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Experiences of problem based learning with a large cohort – the students' perspective

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Abstract
With the increasing number of students going to University, large cohort teaching is becoming more common at the undergraduate level. Lecturers need to be creative in their use of technology to ensure a positive student experience where interaction with the lecturer or facilitator is paramount. A large cohort of Environmental Science students (circa 150) was set the task of solving ecological economics problems based on the following themes: waste, emissions, transport or food. Working on one of these problem areas each small group of five students explored the problem set step by step and attempted to devise a solution strategy. Google Docs was used to aid collaboration between students in each group and to allow feedback on progress at regular intervals from the facilitator. Each group produced a strategy document along with their recommendations for improvements to the process. They also produced and presented an image and accompanying script which summed up their experience. This presentation is a selection of those images and student thoughts. The main conference theme addressed by this presentation is Learning, Teaching and Assessment because the PBL approach taken allowed much closer interaction between students and facilitator than would normally be possible with such as large cohort. However, Google Docs was also used as a medium for social exchange within the groups avoiding emails and facilitating discussion and development of project ideas. Furthermore by allowing the sharing of documents online, the use of Google Docs allowed external sponsors for some groups to read and comment on their project ideas from afar. This enabled external engagement without the need for meetings or travel. In this way all three conference themes are addressed to a greater or lesser extent.