

Targeting Strategies - Hit AND Miss

Introduction

This broadsheet is intended to help teachers when working with students to achieve their targets. We look at the following:

- promoting learning through strategies which include target-setting
- helping students review and plan their learning
- the role of the form tutor/class teacher in the process
- the student's contribution.

The context

The experience of many schools, confirmed by research, suggests that two factors are associated with supporting pupils' learning: the *relationship* between the tutor and the learner, and the *focus on the students' learning*. Some of the most improving schools in recent years have developed these areas.

There is a growing practice of setting targets for individual students, and for teachers to be involved in a process (in secondary schools often called academic or individual tutoring) to help individual or groups of students review their progress, strategies, and next steps. This practice may link to the statutory requirement for schools to set and publish targets for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 for 2000, and to government targets for the LEA, and national targets.

Some pointers about target-setting

- There is an assumption that target-setting motivates students and their teachers; it motivates some students and some teachers, but not all.
- Setting targets is not sufficient to improve learning and performance; we should not assume that students know how to achieve the targets.
- Review by individuals or group of students is a key process in learning; people especially value the process of talking through their work.
- Reviews need to include helpful feedback and then "feed-forward"; students need to consider a range of strategies for how to improve.
- An emphasis on performance can de-motivate students and teachers, and lead to shallow learning¹.
- There are well-known distortions which can follow from target-setting.
- The metaphor of targets is drawn from archery. It might be useful to remember that the choice of a bull's eye only makes sense in relation to the rest of the target, and indeed the rest of the field.

Motivation - how do learners differ?

*"Targets are assumed, rightly or wrongly, to be a form of incentive, and for many people they are. ... Some people hate them. Set some people targets and they will switch off, because they are not competitive or they do not think or work in that way. We all have our own ways of working. Some of us like aiming at something, doing it, ticking it off and then moving on to the next item."*².

Learners vary in a number of related areas: their beliefs about success, their motivation in learning, and their responses to difficult tasks³. Those with a "learning orientation" (next page) are more likely to embrace the idea of reviewing their work and exploring strategies to help them to achieve their targets. Those with a "performance orientation" are less likely to see the point of review and target-setting, and more likely to give up when they encounter difficulties.

positive pattern of motivation: "learning orientation"	negative pattern of motivation: "performance orientation"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belief that effort leads to success • belief in one's ability to improve and learn • preference for challenging tasks • personal satisfaction from success at difficult tasks • problem-solving and self-instructions when engaged in task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belief that ability leads to success • concern to be judged as able, to perform • satisfaction from doing better than others • emphasis on competition and public evaluation • helplessness: evaluate self negatively when task is difficult

So if a school adopts a standard approach it *will* be hit *and* miss.

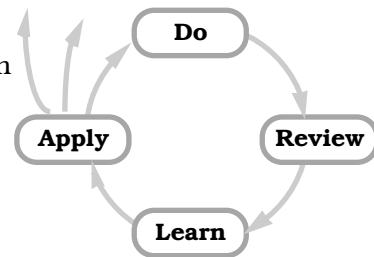
Some young people already work with targets, unknown to their teachers. For them it is a part of a process of achieving their goals and learning as they do. Target-setting is best seen as part of a process of learning. Even when we have a concern about performance we need to remember that a focus on learning can enhance performance, whereas a focus on performance can depress performance.

Where are targets in the cycle of learning?

"Schools can be very good at target setting with lots of documentation and pzazz, but give little or no consideration to how the targets are to be achieved."⁴

Learning is a process of creating knowledge, meaning and ideas from experience. People learn in very different ways, different from each other, and differently in different circumstances and contexts.

The following model of learning highlights activity in learning (Do), the need for reflection and evaluation (Review), the extraction of meaning from this review (Learn) and the planned use of learning in future action (Apply). Targets appear at the *apply* stage and their quality will depend on the quality of the preceding stages, *review* and *learn*.



A process model of learning⁵

A framework such as the following⁶ can help the first stage of the process by prompting a discussion about the learner's perspective.

- What's going well?
- How do I make sense of that?
- What's not going so well?
- How do I make sense of that?
- Has there been any feedback which helped?
- Something I'd like to get better at ...
- Things that might help or hinder ...
- Strategies or resources needed ...
- Steps to be taken ...
- What I need to find out/ think about/ do
- Dates when each step will be started, reviewed, completed
- If I get stuck I will talk to ...
- How the plan will be reviewed

Finding the targets which help students' learning

Students are more likely to feel connected to targets which:

- are related to their own learning purposes and goals
- are set *with* them rather than *for* them

It is *their* efforts which will get the targets achieved.

Targets can be unhelpful if they are vague, moralistic, re-statements of a problem, or if they seek conformity or compliance or have no endpoint. These examples from a secondary school show the point:

Julie: Do hard work in all my lessons (especially History).
Abdul: Aim to get 100% attendance next year.
Martyn: Try and get on with teachers even if I feel cross.
Charmaine: To improve my writing and spelling.
Foster: Try not to distract others.

Now compare with these targets from the same school:

Sarah: I will ask the teacher for help if I am not sure.
Richard: Go to one session at the Maths Homework Club each week.
Debra: I will talk to Mum about homework space.
Sandy: Use a dictionary to help with spellings.
Lisa: Learn 5 new words each week.

These all include a specific action linked to learning, which means it can be monitored, reviewed and lead to clear feelings of achievement.

What is the role of the form tutor or class teacher?

*"Many pupils have found the opportunity of talking with their teacher on a one-to-one basis about achievements, experiences, needs and appropriate future targets a rewarding and helpful experience that has a positive effect on their motivation."*⁷

The form tutor in the secondary school or the class teacher in the primary school may have a helpful overview of the student's performance across the curriculum, and may help them learn by comparing different strategies.

Tutors can provide the structure for a review session, helping students address each phase - review, learn, apply - with a framework such as that above.

Tutors can feel stuck if they feel they have to be the main source of strategies. Instead they can prompt students to select their credible sources through:

- their *imagination* (what might you do? What might a friend advise you to do?)
- *other credible people* (do you know of anyone who seems to be handling this sort of problem well? What might X do?)
- *thinking as a third party* (if you were advising a friend about this, what could help them achieve their goal?)
- *anticipation* (what will help me succeed or hinder me? How might others respond?)

Teachers and students alike need to learn how to use individual review and planning to support students' learning. Teachers too need a chance to review!

What is the student's contribution?

Students should be encouraged to learn about learning, especially their own learning and become independent of the teacher for reflection on their experiences. They do not always manage this, as this comment from a Year 10 pupil shows *"It's not that I haven't learnt much. It's just that I don't really understand what I am doing"*⁸. But students from early years are able to reflect on and enhance their learning⁹. The students' contribution grows as they develop a shared language with which to describe their learning. This occurs through talking about learning with each other and with teachers, and leads to more effective learning.

Some students can describe how they already set and achieve their own targets, in school and out.

Students can monitor their own progress, and can develop this into a supportive climate between peers, thus building an effective community of learners.

As the students' contribution grows, they may also learn to relate to their teachers as sources of feedback.

Distortions related to target-setting?

"All too easily target-setting can become focused on 'outcomes' and 'measures'."¹⁰

In commerce and industry, distortions which can come from target-setting are well known. In education they may include:

- narrowing the focus of our educational endeavour
- focusing on some pupils at the expense of others
- falling into the idea that schooling is to pass exams
- seeking to attract particular types of learners (and to exclude others)
- not seeing some other trends and unintended outcomes (such as the way that standardisation breeds increased division)
- using the achievement of targets to assess the performance of teachers, teams and the school
- shuffling down the layers the blame for targets not being met (LEA to school, school to subject team, subject team to individual student ...)

And finally ...

If the whole thing seems to be getting out of hand, have a laugh with the fertile imagination of Steve Bell (with many thanks for his kind permission)



by Caroline Lodge & Chris Watkins March 1999

Recommended resources and references

Association of Teachers and Lecturers (1998) *Target Setting*, London: ATL

Black P and Wiliam D (1998) *Inside the Black Box*, London: King's College School of Education

Hutchinson T & Neal T (1998) *Managing Targets*, Leicester: MAPS (SHA) Ltd

Watkins C, Carnell E, Lodge C, and Whalley C. (1996), *Effective Learning*, London: Institute of Education School Improvement Network (Research Matters series)

download free on <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/iseic/research.pdf>

Watkins C, Carnell E, Lodge C, Wagner P & Whalley C (1998), *Learning about Learning*, Coventry: National Association for Pastoral Care in Education

¹ Entwistle N (1987) *Understanding Classroom Learning*. London: Hodder and Stoughton

² Ted Wragg at Conference of Association of Teachers and Lecturers, *Hitting the Target ... Missing the Point*, June 1998

³ Dweck C (1986) "Motivational processes affecting learning", *American Psychologist*, 41, 1040-8

⁴ A Head of maths from Dyfed, quoted in "A common language" (1998) *Improving Schools* 1 (3) 14

⁵ Dennison B & Kirk R (1990) *Do, Review, Learn, Apply: a simple guide to experiential learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁶ adapted from Watkins C & Butcher J (1995) *Individual Action Planning: getting more from learning*. London: LETEC

⁷ Broadfoot P et al (1988) *Records of Achievement: report of national evaluation pilot schemes to the DES by the PRAISE team*, London, HMSO [page 158]

⁸ Harris S, Wallace G, & Rudduck J (1995) "Metacognition and secondary-school students". *Research Papers in Education*, 10(2), 253-271

⁹ Pramling I (1990) *Learning to learn: a study of Swedish preschool children*, New York: Springer-Verlag

¹⁰ Paul Sykes in Street H (1998) *Target-setting for Learning; Secondary Leadership Paper No 1*. Haywards Heath: NAHT