

## Danish University Colleges

### Teachers´ Understanding of Learning Goals

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# Teachers' Understanding of Learning Goals

By Dorthe Carlsen, Marie Slot & Charlotte Krog Skott



# The Danish School Context

- National school reform
  - Goal oriented teaching as part of the school reform
  - Rewritten curriculum as competence orientated learning goals
- Project “digitally supported learning goal”
  - Development/research project developing and evaluating classroom digital tool for goal orientated teaching

# Data collection

- Summer 14: project start – schools chosen
- Fall 14: technology development
- **Nov – Dec 14: interview study 1**
- Jan – April 15: intervention
- April – June 15: Interview study 2
  
- Other data in the project:
  - Survey
  - Competence test (pre-post)
  - Collection of interpretations and products from the intervention

# Interview study 1

## Research questions:

- How do teachers use goals in planning, conducting and evaluating teaching?
- What types of challenges and potentials do the teachers experience and expect in relation to goal oriented teaching?
- What are learning goals for these teachers? How are learning goals experienced, generated and conceptualized?

# Methodology

- Qualitative research design
- Semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers
- Semi-structured observations (1-2 lessons prior to the interview)
- Analysis (Kvale 1977: 201ff):
  - Browsing with a special view to identify themes and patterns
  - Looking for plausibility and clusters
  - Saturation
  - Generate conceptual correlations

# Themes

What is a goal ?

- Which understanding of goals do teachers express ?
- What types of goals do teachers use ?
- Will there be differences between subjects ?

What makes goals?

- The relationship between control and direction
- Evaluation
- Planning situation has become more complex

# Diversity of goals

- *There are some **professional goals** in common goals, but we just need in this one class also working with "**social goals**" to promote pupils' wellbeing and how they feel about each other.*
- *Mostly I use **long-term goals**. Also because I know that it is the next three years, they have to pick it up here. Until they have exams.*
- ***The goal is that there must be a product at the end**, they even try to play. Simply see if it is good. And evaluate it at the end. We could have done something differently?*



# Diversity of goals

The curriculum: “Forenklede Fælles Mål”, 21’  
century skills,

Subject orientated goals, learning goals, goals  
for activity, goals for production, student-goals,  
**goals for parents**, learning material goals,  
wellbeing goals... an so on...

# Four Main Strategies

## Pretention as strategy:

*So we do not work with ... **we work with goals, but not in a definite stand: The goal of (...) is (...)** . It's more that "During this week you must draw your board game by using your innovative abilities". So their ingenuity and their competences and so on...*

## Rejection as strategy:

*Well, it is important to give pupils some experiences with subject orientated themes, **there is beyond the endless training of e.g. nouns and verbs**. I would like to enrich them and prepare them to become whole people and ready to seize life!*

# Four Main Strategies

## The instrumental strategy:

But there of course **is a goal set up to start with**, and they are pulled up when we start up an hour, so I usually have three goals I set up a course, and so I prefer the goal, rather , as we are dealing with right now , or as it is about the time here

## The transformation strategy:

So, we do not sit down and like saying “now we have to cover the curriculum - how we convert them into learning goals, and what can we use materials and activities and organizations and something to support it!? But we do not consistently the opposite. So, we might for example focusing on some content and courses we already made: for example I might have conducted a poetry course and have good experiences and have a feeling that it is actually motivating: **So we use it as a skeleton, and I would say, then we can easily adjust it**

What does goals **do**? The influence of goal orientation:  
The relation between **control** and **direction**

## 1. Lose of spontaneity

“But it seems that, **there is never something, that happens with a little more spontaneity**. Because, what I think is, is that there is also some learning outcome, - that is, if everything becomes very, very controlled – that is not necessarily an advantage... Well, you can say: here the children learn something else, e.g. when the children are asking: can't we do it like this, then because, it's their own idea, they are very enthusiastic about what they are doing. I think there is a downside to it”

## 2. Goal orientation is like a straitjacket

”I know very well, what can be attained within a lesson. But sometimes - sometimes they must be allowed to... These kids, they sometimes bring something, you didn’t expect. Then you have to seize the opportunity. Sometimes. Well. There is the downside to it, if I then said: “no, we have to move on; now we have to reach that goal, and that is today. And **maybe I can’t seize that little flower, coming from a pupil.**”

” I can easily see, that you can be more reflective upon your goals, and a lot more organised, because it could qualify the lessons maybe, but it would also **restrict one's freedom** sometimes, I think. ”

## 2. Goal orientation is like a straitjacket (II)

”But, that is the one about, that is – **like a straitjacket**, isn’t is? (...) Sometimes you just say: hey, this is working very well, we are continuing, because it is just... But, then it is just too bad, if you have to close it down. Now we have to stop, because we have to move on. There are sometimes you just have to say. This doesn’t work. Then what do you do?”

“Okay, that means the possibility to adjust ...?”

“Yes. That is important. It is very important to me. **The possibility to adjust** both because of externally imposed factors, **but also the possibility to seize the opportunity – the small ”balls”, that emerge, when you are working with a specific topic. Or throw away some ”balls”, if it is no good”**

### 3. The teacher as an administrator

”...again, if this means that everything have to be written down –

I am affraid of landing in a pure hell like an office worker [HK-helvede] – an open-office hell, where you just have to sit and ... [pound the table with his fingers] – **instead of teaching in the cool way”**

# What does goals do? The influence of goal orientation:

>>Everything that counts<<

“ (...) what is in a matrix [what goals, you put up]; you have to in one way or another to measure these goals. Otherwise there is no idea in putting it up there”

“But I attended business school, and from there I know, that goals have to be measurable, and that is very logical, you see. Goals which relates to Danish as a subject are not measurable. That is more like: “We are going to *learn about*”. But – how do we measure what they have learned? If you think of the goals of the company, then it is to double it’s income within two years, right?”



# The influence of goals

The planning is becoming more complex

Do planning of goal oriented teaching break with textbook centered planning?

Teacher 1 (math):

*“... I would say that **my new challenge was, that I could not just take the chapters from the textbook.** I needed to think anew and needed more materials to juggle with. I see that many of my colleagues take the textbook because it has been their tool ... and it means that you are moving on thin ice as teacher when you use some self-constructed or alternative materials and that is a challenge. **I just had the guts to do it**”*

**The planning is becoming more complex**

**Do planning of goal oriented teaching  
break with textbook centered planning?**

Teacher 2 (Danish-as-a-Mother-Tongue (DMT)):

*” ... **in the beginning I worked the way most teachers do, when they start planning goal oriented.** I looked through the textbook and said “today we work with the letter “e”” . And then I said “the goal is ...” It is easy to work this way. What I did this year – which almost cracks me – is to start with the national goals and compile all goals about for instance “interpretation”. Having these goals I look at the internet and into books trying to construct a teaching material. And **I am almost at the point of return:** taking the next chapter in the textbook and add learning goals, because **the work is so enormous, so enormous ...** “*

**The planning is becoming more complex**

**The teaching material is no longer the central and regular support**

Infinite buffet of materials

Different demands on the teachers:

Teachers 1 (math): *"**I need to be more specific about what I want and what kinds of materials I want ... it was crucial for me this summer when I made the year plan, that I didn't start from the first chapter in the textbook and then took a chapter or half a chapter and so forth. This year I realized that it is very much about choosing the right materials, the right teaching materials: manipulatives, digital materials or ...**"*

A need for (new) didactical tools (the year plan became more important)

# The planning is becoming more complex

## Decomposition of national goals

Unnecessary complexity :

Teacher 2 (DMT): *"No doubt about the potentials of goal oriented teaching. **The most difficult part is the planning.** And here I might **be supporter of some very narrow learning goals formulated at national level.** It takes a long time to decompose national goals. And then I think, that all pupils are going to learn how to add, right?"*

Difficult to decompose goals in relation to the competencies in the subjects

Short- and long-term goals are experienced as complex in different ways

# Baseline and preliminary results

## “Digitally Supported Learning Goal” project





Thank for your attention!

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