

Appendix D

Goal-Setting Experiments

GRADES 3–5

I attempted to implement goal setting in the classroom so that it could touch as many students as possible. Below is the form I presented to the students. I tried to set some manageable and clear limits for them so that goal setting would be a positive experience and one they would want to try again. The goal had to be either classroom work or a specific mutually agreed-upon skill. The time frame could be more than a week.

After consulting with me, the children put their goal sheets up on a public sharing board (bulletin board).

There was some resistance initially. When children realized that goal setting was solely up to them and that they owned the goal, the response was very positive. Students focused on a wide variety of work and skills, and about 90% accomplished their goals. Goal setting is now a part of the classroom.

I learned that (a) children often focus on work about which they are insecure or lacking in skills; (b) goal setting gives both student and teacher an opportunity to relate in a positive, supportive context; and (c) goal setting can be motivating proof that students have power and control where they once felt they had none.

Goal Setting

I want to work on _____ (work or skill).

I will accomplish this by _____ (one week or less, day and date).

I realize that this is something I really want to work on and that it is my own decision.

Student's signature

How it went. Did I accomplish my goal?

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

GRADES 3–5

I try always to be very specific with students about long- and short-term goals for them. They always know, for example, what is going to happen in any given class period and why I think it's important. At the beginning of each new unit, and at several points along the way, I speak about the long-term benefits I hope they will realize. During the writing unit, I did a great deal of work with individual students on setting goals for their writing. I had not, however, asked students to set goals for themselves (without my input), and I thought it might be useful for them and instructive for me to see what goals they might choose.

I began with an inventory of writing skills—both technical and stylistic—which I asked students to think about. Most were able to check a number of areas in which they felt they had achieved mastery. The second step was to look at the items they had not checked and think about which ones they might be able to make progress on in the weeks remaining. I asked them to list four or five of these and to devise a strategy they could use to achieve progress.

Students seemed to have a very clear idea of their own strengths and weaknesses as writers. In almost every case, I was impressed with how forthright students were in assessing their needs and how reasonable their plans for addressing them were. Here are some examples:

Goal: to be less shy in class about reading my work

Strategy: try to get more confidence in myself and volunteer to read before my mind changes

Goal: I need to work on cutting parts that don't relate to what my piece is about. When I write something, I'm not too crazy about taking it out when someone says I don't need it.

Strategy: I have to learn to accept advice without taking it personally. Criticism isn't easy to take, but it is helpful.

Goal: I need to work harder in class every day.

Strategy: I usually need to write in a totally silent place, like a library or my room. I'll try harder to concentrate in class or find a quiet corner to work in.

We discussed our ideas in class, and then students put their inventories and goal-setting sheets in their folders. It's been very helpful since then to have these documents handy for checking in on how things are going.

This strategy will become a permanent part of my writing unit. I think it helped reinforce the implicit (and explicit) goal of the process approach to writing that students take responsibility for their own growth as writers. I also can see applications of these ideas in any number of other situations in an English class. Next year, for example, I think I will have students complete such a survey before they begin working in their reading logs.

GRADES 3–5

I'm interested in working goal setting into my daily interactions with kids.

Initially, I thought I should set up some system or other that worked on a regular basis with all the students. Perhaps I still "should," but what is happening at present is that I am trying goal setting with individuals, as it pops to mind as a possible method of coping.

For example, with a child who is loud, scattered, and tends to be up and away creating turmoil as he tries to establish friendships, I said (in place of my usual exasperated remarks), "Let's see what you've done so far. OK. What would you like to have finished by meeting time in 20 minutes?" To my considerable surprise he knew just how much he wanted to get done and explained his plan and his reasons for it. For the next 20 minutes he concentrated well (for him), showing me occasionally how far he was getting, and most important getting help when he needed it. He did indeed accomplish his goal by meeting time.

What's striking to me is that as I try this with individual kids, I feel as though I'm accomplishing something for once . . . because in fact *they* are.

With another child who is very productive, capable, cheery, and disorganized, I said (instead of feeling simply that I'm not providing adequately for him), "That's a great idea. Now what do you need to finish up before you start on this, and how about deciding to get it all finished by the end of this week?" He was enthusiastic, and I felt much more focused on him, rather than trailing in his wake.

GRADES 3–5

The principle of learning I chose to introduce to my classes over the last couple of weeks was goal setting. It tied in well with the beginning of the New Year.

A discussion of why people make New Year's resolutions led to our program of goal setting. Through a brainstorming activity we listed sensible, realistic goals each of them could work toward weekly.

After the class discussion, each student was handed a form—a bell or a snowman. They recorded the date and their goal for the week. A bulletin board was created using these forms.

In the beginning of each class, I asked each student to repeat his or her chosen goal. On Wednesday, I gave the children a few minutes to discuss their goal with another student. On the last day of the week we congratulated each other on reaching our goal or offered encouragement for the following week.

A pleasant surprise happened in my class. Setting their own goals appeared to make students more responsible in following through with assignments, and the quality of their work greatly improved.

Also, the children experienced a sense of satisfaction, and I reinforced the fact that they were responsible for this wonderful feeling of accomplishment. The second week the children wrote a new goal. Their enthusiasm was refreshing. At this time, we set up a buddy system. Each child chose a friend to help him or her accomplish their goal.

This simple activity was very worthwhile.

GRADES 9–12

The chapter "Principles of Learning" in *The Skillful Teacher* (Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower, 2008) is relevant to everything we do. Interestingly, as I was thinking of an experiment, one of my calculus students came to me concerned that she did not understand summation notation. While she could have gotten by without understanding it, she knew she would benefit from a better grasp. Thus, the perfect opportunity was presented to use goal setting.

Debbie and I talked for quite a while, and she decided to set a goal of understanding the material. I assigned her some reading and spent some time going through the process with her. In my work with her, she began to understand the material better when I started from the end and worked backward (thereby creating a more appropriate sequence of learning). After spending 3 days practicing her new skill, Debbie took a quiz on sigma notation and did very well. In the time since, the concept has come up on a test and in class. In both instances, Debbie has demonstrated a firm understanding of the concept; in fact, in class she readily volunteers to explain problems involving this concept.

Obviously, Debbie benefited from this goal-setting experience. She set the goal (understanding sigma notation) and sought to accomplish it in a short period of time (3 days). She was held responsible for it through the quiz and has had it reinforced regularly.

Since this time, I have sat down with a number of students who have had similar difficulties with other concepts. In most cases, I have tried to set up a similar experiment. Not surprisingly, I have found that most students fare better when they isolate their problems, set goals around them, and are held accountable. I suspect that the added one-to-one contact with the teacher is also helpful. The kids know the teacher cares.

REFERENCE

Saphier, J., Haley-Speca, M. A., & Gower, R. (2008). *The skillful teacher* (6th ed.). Acton, MA: Research for Better Teaching.