

Integrating Goal Setting into Instructional Practice: an update

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Since the publication of our article on goal setting in *Adventures in Assessment* in 2003, we have made a few changes in response to the Countable Outcomes and requirements for goals set by students. The steps in the visual and our overall process remain the same.

We have our first discussion about goals at intake as we did before but, depending on the level of the students and some information garnered during the BEST + test, we may pose questions related to the Countable Outcomes. For example, if the student said in response to a question on the test: “*I took the bus here. I don’t drive here. In my country, yes...*”, we may ask if the student wants a driver’s license in this country. Or if they revealed they have children, we may ask if they go to the children’s school to talk to the teacher.

We also modified our goal setting activities for the session or cycle. For one thing, we now allow more time for many activities relating to goals. We also work with many more potential goals. At the beginning level, we may proceed in a similar fashion, as we did before since students need to have words to express themselves. Then, we broadened the offerings, so to speak, by using picture cards such as those shared by Heidi Perez from the Lawrence Public Schools Adult Learning Center or our own. We use very short stories to talk about problems and ways to solve them. For example, there was one about Wu who was very sad since he arrived in the U.S. What could he do? Or one about Miguel who found a job in another town but does not have a car to get there. Or Maria who does not have much money but likes to watch movies at home after work to relax. Students are asked to identify the problem in each one and brainstorm possible solutions. We post those on large paper around the class and set each one to match the goals page in the students’ logs (our own booklets used to record and reflect on activities). If Wu’s goal is to feel better here, he could take the following steps: find an English class to make new friends, talk to people from his country, look for a job. Miguel may want to buy a car (goal); he must save his money, look at cars, get a new license. Some students suggested

he should move closer to his job! Maria could get a library card in order to borrow movies free of charge. She would have to get an application from the library, fill it out, and return to the library with two pieces of identification. After discussing others' needs, it is easier to ask students what they want to do this year. They can use the cards, the examples from the stories or whatever else has sparked an idea. Students record their goals, at least two, in their logs. Students also understand the idea of taking steps in order to reach a goal. Many of us also use a poster that stays up in the class. Goals are always in plain view and can be checked as they are met. This process works for all levels. Cards work at all levels. The stories selected can be longer and offer more choices at higher levels. Several books now on the market have goal setting chapters that are quite good.

The hardest part for all of us is to view this process as instruction. The activities are the medium used by teachers and students to manipulate and use language for a purpose.

This is learning! However, you cannot do goal setting activities for three weeks for all of the class time. It is too intense. We do other types of learning as well, as requested by the students. There could be a “getting to know you” game for thirty minutes, then thirty minutes devoted to a goal setting activity (part one) and the last part of the class about some grammar point. The next time you meet, you revisit or continue with goals and also do some other useful activity that interests your students.

Even during the first weeks as we focus on goals, our students reflect on each activity in the logs and, at the end of each week, students make requests for the following week. Therefore, our weekly process is unchanged.