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Nextfood - Educating the next generation of professionals in the agrifood system

Practice Abstract #28 - Participating in action learning courses with students from multidisciplinary backgrounds

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The Certificate Course on Agroecology: Action Research and Education is for post graduate students from diverse disciplines at the University of Kerala. In 2019, twelve students attended: two from Agriculture/Forestry, five from social sciences and five from natural sciences. The course employed an action learning curriculum and student experiences during the course provide major recommendations:

Peer learning is effective when students are from multidisciplinary backgrounds. Peers understand conflicts of ideas and/or problem situations when they are from diverse disciplines and can suggest solutions they have already experienced. The varied opinions that arise in a group improve group member interest in new subjects and thus stimulates new learning arenas.

Group activities: Individual Group Plenary (IGP) model discussions, field work, rich pictures, mind maps and peer evaluation can be done. Through group activities, background and learning style of each student can be understood and so, students learn to respect diverse viewpoints.

Division of group work according to the knowledge, strength and weaknesses of the student in the group is a good way to learn from each other.

Dialoguing: Developing the competence of dialoguing through practice sessions can refine the ability of students to communicate and socialise.

In sum, abilities such as communication, cooperation and sense of interdisciplinary understanding and multidimensional thinking can improve learning. Above all, a change in attitude of students and ability to make situational improvements or synthesis of opinions is important.