

Levina Robin
EDC&I 506 Final Research Report

**Implementing Mini Lessons on Note-Taking
for Middle and High School Students**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

A few months ago, I joined a new non-traditional school that specializes in teaching students in one-on-one settings based on their learning needs. Students learn from a standards based curriculum that mainly lives online but we assist them and guide them through their lessons and readings. Most days, the readings are done independently but discussions happen between the teacher and student. These students range from a middle school to high school level and needs based on learning disabilities to recently experienced traumas.

Days into working here, I learned that students were required to take notes on their learning which they used for check-in's, "check for understanding"s, and any quiz or test. However, when it came to understanding their own notes and using them for their tests, students were never taught how to use them. When I first asked them about a concept (based on an objective for that lesson), they looked through their notes and were left with no words, fumbling through the pages on their notebook. As I looked through the old notes they had taken in the last few months, I realized that they were never held accountable to take notes even though it was "required". They used their notes as a safety net during all exams and spent effortless time each lesson taking them, yet did not know how to use or read their own notes to their advantage. How could they take notes so it led to their own success? I wondered if teaching them ways to take notes or tell them explicitly on what to take notes on could form a relationship of competence with their notes that could lead to better performance on their tests.

Urgency

This felt urgent to me because these students already receive slack from various stakeholders for attending a non-traditional school and if they did not retain the information they learned or held onto the skills that they learned here, one on one learning would be deemed not productive. A small thing such as taking notes seemed like a larger issue in a smaller setting like this because students needed these credits to graduate middle school and high school and all activities in a school like this revolve around taking notes and then using them for tests.

Research Questions

In order to best serve my students, it was clear that there needed to be some sort of guidance and accountability for their learning and note-taking. This led me to the following research questions to investigate:

What could happen to middle and high school students' mastery of English and History standards if they are taught mini-lessons on note taking before their real lessons [everyday]*?

- a) What would happen to their overall understanding and knowledge of the topic as related to their notes?
- b) Could this competence and understanding affect their relationship with the subject?*

*The word “everyday” is in brackets because I originally wanted to teach a mini lesson every time but then I decided to stick with three major lessons throughout the last few weeks and just

expand on each specific lesson and its attributes instead which will be explained further in the research design.

*Research question (b) was added mid-way through the action research after realizing that I had data about the students' original relationship with the subject from their interviews on the first day of the lesson and it was an area worth exploring.

Report

First, I will provide a literature review in support of the thousands of scholars that have already studied this type of work and what I have found from them in relation to my research questions. Second, I will thoroughly explain how this research was designed and the methods that were created in order to receive the data that would be most beneficial or telling of the project. Then, I will report my findings and analyze according to matrices and coding that I thought was most appropriate for the findings according to action research literature. Lastly, I will discuss these findings, analysis, and themes in the research and end with a reflection on my next steps.

II. A LITERATURE REVIEW

To set my students up for success in their understanding of how to take notes, what to take notes on, and how to use them effectively, it was important that I reviewed the literature

already available on handwritten note-taking. I focused specifically on topics of students with learning disabilities and their success and strategies on note taking and writing.

Taking Notes Matters, especially for our students with disabilities

Over and over again, studies and research suggest that taking notes adds to our overall understanding and memory of whatever we are learning (Rahmani & Sadeghi, 2011). Having the option for information to be in their notebooks and in their memories offers two different places for learning and knowledge to store. Now, more and more students with learning disabilities are placed in advanced classes where they need to pass state exams. This means a lot of content in lecture style for students to grasp on their own through the act of note taking (Boyle, 2012). Middle school students with learning disabilities already have a disadvantage when it comes to note taking so the act of learning through their notes makes it very difficult. (Boyle, 2010).

Explicitly Teaching Strategies for Taking Notes

Students who are taught strategies on how to take notes score higher on recall and comprehension than students who used their own note-taking (Boyle, 2010). The use of specific note taking such as guided notes and visual organizers enhance student performance especially in lecture based classrooms (Stringfellow & Miller, 2005). Students have been known to perform better on tests when they take notes, and the kind of notes they take matters (Kiewra and Benton, 1988). Since students need to understand the text and then select the information that is relevant to their learning goals, note taking can indicate deeper understanding (Mezek 2013).

When students are explicitly trained for a specific type of note taking, they tend to remember and retain that information better. Students also retain more information when they take handwritten notes, which is what my students will be required to implement during this study (Luo, Kiewra, Flanigan, & Peteranetz 2018).

Conclusion

Although most of these studies suggest that notetaking is extremely related to student success and performance, it is especially important to provide students with learning disabilities with specific note-taking strategies. It makes huge difference to teach them specific note-taking strategies and ask them to focus on specific themes in their notes. Since these students are reading the majority of their text online, it is also important that they are handwriting their notes for better knowledge retainment.

III. METHODS & RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The research that was conducted was an action research project with an intervention/implementation approach (Mills 2011). It aimed to observe if implementing lessons on note-taking before lessons would change quiz and test scores, if there was any change in their knowledge and retainment as related to their notes, and if there was a difference in their relationship with the subject.

Setting and Participants

This research was being carried out within the learning environment of the one-on-one school. Our school operates in an office space with tables spread apart in order to ensure a peaceful and stress free ambiance for our students. Each session with a student lasts 55 minutes. Some students attend sessions at least four times a week, while others only attend two or three. This is usually up to Seattle Public School's discretion or decisions of their guardians. Students used APEX learning as their curriculum while I supplemented with extra outside readings, materials, and worksheets.

Currently, I teach ten different students one-on-one in the subjects of History and English. In order to produce more accurate data and more detailed data, I chose to focus on three students specifically (although I implemented it for other students informally as well). I chose these students because they represent a wide range of learning disabilities and note-taking abilities. Student A has a history of ADHD and finds it hard to focus on one task for a long period of time. They are in English 7 and US History with me. For this project, I will only count their time in US History with me. Student B has a history of apathy towards academia and attends World History with me. Student C thrived in academia until a recent loss/trauma and attends English 9 with me.

Implementation

Before beginning the mini lessons, it was important that I did my research on different note-taking methods that could best support my students in this setting. I settled on three different types of note-taking- a) key terms and vocabulary, b) two sides of the story, c) graphic

organizers. When I introduced these methods to my students, it started with me reading the objectives of the lesson and showing them a sample of their reading on how to extract the information they needed. I had a separate notebook called “Teacher Notes” that students were able to access so they knew the type of notes they were taking. Each lesson, I would give them a specific part of the key terms and vocabulary to focus on. For example, if it was the first time I ever introduced key terms, I would ask them to focus on formatting and organizing their notes. Later, while still asking for key terms and vocabulary, I would ask them to focus on writing the definitions or descriptions in their own words. Each of the lessons above took a week or two due to snow days and depended on how fast the students grasped what they were asked to do. Before each 55 minute lesson ended, I also used the last five minutes to orally check in on how their note taking went, and quizzed them orally on the content they just learned about in the reading. Some days, I did longer oral interviews depending on how far along in the lesson it was. During this process, everything was documented and a lot of qualitative and quantitative data was gathered.

Gathering Data

To see if the implementation of mini lessons on note-taking was truly impacting my students, a lot of different types of data had to be collected. Also, in order for triangulation to work effectively, I had to collect data from all angles (Mills 2011). The following is a list of all the different data I collected.

Quiz and Test Scores (Report Cards as Artifacts)

As I only joined the school in January, I had to use old quiz test scores and report cards to gather how my students were doing on their work before I was their teacher. Since this study

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lasted about two months, I decided to only look at November and December scores as quantitative artifacts to compare with the last two months. Most students are allowed to retake quizzes they do not master, I took original quiz scores *only*, before their edits/retakes for consistency and comparison to the current quiz scores.

Then, I continued to report their quiz scores during my lessons and classes in January and February. All quizzes from November through December were in the same format and always addressed the objectives in the beginning of each lesson. It is extremely important to note that all my students were allowed to use their notes during these quizzes. I did not write any of these quizzes and they were a part of the APEX curriculum ranging anywhere from 10-20 points.

Oral Quizzes/Interviews

Along with the quizzes that tested their mastery on standards and objectives, I conducted my own quiz style oral interview during the last few minutes of each 55 minute session. These questions were specifically based on the objective for

Example objective: ***“Describe the changing role women played in society during the late 1700s and early 1800s.”*** - APEX Learning, Middle School U.S. History, Unit 6:
Lesson 1 Cultural Developments Through the Early 1800s

Sample follow-up oral questions from me based on objective: What are some ways that the role women played in society changed during this time?

Based on APEX’s objectives, I decided if my students understand the objective and then they moved onto their official quizzes.

Observations

It was important to see what typically occurred during a 55 minute session so I acted as an active participant observer and conducted observations on two of my students who I labeled as A and B above (Mills 2011). During the first observations, I was actively participating as I was still their teacher and still teaching while writing down notes on their behavior, actions, and dialogue. I also used data from when I did observations during my training with other teachers, however, these observations were not with any of the students I used for this study. In this case, I was a privileged observer (Mills 2011).

Interviews

The use of interviews as a qualitative data collection came in the form of educator interviews and student interviews. The first interview I conducted was with a middle school history teacher on note-taking in her class who has been teaching for 38 years. The second interview I conducted was a high school language arts teacher who has been teaching for 3 years on effective note-taking strategies she intentionally teaches. The other type of interview was with my students. One of the interviews was my first lesson with them where I asked them to describe their relationship with the subject we were working on. The other interviews were informal and done throughout the last few weeks on how they were feeling about the new strategies and overall check-ins.

Notes as Artifacts

Similarly to using the old quiz scores as artifacts, I used their old notes before I was their teacher as artifacts to inform my work and how to move forward with some students. For example, student A had a tendency to doodle or draw on most pages that did not align with the content objective so how could I incorporate her love for drawing while making sure she is learning? Then, I also took their current notebooks and notes as artifacts after the lessons were implemented.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Addressing the first research question- mastery

To properly explore my data, I had to code, categorize, and organize the above data into matrices and tables. This meant creating rubrics as well as decide the most effective way to show the data. To start, I read my research questions again and thought about which data gathered could properly address the original questions. The first question had to do with mastery and scores and if there would be an change after implementing the lessons. I started with the quiz scores because those would address the question directly. While looking at their quiz scores, I decided it would be easiest to take the average score of each month starting with November and going until February. This would take into account the two months before implementing these lessons and two months during the implementation. See Appendix A.

Addressing the second research question- knowledge and notes

The next research question had to do with their knowledge in regards to their notes. This research question was answered by the data that included their oral quizzes, check-ins, and notes as artifacts. The observations and educator interviews also played a part in answering this part of the research question. Next, with the oral quizzes, I decided that I had to quantify the oral quizzes somehow to truly decide if there was learning happening from their lesson and there was reference to their notes. At the end of the lesson, everyday, regardless of the mini lesson, the students' responses were rated on a scale from 0-2. If they received a 0 for that particular lesson, it was because they missed the APEX objective that was signaled to them in the beginning of the lesson. If they received a 1, it was because their response was incomplete in some way and if/when they were asked to have their notes help them, they did not see the answer in their notes. I gave 2's out only when the objective was fully fulfilled by their oral response and they could also show me some of their notes as implicit or explicit evidence. When I began writing this report, it occurred to be that I had data on this rubric for 15 classes for each student (not counting absences). I decided that taking the average of their first five sessions on this rubric and the average of the last five sessions might tell a story. See Appendix B for this rubric.

Another data gathered that addressed this question was the informal check-ins. Questions that were part of informal check-ins consisted of the following: *How did you decide what was most important to write down? How did this type of note-taking feel? How is it helping you understand _____? Do you want to continue taking notes in this way? Do you think you are ready to learn a new way of taking notes or would you rather stick to the way we have been learning?* After taking notes on their answers to these questions, I took out keywords from their responses and used the following codes: responses that would signal a negative experience

(N), a content or satisfying experience (C), a positive experience (P), or an apathetic experience (A). See Appendix C.

The last item that helped answer the second research question was their actual notes. Each of the different category of notes had its own rubric with the most points for important parts of their notes. For example, I thought writing their definitions in their own words was most important part of their first key terms mini lesson so I gave it a value of 4. See Appendix D for these matrices.

The last research question was answered through their beginning of the semester interviews and their check-ins along the way. These questions included: What has been your relationship with [history or english]. What parts of past classes in these subjects were your favorite? I did not create specific coding for this other than arranging their answers in a table to each question.

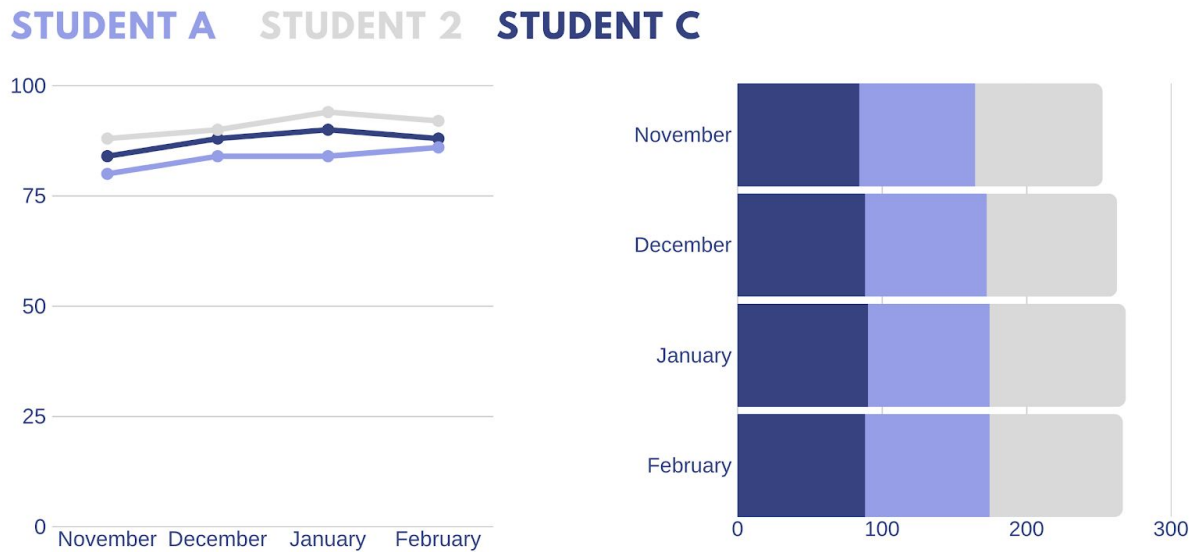
V. FINDINGS

As I started to put the numbers into graphs and tables and the qualitative data into tables and rubrics, there were emerging patterns, themes, and findings. Then, I created mini profiles for each student to showcase findings as related to their note taking, knowledge, and relationships (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009).

Quiz scores

Here we see every student's average quiz score from each month. When we look at the graph on the left where each student's average is shown separately, there is no clear link or explicit increase between November and now. However, when we look at all their scores added

together cumulatively like we see in the bar graph on the right, we can see a distinct increase between November and February. There is an increase in their mastery overall, but it is hard to

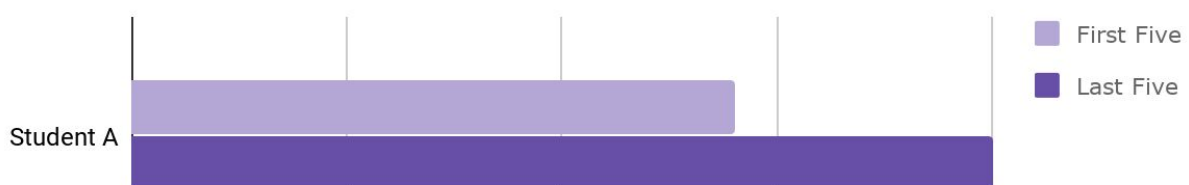


attribute it just to the mini lessons I was teaching and important to note other factors that could have influenced their higher quiz scores as time goes on. January also appears to have the highest quiz scores for two of my students which is baffling as that was a huge transition month for the students with new teachers like me.

Content knowledge and competence

When looking at their content knowledge objective based on their oral quizzes with me at the end of each lesson. There is explicit growth and connection. Student A's average of the first five content oral quizzes was 1.4 and went to an average of 2. Student B started with 0.6 and went up to 1.6. Student C started at 1.6 and went to an average of 2. All students showed significant increase in their oral quiz scores throughout the last fifteen lessons.

First Five Average Oral Quiz Scores vs. Average of Last Five



This could be an indicative of students and their relationship with their notes as they were allowed to use their notes when I asked them the oral questions with their objectives. This could also be indicative of routine. Students knew that I would be asking a question based directly on the objective and read the objective more carefully before they started taking notes and knew they would be asked a similar question everyday.

Intentional note taking

Observationally, students were more engaged with their notebooks and their readings. Students knew exactly what they were taking notes on or how they were taking notes. Since it is a one on one setting, students are not able to slip under the radar and were held accountable every second. Students had to take an extra second or two to think about what they were reading and if it was worth taking notes on based on the objective which led to more thought before writing notes down.

Relationship with competence of a subject vs. subject itself

After the actual oral check-ins and such, my students said that they liked history or english more than they did when they started. However, this left me unsettled because I wonder if their relationship with the subject changed or if their competence of the subject changed. I will address this point further in the discussion and reflection. There was not enough data in this area to make a proper claim in relation to the findings.

Student A

Student A who I have for English 7 and US History had the most positive experience with note taking according to her informal interviews and check-ins (See Appendix C). Her

results show about 7 out of 15 positive experiences (P) and about 3 out of 15 content experiences (C). Out of all the students, student A showed the most enthusiasm when it came to note-taking and would also ask the most questions while she was taking notes. Student A also went from an average of 1.4 on her daily oral quizzes to an average of 2. Although this student was the most absent, there was still a clear increase in her daily oral quizzes. In terms of her mastery of the quizzes in APEX, her average quiz score went from 84% in November to 88% in February with few fluctuations in between. Student A is more confident in her note taking abilities according to her check in interviews and says she gets excited when “there is something new to take notes on”.

Student B

Student B who I have for World History had the most growth out of my three students and more self advocacy (See Appendix C). His results show about 2 out of 15 positive experiences (P) and about 9 out of 15 content experiences (C). Out of all the students, student B showed the most improvement when it came to advocating for themselves. Since this student is typically quieter and does not ask questions or take charge, it was important to note that they did ask questions as they went along their note-taking. Student B went from an average of 0.6 on his daily oral quizzes to an average of 1.6, which is a whole point increase. In terms of his mastery of the quizzes in APEX, his average quiz score went from 80% in November to 86% in February with few fluctuations in between. Student B is more content with his note-taking more so now. Student B’s parents also got involved and said they noticed a distinct increase in his engagement and excitement for school (more on this in the reflection).

Student C

Student C who I have for English 9 had a more content and apathetic experience towards note taking (See Appendix C). Her results show about 2 out of 15 positive experiences (P) and about 7 out of 15 content experiences (C). Out of all the students, student C definitely had the least “positive” or “content” experiences according to her check-ins but her increase in scores and interest tells the opposite story. Student C also went from an average of 1.6 on her daily oral quizzes to an average of 2. This student started out with a great track record of responding to questions based on objectives already but still showed improved. Although this student connected least with my mini lessons and had the least positive experiences, there was still a slight increase in her daily oral quizzes. In terms of her mastery of the quizzes in APEX, her average quiz score went from 88% in November to 92% in February with few fluctuations in between. Student C said she thinks quizzes are getting to be too easy with the kind of notes we take now.

VI. DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Summary of Findings

The overall data suggests that implementing note taking was a satisfying or positive experience for my students: it increased their intentionality of taking notes, it increased their ability to answer questions based on the objective out loud (oral quizzes and APEX quizzes), and it changed their competency and relationship. Students are intentionally taking notes because their notes serve a purpose now and they are held accountable for it. The data also shows that their ability to answer questions based on the objectives also increased or they got used to routine and knew what they were responsible for knowing. Students competency was changed because

they could rely on their notes because they took notes with a purpose. It is unclear, however, if their relationship with the subject changed or if they felt more competent in it. I did not have specific data gathered to measure this.

In Relation to the Action Research Questions

In relation to the first question about student mastery, when looking at the line graph, the averages are not explicitly increasing. However, when you put them on top of each other and see the overall averages added together, there is a slight increase. I still do not believe this is explicit enough to attribute to the implementation of mini lessons but it is definitely better than the scores staying exactly the same or going down.

The second question about knowledge based on their notes can be said to have increased based on the 0-2 oral quiz rubric. This data might suggest that their competence in note-taking increased because there was a routine or pattern that they got used to after some time. There was definitely more ease in navigating their notes organizationally.

In relation to the last research question, the analysis is inconclusive due to not having explicit measures to know if their relationship to an entire subject changed or that it appears to have changed because they have more competency in the specific lessons that were covered during the span of this study.

In Relation to the Literature

This study felt very in-sync with the literature for as far as I could see for the small two month study. Literature shows how note taking truly increases retention and therefore better performance on tests. Literature also shows that competence on a subject also increases scores.

Purposeful note-taking was also important to students with learning disabilities as it made explicit what they needed to do (mini lessons) and why they needed to do it (objectives).

Limitations

This study was limited in sample size, data, and time. Since I only had a few students to start with, I chose three students to focus on. However, as close as they were to representing all my students, the students I serve are all so different, taking different subjects, and need different types of varying assistance. I am curious if this exact study could have worked had I chosen a math student or a student who is already fluent in note-taking and needs a different type of aide. Since this was my first action research project, I also was not well versed in what type of data would explicitly indicate a change in data. I would have interviewed the educators in my building and talked with them about their students and I would have coded and categorized for my last research question more specifically. The time I had to conduct this study also ran short and was also disturbed by various snow days.

Action Steps

There are three steps I want to take moving forward- continuing informal mini lessons, sharing my research, and streamlining expectations and accountability at our school when it comes to taking or using notes. First, since this was implemented in the span of a few weeks, I wonder what could happen moving forward if the same students received more precise mini lessons and if new students also received the same lessons. I want to take down informal data and have it inform future instruction. Second, I want to share this data and research with my supervisor and my co-workers. I think it would be useful for them to see this data as this is an area that everyone struggles with their students. Lastly, it would be really interesting after

sharing this research with them if we streamlined our expectations for students and specific subjects on what we want from their notes or if it should be a requirement to take notes. All students should be held accountable in a way that adds to their knowledge and academic competence.

VII. REFERENCES

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VIII. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student A

Month	Average
November	84%
December	88%
January	90%
February	88%

Student B

Month	Average
November	80%
December	84%
January	84%
February	86%

Student C

Month	Average
November	88%
December	90%

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January	94%
February	92%

Appendix B

0

Response to question was **incorrect** or student was not able to come up with a response based on objective.

1

Response to question was **incomplete** and only partially addressed the objective or key words/vocabulary.

2

Response to question was **complete** (used key words), objective was identified, and at times used notes for reference.

Dates are in the following format: Month/Day/[2019]

***Abs** indicates **absence** for that day

Student A

<i>Date</i>	2/6	2/7	2/14	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/25	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7
<i>Score</i>	1	1	2	2	1	Abs	Abs	1	Abs	1	2	2	2	2	2

Student B

<i>Date</i>	2/6	2/7	2/14	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/25	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7
<i>Score</i>	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2

Student C

Mini Lessons on Note-Taking

<i>Date</i>	2/6	2/7	2/14	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/25	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7
<i>Score</i>	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	Abs	2

Taking the **average** of the first five scores and the last five scores:

	<i>First Five Scores</i>	<i>Last Five Scores</i>
<i>Student A</i>	1.4	2
<i>Student B</i>	0.6	1.6
<i>Student C</i>	1.6	2

Appendix C

Responses that would signal:

a negative experience (N) - “not fun”, “boring”, “I don’t want to do that again”

a content or satisfying experience (C) - “okay”, “satisfied”, “want to try again”

a positive experience (P)- “fun”, “helpful”, “exciting”, “want to do again”, “happy”

or an apathetic experience (A) - “I don’t know”, “I don’t care”, *shoulder shrug*, “whatever”

***nd** indicates **no data** for that day

***Abs** indicates **absent** for that day

Student A

<i>Date</i>	2/6	2/7	2/14	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/25	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7
<i>Response</i>	C	P	nd	P	P	Abs	Abs	C	Abs	nd	P	P	C	P	P

Student B

Mini Lessons on Note-Taking

<i>Date</i>	2/6	2/7	2/14	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/25	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7
<i>Score</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>C</i>

Student C

<i>Date</i>	2/6	2/7	2/14	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/25	2/26	2/27	2/28	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7
<i>Score</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>Abs</i>	<i>C</i>

Appendix D

Note Taking Matrix for 1st Mini Lesson (Key Terms/People/Vocabulary)

Phrasing Definitions into Own Words	4 points
Use of Headers	3 points
Organization	2 points
Use of Drawing or Color as Needed	1 point

Note Taking Matrix for 2nd Mini Lesson (Two Sides to the Story)

Providing Evidence for Both Sides	4 points
Use of Headers/Labels for Both Sides	3 points
Organization	2 points
Use of Drawing or Color as Needed	1 point

Note Taking Matrix for 3rd Mini Lesson (Graphic Organizers)

Use of Categories and Sub-Categories	4 points
Use of Title and Space	3 points

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Organization	2 points
Use of Drawing or Color as Needed	1 point

Points based on matrix for notes

	Mini Lesson #1 (Key Terms)	Mini Lesson #2 (Two Sides)	Mini Lesson #3 (Graphic Organizers)
Student A	8	10	8
Student B	8	10	7
Student C	9	10	8

Missed Points for each student

	Mini Lesson #1 (Key Terms)	Mini Lesson #2 (Two Sides)	Mini Lesson #3 (Graphic Organizers)
Student A	Use of own words	NA	Lacks Organization
Student B	Use of own words	NA	Categories not according to Objective
Student C	Use of own words	NA	No Title