

# Recent perspectives in the study of motivation: Goal Orientation Theory (\*)

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## **Abstract**

Studies on academic motivation from the perspective of goal orientation have been plentiful in recent years. Nonetheless, the conceptual and empirical approach is not uniform, evolving from normative conceptions toward other multidimensional ones. This paper analyzes the classic and reformulated versions of this theory, looking at assumptions, empirical evidence, inconsistencies and research developed along both lines of study. Finally, it evaluates implications in carrying some of these insufficiently verified principles into educational practice.

*Keywords:* Motivation, goals, personality, school.

\* In Memoriam of P.R. Pintrich..

## **Introduction**

Motivation has been a highly important variable, as reflected in the fact that every learning model either explicitly or implicitly incorporates a theory of motivation (Maerh & Meyer, 1997; Alonso, 1997; Walberg, 1981).

From an academic or school perspective, recent motivational models consider motivation as a hypothetical construct that explains the start, direction and perseverance of behavior aimed at a given academic goal focused on learning, achievement, the ego, social value or work avoidance (García et al., 1998). Additionally, four components are involved in this process (Pintrich and De Groot, 1990): the value that students assign to the goals, perception of their competence, causal attributions and emotional reactions.

Historically, there has been ample proliferation of diverse terms and theories related to the psychological construct of motivation. The cause is probably found in the difficulty of defining, conceptualizing and operationalizing this psychological construct with a certain consensus, which today exists only partially. Different models and theories of motivation continue to offer plentiful conceptual basis and empirical evidence which coexist in the field of motivation: the self-efficacy theory (Bong, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 1992), expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), causal attribution theory (Miller, Ferguson & Byrne, 2000; Montero & Alonso, 1992; González-Pienda & cols, 2000) or the intrinsic-extrinsic theory of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In order to form a classification of this panorama, Murphy and Alexander (2000) have reviewed papers published in the last five years with regard to terminology used in research on relationships between motivation and academic achievement; they identify a *corpus* of motivational terms which they consider excessively varied, with too many terms and vague usage. They conclude that studies on motivation are focused on different tendencies: goal approach, intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, interest approach and self-outlining variables. Finally, they confirm the current predominance and importance of contributions from Goal Theory in the study of motivation.

## **Classic Goal Orientation Theory: a normative goal theory**

### ***Conceptual basis***

The cognitive view of motivation has come progressively nearer the study of students' representations of situations, and especially, the representations of goals as motives that each student constructs (Ames, 1992, Dweck, 1986, Urdan, 1997, Urdan & Maerh, 1995). The role of goal orientations is a very contemporary line of research, with relevant contributions in the field of achievement motivation and self-regulated learning (Pintrich 2000a; Pintrich & García, 1994; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). This theory's importance and degree of consideration is reflected in that the *Annual Review of Psychology* recently published an article addressing it (Covington, 2000).

“Goals refer to potentially accessible, conscious cognitive representations ... They are not traits in the sense of classic personality traits, but rather cognitive representations that show stability, as well as contextual sensitivity” (Pintrich, 2000a). “They represent a unit of structured knowledge or personal, subjective conception or "theory" ... about the purposes of an achievement task, as well as other elements referring to how success and competence are defined, the role of effort and errors and evaluation norms. These elements are activated jointly--the schema and the theory--or individually, by seeking relevant information in the context ... or by means of conscious explicit thought and knowledge about the achievement task” (Pintrich, 2000a). Models of cognitive representation suggest that cognition is more of a state, which fluctuates between immediate contextual factors and internal representations (Smith, 1998). From this model, goals can be conceptualized as part of a network of connections among the different aspects of goals as well as the strategies and means for attaining them, or also, as the cognitive link between specific behaviors and general motives (Shan & Kruglanski, 2000), with a certain stability in the subjects (Seifert, 1996).

The basic assumption of normative models holds that students can be classified according to the type of academic goal which they assume. Consequently, there will exist variations in cognitive processing and in the process of learning regulation; students with greater self-regulation show a higher degree of commitment to their own learning, they are the ones who most analyze the demands of school, the ones who do the most planning, they manage their resources and control their learning process (Pintrich, 1999, Zimmerman & Kintzas,

1997). Normative models of goal orientation establish different types of goals: academic goals and social goals.

*Academic goals* refer to motives of an academic nature that students use for guiding their classroom behavior. As such, these goals can encourage the student to pursue different objectives in the academic or school situation:

1) *Learning, mastery, task or task-involved goals*. These are referred to variously as task goals (Anderman & Midgley, 1997; Kaplan & Midgley, 1997; Middleton & Midgley, 1997) or mastery goals (Ames, 1992). This type of goal orients students toward a learning approach characterized by satisfaction upon mastery or completion of a task, with greater levels of efficacy, task value, interest, positive emotion, positive effort, greater persistence, greater use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and good conduct (Pintrich, 2000b).

2) *Performance goals*. These are called ability-focused goals (Nicholls, 1984, Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1998). They orient students toward a greater concern with their ability, and to noticing others' performance, seeming to focus them on goals of doing tasks better than others. In general these goals are seen as less adaptive, because of the type of motivation associated with them, the emotional effects, the lesser use of strategies, and poorer conduct (Ames, 1992, Pintrich, 2000a, Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Urdan 1997).

3) *Goals focused on the ego (work avoidance, ego or ego-involved goals)* (Skaalvik, 1997). These refer to ideas, judgments and perceptions of ability from a normative and comparative reference with respect to others. Some authors have classified these into dimensions of performance-approach and performance-avoidance (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Skaalvik, 1993).

However, the biggest problem when it comes to conceptually categorizing the types of goals is their diversity of taxonomies. Anderman & Maerh (1994) have established a conceptual categorization of goals, limiting themselves to those pertaining to learning and achievement. Nonetheless, some recent papers have completed this panorama. In their work on designing an instrument for evaluation of goals, Urdan, Anderman, Anderman & Roeser (1998)

propose goals oriented toward learning, toward achievement and toward achievement avoidance.

Another essential assumption lies in the idea that academic goals are important because they function as a mechanism that activates a certain type of information processing. Thus, learning goals lead to a strategic-deep level of processing, guaranteeing academic success, while achievement goals provoke a repetitive, superficial processing, influencing final achievement negatively. Relationships between three elements are postulated, as synthesized by Covington (2000): goals <--> cognitions <--> achievement.

*Social goals* refer to reasons that students may have for behaving in an academic situation so as to meet social ends. Although currently we have less understanding of the role which social goals play in learning, results are starting to appear which confirm the importance of this type of goals and allow us to establish some generalizations (Wentzel, 1996; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Some research has found that students may have social goals, such as gaining others' acceptance (Schneider, Ackerman & Kanfer, 1996).

### ***Empirical contributions***

#### ***Academic, learning and achievement goals***

##### ***Academic goals and learning strategies.***

Seifert (1995), by means of cluster analysis, contributes a profile of student groups with different goals (task, ego improvement and ego avoidance) coexisting with different motivational strategies, giving their level of self-efficacy, self-esteem, emotions, attributions and use of learning strategies, concluding with the highest score obtained by students who have a profile of learning goals.

In our country, Núñez and others (1995) have contributed similar results, though they reflect some inconsistencies. Learning and social recognition goals seem to be positively associated with learning strategies and negatively with difficulties in study. In a later study

from the same group, Roces and others (1999) report positive, though moderate, correlations between intrinsic and extrinsic goals with academic achievement.

In a correlational study, Middleton and Midgley (1997) report relationships between learning goals, achievement goals and avoidance goals, finding that learning goals correlate positively with self-regulation strategies and expectations of self-efficacy, and negatively with avoidance of help-seeking. Performance-approach goals correlate positively with avoidance goals, with test anxiety, and with avoidance of help-seeking, and negatively with poorer performance. Performance-avoidance goals correlate positively with test anxiety, help-seeking and negatively with self-regulation and self-efficacy.

Skaalvik (1997), in a study of ego-centered goals, reports a positive association between learning goals and academic self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, while avoidance goals are related negatively to academic self-concept. Goals for increasing the ego are related positively to self-concept, self-efficacy, schoolwork and self-esteem, while goals for self-defense of the ego are related to high anxiety.

### ***Academic goals and self-regulation in learning.***

Learning goals also have a relationship with processes of self-regulated learning. Diverse studies have recognized the degree in which different achievement goals influence regulation of learning. Winne (1997) has proposed a model of self-regulation in which goal selection is an important self-regulation strategy when it comes to planning action and the learning process. He has also offered evidence regarding the role of goal choice as a motivational tactic, showing that goal orientation depends on the student's representation of the task drawn from his ideas and knowledge about it, his or her mastery of that knowledge, knowledge of learning strategies and his or her various motivational ideas. Zimmerman and Kintzas (1997) have studied the effects of using process and product goals in a self-regulative task of an instrumental nature, finding that students with process goals were associated with more self-efficacy, perception of skill and intrinsic motivation; however, the best performance was obtained by those students who in the final phase of execution switched to result goals.

Correlational and laboratory studies have shown that students with learning goals are more involved in self-regulation of their learning (Ames, 1992, Dweck & Legget, 1998; Pin-

trich & De Groot, 1990), they make a greater effort to learn and they are aware of their own comprehension of what is being learned, realizing what they are learning and what they are not (Middleton & Midgley, 1997), they use more summary and paraphrasing strategies for understanding (Archer, 1994; Archer & Scevak, 1998), they make more adaptive attributions in order to understand their failures, they have more feelings of pride and satisfaction in success, and less failure anxiety (Ames, 1992). Results are not so conclusive for students who adopt achievement goals, although there are studies that show that this goal type entails superficial and repetitive strategies (Karabenick & Collins-Eaglin, 1997). In the case of students with failure-avoidance goals, results show a model of reduced tenacity in effort (Bouffard, Vezeau & Bordeleau, 1998).

Learning goals have also been related to characteristics in students' learning disabilities. In a recent study González-Pienda and colls. (2000) have compared goals among students and the same students' characteristics in learning disabilities, reporting significant differences between students with and without learning disability (LD). Students without LD have significantly more learning and ego-related goals, while there is no significant difference between both groups with regard to achievement goals.

### ***Academic goals and self-regulation strategies of motivation.***

There still exists a limited amount of educational research which outlines how students regulate their level of motivation and whether strategies that allow them to maintain or increase their effort toward finishing tasks are an important component of self-regulated learning. Different studies have shown how students are involved in controlling their continued effort. The model of self-regulation of effort (Kulh, 1984, 1985, 1992) has revealed that students work to reach a certain goal, after it is chosen, by means of a variety of voluntary control strategies. Zimmerman and Martínez-Pons (1986, 1990) have provided evidence as to the use of strategies for maintaining persistence in academic tasks when facing distracting and interesting alternatives.

Academic goals have been shown to be an important variable which can help delimit this problem, when incorporated into models of self-regulation of motivation. Volet (1997) uses two dimensions of academic goals (direction and effort), showing the need for both to be produced jointly in order to obtain good academic performance. Effort appears as a motiva-

tional regulation strategy of the first order, predicting academic performance (Boekaerts, 1994). Wolters (1998) has shown how, in different simulated situations, students adjust their motivational self-regulation strategies in order to reach a previously chosen goal. Students actively maintain their motivating commitment in the same way they utilize cognitive regulation strategies. Students with goals oriented toward learning use more intrinsic motivational strategies, while those with goals oriented toward achievement deploy more extrinsic motivational strategies.

### ***Academic goals and conceptual change.***

In current models of conceptual change it is important to take in consideration students' motivational ideas as metacognitive strategies when it comes to explaining how conceptual change is produced in students. Pintrich (1999) has proposed diverse motivational conceptions in students who best facilitate conceptual change. Among others, the student's adoption of learning and knowledge goals makes conceptual change more likely. Various studies back up this proposal, showing an association of students with learning- and knowledge-oriented goals to processing strategies, to a greater level of information elaboration, self-regulation strategies and reflection strategies (Pintrich, 2000a; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990, Pintrich & García, 1994).

Teachers' models of conceptual change have also incorporated contributions from goal theory. Patrick & Pintrich (2001) propose that teachers' conceptions about learning entail implicit goal orientations, as well as teaching designs that favor certain types of orientation in the students.

### ***Academic, learning and achievement goals***

Direct relationships between goals and academic results have appeared in causal studies (Roney, Higgins & Shah, 1995; Roney & Sorrentino, 1995; Schunk, 1996). Numerous studies have also shown relationships between quality of cognitive processing and academic results, showing that a deep level of processing is associated with achievement (Covington, 1992).

Various multiple regression studies have confirmed the association between achievement or failure-avoidance goals with superficial processing and disorganization in study planning, factors associated in turn with poorer academic performance, while learning goals appeared to be associated with deep processing, tenacity, high effort, and finally, high achievement (Elliot McGregor & Gable, 1999).

### ***Academic goals and personal determining factors***

#### ***Student conceptions and academic goals.***

Among the different factors that can influence students' construction of given goals, one which seems to have greater weight is the students' conception of intelligence. According to Nicholls (1984) and Dweck (1986), subjects' conceptions about intelligence are associated with goals taken on in learning situations. Students who understand intelligence as something fixed, stable and differentiated from effort (stable trait) are more likely to assume achievement goals, while those that consider it to be a changing trait and modifiable as a function of effort (increasing trait), will take on learning goals.

One of the indicators of this conception are attributions made by students when faced with success or failure in their academic tasks. It has been found that students with an internalist attributional style construct learning goals, while students with more externalist attributions take on achievement goals (Valle, González, Gómez, Rodríguez and Piñeiro, 1998).

#### ***Personality and academic goals.***

Some authors have recognized the need to incorporate different personal variables, so far insufficiently represented, into explanatory models of achievement motivation (Covington, 2000). Pintrich (1999) suggests understanding goals as a stable, dispositional variable, rather than as a simple response to situational demands. Other authors suggest that goals are interactively modulated by contextual and personality variables, proposing that goals can have a different motivating effort on students depending on personality variables, since there are students that like to be involved in competitive tasks, while others avoid them (Harackiewicz et al., 1997; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carter & Elliot, 2000).

The self-assessment theory (Covington, 1992, 1998, 2000) has postulated the importance of students' need to maintain personal worth. He also takes into consideration various protective strategies students use to maintain it. In line with this theory, Thompson (1994) establishes three types of self-protecting strategies:

1. self-worth protecting strategies: consist of not making an effort when failure is anticipated (Thomson, Davison & Barber, 1995; Covington, 1998).

2. self-handicapping strategies: tactically create some cause (real or invented) which impedes carrying out the task and establishes unrealistic achievement goals (Covington, 1992; Martin, Marsh & Debus, 2001). Migdley and Urdan (1995) find that students with low performance use more self-handicapping strategies than those with high performance, in order to not expose their lack of ability.

3. defensive pessimism strategies: keeping excessively low expectations in order to minimize effort, guarantee success and minimize anxiety produced by not being successful, with consequences of burnout (Urdan et al., 1998)

### ***Gender and academic goals***

In general terms, results confirm the idea that learning and social goals are associated to a greater extent with the feminine gender, while achievement goals are more associated with the masculine gender (Wentzel, 1998). Thorkildsen and Nicholls (1998) report more learning goals in female students, and more ego-centered goals, achievement goals and avoidance goals in male students. Similarly, females show more interest and effort attributions, while males give more extrinsic explanations of performance-related events.

### ***Social risk characteristics and academic and social goals***

Carroll, Baglioni, Houghton and Bramston (1999) have shown significant differences between students with high and low social risk with regard to their academic goals. While the former seem to achieve a good academic self-image, linked to higher educational and interpersonal goals, the latter seem to seek a good social image, with higher social and physical goals, emphasizing the search for social reputation.

## ***Academic goals and learning context***

### ***Context goals and self-evaluating strategies***

The classroom dynamic can moderate goal effects in students. Classrooms with *competitive ability goals* or *failure avoidance goals* encourage students to not pay attention to nor value the importance of learning or mastery in order to focus attention and effort on doing better than others, while classrooms with *learning goals* promote any number of gratifications, getting students involved in their learning, recognizing students' effort, promoting learning from mistakes or clarifying goals (Harackiewicz & Barron, 1998; Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Letho & Elliot, 1997). Slavin (1983) established some defining elements of learning situations that promote learning goals: possibility of task choice, choice of individual goals and autonomy in school action.

Various studies have analyzed the role of classroom goal structure in the students' use of self-handicapping strategies (Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Midgley, 1993; Midgley, Arunkumar & Urdan, 1996; Urdan, Midgley & Anderman, 1998). Personal achievement avoidance goals and perception of the classroom as a situation with achievement goals predict the use of self-handicapping strategies. Learning and achievement goals do not predict their use (Midgley & Urdan, 2001). The students' perception of the classroom goal structure has been considered more decisive than the classroom's actual structure (Ames & Archer, 1988; Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Results of this study reveal that use of self-handicapping strategies is positively associated with perception of an achievement-focused classroom goal, with a poor perception of competence, poor grade point average and with the masculine gender. These results are consistent with prior evidence showing a greater probability of this type of strategy appearing in classrooms with achievement goals, in order to protect one's self-assessment (Covington, 1992; Pajares & Kranzler, 1995; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

### ***Context goals, learning and achievement strategies.***

Some studies have tried to show a relationship between academic goals proposed in the learning situation and the use of learning strategies. Karabenick and Collins-Eaglin (1997) show that classrooms using incentives for group work correlate positively with use of elabora-

tion strategies, critical thought and metacognition. Additionally, achievement goals appeared negatively associated with use of elaboration strategies and critical thought. Schunk (1996), using learning and achievement contexts, with both implicating and non-implicating self-evaluation, shows the effects of these situations on students' expectations of self-efficacy, persistence in effort and tendencies toward self-evaluation.

Bergin (1994), in a study with an interactive experimental design, makes evident the damaging effects of competitive-goal situations for low-performance students, both in a free recall task and in test scores.

### ***Social goals and academic performance***

Friend-seeking is a goal found in children of all ages, frequently given more emphasis than academic goals (Wentzel, 1991, 1992). Schoolchildren with greater social goals are judged more positively by peers and teachers (Wentzel, 1996). Cooperative, docile and willing-to-share social behavior is positively associated with academic performance (Wentzel, 1991, 1993). Social goals are associated with academic goals in order to predict academic achievement (Wentzel, 1998).

## **The Reformulated Theory of Goal Orientation: a theory of multiple goals**

### ***Conceptual underpinnings***

This version of goal theory incorporates some new approaches, backed by empirical evidence (Harackiewicz, Barron & Elliot, 1998; Pintrich, 2000b):

1. Achievement goals are not necessarily maladaptive. They may be associated with good performance if they occur together with learning goals (Elliot, 1997; Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Harackiewicz, et al., 1997; Harackiewicz, Barron & Elliot, 1998).

2. Goals that students adopt may be multiple and flexible in real classroom situations, unlike single models, generally used in experimental studies (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). In

some classroom studies learning and achievement goals have shown positive relationships (Pintrich, 2000a). Therefore, it is possible that a combined, interactive use of both types of goals has a positive multiplicative effect on performance, with a high joint presence of learning and achievement goals being most adaptive for students. It is even possible that the level of learning goals taken on depends to some extent on achievement goals (Harackiewicz, Barron y Elliot, 1998).

Pintrich (2000b) has synthesized the possibility that students adopt different goals at different moments, reaching good attainment, by means of the "journey metaphor":

- 1) students with learning goals may use various motivational, affective and learning strategies over time; when these have resulted in good attainment, it leads them to adopt achievement goals in the end.
- 2) students with achievement goals may attain good performance if in addition to these goals they take on learning goals. Therefore, more important than the type of goal adopted is that it promote affective and cognitive involvement in the activity (Harackiewicz, Barron & Elliot, 1998).

Pintrich (2000a) recognizes the importance of other recent models' contributions in showing the existence of two states--approach vs. avoidance--through which both learning and achievement goals may be updated, suggesting that it is not correct to always define achievement goals negatively in contrast to learning goals (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Elliot, 1997; Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). These authors find that achievement-approach goals can entail good performance, and only achievement-avoidance goals are associated with poor results.

3. The importance of social goals. A recent line of study, historically less developed, recalls the need and importance of social goals in learning and in academic performance. Current models (Wentzel, 1998, 1999, 2000) postulate the importance and possible complementary role of social goals with respect to learning and achievement goals. This type of goal has been conceived as cognitive representations referring to the attainment of social objectives (establishing and maintaining social relationships) and are related to the subject's attain-

ment values. Values provide individuals with specific reasons for pursuing a given goal. Wentzel (1999) establishes a taxonomy of this type of goal:

1. *Self-assertive social relationship goals*. Refer to attainment of individuality, self-determination, superiority and acquisition of social resources.
2. *Integrating relationship goals*. Refer to attainment of common relationships, responsibility and social commitments, equity or justice, provision of social resources.

This model postulates the existence of a relationship between learning goals and social goals when it comes to explaining and predicting learning and performance, postulating three different models: complementary, unidirectional and hierarchically interdependent (Wentzel, 2000).

4. The conception of a greater emphasis on the study of the interaction between the individual and the context when explaining students' multiple goals (Wentzel, 1991,1992, 1993, 1996).

### ***Empirical contributions***

#### ***Academic, learning and achievement goals.***

Harackiewicz and cols. (1997) find positive correlations between learning goals and achievement goals. Bouffard, Vezeau and Bordeleau (1998), focusing on the change that can occur in type of goals over time, find that students in the final grades of secondary education tend to use achievement goals, unlike in earlier grades, when they use learning goals. These results can be considered the students' adaptive strategy to the demands and requirements of the educational system itself, revealing the flexibility of academic goals and the role of external influence over them. Also, better self-regulation appears to be associated with learning goals, at all levels studied.

Pintrich (2000b) obtained results that confirm both the working hypotheses of the reformulated goal theory and those of normative goal theory. In favor of the normative goal theory is the fact that the learning goal entails better behavior and result. In favor of the re-

formulated theory, we find demonstrated in other longitudinal studies that students' motivational behaviors are not static, but adaptable to different points during the tasks, and they adapt goals to these points in time (Eccles, J., Wigfield, A. & Schiefele, 1998; Wigfield et al, 1996). Furthermore, results of his study show no differences between students who are high in learning goals and low in achievement goals, from those students high in learning goals and high in achievement goals (in self-efficacy, cognitive and metacognitive strategies), with a few results in favor of the latter (task value).

Wentzel and colls. (Wentzel, 1994; Wentzel & Asher, 1995; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997) have shown the positive relationship between learning goals and social goals in various studies, pointing to the importance of peer relations and context type for promoting learning goals. Wentzel (1998) has shown relationships between different learning goals. Learning goals correlate positive with family cohesion, perception of support from the teacher, interest in things related to school, social goals, goals of social responsibility, and interest in class; achievement goals correlate negatively with family cohesion and with interest in school; social goals correlate positively with perception of support from the teacher and from peers, interest in things related to school, learning goals, social responsibility and interest in class.

### ***Academic goals and self-regulation strategies of motivation.***

Zimmerman and colls. (Zimmerman, 1994; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997) have reflected conceptual dimensions of academic self-regulation. Their model sets forth the *why* of learning as the first conceptual dimension, giving rise to the psychology dimension called motivation, and establishes goals, self-efficacy expectations, values and attributions as process variables in self-regulation of learning.

Wolters (1998) shows that achievement and learning goals are a variable that defines students' strategies of motivational regulation, together with others such as seeking extrinsic rewards, task value, interest, efficacy, help seeking or will power. Students who choose a certain goal tend to make an effort to maintain it. Secondly, he verifies the use of different motivational regulation strategies in problem situations with different degree of difficulty. This implies that students adapt or modify the use of motivational strategies in order to adapt to the demands of circumstances. He also confirms a positive association between learning goals as motivational self-regulation strategies, and cognitive strategies of elaboration, critical

thinking and metacognition, and viceversa with achievement goals. However, an association between use of learning goals, as a regulatory strategy for maintaining motivation, and final performance, could not be confirmed. This result suggests that learning goals fulfill a function of regulation maintenance in good learning, but it is probably necessary to use achievement goals as a regulatory strategy of motivation in order to achieve an optimal academic result.

### **Conclusions, inconsistencies and educational implications**

Goal theory incorporates a new variable into the study of motivation of academic accomplishment which is essential for understanding and explaining motivational psychological processes that operate in the teaching-learning process, thus becoming a revolutionary force in this area of study. Together with other more classical theories and models of motivation, they form an encouraging panorama. However, there continue to be inconsistencies in this theory, worth taking into consideration in the near future:

1. The study of students' goals has been biased toward the study of academic-type goals, to the detriment of social goals. The latter are being found to have great importance, especially in students from more disadvantaged educational contexts.

2. Starting from a basis of an opposing dichotomy *learning goals* vs. *achievement goals* has led to an implicit presupposition of a linear association with good and bad performance, respectively. Such a hypothesis, despite results that back it up from studies analyzing students' goals from an exclusive perspective, has been shown to be inconsistent in studies that perform goal analysis from a joint perspective, with results revealing students that have good performance and self-regulation and who combine both types of goals.

3. The recent conceptualization of goals as a multidimensional phenomenon has led to consideration of refocusing this field from the predominantly individual point of view to an interactionist view, where research joins the study of goals as an individual variable, as a variable influenced by context, and as an interactive variable together with personal factors (stable and modifiable) and contextual factors. This study focus is currently being adopted with other learning and performance phenomena (Renzulli & Yun, 2001).

Therefore, any educational intervention directed toward improvement of students' motivation should adopt a multidimensional focus:

1. Include goals integrated with other motivational variables and learning strategies, teaching students to self-regulate themselves in a coordinated way (Dembo, 2000).
2. Establish measures for improvement of motivational and learning processes both in the classroom context and in the students.
3. Evaluate possible interactive effects between different types of goals which the teaching process suggests to students, goals which the students construct in the situation depending on their personal variables, and the interaction between both in order to explain learning and performance.

Hidi & Harackiewicz (2000) refer to this problematic with considerable precision:

“Over the last two decades, there has been a strong concern with reducing external motivational influences and trying to energize intrinsic sources. The latter is a worthy goal that we endorse, but energizing intrinsic sources of motivation does not necessarily mean that all extrinsic sources are suspect. The negative evaluations of extrinsic motivators (rewards, reinforcements, etc.), performance goals, and situational interest might all be seen as natural outcomes of these concerns.

“Time has come to reevaluate the situation. The original concern over the power of external influences was a reaction to behaviorism. One consequence of this reaction is that we have now ended up denying the importance of external influences including those that may be necessary to give all students a decent, if not equal, chance to achieve. Furthermore, we consider students who want to excel by trying to be among the best to have maladaptive or politically incorrect goals. Is this not an absurdity?” (p. 169).

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