



## Activity 2.3

### Recognizing the Formative Learning Cycle in Action

#### Learning Target for the Activity

- Be able to tell whether the learning target and success criteria are functioning within a lesson to support student learning.

#### Purpose

This activity gives school leaders practice with the concept of a learning target and success criteria and thus with the idea that learning goals are not just for teachers but for students as well. The observational aspect of this activity helps school leaders “know it when they see it.” The aspects of this activity related to collegial conversations and professional learning goals help school leaders practice what it means to be a leading learner, which is the kind of leadership that has been shown to support classroom formative assessment practices.

#### Time

Variable (takes more or less time as needed), in three segments: (1) pre-observation conversation with the teacher, 10 minutes; (2) observation of a lesson, 20 minutes; and (3) collegial feedback session, 15–20 minutes.

#### Materials Needed

- Collaborative Inquiry Guide for a Learning Target and Effective Success Criteria

#### Suggested Room Setup

For this activity the school leader will work with one teacher. The purpose is formative, and the aim is that both will learn something about learning targets and success criteria. Ideally, the school leader identifies a teacher who is already using a learning target theory of action in their lessons and who wishes to go deeper. The observation portion of this activity (part II) occurs in their classroom, and the consultation portions (parts I and III) occur in a mutually convenient and comfortable location. It would be possible to do this activity with a teacher who is just trying out learning targets, with longer preparation time in part I.

#### Directions

##### *Part I: Pre-Observation Conversation*

Identify a teacher, in your building or elsewhere, who is working on using learning targets with their students. The purpose of the pre-observation conversation is for you and the teacher to explore your current understandings of learning targets and success criteria, to get some background on the lesson you will be observing, and to identify what you will be looking for when you observe. Think of yourself and the teacher as each participating in a formative learning cycle where the goal is to understand learning targets and success criteria more deeply. This pre-observation conversation allows you to define your current understandings and be more precise about exactly what each of you wants to learn next. The observation will identify aspects of the lesson that are observable and serve as information for the collegial feedback conversation, which should help both you and the teacher answer the questions “Where am I now?” and “Where to next?”

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Use the Collaborative Inquiry Guide for Learning Targets and Success Criteria as the basis for your discussion. The teacher may be able to foreshadow some of the things you could be looking for when you observe. Be very clear with the teacher that the end result of this activity is that you should both understand learning targets and success criteria more deeply and have a sense of what work you should both do next to increase your knowledge and skill even more. You may need to make this point very emphatically because some teachers may be used to seeing “observation” as a summative, evaluative tool. No matter what you observe, you are the *learner* in this activity, not an evaluator. Of course the teacher will learn too, which is why the activity has value for them as well.

After you and the teacher have discussed your understandings of learning targets and success criteria and have reviewed the Collaborative Inquiry Guide, ask the teacher to select a lesson or portion of a lesson that will last at least 20 minutes that would be a good candidate for this kind of formative walk-through. Make an appointment to visit them classroom at that time.

### **Part II: Formative Walk-Through**

Arrive at the appointed time to observe the classroom lesson. Take a copy of the Collaborative Inquiry Guide with you, and fill it in as you notice things. Do more than just check the boxes (Yes/Somewhat/No); make sure to explain your choice using evidence you observed during the walk-through.

This evidence should be based in what the *students* are doing. This may feel counterintuitive if you are used to classroom walk-throughs that focus on what the teacher is doing. The key to finding out whether a learning target is living in a lesson is to look at what the students are doing. Are they trying to learn something, or is compliance with teacher directions their main focus?

Observe for about 20 minutes. If for some reason your visit must be cut short, do another visit later when you can spend the full 20 minutes.

### **Part III: Collegial Feedback Session**

After your observation, set up a time to talk briefly with the teacher. To prepare for this conversation, review the Collaborative Inquiry Guide.

To start the conversation, ask the teacher what they noticed about the learning target and success criteria in the lesson you observed. Ask them what they were trying to accomplish with the lesson and what they thought happened. Join in the conversation by sharing what you observed, which should be recorded in the “Explain your choice” sections of the Collaborative Inquiry Guide. Finally, each of you should set a next professional learning goal based on what you have observed and discussed together. The teacher’s next professional learning goal should be something *they* identify as their likely next step (e.g., “I’d like to work on identifying ways in which my students could use success criteria more easily”), not something you tell the teacher they ought to do next.

Your next professional learning goal should be something related to the learning target for this activity: “I understand the role of learning targets and success criteria in connecting classroom-level instruction and learning with broader learning goals.” For example, you might decide, “I want to understand how students experience learning goals and success criteria in my building.” Identify an action plan—what are you going to do to pursue your goal? Identify success criteria—how will you know you are moving toward your professional learning goal?

### **Closure**

Follow up with the professional learning goal and action plan you set for yourself in part III. Reflect on what you are learning.

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## Collaborative Inquiry Guide for a Learning Target and Success Criteria

LEARNING TARGET			
Unless students are using a learning target to aim for and assess their understanding, the teacher may have a learning intention for the lesson, but the classroom learning team (students and teacher) does not have a learning target for today's lesson. Use this inquiry guide to look for the characteristics of a learning target and evaluate if the classroom learning team is guided by one throughout today's lesson.			
	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
Is there a description for students—via words, pictures, actions, or some combination of the three—of exactly what they are going to learn by the end of today's lesson? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Is the description of learning shared in developmentally appropriate language that all students can understand? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Is the description of learning stated from the point of view of a student who has yet to master the content, skill, or reasoning process that makes up the learning target for today's lesson? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Does today's lesson have a specific performance of understanding—what the students do, make, say, or write—that translates the description into action for the students to deepen their understanding, help them aim for mastery, allow them to self-assess the quality of their learning, and provide both the teacher and the students with evidence of the students' level of understanding? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
SUCCESS CRITERIA			
Success criteria, or "student look-fors," describe learning quality in such a way that students can recognize and use them to plan, produce, and improve the quality of their work as they are learning and working during today's lesson.			
	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
Do the criteria connect to the learning target for today's lesson? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Are the criteria about learning rather than assignment completion? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Could the criteria apply to more than one assignment—if the criteria describe learning, the quality should generalize to other similar work (e.g., "My sentences all end with periods," not "I put a period after 'boy'"; "I labeled my answers," not "I wrote 'square inches' after all the area problems"). Or if the criteria are specific to the performance of understanding, is it because the learning is specific too (e.g., "I can describe the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad")? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			

SUCCESS CRITERIA			
Are the criteria appropriate for the level of student understanding, observable to both you and your students (publicly stated), and definable in terms students can understand and use to judge the quality of their performance? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Are the criteria distinct from one another—that is, are they separate qualities that can be regulated and assessed for quality? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Do the criteria form a complete set—that is, when taken together (if there is more than one) do they describe the whole of the learning goal the performance is intended to develop and assess? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			
Do the criteria exist along a continuum of quality—that is, do they describe work on developmental continua so that students can self-assess and set next-step goals to improve their work? <i>Explain your choice:</i>			

*Source:* Adapted by permission from Figure 5.4 (p. 83) and Figure 7.1 (p. 121) of *Formative Classroom Walkthroughs: How Principals and Teachers Collaborate to Raise Student Achievement*, by Connie M. Moss & Susan M. Brookhart. Copyright © 2015 ASCD.