

WHY ARE WE PROPOSING TO REPLACE SO-CALLED PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL) WITH MORE TRADITIONAL METHODS OF INSTRUCTION?

BELOW ARE REAL STORIES FROM REAL PARENTS IN D41.
LISTEN TO OUR STORIES AND YOU WILL UNDERSTAND OUR CONCERNS

1) The torn child – and the distraught parent

As a Dad, I want to teach my children to become good learners. I convey positive messages about school and education. I tell them how much I enjoyed school. I loved learning. I was curious. And teachers could share knowledge so that we can learn and grow, and then use the things we learned when we grow up... to start a business, or get a job. This allows us to buy food and a house and toys, which makes our life much better and easier than life without food and a house and toys. The kids seem receptive to these positive messages so far. Good.

So, what am I supposed to do when, one day, my son comes home from with this look of pain in his eyes. He has this tortured expression on his face. I'm very close to him, I've seen him at his best and worst, elation and tantrums. And I've never seen this look before. He starts asking me about what we do with the pumpkin after Halloween. Now, he's a pretty smart and very observant kid, he should know that we compost it. Apparently, he has been convinced by the school that we don't, and therefore, we are killing penguins and polar bears. He started into this holier than thou regurgitated rant that he obviously absorbed at school.

It was creepy. He stopped about 1 millimeter shy of outright declaring me an evil animal murderer. Now, he loves me and he respects me, and he knows I love him and I will always take care of him and watch out for him. That I'm raising him the best I can, so he can become the best that he can be. So it was obviously difficult and stressful for him to process this conflicting message he was getting from school.

How am I to feel? How should I react if my own son is scoffing at me because he seems to have been convinced that I kill penguins because I bought a pumpkin?

- I can't freak out. That would cause him to freak out. And he would become hesitant to share his day with me anymore. And it's critical during these young years that he shares his day. He should come home from school saying, "Mommy, Daddy guess what I learned today, look what I did today." That's healthy. So I have to be careful with my reaction.
- I can't get defensive and angrily tell him how crazy and wrong this stuff is that he's hearing from school. Kids are sharp, they pick up on things. If I do that, he'll quickly internalize that he shouldn't pay attention at school. Maybe he'll learn nothing. Maybe he'll get F's on everything. Maybe he'll become disruptive to others, a class clown, since he's concluded there's nothing worth learning at school.

So, I have to walk a fine line in clarifying so many of the things he comes home saying, so that the combination of messages from the school and his parents don't ruin his education and set him back in life. But why should I have to do that all the time? Why is D41 making my job harder instead of

easier? I'm paying you for this? Being a parent has many challenges. And it's really hard to be a Dad these days, since our society has twisted and contorted the role of the father in recent decades. All I'm asking of you is to help me teach math and reading and science. Is that too much to ask?

I could do it. Hey, my daughter isn't even in Kindergarten yet but she reads to me because I've worked with her. I can do it and ultimately I am responsible for their education and upbringing and I welcome that responsibility. But I have a job that pays the taxes to you so that you can do it. And I don't get to skip the taxes, nor the mortgage, if I send my kids to private school or quit my job to do it myself.

MY REQUEST:

Please just focus on the core academics. I'll take care of the morals, religion, and yes, political philosophies I'm sure will be instilled naturally. That's my domain. Can you please keep your activism and politics out of my son's curriculum?"

If you really believe that it's OK to push your politics on other people's children, then I propose that you give me your kids. Drop them off at my house at 8:30 every morning, pick them up at 3:30 every afternoon. While I have them as a captive audience for 7 hours, I'll give them too little time for recess where they can benefit from burning off energy and growing through unstructured play. I'll put my morals, convictions, values, religion, and political beliefs into their brains. If you disagree with me, I'll imply that I know better than you what's best for your own child. But don't complain if your child comes home from school questioning your parenting because, say, you don't have a gun at home to protect the family from an intruder, or because you aren't volunteering as a counselor to help pregnant teens find a family for adoption instead of having an abortion, accusing you of wistfully accepting the murder of babies. I think you'll quickly realize that there are plenty of topics that don't belong in a grammar school. Leave that to the parents. Focus on Math and Reading.

2) SUBSTITUTING POLITICS FOR ACADEMICS

As parents, we receive a non-stop barrage of messages centered around themes that sound like they came out of a populist politician's campaign rally.

- "The power of change"
- "The power of community"
- "How we can bring change beyond DuPage"
- "How we can convince others to make better choices for our community"

This may please some people while annoying others. But it should not be pushed ON THE CHILDREN at an elementary school. This is the domain of the family. It is a distraction from the educational process, and feels more like indoctrination. And our test scores suffer as a result of D41 losing focus on its core function: academic instruction.

This comes across as political because, it seems geopolitics are driving the curriculum in general at D41. Let's face it, PBL isn't problem based learning, because the "Problems" are mostly fabricated geo-political issues. Let's use the PBL acronym for what it really stands for: "Political based learning." And the 24/7 Climate Change alarmism preached as if it's a new religion where you worship the earth and environmental mandates from earthly rulers, instead of worshipping God, is NOT teaching science, it's politics. And it's dangerous.

Here's an example from one D41 parent, who said: "I'm putting waffles in the toaster the other day and my 7 year old son, unprompted, blurts out, 'businesses are bad because they take all the money and that's why everyone is poor.'"

Wow. That is so wrong on so many levels. Who is in charge of the curriculum at D41, Hugo Chavez? Karl Marx?

- Firstly, the statement is absurd on its face. Am I poor? Is anyone who works at D41 poor?
- If a business simply *took* my money, that would be theft. They could end up in prison like Bernie Madoff.
- If all businesses are so horrible and we need to *get back at them* by taking all the money back, what would happen when all the businesses close? If you destroyed my business, then ironically, I would become poor since I'd lose my livelihood. And who would be in charge of "taking the money back" and destroying all these bogeyman businesses? The D41 employee who said this to my son?
- Do D41 employees realize that even in the most radically left wing regimes where all property belong to the community, businesses and individuals could not simply take someone else's money. They'd literally cut off your hands as punishment. The only entity that can simply take your money is government. Only a person who's whole life has been based in government (i.e., never had to run a business and win customers) could say something so removed from the real world.
- Why do we demonize commerce and capitalism in D41? Are we in America?
- Maybe some people at D41 need a quick primer on basic economics: How many people in Glen Ellyn own an iPod, iPhone, iPad? Did Steve Jobs show up at your doorstep and put a gun to your head to get your money? No he offered a product on the free market, which you bought of your own free will. YOU decided it would be better to have that iPad than to have \$500 in your pocket. By definition, you are better off. You determined that you have raised your standard of living. And so has Steve Jobs, since you WILLINGLY EXCHANGED money for his product. Does this make him evil? Of course not. Running a business is a great thing because you bring value to people's lives, while improving your own. Everyone wins. It's called rational self-interest. It is also known as the Laws of Nature, which is why it has worked so well since the beginning of civilization, and abandoning it for the false promise of divisive socialism and class warfare has caused so much suffering.

MY REQUEST: If you do not understand how an economy works, then I ask that you don't preach your voodoo economics, which is actually not economics but a radical political view, to my child. Teach her math and reading. Preach that radical stuff to your own child if you want.

3) PUSHING ACTIVISM INSTEAD OF INDEPENDENCE

The 'solutions' always attempt to control other people's behavior. They will have their whole adult life to be involved in politics if they so choose. In the meantime, D41 is sacrificing academic excellence, which particularly hurts all the children who are not going to be politicians. Or is that the point? Are you trying to mold them all into life-long activists instead of life-long learners?

It's an insult to my intelligence when you claim that the kids come up with the solutions to these "random" problems on their own. Then why do we pay PBL coaches? Why can't the teachers handle it? Is it because teachers specialize in academic instruction and PBL coaches specialize in activist training? Are truly different skill sets needed? If the answer is yes (and it seems you think it is), then you are admitting that you have veered way too far of course, and you are no longer focusing on academic instruction.

- The children did not dream up a plan to force everyone else to pay a nickel to the government every time they bag their groceries in plastic at the store. Big government statists did.
- The children did not dream up a plan to forbid their next door neighbor from being allowed to renovate his own property unless he plants the Progressive's preferred vegetation of the week, milkweed. Political activists did. I'm offended that you think so little of my intelligence that you tried to convince me our children came up with that. As if they all want to be imposing, bossy little tyrants that restrict their friend's liberty and erode property rights. You know where the erosion of property rights that have existed since at least the Old Testament comes from? Read a little Manifesto by a guy named Karl.
- The kids had no desire to organize a boycott of Jimmy John's because it doesn't use enough organic food. D41 activists pushed that on the kids. It is shameful. And embarrassing.

The irony is that if you actually wanted to save the world from alleged climate change from overuse of energy, you would teach them actual science. Electricity and magnetism. Chemistry. Bio-engineering. Some of this is too complex for elementary school students. It's OK. They don't have to save the world when they are 8 years old. Give them the math and reading skills they need as a foundation for later learning. Controlling other people's behavior has never saved the world despite the Utopian promises of so many people over the past few hundred years, arguably over the last few thousand years. Remember the old saying, "The welfare of the masses is always the alibi of tyrants." But if you teach them science, maybe they'll develop a new cheap, clean, efficient way to produce energy. Maybe they'll invent products or processes that consume much less energy than what we use today. THAT is how life improves. That comes from technical knowledge and innovation, not from lobbying and restricting other people.

4) SOWING INTOLERANCE AND DISRESPECT INTO OUR CHILDREN'S MINDSET

Our children are being coached and guided to one-sided alleged solutions. There are so many problems with this:

- You are planting negative thoughts in kids' heads. Teaching them that people are bad. That they are careless, reckless and irresponsible if they don't follow your mantra around environmentalism. They are even ANIMAL MURDERERS. And we know that kids love animals.

You do realize that kids take this stuff literally, don't you? My son still believes in Santa Claus, though he asked some pointed questions this year... So, do you not realize something so incredibly important about kids that age? If so, may I suggest you specialize in something other than childhood education?

But what if you DO realize that kids take this literally? And you're planting these thoughts in their heads anyway. I shudder to think it, because that would be horrific. Getting kids to think terrible things about their parents was the hallmark of Mao's Cultural Revolution. Look it up. Why would we risk installing a curriculum that approaches these extremes?

- Now, the kids are becoming more judgmental of others, instead of learning tolerance. And the irony here is the hypocrisy. You'll accuse me of being anti-earth. But how many of you have a compost at your house? We've had several. Typically 2 at-a-time, so we can take from last year's pile while adding to this year's bin. Now I've got a huge custom one that I designed and built myself from scrap materials to meet our specific desires. I'm greener than 99% of you, I bet. Do you have a rain barrel at your house? I have 2. We've had these things since the moment we moved in. Not just now, after a PBL. When Com Ed sends those reports on energy usage, we always come in way below even the threshold for the 'most energy efficient neighbors.' By mathematical definition, almost all of you can't say that.

But here's the thing. This is just how we live. So our kids will pick up our values naturally. We're efficient and live humbly. But you know what we don't do? We don't tell our kids that anyone else who doesn't live like us is selfish, reckless, and destroying the earth. We don't want her trying to tell our next door neighbor how to live her life. He has no authority to do so.

This concerns me, because to convince my son that he has some kind of right, or authority, to tell others how to behave, to control other people, requires a dehumanizing element. He innately knows that he doesn't have the right to tell our neighbor how to live. The only way to have that authority is to outrank our neighbor. So, either my son has to be some kind of super human, above others, or others have to be some kind of sub-human, therefore they can be commanded like a dog or lower caste. This is dangerous in the long run. But your PBLs tell her to do just that. To judge others. To scorn them. And ultimately, to try and control them.

- This is "thought discrimination" and creates heretics.
- Isn't it a uniting issue that people of all political stripes can agree on: we all hate lobbyists? Yet, you turn my child into a lobbyist when you send her to the village board pushing for the 'no renovation unless milkweed' law.
- Sadly, the point is often lost on the kids, because it's political, which doesn't register with their young, apolitical brains. I see little evidence that kids are going home and planting milkweed or forgoing plastic bags or composting their pumpkins. Just judging OTHERS for not doing it. I'd rather focus on individual behaviors. Individual responsibility. Improving yourself. But don't get me wrong: in a school setting, that doesn't mean you tell her how green she must live. My child's personal responsibility, when it comes to school, is for learning. She is accountable for that. And it is measured not by activism but by her demonstrating that she has picked up the skills and knowledge related to the academic instruction topics: math, reading, writing, science.

5) MISSING THE BASIC FUNDAMENTALS

PBLs are taking over the curriculum, leaving less room for the key components of learning at the younger ages, where the children need to start with the basics. They need this foundation before they can apply it, but D41 has 6 year olds jumping into the 3rd stage of [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) before they can tie their own shoes. Why does my child struggle to answer "what does 25 minus 6 equal?" but he can command everyone to stop using fossil fuels, buy organic, etc.?

Why should kids be stemming the tide of the ocean when they can't tie their own shoes? Shouldn't we focus on basic skills before saving the world? 1st graders who can't add basic single-digit numbers should conquer the evils of methane? Kids who can't read yet have to do presentations? We're not just putting the cart before the horse. We're sitting in a cart with no horse.

By veering off course with a PBL-based curriculum, we are leaving our children underprepared for junior high and high school. This has been confirmed by teachers at those schools who have commented about the lack of preparedness of the kids coming out of the prior school.

When claiming we need PBL for modern learning, keep in mind that we could put a man on the moon teaching with slide rules. Maybe traditional education works.

Bloom's Taxonomy - Knowledge unfolds in a logical sequence

Remember (facts) > Understand > Apply > Analyze > Evaluate > Create

Would you want a 3rd grader to perform surgery on you? Why not? Because they don't have the broad expanse of knowledge from which to draw upon to competently perform such a procedure.

The current iteration of PBLs are asking kids to rocket forth to Analyze, Evaluate and Create before building a critical mass of facts from which to draw. Without a broad base of knowledge, who is left to fill in the gaps in the children's understanding? Teachers. And when those gaps are politically charged....

Better use of resources

It is right to start to apply facts, and to start to stretch understanding (that's called growth) but with a less politically charged agenda. For instance,

- create a pile of dirt and organic matter and then talk about all the scientific things going on, molecules, microbes
- build a windmill and then talk about mechanical energy, airfoil design, getting work done with energy, conservation of energy - i.e. energy is neither created nor depleted, rather transferred or converted.

6) PIGEON-HOLING OUR CHILDREN WITH INAPPROPRIATE LESSONS

We've seen how, some kids dominate in the PBL groups. Some kids just go along for the ride, and some get isolated (for example, the child who gets assigned to look up the pre-determined online research information). The slower thinkers could get frustrated trying to keep up with the faster thinkers who are likely to be the natural leaders of the group. In order to overcome this, they would have to slow down the whole group to move at the pace of the more deliberative kids, which can frustrate the faster learners. This does not seem to be helping the children. If each child had to do his/her own presentation on a topic that s/he personally selected and researched, that could be much more effective. And research shows that kids are more likely to retain what they learn when their own interests and curiosities guide them, instead of always having the same topic pushed on them from adults.

Here are some examples of healthy, benign, age appropriate research and presentation projects that students can do, either as a group or by themselves:

- There are lots of boots on the ground that we keep tripping over when we enter/leave the classroom. What can we do about it?

- The kids could probably solve this tangible, realistic problem by figuring out to put the boots away in a less conspicuous spot... or who knows what else they might come up with. Maybe they can implement it without costing us \$20 million for a new facility?
- There is a big crowd by the cubbies every morning when we take off our jackets and hang up our backpacks, etc.
 - The kids might determine that if the room were laid out differently, such as splitting half the cubbies against the wall to the left of the door and half against the wall to the right of the door, or some other solution, it might help. Or again, maybe the kids would come up with another innovative idea that doesn't cost \$20 million.
- Research your favorite animal and tell the class about it.
- Research your favorite state and tell the class about it.
- Tell the class about your family. Do you have siblings? Pets? Favorite games or traditions or vacation spots?
- Pick a random country that you've never heard of, learn about it and share with the class.
- Learn how a common household product is made, or when it was invented and how people used to do things before that product was invented. Share with the class.
- How can I get more exercise? (NOT HOW CAN I FORCE OTHER PEOPLE TO GET MORE EXERCISE!)
- How can I eat healthier food? (NOT LIKE THE PBL ON HOW TO CONVINCING OTHERS TO EAT ORGANIC FOOD OR ANY OTHER FOOD. IT'S ABOUT IMPROVING YOURSELF!) Come up with several different foods you haven't eaten. Learn about their nutritional content, taste them, and share your findings with the class.
- Invent games. I can share with you a few games that my children and I came up with randomly one day when they said they were bored. This a 'problem' and a great chance for *REAL* Problem-Based Learning. Hard to imagine, with the longer school days, plenty of homework, and in the little time left, they have activities, leagues, swim lessons, etc. They barely have any free time, and we have plenty of toys and games at home. Yet somehow they declared themselves bored. Well, we solved that problem. And they immediately latched onto the process of solving it: inventing a game. They were creative, offering lots of ideas. They were engaged, none of them were off doing their own thing. They worked together positively as a group. They collaborated. And came up with something fun that we've enjoyed several times since then.

It was age appropriate, useful, and benign. No politics. No activism involved. And because the kids came up with it, rather than having it fed to them, it was automatically relevant to them, so the value of the lesson is better retained. Pushing concepts that are abstract and undigestible to 6 year olds, such as buying a pumpkin produces an invisible bogeyman called methane that kills animals you have never seen in person and can't actually observe happening, is not age appropriate. It is too complex. It forces children to accept non-intuitive concepts that they can't process, merely on faith. But faith is described as "the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." That is for religion, and religion is not taught in a public school. Unless you are teaching "worship of the Earth".

Let our children define the problems. Don't feed it to them then ask them what to do, and pretend the children came up with it. I think they will impress you. And they will be better

off. And isn't that the ultimate goal of educating our children?

7) STIFLING INNOVATION AND CURIOSITY

When every PBL is about environmentalism, and only shows one side of the story, and always focuses on how to control other people's behaviors, there is another sad side effect: stifling innovation. The children become myopic in their views and the 'group think' will prevent development of critical thinking skills, such as the ability to consider alternative opinions or facts that don't support the pre-determined narrative. They will miss out on developing the ability to work independently, which is also important.

Many of the PBLs simply tell the children exactly where to go to get their 'facts'. Just reading an editorial is not sufficient development of research skills. Kids learn by DOING, not being fed a conclusion to regurgitate. *Being able to regurgitate someone else's opinion is not the same as being able to think critically.*

The pumpkin PBL was totally one-sided and left children with an unrealistic and close-minded perspective:

The pumpkin PBL taught the kids the evils of disposing your pumpkin and generating methane gas. D41 left out key facts:

- 1) Methane is natural. It is a by-product of the decomposition process. When plant matter – fruits, vegetables, leaves, etc. gets old and falls to the ground, it decomposes. This is a good thing, as it provides nutrients in the soil to support the next generation of vegetation and supports life for various tiny species that live in the ground. And yes, it produces methane gas.
- 2) So, if we throw the pumpkin in the compost bin, guess what? It still decomposes and produces methane. So, by D41's logic, if I throw the pumpkin in the compost, which you are telling me to do, I'm killing penguins. You didn't mention that.
- 3) You also didn't mention that much of our garbage goes into the landfill at Green Valley in Naperville, where they use the methane to produce energy that runs 10,000 homes in DuPage county.
- 4) While extolling the evils of humans' impact on the planet, you failed to tell my child that even in the complete absence of human life on planet Earth, pumpkins would still grow, and animals would still eat them, just as the squirrels do so well every October in our yard and countless other yards in Glen Ellyn and elsewhere, and what's left of the pumpkin, of course, decomposes, producing methane.

In other words, it's absurd to blame me or humans in general for the presence of methane, and no, methane is not all bad. Stop demonizing us.

The Wind Energy PBL:

Wind energy sounds good, right? It's clean and doesn't cause climate change, right?

- Well, actually, your preferred supposedly green approach, wind mills, actually kill millions of birds every year. Why is that not mentioned, but the pumpkin PBL gladly infused images of animal death in my child's brain, blaming me?

- It is not economically viable. In North America, it mainly produces energy at night, but people use energy during the daytime, and the storage technology doesn't exist to retain the energy from nighttime to be used during the day.
- So, we subsidize it, costing possibly hundreds of billions of dollars per year if you consider all the related and hidden costs and opportunity costs, and guess what, it's still not economically viable.
- Did you teach the Law of Conservation of Energy? "Energy is not be created nor destroyed. It merely transfers forms." Now, there's mounting research suggesting that the process of transferring wind energy into electric or potential energy, not surprisingly, is altering wind patterns as it transfers the energy out of the wind. The wind doesn't carry the weather as efficiently and it impacts some migratory bird species. Talk about a detrimental impact on the environment!
- Maybe D41 staff should look in the mirror, if you want to slap the label "climate change causer" or "animal murderer" on someone. Because those bird deaths are undeniably caused by the windmills.

It seems that D41 doesn't let facts get in the way of its Political Based Learning.

8) ADDING COSTS WITH NO ROI

- 1) How many "PBL coaches" have we hired?
- 2) What do we pay them?
- 3) Do they receive Benefits? If so, what is the cost?
- 4) What are the operational costs of the additional staff (desks, materials, supplies, personnel management and administration, etc.)?
- 5) What do teachers do while PBL coaches coach?
- 6) Do teachers receive any training on PBLs? (e.g., during SIP days, to become facilitators?)
- 7) Do teachers now just follow pre-programmed Common Core scripts and texts and just *facilitate* PBLs or step aside for PBLs? If so, what unique tasks are they performing that require specialized skills? Does the array of knowledge and skills needed by our teachers and PBL coaches justify the salary and benefits we are paying? How much less did it cost before we implemented PBLs? Is this why taxes keep going up, while test scores are going down?
- 8) What is the ROI of the PBL program? From our perspective, it is negative.

9) Empirical evidence that the PBL approach is failing

- 1) Our test scores have decreased since PBLs began
 - a. Yet our expenses have increased. Why do cost and results go in opposite directions?
 - b. Other districts have contained costs and improved performance. They don't use PBL.
- 2) Why has there been a proliferation of education alternatives in Glen Ellyn in recent years? We don't live in inner city Chicago or Detroit, so why would there be a need? But there are more tutors. Kumons, Best Brains, Mathnasiums, etc. In a place where the taxes are so high, mainly for the public schools, and the school days are longer, you might think that the schools are great and nobody would want (or feel the need) to spend any more money and time on education.

This is the free market, working its magic. Those alternatives would not exist if there wasn't plenty of customers willing to pay, because they would immediately go out of business. And when D41 raises taxes, as it has, that just makes it even harder for parents to pay the extra

money to these providers. Yet, they are growing.

The only conclusion is that D41 must not be doing a good enough job, not providing the educational value that people demand. Is it coincidence that this change in the marketplace has occurred over the past few years as the curriculum has changed, particularly with the implementation of PBLs?

And unfortunately, the achievement gap between those who have the resources to supplement D41 with these alternative services, and those who do not, only grows wider since the very people who need the most help do not utilize the supplemental resources.

10) Ignores better methods of teaching and learning

Please research brain-based learning methods such as [LearningRX](#). These approaches have been shown to increase IQ by up to 30 points. And, they have the most positive impact on students whose starting point is lower, while still benefiting students at all levels and ages.

CONCLUSION:

The PBL-based curriculum is costing us extra money to divert our children from academics to political activism, leaving them close-minded, intolerant, and unprepared for the next phase of their life, while leaving parents with less money in our pockets and weakened families. They are interfering with parenting, hurting our residents, and doing a disservice to our children. We've seen no evidence, no research, no empirical data, that shows they help our children here in D41 raise test scores, etc. At best, they are a social or political experiment. But our children are not your guinea pigs. PBLs in their current form should be removed and academic fundamentals restored.