# Psychoanalysis and Problem-Based Learning: Approaches and Potentials

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## Abstract

This paper aims to analyze possible convergences between Problem Based Learning (PBL) and Psychoanalysis. It is intended to discuss how psychoanalysis can contribute to the efficiency of PBL. This by proposing reflections on affective and unconscious aspects that PBL may be neglecting. Such aspects may become more conscious and reflected, enhancing the results obtained by the PBL. Among these we can mention: teacher-student relationship; the role of tutor and its relation to the abstinence of narcissistic enjoyment; the positive connotation that can be given to the conflict arising from doubts about the problem, among others; how to deal with always partial knowledge; how to deal with the autonomy to learn and the consequent responsibility.

# Psychoanalysis and Problem-Based Learning: Approaches and Potentials

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**Keywords:** Tutor teacher; Applied psychoanalysis; Teaching; Learning.


## 1. Introduction

> *Who knows asks, who answers learns."*
> Alberto Vilani


The epigraph that begins this text, authored by the psychoanalyst and university professor of physics, Vilani, served as an inspiration to initiate this approach, this exploratory discussion about the possible articulations between psychoanalysis and problem-based learning. After all, what is a question, according to the PBL, if not a complex and well formulated question?

Psychoanalysis can complement PBL, and also, in some way, be even a little, complemented by it. Clearly, as established knowledge, psychoanalysis enjoys much more prestige, applicability, and accumulated results since Freud's formulation. However, psychoanalysis has also been pointed as a knowledge of difficult, if not impossible, access. This high place, protected and almost sacred, this true castle that psychoanalysis risks occupying can gain a certain pragmatism and accessibility with its approach to PBL.

The three principles of training: personal analysis, supervision and theoretical training are fundamental. As far as theoretical training is concerned, the PBL can contribute a great deal from our point

of view. As a teacher we realize that many students give up psychoanalysis because they consider it too abstract when compared, for example, with behavioral theory.this is already being done, according to the study from Sweden ...

In this sense, we seek to place the two protagonists of this work on the same horizon. We do not intend to nullify the epistemological differences that may exist between them. The fact that the pbl does not consider the unconscious as a determining force, or psychoanalysis prioritizes free association and dual relationship for the elaboration of conflicts, are examples of what we will not forget.

We assume that both the psychoanalytical clinic and the teaching-learning process, specifically in Brazil, are facing difficulties that require a certain boldness in the search for new instrumentalizations. In the clinic, psychopathological phenomena are quite different from what emerged in Freud's Vienna. Suffice it to cite narcissistic manifestations and bordering personalities to illustrate. As for the educational process, Brazil occupies a very low place in any ranking you want to do. Therefore, we assume that something needs to be done in both clinic and education.

Taking this into account, the purpose of this article is to place PBL as a possibility for psychoanalysis as well as psychoanalysis as a possibility for PBL. That is, to approach them even if in an exploratory and speculative way. We hope that from this discussion, other works developed by us and the readers of this text can point out more systematized and operational applications of the approximation between the two areas.

## 2. About the PBL

The teaching method called Problem Based Learning (PBL) emerged in Canada in the 1960s. It is defined as a facilitator in the acquisition of knowledge through the ability to elaborate a problem, collect data and search for solutions. It has as a curriculum educational strategy the discussion of problem situations or clinical cases in small groups. It refers to a constructivist proposal with innovative didactic strategies aimed at the protagonism of the student. In this sense, Toledo Junior et al (2008, p. 124) adds that "PBL was developed from the best knowledge of the adult learning mode and the understanding of the functioning of human memory. It is based on changing the learning process."

In this context, the PBL proposes to favor the acquisition and structuring of knowledge facilitating its activation and subsequent use. It is understood that the contextualized teaching in a reality that is close to the student increases the understanding and retention of what to be learned. (Leite, 2013).

With technological advancement, new methods for the absorption of scientific information, which has been rapidly multiplying, have been thought of. Since such a rapid and up-to-date assimilation of all the knowledge that is being advanced is not possible, the adequacy of a method for learning to learn has become imperative. From this, we create problem solving contexts, which will lead to new learning based on creativity. The interest aroused by the innovative possibility arising from the practical application of problem solving contributed to the PBL methodology having acceptance and space in the process of teaching and learning. (Gomes *et al* 2016).

Besides medicine, other areas of knowledge began to experiment with this methodology, especially education. The school demand envisioned the integration into the socio-scientific context, tools and

mechanisms to develop, in addition to conceptual and procedural skills, the improvement and involvement of learning agents with the search for innovative solutions (Leite, 2013).

In this way, learning situations are created in which the student acquires knowledge and develops the questioning and communication skills necessary for his / her decision making to be informed, effective and responsible. From problematized contexts formulated by students, with teacher monitoring, the process is analyzed and solved in order to highlight the adopted procedures, with their strengths and weaknesses fostering the development of skills.

These characteristics make PBL a good way for the purpose of creating study and thinking habits leading to a reflective experience, promoting autonomy of learning and teamwork. Teaching is student-centered with a view to their learning process by creating opportunities to think about content by associating with practical applications. The method makes the student responsible for their own learning and the teacher is an active mediator between the content and the appropriation of knowledge. It takes into account previous learning, which serves as a platform for the improvement of new knowledge. Learning is active, interactive and collaborative, developing skills to formulate ideas and verbalize it with critical sense and careful and respectful listening.

The solution of the problem will depend on the acquisition of content and the ability for analysis, synthesis and judgment. Learning is experiential and its context is highly specific, the student learns by analyzing and solving problems in the form of case studies or narratives about the complex challenges of the real world and from that, they deduce solutions. The teacher's primary role is to create problem situations and coordinate their solution; he is a facilitator, advisor and co-learner. The problem situation precedes the theory, and the theoretical knowledge will be sought later (Freitas, 2012).

Education researchers such as Freire, Balzan, Ausubel, Dewey have long advocated a less information-centric, less mechanical, less information-memorized education. For these authors the freedom to learn is necessary, creating within their own socio-cultural reality possibilities for the emergence of creative and questioning minds. In this context, teachers and students in a dialogical relationship open a spacious information sharing, building, from previous knowledge, meaning to the improved contents. New content should enable students to be challenged to advance their knowledge with motivation, integration and interactivity. Learning by valuing concrete and problematic experiences becomes a cognitive lever that facilitates creative and innovative solutions (Vignochi *et al* 2009).

The interactivity between content in a systemic view makes PBL an interesting option. It presents a proposal for curriculum restructuring focusing on the interaction of disciplines covering themes that the student should master and develop. The theme is transformed into a problem that will be the focus of discussion in a tutorial group. The group consists of a tutor and a team of 8 to 10 students. One coordinator and one secretary are chosen. Importantly, with each new theme these functions should be replaced by other people.

As a team, the discussion of the problem begins with the encouragement of hypothesizing and research. In the post-discussion stage, each participant is called upon to improve their knowledge individually and to bring the new information back to the group. There is a need for a time tracker with the incentive to improve their synthesis and objectivity. This activity should not exceed 16 hours of study

(Berbel, 1998).

For the methodology to be effective, studies such as Berbel (1998) have standardized the step by step. The process begins by reading the problem, identifying and clarifying unknown terms. By identifying the problems proposed by the statement, the hypotheses are formulated and the process of research and information search begins. Individually or in groups it is necessary to study and search for new knowledge for a new discussion, now with many data capable of reaching the objective of the study.

One may think that the method has two phases, the first is the formulation of learning objectives from the discussion. And the second individual post-study if the problem is discussed in the light of new knowledge acquired.

Such a methodology completely changes the focus on school actors. The teacher is in the structuring of the method and the student becomes active seeking his knowledge from his learning intent. With the advent of more active teaching methods new redesigns will need to be made in the form of assessing the role of the teacher in teaching, the role of the student in learning. It is seen that changing the focus of the characters changes the educational landscape and brings transitions that need to be worked out without causing harm to learning. (Vignochi *et al* 2009).

A good problem provides a good discussion that indicates whether the learning has been achieved. In order to elaborate a question it must be simple and objective, avoiding false clues that deviate from the main theme. It should be motivating piquing the student's interest in your discussion. A good problem should be situations where the student already has some prior knowledge. The assessment can be compared to a GPS (Global Positioning System) that tells you if you are on the right track or need correction or if you have reached your destination.

The way you evaluate in a PBL curriculum should be rethought. It assesses student progression and assesses the quality of pedagogical work. The process can be done in: modular evaluation, performed at the end of the thematic modules in order to evaluate the quality of the module; Progressive assessment, which takes place at regular intervals and is intended to assess the progress of student knowledge, the assessment of skills consisting of methodical observation of student achievement in the achievement of expected skills and the informal assessment by tutors and monitors in groups. tutorials to verify student interest, conduct, and responsibility. Also a permanent evaluation of the course is developed by the students through the school collegiate and the curriculum committee.

It is important to remember that the climate of cooperation, complicity and trust enables a more formative assessment to be made. The student needs to be evaluated as a whole including interpersonal relationship, respect, goodwill, interest in seeking solutions. Learning requires a striking, meaningful experience that makes sense to the subject, consistent with reality and imprinting a differentiated record in the psyche.

Concerning this differentiated psychic record, the psychoanalytical theoretical framework can contribute. In this sense, this record will not only be cognitive, but also crossed by a drive body. In the next topic, we will deal with that.

## 3. Psychoanalysis and PBL: a possible dialogue

Although a direct approach to education is not found in Freud's work, the creator of psychoanalysis has developed a rich theory for the interpretation of culture. In his text "The malaise in civilization" (1930) contains a thesis about the eternal struggle between Libido and Moral. This permanent conflict would be contained in every psychic symptom. But, to a lesser extent, it also permeates all civilized humans. That is, according to Freud, there would be no model of normal man, immune to conflict. On the contrary, the human being is doomed to a malaise of being civilized.

An important work on the bridge between psychoanalysis and education is the book by French psychoanalyst Catherine Millot (2001) originally published in 1987, with the provocative title "Freud Antipedagogue". Millot defends the thesis that it is up to psychoanalysis to criticize the moralizing excesses of education. The way it creates high ideals for students over their most basic needs. This is to conclude that Education is a major source of neurosis in modernity.

With the advent of psychoanalysis, various forms of understanding of the world were rethought. In the psychoanalytic approach, childhood, adolescence and education assumed another connotation. Specific demarcations of the phases of life emerge, highlighting childhood as a deposit of idealizations and investments compatible with the modern forms of constitution of subjectivity and with the rational and scientific project. At the adolescent stage, the process of constitution of Identity is formed through the construction of alterity that separates the individual from the alienating identification with parents experienced in childhood. In this context, education acts as a tool of society for adequacy, becoming a facilitator of knowledge development and acquisition (Andrade Filha; Castro, 2017).

From this point of view, there is the appreciation of subjectivity, the unconscious processes that can become conscious and, thus, conveys the idea that people should find their place and build their own destiny, overcoming certain unwanted inheritance left by their families and their society. The importance of the civilizing process for the development of humanity lies in controlling the nature and relationships between individuals, restricting exploitation and aggression, as well as the possibility of greater protection in group life. It describes the achievements and regulations that distinguish human life from animal life. However, to achieve this goal it was necessary to repress and transform primary instincts to suit reality, causing many conflicts to arise. The management of these conflicts made possible the scientific, cultural, social and technological evolution by turning instinct into an impulse with an inhibited purpose.

This malaise in civilization raises questions that can be addressed through angles and resignified knowledge. In this respect, PBL and Psychoanalysis maintain convergences. The first summons the subject to a work of confronting the impasses that reality imposes through what he calls a problem. The second, in turn, points to the possibility of this confrontation occurring in sublimatory ways that are not confused with symptomatic formations. The realistic view of PBL can leverage conflict formation to bring awareness, enabling solutions in teaching and learning, identifying subjective impulses and motivating them to develop culture. Psychoanalysis could be a facilitating approach to the PBL methodology. In this sense, the development of autonomy in the learning process that modern methodologies emphasize advocates the same principles (Freud, 1927/1996; Campos, 2015).

It is important to consider that psychoanalysis has provided subsidies to make education more

effective in integrating children with their learning and their relationships with teachers and peer groups. Freud in his studies finds similarities between psychoanalytic and educational activity; The first of these is the impossibility of promoting absolute satisfaction in analysis and teaching. For in Freud's theory it becomes a serious ethical problem to make the other a specular copy of the teacher or the analyst. Moreover, there is no possibility of achieving optimal learning because the teacher does not control the student's desire or the effectiveness of their learning. In this sense, the teacher does not deal with an ideal student, but a real one that will resignify and interpret the contents learned in a unique way. In this regard, Martins (2014, p. 50) discusses: "While the psychoanalyst seeks to avoid causing his values and opinions to provoke in the analysis of an identification, rather than the discovery of his own desire, the teacher has the mission of stimulating in the students the pleasure and charm with reading, study and culture ".

PBL as an innovative, student-centered method that ceases to be a passive recipient and takes the lead in its own learning through research. The teacher containing his phallic and even narcissistic jouissance begins to play a more humble and supportive role. It becomes a lever in the knowledge process, similar to what an analyst plays in analysis. In this scenario, comes the denomination of teacher as tutor. From a psychoanalytic point of view, this will have consequences for the transferential relationship between teacher and student. (Freitas, 2012) Such relocation of transference deserves to be studied in detail. Some of the questions that arise are: How will this relationship be built in the face of a supposed diminution of the teacher's authority? How will the development of student autonomy in the face of the freedom and responsibility that will be placed on them by the PBL occur?

Another relevant aspect in PBL is the formation of problems as triggers for learning, developing cognitive skills for innovative solutions similar to the conflict in the analytical process that arises from the weakening of ego defenses. In psychoanalysis the conflict consists in the clash between opposing forces, among others, governed by three polarities: subject (ego) versus object (external world), pleasure versus displeasure, active versus passive. At PBL, doubts and questions destabilize what has already been learned and call for new and profound learning. It refers to an endless process, similar to what happens with the analysis that never ends up making a total satisfaction impossible (ESCRIVÃO FILHO; RIBEIRO, 2009; FREITAS, 2012).

## 4. Final considerations

Psychoanalysis and Education has been establishing fruitful interlocutions, innovative and fruitful practices and pointing to perspectives yet to be pioneered. Among these promising perspectives are those that, in the educational field, turn to didactics and teaching. Considering that teaching in Brazil, specifically, faces secular difficulties and considering the very low rates of scientific literacy as well as the high rates of dropout and repetition due to the disciplines related to the sciences, psychoanalysis is called to point out paths and think innovations.

This article was intended to explore some aspects of the PBL that remain unreflected. Due to its pragmatic and rational character, the PBL has not given due attention to the unconscious, the affective and the unspoken. Psychoanalysis, in turn, can greatly contribute to the elucidation of such aspects.

Such an approach will likely generate resistance from those who advocate a purer, more classical

and orthodox psychoanalysis. It may also generate criticism from PBL operators who do not want to give space and voice to what bothers them, what is strange and somewhat abstract. However, we bet on the richness of interdisciplinarity

To dare to leave the realm of what is already established can be seen as heresy. But both the teacher and the analyst, the student and the patient at some point, must take responsibility for their free thinking, for their detachment from what remains childish and regressive.

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