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I am here to speak to you today from the perspective of a teacher having spent hundreds of hours over the last six years trying to figure out how best to translate the philosophy of proficiency-based learning into effective practice in my classes and my school. I believe wholeheartedly that this shift is radical, complex, and in the best interests of students. The following is based on my own reflections and observations over the past six years, and I will strive to keep my remarks grounded in my own classroom-level experience.

**Firstly, teaching in a PBL system compels educators to redefine their role.** Teachers can no longer see themselves as disseminators of content knowledge and their students as vessels waiting to be filled. Our job is not to impart information but to facilitate learning. PBL requires us to take responsibility for the learning we expect from *all* of our students. Under a PBL system, we begin our planning for the year by determining what we expect each of our students to know and be able to do by the end of our courses. We decide upon the most essential skills we want students to develop, and we design ways for our students to practice, receive feedback, and demonstrate their growth towards mastery of these skills. I vividly recall a conference with my daughter's first-grade teacher back when PBL was just a meaningless acronym to me. As this gifted educator told my wife and I about the ways in which he was tailoring his instruction to meet her needs, I remember being struck by how well he knew my daughter as a learner. We felt confident and grateful for his ability to help maximize her growth in those critical years of school. PBL asks all educators to teach like we work in a primary classroom: Know your students. Know their interests and what excites them. Know their strengths and their challenges. Own the fact that there is crucial learning that needs to happen for each of them to be successful in the future. Do everything you can to maximize their growth.

Taking responsibility for the learning of our students in this way has been enormously time-consuming and challenging for the educators I work with. We are providing students multiple ways in which to take in new information and ideas, multiple ways to practice new skills, and multiple ways to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they gain. We are designing formative assessments to figure out the range of understandings in our classrooms and designing differentiated follow-up activities based on the results. We are bringing home meaningful, student work many nights a week and providing thoughtful, timely feedback to help move our students from where they are to where they need and want to be. Much more work lies ahead in making our systems both more efficient and more flexible. But as long as we keep student learning as our primary focus, we are on the right track.

**Implementing our PBL system has resulted in improvements in student learning,** and this is evident in the work I see students producing and the kinds of questions I am asked on a regular basis. Here's a recent, concrete example of how the teacher-student conversations in my classroom have changed and what this means in terms of student learning. Last week, a student was in my room for an Extended Learning Opportunity, an ELO block for short, an every other day support structure in which teachers can work with students to complete or revise work, pre-teach, reteach, or offer enrichment. In this instance, a student was revising an essay she had written about Animal Farm. Five years ago, a student in this position would likely have asked me, "What do I need to do to this essay to get an A?" Last week, however, she asked, "Can you help me with my analysis? I know that this quote supports my claim really well, but I'm not sure how to explain why." This student was well aware that the essay she was working on was an assessment of her ability to "Use evidence and reasoning to defend an argument/claim," one of the performance indicators we work on all year using a variety of different texts and

content. With just a slight nudge in the right direction, she was able to clearly explain how the last line of Animal Farm shows what happens when greed corrupts a leader, turning him into a dictator. The result was both a stronger essay as well as measurable growth in this student's trajectory as a writer and a thinker.

I believe that our world needs citizens who can think critically, form their own ideas, and support these ideas with evidence and reasoning. I am clear with my students that we practice this skill not only so that they can be successful in high school but so that they can be successful, articulate members of our democratic society. Under PBL, students have clarity about what skills they are expected to learn and be able to demonstrate. Teachers are working hard to provide clear feedback using objective language from shared rubrics to guide students on how to meet and exceed these expectations. With clear learning targets in mind, I have felt a newfound sense of flexibility to tailor my instruction to help individual students with different needs, learning styles, abilities, and interests. Because of the clarity of our instruction, the objectivity of our feedback, and flexibility of instruction, I have observed students over the last four years who write more effectively, read more closely, and can articulate their thoughts more precisely.

**Teaching in a PBL system requires teamwork.** I am fortunate to be a member of a 9th grade team of educators who meet weekly to discuss teaching, learning, and our students. This team structure has been instrumental in helping all of us gain clarity and consistency over the last four years. At our meetings, we share lesson plans, assessments, student work, questions, and ideas. We work through challenges and have supported each other through this complex and powerful transformation in what we do. In my view, the days in which a teacher could close the door to her classroom, tune out school-wide initiatives, and focus on teaching her own students in isolation are gone. This work requires collective thought, problem solving, and consistency in practice, and while meeting with colleagues may be an increased demand on teachers' time, it is a necessary ingredient for successful implementation.

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I am enjoying my 17th year as an English teacher and have spent the last six years studying and implementing PBL at Harwood. In 2014, our principal at the time, Amy Rex, created a shared leadership team (teachers, students, and administrators) to redefine teaching and assessment at Harwood. I served on this team from 2014-2018, helping to make foundational decisions about our PBL system, including co-writing our district's shared rubrics and helping design PBL-related professional development opportunities for our faculty. I have been teaching under our PBL system for four years, and the first students in my co-taught 9th grade humanities course are graduating this year with a proficiency-based transcript.