



## CHAPTER 11:

# HOW DOES PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING HELP BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER ... ER, SLAY VAMPIRES?

*Rebecca Ferguson, Mark Childs and Mike Collins*

*‘Well, actually,’ says Markzilla, backtracking fast, ‘I like lots of musicals.’ He begins to reel off a list of obscure performances that includes both spaceships and songs.*

*‘I bet you liked the musical episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer?’ interjects Beckzilla.*

*‘Errm, no, I’ve never seen it. But I can compare any number of meerkats!’*

*The others look at him in astonishment and dismay. ‘That’s a shame!’ says Beckzilla. ‘I was planning to show you around the town that neighbours Active Learning, Problem-Based Learning. It would have helped if you’d known something of the challenges involved in vampire slaying.’*

*She stops again to look thoughtfully at her motley crew. ‘Though maybe we’re asking the wrong question...’*

Active learning is a broad category – most types of learning require a bit more activity than sitting at a desk and reading a book, watching a video, or listening to a podcast (however good!) Outside a formal education setting, learning and doing are closely intertwined and there may not be an opportunity to sign up for a course when a problem arises. In this chapter, we'll take a look at an active approach that can be applied both inside and outside the classroom and, as we do so, we'll answer the question: **How does problem-based learning help *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, er, *slay vampires*?**

### *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a US TV show that ran for seven series. In it, actress Sarah Michelle Gellar plays Buffy Summers, a student at Sunnydale High. Sunnydale is an all-American high school that just happens to sit on top of the Hellmouth. This is not only a source of demons, vampires and other terrifying monsters but it also attracts monsters. Luckily for her classmates and fellow citizens, Buffy is not simply any student – she has been selected to be the Slayer.

The role of Slayer comes with enhanced abilities, strength and self-healing powers but also with the demand to take on a stream of evil beings single-handedly, because there is only one Slayer in every generation and the role is traditionally concealed from others. So Buffy spends her nights slaying vampires, and her days trying to be an everyday teenager with friends, family and relationships. Mikezilla describes the show as, 'Wonderful and funny and witty and silly and great. And it's... oh, it's gorgeous.' (Can you tell that Sarah Michelle Gellar was his teenage heartthrob?) Buffy is supported by the school librarian Giles, whose role as a Watcher involves training and guiding the Slayer.

Show creator, Joss Whedon, 'wanted a scene where the petite blonde went into the dark alley with the Big Bad, and then she kicked its ass' (Fudge, 2009). This underpinning idea means the series continually inverts or thoroughly subverts expectations. The first time Beckzilla watched *Buffy*, she just happened to have the television on, saw a young blonde girl walking into a graveyard and thought, 'This is just so stereotypical.' A minute later, when Buffy took on the monsters and won, Beckzilla was, like<sup>1</sup>, 'Wow, what happened there? This is a show I have to watch.'

Alongside that inversion of expectations, the show has a major underlying metaphor, certainly for the first three series: high school is hell. The episodes explore in detail how that would play out if it were literally true. Mikezilla remembers that, in the first episodes he watched, some of the worst and hardest-to-watch moments weren't when a vampire was threatening to eat somebody or characters were engaged in mortal combat. Instead, it was when nasty people were being unpleasant and snide. It was those true-to-life experiences that made him shudder.

An example from S1 Ep 11 *Out of Sight*, *Out of Mind* is villain-of-the-week Marcie, a girl who is invisible but also extremely vindictive. She beats one pupil with a baseball bat, pushes another downstairs, tries to suffocate a teacher and mutilate a classmate. While trying to locate and defeat her, Buffy finds out that Marcie became invisible because she has been ignored all her life. Whenever she approached other people, they ignored her or turned away. They haven't heard her or paid attention to her, either inside or outside the classroom. That's an experience that so many people have had, of feeling on the outside, feeling ignored, and perhaps wanting to punish the people who are pushing you away. The show takes that situation one step further. What would happen if you were literally invisible? What would happen if you were given the opportunity to punish those people? There are

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<sup>1</sup>Well, it is, like, Buffy.

so many things that the show takes one step or even ten steps further.

Markzilla hasn't ever watched *Buffy* (a major impediment to any geek credentials he's purporting to have) but he's still able to place it in its wider context as the start of a big wave of postmodern 90s TV which included a monster of the week, as well as grand, overarching plots that joined everything together across seasons. To take one example, in a huge story arc, *Buffy Series 5* leads up to her heroic death, followed by her unwilling resurrection at the start of *Series 6* and the fallout from those events.

This could easily have become an example of 'jumping the shark', when a show has reached a high point, runs out of ideas and so introduces over-the-top gimmicks to maintain interest (TV Tropes, 2022). Instead, the scriptwriters brazenly acknowledged and mocked that possibility in *S6 Ep 8 Tabula Rasa* by taking the shark motif and developing it further, introducing a demon with shark features who provides kittens to vampires for their poker games then demands repayment at a high rate (a literal loan shark).

*Series 6* also included a musical episode, *S6 Ep 7 Once More with Feeling*, consistently rated as one of the best in the show. In the songs they sing, each character is forced to expose their inner thoughts. This means they reveal things they wouldn't have chosen to tell other people as well as things they had been hiding from other characters for a long time. Open expression of characters' inner monologues makes this a revealing episode, which not only provides a catalyst for future story arcs but is incidentally revealing about how musicals work as a genre. However, in this case, the premise is not, 'Isn't this a beautiful, lovely world where we're all singing to each other all the time?' Instead, the characters' perspective on the lyrics is, 'This is a hellish experience, and we have to stop it as soon as possible.'

Aside from such standout episodes, the show's typical structure is a monster-of-the-week format. In each episode – in addition to the big series-wide arcs – there is a new inciting incident; something weird and wonderful. It might be a strange happening in Sunnydale. It might be the appearance of a new, mysterious character. It might be people disappearing or turning up in bits on the lawn. In response to this inciting incident, *Buffy* and her friends, Xander and Willow, together with Giles, all work together from their base in the school library or, later, the Magic Box shop. Secondary plots typically provide them with an insight or revelation that enables them to understand how to defeat the monster.

In the early series, when *Buffy* is at high school or college, this format intersects at multiple points with education and learning. This happens in several ways. Most obviously, a crucial part of *Buffy's* context in seasons 1–3 is that she's a high school student. As a result, in the background of most episodes, there's some attempt at formal learning going on: lessons, books, homework and tests. These elements occasionally drive storylines. Something will happen in class, or on a field trip, and the plot takes that a bit further. However, formal learning is rarely central.

More important to the teenage characters is the learning that goes on informally during their years at high school. Learning about sex and drugs and rock'n'roll, and how relationships work, and how to negotiate with family and friends. Over the different seasons, viewers watch the characters grow in experience as they develop into adults. This form of learning is common to all the teenage characters, with the effects of adolescence always exacerbated by life on the Hellmouth.

Aside from that formal and informal learning, which will be familiar experiences for most viewers, there's learning that's specific to *Buffy* and her friends. A premise of the 'Buffyverse' is that there's one Slayer in every generation. More accurately,

there's one Slayer at a time. In global terms, Slayers are disposable. As soon as one Slayer dies, another teenage girl somewhere in the world is assigned the role and acquires the powers. So while on the micro scale her own death is a tragedy for each individual Slayer; on the macro scale nothing has changed because there's still a Slayer. The role makes these young women into high-profile targets, so there's a high turnover rate. As a result, the Slayer is usually inexperienced and may, like Buffy at first, initially have no idea what's going on. One day she's a normal teenage girl. The next day she has superhuman powers and superhuman skills and lots of demons start turning up, which is difficult to handle.

Overseeing Slayer activity is the Watchers' Council. This organisation keeps records of Slayers: what they do, which enemies they face, how those enemies are defeated, and how each Slayer is killed. One Watcher from the Council is assigned to each Slayer. Sometimes, like Giles, they're supportive and work with the Slayer. In other cases, the Watcher is unnecessarily controlling, or may even have turned rogue. For the Slayers, an important benefit of Watchers is that they have access to a vast repository of knowledge about monsters and how to defeat them. So the Watchers represent one sort of approach to education, which relies on books, records, and adult experts. The Watchers we see in Buffy are mainly British, and conform to familiar US stereotypes of the British – they have knowledge that comes from books but not necessarily from direct experience, they tend to be very formal, and sometimes their 'dark academic' veneer conceals a villain.

The Watchers' Council does offer value. Members have knowledge and experience that can be used to save the Slayer and even the world. However, they're determined to maintain their control. Their support and teaching are not designed to produce a fully independent Slayer. Their stance is that they are the wise ones who will share knowledge with the Slayer but will also retain control of that knowledge.

In S3 Ep 12 *Helpless*, when Buffy turns 18, the Watchers' Council forces an absolutely pointless test on her as a rite of passage. This very nearly kills her. The obvious parallel in normal high-school life is the pressure of examination, and the imposition of meaningless assessment, which can severely damage the health of the students who are engaged in that process.

A final type of learning is the one Buffy must engage with as she is faced with a different demon every week; a different set of challenges in every episode. In other forms of learning, she has a model to work with. That may be a formal model, as in high school, or learning from her Watcher. It can be an informal model of learning with and from her peers, because they're all going through similar experiences. However, in taking on the demons, it's largely up to Buffy to find a model of learning that's flexible enough and effective enough to keep her alive. Which is where problem-based learning comes in.

## Problem-based learning

Problem-based learning is an approach that was developed in medical schools during the 1960s. It was a response to the observation that medical students would work hard for many years to learn all the facts presented to them. However, when they went out into the world and interacted with patients, they weren't necessarily able to apply what they'd learned. It seemed that a more practice-based approach to learning was needed, which is where problem-based learning came in.

Problem-based learning can be considered as a series of steps that take the learner from, 'Here is the situation and it presents a problem,' to, 'Let's work together as learners, consult with our lecturer, and come up with a solution.' The approach focuses on authentic situations and issues. It's concerned with the

application of knowledge learners already have, and the need for them to work out what knowledge they still need to acquire. It also requires teamwork.

Problem-based learning is typically a group task rather than a puzzle set for individuals to solve. Again, this is authentic. People are rarely in an artificial situation where they have to work alone for extended periods without any access to help, support, or reference materials. We are typically members of a team, living with family, spending time with friends or working alongside colleagues. Outside formal learning settings, most people are in a group, or have access to a group, when faced with problems they must solve.

The educator's role in problem-based learning is not as a 'Sage on the Stage' who shares information for novices to absorb, but as a 'Guide on the Side', facilitating the experience and supporting learners through the process. The role includes offering prompts and asking questions in order to progress the learning. This is a classroom-based approach and so, even when the problem is relatively open-ended, the educator will usually know a way of reaching a solution, which sorts of solution are valid, and which are inappropriate.

### **Problem-based learning in practice**

Maastricht University in the Netherlands uses problem-based learning across its faculties. Lecturers aim to design experiences that are collaborative, constructive, contextual and self-directed. The intention is to prompt students to activate prior knowledge, relate any new information to that knowledge, structure new ideas and critically evaluate their findings and solutions.

Markzilla worked in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing at Coventry University as they introduced problem-based learning for new students. When first-year students joined the faculty, they were set a problem. They had to work together

to solve this during their first six weeks of study. In one case, the challenge was to design a MIDI controller – a piece of hardware or software, such as an electronic keyboard, that's capable of sending musical instrument digital interface (MIDI) data to a device. In order to solve the problem, each group of students had to produce a working controller (Tovey and Davies, 2011).

In the first week, a group might decide on the specifications and design their controller. In the following weeks they would build and refine it. They'd then develop a marketing campaign, and end by writing a report on the project, reflecting on what they'd done and how successful they'd been at each stage. Problem-based learning worked well for these students because they found it hugely motivating. While designing their controllers, many of them investigated ideas and concepts they wouldn't otherwise have encountered until their third year of university study, because that information was what they needed to make a really effective MIDI controller. Not all of them got that far, sometimes their solution to the problem was not as effective as ones devised by other groups. Nevertheless, at the end of six weeks, each group had come up with a way of solving the problem.

When the approach was first tried at Coventry, some lecturers were sceptical about it. However, once they started to receive feedback, Markzilla reports that the staff began to feel, 'Oh my God, this is the best thing ever,' and were keen to extend their use of the approach.

### **Issues with problem-based learning**

Despite positive experiences at Coventry and Maastricht, there are several criticisms of problem-based learning. It makes very heavy use of resources, teachers' time and lab space. For that reason, Coventry identified that it wasn't a practical approach to employ for the students' entire three years of study.

Due to these demands, planning is needed across the institution in order to support problem-based learning effectively. As the problems set for students are relatively open ended, the approach can be difficult to plan for. Educators need to be confident they'll be able to deal with a wide range of questions and different scenarios. Perhaps more significantly from the perspective of student learning, a problem-based approach reduces the breadth of curriculum that can be covered, because students need to spend a lot of time on exploration, breaking things apart, and working things out.

Another issue is that working in groups to solve problems can give students too much to think about at the same time. The cognitive load may prove too great for learning to be effective. Cognitive load theory is based on research into how well humans can handle information, and recognises that we have limited capacity for processing it. Because of this, it's very difficult to do certain things at the same time – for example, reading a book while watching a documentary, or trying to understand a complex PowerPoint slide while a presenter is talking. In the case of problem-based learning, students have to deal with forming a team, collaborating with each other, and dealing with a new situation, as well as with all the different aspects of the problem. If they have to take on all these aspects of the task at once, they may be overwhelmed. For more on cognitive load, read Chapter 9; for more on the issue of balancing cognitive load and problem-based learning, read Chapter 13.

In summary, though, the issues can be summarised by this quote: 'Teaching that only partially guides students, and expects them to discover information on their own, is not effective or efficient. Decades of research clearly demonstrate that when teaching new information or skills, step-by-step instruction with full explanations works best' (Clark et al, 2012). Over-enthusiastic proponents of problem-based learning can fall into

this trap, encouraging students to work things out from first principles that can be taught much more easily through lectures, seminars and tutorials.

Neither approach will be the best in all situations. Students need support to learn and remember the facts and to get an idea of the overall lay of the land. Once they understand what the landscape for a particular discipline is, and have relevant information and tools to work with, then they can use problem-based learning to strengthen their understanding, particularly on work-related courses where they will later be required to apply their knowledge in practical settings.

Problem-based learning has its downsides: it's demanding in terms of time, resourcing, and student engagement, and is typically less effective than direct instruction when acquiring new information. On the other hand, when done well and applied appropriately it can be highly motivating, it can make connections between study and practice, and help to make the learning experience more authentic.

### **Applying problem-based learning**

Problem-based learning can be applied in a variety of ways but it has a set of basic steps (Schmidt, 1983) that are sometimes referred to as the 'Seven Jump' method. These steps are:

1. examine a case and clarify terms;
2. identify the problem;
3. analyse the problem;
4. draft an explanatory model;
5. establish learning goals;
6. work individually to collect additional information;
7. apply and discuss additional information.

To demonstrate how these steps can be put into practice, we've applied them to the problem set to engineering students in Coventry. Students and lecturers begin by examining the case and clarifying terms (1). Lecturers introduce the broad area of study and some of the important terminology, such as what a MIDI controller is. After this overview, the students are presented with the problem: Design a MIDI controller (2).

Each group of students then needs to analyse that problem in depth, identifying the different aspects that will need to be covered (3). Drafting an explanatory model and establishing learning goals involve deciding how the group will go about the task and how they will divide the different sub-processes, deciding who will find out about certain things and who will work on various elements of the controller (4&5).

From the educators' point of view, the learning goals that the students are likely to set themselves need to be considered when deciding what problem to set. In this case, MIDI controllers were chosen because the design problem required students to understand and employ a lot of the theory that they would return to throughout their university studies. Designing a MIDI controller is also a good introduction to a course of study because it's an enjoyable practical activity and students can use their controller to play music once they've designed and constructed it.

Although the educators set up the problem in a way that implied certain learning goals, the students had to identify for themselves what they needed to learn in order to solve the problem. It was up to them to shape their learning by deciding they needed to learn about arrays, MIDI files, soldering, or a range of other subjects. At this point, educators were able to act as guides on the side, checking that the learning goals identified by students aligned with what they were expected to learn.

In some cases, students were prompted towards important learning goals. For example, students who had never heard of

arrays were unaware they needed to learn about them and so needed a prompt. Ideally, though, key ideas like these are introduced right at the beginning – either before the problem-based learning begins, or when educators and students are discussing the first step.

The next step (6) involves members of the group working individually to collect additional information. At this point the task is cooperative, with group members working in parallel rather than duplicating effort. In the final step (7), they pool what they've learned and apply it to the problem, so they're able to produce a solution in terms of a working MIDI controller.

So, the seven steps of problem-based learning can be applied in a classroom environment. Let's take this forward and use this knowledge to answer our question: **How does problem-based learning help *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, er, *slay* vampires?**

## The answer

To do this we can work through the seven steps again, but we'll move the setting from Coventry to Sunnydale, and from a university to a high school perched above the Hellmouth.

At the start of the TV series (S1 Ep1 *Welcome to the Hellmouth* / S1 Ep 2 *The Harvest*), Buffy's new friends, Willow and Xander, are finding out for the first time about vampires and demons. This subject area is completely new to them. In terms of examining the case and clarifying the terms, they're very reliant on Buffy and Giles. Giles knows a lot more about the supernatural elements than Buffy, who's new to the role of Slayer and not too thrilled about it.

However, Buffy knows more about the specific situation that's facing them. She encountered two very powerful vampires in the Sunnydale graveyard and these vampires got away before

she could slay them by putting a stake through their hearts. Having encountered this difficult situation, she went back to school in order to discuss it with Giles. Asking for advice from her Watcher is standard practice for a Slayer.

As well as talking to her Watcher, she also talks to Willow and Xander. One of the things that makes Buffy different from all previous Slayers, and more successful than all previous Slayers, is that she works with friends<sup>2</sup>. This means she learns things collaboratively and can draw on the skills and experience of others. No other Slayer back to the Stone Age has ever done this. So this is a really novel situation. The Slayer and her Watcher explain to two perfectly normal (at that point) people, Willow and Xander, what vampires are and what's going on. That Sunnydale is actually the Hellmouth. That there are demons living under the school, all sorts of really scary, freaky things, all sorts of new knowledge. So between them they examine the case, clarifying the terms and trying to work out what is going on (1).

Then Buffy goes on to identify the problem (2). In this case, the specific problem they're faced with is that people are being killed in the graveyard. She analyses the problem, splitting it down into its separate elements (3). One element is the vampires. One element is that these vampires have superhuman strength. And one element is that the vampires are hiding out in a lair. Nobody in Buffy's team knows where the vampires' lair is, so they can't stake them.

The explanatory model (4) is straightforward. 'If we find them, we can stake them.'

This leads to two learning goals (5): we need to learn the location of the lair, and we need to learn how to go about staking these super-strong vampires who escaped so easily in the past. This is where the strength of Buffy's approach comes in, because there are four people trying to achieve those learning goals,

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2. They call themselves the Scooby Gang, or Scoobies. It's adorkable.

whereas any past Slayer would only have had support from her Watcher. The Scooby Gang can work individually or in small teams to collect additional information (6).

Giles investigates these particular vampires, trying to learn the best approach to slaying them. He searches through books and old documents and diaries in the library (as most pupils avoid the school library, Giles has managed to incorporate a large amount of ancient and arcane texts within the collection). Willow, who is a technical whizz, searches the internet, trying to locate the vampires' lair. She finds a map of the sewers and identifies a likely point. Meanwhile, Xander and Buffy explore both on the ground and under the ground. They descend into the sewers and start looking for the vampires. As the pair of episodes comes to an end, Buffy and Xander apply and discuss the additional information that has been gathered (7). This enables them to find the lair and deal with the vampires, taking them on successfully despite their superhuman strength.

However, as this is the start of a series, this turns out to be a beginning rather than an ending. Buffy finds the situation is much more complicated than she originally thought. The problem she has solved is the first of many because the vampires she has encountered are part of a wider group who are trying to open the Hellmouth so that demons will invade the Earth. So the Scoobies have worked together to solve one particular problem but their solution has opened up a whole other can of worms, which they will have to deal with as the series continues. Their problems are just beginning.

### Going beyond the answer

As Buffy looks forward to another 142 episodes in which her problems continue to pile up, it becomes clear that the question, **How does problem-based learning help *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, er, slay vampires?** was not the right question. Although it



sees her through some tricky situations, problem-based learning is only a small part of Buffy's learning strategy because it is, in essence, a classroom-based pedagogy.

When a problem is set, although it's not necessary for educators to know the solution, they'll have a broad idea of what the solution is. They'll know roughly which knowledge they expect students to apply, and the sorts of learning goal they'll achieve. The problem will also be time-bound. Even if the teacher allocates it a week, a month, or a semester of study time, there's a definite point by which it will have to be solved. In addition, there's always a presumption that there's a workable solution. Different groups will come up with different responses but they're aware that the challenge isn't impossible.

The approach works neatly in the early episodes described above partly because, seen from this perspective, series creator Joss Whedon has designed the plot as a learning experience. He has learning goals in mind for both Scooby Gang and viewers. Along with Xander and Willow, we are introduced to the basics of life and terminology in the Buffyverse, including Slayers, Watchers, vampires and the Hellmouth. Buffy, who already knows most of this, learns she cannot escape her destiny as the Slayer. Giles, who is an expert on the terminology and different types of monster, learns he has an unusual Slayer to watch over and begins to adjust to the idea of working in a larger team. The monsters learn there's a new Slayer in town and she's not easy to defeat. The viewers finally learn to understand Buffyspeak and can follow her cryptic, verb-heavy sentences.

The initial problem of specific vampires killing humans in the graveyard is solved within the confines of two episodes, and the scene is set for the next challenge. However, by Series 5, Buffy will be faced with seemingly insurmountable problems, not least of which is a god from a hell dimension. With the situation at that point declining rapidly from bad to apocalyptic,

it becomes increasingly obvious that there's no good solution and no chance of reaching a happy ending before time runs out. At that point, the effectiveness of problem-based learning has clearly run its course and Buffy can no longer rely on existing knowledge to give her the answers she so desperately needs.

Problem-based learning helps Buffy to pull in and draw on her collaborative networks, developing the metacognitive skills and strategies required to slay the vampire of the week. However, if any of the Scooby Gang are going to reach the end of the series safely, she needs another learning strategy – computational thinking – in her toolkit, an approach we'll look at in detail in a later volume in the series, promise. Until then, you'll just have to listen to the podcast.

## Tips for practice

If your students have no immediate need to avert an impending apocalypse, but they'd find it helpful to be able to apply what they've learned in order to extend and deepen their knowledge, then problem-based learning is a pedagogic approach that could help.

As with any pedagogy or technology used for teaching and learning, there are some basic questions to be answered:

- What are the advantages of this approach, and how can I ensure learners benefit from those advantages?
- What are the disadvantages of this approach, and how can I ensure these don't outweigh the advantages for learners?
- Is this the best approach to use in this situation?

In order for problem-based learning to work well, students need strategies that enable them to work together confidently in

groups. They also require a certain level of subject knowledge – there’s little merit in making them work everything out from first principles. Educators need time and resources to use the approach, and they need to be both confident they can take on the role of guide on the side, and flexible enough to let learners take the lead.

Problem-based learning is a useful tool in an educator’s toolbox, but learners need some grounding in a subject before they’re ready to address problems related to it. Rather than starting with problem-based learning, it’s better to lay the groundwork first, later introducing a problem that helps students to make connections between the different things they’ve learned. This can encourage learners to reach further, increase their learning autonomy, and develop additional skills. Mixing problem-based learning with a more traditional approach helps to scaffold it and also makes it less of a shock to the system for those who haven’t encountered the approach in the past.

If problem-based learning is a major change in practice, it’s important to acknowledge that’s the case, especially if the intention is to use it across the institution. One way of preparing to introduce it is to set up a group whose members have time to think through how the approach will work, sketch out how this will change the curriculum, identify learning outcomes and clarify why problem-based learning is likely to be the most effective way of helping learners to achieve those learning outcomes.

It’s also important to consider how assessment will be aligned with the problem-based approach. Assessment is one of the major factors that influence learner behaviour. If learners realise that although they are encouraged to work in groups they will be assessed individually, they will not be motivated to engage with the group. In that case, they’re likely to focus their efforts on gaining a good mark rather than on being an effective

group member. There are many different ways of assessing group work, so select one that suits the situation, one that your learners feel is fair to them as individuals as well as group members.

Educators will need training to act as facilitators, because this is a challenging role to take on. At the same time, bear in mind that learners come to you with a model of how education works. They’ll be used to the idea that teachers tell them things and they learn those things. So students also need to be introduced to the approach and, because it requires more of them than simply sitting quietly and listening, they need to be convinced that this is an effective way of working. They’ll need strategies for working together as a group. Task division, deadline setting, progress monitoring, accountability, and reflection are all techniques that can be taught and that help to avoid the problems that arise when learners are asked to work in groups but have no clear idea how to do this.

By laying your pedagogy bare, you involve students in the process of implementing a new approach. They can provide feedback and help to evaluate the implementation, identifying what worked well for them and what will need to be improved in future. This helps them to understand that there are different ways of teaching and learning, and that some of these only work in particular contexts. It also makes the process more interesting for everyone involved.

### **There’s no problem that cannot be solved by chocolate. Or references.**

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