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Communicating with Children

Teaching Soft-Skills: Problem-Based Learning

In this approach, students learn in small groups supported by a tutor. They initially explore a predetermined problem. The problem contains triggers designed to evoke objectives or concepts which are used to set the agenda for individual or group investigation and learning after the initial session. Subsequent group meetings permit students to monitor their achievements and to set further learning goals as required. The tutor's role is to offer support for learning and to help reach the expected outcomes. PBL enables students to develop the ability to translate knowledge into practice at an early stage, encourages individual participation in learning and also allows the development of teamwork skills.

Students in PBL courses have been found to place more emphasis on "meaning" (understanding) than "reproduction" (memorization). Students must engage in a significant amount of self-directed learning and lectures are kept to a minimum. PBL originated at McMaster University in Canada, and then at Maastricht University, and is now widely adopted in medical schools in many countries. Each school makes its own adjustments to the basic model. It does require a heavy investment in resources (library books, IT, tutorial rooms) as well as requiring education and training for tutors.



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