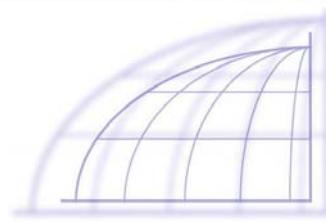


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Section B-5*



T-22: Goal Seeking and Goal Setting

Jeanette is always seeking goals but rarely sets any. Beatrice sets goals - and proudly announces them! - but keeps changing them. Paul sticks to his goals - but rarely achieves them. In this section we will consider the knowledge construction function at stake for Jeanette and Beatrice, i.e. goal seeking and goal setting. In the subsequent two sections we will consider the functions that are at stake for Paul: Planning (T-23) and Goal Achievement (T-24).

This knowledge construction function orients students to the way behavior is rendered purposeful and given direction by seeking and setting goals. Knowing how to search for and establish valued goals for oneself is important to the development of independent and autonomous functioning (C-10). Without this function learners may move from event to event, from act to act, based on momentary needs, passing desires and outside influences. Habits and styles form around all patterns of behavior which can make them difficult to change. This includes patterns of aimlessness and passivity towards the self (see also C-14) that may persist into adulthood. Such patterns may occasionally give way to attempts to look for and set productive goals for personal growth and advancement. Such attempts provide opportunities to enable also the older learner to acquire more effective knowledge construction functions. Yet much can be gained, and much can be avoided, by ensuring that this knowledge construction function is developed and strengthened during the elementary and middle school years.

The function of goal seeking and goal setting is sensitive to variations in mood, optimism and expectations for success. Periods of conflict about goals and values can also influence the application of this function. Especially common and quite normal during adolescence such periods do not by themselves imply that this function is fragile or underdeveloped. On the other hand, students who enter

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adolescence without this function are likely to be particularly vulnerable when confronted with the difficult challenges of the teenage years.

Viewed as a cognitively supported need to make behavior purposeful, goal seeking involves the mental projection of contingencies of awareness, attitudes and values into a more or less remote future. That calls for temporal orientation (R-4) and mental representation (T-7). Goal setting involves selection among alternative options. That calls for rank ordering (T-10) and decision making (T-20). As students gain familiarity with goal seeking and goal setting have them look at different problem situations and identify what functions will be needed to deal with them. To develop this knowledge construction function engage your students in projects and learning events that require them to seek and set goals. "What should we plant in our vegetable garden? What are our goals?" "What do we want to accomplish with our class excursion to the museum of natural history? What are our goals?" Have students discuss what their visit might be like in the absence of goals.

Have small groups of students discuss goals for their projects. Solicit the goals in a whole group format and write them on the board. Engage students in the process of reviewing and evaluating the different goals. Bring in the functions of Decision Making (T-21) and Assessing Implications (T-22). Facilitate your students' discovery that goal seeking and goal setting is a knowledge construction function which they can learn to apply with wisdom and skill. Make the process of goal seeking and goal setting visible for your students.

Be an example and role model for your students. Share your goals for the class with them. Make them explicit. Expect your students to have goals and have them verbalize them or write them down. When starting any activity, ask your students to share their goals and explain to them that without a goal they will not know where or how to begin. Goals help to determine the relevance of different sources of information (T-3) and guide our investment in the perceptual process (T-4).

As you encourage your students to exercise this function help them to seek and set realistic goals that they value. Remember that goal seeking and setting rely on the learner's understanding of temporal orientation. Children under 10 years should have shorter time lengths to relate to. A 12-year-old can say he is going to get an A or B in every subject for one semester, while a younger child may try to have the same goal but for a week at a time. If a goal is too far off into the future for a young child, she may lose her motivation.

Goal seeking and goal setting are sensitive to the elementary biological and cyclical needs of the organism. When tired we learn to seek rest; when hungry we learn to seek food. Needs that are more remotely related to the individual's survival depend upon cognitive rather than biological supports. For example, the need to earn income to maintain the basis for one's existence depends on the function of goal seeking and goal setting. Discuss with students the interplay between cognitive and biologically-based determinants of goal seeking and goal setting. Goal seeking and goal setting are also sensitive to emotional influences which, unless caution is exercised, may overwhelm an individual whose goal seeking and goal setting skills otherwise are well developed. James suddenly felt a strong urge to impress his peers and decided he would make a grand gesture and pay for everyone at the restaurant. Later he realized that his goal for the Thanksgiving vacation had to be dropped (see also T-23).