

Show & Tell: A Video Column / Transfer Goals for Deeper Learning

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For more than a decade, much of the focus of curriculum and instruction has been on teaching skills and strategies. In reading, for example, we have taught our students to predict, summarize, visualize, identify the main idea, connect the text with what they know, and so on.

The problem is that such skills and strategies operate at the surface level. Although surface-level learning is an essential first step (after all, learners need to grasp the literal meaning before they can make inferences, perform analyses, and develop meaningful understandings), it's not sufficient. Students need to deepen their knowledge as they transfer what they've learned to new situations. We believe that transfer is a key component for ensuring that students become lifelong learners.

Speaking and Listening Goals

With our colleagues, we've embarked on a journey to develop transfer goals for students at our school. We asked ourselves, what do we want students to take with them from year to year and after graduation? We wanted to reach schoolwide agreements about the thinking our students should do across curriculum standards, across grades, and across content areas.

Working in collaborative teams, we developed transfer goals in the following areas: writing arguments with evidence, speaking and listening, reading complex texts, thinking mathematically, and understanding and implementing the scientific method. Five broad goals seemed like a reasonable number for our school. We invited student government members to design posters listing the transfer goals as they applied to each grade level, and we hung these posters in every classroom.

The first transfer goal that our faculty adopted related to speaking and listening. Here are the ways we decided to build students' essential speaking and listening skills as they progress through the grade levels:

- In 9th grade, we focus on knowing how to listen to someone who knows something you don't know and to ask clarifying questions.
- In 10th grade, we focus on being open and respectful enough to imagine that a new and strange idea is worth paying attention to.
- In the upper division (11th and 12th grades), students learn to ask questions about widespread assumptions or confusions.

This agreement allowed all of our teachers, across content areas and grade levels, to align our lessons with a greater purpose. For instance, a 10th grade biology teacher integrated the speaking and listening transfer goal into instruction as the students studied the extinction of species. Students engaged in a discussion about the role of zoos, trying to determine their answer to the question, *Are zoos humane places to keep animals?* At the outset of the lesson, students chose their initial response to the question (strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree) and met with others who had similar opinions in one of four labeled corners of the classroom. Each group elected a spokesperson to share the thinking of the group in an effort to recruit other students to its corner.

As students started their discussions, the teacher pointed to a framed poster on which the transfer goals were written, saying, "We're exploring ideas, and some ideas may be strange to you. Remember that we're listening with respect and we're open to considering ideas that might be different from our own."

Once the teams reconfigured themselves on the basis of their arguments, they examined nine articles on related topics, ranging from zoo abuse cases to zoo breeding programs for endangered species. As students explored the ideas in these articles, their teacher noted, "Remember, we're open to new ideas, especially ones that don't line up with your own. Some of the information in these articles will challenge your thinking. You don't have to agree, but I hope you'll think about what the authors are saying."

See It in Action: A Transfer Goal for Younger Students

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar16/vol73/num06/Transfer-Goals-for-Deeper-Learning.aspx>

Transfer goals don't only apply to older students. In fact, primary teachers are always striving for transfer of learning.

In the [video](#) that accompanies this column, kindergarten teacher Hilda Martinez helps her students understand that reading serves many purposes, and that we can choose different texts for different purposes. She has posted the following transfer goal in her classroom: "Readers understand that we read for different purposes. We read for enjoyment, and to find out new information about the world. We also read to learn about others, both imaginary and real."

Ms. Martinez's students are anticipating the coming Thanksgiving holiday. They've been learning that people read recipes to help them cook, they read maps to navigate, and they read fiction, as one girl says, "Because I love stories." Last week, Ms. Martinez's students generated questions they had about turkeys. To show them how reading serves the purpose of finding information, she shows them two informational texts that provide the answers to some of their questions—a book called *Ground Birds* and a poster she got from another teacher.

In the discussion, Ms. Martinez explicitly describes for students how she used the library, consulted the reference librarian, and asked her friends in order to find the specific information the class was seeking. She then models for the students how she located that information in the two texts. The students are excited to see how reading can provide the answers to their questions. Although they're still new to reading, they're already developing a sense of why people read—a valuable understanding that they will transfer to their learning throughout life.

Habits for Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learners are, by definition, people who are equipped to move their own learning forward. The tools and skills students need to take charge of their own learning make up many of the transfer goals that are central to PK–12 schooling. We believe that teams of teachers should work collaboratively to identify the transfer goals that represent their school's values and their beliefs about the curriculum students should master. Unlike grade-level or course skills that describe a specific knowledge base, transfer goals are the intellectual habits that make skills meaningful.