

‘We are the campus’: learning design and ANU’s online PBL JD

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Preview

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What's an Australian JD, and why online and PBL?

A world-first in legal education – but why?

- JD in Australian law is a crowded market
- At ANU, the f2f JD was a mirror of the LLB – but for postgrad students
- Staff saw online as hugely inferior to f2f, preferring elite education – but what about the second word in our institutional title?
- I could see that an entire PBL programme could enhance digital online, and *vice versa*
- PBL + online created the necessity for radical innovation
- PBL online JD became a Masters – a real spiral curriculum, with increasing freedom as the spiral widened in later years

A world-first in legal education – but which design innovations?

Examples...

- Entirely new design of subjects as clusters. Where ‘Priestley 11’ envisaged singleton subjects, we fused them to encourage cross-curricular thinking and research, eg Torts & Civil, Contracts and Civil, Criminal and Evidence.
- A tricluster structure, with ethics, legal history, legal structures and foundations threaded through the curriculum
- Linkage to an ethic of Law Reform and Social Justice
- New administrative structures
- New admin tools (JBeast...)
- Portraits of academics as primarily designers of learning, not teachers

Approaches to learning online

Approaches to PBL online

- Design approach similar to aspects of the [Edinburgh Manifesto](#)
- PBL – key issue is the relation between distance vs intimate learning
- In conceptualising online learning, dichotomy of f2f campus vs online platform is the norm.
- But campus-based learning could be seen as a platform. And online platform as form of campus.
- Primary concern: help students learn – teaching them is only one resource
- Encourage collaborative as well as singleton learning
- Encourage students to bring their other disciplines and their working, personal, social, emotional lives into the learning zone

Approaches to PBL online

- Some literature to online PBL (eg Savin-Baden 2007), but almost no extensive research projects on an entire online PBL program
- Vanilla LMSs converge data but also fragment experience, and above all cut continuity between learning experiences in-school and beyond-school.
- With a range of software applications we have created our own environments that takes forward [imaginative portal approaches](#):
 - PBL realtime comms environment (Adobe Connect) + LMS + Office 365 / One Drive partial integration
 - Resources environment – textual, webcast, podcast, spliced texts in LEXplore, arranged as clusters around the triggers

Breadth of learning: what we focus on

We have:

- Ensured we have breadth of learning as prescribed by regulatory and other codes (Priestley, AQF, CALD, etc)
- Designed the new context of the clusters in order to strengthen bonds of learning and assessment across the entire program
- Used PBL as a heuristic to link courses, eg private law courses and public law courses; pervasive ethics; linkages of substantive legal rules with sociolegal research and policy issues arising from the problem 'trigger' and student outcomes in first PBL sessions and review sessions

Breadth of learning: what we focus on

- Breadth of learning *methods*: singleton, collaborative, various sizes of groups, various types of teamwork; different textual forms, different media; emphasis on a habitual PBL method practised across the curriculum, but in multivariied contexts.
- Expansion of learning methods in later years in Masters choices.

Depth of learning: what we focus on

- deep learning through active learning. Students committed to being engaged from day 1 – PBL obliges them to do this.
- Experiential process, including awareness of learning & knowledge, colleagues' learning, spiral learning, self-management, ethics.
- We hoped this will focus students on dealing with sophistication and complexity and updating knowledge, as well as learning legal principles, leading cases, statutory knowledge, problem handling, etc.

Depth of learning: curricular issues

- PBL is a form of research-led learning
- Improved curricular design that goes well beyond Priestley in sophistication while including Priestley core
- Different knowledge / skills vs same knowledge / skills in PBL programs vs conventional programs? What does the research say?
- ‘the key to expert problem-solving lies in how knowledge is organized, not the quantitative knowledge acquired’ (Lung 2008)

More depth vs more breadth, or both?

‘On knowledge acquisition, Schmidt *et al* (2009) noted what many others observed: that PBL students **better integrate their knowledge**, which resulted in **more accurate reasoning**; that in the **clinical case recall** (a measure of expertise) and **processing speed** (a sign of better understanding) they were superior to the conventionally-educated cohorts (227). In skills acquisition, PBL students demonstrated **much better interpersonal skills**, and **knowledge about skills** (a variable closely related to skilled performance – 236). **Student and expert perceptions of the quality of PBL education were higher** than the results for the conventionally-educated cohorts, with **students commenting positively in particular on their practices in independent study and critical thinking**. In passing, Schmidt *et al* also noted that PBL schools graduate students faster and in larger numbers and retain students better (237).’

(Maharg 2015, 12-13)

Approaches to assessment

Learning | assessment

We designed close proximity between learning zone and assessment zone, because we wanted research-based work to predominate:

- Checkpoints: analysing learning and achievement, where stocktaking involves making a brief self-, peer- and group-convenor assessment (eg checklist) of each individual's contribution, using a purpose-designed tool.
- End of cluster PBL assessment, open-book, at an exam centre, comprising seen and unseen components
- Later, at Masters level, portfolios, capstone activities

Trevitt et al 2014

Why..? See LETR Report, eg BIALL interview...

‘[Trainees] appeared to be generally **unfamiliar with paper-based resources** by comparison with digital resources. In addition they noted that trainees seemed to **depend on one-hit-only searching**: in other words they did not check thoroughly and contextually around their findings. They used Google extensively and **their searches tended to be shallow and brief**. Trainees were also increasingly **unable to distinguish between the genres of legal research tools** – the difference between an encyclopaedia and a digest, for example. They seemed **to lack persistence and diligence** in searching, as well as **organization**. These values, that underlay the learning outcomes of the LILT document, needed to be worked on by students. The group were unanimous in their opinion that many **academics shared the weaknesses of students and trainees in this regard.**’

(Webb *et al* 2013)

What was the staff development process?

How have we done this?

- Workshops and seminars for academic staff on PBL methods
- Multidisciplinary integration of technical staff, educationalists and law academics ie the typical holistic triangle.
- PBL research base collected in Zotero, and consulted extensively in the course of design and development, which also included research on curriculum design and wider aspects of legal education in other jurisdictions.

Feedback

What do students say?

<http://bit.ly/2pxuICh>

JD (Online): Expand knowledge and professional opportunities without uprooting your life

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Photo by Rick Eaves

Margot Kelly is a [JD Online](#) student and a Rural Reporter with ABC Tasmania.

WHY DID YOU WANT TO STUDY A JURIS DOCTOR?

I'm curious to understand the institutions that underpin our society.

I did an undergraduate degree in journalism which was about being able to quickly get a shallow depth of knowledge about a broad range of topics. But I had an

“ It's made it easier to communicate with people and to appreciate the barriers that they face in understanding the legal aspects of their industry. ”

Changes in approaches

'In [the other universities], they still had lectures; there was still didactic teaching which was missing in the JDO. We still got lectures, did not get the answer to the problems, but it armed us with needed knowledge. In [another university], sessions were spent going through the answers to problems to make sure everyone was on the same page.'

Learning design

Participant 1.

'I did 1 ½ years of Arts/Law degree 15 years ago at [another G08 university]. Compared to that, this course has an excellent set up. I like the combination of subjects. It's practical, makes sense. It's quite a lot of work, but well done. I liked the integrated nature of the curriculum, much more like real life.'

Participant 2.

'I agree. I also completed 1 ½ years at a different sandstone university. I like the PBL approach. I found the typical traditional Law School approach is a bit intellectually stagnant. It's difficult to pursue interests you may have. PBL is more engaging and interesting.'

Trigger [scenario] design

'It was so successful, triggers really do trigger learning.'

'PBL was a bit tricky at first, but not that tricky. Well worth overcoming initial issues. You can get trapped in "rabbit-holes".'

'Perhaps there are ways we can use the web-cam, video etc. to do more than just discussion. An opportunity for more mock and re-enactments.'

'If I had to identify a niggle – it would be Sky Wars B. The focus on Civil procedure in some ways left behind matters of law. It was a struggle to let go of legal issues. Bit of a lack of flow – but minor. Sky Wars A problem issues were left a bit unresolved. I'm not convinced there was a cause of action. Slightly clunky trigger design. Scope was getting too big?'

Feedback on online design

‘Good interface because you did not have to go too deep to find resources; few clicks.’

‘[The online learning environment] was fantastic once I understood how it worked. I wasted time early on trying to work out how it worked. I needed to be hand held through the environment, perhaps during enrolment, or early on. Fantastic now.’

‘The learning environment is very good. Working well. We are stretching the technology. Be better if there was one login.’

Pace, platform choice, effects on learning

'We need to use more accessible means of communication to benefit. We could have used more of the tools available but we used social media, group chat in social media -- we set up a Facebook page so we could get instant feedback from each other whereas there is a 24 hour turn around in Wattle communication with the daily digest arriving at the end of each day, resulting in a frustrating delay in Wattle means of communication – however we may have got a better response from facilitator if we used the Wattle tools.'*

* Wattle is ANU's version of MOODLE, the institutional LMS.

Feedback on assessment

'PBL assessment fit so well. Feedback just fitted straight in – seamless.'

'First assessment was PBL. This was very clear. Found it hard to 'turn off' PBL when going back to the essay [assessment].'

'I did not know what was expected of me from the essay; I have not written an essay for years; I had to relearn the process.'

'Agree, there is a disjoint when it comes to essay. PBL assignments links to learning. Much better connection than traditional law school environment. Almost intuitive compared to traditional activity/assessment.'

PBL assessment

VS

conventional assessment...

'First assessment, I didn't quite understand. I had to create a structure. Very new, disappointed in myself. Once I got underway, I got better at doing it. The essay was easier, I'm used to that format. The reflection – alien – more difficult. Writing in the first person. Unusual and unexpected. But not good or bad.'

PBL + online

VS

conventional curriculum design + f2f

'I came in with some trepidation to the course. I have seen online courses done well and done less well before. I've looked at ANU before and couldn't cope with the lack of flexibility. ANU also has a reputation as conservative and traditional – stuffy? This was different. The course worked exceptionally well. I'm very happy and very surprised. Pleased by the quality and level of discussions. I would recommend the course to anyone.'

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