



Identification of students' multiple achievement and social goal profiles and analysis of their stability and adaptability



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ABSTRACT

The present study moves to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of student's goal orientation by jointly analyzing a variety of students' achievement goals together with students' social goals, and their combined effects. Using a person-centered approach (latent cluster analysis) the study identified students' ($N = 386$) goal profiles, analysed in what ways achievement and social goals are combined, and tested whether profile groups differed on their motivational and academic adaptability. Moreover, this study analysed stability and change in students' multiple goal profiles across the transition into secondary school (from 9th to 10th grade). Six distinct profiles of achievement and social goals emerged showing construct stability over time. Across profiles findings showed that prosocial and social responsibility goals are connected with mastery goals, but seem more difficult to reconcile with performance-competitive goals. In general, findings highlighted the positive role of both mastery and social goals in students' academic outcomes (differences between profiles ranging from η^2 0.03 to 0.18), but also showed that distinct goal combinations may be compatible with students' motivation and academic success.

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1. Introduction

Achievement goal theory figures as one of the most representative approaches to student motivation. Within this framework, achievement goals, that is, students' desired end-states in an achievement context, have been linked to student's motivation, academic achievement, and well-being (see Covington, 2000; Elliot, 2005). The present study contributes to this research by addressing two current developments in the field. First, it has been progressively recognized as not probable that a single goal may explain behavior in a given context (Boekaerts, de Koning, & Vedder, 2006; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). A comprehensive understanding of goal-orientation views behavior as typically regulated jointly by multiple goals, the configuration of the various goals determining the course of action and its effects. Secondly, along with the frequently-investigated achievement motivation, the importance of social motivation in students' academic outcomes has also been recognized. In fact, it seems that besides achievement goals, social goals also play an important role in academic performance (e.g., Urdan & Maehr, 1995), and that the interactions between social and academic

goals may influence the amount and quality of student learning (Covington, 2000). This study investigates students' multiple goals, expanding each of the above trends in goal theory and research.

1.1. Students' achievement goals

Within goal theories of motivation in education, initially two types of achievement goals were identified: mastery goals, representing the purpose to improve one's competence, and performance goals, representing the purpose to demonstrate competence and outperform others (see Elliot, 2005). The study of multiple goals first emerged from acknowledging that characterizing students as oriented to mastery versus performance (dichotomous perspective), which dominated much of the research within normative achievement goal theory, may represent an oversimplification of the complexity of motivation (Pintrich, 2000). Thus, a multiple goal perspective should be a relevant issue to consider in seeking to understand the functioning of students, particularly when facing the complex and multidimensional classroom demands.

Nicholls was the first scholar to move from a dichotomous mastery versus performance goal perspective, stressing that students may adopt both mastery and performance goals. To support this argument, he evidenced that some students may show a high-high profile (high

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Mastery and high Performance oriented¹), while other students show a high-low profile in those dimensions (Nicholls, Cheung, Lauer, & Patashnick, 1989). Further distinction into approach and avoidance performance tendencies (known as the revised goal theory; Elliot & Church, 1997) led to the consideration of three main types of achievement goals: mastery, performance-approach (directed towards the demonstration of ability), and performance-avoidance goals (avoiding demonstrating a lack of ability), and thus to a wider range of possible profiles of goal orientations.

Besides the criticism of the dichotomous conceptualization of achievement goals, questioning the debilitating effects of performance goals also moved research to a focus on multiple goals. In fact, initial research linked mastery goals to various adaptive outcomes, including higher levels of self-efficacy, task value, interest, the use of deeper cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and to engagement and achievement. In contrast, performance goals were related to less adaptive motivational and achievement outcomes (see, Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). However, later research suggested more complex interactions between goals. For example, it was hypothesized that performance goals, when coupled with mastery goals, might not be debilitating. Moreover, it has been stressed that a profile with a dominant performance-goal orientation is more adaptive than an overall low achievement goal profile (Pintrich, 2000). Other studies have even confirmed the advantage of an interaction between performance and mastery goals on other motivational variables, learning, self-regulation, and achievement (Ainley, 1993; Bouffard, Boisvert, Vezeau, & Larouche, 1995). However, some studies suggested that a high Mastery and high Performance profile seems to work negatively, weakening the positive relationship between mastery goals and other aspects of students' motivation, cognition, and self-regulation in the classroom context (e.g., Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996).

This line of research was further developed within the revised goal theory framework, suggesting that different combinations of goals may differentially promote achievement outcomes (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001).

However, most of the multiple goal research studies only evidenced the independent or interactive effects of each of the different goals on different outcomes, rather than actual multiple-goals effects. Alternatively, as argued by Pastor, Barren, Miller, and Davis (2007), the use of person-centered methods is particularly suited for revealing the typical goal combinations orienting students' achievement behavior, and hence clarifying the effects of multiple simultaneous goals and predicting more accurately the different educational outcomes of the various goal profiles. Yet only a few studies have adopted a person-centered approach to analyse a large range of achievement goals including approach and avoidance tendencies (e.g., Conley, 2012; Pastor et al., 2007; Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2008, 2011). In the existing studies, mastery-focused profiles were generally found to be adaptive, showing positive relations to achievement. By contrast, indifferent, disengaged, and avoidance-oriented profiles displayed lower achievement. Finally, although performance-oriented strivings within students' multiple goals profiles did not show a negative effect on academic achievement, in the study by Tuominen-Soini and colleagues, they were associated with lower subjective well-being than mastery-oriented profiles. In addition to analyzing profiles of multiple achievement goals, for a fuller understanding of students' goal orientations, social goals should also be considered. Indeed, as Doyle (1986) argued, multidimensionality is a specific element of the nature of classroom environments: "a classroom is a crowded place in which many people with different preferences and abilities must use a restricted supply of resources to accomplish a broad range of social and personal objectives" (p. 394).

1.2. Social goals at school

In a similar direction, goal theorists such as Blumenfeld (1992) or Maher and Braskamp (1986) have also argued early on for the importance of social goals for students' achievement motivation and behavior. For example, Maehr's personal investment theory proposes that learning and achievement depend not only on students' achievement goals, but also on their social-approval and social-compliance goals (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). More recently, the need for studying social goals along with academic goals to gain a more complete understanding of students' motivation has been progressively recognized (Boekaerts et al., 2006; Covington, 2000; Dowson & McInerney, 2001; Lemos, 1996; Patrick, Anderman, & Ryan, 2002; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1992, 1996).

In a preliminary note, it is important to remember that social goals have been differently conceptualized and approached. One line of approach has been to investigate social goals as students' social reasons for achieving academically (e.g., Dowson & McInerney, 2001; McInerney & Ali, 2006; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Within this perspective, social goals are viewed as social reasons why students engage in academic learning and performance.

Another line of research, referred to as the social achievement goal approach (Ryan & Shim, 2008; Shim & Finch, 2014), has applied the conceptual structure of the academic achievement goal approach to the study of social goals. This approach analyses achievement goals in the social domain, focusing on different orientations towards social competence. Specifically, a social development goal orientation is concerned with increasing social competence and developing relationships. Social demonstration goal orientations - approach or avoidance - focus on demonstrating social competence or avoiding social negative judgments. Social achievement goals have been related to academic variables such as help-seeking (Ryan, Hicks & Midgely, 1997) and students' prosocial and aggressive behavior (Ryan & Shim, 2008).

Finally, the present study used a goal-content approach that considers the social outcomes that students are trying to achieve. This conceptualization builds upon Wentzel's (2000) "goal-content" or "social outcomes" approach that focuses on students' social-relevant motivation within the school context. The goal-content approach has inspired a distinct line of research that has documented a wide set of social goals that students strive for in the school context, including goals such as responsibility, prosocial behavior and intimacy, popularity goals and competition, domination and control over others. In general, prosocial goals promote adaptive behaviors and social adjustment, whereas antisocial goal orientations lead to peer difficulties and social maladjustment (see for example Ryan, Jamison, Shin, & Thompson, 2012). However, most educational goal research focuses on Wentzel's social-responsibility (adhering to classroom rules) and prosocial (to help classmates with problems) goals, and their relations to academic adjustment. Wentzel (1993) further suggested the existence of two types of prosocial goals: prosocial friendship-oriented (involving students' efforts to share and to help peers with social problems) and prosocial learning-oriented (students' efforts to share and to help classmates with academic problems).

It has been argued that children and adolescents typically value prosocial goals to promote positive interaction with peers, which may play an important role in the shaping and development of student motivation (e.g., Ryan, 2001; Wentzel, 1992). Empirical literature has evidenced consistent relations between prosocial and social-responsibility goals and motivation, engagement, and achievement at school (see, for example, Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 2005). In general, a sense of school belonging, and the endorsement of social-responsibility goals have been positively associated with mastery orientation (e.g., Anderman & Anderman, 1999). For example, Wentzel (1996) reported that the social goal of sharing is positively related to mastery goals but not to performance goals, which may be interpreted as contrary to positive social values. Similarly, based on a large sample of students, Giota (2010) found high correlations between mastery and social-responsibility

¹ Nicholls actually did not use the terms mastery and performance, but used instead "task" and "ego" orientations (see Murphy & Alexander, 2000).

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