

W2. Beyond “The Pale Horse”: contextualizing problem-based learning for undergraduates to enhance engagement.

JANICE M KENNEDY

School of Science, University of the West of Scotland.

Janice.Kennedy@uws.ac.uk

Like many academics, I previously used the RSC’s “The Pale Horse” scenario with my forensic students. In “The Pale Horse”, students investigate a suspicious death, with information rolled-out weekly and results of requested tests provided as feedback paperwork.

However, after using this scenario once, although PBL principles etc were sound, the students did not feel engaged with the *details* of the scenario. A PBL scenario was therefore specifically written for them which was set within their own frame of reference – the death is of a student, living in residences, drink and drugs could be a contributing factor etc etc. Interview paperwork was written in the local vernacular and made as “real” as possible, even including the bad language! The crime scene was set up using a volunteer student as the “body” and the lounge of a student flat as the location. Photographs were taken of the body, the scene and of all recoverable evidence. Students receive the evidence samples they request for inspection and analysis - although the physical description of evidence remains the same for each offering of the module (a white pill remains a white pill!) what the evidence actually *is* is infinitely changeable. The white pill has been aspirin, paracetamol, MDMA, penicillin, prednisolone, for instance. This has given us enormous flexibility in what information we can provide for the students, without having to re-set the scene each time. We have now used the same scenario and photographs for 7 student cohorts. The scenario and evidence results can be changed easily, but currently covers areas including physical evidence, analytical chemistry, pharmacodynamics, DNA and microbiology. Each year, students come up with surprising new directions which we are happy to let them follow, and we have had all possible outcomes : suicide, accidental death and murder.