

2005

The Tutor's Role in Propagating Blended Problem-based Learning in Higher Education: a Case Study Approach

Roisin Donnelly

Technological University Dublin, roisin.donnelly@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ltoth>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Donnelly, R. (2005). The Tutor's Role in Propagating Blended Problem-based Learning in Higher Education: a Case Study Approach. *Graduate Student Doctoral Research Conference*, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, January 31-February 1.

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Learning Teaching & Assessment at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Other resources by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie, vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie.

The Tutor's Role in Propagating Blended Problem-based Learning in Higher Education: A Case Study Approach

Roisin Donnelly

Learning and Teaching Centre
Dublin Institute of Technology

14 Upper Mount Street
Dublin 2
Ireland

Tel 00 3531 402 7886
Fax 00 3531 6767243
E.Mail roisin.donnelly@dit.ie

Abstract

- It is argued in this thesis that it is vital to seek to develop e-learning teaching and learning strategies in higher education that support approaches with an emphasis on the innovative and cutting edge educational strategies related to education for sustainability. Education for sustainability should be learner centred and will require a significant shift for both academics and students alike. It is essential that all academics who are willing to engage in this process acknowledge that they too are learners and will need to reflect on their teaching and learning practice if we are to develop a truly sustainable global e-learning environment.



Abstract

- There are a wider range of e-learning technologies that are available for the more traditional teaching and learning/instructional strategies. The challenge faced by today's educational developers is the development of e-learning technologies to support constructivist and social constructivism in teaching and learning approaches amongst the academic staff with whom they work so that this is carried forward into their own classrooms and subject disciplines.
- A hugely important area in any form of instructional delivery is the role of the tutor; in an e-learning environment, it is even more crucial. The tutor's role in a blended PBL module will be explored in this research, specifically how their facilitation of the learners builds a sustainable model of educational development. The deeper question driving this research then is the influence of the tutor on the underlying sustainability and long-term viability of this model of learning.



Presentation Outline



Introduction: Course Context
The Major Aspects of the Study
Course Web Site
Q & A

CONTEXT

Postgraduate Diploma in Third Level Learning and Teaching: for lecturers in HE
Underpinning model of learning: PBL

- PBL is a total approach to HE
- Learning is centred round the PBL problem
- The problem has to:

'engage students' interest, compel them to take it on as their responsibility, support the development and application of problem solving skills and stimulate self-directed learning into areas of study relevant to the curriculum.'

Online Learning Module: 10 Weeks duration

online delivery and support of the module was in WebCT, using a problem-based learning (PBL) approach.

- Starter-wrapper f2f
- Asynchronous discussion fora
- Video conference presentation

The Role of the Tutor: Different thinking hats

Define/make explicit tutor's role from the beginning. Different thinking hats include:

- Encouraging participation from the learners
- Showing interest in their progression
- Responding positively to their enquiries
- Providing helpful feedback on module work
- Ensuring learners feel their contribution to module activities are valued
- Model good practice to accentuate exchanges of positive affect
- Should the tutor treat all students alike, supporting an expectation for uniform performances and behaviours, or emphasise individual differences, supporting an expectation for diversity?

Module Evaluation: Case Study Approach

“the instructor's level of participation was *hindered* due to the E-PBL approach; what was needed was a more “*authoritarian*” instructor, which I acknowledge is against the grain of 'traditional' PBL”

“I feel that PBL requires complex social interaction, and a tutor attempting to facilitate this fully online is difficult. To help *work with the tutor* I feel the the participants would have required more experience in online collaborative working than was available in a ten week block. We wanted *more organisation and tutor input* than was present from f'2f PBL instructor facilitation.”



Tutor's Perspective : findings

- difficulties in taking into account individual learning objectives, preferences and capabilities; it only worked seamlessly when the individual objectives overlapped with each other.
- facilitative rather than a didactic approach in technology-supported courses. Mentoring and instruction need to be infused, if the PBL group process is going to work online.
- from a constructivist viewpoint, there a critical component to interaction online is an interpersonal/social component; Social interaction can contribute to learner satisfaction and frequency of interaction in an online learning environment.



Recommendations for Tutor's Role:

**cognitive, managerial and
affective**

At what point does taking the position of
constructivist guide on the side become abdication of
a responsibility to intervene more assertively?

Affective

- Welcoming learners and continuing to encourage, support and motivate them is an important beginning for the role.
- As the nature of online discussion differs in several key ways from face-to-face, certain factors can detract from an online course if the tutor does not tackle them from both a design and a moderating perspective.
- It helps if the tutor has a broad base of life experiences in addition to academic credentials. Feeling comfortable communicating in writing is important, as well as accepting the value of online learning as equal to the traditional model.
- Overall, the E-PBL tutor should demonstrate the characteristics of openness, concern, flexibility and sincerity.

Cognitive

- Clear and appropriately-applied e-moderating is key for a number of reasons.
- Being alert to the possibilities within each online group of learners.
- The most valuable aspect about a course can be the activities: one can learn so much more by doing something. Participation is an area that practitioners need to know more about. Common complaints of experienced online tutors are that participation levels are poor and/or the level of discussion is superficial.
- The tutor very quickly needs to discover what motivates each group of learners to participate or what is making it more difficult for them to participate.
- The tutor needs to be in tune with level of engagement and discussion that the activities are generating.

Cognitive

- The level of engagement can be influenced by the diversity of the group and the timetables of the different participants.
- The process is much more apparent.
- A proactive approach is essential in specific instances.
- Seeding discussions can be important.
- Asking questions, being provocative.
- Assigning tasks –linking ideas –clean up online space before launching a new discussion.
- Over time, these tutor roles should be adopted/passed over to the learners, giving them increased control over their e-PBL learning environment.

Managerial

- Being aware of the tutor's responsibilities at various junctures is important.
- From this study, there is no doubt that there are areas where f2f engagement is vital but the learners could appreciate how some tasks are better online. E.G.
 - student's online reflections on the module
 - using the web as more than a static repository of information – making course notes, powerpoint demonstrations available.

Other Tutor Considerations

- providing an effective induction.
- knowing when and how to make the resources available. seamless movement between roles.
- a major challenge for the instructor is to help ensure that each individual participant learns while also gaining the experience of working collaboratively.

Future Work

- The preparation of online tutors is an area which is still emerging and which is likely to be of increasing importance over the coming years.
- Guidelines are available for:
 - wholly online, direct instruction
 - wholly online, facilitated/guided instruction
- Blended environments using PBL approach and for tutors moving between such teaching strategies simultaneously.

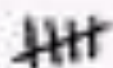
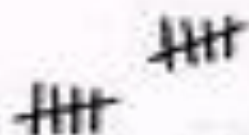
The Course Web Site...

<http://webcourses.dit.ie>



SUCCESSSES

LEARNING
EXPERIENCES



Goff

ANY QUESTIONS?

`http://www.com @ url http://www.vrml www`
`1001010011010011000011000011001100100`