

### Survey Question

### 13. This teacher explains why we are learning what we are learning

#### Australian Professional Standard

Professional Knowledge Domain

Standard 3: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

Focus areas:

- 3.2 Plan, structure and sequence learning programs
- 3.4 Select and use resources
- 3.5 Use effective classroom communication

#### What does this sound like in the classroom?

"I like the way this teacher is able to tell us why what we are doing in class is important. It's a bit selfish, but If I can't see how it's going to help me, I find it hard to stay interested in what we are doing."

#### Why is this important?

Learning intentions need to be both well-designed and well-delivered to students (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Well-designed learning intentions make clear to students the type or level of performance they need to attain. Teachers need to decide how to break down curriculum documents into a series of learning intentions. They should relate to the overall curriculum aim and not just list the task to be completed (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). They should be appropriately challenging and lessons should be structured around students reaching the goals, which means the plan related to learning intentions may need to be adapted to different student learning rates and starting points (Hattie, 2012).

Learning intentions should be shared with, and explicitly taught to, students. Students need to have a deep understanding of what is required, what success looks like and how the tasks relate to the intention (Hattie, 2012). They need to understand what they will be learning and why they are learning it, and they should be able to describe this (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Each lesson or unit should be concluded by referring to the learning intention and helping students understand how much closer they are to the success criteria (Hattie, 2012).

#### What strategies have been shown to work in the classroom?

A good starting point for educators is to try and answer this question themselves. Why **are** students learning what they are learning in the classroom? Is it relevant to their daily lives now? And will it be relevant to their daily lives as adults? It goes without saying that many of our students will be fulfilling jobs in the future that don't exist today, so sometimes it can

be challenging to forecast which 'skills' are most necessary. In addition to the traditional basics of education, 21<sup>st</sup> century students must develop the 'soft' skills communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity in order to be successful in the future.

Teachers undertake much planning in preparation for their classes – scoping and sequencing year-long curricula before breaking it down into neat little packages. But students are not always able to differentiate between the activity and the actual learning that is meant to happen. Carefully framing the learning intention will help direct students to the learning that is about to happen, but there is a need to go further, for the student will be asking: Why is this important to me? The answer will generally fit into one of two categories: the learning is important for progression in school (academic skills) or the learning is important for progression beyond the school gates (life skills). The onus to explain the former will generally sit with the teacher, whereas the latter can be discussed by students as well.

Munro discusses the importance of transparency for students when sharing why the learning needs to occur, recommending that it can be beneficial to inform students of the topics to be learnt, providing class study and topic programs, and working with students to prepare assignment schedules. When students understand clearly the value, purpose, and procedures for the learning activities within a course and the logic by which teachers arrived at their design, they are more likely to see the **value** of what they are being asked to learn and consequently will participate more fully in the course.

What three things can I try in my classroom tomorrow?

1. Provide a learning plan for the students to follow for your current unit. It may be a simple one page document that maps out the unit, the overarching topics or themes (sometimes called the 'big questions' or 'enduring understandings') and how the knowledge and skills will build towards the completion of a research task or major assessment.
2. Make links to the world outside the classroom and how the knowledge and skills will serve the students in 'real life'.
3. Ask the students to share why they think it is important to learn what they are learning. If they can make connections to the real world about the relevance of the learning that is happening inside your classroom, they will find purpose and engagement (and probably a few reasons that we, as adults, would never think of!).

What opportunities are there for collaboration with my colleagues?

Create a learning plan for your students for the unit/term/semester/year that can become a reference point for students to follow and track their progress in your subject. The document may simply be an abbreviated version of your curriculum delivery templates, and should be referred to at key points during class to show students how they are building upon foundational knowledge and skills.

## Where can I find out more?

### Referenced articles, books and other great reads:

- Aakune, Aaron. Why are we learning this? April 3, 2011. Accessed 12 October 2015.
- Hattie, J. (2009) Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement. Routledge.
- Mendler, A. (2013). Why do we need to learn this? Edutopia, January 23 2013. Accessed June 2015
- Munro, J. (undated) Accessed June 2015
- Whitaker, T. (2012) (2ed.) What Great Teachers do Differently: 17 things that matter most: Chapter 14 Base Every Decision on the Best People