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**Learning as a means to achieve social goals: A motivational analysis**<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer Archer  
School of Education  
Faculty of Education and Arts  
University of Newcastle  
Callaghan, NSW 2308  
[Jennifer.Archer@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Jennifer.Archer@newcastle.edu.au)

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Abstract

Fourteen high school mathematics and English teachers were interviewed and observed teaching on two occasions. The focus of the observations and the interviews was students' reasons for working or not working on academic tasks. Analysis of the data showed that classrooms are intensely social places. Even though a social dimension is acknowledged by *achievement goal theory*, insufficient attention has been paid to the way in which essentially social goals are achieved by engaging in academic work. Teachers assert that many students do, or do not do, the academic work set for them to obtain social goals. Teachers also assert that some students do not have consciously adopted goal. An expanded achievement goal theory that incorporates social goals that are mediated by academic pursuit will provide better understanding of students' behaviour in classrooms.

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Achievement goal theory

Achievement goal theory has identified two major goals held by students who work hard (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986). Students who work hard because they want to understand or master a task are said to have adopted a mastery goal. Students who work hard because they want others to acknowledge their competence are said to have adopted a performance-approach goal. It is an ego-focused goal, concerned with how one is perceived by others. According to achievement goal theory, all things being equal, a mastery-oriented student should produce better quality work than an ego-oriented student

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because the former focuses all her attention on the work and seeks strategies that will help her to succeed (Ames, 1992). The ego-focused student is less focused on her work, keeping “half an eye” on the other students and the teacher, concerned with how she appears to others. Harackiewicz and her colleagues (Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carter, & Elliot, 2000) have challenged the argument that a performance-orientation as undesirable, holding that students who hold both mastery and performance-approach goals tend to be the most successful students because they combine interest in the subject matter with the desire to outperform others.

For students who do not work hard, two other goals have been identified. There are ego-focused students who would be performance-approach oriented if they felt they could produce high quality work that they could display to others. However, they doubt their ability to do this, and so adopt a performance-avoid goal of not wanting to appear incompetent in front of others. They use strategies such as procrastinating (*I would have produced good work if I spent more time on it*), cheating, and publicly claiming not to prepare for examinations but preparing in secret. In this way a high mark can be attributed to ability rather than effort, and a low mark can be attributed to lack of effort, not to lack of ability.

The other goal displayed by students who do not work hard has been called an academic alienation goal or a work avoidance goal (Archer, 1994, 2001; Meece & Holt, 1993). This goal usually is not considered an achievement goal; more a way of categorising students who do not adopt mastery or performance goals. Academically alienated students may do sufficient work to satisfy teachers and parents but prefer to invest their time and energy elsewhere. Their attitude to school may be positive (*it's interesting but I've got too many other things going on in my life to get involved with school work*), or may be negative (*it's so boring I can't wait to get away from it*). Performance-avoid students and academically alienated students can display similar behaviour, because performance-avoid students want to give the impression that, like academically alienated students, they do not care about doing well when in fact they do.

Students can hold multiple goals at one time (Ames & Archer, 1988; Harackiewicz et al., 2000). For example, a high achieving student simultaneously could be mastery oriented (*this is an interesting problem that I want to solve*) and performance-approach oriented (*I want the others to see how good I am at solving problems like these*). Another student could be mastery oriented (*this is an interesting problem that I want to solve*) and performance-avoid oriented (*if I can't solve this problem then I'm going to look stupid*). Students can be encouraged by situational cues to adopt a particular goal (Ames, 1992). For example, setting up a competition encourages students' adoption of performance-approach and performance-avoid goals, depending on how well they think they will do in the competition.

#### Social goals achieved by academic pursuit

A performance goal has a strong social dimension: *I want others to see what a good student I am; I don't want others to see what a poor student I am*. Students' sense of self is enhanced or diminished by how they think they are perceived by others. However,

performance goals are not the only goals that combine achievement and social motives. Of course social goals and academic goals can operate relatively independently (Wentzel, 1999; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). Students want to make friends, to join a group, to prevent others from joining a group, and so on. Achieving these goals may not impinge on academic work. Students can talk to others in the playground or while waiting for a teacher. Students may have friends in different classes.

In this paper, however, I consider social goals that are achieved, at least in part, via students' academic work. Students' social goals can centre on their relations with other students, their individual relations with teachers, or their relations *as a group* with teachers. So students may do their academic work, or not do it, because they want to be accepted within a group. Students may work because they like the teacher and want to please him, or they may dislike the teacher and refuse to work to annoy him. Similarly, students may work or not work to please or to annoy their parents. It is easy to think of students holding these goals simultaneously with accepted achievement goals. So a student may work hard because he finds work interesting (mastery goal) and because it is what his conscientious friends are doing (social/friends goal).

These sorts of social goals that are achieved via academic work have been identified previously, but they have not been accorded sufficient attention in the literature on students' motivation to learn. Further, the term goal may suggest more conscious decision making than in fact occurs.

#### How one behaves in the classroom

There are other work-related goals, either articulated or barely conscious, that have received little attention. Achievement goal theory may be broadened with input from sociology. From a sociological perspective, schools have a hierarchical distribution of power (Ball, 1990). The school, with its top-down structure, close surveillance of those who work within it, record-keeping, evaluation and judgment of worth, is designed to create "docile bodies" (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 1990). Both teachers and students become docile bodies who accept the inevitability of schools and their mode of operation.

A cognitive psychologist would recognise this sense of inevitability, but would use the term *cognitive availability*: some ideas or behaviours are available to us, while others we do not contemplate.

*"... one's learning history may make certain options readily available, others not. The culture in which one is raised may have a decisive influence here: To a Mennonite child, stealing is not cognitively available as an option, whereas to an inner-city American youth it may well be. Indeed, society's learning curriculum may try to short-circuit the decision-making process altogether, by making only one alternative cognitively available as the only right or possible thing to do. If this is successful, an actor may "just do" the socially approved thing, "mindlessly" if you wish, without really making a decision at all" (Mook, 1996, p.393).*

Not all students are docile and compliant. Some, especially those from homes where schools are not valued, are less willing to work. Using the notion of cognitive availability, one could say that these students have been raised in a culture where defiance of “official” authority is the norm. Of course oppositional behaviour may not be successful in the long term. Refusing to be a dutiful student means that students can be barred from the benefits schools offer (Dalrymple, 2001).

For students who do not accept the authority of teachers, their behaviour is not based on subservience. Why will they do work set by teachers? It may be interest in the task. It may be to behave like their friends. It may be to demonstrate competence to others. In other cases, it may involve a reversal in balance of power (Gore, 1993). Acting as a group rather than individuals, students may work because they like the teacher and do not want to see her humiliated by having to call for help to control them. This can be done individually, but it is more powerful if students act together. If students do not like the teacher, then they deliberately may inflict public humiliation on her. To emphasise this distinction: students who work to please a teacher have a different motivation from students who work to help a teacher; and students who refuse to work to annoy a teacher have a different motivation from students who refuse to work to humiliate a teacher. A shift in power from teacher to students has occurred. These shifts in the balance of power between teachers and students may be fluid and difficult to detect, but it does affect students’ motivation to learn and teachers’ interaction with students.

#### Do students consciously adopt achievement goals?

I have described students for whom defiance of school authority is the norm. On the other hand, there are students for whom deference to authority is normal. Schools are places where they acquire knowledge and teachers are respected because they hold this knowledge. There is the threat of punishment if they refuse to work, but for many threat is not necessary. They work because this is what students do in school (Hickey, 2003; Wenger, 1998). Other options are not cognitively available. In this case, can students be said consciously to have adopted an achievement goal? One could argue that there is a social goal that impels students to conform, almost unconsciously, to the conventions of their culture, but it is far removed from the conscious goals specified in achievement goal theory. In the next section, the distinction between goals and motives is explored.

Many tasks that students are given appear disconnected or trivial, and bear little relation to a formal discipline such as chemistry or history. I have sat in many classrooms where, in the space of a 45 minute lesson, students are given two or three worksheets to complete. Many students do not finish them, and there is a vague admonition from the teacher to finish them for homework. Neither at the beginning of the lesson nor at the end is there any explanation from the teacher of how these worksheets contribute to students’ understanding of chemistry or history. Jimenez-Alexandre, Rodriguez, and Duschl (2000) describe “doing the lesson” or “doing science.” Students engage in a series of tasks in science classrooms so that they pass the subject, but these tasks bear little relationship to authentic scientific activities. Little wonder, then, that students see schooling as a series of disconnected bits (Roth & Lee, 2002).

### Limitations of cognitive models of motivation

In his review of research on student motivation in learning and teaching contexts, Pintrich (2003) writes of a renewed interest in the role of needs in human motivation. There are limitations in cognitive models that explain behaviour in terms of constructs such as goals (consciously articulated), attributions, and evaluations of self-efficacy. Early motivation research by McClelland and Atkinson (e.g., Atkinson, 1964; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark & Lowell, 1953) defined motivation in terms of needs, specifically the need for achievement, the need for power, and the need for affiliation. Some of the social goals that I discuss in this paper may be more accurately described as a need for affiliation, for social connection and acceptance. However, the social goals that are described in this paper are more varied than the need for affiliation argued by Atkinson and McClelland.

*“Needs and motives are assumed to operate at a more implicit or unconscious level, counterbalancing the cognitive and conscious processes stressed in social-cognitive models. It seems clear that future research will attempt to build models that integrate implicit, unconscious processes with more explicit and conscious processes as their relative strengths and weaknesses complement each other”* (Pintrich, 2003). Urdan and Maehr (1995) also make links between the earlier work on needs and motives and the current focus on social goals. They point out that the need to make social connections with one’s peers is particularly strong in adolescence.

Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), in their review of the literature on school engagement, also argue that needs have been overlooked in the current focus on cognitive models of motivation. They discuss Connell’s self-system model that incorporates a need for relatedness, a need for autonomy, and a need for competence. They argue that students need to feel that they are accepted as members of a school community (in effect, the need for relatedness is satisfied) before they are prepared to work on academic tasks.

### Expanding achievement goal theory

A mastery goal also is entangled with social motives. A mastery-oriented student wants to master a task, to do it as well as she can. She adopts this goal because she finds the task interesting or because she sees the task as important. Importance is culturally defined. To some extent interest may be culturally defined too. Socio-cultural theorists (e.g., Wenger, 1998) have demonstrated how thinking and behaviour are linked inextricably to one’s cultural experience. If achievement goal theory is to be a useful way of understanding students’ classroom behaviour, this entangling of social motives with academic tasks needs further attention.

The following lists provide examples of the goal, or goals, that students may hold when they are engaged, or not engaged, in academic tasks.

#### *I’m doing this task because:*

- a. *It’s interesting.* (mastery achievement goal - interest)
- b. *It’s important.* (mastery achievement goal – important)

- c. *It will help me get a job.* (mastery or performance achievement goal - important)
- d. *I'll look good when I do it better than the others.* (performance – approach achievement goal)
- e. *I'll look stupid if I don't do it.* (performance – avoid achievement goal)
- f. *My parents want me to do well at school.* (social/family achievement goal)
- g. *My friends are doing it and I want to do what my friends are doing.* (social/friends achievement goal)
- h. *I'll be punished if I don't do it.* (social conformity goal; academic alienation goal)
- i. *I like the teacher so I'll do what she wants to please her.* (social/teacher achievement goal with authority resting with the teacher)
- j. *I like the teacher so I'll do what she wants to make her look good.* (social/teacher achievement goal with authority resting with the student)
- k. *It's what you do at school.* (social conformity, no conscious goal)

*I'm not doing this task because:*

- a. *It's boring.* (mastery achievement goal – lack of interest)
- b. *It's not important.* (mastery achievement goal – lack of importance)
- c. *It won't help me get a job.* (mastery or performance achievement goal – lack of importance)
- d. *My parents don't care if I don't work at school.* (social/parents achievement goal)
- e. *My friends aren't doing it and I want to be like my friends.* (social/friends achievement goal)
- f. *I will look stupid if I do the task badly.* (performance-avoid achievement goal)
- g. *There are other things that I would rather do.* (academic alienation goal)
- h. *I don't like the teacher so I don't want to do what she wants me to do.* (social/teacher achievement goal with authority resting with the teacher)
- i. *I don't like the teacher so I'll make her look incompetent.* (social/teacher goal with authority resting with the student)
- j. *My classmates aren't doing it* (social conformity, no conscious goal).

The present study uses interviews with teachers to consider this expanded set of goals, both conscious and unconscious. Obviously, teachers' explanations of why students work or do not work is one step removed from the students themselves, and future research will access students directly. However, teachers have a unique position from which to interpret students' thoughts and behaviour.

Procedure

Seven high school mathematics teachers (four males, three females) and seven high school English teachers (two males, five females) participated in the study. Each teacher volunteered to be involved in the following activities:

1. Initial audio-taped interview with the researcher (or research associate). The researcher asked each teacher to provide a definition of students' motivation to learn; what strategies they thought enhanced students' motivation; the origin of

- these ideas (did they come from their teacher preparation programs, from their colleagues, etc?); differences in motivation between junior and senior students; and differences in motivation from one high school subject area to another. The questions posed by the researcher were open-ended, with no reference to achievement goal theory or any other sort of educational theory.
2. The researcher (or research associate) observed the teacher teaching two lessons (preferably one senior class and one junior class, but this was not always possible). The researcher kept hand-written notes of what happened during the lesson.
  3. After both lessons, the researcher (or research associate) again interviewed the teacher. The interview concerned what had occurred during the observed lesson (why did you use that activity?, why do you think the students appeared more interested in that part of the lesson?, why do you think the girls in the corner of the room refuse to do the activity you set for them? etc).

The 14 teachers came from six high schools in the Newcastle region. One school was a private Grammar school. The other five were public high schools that drew a large proportion of their students from low socio-economic areas. The interview data and the classroom observation data were transcribed. This paper represents a preliminary analysis of the interview data only. The current focus is what the teachers have to say about students' motivation, specifically the goals they see students holding as they engage in academic work.

What is provided here are excerpts from these interviews. These excerpts are used to illustrate the goal categories delineated in this paper. At this preliminary stage and with a limited number of responses, there was no quantifying of teachers' responses: what percentage of responses fitted a mastery goal, what percentage fitted an academic alienation goal, etc. However, it was noteworthy that the teachers frequently made reference to the sort of socially-mediated goals described in this paper, and that these sorts of goals were described much more frequently than the traditional goals of goal theory.

#### Mastery achievement goal

*It depends on the student of course. There would be many different ways (to motivate students). Some kids are very competitive and that's what motivates them, and some of them have a career they are heading towards and that is what motivates them. Sometimes, if you're really lucky there are some kids who just really enjoy the subject. (5BH, mathematics)*

*I have a Year 12 group this year and really I don't have to motivate them. Some of them I would probably have to boost their confidence maybe. I don't know whether that is called motivating but they are in there because they want to do it and they are really interested and it is just a lovely class ... They come in because it is a three unit part, the time for that isn't on their time table it has to be off line and so we agreed to come in at 7.30am two mornings a week to make up the two hours. So I come in on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 7.30 and they all turn up. They have asked can they come in at 7.30 on*

*Monday mornings because they want to do some extra revision. So we are going to do that now. "So they are the ones who have always enjoyed maths?" (interviewer) No they don't enjoy it particularly. They're good but a couple have said to me "I don't like maths" and that's what they say. They need it. They are doing it because they need to and not particularly because they like it. "For a university career?" (interviewer) These kids are totally motivated and they have all got their goals, they want to do this, they want to get to university. So that is a different reason because they can see that it is a means to an end. (1AE, mathematics)*

*A faculty I really admire in a school is the Arts Faculty. Because I go and look at the work which they have produced, which I think is fantastic. I think, how do you do it? ... How you actually go about motivating students to do that? I mean, go for a walk around Art Express which we did on the weekend down at the Newcastle Gallery. This brilliant work. How are these kids motivated as students? I know, as an English Teacher, I have kids who haven't been in class for weeks. Yet you go to any high school two weeks before all the art major works are due in, and the art student who is never in my class ... they are all out doing their major works. Colouring in glass or plasticine, paint or oxy torches and things. "So why are they so motivated?" (interviewer) I think because it is something which is complex, something which is theirs, something which is lasting. I guess it is the same as the D & T (Design & Technology) thing, you end up with something. (23MH, English)*

#### Performance – approach achievement goal

*"They do have goals?" (interviewer) Yes. It might even be just to be the best in that class. I had one student who strives to come first and it doesn't matter what. He came second in his first assessment and he couldn't live with that. He had to come first. So he studied and studied and studied until he got 100% and then no one could beat him. They could come equal but still couldn't beat him. (43SK, mathematics)*

#### Performance – avoid achievement goal

*With the lower ability kids, really with any kids, to be able to give them work that they see themselves succeeding at, rather than just give them work for the sake of it. Obviously the work has to be relevant to the curriculum but it's got to be relevant to the kid's level of ability as well. Once you get them to succeed with the easier stuff, if you can then just try and give them something a little bit more difficult, then they can see that maybe they can do this and they feel good about themselves. They can see themselves doing stuff and getting it right. (17MC, English)*

*I give lollipops out. I give class awards out. There are heaps of teachers in the school who told me not to do it and disagree, but I don't care because it works and I've got all the lower classes so they are really, really low ability and can barely write their names... they might do a thousand and one wrong things, but the one thing that they do right I make a big spectacle of it and we'll sing a song, they get a clap and they get an award just for one thing and that really motivates them. They think that they are dumb and then they see something positive. The other thing that motivates my Year 9 class is when I*

say: "I don't know, I can't do it, can you help me", they get so excited because they how to do something that I don't. (10DL, English)

### Academic Alienation goal

*When I went to my first school, which was out at Lake Cargelligo, it was out in the country. It was a real shock to me that people didn't like maths and didn't see any relevance to it and it wasn't important to them. The school as a whole wasn't important to them, there were other things that they were more interested in. Especially being out in the country, a lot of them live on farms and that and all they want to do, the boys especially, is not be at school but out working on the farm. I'm not sitting here doing trigonometry. I want to go and help dad. So that was a real shock to me. I had to rearrange my thinking. Not everybody has parents who would think education is that important. (AE1, mathematics)*

*The kids always say, did I pass? That is all they want to do, they want to pass the exam, whatever the pass mark they set up. It might be 50% usually. If they think they can do that by learning formulas, crank the handle, put that under zoom, and get the answer out. They are happy with that. (8BH, mathematics)*

*I don't think enough kids in this school see university as a viable alternative for them. They come from families who have never gone to university and why should I be the first generation to go. You say to these kids, you have chosen subjects where you are not eligible for UAI (University Admissions Index). Well that doesn't matter. They are intelligent, they are articulate young people and I think why aren't you doing this. I suppose in terms of their motivation they just see university as another two, three or four years of schooling ... what do you get when you go to university, you just come out with a debt. I have had kids say that to me. (21MH, English)*

*For some of them, nothing motivates them. My Year 12, they're nice kids and it is quite pleasant being in the classroom with them, but they don't care. "Can they not see the connection between effort and success and university?" (interviewer) They have given up. None of them want university. "Or TAFE?" (interviewer) A couple of them want TAFE. I have eleven in the class but there's only two who are working to any degree. "What do they see themselves as doing then?" (interviewer) I don't know and I don't think they really care. That is the lower ability of the four Year 12 classes and I suppose a lot of them are here because they wouldn't be getting the dole, they wouldn't be getting any benefits (if they weren't in school).*

### Social/friends achievement goal

*A lot of kids are basically afraid, you know. I think they are afraid to display, you know, you've got that Australian cultural thing. I don't know if it is across the whole world. Not it's cool to be a fool, but they don't want to stand out from the crowd. "They'd rather under-achieve?" (interviewer) Yes they don't celebrate success very much. It really*

*annoys me. I think that is changing in society but you know, you should celebrate your success. Have a go and too bad if you stuff it up a few times. (30SD, English)*

*Years 8 & 9 are very difficult, can be very difficult, years because their peers become some important to them. They might be interested in a subject but if they feel their peers would not be impressed by their appearing to be interested in that subject they'll act out. (6BH, mathematics)*

Social/teacher achievement goal, with authority resting with the teacher

“How important do you think establishing personal relationships with the children is?” (interviewer) *It is the key. To me it's the key and again that group this morning would have to be probably one of the best examples. There are some boys in that group who almost were asked to leave this school last year. They had a very, very negative approach after that and there are very few teachers in this school who have gone past that with these boys, and have broken that negativity down. I think it's because people haven't labeled them, what they were in trouble for. They just go “giddy, how you going?” I greet them at the door, I ask them about their weekends and that sort of thing. It makes them feel that they are more than a student, that they are a person who has a life, who has difficulties and that you understand. They also know that even though I'm their maths teacher, if they have a problem I will listen and they can come to me after school time or after class time. (16LM, mathematics)*

*Your relationship with kids is really important. Because I think kids are only human. If they don't respect you they won't work for you and they don't see you as working. If they don't see you as working, that can lead to all sorts of problems. If you're someone who for any number of reasons has a high absentee rate (from the classroom), then you lose your respect, no matter how fantastic you are at something. You're not there. The kids are there wanting you, needing you, and you're not there for them. You can go that way. If the kids perceive you as being a weak teacher, it is really hard to motivate them ... I talk to kids about elective choices. Why do you choose a subject? Who is teaching it? (24MH, English)*

“How important do you think the establishment of that rapport is in motivating students?” (interviewer) *Yes, I think it's extremely important, especially for seniors. You have to have some sort of rapport with them. I know at this school, and other schools I've been at, the type of domineering teacher that insists that things always happen this way, and you must do it this way, the person who yells abuse at seniors, ends up with the exact opposite effect of what they are trying to do, to get the best out of the kids. And the kids turn the opposite way and say, “well I hate that teacher and he hates me, I'm not doing a thing.” (26MK, mathematics)*

*Well I think within the classroom environment the quality of the rapport between the teacher and the student is critical. If students perceive the teacher as a person they can trust in the learning process, they are more willing to take risks in their thinking and in moving outside of their comfort zones in terms of types of learning they experience. That*

*to me is a critical factor. Also, the rapport factor which comes from that interaction between the teacher and the student. (27PG, English)*

*I say that to all our prac-teachers. If they don't get involved in the extra-curricular activities, if the children in the school just see them as the person who is there at the door for the lesson, they're not going to have as much success than if they get involved with sport, the normal school sport, or even taking a team or something. They will get along better in the school if the students see them as a bigger-picture person. (36GN, mathematics)*

*I think you can influence them slightly but only if they are that way inclined in the first place. Otherwise, they are just bored or restless or disinterested. Because I'm maths, they may have had a different maths teacher who was very dry. That's not to say I'm not very dry, because maths is very dry, but a lot of kids say I really like you, as a person, so therefore they start to enjoy the class as well, they enjoy coming to class. Whereas a lot of others who can't stand the teacher will probably try and truant or do nothing or try and get into trouble so they leave the room. (44SK, mathematics)*

*I think well if I can try, and I use the word respect because I'm never going to love them because I don't want that relationship with them. At least if I can give them their own space as much as I can within the classroom and try and let them go the way they are, then it might work out. Maybe I have made a little difference and maybe they know I do care a little bit. So then if there is something so dramatic that they can't deal with, they might be able to come and talk to me or somebody else. I mean it is all personality again too. Some kids you will get along great with and some kids you will clash with straightaway. (48SK, mathematics)*

*Yes, don't be heavy. If you don't do this I'll do this, this and this. That is what springs to mind more than most. Don't pressure the kids into succeeding. "Don't make ultimatums?" (interviewer) Because if you do that they just get their backs up. Same if somebody does the wrong thing and you take them outside of the room and start yelling and ranting and raving. They have no respect for that. That is something I've learnt. It took me a fair while but I've learnt that over the years. Kids will respect you much more if you talk to them on a reasonable level, you know, explain that their behaviour is unacceptable. (19MC, mathematics)*

#### Social/teacher achievement goal with authority resting with the students

*Very rarely do I yell ... I never get to the situation, where you see some teachers, harangue the kids. I never nag, I never harangue. It doesn't work you know. If I've got a problem I don't ever escalate it. I just try and identify the behaviour and perhaps talk quietly with the student. Just quietly you don't need to take a tone... very simple, keep your cool, that's it. Never yell because once you start screaming basically you've had a reaction and you escalate it and they think they've got you. She's lost control. She's psycho. I never chuck a psycho, no matter what. (32 SD female English)*

*... it builds relationships between a student and myself. Surely a good relationship is better for learning than a poor one. I don't believe you can rule a classroom by fear and I don't believe you can expect respect. I think kids have to want to respect you and I think one way of that happening is if you respect the child... They are prepared to have a go and prepared not to be a nuisance or naughty in the class just for the sake of it. They might think twice about it. "Because they don't want to give you a hard time?"*  
(interviewer) *Yes, even if they aren't enjoying the work, they are having a relatively better time than they might be having somewhere else. Like in another subject. So they don't really want to be here but it is better than being in there.* (33SJ, English)

*Then I had a couple of these boys who were still hell-bent on teacher-baiting, baiting me and disrupting the lesson. And then that boy left fortunately and we had another couple of boys. One was doing Pathways. He is only doing about three subjects, his first love being sport. He wasn't baiting me, but he'd get upset with me when I didn't think it was his right to talk to others the whole lesson, that sort of thing.* (37GN, mathematics)

*I don't want to say anything derogatory about the school. I don't want to do that, but there is a bit of a culture here where young boys try to impress each other by seeing how naughty they can be. "I don't imagine that it is limited to this school" (interviewer). I have also taught classes in the past (in another school) where it hasn't been like that... it has been the academic thing to do that because the culture of the place respected that.* (7BH, mathematics)

*If I'd have got into a confrontation with him in the classroom, I would have had confrontation with two or three here, one up there and another girl over there was busting to get in on the fight too. She did that to me the other day when Tricia was trying to stand me up about something, a girl I've hardly seen this year because she's had glandular fever. She wanted to tell me my teaching was no good either and that's why they've all done badly. I've found a very successful thing to be able to resolve the conflict without losing face yourself, without going red in the face, sweating and carrying on. I perspire a lot and the kids can see those signs happening, so this year I've found that's been good to be able to diffuse things and relieve my stress. I don't handle the conflict well and I've found, because I don't like kids getting away with things, wearing caps and things, often create conflict because as soon as you ask them to do something they'll come back in on the act. Actually getting the one student outside, unfortunately sometimes I have more than one there, but if I can get one student outside, a quiet word, they don't lose face.* (41GN, mathematics)

*I've just found that I don't get anything out of it (having confrontations with students). All I do is get myself upset and get myself distraught about it. And the kids then feel as though they have won a real thing over you because I'm the boss and I've lost control. If I'm starting to go that way I put them outside or I give them or me time out, until I'm ready to talk to them about it without getting too upset, or for them to get too upset and cause too much drama. I find the less drama the easier it is. I mean that doesn't mean they get away with it, but the less confrontation, and I mean I don't have any problem with confrontation, the less likely they are to get really upset and lose it to the point*

*where they may scream at you or swear at you or hit you or barge you out the way or want to run away from school or vice versa. Sometimes you feel like that too. (49SK, mathematics)*

### Little conscious adoption of a goal

*One thing I have observed in senior classes is the number of kids who actually lose their motivation. It just completely vanishes and they just sit there. “Why do you think that happens?” (interviewer) I think part of it is they have a sense of doom, this foreboding. About the HSC (Higher School Certificate) and what is going to happen. I think they feel they have lost control. I think you have to ask them why are they there. I think a lot of them are here for not their own reasons. Whether it’s to collect government money or whether they are here because people think they should be there ... you have to make a decision and you just have to avoid the decisions, procrastinate and not make any decision at all. I think some of them are just sitting there in a holding pattern. (22MH, English)*

*Having a friendly environment is a good start, greeting them at the door with a friendly face. Students like to be treated as individuals, as a human being. “Do you think that students will do the work for you because they like you?” (interviewer). I think they do because they don’t see any real sense in what they’re doing ... they do it because you ask them to do it. (51LC, English)*

*I’ve had a few lower ability classes, whatever you like to call them, the ones that we’ve rated at the bottom level, over the last few years. They are quite happy to scratch a few notes off the board, which is the only way you can get some work done for them and use a lot of closure exercises, leaving words out and that sort of thing. They seem to get some satisfaction from doing that, but they won’t take the next step, going to the worksheet or going to the textbook, no matter how well you’ve explained it or how much time you’ve spent making sure that everybody’s quiet and they are all focused. So it’s a little bit disappointing, sometimes being a teacher I feel a little bit negative in my responses to them in trying to get them to listen. I also feel I’m not getting much satisfaction out of it... Yes the satisfaction that I experience and have always experienced from being able to get something to work out, the ‘aha’ experience that we talk about. I guess some of them never get that. They can only follow a process. (35 GN male mathematics)*

*I know myself I haven’t got a goal and a lot of the time you just bumble along and when I think about it, okay that will do and I will choose that one. I think a lot of the kids do the same at the moment, especially in this area. A lot of the kids don’t know what they want to do or where they want to be in a few years. “That is interesting, so you think kids don’t think ahead as to where they are going?” (interviewer) Some do but I reckon the majority don’t. “How do they view school, do you think?” (interviewer) As punishment. Not necessarily punishment but something they have to do. Some of them do, but they are good kids and have their little goals, whether it is to get a raise, or to be a rocket scientist or whatever... but a lot of them are just here. You say why are you here, because I have to. Especially my Year 12... I’m only here because I have to be, or I’m here to give up study. So the only motivation really is parents’ force, I suppose. (42SK, mathematics)*

## Discussion

This paper argues for an expansion of a widely accepted theory of motivation by highlighting the social motives students have for doing academic work. Even though a social dimension is acknowledged in *achievement goal theory*, insufficient attention has been paid to the way in which essentially social goals impact on academic achievement. Further, to refer to them as social *goals* may suggest more explicit decision-making than in fact occurs. *Need* or *motive* may be a more accurate term. In addition, the current paper has provided evidence of a variety of social motives – wanting to connect with peers, teachers, and parents in different ways. Adolescence may be a time when the need to be accepted by peers may take precedence over other social needs.

The desire to be accepted by peers may help to explain the power that adolescent students can exert over teachers. Acting as a group they can subvert the nominal power structure in a classroom, choosing to work or not to work depending on the extent to which they like the teacher. Many student teachers have felt themselves at the mercy of a group of adolescent students. In future, data gathered from younger students and adult students may provide evidence of changes in the way academic and social goals are intertwined.

As noted earlier, the current data are interviews with teachers. Teachers are in a unique position to comment on the motivation of their students. It is important now to gather data from students. How do they explain their behaviour in the classroom? Do they work because they want to be like their friends, because they want their teacher to like them, because they want the teacher to look competent, because they want their parents to be proud of them? Do they refuse to work because they want to be like their friends, because they want to annoy the teacher, because they want to make the teacher look incompetent, because they want to annoy their parents?

Teachers working with students in low socio-economic areas frequently voice frustration with their students' lack of motivation to study and their indifference, or active hostility, towards schools. A theory of motivation that incorporates the complex interweaving of students' social and academic goals may help these teachers to understand their students' attitude to school. As students move through school, the gap between the achievement of students from high SES backgrounds and low SES backgrounds widens. A more sophisticated insight into the interplay of students' social and academic goals may help teachers to devise effective ways of encouraging students to work. Which combinations of social goals and achievement goals are most likely to enhance students' motivation to learn?

Most educational psychologists advocate students' adoption of a mastery achievement goal (e.g., Maehr & Midgley, 1996). Though a mastery goal is desirable, it may be unrealistic to expect that students who have shown little or no interest in schoolwork to date will easily adopt this goal. Socially-mediated motivation may be more effective, at

least initially. A mastery motivation may come later as students experience success and get more involved with their work. Classrooms by their nature are intensely social spaces. Motivational theory will be strengthened by acknowledging the various ways in which social motives mediate students' willingness to work or refusal to work.

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