

Table 3.1: Confused and Clarified Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

Confused learning intention	Clarified learning intention	Context of learning	Potential new context
To be able to write instructions on how to change a bicycle tire	To be able to write instructions	Changing a bicycle tire	Writing instructions on how to make a sandwich
To be able to construct arguments for or against assisted suicide	To be able to construct arguments for or against emotionally charged propositions	Assisted suicide	Constructing arguments for or against abortion
To create a written description of a friend	To be able to create an effective characterization	Describing a friend	Creating an effective characterization of a relative

Mix It Up

The ability of students to apply things in other contexts is increased if their learning activities are varied. Students generally prefer to do one thing at a time, and get frustrated if the activities involve “chopping and changing” between different activities, but they tend to learn more. This was rather powerfully illustrated by a twelve-week experiment that involved sixty-four eight-year-old students who practiced throwing beanbags into buckets in gym class (Kerr & Booth, 1978). Half of the students practiced tossing the beanbags into a bucket three feet away, while for the other half the practice was varied by having the bucket either two feet away or four feet away. At the end of the experiment, all the students were tested on their ability to throw the beanbag into a bucket three feet away. The students who had practiced with buckets placed two and four feet away, and who therefore never practiced throwing a beanbag into a bucket three feet away, actually outscored the students who did nothing but practice throwing beanbags into a bucket three feet away. Of course, this is just a single study, but there is now substantial research evidence that despite their preference to work on one idea or context at a time, students learn more when they are required to vary their practice (for an authoritative yet readable summary, see P. C. Brown et al., 2014).