

Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility

John Almarode

Clarity in Learning

JOHN ALMARODE: What is it you want them to learn today? If I don't know, as the teacher, before I walk in that classroom tomorrow, we've got a problem. What do I want my student-- not what I want them to do. I want them to complete a worksheet. No, that's what you want them to do. What do you want them to learn? I want them to do two-digit subtraction, or learn two-digit subtraction with regrouping. Ah, now we're getting somewhere. How will you know they're successful? What will the success criteria be for the day? And can we spell it out? Do I have an image in my mind of what success looks like today, and then do I share that with the learners? What will I do along the way to monitor it? How will I check in every so often to see, are you progressing up the success criteria? Or have you hit a snag, and we need to provide some intervention or support? What tasks and experiences am I going to provide for my learners so that it gives them the highest probability of becoming proficient, or mastering the learning for that day? And then what about those that aren't on level grade level with us? What about those that haven't yet figured it out, or yet mastered it? How am I going to adjust my tasks so that all learners have an equitable access and opportunity to get into that learning? That's the equity and inclusivity of well-being. How do we make sure it is equitable and inclusive? And then the final part is, what am I going to do with this information next? How am I going to give them feedback so that they know what's next in their learning, and they don't believe that learning has somehow stopped just because the bell rang. And so, the feedback should be, here's where you are. Here's where I need you to be. And here's what you're going to do next to get there. Because it is still a process, and it is still a cycle, and the feedback is what conveys that. And so, it's those questions, it's that internal dialogue that we have to have as professionals to make sure we set up the type of environment that promotes engagement, it promotes high-impact instruction, it promotes high-outcome and high-growth learning. So, a learning target, or a learning intention is just simply, what are we learning? It's not what we're doing. It's not the task. It's what we're learning. So, for example, it might be presented to students verbally or on the board, but it might sound like this. Today, we are learning about the relationship between mass and volume and the density of a substance. That's a learning intention. It's not, we're going to do a lab on density. That's not a learning intention or a learning target. That's a task. So, a learning intention is the big idea, the concept, what are we learning? Today, we are learning about figurative language and its role in establishing author's purpose. Today, we are learning about the impact of ancient civilizations on things of today, or events, or elements of modern culture. It's the big concept. It's what we want students to understand or learn, today, the next two days, or this week. So, the learning intention can be something that stretches over a period of one or two days. But, for every learning

intention, we have very specific success criteria. And success criteria are the elements that would give us evidence that the student is progressing towards his or her learning intention. And those things need to be immediate. What are the success criteria today? What are the things that would give me evidence that students are going to show, or evidence I'm going to look for, that tells me whether they are or aren't progressing towards the learning intention? So, let's go back to the ancient civilizations learning intention. We are learning how ancient civilizations played a role in things that we do today in the modern world. One of the success criteria might be, I can list examples of ancient civilizations. I can describe the culture of ancient civilizations. And that may be all I get to today. Because tomorrow, I'm going to move it a step forward. I can compare and contrast things from ancient civilizations with things today in 2017. So, your success criteria need to be something that you can aim for and reasonably get done today. But the learning intention is the umbrella under which those success criteria fit. So, why would we need those? What's the value? If I know what the learning intention is, it allows me as the teacher to be more purposeful in my decisions about the questions I ask, the tasks I pick the direction of the class. It allows learners to answer the question, why are we doing this? Well, we're learning about ancient civilizations. Why? So, we can figure out how they played a role in some of the things we do today. Your success criteria provide the teacher and the student with clear purpose behind what they're going to do to convince you, or me, that they've got it. It informs what our formative assessments will look like. It informs what our tasks will look like. It informs what kind of feedback I'm going to give students. Because if it says I can describe the culture of ancient civilizations, then the strategies I pick had better require students to describe. And so, as a teacher, clear learning intentions and success criteria pave the way for my tasks. As a learner, it paves the way for me understanding what I'm doing, why I'm doing it, and how I'll know I've got it. So, teacher clarity is established by making sure both the teacher and the student can answer the questions, what am I learning, why am I learning it, and how do I know I've learned it? And we do this lots of different ways. So, what am I learning? If we want to make it clear to both students and teachers what we're learning, then we have to have clear learning targets or learning intentions and success criteria every single day. We have to know as teachers, and the students have to see it, understand it, and know it as well. So, why are we learning it? That's the relevancy part. What will this learning allow me to do? What will this learning allow me to do next? What's the whole idea of figuring out this particular problem, or learning this particular concept? The relevancy can be immediate. Today, I am learning about figurative language, so I can see how the author used similes and metaphors to convey his or her purpose. There's the relevancy right there. What are we learning? Figurative language. Why? So, I can see how authors use figurative language to convey a purpose. How do I know I've learned it? These are your success criteria, and the activities or tasks. In this case, it

might be when I can create my own piece of writing and use figurative language where appropriate.