

Smart and scruffy targets

Penny Lacey

SMART targets

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-related) targets have been used in schools for pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities (SLD/ PLD) almost since the schools first opened in the early 1970s. At that point the vocabulary was a little different: behaviour modification; task analysis; skills analysis; behavioural objectives (Gardner, Murphy and Crawford, 1983), but the effect was much the same. Pupils had educational programmes and SMART targets:

‘John will post all 6 shapes into the posting box but with a gestural prompt to the correct hole for the star and the cross, 4 out of 5 times in a week.’

It is obvious from the objective what John was to do. Staff were very clear about the equipment, the amount of help to give, the expectations from John and the criteria by which he will be judged successful. Record keeping was simple. John either got it correct or he did not. Progress was also easy to see as the next objective would contain what John should learn next.

The posting box example was deliberately chosen to illustrate the curriculum that was on offer in the 1970–80s. Pupils spent much of their time on fine motor tasks which they may or may not have understood cognitively. Did John understand the difference between the shapes he was posting? Could he pick those shapes out of a pile? Could he use the shapes for anything other than that particular task? The answer was often ‘no’ to all of the above. Many mechanical tasks were mastered through task analysis leading to behavioural objectives but developing understanding of the meaning of the task was often not included.

Beliefs and views

It will be helpful to examine the beliefs about learning that underpin behaviour modification, task analysis, behavioural objectives and the more modern SMART targets to understand why they have been, and still are considered to be an important ingredient in teaching and learning. Behaviourist views on learning focus on changing the behaviour of the learner. It is impossible to ‘see’ learning in any other way. The learner must show that learning has taken place by doing something that is different from before. Learning to rote count from 1–10 is shown by the ability to provide the number

string 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 on demand. Before that the numbers might be muddled or one might be left out. When the string is correct and correct on more than one occasion then the learning can be attributed to the child.

Early schooling and curriculum developments

Examining the early schooling for pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities helps to demonstrate why behavioural objectives were first introduced. Before 1970, children with SLD/ PLD could be found in junior training centres or in centres attached to mental handicap hospitals. Overnight, many of these services were transferred from Health to Education and the training centres became schools. Schools required teachers, a curriculum and suitable teaching approaches and it is hard to make such fundamental changes quickly. For most of the 1970s, much of the training centre ethos still remained although some people were experimenting with a more ‘scientific’ approach to learning. Psychologists seemed to have the most to offer and their laboratory experiments with behaviour modification helped to present the approach as a powerful tool for changing the behaviour of children with SLD/ PLD. Psychologists had shown how children’s behaviour could be changed if tasks were broken down into small steps and taught one at a time (task analysis). They could learn how to perform everyday tasks from teeth cleaning to cooking meals; they could learn how to use language and money and they could eventually learn to look after themselves.

In 1988, with the introduction of the National Curriculum into mainstream schools, attention turned to the subjects within traditional education. After the initial consternation about how it might be applied to children with SLD/ PLD, schools settled down to teach typical school subjects. Teachers wanted to move away from a diet of self help and motor skills and give the children curriculum experiences that were open to everyone.

In the 1990s, efforts to record progress of children with SLD/ PLD culminated in the P Scales. Each subject of the national curriculum was given a list of best-fit descriptions similar to the national curriculum levels and children began to be described by their P level eg: Mary is at P4 in Maths. Learning targets reflected the P Scales, perhaps mediated by B-Squared or PIVATS (performance indicators for value

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added target setting), which provided small steps within the main levels 1–8.

Still at the centre of the curriculum, lay behavioural objectives, only now they became known as SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-related). Children with SEN in mainstream schools had individual education plans (IEPs) and these were transferred into special schools as well. The 2001 Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) had suggested that all children with SEN should have 3–4 crisp targets which would underpin the learning that was over and above the learning for all children. Children with SLD/ PLD were given SMART targets that related to the National Curriculum subjects, particularly to Literacy and Numeracy, in line with the national strategies. For children with profound learning disabilities, the targets were either unrecognisable in terms of Literacy and Numeracy:

‘Dan will attend for 2–3 seconds to the dog that turns somersaults or the pig that squeaks. He will achieve this 5 days in a row for a week,’

or were true to Literacy and Numeracy and meant little to the child:

‘Eve will experience two-dimensional shapes by tracing her fingers round the sides of a square, circle and triangle, three times a week with adult help.’

Eve was unlikely to understand the properties of the two-dimensional shapes, nor know what to do with that shape in mathematical terms. The word ‘experience’ is not very helpful in terms of what the child is learning and progress in learning is actually hard to show.

In many schools children were given targets in all subjects, which tended to dissipate the learning so it was hard for children to move forward in basic skills such as communication and understanding the world.

‘When presented with the 3 pictures to choose from, Carl will point to a shield, a bow and a spear correctly 3 times in the week.’

Maybe Carl was perfecting his pointing skills and his vocabulary, but it would be hard to attribute historical understanding. Even:

‘Emma will show her understanding of the passage of time through selecting the correct symbol for the activity just completed, throughout the week,’

is more true to the kind of history Emma might be learning but it is, once again unrecognisable in terms of the subject.

Assessment for learning

So, where should we go with targets in the 2010s? Perhaps the first consideration should be with assessment for learning (Black et al, 2003). Assessment for learning is concerned with how assessment can inform teaching and learning: how evidence from learning is used to plan what comes next. Learners’ voices are at the heart of assessment for learning as they decide what they are going to learn and how they are going to learn it. Learning to set their own learning goals or targets is an important skill as is peer-assessment of performance in relation to those targets. It is clear from the preceding description that assessment for learning was not conceived with pupils with SLD/PLD in mind but the principles are transferable and can inform work on target setting for this population.

To embrace assessment for learning requires teachers to change the way in which they think about teaching and learning and their role in those processes. Traditionally, teachers are the fount of all knowledge and decisions about what should be taught, and how it should be learned is in their hands. Teachers (or Government advisers) write a curriculum, decide on the steps required to ensure learning takes place and set targets for individual pupils to achieve. If assessment for learning is at the heart of the process then the pupil is at the centre, not the curriculum. The learning targets come from the pupils’ prior learning, enabling them to build on what they already understand and can do. For typical pupils this can involve them in dialogue with their teachers and with their peers as they work out what to learn next and how. For pupils with profound learning disabilities, the pupil involvement is more likely to be through teacher interpretation based on careful observation over time. Some pupils with SLD can contribute more directly through spoken language and/or through choice processes such as Talking Mats (Murphy and Cameron, 2008). However it is achieved, the bases of the targets are the needs of the children.

Strengths and needs analysis

A very powerful, but non-technical, process is a strengths and needs analysis. This involves teachers in making a list of all the strengths of an individual pupil, followed by his or her needs. It can be helpful to divide the needs into two: what the pupil needs right now and then what the pupil needs to move learning on. William can be an example. William has

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Table 1: Strengths and needs

William's strengths	William's needs right now	William's next learning needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grasping and manipulating objects ● Smiling to indicate enjoyment ● Smiling to anticipate a very familiar and favoured activity ● Indicating dislike with his face ● Pushing away or dropping objects he doesn't want ● Enjoying objects that vibrate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plenty of familiar vibrating objects ● Objects offered one at a time ● Objects and activities offered close to him ● Lots of repetition of an activity to help him anticipate the game ● Lots of opportunities to show like and dislike of objects and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Widening his repertoire of vibrating objects so he can build up his understanding of the way the world works ● Burst-pause games with his vibrating objects to help him learn to anticipate what's going to happen next in more situations ● Staff interpreting his like and dislike responses as 'more' and 'no more' so he can learn to control his environment a little more

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profound learning disabilities, cerebral palsy and visual impairment (see *Table 1*).

From this simple analysis, taken from observing very carefully, William's target might be something like: *'William will show that he is anticipating a repeated stimulus in burst-pause games with an adult'*.

It is clear that this target is not completely SMART. There is no stipulation of the games to play, how many times to repeat the stimulus, nor of the response William is expected to make, nor of how many times he will do this to be attributed with the skill. It is a very poor SMART target but has the beginnings of a good SCRUFFY target.

SCRUFFY targets

SCRUFFY stands for:

- Student-led
- Creative
- Relevant
- Unspecified
- Fun
- For
- Youngsters

SCRUFFY targets are still targets, but they are, perhaps more general aims. According to the example, William needs to learn to anticipate more stimuli but these stimuli are not specified nor is what he will do to show he can anticipate. William will lead the learning, not his teachers. 'U' stands for 'unspecified',

which is very different from the 'specific' of SMART targets. Of course, it means that teachers need plenty of ideas for possibilities and those possibilities need to relate to what William is already known to enjoy and anticipate. It has been observed, for example, that William can anticipate his favourite vibrating object, which is a rubber snake. His reaction to the snake is to put it into his mouth and smile at the feel of the vibrations against his teeth. He has been seen on several occasions to smile and open his mouth as soon as the snake is produced. He then has taken the snake and put it straight to his mouth. So although it is not yet consistent, William is beginning to anticipate the snake.

As soon as this is known about William, teachers can begin to plan for possible extensions to suitable stimuli. They could try other things that can vibrate in his mouth eg: an electric toothbrush. They could move onto things that vibrate on other parts of his body, perhaps initially on his face eg: cushion or massager. Maybe vibrating water, as in a foot spa, would be of interest. Progress for William will be the addition of new resources that he can anticipate, new ways of showing anticipation and maybe a faster speed of anticipation or a reaction to a less obvious stimulus. There are many different ways in which William could show his learning is progressing and having an open-ended target enables us to look at him and not at any preconceived ideas of learning.

So far the emphasis has been on pupils with profound learning disabilities when presenting

the idea of SCRUFFY targets and this group will remain at the centre of this section of the article, although SCRUFFY targets can be very helpful for more able pupils as well (see below). Pupils with profound learning disabilities do seem to be particularly poor consumers of SMART targets. They can take a very long time to move onto the next measurable skill but that does not mean they are not learning. It is so hard to quantify the broadness of a smile or the depth of noticing something happening. Those working with the child feel that fuller attention was paid to an activity than was happening a few weeks before and they might even have some video footage to provide evidence but it still would have been difficult to have put that into a SMART target. Had they done so the learning may never have happened and then there would be a sense of failure for all concerned.

Planning sheet

At Castle Wood school we have devised a simple planning sheet to go with SCRUFFY targets as they cannot just stand on their own. They need accompanying instructions to the people who are going to support the learning of children with profound learning disabilities. Below is an example of Mary (see *Table 2*).

Record keeping

Record keeping should be clearly about what happened and how the tiny shifts in progress of Mary's skills and understanding develop. We are using a simple record sheet for this (see *Table 3*).

More able pupils

Before finishing this article, it might be helpful just briefly to show how SCRUFFY targets can also be used with more able pupils. Counting provides a good example. As was mentioned earlier in the article, SMART targets can be used effectively for learning the observable skills of counting eg rote counting 1–10. What is difficult for SMART targets to do is to support the learning of when counting takes place, why people count and what they can do with the counting once it is done. SCRUFFY targets can be very helpful when building up understanding.

'Amy will show that she understands when to use counting 1–10 in simple board games.'

There is no stipulation of which games to play, nor of exactly what Amy has to do, nor of how many times she has to do it. Record keeping can be flexible so Amy's progress in actually understanding counting can be seen. She could perhaps move on next to

'Amy will show understanding of counting in simple pretend games.'

Again, the recording can simply show in which circumstances Amy can count whilst playing. What becomes clear from this type of record keeping are the circumstances in which Amy still can NOT understand counting. Rote counting 1–10 is the first step but understanding counting is so much more complex.

Conclusions

Targets have been evident in the education of pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities almost since their education began in 1971. However, much progress has been made in understanding the uses of what were first known as learning objectives and became SMART targets. SMART targets are useful for learning skills but are of less use when understanding when and why to use those skills. In the 1970s and '80s pupils were taught, for example, to say 'hello' using skills analysis expressed as:

'Sally will say 'hello' and shake hands when greeting people. She will achieve this 9 out of 10 times in a week.'

Sally did indeed learn to say 'hello' and shake hands but what she did not really understand was when to use this new found skill. She said 'hello' and shook hands with everyone repeatedly.

A strengths and needs analysis may have shown that Sally was interested in greeting people and if so then perhaps a SCRUFFY target may have been more appropriate. Perhaps Sally was going up to people and looking into their eyes or maybe touching them? If so then maybe this would have been a suitable target:

'Sally will acknowledge people who come into the room or approach her.'

That would then be accompanied by suggestions for the type of acknowledgement to watch for. If she is beginning to say 'hello' then this can be encouraged as can smiling, looking into people's eyes and touching people on the arm.

The direction of pupils' learning is important to define. Typical children can be directly involved in setting their own targets and research around assessment for learning shows how this can be done. For pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities teachers have a more directive role. However, it is possible to be directive whilst being directed

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Table 2: Example planning sheet

Name: Mary	Date: 4 March
SRUFFY target Mary will respond to a range stimuli (<i>Routes for Learning step 6</i>)	
Instructions to staff	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilise four senses (not taste as she has an unsafe swallow). ● Mary is visually impaired and responds best to auditory stimuli. Present the stimuli directly in line with her ears on either side. She doesn't seem yet to be able to locate sounds from in front of her or behind. Watch for her turning her head slightly to the sound and note the kinds of sounds she likes best. Please record the volume (quiet, medium, loud) as well as the sort of sound. ● Try also very bright visual stimuli in the dark room. Watch for her to still or any indication that she can locate the source of light. ● Try very gentle tactile stimuli where you touch her. Don't expect her to touch things herself. Look for tolerance of the touch, especially if she gives any indication of wanting to repeat it. Also record very definite rejection of the touch. ● Try gentle smells placed directly under her nose. Go for non-food smells. ● Repeat the stimuli several times (burst-pause sequence) and watch her responses. Try different speeds of presenting the stimuli to establish the best timings for any one day. Build up a record of the stimuli she responds to. 	
Record of stimuli provoking positive reaction (please add any new)	
Auditory: quiet jingle bells, quiet keyboard on bell sound, quiet singing ... Visual: flashing bright white or blue light, ultra violet ... Tactile: chiffon scarf, warm water, hair dryer on legs ...	
Record of stimuli provoking a negative reaction (please add any new)	
Tactile: sand, Velcro ...	
Record of positive reactions (please add any new)	
Stills Moves her eyes sideways several times Sometimes turns her head towards the stimulus Occasionally smiles a little	
Record of negative reactions (please add any new)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blinks her eyes rapidly ● Turn slightly away from the stimulus ● Seems to shrink away from the stimulus ● Will cry if frightened 	
End of half term summary	
Mary is giving clearer signals that she is responding, particularly for auditory stimuli. She seems to be becoming more tolerant of tactile stimuli. She is still not reacting much to smells. Continue with the programme.	

by the needs of the pupils. Teachers do indeed set the targets but always following a strengths and needs analysis and with clear reference to developing pupils' understanding as well as skills.

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Table 3: Simple record sheet

Name: Mary		Routes step 6: Mary will respond to a range of stimuli																												
Date: February 2010																														
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 15%;">Positive reactions to quiet balls</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 15%;">Positive reactions to hair dryer on face</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 15%;">Smiled more clearly</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 15%;">on hands as well</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 15%;">turned more clearly</div> </div>																														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

References

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