Establishing short- and long-term goals for students

What is the practice of setting short- and long-term goals for students?

This practice consists of defining and using clear goals that refer to external standards that help the teacher ensure that all students learn the expected content. Explicit goals allow the teacher to maintain coherent and equitable teaching over time that does not lose sight of its purpose. Setting effective goals involves analyzing students' knowledge and skills in relation to established standards, and making careful efforts to set and sequence intermediate goals that will help ensure steady progress toward higher goals.

A short-term goal assumes that it can be achieved in the course of one class or a couple of classes, whereas a long-term goal is achieved over the course of a unit or semester and involves the sum of shorter-term goals. In this sense, short-term and long-term goals should be related.

Before being able to design their evaluations and plan their classes, teachers must set up short- and long-term goals based on the Learning Objectives set forth in the Curricular Bases. The goals consist of declarative, procedural, attitudinal and value-based objectives or outcomes. To be clear, the goals must consider a concrete and observable performance that can be measured. In this way, evidence of their achievement can be gathered, and decisions can be made to improve performance (Förster, 2018).

Declarative and procedural goals refer to a set of knowledge and ways of doing that the curriculum establishes as necessary for each year of schooling. On the other hand, attitudinal goals refer to the development of attitudes and values contemplated by the school's curriculum or Institutional Educational Project, which implies that they must be developed in all subjects. These goals have an impact on the development of the school social climate, an aspect that, according to different studies, in addition has an impact on the students' learning results. In this sense, a common goal is the foundation for transforming a class into an organized educational community. In addition to learning, it can be included in the goals of a course, that learning is for everyone and that all students feel well treated (Mena, 2015).

Within the short- and long-term goals there may be individual goals, which are aimed at those students who have special or transitory educational needs. These goals should be derived from the educational program developed for the student, serve his or her needs but, at the same time, respond to the national curriculum (Konrad et al., 2014).

Among the benefits of setting clear goals are:

- They supply a focus: clear goals allow directing teaching processes and focusing efforts on those areas that need to be improved (Miami Technology and Arts University, n.d.).

- They ensure teaching effectiveness: they allow aligning each of the classes/learning experiences/units to a broader goal (Moss and Brookhart, 2012).

- They allow measuring progress: they allow collecting clear evidence about students' learning (Konrad et al., 2014).

- They ease decision making: they allow prioritizing actions by identifying consolidated learning from those that need more support (Miami Technology and Arts University).

In addition, by socializing goals with students, the following benefits are reported:

- Empower students: clear goals allow students to guide their learning and self-regulate (Konrad et al., 2014) by having a clear north (Zimmerman, 2001). It also prevents students from having to spend time decoding what is expected of them (Moss et al., 2011).

- Improved outcomes: students who are clear about their learning goals tend to do better than students who are not clear about those goals (Hattie, 2009).

What it is not Setting short- and long-term goals

- Confusing goals with performance or achievement criteria.

A goal involves skills and knowledge to be achieved by students in a class or set of classes. A performance refers to one of many ways in which a student can demonstrate that he or she has achieved a learning goal (Moss and Brookhart, 2012). On the other hand, an achievement criterion allows one to assess to what degree a student has achieved the proposed goal. For example, to assess students' ability to write texts that have a purpose and convey ideas clearly, a performance situation might be for them to write a letter about what they did on their vacation and what they would like to do next year. An achievement criterion for this situation could be the correct use of various connectors such as first, then, after, then, because of that, but, so, because, among others.

- Use the learning objectives of the Curriculum Bases in a textual manner.

The curricular bases provide teachers with a framework of skills and knowledge that students are expected to achieve at each level of education. However, learning objectives are very broad and some may be developed over an entire school year or even a school stage, not allowing them to represent the detail necessary for class planning. In this sense, for short-term goals, objectives should be specified or broken down before beginning to plan teaching and assessment (Konrad et al., 2014). For example, the objective "Determine the length of objects, using non-standardized units of measurement and standardized units (cm and m), in the context of problem solving" (Chilean Ministry of Education, p. 116) should be broken down into at least two goals (one referring to the use of non-standardized measurements and the other to the use of standardized units) that should be worked on in a sequence of classes.

- Use instructional objectives instead of learning goals.

Instructional objectives are written from the teacher's point of view, guiding their work. Learning goals should guide students' learning, so they should be written considering the skills and knowledge they should achieve (Moss and Brookhart, 2012). For example, an instructional objective could be "Present the life cycle of plants through the scientific method", while a learning goal would be "Describe through observation changes in flowering plants during their life cycle".

- Establish goals that do not follow a sequence or do not relate to each other.

Each goal should have a progression that describes the phases of understanding the content or mastery of the skills that enable the achievement of the goal as a whole. Failure to perform this step risks not addressing the goal as a whole (Marzano, 2013). For example, before being able to locate places on a grid using reference lines and cardinal points, students must recognize relative location categories and cardinal points.

- Develop individual goals without considering a student's current performance.

Prior to the definition of individual goals, it is necessary for the teaching team to describe the current performance level of a student who requires some type of support. To do this, the student's results in assessments aligned to the objectives of his or her school level should be taken into consideration in order to identify what the needs are in comparison to his or her peers (Konrad et al., 2014).

Teaching strategies for setting short- and long-term goals for students

- **Deconstructing Learning Objectives:** In order to establish short-term goals, the ministerial or own learning objectives must be deconstructed. This process should be done by analyzing what they must be able to know (concepts) and do (skills) to master the objective (Konrad et al., 2014):

  ○ What students should be able to know is identified by recognizing the nouns present in the objective. Ex: vertebrate and invertebrate animals, historical figures, key words, etc.

  ○ Doing relates to the procedures or skills present in the objective, e.g., problem solving.

- **Differentiate the type of goal:** After deconstructing the objectives, different types of goals should be created. Among them are:

  ○ Goals according to the type of knowledge: declarative knowledge refers to information and what students know, while procedural knowledge refers to processes, their reasoning and what students know how to do (Marzano, 2013). For example, declarative knowledge could be identifying the structure of narrative text, while the associated procedural knowledge refers to students being able to create a narrative text.

  ○ Goals according to ability: The depth of knowledge should be considered, for which learning taxonomies should be used. Among them is Bloom's taxonomy revised by Anderson (2001)

or Webb's taxonomy (2002). These taxonomies will make it possible to investigate the skill to be worked on and its complexity. For example, according to Bloom's taxonomy reviewed by Anderson, explaining implies that the student is able to establish a cause-effect model of a topic or situation, while evaluating implies that the student makes a value judgment based on a given situation. According to this taxonomy, the second skill would be of greater complexity than the first.

- **Write goals that consider a progression:** A progression describes the stages of understanding or mastery of a skill that leads to a larger goal. This allows the teacher to give students clear feedback on what they lack in order to achieve the goal (Marzano, 2013). On the other hand, writing goals that represent different levels of complexity ensures students are challenged without feeling overwhelmed (Konrad, 2014). For example, for an objective that aims for students to perform calculations involving the four operations by applying rules related to the use of parentheses and order of the four operations, one can start by performing combined operations of addition and subtraction and later incorporate multiplication and division.

- **Write performance criteria:** for either short- or long-term goals, performance criteria should be established to clearly define what students will do to show learning (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018). Ex: "Students will read aloud, correcting their errors if necessary, and then answer location questions."

- **Set standards for each performance criterion:** a standard must be in place to determine to what degree students meet the criteria for each stated goal (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018). Standards allow a range to be established from which performance can be judged. Ex: "Students should read 87 words per minute and with fewer than 5 errors, subsequently, correctly answer 10 location questions."

- **Positive:** goals should be worded in a positive way indicating what students can do (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018), e.g., "Students participate by raising their hand and remaining silent during peer interventions."

- **Use the same language:** to ensure success in the use of goals, all teachers and students must know what the key concepts associated with them refer to (learning objective, goal, performance, achievement criteria). To this end, it is suggested to unify the language at the school or teacher group level and present the concepts to students (Marzano, 2013).

- **Collaborative work among teachers:** Since goal setting is complex and often requires a long-term view (e.g., transitioning from one course to another), it is suggested to conduct the goal setting process with colleagues (Konrad et al., 2014).

- **Socialize with students:** By sharing goals with students, you clarify what is expected of them (Moss & Brookhart, 2011). To do this, ensure that students understand the goal and that the goal lets them know where they are in the progression of a larger goal (Marzano, 2013). It is suggested that students can answer the following questions from the goals:

  ○ What will I be able to do when I finish this class or classes?

○ What idea/topic/theme is important for me to learn or understand so that I can do that?

○ How will I prove that I can do this and how well do I have to do it?

To socialize goals with students one can, for example, present rubrics, examples of work that achieves the goal, use students' actual experiences, remind them of the goal during class, etc. (Moss & Brookhart, 2012).

- **Individual goals adjusted to current performance:** Considering a student's current performance, short- or long-term goals should be developed to bring students closer to the expected performance for their level. This will also imply making a selection of which goals will be more relevant to work on depending on the needs of each student (Konrad et al., 2014). For example, for a student who has reading difficulties, the development of phonological awareness can be established as the first goal before aiming at a more complex goal related to text comprehension.

- **Build cross-cutting goals in a democratic way:** through a sequence of intentional activities, the students of the course can be made to define goals and norms associated with the school's Institutional Educational Project (Mena, 2015). For example, a goal can be: "In this course we value the opinion of all classmates". The associated norms: "(1) Listen quietly while someone gives his or her opinion, (2) Maintain eye contact when someone is speaking, (3) Repeat the observation or opinion made by the student before giving my own opinion".

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