

Learning Targets Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson

(Moss, C. & Brookhart, S. 2012)

Introduction:

"This book arose from research and professional learning partnerships with classrooms, schools and school districts." (Moss & Brookhart, 2012. pp 1). These experiences compelled the authors to write the book, (in which I summarise the main theories, key points and applications) explaining the crucial role that learning targets play in student learning and achievement, teacher expertise and educational leadership.

We consider the views, theories, research and practicalities that link to student achievement to learning targets to refine our own practice in how we design learning goals and implement these with the learning environment.

Author Belief:

- Student learning and achievement happens the immediacy of an individual lesson (what the authors call "today's lesson" throughout the book).
- Teachers design the 'right' learning target for today's lesson when they consider **where** the lesson resides in a larger learning trajectory and identify the next steps students must take to move towards the overarching understandings described in standards and unit goals
- The 'theory of action' rests on the crucial distinction that a target only becomes a learning target when the students **use it** to aim for understanding.
- Students can only aim for a target when they know what it is.
- Teachers share the target by telling, showing and - **most important - engaging students in a performance of understanding.**
- *Performance of understanding engages students in an activity that simultaneously shows the students what the target is, develops their understanding of the concepts and skills that make up the target and produces **EVIDENCE** to make decisions about further learning.*

The Theory of Action in a Nutshell

The most effective teaching and the most meaningful student learning happen when teachers design the right learning targets for today's lesson and use it along with their students aim for and assess understanding (Moss & Brookhart, 2012, pp 2).

Key Points

Learning targets guide learning they are not instructional objective, (a broad statement or aim written in teacher speak.)

Learning targets are written in student speak, using lesson sized chunks of information, skills and reasoning processes.

Learning targets provide a common focus for the decisions make about what works, what doesn't work and what could work better.

Chapter 1:

(Read pp 8 – The Beliefs that we hold and the beliefs that hold us)

What is an example you can identify and share?

Learning targets are student-friendly descriptions – via words, pictures, actions or some combination of the three – of what you intend students to learn or accomplish in a given lesson.

When shared meaningfully they become actual targets that students can see and direct their efforts towards.

When educators share learning targets throughout today's lesson they reframe what counts as evidence of expert teaching and meaningful learning.

They engage in double-loop learning to question the merits of their present beliefs and practices.

Read pp 10 -11 The Multiple Effects of a Learning Target Theory of Action

Pp 12 The Nine Action Points (photocopy pp 13 – 27)

Discuss and highlight what is the main point for you as a teacher.

Nine Action Points of Learning Linking to Total Participation Techniques

- 1. Learning targets are the first principle of meaningful learning and effective teaching***

pp 14 fig: 1.2

- 2. Today's lesson should serve a purpose in a longer learning trajectory towards some larger learning goal***

pp 16 fig: 1.3 Questions for Tomorrow's Learning

What did the students learn in yesterday's lesson?

How well did they learn it?

Where were they confused?

What can they use meaningfully?

Where is their learning heading in upcoming lessons?

Do students know where their learning is heading?

- 3. It's not a learning target unless both the teacher and the student aim for it during today's lesson***

- 4. Every lesson needs a performance of understanding to make the learning target for today's lesson crystal clear.***

How do I know what the students know? Did students deepen their understanding of essential content and skill? What evidence did the students produce the supports your conclusions about what they knew or what they were able to do?

- 5. Expert teachers partner with their students during a formative learning cycle to make teaching and learning visible and to maximize opportunities to feedforward to students***

(Moss, C. & Brookhart, S. 2012)

pp 22 fig: 1.6

Where am I going? Where am I now? How can I close the gap between where I am now and where I want to go?

- 6. Setting and committing to specific, appropriate and challenging goals lead to increased student achievement and motivation to learn.
Distal (long term) and proximal (short term).*
- 7. Intentionally developing assessment-capable students is a crucial step towards closing the achievement gap.*
- 8. What students are ACTUALLY doing during today's lesson is both the source of and the yardstick for school improvement efforts.
"Graduating a class of self regulated, assessment capable and life long learners doesn't just happen. It happens when students set specific goals during today's lessons to reach their learning target, select appropriate strategies to help them get there, receive quality feedback that helps them gauge their progress against a set of student look-fors (success criteria that is specific not too broad) and then USE their new learning to meet the challenges of tomorrow's lesson.*
- 9. Improving the teaching-learning process requires everyone in the school – teachers, students and administrators– to have specific learning targets and look-fors.*

Chapter 2:

What is this lesson's reason to live?

This chapter is just that. Think about why you want the students to learn this and how is it important to them. Redirect and question students regularly so that the target is revisited often and the students are constantly referring to the success criteria and identifying their own next steps

What it is, when it happens, why it matters.

Chapter 3 Sharing Learning Targets with Students.

We think we do this well but when students are questioned they don't seem to truly know. We need to do this better.

The power of the learning team pp 62 Chapter 4 Using Learning Targets to Feed Learning Forward.

A really good chapter with practical examples to help teachers understand learning targets but more importantly understand how they involve students in their learning by questioning, redirecting and giving practical examples. Worth a good read.