

## **Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Approaches to Teach Aging Policy**

### **Philosophy of PBL**

“The tacit aim of all educational enterprises is the production of confident, self-reliant, reflective students who can comfortably ignore the presence of the teacher.”<sup>1</sup>

The Zone of Proximal Development<sup>2,3</sup> is the discrepancy between individual problem-solving capacity and that of the group. Through processes of group discussion and critical self-reflection, the problem-solving capacities of the group afford the individual situations and opportunities to internalize group understandings.

Problem-based learning helps students to become self-directed lifelong learners able to adapt to the changing demands that will be placed on them as professionals.

### **Processes of PBL**

Problem-based learning is an active learning technique that integrates academics and real world issues, builds on students’ current knowledge and skills, promotes cooperative learning, and motivates students.

1. Students are placed into permanent groups and presented with a problem. Working collaboratively to solve that problem, they:
2. Organize ideas and previous knowledge,
3. Pose questions, and define what they know and don’t know,
4. Direct resources and assign responsibility for answering questions, and
5. Reconvene to explore newly learned information and refine questions.

In problem-simulated (instructor-guided) PBL, the instructor sets the objectives, chooses the readings and resources, and provides the guiding questions.<sup>3</sup>

In student-centered (self-directed) PBL, students determine the objectives, readings, and the resources that they will consult.<sup>3</sup>

### **“The Problem” in PBL**

Authentic, timely, and grounded in real-world issues, the problem guides student activities and learning. The statement of the problem should not imply its answer. The problem statement should be broad and appropriately vague to suggest multiple solutions and paths to problem-solving. An ill-structured problem may be appropriate.

Through community assessment, students may discover and define the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Rangachari, P. K. Rangachari, P. K. (1996). Twenty-up: problem-based learning with a large group. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 68, 63-71.

<sup>2</sup> Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Cordeiro, P. A. (1998). Problem-based learning in educational administration: enhancing learning transfer. *Journal of School Leadership*, 8, 280-302.

*Here is the sample problem statement used in Peck's Policy Practice and Aging course:*

How do you propose long-term care for older adults be conceptualized, organized, and provided to insure that older adults have a quality life? What public policy issues involved? With what must public policy be concerned? What public policy solutions do you propose?

In the first meeting with students identify<sup>4</sup>:

1. What we know,
2. What we need to know, and
3. What we are going to do.

### **The Role of the Instructor**

The instructor's role is transformed from that of authority and ownership of knowledge to that of facilitator who does not necessarily know the answer. This new role may be less comfortable.

In PBL, the instructor's role constantly evolves. Instructor's roles include:

- A. Diagnostician – what and how much do students understand how they are thinking about a concept.
- B. Expert – deep understanding of the problem, the discipline, related subjects, and connections with other fields and areas of knowledge.
- C. Coach – motivate students, inspire learning and knowledge acquisition.
- D. Facilitator – manage and conduct activities with students, facilitate communication between group members and between each working group and the instructor, engage and question students.
  - a. Ask questions designed to facilitate learning. *See Bloom's Taxonomy.*
- E. Evaluator – assesses outcomes.

### **Culminating Activity / Service-Learning**

PBL as a pedagogical approach can assist students in making academic and community-based connections.

Combining PBL with service learning can foster increased interest in and motivation to learn a subject, enhance multidisciplinary knowledge and understandings, and emphasize the importance of acquiring problem-solving skills.

### **Assessment**

Involve external evaluators such as professionals and experts in the field.

Obtain student feedback regarding learning process. Obtain student input regarding how to thank service-learning site.

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<sup>4</sup> Stepian, W. J., Gallagher, S. A., & Workman, D. (1993). Problem-based learning for traditional and interdisciplinary classrooms. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 16*, 338-357.