

# **Problem-Based Learning in Health and Social Care**

*Edited by*

Teena J. Clouston

Lyn Westcott

Steven W. Whitcombe

Jill Riley

Ruth Matheson



**WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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# 1: Starting out: a guide to using this book and its development

Lyn Westcott

*When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,  
pray that the road is long,  
full of adventure, full of knowledge. . . .  
Always keep Ithaca on your mind.  
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.  
But do not hurry the voyage at all.  
It is better to let it last for many years;  
and to anchor at the island when you are old,  
rich with all you have gained on the way . . .  
Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage.  
Without her you would have never set out on the road.*

From Ithaca by Cavanfy (1863–1933), (Sachperoglou, 2007, p. 37)

When the editing team began to compile this book, we were struck by the similarity of our own experiences of working, teaching and learning to use problem-based learning (PBL) and the metaphor of a journey. As educators, we were aware that our own journeys travelled paths both well worn on occasions and exciting, fresh and ever surprising at the same time. Despite the numerous questions that can be asked when working with and through PBL, part of the essence of the work is the journey of learning. The student and educator move together into the unknown, learning with a freedom of discovery. This keeps us engaged on that road with curiosity and in search of answers and truths, wherever and whatever they may be. The energy for PBL felt strongly by the writing team derives from the value placed on that educational journey. We felt that this was an important text to write because although PBL is an empowering way of working, paradoxically, by taking away familiar structures of traditional education, many people struggle and can feel de-skilled when first encountering it, either as a student or as an educator. We hope this text will therefore help provide a positive way into this work, helping people understand and engage in the fullest potential of the journey and benefiting from what

it can offer. This is because PBL can be a pivotal experience enabling students to drive confidently into a world where their skill and ability as self-motivated lifelong learners is essential to develop ever-growing expertise in practice. For readers with more experience of PBL, we hope the book will present challenging ideas and provoke further consideration of contemporary practice as well as a revisiting of more familiar ideas.

For the contributors to this book, this process has included reflecting on the real-world practicalities of working this way in higher education settings, revisiting and developing the theory that guides a contemporary use of PBL, and examining the curriculum experience for both the learner and the educator. The experience of the contributors is based mainly (although not exclusively) in higher education settings for health and social care professionals, and inevitably that experience has influenced our approach to the writing. Collectively, we have come to PBL in different ways – as students enrolled on this style of course, as staff working on a programme using PBL or as course designers who have actively elected to construct a curriculum with this method of teaching and learning. We hope this book will appeal not only to colleagues and students in the health and social care sector but also to other professional groups using PBL or thinking of adopting it within teaching and learning.

As with any text informed by experience, a number of themes were identified as important by the writing team and these are reflected within various chapters of the text. As themes emerged, were debated and then revised for this publication, a logical shape emerged from the writing that led to the development of three sections or parts to structure the approach taken by contributors. Each of these parts is a distinct entity with a convergence of focus shared by that group of writers, possibly helping readers to find material of interest in a convenient way. In turn, each part links to and complements the others within the book, building up a collection of writing from different perspectives on PBL that are both interlinked and yet distinct in their focus. In addition to the three structural parts, there is this introductory chapter to help navigate the reader into the text and a final concluding chapter in Part 3, written by Teena J. Clouston.

Part 1 – ‘General Principles of Using PBL’ – examines some key areas of common concern to all people engaged in using this way of teaching and learning, such as in Chapter 2, which explores some of the history of PBL and its relevance to curricula today. This said, some chapters may be of particular interest to educators seeking to introduce PBL into their educational practice or critically examine and develop their expertise in this area. There are chapters that prompt the reader to carefully consider whether the time is right to switch to this type of learning as well as those that explore a wide range of practical and

theoretical concepts that enable PBL to be practised in a thoughtful and effective way. The titles of chapters in Part 1 are as follows:

Chapter 2: Exploring the foundations for problem-based learning – Ruth Matheson and Bernhard Haas

Chapter 3: Readiness for problem-based learning – Juan Delport and Steven W. Whitcombe

Chapter 4: Developing problem-based learning curricula – Lyn Westcott, Alison Seymour and Sara Roberts

Chapter 5: Becoming a problem-based learning facilitator – Gwilym Wyn Roberts

Chapter 6: Managing group dynamics and developing team working in problem-based learning – Alison Seymour

Chapter 7: Assessing problem-based learning curricula – Sue Pengelly

Part 2 – ‘The Theoretical Interface with PBL’ – is designed to explore in some depth a selection of theoretical constructs and concepts, offering established and newer discussion on how PBL may be framed and practised. Informed by a body of primary research into these topics, the chapters in this part aim to develop and consolidate the work of other writers and theorists in this area. The key feature of their approach is that they also offer some different emergent insights on the relevance of a particular theory for the practice of PBL. The work will be of interest to readers who wish to explore theoretical parameters alongside some areas of topical debate and reasoning. These chapters and this part of the book are not definitive in their scope, but offer some debate that is different from that found in other PBL texts. It is hoped that they will engage PBL practitioners in discussion on how this work may be further developed and applied. The titles of chapters in Part 2 are as follows:

Chapter 8: Reflection and the problem-based learning curriculum – Gail Boniface

Chapter 9: A reflexive model for problem-based learning – Steven W. Whitcombe and Teena J. Clouston

Chapter 10: Promoting creative thinking and innovative practice through the use of problem-based learning – Jill Riley and Ruth Matheson

Chapter 11: Problem-based learning and the development of capital – Jill Riley and Steven W. Whitcombe

Chapter 12: An evolving vision for learning in health-care education – Andrew Machon and Gwilym Wyn Roberts

Part 3 – ‘The Learner in Problem-Based Learning’ – is a section that explores relevant dimensions for students using PBL as part of their

passage to professional practice and beyond. The work discusses some frank first-hand experience of the student journey, as well as examining a selection of critical interrelated issues when using PBL during study for health and social care professions. This is considered as part of a wider remit of becoming a lifelong learner as well as a qualified practitioner. The work will be of interest not only to health and social care students using PBL but also to other students whose curricula include this type of learning experience. The chapters will also be useful to educators – either those beginning to work in a curriculum using PBL or more experienced staff seeking to appreciate more about the potential of PBL as part of the student journey and about how this contributes to development of professionally responsible practitioners in health and social care. The following are the titles of chapters in Part 3:

Chapter 13: The student experience – Liz Galle and Sandra Marshman

Chapter 14: Becoming lifelong learners in health and social care – Pam Stead, Gareth Morgan and Sally Scott-Roberts

Chapter 15: Becoming a self-directed learner – Susan Delport and Ruth Squire

In the final Part 4 of the book, strands of thinking in problem-based learning have been interweaved by Teena J. Clouston under 'Final Thoughts'. This highlights some conclusions in the light of the content of the book and discusses an interconnected, relational perspective for PBL.

As a group we have been interested in reflecting on our educational experience and understanding of PBL derived from notable contributors in this area relevant to our own practice, including Boud and Feletti (1997), Engel (1997), Baptiste (2003), Sadlo and Richardson (2003) and Savin-Baden (2000, 2003). Some writers have drawn on PBL as an area for conceptual analysis within their higher studies and all have engaged in lively debates with peers and colleagues. This has enabled us to develop our understanding, challenge the ethos and direction of practice as well as consolidate ideas contributing to and shaping the work at hand. We hope that our presentation of some of these areas within this book will appeal both to those new to and those familiar with PBL. As a group we are aware that there is a divergence of opinion on aspects of PBL and enquiry-based learning and how these may be drawn upon within a curriculum. The remit of this text is not broad enough to explore all this in depth, but it does include aspects of opinion that may explore ways forward, challenge understanding and address theory and practice issues topical and familiar to people within the PBL community. We hope that the book will inspire further debate and help

engage even more people into this way of working. We are still on our personal roads to Ithaca; let us enjoy the adventure and knowledge that unfolds ahead.

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