



Chapter III

Why Problem-Based Learning?

Introduction

Since its adoption at McMaster University, Canada, in the 1960s for medical school teaching, PBL has gained popularity and has spread to many disciplines worldwide. Why has PBL become so popular? We will discuss the benefits of PBL for learning by students compared to traditional methods of teaching. Although PBL offers many benefits to students in their learning, it also has disadvantages. Some of these disadvantages are discussed in this chapter. The chapter concludes with personal testimonies from students describing their experiences using PBL in their studies as well as in their current jobs.

Benefits of PBL

Although PBL originated from the teaching of university students, it is increasingly being used in high schools, middle schools and elementary schools in many different countries. More and more tutors are taking on this method as a way of improving students' learning. It works well with educationally disadvantaged and minority students who, traditionally, have not done well in conventional educational settings. PBL provides an equal and exciting opportunity for learning to all students.

The PBL method is seen by many teachers as the answer to many of the problems of teaching in schools. It enables teachers to add many things to their traditional teaching, including problem-solving activities, critical-thinking exercises, collaborative learning, and independent study, and allows them to put these into context and give them meaning.

It is generally accepted by researchers that PBL offers many benefits to learning. Among these are:

- The PBL learning environment is more stimulating and human (Albanese & Mitchell, 1993; Norman & Schmidt, 1992).
- PBL promotes interdepartmental collaboration between basic and clinical scientists (Norman & Schmidt, 1992).
- Learning and teaching is more enjoyable for students and teachers in PBL (Albanese & Mitchell, 1993; Vernon & Blake, 1993; Norman & Schmidt, 1992).
- PBL promotes interaction between students and faculty (Finucane, Johnson, & Prideaux, 1998).
- PBL promotes deeper rather than superficial learning (Eagle, 1992; Newble & Clarke, 1986).
- Self-directed learning skills are enhanced and retained in PBL learning (Norman & Schmidt, 1992; Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980; Dolmans & Schmidt, 1996; Blumberg & Michael, 1992).
- PBL fosters self-directed learning skills (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980; Norman & Schmidt, 1992; Blumberg & Michael, 1992; Dolmans & Schmidt, 1994).
- PBL promotes interaction between different disciplines (Finucane et al., 1998).
- PBL promotes collaboration between students (Banta, Black, & Kline, 2000).
- PBL enables reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983).
- PBL approach matches current efforts to involve students more actively in their education and it improves their learning (Norman & Schmidt, 1992).
- PBL enables students to spend more time on self-directed learning activities, using more information resources (Vernon & Blake, 1993).
- PBL enables staff to have more contact with students (Albanese & Mitchell, 1993).

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