Communicating Learning Targets in Student-Friendly Language

PURPOSE

This activity is designed for use with a group of teachers to introduce and practice the process of converting a reasoning learning target into student-friendly language.

TIME

45–60 minutes (Can be broken into two parts, with the second part beginning at Step 5.)

MATERIALS NEEDED

The handout "Converting Learning Targets to Student-Friendly Language" (Figure 3.1); participants can also bring their content standards for one subject or class

SUGGESTED ROOM SETUP

Tables and chairs arranged so that teachers can work in job-alike groups

CONTEXT

The process of making learning targets clear to students can take many forms, which are explained fully in Chapter 2 of *Seven Strategies of Assessment* for *Learning* (J. Chappuis, 2015). This activity is useful when you want teachers to understand one way to help students answer the assessment *for* learning question, "Where am I going?" by defining key terms in a content standard or learning target.

CAUTION

The process is not a one-size-fits-all remedy for making targets clear to students. It is especially suited to the patterns of reasoning represented in each subject's content standards. More complex learning targets may require a rubric to fully define them as well as a process for converting the rubric into student-friendly language, which can be accomplished as a part of a learning team's work as they study one of the assessment texts explaining this (Arter & Chappuis, 2006, Chapter 3; J. Chappuis, 2015, Chapter 2; J. Chappuis et al., 2012, Chapter 7).

DIRECTIONS

1. Briefly describe the rationale for making learning targets clear to students. Explain that this activity shows one way to do that and that it is especially suited to learning targets that require students to reason. (See Figure 3.1.)

2. Distribute the handout (Figure 3.2) and explain the process, showing how it would work for the learning target "Summarize text."

3. Then ask teachers to select either "Infer" or "Hypothesize" and, working with a partner, to define the word and then translate it into language that their students would understand (Figure 3.3).

4. Ask volunteers to share both their definition and the student-friendly language. After hearing several examples, ask table groups to select one and come to consensus on both the definition and student-friendly language for it. Have tables share the consensus language.

5. Ask teachers to work with their subject-area colleagues (at the elementary level, ask teachers to select a subject area by grade level) to identify a content standard from their own curriculum that would benefit from this process. Have them use the process to create a definition of words needing defining and then to write the learning target in student-friendly language.

6. Ask volunteers to share the original learning target and their student-friendly version.

7. As closure you may wish to ask teachers to use the student-friendly versions they have created with students and come back together after a short time to discuss what they did with the targets and what they noticed happening with students as a result.

Figure 3.1 Converting Learning Targets to Student-Friendly Language

Select a learning target that would be made clearer by this process. Reasoning learning targets are often good candidates. Then use the following process to convert it into student-friendly language.

The Process

1. Identify the word(s) and/or phrase(s) needing clarification. Which terms will students struggle with? Imagine stating the target in its original form to your class. Then envision the degree of understanding reflected on faces throughout the room. At which word did they lose meaning?

2. Define the term(s) you have identified. Use a dictionary, your textbook, your state content standards document, or other reference materials specific to your subject. If you are working with a colleague, come to agreement on definitions.

3. Convert the definition(s) into language your students are likely to understand.

4. Turn the student-friendly definition into an "I" or a "We" statement: "I can _____"; "I am learning to _____"; or "We are learning to _____." Run it by a colleague for feedback.

5. Try the definition out with students. Note their responses. Refine as needed.

6. Let students have a go at this procedure occasionally, using learning targets you think they could successfully define and paraphrase. Make sure the definition they concoct is congruent with your vision of the target.

Figure 3.2 The Process in Action

Learning target: Summarize text.

Word to be defined: *Summarize*

Definition: To give a brief statement of the main ideas and significant details

Student-friendly language: I can summarize text. This means I can make a short statement of the main ideas and most important details from a passage I have read.

Learning target: Make predictions.

Word to be defined: *Prediction*

Definition: A statement saying that something will happen in the future

Student-friendly language: I can make predictions. This means I can use information from what I read to guess at what will happen next. (Or to guess what the author will tell me next.)

Source: Chappuis, Jan, *Seven Strategies of Assessment* for *Learning,* 1st Ed., © 2010, pp. 7, 22–24. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., New York, New York.

Figure 3.3 Your Turn

Working with a partner, select either *infer* or *hypothesize* and follow the process to convert it to student-friendly language.

Word to be defined: *Infer*

Definition:

Student-friendly language: I can infer. This means I can

Word to be defined: *Hypothesize*

Definition:

Student-friendly language: I can hypothesize. This means I can

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