

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

Health Professions Education ■ (■■■■) ■■■-■■■

www.elsevier.com/locate/hpe

What We Think We Know About the Tutor in Problem-Based Learning

Judith C. Williams, Deborah J. Paltridge

Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

Received 1 May 2016; accepted 13 May 2016

Keywords: Problem-based learning; Tutor beliefs and behaviours; Professional lea

This purpose of this brief paper is to provide those new to problem-based learning with a summary of the key findings of research conducted into the beliefs and practices of tutors who facilitate this approach to learning. Although findings from the research do differ there are many areas of agreement. There is general consensus that effective problem-based learning tutors know their subject content and are able to communicate their knowledge in ways that students can comprehend; that they are able to judge when and to what extent to intervene in student learning; and enter the learning environment with an intent for students to develop an understanding of knowledge rather than simply acquire it. Findings from research also suggest that to become an effective tutor takes time and requires support in the form of professional development.

Education of health professionals saw the early adoption of Problem-based Learning (PBL), with many medical schools introducing it as a key instructional strategy over 40 years ago.¹ From the beginning the tutor in PBL was regarded as a significant factor when measuring the success of this approach to learning,² as such research on tutors in PBL has been extensive. This paper is aimed at those new to the role of tutor in PBL, to help them understand some of the key evidence-

based findings from this canon. What we think we know about the tutor in PBL can be categorised in the literature as (1) that which is focused primarily on identifying and categorizing the behaviours of PBL tutors and (2) that which is more concerned with the relationship between tutors' behaviours and student outcomes (academic and broader learning outcomes). Studies have used a variety of research methods including data collected via self-reports, surveys of students, third-party observations and interviews. In contrast there is a paucity of research which examines the teaching beliefs of PBL tutors and the development of their beliefs and behaviours over time. This paper attempts to highlight the key findings from the three categories and provide implications for PBL tutor professional development. First however, is a brief summary of what is meant by PBL.

PBL can be implemented into the curriculum in a variety of ways, however there are a number of commonalities that cut across all models.³ Learning always begins with a problem scenario; whereby students actively construct mental models of the problem and its solution. PBL encourages self-direction, with students determining their learning goals, identifying and dealing with obstacles and undertaking research. The learning process requires students to work individually and in small groups, and finally, solutions to the problem are presented to peers and a

Peer review under the responsibility of King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hpe.2016.05.001>

2452-3011/© 2016 King Saud bin AbdulAziz University for Health Sciences. Production and Hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Please cite this article as: Williams JC, Paltridge DJ. What We Think We Know About the Tutor in Problem-Based Learning. *Health Professions Education* (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hpe.2016.05.001>

tutor for discussion, feedback and reflection.^{4–7} Such an approach is based on a constructivist theory of learning and requires a model of teaching that is different to the conventional classroom. In traditional classrooms, the teacher is the distributor of knowledge and the students the passive recipients of this wisdom.⁸ In contrast, PBL is based on a philosophy that views learning as a process of knowledge construction with students playing an active role in knowledge acquisition. It requires teachers to facilitate student learning as opposed to providing direct instruction, and for students to be active in their learning; hence in PBL the teacher is generally called a tutor or a facilitator.^{9–11} Given that the tutor in PBL plays a unique role in students' learning process what do we know about this facilitator of learning, their behaviours, their impact on students, and the development of their beliefs and behaviours?

1. Identifying and categorising the behaviours of PBL tutors

Studies that have looked at tutors' behaviours in PBL have offered a number of classification systems in which the tutor can be placed. For example, Wilkie¹² talks about the tutor who is either a, (i) liberating supporter, (ii) directive conventionalist, (iii) nurturing socializer or (iv) pragmatic enabler, whereas Mayo et al.¹³ state that an ideal tutor should be an activator rather than a facilitator; their thinking being that an activator will provoke students into engaging with learning as their approach is more motivational and dynamic than a facilitator. Basing her work in phenomenology Silén¹⁴ provides two labels for tutoring styles; 'present' tutors and 'dys-appearing' tutors. In essence 'present' tutors base what they do on the students, their needs, and how they are functioning in groups to the point that students perceive these types of tutors to be present and supportive in the group rather than focusing on their own teaching. In contrast, 'dys-appearing' tutors are less sure of what to do and hence they are more consciously thinking of themselves and their role as a tutor so that students view them as being distant or non-existent in the student learning groups.

Our understanding of the effective tutor in PBL has been further enhanced by work that has categorised and measured tutor actions. For example Leung, Lue and Lee,¹⁵ used four types of teaching behaviours, (i) assertive, (ii) suggestive, (iii) collaborative and (iv) facilitative, while De Grave et al.¹⁶ have shown that effective tutors are those who score highly on four dimensions: (1) elaboration, (2) directing the learning

process, (3) integration of knowledge, and (4) stimulating interaction and accountability, and are perceived by students as being the most effective tutors. Interestingly the De Grave et al.¹⁶ study suggested that students perceived tutors who stressed content as being less effective than those who focus on the learning process, although the difference was not statistically significant.

What is common in all of these studies on types of tutors is the consensus that a spectrum of teaching behaviours exists.^{15,17} However the effective PBL tutor sits at the end of the spectrum that is represented by a view of teaching that is based on constructivist theory of learning, which is student-centred, concerned with developing students as self-directed, independent learners and where the tutor takes a facilitative role in the classroom – all factors considered essential for PBL.^{3,7,9} A couple of studies have highlighted behaviours that should be in the repertoire of an effective tutor but which can be problematic. Maudsley¹⁸ has examined how tutors try to facilitate rather than teach in PBL classes and found that a key issue in facilitation was a lack of knowing when and how to intervene in student learning. This finding was also raised by Haith-Cooper.¹⁹ In both studies, when tutors decided there was a need to intervene they tended to slip back into the familiar teaching role and start to provide unsolicited information, and direct students' learning. In an earlier study by Maudsley²⁰ some tutors were interpreting the role of a tutor as being 'tutor inactive' whereby they played virtually no role in the classroom or as Neville describes they felt like "wallflowers",²¹ they made little contribution because they thought they could not use their subject expertise to help students. It seems that knowing when, why and how to intervene in PBL classes is an elusive skill. Indeed, in a review of numerous studies of the PBL tutor, Neville²¹ claims the key problem facing teaching staff using this approach is deciding how directive or facilitative they need to be to achieve the balance between students acquiring an understanding of their subject and students being self-directed in their learning. What is unclear from these studies is whether the difficulty related to intervention is based on tutors' lack of knowledge about how to facilitate PBL or a lack of conviction about the appropriateness of this method.

2. The impact of the PBL tutor on students' outcomes

There is a second body of work in the literature on the tutor in PBL that expands upon the research that identifies the behaviours of tutors by looking at how

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8582958>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8582958>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)