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How Do You Solve a Problem
Like PBL?




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Objectives

- Define PBL
 - Describe PBL
 - Discuss problems with implementation
 - Recommend strategies to address problems
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What exactly is PBL?

- Problem-based learning (PBL) is an innovative approach to teaching and learning first pioneered about three decades ago by Dr. Howard Barrows, in McMaster University, Ontario, Canada.



The best way to describe...

through 3 major characteristics:

- use of problem or problems to trigger discussion of intended learning outcomes.
- students work in collaborative groups.
- teacher plays the role of a 'facilitator.'



One caveat!

- PBL should not be viewed only in the context of small groups and problems (actually majority of the problems faced by PBL implementers are brought by this limited view of PBL).
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Let us take a look (again)...



How does PBL work?

- Initial analysis of the problem and activation of prior knowledge through small-group discussion
- Elaboration on prior knowledge and active processing of new information
- Restructuring of knowledge, construction of a semantic network
- Social knowledge construction




The 'problem' with PBL

- **mismatch between PBL outcome and what will be tested in the board examination**
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The 'problem' with PBL

- Level of **preparedness** of both faculty and students to handle and participate in PBL sessions respectively
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The 'problem' with PBL

- **economics of running PBL**





Problem Analysis and Some practical solutions

- **Mismatch between board examination and PBL outcomes**
 - is not a problem of PBL but the way PBL is designed and implemented
 - some problems being constructed for use by first year PBL students are too clinically oriented, forcing them to discuss clinical more than basic contents
 - If the intended learning outcome for a session is better understanding of basic science concepts and phenomena, then cases should be formulated to trigger such



Problem Analysis and Some practical solutions

- **Preparedness of faculty and students** is not a problem of PBL but the way PBL is designed and implemented
 - Lack of preparedness is to me the easiest to address
 - Faculty members should undergo extensive training on running and facilitating small groups while students should be given at least 4 weeks of preparation for leading and participating in small group sessions (my suggestion is 2 weeks before actual start of classes and during the first two weeks of class).



Problem Analysis and Some practical solutions

- **Economics of PBL**

- PBL would require some reengineering not only of infrastructure but also sociotechnical systems.
- However, with or without PBL schools should really provide adequate resources for faculty and students
- With availability of free online repositories, it is more practical to provide 24/7 free wifi access to faculty and students. The strategy might even unclog crowded and limited library space.
- Regarding use of more facilitators and tutors, this is design issue