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Rethinking motivation goals for adolescents: beyond achievement goals

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Abstract

For the past two decades the prime focus of motivation research in adolescence has been concerned with achievement goals, namely mastery and performance goals. In the real life learning contexts in which students participate, however, such goals are inextricably linked to other goals such as social goals and broader life and future goals. Moreover, goals are not pursued in isolation but as components of complex and dynamic motivational systems which individuals shape to suit context and purpose. Using a multiple goals perspective, and focusing on both why students want to achieve at school (achievement goals) and what goals students are trying to achieve at school (goal content), this paper presents findings from a study investigating the goals of twenty-nine secondary school students (juniors, ages12-13, and seniors ages 16-17). With data gathered during focus group interviews, the study shows that students pursue multiple goals and that those goals are related to four main goal domains, those being future goals, achievement goals, social goals and personal wellbeing goals. Furthermore, the study reveals relationships between goals in particular domains and highlights the important role played by future goals in adolescents' motivation at school. Methodological challenges in investigating multiple goals for adolescents are discussed. The findings suggest that to further understandings about multiple goals for adolescents, future research should consider multiple goals across the four domains and more closely examine the role of future goals in influencing other goals and adolescents' motivation at school.

Keywords: goals, motivation, adolescents

Introduction

The motivation of adolescents in learning contexts has been the subject of an abundance of research over the last 30 years and a range of theories about student motivation have been developed (see Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008, for a review). Amongst these, Goal Theory in particular, has been used extensively to better understand student motivation (Midgley, 2002). As the "internal representations of desired states" (Austin & Vancouver, 1996, p. 338) goals play an important role in cognition, behaviour and affect. Goals have been examined with regard to their achievement orientation (Ames, 1992b; Ames & Archer, 1988), focusing on *why* students want to achieve, and their content (Ford & Nichols, 1987; Lemos, 1996; Wentzel, 2000) or *what* students are trying to achieve. Although achievement goal research has dominated the field, goals such as social goals (Juvonen & Wentzel, 1996; Urdan & Maehr, 1995) and future goals (Phalet, Andriessen, & Lens, 2004) have also received attention and their role in students' achievement, motivation and success at school has been documented. Furthermore, there has been significant research focusing on the multiple goals contributing to students' motivation and achievement (Boekaerts, de Koning, & Vedder, 2006; Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Wentzel, 1992, 1993; Wosnitza & Volet, 2009). Few studies, however, have taken account of the range of goals (including *what* students are trying to achieve at school and *why* they want to achieve academically) that are relevant to adolescents in real learning situations and if and how these goals may be related. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion about multiple goals for adolescents, both including and going beyond, achievement goals.

Achievement goals

An achievement goal approach (Ames, 1992b; Ames & Archer, 1988) has been widely used to investigate the purposes of achievement behaviour among learners in learning contexts.

Achievement goals have been described as perceptions of the different purposes students may adopt for their learning in achievement situations (Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Focusing on competence, the two main achievement goals of mastery and performance have been identified and thoroughly investigated. Students pursuing mastery goals aim to develop their competence and are concerned about developing new skills, improving understanding and mastering their work (Ames, 1992a; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988). Mastery focused students have also been found to have positive psychological wellbeing (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). Students pursuing performance goals aim to demonstrate competence relative to others and are concerned about extrinsic variables including gaining recognition and pleasing others (Ames, 1992b). Performance goals have been conceptualised in both the approach (aiming to demonstrate high levels of competence relative to others) and avoid (aiming to avoid demonstration of lack of competence) forms (Elliot, 1997, 1999).

Although research concerning mastery and performance goals has been prolific, some authors, such as Urdan and Mestas (2006), propose "researchers may over-estimate the natural occurrence of mastery and performance goals in particular settings" (p. 355). Furthermore, the role of social comparison in performance goals has been scrutinized in the literature with some research showing students do wish to demonstrate high performance, but without comparison to others (Dowson & McInerney, 2003; MacCallum, 1997). Brophy (2005) suggests performance goals are a "low incidence phenomenon" (p. 171) and that unprompted, students rarely describe performance goals with social comparison as being relevant to their achievement. Indeed, reasons other than competence are often articulated when students describe why they wish to engage and achieve at school (Miller, Greene, Montalvo, Ravindran, & Nichols, 1996). This paper makes a contribution to the literature

regarding students' goals by considering both achievement goals and broader goals that influence students' motivation in learning contexts.

Social goals

Social goals have also featured in the literature regarding goals (Juvonen & Wentzel, 1996; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1991). Some research has investigated the social reasons underpinning students' desire to achieve at school (Anderman, 1999b; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Horst, Finney, & Barron, 2007) and particular social goals have been positively correlated with adaptive achievement goals. Social goals, however, can also be examined from a content perspective (Wentzel, 2000) as not all social goals in school contexts are necessarily related to achievement. The desire to establish and maintain supportive relationships with others (relationship goals) (Wentzel, 1996), to adhere to rules (social responsibility) (Anderman, 1999b), to cooperate with others and be helpful (prosocial goals) (Spera & Wentzel, 2003), and to be well regarded by others (status goals) (Levy, Kaplan, & Patrick, 2004) all represent very real goals in adolescents' lives. Such social goals can have a significant impact on students' school adjustment and learning.

Future and Instrumental goals

Similarly, instrumental and future goals have been shown to influence student motivation in learning contexts. Instrumental goals link present activities to an envisaged future, for example, "realising future goals such as having a good job, helping to make the world a better place, earning high income, and getting into graduate school" (Malka & Covington, 2005, p. 66). Research consistently reports positive relationships between future vision and goals, engagement and performance (Miller, et al., 1996).

There has been some discussion in the literature about the relationships between instrumental and/or future goals and achievement goals. Nieswandt and Shanahan (2008), for example, argue that although achievement goal theory allows for examination of possible goal changes over time, it does, however neglect "the instrumental value of goals for the near or distant future" (Nieswandt & Shanahan, 2008, p. 5). Particularly as students reach the end of their secondary school careers, there is an increasing focus on the future and goals associated with future extrinsic outcomes (e.g. obtaining university entrance). Future goals may also help sustain effort in times of low interest (Miller, et al., 1996) and can contribute to sustained achievement motivation (Phalet, et al., 2004). Miller and Brickman (2004) argue that personally valued future goals enable individuals to "purposefully generate a coherent framework or system of proximal subgoals to guide action toward the attainment of future goals" (p. 15). Thus future goals can influence other goals pursued in learning situations.

Adolescents' future goals have been explored in some research (see for example, Lee, McInerney, Liem, & Ortiga, 2010; Malmberg & Norrgard, 1999; Nurmi, 1991; Nurmi, Poole, & Seginer, 1995), with the findings that future goals play an important role in future opportunity and identity formation (Nurmi, et al., 1995). In their cross-cultural study of Finnish, Israeli and Australian adolescents, Nurmi, et al., (1995) found differences in goals related to future work and education, family and marriage, leisure activities and property. In Singapore, Lee, et al. (2010) examined the relationship between students' achievement goals (mastery and performance) and intrinsic (career, society and family-oriented) and extrinsic (fame and wealth-oriented) future goals. Their findings that there is congruence between intrinsically-focused future and achievement goals, and extrinsically focused future and achievement goals, supports the view that future goals and achievement goals need dual

consideration in examining adolescents' motivation. Indeed, in the real lives of secondary students, teachers, parents and family members actively encourage students to set goals for the future with the hope that such future visioning will provide direction and motivation at school. This paper considers the role of future goals in the goals spontaneously expressed by adolescents.

Multiple goals

Students pursue multiple goals in learning contexts (Boekaerts, et al., 2006; Lemos, 1996; Pintrich, 2000; Wosnitza & Volet, 2009). Malka and Covington (2005) argue that "from a goal perspective, to understand a person's behaviour one must be mindful of the goals existing at multiple levels of abstraction" (p. 61). In addition Boekaerts, De Koning and Vedder (2006) argue that "goal directed behaviour in the classroom can only be understood if, as researchers, we gain insight into the content of the multiple goals that become salient in the classroom and in the links that students have established between their multiple goals" (pp. 34-35). Even though early goal theory research acknowledged students pursue multiple goals in learning situations (Wentzel, 1992, 1993), this idea has not been extensively pursued in further research. Instead, "the literature has typically conceptualised students' goals as uni-dimensional cognitive constructs affecting students' academic motivation and performance" (Dowson & McInerney, 2003, pp. 93-94). Such an assumption neglects the complexity of students' motivation in real classrooms.

Those researchers adopting a multiple goals perspective have shown relationships between goals, for example achievement goals and social goals. Mastery goals have been shown to have a positive impact on social responsibility and relationship goals, and a strong association has been shown between performance goals and social relationship and status goals

(Anderman, 1999a; Anderman & Anderman, 1999). Similarly, Dowson and McInerney (2003) have shown academic and social goals can act in conflicting, converging or compensatory ways to influence motivation and achievement. Even so, how these social and academic domains interact to influence students' achievement still needs further research. As Anderman (1999a) argues the "reciprocity of these domains has received little attention. Understanding how these domains interact remains a challenge for future research" (p. 305).

It has also been posited that individuals' goals are organised hierarchically. Wentzel (2000) suggests that students might have a Task (mastery or to attain a particular standard of achievement) → Social goal hierarchy should they pursue goals to do well at academic tasks in order to seek social approval from parents or teachers. Students may also have a Social → Task hierarchy if they believe that seeking social approval by pleasing teachers will result in academic gains. While these research findings have evidenced associations between academic and social goals and have begun to show how goals may interact, there may be additional goal domains, such as future goals, that play a significant role.

Hierarchies of multiple goals, including goals other than social and achievement goals, have also been described by other researchers (Boekaerts, 1998, 2002; Carver & Scheier, 1982; Ford, 1992; Ford & Nichols, 1991). Boekaerts, et al. (2006) make the case that higher order goals ('I want to be' goals, i.e. I want to be successful) give direction to action programs ('do' goals, i.e. I want to increase my performance in class) and scripts (i.e. I will do my homework regularly). Understanding how goals operate on these multiple levels and that higher order goals play an important role in determining more immediate goals, enables consideration of goals that may be specific to a learning context as well as goals that are more broadly related to views of self and the future. This is an important direction for future

research, which, as these authors argue, should "uncover patterns, alignments, and conflicts students establish among their different content goals" (p. 33).

From the literature reviewed, a possible way forward in developing understandings about students' goals in real learning situations, may include an examination of the spontaneously expressed goals of adolescents in real learning contexts from both an achievement goal and a goal content perspective. An achievement perspective enables examination of why students wish to achieve at school, and a content perspective enables investigation of what students are trying to achieve when at school. These two areas of investigation may well be complementary and act in ways to support each other, or it may be that achievement goals and 'other' goals operate simultaneously with little relationship to each other.

This paper seeks to extend the discussion about goals that adolescents consider to be relevant in secondary school by reporting a study investigating the goals of junior and senior secondary school students. The current study has two main aims. Firstly, to investigate the range of goals pursued by a group of adolescents, considering both achievement goals (i.e. *why* I want to achieve at school) and the content of other goals, such as social goals (i.e. *what* I want to achieve at school). Secondly, the study aims to explore relationships between goals, as articulated in the spontaneous comments of the students. It is anticipated that this exploration will build upon some relationships already shown in the literature, but develop these further to encompass the range of goals expressed by students.

Methodology

To address the aims of the study, a qualitative approach was used, gathering data through focus group interviews.

Participants

Participants were 29 student volunteers attending one of two secondary schools in low to middle income, ethnically diverse areas in metropolitan Western Australia. Twenty students (11 girls, 9 boys) were in their first year of high school (junior, ages 12-13) and nine students (5 girls, 4 boys) were in their final year (senior, ages 16-17). Focus group interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes were conducted with groups of 4-5 students. Interviews were conducted during school time and were audio taped with participants' consent.

Data collection

Focus group interviews. Four focus groups were conducted with junior students and two with senior students. At the commencement of the interviews students were informed that the purpose of the interview was to discuss why they wanted to achieve academically at school and to talk about goals they had at school. Students were informed that people may have different ideas from each other and that all views would be treated respectfully by all group members. The interviews were designed to allow students the opportunity to speak freely and to explain the reasons behind their ideas.

Interview activity. The interviews involved both individual reflection and writing and group discussion. At the beginning of the focus group interviews students were asked to write their answers to the question "Why do you want to achieve at school?" on small cards. Students were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to this question and that they should write reasons that were important to them, and not be concerned about what others were writing. Students were not restricted in the number of reasons they could write, but were asked to write one idea on each card. The purpose of this activity, from the research perspective, was to capture individual's spontaneous responses to the question. When

students had finished their writing each student explained their responses. The purpose of this, from the research perspective was to enable ideas to develop further through discussion, and adding to the richness of the data. Where appropriate the interviewer used probes to prompt further discussion and explore common ideas. Next, students were asked to individually write down any other goals they wished to achieve at school. As before, these were shared in the group. Following this discussion students were asked to arrange their ideas in order of importance (from most important to least important) on the larger sheet of paper. Students then had the opportunity to explain relationships that existed between their ideas and why some ideas may be more important than others.

Data analysis

To analyse the goals described in the focus group interviews a combined inductive and deductive approach was used. Using the broad groupings of achievement goals, future goals and social goals, three researchers coded approximately 50% of the data (two junior and one senior interview). Within each grouping, goals well established in the literature were identified (for example, mastery goals, relationships goals, etc) and those representing 'other' goals were identified for discussion. The researchers then met to confirm coding and discuss how to code 'other' goals. Through this process 'personal wellbeing goals' (specifically positive self-related goals, see Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997) were identified and the coding system was revised and refined, for example, 'future goals' was further refined to include 'future extrinsic' and 'future intrinsic' goals. Goals were also allocated to one of two possible contexts, those being the immediate context of the school and the imagined context of the future. The goals and definitions agreed on are presented in Table 1. These codes were used for analysing the remaining data.

Table 1. Goal domains, goals and definitions

Goal domain	Goal	Definition
Future goals	Extrinsically focused	Wanting to attain employment, have a particular career, and/or gain university entrance. Desiring money, respect, materialistic possessions and/or recognition in the future (status).
	Intrinsically focused	Wanting positive future wellbeing (happiness, success, relationships). Wanting to make a positive contribution to the world / society (altruistic).
Achievement goals	Mastery	Wanting to learn and to improve knowledge/skills
	Performance (grade)	Wanting to attain and/or maintain 'good' marks or grades
	Performance (approach)	Wanting to demonstrate higher academic performance than others
Social goals	Relationship	Wanting to form positive and/or close inter-personal relationships with others
	Approval	Wanting to attain approval from parents and/or teachers
	Welfare	To assist others / to enhance the welfare of others in the community
Personal wellbeing goals		Wanting to enhance self-confidence, self-esteem, and to be happy. To enjoy school and have fun. To support emotional and physical wellbeing.

Interview activity

Across the 29 students who participated in the focus groups, 190 statements (minimum 4, maximum 10, average 6.5) revealing *what* students wanted to achieve at school and *why* they wanted to achieve academically were given during the interview activity. These reasons were coded by two judges according to the goals and definitions agreed on previously. Initial inter-rater reliability was 91%, with disagreements being the result of brevity of student answers (for example, "parents", "sport"). This was resolved by agreement to exclude ambiguous responses, which left 174 responses coded. The final inter-rater agreement was 96%. The responses were then organised in two tables, the first focusing on the student (showing coding per student), and the second focusing on goals (showing the frequency of codes and number of students coded for each goal). It was important that this second table include both frequency and number of students, as students were able to give multiple statements in the activity, which meant that some students had, for example, 'Future – extrinsic' coded more than once.

Focus group interviews.

Because the aim of the research was to investigate the goals described by students and the possible relationships between goals, goal related statements and accompanying explanation(s) were considered the most appropriate unit of analysis for the interview transcripts. Goal related statements included both what students wanted to achieve and why students wanted to achieve academically. These were identified by one researcher. These statements and explanations were sometimes brief but on other occasions required a longer text extract to fully describe the idea(s). As the research also investigated associations between goals, lengthier extracts of text were needed to capture possible relationships and to retain the integrity of the text. Two researchers coded the interview goal related statements.

Statements were double coded where more than one goal was indicated in the text. Relationships were identified when students described how achievement of particular goals would assist achievement of other goals. Coders showed relationships between goals by placing an arrow between codes. A total of 60 text extracts were coded, with initial inter-rater reliability of 85%. Disagreements occurred where comments were ambiguous, but agreement was reached after discussion between researchers. Following the coding, a frequency chart of goal associations was developed (for example, future-extrinsic and performance goals) to reveal those goal associations that were most commonly associated in the interview transcripts. The frequency chart also included the number of students who described each goal association.

Results

What goals do adolescents pursue at school and why do they want to achieve?

At the commencement of the interview students were asked to write and then discuss why they wanted to achieve academically at school. Next, students were asked to write and discuss other 'things' they wished to achieve at school. Both the interview transcripts and the interview activity revealed that there were a range of goals that adolescents pursue at school, some directly related to academic achievement and others related to the future and social and emotional aspects of school life. These goals expressed were focused on four main domains, namely, future goals, achievement goals, social goals and personal wellbeing goals. Table 2 shows the goal domains, specific goals and number of students (N and %) who articulated each.

Table 2. Goal domains, goals and case frequencies

Goal domain	# students	% students	Specific goal	# students	% students
Future	29	100%	Future extrinsic	29	100%
			Future intrinsic	13	45%
Achievement	16	55%	Mastery	6	21%
			Performance – grade	8	27%
			Performance approach	3	10%
Social	28	96%	Relationship	27	93%
			Approval	13	45%
			Welfare	6	21%
Personal wellbeing	22	76%			

A notable finding was that for these students, explaining *why* they wanted to achieve academically gave rise to discussion of other goals that were important at school. For example, students wanted to achieve at school so they would have a successful future and make their parents happy. Due to achievement goals being intertwined with other goals at school, the analysis did not separate the achievement goals from other goals, but rather considered them as a part of the range of goals articulated by students.

Future goals

All students participating in this study (N=29) expressed the view that achievement at school was necessary to achieve future extrinsic goals. These included *"to get a good job"* (AS21, BJ27, AJ32, AJ66), *"being able to financially support myself"* (AS05), *"so I can get a good job and some money"* (AJ40) and *"to get into university"* (BJ37, BJ04, BJ35, BJ16). Students (N=13) also expressed the view that achieving at school was necessary to fulfil future intrinsic goals, such as feeling happy and successful in later life. *"I want to have a greater understanding of the world... to be happy in my life and successful doing something I love"* (AS21). *"I want to achieve at school because I want to enjoy being an adult rather than worrying about my education"* (BJ17). Some students also aspired to fulfil altruistic type goals such as *"I want to make an impact on the world"* (AS27). This data clearly illustrates the importance of future goals for both junior and senior students.

Achievement goals

While the initial question asked of the students assumed that they did want to achieve at school (and data collected in the earlier study supported this assumption), eight students specifically described their desire to demonstrate academic performance through obtaining *"good grades"* and/or "*high marks"*. These comments support endorsement of performance (grade) goals which do not include social comparison. Six students described mastery goals. For example, *"I want to learn new things"* (AJ26) and *"have a broader mind filled with knowledge and different points of view"* (AJ71). Students also referred to improving in particular subjects and *"learning as much as I can"* (AJ41), which may also be considered as 'personal best' goal. Only three students described their desire to outperform their classmates and perhaps not surprisingly, these students were all in their senior year, about to sit their final school examinations which would determine their career opportunities in the following years. The possibility that social comparison and competition emanated from the school

context was acknowledged by a student, *"teachers tell you to be competitive, and you know, in life, that's what it's about. Teachers do encourage it"* (AS40).

<u>Social goals</u>

Social relationship goals were overwhelmingly supported with 27 students expressing the view that while at school they wanted to develop social relationships and, for example, *"make good friends"* (AJ64, AJ31, AJ36) and *"make good relationships that will stay with me throughout my life"* (AS21). Some junior students also noted that it was important to develop good relationships with teachers, for example, *"get on well with the teachers so they don't make it harder to go through high school"* (BJ27).

Thirteen students commented that it was important to obtain approval from others including parents and teachers and made statements like *"I really want my parents and my family to be proud of me"* (AS23) and *"I want to be respected by the teachers … I want them to think that I'm okay"* (AJ36). Older students also desired approval from younger students and stated the wish to *"be a role model to younger students"* (AS40).

Six students shared the view that while at school they were also interested in the welfare of others and wished to do well so they could help others both at school and in the future. In addition, some senior students mentioned that they wished to *"make a difference for others in the school"* (AS30), *"promote respect/love"* (AS27) and assist in *"uniting everyone as a community"* (AS26). Interestingly, all the students expressing this view were students in their final years of schooling. This suggests that there may be a developmental link between pursuit of social welfare goals and/or that there may have been particular contextual triggers that had begun students thinking in this way. For example, some students spoke of taking

16

leadership roles in the school and discussed how they wanted to assist younger students and help make the school a great place for all students to be. In this sense, pursuit of social welfare goals seems to have been promoted in that school.

The social goals expressed by these groups of junior and senior students highlight the importance of social goals for adolescents at school. Furthermore, for some students the social dimensions of school underpinned other dimensions, whereby support from friends was perceived to have a positive impact on academic achievement and sense of personal wellbeing. The salience of social goals is discussed further in the next section.

<u>Personal wellbeing goals</u>

Twenty-two students made comments revealing that personal wellbeing was important to them at school. Junior students spoke of the importance of *"feeling safe"* (AJ64) at school, and others wished to *"not be under a lot of stress"* (AJ21). Older students mentioned wanting to develop confidence and positive self-esteem (*"I want to have good self-esteem. I want to be confident, successful and happy"* - AS28). Students spoke of their own satisfaction at school.

> *"My own satisfaction is important because not only do you do well, but you beat your own goals and you feel better about it and you know that you can keep doing better and better at it and it helps you have a purpose, so you know where you go so it kind of builds up a goal"* (AS40).

A majority of students discussed how important it was that school be fun because enjoying learning meant they learnt more and having fun helped them feel relaxed in the school

environment. In addition, some students saw their involvement in school sport programmes as critical to keeping fit, having fun, developing team skills and motivation – all which contributed to a positive wellbeing.

Are these goals related? If so, how?

During the focus group interviews students elaborated on their stated goals and explained why they were important. In doing so, however, students explained how some goals were related to others. Interestingly, out of 60 coded text units from the interviews, only 5 described single goals. Essentially, students spoke of multiple goals which supported or were intertwined with each other.

Four main domains of goals were described, those being goals that related to the future, to academic achievement, to social dimensions of school life, and to personal wellbeing. Relationships between those domains were described by students when they stated that achievement of one goal would lead to achievement /or enable progress toward, another goal(s). Figure 1 shows the relationships and arrows are used to show the relationships between goals domains, where indicated in students' comments.

Figure 1. Relationships between goal domains
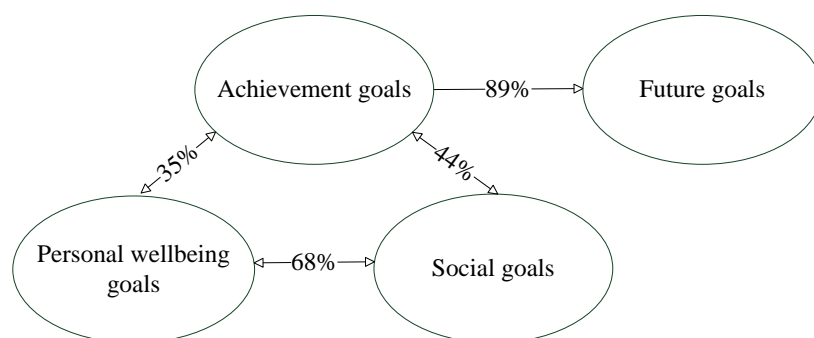
Within these four domains there were more specifically articulated relationships. The four most commonly reported relationships existed between future (extrinsic) and achievement (performance-grade) goals (N=26, 89%), personal wellbeing and social (relationship) goals (N=20, 68%), achievement (performance-grade) and social (approval) goals (N=13, 44%), achievement (performance-grade) and personal wellbeing goals (N=10, 35%). Less frequently, but still reported relationships existed between future (extrinsic) and personal wellbeing goals (N=4, 13%) and future (extrinsic) and social (approval) goals (N=5, 17%). The four most frequently articulated goal relationships are discussed below.

Future goals and achievement goals

For twenty-six (89%) students, achievement (performance-grade) goals were critical to achievement of future (extrinsic) goals. This relationship was illustrated through comments where students spoke of wanting to obtain good grades to get a good job and/or gain university entrance.

> *"Because having like good grades you have like a wider choice of what you want to be in the future and get into uni and get a good job." (AJ27)*

> *"So basically the next step after schooling is the workforce and that's what we need to do - to prepare ourselves, to achieve well and get good grades at school - that's the next step, to prepare ourselves for the workforce." (AS05)*

> *" I would like to achieve at school and get good grades so that I can get a good job and earn some money. 'Cause I'm trying to get a good job to get lots of money so I*

can hopefully become a professional soccer player, because that's my dream, I want to get to the World Cup or something and my Mum's saying that I have to get a good job before that so that I can get the money to travel and stuff … I have to get good grades to hopefully be accepted." (AJ40)

Achievement (performance-grade) goals were also related to future (intrinsic) goals for some students.

"The reason I want to get good grades is to eventually help make a difference in the world, so if I can do a little bit now then I feel good about it and it motivates me to still study hard to get that degree to make a difference." (AS23)

Furthermore, for some students the relationship between goals went beyond these two domains to include wellbeing goals.

"I think grades are really important because they'll definitely help in the future with what you want to become. And also when you do achieve good grades and you are a good student at school, you wouldn't be under a lot of stress." (AJ65)

"I want to achieve at school because I want have a good education to get a good job, and to earn money … achieving at school would make me feel stronger, to feel like better and to do things that other people might not be able to do." (BJ22)

The comments made by students show that there is a strong relationship between immediate achievement goals and their envisioned future. This relationship also appeared to be

directional, that is, successful pursuit of achievement goals would enable future goals to be realised. While it could be argued that future goals provide direction for achievement goals, this data shows achievement goals leading to future goals. This is therefore represented by the uni-directional arrow in Figure 1.

Achievement goals and social goals

Students (N=13, 44%) also associated achievement (performance-grade) goals with social (relationship) goals. Academic grades were important for social relationships and vice versa.

> *"If you have your friends to start off then you can work really well and get really good grades in year 12." (BJ16)*

> *"If you have a good group of friends that support you in whatever you do then you're more likely to achieve better and get much better grades when you have that support around you." (AS26)*

> *"I really want to get good grades so then I can stay in classes with my friends … good friends help you get good grades." (AJ27)*

These responses show a two-way relationship between achievement and social goals. On the one hand, supportive friendships were seen to help attainment of 'good grades' and also maintaining 'good grades' provided opportunities to work in a socially supportive environment. As there may be a reciprocal relationship between these goals, Figure 1 reflects this with a bi-directional arrow.

Achievement (performance-grade) goals were also related to social (approval) goals, via future goals.

> *"I want to get good grades so I can make my parents proud … because I want to be in the filming business, I want to get into that sort of thing, it's not just because of the money but it's just what I like and I want to make my parents proud and stuff so they can say "Aw, did you see that film you made, it was brilliant, like 5 stars and everything" – that would be nice … I just want to make my parents proud … every kid wants that." (AJ66)*

Comments such as this highlight the complexity of goals, as students' interrelated goals move across two and even three domains.

<u>Achievement goals and personal wellbeing goals</u>
Demonstrating academic achievement (performance-grade goals) was also important for students' personal wellbeing.

> *"I just want to get good grades and do well … just for the self-satisfaction, and just to feel complete in myself that I've done something good and worked hard for it." (AJ36)*

> *"School is more enjoyable when you are like achieving good results and also … sometimes I find myself that like, sometimes having fun and enjoying yourself helps with getting high marks, you know, it makes you feel good about yourself and you're a bit more relaxed and that helps you learn." (AJ32)*

> *"When you get good marks you feel less stressed, you know, you can relax and take the pressure off."* (AS26)

Both junior and senior students in the two schools noted the importance of personal wellbeing not only as a goal in its own right, but as interrelated with other goals. Personal wellbeing appeared to underpin other dimensions of schooling and students recognised that feeling positive about oneself enabled relationships to develop and achievement to come more easily. The relationship between these goals, as indicated in the data, is also bi-directional, as shown in Figure 1.

Personal wellbeing and social goals

Similarly, a bi-directional relationship was shown between personal wellbeing and social goals. Students expressed the view that when their wellbeing was strong, they were in a better position to develop and maintain relationships with others. Conversely, having difficulties with social relationships could have a negative impact on sense of wellbeing and even achievement.

> *"Let's say you've got no friends, it kind of brings down your self-esteem, you've got no motivation to do school because you're not very happy either … so you're not doing well and not wanting to achieve any more."* (AS40)

> *"I think that without friends in class and stuff like it would get really boring … work would be boring, but with friends you can talk with them … it helps you get less bored and learning is more fun which means you achieve more and feel happier at school."*

(BJ27)

Again, these comments illustrate the interaction between goals across more than one domain as achievement is referred to in the explanations.

In sum, the results presented in this section highlight that students' motivation in learning contexts is influenced by future goals, achievement goals, social goals and personal wellbeing goals. Between these four goal domains relationships exist across two and even three domains. These findings emphasise the complex associations between goals.

Discussion

This study raises a number of important issues regarding the multiple goals of adolescents and how these are related to influence motivation and achievement. Firstly, this study makes a case for considering the content of adolescents' goals, i.e. *what* goals students are trying to achieve at school (Wentzel, 2000), as well as achievement goals, i.e. *why* students want to achieve at school (Ames, 1992a), to provide a more complete picture of how goals operate for students. As argued by Boekaerts (2006), "achievement goals are but a fraction of the goals that students bring to the classroom and that these goals are not isolated driving forces in the classroom" (p. 34). Researchers are beginning to look beyond achievement goals to further understand students' motivation (see for example, Nieswandt & Shanahan, 2008; Urdan & Mestas, 2006), yet there is more important research to be done in this field. In terms of development of goal theory, the spontaneously articulated comments from students in this study highlight the relevance of future, social and wellbeing goals in their motivation at school. Research regarding future goals is emerging in the literature, but more

investigation of the relationships between wellbeing goals and other goals (see for example, Kaplan & Maehr, 1999) is needed.

In addition, the study shows that the well established achievement goals of mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance are not the most frequently described goals when adolescents are asked about why they want to achieve at school. The responses from students in this study show that performance-grade goals, (i.e. the desire to attain a particular standard of achievement that will lead to other things such as future success or social approval) are most commonly articulated. Interestingly, these performance goals without social comparison have been found in other Australian studies (for example, Dowson & McInerney, 2003; MacCallum, 1997) and this finding might suggest there are features of schools, national curriculum and reporting procedures, and/or cultural contexts that might generate, or fail to generate, performance goals with social comparison. While an investigation of the school contexts was beyond the bounds of this study, the findings do suggest that achievement goals as typically defined may not accurately reflect all adolescents' reasons for achievement at school.

Another interesting finding regarding achievement goals is that avoidance (mastery or performance) goals were not articulated by participants in this study. Given that the approach/avoidance distinction is critical to the achievement goal approach (Elliot, 1999), this finding indicates that some caution around the assumption that adolescents pursue avoidance goals, in particular contexts, may be warranted.

The study overwhelmingly shows support for a multiple goals' perspective to assist developing understandings about motivation in learning contexts (Boekaerts, et al., 2006; Wentzel, 1993, 2000; Wosnitza & Volet, 2009). Adolescents do not pursue goals in isolation

and have the capacity to pursue related goals such as achievement (performance-grade) and future (extrinsic) goals when they strive to get good grades so as to have a good job or successful career. Students may also pursue unrelated goals simultaneously when they for example, wish to get good grades (achievement, performance-grades) and have good relationships (social-relationships) at school.

Students' spontaneously articulated and self-generated goals also show that there are four main domains that are influential in students' goals – those being future goals, achievement goals, social goals and wellbeing goals. While much existing research focuses goals within one single domain, such as achievement goals or social goals, and some focuses on two domains, most notably achievement and social goals, there is little research investigating beyond two domains and considering the reciprocity of domains (Anderman, 1999a). This study shows that each of the four domains is important to adolescents' motivation at school and that goals in each domain have the potential to inform and support each other. For example, future goals and achievement goals can support each other and operate in a complementary fashion, as can achievement and social goals, social and well being goals and achievement and well being goals. Furthermore, while goals in two domains might take precedence for some students, for others multiple domains are evident. This finding suggests there may indeed be "multiple goal networks" in which patterns of related goals (for example, personal wellbeing, social relationships and performance grade goals) interact to influence behaviour and achievement. In addition, different goal hierarchies among domains (for example, achievement goals → future goals) as suggested by Wentzel (2000) may exist for particular types of students. Further research exploring such goal patterns or "networks" would be useful to advance goal theory.

In addition, the study contributes to the growing number of studies emphasising the importance of the role of future goals in students' motivation at school (Lee, et al., 2010; Malmberg & Norrgard, 1999; Nurmi, 1991; Nurmi, et al., 1995). In their spontaneous responses, all students mentioned the importance of future goals, either extrinsic (to have a good job, gain university entrance) and/or intrinsic (to make a contribution to society, to be happy and successful) so it seems important that future research into students' goals pay more heed to future goals. Furthermore, this study provides evidence that a relationship exists between future goals and achievement goals. The findings here suggest that goal theory research may benefit from further investigation of the role of future goals, their influence on other goals, and students' achievement and motivation at school.

Limitations of the study

Limitations of this study include small sample size and exclusive use of focus group interviews for gathering data. The particular social dynamics of each focus group may have meant that students did not openly discuss issues they were worried about or instead used passive voice, thus generalising issues, to indicate some of the challenges in pursuing particular goals at school. Even so, the study does raise the methodological challenges of investigating multiple goals for adolescents. The complexities of goal relationships illustrated in this study would benefit from further exploration through development of survey measures that recognise students' goals in all four domains and use a larger sample size to further explore relationships between not only domains but particular goals. Future studies concerning adolescents multiple goals should use mixed methods so as to benefit from larger scale quantitative analysis, yet still acknowledge and account for the voices and goals of participants in different contexts.

Conclusions

The aims of this study were to investigate the range of goals pursued by junior and senior secondary school students and to explore possible relationships between goals. The findings confirm that adolescents pursue multiple goals, including achievement goals, social goals, personal wellbeing goals and future goals. Furthermore, associations exist between these goal domains. Future research may build on these findings, extending to mixed method studies and further examination of goal relationships at both the domain level and specific goal level.

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