

CITYLIT

TEACHING AND LEARNING ISSUES
ISSUE NO 25 JANUARY 2023

Helping students own their own learning.

Learning can be described as moving from *unconscious incompetence* (I don't know - and don't know what I don't know!) to *unconscious competence* where a piece of knowledge or a skill has become so second nature that we use it without thinking about it.¹ Learning to drive a car illustrates this transition very well.

In between are the conscious stages - '*conscious incompetence*' where I realise what there is to learn and how much is involved, and '*conscious competence*' where I have acquired knowledge and skills but have to think before I use them and need more practice.

This issue is about helping people through these conscious stages – helping them be aware of what they know and don't know and where their challenges are.

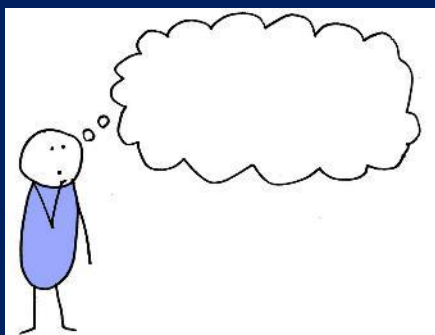
It is also about helping students articulate a vision – in the short term (in the next weeks) and the long term (after their course) that can keep them focused and on track.

Educational research² shows that students who can articulate the past, present and future in their learning - what they have learned so far, their next challenges and their longer term goals - are much more likely to achieve well. Below are some ways of helping them do this.



¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_stages_of_competence for more on the competence model...

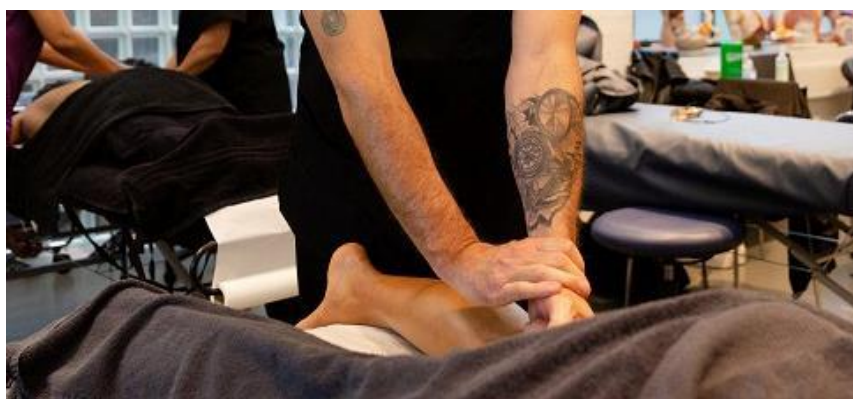
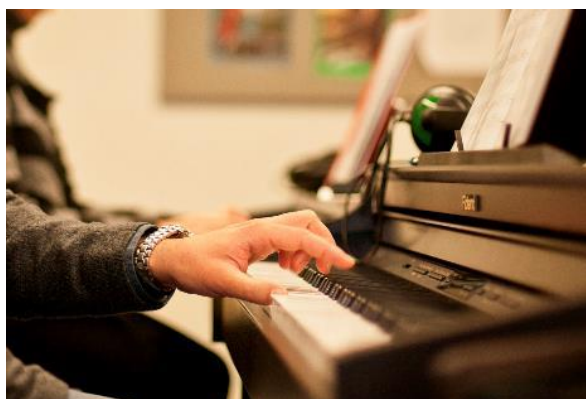
Helping our students articulate their progress, challenges and goals.



1. 'What have you learnt this morning?
2. Are you learning/making progress?
3. What is your next challenge/target?
4. Do you know what you will be learning this term/next week?
5. What are your longer-term learning goals?

Recently an Ofsted consultant visited our classes and found a lot of students were somewhat stumped by these questions not because they weren't learning, but they were unused articulating their progress, challenges and goals. Being conscious of these can really help people achieve.

Ideally students should be able to make statements along the lines of the following:



"My goal is to have a basic conversation in French with my mother-in-law. After today, I can ask and answer simple questions about my weekend using the past tense. My challenge is to remember irregular verbs and use them in conversation. We are going to learn how to describe a trip in the next couple of weeks"

"I can now explain why Northanger Abbey is often considered a Gothic novel because of Jane Austen's satiric use of Gothic characteristics. In the rest of the course we are going to look at other gothic novels from the 19th Century and discuss why they were so popular in this period. My challenge will be to identify 'Gothic' characteristics in other novels."

"My goal is to create my own website. I can access and use the WordPress software to create web pages. We are next going to learn how to put in a navigation menu to our webpages. My challenge is to make a user friendly and visually stimulating website for my business by the end of the course."

"I want to maintain my flexibility and core strength as I get older. I can see that I am able to do the poses for slightly longer each week. My challenge is to maintain this."

Five ways to help

How can teachers help? Below are 5 ways we can support students to articulate their progress, challenges and goals. You may know more!

- 1 Model personal goals for students at the start of the course
- 2 Plan time to reflect on learning at the end of each session
3. Give students something to look forward to next week
4. Plan periodic reviews
5. Use medals and missions feedback.

1 Model personal goals

We ask students to identify their personal goals on their Individual Record of Learning. They may find this difficult or be very vague. 'I want to improve my Spanish' may be their first go.

It can help to give students some example goals that are SMART (ie specific, realistic and achievable) and are based on likely reasons students come to the course, such as

- I want to prepare and give an effective presentation for work.
- I want to create an attractive website that's easy to navigate for my business...
- I want to hold a simple/more fluent conversation with my parents -in-law in Spanish.
- I want to play a piece on the piano for my family and friends.

2 Plan time to reflect at the end of each session

A great way to summarise learning at the end of a session is to ask students 3 questions such as

- What have you learned today?
- What do you want to find out/practice more?
- What are you looking forward to next week?

The questions can of course be adjusted to suit your subject and group....E.g. alternatives to the first question could be:

- What has been the most interesting thing we did today?
- What are you most proud of achieving today?

The students can write on post it notes, or online on a Jamboard ,or Google form. handed in. You will be able to think of techniques that work for your group.



3 Give students a vision of future sessions.

It's good practice to look forward to next week, or next couple of weeks, at the end of each session, giving students something to look forward to.

Students will also benefit from knowing the overall shape of a course and its topics - a week by week programme, or simply a list of topics that will be covered. The course outline does give an overview, this is often not read by students.

You can explain that the sequence may be adjusted as you go along depending on the group.

4 Include mid-course reviews and a chance to reflect.

Regular revision is very important as we know and most of us will recap the last session at the beginning of the next. But we should also be reviewing learning at least once mid-course, and again at the end. Otherwise, earlier learning can be forgotten.

There are multiple ways of doing this. If possible, use an activity where students apply what they have learned in context, - as is the case with a case study, project, role play or task.

Follow these reviews with a chance for learners to reflect on their progress

For example,

- Ask them to write an achievement and a challenge on post it notes, or on a jamboard.
or
- Get them to tell each other an achievement and a challenge in pairs, then choose a few students to feed back.
or
- Ask them to answer short questions on Google classroom (e.g. what they can do at this stage, what they want to focus on next)

5 Use 'Medals and Missions' feedback²

Using clear and constructive feedback will help learners identify their strengths and challenges.

'Medals and Missions' is a simple formula for giving effective constructive feedback. Tutors give students very specific 'medals' for what they have achieved and a 'mission' on what to work on next.

Medals

Your writing is clear and interesting, showing a good understanding of the subject
 You have used reading and research to develop your points
 Your punctuation is mainly accurate and you use a good range of vocabulary.

Missions

For your next piece, start to work on your paragraphing - paragraphs should be longer than a sentence and have an introduction, middle and end.

If you have any great ideas on how to help learners recognize their own progress and goals, please share. Send to Wendy.Moss@citylit.ac.uk

²For more on the value of effective formative assessment and medals and missions feedback see a summary by Geoff Petty of research by Black and Wiliam [BlackandWiliam2.doc \(live.com\)](#)



Learning - what's the point?

Ian Wollington, Universal Skills

What is the purpose of learning? Throughout 2021-22, tutors in Universal Skills were asking themselves and their learners this question as part of action-research funded by the Education and Training Foundation. Is it, as our ESOL, English, maths and digital skills students are so wont to say, to use phrasal verbs correctly, to punctuate accurately, to multiply fractions, to filter an Excel table?

Well, perhaps. Yes, certainly. We all need these skills. But. How do we learn them? More pertinently, what's the point?

These two questions framed our research. Along with a third: how could our learners come to ask themselves these questions?

Our strategy was twofold:

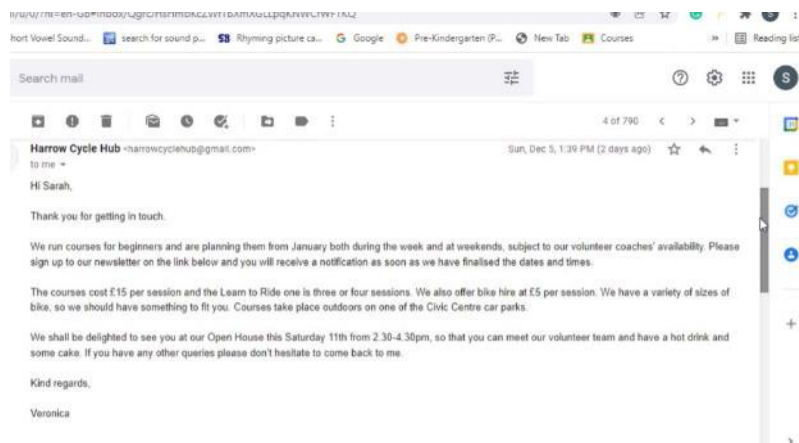
a) To investigate a task-based learning (TBL) approach within the classroom. What does this involve? How does it differ from a common (all too common) Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) methodology? And does it produce different answers to the what's the point question from the more traditional methodology?

b) To encourage learners to develop meaningful task-based targets in contrast to the more abstract competency-based ones outlined above.

We started by shrinking the issue and reducing TBL to two principles: performance before competence and meaning before form. In PPP the inverse is true. A boxer learning the jab, for example, is presented with the punch and its qualities through demonstration and questions. She then practises the punch on a bag or with pads. When ready, she enters the ring and produces the punch when necessary. For an extra bonus she reflects on what she has learned. In contrast, within TBL, a learner discovers and develops competences within performance, the purpose of what he needs to do (meaning) takes precedence over applying form (technique). We approached learners' personal targets in a similar way: focusing students on the what-for of their competency concerns, helping them choose something meaningful to do and achieve.



Pudsey Cake - Level 2 English 1



Letter from Cycling Club: task based target

Two examples manifested this approach. Level 2 English functional skills deaf students chose to raise money for Children-in-Need. They succeeded in raising over £350. Along the way, they baked cakes, altered the Pudsey Bear logo to reflect deafness, made a video of themselves asking hearing people for directions without using British Sign Language or writing, created publicity for the campaign, wrote to the BBC, created a fundraising page. And a lot more. And in so doing, developed the necessary English skills to complete these tasks.

On a Cambridge English Advanced course, an isolated ESOL learner had always wanted to learn to ride a bike. She also wanted to improve her formal register. With the help of her classmates, her task-based target became to join a cycling club: she worked on an email to her local club, received a reply and is now a cyclist. She simultaneously developed her letter-writing form. And in her own words gained the confidence to ask for things

So, back to our original questions. We learned that when the point of learning is motivated by the task, students themselves become motivated. When the purpose of their learning becomes the purpose of the task they are involved in, not of themselves, nor of the tutor, students become productive, guided and focused. For example, as part of their project reflection, the L2 English learners conducted a chat show. When asked about the posters they had to create, two learners exclaimed and referenced their response at the time: how can I reduce all the necessary information but make it interesting, how can I make it make sense, how can I grab people's attention? It was a wonderful instance of students discovering about writing for an audience, creating an effect, concision, coherence. It is an example of learning in context, in situ, out of the needs of the task. That's the point.



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