

PBL FOR LEARNERS' RESPONSIBILITY OVER LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Reflective writing is a way to explore what we can become without being judged. Problem-based learning (PBL), an approach to learning and teaching that has reflective writing as one of its central components, has been seen to have the ability to improve the application of lesson-based theory to clinical practice and to assist students to develop skills for overcoming the environmental constraints of clinical practice. PBL is an educational design that emphasizes active participation, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. In this paper, I share my experience of PBL as they were captured in reflective diaries and later compiled into an "integrated essay." I believe PBL works better than lecturing in linking theory with practice and in enhancing students' understanding of the content; and that it could enhance students' responsibility for their learning and development of critical thinking, problem solving, information retrieval, self-appraisal, and group process skills.

Key words: reflective writing, problem based learning, nursing education

Background and Introduction

Reflection is defined by Bolton, G. (2010) as a process of thinking deeply about a particular subject that is frequently influenced by one's past life and experiences. Reflection is a way of enabling self-development and deeper learning by looking back at an experience so as to learn from it and then move forward. Reflecting on an experience or Reflection on action can help you to make links between theory and practice and between your past and present knowledge. Reflecting on, and learning from your experiences can help you to avoid repeating mistakes and move away from acting automatically without thought, it will help you to identify the successful aspects of an experience, and any useful principles which can be applied to other situations. Critical reflection promotes an understanding of diversity in beliefs, values, behavior, and social structures. The more we share our thoughts and feelings, the more we challenge accepted views of traditions and myths, which have kept alternate interpretations from becoming possibilities. One important goal in nursing education is to ensure that graduates are able to transfer theory to practice (Sportsman *et, al.* (2009). As knowledge in health care continues to expand and as new

technology develops, the demand for graduates to be able to effectively solve complex problems has also increased (Sangestani & Khatiban, 2012). However, constraints related to both time and specific clinical sites do not always allow students to experience the full variety of situations similar to those they are likely to meet at their workplace upon graduation (Rothgeb, 2008).

Problem-based learning, an approach to learning and teaching that has critical reflection on the learning process as one of its central components, has been seen to have the ability to improve the application of lesson-based theory to clinical practice as well as to enable students to develop problem-solving skills related to overcoming the environmental constraints of clinical practice (Sangestani & Khatiban, 2012). Problem-based learning (PBL) is an educational design that emphasizes active participation, problem solving and critical thinking skills. It encourages learners to identify their own knowledge and skills and apply them to novel situations or to use them, by combining previous knowledge or principles, to achieve specific goals (Williams, 2004). Through critical reflection on their learning, along with collaborative exchange with peers and the facilitator, students construct knowledge (Gentry, 2000).

In this paper, I share my experience of PBL generated through reflective diaries that were later compiled into an “integrated essay.” As a graduate student, I participated in a course that used PBL as an approach to learning and teaching. Like many students in my class, going through the course was my first encounter with PBL. I share my experiences with learning scenarios, group work, and learning facilitation. Lastly, I provide a concluding statement and some recommendation for enhancing learning in nursing education.

My Experience of Problem-based Learning

Learning Scenarios

The first scenario assigned to my group expected us to capacitate expecting (pregnant) women on taking their children through social emotional learning and cultivating in them a sense of social responsibility, I had a challenge in coming up with learning objectives for the group, perhaps because I had no idea what problem-based learning was, what was it entailed, what was expected of me. Neither did I have a clue of what social emotional learning was. Initially, I thought the assignment meant that we came up with a plan on how we were going to teach those provide health education to women. I did not think we would bother ourselves with social emotional learning and social responsibility content. It was only after another group working on the same assignment presented what it had prepared to the class that I realized that there was more my group still needed to do. Listening to the feedback that the class and the facilitator provided to the presenters, I began to understand what PBL was and what was expected from the small groups. One thing that I found interesting was that my group and the other group came up with completely different approaches to addressing the same problem. This helped me to appreciate that the context and worldviews of actors at play an important role in determining the right solutions to problems; and that important as every point of view may be, unless that is supported by convincing evidence, it may not be useful. PBL helped me appreciate our uniqueness as human beings in the way we interpret situations and approach problem solution.

As we considered the implications of public policy when working on scenarios, I came to realize that I had not done much in familiarizing myself with different policy documents. I need to be honest and admit that I knew little about most policies including Children's Act more. I have since realized that as a health care provider, my day-to-day work demands that I am familiar with different policies that support or have the potential to support health communities' promotion. The second scenario assigned to my team required us to capacitate community health care workers on "the what, how and why" of effective health education. The analysis of the scenario helped me realize how crucial it is for us as nurses to know and understand our clients and the communities we serve in order that our planning and delivery of our services take into consideration their traditions, customs and beliefs.

Small Group

In our group, it was easy working together because none of us was intimidated by the other members of the group. We respected each other and we were all ready to learn from one another. One thing I loved about my group members was that, whenever individual members were given task, they always ensured that they did that without fail; one would even go an extra mile and study other members' tasks. This made our discussions productive informative. Sportsman et, al. (2009) noted that group work helps develop learning communities in which students feel comfortable developing new ideas and raising questions about the material. Our group was indeed a learning community. From the two scenarios that we were given, we were able to gather most of the information we needed. For every meeting we had, we would choose a chairperson to lead the discussion and I had the opportunity to be that in one of the discussions. I did not have any problem playing that role because I had prepared well for the discussion and my group members had also researched on their given tasks. The challenge that my group had concerned meetings because of the scheduling constraints at our workplaces. It was difficult for us to find time that was convenient for all of us. However, such constraints did not discourage us. The few who were available would meet and we would then use "WhatsApp" as a complementary strategy to involve everybody in the dialogue.

Learning Facilitation

Our facilitator played a vital role in modeling the problem based learning and skills needed to support students' self-directed learning. Although the she gradually stepped back to allow the students more independent working as the group gained experience with the PBL, she continued to monitor the group, making moment-to-moment feedback with regard to how the learning process could best be managed. She supported the students' collaborative learning, many of the times the students were given assignment in groups of five students per group. Sometimes two different groups were given the same assignments and when it comes to presentation the facilitator will encourage us to share information and cooperate within our group and with other groups in class. Lastly our facilitator introduced self and peer assessment in our class, being assessed by the other group members and assessing ourselves increased our cooperation, honesty, responsibility and reliability. Hmelo-Silver (2004) noted that the facilitator's role is critical to making PBL successful through modelling coaching and though challenging thinking through questioning. It has been argued that learning facilitation that fosters the development of positive teacher-student and student-student relationships instills confidence in the learners,

giving them a sense of ownership over their learning, and enhancing their motivation to learn and to achieve (Tseng *et al.*, 2011). Having been in this class increased my confidence when it comes to reasoning, discussion and presentation, lastly the whole class, including myself we were so close with our facilitator and this was very beneficial in or learning, as all our assignments were made within agreed time.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Having now experienced both the traditional lecture method and problem-based learning, I believe PBL is better than lecturing in linking theory with practice and in enhancing understanding of the content. I found it more beneficial to be introduced in across all subjects at tertiary level. I believe if I had met PBL at undergraduate level, I would have benefitted even more from it this time when I met it at graduate level. My recommendation is that PBL be adopted for both undergraduate and graduate programs across disciplines because this could gradually move students from teacher-direction to taking responsibility for their learning and enhance their development of critical thinking, problem solving, information retrieval, self-appraisal, and group process skills.

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