Connecting rubrics with learning progressions, learning goals and success criteria

The purpose of rubrics is to help students understand and internalize quality. In this way, they are related to learning goals, success criteria and learning progressions. This document is meant to help make sense of similarities and differences of these tools, so that teachers know how to create and use these without duplicating effort or confusing their students!

Let's begin with the definitions on Handout 1.6.

Learning goals/learning outcomes
Learning goals specify the learning that is intended for a lesson or a sequence of lessons. Learning goals focus students on what new understandings they will have from the lesson, not the tasks they will complete. They enable students to know what they are learning and why. Research has consistently pointed out the value of student review of learning goals. Students focused on learning goals develop greater intrinsic motivation (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1999) as long as those goals are manageable, and as long as students understand both the learning goal and the criteria for success.

Criteria for success
Criteria for success specify how a student can demonstrate that they have met the learning goal. The criteria for success help students understand what they will be able to do differently as a result of the lesson. Success criteria help students monitor their own learning. The use of exemplars and model products can be very helpful to show students evidence about the criteria that teachers will use to look for evidence of learning.

Learning progressions
Learning progressions describe the pathways along which students are expected to progress. A learning progression provides the teacher with additional clarity regarding how student learning develops in a particular domain, or on a particular standard or topic. This progression is often not linear, and may not look the same for each student. Learning progressions help teachers locate students' current status along a continuum and helps teachers decide on the most useful instructional actions that will move students' learning forward.

And, now let's add a definition for rubrics.

Rubrics
The purpose of rubrics is to help students understand and internalize quality. It includes criteria, a measurement scale, and descriptions of characteristics for each scoring level. Effective rubrics communicate the most important dimensions for learnings for that learning goal, and key quality indicators for the work product or performance being evaluated. In this way, rubrics serve as a guide for educators, peers, or students to assess their work. When students understand and work with the rubrics in advance of evaluation, this can be extremely helpful for student learning. Similar to success criteria, the use of exemplars and model products can help students internalize the quality expectations as outlined in the rubric.

The following are some things to think about when developing these tools to ensure each is useful.

Potential area of confusion 1 - Rubrics and learning progressions

- A learning progression is **not** a rubric. Learning progressions are focused on what the steps in learning look like as students progress in their understanding. Rubrics (typically) are focused on the level of quality that will be used to count toward a score or an evaluation of student work.

- A learning progression (unlike a rubric) is not meant to portray a linear development of learning. A good learning progression can show that learning can be messy and uneven. For example, as a student is learning something, it is *not often* the case that the student moves from doing a little of something to a lot of something (as is often described in rubrics). It is often the case that there is a gap in understanding, and then when that gap is addressed they move to a new and different kind of understanding.

- A learning progression (unlike a rubric) is designed to clarify what students **can do** as they are progressing in their learning. In this way, it is **strengths-based**. A learning progression should help teachers see what students will be able to do along the way as they move to a bigger learning goal. A good learning progression clarifies what successful learning *looks like*. Rubrics are often designed in ways that tell students what they are not doing well, and as such are (more often than not) deficits-based.

Potential area of confusion 2 – Rubrics and Success Criteria

- Success criteria are primarily designed to capture what learning *looks like* when a student has reached proficiency. Success criteria show the kinds of evidence that a teacher or student can look for to see if learning is taking place.

- Rubrics are primarily designed to indicate the *degree of quality* that will be required to achieve a certain score on an assignment. As such, rubrics are primarily indicators that document the level of quality of a particular piece of work.

- Success criteria can be used as the foundation of a rubric. When teachers would like a rubric that is *fully aligned* to a formative assessment unit plan, then a strategy to design this rubric would be to use the "Level 3 Criteria" from the learning progression to establish the criteria for the rubric. Students and/or teachers would then "build out" the rubric by determining what aspects of quality would be used to evaluate or measure the quality of meeting the success criteria.

- However, it is also feasible to use rubrics that are *not tightly aligned* to the learning goals and success criteria of a particular unit. For example, many schools use writing rubrics across grades and content areas. There may be a particular segment of a unit that includes a component of the writing rubric, such as voice or organization. In these cases, teachers should use the existing rubric (or specific component they are addressing in that unit) for scoring. It may or may not be tightly aligned to the learning progression or success criteria, but it will show students what level of quality is expected regarding a specific component of the work.