

How does your experience of your course compare with your expectations before university?

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While at university, I have been interested in the teaching within my course and have fulfilled various roles within the Pharmacy School. Currently I am the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences (FHMS) student intern within the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Enquiry Based Learning (CEEBL) at Manchester University. My work within the centre has given me a valuable insight into enquiry based learning (EBL) which, I believe, would be of benefit to the Pharmacy course. EBL engages students in active, collaborative processes of enquiry, allowing them to take the responsibility for differing knowledge and applying it to specific situations. In this essay I will first identify problems that the pharmacy degree faces and then describe an EBL project within the first year of the course, which I have had a major role in developing. To conclude, I will discuss how this project will impact upon the engagement of students within the course.

Before I came to university, my perceptions of pharmacy were perhaps quite different from the reality. I had a small amount of work experience in a pharmacy shop and, like many of the public, believed that a pharmacist was simply the person who dispenses prescriptions. However I was soon to realise that the career could be far more complex than this, owing to there being many other areas of pharmacy, including work within hospital and industry as well as medicines information, and even opportunities within the *Pharmaceutical Journal*. The material which needs to be taught is also very varied, as studying the design and delivery of drugs is just as important as studying microbiology, but the relevance of some modules will not necessarily be immediately apparent to the students. Additionally, the course faces the challenge of preparing students who often come from different academic backgrounds, and also from different cultures, to be able to work within a variety of diverse careers. This can be quite difficult to achieve.

Thus a course such as pharmacy can have problems engaging students at the beginning of their degree. In an attempt to provide students with a more varied

approach to pharmacy, two modules, dispensing and the appropriate use of medicines are presented in year three. Delaying these courses reduces their impact and students would benefit from having them earlier in the degree. This is important as from the beginning of the degree, in order to engage the students, the course needs to be able to widen their perceptions of the pharmacy degree, whilst maintaining those standard aspects of the course, such as dispensing,

To identify how aspects of the course can maintain students' interest in the degree, areas of the degree which, from a student perspective, are working well may be examined. An example is hospital tutorials, an area of the course which receives much positive feedback and is considered a favourite by many students. These tutorials provide an opportunity not only for the students to see pharmacy in practice and to work with practitioners, but also to become involved within their own learning. Interactive teaching methods, such as group retrieval exercises and role plays, are carried out within the clinical setting to emphasize the relevance of this area of study to the students. More extensive use of interactive methods of teaching would benefit other areas of the degree. They could, for example, be used to indicate where a student may encounter or use the information within their career and, in doing so, highlight the relevance of the area of study to students.

Relevance of a subject to the role of a pharmacist can be difficult to portray through the medium of a lecture, yet the course, as it is presently run, relies heavily on lectures as its primary method of teaching. If the relevance of the degree is not established, the student will be unable to comprehend the importance of the subject area and may be unable to focus on their learning. EBL could be used, additionally to lecture material, to maintain interest and enthusiasm for the course. As a result students would be able to retain far more information and would also have a better understanding of the material, as opposed to simply mimicking their lecture notes for the exams. EBL is also of great benefit in a degree such as pharmacy, where students will have to be prepared for careers needing individuals with exceptional social skills, who are able to work in multidisciplinary teams. For this reason, when I began my position as FHMS student intern, it became apparent that, although EBL was an integral part of many courses within the Faculty, this was not the situation within pharmacy despite the obvious benefits of such a development in pedagogic method.

Within the first year there are foundation modules for students who have not done an A level in one of the subjects deemed necessary for the course. This is a good idea, but it is perhaps unrealistic to try to incorporate all this material into a few lectures, whilst there is also the inherent problem that these are topics that the students may not necessarily find interesting. In addition to this, first year students are also expected to complete individually a complex drug project .A lecturer within the pharmacy school had observed how many students in the first year were struggling with this exercise, and proposed a project to incorporate the drug project into an enquiry based learning exercise which I, as part of my role, have been able to assist in.

This became my main focus within my job and I have worked upon the project, making alterations and offering suggestions to the project co-ordinator on how to implement it into the module. I also helped on the writing of the bid, in order to acquire funding from the CEEBL. The project requires first year students to work within a team on three drugs within a therapeutic area in order to complete a chemistry retrieval exercise and to be able to apply the material they are currently studying to a clinically relevant situation. Currently I have been helping to facilitate some of the workshops which were conducted at the centre to introduce the students to EBL and intend to assist with many other aspects of the project.

The course should benefit greatly from this exercise as all students will be able to contribute their own ideas and work as part of a team, a skill essential for a pharmacy career. The relevance of the project to their future career should be readily apparent and hopefully it will be an enjoyable way of learning that will enhance the students` experience of the first year teaching. Students` motivation will be maintained by emphasis on importance of keeping to deadlines and many have been set at various stages in the project, allowing that the groups` progress can be monitored. The aim of this is to keep the group motivated and provide an outline of how students are to progress to their final goals of producing the poster and the report. At the end of this project I hope to conduct some focus groups as the student feedback will be very valuable reflection of whether we have achieved our aims.

Although we can not be certain before we receive feedback, making the course more career focussed from the beginning, and using enquiry based learning as a method of doing this, should improve students` perceptions of the pharmacy degree. It is quite clear that if this project is successful, it will lead to more enquiry based learning being incorporated into the course. This will engage students more and the relevance of their studies to their degree will become more clear, leading to the students being more focussed on their work and enhancing their experience of the degree. Therefore in the future I hope to see EBL embedded within the pharmacy programme as I feel that it will be such a valuable learning experience.