

GROUP 3G  
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**Question:** WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOAL SETTING IS INTRODUCED TO THE CLASSROOM?

**Rationale:**

My background before entering teaching was Human resource management, with a particular focus on motivating employees. Since joining teaching I have adapted my previous knowledge and been able to apply it in a classroom setting. I have found it a challenging to motivate a particular group of children in my class. This group do not respond as effectively to extrinsic rewards as other pupils in the class. This led my decision making process when enquiring whether introducing goal setting more frequently would improve the quantity and quality of pupil work.

**Aims:**

The aim of this enquiry was to investigate if goal setting would improve a group of pupils' quality and quality of work. It was also hoped that by agreeing these goals with students that they would be more intrinsically motivated in their own learning.

**Methodology:**

**Subjects:**

This enquiry was carried out during February and March over a month period within a primary six class which composed of twenty-two children. A select group participated in the enquiry and no other class was involved. The reasoning behind this sort of participant sample was due to convenience. Sekeran and Bougie (2009) state that this sort of sampling "refers to the collection of information from members of a population who are conveniently available to provide it" (Sekeran & Bougie, 2009, p276). It would be beneficial in the future if carrying out a similar enquiry to have a wider range of participants to observe, however as the school was very busy with other events during the time of Easter this was the only practical group that could be used.

**Procedure:**

Throughout the month span of my professional enquiry I kept a reflective journal, which I recorded qualitative data such as what went well and what could be improved upon. I planned to introduce size lessons in which I used goal setting task cards. The level of input I had in setting goals on these task cards differed greatly depending on what stage the enquiry was in.

- Lesson one and two was completely teacher guided set goals.
- Lessons three and four the practitioner introduced pupil participation in setting their own goals.

- Lesson five and six were completely student set goals.

The purpose of differing the contribution was to measure if allowing children to set their own goals impacted in motivation to complete a greater quality and quantity of work.

Along with the professional feedback and reflective journal notes, I kept critical incident notes throughout the full placement to give a more rounded perspective. After collecting all research, I shall analyse and determine if there were any pattern or trends in behaviour when more reward variety was introduced (Baumfield, 2008).

### Design:

The enquiry design for observing whether a goal setting increases student work rate and quality within a primary six class would follow an exploratory route as it, “seeks new insight into phenomena, to ask questions, and to assess the new phenomena in a new light” (Saunders et al, 2012, p670). The practitioner chose exploratory research as previous research often offered “broad and scattered” insights into whether reward variety modified behaviour (Nai Paul, 1989, p31).

The enquiry will employ the use of observations and notes of critical incidents from a reflective journal. Due to this, the methods will be qualitative, which “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p21). When using such qualitative methods, it is important to highlight that the data collected will be subjective and down to personal interpretation. In order to try reduce biases and improve validity, I was very upfront with my mentor about trying to leave all prejudices out of observation feedback. Although there are perhaps more effective ways to ensure rigor and validity, for this particular enquiry these methods chosen were more practical and doable.

### Findings:

During this enquiry I made frequent notes of incidents or difficulties I had. This section shall examine key moments from critical incidents and journal reflections which I found to be significant to challenging my initial thinking.

The results from my enquiry generally found positives in setting goals to improve quality and quantity of work produced by students. At the start of my enquiry I collected qualitative research through reflective logs, which noted,

*“Children seem to be responding well to task cards and are more focussed on tasks set by teacher. Pupil A however still seems distracted at times and at times was found playing with the task card”* (Reflective journal 10/2/17).

Reacting from this I set about including new elements to the task cards, such as autonomy of setting their own goals and introducing an element of competition through performance

goals. I noted that the more autonomy introduced the greater the quality of work produced. However, this was not visible in all students and the selected girl pupils found it difficult at times to set their own tasks, this was evident in my journal entry:

*“The girls seem to take a long time to create their own goals for a given lesson. It is my assumption that this may be due to their ability level and low confidence.”* (Reflective journal 1/3/17). The boys reacted much more effectively to setting their own goals than the girls but have polar opposite reactions to the increased competition. In which they would tease each other and rush work, which resulted in a lower quality of work produced.

The above theme that emerged in my reflections was the conflicting views concerning ‘Performance goals’, also known as ego goals. I thought it was a highly effective method of modifying behaviour. It usually meant adding a competitive element to your lessons. I felt that it was useful in challenging children’s thinking and was an effective motivator, especially at the beginning of tasks (Hayes, 2012). I was unsure on adding too much competitiveness to children, but ensured positive feedback is given to every child with task cards.

### **Conclusion and implications for future practice:**

The enquiry although short was very informative, the introduction of goals setting in the class has to be structured in a way that is unique for each child and takes into account the background, ability and in certain cases gender. Goal setting in my class has been a key tool in improving the quality and quantity of work and I would like to maintain this throughout my teaching career.

It is through this enquiry that I now realise my own strengths I currently possess, such as empathy and patience. I now have the confidence in myself to critically evaluate why something might not be working and to produce alternatives or improvements.

### **Reference list:**

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Hayes, D (2012) Foundations of Primary Teaching. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, USA: Routledge

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