

Book Reviews

Advancing the Healthy People 2010 Objectives Through Community-Based Education: A Curriculum Planning Guide

KARA M. CONNORS

S. CASHMAN, S.D. SEIFER, M. UNVERZAGT (Eds)

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, San Francisco, CA (2003)

240 pp.

The author and editors of this curriculum planning guide, representing the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) state the purpose of this publication is to:

equip faculty with the tools and resources to expand the health promotion and disease prevention content in the curriculum through community-based education and advance the “Healthy People 2010” objectives through that curriculum.

The CCPH is an American based organisation and this guide appears primarily targeted at the American health profession faculties, however the guide book is a very useful resource for all those wishing to foster a partnership between the “community and the campus”. Do not let the “Healthy People 2010” distract you either, as this is a health promotion/disease prevention agenda drawn from the ten leading health indicators for the USA, but on looking down the list of these indicators, they are applicable in their entirety or in part to most countries. Therefore the guide will be a resource for all those looking for a way of developing health promotion and prevention within their curricula and at the same time realising the potential of the community as a learning environment.

By far the largest portion of this guide is made up by the eight “units” devoted to taking the reader through the stages involved in organising community-campus partnerships, including for example: the initial seeking of appropriate partners, through drawing up agreements, developing learning objectives, potential educational strategies and resources, evaluation methods through to sustaining the partnerships.

Each of the eight units delivers an introduction followed by pointers to assist the reader to think around the topic and asks the reader to interact with the text in terms of reflective questions and case notes requiring analysis and comment. Where appropriate, there are worked examples of agreements, planning grids, assessment tools and potential resources (though with respect to these resources they are mainly drawn from the American literature or evidence).

For those of us outside of the USA the language of American health policy and education can make the progress through the guide difficult, but this said the underlying principles and processes are clearly stated.

In summary, we are provided with an excellent tool to guide all health profession educators and curriculum designers in ways of increasing the social responsibility of the faculty and new ways of enabling students to gain the competencies needed for health promotion and disease prevention.

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Assessment: Case Studies, Experience and Practice from Higher Education

PETER SCHWARTZ AND GRAHAM WEBB (Eds)

Kogan Page, London (2002)

196 pp., ISBN 0 7494 3623 9

This volume is as interesting and as easy to read as Peter Schwartz's previous collection on Problem-Based Learning (Schwartz *et al.*, 2001). Both illustrate the value of a wide ranging, scholarly interest across the spectrum of educational initiatives.

The present text offers the practising academic 22 experiences, assembled in six sections and contributed by 33 authors from four countries in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere:

- Information Technology—one answer to assessment in large classes.
- Reflective Assessment—journals, log books, portfolios, peer assessment.
- Institution wide Assessment Programmes—the US perspective.
- Assessment Methods for Special Purposes.
- Addressing the Needs of Individual Students in Assessment.
- Hands on Assessment—everyday problems.

Do not omit to read the Introduction. It opens the door, as it were, to the treasure trove within. The first seven pages provide a succinct overview of the quite different uses of the word “assessment”. Before offering a guide to the use of the book, it explains how the ‘Cases’ from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America were gathered and constructed to offer a consistent format. The last of these is worth quoting:

How well was the situation handled?

What other options might there have been for dealing with it? What lessons did the reporter and his/her colleagues learn from the experience?

What lessons are there for you from the case?

Thus, the reader will at once become involved and, indeed, challenged to empathize with the authors' task, conundrum, dilemma and frequently brilliant decision making. The great virtue of the book is that it helps the reader to benefit directly by reflecting on the experiences s/he has just shared with the authors from a wide range of disciplines.

Readers can make their own judgement as to the solutions offered by the authors. Perhaps a set of criteria, such as validity, reliability and educational value for the students might have been useful for expecting the students to justify each of their decisions. This would seem to be desirable, if the tests were to assess not only the students' ability to make relevant decisions, but also to justify these in terms of the underpinning disciplines. The dual advantage would be (1) students are encouraged to link practice with the application of theory, and (2) the accompanying reasoning would satisfy the assessors that the answers were not merely a happy instance of guesswork.

Some readers may also be less than content with a frequent mention of "grades". There is also a regrettable dearth of reference to the need for assessment to foster learning and thus the imperative for positive feedback to the students.

A further contribution to the book is a consideration of the affect of the educational and administrative environment on the initiation and eventual fate of innovation and change. The message would seem to be that, however courageous and imaginative an innovation might be at the personal or departmental level, lasting success would require the support of a rapidly growing educational professionalism with overt support from the institution's *political will*.

The book is rounded off with a thoughtful Conclusion—a veritable gem and an extensive, well selected list for Further Reading, as well as a very helpful Index. This is not yet another tome for scholars of the theories of assessment, it is of genuine interest and immediate practical value for all who wish to overcome awkward difficulties and perhaps improve the all round effectiveness and practicability of their assessments.

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Reference

Schwartz, P., Mennin, S. & Webb, G. (Eds). (2001). *Problem-Based Learning: Case Studies, Experience and Practice*. London: Kogan Page.

Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions

DOROTHY H. EVENSEN AND CINDY E. HMELO (Eds.)

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey, London (2000)

362 pp., ISBN 0-8058-2645-9

Primarily a research publication directed at medical and health professional education, this first edition of *Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions* has a table of contents, a foreword by Howard Barrows of Southern Illinois University, a preface, acknowledgements, two main parts—The Group Meeting and Self-Directed Learning, 13 chapters with references, 14 figures, 27 tables, an epilogue, author index, a subject index and a list of contributors. Brief biographies profiles of the editors and the contributors are given in the list of contributors. It would be useful to move the list of contributors to the front sections of the book to leave the subject index as the last section of the book. The book has no list of figures, list of tables, suggested further reading, list of abbreviations or a glossary. The latter may have been very useful and could be considered for future volumes or related works. The textbook's concise writing style makes it easy to read and to refer to as a reference textbook. It is well researched, fairly consistent, and systematic in its presentation.

Problem-based learning (PBL) has become central to the modern medical curriculum in a large number of medical schools. *Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions* incorporates and discusses recent research into PBL thus providing a more evidenced-based approach to its incorporation into the medical curriculum, as well as providing an improved understanding of issues surrounding PBL. This first edition provides discussion on these matters and more. Chapters in Part 1 "The Group Meeting" include "Introduction", "Factors affecting small-group tutorial learning: a review of research", "When is a problem-based tutorial not a tutorial? Analysing the tutor's role in the emergence of learning issue", "Whose group is it, anyway? Equity of student discourse in problem-based learning", "How are we doing? Methods of assessing group processing in a problem-based learning context", "Five readings of a single text: Transcript of a video analysis session", "Groups in problem-based learning: essential elements in theory and practice", and "Commentary on Part 1: process and product in problem-based learning research". Chapters in Part 2 "Self-Directed Learning" include "Evaluating the evidence that problem-based learners are self-directed learners: a review of the literature", "Becoming self-directed learners: strategy development in problem-based learning", "What directs self-directed learning in a problem-based curriculum?", "Observing self-directed learners in a problem-based learning context: two case studies" and "A commentary on self-directed learning". The epilogue is titled "Assessment of students for proactive lifelong learning".

Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions gives good coverage of research into PBL both in terms of group work and self-directed learning (SDL). In the Foreword, Howard Barrows indicates that PBL is not a single method of health professional education but in fact comprises a variety of “species” and “mutations”. He indicates that the book will be useful for anyone “designing a PBL curriculum or who is responsible for maintaining and improving a PBL curriculum”. Particular highlights of the book include “Groups in PBL” (Chapter 7), which provided useful information for those possibly confronting the inevitable group work in PBL discussing the evidence for their inner workings and as well as reviewing likely outcomes. An excellent review of the contribution of PBL to SDL is given in Chapter 9. This is an important chapter for anyone to read who is seeking evidence for PBL promoting SDL for an upcoming accreditation review. The self-reflective health professional educator will also be interested in the review of research concerning small group learning, particularly those aspects that make a more effective tutor (Chapter 2). Even the epilogue gives a valuable description of assessment for the “proactive lifelong learner”.

The editors are both academics in the field of education. Both editors are based in the United States of America (USA). Multiple contributors have authored 11/13 (85%) of the 28 chapters. There are 20 contributors from three countries, although most of the contributors appear to be listed as based in institutions of higher learning in the USA (15/20) with the remainder coming from the Maastricht University in the Netherlands (3/20) and the University of Toronto in Canada (2/10). Most of the contributors to *Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions* have indicated they are active in educational research, particularly in the context of the medical curriculum. Perhaps future editions will tap into the PBL experiences of researchers in other countries, especially in Australia.

The intended audience for *Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions* is “both researchers and practitioners”. It is an essential reference for those working professionally in health professional and medical education, particularly in PBL environments. The book will also appeal as a reference textbook for health professionals, especially those who are called upon to contribute to PBL sessions on a regular basis. Academic and research departments of health professional education and medical education should also consider the book as a required reference textbook for their libraries and also for advanced postgraduate courses. This first edition of *Problem-Based Learning: A Research Perspective on Learning Interactions* is a worthy addition to the exclusive international portfolio of standard textbooks in PBL, edited by health professionals with noteworthy research backgrounds in education.

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