Chapter 2: Learning Goals and Success Criteria
Activity 2.7

Introduction

So far in this module, you have learned quite a lot about Learning Goals and Success Criteria. The eReader experience is intended to help you deepen your understanding of these critical components in formative assessment. In this eReader, you will learn more about the purpose of Learning Goals and Success Criteria, see an additional video of teachers talking about them and using them, and have the opportunity to reflect on your own understanding so far.
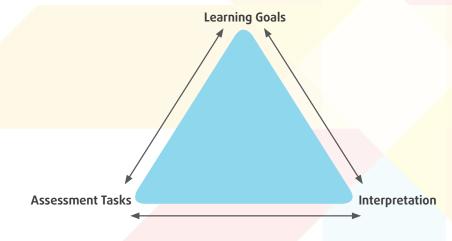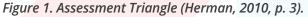
There are four sections in this chapter:

1) Assessment Quality

2) More on Developing Learning Goals

3) More on Creating Success Criteria

4) Students' Use of Learning Goals and Success Criteria

Assessment Quality

Assessment quality is critical in large-scale assessment, such as the end-of-year state tests where the stakes from assessment use are very high. It is also something we need to be aware of in formative assessment, even though the stakes are not so high—if teachers draw the wrong inference one day from formative assessment evidence, they have a chance to fix this the following day.

A first step in ensuring assessment quality is establishing Learning Goals. Then assessment tasks are created specifically to reflect those goals—not vice versa. As you can see in the assessment triangle below (Figure 1), noted assessment expert Joan Herman shows the need for alignment between Learning Goals and assessment tasks.

Figure 1. Assessment Triangle (Herman, 2010, p. 3).

Alignment is key to assessment quality. Assessment tasks, ranging from those that occur in the course of a lesson to annual summative assessments, are **_aligned_** to a Learning Goal. In formative assessment, a task aligned to a lesson-sized Learning Goal might be for students to respond to teacher questions and probes as they are engaged in a learning activity. The annual summative assessments are aligned to the **_goals_** of the grade-level standards.

The third vertex of the triangle is 'interpretation.' With clear goals and aligned assessment tasks, assessment results can be interpreted in reference to the goal. The results of annual summative assessments are interpreted in relation to the standards to answer the question, "Have the students met the standards or not?" Formative assessment evidence is interpreted relative to the Lesson Goal to determine the current status of students' learning.

As Herman observes, "The quality of an assessment—termed validity by the measurement community— resides in part in the relationships among and between the three vertices" (Herman, 2010, p. 3).

Blueprints are also essential for sound assessment. A blueprint is really a set of specifications for an assessment, and documents the knowledge, skills, and understanding that an assessment measures. When test developers have a clear picture of the specifications, they can create the assessment task or items. Success Criteria function rather like a blueprint. They describe what students will be able to do if they are meeting the goal, and help teachers plan how they can obtain evidence related to the criteria.

More on Developing Learning Goals

We have established that Learning Goals are essential to all assessments. Lesson-sized Learning Goals drive the whole process of formative assessment. However, anyone who has begun to implement formative assessment knows that developing Learning Goals is not easy at first. While it might be easy enough to create poor Learning Goals, coming up with effective ones can be a challenge. The good news is that with practice, support, and feedback from colleagues, teachers can ultimately become very accomplished in devising them, on their own or in collaboration with their students.

In this module you have already seen writing tips for Learning Goals. Now, here are two more tips to help you create quality goals.

(1) Just Right Goals

Learning Goals need to reflect worthwhile learning in the course of a lesson. After all, one of the primary functions of Learning Goals is to communicate what learning is important and valued. Learning Goals also need to be manageable and achievable within a lesson. In other words, they need to be just right. Take a look at these examples from science:

(a) Students understand that all matter has characteristic chemical and physical properties and functions;

(b) Students know that water is H_2O; and

(c) Students understand that energy can be transformed from one form to another.

Which one is just right? Learning Goal *a* is not just right. While it reflects substantive, worthwhile learning, it is more likely to be a goal for a unit. It is too broad and complex to be a Learning Goal that can be accomplished in one lesson (2-3 class periods). Learning Goal *b* represents a single discrete fact, and while it is something teachers want students to know, it does not reflect a substantive goal for a lesson. Learning Goal *c* is substantive enough to be a worthwhile Learning Goal, and it is achievable within the timeframe of a lesson.

(2) Avoid Including the Context

Shirley Clarke, an expert in formative assessment, suggests that Learning Goals are far less useful if they specifically include the context of the learning. She provides this example of a Learning Goal: "To understand the effects of banana production on the banana producers" (Clarke, 2005, p. 28). In this case, a better Learning Goal would be: "To understand the impact of production on producers." The first goal could lead students to believe that the effect of production on producers is only an issue about bananas, rather than understanding it is the context for knowing the relationship between production and producers. As Clarke says, "If you want the students to learn it, it needs to be part of the learning goal. If it is the context for learning (the 'how' or the vehicle), it needs to stay out" (Clarke, 2003, p. 28).

More on Creating Success Criteria

One of the challenges that teachers have when they begin formative assessment (in addition to deriving quality goals) is coming up with Success Criteria that are aligned to the Learning Goal. The Success Criteria are the indicators that both the teacher and students will use to know if students have actually met the goal. This means it is essential that the Success Criteria are clear descriptions of the learning performances that students will evidence when they have met the goal.

In addition to the writing tips you saw earlier in Lesson 1, here is another tip for you to think about for creating Success Criteria.

Co-constructing Success Criteria

Students benefit from co-constructing Success Criteria because it helps them internalize the criteria so they can make use of them while they are learning. Shirley Clarke provides several suggestions for how to co-construct criteria:

(a) Demonstrate a skill: The teacher can demonstrate a specific skill and ask students "What did I just do?" as a way of gathering evidence of the criteria;

(b) Illustrate good and bad: Model how to do the skill well and how to do it poorly, and ask students to identify key features of a successful performance;

(c) Work through an example: Analyze a graph or diagram and discuss ways to pull out the criteria; and

(d) Provide poorly written Success Criteria: Students analyze the errors and suggest how to rewrite the Success Criteria (Clarke, 2014).

This video shares short clips from teachers and leaders at Lockerman Middle School in Maryland talking about the shifts teachers—and students—have experienced since they began engaging students in developing and using Success Criteria.

> ▶️ **Video**
>
> ***Learning Goals and Success Criteria: Teachers and Leaders***
> ***Lockerman Middle School in Maryland (2:53 min.)***
> *https://goo.gl/Tr0B9Z*

Students' Use of Learning Goals and Success Criteria

Learning is the property of the learner. Teachers can help students learn, but at the end of the day, it is the students who actually DO the learning. To this end, a core objective of formative assessment is to involve students in the management of their own learning. This means that students are able to reflect on where they are in their learning, decide where they need to go to next, and figure out what they need to do to take the next steps. Unless they are able to learn in this way, and take action when they need to, they remain overwhelmingly dependent on teacher feedback and direction as the primary resources for learning, and lack the capacity to develop as self-sustaining lifelong learners (Heritage, 2010). Success Criteria provide a critical tool for students to understand where they are in their learning and to clarify for themselves which next steps they need to take.

In his seminal paper on formative assessment, Royce Sadler, an Australian scholar, stressed that to be able to monitor their own learning, students must come to hold a conception of quality similar to the teacher's. Developing this conception depends on:

(a) possessing a concept of the standard (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for;

(b) comparing the actual (or current) level of performance with the standard; and

(c) engaging in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap (Sadler, 1989, p. 120).

Let us take a moment to think about Sadler's perspective. Notice that he refers to students' "possessing a concept of the goal." In practice, what is meant by this is not just that teachers post the goal on the

classroom whiteboard, but that students have a clear understanding of what the Learning Goal and the Success Criteria entail. In situations where the teacher and students derive the Learning Goal and Success Criteria together from an instructional activity, then it is clear to the students what is involved.

When teachers communicate the Learning Goals and Success Criteria, it is essential that they spend time discussing what they mean. Often it is useful to use examples of students' work (not from the same class) as a means to make the criteria clear, discussing the degree to which the criteria have been met. Once the students know what is expected, they are better able to monitor their learning, know how they are progressing, and take action to move forward when they need to. At other times, teachers can have a discussion with their students so that everyone knows what is expected.

Students learn better when they know what is expected of them. They are more motivated to learn when they know where they are going—learning should never be a mystery. Students can be part of the assessment process when they understand the indicators they can use to monitor their own learning. Learning Goals and Success Criteria focus students' attention on learning and enable them, in Sadler's terms, to compare the actual (or current) level of performance with the Learning Goal. A key practice in formative assessment is to ensure that students understand the goal and criteria and have a clear picture of what they mean. Successful implementation of formative assessment hinges on these foundational planning elements, as you will see in subsequent modules.

References

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