

# PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: An innovative approach to learning and teaching

Problem-based learning (PBL) has become widely used in many professional education<sup>1</sup> and is now being adopted by nurse educationalists for use within their teaching strategies.<sup>1</sup> According to nurse teachers, problem-based learning is highly regarded and promoted as a most effective teaching and learning method to take nurse education forward.<sup>2,3</sup>

PBL has its origins some 25 years ago in medical education at universities in McMaster (Canada), Case Western Reserve (USA), Maastricht (Netherlands) and Newcastle (Australia), and since then it has gain popularity worldwide.

However, there are many barriers to implementing PBL and many academics consider the approach to be radical and resources intensive. The main obstacle is perhaps due to the fact that academics cannot come to terms with students who will be able to handle problems without being “given foundations.”<sup>4</sup>

The other argument is the “pure” form of PBL as developed in medical education has proved to be a barrier for others who wish to adopt some aspect of it. This is because medical schools tend to be well resourced, and recruit highly motivated and high achieving students.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the challenge is to adapt the approach to meet the different needs of students and to transform teaching and learning for the benefit of learners of all ages.<sup>6</sup>

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the concept is to encourage learners to participate actively in seeking the whole picture. They should engage in reflective practice and evaluation among themselves, peers and groups, and use exploratory ways to make sense of new ideas and experiences within the learning process so deep learning will occur. Schwartz<sup>7</sup> (2004) endorses this approach as graduates from PBL courses are prepared for a lifetime of learning and discovery, and are more motivated and satisfied with their education.

The purpose of introducing PBL into the design of teaching community mental health specialist practitioner students is to improve the quality of student learning. The approach calls for trying it out as a discrete part of a course module. It is with the hope that students are able to apply theory to practice, and will value the opportunity to share experiential learning and common goals, and thus contribute to improving the appreciation of multidisciplinary and collaborative working.

Cannon and Newble<sup>8</sup> (2000) suggest that PBL also requires students to develop a whole range of skills to enable them to learn effectively, including information skills, team working

skills, communication and, most importantly, high order cognitive skills for professional development – the type of key skills that are valued by most employers.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (1999) *Fitness for practice*, London: UKCC.
- <sup>2</sup>Darvill A (2003). Testing the water- problem-based learning and cultural dimensions, *Nurse Education in Practice*, 3, pp.72–79.
- <sup>3</sup>Wilkie K (2000). “The nature of problem-based learning”, in Glen S and Wilkie K (editors), *Problem-based learning in nursing: a model for a new context*, London: Macmillan.
- <sup>4</sup>Biggs J (2003) *Teaching for quality learning at university*, Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press. Biggs uses PBL to illustrate “constructive alignment” within a model which emphasises the need to align learning objectives, learning and teaching methods, and assessment.
- <sup>5</sup>Albanese MA and Mitchell S (1993) Problem-based learning: a review of literature on its outcomes and implementation issues, *Academic Medicine*, 68 (1), pp.52–81.
- <sup>6</sup>Torp L (1997) What is problem-based learning? Learning productivity, *Wingspread Journal*. Available from: [www.johnsonfdn.org/summer97/pbl.html](http://www.johnsonfdn.org/summer97/pbl.html) (Accessed 24/1/08) (Internet).
- <sup>7</sup>Schwartz S (2004) Time to bid goodbye to the psychology lecture, Personal Space, *The Psychologist*, 17, (1).
- <sup>8</sup>Cannon R and Newble D (2000) *A handbook for teachers in universities and colleges. A guide to improving teaching methods* (4th edition), London: Kogan Page.

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