

GETTING STARTED IN PBL

Philosophical Decisions

- Clear idea and statement of course objectives
- Balance between problems and lecture (and other pedagogical strategies)
 - Problems and group work only? Equal mix of lecture and problems? Occasional problems?
- Balance between content and process skills
 - To what extent will nature of content change? How much content to retain? What to cut?
 - What process skills are desired? Degree of emphasis?
- Extent of student- vs. teacher-centered instruction
 - How much control/support?
 - Degree of comfort for both students, instructor? (New roles for both: independent learners and facilitator)
 - Getting students to “buy in”: address concerns
- Extent of emphasis on group work
 - Individual vs. group grading
 - Formal (permanent) vs. informal (temporary) groups
- Outside expectations with respect to content
 - Later course requirements, certification standards

Practical Decisions

- Class Format
 - Scheduling: number, length of class periods (*What is the time frame into which **this** problem must fit? Does this time frame allow students enough time to digest and ponder the problem?*)
 - Room size and structure: fixed vs. moveable seating, space for resource materials
 - Structuring class time: group work vs. whole class; lecture vs. discussion; special events
- Groups
 - Organization: size, criteria for composition
 - Fostering desired group function/behavior
 - Guidance within groups: Independent? Instructor as “roving” facilitator? Peer facilitators or TAs (how will they know what to do? do they have buy-in?)
 - Extent of outside group work required
- Problems
 - Content to address through problems (*How will **this** problem help to accomplish goals of the course?*)
 - Number, length, degree of difficulty
 - Degree of structure within problem: guiding questions vs. completely free response
- Grading and Assessment
 - Must reflect all course objectives - process as well as content; how to balance
 - Exam, quiz format: should it change? How?
 - Group vs. individual grading; policies and safeguards
 - Evaluation of group work and projects (“mastery” vs. “normed” achievement standards)
 - Peer evaluations
 - Attendance and participation policies
- Learning Resources
 - Degree of reliance expected on non-text resources
 - Training/expertise level in using resources such as library, Internet and Web, e-mail, computing skills, multimedia
 - Coordination with lab or other special components of courses