##### ABSTRACT B – Shukor

Small-group discussions are a key activity during problem-based learning (PBL). This is when students discuss the learning issues, exchange ideas, engage in peer teaching and decide on the solution as a group. What exactly do students think during these discussions? Do they engage in active thinking of the subject under discussion, or are they simply listening passively? How are their thoughts in the PBL small group discussions compared to their thoughts in the conventional tutorial discussions? This study aims to answer these questions. It is an extension of a study done in Maastricht by Geerligs (1995) on students’ thoughts during the PBL small-group discussions. The students’ thoughts in this study were obtained using the ‘thought-sampling’ method. During these discussions, students report their thoughts at random times at the signal of a bell. The thought reports were classified into the following categories: content-related (passive), content-related (non-passive), procedure-related, metacognitive-related, off-task, and miscellaneous.

The study shows that students are inclined towards content-related (non-passive) thoughts during both the conventional tutorial discussions as well as during the PBL small group discussions. There is a comparable pattern of thoughts during the conventional tutorials, whereby the content-related (passive) and (non-passive) thoughts were prominently high for all the four weeks. However, students’ thoughts in small group PBL discussions are mixed. The content-related (non-passive), procedure-related, and off-task thoughts show relatively high percentages during the PBL small group discussions. It seems that students’ thoughts during the PBL discussions ensue the various stages of the PBL process.

The dissertation further discusses the implications of the findings towards the management of the PBL process, as well as the importance of good management of the hidden curriculum. It is advocated that structured PBL process leads to better students’ learning, and the hidden curriculum in terms of the PBL tutors’ skills, the assessment components within the PBL process, and even students’ perception of the new approach, determines the success or failure of the process. The dissertation further recommends that similar study could be conducted to affirm the current findings, or a case study could be conducted on a smaller group of students using the stimulated recall procedure.

**Note:** this abstract is linked to Chapter 7 of the book by Opie and Brown (2019).

Opie, C. and Brown, D. (eds) (2019)*Getting Started in Your Educational Research: A Student’s Guide to Design, Data Production and Analysis*. London: Sage.

Shukor, S.B. (2001) ‘Student’s thinking: A comparison between conventional tutorials and problem-based environment’. MEd thesis, University of Sheffield.