

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Co-editors' note: Please note that Letters to the Editor do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the co-editors of Education for Health.

On the Additional Value of Lectures in a Problem-Based Curriculum

My attention was immediately attracted by the title of the article: “On the additional value of lectures in a PBL curriculum” (Berkel & Schmidt, 2005). I felt like “Oh! not again, this dead horse has been beaten to death since the irrefutable paper by D. Bligh over 20 or 30 years ago”. But I saw Henk’s name and as I always enjoy reading his articles and books I read it avidly. I knew he would Chi square-me, close my limit of freedom and drown me in the RM SEA and in addition I expected he would reach the Nobel by proving that Bligh was wrong.

In the introduction we are reminded that in spite of the “relative” ineffectiveness of the frontal lectures “Do these results imply that lectures could be discarded in a PBL curriculum?”. Next sentence: “Lectures have some positive role to play (...) to clarify the underlying structure of the curriculum”. Duh!

Following this is a 7-page description of a very solid study, with all the expected statistical considerations, which grosso modo ends by confirming Bligh’s position: “Our study does not support the idea that the quality of lectures adds something to the PBL learning model. (...) Using lectures as a means of knowledge transmission is a waste of time”.

But then surprise: “However this *does not* imply that we suggest that lectures should be deleted from these curricula. We believe (?) that lectures may be (?) an important (?) means to help students put their knowledge into a broader (?), often (?) professionally relevant perspective”.

Earlier in the article it is stated that “generally lectures are well attended by students”. So what? Students are normally intelligent and more. They have learned since age 7 that in order to survive they must pass exams, that to pass exams they must be in agreement with their teachers’ beliefs and that the lecture is a sounder source than Internet or the medical library.

As long as certifying exams mainly require the demonstration of a solid mega-memory students will attend lectures or obtain verbatims.

Please let teachers teach what and how they want to teach. Provide students with many sites where they have a chance to be confronted with their future profession’s reality.

And last, but clearly not least, insure that certifying exams mainly require the repeated demonstrations of an acceptable level of professional competences (sensory-motor, interpersonal communication and intellectual skills) covering the spectrum of the profession students have chosen.

Forget the scientific arguments (with square multiple correlations and beta weights) that have *never* convinced an academic teacher to modify his teaching habits. George E. Miller said as much many years ago. R.I.P.

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Reference

VAN BERKEL, H.J.M. & SCHMIDT, H.G. (2005). On the additional value of lectures in a problem-based curriculum. *Education for Health*, 18, 45–61.