

Goal Setting as Teacher Development Practice

Heather Camp

Minnesota State University, Mankato

This article explores goal setting as a teacher development practice in higher education. It reports on a study of college teacher goal setting informed by goal setting theory. Analysis of study participants' goal setting practices and their experiences with goal pursuit offers a framework for thinking about the kinds of goals teachers might set in university settings. This analysis also sheds light on potential factors that help and hinder goal achievement, especially goal commitment and self-efficacy. The article concludes with recommendations related to these areas. The overall aim of this article is to assist teachers and teaching supervisors who may be interested in using goal setting to foster growth in teaching.

Goal setting is a widely embraced practice in corporate settings and a highly regarded subject in literature on the workplace. However, its presence is weaker in higher education scholarship on teaching. Recent research on the primary and secondary levels of education gives reason to pay greater attention to teachers' goals. Findings indicate that teachers' goals may impact their professional growth and instructional effectiveness. A teacher's "goal orientation" appears to impact his/her likelihood of seeking help in the face of teaching challenges (Butler, 2007), effort at creating classroom environments that emphasize growth over competition (Shim, Cho, & Cassady, 2013), commitment to serving as a socio-emotional support for students (Butler, 2012), and resistance to teacher burnout (Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblov, & Schiefele, 2011).

The potential impact of teachers' goals on student experience makes teacher goal setting an important research area. Researchers interested in studying teacher goal setting in higher education might take cues from the previously cited studies and focus on goal orientation; alternatively, they might look at other areas related to goal setting, including characteristics of effective goal setting programs and factors that aid and impede teachers' goal progress. Such research might shape campus-wide and discipline-specific teacher preparation practices, influence programs offered by Centers for Teaching and Learning, and help individual faculty pursue teaching growth amidst other professional responsibilities.

This article explores the value of goal setting as a teacher development practice. It reports on a study in which twelve teaching assistants in an English department were acquainted with basic tenets of goal setting theory, set teaching goals, and reflected on their goal progress at midterm and the end of a semester. Analysis of teachers' goal-setting practices and their experiences with goal pursuit provides a framework for thinking about the kinds of goals teachers might set. This analysis also sheds light on potential factors that help and hinder goal achievement, especially group dysfunction and competing demands on time.

Conclusions drawn from this study suggest that for some teachers, goal progress may be stalled by a lack of goal commitment and low self-efficacy. Therefore, this piece concludes with recommendations related to these areas. The overall aim of this article is to assist teachers and teaching supervisors who may be interested in using goal setting to foster growth in teaching.

Literature Review

The term "goal" takes on different meanings in different contexts; thus, some definitional work is in order. In an expansive sense, goals can refer to "the object or aim of [any] action" (Locke & Latham 2013a, p. 4). Under this broad definition, goal pursuit encompasses the grandiose and the mundane, the deliberate and the subconscious. Goals include biological and social needs that are met through routine decision making, as well as more abstract values and ambitions that drive an individual's "personal projects" (Little, 2014). Often, both types of goals are largely intuitive, woven into a person's everyday patterns of thinking and behavior.

In common parlance, "goals" generally refer to more concrete and mindful ends. They are performance outcomes or learning targets that individuals use for self-evaluation, "a criterion against which to assess, monitor, and guide cognition" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 457). They are also aspirational, orienting the individual toward a "desirable future state of affairs" (Shah & Kruglanski, 2000, p. 85). Through New Year's resolutions, for instance, individuals identify positive changes they want to make for the coming year, often emphasizing the improvement of health habits. In business environments, SMART goals—a popular acronym used to identify the characteristics of effective goals—are often set by individuals or teams as a means to boosting productivity and achievement.

This familiar and concrete definition of "goal" appears in higher education research in studies that use goal setting to promote student learning and achievement (Emery et al., 2014; Huang, 2015; Kato,

2009; Wang & Ertmer, 2003). In Glynda Hull's (1981) study of goal setting in a college writing course, for instance, first-year students doubled their journal writing production when they were working toward lines-per-day and entries-per-week goals and were tracking their progress. Latham and Brown's (2006) study of goal setting in an MBA program indicated that students' goal setting may influence their end-of-semester GPA and satisfaction with their degree program. And George, Reis, Dobson, and Nothnagle's (2013) study of the use of a faculty mentor to facilitate goal setting for second-year medical school residents underscored the value of providing students with "protected time for self-directed learning."

While such examples illustrate how goals and goal setting have been used in higher education research to support student learning, research that examines the use of goal setting for *teachers* is noticeably absent. Thus, we lack information about the benefits and drawbacks of goal setting for this group. This research aims to help fill this gap. The questions guiding the study were as follows:

Can key findings from goal-setting research be used to facilitate teacher improvement? What challenges might deter teaching supervisors from using this theoretical framework for teacher development? What opportunities does this theory open up?

Theoretical Framework

Industrial-organizational (I/O) psychology has a strong research tradition around goal setting that can be useful to the college teacher. In fact, goal setting has been characterized as "one of the most *extensively studied topics* [emphasis added] in the fields of industrial-organizational psychology, organizational psychology, and management" (Locke, 2001, p. 44).

The accumulated findings from I/O research on goal setting have been compacted into a set of patterns and assumptions now referred to as *goal setting theory*. Described as an "open" theory in that it evolves with new research, a key version of goal setting theory was formulated in 1990 based on 400 studies (Locke & Latham, 1990). Since then, more than 600 studies have been completed (Locke & Latham, 2013b, p. xi), leading to new findings and additional areas of inquiry.

Goal setting theory has been acclaimed as "among the most valid and practical theories of employee motivation" (Locke & Latham, 2002, p. 714). A number of principles comprise its foundation, the most immutable of these being that setting *specific, difficult* goals produces stronger outcomes than setting easy or medium goals or simply trying to "do your best." This finding was central to the 1990 formulation of goal setting theory. Locke and Latham noted a linear relationship between goal difficulty and performance,

citing one study in which participants setting the highest goals outperformed those with the easiest goals by 250% (2013a). Numerous literature reviews and a series of meta-analyses substantiated the abstract vs. specific goals conclusion as well (2013a).

Locke and Latham attribute the effectiveness of goals to four mechanisms. Goals have a *directive* effect: they direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities" (2002, p. 706). They have an *energizing* and a *persistence* effect: "effort is mobilized and expended in proportion to the difficulty level of the goal," and we work longer at the task than we otherwise would (2013a, p. 6). Finally, they promote *strategy use and development*, causing us to search our problem-solving repertoire for skills relevant to the task or, when lacking, to generate alternatives.

Beyond defining the nature of the goals that should be set, goal setting theory sheds light on the effect of feedback, or knowledge of results, on performance outcomes. Findings indicate that an individual's awareness of his/her progress on a given task is essential for goal setting to be effective, and, just as important, absent goal setting, knowledge of results is a weak facilitator of improvement. Tellingly, the latter finding is buttressed by workplace studies in which employees receive a performance review but aren't instructed to set goals based on their appraisal (Latham, Mitchell, & Dossett, 1978; Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979), a scenario reminiscent of peer or supervisor feedback on teaching or personal reviews of one's student evaluations.

One intriguing tenet of goal setting theory concerns the orientation of the goal, whether directed toward *learning* or toward *outcomes*. In situations that are complex for an individual, the literature indicates that a person is better served by setting a specific, difficult *learning goal*, emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge and skills, rather than a goal focused on results. The former will help her learn *how to* tackle the problem, equipping her with the skills to succeed, while the latter will deplete cognitive resources that are needed for task learning and strategy development. Outcome goals set in novel, complex circumstances can also reduce an individual's self-efficacy—belief in one's ability to succeed on a task—in turn, impacting performance (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Latham & Brown, 2006; Winters & Latham, 1996).

Method

These findings from goal setting theory informed a semester-long, IRB-approved study of college teacher goal-setting activities. Twelve graduate teaching assistants (0.5-2 years college teaching

experience) volunteered for the study. These teachers were the instructors of record for English composition courses at Minnesota State University, Mankato, a Masters-granting institution in the US with a student population of 15,000. Each teacher was enrolled in one of the English Department's graduate degree or certificate programs: five Creative Writing, three Teaching English as a Second Language, two Literature and English Studies, and two Technical Communication. Each of the teachers had taken a two-week summer teaching workshop prior to teaching and, during his/her first semester, enrolled in a weekly teaching course and a peer mentor group. The teachers also took part in the English department's ongoing teacher development activities, including classroom observations and conferences over their teaching.

At the beginning of the semester, teachers who had volunteered for the study attended a workshop that introduced them to the central tenets of goal setting theory and that assisted with goal setting. Using self-reflection, student evaluations, and peer/supervisor feedback as a guide, teachers identified general areas in which they wanted to grow. In the workshop they were encouraged to select areas that would make them feel more effective in the classroom and satisfied with their teaching. They left the workshop assigned to a peer group intended to support their goal progress and with the following goal-setting instructions:

- Pick one area in your teaching that you would like to focus on this semester.
- With your group's help, develop one or more difficult, specific goals for yourself related to this area. These may be outcome or learning goals.
- Determine how, when, and from whom you will receive feedback on your goal setting. Possible individuals include group members, the Composition Director, other TAs, English faculty, students, and/or yourself.
- Submit an action plan by the end of the week.

Following the workshop, teachers composed (and in some cases revised) their "action plans," identifying the teaching goal(s) they planned to pursue that semester and the steps they planned to take. At midterm and the end of the semester, teachers completed a questionnaire about their progress within, and feelings about, the goal-setting program.

The data for this study consisted of notes from a full-group discussion held during the goal-setting workshop, teachers' written goal plans, and mid- and end-of-term goal-setting questionnaires. These documents were examined via a "grounded" coding technique in which categories were developed

inductively, and patterns in teachers' goal areas, goal types, progress facilitators, and progress impediments were recorded. A goal setting theory framework was also applied to analyze teachers' written goal plans. Finally, aggregate Likert responses from the midterm survey were used to identify trends in teachers' views and experiences.

Results

Generating Goals

In the goal-setting workshop, four goal areas surfaced more frequently than others in teachers' brainstorming. Teachers were interested in setting goals related to:

- Organization: being more prepared for class
- Use of class time: eliminating "busy work," creating worthwhile class activities
- Engagement: increasing student interest and investment in the material/course
- Class discussion: facilitating more productive, active conversations

Some goal areas were named less often but still showed up more than once--specifically, tailoring teacher ethos (e.g., being stricter or more personable); strengthening the selection, organization, and delivery of content; and speeding turnaround time on grading.

Conceivably, teachers' gravitation toward the Big Four may be tied to their newness to teaching. For new teachers, pragmatic concerns pervade; speaking of new Composition teachers, for instance, Jessica Restaino notes, "[F]rom the vantage point of the new writing teacher, the challenge of what to do each day looms" (2012, p. 31). *Organization* and *use of class time* goals may reflect this beginning teacher preoccupation. The popularity of *engagement* and *class discussion* goals suggests that for many teachers, immediate concerns had been sufficiently handled to attend to teaching methods. Jody Nyquist and Jo Sprague (1998) categorize such thinking as second stage, or "colleague-in-training" concerns in the arc of TA development.

In the week that followed the goal-setting workshop, teachers had to narrow their focus and select one or more goals to pursue. All twelve teachers selected goals and generated a written plan that described how they would accomplish them. Across plans, three categories emerged that differentiated the goals by their primary emphasis:

- Content goals emphasized mastering, or developing strategies to master, a body of content in order to be better prepared to teach it.

- Course management goals emphasized learning or instituting practices that would improve the administration of a course.
- Teaching strategy goals emphasized learning or instituting teaching practices in order to improve the quality of learning.

In this study, teaching strategy goals were most popular (59%), followed by course management goals (36%), with only one content goal being set (5%). Here again, teachers' stage of teaching development may have had an effect on goal distribution. It's plausible that more experience would have increased teachers' contact with the teaching profession and with disciplinary literature; that contact, in turn, may have alerted teachers to content areas in which they wanted to grow. Furthermore, it's likely that cuing from the goal workshop influenced teachers' goal selection. Teachers were directed to use teaching evaluations, peer and supervisor feedback, and reflection on their teaching to inform their goal setting. These cues may have directed attention to teaching strategy and course management over content goals.

Table 1 categorizes goals by their *focus*. It lists the more specific outcome that individuals intended to achieve with their goal(s) and identifies the number of goals that had each focus. For this group of teachers, improving class discussion was a top priority. In general, teaching strategy goals varied (with the exception of class discussion) while course management goals tended to group in similar focus areas.

As far as goal *orientation*, goals directed toward achieving results (outcome) were more popular than those that emphasized gaining knowledge (learning). Ten of the twelve teachers (83%) set outcome goals, with four of these teachers also setting learning goals. Half of the total number of teachers set learning goals. The mean number of goals set by teachers was two.

Applying Goal-Setting Tenets

In the goal-setting workshop, teachers were instructed to set *specific, difficult* goals and to delineate a *mechanism for receiving feedback* on their goal progress. Each factor is considered below.

Specificity. Generally, teachers' written plans identified one to two goal areas that the teachers wanted to work on and laid out steps for pursuing these goals. Listing implementation steps was essential to moving teachers from abstract, high-level goals to concrete, low-level actions.

Locke et al. define specificity as "the degree of quantitative precision with which the aim is specified" (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981, p. 126). Across plans, the specificity of teachers' implementation steps

varied widely. Quantitative precision was evidenced in implementation steps like the following:

Kyra's Learning Goal:

Learn techniques for teaching to a wide range of skill levels in one classroom. Identify at least 3 new strategies through (a) conversations with at least 3 experienced teachers and (b) gathering at least 3 pieces of scholarly research on the subject. I will test at least 2 of my identified strategies in the classroom this semester and report back to my feedback group on my experiences.

Dana's Learning Goal:

Research 10-15 effective practices for facilitating class discussion.

Adam's Outcome Goal:

I will have my lessons prepared at least twenty-four hours in advance.

Ellie's Outcome Goal:

Use Jing to create a tutorial for my class next semester.

On the other end of the spectrum were plans that identified goals but adopted vague steps for implementation. Sometimes this vagueness seemed to be due to the nature of the goal itself; other times, it seemed to be more a consequence of the teacher's lack of understanding of or effort to design a precise goal.

Excerpts from Megan's plan illustrate the challenges that teachers had setting specific goals. In her plan, Megan identified two goals she intended to pursue: improving her discussion leading skills (outcome goal) and cultivating a more authoritative teacher ethos (learning goal). In discussing the first goal, she indicates that during the previous semester, she had "been so overloaded with work" that she succumbed to "correcting" and "telling" over "guiding." Her first goal was intended to curb that habit. She writes the following:

My goals for my teaching this semester are to listen more to what my students think while focusing my energies on open-ended questions to begin to develop their interpretative viewpoints and analytic skills. In addition to asking more [open-ended] questions, I intend to allow the silence to hang longer while I wait for them to begin to answer the questions. To give myself more opportunities to do so, I intend to spend more time scaffolding the types of analysis and

Table 1
Focus of Goals

Goal Type	Goal Focus	Number of Goals with this Focus
Content	Learning MLA Guidelines	1
Course Management	Using class time effectively	3
	Improving organization	2
	Constructing an effective teacher ethos	2
	Returning student work in a timely manner	1
Teaching Strategies	Improving class discussion	5
	Increasing student engagement	2
	Fostering student independence	1
	Improving delivery of content	1
	Leading effective peer reviews	1
	Teaching different levels of learners	1
	Teaching using active learning	1
	Teaching with technology	1

activities as a whole group before moving to small groups or individual responses.

In her quest to develop a “guiding” teaching style, then, Megan intended to:

- 1) Listen more
- 2) Invest more energy into open-ended questions tied to interpretation and analysis
- 3) Allow silence to hang longer
- 4) Spend more time scaffolding

Each of these sub-goals could be stated in such a way to make it quantifiable. For instance, Megan could indicate how many seconds she would remain silent while waiting for a student response. She could delineate how many open-ended questions she would pose per week. Doing so would require her to define meaningful, cross-situational standards—no easy task—and to create and implement sensitive feedback mechanisms. In lieu of this complexity, she names general practices that support her goal.

Difficulty. Locke recommends that goal level should be “*very hard—even outrageous*” [emphasis in original] to produce optimal results (2001, p. 50). Harder goals induce goal setters to expend greater effort; thus, even if individuals don’t achieve their goals, their achievements outweigh those of their easy-goal or no-goal peers. At the same time, individuals must perceive their goals as attainable; impossible goals backfire by undermining confidence and motivation (Kerr & LePelley, 2013). In the present study, teachers determined for themselves what constituted a difficult goal. Two sources of difficulty were mentioned in

teachers’ implementation plans: personal weakness and lack of time.

A few teachers signaled that their source of goal difficulty came from personal characteristics they were attempting to address. Brandi, for example, set a number of sub-goals related to organizing and simplifying her teaching routines and materials. Commenting on their difficulty level, she writes, “I am and always have been one to worry, overthink, overplan, and overextend myself, leading to anxiety, indecision, and poor organization. . . [My goals may] at first glance seem to be deceptively simple goals. However, this is subjective to the individual, and for me, the very difficulty lies in simplicity.” Likewise, one of Dillon’s implementation steps related to strengthening the teacher-student relationship, including being more outgoing and friendly. He cites his tendency to “feel awkward in large groups” and the fact that he “[is] not the most personable teacher out there” as sources of goal difficulty.

Too much to do, too little time also was cited as a source of difficulty in implementation plans. “The biggest challenge for me in graduate school is time management,” writes Adam, “These goals may not sound difficult by themselves, but I am already feeling pretty challenged to balance all of my responsibilities as a student, a writer, and a composition instructor.”

A third source of difficulty that was evident in teachers’ plans was the elaborateness of their plans and/or the consistency that would be needed to achieve their goals. Elaborate plans might include six or more steps, each requiring a significant investment of time and energy; consistency-intensive plans required frequent inputs: daily study, for

instance, or manually tracking students' participation during each class period.

Feedback. The mechanisms for feedback that teachers adopted depended on the nature of their goals and the specificity of their plans. Self-monitoring through written records, peer teaching observations, and goal-setting group contact/observations were all listed as sources of feedback on goal progress.

Teacher Self-Assessment

At midterm and the end of the semester, teachers completed a questionnaire on their progress on, and attitude toward, their goals. The questionnaire had two sections: a series of short answer questions and a Likert scale. The short answer questions asked teachers to describe their goal activities, identify factors that aided or impeded their goal progress, assess their satisfaction with their headway, and share their thoughts about the strengths and limitations of using goal setting theory in teacher development, based on their experiences (see Appendix).

Nine of the twelve teachers completed a questionnaire at midterm. Six of the twelve teachers completed a questionnaire at the end of the semester, including two teachers who did not complete midterm surveys. Except in an instance in which a teacher completely revamped her goals at midterm, Likert survey responses at the end of the semester strongly resembled those at midterm. Figure 1 displays the teachers' responses to the Likert scale at midterm, the point at which there was a higher return rate.

In their Likert responses, teachers were positive about the goal-setting process: all nine teachers felt that their teaching had improved by setting goals, and eight of the nine teachers considered the goal-setting process to be a worthy time investment. Interestingly, this was the case for teachers who were making progress on their goals *and* for those who were not. Goal progress, and satisfaction with that progress, was uneven, with the group split between those who appeared to be advancing toward their goals and those who were stalled. Thus, almost half the teachers were displeased with their lack of progress on their goals *yet* were convinced that goal setting was strengthening their teaching.

Teachers' short answer question responses clarified this puzzling tension. Teachers whose progress had been impeded nonetheless appreciated the reflective and directive value of goal setting. Teachers stated the following:

- "Putting my goals down on paper helped clarify my thoughts."
- "It helped give me an overall sense of direction."

- "Setting goals that are specific forced me to really think about my teaching practices."
- "It did raise my consciousness of what I am doing in the classroom somewhat."
- "Simply setting the goals was a beneficial process because it helped me think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher and has helped bring focus to my teaching."
- "This experience has helped me become a better teacher because I realize what makes me comfortable and what makes me feel underprepared."

Teachers' comments suggest that they valued the *kind of thinking* facilitated by goal setting and saw it as a mechanism for growth. Goal setting instigated purpose-driven reflection, entailing an overarching assessment of one's teaching paired with a careful tracing of root causes and exploration of mechanisms for action or change. Teachers appear to have valued this process for its ability to provide self-understanding and a sense of focus, direction, and control. For them, self-awareness and vision were important components of growth, whether or not immediate action was taken.

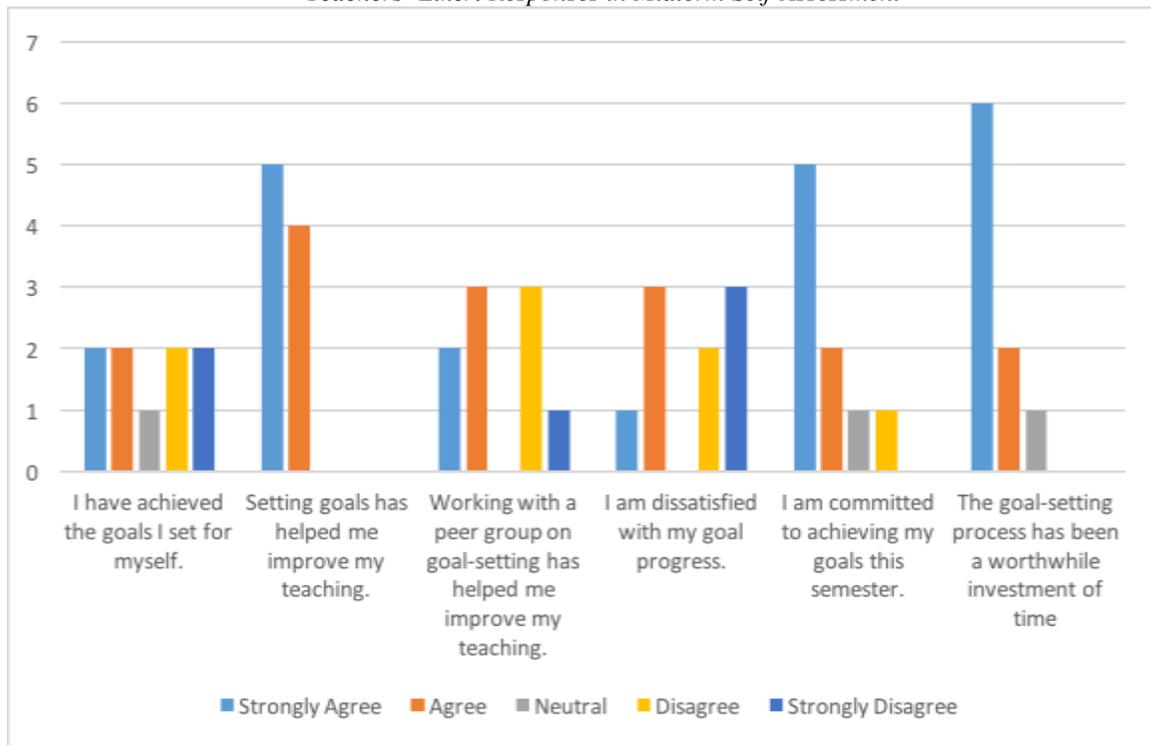
Factors that supported teachers' goal progress varied. Teachers attributed their success to their intrinsic motivation to teach well, the immediate "feel-good" payoff associated with achieving certain goals, accountability to and assistance from others, their increased comfort in the classroom, and the level of specificity of their goals.

In contrast to this variety, two clear trends emerged in the factors that impeded—or failed to support—teachers' goal progress. These factors were competing commitments for time and dysfunctional peer groups. Additional factors mentioned were ambiguity surrounding how to delineate/measure goal achievement and personal life stress.

Teachers cited lack of time as a hurdle to goal accomplishment. They mentioned their graduate course load, teaching responsibilities, thesis demands, and professional writing and reading as priorities that took precedent over their goals. "Most weeks, it seems virtually impossible for me to complete all of that work *and* add these other goals to the mix," observes Adam. He characterizes his teaching goals as "only supplementary to my overall experience," a lesser priority in comparison to the academic and work-related "necessities."

Challenges posed by peer groups included disparate goals (which thwarted the opportunity for "joint brainstorming") and lack of organization and commitment, facilitated by vague planning (e.g., "we'll check in later,"), confusion over group function, and predominance of social relationships.

Figure 1
Teachers' Likert Responses in Midterm Self-Assessment



Discussion

What insight does this study provide into the use of goal setting as a teacher development practice? First, this study suggests categories of goals that might be valued by teachers, especially those who are newest to the profession. Specifically, in this study, teaching strategy, course management, and content goals guided teachers' activities. Within these categories, both process and outcome goals were pursued. This general framework might be usefully appropriated by teachers to generate goals for their teaching.

Conceivably, the type of goals set by teachers in this study was influenced by their years of experience and by the instructions they were given in the goal setting workshop. A different set of instructions or a different population of teachers might alter the ratio of goals in each category or the categories themselves. For example, guidelines for teacher goal setting might have been broadened to make room for "professional goals," goals related to nurturing one's teaching identity within a community of teachers. Such goals might have helped teachers see growth in teaching as a process that extends beyond the walls of the classroom, nurtured through collegial relationships and participation in the give-and-take of a discipline. Nevertheless, the three

categories described here may serve as a generative starting point for teachers interested in defining and pursuing growth in teaching.

Second, this study sheds light on the opportunities and challenges of applying goal setting to college teaching. Findings indicate that teachers viewed goal setting as a positive investment of time and felt it improved their teaching. By semester's end, half of the teachers reported that they had achieved their goals and appeared to be satisfied with their goal progress. Even those who did not make significant progress indicated that goal setting had been valuable to them through its directive effect, facilitating purpose-driven reflection and problem solving. At the same time, teachers encountered several impediments that stymied goal achievement. Half of the teachers relayed that they did not achieve their goals, with the central factors impeding goal process being dysfunctional peer groups and competing time commitments.

With respect to peer groups, teachers' concerns varied, and thus no single, clear solution would seem to suffice. It may be that group functioning could be improved through establishing a clear schedule and agenda from the outset; alternatively, embedding goal setting within well-established peer cohorts on campus may help. For example, the English department's well-

established and highly functional TA peer mentoring program would be a promising site for piloting goal-setting activities. Embedding goal setting within one of the faculty programs offered through the university's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is another possibility. Still another approach might be to explore feedback and accountability measures that do not rely on peer groups. More experimentation is necessary to determine how peer groups might support teacher goal setting.

"[A]s a graduate student, time and energy are scarce resources, and I unfortunately felt too drained or stressed to make extensive progress toward my goals" (Adam). This "lack of time" sentiment was shared by a number of teachers. Time constraints may present one of the biggest challenges to effective goal setting for teachers. Both new and experienced teachers may perceive goal setting as a positive activity but low priority, particularly when weighed against other commitments.

Employees in other work environments struggle with similar challenges. As a result, a new line of I/O Psychology research has taken up the competing demands dilemma, exploring scenarios in which more than one goal is at play. Researchers studying multiple goal pursuit examine how goals are pursued in such settings, studying the effects of goal difficulty, task environment, confidence in goal attainment, and incentives on goal activity.

One relevant finding from this literature is that incentives influence resource allocation within a dual-goal environment. In their multiple goal research, Schmidt and DeShon found that "[w]ith an incentive available for only one of . . . two tasks, participants focused heavily on the task with which the incentive was associated" (2007, p. 938). For participants in Schmidt and DeShon's study, the incentive was financial; however, in many settings, incentives may be more intangible. For example, a first-semester teaching assistant may be motivated by the desire to secure peer respect, teacher approbation, and an image of oneself as an excellent graduate student; these "incentives" may lead teaching assistants to focus on graduate course assignments at the expense of teaching goals. Further encouraging this resource allocation pattern are looming assignment deadlines and the intrinsic motivation felt toward a subject matter or craft. While not inherently bad, these forces have the potential to severely undermine teacher goal-setting activities through orchestrating teachers' decisions about time.

To be sure, time is finite, requiring teachers to decide how to allocate their mental and physical resources. Write Schmidt and Dolis, "If an individual's resources are insufficient to meet the cumulative demand . . . then something has to give, necessitating difficult decisions concerning how to divide one's time

across the competing demands" (2009, p. 680). At the same time, it's possible that in many instances, goal success may hinge less on increased free time than on goal commitment and a strong belief that multiple goal achievement is possible. In other words, teachers may discover that they do have time for goal pursuit, if they are intent on achieving their goals ("goal commitment") and have confidence that they can be achieved without compromising other important priorities ("dual-goal expectancy"). For teacher goal setting to be successful, teachers and teaching supervisors may need to pay particular attention to these areas.

Conclusion

Goal Commitment

Without commitment to one's goals, significant progress is unlikely. Simply put, "no motivational effects will occur from goal setting if there is no commitment to a goal" (Slocum, Cron, & Brown, 2002). Fortunately, many steps can be taken to increase goal commitment, thereby facilitating goal achievement.

Factors that have been shown to increase goal commitment include:

- *Supervisor investment and support.* Deans, department chairs, and TA directors can signal investment in goal setting as a teacher development practice. Goal setting might be incorporated into new college-wide orientations or be allotted time in faculty meetings, for instance.
- *Public Goal Setting.* Faculty can institute goal setting in public forums, developing communicative mechanisms that promote greater accountability toward and visibility of teachers' goal progress.
- *Incentives.* Teaching supervisors can make judicious use of incentives to spur teachers' goal setting activities. For example, the Minnesota State University, Mankato English department recently implemented an Excellence and Innovation in Teaching award for teaching assistants, a prize conferred through a competitive selection process. This award incentivizes effort and creativity in teaching through offering teachers recognition and a small cash prize. The department also recently created an Outstanding Adjunct Faculty award, given to someone whose application demonstrates his or her "commitment to continued growth as a teacher." Awards like these can be tied to goal-setting activities, thereby increasing goal commitment.

- *Intangible Rewards.* Locke and Latham cite “internal rewards” as an important factor in goal commitment (2013a, p. 7). This finding was reinforced by comments Adam made when explaining why he was able to make progress on his course preparation goal, even though he was busy. “The reason I was able to complete the first goal so [often] is because it was the most rewarding,” he writes, “*It is a very nice feeling* [emphasis added] to have lesson plans done in advance so that I don’t have to think about them at the last minute.” When teachers select goals that provide a strong emotional or psychological pay-off, they may be more likely to stick with them.
- *Concerted Planning.* Locke and Latham claim that greater mental exertion in developing one’s goals may influence commitment. They posit that “such intense processing makes people more aware of how the goal might be attained, and thus leads to the formulation of well-thought-out plans that in turn increases self-efficacy for implementation and goal attainment” (2013a, p. 8). Structures and communication that underscore the importance of careful goal development may support goal commitment.
- *Goal Clarity.* One teacher in the study submitted a highly elaborate and ambitious goal plan. She identified five broad goal areas that she wanted to work on during the semester (e.g. “consistency,” “interactivity,” “selectivity”) with action items related to each area. Her plan was weighed down by complexity. In relation to this problem, Locke offers this advice: “*Do not set too many goals for a given person or unit* [emphasis in original]. Goal overload causes everything to be lost in confusion” (Locke, 2001, p. 49).

Dual-Goal Expectancy

In addition to taking measures to increase goal commitment, teachers should take steps to help themselves feel confident that they can attain their goals, even when other commitments are vying for their attention. Research on “dual-goal expectancy” addresses this situation. Findings suggest that dual-goal expectancy, the expectation that two goals can be met in a given environment, impacts individuals’ allocation of resources. When dual-goal expectancy is high, individuals direct their effort toward the goal furthest from achievement, working to reduce the larger discrepancy. They operate under the assumption that both goals will be met. In contrast, when dual-goal expectancy is low, effort is channeled toward the least

discrepant goal, “to the neglect of the other goal” (Schmidt & Dolis, 2009, p. 686). Working in this way, they believe, will “increase their chances of meeting at least one of their goals” (p. 680).

The takeaway for teachers is that goal setting will likely be more effective in an environment in which multiple goal expectancy is high; in such an environment, energy spent on daily demands will not preclude attention to longer-term developmental goals. Factors that may impact goal expectancy include:

- *Self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief that he/she has the capability to achieve a specific task. A substantial body of research indicates that individuals with strong self-efficacy are more likely to stay committed to their goals in the face of challenges (Locke & Latham, 2013). Albert Bandura (1994), the psychologist who introduced the concept, maintains that self-efficacy is built, first and foremost, by “mastery experiences.” “Successes build a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy,” he writes, “Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established.”

Self-efficacy and success are increased as individuals tailor their goals to the nature of the task at hand. When tasks are novel or complex for an individual, or when he/she lacks requisite knowledge, *learning* goals are preferable to outcome goals. In such situations, specific, difficult outcome goals increase the likelihood of failure, which decreases self-efficacy. This is because the cognitive demands of self-regulation impede individuals from developing strategies to succeed (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). In contrast, setting learning goals enables individuals to acquire essential skills, which, in turn, boosts self-efficacy (Seijts & Latham, 2001, pp. 303-304). Teachers can build their own self-efficacy through setting learning or outcome goals as appropriate, given their personal characteristics, teaching background, and goal focus. The right kind of goals can provide mastery experiences that keep teachers on track.

- *Goal difficulty.* Research on multiple-goal pursuit challenges the notion that exceedingly difficult goals are the gold standard. In Schmidt and Dolis’ study, “Assignment of two difficult goals did not significantly increase total productivity across both tasks a combined . . . [T]he goal conflict created by multiple-goal assignments can undermine performance

on one or more of the tasks” (2009, p. 688). Schmidt and Dolis posit that difficult goals can backfire by lowering dual-goal expectancy, leading individuals to sacrifice the broader goal for the more immediate and attainable. They submit that *moderately difficult goals* may be a better option in a multiple-goal environment.

Research on teacher goal setting is still in its infancy. Jan Retelsdorf and Katarina Gunther maintain that more research is needed “to investigate and uncover further details on how teachers’ goals are effective in educational settings” (2011, p. 1115). This project is one contribution. Drawing off of findings on goal setting from I/O Psychology, this study begins to work out how goal setting might function for college teachers. Given that applying goal setting to particular sites and work activities “is not just a science, but also an art” (Locke 2001, p. 48), the move to incorporate goal setting into college teacher development may require some tinkering. Yet, findings from this study suggest that there is value in beginning the experiment.

The results from this study suggest that goal setting can benefit teachers, whether through spurring them to directed action or through triggering thinking that leads to self-understanding and feelings of control. At the same time, it’s clear that goal setting has to be implemented with care, with an understanding of potential challenges and a concerted effort to counteract them. Further, goal setting cannot substitute for skills and abilities that are beyond a teacher’s reach. Goals succeed as they energize and direct, encouraging skill development and perseverance. While not an easy fix, goal setting nonetheless has the potential to benefit teachers through providing a lens through which to scrutinize their teaching and the opportunity to chart their own path toward learning and improvement.

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HEATHER CAMP PhD is an Associate Professor of English and the coordinator of the writing across the curriculum program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her research interests include college writing teacher development, writing program administration, and honors education. Prior to serving as the WAC Coordinator, Dr. Camp directed the first-year composition program for seven years.

Appendix
Mid-Semester Questionnaire

1. Identify the teaching goals you set for yourself during the goal-setting workshop, and describe your progress towards these goals. Specifically, what actions have you taken and what actions have you not completed?
2. What factors have aided your progress toward your goals? What factors have impeded your progress?
3. How satisfied are you with the progress you have made thus far? Why?
4. Based on your experience with this goal-setting project thus far, describe the strengths and limitations of using goal setting theory in teacher development programs.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have achieved the learning goals I set for myself at the beginning of the semester.					
Setting teaching goals has helped me improve my teaching.					
Working with a peer group on goal setting has helped me improve my teaching.					
I am satisfied with the progress I have made on my goals.					
I am committed to achieving my learning goals this semester.					
This project has been a worthwhile investment of my time.					

Please use this area to explain any of the answers you provided above.