



Striving to connect and striving to learn: Influences of relational and mastery goals for teaching on teacher behaviors and student interest and help seeking



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ABSTRACT

We extended a new achievement goal approach to teacher motivation to predict that relational strivings to achieve caring relationships with students and mastery strivings to develop competence have different consequences for teacher behaviors and thus for students. Participants were 341 teachers in Study 1 and 51 middle school teacher-class pairs (1281 students) in Study 2. As hypothesized, teacher relational goals predicted teacher reports of social support for students and teacher mastery goals predicted teacher reports of cognitively stimulating instruction (CSI). HLM analyses of Study 2 data confirmed that teacher relational goals predicted student help seeking via the relation with perceived teacher social support. Teacher mastery goals predicted student interest; this relation was partially mediated by perceived CSI. Results establish strivings to connect and to learn as distinct systems of teacher motivation.

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1. Introduction

Student motivation for learning has been a major focus of research in educational psychology for decades. Interestingly, until recently there was almost no systematic, theory-driven research on teacher motivation. In one attempt to address this lacuna, Butler (2006, 2007) proposed that achievement goal theory can provide a promising conceptual framework because the school is an achievement arena not only for students, but also for teachers. She began by extrapolating directly from research on students' achievement goals to examine whether teacher mastery, ability approach, ability avoidance, and work avoidance goals constitute distinct motivational systems. This strategy can be faulted, however, for failing to consider that teaching is an inherently interpersonal endeavor. Against this background, Butler (2012) expanded her framework and measure to incorporate a novel fifth class of relational goals to achieve close and caring relationships with students. The overarching objective of the present research was to extend this line of inquiry by examining whether teachers' mastery and relational strivings, the two clearly desirable kinds of achievement goals for teaching studied so far, are associated with different teacher behaviors and thus also with different student outcomes.

1.1. Achievement goals for teaching: from four to five factors

Achievement goal theory views students' perceptions, strategies, and outcomes as depending importantly on their constructions of the goals of schoolwork, and thus on what they want to achieve. Initially, theorists distinguished between

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mastery, learning, or task goals that orient students to strive to learn and develop competence versus ability, performance, or ego goals that orient students to strive to maintain self-esteem by proving superior or masking inferior ability (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1989). We use the terms “mastery” and “ability” to refer to these two kinds of achievement goals (see also Midgley et al., 1998). Subsequently, Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) proposed that strivings to prove superior ability and strivings to avoid the demonstration of inferior ability reflect distinct approach versus avoidance forms of ability goals. In addition, Nicholls (1989) defined a class of work-avoidance goals whereby students try to get by with little effort. Scores of studies have confirmed that achievement goals matter because they are associated with qualitative differences in the ways students define and evaluate success, process information, and regulate behavior (for reviews see; Butler, 2000; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007).

Following this lead, Butler (2006) proposed that teachers, like students, presumably strive to succeed, but may differ in the ways they define success, and thus in their achievement goals for teaching. In support, Butler (2007) showed that Israeli teachers' responses to a self-report measure of Goal Orientations for Teaching (GOT) loaded on four factors that corresponded to previously identified goal orientations for learning and reflected strivings to (a) learn and develop professional competence (mastery goal orientation), (b) prove superior teaching ability (ability-approach), (c) avoid failure and the demonstration of inferior teaching ability (ability-avoidance), and (d) get through the day with little effort (work-avoidance). This structure has been replicated for samples of pre-service and in-service teachers in Germany (Dickhauser, Butler, & Tonjes, 2007; Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblov, & Schiefele, 2010).

Initial validation studies examined relations between teachers' goal orientations and their help-related attitudes and behaviors (Butler, 2007; Dickhauser et al., 2007; see also Nitsche, Oliver Dickhauser, Fasching, & Dresel, 2011). In keeping with results from studies of relations between achievement goals for schoolwork and help seeking among students (for a review see Butler, 2006), mastery goals for teaching predicted adaptive help seeking, as reflected in teacher reports that they sought needed help and preferred help that could enable them to learn and cope better with difficulties with teaching. In contrast, ability-avoidance goals predicted perceptions of help seeking as a low ability cue and reluctance to seek help, and work avoidance predicted preferences to save effort by referring problems to others. Other studies of teachers' strategies and wellbeing have shown similar patterns, whereby teacher mastery goals were associated with an adaptive pattern of constructive problem solving, interest in teaching, and low burnout, ability avoidance with defensive self-handicapping, and work avoidance with a disengaged pattern of burnout and low interest (Papaioannou & Christodoulidis, 2007; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Retelsdorf et al., 2010).

Evidence is also beginning to accumulate that teachers' achievement goals are associated with theoretically relevant approaches to instruction. Achievement goal theorists distinguish between mastery instructional practices, whereby teachers teach in ways that value and recognize students' personal effort and progress, and performance instructional practices, whereby teachers emphasize the importance of showing high ability and performance relative to other students (e.g., Ames, 1992; Midgley et al., 1998, 2000). As one would expect, the more teachers strove to learn and develop professional competence, the more they reported using mastery instructional practices (Retelsdorf et al., 2010). In contrast, ability and work avoidance goals predicted teacher reports of performance instructional practices (see also Butler, 2012). In a similar vein, Retelsdorf and Günther (2011) showed that different achievement goals oriented teachers to use different standards to evaluate student performance. Mastery goals oriented teachers to evaluate students relative to their prior outcomes, while ability and work avoidance goals oriented teachers to evaluate students relative to one another.

Conceptualizing teacher motivation in terms of previously identified goals for learning is clearly fruitful. Extrapolating directly from theory and research on student motivation does not consider how the roles and motives of teachers and students might also differ, however. Perhaps most important, teaching is an interpersonal rather than only a personal endeavor. Achievement goal researchers have begun to study young people's social or friendship goals (Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006; Ryan & Shim, 2008). Students' interpersonal goals are viewed as operating alongside their academic achievement goals (Roussel, Elliot, & Feltman, 2011; Wentzel, 2000), but for teachers they are inherent to their professional role. Thus, while students' social relationships do not serve as standards for defining and assessing their achievement as learners, the quality of the relationships teachers create with students is an important aspect of their competence as teachers (Wentzel, 1997). Indeed, in an influential analysis, Noddings (1992) defined an orientation of care for students as the essence of good teaching.

Against this background, Butler (2012) proposed that strivings to achieve caring relationships with students comprise a distinct class of relational achievement goals for teaching. In support, she showed that items describing such strivings loaded on a fifth factor, distinct from the four achievement goals for teaching assessed in her original measure. Validating a new goal necessitates verification that it also “matters” in the sense of uniquely predicting relevant outcomes. Butler's (2012) main prediction was that teacher relational goal would predict teachers' social support for students, as expressed by the degree to which the teacher cares for students, listens to them, and addresses their personal problems (e.g., Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Trickett & Moos, 1973). As expected, the more teachers aspired to create close and caring relationships with students, the more both teachers and their students reported that the teacher behaved in socially supportive ways (Butler, 2012). Importantly, mastery orientation, the other kind of positive achievement goal for teaching did not predict social support. This was the case for teacher ability and work avoidance goals as well.

Butler (2012) anticipated that teacher mastery, rather than relational goals would predict mastery instructional practices. Surprisingly, although teacher strivings to learn and acquire professional competence were significantly correlated with teacher reports of mastery instruction, when Butler modeled both goals, relational, rather than mastery goals predicted

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