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The Effects of Personal Goal Setting in Music Ensembles

Benjamin White

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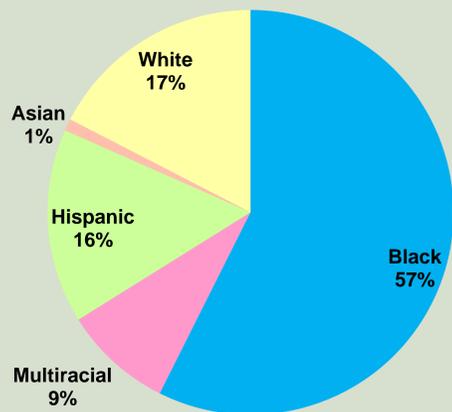
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Abstract

This research explores the use of guided personal and class goal setting and its effect on students' comprehension of the material that is taught in any given lesson. The project was staged in two classes of roughly the same size, with an average of 25 responses per survey; demographics in each class consisted of approximately 90% minority students, with only 2-4 males per class. Surveys were taken twice a week for the four week experimental period; one group was given guided goal worksheets for weeks three and four while the other did not receive goal guidance. The findings show that the guided goal system had little or no influence in the self-reported comprehension of the material to be learned in class. Further extensive testing would be necessary with a broader test group to determine if a guided goal worksheet would positively influence students' comprehension of classroom learning goals.

Context

Fig. 1: High School Enrollment by Ethnicity 2011-2012¹



This study was conducted in two orchestra classes of roughly 25 students each. The composition of the school as a whole is shown in Figure 1. In each of the classes, the gender of approximately 90% of the students is female. Overall, 53% of the school receives free or reduced lunches.¹ As a control group, this sample may be considered problematic—the implications on male learning and comprehension will be severely underreported.

¹ Data retrieved from <http://compass.doe.in.gov>

Research Question

Does the use of personal goal setting increase students' awareness of the material they are expected to learn during a given class period?

Methodology

Students in two separate classes of equal skill and developmental level participated twice a week in a short four question survey. This survey is designed to gauge how well the students understood the material covered in the lesson, as well as how personally responsible they felt for learning the material being taught. Results were compiled based on the percentage of students who responded "Very Much" out of the total number in the class. After two weeks of surveys, the experimental group was given a short goal setting worksheet to help guide their personal goals. The two weeks of surveys following demonstrated the change in comprehension of what material students are expected to learn.

Data Table & Analysis

Fig. 1: Experimental Group Survey Results

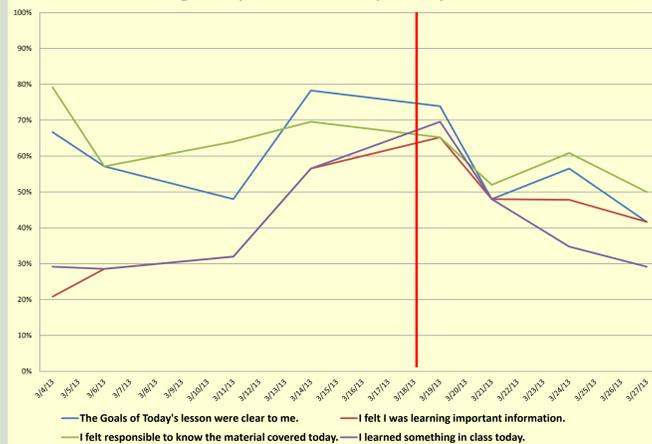
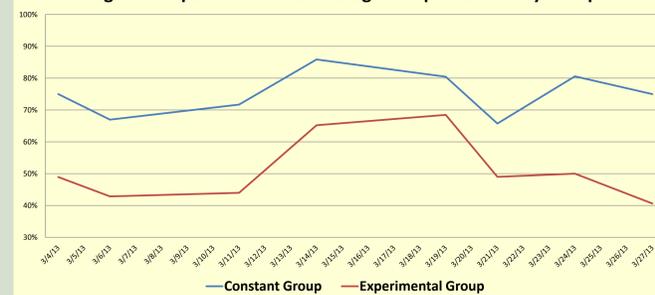


Fig. 2: Constant Group Survey Results



The data in Figures 1 and 2 represent the responses of students in the two classes, with the graphed line indicating the percentage of students responding "Very Much" to each indicated question. In the experimental group chart, the red vertical line indicates the introduction of a guided weekly goal sheet to the members of the class. It is important to note that the experimental group's first survey showed broad responses that averaged lower than the control group. After the goal worksheet was introduced, the students' surveys showed that they comprehended roughly the same or less in the experimental group, **yet the four response averages were more unified and focused.** Figure 3 shows the average of the four responses, illustrating the total comprehension in each class is most often parallel with the experimental group 20% lower than the control group.

Fig. 3: Comparison of Total Average Comprehension by Group



Impact on Student Participants

This study failed to demonstrate a general increase in student comprehension of lesson objectives when a guided personal goal worksheet was used in the classroom. Originally, the intention was that concrete weekly goals, both class-wide and personal, would help students focus on the materials and learn them more efficiently during the lesson. Surprisingly, the only change after the introduction of the worksheet was a more clearly focused response from the students regarding their learning. After the worksheet, students were more likely to respond to all four questions in a similar manner.

Long term implications, if this methodology were to be revised and re-tested, may show no increase in student self-awareness of comprehension. A different survey might be used to help students think more about their responsibility in the learning process, instead of allowing it to be an open forum for boredom or anger toward the teacher. In addition, another test may be completely adopted to gauge concrete student understanding instead of their perception of their own understanding.

Impact on the field of Education

Goal setting is an important tool in both learning and the organization of the classroom. With an image of a final product or outcome, learning can become more meaningful. Yet, the implementation of this goal setting is crucial to ensure success. From this study, I conclude that the goal-setting climate must be set from day one in the classroom environment. Without any precedent or continuity from class to class (the control group did not set goals), the worksheet and goal-setting mentality were not accepted. Using this study's data as a base measure, a similar study may show that the long-term use of goals increases both the perception and reality of comprehension in students.

Contact information

Benjamin E. White
Valparaiso University Class of 2013

Phone: (219) 779-7440
Email: benjamin.white@valpo.edu