Learning Goals, Motivation & Assessment

Purpose:
To raise awareness of the strong links between learning goals, motivation and how we assess students.

Some interesting research ... that could challenge our practices

What you need:
- 1 copy of page 1 (this page) for each pair of teachers
- 1 copy of pages 2 & 3 (back-to-back) per pair
- 1 copy of page 4 for each individual teacher.

Step 1:
- READ the "Key Research" (pages 2 & 3).

Step 2:
- USE the "My Reflections" page to quietly SELF-ASSESS and REFLECT on the Key Research. Please write your thoughts down, as individuals.

Step 3:
- DISCUSS in small groups of 3-6:
  In what ways do "learning goals" differ from "performance goals" as used in this research?
  How can we adapt current practices to take account of these research findings?
- SHARE some suggestions with the whole group.
Key Research
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Learning Goals and Self-Esteem:

“The less individuals believe in themselves, the more they need explicit, proximal, and frequent feedback of progress that provides repeated affirmation of their growing capabilities.”
(Albert Bandura 1997, p. 217)

Types of Goals and their Consequences

Carol Dweck’s work shows that there are two types of achievement goals that students can have: ‘learning goals’ (striving to “increase competence”, to “understand something new”) or ‘performance goals’ (“strive to document, or gain favourable judgements, of their competence.”
(Harry Torrance and John Pryor 1998, p. 85)

“In summary [Dweck] has found that children with learning goals
• choose challenging tasks regardless of whether they think they have high or low ability relative to other children;
• optimize their chances of success;
• tend to have an ‘incremental theory of intelligence’
• go more directly to generating possible strategies for mastering the task;
• attribute difficulty to unstable factors e.g. insufficient effort, even if they perceive themselves as having low ability;
• persist;
• and remain relatively unaffected by failure in terms of self-esteem …

She has further suggested that learning goals are prevalent in pre-school children, are fostered by collaborative work, and encourage personal standards of success(Dweck 1989, p. 111).

On the other hand, pupils with performance goals:
• avoid challenge when they have doubts about their ability compared with others;
• tend to self-handicapping so they have an excuse for failure;
• tend to see ability as a stable entity;
• concentrate much of their task-analysis on gauging the difficulty of the task and calculating their chances of gaining favourable judgements;
• attribute difficulty to low ability;
• give up in the face of difficulty;
• and become upset when they are faced with difficulty or failure.”

“Dweck also found that performance goals are developed in the early school years and become prevalent by the middle years of schooling; that they are fostered by competition and encourage normative standards of success, i.e. comparison with peers. This tendency to adopt performance goals is not in the long term interest of the learner” (Torrance and Pryor 1998, p. 86).
Dweck argues that it is better to tell students specific causes for their lack of success, and to focus on learning goals and challenging students. She says that “high aspirations and achievement are fostered by a tendency to:

a) think strategy (i.e. to engage in task analysis that focuses on strategy formulation, particularly on challenging tasks, under evaluative pressure and when problems arise);
b) think progress (i.e. adopt challenging standards that are based on personal progress vs. inflated norms); and
c) focus on past and future success, and on effort and strategy as causes of and cures for failure” (Dweck 1989, p. 110).

Paul Weeden and colleagues also report a study where 9 and 10 year-old students who focussed on learning goals had greater learning gains than their peers who were focused on performance goals (Weeden et al. 2002, p. 27).

This contrasts with old (Western) notions of “ability” as a fixed construct, whereas a focus on effort and learning improvement (an Eastern view of ability) can see all students build self-esteem and learn more than it was previously thought possible.

**Rewards and Motivation**

“Many of the practices routinely adopted by teachers as ‘positive reinforcement’ to enhance motivation, may actually result in children avoiding intellectual tasks, approaching them with limited confidence, and not persisting in the face of difficulties” (Torrance and Pryor 1998, p. 84).

According to Harry Torrance and John Pryor it is better to foster learning goals and this means less use of extrinsic rewards (stickers, ticks, etc), and a clearer focus on intrinsic rewards (personal satisfaction). Further, they show that “the provision of extrinsic rewards for task involvement (i.e. trying hard) rather than for achievement, actually harms intrinsic motivation” (Torrance and Pryor 1998, p. 101). Students who focus on learning goals are “not so vulnerable to the verdict” of their teachers. Their sense of self as a good learner is stronger.

**Personal Learning domain**

The Personal Learning domain in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards aims to provide “all learners with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to:

• develop an understanding of their strengths and potential
• seek and respond appropriately to feedback from their teachers, peers and other members of the community
• develop skills of goal setting and time and resource management
• increasingly manage their own learning and growth by monitoring their learning, and setting and reflecting on their learning goals
• learn to understand and to manage their own emotions …” (VCAA revised version Dec. 2005)

My Reflections
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QUIET WRITING TIME:
Complete the following questions, in writing, and individually:

1. What surprised you?

2. What new ideas did you find out about?

3. How do you feel about the ideas here?

4. What do you find confusing or uncomfortable about this research?

5. What do you want to follow-up, e.g. by trying out something with students?