assumptions about their own profession. Each person has the opportunity to share the roles and responsibilities of their profession and the group discusses what the professions have in common and how they differ. This is usually the most important learning experience of the event. Students have the opportunity to do what IPE is intended to do: learn from, about, and with each other. By openly and honestly expressing assumptions and actively listening to others in the room, students learn the roles and responsibilities of other professions. They come to the realization that they can lean on the expertise of these other professionals instead of trying to do everything on their own. They learn the power of the team.

Once all assumptions are out of the way and each profession has been accurately described, the group begins thinking about a case that is presented. This case was carefully designed by the IPE team to include potential talking points for each profession. Enough detail is given to allow for understanding, but some details are left out to encourage discussion and questions among the group. After each person reads the case and identifies areas where their profession might come into play, the group talks through the strengths and barriers of the case, then discusses where support is needed and what questions they have. Finally, the group comes up with a plan of action and identifies who will carry out each step of the plan. If time allows after completing the plan, a short reflection activity is available for groups.

### ***Event – Debriefing/Dinner***

It is important to gather the students immediately after the breakout group activity to debrief the experience. Students come back together in the large room and sit with their respective professions. Participants are invited to complete the post-survey, then are encouraged to talk about their experiences that took place in the breakout rooms. A set of guiding questions is provided at each table to lead discussion. If possible, a faculty member from that profession is at the table to provide a trusted, familiar leader for the debriefing. Of course, dinner is the big draw for the in-person students, and virtual participants get together in an online room to debrief with each other, guided by a faculty member. In addition to the dinner debrief, all faculty from represented programs are given suggestions for follow-up with their classes and faculty are sent an electronic evaluation survey to gather their feedback and suggestions.

After each IPE event, the organizing team gathered together to review the evaluations and make suggestions for improvement. For example, based on feedback we considered how the breakout groups could be rearranged to have some groups that were fully in-person and some that were fully virtual. However, it remains important for each group to have full representation of as many professions as possible so we continue to keep the hybrid format. We are encouraged by comments from faculty and student participants about the power of the event:

“It was great working as a team with people with different educational backgrounds and experiences to solve problems. I wasn’t expecting how satisfying it was to be able to address not only the emotional or academic well-being of the students, but also the physical and mental aspects as well.”  
(Student 1)

“I think it promotes awareness of the different aspects that go into helping students/children be successful. It promotes the idea that it takes a village to help students be successful and we really do need to tap into every resource possible.”

(Student 2)

“My key takeaway was that every organization, department, or school of thought does a lot more than we see on the surface. There’s a lot of misconceptions out there about different professions. It was really cool and interesting to get that confidence to share with people across different professions.”

(Student 3)

“...it makes me think of more professions I could reach out to for advice and help with certain students that I have in my future classes that I wouldn’t have thought of before.”

(Student 4)

“Students in my breakout group said when they were working on their cases, ‘We really need a person from ----- profession to help in this case.’ They realized that the missing professions would have really added to the plan they were creating.”

(Faculty 1)

### ***Suggestions for PK-12 schools***

Interprofessional Education and Practice should not stop at the pre-service teacher stage. It is possible to begin IPECP (adding the “collaborative practice” piece) in PK-12 schools. As a leader and collaborative partner, the school librarian is in a perfect position to begin this initiative. As a school librarian, I would start with informal conversations with specialists in the school. Do you have a common time when you can gather with other specialists? Talk about the roles and responsibilities of the various specialists through informal conversations or over lunch. Find out about their professional standards. On your own, do a bit of research to find out about the professions. As you develop relationships and establish trust, introduce an idea or problem that you have been pondering, and ask for input from their perspective. Allow this to slowly blossom into a collaboration, then share your success with others in your building.

Once you have buy-in from the administration based on your informal, small scale work, offer to lead a professional development session at the school to bring together teachers,



specialists, and other school community professionals. Start with a mini-IPE event at the beginning of the school year. Even though you all work in the same building with the same students, it is very likely that you do not all know what the other professions truly do on a daily basis. In my experiences in schools, I spent a lot of time explaining to individual teachers about the role of the school librarian. I know other specialists find themselves doing the same. Bring school professionals together to work through an assumptions exercise and learn more about the roles and responsibilities of the professions in the school community. Then present a case and challenge the groups to develop a plan to serve the persons in the case. This case could be hypothetical or based on a real need in the school. As the manager of this professional development experience, the librarian should keep careful note of suggestions made by various people and follow up to bring people together to further develop plans for actual needs in the school.

### *Next Steps*

Longwood has held successful IPE events for two years during a pandemic; that alone is a success, but the team is not ready to stop at just one event each year. Now that we feel like we have established a solid event, we plan to push our reach further to reach more of our goals. We hope to encourage faculty to add more content to classes prior to the event so students have some knowledge about how to work as part of a team. Students indicated the desire for more input from practicing professionals, which could be incorporated into the event or into classes before the event. Students also commented on the power of having diverse voices in the breakout rooms, encouraging the team to keep the emphasis on broad representation in each group. We would like to promote the event beyond just the College of Education, Health, and Human Services, embracing programs from around the university and drawing on the many strengths of people across the university community. We are also considering partnering with a neighboring university with different programs to offer a second student event each year. Similar to the model we observed, the goal is to have one event focused on health professions and one focused on children and education.

An ultimate goal is to move interprofessional practice beyond just the educational event, giving our students practical experience working as part of an interprofessional team in a local school or community agency. Citizen leaders learning with, from, and about each other to collaboratively address real issues - making a positive impact on their community.

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