Author's response to reviews

Title: Facilitators' Influence on Student PBL Small Group Session Online Information Resource Use: A Survey

Authors:

Dr Christopher B Reznich (reznich@msu.edu)
Elizabeth Werner (wernere@msu.edu)

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PDF covering letter
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Ms. Jane Borthwick, Assistant Editor
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RE: MS: 6420133182886336, Facilitators’ Influence on Student PBL Classroom Online Information Resource Use: A Survey (old title)

Facilitators’ Influence on Student PBL Small Group Session Online Information Resource Use: A Survey (revised title)

Thank you very much for your email of May 4, 2004, informing me of completion of another peer-review of the above-referenced manuscript. I continue to be impressed at the thoroughness of the reviews and appreciate this opportunity to revise and resubmit the manuscript.

The reviewer’s comments, and my responses in italics, are as follows:

1. The use of the word “classroom”. This word has connotations of didactic teaching. As the facilitator is a process and not a content expert, I would prefer that this word is replaced by “PBL tutorial” or “small group session”. Classroom can be found in
   · The title (very misleading)
   · Abstract (para 1)
   · Results (para 2) – “PBL class” and “per class” are used.
The text has been revised according to the reviewer’s feedback.

2. The use of the word “behaviour”. I still have a problem with this. While the authors have addressed this for the facilitator, it still persists with regard to the students’ “activities”. Student “usage” regarding their consulting online information is more appropriate than “behaviour”.

The text has been revised according to the reviewer’s feedback. The term “usage” has been substituted with reference to student use of online information resources.

3. The first statement (a question) under Background. “What are the components that influence student behaviour?” This question is so broad that it covers many aspects of medical education, which I believe is not the intention of this manuscript. Even narrowing the question to “What affects student learning in a PBL session?” covers many aspects (e.g. group dynamics, group size, duration of group, gender distribution, social background, facilitator expertise, motivation, to mention but a few) which are beyond the scope of this article. In essence, the question the authors are asking for their unique PBL tutorial arrangement is “What is the impact of the facilitator on student activities (in this case online resource usage) during a PBL session?”.

The first sentence of the background section has been revised in line with the reviewer’s feedback. The second sentence has been deleted, and the third modified as a result. We believe this “tightens up” the paragraph nicely.

4. Under Results
Para 1
64 + 7 = 71% (not 70%, as indicated in the text of the first paragraph). There is duplication of information in this first paragraph.

The percentage has been revised accordingly. It is not clear which information is duplicative. The paragraph reads:
“The survey was distributed to 106 students and 14 facilitators. Seventy-four (71%) student forms and 10 (71%) facilitator forms were returned. Sixty-eight students (64%) and 9 facilitators (64%) returned complete survey forms and indicated their willingness to participate in the research. Six student respondents (7%) elected not to have their surveys used in the study. One facilitator (7%) returned a completed survey, but indicated he/she was unwilling to participate in the research.”
Thus, of 106 students sent surveys sent, 74 returned, of which 68 were completed with agreement to participate, 6 indicating desire not to participate, Of 14 facilitator surveys sent, 10 were returned, with 9 completed with permission to participate granted, and one completed, but no agreement to participate. It would be helpful to know precisely which information the reviewer found duplicative.

5. Para 3 “The vastly majority...” Please put values in the text, as appropriate, and refer to Table 1 at the end of the first sentence. In fact, the para before Table 1 should be placed earlier.

The paragraph before Table 1 has been placed immediately after the first paragraph of the results section.

We do not understand the suggestion to “...put values in the text as appropriate...”, as the text does include values. The suggestion would be improved by specifying which other values should be included.

6. Para after Table 1: “The Chi Square...” indicate these stats on the Table.

The text has been revised to indicate the statistics on the Table.

7. Para 2 after Table 2: The mean student rating was 4.0-5. What does this mean?

The correct number should have been 4.05, and has been changed in the text.

8. Discussion

Para 3. The reference should be Schmidt and Moust (not just Moust).

The text has been revised accordingly.

9. Other

A p value of 0.000 (on one of the tables)? Should this not be 0.001?

The value of p>.000 was generated by the SPSS program.

With respect to formatting the manuscript, I have downloaded and thoroughly reviewed the formatting checklist at the web site whose URL you provided (http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/medicine_journals). I have endeavored to
follow the guidelines closely. Please note that we followed checklist guideline number 25 with respect to positioning of tables within the text, rather than guideline number 12.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to email me.

Sincerely,

Christopher B. Reznich, PhD
Associate Professor