

IMPLEMENTING PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL) IN SOCIAL SCIENCE COURSES : A CASE STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Introduction

Most of the disciplines within the social sciences have been mainly centred around textual analysis. The teaching processes are also lecturer centred with long hours of one way monologue. International relations and strategic studies is no exception in that. The traditional pedagogical approaches are prevalent. In a world where education and knowledge-seeking has been commercialised by global capitalism, the tendency to reexamine the traditional methodology to suit market demands is indeed inevitable. At the end of the way, it boils down to some of the very basic question of humanity which include what it means if the current education system could not provide the very means of bread and butter. At lease one saint said that modern education can be about producing a higher clerk that can be called as lawyer. This warrants some serious investigation. Perhaps PBL could be only a beginning.

IMPLEMENTING PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DISCIPLINE.

The field of international relations is becoming an important discipline in social sciences in recent years. At one time, it was popularised by the political science discipline. But this has changed within the last two or three decades or so. In fact, there were developments to create further sub-disciplines. The rise of strategic studies to establish itself independently provides testimony that international relations warrants a status of discipline within social sciences.

As a discipline within social sciences, international relations engage itself in various dimension of inquiring. This includes the question of peace, war, cooperation, conflict and the status quo among states and non-states actors. In fact, the profile of the discipline has been raised further by the reality of globalisation. The question of war and peace is certainly an unending problem that need to be viewed from various epistemological dimension.

While it can be argued that the many disciplines in social sciences use different methodology, we can also assert that PBL is not a new approach to the discipline of international relations in its pursuit for knowledge, hence its process of teaching and learning. The main thrust of the discipline rest on problems of community both within a state as well as when it entangles with the international environment.

Therefore, the implementation of PBL in international relations cannot be underestimated. In fact PBL has already been embedded within the discipline. For that, the construction of problems for using the PBL method is a natural one. International relations as a discipline is all about studying problems of mankind and humanity like in the case studying diseases and other biological problems in the field of medicine.

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

International relations studies is not just about inter-state or intergovernmental relations. It covers almost all dimensions of problems of community. The community is also no longer can be seen in isolation. With globalization, society is beginning to feel the impact of international crises at the local level. Similarly, local problems are getting international attention and demanding solutions that warrant international effort.

Therefore the identification of problems for PBL method can be manifold. Problems can be identified at inter-state level through the act of war, aggression and hegemony. The use of military can be both a problem and solution. Human rights violation can be seen as both a local and international relations problem.

One major area in international relations is policy studies, particularly relating to foreign policy of states. This presents a plethora of issues for policy analysis by basically studying what kind of policy is made to the type of problems faced by the state and its people. Similarly, policy addressing the challenges of global community can be scrutinised.

Aside the above, crises management and conflict resolution is another major areas in which problems emerge naturally to be tapped for PBL methods. The process of identifying problems therefore depends heavily on the kind of scenarios that can be created or simulated in order to implement the PBL approach. And what make the international relations discipline so suitable for the PBL educational method is that it naturally comprise many areas of real world problems. Therefore PBL and international relations has no contradiction whatsoever that can be seen as problematic epistemologically.

CONSTRUCTING PROBLEMS FOR PBL IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STUDIES

Several cases, scenarios and simulation can be brought in for the purpose of PBL in international relations studies. This can be done by looking at the content of a module or in various topics in a particular course. Identifying and constructing problems can also be used on both the theoretical and empirical aspects and questions within a course.

A good theoretical example for implementing PBL on theories can be seen as follows:

A lecturer, who is now to be only a facilitator, can provide a brief introduction to the Theory on Balance of Power. He/She then can design scenario/problems between states in which this theory become relevant to the learning process, to examine not just the applicability of the theory but also trace back the origin and the relevant conceptual underpinnings. Here the theoretical questions can be learned in an active way both in terms of its concepts and use in real world problems in international scenarios.

A case study or issue base approach to PBL in international relations can also be adopted by looking at large problems confronting the global community. Environmental security and military purchases can be classic examples for PBL methods;

Fictions of countries buying weapons. How to deal with them internationally or from a single state point of view can be seen as good case study approach ripe for PBL interventions. Similarly, why Third World countries are chopping down the trees can also be used for problem constructions.

On the whole theories, scenarios, simulations or case studies must be designed to answer not just specific events but also some of the broad concepts and detail understanding of the subjects so that students do not engage in empty discussions or group interaction. But most importantly seek to enhance their knowledge on relevance of PBL to understand the real problems of community and their role and place in it. Most important of all is how to attempt in resolving or managing them.

PBL TECHNICS/ METHODOLOGY FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Fictional scenarios.
2. Presidential Advisor /Executive Briefing
3. Policy Makers.
4. Case studies.
5. Open Debate.
6. Structural Debate.

SKILL ACQUIRED

1. Role play (Role Learning)
2. Team skills (interactive learning / Cooperative learning)
3. Drafting skills
4. Literature research.
5. Verbal skills/ communication skills.
6. Decision making skill (student decides) (self directed learning)
7. Critical thinking.
8. Lateral/ Horizontal Thinking.
9. Problem-solving skills.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING PBL

1. Infrastructure /Facilities (Traditional versus modern)
2. From Lecturer to Facilitator.
3. Quality of students.
4. Assessment.

CONCLUSION

Moving from the traditional approach of teaching and learning in university require a change in the mindset. PBL will fail if there is no change in the mindset. This is simply because we are talking about a revolution and not evolution. PBL is certainly about revolutionizing the learning process. Are the teachers ready in full scale? Are the schools giving out the students who are self-directed in learning is a question remains to be answered. Nonetheless, when there is a will, there will always be a way.