Online Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) programs are challenged to deliver content with a learner-centered focus that supports students’ learning at a deep level, the level of “understanding”. To accomplish this from a cognitive, constructivist learning perspective, authentic methods that mimic FNP practice are being utilized. Problem-based learning (PBL) is considered an authentic teaching method.

This step-wise process of PBL is problematic to manage in the threaded discussion online environment, specifically during the hypotheses generation phase. During this step, students identify the limits of their current knowledge and subsequently create a list of learning issues or topics that require additional study. This process is time-intensive and creates a great deal of dialogue.

A Wiki is a web page that allows users to easily edit their own work and that of others, creating one fluid document. Students can easily collaborate on group projects by creating an online document and make edits. Recently an asynchronous chat capability has been added to the Wiki environment called LiquidThreads. This asynchronous chat environment may have advantages over the threaded discussions within BlackBoard, the learning management system currently being used for online education. Within Blackboard, students post individually in a threaded discussion requiring that each post be opened, which fragments the discussion. In a Wiki using LiquidThreads, all time and name-stamped posts are viewed on a single page and can be edited by all participants. This creates a fluid online dialogue within the same document. With the ability to edit the work, this environment opens new vistas in education. Students can edit by adding to or deleting from what they have posted to fine-tune their thoughts based on others' comments.

During Fall semester 2007, authentic PBL was explored in an FNP cohort using the asynchronous discussion tool within BlackBoard. In Spring of 2008 an exploratory study will be conducted evaluating student and faculty satisfaction in an online Wiki environment compared to their experience using the threaded discussion in BlackBoard.
Steps involved in authentic problem-based learning

1. Establish objectives
2. Encounter the problem
3. Reasoning through the problem
   a. Generate hypotheses through brainstorming
   b. Inquiry
      i. What is known about the patient
      ii. What needs to be researched to fill gaps in knowledge (learning issues)
   c. Revisit hypotheses and associate with new knowledge
   d. Analyze problem and commit to outcome
4. Analyze resources and summarize case

Evaluate the use of a Wiki as an online discussion forum for PBL

As compared to the Discussion Board in BlackBoard, 5 out of 6 students:
- strongly agreed that the Wiki was easier to navigate
- agreed that it was easier to read posts & follow the discussion
- felt that commenting on other students’ posts was easier
- preferred to use the Wiki for future case discussions

Posting in the Wiki required the use of HTML tags. Three were taught:
- `<BR>` for line break
- Numbering of lists
- Bullet points

4/6 felt that formatting was easy. This topic generated the most comments.

Compare and contrast the use of asynchronous threaded discussion in BlackBoard with fluid discussion using a Wiki.

Student comments:
- I thought much easier to navigate than BlackBoard.
- The Wiki was much easier to look back at past postings and add to them.
- The `<BR>` is not time effective and sometimes lost postings causing the need to rewrite.