#Goals: Fostering Student Self-Esteem Using Goal Setting and Self-Evaluation

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As a special education teacher, I frequently hear complaints from my students such as "I hate school!", "I can't do this!", and "I'm just going to fail, why bother trying?"

By the time students reach me in middle school, many understand that they have been identified as having a disability and are receiving special education services. They recognize that they have unique difficulties with learning and may need the information presented in a different way. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a poor self-image in many of my students, as well as little to no personal accountability when it comes to learning. Others display a "learned helplessness" and do not want to try to complete various tasks for fear of failing. This lack of confidence, ownership, and self-esteem does appear to have an impact on their willingness to participate in class and complete assignments.

Middle school also places them in a unique position where they may begin to participate in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings with parental consent. At every IEP meeting we go over student progress and set annual goals, and at the 8th-grade level, we begin to build a transition plan for the student where we set goals for high school and beyond.

As a teacher, it can be difficult to find a way to motivate my students when their mindset is "why bother?" I want my students to understand that they are capable of learning and that their ownership in their own learning plays a role. I want them to also be able to set realistic goals for themselves and analyze not only what they did to do to achieve these goals, but also monitor their progress. These are skills that I want to teach and practice within my classroom but eventually generalize across other settings, including in the general education classroom as well as outside of school.

Instructional Context

School

Philip Murray Language Academy is a public elementary school located in Chicago's historic Hyde Park neighborhood, just north of the University of Chicago and the Museum of Science and Industry. It has been open since December of 1954.

The racial composition of the 461-student population at Murray Language Academy is 91% African American, 3.9% mixed race, 3.7% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0.4% Asian. Of the 461 students who attend the school, 63.8% are considered low income and are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches from the school.

Murray Language Academy became a World Language Magnet School in 1981. Because it is a magnet school, Murray Language Academy enrolls Kindergarten through 8th-grade students from all over the city of Chicago via a blind lottery system, which sets it apart from many other Chicago Public Schools that have strict attendance boundaries they must adhere to. Another unique feature of the school is that every student at the school studies French, Spanish, or Mandarin Chinese as an additional class for the duration of their enrollment in the school. By the time they are in middle school, many students have studied a language for nine years and are considered proficient enough to earn a Seal of Biliteracy. The goal of Murray Language Academy's world language program is for students to become proficient in their world language, develop cultural awareness and understanding, and improve learning outcomes in other core content areas through integrated units of study. Murray Language Academy believes that providing students the opportunity to study world languages gives them tools the school's vision, which states:

The mission of Murray Language Academy is to develop and inspire the intellectual will in young people. We believe in scholarship, creative minds, healthy bodies, and ethical spirits needed to contribute wisdom, heart, service, and leadership to a global society. We strive to maintain a safe, secure, caring, and joyful environment.

Another key component to Murray's culture is a school-wide commitment to a program called "Leader in Me," a framework based on Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989). The goal of the program is to "teach leadership to every student, create a culture of student empowerment, and align systems to drive results in academics." This program is used building-wide to promote student leadership and positive behavioral choices.

In terms of specialized instruction, just 2.2% of the student population are considered English Language Learners, with many demonstrating a high level of English proficiency and needing limited or no formal instruction from a certified English as a Second Language Teacher. Of these students, there is a wide range of native languages spoken at home, such as Spanish, Mandarin, Bagheli, Hebrew, Bengali, Haitian-Creole, and Akan.

Of the total population, approximately 15% of students at Murray (roughly 71 of the 463 students currently enrolled) receive specialized instruction due to a documented disability. Of these 71 students, 18 have a 504 Plan and 53 have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to provide them with specific special education services including academic instruction in the resource room, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, social work, and nursing.

Classroom and Students

These students with documented disabilities are the students that I work with as the 7th and 8th-grade special education teacher. I provide individualized instruction in reading, writing,

math, science, social studies, and/or independent functioning to my caseload of 16 students. Nine

students are 7th graders and seven students are 8th graders. Of these students, eight report that

they identify as male, and eight report that they identify as female.

Special Education services occur within my resource room to students with a wide range

of disabilities and functional levels, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (one student),

Intellectual Disabilities (one student), Specific Learning Disabilities (nine students), Emotional

Disabilities (two students), Traumatic Brain Injuries (1 student), and Other Health Impairments

including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (one student) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

(ADHD) (five students). Also of note, there is some comorbidity found within my caseload. For

example, I have three students with learning disabilities who also have been found to have

ADHD, and a student with a Traumatic Brain Injury also has been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol

Syndrome.

Most of my students receive direct support in the resource room, away from their general

education peers for 210-350 minutes per week in both reading and math and then receive

appropriate accommodations for their other subjects within the general education setting.

Students who come to the resource room more frequently or for additional subjects such as

science and social studies are those performing significantly below grade level and need a higher

level of support from their special education teacher. Of these students, two have a dedicated

Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA) who travels with them throughout the day to

provide one-to-one support, including during elective classes as well as lunch and recess.

I teach four instructional blocks during the day, and these blocks align with the standard

7th and 8th-grade schedule followed by the general education classes. During each block, I teach

7th and 8th grade and teach both reading and mathematics. In the first and second block, I teach 7th-grade math and 8th-grade reading, and in the third and fourth blocks, I reach 7th-grade reading and 8th-grade math. There are usually five to seven students per grade in my room during each block. I typically split the block between the two subjects. While I provide direct instruction to the math students, the reading students are working on learning centers or independently on a computer program used by our school for reading and math. Then, we switch halfway through the block and I will provide direct instruction to the reading students while the math students are working independently or completing learning centers.

Review of Literature

Developing Self-Concept

A person's self-concept develops due to one's experiences within their environment, including experiences within the school setting. Academic achievement has an impact on students' self-concepts in a variety of ways. When students experience learning difficulties, it has a negative impact on their developing academic self-concepts (Möller, Streblow, & Pohlmann, 2008). After experiencing failure in the academic setting, students identified as having a learning disability, in particular, were shown to display negative emotions and a sense of hopelessness compared to their peers without an identified disability (Sideridis, 2003). This finding brings to focus the need to more deeply understand how students with disabilities come to develop their self-concepts and how they cope with the challenges they face in the classroom.

Marsh (1986, 1990) has proposed the *Internal/External Frame of Reference Model* (I/E model). According to the I/E model, students may compare their academic ability to other individuals (external frame of reference), which could lead to a poor self-concept if they are making upward

comparisons to a high-performing peer while they are struggling in the same subject (Marsh, 1986, 1990; Möller et al., 2008). Students may be influenced by an internal frame of reference when they compare their own performance across academic subject areas (e.g. a strong performance in math compared to difficulties with reading), and research has shown that achievement in a subject leads to a positive self-concept in that area and a negative self-concept in other areas (Marsh, 1986, 1990; Möller et al., 2008).

Some positive impacts of this outcome are that students with learning disabilities are able to specialize in their stronger subjects areas, leading to strengths that can be considered when planning future academic and occupational options (Möller et al., 2008). On the other hand, one challenge is that students may then in turn neglect the subject areas they have a negative self-concept in, which could lead to a further weakening of those skills over time (Möller et al., 2008).

Knowledge of self and knowledge of their rights serve as a foundation for students' self-advocacy, along with communication and leadership, which will allow an individual to advocate not only for their own needs, but eventually the needs of others as well, at various stages of the person's life (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005).

Goal Setting

Educators can assist students with developing a positive self-concept by being intentional while giving students clear feedback and encouragement, which may also improve their performance by increasing their task motivation (Viljaranta, Tolvanen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2014). This aligns with Eccles et al. (1983)'s Expectancy Value Theory, which argues that a student who values an activity and expects to perform well in it is more likely to pursue that activity. Further,

the type of feedback teachers are offering their students is important to consider when trying to build positive self-concepts. For example, a student tends to receive more objective feedback in subjects like mathematics, whereas in subjects like reading there are more varied types of feedback to determine if someone is a "good" reader. The implication is that the accuracy of a student's self-concept can vary greatly from their actual academic performance depending on the type and amount of feedback they are receiving in the subject (McCauley et al., 2017).

Another method of helping students improve their self-concept as well as their academic performance is to teach students skills related to self-regulation. Pintrich (2000) defines self-regulation in academic settings as an "active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (p. 453).

Students who are successful in the classroom are able to set goals, focus and persevere when completing difficult tasks, and they organize their materials and time to self-regulate their own learning through three phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Buzza & Dol, 2015; Zimmerman, 2000). Educators who serve students with learning disabilities need to intentionally focus on building students' confidence to manage their own learning because students' performance on academic tasks only partially depend on their ability; belief in their abilities to regulate themselves and manage their learning environment is equally important for success (Klassen, 2010). Young adolescent students with learning disabilities are at a stage of critical personal development, and self-regulation skills such as the ability to develop strategies, focus on learning tasks, and utilize study skills independently become an important part of

academic functioning, to the point that many students become *more* strategic in their

self-regulation as they mature and progress through the middle and high school years (Pintrich &

Zusho, 2002).

In particular, planning tasks and setting appropriate and realistic goals have been shown

to significantly increase students' ability to monitor their own progress (Zimmerman, 2000). It is

crucial to involve students in the process of their own goal setting because it increases their

awareness of learning targets, promotes self-evaluation, and increases the overall meaning and

importance of the goal from the perspective of the student (Agran, King-Sears, Weheyer, &

Coplane, 2003). According to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, individuals exercise

agency over their lives in a productive manner in order to achieve goals they perceive to be

important, and they convert their beliefs about their abilities into action.

Goal setting requires students to make decisions about their academic priorities and

self-evaluate their needs in relation to their current academic performance, along with direct

instruction on effectively defining an objective and creating a measurable goal (Agran et al.,

2003). Learning to write detailed, specific, and meaningful goals helps students increase

engagement in learning activities, their self-regulatory behavior, and overall self-concept in

relation to their abilities in that particular area (Buzza & Dol, 2015). Academic growth has been

shown to occur from goals that are directly related to academic growth as well as those that are

indirectly related, such as stress management, and appears to be aided directly by growth

reflection throughout the learning process (Travers, Morisano, Locke, 2014).

Helping students with learning disabilities become self-regulated learners is important

because it allows them to become proactive in their use of goal-setting and problem-solving

strategies (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). As students build their self-concepts and grow in their ability to self-regulate and set goals for themselves, it prepares them to be able to self-advocate, or speak up for what they want and need (Downing, Earles-Vollrath, & Schreiner, 2007).

Methods and Implementation

My main method of implementing goal setting into my classroom was through weekly reflective check-ins as well as conferences with my students.

Weekly Check-In/Check-Out

Every Monday, all students were given a digital form to fill out that served as a weekly check-in. The form asked them to set a goal for reading, a goal for mathematics, and a personal goal, as well as identify if there were specific resources or assistance the students anticipated they may need in order to meet their goal.

On Fridays, students were asked to self-evaluate their progress and reflect on the short term goals they had set earlier in the week, including what adjustments, if any, they would make as they prepared for the next week.

Conferences

Students also participated in individual conferences with me at the start of each marking period to review their progress and set goals for the coming quarter. For example, I conducted a "back to school" growth mindset interview with my students when we returned from winter break. I spoke individually to all of my students ($n = 17$). I did not scaffold and all answers were supplied directly by the students; all areas for improvement and strategies described were independently generated.

In addition to gathering important information from my students through the reflective check-ins and conferences, I also gathered data through the use of a focus group, student data, and a personal journal.

The Focus Group

From the seven 8th graders on my caseload, I selected four case study students[1]. Individual interviews with these students as well as focused observations allow for a more in-depth look at student perspectives as they explain in their own words their goals for themselves and how they see themselves as learners.

Student Data

For the duration of the project, I tracked students' overall grades, Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment scores, behavior logs, and attendance to allow me to make connections between the self-talk and self-concept I was observing in my students and their academic performance, particularly for the case study students.

Teacher Journal

A daily journal allowed me to capture the day-to-day happenings related to the research question. The journal contained specific observations related to students, their goal-setting and self-evaluation, as well as things such as their day-to-day participation in lessons. It also allowed for personal reflection regarding my perspective on my students and classroom "in the moment" as these events occurred, highlighting how my perspective changed over time.

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[1] To protect student privacy, all student names used throughout this paper are pseudonyms.

Results and Interpretation

Goal Setting and Self-Evaluation

Early in the first quarter, as we started to establish our classroom routine but prior to any formal instruction on goal-setting and self-evaluation, I sat down individually with each student ($n = 17$) to discuss the new school year, the emotions that students were feeling surrounding returning to school, and any goals they had for themselves and why.

All 17 of my students mentioned classes or subject areas that they were hoping to improve in during the new school year. Because I had taught 11 of the students the year before, it appeared that the students felt comfortable enough speaking with me that they were able to further expand upon the area that they wanted to improve in and why. Figure 1, below, shows the subject areas that students self-identified in these initial conversations.

Figure 1

Student-Identified Areas for Improvement, by Category
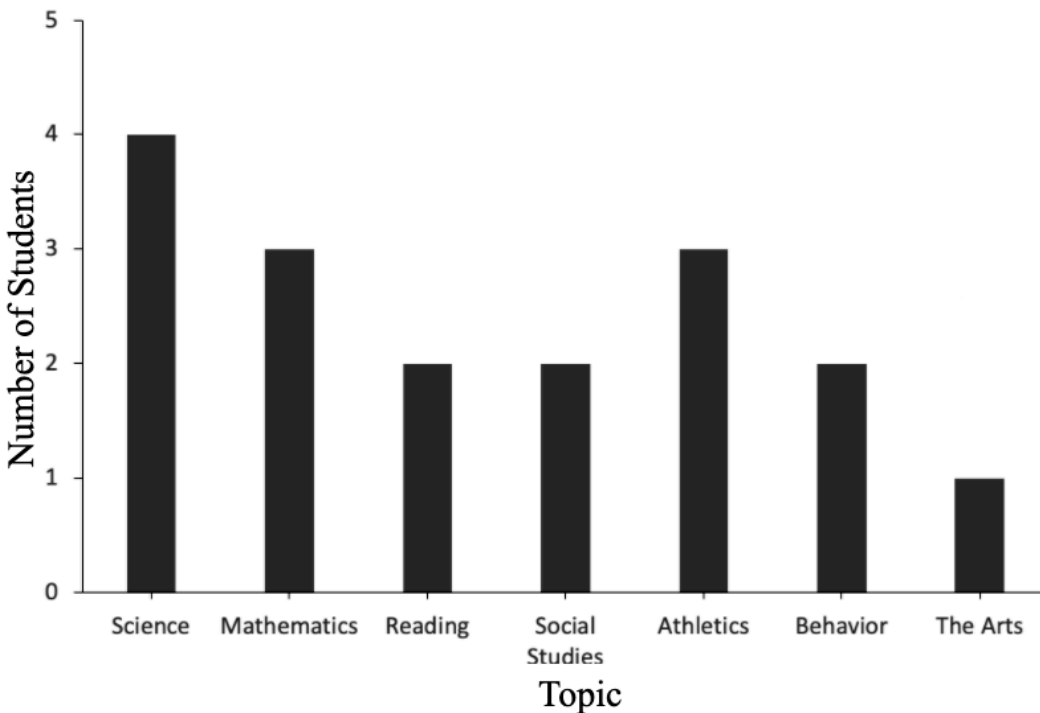
In terms of academics, many students indicated that they most wanted to improve in science (n = 4), mathematics (n = 3), and athletics/physical education (n = 3). Fewer students identified reading (n = 2), social studies (n = 2), and behavior (n = 2) as areas for improvement. I was expecting more students to be concerned about their mathematics or reading performance based on how often they complained about their grades or work in the class in the past as well as in their back-to-school interviews.

All students were able to identify what area they wanted to improve in, but when asked why, students struggled to provide reasoning to support their decision beyond wanting to improve their grades. Jamal and Gabi chose reading and Starr chose mathematics as areas for improvement, but even with prompting, they were not able to provide reasons that suggest anything other than an extrinsic motivation to improve their grades in these classes. When asked a follow up question about whether or not they thought they thought they were "good" students, all three students said no and again referenced previously poor grades in the area.

Even though areas such as athletic, physical education, or the arts are not typically looked at as "core" academic subjects, I intentionally chose to allow students to select any area they studied at school. Kalan was one of the students who identified that he was hoping to improve in athletics. He is a star athlete on his football team, and in his interview explained that he was hoping to become captain because he wanted to become a good leader. This is important because Kalan, along with several of his peers, views athletics as an important area to improve in and there are still valuable skills to be gained even though they may not be within a "core" content area. This highlighted that it would be important to give my students choice as I was teaching goal setting and asking them to set their own goals.

Within the same interview, I asked the students to identify specific skills and strategies that they could develop and use to help support them in meeting their academic goals for the year. I intentionally left this question open-ended so that students could supply me with strategies that they personally used or were at least familiar with. Figure 2 outlines the specific strategies the students selected.

Figure 2

Student-Identified Strategies for Improvement
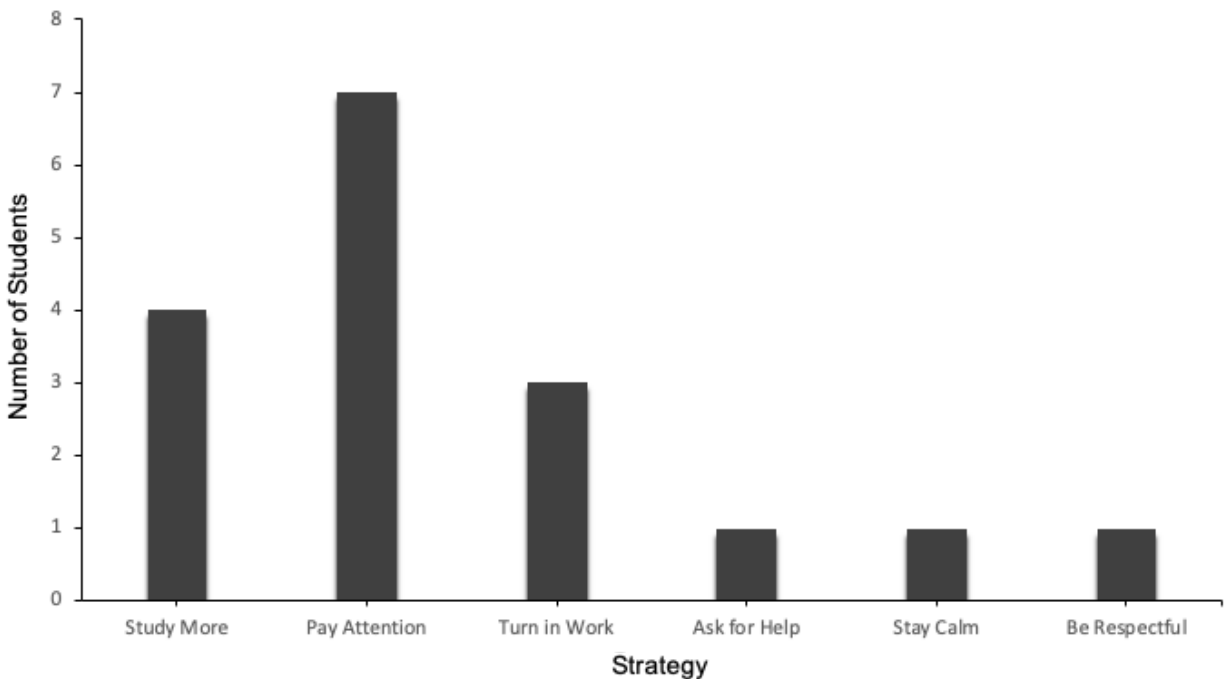
I was impressed with some of the specific strategies students identified, as I asked students to come up with their own, not use a word bank or prompt. Many students reported that they needed to pay attention more in class ($n = 7$), study/practice more ($n = 4$), and turn in work on time ($n = 3$). I knew that I would be able to take advantage of these strategies as I supported students with goal setting throughout the school year.

Next, I began providing my students with explicit instruction in goal setting. The

educational materials I used for instruction included posters and handouts found in Appendix A.

We used the SMART goal model so that students were able to create detailed and realistic goals.

An example of the SMART goal framework can be found in Appendix B. SMART is an acronym

that helps a person to set a quality goal that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and

Timely.

This is around the same time that I implemented the weekly check-in/check-out with my

students, where they were asked to set a weekly short-term goal for themselves at the beginning

of each week and reflect on their progress at the end of each week. I felt it would be an important

way to provide students with an opportunity to practice the goal setting skills they were learning

as well as give me an easy way to monitor their address.

The first few weeks, I wrote several journal entries about how I suspected that my

students were just "going through the motions" (October 2, 2019) of setting goals without

thinking deeply about the reasoning behind their goals or without understanding what their goals

really meant.

For example, Starr produced goal setting sheets with vague goals such as "do good at

math" or "do my reading." Even with prompting and teacher feedback, she was struggling to

develop these goals further:

TEACHER (me):   I see you said you want to "do good at math" for your goal this week.
                          What does that mean to you?

STARR: I want to do better at math.

TEACHER: Is there a specific area of math you could get better at?

STARR: I don't know. All of it?

TEACHER: To set a goal that is really powerful, it is good to make sure it is specific. We want to tell ourselves exactly what we are going to work on. "Math" is a really big thing that could mean different things. Let's get more specific. That's the "S" in SMART. What's something you are having a hard time with right now?

STARR: Multiplication

TEACHER: Ok that's great! Where are you at in learning your multiplication facts right now?

STARR: 9s.

TEACHER: So we could take that and turn it into a goal that is specific.

Even after this conversation (September 30, 2019) and others like it where Starr was told her goal needed to be more specific, she and her classmates continued to write goals that were general instead of specific.

It became apparent that I needed to provide additional instruction in goal setting. I started to focus on making sure students understood how goals were relevant to their daily life, both in and out of school. I used student-friendly language to model my own goal setting for the students (see Appendix C). I also targeted students like Starr who were struggling to write in the SMART goal format and explain their reasoning. These targeted students had small group and individual conferences with me where we discussed what an appropriate goal for them looked like. I also

gave extra attention to these students at the end of the week to support them in their

self-reflection:

> TEACHER (me):   What do you notice about your work from Monday til now?
>
> STARR: I did better at multiplication.
>
> TEACHER: Yes, great job! How do you think you grew this week?
>
> STARR: I got better at doing the multiplication facts. More right.
>
> TEACHER: How does that make you feel?
>
> STARR: Good cuz before now I couldn't do them right.
>
> TEACHER: Do you think that this was a good goal for this week?
>
> STARR: Yes it was cuz I needed to work on it to get better and I got it done
>   this week.
>
> January 30, 2020

Over time, I saw a change in Starr's goal setting. Instead of writing "do good at math" for

her goal, by March Starr was able to write goals modeled after those that I showed her, such as

"By Friday I will be able to say my 12s multiplication table 3 times in a row with no mistakes."

She was also able to defend why she selected her goal and explained how she would use a

strategy of practicing flashcards on the bus and with her mom to help her achieve her realistic

goal. She was clearly a lot more comfortable and accustomed to setting and talking about her

own personal learning goals.

While I did let my students select goals they felt were relevant, occasionally I did push

and challenge my students to set academic, school-related goals rather than just personal goals.

For example, Gabi is an accomplished dancer who was writing many goals about dance. I spoke

with her about her great goals about dance, and encouraged her to examine other areas of her life

in school. Rather than stopping her from writing about dance, which was very important and

motivating to her, I just asked her to add on an additional goal, which she was willing to do:

TEACHER (me):   Let's focus on school now. What's giving you a hard time at school

right now? We are going to make that goal #2.

GABI: Reading.

TEACHER: What specific part of reading class is giving you a hard time?

GABI: Finding text evidence in the story.

TEACHER: Why do you think that is?

GABI: Seeing it or finding it and then I lose it.

TEACHER: Ok, we can work on that! What could we do to get better at that?

GABI: Maybe I could use a highlighter to find the evidence.

TEACHER: That's a really good idea, [Gabi]! Now let's turn this into a goal.

February 3, 2020

Samples of student goals at the beginning, middle, and near-end of the academic year can

be found in Appendix D.

In a final reflection interview with Jamal (May 29, 2020), he described his approach to goal setting:

           JAMAL: I've got like this picture in my mind of what I want to be or do. That's how I know what I want my goal to be.

   TEACHER (me):   So how do you know what to do to meet your goal?

           JAMAL: Well I see [the goal] in my mind. You know how when you lose something you gotta go back over your steps to find it. Well I take the goal in my brain and think backwards about what I need to do, and go from there. I make a list sometimes if it's a lot.

Jamal is showing that he visualizes his goal to begin the goal-setting process. I was very impressed with his "work backwards" strategy to figure out the steps needed to achieve his goal. It is important to have a plan of action to make progress toward the goal:

   TEACHER (me):   What happens if you have a hard time working on your goal?

           JAMAL: You just gotta stay on it. I go for it no matter what. Even when I'm mad or annoyed I just keep going and sometimes I'll learn that way. Just keep goin' otherwise I won't get it done. I ask for help too. That helps me a lot.

Things don't always go as planned when working towards goals, but Jamal has learned it is important to keep working toward it and use resources like his teacher to help him if he needs

it. He also acknowledges that sometimes you are able to learn from the struggles that may occur during a challenge.

TEACHER (me):   That's amazing, [Jamal]! How do you feel at the end when you've

met your goal?

JAMAL: Seeing I got work done and right makes me feel good. It isn't right all

the time but I always try to do it and if I'm wrong I will keep trying

so I can have it right and understand.

This helps show that Jamal has moved more toward being intrinsically motivated to meet his goals. Rather than just working on the goal to get a good grade, Jamal has also realized that he feels good when he meets the goal and will keep working until he gets it right.

Effect on Self-Concept

The NWEA assessment is administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the year in order to track student growth and progress in both reading and mathematics. The test generates a goal score for students to meet by the end of the academic year, and students are aware of their goal and how many points they need to increase their score to meet it. Although I place an emphasis on trying hard and showing what they know, students can sometimes get competitive and will get very excited or very frustrated depending on how they perform. This is especially true in the middle of the school year (January), which is their first chance to formally check their progress toward their goal.

During the January 2020 middle of the year NWEA MAP testing administration for both reading and mathematics, I wrote down direct quotes that students were saying about themselves

and their performance. These quotes are compiled in Appendix E and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Student Testing Quotes, January 2020 NWEA

	Number of Responses	
	Positive Comments	Negative Comments
Overall Comments	8	14
By Subject		
Reading	1	3
Mathematics	7	11
By Grade		
7th Grade	0	9
8th Grade	8	5

Even though I was hoping the opposite would be true, I wasn't surprised that the student

reactions were primarily negative because historically my students have complained about

NWEA testing along with expressing that they didn't feel confident in their ability to do well on

the assessment. What I thought was interesting is that students had more comments overall about

mathematics compared to reading, for both positive and negative. I was expecting more negative

comments about mathematics and more positive comments about reading, but mathematics had a

lot more positive responses as well.

I also found it interesting to look at the responses by grade. The 8th graders had more

comments overall, and they were more positive compared to the 7th graders. 8th grade had eight

positive comments while 7th grade had zero, and the 8th graders made five negative comments

while 7th grade made nine. This could be because the 8th graders have an additional year of

experience taking this assessment compared to the 7th graders, which has helped to increase their

ability to have a positive outlook.

As the school year went on, students continued to receive instruction in goal setting and

the opportunity to set goals at the start of each week and reflect on goals at the end of each week.

As these initiatives became part of our regular routine within the classroom, I began to record

changes in student self-talk during our small group time.

One day in March, right before lunch, Kalan was working on solving a multi-step word

problem, a skill that he struggles with and is one of his IEP goal areas. As he worked through the

problem, he was starting to get frustrated but suddenly picked his pencil back up. He said "I can

do this. I just need to slow down and take my time." After he solved the problem, I asked him to

explain his process to me. He explained:

> Well I was feeling annoyed because I couldn't get it. I kept mixing up steps and doing it
>
> out of order and I knew it.. I was getting more and more mad because you worked with
>
> me [on how to solve these problems] and this is my goal to get better at. Then I stopped
>
> and slowed down and checked the steps like I practiced and I could think better and then
>
> I was able to do the steps like I learned. (March 6, 2020)

There are several important skills that Kalan was able to demonstrate. First, he was able to

recognize his own frustration and calm himself down. Next, he recognized that this skill was one

of his goals, and through self-evaluation realized that he was doing it incorrectly. Finally, he was

able to apply the strategies of slowing time and checking over his work to help make sure the

steps were being completed correctly. His confidence in himself as a mathematician increased because he remembered to apply this process by himself, in the moment.

This is a big change, because at the start of the school year Kalan was one of the students who had difficulties naming specific strategies that could help him achieve his goals. Now, after practicing goal setting and applying these strategies, he was able to recognize and respond to a situation that required him to use these skills independently, without a teacher stepping in to talk him through the process. This change in thinking shows that Kalan's view of himself has shifted; where before he just knew he needed to do better in certain mathematical tasks, Kalan now recognizes how he needs to do better and why.

Similarly, Jamal told me, "Seeing I got work done and right makes me feel good. It isn't right all the time but I always try to do it and if I'm wrong I will keep trying so I can have it right and understand" (May 29, 2020). This insight into Jamal's thinking shows that his confidence has improved as he has set goals and seen his own progress as he works toward them.

Conclusion

Goal setting has become a key component within my classroom culture and routine, and there is evidence to suggest that it has had a positive effect on students' independence, ownership, and self-esteem. It is crucial to explicitly teach students how to set rational and relevant goals, develop a realistic plan of action, and track progress through reflection and self-evaluation. Students will be left feeling greater ownership and more control over their own learning.

Student choice also plays an important role in goal setting. I realized early on through my discussion about sports and leadership with Kalan that I shouldn't limit my students to strictly

the academic work that I wanted them to improve upon, because there are still valuable skills that can be gained from setting goals related to other interests as well. When my students were given a choice about the goals they set, the goals were more personal to them, they were more interested in talking with me about the goals, and the goals were generally better-developed. Even when setting academic goals, it was important that I let students decide for themselves areas they felt that they were struggling in so that they felt they had personal stakes in the goal.

As a teacher, providing feedback on their goals was vital to helping a majority of my students become successful goal-setters. Without feedback, many students would write generic goals such as "do better at math" instead of making goals that were specific and measurable. My students responded well to questioning, as it allowed them to really think through the process on their own. Most of the feedback occurred through our small groups or through on-on-one discussion because it allowed us to "workshop" the goals together when the students struggled.

Finally, fostering a goal setting culture in my classroom seems to have changed the way that students viewed themselves as learners, leaders, and people. At the beginning of the school year, few students had positive things to say about themselves or their skills. After spending time learning how to set quality goals, and eventually meeting those goals, students were able to grow more confident. They felt good about the progress they made and saw that they were able to develop their own strategies to work through the goal.

Policy Recommendations

Make Goal Setting Part of the Classroom Routine

Students need opportunities to practice long and short-term goal setting throughout the school year in order to develop the skills needed to create and work toward realistic goals.

Students will develop a deeper understanding of goal setting and also may develop greater self-esteem and intrinsic motivation as they meet their personal goals.

I built goal setting into my weekly classroom routine. Students received explicit instruction on how to create SMART goals and were asked to create weekly goals. I still had some students who needed additional support, but I worked with those students in small groups or individually and provided them with feedback through specific questioning to help guide them through the process. Gradually I saw the quality of my student's goal setting improve as their understanding of goal setting deepend. I saw that they were thinking in more detail about how and why they selected their goals. Students were even able to describe their strategies to me, many of which they developed on their own.

I was also lucky enough to work with multiple students for two years in a row. I believe that my pre-existing relationship with these students allowed them to be more vulnerable and honest with me. Whenever possible, making goal setting a routine that carries over multiple grades, especially with the same teacher through "looping" or scheduling choices, increases the quality of the teacher-student relationship, the quality of feedback, and the quality of goals the students are able to develop and achieve.

Provide Frequent Opportunities for Self-Evaluation

Similarly, students also need to practice self-evaluation in order for it to be effective and meaningful for them. Self-evaluation gives students the opportunity to reflect on their progress and it plays an important role in their ability to see their hard work pay off.

My students were asked to self-evaluate their weekly goals at the end of each Friday. Over time, students became more reflective and were able to realistically evaluate their progress toward their goals.

Provide Students with Choices

One major choice that increased student interest in setting goals is to allow students to have a choice about the type of goals they are setting along with the specific skills they want to work on. If it is difficult to get students to set goals about their academic learning, it can be beneficial to foster their interest with the goals they do care about, such as how Kalan set a goal related to his football team. He started learning the skills by creating goals centered on a high-interest topic and gradually we were able to transition those skills to academic goals as well, still allowing choice in what specific goals he wanted to improve upon.

It is vital to provide students with choice when goal setting because even if they aren't setting academic goals, it is by no means a waste of time. There are valuable skills and traits that can still be developed with non-academic goals that can later be generalized across to the classroom, such as how Kalan wanted to make Captain of the football team because he wanted to become a better leader. This is a deep, intrinsic interest that would be hard to replicate by requiring students to write formulaic, predetermined goals, even if they were for areas the students needed to improve in.

Limitations and Considerations

One of the greatest challenges over the course of this study was events out of the scope of my school's control impacting instruction and making it difficult to establish a quality routine and long-term opportunities for practice.

In October 2019, the Chicago's Teachers Union held a ten day labor strike, so schools were closed for students and I was unable to teach them or continue with our goal-setting routine. In March 2020, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, school was temporarily closed and later shut down for the year, with all learning taking place remotely. A number of my students have limited or no internet access so it has been difficult to connect with them consistently enough to maintain our regular classroom goal setting routine.

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Appendix A

Sample Student Materials

SMART Goal Checklist

Making SMART Goals

Specific	What <u>exactly</u> do you want to happen?
Measurable	How will you know you have reached your goal?
Action	What steps will you take to reach your goal?
Realistic	Can you achieve this goal?
Time	What is the deadline for reaching your goal?

SMART Goal Graphic Organizer

I want to...

I will Know I have when...

I Know I CAN because ...

I want to because...

Date to complete:

Goal Action Plan

Plan out the steps you will take to reach your goal.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

Weekly Check-In (Electronic Google Form)

Weekly Check-in Monday -

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Name *

Your answer

Date *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy 📅

Today I am feeling: *

☐ Happy

☐ Sad

☐ Excited

☐ Angry

☐ Tired

☐ Calm

☐ Other:

One thing I am looking forward to this week: *

Your answer

Remember to set SMART goals for yourself!

This week in reading, my goal for myself is:

Your answer

I will work on my reading goal by:

Your answer

Ms. Jankowski can help me with my reading goal by:

Your answer

This week in math, my goal for myself is:

Your answer

I will work on my math goal by:

Your answer

Ms. Jankowski can help me with my math goal by:

Your answer

My non-academic goal for myself is:

Your answer

I will work on my non-academic goal by:

Your answer

Ms. Jankowski can help me with my non-academic goal by:

Your answer

Is there anything else you would like Ms. Jankowski to know? (school or non school - it can be about a game/event, something you are excited about, something you need me to know, etc)

Weekly Check-Out (Electronic Google Form)

Weekly Check-Out (Friday)

* Required

Name *

Your answer

Date *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy 🗓

Today, I am feeling: *

☐ Happy

☐ Sad

☐ Excited

☐ Angry

☐ Calm

☐ Tired

☐ Other: _____

GOAL REFLECTION

Before you answer each question, think about the goals you set for yourself and how you think you did in class this week. Did you make progress on your goals? Did you try your best? Could you have done better? Keep these things in mind as you answer the questions.

In math this week, I worked on:

Your answer

How I feel about what I did in math this week:

○ 1 - 😊 Good!

○ 2 - 😐 Fine.

○ 3 - 🤢 Not so good.

In reading this week, I worked on:

Your answer

How I feel about what I did in reading this week:

○ 1 - 😊 Good!

○ 2 - 😐 Fine.

○ 3 - 🤢 Not so good.

For my non-academic goal this week, I worked on:

Your answer

How I feel about what I did on my non-academic goal this week:

○ 1 - 😄 Good!

○ 2 - 😑 Fine.

○ 3 - 😩 Not so good.

What was something that helped you learn or make progress on your goals this week? *

Your answer

What can Ms. Jankowski do to help you with your goals next week? *

Your answer

What is something that you are proud of this week? *

Your answer

What is something that you could have done a better job of this week? *

Your answer

Appendix B

SMART Goal Framework

Appendix C

Goal-Setting Model by Teacher

S

I want to...
give my students clear and timely feedback

M

I will know I have when...
I am giving feedback to students on their work within 48 hours

A

I know I CAN because ...
I can write feedback and conference with my students

R

I want to because...
Giving good feedback will help my students learn more

T

Date to complete:
The end of Quarter 1

Appendix D

Sample Student Goals (Beginning, Middle, End of School Year)
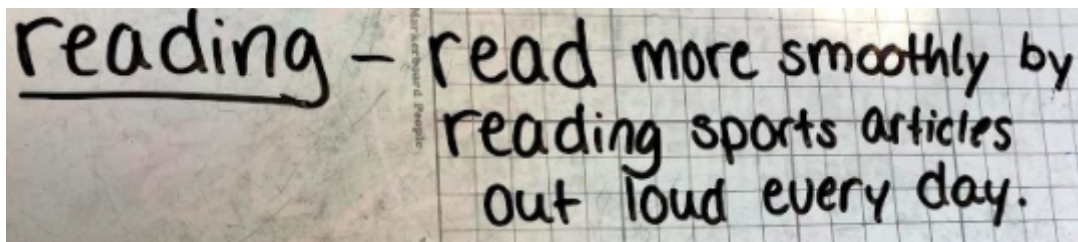
Beginning of the Year:

(By Kalan, September 16, 2019, Typed on Weekly Check-In)

"Be good at reading"

Middle of the Year:

(By Kalan, February 17, 2020)

End of the Year:

(By Kalan, May 11, 2020, Typed on Weekly Check-In)

"By the end of the week I will learn
10 new vocab words from our list."

Appendix E

Summary of Student Quotes During NWEA Assessment

Test	Positive Comments	Negative Comments
Reading	"Yeah! Can I show my mom?"	"I'm going to get my phone taken if I don't do good."
		"I'm not ready to do this."
		"I can't do this."
Math	"I thought I did a good job."	"I must be retarded."
	"I'm gonna destroy this one, too!"	"You got me feeling retarded."
	"I'm taking this seriously	"I just answered that wrong. I feel slow.
	"I can fix this."	"I feel stupid."
	"I know what to do."	"I'm retarded."
	"I got this."	"I'm not smart."
	"I can do this."	"I'm so stupid."
		"I'm stupid."
		"I'm just so supid. I got a 202."
		"I'm going to a bad high school."
		"My mom is going to kill me."
TOTAL:	8	14
Total Reading:	1	3
Total Math:	7	11
Total 7th Grade:	0	9
Total 8th Grade:	8	5