

Perspective from a Master of Speech Pathology graduate

The nature of my undergraduate university studies, in particular the classic teaching style of purely lectures and tutorials, had not fostered an adequate training for this young up and coming journalist. Of course I learnt a lot about the media, of particular interest to me was its relationship with sport. Unfortunately more time was probably spent reading others journalistic endeavours than actually producing anything of significance myself in class. I believe there was simply not enough relevant and real life learning and training occurring.

As such, commencing a postgraduate Masters degree in Speech Pathology brought with it some trepidation about returning to the compression of seemingly endless information into arduous lecture format. Instead I was greeted with a new teaching style that has since highlighted that learning isn't necessarily a one-way street with lecturers lecturing information to students. Rather learning can be a busy intersection with lecturers directing and facilitating a flow of information from interactive participants actively involved in real-life contextual cases.

Problem Based Learning revolves around a focal problem that is initially explored by a group as a real life 'trigger'. This trigger takes the form of case based background information, test results etc. that then form the basis for identifying what learning is required over the course of a week to solve the problem. If you're thinking CSI Bundoora here, you're not far off it. The lead characters are played by the other group members who bring to the table, through discussion and feedback, a vast range of life and academic experience. This of course brings challenges in itself. However, learning to work together in a harmonious and effective manner brings about results for the greater good. Furthermore, the strategies and considerations for developing teamwork certainly carry over into the working world at the end of the two-year course duration.

During the week the case is taken through a series of twists and turns as new information is presented and identified. Readings, skill classes and lectures, all designed to be relevant to the week's topic, are coupled with a student's self directed learning to solve the case by week's end. Whilst university on Fridays is somewhat of an anomaly to most university students, the PBL format brought a genuine excitement and enthusiasm to class. Friday represented not just the commencement of a weekend, but the culmination of a week's work towards a common goal.

Whilst the names have been changed to protect the innocent, like any good television drama, the cases are authentic and the learning that has occurred is firmly grounded. In fact I still remember back to 'Mrs. Davis' from the aphasia case in first semester of 2nd year now during my current clinical work. Furthermore, the relationships developed through the close-knit PBL group work, including the facilitators, also remain tight and have proven to be an excellent network in our professional lives.

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