Problem Based Learning: Connecting Sociocultural Theory with Service Learning and Reflection

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PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: CONNECTING SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY WITH SERVICE LEARNING AND “REFLECTION”

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PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

In this presentation I aim to illustrate and discuss the following:

– the **principles** of Problem Based Learning (PBL)
– **sociocultural theory (SCT)** in relation to PBL
– how **Service Learning** is an important aspect to PBL and Sociocultural Theory

I will add some thought into the research for carving out space for “Reflection” and how these fields are interrelated and interdisciplinary.

Lastly, I will highlight the ways in which **Composition Studies and Technical Communication** incorporate these concepts already and where more work can be done moving forward.
HAS THIS EVER BEEN YOU IN A CLASS LECTURE?
WHAT IS PBL?

ARGUMENTS AND OBJECTIVES:

• PBL is all the **buzz** right now, primarily due to its ability to actively engage students and researchers in the learning process by allowing them to solve real-world problems through collaboration and research.

• The **goal** of PBL is achieved through global topics presented by the teacher (facilitator); students then examine cases and/or real-world problems by bringing their own set of knowledge, exploring new ideas, and collectively sharing new knowledge to reflect and respond upon.

• PBL can also take students outside of the classroom through service-learning. This experience helps to examine different sociocultural settings.

• PBL has the same potential for researchers in the field of technical communication. In this presentation, I will highlight how.
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<td>What do you know?</td>
<td>What do you want to learn?</td>
<td>What did you learn?</td>
<td>Reflect upon your findings</td>
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<td>Students bring their own knowledge of the topic and apply their critical thinking skills to the collective group.</td>
<td>Through assessment, discussion, and experiment; students decide what they want to learn. This generates questions and critical thinking.</td>
<td>Students form answers and solve problems by applying connected knowledge, socio-cultural influences, and results.</td>
<td>KWL+R=KWLR Reflection is an important aspect to add. It couples well with Service Learning, as researched by James Dubinsky.</td>
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<td>From there students begin to research and apply their own knowledge to solving problems</td>
<td>It applies individual knowledge with growth to formulate further research and change to make the world a better place.</td>
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HOW DOES IT ALL CONNECT?
INTERDISCIPLINARY
WHY PBL COMBINED WITH SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY, SERVICE LEARNING, AND REFLECTION?

- The idea of student-centered learning, as shown in PBL, when presented with real-world problems most likely will enhance global perspectives and awareness and deepen and enrich a student’s cognitive development.
- Through a repetitive nature of PBL, instructors scaffold students’ learning and their cognitive abilities begin to increase.
- Through service learning and reflection, students can begin to influence and change the world around them.
PBL CONNECTS TO SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS

• Students should be presented with real-world problems in order to connect to various sociocultural aspects.

• Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (1978) highlights that learners who are entrenched in different sociocultural contexts advance their cognitive development. This is enhanced through social interactions.

• “The social dimension of consciousness (i.e. all mental processes) is primary in time and fact. The individual’s dimensions of consciousness is derivative and secondary” (Vygotsky, 1979, p. 30)

• Authentic engagement versus pseudo-problems allows for organic, cognitive, and inter-connected agency of thought, brainstorm, and research.

• Facilitators play a vital role by engaging a student’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) through support and presentation of real-world problems.

• “Vygotsky’s conception of what an individual can accomplish when working in collaboration with others (more) versus what he or she could have accomplished without collaboration with others (less)” (Zuengler, J., Miller, E., 2006, pp. 38-39).
INFLUENCES AND INCORPORATING SERVICE LEARNING PEDAGOGY

• James Dubinsky in *The Role of Reflection in Service Learning* (2006) discusses the importance of reflection on service learning and experiences. This reflection can often adjudicate a need for a social change from a PBL presented real-world problem.

• Through service learning activities, students can assess the community around them and through observation and discussion, they can define a real-world problem to address.

• Through reflections of those experiences, students can take the beginning steps to social change.

• Dubinsky urges educators to schedule reflections often and in various formats.
Combining the practices of PBL, Sociocultural Theory, service learning and reflection lends way to an emerging space within Composition Studies and Technical Writing Studies. This combination of inquiry and research defies the confines of limited social and cultural research.

It allows the exploration and “big” thinking to happen.

We have seen with Angela Haas’ critical race studies in technical communication and in Carolyn Rude’s framework with mapping research questions on Technical Communication or in Natasha Jones’ research in rhetorical narratives in black entrepreneurs.

These examples within Technical Communication and Professional Writing begin to carve out the space for “Reflection,” which can shape the ethics and future of tech comm. It is an interdisciplinary approach with great potential.
WHAT NEXT?

• Connections and Inquiry...
• Problem Based Learning, Sociocultural theory, and service learning and reflection have ties to some of the research in Second-language acquisition (SLA), through Vygotsky and the four foundational pillars of education (UNESCO, 1993).
• Composition Studies and Technical Communication and Pedagogy. Ethics and Sociocultural Theory and future research, for example in education, health care, human-centered design...

PATHS...

• Still need to research …
• How is Critical Theory connected to PBL?
• How can research in classroom discourse analysis include PBL?
• Pedagogy practices in PBL and differentiated learners, such as SLA and disability rhetoric?
• Carve out more space in Composition studies for combining these theories into pedagogical practices.


