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Increasing Academic Motivation in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students From Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds

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There are increasing numbers of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) in U.S. schools. Students who are CLD do not share the dominant language and/or culture, and they face many obstacles that contribute to their experiences of failure in school. Students from CLD backgrounds are more likely than their peers to leave school prior to graduation. Students who are CLD may face issues with academic performance (Knesting & Waldron, 2006), lack of school engagement (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003), and behavioral problems. Additionally, students from low socioeconomic areas and students who are Hispanic or African American are more likely to fail and drop out of school (Adam, 2004). Specifically, Hispanic students comprise the largest group of dropouts at 8.9% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES],

According to research, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have lower rates of high school graduation and university attendance. There is little research regarding interventions to address these issues. The current study compared the effects of two programs designed to increase academic motivation. Forty-seven high school female athletes from culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged backgrounds participated in the study. The programs were implemented over a 12-week period, 2 days per week within the school day. One group received instruction using a program that was designed by the school's physical education faculty. The other group received instruction using the Possible Selves program (Hock, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2003). The researchers investigated the effects of the programs with regard to the students' level of hope for the future as measured by the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1994), records of the students' grades and number of administrative behavioral referrals, students' self-reports about their participation, and researchers' evaluation of the students' goals. The results did not indicate a difference in the students' hopes for the future. There was little difference in overall grade point averages and no difference in behavioral referrals between the two groups. The students' perceptions of their participation in the programs were similar. However, the students in the Possible Selves group indicated that they received more support from an adult during their program, and they reported higher levels of effort toward academics than the comparison group. The most significant finding was a difference in the quality of goals written. The Possible Selves group wrote goals and action plans that were more specific and realistic.

summary

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2004). Students from low-income families are four more times likely to drop out than students from high-income families (NCES, 2004).

Supportive Factors

Researchers have found that certain factors are common among high-achieving minority students. DeJesús and Antrop-González (2006) analyzed the experiences of students attending two Latino community-based high schools. Successful students reported experiencing high expectations from educators and quality interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (DeJesús & Antrop-González, 2006). Similarly, Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) used data from 90,000 students in grades 7–12 who took part in a national longitudinal study of adolescent health to determine the effects of intergenerational relationships on student achievement and student discipline. Their study indicated that quality intergenerational relationships within schools led to increased academic achievement for Hispanic girls.

In a qualitative study, Hassinger and Plourde (2005) also examined the characteristics of high-achieving Hispanic students. Four high-achieving Hispanic high school students participated in observations and structured interviews that contained questions related to school, family, supportive relationships, and future expectations. School factors that contributed to their success were physical and emotional safety. Family factors included unconditional love and the acceptance of the student within the familial units. Supportive relationships were defined as the presence of one person who cared for and understood the student. All 4 students were involved in extracurricular school activities, and they viewed school in a positive way. They attached meaning to school and their lives. The results of this study indicated that the support offered through family, teachers, and the school setting allowed students to feel as though they would achieve their

goals and that they could envision their futures (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005).

Similarly, Sánchez, Reyes, and Singh (2005) conducted qualitative interviews with 10 Mexican American college students. The researchers found that individuals whose parents possessed limited education benefited from emotional and cognitive support from a nonparental adult. Zalaquett (2005) also used qualitative methods to analyze the experiences of Latino/a college students. Factors supporting their achievement included a sense of accomplishment, quality interpersonal relationships, caring teachers or other school personnel, and community support.

Goal Orientation

Knesting and Waldron (2006) found that goal orientation was in important factor in academic achievement among minority students. The researchers interviewed 17 high school students regarding characteristics of the classroom, teachers, and dropping out. Student interview results indicated that successful students had a goal to graduate, were willing to follow school rules and procedures while in school, and had teachers with whom they could form relationships and who believed in them. Interestingly, students who had a goal of graduating and who had a caring relationship with a teacher were more likely to take action and make choices that would enable them to stay in school. Further, they demonstrated persistence while striving to reach their goal of graduation (Knesting & Waldron, 2006).

Caraway et al. (2003) also found that goal orientation had a positive effect on student achievement. The researchers surveyed 123 students about their self-efficacy, goal orientation, and fear of failure. Caraway et al. found that when students set and reached goals, they were more likely to continue with goal-setting behavior. Furthermore, these students were more likely to put necessary effort into new goals.

Interventions for Increasing Goal Orientation

The preceding literature offers a brief insight into the possibility of goal orientation and goal setting for students who are CLD. Factors such as a caring relationship with an adult, the desire to reach a goal, and confidence in ability all may impact a student's goal attainment. These factors have emerged through descriptive research using interviews and surveys. Less research has focused on actually teaching students how to set and reach goals. What can be done for those students who do not think in terms of goals? What interventions can prepare a student to set and meet goals?

Possible Selves

Possible selves is a term used to describe what one might become in the future and includes the concepts of hope, fear, and dreams. The concept of possible selves contains the premise that an individual sets goals and then creates a plan for meeting these goals by discerning aspirations and envisioning what and who they want to become (Markus & Nirius, 1987). In a study of college students, Pizzolato (2006) examined the concept of possible selves with 28 college students. The students were classified as at-risk of dropping out of college, low income, and identified as Black, Latino, Asian, or of more than one race. Through interviews, the researcher studied the construction and achievement of possible selves goals related to entering college, attending college, and being able to remain in college. Results indicated that students who understood the procedural aspects of college admissions and were able to follow through with their aspirations of becoming a college student and being successful in that role were more likely to be admitted to and remain in college. They were more likely to make passing grades, have financial resources, and to deal with conflicts and challenges that arose. Both of these factors were found to be stronger indicators of whether or not a student would remain in college than parental encouragement.

Another study used narratives to examine the use of the concept of possible selves when examining career choice and career goals. Thirty-two college-aged students ranging from first-year students to fourth-year students participated in the study. Students were asked to write narratives related to the most important decision they had faced in the last 5 months. These documents were analyzed using the constant comparative method of coding. Students who were faced with difficult obstacles related to career choice did one of two things: They either chose to discard their career goals (abandon their career possible self) or to persevere through the obstacles and find a way to achieve their goals (recreate their possible self; Pizzolato, 2007).

Goal orientation appears to be a salient characteristic of successful high-achieving students from minority backgrounds. The concept of possible selves could serve to foster goal orientation. However, it is not known whether interventions that include the concept of possible selves affect student performance or outcomes differently than interventions solely focused on goal setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare a predesigned goal-setting program based on the concept of possible selves to an existing program being used intermittently in an urban school. The questions that guided the study were:

1. How do the goals created by students using the Possible Selves curriculum compare to the goals created by students using the school's existing goal-setting program?

2. Does the use of either the Possible Selves or the school's existing goal-setting program impact the grades or behavior of the participants?

Method

Setting

This study was conducted in one high school in an urban district in a large Southwestern city. The majority of students were from CLD and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Specifically, the ethnic composition of the school was 96.6% Hispanic, 2% African American, 1.3% White, 0.1% Asian, and 0.1% Native American, and 95% of the students came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The study took place within the school day during a regularly scheduled athletic period. All female athletes within the school were enrolled in an athletic period designed to provide practice time, study time, or other activities related to participation in team sports. Two days per week students received instruction from one of two programs. Participants were randomly assigned to either the school's existing program, which we refer to as the Existing Goals group, or to the Possible Selves program group (Hock, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2003). The study took place over the course of 12 weeks: 6 weeks during the fall semester and 6 weeks during the spring semester.

Participants

The participants were female students in grades 9–12 who played either volleyball or basketball. The study began with 64 participants. However, due to attrition, only 47 students completed the study; 28% of the participants did not complete the study. Student attrition was due to the following factors: (a) 3 students had conflicts with other courses; (b) 1 dropped out of school; (c) 4 students dropped out of athletics; and (d) 9 students were absent from school too often for full participation and data collection. Out of the 31 who began the study in the Possible Selves group, 24 completed all aspects of the program (77%). In the Existing Goals group, 33 began the study and 23 completed all aspects of the study (70%).

The 47 students in the study consisted of 46 Hispanic female athletes and 1 African American female athlete. In the Possible Selves group, 23 participants were Hispanic and 1 was African American. In the Existing Goals group, all 23 participants were Hispanic.

Data Collection Measures

Data collection consisted of both quantitative and qualitative measures. The students completed a pretest and posttest survey of their level of hope for the future. Additionally, students' overall grade point averages and the number of administrative referrals for behavior before and after the study were recorded. Students also participated in an interview designed by the researchers to evaluate their perceptions of their participation in each program. Finally, the researchers qualitatively evaluated the goals students developed by the end of each program.

Hope Survey. The students completed the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1994) before and after participating in the study. The measure evaluated the program's effect on the students' hopes for the future. The survey consisted of 12 statements with a 4-point Likert response scale (*definitely false*, *mostly false*, *mostly true*, or *definitely true*).

Grade Point Average and Behavioral Referrals. To measure the effect of the study on student grades, the researchers used grades from student report cards to establish the initial grade point average (GPA) for each student. The initial GPA was based on the grades students received on the report card issued closest to the start date of the program. Overall GPA was determined by assigning points to grades reported on each student's report card and then averaging the total, using the same method used to determine overall grade point averages for all students at the school. The method was modified slightly from the school's method of determining the grade point average; grade points reported by the school were cumulative and based on semester averages, and therefore would not accurately reflect any change in grades by grading period.

As part of the interview process, students were asked to report information about their grades. Specifically, they were asked, "How were your grades before the program?" and "Do you think your participation in the program impacted the grades

you have made since participating in the program? How were your grades impacted?" Answers provided information about students' self-report of grades.

Behavioral referrals were defined as referrals written by teachers and sent to the school administration for review. Participants' coaches were asked to record any behavioral referrals of their athletes.

Student Interview. The first author interviewed the participants in both groups to investigate their perceptions of each of the programs. The researcher asked each student a series of questions concerned with the following: what they liked and disliked about the programs, their level of motivation toward academics before and after participation, their efforts toward academics before and after participation, their grades before and after participation, their plans for continuing to work toward their goals, and their perceptions of the importance of setting goals and monitoring progress.

Additionally, interview questions allowed for discussion about certain topics such as students' feelings about participating in the program, activities that participants found most helpful, and skills they learned that might be used again. After the interviews, the researchers coded the data. The coding allowed the researchers to organize data into similar themes and use those themes to discuss and organize findings (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Open coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used to identify specific themes from the interviews. The researchers compared the participant interviews with grade reports, discipline referrals, and materials from each goal-setting program to triangulate the data.

The qualitative data analysis revealed two primary categories of information. The first area was coded as positive feelings about participating in the program. Participants reported enjoyment about participating in the program and felt motivated to continue to monitor and works toward their goals. The second area that emerged was benefits of participating in the program. The data that fell into this category suggested that individuals did not enjoy all aspects of their program, but felt they benefited

from specific activities such as learning how to set goals and how to work toward achieving those goals.

Students' Goals. The researchers evaluated each of the students' goals at the end of the study. The purpose of this evaluation was to investigate the effect of each program on the students' ability to develop goals that were realistic and likely to be accomplished. Both groups had discussions and activities about setting and achieving goals. At different points during each program, students were asked to set goals and also spent time evaluating the steps necessary to achieve the goals. Student goals were collected as part of each individual's program. The evaluations included the amount of specificity and detail/description in the goals set by the students.

Instructional Components

Existing Program. The program consisted of topics for group discussion and related worksheets. Group discussions were followed by completion of worksheets in which students summarized their learning. Topics were related to characteristics of goals, benefits of goal-setting, and the components of developing long-range and short-term goals.

Possible Selves. There were six components to the program: discovering, thinking, sketching, reflecting, planning, and working (Hock et al., 2003). The first component of the program involved discovery of one's strengths and interests. Second, students were asked to think about their hopes, expectations, and fears. Participants were asked to sketch a figure that represented their expectations, hopes, and fears. Third, participants used the drawings to determine areas in their lives that needed further development and action. The fourth step focused on planning actions to address the areas of need identified during the reflection stage by setting goals and developing action plans. The final step emphasized working toward and monitoring the progress of their goals.

Instructional Procedures

Existing Goal-Setting Program. The program was implemented over the course of 12 weeks. The first week of instruction involved an introduction to the program and explanation of the concepts of goals, plans, and purpose. The students completed a worksheet related to the reasons why one would exceed other people's expectations and work toward being great rather than accepting average performance. During the second week of instruction, the group discussed the importance of setting goals. The students completed a worksheet in which they answered questions about why goal setting is important, why some people do not set goals, and ways in which one could overcome reasons for not setting goals. Students also set one goal that could be accomplished within the week. The third week of instruction involved discussions about being a leader and a follower. The students completed a worksheet related to their perceptions of themselves as leaders or followers, their plans to become leaders, and ways in which they could overcome issues that keep them from being leaders. The fourth week of instruction involved discussions of how people work together as a team to accomplish a common goal. The students discussed how they could work together with a peer to support each other in attaining a goal.

In the fifth and sixth weeks of instruction, students discussed the characteristics of goals and the difference between long-range and short-term goals. Instruction emphasized the importance of stating goals in positive terms, rather than setting goals to avoid detrimental behaviors. Additionally, students developed goals in the areas of physical health, academic achievement, and athletic performance. For the seventh week, the group discussion revolved around how to work toward long-range goals on a daily basis through short-term goals. This instruction stressed the importance of creating specific and measurable goals. Students completed a worksheet summarizing their understanding of long-term, short-term, and specific goals. During Week 8, the group discussed how other people or events can interfere with the accomplishment of one's goals.

Further, students discussed how they could help a peer overcome the obstacles in accomplishing a goal. Week 9 consisted of students recording their daily activities and discussing how these activities supported the accomplishment of their goals. During the 10th week of instruction, each student developed a daily schedule that incorporated the accomplishment of short-term goals that would lead to attainment of their long-range goals. In Week 11, the students further refined their athletic goals and discussed the steps needed to accomplish their athletic goals. During Week 12, students further refined their personal goals and discussed the steps needed to accomplish them.

Possible Selves. The Possible Selves program also was implemented over the course of 12 weeks. The first four instructional sessions were used to introduce the students to the concept of possible selves, provide an overview of the program, and secure a commitment to participate by each of the students. The concept was introduced through examples of dreams, expectations, hopes, and fears. For each concept, after showing and explaining written samples, a group discussion followed. The instructor explained the connection between these components and their contribution to the overall program. At the end of the fourth lesson, students were asked to make a commitment to participate in the program in the form of a written contract. The fifth lesson involved discovering students' strengths and interests. The students created a collage of their strengths, interests, and what they would like to be like in the future. Lessons 6–9 involved thinking about the students' individual hopes, expectations, and fears. The students completed a questionnaire with the guidance of the instructor. The questionnaire involved questions related to the students' hopes, expectations, and fears within their roles as a person, learner, and worker. Prior to completing the various sections of the questionnaire, the instructor led a discussion about key vocabulary words such as hope, expectation, individual strength, learner, person, and worker. This vocabulary word discussion consisted of four sections: (a) individual strengths, which asked open-ended ques-

tions about what the student was "really good at doing," words that described her performance in that area, and things that the student hoped to achieve, expected to achieve, and feared in that area; (b) learner, which asked the student to describe herself as a learner, things that the student hoped to achieve, expected to achieve, and feared as a learner; (c) person, which asked open-ended questions about how she described herself as a person, and things that the student hoped to achieve, expected to achieve, and feared as a person; and (d) worker, which asked open ended questions about how the student described herself as a worker and things that she hoped to achieve, expected to achieve, and feared as a worker.

After the students completed the questionnaires, during Lesson 10, they sketched a tree that represented their hopes, expectations, and fears related to their role as a person, learner, and worker. The instructor modeled how to construct the tree using a questionnaire that she had completed previously. The tree featured three main limbs that were labeled person, learner, and worker. Branches on each of the limbs were the hopes and expectations in the areas of person, learner, and worker. The tree included a root system that represented the students' current description of themselves as person, learner, and worker. Positive statements were drawn as long and thick roots, and negative statements were drawn as short, thin roots. Finally, potential dangers to the survival of the tree were drawn. Fears in each of the areas were drawn using symbols such as termites, lightening, or a hatchet. See Figures 1 and 2 for examples of tree sketches completed by students.

Lesson 11 involved reflection on the students' tree sketches. Students were asked to identify which limbs had the most branches and fewest branches because branches represented the extent to which these areas were developed. The students were asked: (a) which limbs had the most positive words and which had the least positive words; (b) which limbs needed the most strengthening; (c) their main hope for the area with the fewest branches; and (d) to name three immediate short-term goals that could help them attain this hope. Lessons 12–15 involved

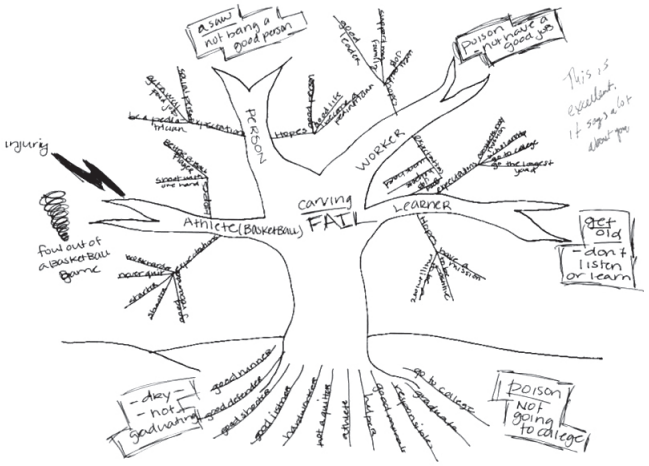

Figure 1. Example of tree sketch.

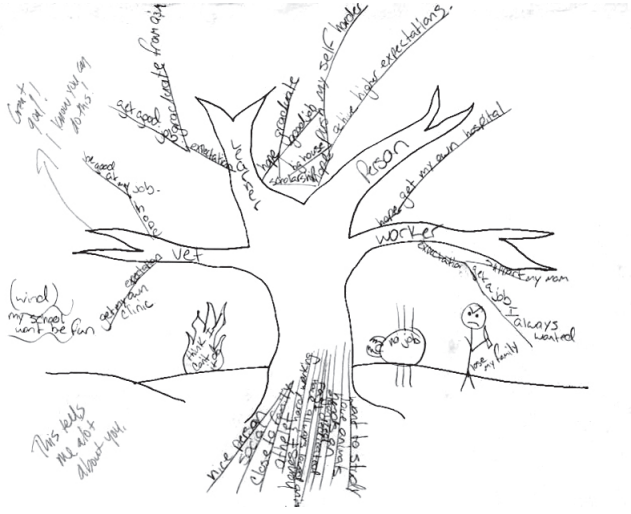

Figure 2. Example of tree sketch.

planning the ways to reach the goals that were established in Lesson 11. During Lessons 16–18, students shared their plans with the group. The remaining lessons were spent reviewing students' progress in achieving their goals.

Results

Children's Hope Scale

The students completed the Children's Hope Scale both before and after participation in the study. There was no change in participants' mean responses. Students reported moderate levels of hope for the future both before and after participating in the study. Neither program had a significant effect in this area.

Academic Achievement and Behavioral Performance

There was no statistically significant difference in the students' academic performance (overall GPA) across groups, as can be seen in Table 1. In the Possible Selves group, 29% of participants increased their overall grade point average from the beginning of the study to the end of the school year. The average increase in grade point average was .33%. In the Existing Goals program 50% of participants had an increase in grade point average from the beginning of the study to the end of the school year with the average increase of .31%. However, each group also experienced decreases in overall grade point averages by several participants: 50% of participants for Possible Selves and 36% of participants for the Existing Program. The average decrease in overall grade point average was .31% for the Possible Selves group and .4% for the Existing Goals program group. Twenty-one percent of Possible Selves participants had no change in overall grade point average, whereas 14% of participants in the Existing Goals program experienced no change in their grade point averages as shown in Table 1. The increase, decrease, or static situation of overall grade point average was inconsistent with student self-reports of grade improvement during the interviews. In other words, what the students reported about their grades improving, remaining the same, or decreasing was not consistent with the actual grades on their report cards.

There was no statistically significant change in the students' behavior as measured by administrative referrals. The number of

Table 1

Percentage of Average Grade Point Changes

Group	Students with increase in GPA (%)	Average increase	Students with decrease in GPA (%)	Average decrease	Students with no change in GPA (%)
Possible Selves	29	.33	50	.31	21
Goal Setting	50	.31	36	.4	14

referrals was low across both groups. Each group reported an average of less than one referral per week.

Student Interview

The students completed an interview related to their perceptions of participation in the programs. Students in both groups reported that they enjoyed each program (student interviews, May, 2006). Additionally, students who participated in the Existing Goals program reported that they liked discussing and setting goals but did not like the writing involved in completing the worksheets (student interviews, May, 2006). Students reported that their grades, motivation, and effort toward academics improved somewhat. One student stated that the Existing Goals program "helped me pay attention to my goals" (student interview, May, 2006), and another student said that she "learned many things" (student interview, May, 2006). A final student said that the program enabled her to "set goals for the future" (student interview, May, 2006). Sixty-four percent of the students reported that they will very likely monitor their progress toward their goals (student interviews, May, 2006). All of the students reported that knowing how to set and monitor goals was important to their lives (student interview, May, 2006).

Students who participated in the Possible Selves program (Hock et al., 2003) reported liking the program because they discussed their goals with someone who thought they could achieve them; they felt comfortable talking about their dreams,

hopes, expectations, and fears with others in the group; and they came to know themselves better (student interviews, May, 2006). These students reported that their grades improved somewhat (student interviews, May, 2006). Participants in this group reported somewhat greater levels of motivation and effort toward improved academics (student interviews, May, 2006). One student reported that the Possible Selves program "helped me to think about the future and realize that it is important" (student interview, May, 2006). Other students stated that the program "gave me more encouragement to fulfill my goals" and "helped me know what I needed to achieve my goals" (student interviews, May, 2006). Fifty percent of the students reported they will very likely monitor their progress toward their goals (student interviews, May, 2006). Another student reported that the program "most definitely put me on the right track" (student interview, May, 2006). All students reported that knowing how to set and monitor goals was important to their lives (student interviews, May, 2006), with one student saying that the program "helped me realize how important goals are" (student interview, May, 2006).

Student Goals

There were differences in the quality of goals developed by the Existing Goals program and the Possible Selves program. The goals set by participants of the Possible Selves group were more specific, involved smaller, more realistic steps in their achievement, and involved actions to circumvent possible barriers. For example, a student who created a long-term goal about attending college included steps such as meeting with a college counselor and investigating financial aid, scholarships, part-time attendance, and working. For this student, finances were a barrier and her goal and action plan accounted for this. Students who participated in the Existing Goals program developed long-term goals similar to the Possible Selves group; however, their short-term goals were less specific and did not take into account potential barriers. For example, a student who created a

Table 2

Comparison of Goals

Possible Selves Group Goal Examples	Existing Program Group Goal Examples
1. Do good on tests by studying, taking notes in class, and reviewing.	1. Keep my grades up and bettering my education.
2. Graduate from high school by succeeding in my classes, having perfect attendance, paying attention in class, and asking for help when I need it.	2. A-B Honor Roll
3. Enjoy what I do as a learner by studying in a fun way, thinking about doing and asking myself why, and keeping asking questions until I understand.	3. Play softball and then get a job.
4. I want to be a psychiatrist and will get As and Bs so that I can get a scholarship to pay for college.	4. Study harder and pass all classes.
5. I will obtain a career in psychology by doing my work, getting the highest grades possible, doing well my Junior and Senior year, applying to a lot of colleges and going to college and doing well in college.	5. Apply to college to become a teacher.
6. I want to be a second-grade teacher and will talk to my teachers about how I am doing in their classes, work hard to get good grades, [and] work during the summer to earn money for college.	6. Go to university.

long-range goal about attending college included steps such as study, spend time in school, and make good grades. These differences were consistent across all students who participated in each program. Table 2 illustrates these differences.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences between the effects of two goal-setting programs. Forty-seven female student-athletes from CLD and economically disadvantaged backgrounds participated in one of two programs: an Existing Goals program developed by the school's physical education faculty and the Possible Selves program (Hock et al.,

2003). The effects of the programs were measured using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Neither of the programs had an effect on the students' hopes for the future, as measured by the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1994). The students' hopes for the future were moderate before and after the study. The programs were implemented over a 12-week period and perhaps this did not provide the intensity needed to make an impact on the students' level of hope. The students' performance also might be due to their understanding of the survey items. The students had difficulty understanding the wording of 4 out of the 12 items: (a) I can think of many ways to get out of a jam; (b) There are lots of ways around a problem; (c) I am easily downed in an argument; and (d) I energetically pursue my goals. The first author administered the survey and explained these items to students in terms they appeared to understand. However, these misunderstandings may have interfered with their performance.

Research indicates that students who are more confident in their academic ability are more likely to perform better and be more involved in school (Caraway et al., 2003). However, the current study indicated that all participants felt confident about their schoolwork, but that confidence was not consistently reflected in an increase in grades during the study. Further, there was little difference in the students' academic grades or the number of behavioral referrals between groups. The Possible Selves group's self-reports regarding effort toward academic work were higher than the other group. However, these reports are not based on the students' actual grades. Although many students reported that their grades had improved somewhat, that was not reflected in overall grade point average. In other words, some participants reported their grades had improved somewhat, but when examining their grades, it became apparent that the improvement from a C to B or B to A in a class was offset by an equivalent drop in grade in another course. This was evident in the majority of situations of participants reporting an improvement in grades. Additionally, during interviews with participants, it became apparent that the reports of grades improving

somewhat could have been attributed to the participation in an in-season sport during which students must have passing grades in order to play. During in-season sports, it is necessary for the coaches to monitor grades, providing a more frequent check on the athletes' academic performance that in turn could impact the academic effort put forth by the participants. Behavioral referrals were low for both groups, and students reported being more concerned about their coach's reaction to the referral than to the referral itself. Therefore, the program appeared to have had no impact on behavioral referrals.

Although the Possible Selves group reported greater increases in academic effort, fewer of these students reported that they were very likely to continue monitoring their progress toward their goals than the other group. This appears contradictory because one might assume that the students in the group with higher levels of academic motivation would be more likely to continue monitoring their progress toward long-range and short-term goals. Another difference in the students' reports was their preference for certain program components. The students in the Possible Selves group consistently reported liking to work with a supportive adult who believed they could achieve their goals. One student participating in the Possible Selves group stated that "what I enjoyed most was expressing my goals to someone who thinks that they can happen" (student interview, May, 2006). This preference for relationships is consistent with the literature that suggests that students who had a caring relationship with a teacher or other adult were more likely to act upon their goals and make choices that would enable them to stay in school (Crosnoe et al., 2004; DeJesús & Antrop-González, 2006; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Knesting & Waldron, 2006; Sánchez et al., 2005; Zalaquett, 2005).

The greatest difference between groups was observed in the students' goals and action plans. All members of the Possible Selves group developed more specific and realistic goals and action plans. Their goals and plans showed evidence that they had considered the barriers that might interfere with their goals and developed goals accordingly. For example, one of the stu-

dent's goals was to become a pediatrician, but her fears included not staying in school because it was boring and difficult. Her action plans included asking questions in class, paying attention in class, and staying away from distractions at home and school. None of the students in the Existing Goals group were this specific. For example, one of these students' action plans for going to college involved "getting good grades," but made no mention of the specific actions involved in this achievement. The students' long-term performance may be the most significant difference between groups. The Possible Selves group members had a more well-defined vision of their future as well as the actions needed to realize their dreams. They could state their processes for completing these goals. For example, during the interviews, one student stated, "I set a timeline for my goals and am talking to others so that they can help me reach my goals" (student interview, May, 2006). The other group developed admirable goals, but they did not articulate realistic and specific ways of achieving them. Furthermore, the other group members may be less likely to achieve their goals because none of the barriers were addressed. This result was promising in light of research that indicates that, when students possess a goal that they think is achievable and make a plan of action, they are more likely to reach their goal (Knesting & Waldron, 2006).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was its relatively short duration. Research demonstrates that when students set and reach goals they are more likely to continue that process and apply the necessary effort to reach new goals even if the amount of effort increases (Caraway et al., 2003). A longer study might provide information related to how students continue to create new goals and action plans that help them achieve their high school goals and transition to college. More data could be gathered to evaluate whether the differences observed between groups have an effect on the students' graduation rate, college acceptance, attendance, and matriculation. Although many of

the students reported that they would continue to monitor their progress toward goals, the length of time that students' actually continue is more important. Another limitation was the fact that the participants in this study were enrolled in an athletic program. Therefore, they belonged to a group within the school and may have had supports that other students within the school lack. The fact that the researcher implemented the Possible Selves program and conducted the interviews also can be seen as a limitation to the study. Active participation in the research environment could have impacted participant responses during the interview. Lastly, these findings cannot be generalized to other student populations with dissimilar demographics.

Conclusion

There are numerous studies that delineate how students think about goals and what process they use to establish goals. Most of these studies used interviews and surveys to gather information, yet few discussed the use of specific goal-setting programs to measure whether or not students actually reach the goals they set. This study indicated that using a specific goal-setting program with students, Possible Selves, made a difference in the area of goal setting. The Possible Selves group demonstrated the ability to create, set, and strive for goals using more specific plans of action than the Existing Goals group. This study does not indicate whether or not the program has long-term effects. However, in the short term this study established that students who are presented with this specific model for goal setting are able to better articulate their goals and begin a plan of action that could guide them toward goal attainment.

In addition, the students in the Possible Selves group indicated that they liked interacting with a caring adult. Through this program, the students and instructor shared personal information such as their hopes, dreams, and fears in a safe environment. The instructor provided encouragement and helped the students identify barriers as well as ways to address avoidance

of those barriers. This program was conducive in fostering a caring adult-student relationship that research has shown increases academic achievement (Crosnoe et al., 2004; DeJesús & Antrop-González, 2006; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005; Sánchez et al., 2005; Zalaquett, 2005).

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