

Everything I know About Lichens, I Learned from My Students: Implementing a Problem Based Learning Class for Non-Majors Biology Students

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Sometime around the spring of 2013 I lost my mind and told my Department Chair that I wanted to teach a problem based learning class (PBL). Most folks have probably heard of a PBL but just so we are on the same page, a Problem Based Learning class is a student centered method of teaching that originated with medical school students. Students work in groups to solve open-ended questions. Students are typically taught to frame the problem in terms of what they know, what they need to know, and how they will find the information they need. Attendees of this workshop will have the opportunity to model the introduction to one such problem. This will be followed by an open question/answer session about my experience, the type of questions that lend themselves to this type approach, and preparation for teaching using this method. Afterwards we will discuss the pros and cons of using PBL models in general and the special challenges of using it in a non-majors biology course. We will conclude with a summary of the affect PBL had on the learning outcomes of the students in a PBL class compared to those in a traditional lecture based class.

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Citing This Article

Hall, M C. 2017. Everything I know About Lichens, I Learned from My Students: Implementing a Problem Based Learning Class for Non-Majors Biology Students. Article 34 In: McMahon K, editor. *Tested studies for laboratory teaching*. Volume 38. Proceedings of the 38th Conference of the Association for Biology Laboratory Education (ABLE). <http://www.ableweb.org/volumes/vol-38/?art=34>

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