

Teachers' goal orientations for teaching: Associations with instructional practices, interest in teaching, and burnout

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Abstract

Two studies (one longitudinal) were designed to extend Butler's model of teachers' goal orientations for teaching. In Study 1, results from 281 teachers in Germany confirmed the predicted four-factor model comprising mastery, ability-approach, ability-avoidance, and work-avoidance goal orientations. As expected, mastery orientation and work avoidance emerged as positive and negative predictors, respectively, of adaptive patterns of instruction (mastery-oriented practices and cognitive stimulation) and high interest in teaching and low burnout; associations for both ability orientations were less consistent. In Study 2, 69 Israeli teachers completed the measures of instructional practices, interest in teaching and burnout several months after reporting their goal orientations. Results were very similar to those of Study 1. The two studies confirm that research on teachers' goal orientation is promising and has implications for understanding how teacher motivation might influence both teachers and their students.

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1. Introduction

In contrast with the many studies on students' motivation for learning, there has been surprisingly little research on teachers' motivation for teaching, at least partly because of the paucity of compelling conceptual frameworks (see also Butler, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2008a). De Jesus and Lens (2005) recently proposed an "integrated model of teacher motivation". In contrast to contemporary theories of student motivation that emphasize the role of qualitative differences in motivation in guiding achievement-related processes and outcomes, these researchers focused on the "quantity" of teacher motivation, as reflected in the level of professional well-being, and treated teacher motivation only as an outcome

variable. In a similar vein, many studies have examined individual differences in teachers' instructional practices and perceptions of students (Astleitner, 2005; Brophy & Good, 1986; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 2006), but with rare exceptions (Butler & Shibaz, 2008; Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque, & Legault, 2002; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007) researchers have not considered possible influences of teachers' motivation on teachers' cognitions and teaching behaviors.

In a recent attempt to address this lacuna, Butler (2007) proposed that achievement goal theory, which has proven very useful for understanding students' motivation for schoolwork, might provide a promising framework also for conceptualizing teachers' motivation for teaching. The central distinction drawn by achievement goal theorists is, on the one hand, between mastery, learning, or task goals that orient students to strive to acquire and improve skills and understandings, and, on the other hand, ability, performance, or ego goals that orient

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students to strive in order to demonstrate superior, or mask inferior ability (Ames & Ames, 1984; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1989). Although most researchers follow Ames and Archer (1988) in using the labels mastery and performance goals, Butler (2000, 2007) has argued that the terms mastery and ability goals (e.g., Ames & Ames, 1984) better capture the central difference emphasized by all goal theorists between strivings to acquire competence and strivings to demonstrate or prove ability (see also Grant & Dweck, 2003; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Thus, in this paper we follow Butler and use the terms mastery and ability goals.

1.1. Students' achievement goals

Over two decades of experimental and classroom research has confirmed that students' achievement goals matter because they are associated with different patterns of meaning and action (for reviews see Ames, 1992; Butler, 2000; Elliot, 2005; Molden & Dweck, 2000). In brief, mastery goals are associated with tendencies to evaluate competence relative to task demands or prior outcomes, to attribute outcomes to effort, to prefer challenging tasks, to use deep learning strategies, and to respond to difficulty by seeking strategies, information, and help relevant to promoting mastery. In contrast, studies have tended to show that ability goals orient students to define and evaluate competence relative to others, to attribute outcomes to ability, to use surface processing strategies, to prefer tasks on which they are likely to succeed, and to display helpless responses to setbacks.

The most important subsequent expansion of this dichotomous conceptualization of achievement goals was introduced by Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996), largely to account for findings that ability goals did not always have the maladaptive consequences reviewed above. Extrapolating from Atkinson's (1957) early distinction between hope for success and fear of failure, Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) proposed that strivings to excel and strivings to avoid failure reflect distinct approach and avoidance forms of performance, or in present terms ability goals that might be associated with positive and negative outcomes, respectively. Although Nicholls (1989) reported that items assessing strivings to demonstrate superior ability and strivings to avoid the demonstration of inferior ability loaded on the same factor, most subsequent studies have supported a trichotomous structure because items assessing mastery, ability-approach, and ability-avoidance loaded on three distinct factors (Elliot & Church, 1997; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997; Smith, Duda, Allen, & Hall, 2002). These and other studies have confirmed negative effects of ability-avoidance, but there is still some debate whether ability-approach goals have basically similar, or clearly more adaptive consequences (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001).

Finally, Nicholls (1989) identified another class of work-avoidant goals that reflect strivings to get through the day with little effort. There has been less research on work avoidance, but as expected this orientation was associated with low levels

of engagement and investment in learning (Dupeyrat & Mariné, 2005; Nolen, 1988; Skaalvik, 1997; Smith, Sinclair, & Chapman, 2002).

1.2. Teachers' achievement goals

Butler (2007) proposed that achievement goal theory might offer a promising framework for the conceptualization of teacher motivation. She reasoned that the classroom constitutes an achievement arena not only for students but also for teachers, who presumably strive to succeed at their job but may differ in the ways they define success, in the goals they strive to attain, and, thus, in their achievement goals for teaching. In support, she found that teachers' responses to her new self-report measure of goal orientations for teaching loaded on four factors that corresponded to the previously identified goals for learning and reflected strivings to (a) learn and develop professional competence (mastery goal orientation), (b) demonstrate superior teaching ability (ability-approach goal orientation), (c) avoid the demonstration of inferior teaching ability (ability-avoidance goal orientation), and (d) get through the day with little effort (work-avoidance goal orientation).

To date, construct validity has been examined by exploring relations between teachers' goal orientations and their help-related attitudes and behaviors. As expected, Butler (2007) found that the more teachers pursued mastery goals, the more likely they were to express positive perceptions of help seeking as beneficial for learning, to prefer to receive help that could enable them to become more knowledgeable and effective, and to report high levels of actual help seeking. In contrast, the more teachers were motivated by ability-avoidance goals, the more likely they were to perceive help seeking as a threatening admission of low ability, and the less likely were they to report having asked for help or advice. Work avoidance was associated with preferences for having others solve one's problems by, for example, disciplining unruly pupils. In keeping with some recent results for students (Linnenbrink, 2005; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Ryan, Patrick, & Shim, 2005), teachers' ability-approach goal orientation did not emerge as a significant predictor of either positive or negative help-related attitudes or behaviors. A subsequent study (Butler & Shibaz, 2008) showed further that teachers' mastery goal orientation predicted the degree to which students reported that teachers actively supported student question asking and help seeking and teacher ability-avoidance was associated with student reports that teachers inhibited questioning and help seeking by conveying that these behaviors are signs of low student ability.

1.3. The present study

Against this background, the two studies reported in the present article had three main objectives. The first objective was to examine whether the four-factor structure of goal orientations reported by Butler (2007) for an Israeli sample would be replicated for a sample of practicing teachers in

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