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# Using Problem Based Learning To Help Social Care Students Link Theory and Practice

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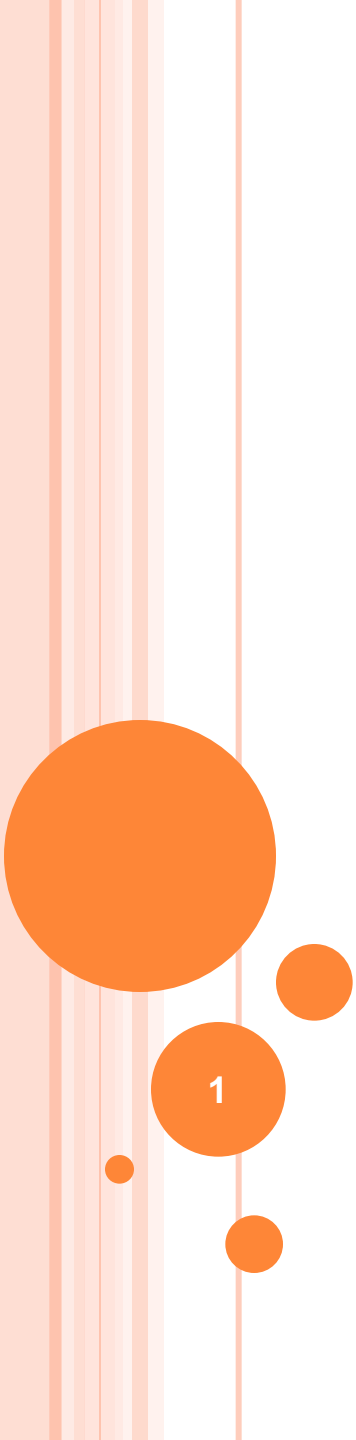
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# USING PROBLEM BASED LEARNING TO HELP SOCIAL CARE STUDENTS LINK THEORY AND PRACTICE

Dave Williams

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# OVERVIEW

- Defining Problem Based Learning (PBL)
- The characteristics of PBL
- Why use PBL as a teaching tool?
- Reasons for incorporating PBL into a professional practice module?
- The process
- The challenges of using PBL in a professional practice module
- Student feedback: positive and negative

# DEFINING PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

- Popularised by Barrows & Tamblyn (1980)
- PBL is an approach to learning that is driven by the process of inquiry
- Uses problem scenarios to encourage student engagement in the learning process
- The tutor selects the task and supports or facilitates the process but the students are expected to explore the task, claim their present understanding, examine their knowledge and skills gaps in order to decide what new information and skills they need to appropriately address the task and resolve the problem.

# PBL

- Can be defined as an inquiry process undertaken by students that seeks to resolve questions and uncertainties about complex life situations. Students learn from and build upon each others' questions, are open to different points of view, listen to and respect each others' ideas and work collaboratively towards problem resolution and reasonable conclusions (Barell, J. 2007).

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PBL

- Real life situations that have no 'right' answer are the organising focus for learning
- Students work in teams to confront the problem, identify learning gaps, develop viable solutions
- Students gain new information through self-directed learning
- Staff act as facilitators
- Problems lead to development of judgement-based decision making, and problem-solving capabilities (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2004)

## CHARACTERISTICS (CONT'D)

- Acknowledgement of learners' experience base
- Students take responsibility for own learning
- Intertwining of theory and practice
- Focus on process rather than product of knowledge acquisition
- Change of tutor's role from that of instructor to that of facilitator
- Change of focus from assessment of outcomes to self assessment and peer assessment
- Focus on communication and interpersonal skills so that students understand the importance of being able to relate their knowledge (Boud 1985)

# LEARNING THEORY

- Learning is a process in which the learner actively constructs new knowledge on the basis of current knowledge and understanding
- It is a constructive rather than a receptive process
- It is an active process of finding out in which learning occurs by doing



# TEACHING

- Helping students to become self-directed learners
- Facilitating the learning process
- Providing an opportunity to explore knowledge and understanding
- Learning from experience
- Providing formative and summative feedback

# TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 'I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think' (Socrates)

# LEARNING GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

- Shared aims
- Collective perception
- Interdependence
- Social Organisation
- Focused Interaction
- Cohesiveness
- Collective responsibility

# AIMS OF GROUP LEARNING

- Understanding
- Critical thinking skills
- Personal growth
- Communication skills
- Group and teamwork skills
- Self-direction in learning

# GROUP LEARNING


- Facilitates: exploration and discovery of perspectives
- Different methods of learning
- Engagement with complexity and ambiguity
- Recognition of gaps in understanding
- Learning through teaching others

## GROUP LEARNING (CONT'D)

- Development of listening, explanation and questioning skills
- Development of group identity
- Emotional connection with topic
- Involvement in leadership and recording roles
- Formation of independent judgements

# PBL

<u>Method</u>	Learning through problem solving	Project based learning	PBL
<u>Emphasis</u>	Application	Integration and application	Acquisition Integration Application



# PROBLEM BASED LEARNING (RILEY & MATHESON, 2005)

- See Handout



# CHARACTERISTICS OF PBL

- Engagement with a complex problem or scenario which is sufficiently open ended to allow a variety of responses
- Students direct the lines of enquiry and methods employed
- The enquiry requires students to draw on existing knowledge and identify their required learning needs

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PBL

- Tasks stimulate curiosity in students, encouraging them to actively explore and seek out new evidence
- Responsibility remains with the students for analysing and presenting that evidence in appropriate ways and in support of their own response to the problem
- Provides match between contemporary issues in higher education/ practice and problem based learning (see handout).

# REASONS FOR INTRODUCING PBL TO A PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE MODULE

- Assist students in linking theory and practice
- Encourages links between college and practice placements
- Encourage students to access resources and information for practice
- Promotes experience of working in a team e.g chairing meetings, minute taking, accountability, managing conflict

# REASONS FOR INTRODUCING PBL TO A PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE MODULE

- Challenges students stereotyping, labelling, and making assumptions in practice
- Promotes awareness of legislation, standards and social policies when making assessments and planning interventions
- Promotes leadership, managing conflict and constructive disagreement

## PBL TASKS

- Delegate roles of Chair and Recorder for each session
- Clarification of scope of problem
- Exploring current knowledge and understanding
- Peer support and tutoring
- Identification of learning issues
- Facilitation of goal-directed tasks

# ROLE OF CHAIR PERSON

- Agenda, time management and structure
- Agreeing priorities
- Leading
- Ensuring everyone's participation
- Questioning, clarifying, concluding

# STRUCTURE FOR RECORDING

Ideas	Facts	Learning issues	Actions



## PBL GROUP PROCESS

- Independent study – library, internet
- Group: review the acquired information, peer tutoring, aim for group understanding and consensus
- Repeat as necessary
- Present solution/report



## ROLE OF TUTOR

- Keep process moving
- Probe students' knowledge and understanding
- Make sure all students involved in process
- Monitor group learning
- Modulate challenge of the problem; make sure it moves at an appropriate pace

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PBL IN PRACTICE

- The organisation of curricula around a problem
- Students work in groups
- Group and self-directed learning
- Lecturer role becomes that of facilitator

## USEFUL TIPS IN INTRODUCING PBL

- Experienced students might model the process
- Students are provided with articles or web support on the concepts and theories related to PBL
- Allow time for group to gel
- Explain clearly the role of the facilitator
- Run mini sessions where students 'can have a go' on smaller case examples

## THE CASE STUDY

- See handout
- Promotes learning around concept of risk assessment and strengths based perspectives
- The tasks of the assignment

## PBL - PROCESS

- 1/Encounter problem without prior study
- 2/Explore existing knowledge in group
- 3/Form and test hypotheses
- 4/Identify further learning needs
- 5/Undertake self-directed study between group meetings
- 6/Return to group to integrate new learning
- Repeat steps 3-6 as necessary

# THE PBL PROCESS IN PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

- Interactive lecture on PBL
- Explanation of key roles and responsibilities of key parties
- Selection of student groups
- Presentation of case study
- Session on accessing resources and sharing knowledge
- Timetabled sessions for groups to meet and involvement of facilitator

# CHALLENGES OF INTRODUCING PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

- Fear of lecturers in moving away from more traditional forms of teaching
- Fear of students in moving away from more traditional forms of teaching
- Managing group dynamics and histories
- Moving away from role of lecturer to role of facilitator

# CHALLENGES OF INTRODUCING PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

- Encouraging reluctant students to buy into the process
- Managing high achieving students who are focused on high marks
- Promoting management of students who are not 'pulling their weight'
- Group Selection
- Time in busy academic schedule



## FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

- ‘You work with a group you did not choose yourself, which is good as you won’t necessarily be working with people you choose in the workplace’
- ‘I enjoyed it because it was so applicable to my future work as a Social Care Worker’

## FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

‘I liked that the group were allowed to make their own decisions but the facilitator was available to help. The more responsibility we get the better’

‘Gives an impression of working in a professional team’

‘Good practical example which was like real life situation’

‘Motivated me to read widely on the subject area’

## FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

‘The recognition of the importance of team work and a new challenge for me to work with people who are more laid back than me’

# FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

‘group work was good but annoying when people didn’t turn up’

‘People not pulling their weight or failing to complete their work put pressure on the dynamic of the group and our morale’

‘Progress depended on teams and not everyone put in the same effort’

‘Left too late in the year’

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