Achievement goals for teaching as predictors of students' perceptions of instructional practices and students' help seeking and cheating

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Abstract

This study examined a new achievement-goal approach to teacher motivation by testing the predictions that mastery and ability-avoidance goals for teaching would predict students' reports of teacher support for and inhibition of question asking and help seeking, as well as students' help seeking and cheating. Surveys were completed by 53 teachers and 1287 students in Grades 7–9. Effect sizes from a set of HLM analyses were small, but confirmed that teacher mastery goals were associated with higher levels of perceived teacher support and lower levels of perceived teacher inhibition; the reverse was the case for teacher ability-avoidance goals. Thus, teacher mastery and ability-avoidance goals were associated with students' reports of positive versus negative instructional practices. Teacher ability-avoidance goals were associated with student cheating, but teacher achievement goals did not predict students' help seeking.
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1. Introduction

Student motivation for learning has long been a major focus of theory and research in educational psychology. Given the centrality of motivation in guiding attitudes and behaviour, one might have expected to see corresponding interest also in teacher motivation for teaching, both because teachers are worthy of study in their own right and because teachers influence students, and hence the processes, outcomes, and quality of learning. Interestingly, however, there has been little systematic, theory-driven research on teacher motivation. Moreover, researchers have tended to treat teacher motivation only as an outcome, rather than as a predictor, and to focus on the quantity of motivation as assessed by the level of job satisfaction or commitment (e.g., De Jesus & Lens, 2005). In contrast, social-cognitive theories of student motivation, such as achievement goal theory (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination

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theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) emphasize how different goals and motives create qualitatively distinct systems that evoke different patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour.

Studies of student teachers have confirmed that their career decision was guided by various kinds of goals or motives (Monteccinos & Nielson, 1997; Serow & Forrest, 1994). By and large, however, research in this tradition has not been grounded in general theories of motivation (Richardson & Watt, 2006) and has not generated concepts or measures that can serve to guide research on practicing teachers and on the consequences of different motives for teaching for both teachers and students. In this case, an important challenge is to develop compelling frameworks that can serve both to conceptualize qualitative differences in teacher motivation and to predict how these might influence both teachers and their students. One potentially fruitful strategy could be to extrapolate from theories that have proven useful in studying motivation in educational contexts, albeit for learning rather than for teaching. For example, Watt and Richardson (2007) adopted an expectancy-value framework to examine motivation for choosing teaching as a career. Studies of practicing teachers have confirmed that teachers' beliefs that they can achieve desired student outcomes have positive consequences for both teachers and students (for reviews see Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Ross, 1998). A recent study guided by self-determination theory showed that teachers' intrinsic motivation for teaching predicted their endorsement of intrinsically motivating instructional practices (Pelletier, Seguin-Levesque, & Legault, 2002). However, research on teacher self-efficacy has not considered possible differences in the kinds of objectives teachers strive to achieve, including outcomes not only for students but also for themselves (see also Wheatley, 2005). In addition, although self-determination theory distinguishes between several different kinds of motivation for learning, Pelletier et al. (2002) focused only on the level of teachers' intrinsic motivation.

Against this background, Butler (2007) proposed that achievement goal theory could provide a useful framework for conceptualizing qualitative differences not only in students' motives for learning but also in teachers' motives for teaching. The main objective of the present study was to examine the novel proposal that teachers' achievement goals for teaching have implications for their instructional practices and, specifically, for the degree to which students perceive the teacher as behaving in ways that support or inhibit student question asking and help seeking. We then examined whether teachers' achievement goals and instructional practices also influence student behaviour, and, specifically, the likelihood that students will ask the teacher for needed help, on the one hand, or cheat on their schoolwork, on the other.

1.1. Student achievement goals and implications for teacher motivation

Achievement goal theory assumes that students' perceptions, strategies, and outcomes depend importantly on their constructions of the goals of schoolwork, and thus on what they want to achieve. Early formulations distinguished between mastery, learning, or task goals that orient students to strive to acquire worthwhile skills and understandings versus ability, performance, or ego goals that orient students to strive to maintain self-esteem by showing superior ability (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984, 1989). In this paper we use the terms ''mastery'' and ''ability'' to refer to these two achievement goal orientations. In the most influential extension of goal theory, Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) proposed that strivings to demonstrate superior ability and strivings to avoid the demonstration of inferior ability as reflecting distinct approach versus avoidance forms of performance, ego, or what we label ability goals (see also, Elliot & Church, 1997; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997). In addition, some years earlier Nicholls (1989) defined another class of work-avoidance goals whereby students strive to get by with little effort.

Scores of studies have confirmed that goals matter because they create distinct motivational systems associated with qualitative differences in the ways students define and evaluate success, process information, and regulate behaviour (for reviews see Ames, 1992; Butler, 2000; Molden & Dweck, 2000). In brief, mastery goals orient students to define and evaluate competence relative to task demands or prior outcomes, to attribute outcomes to effort, to prefer challenging tasks, and to construe difficulty as diagnostic of the need for further learning. In contrast, ability goals orient students to define and evaluate competence relative to others, to favour ability attributions, and to construe difficulty as diagnostic of low ability. There is some evidence, however, that these rather negative patterns are associated more consistently with avoidance than with approach forms of ability goals (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrush, 2002; Middleton & Midgley, 1997). As a result, some researchers have adopted a multiple goals perspective and have proposed that high levels of both mastery and performance-approach goals might be particularly adaptive (e.g., Harackiewicz et al., 2002). There has been less research on work avoidance, but some studies have confirmed