



EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Using Learning Targets over the Long Term

Excerpts from Leaders of Their Own Learning

There are many layers to learning targets. Writing and using discrete learning targets for daily lessons is the first step in gaining facility with the practice. Employing learning targets for longer-term goals takes this work one step further, requiring that teachers consider the more sophisticated features of the practice:

- Prioritizing and contextualizing Common Core, state, and local standards
- Using long-term and supporting learning targets
- Integrating character learning targets
- Aligning standards, targets, and assessments

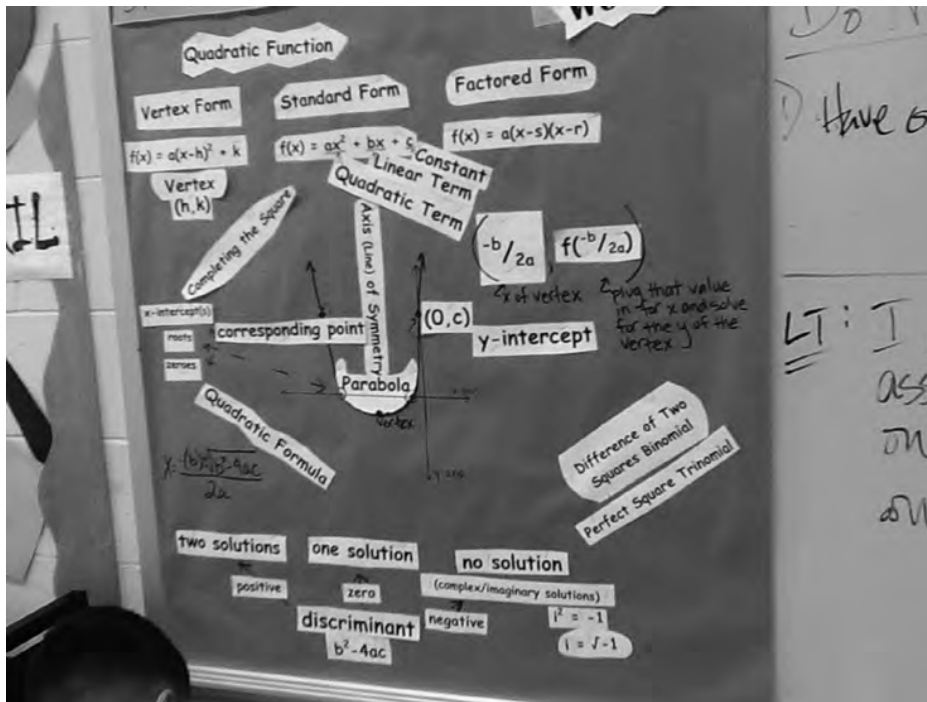
Prioritizing and Contextualizing Common Core, State, and Local Standards

It is one thing to transform the objectives for a lesson into learning targets, and quite another to do this work for all of the standards for a long-term project, unit, or course. Schools can prioritize standards by identifying the big ideas and enduring understandings they want students to master, and distinguishing between what's critical to know and be able to do and what's worth being familiar with. A schoolwide standards-based curriculum map is a solid foundation for planning and instruction and an invaluable tool for teachers. If a school does not have a curriculum map in place, teaching teams should work together to identify the standards that address the big ideas that are compelling and important for students and that can be reasonably addressed during the course of a project, unit, or course.

Strategy Close Up: Using a Learning Target Concept Map

Hilary Ducharme uses vocabulary concept maps as visual representations of the learning targets for any given unit in her algebra II class at the Springfield Renaissance School in Springfield, Massachusetts. She creates the concept maps when introducing new long-term learning targets to her students as a way to foreshadow the learning. She and the students refer to the maps frequently as new learning targets, with new vocabulary, are introduced over days and weeks. Ducharme is careful that the visual arrangement of the vocabulary words also gives students information about their meaning. When students are reviewing for summative assessments, the words are a map of their learning throughout the unit. Ducharme finds the concept maps especially helpful for visual learners or students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) who may need the extra support that the visual provides (see the vocabulary concept map).

This vocabulary concept map highlights the key vocabulary and learning targets for a unit on quadratic models.



In the schools where our examples and stories are drawn from, the primary unit of study is the learning expedition. Learning expeditions are based on case studies that give broad topics a specific—often local—context. The specific context enables teachers to translate required standards on broad topics into learning targets that are meaningful to students in the context of a locally specific case study. Students are more likely to be engaged in protecting the river that runs through their neighborhood than they are in river ecosystems in general. In a school that does not have a curricular structure such as learning expeditions, choosing a locally relevant case study through which to study academic content makes the curriculum more compelling for students and increases engagement.

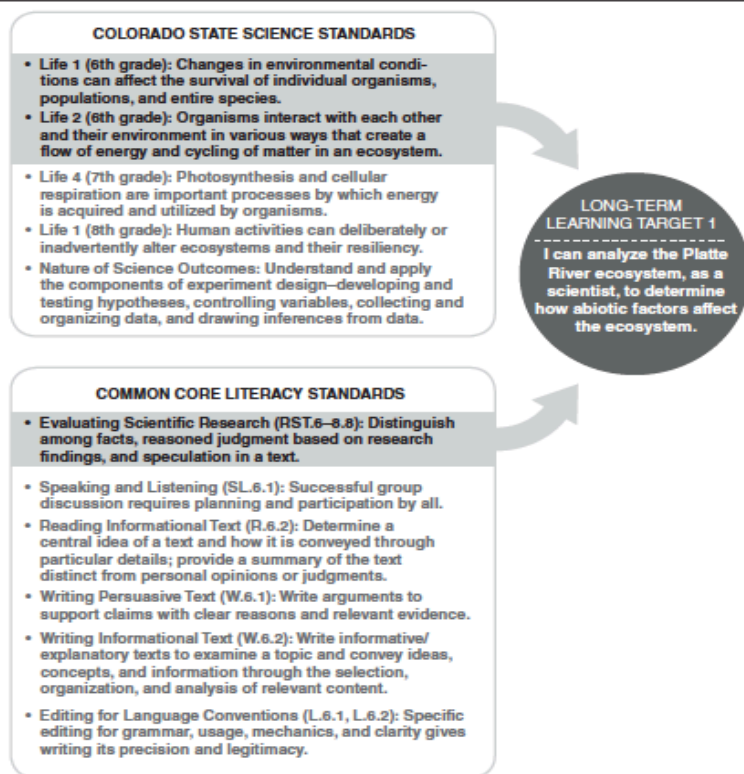
Learning expeditions are interdisciplinary studies, usually lasting six to twelve weeks, led by a teacher or teaching team. Learning expeditions are based on state and Common Core standards, aligned with local curriculum maps, and focused on essential content and skills. Each learning expedition includes guiding questions, kickoff experiences, case studies, projects, lessons, fieldwork, experts, service learning, and a culminating event that features high-quality student work.

To illustrate the prioritization and contextualization process, consider the “We All Live Downstream” learning expedition from the sixth grade at the Odyssey School. Students spent approximately three months studying Colorado’s endangered Platte River. Using the school’s curriculum map as a guide, instructional guide Liza Eaton worked with teachers to identify the key state science standards and Common Core literacy standards that they would address during the course of the learning expedition.

From there, they prioritized the most salient standards that would offer opportunities for depth and a compelling local context, and wrote long-term learning targets that guided the students throughout the expedition. They paid careful attention to a sequence of learning targets that would address the standards. For example, reading standards were drawn on more in the beginning of the learning expedition as students built background knowledge about the Platte River and river ecosystems. Writing standards entered the process more toward the end, as students prepared to present their experimental findings.

Figure 1.1 illustrates how two state science standards and one Common Core literacy standard were combined to form long-term learning target 1, one of several long-term learning targets for the learning expedition.

Figure 1.1 Prioritizing and Contextualizing Standards into Long-Term Learning Target 1 for the “We All Live Downstream” Learning Expedition



Using Long-Term and Supporting Learning Targets

Supporting learning targets are the building blocks for meeting long-term learning targets. They nest inside long-term learning targets. There are no rules about the number of supporting learning targets, but it is common for each long-term learning target to be supported by three to five supporting learning targets. Supporting learning targets are specific and easily measurable. They guide a teacher's daily lessons. At times a supporting learning target will need to be broken into even more specific daily learning targets. Alternatively, often the same supporting learning target, such as, "I can ask questions and develop testable hypotheses," will take a series of classes to address.

Long-term and supporting learning targets should never be developed by tacking "I can" onto the beginning of a Common Core or state standard. Learning targets may address just a small part of a standard or span multiple standards. The language of the learning target must make things clear to students, and standards are rarely written with this goal in mind. For example, a first-grade teacher can translate a state social studies standard that reads *Students understand the monetary value of standard U.S. coinage* into two sequential learning targets that students can more easily understand: "I can make change for a quarter in many ways" and "I can make change for a dollar in many ways."

Continuing with the "We All Live Downstream" learning expedition, we see a good example of creating supporting learning targets to guide the daily work of meeting long-term learning targets that address multiple standards. Figure 1.2 illustrates how this long-term learning target was further broken down into three supporting learning targets.

Integrating Character Learning Targets

Character learning targets are based on schoolwide expectations for habits of scholarship and norms for social behavior. If a school hasn't already identified the habits of scholarship that guide student learning—often called a *code of character*—a review of the school's mission statement can be a helpful starting place to identify character learning targets.

Table 1.2 contains the character learning targets for the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at the Odyssey School, which guide students throughout the year. Not every character learning target can be addressed during a unit or learning expedition. It is up to the teacher(s) to select two or three key character learning targets that are a best fit for the content or the needs of the class. For the "We All Live Downstream" learning expedition, students focused on one character learning target that addressed chronic editing errors in their written work and two that were a good fit for the collaborative lab work and fieldwork involved with their study of the Platte River ecosystem:

- *Revision*: I can use one or more effective tools or strategies to eliminate all editing errors in my final draft.
- *Collaboration and leadership*: I can identify when my contribution improved the quality of our work.
- *Service and stewardship*: I can apply what I have learned in class by taking action to improve a situation in my community or in the broader world.

Figure 1.2 Long-Term Learning Target 1 and Supporting Learning Targets for the “We All Live Downstream” Learning Expedition

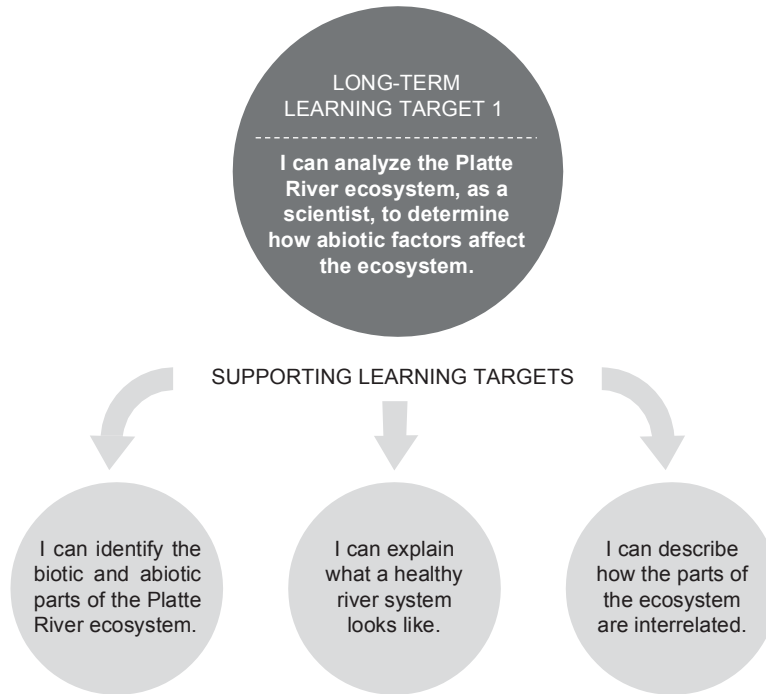


Table 1.2 Sample Sixth- to Eighth-Grade Character Learning Targets

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| <p>Responsibility I can begin to advocate for myself. I can maintain focus. I can complete quality work on time.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can demonstrate consistent use of strategies (e.g., my own notes, participation in class, before- and after-school help sessions) to fully engage in my learning. • I can complete quality classwork on time. • I can act as an intentional up-stander (i.e., stand up for others). |
| <p>Revision I can use critical feedback to improve my work.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can demonstrate how I know my final draft is my best work. • I can demonstrate a consistent use of revision strategies. • I can use one or more effective tools or strategies to eliminate all editing errors in my final draft. |

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| <p>Inquiry I can use the practices, tools, and skills of an academic discipline to investigate, evaluate, form, and test theories. I can use those skills to understand specific situations and make sense of big ideas in that discipline.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can develop deep, probing questions and theories based on initial research and background knowledge. • I can locate diverse and quality resources that help me answer my questions and deepen my understanding. • I can evaluate and synthesize the information and evidence I find. • I can report findings in a way that helps my audience access them. |
| <p>Perspective Taking I can consider multiple perspectives and their implications in terms of justice, freedom, and human rights.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can make use of diverse opinions to help me make sense of the world. • I can use conversation to gain understanding of others' ideas and not just as a way to voice my ideas. • I can explain how my understanding of an issue has been altered or deepened after investigating an opposing viewpoint. |
| <p>Collaboration and Leadership I can engage positively with others to learn things and create work that is larger and deeper than I could create on my own.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can identify when our work improved because of the contribution of a peer. • I can identify when my contribution improved the quality of our work. • I can implement leadership strategies and evaluate their effectiveness. • I can walk my talk by being a good role model. |
| <p>Service and Stewardship I am crew (for more on <i>crew</i>, see chapter 5). I can do things to care for my environment and my community. I can make connections between my actions and the global community.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can make choices that result in leaving a positive trace in the environment (classroom, school, nature). • I can apply what I have learned in class by taking action to improve a situation in my community or in the broader world. • I can demonstrate care for my buddy. |

The Common Core State Standards offer descriptions of students who meet the standards and are thus ready for college or career. The descriptions closely align with the habits of scholarship identified by the Odyssey School and many other schools described in this book. In fact, actively teaching these habits is what will enable students to become the students described by the Common Core: independent learners who are able to critique the reasoning of others, value inquiry and evidence, and persevere in solving problems.

Considering the Rigor of Learning Targets

Writing learning targets is an opportunity for teachers to ramp up the rigor in their classrooms. The framework of knowledge, skill, and reasoning as three types of learning targets is a helpful starting place for analyzing what teachers expect a student to understand and do (see table 1.3). All three types of learning targets are important. Through analyzing learning target type, teachers can make informed decisions about instructional sequencing and make good estimates about how much time students will need to reach proficiency with a target. For example, knowledge learning targets in geometry that require students to memorize definitions may be reached in a single lesson, whereas learning targets requiring students to apply geometric concepts to novel problems—using reasoning—may take several days. This analysis of learning target types also equips teachers to select effective assessments.