

Problem-Based Learning Approach on the NUS MSc(SLP) Programme

The NUS MSc (Speech & Language Pathology) Programme is based on a series of about 40 Problem Based Learning (PBL) clinical cases covering swallowing, language, speech, voice and fluency for adults and children. Some of these cases have been developed by NUS teaching staff and depict Singaporean clients, local culture and rehabilitation approaches. The PBL approach supports students' clinical reasoning and problem-solving skills as they develop theoretical foundation relevant to clinical issues. This enables a relatively seamless integration of academic work into the clinical settings where students will assess and treat real clients during clinical placements. Importantly, through PBL students also acquire life-long learning skills, which include the ability to find and use appropriate and current learning resources.

The PBL groups are led by facilitators who are either NUS Core Team members or local Speech-Language therapists with relevant expertise who have been trained in the PBL approach. Students are taken through the PBL format during the orientation period in the first semester, and supported with regular feedback. Specific guidelines regarding roles, organization and format are provided in the MSc(SLP) Handbook and are discussed by students and facilitators to ensure that everyone is aware of the expectations.

In a typical week there are two PBL sessions for a specific PBL, several self-study periods, two or more lectures, and a Skills Class or Workshop relevant to the case for that week:

- At the first tutorial on Monday morning, groups of 9-10 students each are presented with a PBL case (e.g., a paper-based, videotape-based or audiotape-based case). Students organize their ideas and any previous knowledge related to the problem, and attempt to define the broad nature of the problem. Throughout the discussion, students pose questions, called "learning issues," on aspects of the problem that they do not understand. The learning issues are recorded by the group. Students are continually encouraged to define what they know - and more importantly - what they don't know (Know, Need-to-Know, Hunches).
- Students rank, in order of importance, the learning issues generated in the first session. They decide which subgroup of 2-3 students will cover which issues, for later presentation to the whole group. In Semesters 3 and 4, all members are asked to submit their own individual intervention and management plans where relevant. Core and suggested references are provided at the end of the first tutorial (available either in online journals, IVLE, or as library books), but students often read beyond these.
- When students reconvene on the Friday after their lectures, skills classes and self-study periods, they explore the previous learning issues, and integrate their new knowledge into the context of the problem. Students summarize their knowledge and connect new concepts to old ones.

The experience of the SLP teaching staff and community is that NUS MSc(SLP) students reap the benefits of this PBL approach as they develop into clinicians.