THEORY GUIDE

Concept: Performance vs Mastery Goals

Brief overview of concept:

Self-regulated learning is often aligned to three key domains: The **Cognitive** domain (how we think, learn, and process information); the **Metacognitive** domain (how we assure the efficacy of cognition, and verify that it is effective), and the **Motivational/Affective** domain (the motivations we have for studying/learning and what drivers influence the learning). Boerkhart's (1999) model ascribes a high importance to this latter domain, placing it as the outer domain in a model of SRL which features the domains as concentric rings. The Motivational domain influences the other two domain considerably. In particular, the motivations for a learner impact on their goals for learning, and therefore the degree of depth they undertake (Pintrich, 2000).

In her chapter on fostering a mastery goal orientation in the classroom, Svinicki (2009) asks:

> *"Raise your hand if you have ever had a student ask you one of these questions: "Will that be on the test?;" "Is there anything I can do for extra credit? I have to have an A in this class!;" or "Could you just tell me what you want?" Have you ever wished that all your students would ask this question instead: "Could you help me understand this better?" "*

This question encapsulates the difference between a performance goal orientation and a mastery goal orientation, when describing a learner's motivations for learning. A learner with a **performance** goal orientation is focused primarily on the task, and performing a specific activity or achievement. For example, scoring well on a test, or remember some information, or performing an action effectively. The end goal of the learning is meeting an **extrinsic standard** – such as a pass mark, or assessment criteria, set by another person (e.g. a teacher). A learner with a **mastery** goal orientation focuses on a deeper and more holistic understanding of what it is they are doing. This does not exclude the influence of extrinsic motivators, but there is also a strong **intrinsic** motivation to gain a deeper understanding of the material, to self-improve, and enhance their overall knowledge or skills base in this area (Cerasoli & Ford, 2014). A mastery goal orientation often focuses around intrinsic goals of self-improvement, and self-satisfaction.

The extent to which a student may exhibit mastery goal orientations may change as they progress through their course, either positively or negatively (Luo *et al.*, 2023) based on the approaches the student adopts towards their study, their interest in their work, and the educational environment around them.

Links with other concepts:

Goal orientation is an important aspect of **control cognitions**. Control conditions include aspect such as academic self-efficacy (belief in ability to do well), grade goal (what standard a learner is aiming for), self-motivation (goal orientation, mastery & performance goals), persistence (the extent to which a learner is able to persist in the face of frustration or failure), and effort regulation (Panadero, 2017; Richardson et al., 2012; Schneider & Preckel, 2017). Mastery and Performance goals fall very firmly under the self-motivation elements of control cognition.

Mastery goal orientations also link very strongly with a 'deep approach' to learning (Entwhistle and McCune, 2004; McCune and Entwistle, 2011), study approaches which involve gaining a detailed and holistic understanding of a subject, rather than superficial 'surface' approaches, which are tailored to address the immediate needs of a specific assessment or activity. The challenge with supporting a mastery goal approach is to define '**what constitutes a 'deep' approach in the discipline?**', and how do we encourage students to adopt that approach to their learning in the disciplinary context?

Alignment with EAT:

With its roots firmly embedded around student agency and encouraging students to manage their own learning, the EAT Framework aligns strongly with providing an environment where mastery goals are encouraged above performance goals. Promoting student agency encourages students to develop intrinsic motivations for success, rather than responding to extrinsic requirements laid down by the teacher/educator.

Assessment Literacy subdimensions of EAT emphasise these intrinsic motivations, by enhancing a student's active understanding of the role of assessment in their own learning. Sub-dimension AL2, 'How assessments fit together' is an example of this, where the student should be able to see the forward path of their learning, beyond an individual assessment activity. Identifying how assessments align with the discipline (AL4), and defining the roles and responsibilities of lecturer and student (AL3) also emphasise the importance of agency and internalised motivations.

Where mastery goals are exhibited strongly is in the 'Assessment Feedback' dimension. Here the focus is on emphasising how students gain develop self-critical skills through either their engagement with feedback (AF1), their early active use of feedback (AF2), or crafting feedback for themselves and their peers (AF4 and AF3, respectively).

Effective assessment design is the key to developing a Mastery approach with students. Adoption of meaningful/authentic assessments (AD2) and assessments that are inclusive for all learners (AD3) promote the development of learners' personal investment in their assessments, and empowers them to draw connections between the assessment, their learning, and their future career goals. Designing assessments that provide students with personal choice, real-world activities, and which are tangibly relevant to their own lives, encourages the personal investment needed to enhance intrinsic motivations and mastery goals.

References

Boekaerts, M. (1999). Self-regulated learning: where we are today. International Journal of Educational Research, 31(6), 445-457. doi:10.1016/s0883-0355(99)00014-2

Cerasoli, C. P. & Ford, M. T. (2014) Intrinsic Motivation, Performance, and the Mediating Role of Mastery Goal Orientation: A Test of Self-Determination Theory, *The Journal of Psychology*, 148:3, 267-286, DOI: 10.1080/00223980.2013.783778

Entwhistle, N., & McCune, V. (2004). The conceptual basis of study strategy inventories. Educational Psychology Review, 16(4), 325-346.

Luo, M., Feng, Y., Yao, X., and Liu, J (2023) Changes in mastery goal orientation in college students: Trajectories and predictors. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 106, 102326. DOI: 10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102326..

McCune, V., & Entwistle, N. (2011). Cultivating the disposition to understand in 21st century university education. *Learning and Individual Differences, 21*(3), 303–310.

Panadero, E., Jonsson, A., & Botella, J. (2017). Effects of self-assessment on self-regulated learning and self-efficacy: four meta-analyses. *Educational Research Review*, 22, 74-98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.08.004

Pintrich, P. R. (2000). Multiple goals, multiple pathways: The role of goal orientation in learning and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(3), 544–555. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.92.3.544

Richardson M, Abraham C., & Bond R. (2012). Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychol Bull,* 138(2), 353-87. doi: 10.1037/a0026838. PMID: 22352812.

Schneider, M., & Preckel, F. (2017). Variables associated with achievement in higher education: A systematic review of meta-analyses. *Psychol Bull,* 143(6), 565-600. doi: 10.1037/bul0000098

Svinicki, M.D. (2009) Fostering a Mastery Goal Orientation in the Classroom. In S. A. Meyers & J. R. Stowell (Eds.), *Essays from e-xcellence in teaching* (Vol. 9, pp. 11-16). Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology Web site: http://teachpsych.org/ebooks/eit2009/index.php

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission (Grant Number: 2020-1-UK01-KA203-079045). This Web site reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.