

MAKING LEARNING TRANSPARENT

Benjamin Franklin once said, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn” (BrainyQuote 2014). Students come to school to learn and teachers are employed to teach. There are no secrets here! However, in order for students to learn, teachers need to involve them in their learning. This is where learning intentions and success criteria come in.

When I sit down to plan a lesson, I look at what my students have already achieved and what the next thing is that they need to learn. This becomes my learning intention. I will then organise teaching and learning activities, to assist the students to experience success with their learning. I know the learning outcomes that I am trying to achieve, however my students are not mind readers! Unless I explicitly communicate with them the learning intention for each lesson, my students will focus on the ‘activity’, rather than on the desired learning outcomes. By imparting to my students the learning intention at the beginning of a lesson, it helps them to focus on the goal of the activity; rather than on just completing the teaching and learning task that I have set.

Learning intentions describe what my students need to know, understand or do as a result of the teaching and learning activity. However, they are only part of the information that I need to provide for my students. Success criteria build upon learning intentions, and enable my students to know what the successful completion of the task will look like, and how they can go about attaining it. Success criteria can come in different forms, such as: written information or rubrics. So by providing success criteria to my students, it empowers them to assess whether or not they have attained the learning intention that I have set for them.

A further piece of information that I provide for my students is to tell them why the learning intention has been set in the first place. This helps them to put their learning into context and further aids their overall understanding. Generally, the reasons why I set learning intentions are either because they are necessary for future life skills or academic success.

There are many ways that teachers can communicate learning intentions and success criteria to their students. Some teachers will write them on a whiteboard, others make up laminated templates that can be written on, rubbed out and reused. I have made up an electronic template using the acronyms ‘WALT’ (We Are Learning To...), ‘WILF’ (What I’m Looking For...) and ‘TIB’ (This Is Because...). The template is displayed on a large TV screen for the duration of the lesson. This is referred to at the beginning of the lesson, often throughout, and then again at the end of the lesson.

In choosing to impart specific information to my students – what they are learning, how this learning can be achieved, and why they need to learn it - I am involving my students in their learning, and therefore empowering them to take greater responsibility for their own educational journey.

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