Exploring novice and experienced PBL facilitators’ perceptions of their roles and skills.
Does experience matter?

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2000

• Graduate Entry Masters (GEM) PBL
• 68 students
• 6 tutes
• experienced facilitation staff

2011

• GEM & Combined degree PBL
• 143 students
• 13 tutes
• extra facilitators recruited
Recruitment of PBL facilitators

New facilitators included:

• experienced academic staff
• new academic staff
• experienced clinicians
• post graduate students
A sustainable PBL curriculum depends upon Recruitment & retention of PBL facilitators.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>facilitator beliefs &amp; values re: PBL</th>
<th>role of facilitator</th>
<th>pathways to facilitator competency</th>
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Beliefs & values of PBL facilitators

• Facilitators are a key element of PBL and play a pivotal role in the learning experience of students.
  (Albanese, 2004; Chng et al. 2011; Kaufman & Holmes, 1995; Barrows, 1985)

• Facilitator beliefs and values regarding educational ideas influence their interpretation of PBL.
  - Facilitators will develop different understandings of PBL
  (Taylor & Miflin, 2008; Johnston & Tinning, 2001)
Beliefs & values of PBL facilitators

- Facilitator beliefs and values regarding PBL also influence competency in role.
  (Johnston & Tinning, 2001; Taylor & Miflin, 2008; Creedy et al. 1992)

- Facilitators beliefs and values ultimately influence the way in which PBL curriculum is implemented.
  (Taylor & Miflin, 2008; Johnston & Tinning, 2001; Albanese, 2004)
The role of the PBL facilitator

• Ongoing debate regarding the role of facilitator.
  • content vs. non content expert
  • process vs. content focus

  (Taylor & Miflin, 2008; Dolmans et al. 2002; Haith – Cooper, 2003)

• Role of the facilitator remains unresolved.
  (Taylor & Miflin, 2008)
The role of the PBL facilitator

- Individual differences in facilitation styles are to be expected.  
  (Taylor & Miflin, 2008; De Grave et al. 1999; Haith-Cooper, 2003)

- However, role ambiguity creates challenges for staff new to PBL facilitation.  
  (Haith-Cooper, 2000)
Facilitation skills are not innate and most staff will need to learn a new set of skills. (Barrows, 1985; Haith-Cooper, 2000; Johnston & Tinning, 2001)

Experience in PBL facilitation may or may not contribute to competency in this role. (McLean, 2003; Barrows, 1985; Kaufman & Holmes, 1996)
Pathways to competency

• Both experienced and novice facilitators perceive the need for continuing development and support in this role.
  (Tremblay, Tryssaar & Bung, 2001; Bung et al. 2005; McLean, 2003)

• Facilitator’s experiences and perceptions can inform support and training programs.
  (Dolmans et al, 2002; Bung et al. 2005; Tremblay et al. 2001)
1. To survey facilitators regarding their perceptions of PBL and their facilitation role.

2. To compare novice and more experienced facilitators’ perspectives on their roles with a view to delineating their specific professional development requirements.
Methodology

PBL facilitator perceptions questionnaire developed.

32 rating scale responses
Roles and responsibilities of facilitator

4 open ended questions.

Based upon your facilitation experience, describe the strengths and weaknesses of the PBL approach to teaching.

Describe any challenges and/or frustrations you have experienced in the PBL facilitation process.

Describe any aspects of the PBL facilitation process that you enjoy.

How could the School best provide ongoing support for PBL facilitators?
Facilitator characteristics

<table>
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<th>Facilitator sample</th>
<th>(n = 12)</th>
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<td>Response rate = 71 %</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>NOVICE</th>
<th>6 (50%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>(no facilitation experience prior to semester 1 2011)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>EXPERIENCED</th>
<th>6 (50%)</th>
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<td>(facilitated more than once prior to semester 2 2011)</td>
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Self rated understanding of PBL philosophy

* $P < 0.05$
Novice & experienced facilitator’s perceptions

** $p < 0.01$  * $p < 0.05$
## Challenges and / or frustrations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1. Group dynamics</th>
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<td>“Challenges are around supporting the group when there are difficult interpersonal dynamics.”</td>
<td>“As a new facilitator, managing the group process without being prescriptive can be challenging.”</td>
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<th>2. Role conflict</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Adjusting to role as facilitator rather than expert teacher / researcher.”</td>
<td>“Due to my clinical teaching background, I sometimes find it hard not to give too much information.”</td>
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### Challenges and / or frustrations

#### 3. Social relationships

“Facilitator becomes a constant presence week to week and therefore becomes an outlet for students (e.g. Mentor / confidante).”

#### 4. Curriculum structure

“Some case notes are easier to facilitate than others.”
### Enjoyable aspects of PBL facilitation

#### 1. Positive student learning

| “Seeing students wrestle with a problem and find a way to solve it.” | “Observing each participant grow in confidence in their own knowledge and ability to apply it during PBL sessions.” |

#### 2. Group Collaboration

| “Watching group members become a team to pool knowledge and address learning issues. “ | “Observing the group take ownership of their learning processes.” |
### Enjoyable aspects of PBL facilitation

#### 3. Social Relationships

| “Getting to know students and see them develop.” | “Getting to know a group of individuals who will be my future colleagues.” |

#### 4. Professional Development

| “Increasing my own knowledge in areas outside of my expertise.” |  |
## Continuing support for PBL facilitators

### 1. Knowledge – based resources

- **“One colloquium PA devoted to PBL topic?”**
- **“Provision of formalised education program re: PBL facilitation when commencing a role such as this.”**

### 2. Peer support

- **“More frequent de-briefing sessions with other facilitators and more experienced facilitators.”**
- **“Regular debriefing sessions to discuss implementation of PBL philosophy. “**
### 3. Workshop handling group dynamics

“Workshops on managing “difficult” student interactions.”

### 4. Co-facilitation and mentoring

“Having a PBL mentor or support person for any questions / issues which arise.”

### 5. Curriculum developments

“Seek feedback from facilitators about the subject (not only individual cases), including PBL rostering changes.”
Discussion

• Experienced facilitators rated their understanding of the PBL philosophy more highly than novices.

• Experience in PBL facilitation influenced perception of the role.
  – Novice facilitators less likely to agree on their role in handling group dynamics & communicating curriculum information.
Discussion

• Both novice and experienced groups grappled with content vs. group facilitation role.

• Social relationships, student achievement and group collaboration were positive aspects of facilitation reported by both groups.

• Both novice and experienced facilitators need continuing support in this role but their needs change with experience.
Future directions

- Facilitators perceptions
  - curriculum
  - case
  - philosophy
  - process


McLean, M. (2003). What can we learn from facilitator and student perceptions of facilitation skills and roles in the first year of a problem-based learning curriculum? *BMC Medical Education* 3(9), 1-10.


EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEM BASED LEARNING (PBL) AND FACILITATION

1. Before semester one 2011, had you had previous experience as a PBL facilitator?
   □ Yes □ No

If you answered yes approximately how many PBL cases had you facilitated?

2. How would you rate your understanding of the PBL philosophy?
   □ None □ Scant □ Reasonable □ Good □ Excellent

3. Based upon your facilitation experience, describe the strengths and weaknesses of the PBL approach to teaching.

4. Describe any challenges and / or frustrations you have experienced in the PBL facilitation process.

5. Describe any aspects of the PBL facilitation process that you enjoy.

6. How could the Department of Human Communication Sciences best provide support for PBL facilitators?