

To master means to commit? Reciprocal links between educational identity and perceived school goal structures over two years in high school

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Various practices and interactions at school constitute an important venue for the development of personal identity in adolescence, particularly, in the educational domain. In this study we look at how perceived goal-related school practices and interactions (i.e., school goal structures; Maehr & Midgley, 1991) relate to educational identity formation during the 9th - 10th grade. We explored whether perceiving school interactions as supportive of mastery or performance goals contributes to identity processes (identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, and reconsideration of commitments), and vice versa.

A sample of 1268 adolescents (51.9% females), aged between 14 and 16 ($M = 14.86$ $SD = 0.39$), attending 36 high schools of Lithuania, took part in a four-wave longitudinal study on adolescent goals. Identity processes were measured using a post-transition version of Christiaens et al. (2021) identity instrument. We assessed perceived orientation towards mastery and performance at school using Perceived School Goal Structures scale (Park et al., 2018).

Cross-lagged panel model indicated that students with stronger perceptions of mastery goals in their school environment increased their educational identity commitments and in-depth identity exploration, but reduced reconsideration of commitments over time. At the same time, those with stronger perceptions of performance goals at school reduced their identification and began reconsidering their commitments. This suggests that the emphasis on mastery goals at school

supports the formation of students' educational identity after the transition to high school, while the emphasis on performance goals hinders educational identity formation.

Moreover, students with stronger educational commitments saw their school environment as increasingly oriented towards mastery goals, while those with high commitment reconsideration – as increasingly oriented towards performance goals. This suggests that the level of educational commitments may direct the students' attention towards specific goal-related cues at school. Also, teachers may differently respond to students with different levels of educational identity processes.