THROUGH SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING, PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING CHALLENGES STUDENTS' CREATIVITY

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Abstract

A reflection on what is learned has been found to enhance learning and the retention of what is learned. Reflection involves documentation and thoughtful examination of the experiences of a situation and associated emotional responses. Learners' reflection on the learning experience is one of the defining attributes of problem-based learning (PBL), an approach to learning that emphases learner's construction of knowledge in small groups. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on my personal experience of problem-based learning. I have found PBL to enhance self-directed learning, team work, creative and critical thinking, problem solving and life-long learning. PBL prepares students for both academic achievement and meeting the challenges of the work place upon graduation. BPL challenges students' creativity and problem solving and as such, enhances the transfer of what is learned to the work place. I would therefore recommend problem-based learning for nursing education.

Keywords: Problem Based Learning, Reflection.

Background and Introduction

A reflection on what is learned has been found to enhance learning and the retention of what is learned. Reflection is a purposeful activity in which experiences of a situation and associated emotional responses are documented and thoughtfully examined in order to maximize learning (Woods 2003). Learners 'reflection on the learning experience is one of the defining attributes of problem-based learning (PBL), an approach to teaching and learning that emphases learner's construction of knowledge in small group (Alrahlah, 2016). According to Wood, problem-based learning uses problems or scenarios as triggers for leaning. After analysing the provided scenario, students engage in independent, self-directed study before returning to the group to discuss and refine their acquired knowledge. The role of the teacher in PBL is to guide and support learners in their self-directed construction of knowledge (Alrahlah 2016). There is a lot evidence concerning the effectiveness of Problem Based Learning, PBL is more advantageous as it enhances active students learning, activates prior knowledge and students ability to discover knowledge and hence enable students to get

better at learning ,digest and recall information (Alrahlah 2016). Students also gather expertise through own studying and research, study together, disscuss, review, compare and debate what they have learned (Dolmans et al 1996).

Although PBL has been gained popularity in many educational institutions across the globe, following its development in medical education at MacMaster University in Canada some decades ago, it remains unexplored in other parts of the world. I have just had my first exposure to BPL recently when it was used in a graduate course that I participated in as a student. I found it very interesting and fun, all the students were engaged in the learning process and students were able to integrate basic knowledge into solution of problems. This enhanced deep learning as we interacted with learning material and each other, thus our understanding was improved and broadened.

The purpose of this paper is to share my personal experience of problem-based learning so order that those who have not had the opportunity to be exposed to can know what it holds for them. Reflection on my experience covers how PBL was introduced to the class, team learning, learning facilitation, and insights that I have gained from my exposure to PBL. Lastly, I present conclusion and recommendations.

My Experience of Problem-based Learning
Class Briefing on PBL
Problem Based Learning (PBL) was introduced to us by the course lecturer. It was my first encounter to learn about PBL. The teacher briefed the class about what problem based learning was all about. However, it was difficult for the class to grasp what she was taking about; and I believe it was because we had not expected that the course offering would be any different from the traditional lecture-based method of teaching that we were used to. As we worked on more scenarios, with exchange between students and the facilitator and as a read about PBL, I began to understand what it is and to appreciate it.

Team Learning
My team comprised of six members and all and tasks were distributed fairly among team members. Team leadership rotated among group members so that each person had a chance of being a leader. For the most part, the team was quite cohesive and the flow of communication was smooth. We researched on our assigned tasks, we held meetings at which we shared what each person had gathered, and we completed and submitted assignments on time. However, we encountered a few challenges. Although scheduling and holding meetings, time management was a problem because of other commitments of the team members. We decided to give more time to individual assignments so that we would have short meetings.

Even though we did not experience any serious conflict in my team, tension often built up when the team had to decide what information to include in the class presentation and the final submission to the facilitator and what had to be left out. Members tended to defend information that they had brought to the team even when evidence suggested it was invalid.

The issue was usually addressed by giving the person time to explain why she or he thought the information was justified. The team usually amicably resolved those kinds of problems. Another challenge that I had was when my turn for convening and chairing meetings came. Sometimes I would feel uneasy negotiating a meeting schedule with members who were not prepared to compromise and squeeze the team meeting within their tight work schedules.

We were required to complete self and peer-assessment of participation in learning. However, the exercise proved to be a source of tension because each of us tended to be uncomfortable accepting own weaknesses. In addition, we were not bold enough to be able to point at one another's weaknesses. Assessments were therefore unfair as they lacked objectivity. My suggestions would be that performance assessment be left to the facilitator so as to relieve team members of the tension that tends to build at the time of peer assessment.

There was a situation whereby somehow communication about a meeting schedule failed to go through. This prompted us to from a WhatsApp group; and this helped improve communication among team members.

Facilitation in Problem Based Learning

The role of the facilitator in PBL is to guide students so they are focused in their leaning (Caldwel, 2013). The facilitator briefed the class on problem-based learning and encourage all to participate in class discussions. She was gentle and patient with those who were slow to grasp the concept of problem-based learning, and availed herself for consultations outside scheduled class time. She was prompt in providing feedback and clarification where students seemed to be going out of the way. Prompt feedback was important as it ensured that students did not waste time on work that would not benefit their learning.

I have found that, through giving students the responsibility over their learning, PBL enhances the development of communication skills and stimulate high order thinking. It mobilizes all learners as everybody has a role to play. Students also gain time management, data collection, and report writing skills. I was able to refresh my existing knowledge and learn more about policies and culture as we checked their implications for decisions that we were making on the problems presented in the scenarios.

What I have Leaned

I have realized that PBL is a good way of brainstorming problems and ideas. As students work on scenarios, they become active participants in their learning. Scenario analysis enhanced my decision making skills as we were engaged in high order thinking in order that we could reach a solution. Scenarios gave me an opportunity to search for what I did not know because the scenario sets one in motion to search for information and to learn.

As Tappen (2001) noted, when presented with a difficult situation, people are compelled to analyse the situation, consider alternative solutions and make a choice of the best decision. I therefore believe that the more scenarios they work on the better will their learning be. In addition, group work provides an opportunity for students to learn from one another and

construct knowledge that is richer than what any individual student could come up with. I have seen my confidence in sharing my opinion improve. With scenarios, learning becomes more meaningful than learning that is not context focused because one directly applies what is learned.

Through my experience in teamwork, I have learned a lot about human beings. I have learned that everyone needs to be treated according to his or her needs, strengths and weaknesses. I have realized that it is difficult for human beings to admit their weaknesses and to openly acknowledge it when others demonstrate exceptionally superior performance.

Problems promote meaningful discussions within the group (Tappen,2001). I have realised that having an encounter with problems really assists in meaningful discussions so that solutions can be made , without the problems the discussions lose their meaning because there is nothing that is being solved, hence problems are stimulus for learning because without them there is no learning that can take place. According to me problems also broaden and diversify the scope of learning because someone think beyond the problem before it is solved.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Problem-based learning enhances self-directed learning, team work, creative and critical thinking, problem solving, and life-long learning. It does not only prepare students for academic achievement but it also prepares them for the challenges they will meet at the work place when the graduate. The merit of BPL over that of the traditional lecture method is that the former challenges students' creativity and problem solving whereas the latter provides them with readymade solution and deprives them of developing skills that they can transfer to the work place. I therefore recommend problem-based nursing for nursing education.

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