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Teaching Goal Setting Strategies In A Title I Elementary School; An Action Research Study

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TEACHING GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES IN A TITLE I ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL; AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation achievement is dedicated to my grandmothers, Emmaline Porter and Lillian Ridgeway, who blazed the educational path before me. As women ahead of their time, they both served as role models to our family and society by obtaining four-year college degrees before educators were required to do so. These women influenced me to strive for the best in life, and I owe my initiative to fulfill this requirement for a doctoral degree to them.

This achievement is also dedicated to my incredibly supportive family. I am in deep appreciation of my husband, Troy, who allowed me to put life on hold to read, write, and study throughout the doctoral experience. In moments of doubt, Troy lifted me up and gave me faith that I could make it through to the end while living through the experience of being a doctoral student himself. You make me want to be the best person I can be, and for that, I am forever thankful. I am also in deep appreciation of my mother and father, Emily and Mark Ridgeway, who raised me to believe that I can do anything to which I am willing to put my mind. I would also like to express deep appreciation to my brother, Mark Ridgeway Jr., the first person in our family to earn a doctorate and my sister, Elizabeth Starkweather, an outstanding educator who inspires excellence in others. You each encouraged me to pursue my dreams and gave terrific advice along the way. I also have a great deal of gratitude for my in-laws, Melody and Joe Nunamaker, who created an oasis in their home where I could go to get away from it all when needed. Thank you to my wonderful family for your continuous support through this journey.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative action research study is to explore the impact of goal setting on the learning process of fifth-grade students in a Title I school. The subjects of this research study are 17 fifth-grade student-participants along with their homeroom teacher-participant. A goal setting unit was designed specifically for this action research study to enable student-participants to experience setting mastery goals and to develop an academic engagement practice through goal setting; thus empowering them for future learning. Semi-structured student interviews, student data journals in the form of goal setting forms, and an open-ended interview with the teacher-participant provide the data for this research. Focus Elementary School (pseudonym) student-participants' and their homeroom teacher-participant's reaction to the goal setting unit was found to impact the learning process in the form of academic engagement through the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus in the classroom. The participant-researcher reflected on the data with school leadership, including the teacher-participant, to determine future implementation of a student engagement plan focused on goal setting for fifth-grade classrooms at FES. An action plan designed to enable teachers to empower students for future learning through goal setting was developed through this research study.

Keywords: student engagement, goal setting, self-efficacy, self-regulation, Title I

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

Chapter One provides an overview of an action research study designed to enable one fifth-grade teacher-participant to strengthen the student engagement practices of her 17 fifth-grade students through a student goal setting unit. It includes an explanation of the identified problem of practice (PoP) for the dissertation in practice (DiP) that took place in a rural Title I (i.e., at least 40% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced lunch status) elementary school located in the South. The fifth-grade teacher approached the participant-researcher, who is Focus Elementary School's (FES) (pseudonym) curriculum specialist, to request instructional assistance engaging her students with curricular material to strengthen students' success in school because she felt that her students were not engaged in the curricular material at an acceptable level and expressed concern that her students exhibited a lack of self-efficacy related to their own academic achievement. Together, the teacher-participant and I designed an action research study to find solutions to this identified problem related to goal setting.

Goals & Objectives

The goal of this qualitative action research study was to explore an evidence-based student engagement strategy in the classroom of one fifth-grade teacher of low socioeconomic (SES) students to enable her students to set goals for themselves and increase their levels of self-efficacy to be successful in school. The student-participants

within this study attend a rural Title I school located in the South. The primary objective of this study is to explore the effect of student goal setting on the learning process for fifth-grade students within one classroom in a southern, rural Title I elementary school. However, if the strategy is successful it may be implemented throughout more fifth-grade classrooms at FES in the future to strengthen students' engagement practices. An action research approach was chosen for this study in order to put theory into practice, as well as, build upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work focused on student engagement and Jensen's (2009) work focused on successfully reaching students of poverty through instruction. Student engagement and feelings of self-efficacy in students were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher-participant and are the focus of the study.

Scholarly Research Substantiating the Need for Engagement

Scholarly research-based literature substantiates the need to explore strategies to increase student engagement. According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), "engagement is a decisive turning point in the web of causality that links individual students' experiences to their behaviors in school and beyond" (p. 18). Disengagement consequences are often more serious for young students from disadvantaged backgrounds because they do not usually get a second chance as opposed to the likelihood of second chances for many young privileged students (National Research Council, 2004). Publication after publication links student engagement to dropout (i.e., leave school before graduation from the 12th grade) rates and future success in post-secondary institutions. According to Tileston and Darling (2009):

The challenge before teachers, and what they *do* have the power to control, is to create the educational conditions for these [low-SES] students to succeed in spite

of the diverse circumstances under which they live. When teachers create these conditions, they build resilience in their students to succeed in school, create hope and belief in their students as persons and learners, help students aspire to some form of postsecondary education, and provide their students with the key to override the impact of poverty. (p. 27)

Learning goals provide a strategic method for teachers to create these educational conditions for student success. Ames (as cited in Collopy & Green, 1995) argued, “When students adopt learning goals, they take on more challenging tasks, persist longer, are less debilitated by mistakes and failure, and use higher-level thinking skills than when they focus on ability goals” (p. 38). The importance of student engagement as a foundational piece toward student success encouraged the prioritization of strengthening student engagement practices on the list of school improvement strategies. Student goal setting will be explored through this action research study in an effort to strengthen student engagement practices within one fifth-grade classroom at FES. According to Shellenbarger (2011), “A student’s ability to set and achieve realistic goals is linked to higher grades, lower college-dropout rates, and greater well-being in adulthood” (p. 1).

Scholarly Research Substantiating Goal Setting Strategy

Goal setting is a common strategy for increasing student engagement, self-efficacy, self-direction, self-regulation, and motivation in students throughout the literature. Within academic settings, goal setting is a vital component of students’ motivation, self-regulation, and achievement (Schunk, 2009). According to Ames (1992), “Mastery goals increase...the quality of their [students’] engagement in learning (p. 262). It is a mastery goal that promotes a motivational pattern likely to promote long-

term and high-quality involvement in learning” (p. 263). Mastery goals result in positive relations to both achievement behaviors and ability perceptions across grade levels and subject areas (Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). Schunk (2009) argues:

Goal setting is an important component of students’ motivation, self-regulation, and achievement in academic settings. Self-efficacy and motivation are strengthened when they [students] believe that they are making progress toward their goals. Self-efficacy is further enhanced when learners attain their goals, as well as their motivation to set and pursue new goals. (pp. 1-2)

This is especially true for children of poverty. According to Pellino (2007), “Goal setting is a critical aspect of agency because it allows individuals to construct outcome expectations. This provides direction, coherence and meaning to life, elements often lacking in low socio-economic students” (Challenge: Student Motivation to Learn section, para. 8).

Statement of the Problem of Practice

The identified problem of practice for the action research study at FES, which is a rural Title I school in the South, involved a fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom. The teacher felt that her students were not engaged in the curricular material at an acceptable level and expressed concern that students exhibited a lack of self-efficacy in their own academic achievement. The teacher was frustrated with the present pedagogical and curricular structures and requested instructional support to enable her students to be actively engaged in the classroom. Goal setting and feelings of self-efficacy were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher and are the focus of the study. This study is centered on

enabling this teacher-participant to employ strategies for goal setting and self-efficacy to be potentially implemented throughout other FES fifth-grade classrooms in the future to strengthen engagement practices and goal setting skills for children of poverty. Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom* provided the framework for the goal setting unit that frames this study.

Addressing the Problem of Practice

The present study was developed in response to one fifth-grade teacher requesting assistance in enabling her students to be more engaged in the learning process and expressed willingness to participate in an action research study. This study centered on enabling one teacher-participant to employ strategies for goal setting and self-efficacy to be potentially implemented throughout FES in the future to strengthen engagement practices and goal setting skills for children of poverty. To address the identified Problem of Practice, I chose goal setting as the engagement method to be studied through the action research process after reading Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom*, as well as, Jensen's (2009) *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. At the onset of this action research study, all Title I schools within our school district were invited to attend a workshop entitled "Teaching Children of Poverty" presented by Francis Marion University's *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty*. Goal setting was a strategy discussed during the workshop as a means of engaging students of poverty and enabling students to strive for academic success. This confirmed my decision to focus on student goal setting as this action research study developed.

It was apparent through my informal conversations with the teacher-participant

that a majority of her students did not possess a skill set to set measurable and attainable goals for themselves due to a lack of exposure to the goal-setting process. For example, some middle-class families define future aspirations for themselves and their children through success in schooling (US Department of Commerce, 2010), whereas some low-SES families find it difficult to cultivate future focus through success in schooling because the focus is often on surviving today's challenges without a guarantee for tomorrow (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). This was a hurdle that we needed to assist students in overcoming due to the importance of the ability to goal set according to the literature.

Professional literature indicates that engaged students are more likely to earn better grades and perform well on standardized tests (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2004). Research suggests that student engagement is considered the primary phenomenon for predicting and understanding dropout (i.e., leaving school before graduation from the 12th grade) (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). In addition, the consequences for disengagement in schooling are far more serious for so called "at-risk" children (i.e., at risk for leaving school before graduation) (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). See Chapter Two for a more detailed literature review regarding the importance of goal setting in the lives of low-SES students.

Research Site

The research site is a Title I school filled with at-risk children due to challenges that they face beyond classroom walls. The population of children consists of 25% homeless students due to a children's emergency shelter within the attendance zone, 72% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and 20% English language learners (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Students' lives consist of hardships

that a majority of the faculty and staff have never had to experience within their own lives. Students come to school hungry, tired, unable to understand the language of teachers and peers, afraid of what lies ahead when they return home in the afternoon, and wondering when they will be allowed to see their mother or father again (C. Burgess, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

This action research study took place in one fifth-grade teacher's Title I classroom as a result of her request for assistance in enabling her students to be more engaged in the learning process and expressed willingness to participate in an action research study. The classroom consisted of 17 students of mixed genders from a variety of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The class was made up of nine boys and eight girls. English language learners made up 11% of the class. Overall, the ethnic makeup of this class was 26% African American, 16% Hispanic, 53% White, and 5% identified as having two or more ethnicities. Students receiving free and reduced lunch made up 84% of the students within this class, and 21% of students were considered homeless (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016). The primary objective of this study was to explore the effect of student goal setting on the learning process for these specific fifth-grade students.

Research Question

What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?

Research Objective

The goal of this qualitative action research study was to explore an evidence-based student engagement strategy in the classroom of one fifth-grade teacher of low

socioeconomic (SES) students to enable her students to set goals for themselves and increase their levels of self-efficacy to be successful in school. This qualitative action research study is centered on enabling one teacher-participant to employ strategies for goal setting and increased levels of self-efficacy for children of poverty within her fifth-grade classroom. Student engagement and self-efficacy in students were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher-participant and are the focus of the study. An action research approach was chosen for this study in order to put theory into practice, as well as, build upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work focused on student engagement and Jensen's (2009) work focused on successfully reaching students of poverty through instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of the present qualitative action research study was to explore student goal setting in a fifth-grade classroom at Focus Elementary School (FES), a rural Title I school located in the South. The participant-researcher explored an evidence-based strategy that one teacher-participant implemented in her self-contained general education classroom of 17 students at FES, aimed at strengthening low-SES student-participants' goal setting skills to improve student engagement in the learning process, as well as, increase students' levels of self-efficacy to be successful in school.

Fifth-Grade Study Participation

Fifth-grade was chosen as a research focus for this action research study due to students' heightened academic disaffection within the eight to 11-year-old age group according to the literature, as well as, signs of student academic disaffection within fifth-grade students at FES. A partnership to conduct the study within the teacher-participant's

classroom also played a role in choosing fifth-grade for this action research study due to her willingness to serve as the teacher-participant. The teacher-participant requested assistance in enabling her students to exhibit greater academic engagement and willingly agreed to participate in this action research study in order to determine the impact of goal setting on students' academic engagement.

The participant-researcher and teacher-participant worked together to create a unit about setting measurable and attainable goals. As the teacher-participant taught the lesson, the participant-researcher assisted her in conferencing with student-participants as they learned to set goals. Student-participants set their own individual goals, which were measurable and student-participants felt would be attainable. The intent of allowing student-participants to set their own learning goals was to allow student-participants to focus on mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge that was important to them. Student-participants set goals in a variety of areas including sports, art, social skills, social studies, writing, math, and reading.

Rationale for the Study

The effect of student goal setting on the learning process for fifth-grade students within a Title I school was explored through this qualitative action research study. Goal setting is a student-focused strategy that “requires students to self-observe, self-judge, and self-reflect” (Schunk, 1990, p. 71). With that in mind, goal setting was explored as an option for assisting FES in developing an evidence-based strategy to strengthen student engagement practices through the action plan that resulted from collaboration and reflection on the impact of goal setting on the learning process for fifth-grade low-SES students in one FES classroom.

Goal setting is currently a focal point within the field of education, particularly among experts focused on educating children of poverty. For example, according to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “Student engagement has long been recognized as the core of effective schooling” (p. 3). Marzano and Pickering (2011) argue:

Self-efficacy is quite possibly the most important factor affecting engagement . . .

A comprehensive approach to developing self-efficacy . . . would include tracking progress over time, setting personal academic goals, and examining effort and preparation. (p. 117)

One longitudinal study conducted found a significant correlation between student engagement and school dropout rates. The study concluded that participation and active learning are critical determinants of student investment in their education (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2009). According to Kidwell (2010):

If students are not engaged in the learning process, all of the testing, data analysis, teacher meetings, and instructional minutes in the world will not motivate students to learn. The only instructional program that makes a difference is that which involves students in their learning. (p. 4)

Disengagement consequences are even more serious for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Disadvantaged students are less likely to graduate and will face more limited employment prospects. This increases disadvantaged students’ risk of future poverty, poor health, and involvement in the criminal justice system (National Research Council, 2004). As a designated Title I school filled with hopeful students from disadvantaged backgrounds it is imperative that leadership and faculty seek opportunities for students to become engaged and take ownership in their learning.

Following Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), the present qualitative action research study focused on student goal setting because findings show that “students who are encouraged to take risks, to view mistakes as opportunities for learning, and to understand the need for help as an indicator of a growing mind will likely experience school as opportunity rather than threat” (p. 14). Moreover, according to Pellino (2007), “a critical task facing teachers is to help students develop . . . skills for self-regulation (goals, plans, and perseverance), and self-efficacy (the belief that something can be done)” (Challenge: Student Motivation to Learn section, para. 9). Goal setting is a strategy that has the potential to teach students how to challenge themselves, track progress, and acknowledge that their own efforts play a major role in the progress made toward the goal they set for themselves. Marzano and Pickering (2011) argue:

By asking students to track their progress over time, teachers are encouraging them to see assessments not as isolated tests that can permanently influence their overall grade but as connected measurements of their learning and progress over time. (p. 119)

Theories Used to Ground the Study

The present qualitative action research study is grounded in self-regulated learning theory and self-efficacy theory (Zimmerman, 1989). According to Zimmerman (1989), “students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process” (p. 329). To qualify as self-regulated according to Zimmerman’s (1989) theory, “students’ learning must involve the use of specified strategies to achieve academic goals on the basis of self-efficacy perceptions” (p. 329). Zimmerman’s

definition of self-regulated learning theory assumes the importance of 3 elements, which include self-regulated learning strategies, self-efficacy, and a commitment to academic goals. Self-regulated learning strategies consist of “actions or processes directed at acquiring information or skill that involve agency, purpose, and instrumentality perceptions by learners” (Zimmerman, 1989, p. 329).

Self-Regulated Learning Theory

The first theory used to ground this action research study is self-regulated learning theory. According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012):

Self-regulation theory is concerned with what students do to generate and sustain their engagement. It begins with the recognition that students are active participants in their own learning . . . To be self-regulated is to be goal-directed and demonstrate control over and responsibility for one’s focus and effort when engaged in learning. (p. 18)

According to Schunk (1990), three self-regulation behaviors occur within self-regulated learning: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reflection. Self-regulation is the product of one’s motivations, self-appraisals, environmental evaluations, and level of skill in staying focused (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). According to Zimmerman (1989), self-regulated students “personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of instruction” (p. 329).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is one’s perception of her/his capabilities to organize and implement actions necessary to attain designated performance of skill for specific tasks (Bandura,

1986). Tollefson (2000) explains, “Individuals’ beliefs about their abilities make up their sense of self-efficacy . . . these beliefs are important determinants of whether individuals will expend effort on a task and persist in the face of difficulty” (p. 67).

Self-efficacy plays an important role in a student’s self-observation, which according to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “is quite possibly the most important factor affecting engagement. If a student’s answer to the question ‘Can I do this?’ is no, most, if not all, engagement is lost” (p. 117). On the other hand, when students feel confident they can succeed they tend to construct the processes they need to get the job done. According to Zimmerman (1989), “in order for students’ strategic actions to be described as self-regulated one must know their academic goals and perceptions of efficacy” (p. 329). “When students perceive satisfactory goal progress, they feel capable of improving their skills; goal attainment, coupled with high self-efficacy, leads students to set new challenging goals” (Schunk, 1990, p. 71).

Action Research Methodology Summary

In an effort to assist students in developing a skill set in mastery goal setting, the participant-researcher partnered with a fifth-grade teacher who introduced the concept and practice of goal setting to her homeroom class. This goal setting model was developed using Marzano and Pickering’s (2011) work on setting personal academic goals. Students used a derivative of Marzano and Pickering’s (2011) self-evaluative goal setting form within student data journals to track their progress and reflect on their own efforts in working toward their goals. The students’ homeroom teacher used think-aloud modeling to guide a class discussion about setting measurable and attainable mastery goals. Students set mastery goals two times (one goal every four weeks) throughout the

study in order to protect instructional time in the classroom while creating a proximal goal setting experience. In addition to setting measurable and attainable goals, students documented strategies they planned to utilize to obtain their goals, as well as, tracked and evaluated progress of goal attainment. This allowed students to engage in discussions and self-evaluation regarding the relationship between effort and performance.

According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “It is significant for students to discuss self-efficacy and study it firsthand through correlating their effort and preparation with achievement” (p. 127).

Conceptual Framework

The framework of this action research study consisted of a four-step process built from Mertler’s action research model consisting of the planning stage, acting stage, developing stage, and reflecting stage. Although the reflecting stage is listed as the fourth stage, it is important to note that reflection occurs constantly throughout this action research study. According to Mertler (2014), “It is critical . . . to reiterate that action research . . . is not a linear process. Whereas action research has a clear beginning, it does not have a clearly defined endpoint” (p. 37).

Planning Stage

The planning stage consisted of identifying the action research topic, gathering information, reviewing related literature, and developing a research plan. In the planning stage, this action research topic was identified through a fifth-grade teacher’s request for instructional assistance in developing an effective student-focused activity to strengthen student engagement practices her classroom. The participant-researcher conducted a review of professional literature on student-focused activities to promote student

engagement practices within the elementary setting; specifically focused on a low socio-economic school community. A research plan was developed in order to explore student goal setting in the teacher's fifth-grade classroom at FES as a means of strengthening student engagement practices of fifth-grade low-SES students.

Acting Stage

In the acting stage, the participant-researcher collected and analyzed the data. Several sources of data collection were utilized throughout the study in order to triangulate the data in support of the study's findings. Student data journals in the form of goal setting forms (See Appendix A) were used as the fifth-grade student-participants documented their goal setting experiences, which included monitoring and evaluating one's own efforts toward meeting her/his goal. Interviews were conducted with a subset of eight randomly chosen student-participants at the conclusion of the data collection stage. These semi-structured interviews consisted of specific pre-determined base questions (See Appendix B) that were asked consistently during each interview session, allowing for follow-up questions in the event that expanding on the question appeared valuable to the research effort. An open-ended interview took place with the teacher-participant (the fifth-grade class's homeroom teacher) at the conclusion of the action research study. The teacher-participant was asked to share any observed changes in her students' learning strategies in response to the goal setting unit.

Once the data collection progress began, the participant-researcher chose to track and report student data through the use of student identification numbers. The identity of each participant was kept confidential at all times. Each student-participant's identification number was used as a substitute for the name of the student-participant on

any work samples collected. Identification numbers were used within interview notes in order to protect the identities of all study participants. Participant information was not disclosed at any point during the study nor will participant information be disclosed at any point after the study, including the dissemination of conclusions or any future publications.

Developing Stage

The developing stage consisted of action plan development. Data collected throughout the study was analyzed to determine if the research required future adjustments, including gaps in the present action research study, a variance in the way goals are set by the class, the timeframe in which student goals are reflected upon and new goals are set, the method in which goal setting is taught, how progress toward goals is measured, or the way in which student self-monitoring takes place. Specifically, student-participants' need for mentorship and supplies was found to be a significant challenge to the study that had not been accounted for during the planning stage. The data continuously guided the development of shifts in research.

Reflecting Stage

In the reflecting stage, results were shared and communicated, as well as, reflected upon. The participant-researcher continuously engaged in reflective practice throughout the planning stage and continued to consistently monitor the progress of the study throughout the acting, developing, and reflecting stages of this action research study. Reflections occurred at the conclusion of the study to determine adjustments for further studies. Reflections may also occur in the form of feedback given during the sharing and communication of results phase of the study set to take place in May 2017.

The participant-researcher reflected on research findings with the teacher-participant, as well as the school's administrative team, at the onset of developing an action plan that is iterative and cyclical in terms of enabling students to set goals that are congruent with their academic engagement. Group reflection during the developing of an action plan phase, as well as the sharing and communication phase, was a vital part of this study because of its purpose to explore an evidence-based strategy for teachers to potentially implement throughout fifth-grade classrooms at FES to strengthen student engagement practices.

An action plan was developed to make any necessary adjustments to the present action research study and recruit fifth-grade teacher-participants on a volunteer basis to help the participant-researcher study the impact of a goal setting unit adjusted to meet the gaps found within the present action research study within various fifth-grade settings at FES. As other fifth-grade teacher-participants take part in action research within their own classrooms the results may lead to greater teacher beliefs in the power of teaching goal setting to their low-SES students should teachers witness greater student commitment to academics through the student goal setting process, which may lead to kindergarten through fourth-grade teachers' willingness to implement developmentally appropriate student goal setting units in the future.

After sharing findings and creating an action plan with the teacher-participant and administrative team, the participant-researcher plans to share findings with the school's fifth-grade teachers and related arts teachers during the professional learning community meeting scheduled for May 2017. Each month teachers meet with the participant-researcher to discuss strategic instructional design during the school's professional

learning community meeting. The sharing of these findings with fifth-grade and related arts faculty members during one of these meetings will greatly enhance the school's instructional planning discussions because of the ability to create an opportunity for discussion regarding teachers own middle class values surrounding goal setting, low-SES students' lack of exposure to goal setting, and the academic implications of teaching goal setting in the classroom. The administrative team and teacher-participant will be invited to participate in the faculty discussion in hopes of growing interest in further classroom studies surrounding student goal setting. In addition, FES's student teachers, who are currently interning in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, will also be invited to join this PLC meeting in order to gain knowledge in the area of student goal setting and potentially spread the strategy through their future classrooms in various school settings.

Findings may also be shared with the Francis Marion University *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty* due to their focus on student goal setting as a strategy for student engagement in schools with high levels of students living poverty. "Poverty" is defined as a student receiving free or reduced lunch (i.e., students qualifying for free lunch status due to a maximum income of \$29,055 for a family of four or students qualifying for reduced lunch status due to a maximum income of \$41,348 for a family of four) (see United States Department of Education, 2014). Findings will be shared at Francis Marion University's Summer Institute and through a presentation at the annual South Carolina Association of Title I Administrators Conference.

In the spirit of action research methods, reflection with participants at FES will continue to offer "a process by which current practice can be changed toward better

practice” (Mertler, 2014, p. 13). Change for the better requires constant reflection and adjustment. Therefore, the present action research study will be a continuous cycle of reflection and adjustment in an attempt toward better instructional practice at FES.

Participant Selection

Students assigned to the teacher-participant’s fifth-grade homeroom class were selected for participation within the study. Selected students were given opt-out consent letters (See Appendix C) to inform parents of the study and request consent for participation. All selected students whose parents gave consent participated in the study. The teacher-participant’s homeroom class consisted of approximately 17 students of mixed genders from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The class was made up of nine boys and eight girls. English language learners made up 11% of the class. Overall, the ethnic makeup of this class was 26% African American, 16% Hispanic, 53% White, and 5% identified as having two or more ethnicities. Students receiving free and reduced lunch made up 84% of the students within this class, and 21% of students were considered homeless (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

The teacher-participant is a teacher-leader amongst the faculty at FES, always willing to share ideas that work in her own classroom with others. She is a well-respected teacher who is energetic and willing to try anything that she believes will benefit her students. The hope was for her to see value in student goal setting and to encourage the faculty to include this strategy within their own classroom instruction should positive effects have occurred in the area of student engagement with the use of student goal setting in her homeroom class.

Research Site

FES is located in a rural South Carolina (SC) town. FES educates a population of 385 students consisting of 201 boys and 184 girls in grades 4K-5th. The ethnic population of students in grades 4K-5th is 2.5% Asian, 0.5% Native American, 13% African American, 17% Hispanic, 6% 2 or more races, and 59% White. Twenty percent of students are considered English language learners who qualify for English as a Second Language (ESOL) services. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch is 72%. Due to a children's shelter located within this school zone, 25% of students are considered homeless. Less than 10 years ago, FES was considered a highly regarded alternative to a neighboring school's large, competitive classrooms. Over the years parents within the neighboring communities have been offered school choice options, and many parents chose to send their children to FES for its reputation of caring teachers and smaller class sizes. FES was awarded the honor of National Distinguished Title I School in 2011 (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

Over time FES's test scores, rigor, and reputation have dwindled, leading to the decline of its student population count. FES is now considered by many to be a sub-par alternative to neighboring schools. The State Department of Education considered FES to be a National Focus School during the 2013-2014 school year, meaning that the school was identified as a South Carolina Title I school with one of the largest achievement gaps in subgroup performance on state testing. This led the school district to provide transportation for students whose parents opted for their children to be shuttled from FES to a neighboring school to be educated each day.

Role of Participant-Researcher

As the participant-researcher, my role in this action research study complemented my role as the Title I curriculum specialist within FES. Although this is only my third year serving the school, professional trust has quickly developed with the faculty throughout FES. Before joining the FES faculty I was a first-grade and third-grade teacher at the neighboring school mentioned earlier in this chapter in regard to the high-achieving school within the district. I routinely offered professional learning sessions focused on student engagement and classroom management for teachers throughout the school district during my time as a classroom teacher. Due to leading professional learning sessions prior to becoming the curriculum specialist at FES I had the opportunity to develop professional relationships with many of the faculty members throughout the school, and I was able to enter the school with a reputation of possessing a practical expertise in classroom engagement through daily instructional practices.

Many of the teachers request my presence in their classrooms for coaching sessions routinely with a desire for observational feedback, as well as, co-teaching activities specifically in the area of student engagement activities embedded within lessons. This was an asset as I entered the fifth-grade classroom to perform this action research study. Students were comfortable with my visits to their classroom, oftentimes greeting me by name in the hallways outside of the classroom. Students were used to me conducting lessons beside their teacher in the classroom, as well. Be that as it may, it remained extremely important that I blend into the classroom environment as a participant-researcher. It was imperative that I worked diligently to remain in a co-teaching position throughout the action research process in the teacher-participant's

classroom, especially considering that this activity was new to our school and outside of our students' typical school experience.

Transformational leadership best describes my leadership philosophy as a leader in the research site. Maxwell (2001) argues, "The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on transformational leadership. There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people, raises them up as leaders, and continually develops them" (p. 185). According to Covey (1990):

The goal of transformational leadership is to 'transform' people and organizations in a literal sense – to change them in mind and heart; enlarge vision, insight, and understanding; clarify purposes; make behavior congruent with beliefs, principles, or values; and bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating, and momentum building. (p. 287)

Transformational leaders model fairness and integrity, set clear goals, have high expectations, encourage others, provide support and recognition, stir the emotions of people, get people to look beyond their own self-interest, and inspire people to reach for the improbable (Bass, 1985). As a leader in the school community, my ultimate goal was to exhibit the behaviors of transformational leadership through this action research study.

In the event that this exploratory study found goal setting to impact student engagement in a positive way, I hoped to model setting and reaching goals for others through a transformational leadership approach. My goal was to inspire students and faculty to set their own personal and professional goals and, in turn, strive to reach those goals through this study. I believe that a truly successful leader empowers others to reach their full potential by giving them the support, tools, and resources necessary to strive for

their best. Ultimately, my hope was for this action research study to give students and faculty additional support, tools, and resources for success in their endeavors within the classroom and beyond.

Sources of Data Collection

This action research study consisted of a qualitative research design. The present study explored student goal setting (the central phenomenon) with fifth-grade student-participants at FES. Qualitative research methods were used throughout the action research study. Several sources of data collection were utilized throughout the study in order to triangulate the observational data. For example, student data journals in the form of goal setting forms (See Appendix A) were used as students documented their goal setting experiences, which included monitoring and evaluating her/his own efforts toward meeting her/his goal, and semi-structured interviews with student-participants were conducted with a subset of eight randomly chosen student-participants at the conclusion of the observational data collection stage. These semi-structured interviews consisted of specific pre-determined base questions (See Appendix B) that were asked consistently during each interview session, which allowed for follow-up questions in the event that expanding on the question appeared valuable to the research effort. An open-ended interview took place with the teacher-participant (the fifth-grade class's homeroom teacher) at the conclusion of the action research study. The teacher-participant was asked to share any observed changes in her students' learning strategies in response to the goal setting unit.

Potential Weaknesses

It should be disclosed that the participant-researcher is a white, middle-class

female who holds many white, middle-class values. My values are often in line with those of public institutions. At the onset of this action research study, I made the assumption that student-participants' had been exposed to goal setting through daily life and that a simple goal setting lesson would be enough to encourage student-participants to begin setting goals for themselves. However, student-participants needed more than a simple lesson on goal setting in the classroom. As the teacher-participant and I circulated the classroom at the conclusion of the initial goal setting lesson in an effort to assist student-participants in setting their goals, we learned that the process of helping student-participants understand how to set measurable and attainable goals would take more time than we originally planned. The process took one-on-one conferencing as opposed to the quick circulation for which we planned within the fifth-grade classroom.

In addition, it was assumed by the participant-researcher at the onset of the study that student-participants would set goals pertaining to skills learned with their homeroom teacher-participant. This assumption was incorrect as many student-participants set mastery goals outside of the expertise of the teacher-participant or participant-researcher. While many students were able to rely on family members for assistance with practice in meeting goals set outside the expertise of the teacher-participant or participant-researcher (specifically in the areas of physical education and art), some students did not have that same family support available to them. In order to fill in the mentorship gap during the present action research study, students were encouraged to develop relationships with faculty members specializing in the area of the set goal. For example, students who set goals in a sports related area were encouraged to ask the physical education teacher to assist them in developing the skill they wished to learn. The participant-researcher

discussed this with the physical education teacher, as well as, the art teacher prior to encouraging students to develop these relationships. Each of the teachers agreed to assist students with excitement and willingness. In the future, the word ‘attainable’ will be redefined to include access to expertise and support in the area of the mastery goal.

The participant-researcher also did not take into account that student-participants would set goals requiring supplies or equipment outside of the homeroom classroom setting. Several student-participants set goals that required art supplies. Many other student-participants set goals requiring practice sports equipment. The participant-researcher worked with the art teacher and physical education teacher behind the scenes to ensure that students were able to obtain the supplies necessary to work toward their set goals. However, the word ‘attainable’ will be redefined in future goal setting lessons to include access to necessary supplies needed to work toward a mastery goal.

The eight-week data collection timeframe is also a potential weakness. Two rounds of goal setting appeared to merely give student-participants the opportunity to begin to practice the process of goal setting and develop an understanding of the feelings created by the goal setting process. For example, findings suggest that self-regulation in the form of approaching teachers for assistance in meeting goals increased over time with goal setting. If the pattern were to continue, there is potential for self-regulation to continue to increase and present itself through other constructs over a longer timeframe. Student-participants would benefit from a longer goal setting unit timeframe in future studies.

The present action research study was completed by the participant-researcher within one teacher-participant’s fifth-grade classroom. The participant-researcher’s time

spent inside the fifth-grade classroom was limited due to the need to perform curriculum specialist job duties within the school. Therefore, the participant-researcher was unable to control all variables within the classroom that potentially impacted the study's findings. For example, the teacher-participant implemented a career exploration unit that overlapped with the conclusion of this study's data collection period. Future focus was a significant theme among student-participants' interviews at the conclusion of this action research study's data collection period. The career exploration unit that took place within the fifth-grade classroom likely influenced student-participants to consider their futures, which impacted this action research study's findings. It is unknown if other factors within the classroom potentially impacted the present action research study. Although the teacher-participant spoke informally with the participant-researcher on a continuous basis regarding classroom curriculum and instruction, the fifth-grade student-participants could have been influenced by day-to-day classroom activities unknown to the participant-researcher because it was not possible for the participant-researcher to be inside the classroom at all times.

Key Concepts / Glossary of Terms

The following words are unique to this action research study, which focused on the impact of goal setting on student engagement practices:

Action Research - Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn (Mills, 2001).

English Language Learner - An individual who is in the process of actively acquiring

English, and whose primary language is one other than English. This student often benefits from language support programs to improve academic performance in English due to challenges with reading, comprehension, speaking, and/or writing skills in English (Bardack, 2010).

Goal Setting - Goal setting refers to the process of establishing a behavior or outcome to serve as the aim of one's actions (Schunk, 2009).

Mastery Goal Orientation - A mastery goal orientation is defined in terms of focus on developing one's abilities, mastering a new skill, trying to accomplish something challenging, and trying to understand learning materials. Success is evaluated in terms of self-improvement, and students derive satisfaction from the inherent qualities of the task, such as interest and challenge (Meece et al., 2006).

Poverty - The term poverty for the purposes of this study refers to the percentage of students within a school who qualify for free and reduced lunch due to economic need. Family income must be within 130% of the poverty line (a max of \$29,055 for a family of four) to obtain free lunch status and within 185% of the poverty level (a max of \$41,348 for a family of four) to obtain reduced lunch status (United States Department of Education, 2014).

Proximal Goal - A proximal goal is relatively close at hand (Schunk, 2009). It provides immediate incentives and feedback about an individual's progress (Bandura, 1986).

Qualitative Research Design - Qualitative research designs use systematic observation in order to gain knowledge, reach understanding, and answer research questions (Mertler, 2011).

Self-Efficacy - Self-efficacy refers to beliefs concerning one's capabilities to attain

designated levels of performance (Bandura, 1986, 1988).

Self-Evaluating - Self-evaluating refers to students making statements which indicate student-initiated evaluations of the quality or progress of their work (Zimmerman, 1989).

Self-Observation - Self-observation refers to students' responses that involve systematically monitoring their own performance (Zimmerman, 1989).

Self-Regulation - Students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process. Students personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of instruction. Self-regulated learning occurs to the degree that a student can use personal processes to strategically regulate behavior and the immediate learning environment (Zimmerman, 1989).

Socioeconomic Status - Socioeconomic status is the relative standing in society based on income, power, background and prestige (Woolfolk, 2007).

Student Engagement - Student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

Title I - Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. To be considered a school wide Title I program at least 40% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced

lunch status (United States Department of Education, 2014).

Summary of the Findings

Through the exploration of student goal setting with one classroom of fifth-grade students at FES the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus exhibited a pattern amongst student-participants' responses during reflection and analysis. Overall, all data in the form of student data journals, eight student-participant semi-structured interviews, and a teacher-participant open-ended interview comprise the data set. The findings paint a comprehensive picture of the collective student goal setting experiences at FES over the Fall 2016 term. Findings are supported with selected participant quotations throughout the Findings section in Chapter Four of this Dissertation in Practice.

Significance of the Study

This action research study explored an evidence-based strategy to enable fifth-grade students of low-SES parents to engage in academics and increase feelings of self-efficacy to find success in school. Findings indicate an increase in student engagement through the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus with the implementation of the goal setting unit in this fifth-grade classroom. Student-participants were taught a strategy that enabled them to be more successful in their current and future academic endeavors. Many students reported a desire to continue utilizing goal setting within their lives as they move into middle and high school. Teaching students to set goals focused on what they want in life helps students from low-SES families to increase their perception of control over their environment by showing them how to act differently and therefore better manage their own stress levels for success in present and future

endeavors (Jensen, 2009).

In addition, the problem of practice guiding this action research study addressed a fifth-grade teacher's need to enable her students to be actively engaged in the classroom. The study focused on an evidence-based strategy that increased student engagement through the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus with fifth-grade student-participants at FES, which is a rural Title I school located in the South. Reflections took place with FES's leadership team, which included the teacher-participant, in order to develop an action plan to offer coaching cycles for other fifth-grade teachers willing to implement a goal setting unit for their own students. This opportunity will enable fifth-grade FES teachers to teach their students goal setting skills in an effort to increase their students' engagement in academics and success in school.

Dissertation Overview

An action research approach was chosen for this study of student goal setting in order to put theory into practice, as well as, build upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work focused on student engagement and Jensen's (2009) work focused on successfully reaching students of poverty through instruction. Upon recognizing a school improvement need for increased student engagement the participant-researcher consulted the literature and found student goal setting to be an evidence-based strategy consistently suggested by experts in the field of engagement. A qualitative research design was developed to determine what occurred over time when student goal setting was implemented within one fifth-grade Title I classroom in partnership with a fifth-grade teacher-participant. The study is grounded in Self-Regulated Learning Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory.

Student data journals, interviews with a subset of eight students, and an interview with the teacher-participant were collected and analyzed in an effort to triangulate data. Potential weaknesses of the present study include the participant-researcher's perspective as a white, middle class female, the unaccounted for need for mentorship and supplies when working toward mastery goals, a limited data collection timeframe, and the limited time spent within the student-participants' classroom due to the participant-researcher's job duties. Further research studies focused on goal setting with low-SES students, specifically within future researchers' own classrooms with longer data collection timeframes, would benefit the current understanding of the impact of student goal setting on the learning process. The present action research study found the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus through the exploration of student goal setting with fifth-grade students at FES.

Knowledge gained from this qualitative action research study is organized into the following chapters. Chapter Two consists of a literature review that substantiates the present study. Literature is summarized around the themes of student engagement, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. Chapter Three describes the methodology utilized within this qualitative action research study. The action research design, research participants, the research setting, data collection, data analysis, and reflection are described within the chapter. Chapter Four presents the findings and implications of the present action research study. Research participants' ongoing analysis and reflection, as well as, data analysis and interpretation culminate in answering the research question, "What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?" Chapter Five provides a summary, the conclusions, and an action

plan for this action research study. An action plan to facilitate educational change and suggestions for future research are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two of this Dissertation in Practice focuses on a review of literature related to the impact of goal setting on elementary students' engagement practices. The scope of this literature review is divided into six sections. In the introductory section, the problem of practice that initiated this action research study is reviewed. This includes the statement of the problem of practice, research question, and purpose statement that guide the study. Next, this chapter focuses on the importance of a related literature review with a goal of identifying the need for this particular study in regard to the studies that have historically taken place in the realm of goal setting. The methodology utilized to guide this action research study as it relates to the literature is also discussed in this chapter. In addition, theoretical perspectives and previous research findings of those who have theorized and studied goal setting and its effect on engagement in school, as well as, workplace settings are described. A historical chain of thought regarding student engagement and the impact that goal setting has on engagement is also included within the chapter. The related literature review conducted through the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library database, as well as, the research site's professional development library played a significant role in the development of this action research study. This chapter outlines how literature guided the research from a broad topic related to a fifth-grade Focus Elementary School (pseudonym) (FES) teacher's request for

instructional assistance in the classroom to the development of a specific action research question studied in an effort to determine the impact on the lives of students and their teacher.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

The identified problem of practice for the action research study at FES, which is a rural Title I (i.e., at least 40% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced lunch status) school in the South, involved a fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom. The teacher felt that her students were not engaged in the curricular material at an acceptable level and expressed concern that students exhibited a lack of self-efficacy in their own academic achievement. The teacher was frustrated with the present pedagogical and curricular structures and requested instructional support to enable her students to be actively engaged in the classroom. Goal setting and feelings of self-efficacy were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher and are the focus of the study. This study is centered on enabling this teacher-participant to employ strategies for goal setting and self-efficacy to be potentially implemented throughout other FES fifth-grade classrooms in the future to strengthen engagement practices and goal setting skills for children of poverty. Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom* provided the framework for the goal setting unit that frames this study.

Relation of Literature to Problem of Practice

To address the identified problem of practice, I read about ways the teacher-participant could better impact her fifth-grade students' academic engagement practices through teaching goal setting, which the literature suggests engages students of poverty

while building self-efficacy and self-regulation. Goal setting was chosen as the engagement method to be studied through the action research process after reading Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom*, as well as, Jensen's (2009) *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. However, it was apparent through my informal conversations with the teacher-participant that a majority of her students did not possess a skill set to set measurable and attainable goals for themselves due to a lack of exposure to the goal-setting process. For example, some middle-class families define future aspirations for themselves and their children through success in schooling (US Department of Commerce, 2010), whereas some low-SES families find it difficult to cultivate future focus through success in schooling because the focus is often on surviving today's challenges without a guarantee for tomorrow (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). This was a hurdle that we needed to assist students in overcoming due to the importance of the ability to goal set according to the literature.

Professional literature indicates that engaged students are more likely to earn better grades and perform well on standardized tests (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2004). Research suggests that student engagement is considered the primary phenomenon for predicting and understanding dropout (i.e., leaving school before graduation from the 12th grade) (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). In addition, the consequences for disengagement in schooling are far more serious for so called "at-risk" children (i.e., at risk for leaving school before graduation) (Parsons & Taylor, 2011).

Research Question

What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?

Research Objective

The goal of this qualitative action research study was to explore an evidence-based student engagement strategy in the classroom of one teacher of low socioeconomic (SES) students to enable her students to set goals for themselves and increase their levels of self-efficacy to be successful in school. This qualitative action research study is centered on enabling one teacher-participant to employ strategies for goal setting and self-efficacy for children of poverty within her fifth-grade classroom. Student engagement and feelings of self-efficacy in students were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher-participant and are the focus of the study. An action research approach was chosen for this study in order to put theory into practice, as well as, build upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work focused on student engagement and Jensen's (2009) work focused on successfully reaching students of poverty through instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of the present qualitative action research study was to explore student goal setting in a fifth-grade classroom at Focus Elementary School (FES), a rural Title I school located in the South. The participant-researcher explored an evidence-based strategy that one teacher-participant implemented in her self-contained general education classroom of 17 students at FES, aimed at strengthening low-SES student-participants' goal setting skills to improve student engagement in the learning process, as well as, increase students' levels of self-efficacy to be successful in school.

Fifth-Grade Study Participation

Fifth-grade was chosen as a research focus for this action research study due to students' heightened academic disaffection within the eight to 11-year-old age group

according to the literature, as well as, signs of student academic disaffection within fifth-grade students at FES. A partnership to conduct the study within the teacher-participant's classroom also played a role in choosing fifth-grade for this action research study due to her willingness to serve as the teacher-participant. The teacher-participant requested assistance in enabling her students to exhibit greater academic engagement and willingly agreed to participate in this action research study in order to determine the impact of goal setting on students' academic engagement.

The participant-researcher and teacher-participant worked together to create a unit about setting measurable and attainable goals. As the teacher-participant taught the lesson, the participant-researcher assisted her in conferencing with students as they learned to set goals. Students set their own individual goals, which were measurable and students felt would be attainable. The intent of allowing students to set their own learning goals was to allow students to focus on mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge that was important to them. Students set goals in a variety of areas including sports, art, social skills, social studies, writing, math, and reading.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The literature review continuously played a vital role in the formulation of this qualitative action research study. The importance of enabling disengaged students to develop goal setting skills and increase their levels of engagement became clear as I consulted the literature to gather information regarding strategies to improve student engagement in high poverty schools. The literature surrounding the consequences of disengagement, especially for students of poverty, was startling. This accelerated the sense of urgency to find a viable strategy to strengthen student engagement within the

teacher-participant's fifth-grade classroom at FES.

Impact of Disengagement on Low-SES Students

Marks's (2000) study found, "Social class contributed significantly to the engagement of students at all three grade levels [elementary, middle, and high]" (p. 167). Another study focusing upon ninth grade students found that Hispanic students exhibit the lowest levels of student engagement and school preparedness, as well as, the most negative attitudes towards school (Madrid, 2014). FES has a significant Hispanic population, many of whom live in communities where poverty is prevalent. According to Parsons and Taylor (2011), "consequences of disengagement are often much more serious for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds because they do not usually get a second chance; students from more privileged backgrounds frequently do" (p. 13). Willms's (2003) study found, "Students from low socio-economic families are more likely to be disaffected from school, as are students who attend schools that have a high percentage of students of low socio-economic status" (p. 48). The same study found that engagement is likely tied to long-term health and wellbeing, including economic success (Willms, 2003). According to Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, and Kindermann (2008), "students who are engaged in school are both more successful academically and more likely to avoid the pitfalls of adolescence" (p. 765). The National Research Council (2004) reports, "The primary ingredients that foster involvement and motivation to learn are competence and control, beliefs about the value of education, and a sense of belonging" (p. ix). Hernandez's (2012) study found:

Overall, 22% of children who lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6% of those who have never been poor. The figure rises to 32% for

students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty. For children who were poor, lived in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and are not reading proficiently the proportion failing to graduate jumped to 35%. (p. 5)

The literature regarding consequences of disengagement in students within schools of poverty intensified the necessity to strengthen student engagement practices for the fifth-grade students in the teacher-participant's classroom at FES.

Literature's Recommended Strategies to Increase Student Engagement

Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom* was a staple reference when working to increase student engagement practices at FES. This research-based book lists the following instructional strategies to enhance student engagement in the classroom:

1. effective pacing, demonstrating intensity and enthusiasm,
2. building positive teacher-student and peer relationships,
3. using effective verbal feedback,
4. incorporating physical movement,
5. using humor,
6. using games and inconsequential competition,
7. initiating friendly controversy,
8. presenting unusual information,
9. questioning to increase response rates,
10. connecting to students' lives,
11. encouraging application of knowledge,
12. tracking and studying progress,

13. providing examples of self-efficacy, and
14. teaching self-efficacy (Marzano & Pickering, 2011).

This action research study focused upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011) suggestion to track and study progress. According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), "Tracking and studying student progress can reinforce efficacy and help students respond positively to the question 'Can I do this?'" (p. 153).

Theoretical Framework for Action Research Study

The literature assisted in creating a theoretical framework from which to study student engagement practices. Self-regulated learning theory occurs within three behaviors: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reflection (Schunk, 1990). Each of these behaviors is required when setting goals, monitoring and evaluating one's own efforts toward meeting set goals, and determining success or failure in ultimately meeting the set goals. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) argue:

Self-regulation theory is concerned with what students do to generate and sustain their engagement. It begins with the recognition that students are active participants in their own learning...To be self-regulated is to be goal-directed and demonstrate control over and responsibility for one's focus and effort when engaged in learning. (p. 18)

Self-efficacy theory also plays an important role in a student's self-observation process, which according to Marzano and Pickering (2011), "is quite possibly the most important factor affecting engagement. If a student's answer to the question 'Can I do this?' is no, most, if not all, engagement is lost" (p. 117). On the other hand, when students feel confident they can succeed they tend to construct the processes they need to get the job

done. According to Zimmerman (1989), “in order for students’ strategic actions to be described as self-regulated one must know their academic goals and perceptions of efficacy” (p. 329). “When students perceive satisfactory goal progress, they feel capable of improving their skills; goal attainment, coupled with high self-efficacy, leads students to set new challenging goals” (Schunk, 1990, p. 71). Teaching students to set goals focused on what they want in life helps students from low-SES families to increase their perception of control over their environment by showing them how to act differently and therefore better manage their own stress levels for success in present and future endeavors (Jensen, 2009).

Goal setting became the focal strategy for this action research study to determine a possible approach to strengthen fifth-grade students’ engagement practices through self-regulation and self-efficacy at FES because it was discussed as a means of students tracking and studying their own progress in much of the literature consulted. According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “Tracking and studying student progress can reinforce efficacy and help students respond positively to the question ‘Can I do this?’” (p. 153). Student goal setting heightens students’ perceived self-efficacy and interest in activities that held little attraction for them initially (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). This was also confirmed in Lau and Nie’s (2008) study, which found, “students’ achievement goals represent their reasons or purposes for engaging in academic tasks” (p. 15).

Impact of Literature on Methodology

There is a great deal of literature available on goal setting in the form of goals set in the workplace, as well as, middle and high school classrooms. The literature, especially past research studies, assisted in creating a methodology for the elementary

setting. Student data journals in the form of goal setting forms (See Appendix A) derived from Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work were used as students documented their goal setting experiences, which included monitoring and evaluating one's own efforts toward meeting her/his goal. Interviews were conducted with a subset of eight randomly chosen student-participants at the conclusion of the data collection stage. These semi-structured interviews consisted of specific pre-determined base questions (See Appendix B) that were asked consistently during each interview session, which allowed for follow-up questions in the event that expanding on the question appeared valuable to the research effort. An open-ended interview took place with the teacher-participant (the fifth-grade class's homeroom teacher) at the conclusion of the action research study. The teacher was asked to share any observed changes in her students' learning strategies in response to the goal setting unit.

Proximal Goal Setting

In the present action research study's goal setting unit, student-participants received guidance in forming mastery-oriented proximal goals. Research indicates that proximal goals tend to be more effective than long-term goals in many cases. According to Pajares (2002), "Short-term, proximal, goals are more easily digestible for students, and they have the added benefit of raising self-efficacy...proximal goals make a task appear more manageable" (p. 121). In order to develop motivation through goal setting with student-participants, student-participants received assistance in setting a proximal goal for a length no longer than a four-week period for each goal set. Yearta, Maitlis, and Briner's (1995) study found, "increasing the frequency of appraisals and the involvement of the appraiser would seem to offer some possibility of maximizing the benefit of goal

setting” (p. 250). Although this study took place in an adult workplace environment the finding can certainly be pertinent to this action research study within the elementary school setting.

Mastery Goal Orientation

This qualitative action research study focused on mastery goal setting in order to guide students in enhancing their involvement in the learning process, as opposed to performance goal setting that aims toward a specific end result to include such goals as test grade attainment. According to Meece et al. (2006), “A mastery goal orientation is defined in terms of a focus on developing one’s abilities, mastering a new skill, trying to accomplish something challenging, and trying to understand learning materials” (p. 490). Positive perceptions of academic ability and self-efficacy are associated with mastery goals (Meece et al., 2006). Mastery goals focus on effort, not ability, and belief in one’s effort. Ames’s (1992) study found, “Enhancing motivation means enhancing children’s valuing of effort and a commitment to effort-based strategies through the design of mastery-orientation classroom structures” (p. 268). By facilitating student goal setting through a mastery goal structure, the intent was to assist student-participants in valuing their educational experiences and ultimately guide student-participants to engage and take ownership in their learning. According to Zimmerman (1990), “Teachers need to teach students how to become masters of their own learning” (p. 4).

Gaps in Existing Research

Prior studies played a significant role in shaping this action research study. Many studies focus on the workplace environment or middle/high school environments. While studies can be found on the effects of goal setting on academic achievement there appears

to be a lack of studies on the elementary environment in terms of goal setting and its impact on student engagement practices. There also appears to be a gap in existing research on the impact of mastery goal orientation in the elementary environment. Studies tend to focus on performance goal orientation where outcomes are based on meeting a certain grade or score requirement. Therefore, this study aims to add to the existing research surrounding student goal setting by putting together several elements that are studied in isolation within existing research through studying the impact of proximal mastery goal setting with student self-evaluation and its impact on student engagement in the elementary setting.

Reviewing the related literature made it possible to develop a study that brings together isolated concepts surrounding goal setting and student engagement to create a more encompassing study through related concepts such as proximal goals and mastery goal orientation, which appear to have a relationship in terms of goal setting and its impact on student engagement in the elementary setting. The development of a theoretical framework, as well as, methodological framework for this action research study was made possible because of the related literature review. This literature review allowed for the development of this study based on the issues most important to the research setting and the creation of a worthwhile research focus based on an extension of the work of previous researchers, constructing an opportunity for this study to meet a need in the field of elementary education's quest toward student engagement in a high poverty school.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used throughout the present action research

study in order to allow the process of research to be a “more manageable task that brings about results that are more informative and have immediate and direct application” (Mertler, 2014, p. 4). This was an open-ended study that explored student goal setting with one fifth-grade teacher-participant and 17 fifth-grade student-participants at Focus Elementary School (FES), a rural Title I school located in the South. A key process within the study was to interpret the meaning of student goal setting in the lives of the student-participants due to the literature describing goal setting as a student-focused strategy that “requires students to self-observe, self-judge, and self-reflect” (Schunk, 1990, p. 71).

Student-participants received guidance in forming mastery-oriented proximal goals as a result of literature indicating that proximal goals have the added benefit of raising self-efficacy and make tasks appear more manageable (Pajares, 2002), as well as, offering the possibility of maximizing the benefit of goal setting (Yearta, Maitlis, & Briner, 1995). In addition, the literature provided guidance on the implementation of a mastery-oriented goal setting approach. Positive perceptions of academic ability and self-efficacy are associated with mastery goals (Meece et al., 2006), and mastery-oriented classroom structures enhance students’ value of effort and commitment to effort-based strategies (Ames, 1992).

Several sources of data collection were utilized throughout the study in order to triangulate the data in support of the study’s findings. Student data journals in the form of goal setting forms (See Appendix A) derived from Marzano and Pickering’s (2011) goal setting form were used as students documented their goal setting experiences, which included monitoring and evaluating one’s own efforts toward meeting her/his goal.

According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “A comprehensive approach to developing self-efficacy . . . would include tracking progress over time, setting personal academic goals, and examining effort and preparation” (p. 117).

Interviews were conducted with a subset of eight student-participants, as well as, the teacher-participant at the conclusion of the data collection stage. The goal of student-participant and teacher-participant interviews was to determine changes in student-participants’ learning process, which assisted the teacher-participant and I as we reflected upon the data collected to determine the effectiveness of student goal setting. According to Zimmerman (1990), “Teachers need to teach students how to become masters of their own learning” (p. 4). Student-participant and teacher-participant interviews provided insight regarding student-participants’ progress toward engagement in their own learning process as a result of the student goal setting unit. Data collected from interviews assisted in reflection upon the current goal setting unit and provided a means to determine adjustments for future student goal setting units in order for this action research study to offer “a process by which current practice can be changed toward better practice” (Mertler, 2014, p. 13).

Theoretical Basis

This action research study is grounded in self-regulated learning theory and self-efficacy theory. According to Zimmerman (1989), “students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process” (p. 329). To qualify as self-regulated under Zimmerman’s (1989) theory, “students’ learning must involve the use of specified strategies to achieve academic goals on the basis of self-efficacy perceptions” (p. 329).

Zimmerman's definition of self-regulated learning theory assumes the importance of three elements, which include self-regulated learning strategies, self-efficacy, and a commitment to academic goals. Self-regulated learning strategies consist of "actions or processes directed at acquiring information or skill that involve agency, purpose, and instrumentality perceptions by learners" (Zimmerman, 1989, p. 329).

Self-Regulated Learning Theory

The first theory used to ground this action research study is self-regulated learning theory. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) argue:

Self-regulation theory is concerned with what students do to generate and sustain their engagement. It begins with the recognition that students are active participants in their own learning...To be self-regulated is to be goal-directed and demonstrate control over and responsibility for one's focus and effort when engaged in learning. (p. 18)

Three self-regulation behaviors occur within self-regulated learning: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reflection (Schunk, 1990). Self-regulation is the product of one's motivations, self-appraisals, environmental evaluations, and level of skill in staying focused (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). According to Zimmerman (1989), "[self-regulated] students personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of instruction" (p. 329).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is one's perception of her/his capabilities to organize and implement actions necessary to attain designated performance of skill for specific tasks (Bandura, 1986). Tollefson (2000), explains, "Individuals' beliefs about their abilities make up

their sense of self-efficacy...these beliefs are important determinants of whether individuals will expend effort on a task and persist in the face of difficulty” (p. 67). Self-efficacy plays an important role in a student’s self-observation, which according to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “is quite possibly the most important factor affecting engagement. If a student’s answer to the question ‘Can I do this?’ is no, most, if not all, engagement is lost” (p. 117). On the other hand, when students feel confident they can succeed they tend to construct the processes they need to get the job done. According to Zimmerman (1989), “in order for students’ strategic actions to be described as self-regulated one must know their academic goals and perceptions of efficacy” (p. 329). “When students perceive satisfactory goal progress, they feel capable of improving their skills; goal attainment, coupled with high self-efficacy, leads students to set new challenging goals” (Schunk, 1990, p. 71).

In an effort to assist student-participants in developing a skill set in mastery goal setting the participant-researcher partnered with a teacher-participant who used think-aloud modeling to exhibit, and guide discussion focused upon, setting a measurable and attainable mastery goal. Students set one mastery goal every four weeks throughout the study for a total of two goals. The motive behind this method was to assist students in building self-efficacy within themselves as they participated in goal setting.

In addition to setting measurable and attainable goals, students documented strategies they planned to utilize to obtain their goals, as well as tracked and evaluated progress of goal attainment. This allowed students to engage in discussions and self-evaluation in regard to the relationship between effort and performance. According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “It is significant for students to discuss self-efficacy and

study it firsthand through correlating their effort and preparation with achievement” (p. 127).

Historical Context

Student engagement takes root in John Dewey’s progressivism pedagogy. “Dewey’s methods emphasized student interests, student activity, group work, and cooperation” (Spring, 2014, p. 252). This research study focused upon the utilization of student goal setting to strengthen engagement practices, essentially emphasizing student interests and motivation. In reference to goal setting, Dewey (1922) declared:

Liking the activity in its acquired meaning, they [men] not only take aim when they throw instead of throwing at random, but they find or make targets at which to aim. This is the origin and nature of goals of action. They are ways of defining and deepening the meaning of activity. Having an end or aim is thus a characteristic of present activity. It is the means by which an activity becomes adapted when otherwise it would be blind and disorderly, or by which it gets meaning when otherwise it would be mechanical. In a strict sense an end-in-view is a means in present action; present action is not a means to a remote end. Men do not shoot because targets exist, but they set up targets in order that throwing and shooting may be more effective and significant. (p. 226)

Interest in progressivism pedagogy declined in the era of the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s (1983) *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* report. According to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), “This curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today” (Findings Regarding Content

section, para. 2). This statement was made in reference to high school course offerings, but the foundation of the statement is that extensive student choice is a hurdle in the education of American students. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) recommended:

Standardized tests of achievement (not to be confused with aptitude tests) should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work. The purposes of these tests would be to: (a) certify the student's credentials; (b) identify the need for remedial intervention; and (c) identify the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work.

The tests should be administered as part of a nationwide (but not Federal) system of State and local standardized tests. This system should include other diagnostic procedures that assist teachers and students to evaluate student progress.

(Recommendation B: Standards and Expectations section, para. 3)

Standardized testing oftentimes influences teachers' pedagogical practices within their classrooms. According to Voke (2002), "Critics assert that the movement discourages educators from exploring new ways of teaching and organizing schools that might ultimately lead to improvements in student engagement and achievement" (Student Engagement and the High-Stakes Environment section, para. 3). Sheldon & Biddle (1998) reviewed several studies on the topic and examined four perils of standardized high-stakes testing arguing:

Too much focus on tests can lead teachers to adopt a narrowed curriculum, dampening student interest and inhibiting critical thinking. Teacher incentive systems tied to student test scores often cause teachers to become more

controlling, thus undermining students' conceptual learning, intrinsic interest in the subject matter, and desire to pursue future education. (p. 174)

Interest in student engagement has grown in recent years due to the growing awareness of the link between student engagement and high school dropout rates. Experts have begun to study the links between dropout and disengagement, as well as, methodologies for improving student engagement strategies as an intervention to deter high school dropout. Schools, especially Title I schools, look to student engagement as a method of school improvement, as research suggests that student engagement leads to better grades and test scores (Fredricks et al., 2004). Title I schools serving students of poverty have learned from researchers that “Social class also contributes significantly to the engagement of students at all three grade levels [elementary, middle, and high]” (Marks, 2000, p. 167). Students learning in Title I schools struggle with engagement according to a study completed with 81,000 students across the United States. Middle and high school students not served in Title I schools surveyed consistently reported higher levels of engagement than students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch (Yazzie-Minz, 2007). Measures of engagement have been correlated with schools that have a high socio-economic status, strong disciplinary climate, good student-teacher relations, and high expectations for student success (Willms, 2000). Interestingly, “the construct of student engagement was drawn upon first to address the issue of academic inequities for middle and high school students who were not successful finding opportunities for achievement in Industrial Age models of public education, and thus were dropping out” (Parsons & Taylor, 2011, p. 10). Recently, according to Gilbert (as cited in Taylor & Parsons, 2011), “student engagement has been built around the hopeful

goal of enhancing all students' abilities to learn how to learn or to become lifelong learners in a knowledge-based society" (p. 4).

Education experts have identified goal setting as a strategy to strengthen student engagement practices. Research suggests that high achievers use goal setting more frequently and more consistently than low achievers (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986). Bishop (as cited in Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012) reports, "85% of individuals responded 'no' when asked 'Were you taught how to set goals in school?'" (p. 154). According to Cheung's study (2004), "Lack of goal setting experience explains why they [students] do not set goals. Lack of knowledge and skills in the process of goal setting also comes into play" (p. 6).

As I worked with the teacher-participant to strengthen her students' engagement practices it remained important to continuously reflect on historical events in education that have led to and improved student engagement practices across the United States, specifically in schools serving students of poverty. Dewey led efforts to engage students through his Progressivism Philosophy. Researchers continue to build upon Dewey's efforts to strengthen the educational experience for all students. Throughout this action research study, existing philosophies and supporting research have been continuously reflected upon to extend educational experts' studies in this particular research setting. This allowed for the construction of an optimal action research study that incorporated a recommended goal setting strategy within the classroom with self-evaluating methods to determine the effects of student goal setting in a Title I elementary setting; a setting in which little research has been conducted in the area of effective student engagement practices.

Conclusion

A review of the related research increased the sense of urgency to develop an action plan to strengthen student engagement within the teacher-participant's fifth-grade classroom. Studies suggest that students of poverty are less likely to be engaged in school, but face much more serious consequences if not engaged. In response to this information, an action research study was conducted to explore the effects of goal setting on the learning process of fifth-grade students in a Title I school. The related literature allowed the participant-researcher to draw from others' research studies to determine the best methodology for this particular action research study. Past studies indicate the importance of teaching goal setting skills and methods, goal orientations that are better suited for this study's objectives, and the importance of self-evaluating methods as students take part in the goal setting process.

Philosophies surrounding student engagement found in the literature review, as well as, past and current theories surrounding student engagement and goal setting have been referenced throughout this action research study. The theoretical frameworks of self-efficacy and self-regulated learning theory were applied to shape the study. Without this related literature review, it would have been virtually impossible to create a high-quality action research study on the effects of goal setting on student engagement with fifth-grade students in a Title I school. Valuable information shared by experts who have blazed a path in educational research for researchers entering the field for the first time allows novice researchers to make their own impact on student success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the qualitative action research study designed to explore the ways a fifth-grade teacher of low socioeconomic status (SES) students at Focus Elementary School (pseudonym) (FES), a rural Title I (i.e., at least 40% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced lunch status) school in the South, strengthens her students' engagement in the learning process by enabling them to set learning goals for themselves. The study explored an evidence-based strategy in one teacher-participant's classroom designed to strengthen these students' engagement practices and goal setting skills. The identified problem of practice involved one fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom.

This action research study was developed in response to one fifth-grade teacher requesting instructional assistance from the school's curriculum specialist, who is also the participant-researcher, in enabling her students to be more engaged to succeed in school and expressed willingness to participate in an action research study. The participant-researcher serves as the school's curriculum specialist who provides instructional assistance in the classroom as requested by teachers. The participant-researcher completed the study in this fifth-grade teacher's classroom in order to explore the research question, "What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?"

Action Research Approach

An action research approach was chosen for this study in order to put theory into practice, as well as, build upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work focused on student engagement and Jensen's (2009) work focused on successfully reaching students of poverty through instruction. Student engagement and feelings of self-efficacy in students were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher-participant and are the focus of the study. Upon the request for assistance in determining a student-focused activity to strengthen student engagement practices, the participant-researcher who is the school's curriculum specialist decided to explore a potential solution (student goal setting) to enhance students' learning experiences within this FES fifth-grade classroom through action research.

While other research approaches were options, action research was the most effective option for providing a platform for iterative and cyclical reflection and discussion regarding the effects of student goal setting with the teacher-participant who requested instructional assistance with increasing student engagement within her classroom. According to Mills:

Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. (as cited in Mertler, 2014, p. 4)

Goal setting was chosen as the engagement method to be studied through the action research process after I consulted my school's Title I professional development library

and read Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom*, as well as, Jensen's (2009) *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. At the onset of this action research study, all Title I schools within our school district were invited to attend a workshop entitled "Teaching Children of Poverty" presented by Francis Marion University's *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty*. Goal setting was a strategy discussed during the workshop as a means of engaging students of poverty and enabling students to strive for academic success. This confirmed my decision to focus on student goal setting as this action research study developed.

Scholarly Research and Literature Review on Student Engagement

The scholarly research on the topic and the literature review impacted the development of the research question. Upon investigation of best practices to strengthen student engagement, in particular for schools serving a poverty population, the sense of urgency to engage our fifth-grade students in taking ownership in their learning was heightened. Hernandez's (2012) study found:

Overall, 22% of children who lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6% of those who have never been poor. The figure rises to 32% for students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty. For children who were poor, lived in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and are not reading proficiently the proportion failing to graduate jumped to 35%. (p. 5)

Meanwhile, according to Parsons and Taylor (2011), "consequences of disengagement are often much more serious for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds because they do not usually get a second chance; students from more privileged backgrounds frequently do" (p. 13). Willms's (2003) study found, "Students from low socio-economic

families are more likely to be disaffected from school, as are students who attend schools that have a high percentage of students of low socio-economic status” (p. 48). The same study found that engagement is likely tied to long-term health and well-being, including economic success (Willms, 2003). According to Skinner et al. (2008), “students who are engaged in school are both more successful academically and more likely to avoid the pitfalls of adolescence” (p. 765).

Based on the literature, fifth-grade students are vulnerable in terms of self-efficacy and its impact on student engagement practices. Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose, and Boivin (2010) found:

Self-descriptions of children aged between five and seven are typically undifferentiated because this age is characterized by an all-or-nothing kind of thinking. That is, children at this age believe that they are good at everything or bad at everything. In contrast, children aged between eight and eleven years have a more differentiated self-perception, such that they can better understand and integrate evaluative feedback, which leads to more accurate self-perceptions...it is likely that the development of identified regulation occurs when children have capacity to integrate evaluative feedback. (pp. 714-715)

Studies show that social class significantly contributes to student engagement levels in elementary, middle, and high school (Marks, 2000). For example, a study completed with 81,000 students across the United States found that students learning in Title I schools struggle with engagement. Middle and high school students not served in Title I schools surveyed consistently reported higher levels of engagement than students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch (Yazzie-Minz, 2007). Self-perception based on

age, in combination with social class, led the participant-researcher to ask the fifth-grade teacher-participant to allow her class to be the focus of this research study. The teacher-participant willingly agreed to participate in the action research study in an effort to explore a way to enable her students to find success in school through student engagement. Therefore, this fifth-grade class was determined to be the best group for study participation.

The first action in the examination of student engagement strategies was to read Marzano and Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom*. Goal setting was discussed in-depth as a means of tracking and studying progress, which according to Marzano and Pickering (2011), "can reinforce efficacy and help students respond positively to the question 'Can I do this?'" (p. 153). Student goal setting heightens students' perceived self-efficacy and interest in activities that held little attraction for them initially (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). This was also confirmed in Lau and Nie's (2008) study, which found, "students' achievement goals represent their reasons or purposes for engaging in academic tasks" (p. 15).

Proximal Goal Setting

The participant-researcher partnered with a fifth-grade teacher who guided student-participants in forming mastery-oriented proximal goals. Research indicates that proximal goals tend to be more effective than long-term goals in many cases. According to Pajares (2002), "Short-term, proximal, goals are more easily digestible for students, and they have the added benefit of raising self-efficacy . . . proximal goals make a task appear more manageable" (p. 121). In order to develop motivation through goal setting students set proximal goals for no longer than a four-week timeframe for a total of two

goals set during the eight-week data collection period. Yeara et al.'s (1995) study found, "increasing the frequency of appraisals and the involvement of the appraiser would seem to offer some possibility of maximizing the benefit of goal setting" (p. 250). Although this study took place in an adult workplace environment the finding can certainly be pertinent to this action research study within the elementary school setting.

Mastery Goal Orientation

This qualitative action research study focused on mastery goal setting in order to guide students in working toward engagement through self-efficacy and self-regulation throughout the learning process, as opposed to performance goal setting that aims toward a specific end result that may include test grade attainment. According to Meece et al. (2006), "A mastery goal orientation is defined in terms of a focus on developing one's abilities, mastering a new skill, trying to accomplish something challenging, and trying to understand learning materials" (p. 490). Positive perceptions of academic ability and self-efficacy are associated with mastery goals (Meece et al., 2006). Mastery goals focus on effort, not ability, and belief in one's effort. A strong sense of self-efficacy can assist in strengthening resilience in children of poverty (Pellino, 2007). Ames's (1992) study found, "Enhancing motivation means enhancing children's valuing of effort and a commitment to effort-based strategies through the design of mastery-orientation classroom structures" (p. 268). The intent of this action research study was to assist student-participants in valuing their educational experiences and ultimately engage in the learning process with the facilitation of student goal setting through a mastery goal structure.

Action Researcher

The participant-researcher is a member of FES's leadership team. As the curriculum specialist, many of the teachers request my presence in their classrooms for coaching sessions routinely with a desire for observational feedback, as well as, co-teaching activities specifically in the area of student engagement activities embedded within lessons. This was an asset as I entered the fifth-grade classroom to perform this action research study. Students were comfortable with my visits to their classroom, oftentimes greeting me by name in the hallways outside of the classroom. Students were used to me conducting lessons beside their teacher in the classroom, as well. Be that as it may, it remained extremely important that I blend into the classroom environment as a participant-researcher. It was imperative that I worked diligently to remain in a co-teaching position throughout the action research process in the teacher-participant's classroom, especially considering that this activity was new to our school and outside of our students' typical school experience.

I partnered with the teacher-participant to conduct a lesson on student goal setting in her fifth-grade classroom. As the participant-researcher, I planned the lesson and co-taught the lesson with the teacher-participant. All data collection and analysis was led by the participant-researcher. Student-participants met with the participant-researcher to turn in student data journals and set new goals. In addition, the participant-researcher met one-on-one with a randomly chosen subgroup of eight student-participants to collect data through semi-structured interviews. The participant-researcher also met one-on-one with the teacher-participant to collect data through an open-ended interview. All data collected was coded by the participant-researcher in order to search for patterns and

themes.

Reciprocal reflection occurred between the participant-researcher and teacher-participant. An action plan was created that consists of sharing the findings with the fifth-grade and related arts faculty of FES in May 2017, as well as, offering coaching cycles focused on student goal setting for willing fifth-grade teacher volunteers during the 2017-2018 school year. The participant-researcher led the reflection discussion to gain the teacher-participant's thoughts on how to best present findings to the fifth-grade and related arts faculty, as well as, ways in which the goal setting unit can be adjusted to better meet the needs of fifth-grade teachers in future implementation. In addition, the participant-researcher led discussion within an FES leadership meeting to discuss the reflections that occurred between the participant-researcher and the teacher-participant and determine the best action plan in an effort to enable fifth-grade teachers to teach goal setting in their classrooms to increase student engagement and encourage success in school. The leadership team decided to invite FES's student teachers, who are currently interning in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, to join the May 2017 PLC meeting with fifth-grade and related arts faculty in order to allow our student teachers to gain knowledge in the area of student goal setting and potentially spread the strategy through their future classrooms in various school settings.

According to Zimmerman (1990), "Teachers need to teach students how to become masters of their own learning" (p. 4). In order to assist students in becoming masters of their own learning, the participant-researcher partnered with the teacher-participant to develop a proximal mastery goal setting unit, which included self-evaluation, for her homeroom class. This goal setting unit was developed in order to

encourage students to become masters of their own learning through an evidence-based strategy aimed to strengthen self-efficacy and academic engagement. Transformational leadership consists of four components: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Riggio (2009) argues:

Research evidence clearly shows that groups led by transformational leaders have higher levels of performance and satisfaction than groups led by other types of leaders...transformational leaders hold positive expectations for followers, believing that they can do their best...they inspire, empower, and stimulate followers to exceed normal levels of performance. (Are You a Transformational Leader section, para. 3)

The participant-researcher's goal as a leader and researcher in the field of education is to empower the entire school community to reach its full potential and create a culture of pride in teaching and learning.

Participants

The specific purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore student goal setting in a fifth-grade classroom at Focus Elementary School (FES), a rural Title I school located in the South. The participant-researcher explored an evidence-based strategy that one teacher-participant implemented in her self-contained general education classroom of 17 students at FES, aimed at strengthening low-SES student-participants' goal setting skills to improve student engagement in the learning process.

The student-participants within this study attend a rural Title I school located in the South. The classroom consisted of 17 students of mixed genders from a variety of

backgrounds and their white, middle-class teacher. The class was made up of nine boys and eight girls. English language learners made up 11% of the class. Overall, the ethnic makeup of this class was 26% African American, 16% Hispanic, 53% White, and 5% identified as having two or more ethnicities. Students receiving free and reduced lunch made up 84% of the students within this class, and 21% of students were considered homeless (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Access was gained to the study participants through the willingness of the fifth-grade teacher to participate in the study in hopes of enabling her students to engage in academic learning and find success in school. All students in this fifth-grade classroom were eligible to participate in the study.

Measures of Ethical Protection of Participants

Ethics remained at the forefront throughout all phases of this action research study. The principles of accurate disclosure, honesty, beneficence, and importance were key components in designing and implementing this action research study. In order to ensure accurate disclosure and honesty, assent forms (See Appendix D) were provided and explained to each student-participant before the research began. In addition, parents of student-participants received an opt-out consent for classroom research letter (See Appendix C) explaining the purpose of the study, description of participation, guarantee of confidentiality, voluntary participation explanation, and information about how to opt-out before or during the study through written or telephone communication. The teacher-participant received a similar consent letter (See Appendix E) through which she formally agreed to participate through signature approval.

In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants throughout the

action research study identification numbers were assigned to each participant. The connection between participant names and identification numbers were kept under lock and key in the participant-researcher's office at all times. All data collected identified participants solely based on the assigned identification number. Data was also kept under lock and key at all times. The name of the school was changed to a pseudonym to further decrease the likelihood of participant identification. In addition, student-participant responses given in the form of student data journals or one-on-one interviews are cited using pseudonyms. The teacher-participant was also given a pseudonym when cited in this action research study.

Setting

The research site is a fifth-grade classroom located in a southern, rural Title I school filled with at-risk children due to challenges that they face beyond classroom walls. The school population of children consists of 25% homeless students due to a children's emergency shelter within the attendance zone, 72% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and 20% English language learners (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Students' lives consist of hardships that a majority of the faculty and staff have never had to experience within their own lives. Students come to school hungry, tired, unable to understand the language of teachers and peers, afraid of what lies ahead when they return home in the afternoon, and wondering when they will be allowed to see their mother or father again (C. Burgess, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

The particular fifth-grade classroom participating in this action research study consisted of 17 students of mixed genders from a variety of backgrounds. The class was

made up of nine boys and eight girls. English language learners made up 11% of the class. Overall, the ethnic makeup of this class was 26% African American, 16% Hispanic, 53% White, and 5% identified as having two or more ethnicities. Students receiving free and reduced lunch made up 84% of the students within this class, and 21% of students were considered homeless (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

Fifth-Grade Study Participation

The participant-researcher and teacher-participant worked together to create a unit about setting measurable and attainable goals. As the teacher-participant taught the lesson, the participant-researcher assisted her in conferencing with students as they learned to set goals. Students set their own individual goals, which were measurable and students felt would be attainable. The intent of allowing students to set their own learning goals was to allow students to focus on mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge that was important to them. Students set goals in a variety of areas including sports, art, social skills, social studies, writing, math, and reading.

Action Research Design

This action research study consisted of a qualitative research design. This was an open-ended study that explored student goal setting (the central phenomenon) with fifth-grade students (participants) at Focus Elementary School (research site). Qualitative research methods were used throughout the action research study. The goal of this study was to determine what happened over time when student goal setting was implemented within the fifth-grade learning environment. A key process within the study was to interpret the meaning of student goal setting in the lives of the student-participants. The

description of what happened within the learning environment through student data journals, student interviews, and an interview with the students' homeroom teacher was a major factor when analyzing data to determine results of the study.

Instrumentation and Materials

Several sources of data collection were utilized throughout the study in order to triangulate the data in support of the study's findings. Student data journals in the form of goal setting forms (See Appendix A) derived from Marzano and Pickering's (2011) goal setting form were used as students documented their goal setting experiences, which included monitoring and evaluating one's own efforts toward meeting her/his goal. Interviews were conducted with a subset of eight randomly chosen student-participants at the conclusion of the data collection stage. These were semi-structured interviews consisting of specific pre-determined base questions (See Appendix B) that were asked consistently during each interview session, allowing for follow-up questions in the event that expanding on the question appeared valuable to the research effort. An open-ended interview took place with the teacher-participant (the fifth-grade class's homeroom teacher) at the conclusion of the action research study. The teacher was asked to share any observed changes in her students' learning strategies in response to the goal setting unit.

An action research study is a four-step process, which includes four phases: 1) identifying an area of focus, 2) collecting data, 3) analyzing and interpreting the data, and 4) developing a plan of action (Mertler, 2014). This action research study followed each of the 4 steps within its phases. The following phase descriptions exemplify action research's ability to allow the process of research to be a "more manageable task that

brings about results that are more informative and have immediate and direct application” (p. 4).

Data Collection

Although quantitative research methods were considered, it was determined that participant responses through data journals and one-on-one interviews would best inform the participant-researcher when answering the research question, “What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?” Student-participant responses, as well as, the response of the teacher-participant were collected throughout the data collection time period in order to fully explore changes in self-efficacy, self-regulation, and future focus. These changes were observed through one-on-one interviews and written student-participant responses as they journaled their own experiences with the goal setting unit. A qualitative action research study was deemed to be the best method for collecting and analyzing data in order to gain valuable information regarding the impact of student goal setting on the learning process for the fifth-grade student-participants at FES.

Plan for Identifying an Area of Focus

The first phase of action research involved identifying an area of focus. This phase occurred over the course of the 2014-2015 school year. Curricular observations were conducted within each classroom at Focus Elementary School; most classrooms were visited multiple times. A pattern of disengagement between students and the instruction was observed in classrooms. One fifth-grade teacher, in particular, approached the participant-researcher to discuss her perceptions of student disengagement. She requested instructional assistance from the school’s curriculum

specialist, who is also the participant-researcher, in enabling her students to become engaged, active participants in their learning and find success in school. The teacher willingly agreed to participate in an action research study with the participant-researcher in order to explore ways in which she could increase student engagement among her students. The school's principal took interest in finding a solution to the problem of student disengagement and encouraged the partnership between the participant-researcher and teacher-participant in this action research study.

The participant-researcher began to seek out solutions to respond to the teacher-participant's request. A reoccurring suggestion surfaced through all of the literature consulted. Student goal setting is thought to assist students in strengthening self-efficacy and student engagement throughout professional journal articles and texts focused on best practices in education. In addition, a workshop hosted by Francis Marion University's *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty* highlighted the need for student goal setting when engaging students of poverty. The area of focus for this action research study was determined by first identifying a school improvement need and then seeking the best potential solution to explore in an effort to meet that need.

Plan for Data Collection

The first step in Phase II of the study was to obtain parent permission for student participation in this action research study (See Appendix C), student agreement to participate in the study (See Appendix D), and teacher agreement to participate in the study (See Appendix E) during the Fall 2016 term. Phase II continued as the participating fifth-grade teacher instructed her homeroom in the area of setting measurable and attainable goals through a framework suggested in Marzano and

Pickering's (2011) *The Highly Engaged Classroom*. Student-participants set a mastery goal to work on independently for no longer than a four-week period. Each student-participant self-evaluated progress toward their mastery goal through a student data journal in the form of a goal setting form (See Appendix A) derived from Marzano and Pickering's (2011) work. Each student-participant reflected upon her/his mastery goal independently. Student-participants set a new mastery goal upon completion of goals throughout the research period.

Phase II concluded with one-on-one interviews with a randomly chosen subset of eight student-participants. The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions (See Appendix B) to allow feedback from student-participants regarding their experience with goal setting, specifically in relation to engagement practices. An open-ended interview with the teacher-participant also took place at the conclusion of Phase II. The purpose of the teacher-participant interview was to gain an understanding of the teacher-participant's perceptions of her students' classroom learning strategies as a result of the goal-setting experience.

Once the data collection progress began, each student-participant's progress was tracked and reported through the use of student-participant identification numbers. The identity of each participant was kept confidential at all times. Student data journals, in the form of individual goal setting forms, were collected throughout the research timeframe for data and reflection purposes. Each student-participant's identification number was used as a substitute for the name of the student-participant on any work samples collected. Identification numbers were utilized within the participant-researcher's notes in order to protect the identities of all study participants. Participant information was not

disclosed at any point during the study nor was participant information disclosed at any point after the study, including the dissemination of conclusions or future publications.

Plan for Data Analysis

Phase III of the study consisted of analysis and reflection of the data collected throughout the study. Data was collected in the form of student data journals (See Appendix A), one-on-one interviews with a subset of eight student-participants (See Appendix B for guided interview questions), and a one-on-one interview with the teacher-participant where she was asked to share any overall changes she had observed in the learning process of her students. The data collected was reviewed and analyzed to determine adjustments for future research.

Student data journal responses, as well as, transcribed student-participant and teacher-participant interviews were analyzed to determine response patterns in the development of specific themes. Student data journal responses and interview responses were color-coded based on patterns that fell into emerging themes. Responses describing student-participant initiated efforts were color-coded blue. Responses describing a belief in one's own abilities were color-coded purple. Responses describing the use of goal setting in the future were color-coded green. Lastly, any responses that did not fit into any of the response patterns that emerged were considered outliers and were color-coded red. Research findings are organized by the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus within Chapter Four. Themes are reported as discrete, but there is considerable overlap among them.

Plan for Reflecting with Participants on Data

Systematic reflection played a vital role in the present action research study's

ability to fully benefit the stakeholders of FES. The participant-researcher continuously engaged in reflective practice throughout the planning, acting, developing, and reflecting stages of this action research study. Reflections occurred at the conclusion of the study to determine adjustments for further studies. In addition, reflections occurred in the form of feedback given during the sharing and communication of results phase of the study.

The findings of this study have the potential to impact present and future fifth-grade students at FES. Therefore, it was important that the participant-researcher share the information gained and host professional gatherings to reflect upon adjustments needed for future implementation within fifth-grade FES classrooms. After sharing findings and creating an action plan with the teacher-participant and administrative team, the participant-researcher planned a date in May 2017 to share findings with the school's fifth-grade and related arts faculty during a scheduled professional learning community (PLC) meeting. Content for this PLC is fully developed within the action plan explained in Chapter Five of this Dissertation in Practice. FES's student teachers, who are currently interning in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, will also be invited to join the May 2017 PLC meeting in order to allow our student teachers to gain knowledge in the area of student goal setting and potentially spread the strategy through their future classrooms in various school settings.

Each month teachers meet with the school's curriculum specialist, who is also the participant-researcher, to discuss strategic instructional design during the school's professional learning community meeting. Therefore, the sharing of these findings with faculty members during a professional learning community meeting made for a great enhancement to our instructional planning discussions. The administrative team and

teacher-participant were invited to participate in the professional learning community meeting discussion in hopes of growing interest in further studies surrounding student goal setting.

The participant-researcher plans to share findings with the Francis Marion University *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty* due to their focus on student goal setting as a strategy for student engagement in schools of poverty. This may be in the form of presenting at the annual Summer Institute hosted by Francis Marion University or simply sitting down with the Francis Marion University *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty's* administration to share findings. In addition, the participant-researcher plans to share findings through a presentation at the annual South Carolina Association of Title I Administrators Conference to assist colleagues working with students of poverty as they strive to enhance students' learning practices.

Plan for Devising an Action Plan

Phase IV of the study consisted of the dissemination of the results of this action research study. In the reflecting stage, results were shared and communicated, as well as, reflected upon. Data was first shared with the fifth-grade teacher-participant and the principal to reflect upon results as a team. A plan was devised to share findings with the school's fifth-grade teachers and related arts teachers during the professional learning community meeting scheduled for May 2017. Each month teachers meet with the participant-researcher to discuss strategic instructional design during the school's professional learning community meeting. The sharing of these findings with fifth-grade and related arts faculty members during one of these meetings will greatly enhance the

school's instructional planning discussions because of the ability to create an opportunity for discussion regarding teachers' own middle class values surrounding goal setting, low-SES students' lack of exposure to goal setting, and the academic implications of teaching goal setting in the classroom. The administrative team and teacher-participant will be invited to participate in the faculty discussion in hopes of growing interest in further classroom studies surrounding student goal setting. In addition, FES's student teachers, who are currently interning in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, will also be invited to join this PLC meeting in order to gain knowledge in the area of student goal setting and potentially spread the strategy through their future classrooms in various school settings.

Reflection continues upon this action research study long after the sharing and communicating results stage. Adjustments will be made based upon answers to questions such as "How well did the process work?", "What challenges occurred within this process?", and "Is there additional data that can be gathered to further understand the impact of student goal setting on the learning process?" Action research is a cyclical practice in which the participant-researcher attempts to offer "a process by which current practice can be changed toward better practice" (Mertler, 2014, p. 13). Change for the better requires constant reflection and adjustment. This action research study continues to be a continuous cycle of reflection and adjustment in an attempt toward better instructional practice.

Conclusion

An action research approach was chosen for this study of student goal setting in order to put theory into practice, as well as, build upon Marzano and Pickering's (2011)

work focused on student engagement and Jensen's (2009) work focused on successfully reaching students of poverty through instruction. Upon recognizing a school improvement need for increased student engagement the participant-researcher consulted the literature and found student goal setting to be an evidence-based strategy consistently suggested by experts in the field of academic engagement. A qualitative research design was developed to determine what occurred over time when student goal setting was implemented within a fifth-grade Title I learning environment. Student data journals, interviews with a subset of eight student-participants, and an interview with the teacher-participant were collected and analyzed in an effort to triangulate data. Data was collected and analyzed in order to continuously guide the development of shifts in research, as well as, potential future studies. Results were shared with the teacher-participant and school's administrative team before a date was set to communicate the study's findings with fifth-grade faculty, related arts faculty, and FES's current student teachers. In an attempt to work toward better instructional practice, the present action research study remains a continuous cycle of reflection and adjustment.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four outlines the findings and interpretation of results of the qualitative action research study designed to explore the ways a fifth-grade teacher at Focus Elementary School (pseudonym) (FES), a rural Title I (i.e., at least 40% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced lunch status) school in the South, copes with enabling children of low socioeconomic status (SES) parents to be successful in school by enabling these children to set learning goals for themselves. The study explored an evidence-based strategy in one teacher-participant's classroom designed to strengthen these students' engagement practices and goal setting skills. The identified problem of practice involved one fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom. The teacher requested assistance from the school's curriculum specialist, who is also the participant-researcher, to develop an instructional strategy that would enable her students to increase their academic engagement and self-efficacy for increased success in school.

This action research study was developed in response to one fifth-grade teacher requesting assistance in enabling her students to be more engaged to succeed in school and expressed willingness to participate in an action research study. The participant-researcher serves as the school's curriculum specialist who provides instructional assistance in the classroom as requested by teachers. The participant-researcher

completed the study in this fifth-grade teacher-participant's classroom in order to explore the research question, "What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?"

The intent of this study was not to generalize findings to a larger population within the United States, but to describe one local and particular phenomenon in one local and particular classroom within the present time and place based on literature supporting goal setting as a strategy to increase student engagement in school. The study explored an evidence-based strategy that one teacher-participant implemented in her fifth-grade classroom at FES to strengthen student-participants' goal setting skills, which led to an increase in students' engagement in the learning process through the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus according to this action research study's findings. In addition, challenges within the goal setting unit, as well as, outlier student-participant responses will be addressed within this chapter.

Description of Particular Phenomenon and Classroom

The fifth-grade classroom participating in this action research study is located within FES, a Title I school in the South. The classroom consisted of 17 students of mixed genders from a variety of backgrounds. The class was made up of nine boys and eight girls. English language learners made up 11% of the class. Overall, the ethnic makeup of this class was 26% African American, 16% Hispanic, 53% White, and 5% identified as having two or more ethnicities. Students receiving free and reduced lunch made up 84% of the students within this class, and 21% of students were considered homeless (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

This qualitative action research study is centered on enabling one teacher-

participant to employ an evidence-based strategy to increase student engagement for children of poverty within her fifth-grade classroom through the implementation of a student goal setting unit. Student engagement and feelings of self-efficacy in students were identified as areas of weakness by the teacher-participant and are the focus of the study. Goal setting was introduced as an evidence-based strategy to engage students of poverty while assisting students in building self-efficacy for increased academic success. However, it was apparent through my role as the curriculum specialist that led to informal instructional coaching conversations with the teacher-participant that a majority of students did not currently possess a skill set to set measurable and attainable goals for themselves due to a lack of exposure to the goal-setting process, specifically in the area of mastery goals. Whereas, many middle-class families define future aspirations for themselves (US Department of Commerce, 2010), some low-SES families find it difficult to cultivate future focus because the focus is often on surviving today's challenges without a guarantee for tomorrow (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

According to research, low-SES students oftentimes appear unmotivated because of a lack of hope and optimism (Jensen, 2013b). "These behaviors will likely puzzle, frustrate, or irritate teachers . . . but it's important to avoid labeling, demeaning, or blaming students . . . Every proper response that you don't see at your school is one that you need to be teaching" (Jensen, 2009, p. 19). Marzano and Pickering (2011) recommend asking students to set personal goals for individual progress and strategize how they will accomplish goals in order to empower students of poverty.

The teacher-participant and I discussed Marzano and Pickering's (2011) recommendation of goal setting in response to the teacher-participant's request to find a

way to increase academic engagement and feelings of self-efficacy in her fifth-grade classroom within a rural Title I school in the South through the research question, “What effect does student goal setting have on the learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?” The purpose of the study was to explore an evidence-based strategy that one teacher-participant implemented in her fifth-grade classroom at FES to strengthen 17 student-participants’ goal setting skills, which led to an increase in students’ engagement in the learning process through self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus according to the study’s findings. Goal setting enables learners to increase intrinsic motivation as well-defined goals chosen by students improve the learner’s content beliefs and context beliefs, providing a clear purpose to the student for learning (Tilestone & Darling, 2009). Based on literature regarding increased student engagement and feelings of self-efficacy, the research focused on exploring student goal setting while conducting this action research study in one fifth-grade classroom within a Title I school located in the South.

Fifth-Grade Study Participation

Fifth-grade was chosen as a research focus for this action research study due to students’ heightened academic disaffection within the eight to 11-year-old age group according to the literature, as well as, signs of student academic disaffection within fifth-grade students at FES. The fifth-grade teacher-participant’s request for assistance in enabling her students to exhibit greater academic engagement and willingness to participate in this action research study in order to determine the impact of goal setting on students’ academic engagement played a role in choosing fifth-grade for this action research study.

The participant-researcher and one fifth-grade teacher-participant worked together to create a unit about setting measurable and attainable goals. As the teacher-participant taught the lesson on setting measurable and attainable goals, the participant-researcher assisted her in conferencing with students as they learned to set goals. Students set their own individual goals, which were measurable and students felt would be attainable. The intent of allowing students to set their own learning goals was to allow students to focus on mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge that was important to them. Students set goals in a variety of areas including sports, art, social skills, social studies, writing, math, and reading.

Mentorship Gap

It was assumed by the participant-researcher at the onset of the study that student-participants would set goals pertaining to skills learned with their homeroom teacher-participant. This assumption was incorrect as many student-participants set mastery goals outside of the expertise of the teacher-participant or participant-researcher. While many students were able to rely on family members for assistance with practice in meeting goals set outside the expertise of the teacher-participant or participant-researcher (specifically in the areas of physical education and art), some students did not have that same family support available to them. In order to fill in the mentorship gap during the present action research study, students were encouraged to develop relationships with faculty members specializing in the area of the set goal. For example, students who set goals in a sports related area were encouraged to ask the physical education teacher to assist them in developing the skill they wished to learn. The participant-researcher discussed this with the physical education teacher, as well as, the art teacher prior to

encouraging students to develop these relationships. Each of the teachers agreed to assist students with excitement and willingness. In the future, the word ‘attainable’ will be redefined to include access to expertise and support in the area of the mastery goal.

Supply Gap

The participant-researcher did not take into account that student-participants would set goals requiring supplies or equipment outside of the homeroom classroom setting. Several student-participants set goals that required art supplies. Many other student-participants set goals requiring practice sports equipment. The participant-researcher worked with the art teacher and physical education teacher behind the scenes to ensure that students were able to obtain the supplies necessary to work toward their set goals. However, the word ‘attainable’ will be redefined in future goal setting lessons to include access to necessary supplies needed to work toward a mastery goal.

Findings of the Study

Overall, the action research process that took place at FES helped the participant-researcher to determine an evidence-based strategy to implement in an effort to enable the fifth-grade teacher-participant to assist her fifth-grade students in strengthening their engagement practices and increasing their self-efficacy to be successful in school. The major finding of the study was that goal setting impacts the learning process in the form of academic engagement in the classroom through the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Challenges to implementing a classroom goal setting unit were also found within this action research study. Specifically, a plan must be designed to provide student access to mentors with expertise in the area of the mastery goals set, as well as, access to supplies necessary to work toward these mastery goals. In addition,

data collected through student interviews indicated that some students might exhibit difficulty relating the learning goal that they set to success in academic studies. Through the exploration of student goal setting with fifth-grade students at FES the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus exhibited a pattern amongst student-participants' responses during data analysis. Overall, all data in the form of student data journals, student-participant interviews, and the teacher-participant interview were brought together to form a comprehensive picture of a collective student goal setting experience.

Data Collection Strategy

In an effort to assist fifth-grade student-participants at FES, a rural Title I school in the South, in developing a skill set in mastery goal setting the participant-researcher partnered with a teacher-participant who used “think-aloud” modeling to exhibit, and guide discussions that were focused upon, setting measurable and attainable mastery goals. In the present study, fifth-grade students set one mastery goal every four weeks throughout the eight weeks of data collection for a total of two goals.

In addition to setting measurable and attainable goals, the fifth-grade student-participants documented strategies they planned to utilize to attain their goals, as well as, tracked and evaluated progress of goal attainment. This allowed these student-participants to engage in discussions and self-evaluation in regard to the relationship between effort and performance. According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), “It is significant for students to discuss self-efficacy and study it firsthand through correlating their effort and preparation with achievement” (p. 127). Teaching students to set and track goals that focus on what they want to learn empowers low-SES students to increase

their perception of control over their environment by *showing* them how to act differently in order to better manage their own stress levels rather than *telling* them how to act differently for the betterment of their environmental circumstances (Jensen, 2009).

Student-participants were given the opportunity to set a goal in any area they wished to learn a new skill or acquire new knowledge. A lesson in goal setting was performed in partnership between the teacher-participant and participant-researcher prior to students setting their first round of goals. Teaching goal setting before beginning the unit was important because research suggests that high achievers use goal setting more frequently and more consistently than low achievers (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986). Bishop (as cited in Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012) reports, “85% of individuals responded ‘no’ when asked ‘Were you taught how to set goals in school?’” (p. 154). According to Cheung’s study (2004), “Lack of goal setting experience explains why they [students] do not set goals. Lack of knowledge and skills in the process of goal setting also comes into play” (p. 6).

This lesson on goal setting was implemented in an effort to set the stage for student-participants unfamiliar with goal setting to be able to enter the goal setting unit successfully. “Think aloud” modeling to determine an appropriate learning goal, which specifically highlighted the concept of setting both a measurable and attainable goal, and one-on-one conferencing occurred as each student set her/his first goal. At the conclusion of the lesson, the teacher-participant and participant-researcher conferenced with students one-on-one as students set goals during the first round of goal setting. One-on-one conferencing was an important part of the lesson in an effort to assist students in developing measurable and attainable learning goals.

The participant-researcher realized during one-on-one conferencing that a large gap existed within the present action research study. I incorrectly assumed that students would set goals within the area of expertise of the teacher-participant's classroom. However, encouraging students to set mastery goals within their area of interest led to goals outside of the homeroom teacher-participant's area of expertise. Students set sports-related goals and art-related goals in addition to goals related to content covered within the teacher-participant's classroom during round one of goal setting. It was important that I quickly develop a plan to ensure that students would have the mentorship and supplies needed to work toward their goals. I immediately sat down with the physical education and art teachers to explain the situation and ask for their willingness to support students. Each of these teachers willingly agreed to assist students in working toward their goals. I then encouraged students to approach the physical education teacher and art teacher for assistance. In the future, the word 'attainable' will be defined to include access to expertise and supplies to ensure that students can work toward their set mastery goals without the hurdles of a lack of mentorship or supplies. In addition, I will ask faculty members to serve as mentors prior to teaching the lesson on goal setting in order to provide a list of potential mentors and their areas of expertise when defining the word 'attainable' for students.

Student Goals Set During Round One of Goal Setting

The first round of goal setting resulted in four student-participants setting goals relating to football, one student-participant setting a goal related to basketball, five student-participants setting goals relating to general physical education, four student-participants setting goals related to social studies, and three student-participants setting

goals related to art. Student-participant mastery goals set during round one consisted of:

1. I want to learn to catch a football with one hand.
2. I want to improve catching a football from the side in two weeks.
3. I want to catch one-handed with a football.
4. My goal is to dunk on an eight-foot basketball goal.
5. I want to learn at least 15 facts about World War II.
6. I want to draw a perfect head (no wavy lines and less erasing).
7. I want to learn how to throw a football farther (at least 10 yards).
8. I want to learn at least 10 facts about World War II.
9. I want to learn how to do 20 push-ups without getting tired.
10. I want to do a perfect (straight arms and legs) cartwheel.
11. I would like to learn at least 10 facts about World War II.
12. I want to learn to draw a life-like person.
13. I would like to know 10 facts about World War II.
14. My goal is to jump 50 times on a short jump rope.
15. I want to know how to do a push up, but when you come up your hands come up with you.
16. I want to learn how to draw a picture of a person.
17. I want to do a back handspring without falling.

Student Goals Set During Round Two of Goal Setting

The second round of goal setting resulted in one student-participant setting a goal related to football, one student-participant setting a goal related to baseball, one student-participant setting a goal related to soccer, one student-participant setting a goal related to

basketball, five student-participants setting a goal related to general physical education, one student-participant setting a goal related to reading, one student-participant setting a goal related to writing, two student-participants setting goals related to math, one student-participant setting a goal related to social studies, one student-participant setting a goal related to social skills, and two student-participants setting a goal related to art. Student-participant mastery goals set during round two consisted of:

1. My goal is to not argue with people for one week.
2. I want to learn 10 facts about the Berlin Wall.
3. I want to catch three footballs one-handed, catching the third football with the other two footballs.
4. I want to pitch a curve ball and a fastball in baseball.
5. I want to learn to read higher-level books, from my current 5.0-6.8 AR level to 5.0-8.0 AR level.
6. I want to try to write a 10-page report on the Cold War. I want it to be super detailed with strong words.
7. I want to learn how to do the Death Crawl around half of the track.
8. My goal is to hula-hoop 10 times.
9. My goal is to dribble at soccer without messing up at least 17 meters.
10. I want to run one mile without losing my breath.
11. My goal is to shoot basketballs in the hoop 10 times at 15 feet away from the hoop.
12. I want to continue to learn how to draw a life-like person.
13. My goal is to be able to kick the kickball past first base.

14. My goal is to get 10 questions correct in a day when we study for our math test.
15. I want to do 10 problems correctly in math with rounding decimals.
16. I want to learn to run five miles.
17. I want to be able to create a painting with the use of words.

Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis at Conclusion of Goal Setting Rounds

Data was collected in the form of student data journals (See Appendix A), one-on-one interviews with a subset of eight student-participants (See Appendix B for guided interview questions), and a one-on-one interview with the teacher-participant where she was asked to share any overall changes she had observed in the learning process of her students.

Student data journal responses, as well as, transcribed student-participant and teacher-participant interviews were analyzed to determine response patterns in the development of specific themes. Student data journal responses and interview responses were color-coded based on patterns that fell into emerging themes. Responses describing student-participant initiated efforts were color-coded blue. Responses describing a belief in one's own abilities were color-coded purple. Responses describing the use of goal setting in the future were color-coded green. Lastly, any responses that did not fit into any of the response patterns that emerged were considered outliers and were color-coded red. Research findings are organized by the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus within this chapter. Themes are reported as discrete, but there is considerable overlap among them.

Theme One: Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is defined as the degree to which students are metacognitively,

motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process. Self-regulated students personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of instruction (Zimmerman, 1989). The present action research study's findings indicate an overall increase in student-participants' self-regulation when the goal setting unit was put into place in the classroom. For example, student-participants used terms such as 'hard work, practice, and effort' when writing reflections regarding the goal setting experience within their student data journals. In addition, although student-participants were encouraged to approach teachers for assistance when working toward their mastery goals during round one it was found that students took their own initiative to approach teachers for mentorship during round two of goal setting.

Initiative to Learn Described in Data Journals

Student-participants set self-selected mastery goals through two rounds of the goal setting unit. Findings show an increase in student-participants' initiative to direct their own learning by reaching out to teachers for a mentor-like relationship to gain assistance meeting their goals during the second round of goal setting. During the first round of goal setting, one student-participant asked a teacher for assistance, six student-participants requested assistance from family members, and two student-participants requested assistance from friends. Four students who requested assistance from family and friends noted in their data journals that they were having trouble working toward their goals because of not being able to meet with the person helping them for various reasons. Students who encountered this hurdle were encouraged to approach teachers within the school possessing expertise in the goal area to request assistance.

The number of student-participants personally initiating academic assistance from a teacher within their school increased during the second round of goal setting. During the second round of goal setting, seven student-participants requested assistance from a teacher, five student-participants requested assistance from family, and one student-participant requested assistance from a friend. Student-participants appeared to become active participants in their own learning over time in the goal setting process, choosing to ask teachers to assist them in acquiring new skills and/or knowledge more frequently during the second round of goal setting.

Descriptions of Hard Work, Practice, and Effort in Data Journals

Terms such as ‘hard work, practice, and effort’ were used as student-participants completed reflections regarding the goal setting unit within their student data journals. During round one of goal setting, seven out of the 17 student-participants used the word ‘practice’ when prompted to reflect upon their belief as to why their individual experience resulted in either meeting or not meeting the mastery goal. The prompting question set read, “Did you accomplish your goal? Why do you think this happened?” However, during round two of goal setting student-participants attributed success to their effort, promises to oneself, motivation, dedication, and staying focused. When describing why he met his goal, a student-participant wrote, “This was something I set out to do, so I tried my hardest to do that” (A. Perez, personal communication, September 28, 2016). Findings suggest that the goal setting unit assisted student-participants in building self-regulation in the form of increasing student-participant investment in their own learning.

Self-Regulation Described by Students Facing Goal Attainment Challenges

There is a great deal to learn about the development of self-regulation through the

analysis of the four student-participants who did not meet their self-selected mastery goals in the first round of goal setting, but were able to meet their goals in the second round of goal setting. These student-participants attributed their ability to meet their goals in the second round of goal setting to an increase in self-regulation. The experiences of these student-participants are highlighted due to the knowledge produced by studying the changes they reported within themselves. This knowledge has the potential to impact teachers' abilities to encourage self-regulation in students with similar experiences. These student-participants discussed the concept of self-regulation in the form of student initiative and active participation within their student data journals. Relevance of mastery goals and student investment in working toward self-selected goals played a key role in the success of these student-participants.

The first of the four student-participants who did not meet his goal during round one of goal setting described frustration in not meeting his goal. He stated, "I'm mad because I was trying to reach my goal, but I had a problem that stopped me [basketball equipment malfunction]. I'm going to keep trying to reach my goal" (M. Grace, personal communication, September 8, 2016). The student-participant continued to work toward his goal on his own, eventually meeting his goal two weeks after the conclusion of round one of goal setting. The same student met the second goal he set during round two of goal setting. He described the meeting of his goal within his student data journal stating, "This was something I set out to do, so I tried my hardest to do that this time" (M. Grace, personal communication, September 28, 2016).

The second of the four student-participants who did not meet their goal in round one of goal setting requested to continue her goal into round two because she felt that she

was very close to meeting it. In round two of goal setting, this student-participant met her goal. She described the experience in her student data journal stating, “This feels extra special to finish something after focusing on it and working so long and so hard” (I. Garcia, personal communication, September 28, 2016).

The third of the four student-participants who did not meet their goal in round one of goal setting described his investment in meeting his goal in round two. He wrote in his student data journal, “I tried other goals that never worked out, so I wanted to meet this one” (C. Strickland, personal communication, September 28, 2016). The student went on to describe his feelings within his student data journal by writing, “It felt great to meet my goal because I practiced so hard and actually beat my goal” (C. Strickland, personal communication, September 28, 2016).

The fourth of the four student-participants who did not meet their goal in round one of goal setting attributed her success in meeting her goal in round two to passion and hard work. She wrote in her student data journal, “I met my goal because I had passion. I put in hard work to achieve something” (J. Rice, personal communication, September 28, 2016). This student-participant’s description of her goal setting experience exhibits active participation in her own learning, the foundation of self-regulation.

Self-regulation developed over time for these student-participants. Exposure to the goal setting unit that included opportunities for self-reflection over time appeared to assist these student-participants in increasing their initiative to achieve self-selected mastery goals. These student-participants’ experiences with the goal-setting unit impact future implementation of the unit as they shed light on the need for an extension of goal setting rounds within the unit.

The participant-researcher mistakenly assumed that student-participants would respond to the goal setting unit during the first round of goal setting. However, the four student-participants discussed here taught the participant-researcher that several rounds of goal setting may be needed to assist some students to practice setting goals before they are able to fully benefit from a goal setting unit. The participant-researcher also learned that some students potentially need to participate in several rounds of a goal setting unit to feel either success or disappointment before they are able to develop a feeling of motivation and initiative to meet their goals. Therefore, the participant-researcher plans to continue using proximal goal setting timeframes with students in the future while extending the number of goal setting rounds in which students participate for a longer overall goal setting unit timeframe in order to assist all students in increasing self-regulation.

Student Descriptions of Personal Initiative and Hard Work in Interviews

A subset of eight student-participants described personal initiative to learn and an understanding of their own hard work and effort during one-on-one interviews with the participant-researcher. One student-participant described an increase in personal initiative stating, “I want to see how many goals I can meet and how many I can’t so that I can keep trying on the ones I can’t meet” (J. Smith, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Another student-participant said, “I like to draw and this made me want to learn more on how to draw different things” (I. Garcia, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Student-participants described an increase in their belief in their own abilities to take initiative. One student-participant stated, “I can now set my own goals” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016), while another student-participant summed up

the experience by saying, “You can set them [goals] for yourself. It doesn’t always have to be the teacher telling the students what to learn” (A. Whitner, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Students’ Increased Self-Regulation Described by Teacher-Participant

Findings from the one-on-one interview with the teacher-participant supported an increase in self-regulation as a result of the goal setting unit. The teacher-participant reported an overall positive change in students monitoring their own progress in learning, adjusting their own actions in the learning process, and evaluating their own work to make needed adjustments for academic success. She shared, “My students have been more apt to approach me to request assistance since we started the goal setting unit in the classroom. They appear to have more of an investment in their own learning overall” (T. Stegall, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Theme Two: Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as students’ beliefs concerning their capabilities to attain designated levels of performance (Bandura, 1986, 1988). Findings of the present action research study suggest that student-participants’ self-efficacy increased through the goal setting unit. Each of the student-participants interviewed used the term ‘I can’ to describe changes in themselves as a result of the goal setting unit during one-on-one student interviews at the conclusion of the study.

Challenges with Students’ Self-Efficacy During Student Interviews

Although students were able to describe changes within themselves they did not always see themselves as a changed student as a result of the goal setting unit. In contrast to students articulating increases in self-efficacy, four of the eight students stated “No” or

“Not really” when asked, “Has goal setting changed anything about how you feel as a student?” It did not appear that students transferred changes they saw within themselves to changes they saw within themselves as students, which led the participant-researcher to question whether or not students would eventually be able to make this connection or if it would be beneficial within future goal setting lessons to explicitly assist students in connecting themselves to the role of student in future studies. As a result, this section focuses on students’ answers in regard to how they described changes within themselves through the goal setting unit as opposed to changes in how they viewed themselves as students when setting goals.

Descriptions of Students’ Increased Self-Efficacy During Student Interviews

When asked how the goal setting unit helped or did not help with schoolwork, a student-participant responded, “It showed me I can accomplish something and it makes me think I can do better in school” (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Another student-participant described his experience with the goal setting unit by saying, “I realized now how much of a good kid I am and how really smart I am” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016). The same student-participant later stated in the interview, “Goal setting got me smarter and now I know I can accomplish what I want to in my life” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016). When asked to explain what each student-participant learned about themselves, student-participants responded with answers that included the belief in reaching goals for themselves, the ability to now reach goals, and the ability to be able to do anything with help, practice, and persistence. Responses illustrated the impact of goal setting on self-efficacy, as well as, the crossover between self-efficacy and self-regulation.

When the subset of eight student-participants taking part in one-on-one student interviews were asked “What have you learned about yourself while setting goals in the classroom?” student-participants each used “I can” to describe their view, answering:

1. “I can reach goals I set for myself” (J. Smith, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
2. “I can meet goals very, very well” (J. Land, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
3. “I know I can meet goals and do better when I get to middle school” (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
4. “I learned how smart I am and all the other stuff I could do” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
5. “I could really make any goal if I really worked hard to” (A. Perez, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
6. “I can do anything with help and practice” (I. Garcia, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
7. “If I keep trying, I can do anything” (J. Rice, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
8. “It’s shown me that I can accomplish tough goals” (R. Dean, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Each of the student-participants taking part in one-on-one interviews used a variation of the word ‘accomplish’ when describing their experience with the goal setting unit.

During the one-on-one student interviews, student-participants shared:

1. “I want to set goals in the future because there are some other things I want to

- accomplish about myself” (J. Smith, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
2. “I liked setting goals because I tried something new and accomplished it. It felt awesome” (J. Land, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
 3. “Setting goals helped me with my schoolwork because it showed me I can accomplish something. It makes me think I can do better in school” (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
 4. “I see a difference in me because I have accomplished the football spiral and kicked a football really far” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
 5. “I feel more proud of myself because I accomplished something” (A. Perez, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
 6. “I feel like I’m a better student now because I know how to accomplish things by setting goals and getting help” (I. Garcia, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
 7. “I liked goal setting because it makes me feel like I can accomplish anything” (J. Rice, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
 8. “It [goal setting] changed me as a student because it’s shown me that I can accomplish tough goals” (A. Whitner, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Description of Recommendations to Friends During Student Interviews

When student-participants were asked if they would recommend goal setting to friends in different classrooms, all students replied that they would recommend goal setting to friends. Six out of eight of the student-participants interviewed discussed a form of self-efficacy as the reason that they would recommend goal setting to a friend. A

student-participant shared, “I would recommend goal setting to a friend because if you make a goal you can actually try to do something to make you be proud of yourself and accomplish that goal” (A. Perez, personal communication, October 5, 2016). The pattern of increased self-efficacy and its impact on students’ belief in themselves as learners was consistent within student data journal responses and one-on-one student interviews, as well as, supported by the teacher-participant’s feedback.

Descriptions of Students’ Increased Self-Efficacy in Data Journals

Student-participants frequently used the words ‘I can’ when reflecting upon goal setting experiences within student data journals. In response to his reading goal, a student-participant shared in his student data journal, “I can understand hard concepts. This will help me to have a better career when I grow up” (B. Felder, personal communication, September 28, 2016). A student-participant who set a goal in soccer and exceeded his goal before the end of round two wrote in his student data journal, “I can go farther than 17 meters. That makes me feel good because I accomplished something for the first time” (A. Perez, personal communication, September 28, 2016). In addition, another student-participant shared in her student data journal, “When I set a goal I try to accomplish it every time. I think to myself ‘I can do stuff’” (Y. Olvera, personal communication, September 28, 2016). A pattern of an increase in self-efficacy developed as the participant-researcher analyzed student data journals, as well as, held one-on-one interviews with a subset of eight student-participants.

Students’ Increased Self-Efficacy Described by Teacher-Participant

A one-on-one interview with the teacher-participant demonstrated an increase in students’ self-efficacy as a result of the goal setting unit. The teacher-participant reported

students' increased effort as a whole in the classroom, which she believed to be due to increased belief in their own abilities. She shared, "A majority of my students appear to believe in themselves more so than before the goal setting unit. I've noticed that they are more apt to hold discussions with confidence and seem to be questioning themselves less, especially during our Number Talks conversations during math instruction" (T. Stegall, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Theme Three: Future Focus

Goal setting appeared to encourage student-participants to focus on learning in the future. Students interviewed during one-on-one student interviews indicated a desire to continue to utilize goal setting for future learning. Student-participants described new knowledge and skills that they would like to use goal setting to attain in the future.

Descriptions of Students' Future Focus During Student Interviews

One-on-one interviews with a subset of eight student-participants revealed an increase in future focus amongst student-participants. Each of the eight student-participants referred to the future during the one-on-one interview. When asked about how goal setting has helped with his schoolwork a student-participant shared, "Goal setting got me smarter and now I know I can accomplish what I want to in my life" (A. Lester, personal communication, October 4, 2016). Another student-participant had middle school in mind when discussing goal setting with the participant-researcher. When asked what he learned about himself through the goal setting process he shared, "I know I can meet goals and do better in middle school" (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016). A student-participant also referred to middle school when asked how goal setting had affected his thoughts about coming to school each day.

The student-participant shared, “It has made me think about how to use goals in middle school” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Descriptions of Students’ Desire to Learn More During Student Interviews

Five out of eight student-participants interviewed discussed future focus when asked if the goal setting unit had given them motivation to learn more at school. Student-participants shared hopes to learn about sports outside of the sport in which they set their goals, wanting to learn to do more things on their own in the future, wanting to accomplish more through goal setting in the future, and a desire to continue with goal setting due to a realization that a person can set goals on their own. The goal setting unit appeared to inspire student-participants to continue utilizing the goal setting process to gain further skills and knowledge in future academic endeavors.

Descriptions of Students’ Future Goal Setting During Student Interviews

Student-participants were asked during the one-on-one interviews to share how they thought they would use goal setting in their own futures. Student-participants discussed passing goal setting skills on to their own children, using goal setting to obtain a good job, learning new skills as they get older, and thinking back on this goal setting unit to help with learning in the future. Students responded:

1. “I will set goals in the future because if I have kids I want to teach them to set goals and be organized. I want to teach others to set goals. Everyone can set them for themselves. It doesn’t always have to be a teacher and a student” (R. Dean, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
2. “I feel like I can do new goals on my own in the future and accomplish those goals if I work hard to” (A. Perez, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

3. “When I get older I will set a goal for getting a job” (J. Rice, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
4. “There are thousands of plans of what I want to do in high school. I have a goal of going into the ROTC and military” (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
5. “Goals could take me far in life. If I come to something I don’t know how to do I can think back to this time and I could figure out how to do it” (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
6. “I will use goals in the future. If I have something that’s very, very hard I can work on it and get better and better” (J. Land, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
7. “I will use goal setting in the future because the goal I set about not arguing with people kept me out of trouble. There are more things like that I need to accomplish about myself” (J. Smith, personal communication, October 5, 2016).
8. “I’ll use goal setting because I want to do more stuff and keep learning how to do more stuff once I get older. Goals can help me do that” (I. Garcia, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

It was noted that each student-participant took very little think-time to come up with an answer to the question. This made it appear as though student-participants had been thinking about goal setting within the future tense before being asked about using goal setting in the future by the participant-researcher.

Descriptions of Recommendations to Friends During Student Interviews

Two of the student-participants taking part in one-on-one interviews referred to

the future when telling the participant-researcher why they would recommend goal setting to a friend. One student-participant responded:

I would say to a friend, ‘What do you want to do?’ because goals can help you in school and in the future. What are you good at and want to get even better at or what’s something new you want to learn? (A. Lester, personal communication, October 5, 2016)

Another student-participant responded, “I would recommend goal setting to a friend because it could help them out in life in the future” (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Teacher-Participant Reveals Challenge to Future Focus Finding

The participant-researcher asked the teacher-participant her thoughts on student-participants’ references to future focus and learned that the teacher-participant makes a point to consistently discuss careers and the qualities of strong employees throughout the school year. At the time of one-on-one interviews the teacher-participant was facilitating a unit that included applying and interviewing for a job with the Mars I project. This likely impacted the student-participants’ responses. It is difficult to determine if increased future focus was a result of the goal setting unit or the teacher-participant’s career exploration unit at the time of this action research study.

Although the participant-researcher initially viewed the teacher-participant’s concurrent career exploration unit as a challenge to the present action research study, reflection on the concurrent goal setting unit and career exploration unit illustrates an opportunity for instructional improvement. The two life skills focused units taught concurrently have the potential to assist students in fully considering the impact of goal

setting within the broader scope of life outside the classroom walls.

Outliers and Challenges for Future Research Consideration

Student-participant responses within student data journals and one-on-one interviews revealed the themes of increased self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus that created increased engagement in the learning process. However, outliers came to light as student-participants took part in one-on-one interviews. These outliers included one student-participant's reported improved attitude toward himself, another student's inability to transfer the goal setting experience to her schoolwork, and students' inability to transfer changes in themselves as individuals to changes in themselves as students.

Social-Emotional Impact of Student Goal Setting

When asked if the goal setting unit helped him to see himself differently, one student-participant responded, "Yes, I have a better attitude after I accomplish something I've been trying to do" (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016). The majority of student-participants' answers to this question supported an increase in self-regulation and/or self-efficacy. However, this student-participant brought an interesting social-emotional element to light within the study through this response. This response led the participant-researcher to consider the social-emotional impact of goal setting for future research.

Ability of Students to Transfer Goal Setting to Academic Success

Another student-participant exhibited an inability to transfer the goal setting unit from athletics to her core classroom learning experience. When the student was asked during her one-on-one interview to tell the participant-researcher about how setting goals

has or has not helped her with her schoolwork she replied, “This hasn’t helped with my schoolwork, but it has helped me be athletic” (J. Rice, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Student-participants were encouraged to set self-selected mastery goals in the area most important to them as learners in an attempt to allow students to set relevant goals for themselves. Most student-participants appeared to transfer goal setting experiences from their self-selected mastery goal to schoolwork, but this student-participant’s response illustrated the need to add an element to the goal setting unit to ensure transfer of goal setting capabilities and understandings from self-selected goals to schoolwork for every student.

Ability of Students to Transfer Changes in Self to Changes in Student Role

Four out of eight student-participants who took part in one-on-one interviews replied “No” or “Not really” when asked, “Has goal setting changed anything about how you feel as a student?” It did not appear that students transferred changes they saw within themselves to changes they saw within themselves as students, which led the participant-researcher to question whether or not students would eventually be able to make this connection or if it would be beneficial for goal setting lessons to explicitly assist students in connecting themselves to the role of student in future studies.

Impact of Goal Setting Unit on Life Skills

The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (2015) developed “The Profile of the South Carolina Graduate” that articulates three overarching goals for students as they graduate from the public education system. These include world class knowledge, world class skills, and life and career characteristics. Knowing how to learn, as well as, self-direction and perseverance are expectations for students within the

overarching themes. In addition, The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2016) developed seven competencies for career readiness, which includes the ability to “Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems” (Definition of Career Readiness and Competencies section, para. 1). Goal setting may provide a strategy to teach these skills within the classroom, no matter whether students relate the skills to being a student that uses the skills within the academic arena or utilizing these skills as an individual in the workplace.

Scholarly Literature to Support Findings

The theories of self-regulated learning and self-efficacy support this action research study’s findings. Student-participants reported self-regulated behaviors through increased initiative to learn described in student data journals, as well as, one-on-one interviews. Terms such as ‘hard work, practice, and effort’ were used by student-participants to describe investment in their own learning within personal reflections regarding the goal setting unit. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) argue:

It [self-regulation] begins with the recognition that students are active participants in their own learning . . . To be self-regulated is to be goal-directed and demonstrate control over and responsibility for one’s focus and effort when engaged in learning. (p. 18)

In addition, goal setting was found to increase student engagement in Lau and Nie’s (2008) study which found, “students’ achievement goals represent their reasons or purposes for engaging in academic tasks” (p. 15). Specifically, a mastery-oriented goal structure was implemented within this action research study to encourage student-participants’ commitment to learning. Ames’s (1992) study found, “Enhancing

motivation means enhancing children's valuing of effort and a commitment to effort-based strategies through the design of mastery-oriented classroom structures" (p. 268).

Student-participants used the term 'I can' to described changes in themselves as a result of the goal setting unit during one-on-one interviews at the conclusion of the study. According to Marzano and Pickering (2011), "Self-efficacy is quite possibly the most important factor affecting engagement. If a student's answer to the question 'Can I do this?' is no, most, if not all engagement is lost" (p. 117). Studies focused on goal setting have concluded that goal attainment coupled with self-efficacy leads students to set new challenging goals (Schunk, 1990). In addition, student goal setting heightens students' perceived self-efficacy and interest in activities that held little attraction for them initially (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). The mastery-oriented proximal goal setting unit within this present action research study increased student-participants' engagement in the learning process through self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Reflection upon this qualitative action research study occurred with the teacher-participant, as well as, the school's administrative team. As a team, we believe that the findings of this action research study, in addition to, scholarly literature indicating the benefits of student goal setting will assist our school in strengthening student engagement practices, thereby providing a means of academic success for the students we serve.

According to Zimmerman (1990), "Teachers need to teach students how to become masters of their own learning" (p. 4). The mastery goal orientation utilized within the present action research study's goal setting unit focused on allowing students to set goals to learn a new skill or obtain new knowledge important to them. Teaching students to set goals focused on what they want in life helps students from low-SES

families to increase their perception of control over their environment by showing them how to act differently and therefore better manage their own stress levels for success in present and future endeavors (Jensen, 2009).

As we strive to prepare students for success beyond the classroom it remains important to assist students in developing holistic skills such as knowing how to learn, self-direction, perseverance, and the ability to overcome problems (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015; National Association of College and Employers, 2016). Future research regarding the impact of goal setting on desired skills defined as college and career readiness may prove useful as we seek ways in which to teach these necessary skills through students' interest areas within the classroom setting. According to Tileston and Darling (2009):

The challenge before teachers, and what they *do* have the power to control, is to create the educational conditions for these [low-SES] students to succeed in spite of the diverse circumstances under which they live. When teachers create these conditions, they build resilience in their students to succeed in school, create hope and belief in their students as persons and learners, help students aspire to some form of postsecondary education, and provide their students with the key to override the impact of poverty. (p. 27)

The concurrent instruction of the present action research study's goal setting unit and the teacher-participant's career exploration unit that occurred at the conclusion of the goal setting unit provide an instructional framework for future studies to determine the impact of teaching life skills through a goal setting lens within the classroom.

Interpretation of Results of the Study

This section of Chapter Four compares the findings of the present action research study with the literature review for similarities and differences. The overarching finding of this action research study is that goal setting impacted the learning process through student engagement due to the resulting increase in self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus for students of poverty in one fifth-grade Title I classroom within a southern, rural community. The findings of this action research study include: 1) Goal setting increased self-regulation in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; 2) Goal setting increased self-efficacy in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; and 3) Goal setting increased future focus in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom. However, many of the student-participants within this one FES classroom required faculty support and supplies in order to work toward the goals set during the goal setting unit due to setting goals outside of the homeroom teacher-participant's domain and a lack of access to mentorship and supplies in the home setting. The goal of this section is to analyze and discuss the meaning of the present action research study's findings in terms of their value within our school, as well as, schools with similar student populations transitioning from elementary to middle school.

Implications for Students' Self-Regulation

Student-participants set self-selected goals through two rounds of a goal setting unit. An increase in student-participants becoming active participants in their own learning occurred over these two rounds of goal setting. According to Zimmerman (1989), "[self-regulated] students personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of

instruction” (p. 329).

Relationships Between Students and Teachers

One out of 17 student-participants initiated a teacher relationship on her own to ask for assistance in working toward her goal during the first round of goal setting while four additional student-participants initiated teacher relationships with encouragement from the participant-researcher. However, seven out of 17 student-participants initiated a teacher relationship on their own for assistance in working toward goals during the second round of goal setting. This may be due to student-participants’ reliance on mentorship and supplies that were not available within the home at times, which sheds light on the importance of relationships developed between students and teachers within a Title I school.

Rather than waiting for a teacher to teach a lesson pertaining to her/his self-selected goal, student-participants initiated conversations with teachers on their own to ask for assistance and/or mentoring in order to reach their goal. This not only assists students with acquiring new knowledge with a teacher’s assistance, it helps to build stronger student-teacher relationships. Measures of engagement have been correlated with schools that have a high socio-economic status, strong disciplinary climate, good student-teacher relations, and high expectations for student success (Willms, 2000). The opportunity to utilize goal setting as a means to strengthen student-teacher relationships through mentorships as students initiate and value those relationships in order to work toward meeting mastery goals was discovered through this action research process.

As the participant-researcher and FES’s curriculum specialist, I plan to utilize this newfound knowledge as our school strives to build stronger student-teacher relationships.

Future implementation of goal setting units within the remaining fifth-grade classrooms may result in stronger student-teacher relationships throughout the grade level. If so, this will give me evidence to present to teachers within various grade levels who have a desire to strengthen student-teacher relationships within the classroom, which will potentially assist in developing a willingness of teachers to implement a goal setting unit within more classrooms at FES.

Student Engagement in the Learning Process

The present action research study's goal setting unit appeared to have a positive impact on students' academic engagement practices. As student-participants grew as goal-setters in round two of goal setting they began to attribute success to effort, promises to oneself, motivation, dedication, and staying focused. Student-participants' reflections of the goal setting experience illustrated increased self-regulation through investment in their own learning. Pellino (2007) argued:

When many children from low socio-economic status run into challenges they engage in negative self-talk and may perceive their failures as challenges they cannot overcome. They may not increase their efforts and may become despondent if they interpret failure to mean they are personally deficient.

(Challenge: Student Motivation to Learn section, para. 8)

However, Ames (as cited in Collopy & Green, 1995) argued, "When students adopt learning goals, they take on more challenging tasks, persist longer, are less debilitated by mistakes and failure, and use higher-level thinking skills than when they focus on ability goals" (p. 38). Fifth-grade low-SES student-participants in the teacher-participant's classroom at FES exhibited persistence through continued efforts to accomplish learning

goals, motivation, and dedication to succeed as a result of the goal setting unit. Goal setting in the form of learning, or mastery, goals is a research-based strategy that can help our fifth-grade low-SES students strive for success even in the face of failure. The four student-participants who did not meet their goal during the first round of goal setting, but met their goal during the second round of goal setting demonstrated success in the face of failure. Each of these students attributed their success to self-regulation concepts. The implementation of a mastery goal setting unit within the teacher-participant's instructional practice was found to be an evidence-based strategy that can be shared with other FES fifth-grade teachers to enable their low-SES students to strive for success in school.

Implications for Students' Self-Efficacy

Each of the student-participants taking part in the one-on-one interview used the term 'I can' when describing changes in themselves as a result of the goal setting unit. When asked during one-on-one interviews what student-participants learned about themselves as a result of this goal setting unit, student-participants responded with answers such as, "I can reach goals I set for myself" (J. Smith, personal communication, October 5, 2016), "I can meet goals very, very well" (J. Land, personal communication, October 5, 2016), "I can do anything with help and practice" (I. Garcia, personal communication, October 5, 2016), and "If I keep trying, I can do anything" (J. Rice, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Self-efficacy plays an important role in a student's self-observation process, which according to Marzano and Pickering (2011), "is quite possibly the most important factor affecting engagement. If a student's answer to the question 'Can I do this?' is no, most, if not all, engagement is lost" (p. 117).

Classroom Instruction to Promote Student Engagement

According to the findings, the implementation of a goal setting unit within classroom instruction is an evidence-based strategy that has the potential to promote student engagement within students through increased self-efficacy, which now allows me to provide fifth-grade teachers at FES with a classroom strategy to increase their students' academic engagement. Student goal setting heightens students' perceived self-efficacy and interest in activities that held little attraction for them initially (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). As I provide instructional coaching to teachers who strive to increase student motivation for learning in the classroom, students' perceived self-efficacy must be considered. Tollesfson (2000) explains, "Individuals' beliefs about their abilities make up their sense of self-efficacy . . . these beliefs are important determinants of whether individuals will expend effort on a task and persist in the face of difficulty" (p. 67). One student-participant illustrated this when she shared, "When I set a goal I try to accomplish it every time. I think to myself 'I can do stuff'" (Y. Olvera, personal communication, September 28, 2016). This newfound knowledge better equips me as I provide instructional coaching and assist FES teachers, specifically fifth-grade teachers, in implementing evidence-based instructional strategies to strengthen student engagement in FES classrooms. I will be able to share student-participants' experiences with the goal setting unit with FES fifth-grade teachers in an effort to encourage teachers to utilize goal setting to strengthen student engagement and motivation in the classroom.

Student-to-Student Goal Setting Mentor Program

Findings suggest that student-participants would recommend goal setting to friends in school. In order to create a community of learners who value goal setting,

creating a student mentor program based on goal setting may be of value for increasing self-efficacy in students outside of the present action research study. This newfound knowledge allows me to present the idea of a student-to-student mentor program within a goal setting unit to the FES leadership team. This is an instructional strategy that has the potential to impact student engagement through self-efficacy of low-SES fifth-grade students at FES working as mentors and mentees, which may impact a larger population of low-SES students at FES.

When student-participants were asked if they would recommend goal setting to friends in different classrooms, all students replied that they would recommend goal setting to friends. Six out of eight of the student-participants interviewed discussed a form of self-efficacy as the reason that they would recommend goal setting to a friend. A student-participant shared during a one-on-one interview, “I would recommend goal setting to a friend because if you make a goal you can actually try to do something to make you be proud of yourself and accomplish that goal” (A. Perez, personal communication, October 5, 2016). The pattern of increased self-efficacy and its impact on students’ belief in themselves as learners was consistent within student data journal responses and one-on-one student interviews, as well as, supported by the teacher-participant’s feedback.

The belief that a majority of student-participants had in goal setting has the potential to create buy-in for FES students outside of the study. A student-mentor program that allows the fifth-grade student-participants in the participating classroom to mentor students within the two fifth-grade classrooms who were not study participants may provide an opportunity for increased self-efficacy in more FES fifth-grade students.

However, reflecting upon the present research study, it should be made known that FES students will often need more than just goal setting skills and mentorship from their peers. These students will likely need faculty expertise and support in setting and working toward goals, as well as, possible supplies to work toward their goals.

Implications for Students' Future Focus

Each of the eight student-participants referred to the future during the one-on-one interview. When asked what he learned about himself through the goal setting experience one student-participant shared during a one-on-one interview, "I know I can meet goals and do better in middle school" (M. Grace, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Another student replied, "Goal setting has taught me I could do this over and over and you don't have to stop. I want to keep going" (R. Dean, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Several student-participants mentioned teaching their future children how to set goals one day, setting goals when getting a job one day, and looking back on this goal setting experience for inspiration when things get tough in the future. Hazarian (as cited in Marquis-Hobbs, 2014) claims, "families in poor neighborhoods find it difficult to cultivate future focus . . . this lack of future focus is a direct consequence of the survival mode in which many families find themselves. When resources are scarce, a family's energy must be focused on survival" (p. 36).

The finding that student goal setting impacts students' future focus was a surprise to me. I did not expect student-participants to describe future focus as they did during the one-on-one student interviews. Future focus was likely increased by the concurrent career exploration unit presented to student-participants by the teacher-participant at the conclusion of the present action research study. The newfound knowledge that student

goal setting made an impact on future focus gave me a new perspective on the importance of goal setting for FES's fifth-grade low-SES students as they transition from elementary school to middle school. Student goal setting is an evidence-based instructional strategy that I can share through my role as a curriculum specialist to enhance the overall life skills of fifth-grade students at FES if teachers are willing to allow me to work with them to implement student goal setting within their classrooms.

Classroom Instruction to Increase Life Skills Through Future Focus

This action research study revealed that these southern, rural fifth-grade low-SES student-participants could develop future focus through the goal setting unit. This is likely attributed to the teacher-participant's focus on future career development in the classroom, as well. However, student-participants reported an increase in future focus as they discussed goals that they wanted to set for future learning, as well as, teaching their own children how to goal set and using goal setting in the job market one day. Many of the student-participants taking part in one-on-one interviews referred to using goal setting when they get to middle school next year. As students develop a skill set in goal setting they strengthen their potential to emulate many of the skills required by the "Profile of the South Carolina Graduate" (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015), which includes knowing how to learn, self-direction, and perseverance.

Although the participant-researcher initially viewed the teacher-participant's concurrent career exploration unit as a challenge to the present action research study, reflection on the concurrent goal setting unit and career exploration unit illustrates an opportunity for instructional improvement. The two life skills focused units taught concurrently have the potential to assist students in fully considering the impact of goal

setting within the broader scope of life outside the classroom walls.

Conclusion

This action research study addressed a school need for an evidence-based strategy for FES fifth-grade teachers to potentially implement in the future to strengthen student engagement practices. The identified problem of practice for the action research study at FES, which is a Title I school in the South, involved one fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom. The teacher requested assistance from the school's curriculum specialist, who is also the participant-researcher, to develop an instructional strategy that would enable her students to increase their academic engagement and self-efficacy for increased success in school.

The overarching finding of this action research study is that goal setting impacts the learning process because of the resulting increase in self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. The major findings of this action research study include: 1) Goal setting increased self-regulation in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; 2) Goal setting increased self-efficacy in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; and 3) Goal setting increased future focus in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom. However, many of the student-participants within this one FES classroom required faculty support and supplies in order to work toward the goals set during the goal setting unit due to setting goals outside of the homeroom teacher-participant's domain and a lack of access to mentorship and supplies in the home setting.

Student-participants reported an increased initiative over time to engage teachers in assistance and/or mentorships when working toward their self-selected mastery goals. Student-participants attributed their success to self-regulation, using words such as 'hard

work, practice, and effort' when reflecting on their experiences with the goal setting unit. Student-participants reported increased self-efficacy at the conclusion of the goal setting unit. Each student-participant taking part in one-on-one interviews used the term 'I can' to describe changes in themselves as a result of the goal setting unit. These fifth-grade student-participants also reported future focus, often referring to using goal setting when they get to the middle school next year, as well as, using goal setting in obtaining a job one day and teaching their future children to set goals.

Through the action research process, student-participants experienced increased self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Student engagement was impacted through increased self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Through this action research study, goal setting has been found to be an evidence-based strategy in which FES fifth-grade low-SES students can be enabled to set goals for themselves and be successful in school. An action plan and suggestions for future research were determined through the action research process, which assisted in creating a goal setting unit to be implemented within volunteer fifth-grade teacher-participants' classrooms throughout FES in the future to strengthen student engagement practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Chapter Five outlines the summary and conclusions of the qualitative action research study exploring the ways in which a fifth-grade teacher at Focus Elementary School (pseudonym) (FES), a rural Title I (i.e., at least 40% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced lunch status) school in the South, enables students of low socioeconomic status (SES) parents to set goals for themselves and become more motivated to succeed in school. The study was designed to explore an evidence-based strategy in one teacher-participant's fifth-grade classroom to enable the teacher-participant to strengthen these students' engagement practices and goal setting skills. The identified problem of practice for the action research study at FES, which is a rural Title I school, involved one fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom.

This action research study was developed in response to one fifth-grade teacher at FES requesting assistance in enabling her students to be more motivated to succeed in school. The intent of this study was not to generalize findings to a larger population within the United States, but to describe one local and particular phenomenon in one local and particular classroom within the present time and place. The participant-researcher completed the study in this fifth-grade teacher-participant's classroom in order to explore the research question, "What effect does student goal setting have on the

learning process for fifth-grade students at Focus Elementary School?”

The study explored an evidence-based strategy that one teacher-participant implemented in her fifth-grade classroom at FES to strengthen student-participants’ goal setting skills, which contributed to an increase in student-participants’ engagement in the learning process through the themes of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus according to the study’s findings. It was concluded that the implementation of goal setting within classroom instruction is likely to benefit FES students within the other existing fifth-grade classrooms through increased student engagement.

As a result of the findings, as well as, reflection upon the implementation of the present goal setting unit an action plan was developed to invite the remaining FES fifth-grade faculty members to participate in a coaching cycle with the school’s curriculum specialist, who is also the participant-researcher. This coaching cycle focuses on student goal setting to include a professional development session and co-teaching in the classroom in order to deepen teachers’ understanding of the goal setting process with students. In addition, the coaching cycle includes assistance in monitoring teachers’ own findings through the use of student data to determine successes, as well as, opportunities for adjustments for future implementation of a student goal setting unit within teachers’ classrooms.

Reflection upon the present action research study influenced the goal setting unit to be implemented within classrooms during future coaching cycles. Goal setting units will consist of a minimum of four rounds of proximal goal setting to better nurture and develop goal setting skills within student-participants, the term ‘attainable’ will be better defined for students during the goal setting lesson to include the ability to gather

necessary supplies to meet the goals set, and students will choose a faculty mentor to provide feedback and guidance during each goal setting round to establish continued support and mentorship. Related arts teachers will also participate in professional development on student goal setting in preparation for serving as mentors to fifth-grade students, should they be willing.

Study Participants and Setting

This qualitative action research study focused on enabling one FES fifth-grade teacher-participant to assist her classroom of fifth-grade students with setting learning goals in an effort to increase student engagement in the classroom. The student-participants within this study attend a rural Title I school located in the south. The classroom consisted of 17 students of mixed genders from a variety of backgrounds. The class was made up of nine boys and eight girls. English language learners made up 11% of the class. Overall, the ethnic makeup of this class was 26% African American, 16% Hispanic, 53% White, and 5% identified as having two or more ethnicities. Students receiving free and reduced lunch made up 84% of the students within this class, and 21% of students were considered homeless (P. Bowers, personal communication, August 30, 2016). The primary objective of this study was to explore the effect of student goal setting on the learning process for these specific fifth-grade students.

Fifth-Grade Study Participation

Fifth-grade was chosen as a research focus for this action research study due to students' heightened academic disaffection within the eight to 11-year-old age group according to the literature, as well as, signs of student academic disaffection within fifth-grade students at FES. The teacher-participant requested assistance to gain instructional

support from the school's curriculum specialist, who is also the participant-researcher, in enabling her students to exhibit greater academic engagement and willingly agreed to participate in this action research study in order to determine the impact of goal setting on the learning process, specifically students' academic engagement. The participant-researcher and teacher-participant worked together to create an instructional unit about setting measurable and attainable mastery goals that included a whole-group lesson on setting measurable and attainable goals, "think-aloud" modeling of goal setting, and conferencing with each student one-on-one as she/he set her/his first goal. Students set a total of two mastery goals over the eight-week data collection period and used student data journals to self-evaluate and track goal progress.

Data Collection Strategy

As the teacher-participant taught the lesson on setting measurable and attainable mastery goals, the participant-researcher assisted her in conferencing with students as they learned to set mastery goals. Student-participants set their own individual goals, which were measurable and students felt would be attainable. The intent of allowing students to set their own learning goals was to allow students to focus on mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge that was important to them. Students set goals in a variety of areas including sports, art, social skills, social studies, writing, math, and reading. Data was collected in the form of student data journals utilized throughout the eight-week data collection period, as well as, one-on-one interviews with a subset of eight student-participants and a one-on-one interview with the teacher-participant at the conclusion of the study.

Findings and Interpretation of the Findings

Findings indicated an overall increase in student-participants' self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus that contributed to increased student engagement when the goal setting unit was put into place in this particular fifth-grade classroom. Challenges to the implementation of the goal setting unit included student-participants' need for mentorship to learn a new skill, as well as, necessary materials such as art and sports supplies in order to work toward their goals. Challenges were not accounted for at the forefront of the study, but brought to light during the action research study.

The Challenge of Faculty Mentorship

It was assumed by the participant-researcher at the onset of the study that student-participants would set goals pertaining to skills learned within their homeroom teacher-participant's classroom. This assumption was incorrect as many student-participants set mastery goals outside the expertise of the teacher-participant or participant-researcher. In order to fill in the mentorship gap during the present action research study, students were encouraged to develop relationships with faculty members specializing in the area of the set goal. For example, students who set goals in a sports related area were encouraged to ask the physical education teacher to assist them in developing the skill they wished to learn. The participant-researcher discussed this with the physical education teacher, as well as, the art teacher prior to encouraging students to develop these relationships. Each of the teachers agreed to assist students with excitement and willingness.

The Challenge of Necessary Supplies

The participant-researcher did not take into account that student-participants would set goals that required supplies or equipment outside of the homeroom classroom

setting. Several student-participants set goals that required art supplies. Many other student-participants set goals requiring practice sports equipment. The participant-researcher worked with the art teacher and physical education teacher behind the scenes to ensure that students were able to obtain the supplies necessary to work toward their set goals. However, the word ‘attainable’ will be redefined in future goal setting lessons to include access to necessary supplies needed to work toward a mastery goal.

Interpretations of the Findings

According to the analysis of student data journals, one-on-one interviews with a subset of student-participants, and a one-on-one interview with the teacher-participant, student goal-setting contributed to increased student engagement through an increase in self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus in the fifth-grade student-participants included in this action research study. Challenges were presented during the action research study that were not considered prior to the start of the study. A need for mentorship with a person having expertise in the mastery goal area, as well as, the need for access to supplies to work toward mastery goals came into play during the action research study.

Student goal setting appeared to have a positive impact on the learning process through increased student engagement in the form of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. These findings indicate value in implementing student goal setting within classroom instruction for fifth-grade students at FES. However, changes need to occur within the implementation of goal setting in order for students, specifically low-SES students, to fully benefit from the experience. These changes possess the potential benefit of leading to stronger student-teacher relationships.

Faculty mentorships would likely be beneficial if created based on individual student mastery goals set and faculty willingness to support a set goal within their area of expertise. The availability of a faculty mentorship should be a factor in setting an attainable goal. For example, if no support is available for working toward a goal through a faculty mentorship then the goal should not be considered attainable and a new goal should be set in place of the unattainable goal.

In addition, supplies for working toward the goal should be accessible in order for the goal to be considered attainable. The term ‘attainable’ should be clearly defined as something one can successfully do or learn through hard work and practice, as well as, something that can be supported through faculty mentorships and accessible supplies. Although changes need to occur within the present student goal setting unit, it is considered a worthwhile exercise for enabling FES fifth-grade students to become engaged and be more motivated in school.

Key Questions

Key questions arose from the findings and interpretation of findings resulting from this action research study. The study found that students were able to learn goal setting skills, but ran into hurdles in securing support from a mentor who could help in working toward the set goal. The question arose, how can faculty mentorships be created in order to provide the most support to students working toward a set goal? In addition, do the characteristics of students’ assigned teacher impact students’ success with the goal setting unit? For example, if a homeroom teacher does not offer support for goals set within her/his realm of expertise will a student be less likely to fully participate in the goal setting process? Is a mentor relationship necessary to build student engagement

through goal setting? Or does the implementation of goal setting within classroom instruction naturally help to create student-teacher relationships?

In addition, due to instructional stresses currently placed on teachers the leadership team asked, what is the best way to encourage teachers to implement goal setting within classroom instruction? And if teachers are willing to implement goal setting within classroom instruction, how will scheduling provide time for goal setting within the demands of the school day? It was also found during the study that several students did not have access to the supplies necessary to work toward the set goals, specifically art supplies and sports equipment. How will these supplies be provided? Teachers already face demands in providing basic school supplies, so a plan will need to be in place in terms of providing supplies for student goal setting. Currently, the action plan is to require accessibility to supplies before a goal can be deemed ‘attainable’ when setting measurable and attainable goals in future action research studies at FES.

Focus of the Study

The related literature review, as well as, professional development sessions sponsored by the participant-researcher’s Title I school pointed the participant-researcher toward the investigation of goal setting as a means of strengthening engagement practices for students of poverty. The present action research study links a mastery goal orientation with student self-evaluation to determine its impact on student engagement in the elementary setting. Specifically, the study explored an evidence-based strategy that a teacher-participant implemented in one classroom at FES to strengthen student-participants’ goal setting skills, which contributed to an increase in students’ engagement in the learning process. The goal setting unit was tested with 17 student-participants and

their teacher-participant homeroom teacher. Findings indicated an overall increase in student engagement in the learning process through student-participants' self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus when the goal setting unit was put into place in the classroom.

Overview/Summary of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore the impact of goal setting on the learning process with fifth-grade students in a rural Title I school in the South. A goal setting unit was designed specifically for this action research study to enable student-participants to experience setting mastery goals and develop an academic engagement practice through goal setting. Semi-structured student interviews, student data journals in the form of goal setting forms, and an open-ended interview with the teacher-participant provide the data for this research. Study participants included 17 FES student-participants and their homeroom teacher-participant.

Data Collection Strategy

The participant-researcher partnered with the teacher-participant to implement a goal setting unit within her fifth-grade classroom. The participant-researcher and teacher-participant partnered to teach an introductory lesson on goal setting within the classroom based on setting measurable and attainable mastery goals. The teacher-participant used "think aloud" modeling to provide examples of setting measurable and attainable mastery goals for the student-participants. The participant-researcher assisted the teacher-participant in conferencing with individual students one-on-one as she/he set her/his first mastery goal at the conclusion of the lesson.

Student-participants set self-selected mastery goals for four-week goal setting

rounds over the data collection period of eight-weeks for a total of two goals. Student-participants were provided student data journals for self-evaluation purposes. The participant-researcher collected student data journals at the conclusion of each goal setting round and met individually with a subset of eight student-participants for one-on-one interviews at the conclusion of the study. The participant-researcher met with the teacher-participant at the conclusion of the study to discuss overall changes she observed in the learning process of her students.

Developing an Action Plan

Findings suggest the goal setting unit impacted the learning process in the form of academic engagement in the classroom. The present action research study demonstrated an increase in self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus in student-participants as a result of the goal setting unit. Challenges presented themselves during the present action research study in the form of the need for mentorship, as well as, necessary supplies when working toward set goals. Overall, it was concluded from the findings that there is value in implementing student goal setting within classroom instruction for fifth-grade students at FES. However, changes need to occur within the implementation of goal setting in order for students, specifically low-SES students, to fully benefit from the experience. These changes possess the potential benefit of leading to stronger student-teacher relationships. The participant-researcher reflected on the data with school leadership, including the teacher-participant, to determine future implementation of a student engagement plan focused on goal setting for fifth-grade FES classrooms.

Action Plan Timeline

The participant-researcher will share the findings within a professional learning

community (PLC) meeting with FES's fifth-grade faculty, which includes two teachers and the present action research study's teacher-participant, as well as, four related arts teachers. In addition, FES's student teachers, who are currently interning in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, will also be invited to join this PLC meeting in order to gain knowledge in the area of student goal setting and potentially spread the strategy through their future classrooms in various school settings. This is currently scheduled to take place in May 2017 to assist teachers as they begin to plan for the 2017-2018 school year. During this PLC meeting, the participant-researcher will offer to provide coaching cycles for fifth-grade teachers that will begin in August 2017 in an effort to assist with implementation of a goal setting unit within volunteer teacher-participant classrooms in order to continue the action research process and refine the goal setting unit. In addition, related arts teachers will be invited to participate in professional development on student goal setting in preparation for serving as mentors to fifth-grade students should they be willing to serve. Professional development is scheduled to occur with the participant-researcher in August 2017.

FES's leadership team, consisting of the principal, assistant principal, and curriculum specialist, chose to present the findings at the end of the school year due to time constraints placed on teachers within the building during the school year. Asking fifth-grade teachers to voluntarily participate in a coaching cycle to implement a goal setting unit within their classrooms presents a challenge. In addition, asking related arts teachers to serve as mentors to fifth-grade students who set goals within their area of expertise also presents a challenge. Teachers are currently in overload with the new state evaluation system, new reading instruction requirements, new requirements to document

the progress of struggling learners, and the school's focus on text-dependent analysis integration in all subject areas in light of new state testing requirements. Although findings of the present action research study suggest student goal setting impacts the learning process through student engagement in the form of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus, asking teachers to implement 'one more strategy' may prove difficult at this point in the school year. The leadership team felt that waiting to present the information at the end of the school year when things begin to calm down and teachers begin planning for the next school year will result in a stronger teacher volunteer base to participate in a coaching cycle focused on implementing a goal setting unit in fifth-grade classrooms at FES to continue the action research cycle.

Action Researcher as Participant-Researcher

The participant-researcher currently serves the faculty and students of FES as its curriculum specialist. This role includes curricular leadership in the form of instructional coaching, as well as, curriculum initiative liaison between the district/school leadership team and FES faculty members. The role of curriculum specialist lent itself to partnering with a teacher-participant to perform this action research study. The participant-researcher worked with the teacher-participant to plan a goal setting instructional unit for classroom implementation. In addition, the participant-researcher and teacher-participant worked together to conference with student-participants as each student-participant set her/his first goal during round one of goal setting. The participant-researcher collected data through student data journals during each of the two rounds of student goal setting during the data collection timeframe. In addition, the participant-researcher led one-on-one interviews with a subset of eight student-participants, as well as, the teacher-

participant at the conclusion of the study. The participant-researcher collected the data during the data collection timeframe in order to code, analyze, and share the data. The participant-researcher and teacher-participant reflected upon the data in a reciprocal manner throughout the study.

The role of curriculum specialist at FES led the participant-researcher to be an insider who historically worked with the teacher-participant in a coaching capacity, as well as, co-taught student-participants from time-to-time within the classroom setting. Entering the classroom for this action research study was a natural extension of the role of curriculum specialist. However, the participant-researcher was, for the most part, an outsider when entering the teacher-participant's classroom to perform the present action research study. The participant-researcher did not always have a clear picture of what was happening within the classroom outside of the research study. For example, the teacher-participant began teaching a career exploration unit at the conclusion of this action research study. This impacted student-participants' interview responses because they had been discussing their futures within the classroom. Student-participants discussed future focus during one-on-one data collection interviews. It wasn't until the participant-researcher shared findings with the teacher-participant that it was discovered the impact the career exploration unit had on the action research study's findings.

This participant-researcher outsider role presented personal challenges. I consistently felt guilt for asking to utilize the teacher-participant's instructional time. In addition, scheduling often posed issues during the data collection process as I worked to perform the demanding duties of the curriculum specialist role while finding time to also serve as a participant-researcher in this action research study. For example, while I was

working to collect data around scheduled meetings and trainings the teacher-participant was also striving to find times convenient for students to leave instruction to take part in interviews.

It is yet to be determined how the findings and call for participation in coaching cycles focused on student goal setting will be received. I worry that the fifth-grade teachers will be resistant to devote instructional time to a topic that is not the primary focus of standards to be tested at the end of the school year. Teachers are currently overloaded with state and district mandates. As the curriculum specialist, I am often a sounding board for teachers as they vent about a lack of time to teach their curriculum standards. Time is scarce within FES classrooms, specifically due to the new multi-tiered system of support initiative requiring 30 minutes of an instructional block per school day to perform reading and math intervention for students struggling in those areas. Asking teachers to allocate time for the implementation of student goal setting may not be readily accepted. However, this action research study's findings indicate potential academic benefits for low-SES students. It will be imperative that I present the findings in a manner that encourages fifth-grade teachers at FES to participate in a student goal setting coaching cycle in order to benefit their students' academic engagement and motivation to be successful in school.

In addition, related arts teachers have demanding schedules as they work to teach all grade levels with the school. Although the art and physical education teachers willingly agreed to assist students during the present action research study, it may be difficult to gain their willingness to serve as official mentors in future implementation of goal setting units. It will be imperative that related arts teachers are included in the

sharing of findings and that student benefits are relayed to encourage related arts teachers to serve as mentors.

Action Plan for Student Goal Setting Implementation

According to Knight et al. (2015), “Instructional coaches who use a proven coaching cycle can partner with teachers to set and reach improvement goals that have an unmistakable, positive impact on students’ lives” (p. 18). The participant-researcher currently serves FES as its curriculum specialist. The role of curriculum specialist includes instructional coaching, which lends itself to offering professional development and coaching cycles focused on student goal setting as a result of this action research study.

Professional Development

Professional development with fifth-grade teachers and related arts teachers who volunteer to participate will consist of an approximately hour-long session to deepen teachers’ understanding of the goal setting process with students. This professional development session includes an introduction to the rationale for student goal setting within classrooms based on cultural competence, illustrations of teaching students to set measurable and attainable mastery goals, best practices for mentorship, and known challenges that should be met in advance of implementing goal setting units to the largest extent possible, such as access to mentors with an expertise in the area of the mastery goal set and access to necessary supplies when working toward a goal. Related arts teachers will be invited to participate in this professional development session in order to gain enthusiasm for mentoring, as well as, develop skills as a mentor.

Coaching Cycles

Coaching cycles will take place within fifth-grade teachers' classrooms where the participant-researcher will co-teach with the teacher in order to model the implementation of student goal setting, as well as, assist the teacher in the implementation and facilitation of the goal setting unit. In addition, the participant-researcher will assist teachers in monitoring their own findings regarding the goal setting unit within their classrooms through the use of student data to determine successes, as well as, opportunities for adjustments for future implementation of the goal setting unit. The coaching cycle process will assist the FES leadership team in gathering more information regarding the impact of student goal setting on the learning process of FES fifth-grade students, as well as, potentially create a willingness in teachers within other grade levels throughout FES to spread student goal setting practices throughout the school as they hear positive comments made by teachers who have participated in the coaching cycle.

Discussion of Major Points of the Study

The major findings of this action research study include: 1) Goal setting increased self-regulation in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; 2) Goal setting increased self-efficacy in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; and 3) Goal setting increased future focus in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom. The overarching finding of this action research study is that goal setting impacts the learning process by contributing to increased student engagement in the form of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus.

Study Challenges Leading to Increased Self-Regulation

The participant-researcher incorrectly assumed at the onset of the action research

study that student-participants would choose to set mastery goals within the realm of academics studied within the classroom described in the research setting. However, many students chose to set mastery goals outside of the particular classroom setting by setting sports-related and art-related goals. The need for mentorship to assist students in working toward these goals arose. In order to find a solution to this gap in planning for the present action research study, the participant-researcher encouraged student-participants to seek out mentorships by approaching teachers with an expertise in the area of the mastery goal set. Student-participants were unaware that the participant-researcher approached the art and physical education teachers for permission to encourage student-participants to approach them for help. This occurred during round one of goal setting after the participant-researcher realized that many of the goals student-participants set were related to art and sports. The art teacher and physical education teacher willingly agreed to assist students if approached.

Student-participants approached faculty for assistance in working toward their mastery goals on their own accord during the second round of goal setting. Although encouragement was needed to assist students in seeking out mentors during the first round of goal setting, encouragement was not needed to develop relationships between student-participants and faculty during round two of the action research study. Student-participants exhibited an increased initiative to approach and engage their teachers in a mentor relationship, which is a form of increased self-regulation through initiative.

Self-Regulation

Student-participants attributed their success to self-regulation, using words such as ‘hard work, practice, and effort’ when reflecting on their experiences with the goal

setting unit. In addition, student-participants reported an increased initiative to approach and engage teachers in assistance and/or mentorships in relation to working toward their mastery goals. Although the student-participants were encouraged to engage teachers in mentorships by the participant-researcher during the first round of goal setting, students chose to interact with teachers as mentors on their own during the second round of goal setting. The student-teacher relationships built through student goal setting have the potential to impact academic engagement. According to Jensen (2013a), “Students who have positive relationships with their teachers experience less stress, behave more appropriately, and feel more excited about learning” (p. 23). The present action research study’s goal setting unit impacted the learning process in the form of student engagement through increased self-regulation, in particular student-participants’ initiative to develop relationships with teachers for the purpose of working toward a self-selected mastery goal. This finding creates a potential draw for teachers who have become frustrated with current pedagogical practices and current student engagement levels to voluntarily take part in further action research focused on student goal setting.

Self-Efficacy

Student-participants reported increased self-efficacy at the conclusion of the goal setting unit. Each student-participant taking part in one-on-one interviews used the term ‘I can’ to describe changes in themselves as a result of the goal setting unit. Goal setting increased student-participants’ belief in themselves as learners. Several student-participants shared a desire to continue utilizing a goal setting process on their own in order to continue growing as learners. One student-participant described developing a better attitude in general due to the belief he built within himself as a result of the goal

setting unit. The increase in student-participants' self-efficacy as a result of the goal setting unit has the potential to assist students of poverty in believing that they can have an influence on their own educational endeavors and accomplish academic goals. It is conceivable that the increase in self-efficacy may lead to increased resiliency in students of poverty. According to Tileston and Darling (2009), "Resilient students have goals and educational aspirations, and they are motivated to achieve" (p. 29). One of the five internal factors to building resiliency is self-efficacy. The other factors are social skills, problem-solving skills, self-control, and optimism (Tileston & Darling, 2009). Resiliency is only one of many positive outcomes that increased self-efficacy can develop within students of poverty. This goal setting unit may be the first step in impacting the learning process in the form of student engagement through increased self-efficacy, which has the potential to lead to many more positive outcomes.

Future Focus

Fifth-grade student-participants reported future focus, often referring to using goal setting when they get to the middle school next year, as well as, using goal setting in obtaining a job one day and teaching their future children to set goals. Goal setting units that teach students to set goals to focus on what they want is one of the ways to empower students of poverty to have control over their own environments. The instruction of goal setting for students of poverty allows teachers to take the time to *show* students how to react differently instead of *telling* students how to react differently to adversity (Jensen, 2009). The present action research study's goal setting unit resulted in many student-participants describing future focus during one-on-one interviews. This goal setting unit enables fifth-grade teachers to provide goal setting instruction in the classroom that will

allow students to be taught how to create success in the present timeframe, as well as, future academic and career endeavors through engagement in their own learning.

Conclusion from Findings

Through the action research process, student-participants and their homeroom teacher-participant reported increased self-regulation and self-efficacy, while a subset of eight student-participants taking part in one-on-one interviews reported an increase in future focus. Student engagement was impacted through increased self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Through this action research study, goal setting has been found to be an evidence-based strategy with which the fifth-grade teacher-participant was able to enable her low-SES students to set goals for themselves, engage in the learning process, and be successful in school. It was concluded from these findings that the implementation of a student goal setting unit within fifth-grade classrooms at FES has the potential to contribute to increased student engagement in the form of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus, thereby enabling low-SES fifth-grade students at FES to be more motivated and find more success in school.

Action Plan: Implications of the Findings

The participant-researcher continuously engaged in reflective practice throughout the planning stage and continued to consistently monitor the progress of the study throughout the acting, developing, and reflecting stages of this action research study. Reflections occurred at the conclusion of the study to determine adjustments for further studies. Reflections also occurred in the form of feedback given during the sharing and communication of results phase of the study.

Participant Group Reflection

The participant-researcher reflected on research findings with the teacher-participant, as well as, the school's administrative team at the onset of developing an action plan that is iterative and cyclical in terms of enabling students to set mastery goals that are congruent with their academic engagement. Group reflection during the developing of an action plan phase, as well as, the sharing and communication phase was a vital part of this study because of its purpose to explore an evidence-based strategy for teachers to potentially implement throughout FES fifth-grade classrooms to strengthen student engagement practices.

Participation in Professional Development

FES fifth-grade teachers and related arts teachers will be invited to take part in an hour-long professional development session with the participant-researcher, who is also the school's curriculum specialist, in August 2017. This professional development session will consist of the rationale for implementing a student goal setting unit in the classroom, steps for teaching measurable and attainable mastery goals, best practices for mentorship, and the facilitation of a reciprocal discussion regarding potential problems and the formulation of potential solutions to those problems within the professional development session. Challenges found during the present action research study, such as the need to better define the word 'attainable' to include access to expertise and supplies to ensure that students can work toward their set mastery goals, will be discussed within the potential problems portion of the professional development session.

Participation in Student Goal Setting Unit Coaching Cycle

FES fifth-grade teachers will be invited to participate in a coaching cycle led by

the participant-researcher throughout the 2017-2018 school year to continue the action research cycle focused on the implementation of student goal setting. Teacher-participants will assist with shaping the action research study based on their student-participants' needs based on classroom community and developmental levels. The coaching cycle will consist of co-teaching a lesson on setting measurable and attainable mastery goals, "think-aloud" modeling with students, one-on-one conferencing with students as they develop mastery goals, faculty mentor assignments for students based on goal area, implementation of student data journals focused on self-evaluation of goal setting and progress, and teacher reflection throughout the process. The participant-researcher will adjust these future action research cycles to consist of a minimum of four rounds of proximal goal setting to better nurture and develop goal setting skills within student-participants based on lessons learned from the present action research study.

Introduction of Findings with FES Faculty Members

Findings will be shared with all FES faculty members during an after school faculty meeting in order to develop interest in student goal setting. However, the participant-researcher plans to go into more detail surrounding the present action research study's findings with the school's fifth-grade teachers and related arts teachers during the professional learning community (PLC) meeting scheduled for May 2017. Each month teachers meet with the participant-researcher to discuss strategic instructional design during the school's professional learning community meeting. The sharing of these findings with faculty members during the May 2017 meeting will greatly enhance the school's instructional planning discussions because of the ability to create an opportunity for discussion regarding teachers' own middle class values surrounding goal setting, low-

SES students' lack of exposure to goal setting, and the academic implications of teaching goal setting in the classroom. The administrative team and teacher-participant will be invited to participate in the faculty discussion to grow interest in further classroom studies surrounding student goal setting. In addition, FES's student teachers, who are currently interning in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, will also be invited to join this PLC meeting in order to gain knowledge in the area of student goal setting and potentially spread the strategy through their future classrooms in various school settings.

Communication of Findings Outside of FES

The participant-researcher plans to share findings through a presentation at the annual South Carolina Association of Title I Administrators Conference to assist colleagues working with fifth-grade low-SES students as they strive to enhance students' learning practices. Should findings be shared through workshop presentations outside of FES the presenter will ensure that permission is obtained from guardians of any student-participant who may be included in the presentation through work samples, as well as, the teacher-participant and school administration.

In addition, the participant-researcher plans to share findings with the Francis Marion University *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty* due to their focus on student goal setting as a strategy for student engagement in schools of poverty. This may be in the form of presenting at the annual Summer Institute hosted by Francis Marion University or simply sitting down with the Francis Marion University *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty's* administration to share findings.

Continuous Reflection

Reflection will continue upon this action research study long after the sharing and communicating results stage. Adjustments will be made based upon answers to questions such as “How well did the process work?”, “What challenges occurred within this process?”, and “Is there additional data that can be gathered to further understand the impact of student goal setting on learning practices?” Action research is a cyclical practice in which the participant-researcher attempts to offer “a process by which current practice can be changed toward better practice” (Mertler, 2014, p. 13). Change for the better requires constant reflection and adjustment. This action research study continues to be a continuous cycle of reflection and adjustment in an attempt toward better instructional practice.

Facilitating Educational Change

The present action research study seeks to facilitate positive educational change. The goal of this qualitative action research study was to explore the ways in which one fifth-grade teacher of low socioeconomic (SES) students enables her students to set goals for themselves and become more motivated to succeed in school. The primary objective of this study was to explore the effect of student goal setting on the learning process for fifth-grade students within a rural Title I elementary school in the South. The study explored an evidence-based strategy for teachers to be potentially implemented in fifth-grade classrooms at FES to strengthen students’ engagement practices, thereby enhancing the lives of students, teachers, and administrators.

Student-participants benefited from the present action research study through increased self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Many student-participants

reported the ability to utilize the goal setting unit in the future. The hope is that student-participants developed goal setting skills that will continue to benefit them into the future. FES fifth-grade teachers who choose to voluntarily participate in a coaching cycle with the participant-researcher based on the implementation of a goal setting unit will be exposed to a powerful strategy to assist students in engaging in the learning process through increased self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. Student engagement has the potential to impact classroom culture in a positive way. The implementation of a goal setting unit within fifth-grade classrooms has the potential to lead to stronger student-teacher relationships as students become more comfortable with approaching teachers for assistance in working toward their mastery goals, thereby developing mentor relationships with teachers throughout FES. Teachers may find that they are less frustrated with current pedagogical practices, students may find that they are more excited about learning, and administrators may find that behavior caseloads decrease as a result of student engagement.

Goal Setting Unit Implementation Challenges

State and district requirements currently placed on teachers present challenges to implementing a goal setting unit in FES's fifth-grade classrooms. The State Department of Education's new teacher evaluation system, the school district's reading initiatives, and our school's focus on the implementation of text dependent analysis strategies within all subject areas due to new state testing requirements have sent teachers into overload. Teachers have expressed a lack of instructional time in the classroom, too many instructional requirements, and an overall sense of frustration. School leadership fears that introducing a goal setting unit at this point in the school year has the potential to

lessen the rate of teacher participation in the implementation of student goal setting.

Addressing Implementation Challenges

In an effort to increase participation, the school's leadership team recommended that FES fifth-grade teachers be introduced to the idea of participating in a coaching cycle led by the participant-researcher focused on student goal setting during the May 2017 professional learning community meeting. The participant-researcher plans to introduce the concept in May 2017 in order to gain enthusiasm amongst fifth-grade teachers in implementing the goal setting unit within individual classrooms during the 2017-2018 school year. Related arts teachers will be invited to attend the professional learning community meeting with fifth-grade teachers as they begin to consider their willingness to serve as mentors to students who set a mastery goal within a related arts area. This will allow the participant-researcher to introduce the concept at a time when a sense of calm begins to enter the school building and teachers begin to release the stresses of the school year. The timing will also allow teachers to consider participation in the goal setting unit, ask questions of the participant-researcher, and prepare to work with the participant-researcher in a coaching capacity to begin the new school year.

Coaching sessions focused on the implementation of student goal setting will also assist in creating a learning environment of scholarly practitioners and a culture conducive to change. As FES fifth-grade teachers experience success in the implementation of student goal setting within their classrooms they have the potential to talk to their colleagues about positive experiences. Related arts teachers may see improvement in student performance as students set goals in related arts areas, which may lead to related arts teachers adding to the scholarly conversation surrounding student

goal setting throughout FES. Past experience with other coaching cycle topics has taught the participant-researcher that assisting a teacher with the implementation of a successful strategy tends to encourage other teachers to volunteer for coaching cycles within their classrooms. The process of offering coaching cycles focused on student goal setting to various grade levels after fifth-grade teachers complete a cycle allows teachers to ask those who have experienced the coaching cycle questions, which encourages professional discussion.

Impact of Action Research Process

The implementation of the action research process will assist in the creation of a learning environment of scholarly practitioners and a culture conducive to change. Fifth-grade teachers will utilize data within the coaching cycle to determine the impact of student goal setting on the learning process of their students. Teachers will also utilize data to make adjustments to the student goal setting unit in order to create the best possible experience for their students. The participant-researcher will provide support in collecting and analyzing data to provide a foundation for action research in a safe and nurturing coaching cycle for teachers. Related arts teachers will be invited to participate in the process of analyzing data to determine the outcomes of their mentorship efforts. The hope is that this process will carry over into teachers' use of action research for the implementation of instructional strategies beyond the present goal setting unit.

Suggestions for Future Research

This qualitative action research study explored student goal setting with fifth-grade students in one classroom within a Title I school located in the South. However, more research is needed on the impact of goal setting with students of poverty. The

present study found an increase in self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus after two rounds of goal setting. More research is needed to determine if extending goal setting rounds to a semester or year-long period would have a greater impact on the learning process in the form of student engagement. Specifically, student-participants within the action research study appeared to develop initiative for learning by initiating relationships with and engaging teachers in assistance when working toward self-selected mastery goals. Further research is needed to determine the impact of goal setting on the relationships created between teachers and students, as well as, goal setting's impact on the strength of student-teacher relationships and its impact on student engagement.

An outlier response found during the one-on-one interview indicated that attitude was improved as a result of the goal setting unit. Future research exploring the social-emotional impact, specifically the concept of resiliency, of goal setting on students of poverty may prove beneficial as educators work to strengthen students' engagement practices. Specifically, research exploring students' attitudes toward school might prove valuable as the education system seeks strategies to close the achievement gap and reduce dropout rates.

The present action research study took place with fifth-graders. Future research is also needed to determine the effectiveness of this goal setting unit with various grade levels within the elementary setting. Adjustments to the goal setting unit may be found to be more effective as researchers look to create goal setting units that are developmentally appropriate for younger students. In addition, the concept of extrinsic motivation may be incorporated into the goal setting unit within various grade levels to determine if students benefit from incentivizing learners to take part in the goal setting process.

There is a great deal of research yet to be completed in the area of goal setting, specifically with students of poverty. The present action research study adds to the existing body of knowledge within the field of education through the development of using a mastery goal orientation with a self-evaluation process in a southern, rural Title I elementary setting. However, many questions emerged during the data analysis phase of this action research study.

The participant-researcher looks forward to continuing to explore the impact of goal setting as a cyclical process long after the present action research study concludes. There is much to be explored in the areas of extended instructional timeframes for the goal setting unit, the impact on student-teacher relationships as a result of the goal setting unit, social-emotional impacts such as students' attitudes toward school as a result of the goal setting unit, and the impact of incentivizing students through extrinsic motivation tied to the goal setting unit. Additionally, it is vitally important to continue researching and creating developmentally appropriate adjustments to this particular goal setting unit in order to determine if goal setting can serve as an evidence-based strategy to strengthen student engagement in kindergarten through fourth-grade levels to assist students in finding success in school.

Conclusion

This action research study addressed a school need for an evidence-based strategy for teachers to potentially implement throughout FES fifth-grade classrooms in the future to strengthen student engagement practices. The identified problem of practice for the action research study at FES, which is a rural Title I school in the South, involved a fifth-grade teacher who reported an increasing lack of student engagement in her classroom.

The present study was developed in response to one fifth-grade teacher requesting assistance in enabling her students to be more motivated to succeed in school and expressed willingness to participate in an action research study. This study centered on enabling this teacher-participant to employ strategies for goal setting and self-efficacy to be potentially implemented throughout other FES fifth-grade classrooms in the future to strengthen engagement practices and goal setting skills for children of poverty.

The major findings of this action research study include: 1) Goal setting increased self-regulation in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; 2) Goal setting increased self-efficacy in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom; and 3) Goal setting increased future focus in fifth-grade student-participants in one FES classroom. The overarching finding of this action research study is that goal setting impacts the learning process in the form of engagement due to the resulting increase in self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus.

The participant-researcher reflected on research findings with the teacher-participant, as well as the school's administrative team, at the onset of developing an action plan that is iterative and cyclical in terms of enabling students to set mastery goals that are congruent with their academic engagement. An action plan was developed to make any necessary adjustments to the present action research study and recruit fifth-grade teacher-participants, as well as, related arts teachers to serve as mentors on a volunteer basis to help the participant-researcher continue to study the impact of goal setting on student learning practices within their own classrooms and assist FES fifth-grade teachers in developing a skill set in teaching goal setting through coaching cycles.

Through this action research study, goal setting has been found to be an evidence-

based strategy in which the fifth-grade teacher-participant can enable her low-SES students to set goals for themselves and become more motivated to succeed in school. Further research is needed in the areas of extended instructional timeframes for the goal setting unit, the impact on student-teacher relationships as a result of the goal setting unit, social-emotional impacts, such as students' attitudes toward school and levels of resiliency as a result of the goal setting unit, and the impact of incentivizing students through extrinsic motivation tied to the goal setting unit. Additionally, it is vitally important to continue researching and creating developmentally appropriate adjustments to this particular goal setting unit in order to determine if goal setting can serve as an evidence-based strategy to strengthen student engagement in kindergarten through fourth-grade levels to assist students in finding success in school.

As the participant-researcher, I learned a great deal through this action research study. As a white, middle-class person I held assumptions that students would naturally set goals in the classroom. However, this goal setting unit taught me that students, specifically in Title I schools, need to be exposed to goal setting units in the classroom if educators expect them to set, and work toward, self-selected mastery goals. Specifically, I made the incorrect assumption that students would approach teachers on their own when they desired assistance in mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge. I also mistakenly did not consider that students would not have access to mentors with expertise in the area of the mastery goals in which they set nor did I consider the students' lack of access to supplies needed when working toward their goals. I grew to understand the need to clearly define the term 'attainable' when teaching a goal setting unit to help students think through all of the supplies and support needed when setting a mastery goal.

I also grew to understand the need for mentorship when goal setting, as well as, the need to encourage students to develop mentorships when working toward mastery goals. This action research study helped me to understand the need for an evidence-based strategy, such a goal setting, to encourage students to take ownership in initiating and developing relationships with teachers as they seek assistance in mastering a new skill or acquiring new knowledge.

The present action research study assisted the school leadership team in leading a movement to change faculty's conversation regarding student engagement, starting with fifth-grade. The findings of this action research study assisted the leadership team in developing an evidence-based strategy to improve student engagement by increasing students' self-regulation, self-efficacy, and future focus. The school will continue to study the impact of goal setting on the learning process as we extend the evidence-based strategy throughout fifth-grade classrooms, possibly incorporating various grade levels in the future, in an effort to cultivate student engagement for future academic success.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT DATA JOURNAL GOAL SETTING FORM



My ID Number: _____

My Measureable and Attainable Goal:

What will I do to accomplish my goal?

Checkpoint 1 (Checkpoint Descriptors Below): Date: _____

How well am I doing?

What do I need to do to accomplish my goal from here?

Checkpoint #1 - Checkpoint Descriptors:

4 – To be sure I accomplish my goal, I’m trying harder and preparing more than I think is necessary.

3 – I’m trying hard enough and preparing hard enough to reach my goal.

2 – I’m trying hard but not preparing as well as I could.

1 – I’m not trying very hard or preparing very well.

0 – I’m not really trying or preparing at all.

What rating do you give your efforts so far? _____

End Result: Date: _____

Did you accomplish your goal?

Why do you think this happened?

Goal setting form derived from:

Marzano, R. J., & Pickering, D. J. (2011). *The highly engaged classroom*. Bloomington, IN:
Marzano Research Laboratory.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

1. Tell me about your experience with setting learning goals in the classroom.
What did you like or not like about goal setting?
2. Has goal-setting changed anything about how you feel as a student?
Please explain.
3. Can you tell me about how setting goals has (or has not) helped you with your schoolwork?
4. What have you learned about yourself while setting goals in the classroom?
5. How has goal-setting affected your thoughts about coming to school each day?
6. Do you see yourself differently in the classroom after setting and tracking goals?
Please explain.
7. Would you recommend goal-setting to friends in a different classroom?
Please explain.
8. Do you think you will use goal-setting on your own in the future?
Tell me more about that.
9. Has goal-setting given you motivation to learn more at school?
Can you give me an example?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about goal-setting in the classroom?

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FOR CLASSROOM RESEARCH (PARENT)

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Susan Nunamaker. I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite your student to participate.

I am studying student goal setting in your student's fifth-grade classroom. If you decide to allow your student to participate, he/she will be asked to learn from his/her teacher about goal setting, complete a goal setting form for the two goals he/she sets, meet with me twice so that we can discuss the goal that he/she set, and possibly allow me to interview him/her about his/her experience with goal setting. In particular, your student will be asked questions about how goal setting has impacted their school experience. Responses may be recorded during interviews for research transcription purposes only. All meetings will take place at school in his/her homeroom, and should last from 5 to 15 minutes each over an 8-week period. Your student's teacher and I are working together to insure that your student does not miss any instructional time when participating in this study. The hope is that your student will gain goal-setting strategies for future success through this study.

Participation is confidential. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your student's identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to allow your student to be a part of this study if you do not want to. Your student may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question he/she is not comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 864.650.3940 or susann@email.sc.edu or my faculty advisor, (Susan Schramm-Pate, 803.777.3087, and esschramm@mailbox.sc.edu) if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your or your student's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803.777.7095.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, you do not need to take any action. However, if you do not want your student to participate then you can make note on the bottom of this letter and send it back to school, call me to let me know, or email me to let me know. If I do not hear from you by the end of the week then I will gratefully assume that you are allowing your student to participate in the study.

With kind regards,
Susan Nunamaker
864.650.3940
susann@email.sc.edu

APPENDIX D

ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT (STUDENT)

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT Exploration of Student Goal Setting in a Fifth-Grade Classroom

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about student goal setting and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about student goal setting. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you. If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Answer some written questions about goal setting. This will take about 5 minutes each time you answer questions, which you will be asked to do 2 times.
- Learn about setting goals and set your own goals. Learning about goals will take about 20 minutes during your homeroom block.
- Set your own goals. You will do this twice. It will take about 5 minutes each time you set goals.
- Meet with me individually and talk about your goals and your progress toward achieving your goals. The talk will take about 5 minutes, and will take place at in your homeroom class.
- Meet with me individually to talk about your experience with goal setting. I will ask you about 8 questions during this time. It will take about 15 minutes during your homeroom block.

Any information you share with me will be private. No one except me will know what your answers to the questions will be.

You don't have to help with this study. Being in the study isn't related to your regular class work and won't help or hurt your grades. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you won't be in any trouble and no one will be mad at you. Please ask any questions you would like to.

Signing your name below means you have read the information about the study that any questions you may have had have been answered, and you have decided to be in the study. You can still stop being in the study any time you want to.

Printed Name of Minor

Age

Signature of Minor

Date

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FOR CLASSROOM RESEARCH (TEACHER)

Dear Participating Teacher,

My name is Susan Nunamaker. I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I would like to study student goal setting in your fifth-grade classroom. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to teach students about goal setting, allow me to meet with students up to two times to discuss the goal that they each set, allow me to interview you about changes you observe in student learning strategies at the conclusion of the study, and allow me to interview a subset of students about their experiences with goal setting. In particular, students will be asked questions about how goal setting has impacted their school experience. All meetings will take place at school during the homeroom block, and should last from 5 to 15 minutes each over an 8-week period. We will work together to insure that your students do not miss any instructional time when participating in this study. The hope is that your students will gain goal-setting strategies for future success through this study.

Participation is confidential. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but you and your students' identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be a part of this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 864.650.3940 or susann@email.sc.edu or my faculty advisor (Susan Schramm-Pate, 803.777.3087, and esschramm@mailbox.sc.edu) if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803.777.7095. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign below and return this letter by the end of the week. You will receive a copy of this letter after you sign and return it to the researcher.

With kind regards,
Susan Nunamaker
864.650.3940
susann@email.sc.edu

I, _____, agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can
withdraw my participation at any time.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

APPENDIX F

ACTION RESEARCH SCHEDULE

Phase I: Planning Stage

Spring 2015 - Fall 2016

- Problem of practice identified through request from teacher-participant for instructional assistance engaging fifth-grade students with curricular material to strengthen student engagement
- Review of related literature
- Attended a workshop entitled “Teaching Children of Poverty” presented by Francis Marion University’s *Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty* (Goal setting was a strategy discussed during the workshop as a means of engaging students of poverty and enabling students to strive for academic success.)
- Research focus was determined to be goal setting as a method to strengthen student engagement in fifth-grade teacher-participant’s classroom

Phase II: Acting Stage

Fall 2016

- Permission obtained from school principal and district office assistant superintendent to conduct action research within the school
- Permission obtained from teacher-participant to conduct research in her fifth-grade classroom
- Permission obtained from student-participants’ parents/guardians to participate in action research study, leading to determination of eligible student-participants
- Student-participants introduced to action research study and assent to be a research participant signed by student-participants
- Description of research participants gathered from school data entry clerk and family liaison
- Eight-week data collection period:
 - Goal setting unit introduced in fifth-grade classroom
 - Round one of goal setting for four-week timeframe
 - Student data journals collected from round one of goal setting unit
 - Round two of goal setting for four-week timeframe
 - Student data journals collected from round two of goal setting unit
 - Semi-structured interviews with subset of eight student-participants conducted
 - Open-ended interview with teacher-participant conducted

Phase III: Developing Stage
Fall 2016

- Interviews transcribed and coded for analysis
- Analysis and reflection of data collected throughout the study
- Determination of necessary research adjustments
- Development of ideas for future studies

Phase IV: Reflecting Stage
Spring 2017

- Dissemination of action research study findings to teacher-participant and school administration
- Reflection of action research study process and results focused on the usefulness of goal setting as a student engagement practice for possible extension into the school's fifth-grade classrooms
- Adjustments made for future goal setting unit implementation based on research findings
- Action plan created as a result of action research study:
 - May 2017 professional learning community (PLC) meeting will focus on dissemination of action research study findings and encouragement of student goal setting unit implementation with fifth-grade teachers and related arts teachers (student teachers will be invited to attend)
 - August 2017 professional development session will be planned for fifth-grade teachers willing to participate in a coaching cycle focused on student goal setting and related arts teachers willing to support the student goal setting unit through mentorship
 - Coaching cycle focused on student goal setting will occur with willing fifth-grade teachers throughout the 2017-2018 school year (reflection will continue through an action research process)