5 Sample Problem-Based Learning Cases in Psychology

In the previous chapters, we were introduced to the content of a PBL psychology course with figures and tables outlining its structure and clearly defining the themes and the modules of the entire course. This chapter outlines two PBL psychology cases, and each of these cases are presented in the short and long case (progressive release) format. The first case is from Year 1, Beginning of Life Cycle module, week one, and covers normal aspects of child development. The second case is from Year 2, Meet the World Module, week 14, and focuses on abnormal aspects of development. For the short cases, the tutor notes and a mind map are presented while for the long cases tutor notes and learning objectives (LOBs) that need to be generated during the PBL session are inserted.

Construction of PBL cases

Before going into the cases, we would like to offer some helpful suggestions when writing PBL cases. As it has been stated in previous chapters, PBL cases are selected and written to address specific LOBs that will be covered in PBL sessions, lectures, placements and skills workshops. The case study narratives should include enough ambiguity so as to reflect diagnostic and etiological dilemmas, while at the same time encourage critical analytical thinking. In the short case PBL version, the case information is given out all at once, whereas in the progressive release PBL case, the tutor gradually presents hard copies of information to students, who then take turns reading that information out loud. This process enables students to develop hypotheses about the causes of different problems, discuss relevant
information and articulate their own personal theories in an effort to problem-solve. In turn, hypotheses can be strengthened or ruled out and new avenues to proceed with the case are formulated. As the case slowly builds up, students can brainstorm about important theories, concepts or other related issues, using their existing knowledge and each other as resources. Throughout the PBL session, and as the case develops, the LOBs are elicited with the help of the PBL facilitator and are recorded on the board for all students to copy in their notebooks.