



## Examining the Impact of PBL on Surface and Deep Approaches to Learning: Final Report on SWAP Funded Project 2006

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This study examines PBL in the new social work honours degree and the extent to which it impacts on students' approaches to deep and surface learning. The first part of the study involved 15 in-depth interviews with year two BA degree students who had not experienced PBL. The initial part of the interview required answers to twentyeight questions about the student's learning experience in relation to a major assignment that related directly to the practice placement. The questions focussed on students' deep and surface approaches to learning. A further 15 questions focussing on students' work experience were asked in the second part of the interview. Data from the interviews has been transcribed and analysed.

The second part of the study involved interviewing 15 year two students who were undertaking the new honours degree. The interviews were to have taken place in January, 2006, after they had completed their practice placement. This would have provided data about the learning process in relation to students who had experience of PBL. However, changes in the structure of the degree mean that students will not complete the placement until June. Therefore, June 2006 is the earliest the interviews for the second part of the study can occur. It was decided to collect additional data due to the delay in the second part of the study.

Data about academic progression and experiences of paid employment were collated in order to gain a better insight into the learning environment and factors that might affect the implementation of PBL. Progression rates at the June Exam Board were examined for all of the students' assignments (4586) in the social work department for the past five years. This data suggests that a significant proportion of students are failing one or more assignments. A survey of year 1 students' experiences of paid employment was also undertaken. Data from the survey suggests that the majority of year 1 students are working approximately 17 hours per week, which is slightly higher than findings from other studies. Such findings may have particular implications for social work students who undertake a practice placement, especially in terms of their health and ability to provide an effective service.

The findings for the first part of the study have been used to produce a manuscript which will be submitted to a refereed journal in June, 2006. These findings will also provide a context for the second part of the study, which examines the impact of PBL on student learning. The intention is to produce an article for publication in a social work journal by October 2006 and present the findings at a conference. Prior to this, the findings from the study will be presented to staff and students at a workshop in

October 2006.

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