



Chapter XII

Postscript

Keep it exciting and fun! If you want some real advice, look at how young children learn or how your students learn new skills, knowledge, etc. outside the classroom in their hobbies and personal life. It's all problem-based! (Ranald Macdonald)

We hope that by the time you have reached this chapter, you will have become enthusiastic to incorporate principles and practice of PBL into your teaching.

In the chapters of this book, we have tried to explore issues that are central to successfully implementing PBL. There are clearly many differences from the traditional transmission model of teaching, since PBL is fundamentally a different philosophy, based on student enquiry. However, if we set aside labels, it is also clear that there are principles and aspects of PBL practice that are often incorporated in many courses and we would argue that there is a continuum of pedagogical approaches from what might be regarded as *pure* transmission, in the archetypal lecture, through to *pure* research. Problem-based learning is somewhere near the research end.

Analysing and deconstructing problem-based learning in the way that we have in this book is useful in order to explore aspects of the method in some detail. However, it also has some inherent dangers: PBL is a closely coupled system and the components that we have explored in previous chapters are interdependent. The interdependencies within PBL are not the only ones to be considered, unless you are implementing PBL throughout the entire curriculum, it is part of a wider

teaching and learning context in your institution, and consequently there are also significant influences from that environment into the problem-based elements. Since learning is complex, institutional contexts differ widely and PBL changes many aspects of the learning system. We posed the following question to a wide range of PBL researchers and practitioners:

What is the Most Important Advice You Could Give Someone Just Starting to Use PBL?

We received replies from locations as diverse as Australia, Finland, Mexico, Alaska, and the UK, which provided a global perspective.

There were three themes that were prevalent: the importance of preparation; the likelihood of criticism and difficulties; and the need to adapt to your local situation.

Preparation and Planning for Change

Perhaps unsurprisingly, preparation and planning were cited as essential.

Pedro Gordan helpfully identifies four areas for preparation and planning: goals, people, information, and resources, which are also supported by other respondents.

The goals for PBL are usually broader than cognitive objectives, encompassing process skills.

“Be clear about the purpose for introducing PBL and the learning outcomes,” recommends Jim Wood.

Linda Dislehorst further emphasises the importance of the learning outcomes in the design of PBL: *“Knowing those outcomes will determine every other piece that goes into the structure of the PBL experience.”*

The people dimension is reported as being one of the most problematic: “People have been used in traditional way of teaching for a few thousand years,” points out Markku Suni. “Thus, it is rather natural to expect teaching going this way.” So, preparing the stakeholders for the change—both staff and students—is critical to success.

The biggest difficulties were reported as being the adaptation of staff, rather more than students. According to David Rawcliffe, “It is difficult for teachers to change, especially for the “experienced” teacher who believe what they have been doing is right.”

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