Characteristics of Good Learning Issues
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"...once you have learned to ask questions - relevant and appropriate and substantial questions - you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning what ever you want or need to know."

In, Teaching as a Subversive Activity

Knowledge is power (Bacon). All of us have vast areas of ignorance and we will never come close to knowing more than a very small fraction of what there is to know. Nevertheless, being aware of what we don’t know is also a type of power because it enables us to focus our learning where it counts when we have problems to solve. The more adept we become at defining what we need to know in a way that it can be pursued, the easier it is to quickly locate needed information and the better problem solvers we become.

Most of us are reluctant to reveal our ignorance. Who wants to look “stupid?” A major tenet of problem-based learning is that learning occurs best in an environment where we can admit our knowledge gaps and do something about them by working together to achieve understanding. In problem-based learning, our knowledge gaps become our learning issues. The way we go about defining learning issues influences the depth of understanding we achieve. What are the characteristics of a good learning issue?

1. Presented in the form of a question or series of questions.
2. Focused so that it seeks specific information.
3. Constructed so that it asks an answerable question.
4. Pursues information that is relevant to the problem.
5. Goes beyond superficial knowledge to probe conceptual issues.
6. Often set in a context that provides direction. Why is the question important?