Book Review: A Practical Guide to Problem-Based Learning Online

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Beginning with the definition of problem-based learning and PBLonline, Savin-Baden's book comes full circle by providing development, assessment, and evaluation resources for PBLonline. The audience for this book is practitioners, including developers and instructors, and preferably those with some previous experience with problem-based learning and distance education. As Savin-Baden explains, this book is

> not designed to be a comprehensive guide through the design and implementation of PBLonline, although a number of pointers are given; rather it offers suggestions and perspectives that to date have been underexplored and offers some possibilities for rethinking PBLonline for the future. (p. 4)

This book is an excellent resource for those looking for a truly integrated discussion of what PBL and online learning can provide in a new, merged environment.

Part 1 of the book provides a foundation to PBLonline in four chapters. In chapter 1, the author provides a brief review of the history of PBL, including useful comparisons and charts related to the models, types, characteristics, and components that have evolved over the past few decades. The author also defines pure PBL and hybrid PBL types and what constitutes PBL. In addition, Savin-Baden provides a basic overview, or building block approach, for setting up a PBLonline module. Chapter 2 presents PBLonline models or "designs in practice" with many real-world, international examples incorporated: the single online module at a distance, the single blended module, blended programs, and content management systems for PBLonline. While all collaborative in nature the models range from the most simplistic in terms of implementation, the single online module

(1-12 weeks in length, offered entirely at a distance, and tend to occur towards the end of a program, for example during a clinical experience) to the more far-reaching forms of PBLonline, namely blended programs (full degree programs that have PBLonline as the underlying philosophy) and content management systems (extending from websites to developed content management systems).

Having discussed the foundations and current standing of PBLonline, chapter 3 moves to common mistakes and assumptions related to PBLonline. The mistakes discussed cover everything from the definition and characteristics of PBL (problem-solving versus problem-solving learning versus problem-based learning) to assumptions made about students and their abilities in new learning environments (e.g., students will facilitate it well) to mistakes that involve design and implementation of PBLonline (e.g., discussion boards alone offer adequate support). This chapter closes with some alternative strategies to help developers and practitioners overcome the common pitfalls. Building from these points, chapter 4 deals with "equipping" staff and students for PBLonline. Beginning by looking at how "staff" position themselves as facilitators, including their pedagogical perspective, the chapter moves to a discussion about the role of facilitators in PBLonline. It concludes by looking at the experiences of several students as a means for practitioners to better understand how to prepare students for the experience.

Part 2 consists of three chapters focused on designing problem-based learning online environments . Chapter 5 provides readers with a working outline or guidelines of a schema that can be utilized to develop a PBLonline module, including the steps of the schema, while promoting "learning intentions, assessment, and the development of [students'] capability" (p. 63). Additional resources in this chapter include sample activities to be considered for module development. As a final step in the development process, chapter 6 provides ten steps for developing effective PBLonline, including choosing the form of PBLonline right for each situation. The concluding chapter looks to PBLonline futures, specifically possibilities for moving problem-based learning forward as both a philosophy and an approach to learning. Moreover, the chapter provides some glimpses into what PBLonline could look like with the integration of applications that provide alternative learning spaces, including those found in Web 2.0 and 3D worlds.

Part 3 concludes with a resource section for developers and practitioners alike. It provides a section on developing online teams, a section on writing problem scenarios and types of scenarios, a section on assessment, and one on evaluation of PBLonline. A frequently asked questions and glossary section are also provided.

Overall, the book should be viewed as a resource, offering solid, practical steps to development and implementation while providing models and characteristics of PBLonline; in essence, this is a "tips and tricks" resource. Given the breadth of the topic and the many

layers of PBLonline covered in such a compact resource, the book can be overwhelming to novices. However, many practical, real-world examples are provided throughout the sections, and those with background knowledge in PBL will find it a stimulating and thought-provoking resource.

Jennifer C. Richardson is Associate Professor of Educational Technology at Purdue University. Her research interests include best practices in distance education, especially as it relates to sociocognitive aspects of learning, and the professional development of K-12 teachers and higher education faculty in technology integration.

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