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The Paradox of Appreciative Inquiry - advancing new approaches to problem based learning (PBL) in occupational therapy education.

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Introduction - Research by Roberts (2009) shows increasing dissatisfaction with aspects of PBL as applied to OT education in the UK. Over focusing on problem solving in PBL may inhibit creativity in students' thinking and learning and in tutors facilitation of groupwork. Applying appreciative inquiry (AI) as another level to an established PBL curriculum may benefit both students and academics. The paper presents a key recommendation, that of the development of a new and innovative educational approach termed paradoxical Inquiry.

Objectives:- To highlight how the introduction of AI to PBL in OT may encourage tutors to guide students to view educational problem scenarios and situations in practice first of all with an appreciative eye.

Methods:- A qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews to collect the data. An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was used to analyse the data. A purposive sample of eighteen academic staff who facilitate PBL on three pre-registration undergraduate occupational therapy programmes in universities in the United Kingdom (UK) were recruited.

Results:- Participants felt strongly that in real life, at times OT's do not solve peoples problems but help them adapt to a life with challenges. What PBL has in limitation, AI appears to offer as its strength, the two appear to be complementary- this is the paradox. AI invites a completely different context and vision of learning. In contrast to developing an analytical eye, AI instead cultivates an appreciative eye in that it promotes that which is working well and encourages students to invest their efforts there. It is suggested that combining AI and PBL allows for the development of transferable skills through a new proposed model termed Paradoxical Inquiry.

Conclusion:- The apparent paradox may guide OT tutor to add something new to their facilitation in order that they can guide OT education towards an integration and possible synthesis of both PBL and AI as learning approaches.

Contribution:- Such a generative approach to learning, teaching and practice may potentially influence and change the culture of a Health Service as well as OT education worldwide. An opportunity exists to engage in action research with students and practitioners.