

Why Learning Targets?

Excerpted from Berger, R., Rugen, L., & Woodfin, L. (2014). *Leaders of their own learning: Transforming schools through student-engaged assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

“Student-engaged assessment encompasses a wide array of practices that bring students into the process of assessing their own growth and learning. They gain a deeper sense of their progress and ultimately become more independent learners. Through student-engaged assessment, students learn the language of standards and metacognition, set academic goals and monitor progress, identify patterns of strength and weaknesses, become self-advocates, and assess their own work with honesty and accuracy.” (p. 5) Establishing a system to scaffold all students to become this kind of independent learner is culturally responsive teaching!

Assessment at its best is “when students know what is expected of them and when teachers are precisely attuned to support them in meeting academic standards.” (p. 5) Assessment is much more than a measure. If we do it right, it’s a way to “motivate students, provide models of high quality work, contribute to a sense of classroom community, and invest school activities with a strong sense of purpose.” (p. 5) Student-engaged assessment not only measures growth but also can stimulate it! “The root meaning of the word assess is ‘to sit beside, and when schools adopt student-engaged assessment practices, teachers and families will find themselves often sitting beside their students, discussing with them the quality of their work and thinking, and their plans for growth and improvement.” (p. 5)

“The most important assessments that take place in any school building are seen by no one. They take place inside the heads of students, all day long. Students assess what they do, say, and produce, and decide what is good enough. These internal assessments govern how much they care, how hard they work, and how much they learn...They set the standard for what is ‘good enough’ in class. In the end, these are the assessments that really matter. All other assessments are in service of this goal—to get inside students’ heads and raise the bar for effort and quality.” (p. 6)

“Students frequently have widely varying internal standards for quality and aren’t clear about what ‘good enough’ looks like. Some students have internalized a sense that they don’t have a value or voice in the classroom setting and that anything they do will be inferior to the work of the ‘smart kids.’ In other cases, they believe they have only one chance to do something and begin to work from a place of compliance and completion rather than working toward quality through a series of attempts.” (p. 6)

“Student-engaged assessment [starting with learning targets that articulate a clear vision of the intended learning] requires and inspires students and teachers to change their mindsets about intelligence, effort, and success. As they experience success and track actual progress, their positive mindsets strengthen. They recognize the connections among their attitude, effort, practice, and increased achievement.” (p. 7) They become independent learners.