



## After your visit 1: the learning conversation

### **DVD** DVD1 – ‘Using your findings to increase learning and the next steps’

**Overview:** You will hear Martin Skelton discussing how you record your findings of the learning conversation. He then goes on to discuss further Looking for Learning questions.

**Outcome:** By watching this you will find out more about the place of the learning conversation in the process and will be helped to begin to think about the next Looking for Learning questions.

**Options:** You could watch this clip when you are introducing learning conversations with colleagues or suggest that colleagues watch it before they have their own learning conversations.

To make good use of Looking for Learning data, classroom visits must be followed by a learning conversation.

**The follow-up learning conversation is at the heart of using the qualitative data successfully and building a bank of useful quantitative data.**

The learning conversations allow colleagues

- to reflect on the key Looking for Learning questions in light of evidence
- to come to good judgements
- to begin to reflect on classroom practice.

But there are important differences between a learning conversation and conventional feedback.

## A learning conversation

### 1 Discusses *learning before teaching*

This is the key rule of a learning discussion. Our past practice and culturalisation, our natural willingness to want to help and support our colleagues and our own unavoidable reflections as observers on our own classrooms makes it very difficult for people to avoid talking about teaching, classroom activity or even classroom display first.

The golden rule of the Looking for Learning conversation is this:

*No discussion can take place about anything else until we have defined whether learning was taking place, what it was and whether it was appropriate and sufficient. Then – and only then – can we discuss the teacher's actions and the school's contribution.*

### 2 Is structured around the seven key Looking for Learning questions

The learning discussion is a very focused and professional discussion. Following on from the point above, the discussion follows strictly the order of the Looking for Learning key questions. This structure helps to focus the discussion, makes sure that less time is wasted and provides permission for either colleague in the discussion to bring the other back to the structure if they wander off.

### 3 Is forward focused

The ultimate point of the discussion is

- a) to increase the amount and appropriateness of the learning children and students achieve and
- b) to enable a teacher, through reflection, to improve the way they facilitate learning in their classroom.

Looking for Learning is, therefore, *about improvement rather than blame*. We strongly recommend that schools using Looking for Learning make sure that they also have a 'competency' procedure as well. The purpose of the competency procedure is to deal with issues relating to the professional competence of teachers to stay in their job. The evidence-based discussion process in Looking for Learning requires teachers at times to face some uncomfortable issues about their classrooms, even though they are at least competent professionals. Fewer teachers are likely to be rigorous in their discussions if they think (or know) that less positive evidence is going to be used against them.

#### **4 Leaves most teachers feeling empowered**

We have said a number of times that teachers should feel stronger as a result of taking part in the Looking for Learning process. This means that they should be encouraged to think and analyse as much as possible. The observer should be the facilitator who has usefully gathered some evidence that will form the basis of the discussion, but it is the teacher who should be learning and the teacher's brain that should be working hardest. Then the changes will happen to them rather than, or as well as, the observer.

#### **5 Has mutual benefit**

See above!

#### **6 Is evidence based**

Here is the second golden rule of Looking for Learning.

*There is a huge difference between two teachers just meeting to chew the fat and two teachers having a learning conversation, and that difference is evidence.*

As you move through the seven key questions both observer and teacher should be free to challenge each other on the evidence they are using to support the judgements they are making. *Without evidence, any statements made are opinions, not judgements.* And opinions are inadmissible in Looking for Learning.

#### **7 Ends in action planning**

At the end of the learning discussion, the teacher should accept responsibility for taking some action to improve or sustain their facilitation of the learning in their classroom. The observer should accept responsibility for developing their skills as an observer.

In the same way, as the school begins to accumulate quantitative data, it should take responsibility for using that data to develop genuine learning-focused targets for the school improvement plan and other improvement related systems and structures that are in use.

On the following pages is a suggested structure for a learning conversation, together with guidance and examples from our own conversations.



# 1 A paradigm shift in attitude

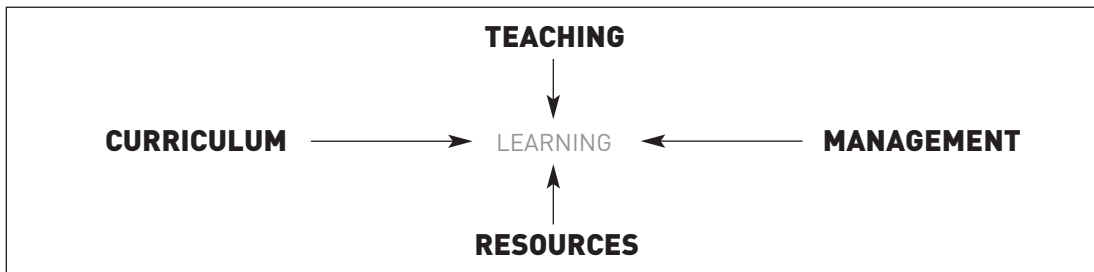
## **DVD** DVD1 – ‘Background’

**Overview:** You will hear Martin Skelton talking about a paradigm shift in education – the move from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.

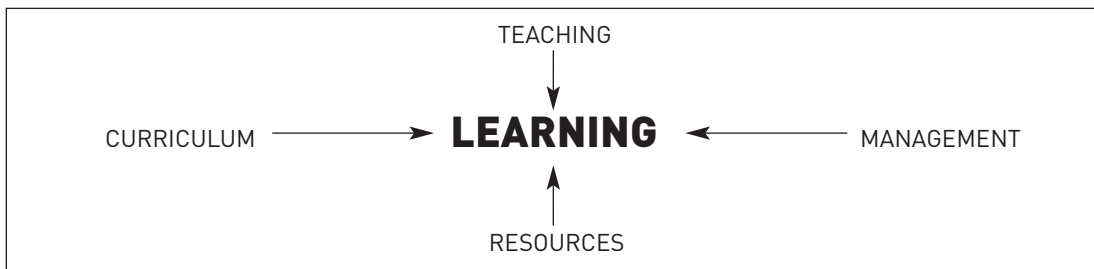
**Outcome:** You’ll increase your knowledge and understanding of this shift and the differences between learning and Teaching for Learning.

**Options:** You can use this for you and your colleagues to learn more about the shift and to help you consider if the focus is on learning or teaching in your school.

### Have we been doing this for too long?



### When we should have been doing this?



We can think of what we do in schools as a little like a learning machine. And up until now, the dominant theory has been that as long as all the components are in place and functioning properly, all we need to do is pull the right levers and press the right buttons, and the learning will happen.

The first diagram on the previous page however makes a dangerous assumption – and it’s one that is easy to make: if we can only get a number of undoubtedly important levers right and pull them at the right time, then the end product will be created so efficiently that we don’t need actually to focus on it. In other words, as long as, for example, teaching, resources and curriculum are in place and management is effective, learning will happen. All over the world, accreditation and inspection models perpetuate this notion by focusing on levers like these.

The lever schools have most recently been asked to pull is ‘Teaching’, with the result that we now have numerous lists of what defines ‘good’ teaching, any number of rubrics defining teaching in action and far too many people sitting at the back of classrooms watching teachers teach.

*But it’s simply not good enough to assume that because a teacher does ‘A’, ‘B’ or ‘C’ in a classroom then learning is happening.*

This is no more the case than saying someone is a stand-up comedian because they dress like ‘A’, stand at a microphone like ‘B’ and tell stories like ‘C’. Comedy clubs are where people laugh; not where individuals act in certain ways. Those actions may lead to laughter, but they may not. Classrooms should be places where children and students learn; not where teachers perform certain actions. Those teaching actions may lead to learning, but they may not.

(There are perfectly good reasons for what has happened, not least that as governments and authorities want to determine what they are getting for the ever-increasing amounts of money that are being put into education, they want whatever evidence they can use as quickly as possible. So they pull the relatively unsophisticated levers of teaching, management, curriculum and resources precisely because the very sophisticated levers about learning are more complex and too difficult to pull. When governments do try to pull a learning lever, they inevitably pull the crudest one; national and state testing.)

Looking for Learning, though, asks a radical question.

***Instead of focusing all our efforts on teaching, curriculum, resources and management and hoping that learning will appear in the centre, why don’t we start with learning and work outwards?***

It is learning that should be the driver, the key factor, the major influencer and player in all our decision-making processes in schools. **Learning should not be seen as a lucky by-product of school activity; it should be its core purpose.**



## 3 The learning-focused dashboard

### **DVD** DVD1 – ‘The learning dashboard’

**Overview:** You will hear Martin Skelton explaining our term ‘the learning-focused dashboard’ and discussing what it will display.

**Outcome:** You’ll increase your knowledge and understanding about the different kinds of learning data that your school should have on its dashboard.

**Options:** You can use it as an introduction to the ‘learning-focused dashboard’ for your colleagues. You can begin to compare the data that you already have in your school against what is described in the dashboard.

Analogies help us to make sense of situations and to bring structure to our ideas. One particular analogy that we have found really useful is the one we refer to as the **learning-focused dashboard**.

Almost every car has a dashboard containing a range of dials. The point of this dashboard is that it allows the driver of a car to keep an eye on the key information that tells her the car is running well. Most dashboards enable the driver at least to check speed, mileage, fuel availability, engine speed and water and oil temperatures. Together, these dashboard dials provide the information which informs the driver that the car is functioning well and that she is driving safely, legally, economically and so on.

Of course, there’s lots more going on in the car than that which is conveyed by the dashboards. Sparkplugs are working, cylinders are moving up and down, the exhaust pipe is discharging gases and so on. All of these elements are vital to the running of the car. For most of the time, though, the driver doesn’t need (and couldn’t cope with) all of the information that is potentially available. So car designers decide what key information a driver does need to know and focus on providing that information as effectively as possible.

Now let’s use that analogy for learning, teachers, students, schools and Looking for Learning.

First, we can make an important link between the car's dashboard and the classroom and school. The dashboard displays the *evidence* that the car is running well, doing what it should be doing. But it's significant that the dashboard is displaying *the key evidence and not all of the evidence*.

In this respect, the car dashboard fits nicely with current thinking about assessment in schools. This says that as we can't assess or evaluate everything a child or student has learned (there's too much of it and we don't have time) we need to define what the most important evidence might be and then find the best ways to make the assessment or evaluation of that as reliable and valid as possible. *Assessment and evaluation are processes of inference not completeness*.

This applies to single subjects as much as it does to the whole curriculum. It's why teachers engage with students in the process of trying to second-guess what questions will come up in exams. It's why when we are trying to decide whether someone can ride a bicycle we choose key criteria against which we can form our judgements such as balance, steering and braking. We don't assess and evaluate everything they are doing.

**Now let's transfer the dashboard idea to your school and to the classrooms in your school.** Focused as you are on learning, very similar questions need to concern you as concern car designers. At the very least, you probably need to decide:

- What is the most important evidence a learning-focused school or classroom must have?
- What would give us comfort that our learning-focused school is working well?
- What would the dashboard of a learning-focused school or classroom contain?
- What should we be looking at every time we get into the 'learning car' and every time we 'drive' it?

**Putting it even more simply,**

- What is the minimum evidence a teacher needs to know that her classroom is a learning classroom where children and students make genuine progress?
- What is the minimum evidence the management and leadership of a school needs to know that the school is a place where learning takes place most of the time?

These questions are vital because, once we have the evidence in front of us, we can probably 'drive' our learning 'car' with much more confidence. But without the evidence, we are likely to be in a perpetual state of uncertainty, responding to every small change of noise and vibration as the school or classroom year progresses.

**Here is a list of some evidence that schools use that *don't* provide us with that information.**

- The quality of display in a classroom or on a wall. (This might tell you how artistic the teacher is, how hard the teacher works, how much work the children or students have produced and so on. Unless it is a particularly well-produced learning-focused display, though, it isn't going to tell you much about learning.)
- The number of courses a colleague attends. (This might tell you about how keen your colleague is about his own learning, how quickly he wants promotion, how little of a personal life he has got, but it won't tell you much about the learning that's taking place in his classroom.)
- The affection children and students have for teachers or school leaders. (Children and students like teachers for all sorts of reasons. The reasons they most frequently give are having a sense of humour, keeping control and giving them lots to do. All of these are good reasons to like a teacher, but none of them guarantees that the teaching is resulting in learning.)
- The sharing of learning outcomes with children and students at the beginning of lessons. (This is not unimportant and does suggest that the lesson might have some focus to it, but it doesn't tell you that learning is happening any more than saying you are going to run five kilometres today is proof that you have.)

This list could go on and on but you are probably getting the idea by now. This huge amount of the evidence we spend much time collecting is telling us *something*; it's just that it's not telling us much about how much *learning is going on*.

## **WHAT SHOULD OUR 'LEARNING-FOCUSED DASHBOARD' DISPLAY?**

### **1 The learning that the children and students already have at the start of a unit or programme of work and how consolidated it is.**

Close to the beginning of each unit of work in *The International Primary Curriculum* is a step called the 'Knowledge Harvest'.

To carry this out, teachers work with children, using a variety of techniques, in order to find out what it is that the children already know about the unit in question.

In doing so they assess two kinds of 'know':

- 'knowing that' (the factual knowledge)
- 'knowing how' (the skills).

### **THE KEY STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEARNING-FOCUSED SCHOOLS AND OTHER SCHOOLS**

	<u>Learning-focused schools</u>	<u>Other schools</u>
'Planning' structures and systems	Systemise the way in which the key planning devices of the school drive learning.	Often pay equal attention to the importance of systemising key planning devices but don't focus them around learning.
'Meetings' structures and systems	Minimise the number of meetings people have to attend; maximise the focus of each meeting on learning and learning-related issues.	Often hold unnecessary meetings and focus them too often on relatively low-level administrative matters.
'Monitoring' structures and systems	Create learning-focused structures and systems and are clear about the need to check frequently on their effectiveness.	Often know the need for structures and systems but make assumptions that once created they will be effective.
'Feedback' structures and systems	Focus all feedback throughout the school on learning and only then on what has affected the learning.	Often provide feedback but usually about activity or process, making an assumption that high activity or complex processes will self-evidently produce learning.
'Other' structures and systems	Are aware that there are appropriate ways to systemise many activities in the school and focus them positively on learning.	Allow significant activities of school life to happen without a learning focus, so much so that they often outnumber learning-focused activities or diminish their importance.

**The learning-focused school – Structures and Systems Rubric 7**  
**PARENT/CARER INFORMATION MEETINGS**

<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Mastering</b>	<b>Your judgement</b>
<p>The school organises information meetings for parents and carers. Most of the time they focus on what the children and students have done or are going to do or what the teachers are going to organise for their children. Essentially, parent information meetings are reports about activity.</p>	<p>The school organises parent/carer information meetings. They still focus mainly on activities that are taking place in the school although some reference is made to the learning that children and students will make.</p>	<p>The school organises parent/carer information meetings. They are focused principally around learning: what children and students learn, how they learn and how parents can help.</p> <p>The school spends some time talking about activities but only in the context of the learning they want children and students to achieve.</p>	

and core skills because they have looked at the evidence and come to a conclusion that this is the best they can do under the circumstances. Others take exactly the same decision through a knee-jerk allegiance to the past. At least the first group of schools has considered the evidence.

**THE KEY EVIDENCE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN  
LEARNING-FOCUSED SCHOOLS AND OTHER SCHOOLS**

	<u>Learning-focused schools</u>	<u>Other schools</u>
Evidence of learning in action	Have evidence that is directly related to the learning they have decided is important for children and students to achieve.	Have limited evidence that doesn't adequately cover all of the learning the school has decided it is important for children and students to learn.
Evidence about learning in the classroom	Have evidence about the amount and quality of learning that goes on daily in classrooms and about how teachers and the school affect this learning.	Have very limited evidence about learning in classrooms and make assumptions that evidence about teaching and resources etc. allows judgements to be made about learning.
Evidence about the factors that affect learning	Have evidence about the impact on learning of various claims made for different strategies and products.	Either don't think about new strategies or products that might impact on learning OR adopt them uncritically to give the appearance of being learning focused.

**THE KEY INDIVIDUAL PASSIONS AND BELIEFS DIFFERENCES  
BETWEEN LEARNING-FOCUSED SCHOOLS AND OTHER SCHOOLS**

	Learning-focused teachers and leaders	Other teachers and leaders
Have a sense of the 'other'	Can focus on the perspectives and needs of others as well as their own.	Are more likely to be (implicitly or explicitly) concerned with focusing on their own perspectives and needs first.
Are learners	Are concerned to learn about learning and how it is facilitated. Are also reflectively engaged in the process of learning from which they can derive insights about the learners for whom they are responsible.	Are happy to know something about teaching and learning but are more likely to rely on a series of, for them, tried and tested strategies. Are not always engaged in their own learning and have less useful experiences of their own from which to derive insights into the learning of those for whom they are responsible.
Are outcome rather than activity focused	Are almost always more concerned about the academic, social, emotional, physical and spiritual outcomes that derive from the activities they create than about the activities themselves.	See success more in terms of the success of the activities they have planned than in terms of the contribution of those activities to learning.
Have a big picture	Are driven by their own personal hedgehog concept about learning that enables them to put into context much of what happens in schools.	Are less likely to have a learning hedgehog concept and may not have a hedgehog concept of any kind. This causes them to become overly affected by the sheer weight of things that happen in schools.

*continued ...*

	Learning-focused teachers and leaders	Other teachers and leaders
Have a forensic attention to detail	Are willing and able to look at the many different factors that affect learning and consider the impact of each in turn and act on their considerations.	Even if they have a learning hedgehog concept, they may make assumptions that this is, in itself, enough to facilitate learning. In doing so, they don't pay sufficiently detailed attention to the factors that affect learning.
Are multi-faceted	Are able to bring a wide repertoire of strategies to play, which enables them to respond more appropriately to others and to different situations.	Are likely to rely only on a narrow range of tried and tested strategies which limit their ability to respond appropriately to others.
Have a wide range of conventional teaching skills	Have a wide range of conventional and widely accepted teaching skills which they put to the service of learning.	May have a range of conventional teaching skills but often believe that learning will follow automatically from their use.
Are resilient	Are willing and able to draw on reserves of resilience and positivity to help them through times when facilitating learning in the classroom or school is difficult.	Find it harder to overcome what others see as the expected difficulties of facilitating learning and this often hampers their success.

**THE KEY COLLECTIVE PASSIONS AND BELIEFS DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEARNING-FOCUSED SCHOOLS AND OTHER SCHOOLS**

	Learning-focused groups and teams	Other groups and teams
Balance the individual and the collective	Are able to accommodate learning-focused individual passions, attributes and skills alongside the collective behaviours of the school.	Either allow individual behaviours to dominate so that collective action is difficult to generate or demand so much collective responsibility that there is no room for individual passion.
Integrate the new and the experienced	See the combination of 'new' and 'experienced' as complementary and beneficial.	See the combination of 'new' and 'experienced' as competitive and divisive.
Work on the principle of 'different, therefore equal'	Only favour different bodies of knowledge, skill sets and dispositions on the grounds of appropriateness to the issue.	Develop a ring-fenced sense of what is allowable, and overtly reject difference even when it could be appropriate and beneficial.
Accommodate feelings as well as ideas	Are aware that their collective success is bound up in a mix of both rational and emotional ideas about what to do. Both are allowed to be discussed.	Focus on either rationality or emotions to the detriment of progress. Decisions often appear to be rational, with the emotional component hidden.
Are assertive, not aggressive	Are able to have discussions and decision making with each other in a spirit of respect for each other's views and opinions which do not seem as personal.	Are not able to present different ideas to each other without situations becoming inflamed (either overtly or hidden).
Work from consent, not consensus	Focus 'ownership' around the hedgehog concept of learning, and give their mutual consent to put whatever actions are agreed into practice.	Demand a usually impossible-to-achieve ownership from everyone on almost every issue in the school. Can't move forward unless everyone is personally and fully on-board.

*continued ...*

	Learning-focused groups and teams	Other groups and teams
Are mutually self-regulating	As well as working with each other, are continually engaged in reviewing the process of improving learning as well as the outcomes, providing feedback to appropriate groups of colleagues.	May focus on outcomes but the process is either left to individual implementation or monitored ineffectively by too few people.
Are aware of the situational context of learning	Know that one size does not fit all and are capable of allowing the same group of people to put different strategies into practice on the basis of appropriateness.	Believe that one size must always fit all. Create a pathological sense of consistency that hinders progress in learning.
Deal with both 'now' and the 'future'	Are able to prioritise the work that needs to be done 'now' whilst at the same time combining current busyness with an acknowledgement that future improvements in learning have to be planned for.	Are so wrapped up in the unfocused busyness of now that planning for future improvements in learning is rarely attempted.
Can be focused, ambiguous, uncertain and imperfect at the same time	Combine an awareness that focus is essential for the development of learning with an awareness of the complexity of learning and its messiness. Are able to define outcomes for themselves that are challenging and achievable but not unrealistic.	Either are overly focused and continually set back when things don't work out as planned or use the messiness of school life as a reason for failing to plan improvements in learning or achieve them.

## 4 How to write success criteria

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Success criteria help you come to a decision that you have achieved your target when the target itself is not explicitly clear about the outcome. That's why you need success criteria with expressive targets but not with instructional targets.

Think of success criteria as indicators of achievement. Because your target cannot be explicit, success criteria provide an indication of what a successful outcome might look like. Because they only provide an indication, it is a good idea to have a few different success criteria so that your judgement is a more rounded one.

To write success criteria, therefore, you simply need to ask yourself the question 'If we become successful at reaching our target, what would that success look like?' For our friends visiting the city, 'Having a good time' might mean:

- They had disagreements while they were away together but no arguments that caused the group to fragment.
- They spent time together but they could also have time on their own or in smaller groupings.
- Everyone did at least one thing they wanted to.
- On their return home, they all genuinely felt that they would like to go away together again.

Our group of friends decide that, taken together, evidence that these different descriptors occurred will give them the indication they want that they all had 'a good time'.

Lfl3 contains a number of rubrics that describe progress towards the definition of a learning-focused school. Rubrics are, in effect, success criteria. Because we can't say precisely what it means to be at Beginning, Developing and Mastering stages each rubric provides the indicator that helps us to make the decision.

## TO CONCLUDE

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Clear targets are the most important feature of any plan or planning process. With a few simple questions, many targets can be written explicitly. Where they can't, success criteria provide an indication of whether success has been achieved. Spending time at the beginning creating clearer targets saves huge amounts of time later on.



# How to write learning-focused targets

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## THE BIG PICTURE

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As learning is the hedgehog concept of learning-focused schools, learning should be at the centre of the school's planning work. We call plans that start with a focus on learning Learning Improvement Plans (see LfL3, pp. 89–92, for more on our distinction between Learning Improvement Plans and School Improvement Plans). All of the targets in this plan should be about learning.

What often happens in schools is that most of the targets are about anything but learning, and the 'learning' ones are confusing. Look at the following four targets all taken from actual improvement plans:

- To develop a professional learning community.
- To develop inquiry questions.
- To introduce interactive white boards to all HS classes.
- To introduce a new science programme of study.

There is nothing wrong with these targets per se. It's just that they are not about learning – they are all means to the end of improving learning. Achieving these targets will not necessarily improve learning or impact on it in any positive way.

A successful outcome to the first two will result in a change in teacher behaviour, not student learning. What would be the point of spending a whole year reading about and developing professional learning communities if the focus of the community was more about teachers than about the children's learning?

A successful outcome of the second two targets will affect resources and hardware. But there is no guarantee that introducing a new science programme improves learning; and what really would be the point of spending all year introducing the very expensive interactive white boards if they had no impact on learning whatsoever?

Learning improvement plans should have targets that are explicitly about learning. If this happens, a successful outcome will also be about learning. This section provides guidance about how to write learning-focused targets.

## THE DETAIL

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### 1 Use evidence

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All targets should be supported by and derived from evidence. In LfL1 we described our concept of the 'learning-focused dashboard' which, like a car dashboard, contains four main dials to show that key areas in a school are functioning effectively:

- that there is evidence about children's and students' learning at the start of a programme or unit of work;
- that there is evidence of their learning at the end of the programme or unit;
- that there is evidence from the assessment and evaluation of their ongoing work in class;
- and, most importantly for us, that there is therefore evidence of the extent to which children and students are learning hour-by-hour, lesson-by-lesson and day-by-day in the classroom.

Taken together this learning dashboard provides a considerable amount of data that, through the process of disaggregation, can be turned into information.

As a result of this process you will have either hard evidence about student learning:

'All our students score below the internationally recognised reading standard for their age'

or medium-hard evidence:

'Our "assessment for learning" programme suggests that by the age of twelve no child at the appropriate Mastering level in science skills'

or soft evidence:

'We can't quite put our finger on it but it feels to us that this year's children's fiction writing is not as good as it has been in the past.'

Once you have disaggregated your evidence, you can then begin to form targets.

### 2 Focus first and explicitly on student learning

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Next, make sure that any targets you create are learning targets. The reason for this is that you will quickly see that many traditional targets, such as 'introducing a new science programme of study', are likely to become action steps towards the learning target rather than the target itself.

Look at the information your evidence is providing you with and try to turn it into a learning improvement target. So

All our students score below the internationally recognised reading standard for their age'

might become

'Within two years our students will reach the internationally recognised reading standard for their age.'

Producing a target like this begins the process with student learning.

### **3 Think about instructional and expressive targets**

Next, try to make your targets as instructional as possible. (See the previous section for more on instructional and expressive targets.) Essentially, this means making sure that the target says exactly what you want it to say.

Consider again the target above about reading.

- This might cause you to think about the entry-level abilities of your students and decide that not all of them are capable of achieving the performance your target currently describes.
- Alternatively, following investigation you might decide that the problem lies in the ability of you and your colleagues to teach reading to children and students for whom English is not their first language and that only an extensive period of professional development can remedy the current weaknesses amongst the staff or faculty.

These reflections might cause you to re-word your target to something like:

'By the end of the next but one academic year, 80% of our students will be reading at the internationally recognised reading standard for their age, as measured by the test currently used in 2009.'

This is getting to be a much better learning target. You might then want to keep the focus on learning by re-working it one more time to something like:

'By the end of the next but one academic year, we will have helped our students develop their learning in reading so that 80% of them will be reading at the internationally recognised reading standard for their age, as measured by the test currently used in 2009.'

This target is even better. It is also instructional, in the sense that you have made explicit the outcomes and the improvements you expect to see in two years. It doesn't mean that you are satisfied with this improvement, and in two years' time you may choose to improve it still further. But it does make explicit an improvement in student learning that you consider to be important, and the actual target that you are aiming for.

## 4 Use the 'What's the issue?' question

We saw earlier that some of your evidence can be soft evidence. Our example was about children's learning in fiction writing:

'We can't quite put our finger on it but it feels to us that this year's children's fiction writing is not as good as it has been in the past.'

This is soft evidence because in lieu of the fact that you have no other assessments to hand, it emerges from feelings that you and your colleagues have.

You still need to make this into a target, though. By using the 'What's the issue?' question you can help yourselves focus in on the learning.

It's difficult to use this question on paper and easier to use it in conversation. But we'll try. Let's take a target we've seen in an improvement plan, a target that was written in good faith following similar soft evidence to that which produced our earlier target. The following is a dialogue that one of us has had in one of our schools.

Us: What's the target you have?

School: To improve children's writing.

What's the issue?

What do you mean?

What is it about children's writing that you particularly want to improve? Is it all poor, throughout the school?

Oh no. We need to improve children's extended writing skills

What's the issue?

What do you mean?

What is it about children's extended writing skills in particular?

Well, they need to write longer pieces of writing.

What's the issue? Don't they write any longer pieces of work?

Well, the children only write short pieces when they report on their International Primary Curriculum activities

So, what's the issue?

We feel that the children should be able to report on their IPC activities using more extended pieces of writing

Is this the whole issue? Is it true for all children in the school, for example?

No, some children are able to do this very well. We'd like all children from upper Milepost 2 to be able to do this. That's where we think the improvement can be made.



**The learning-focused school – Individual Passions and Beliefs Rubric 3**  
**A FOCUS ON OUTCOMES RATHER THAN ACTIVITY**

<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Mastering</b>	<b>Your judgement</b>
<p>Individuals are aware that the actual learning of children, students and adults is what matters. They may still confuse the actual learning with the learning-focused activities in which they or their learners are engaged. They may also continue to focus on a narrow range of learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Individuals are focused on the learning outcomes of children, students and adults as what matters. They are able to encompass a widening range of outcomes that include but go beyond academic outcomes. Generally, they see activities as facilitating the learning but may not hold this view consistently.</p>	<p>Individuals are clearly focused on – and possibly driven by – learning outcomes and know that activities are the means by which much learning is facilitated. They judge the quality of their work on the learning their children, students and others have achieved and judge the activities they have planned on the way they contributed to that learning. They are able to work with academic outcomes but also with other important learning outcomes such as personal, social, physical and spiritual learning.</p>	