

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, JAMAICA

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING INITIATIVE

June 4-7 2007



The University of Technology, Jamaica, through its Office of Curriculum Development and Evaluation (OCDE) is presenting two events on Problem-Based Learning (PBL) during the week of June 4-7, 2007.

The University has invited **Professor George H. Watson**, Director and founding member of the Institute for Transforming Undergraduate Education (ITUE), Senior Associate Dean of the Arts and Sciences College and Professor of Astronomy and Physics at the University of Delaware to lead the University's exploration of PBL.

PBL is an innovative approach to organising learning and teaching that addresses learning outcomes through the students' active involvement in problem-solving and sharing of the solutions they identify. It is a system that encourages critical thinking and stimulates the analysis of ideas and consensus- building – all critical skills needed in the global environment and the modern workplace.

PBL is:

- A learner-centred education model
- Experiential in design
- Based on activities carried out by a community of learners in a classroom, laboratory, library or the field
- Assessed on the basis of process and outcomes

On Monday June 4, Professor Watson will give a Public Lecture entitled, “Problem-Based Learning in Tertiary and Workplace Education” in The Alexandria Room of the Four Seasons Hotel 5:30 -8:00 p.m. This public event is free.

From June 5 to 7, he will facilitate a three-day workshop entitled “Experiencing Problem-Based Learning” at The Courtleigh Hotel. This practical experience-based workshop, is targeted both to Jamaican workplace training managers and tertiary educators.

The workshop will enable participants to achieve a particular learning outcome by challenging them to solve a particular problem relevant to the Jamaican context. By having participants directly experience the problem-based learning approach in accomplishing specified learning outcomes, Professor Watson anticipates that participants will understand the power of the methodology in an adult learning context. “Problem-solving is a powerful way for learners to expand both their knowledge base and critical thinking skills.”

The workshop participants will also explore the challenges of measuring learning accurately in a problem-based learning exercise and designing effective assessment instruments to measure individual learning in a group setting.

By the conclusion of the workshop, Professor Watson anticipates that the participants will be able to translate existing courses – whether designed for the tertiary classroom or the training situation – into a problem-based modality.

The workshop is fully subscribed, according to Dr. Nancy George, Director of the Office of Curriculum Development and Evaluation. “We have had an extraordinary response to the workshop announcement: we had enquiries and applications from across the island ...the workshop was fully subscribed within two weeks of the announcement.”

This workshop is the first in a series being undertaken by UTech in order to contribute to strengthening the quality and currency of educational methods used in tertiary and workplace education. Over the next two years, the

OCDE plans to offer at least four such workshops facilitated by international experts.

The University of Delaware's Institute (<http://www.udel.edu/inst/>) and its origins are best described in Prof. Watson's own words in his 1998 article on the need for change in tertiary education, especially in the sciences.
<http://cte.udel.edu/aboutteach/spr98/watson.html>

Although the University of Delaware Institute focuses on transforming tertiary/undergraduate education and workplace training, the need for change in instructional approaches in tertiary and workplace learning is more pervasive than just the undergraduate level:

“...graduate education traditionally has focused on preparing students for jobs in academe. But today well over half of all doctoral recipients go to work in non-academic settings, where they often need to call on a wide array of skills.”¹

The following articles available on the listed websites provide interesting and useful background on current modalities of organised learning related to Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

<http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/webform/contents>

<http://books.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/>

<http://www.nas.edu/21st/education/>

<http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Papers/Resist.html>

- Office of Curriculum Development & Evaluation
May 16, 2007

¹ “Graduate Education Should Focus on Student Needs” *Preparing for the 21st Century* downloaded from <http://www.nas.edu/21st/education/> May 16, 2007