




Article

# Promoting the Self-Determination of Mexican Young Adults Identified with Intellectual Disability: A Sociocultural Discourse Analysis of Their Discussion about Goal Setting

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**Abstract:** Self-determination is the product of the individuals' volition in interaction with their environment. Enhancing the self-determination of young adults with intellectual disability (ID) has been related to positive adult outcomes. Educational programmes to promote self-determination commonly rely on the interaction between students and educators to set goals and make plans to achieve them. Yet the quality of these interactions has been little studied. This research involves Mexican students identified with ID who had accessed universities through the education programme: Building Bridges. The paper presents findings of a sociocultural discourse analysis of the conversations that arose when three students, a teacher and a facilitator discussed courses of action to achieve the students' "Challenge of the Month" goals. We discuss how the student's goal setting could be supported and hindered in these conversations. Potential constraints on students' goal setting are noted when discussions of concrete courses of action are prioritized over discussions that would lead students to reflect more deeply on the motives behind their goals.

**Keywords:** self-determination; goal setting; dialogic interactions; intellectual disability; young adults; sociocultural discourse analysis

## 1. Introduction

As with all young people, enhancing the self-determination of young adults with intellectual disability (ID) has been related to positive adult outcomes (Wehmeyer 2015). A meta-analysis of interventions to promote self-determination for students with disabilities (Burke et al. 2018) suggests that most of these interventions rely on the interaction of students with educators to set goals and make plans to achieve them (e.g., The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction by Shogren et al. 2017). Nevertheless, the quality of these interactions has been little studied. Findings from a sociocultural discourse analysis (SDA, Mercer 2005) that emerged from the first author's doctoral thesis showed different ways in which the students' goal setting can be promoted or hindered in these interactions. In this paper we show how students' goal setting could be hindered when discussions of concrete courses of action are prioritized over discussions that would lead students to reflect more deeply on the motives behind their goals.

### 1.1. Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Contexts

It has become increasingly significant to promote access to postsecondary education (PSE) for people with ID in Western countries (e.g., United Nations 2006; Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004, USA; The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2010, UK; National

Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) (2009), Mexico). Some international initiatives that have facilitated this access include the Up the Hill Programme in Australia (Rillota et al. 2018); the project Inclusive Post-Secondary Education in Canada (Aylward and Bruce 2014); the Think College in the USA (Grigal et al. 2020); the Certificate in Contemporary Living in Ireland (O'Connor et al. 2012); the Pro-mentor programme in Spain (Izuzquiza and Rodríguez 2016); and the Building Bridges programme (Building Bridges is the translation to English of the original name of the programme in Spanish: Construyendo Puentes) in Mexico (Saad et al. 2017), in which this research project took place.

Hart et al. (2006) propose a categorisation of three types of PSE models. Following this differentiation, the Building Bridges programme would be better categorised into the first type.

- Mixed/hybrid model: students participate in social activities and/or academic lessons with students without disabilities and take other academic and/or “life skills” classes with other students identified with disabilities.
- Substantially separate model: students participate only in classes with other students with disabilities and may have the opportunity to participate in social activities and employment experience on campus.
- Inclusive individual support model: students receive individualised support and services in academic classes with students without disabilities.

PSE for people with ID can improve their chances of employment (O'Connor et al. 2012). In PSE settings, instruction in self-determination has proved to be beneficial for students (Morningstar et al. 2010). Accordingly, there is a body of interventions to promote the self-determination of young adults with ID (Algozzine et al. 2001; Burke et al. 2018) and other research findings indicate that self-determination is related to positive school and adult-life outcomes (Wehmeyer 2015).

### 1.2. The Volitional and Interactional Nature of Self-Determination

Our understanding of self-determination draws on two influential theories that emerged from research that included young adults with disabilities in the USA: the functional theory of self-determination (Wehmeyer 2005) and the ecological model of self-determination (Abery and Stancliffe 1996).

Wehmeyer's definition of self-determination has evolved through time in the light of empirical evidence and changes in the conceptualisation of disability (Shogren et al. 2015). Nevertheless, at the heart of his definition have remained the terms causal agency, i.e., acting with the intention of causing an effect to accomplish an end or to cause a change; and volitional action, i.e., making conscious choices (Wehmeyer 2005). He acknowledges that self-determination presumes contextual variance; nevertheless, his work has focused on characteristics that would enable individuals to act in more self-determined ways (Shogren et al. 2017).

Abery and Stancliffe (1996, 2003) acknowledge the interaction between ‘self-determination competencies’ and environmental variables. Nonetheless, a major focus of their work has been on the latter (e.g., Stancliffe et al. 2000). They argue that, while some environments may facilitate self-determination, others might serve as barriers. Therefore, to fully understand self-determination, one must understand not only how various personal characteristics influence self-determination, but also how the context in turn influences its development and manifestation.

Self-determination therefore does not lie entirely ‘within the person’. It, instead, exists in the interaction of the causal agents and their volition, with a supportive person or environment.

This socio-ecological view of self-determination echoes socio-ecological approaches to ID itself, in which the focus shifts from understanding ID as an invariant trait of a person to seeing it as a “multidimensional state of human functioning in relation to environmental demands” (Thompson et al. 2009, p. 135). When the demands of the environment do not coincide with the personal and contextual factors that mediate the demand, a need for support arises. Therefore, this perspective stresses the power of person–environment interaction and the enhancement of human functioning through the provision of pertinent, individualised, and community-based support (Thompson et al. 2009).

While there is evidence of how certain characteristics of the person and the environment may influence self-determination (Algozzine et al. 2001; Burke et al. 2018; Stancliffe et al. 2000), there is a need to developing approaches to observe the exercise of self-determination and the actions of others that can facilitate or limit self-determination (Wehmeyer and Abery 2013). In this paper we propose that opening-up spaces of dialogue helps to achieve this. In dialogic terms (as discussed below) the ways in which others respond to what students say affects the way in which self-determination is expressed and developed. In educational contexts, an interactive view of self-determination would mean promoting the students' consciousness and intentionality in their decision-making processes and supporting this through dialogue. Yet promoting productive dialogic interactions is not easy nor straightforward. While educators may be recommended to encourage students to take responsibility for decision-making with active involvement (e.g., McGlashing-Johnson et al. 2003), it is known that attempting to help young adults with ID to make authentic decisions often results only in passive signs of agreement (Clouse and Bauer 2016).

### 1.3. Dialogic Interactions in Educational Contexts

Bakhtin (1981) explains that dialogic stand in opposition to monologic discourses. Participating in dialogic interactions becomes especially relevant for marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities, who participate in relationships of power which may result in silencing their voices (Freire 1970).

In educational contexts, dialogic interactions should be differentiated from other types of educational talk such as recitation to test students' knowledge, or instruction to tell pupils what to do (Alexander 2008). Dialogic interactions arise when educators guide dialogue with educational objectives in mind (dialogue is purposeful); and educators and pupils: address the learning tasks together (dialogue is collective); share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints (dialogue is reciprocal), help each other reach common understanding (dialogue is supportive); and build on their own and other's ideas (dialogue is cumulative). Some indicators of dialogic interactions include: questions that provoke thoughtful answers; answers that take the form of explanations or arguments; negotiations aimed to seeking agreement; chains of interaction that build on previous contributions; informative feedback that goes beyond simple positive or negative judgments; and a classroom ethos of support in which students feel confident to articulate their ideas (Alexander 2008).

It is important to note that the term dialogic has been used to refer to diverse educational approaches and research interventions resulting in differences in the term's usage (Wegerif 2019). Kim and Wilkinson (2019) differentiate between works that have characterised dialogic teaching as a general pedagogical framework (e.g., Alexander 2008), from those which have put more emphasis on the specific discourse practice, which has to do with the forms and functions of dialogue (e.g., Hennessy et al. 2016). While acknowledging the inevitable overlaps between the two, this paper could be better categorised in the second group. Educational programmes have been documented in literature aimed to support students' self-determination through goal-setting activities.

Some programmes acknowledge that the process should be a conversation with students rather than simply responding to questions and asking educators to take the role of the students' partners and facilitators rather than "authorities" (e.g., Shogren et al. 2017). These guidelines strengthen our argument that promoting self-determination goes beyond initiating conversation with open-ended questions. Overlooking the full range of dialogic interactions could result in practices in which students meet goals through a process that is not necessarily promoting their self-determination when working in goal-setting activities. This is reminiscent of the interactive/authoritative communicative approach that has been described by Mortimer and Scott (2003) in science lessons. In this communicative approach the teacher's interventions are based on questions; however, when students do not give the required answer, their suggestion is put aside. Taking an authoritative role in the conversation would limit the students' agency and thus their self-determination, and yet this is a common practice that often goes unnoticed. As reported by Mortimer and Scott:

... we met several teachers who firmly believed that they were 'taking into account students' own ideas', because they (the teachers) were 'always asking questions' and 'getting the students to talk'. When we looked at the videotapes, we realized that most of the questions being asked had only one possible answer, and that was the answer required by the teacher... When we reviewed and analysed these kinds of interactions with the teachers, during professional development programmes, some of them were very surprised to realize that although their lessons involved lots of questions and answers and much interaction, there was very little probing of, and working with, students' ideas. (p. 24)

This is not to say that authoritative classroom talk is to be entirely rejected. [Mortimer and Scott \(2003\)](#) show how teachers can and should adopt more authoritative approaches in certain moments of the lesson according to the teaching objectives. The key point is that explicit attention should be paid to the varying nature of the talk in each phase of the lesson depending on the given teaching purposes. This points to the importance of doing an in-depth analysis of the interactions to examine if the communicative approach adopted is consistent with the teachers' purposes. In this research, an in-depth analysis was carried out on the dialogic interactions that arose in the context of a goal setting and planning activity.

#### 1.4. Goal Setting

Goal setting and attainment have been widely studied as skills associated with self-determination ([Algozzine et al. 2001](#); [Burke et al. 2018](#)). However, although it may be possible to identify some knowledge, skills and behaviours that facilitate self-determination, it is inaccurate to understand self-determination as a set of skills that a student must master ([Wehmeyer 2005](#)). In this paper we claim that a goal setting activity, like the one that will be explained below, does not exactly match a deeper understanding of self-determination. To study self-determination observations of students' interactions with different agents and in different contexts might be needed. However, in educational terms, goal setting activities may be seen as part of an essential educational learning process towards acting with more volition and intention in the immediate and wider contexts of students' lives. This transfer of learning can be supported in dialogue through reference to students' experiences and knowledge beyond the immediate classroom setting ([Rojas-Drummond et al. 2013](#)).

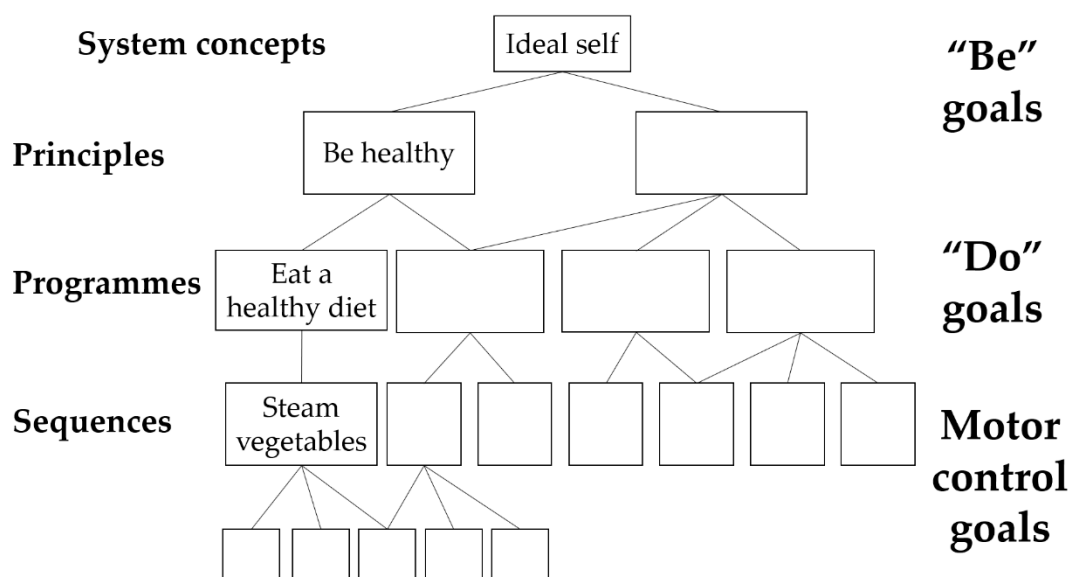
In a large number of the interventions reported in Burke et al.'s meta-analysis ([Burke et al. 2018](#)), researchers used programmes in which students, with the support of educators or parents, set goals and planned courses of action to meet them in a self-regulated fashion. One of the most common programmes in the literature is the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction ([Shogren et al. 2017](#)) which has been used to achieve students' academic and transition goals ([Agran et al. 2001](#); [Agran and Wehmeyer 2000](#); [Shogren et al. 2012](#); [Wehmeyer et al. 2012](#)); work-related goals ([McGlashing-Johnson et al. 2003](#)); and goals related to social skills and behavioural issues ([Wehmeyer et al. 2000](#)). Other programmes include The Postschool Achievement Through Higher Skills (PATHS), a career development curriculum targeted at women with disabilities and those at risk ([Doren et al. 2013](#)); educational residential programmes to achieve personal goals in everyday activities ([Sheppard and Unsworth 2011](#)); and programmes to propose and accomplish Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals such as Take Action ([German et al. 2000](#)) and the Interactive Hypermedia Programme (IHP), mostly mediated by technology ([Lancaster et al. 2002](#)). Many other programmes have been used to help students achieve transition goals. For instance, Whose Future is it Anyway ([Wehmeyer et al. 2011](#)), Next S.T.E.P.: Student Transition and Educational Planning ([Zhang 2001](#)), Family-centred transition process ([Hagner et al. 2012](#)), and Choice-in-Transition ([Taylor-Ritzler et al. 2001](#)). Other interventions have gone a step further by not only focusing on the attainment of transition goals but also in increasing the students' involvement on their transition planning (e.g., [Mazzotti et al. 2015](#); [Palmer et al. 2012](#); [Powers et al. 2001](#); [Seong et al. 2015](#); [Wehmeyer et al. 2006](#)). In most cases, the focus of analyses was on how successful the students were at achieving their goals and on whether there were significant changes in self-determination scores, as measured with scales such as the Goal Attainment Scaling ([Kiresuk et al. 1994](#)) and the Arc's

Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer and Kelchner 1995). Even though some interventions observed the actual participation of the students (e.g., Mazzotti et al. 2015), little attention has been given to the content of the interactions between students and other agents through which the students set goals and propose courses of action to achieve them.

Self-regulation has been typically described as individuals’ ability to adjust their actions to achieve desired results, therefore placing emphasis on personal resources (Jackson et al. 2005). However, as explained by Jackson et al., the concept of inter-reliance acknowledges that people do not act in isolation, nor have complete control over their actions. In accordance with inter-reliance, goal setting is always embedded in a broader social context. Personal goals are intertwined with social goals and are accomplished through interpersonal interactions. Therefore to accomplish goals, individuals make use of other people within their social network while, at the same time, their individual needs are weighed against the needs of others who will be impacted by their decisions. Drawing on Jackson et al. we claim that individual goals are thus accomplished and negotiated through interpersonal interactions.

### 1.5. Goal’s Levels of Abstraction

Not all goals are alike; goals differ from each other in that some are broader in scope than others. Sometimes this difference is in terms of temporal commitment while others differ in relation to the goal’s level of abstraction (Carver and Scheier 2005). The latter is what we were interested in in this research. A goal at a high level of abstraction is concerned with being a particular kind of person, while a goal at a lower level is concerned with completing a particular kind of action. Other goals are even more concrete since they describe specification of individual acts. Therefore, abstract goals are linked to concrete sub-goals in a hierarchy of level of abstraction. In this context, the hierarchy might look like that illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A hierarchy of goals for self-determination. Adapted from: ‘A hierarchy of goals’ on ‘On the Structure of Behavioral Self-Regulation’, by C. Carver and M. Scheier, 2005.

According to Powers (1973, in Carver and Scheier 2005), at the “system concepts” level lies the idealised overall sense of self, relationship or group identity; at the “principles” level are trait labels; “programmes” refer to activities involving conscious decisions at various points; and “sequences” is the next level down and go their own way directly once cued (Carver and Scheier 2005). Another theory that resembles Power’s is the Action Identification Theory (Vallacher and Wegner 1987). This explains that people can identify an action in many ways, and the act of identification can vary in level of abstraction. A high-level can convey a more general understanding of the action by indicating why an

action is done, while lower levels convey the details or specifics of the action and so indicate how the action is done.

As will be shown below, keeping these levels in mind is of great importance during goal-setting activities with students. As noted by Snelgrove (2005), engaging people with ID in their educational process is not a matter of simply talking to them, but of developing pedagogical strategies. This process demands awareness of the concerns of the people with ID and sensitivity to the worth of their experiences. As she notes, in doing so the social construction of the student as ‘deficient’ and ‘passive’ is challenged and an opportunity may arise for students to articulate a counter discourse. It is for this reason that leaving conversations with students at the “how” level in order to achieve their goals may not be enough. It would be equally important to open spaces to explore the “whys” behind those goals. Moreover, a conversation about these “whys” would also facilitate the students’ volition and agency by encouraging them to reflect on their goals, thus potentially benefiting their self-determination.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Objectives and Research Questions

The main objective of the project from which the following findings emerged was to develop a pedagogy based on dialogue with students with ID to explore the following questions: how do the students experience self-determination?; how is self-determination co-constructed over time in dialogue?

To get a broad understanding of the students’ self-determination, the first author implemented the said pedagogy in a series of discussion groups that were held once a week for six months with ten students. Various topics of interest to the students were discussed in five activities and a focus group, including their goals for the future, love relationships and their transition to an independent-living flat. Furthermore, the first author observed the students’ interactions with different agents and in different contexts. An in-depth analysis of these data falls outside the scope of this paper; however, Table 1 summarises the aspects of self-determination that the students talked about in the discussion groups.

**Table 1.** Summary of aspects discussed.

<b>Decision-making in relation to:</b>	friendships, love relationships, health, independent-living, money, personal appearance, personal mobility, routines, studies, work, travel, recreational time.
<b>Agents involved in the students’ decision-making process:</b>	parents/family, facilitators/teachers, friends/love partners.
<b>Other topics related to the decision-making process:</b>	new learning, support, feelings, rights.

This paper focuses on an activity called “The challenge of the month” which was implemented with three of the ten students. In this activity, the students selected a goal they wanted to meet in the short-term and proposed plans of action to reach it. The sessions where the challenge of the month was discussed were analysed to identify moves in dialogue that helped or hindered students’ goal setting.

The findings here reported came from these analyses to answer the research sub-question: when proposing courses of action, at what level of abstraction is goal setting discussed?

### 2.2. Context and Participants

The students who participated in the research project are part of a very select group of the Mexican population with ID who have obtained access to higher education. Their access to higher education was facilitated through a civil association called CAPyS ([www.capysac.com](http://www.capysac.com)). CAPyS works with people identified with ID to foster the development of their autonomy through diverse educational programmes. One of these programmes is Building Bridges, which aims to include young adults with

ID in university contexts. The conversations analysed and presented in this paper took place at a private university in Mexico City in which these participants studied at the time. These young adults did not pursue a bachelor's degree. Instead, the programme provided a transition service to independent adult life by giving guidance and emotional and formative support to foster the development of basic independent-living skills, personal development, and the management of their sexuality. Students also participate in academic, social, cultural and sports activities at the university; attend working internships; use community services; and have their first experiences of living independently with peers and a facilitator (Saad et al. 2017).

### 2.2.1. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included changing the names of the participants to pseudonyms and gaining informed consent from participating teachers, students, parents, and the Building Bridges coordinator. The informed consent forms were accompanied by information sheets about the research project. The students' information sheet and consent form consisted of short, clear sentences and included descriptive images. The forms and information sheets were previously discussed with, and approved by, the coordinator and psychologist of the Building Bridges programme. The first author met with the potential participating students in an introductory session to explain the objectives of the project and the consent form that they would discuss and complete with their parents and/or teachers after the session. At the time of this session, the students were familiar with the researcher as she had been assisting in the programme's activities for the previous three months. The first author explained that she was a student carrying out a research project about the decision-making process of university students with ID. These students recognise themselves as young adults with ID and were familiar with terms such as "research project" and "doctorate degree" because, in addition to having relatives at these educational levels, the programme is constantly the scene of research projects. The researcher explained that they would participate in discussion sessions with other Building Bridges classmates, a teacher and herself; that the sessions would be audio and video recorded in order to write down what they said in the sessions, and therefore they had to talk to their parents/teachers to decide if they would be comfortable in this setting. It was clarified that they could stop participating if/when they decided to do so and even ask, within the sessions, to stop the recording at any time. To ensure that the students had understood, they were asked to rephrase what was explained. The students' concerns were discussed during that session and the first author was also available to answer questions in the following days. Parents' support was requested to discuss the students' information sheet and consent form with them. Parents were also asked for their consent to audio and videotape the students in the sessions. The participating teachers were also provided with information sheets and consent forms. The consent forms signed by the students, parents and teachers were collected a few days later.

### 2.2.2. The Challenge of the Month Activity

The Challenge of the Month was a goal setting and planning activity that the first author proposed to the students after listening to their goals for the future. This activity was carried out with one group of three students: Gabriel, Nicole and, Sebastian. Two Building Bridges teachers participated in the discussion groups at different times: Amy and Derek. The first author participated in the discussions in the role of facilitator.

The activity consisted of each student choosing a goal; strategies would be discussed to achieve the goals, and the progress of the students would be reviewed weekly in the discussion group. The activity took place over three months. As the name implies, the original purpose was for students to change their challenge each month. However, in practice the first author decided not to rush the students to change to a new challenge, because situations such as students' absences and the Easter vacations occurred. Gabriel and Nicole stayed with the same challenge over the course of three months; Sebastian changed his challenge once.

### 2.3. Analyses

#### 2.3.1. Sociocultural Discourse Analysis (SDA)

SDA was proposed by Mercer (2005, 2010) as a methodology based on a sociocultural perspective on teaching, learning and cognitive development. According to this methodology, language is an educational tool for teachers and learners to co-construct knowledge, create joint understandings, and tackle problems collaboratively. The interest of SDA is not only in educational outcomes but in the study of the educational processes through which participants construct common knowledge.

As part of the SDA, the discussions that emerged when talking about the challenges of the month with Gabriel, Nicole and Sebastian were transcribed verbatim using an adapted version of the notation system proposed by Jefferson (2004)<sup>1</sup> and translated from Spanish to English. The turns were coded using a scheme called Cam-UNAM Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (SEDA, Hennessy et al. 2016). SEDA has 33 codes categorised into eight clusters that aim to operationalise dialogic interactions in educational contexts (<http://tinyurl.com/BAdialogue>).

For the results shown below, we focused only on those turns coded as a proposed course of action (G2). A G2 is coded when a participant “proposes a course of action in the context of a dialogue or collective activity”. For this specific analysis, the activity discussed collectively was The Challenge of the Month. Therefore, a course of action was coded when a participant made a proposition related to achieving a challenge of the month. This proposition could take the form of a strategy/tactic/plan to achieve their own or someone else’s challenge. Due to the educational nature of this activity, the interest was not only on students achieving their goals, but also on them learning to monitor their progress. To monitor their progress, the students were provided with “The Challenge of the Month form” as a self-regulatory tool (Figure 2). The courses of action directed to regularly track the students’ progress on the form were also coded as G2.

The turns coded with G2 in a first phase of analysis were discussed between the authors and with an external coder. This external coder was a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge and has used the scheme in her own research. Feedback from this coding process was also collected in a workshop in which members of the Cambridge Educational Dialogue Research Group (CEDiR)<sup>2</sup> from the Faculty of Education participated. Coding was refined from the feedback received.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendix A for an adapted version of the notation system proposed by Jefferson (2004).

<sup>2</sup> CEDiR refers to the Cambridge Educational Dialogue Research group. Some CEDiR members participated in the development and refinement of SEDA (<http://tinyurl.com/cedirgroup>).



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## My challenge of the month

My goal is: \_\_\_\_\_

MARCH						
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

**Figure 2.** The Challenge of the month form.

### 2.3.2. Classification of the Courses of Action: ‘Be’ and ‘Do’ Goals

Upon further analysis of those turns coded as proposed courses of action (G2), the authors identified that these varied in level of abstraction. Drawing on ideas from Powers (1973, in [Carver and Scheier 2005](#)) and [Vallacher and Wegner \(1987\)](#), the courses of action proposed were thought of as sub-goals to accomplish more overarching goals. Goals and sub-goals varied in level of abstraction from the most abstract (the highest-level of abstraction which indicates why the action is done), to the most concrete (the lowest level of abstraction which indicates how the action is done). Moreover, in a hierarchy the sub-goals have a lower level of abstraction in relation to the details of the action. Following these ideas, we categorised the goals and sub-goals into two categories:

- Be goals: idealised overall sense of self, relationship or group identity, trait labels. Goals aiming to be a particular way. e.g., being healthy; be successful in school.
- Do goals: activities involving conscious decisions at various points. Goals aiming to do certain things. e.g., prepare dinner; get good grades, study every night. These goals may in turn be achieved through a set of more concrete sub-goals regarding the details of the proposed strategies. e.g., prepare dinner can have the sub-goals of slicing broccoli and turning on the oven (some of these examples were taken from [Carver and Scheier 2005](#), and [Boekaerts and Niemivirta 2005](#)).

Drawing on the concept of inter-reliance ([Jackson et al. 2005](#)), the levels of abstraction/concreteness indicated are not to be understood as cognitive levels of any of the participants, but as the level of abstraction of the goals that were discussed among the participants.

### 3. Results

The episodes below arose when students discussed their goals for the future, chose their challenges of the month, and then reflected on the activity. These conversations were chosen purposefully since they show an apparent effect on students’ goal setting, regardless of whether students meet their goals.

### 3.1. Gabriel's Challenge of the Month

Episode one in Table 2 took place when Gabriel shared his goals for the future. One of the goals he had was buying a movie ticket by himself. Sebastian and Nicole suggested that he should save in a moneybox the money he did not spend at the university.

**Table 2.** Episode 1.

345	Sebastian	You can, well. One could be::: to buy a moneybox
346	Gabriel	Uh-huh (( <i>sound expressing affirmation</i> ))
347	Sebastian	And in that moneybox you just put little money, little money like
348	Nicole	From the money that they (( <i>his parents</i> ))) give you for the week
349	Gabriel	Ok
Turns later		
471	Facilitator	(( <i>The facilitator speaks to Gabriel</i> )) If we have the moneybox as they say
472	Gabriel	Ok
473	Facilitator	And you put money in every now and then, I don't know, every week or so
474	Gabriel	That's ok
475	Me	Maybe [you'll have] money to pay for your ticket, I don't know, once every two months or every month
476	Nicole	[Every fortn-]
477	Gabriel	That's ok (( <i>nodding</i> ))
478	Me	Would you like us to do something like that for your challenge of the month?
479	Gabriel	Yes, it could be

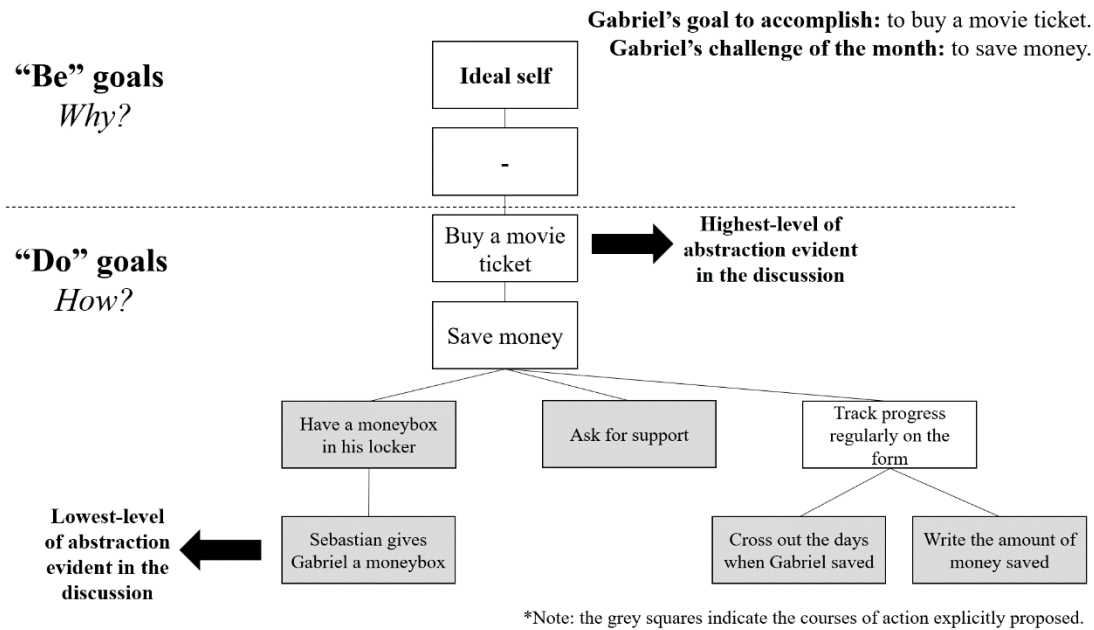
Episode two in Table 3 took place in a later session when the students formally chose their challenges of the month. In this episode, Gabriel remembered his peers' suggestion and chose "to save money" as his challenge of the month.

**Table 3.** Episode 2.

1203	Facilitator	Let's think, what would you like to do as a challenge of the month. What would you like to do guys?
1204	Nicole	Oh, I am between two! (( <i>she smiles and leans her head on the table</i> ))
1205	Sebastian	Oh, they give us too many challenges! Oh, we have too many ideas! (( <i>smiling and slightly shaking his head as saying 'no'</i> ))
1206	Facilitator	Well, just- let's choose one first. (( <i>Facilitator notices that Gabriel is looking at the table and seems distracted</i> )) You know which one already, right Gabriel?
1207	Gabriel	Yes (( <i>Gabriel is still looking at the table</i> ))
1208	Facilitator	Which one?
1209	Gabriel	Which one? (( <i>Gabriel looks at Facilitator</i> ))
1210	Facilitator	Uh-huh, what was going to be your challenge of the month?
1211	Gabriel	To save money (( <i>he writes this down in his challenge of the month form</i> ))
1212	Facilitator	Ok, then your challenge of the month, here, here, here, here (( <i>Facilitator points out where to write down his challenge in the form</i> ))

As shown in episodes one and two, prior to filling in their challenge of the month forms, Gabriel's peers and facilitator had suggested that Gabriel save the money he did not spend at the university to meet his goal of buying a movie ticket by himself. These conversations set the ground for Gabriel to

choose his challenge and he filled in his form accordingly. After choosing his challenge, courses of action were proposed to achieve it, as well as to regularly track his progress on the form. Figure 3 gives an overview of Gabriel’s goal and the courses of action that were proposed organised into their level of abstraction/concreteness.



**Figure 3.** Overview of the courses of action proposed when Gabriel chose his challenge.

It is important to mention that, at the time of the intervention, the facilitator was not aware of the levels of abstraction/concreteness at which the discussions remained, so she did not employ these explicitly. These levels were identified during the data analysis.

Gabriel’s goal was to buy a movie ticket. “Buy a movie ticket” was categorised as a ‘Do goal’. The conversations revolved around other ‘do goals’ to accomplish this overarching goal. Therefore, the highest level of abstraction discussed in relation to Gabriel’s goal was the ‘do goal’ “buy a movie ticket”, since it was the reason why the rest of the actions were proposed (Figure 3). The reasons behind Gabriel’s interest in buying the ticket, (i.e., be goals) were not discussed.

The conversations in which courses of action were proposed to achieve Gabriel’s challenge follow. In episode three in Table 4, the facilitator took up Gabriel’s challenge as an example to illustrate how to fill in the Challenge of the month form. Firstly, she explained that the form said “March” on the top because that was the month running at the time. Then, the participants discussed how to fill in the form and how to regularly monitor Gabriel’s progress.

In episode three, details on how the ‘do goal’ “save money” could be facilitated were discussed at a lower level of abstraction: “having a moneybox in Gabriel’s locker” and “ask support from his teachers and/or parents”. The facilitator also asked questions on how to track Gabriel’s progress on the form. At the lowest level of abstraction, participants proposed actions related to specific forms of tracking progress on the challenge of the month and suggesting people to get the moneybox from.

It is also relevant to mention that, although the challenge discussed was Gabriel’s, sometimes teacher Amy, Sebastian, Nicole and the facilitator contributed to the conversation without really promoting Gabriel’s active participation, even referring to Gabriel in the third person in some occasions. Moreover, many of the questions the facilitator asked Gabriel were closed-ended, thus maintaining a directive role over the task (e.g., turns 1224 and 1246).

Table 4. Episode 3.

1218	Facilitator	((Facilitator holds Gabriel's form and show it to the students while she speaks)) So I put the month March because we are in March right now, ok? And what we are going to do is that we are going to cross out the day in which we start and then each day we will- for example, <u>Gabriel</u> ((Facilitator emphasised Gabriel's name to catch his attention. Gabriel was looking at the table))
1219	Gabriel	Yes? ((Gabriel raises his head and looks at Facilitator))
1220	Facilitator	((Facilitator speaks to the students)) He will write down how much money he saves
1221	Gabriel	Ok° ((speaks in a very low voice))
1222	Facilitator	((Facilitator looks at Gabriel)) So that at the end we know how much money you have
1223	Gabriel	Ok
1224	Facilitator	((Facilitator shows the form to Gabriel while she speaks)) Do you want, do you want to know how much money you have or do you want to cross out the days in which you save money?
1225	Sebastian	Well:::
1226	<b>Gabriel</b>	<b>Cross out when I save <sup>1</sup></b>
1227	Facilitator	[Ok]
1228	<b>Sebastian</b>	<b>[Mmm::] ((sound expressing thinking)) no, better not. The money, to see mm::: like to help him, could it be? Like, for example, he puts the money. If he spent little and put a little less [of the money] [and then you kind of save less], I don't know, and then like help him with that</b>
1229	Facilitator	[Do you have a locker here?] ((asking Nicole))
1230	Nicole	[Locker, we do have] ((Nicole answers Facilitator's question))
1231	Facilitator	Yes, that would be great Gabriel ((Facilitator shows the form to Gabriel and points out to it while she speaks)), that you were writing like "today I saved five pesos". But how do we control this? ((Facilitator looks at the form))
1232	Gabriel	Ok
1233	Facilitator	((Looking at Gabriel)) How do we look- How do we supervise this?
1234	<b>Teacher Amy</b>	<b>Well that about leaving in the locker a moneybox</b>
1235	Facilitator	To leave in the locker the moneybox? ((looking at teacher Amy))
1236	Teacher Amy	And that they go putting money in
1237	Facilitator	Uh-huh
1238	Teacher Amy	But then you could only supervise well, well, Thursday and Friday
1239	Facilitator	No, I could come more days per week
1240	Teacher Amy	Yes?
1241	<b>Facilitator</b>	<b>Yes, to supervise the guys' challenges. We'll go from there, but something like that. [Or maybe I can ask support from] Teacher Isabel or something ((Isabel was a teacher of the Building Bridges programme)), just to see that they save. I don't know ((Looking at Teacher Amy and shaking her head indicating no)). No</b>
1242	Nicole	[Or in the case of:::]
1243	Nicole	Or from Derek and Lucy? ((Derek and Lucy were the facilitators of the independent-living flats where Nicole and Sebastian lived at))

Table 4. Cont.

1244	Facilitator	In your case Derek and Lucy can support you, yes. In your case Derek and Lucy will support you ( <i>talking to Nicole</i> ). ( <i>Looking at Gabriel, Facilitator continues speaking</i> ) Because I thought of saying this at your home, Gabriel
1245	Gabriel	Ok
1246	Facilitator	Do you think they will support you at home?
1247	Gabriel	Yes
The conversation continued a few turns later when the Facilitator tells Gabriel that he would need to take a moneybox to the university, thus taking up the proposal of having a moneybox in Gabriel's locker in order to supervise him regularly		
1266	Facilitator	Ok. So we are going to send a message to your parents now before we forget. Now [before- when] we finish ( <i>Facilitator touches Gabriel's hand to stop him from getting up</i> ). Sorry, sorry, when we finish. When we finish, we are going to send a message to your parents that we need a moneybox for next week
1267	Gabriel	[Ok] ( <i>Gabriel stands from his place. After Facilitator touched his hand he sits down once again</i> )
1268	Gabriel	Ok
1269	Facilitator	For tomo- for tomorrow is too soon. For Monday
1270	Gabriel	For Monday, ok
1271	Facilitator	And we have the moneybox and start with your challenge of the month
1272	Gabriel	Ok
1273	<b>Sebastian</b>	<b>Or I give him one of mine</b>
1274	Facilitator	You have many?
1275	Sebastian	Let's say, I even have a piggy bank there ( <i>points with his right hand to his left side</i> )

<sup>1</sup> Turns in bold indicate courses of action proposed.

Conversations continued once Gabriel started working on his goal. For instance, week by week Gabriel chose how much money he would put in his moneybox based on the money he had left over. After two weeks of saving \$10 Mexican pesos his peer Sebastian proposed to Gabriel a course of action: "If you want, well, if you have enough, you can put more [money] in . . . I mean, it doesn't have to be \$10 always". Gabriel nodded in agreement but did not put more money in, even though he had more left-over money in his wallet. Sebastian repeated, "You could put another \$10 if you wanted to" Gabriel replied "Yes". I intervened "But you don't want to?" To which Gabriel shook his head indicating no. After having a look at this form, we concluded that it would take him another three weeks to save enough money for a movie ticket if he continued saving \$10 per week and he was comfortable with that.

After two more weeks of saving money (\$20 in one week and \$10 in the other), Gabriel saved enough money to buy his movie ticket. In relation to this Gabriel said he felt "very good . . . because I will be able to achieve what I set for myself this month".

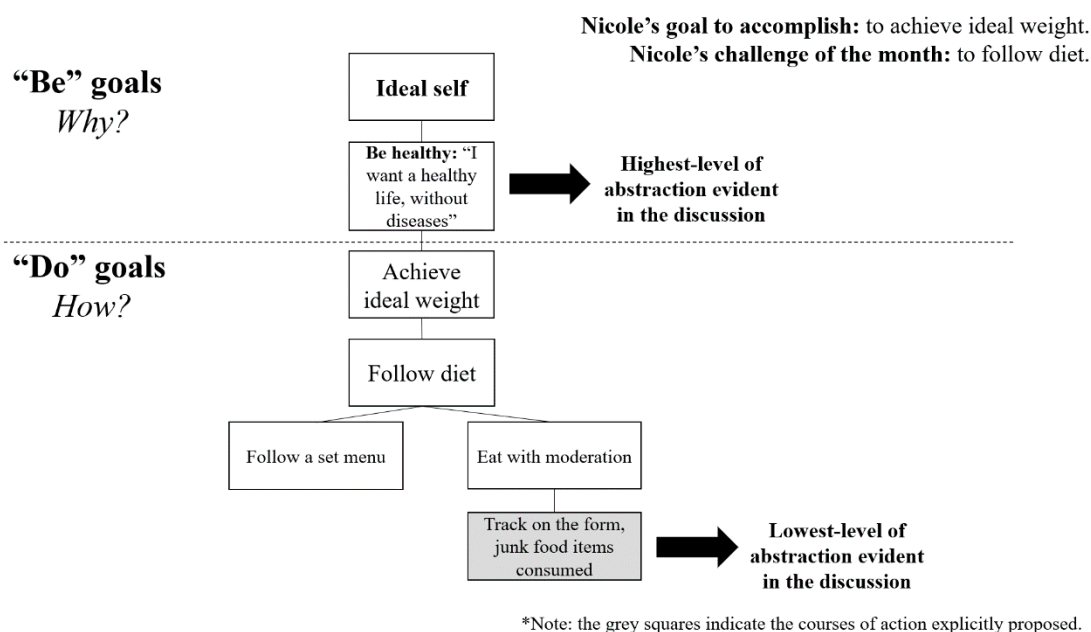
### 3.2. Nicole's Challenge of the Month

When choosing her challenge, Nicole mentioned that she was undecided between two of the goals she had shared in a previous session. After a brief discussion, she chose her challenge of the month (Table 5).

Table 5. Episode 4.

1399	Facilitator	In the meantime, let's see, Nicole, you which one?
1400	Nicole	It's just that I am between two (( <i>smiling, she brings her two index fingers together</i> ))
1401	Facilitator	Ok, which two?
1402	Nicole	The one of my diet
1403	Facilitator	The one of your diet
1404	Nicole	And to save money
1405	Facilitator	And to save money
1406	Nicole	And to keep saving money because I am saving but I want to keep saving more
1407	Facilitator	Ok, and if it was saving money, what would be the goal? (( <i>Nicole looks at her form. After two seconds of silence Facilitator continues</i> )) Just to keep saving it? (( <i>Facilitator smiles, Nicole looks at Facilitator and nods</i> )) And if it was the diet, what is the goal?
1408	Nicole	Mm:: (( <i>sound expressing thinking</i> )), achieve mm:: the weight that I should weigh?
1409	Facilitator	(( <i>nods</i> )) Ok. Which one do you think that would be better? (2) For now?
1410	Nicole	I think the diet
1411	Facilitator	I think so as well. Because saving is something that you already do (( <i>Nicole nods</i> )) and you are very disciplined already, right? To save your money and that? And right now, there isn't something- I mean now Gabriel (( <i>Facilitator touches Gabriel's arm to bring back his attention to the conversation</i> )) wants to save but because he has the goal, very specific, of wanting to buy a movie ticket
1412	Gabriel	Ok
1413	Facilitator	(( <i>Looking at Gabriel</i> )) Yes, right?
1414	Gabriel	Yes
1415	Facilitator	(( <i>Looking at Nicole</i> )) Therefore his challenge now is saving money
1416	Gabriel	Ok
1417	Facilitator	Yours, now, your challenge is to get to the weight that you want, or need, or that you are asked to. And then the goal- Well, the goal is, sorry to get to that weight, that's the goal
1418	Gabriel	Ok
1419	Facilitator	Then the challenge could be to follow your diet (( <i>Nicole nods</i> )). I think that's something that right now you feel that it's more necessary. (( <i>Facilitator shrugs her shoulders</i> )) That doesn't mean that you're going to stop saving, because it's something you do anyway, right? (( <i>Nicole nods</i> )) Ok, then we can put it like this. So the challenge is
1420	Nicole	Mm::: (( <i>Nicole writes down on her form</i> ))

In episode four, Nicole chose her challenge of the month after the facilitator focused the conversation on a key aspect of the activity: that the challenges were meant to achieve goals (turn 1407). Figure 4 shows an overview of Nicole's goal and the courses of action that were proposed, organised into their level of abstraction/concreteness.



**Figure 4.** Of the courses of action proposed when Nicole chose her challenge.

Nicole proposed as her challenge of the month ‘to follow her diet’. This was one of the goals that Nicole shared when she had talked about her goals for the future in a previous session: “[I want to] keep my diet because I want to have a healthy life, without diseases and pain”. This aim of ‘Being healthy’ was thus considered the highest level of abstraction discussed in relation to this goal (Figure 4). After choosing her challenge, the facilitator and Nicole discussed how she would monitor whether she was following her diet (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Episode 5.

1548	Facilitator	Do you have a written diet? From Monday’s menu, Tuesday’s menu, Wednesday’s menu? Or is it that you more or less know what you have to eat?
1549	Nicole	More or- I <u>do</u> know what I have to eat
1550	Facilitator	Is there something you should not eat that you sometimes eat? ((Facilitator shakes her head no while saying “should not eat”))
1551	Nicole	Mmm:: ((closes her eyes a little and shakes her head slightly from side to side)) well I can eat but not very often and sometimes yes ...
1552	Facilitator	You eat more often?
1553	Nicole	Mmm well no but if I do it, I don’t know, once a week or something. The nutritionist told me that I can eat everything but not
1554	Facilitator	Limited (2) moderated ((Facilitator nods))
1555	Nicole	Moderated ((nods slightly))
1556	Facilitator	Because to follow your diet you could say, “today Monday, yes I followed it”, but how do you know that you followed it? If you didn’t ea:::t (2) crisps or if you didn’t ea:::t
1557	Nicole	(2) Bread?
1558	Facilitator	Bread for example. Then you can write. ((Facilitator put her hands in front of her with the palms facing each other leaving a space between them)) For example we can limit it only to eating bread. Or something like that. ((Facilitator lowers her hands, crosses her arms, and rests her elbows on the table)) Something you like and you shouldn’t eat all the time
1559	Nicole	Well, crisps, bread

Table 6. Cont.

1560	Facilitator	So you can write down like ((Facilitator acts like she is writing using her right hand while saying the following)) [ <b>“today I ate crisp”</b> ], <b>“today I ate bread”</b> , <b>“today I did not eat these things, today I ate vegetables”</b> or something like that. ((Using her finger, Facilitator points out different days on the form while explaining the following)) Like writing down what days, for example today if you eat bread you put <b>“I ate bread”</b> and then you see here <b>“today I ate bread and yesterday I ate crisps and tomorrow I ate carbohydrates and sat-”</b> , sorry, yes, <b>“crisps and here again. This day I only ate well, without crisps and without bread, but this day I ate crisps again and this day I ate bread again and this time, I didn’t realise it but I ate crisps again”</b> . Do I make myself clear? <sup>1</sup>
1561	Sebastian	[Junk food]
1562	Nicole	Oh, ok! ((smiling looking at her form))
1563	Facilitator	Like things you should not eat much, you can write them down
1564	Nicole	Ok
1565	Facilitator	Yes? [Something like that?] ((shaking her hand to express ‘more or less’)) Yes? And then we see each Thursday how your diet is going ((Nicole nods)) Ok
1566	Nicole	[Yes, ok]

<sup>1</sup> Turns in bold indicate courses of action proposed.

Nicole shared that she wanted to follow her diet to reach her ideal weight. Thus, to “follow a diet” was thought of as a means to “achieve ideal weight”, which in turn was a means to “be healthy”. Therefore, we categorised “achieve ideal weight” and “follow diet” as ‘Do goals’ to achieve the ‘Be goal’ of being healthy. Two ways of following a diet were briefly discussed: following a set menu or eating with moderation. Nicole focused the conversation on the latter and the facilitator proposed a way to track her progress on the challenge of the month form. This tracking on the form was the lowest level of abstraction discussed relating to this matter.

Nicole maintained this challenge of the month for the three months that this activity lasted. She usually reported feeling “good” with her progress in the activity. On the days that Nicole considered having eaten healthily, she put a tick on her form; this was on most days. When she ate junk food, she marked the day with a cross and wrote down the junk food consumed, e.g., “pizza, hamburger, cornbread”. When discussing this in one of our later sessions she explained that she could eat junk food once a week: “once a week, my doctor says yes”. At the end of the activity, Nicole was still two kilograms above the recommended weight. However Nicole commented: “[the challenge of the month form helped me] to see what days I failed so that the next day I would not fail with my diet and say no, here I failed and today I do not have to fail in my diet and I have to keep it well”.

### 3.3. Sebastian Chooses His Challenge of the Month

Sebastian proposed as his challenge of the month to take his own breakfast from the independent-living flat where he lived to the university (Table 7).

The interaction between Sebastian and Nicole in turns 1425 to 1426 is interesting because, after having chosen his challenge, Sebastian incorporates Nicole into the conversation by asking for her confirmation: “Sometimes I forget, right?” It makes sense that Sebastian asked Nicole for her confirmation since both were very close friends and usually sat down together in the university cafeteria during mealtimes. Nicole answered by focusing Sebastian on the question the facilitator had previously asked: “But which days do you want to bring breakfast, or all week?”. In this way Nicole provided support to her peer to move his task forward.



Table 7. Episode 6.

1421	Sebastian	Oh, I know which one!
1422	Facilitator	Which one?
1423	Sebastian	Bring breakfast to the university
1424	Facilitator	Ok. That’s your challenge, bring breakfast to the university, how often?
1425	Sebastian	((Looking at Nicole)) Yes, sometimes I forget, right?
1426	Nicole	((Looking at Sebastian)) But which days do you want to bring breakfast, or all week?
1427	Sebastian	In all, in all the- [to see what days I fail], to see what days for example
1428	Nicole	[All week?] ((She asks Sebastian but looks at Facilitator))
1429	Nicole	Oh, I think I got it!
1430	Facilitator	It’s like you want to have a record of the days you bring breakfast and the days you spend money?
1431	Sebastian	Mmm::: ((sound expressing thinking)) something like that
1432	Facilitator	But what is your goal? To bring it every day, bring at least three times a week?
1433	Nicole	Once a week?
1434	Facilitator	At least once a week? I mean, how many times a week would you like to bring breakfast?
1435	Sebastian	It’s like trying not to spend so much money
1436	Facilitator	Ok ((nods))

In turn 1432, the facilitator posed the question to Sebastian “What is your goal?” and as a scaffolding strategy to encourage Sebastian’s response she gave him some options: to bring breakfast every day, at least three times a week. However, with these options she was assuming that Sebastian’s goal was related to bringing food to the university on a certain number of days per week. Fortunately, Sebastian clarified the previous contribution shedding light onto what his goal was: “trying not to spend so much money”. Figure 5 shows an overview of Sebastian’s goal and the courses of action that were proposed, organised into their level of abstraction/concreteness.

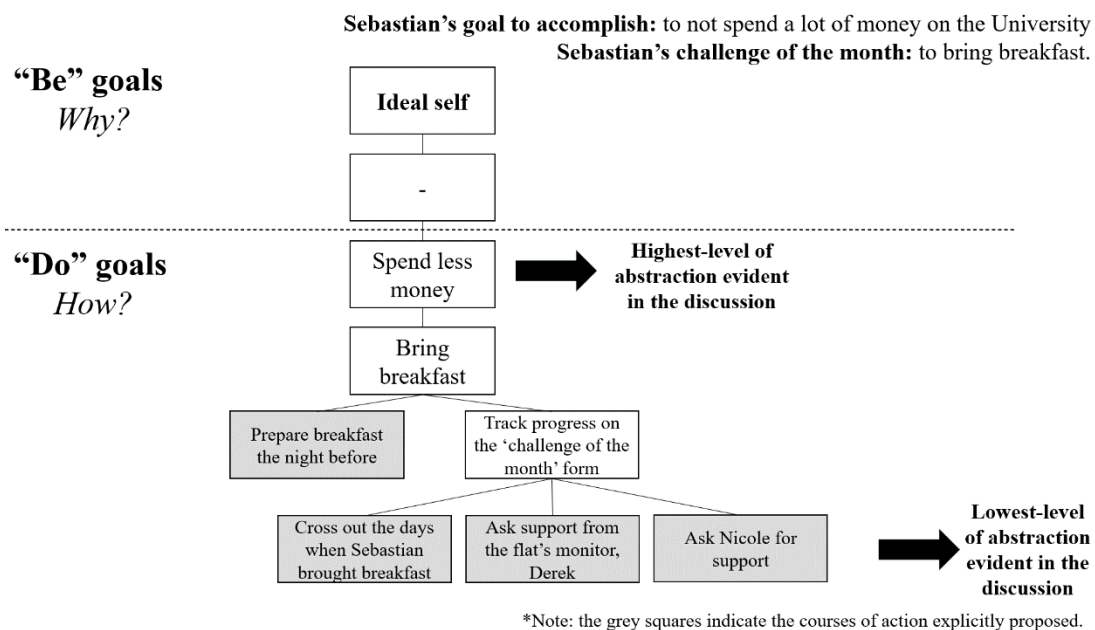


Figure 5. Overview of the courses of action proposed when Sebastian chose his challenge.

Sebastian's goal was discussed at the 'Do goals' level only, similar to Gabriel's case. The conversations in which these propositions aroused are transcribed below (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Episode 7.

1468	Facilitator	Ok then what are we going to do? ((Facilitator touches with her finger Sebastian's challenge of the month form)) The days that you bring breakfast, you'll cross them out or how are you going to mark there that you did bring breakfast? Or are you going to write yes or no? How are you going to do it?
1469	Sebastian	Mm:: ((sound expressing thinking)) like every time that I bring a food container and food is like I brought my breakfast. [I mean
1470	Nicole	[Uh-huh, but here, how will you register it? ((points to Sebastian's form))
1471	Facilitator	For example, today is Thursday 7, did you bring your breakfast today?
1472	Sebastian	Ehm yes, I even brought chicken
1473	Facilitator	Perfect, [so then on Thursday 7-] ((Facilitator realised that Nicole wanted to say something, thus she paused herself and look at Nicole giving her the turn to speak))
1474	Nicole	<b>[So the-] Then you could cross it out or you could put [a tick]</b> <sup>1</sup>
1475	Facilitator	[a mark], a tick. Whatever that means that on that day, that makes se- that you [know]
1476	Nicole	[understand] ((chuckles))
1477	Facilitator	Uh-huh, that on that day you brought your breakfast ((Sebastian puts a cross on his form to indicate that on that day he took his breakfast to the university)). Perfect, ok? Then, how do we do it so that every day you remember to mark if yes or no? ((I point to Sebastian's form using my finger))
1478	Sebastian	Mm:: well:: ((sound expressing thinking)) what do you mean?
1479	Facilitator	Tomorrow, tomorrow, if I'm not here or on Monday if I'm not here, how do we do it so that you remember ((Facilitator snaps her fingers simulating that she just remembered something)) "Oh, today I brought breakfast!" or "today I didn't bring breakfast"?
1480	Sebastian	Oh, then only if I don't bring breakfast I cross it out ((looking at his form))
1481	Nicole	<b>Or you can ask Derek for support ((Derek is the facilitator of the men's independent-living flat where Sebastian lived from Monday to Friday))</b>
1482	Sebastian	Might be
1483	Facilitator	But- Yes. But that you- The important thing is that you do it every week. Every day
1484	Sebastian	Yes, that's what Derek tells me
1485	Facilitator	No, no, no. I am not explaining myself clearly
1486	Sebastian	No, it's just that Derek tells me
1487	Facilitator	Yes
1488	Sebastian	So
1489	Facilitator	Yes, yes, yes, but even if Derek tells you, sometimes you have the time and you bring it and other times you don't, right?
1490	Sebastian	<b>Yes, but what I have to do is prepare it the night before</b>
1491	Facilitator	Ok

<sup>1</sup> Turns in bold indicate courses of action proposed.

At the beginning of the previous episode, the facilitator moved the conversation towards completing the challenge of the month form by asking: "Ok then what are we going to do? The days that you bring breakfast, you'll cross them out or how are you going to mark there that you did bring

breakfast?...” (turn 1468). Consequently, a ‘Do goal’ was proposed, i.e., to fill in the form (turn 1474). The suggestion was elaborated in the following turns. In turn 1477, the facilitator posed a different question: “How do we do it so that every day you remember to mark if yes or no?” Sebastian and Nicole proposed courses of action (turns 1481 and 1490); however, they were not related to the question that the facilitator was posing. In the following episode, the facilitator rephrased the latter question (Table 9).

Table 9. Episode 8.

1500	Facilitator	Ok perfect (( <i>Facilitator nods while speaking</i> )). Ok yes, you have a plan on how to bring your breakfast. I understand that perfectly. What I want to know is, when I am not here, will you remember to put a tick or a cross?
<b>1501</b>	<b>Sebastian</b>	<b>Mm ((<i>sound expressing thinking. Sebastian turns to look at Nicole</i>)) Would you remind me?</b> <sup>1</sup>
1502	Facilitator	Who can remind you? (( <i>after three seconds of not having a response, Facilitator continues</i> )) What support do you need to remember something every day at the same time?
1503	Nicole	(( <i>Takes Sebastian's mobile phone from the table and picks it up</i> )) This
1504	Sebastian	An alarm
1505	Facilitator	(( <i>Nods</i> )) At what time are you going to set it up for?

<sup>1</sup> Turns in bold indicate courses of action proposed.

In episode eight it is interesting to see how Sebastian asks Nicole for support to fulfil his goal. However, the facilitator hinted at a different course of action that would allow Sebastian to achieve his goal without relying on Nicole.

As described in episodes six to eight, Sebastian’s goal was to spend less money. “Spend less money” was the goal at the highest level of abstraction because it is the reason why the rest of the courses of action were proposed. To spend less money, Sebastian proposed to “bring his own breakfast to the university” rather than buying it there. To do so, he proposed to “prepare breakfast the night before”. The facilitator focused the conversation on ways to track down Sebastian’s progress on the form. Other regular ‘Do goals’ were proposed: “cross out the days when Sebastian brought breakfast” and “ask for support”.

After a few weeks, Sebastian changed his challenge of the month to stay within a daily budget of \$100 Mexican pesos for food expenses at university. Taking his own breakfast was one of the suggested strategies to stay within this budget. Nevertheless, Sebastian found it challenging to keep his daily expenses within his budget (Table 10).

Table 10. Episode 9.

385	Facilitator	You spend \$125 pesos a day ... But that’s because you’re not taking breakfast anymore (( <i>from his flat to the university</i> )) ...
386	Nicole	More or less
387	Facilitator	But that is because you are no longer taking breakfast and then you can spend I don’t know, \$125 pesos a day. Is it ok to spend \$125 pesos a day?
<b>388</b>	<b>Sebastian</b>	<b>((<i>On the table in front of Sebastian, there was a sheet in which he made sums of his daily expenses</i>)) Well it would be better to take breakfast and know what days, I mean let’s say::: if here ((<i>pointing a sum at his sheet</i>)), I would not have forgotten to take the papaya that I had there ((<i>he means his flat</i>)), then in the breakfast I would have been ok</b> <sup>1</sup>
389	Facilitator	And then you would have saved up to \$70 pesos
390	Sebastian	Yes

<sup>1</sup> Turns in bold indicate courses of action proposed.

Episode nine shows the importance of following up the intervention with further discussions. At the end of the challenge of the month activity, Sebastian started a job in a museum. This brought about changes in Sebastian's routine, including taking food to work daily. At this Sebastian reflected: "[Staying inside the budget] was a big challenge. Most of the time I was over budget because I would have to take breakfast from my flat to the university. From this I learned that it was better to prepare a meal and now that I am working in the museum, I take my food. This has helped me save money".

#### 4. Discussion

The challenges of the month were aimed at meeting some of the students' goals. Additionally, some courses of action were proposed to carry out these challenges and monitor them regularly.

The episodes show that students chose their own challenges based on their goals and that they perceived the activity as beneficial to meet their challenges. However, the episodes also show how the students' goal setting was affected in relation to the level of abstraction at which discussions remained. In relation to the latter, the findings revealed that the discussions were mainly on specific and concrete actions to achieve goals (i.e., 'Do goals'). This was mainly due to the facilitators' interest in students meeting their goals and learning a self-regulation strategy that allowed them to monitor their progress. Furthermore, at the time of the intervention the facilitator was not aware of the level of abstraction/concreteness at which the conversations were taking place. However, by focusing on the "hows" there were almost null opportunities to explore the students' overarching motivations behind their goals (i.e., 'Be goals'). We argue that to move from practices that train students to achieve goals to pedagogies that truly acknowledge the students' experiences, bearing in mind these levels of abstraction/concreteness might be useful.

Moreover, leaving the conversation at a 'Do' level may potentially limit the students' self-determination. If we are to advocate that self-determination is not only to do with mastering a set of skills but more with volition and becoming causal agents in one's life (Wehmeyer 2005), we must foster educational interventions that promote the students' consciousness and intentionality in their decision-making process. In this way, the role of teachers is to promote students to express their interests and preferences and truly involve them in the decision making processes that concern them. Freire (1970) claims that pedagogies are to be developed through a constant dialogue in which the emergence of consciousness and individuals' critical intervention in reality is sought. Therefore, to promote students' self-determination, a first step would have to be to talk to them about their 'Be goals' to better understand their experiences and understanding of self-determination. Perhaps in this way, we could move from thinking of "setting goals" as a skill that people with disabilities must master, to an opportunity to open-up a space in which people with disabilities articulate a discourse contrary to the labels of "deficiency" that are still attributed to them. Moreover, the students' consciousness might be promoted by encouraging them to reflect on their motives behind their goals.

In addition to the level of abstraction, the findings revealed other ways that could risk the self-determination of the students. The findings show that even when students are present, and efforts are made to involve them in the conversation, there might be times when students may be agreeing passively while others talk about them in the third person, as happened with Gabriel in episode three. Even though giving students response options is a common pedagogical strategy, educators must also ensure a classroom ethos in which the students can disagree or give another option that truly reveals their desires. In episode six, the facilitator gave options to scaffold Sebastian's response after asking him what the goal was he was pursuing in his challenge of taking breakfast to his university. The options provided by the facilitator had to do with bringing breakfast a certain number of days per week. In response, Sebastian stated that his goal was to spend less money. In this example, the scaffolding strategy worked well since it prompted Sebastian's response. Moreover, in his response Sebastian discarded the options the facilitator had given him and instead expressed what his goal was. Unfortunately, there may be times when students simply choose options that do not correspond with their desires and go unnoticed.

These findings taken together show the importance of looking into interactions in detail to promote educators' reflection on their practices and come up with strategies that help educators in this process. Reflective inquiry is a method that has been proved to be helpful in teacher's professional development (e.g., [Lyons et al. 2013](#); [Rodgers 2002](#); [Vrikki et al. 2019](#)). It takes place when practitioners observe carefully and reflect critically on their own practice in order to enhance the teaching-learning process. A resource aimed to support educators' inquiry in relation to dialogic teaching practices is the Teacher Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (T-SEDA) (<http://bit.ly/T-SEDA>). Future research could use resources like T-SEDA to support teachers' inquiries into opening up dialogic spaces that promote self-determination and the monitoring of what happens over time.

In another vein, it was interesting to see that having a discussion space in which not only teachers but also peers participate opened the possibility of giving and receiving support among peers. Social support is key to optimal functioning within a social context ([Jackson et al. 2005](#)). In the inclusive education field, much has been said about the importance of providing support to students identified with a disability (e.g., [Buntix and Schalock 2010](#)). Research has documented the benefits associated with peer support in teenagers and young adults (e.g., [Carter et al. 2005](#); [Vogel et al. 2007](#)). Nevertheless, students identified with a disability tend to be tutees receiving support from a peer that has not been identified with a disability. The findings documented in this research show the potential of students with ID to take the role of active tutors and not just to assume the novice role that they tend to be given. Even more so, when dealing with topics that directly concern the life of the student, their active role is fundamental. In the words of [Nirje \(1972, p. 177\)](#) in relation to the right to self-determination:

the choices, wishes, desires, and aspirations of a [person with a disability] have to be taken into consideration as much as possible in actions affecting him . . . It is especially difficult for someone who has a disability or is otherwise perceives as devalued... Thus, the road to self-determination is indeed both difficult and all important.

A limitation of this study is that the findings come from conversations with the only three students involved in the "Challenge of the month" activity in the context of the wider study. The replication of this study with a larger sample and/or with other groups of students with ID is thus recommended in future research projects. Another limitation was that in most cases the students put into practice the courses of action by themselves. This limited opportunities for intervention that would favour the achievement of goals. In this study, the researcher decided to limit her intervention while the students exercised their courses of action for two reasons. First, the students exercised these courses of action in moments and settings in which the researcher was not always present (e.g., independent-living flats, mealtimes). Second, even if present, the researcher considered that her intervention could be counterproductive for the social inclusion of the students in certain scenarios. For example, in the university cafeteria, Sebastian had to decide what to buy to stay within his budget. The researcher could have stood by him and guided his purchases. However, the presence of a teacher/researcher in these moments in which students come together with other university students could favour labels of "dependency" usually attributed to people identified with ID. Nevertheless, an interesting and useful implementation in future research could be to plan strategies through which researchers and teachers could follow the students more closely in the implementation of courses of action since it is key for the achievement of their goals ([Zimmerman 2005](#)).

The results shown in this paper do not translate straightforwardly into effects on self-determination. We believe that to have a broader vision of the students' self-determination, observations of their interactions with different agents and in different contexts might be helpful, as well as conversations that shed light into their own definitions of self-determination. A brief example is shown in [Table 1](#) which describes some other aspects related to self-determination that the participating students experienced at the time of intervention. However, we hope the findings here reported contribute to the field. First, we show examples of agency and the active role that students with intellectual disabilities take both by proposing courses of action to achieve their goals, and also by suggesting strategies to their peers to do so. These Zones of Proximal Development (ZDP, [Vygotsky 1988](#)) which emerge

between peers may be of great interest for analysis in future research. Second we would argue that educators need to take a more active role in supporting students' agency by inquiring purposefully about the students' "Be goals", which did not generally appear in the students' conversations. This is an important reflective strategy required to promote students' consciousness and intentionality and thus, potentially, their self-determination.

Moreover, we hope that the evidence presented in this paper upholds the importance of not overlooking the interactions that take place when the students set goals, since these interactions open up opportunities to promote or hinder the students' volition and agency, on which their self-determination is based. In the current literature in the field, the importance of having conversations with students and actively involving them in their goal setting is acknowledged. Unfortunately, however, this is more easily said than done. Therefore, supporting educators in analysing and reflecting on their dialogic practices is important to reduce unnoticed oppressive educational interactions.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Adapted version of the notation system proposed by Jefferson (2004).

Symbol	Name	Use
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper, reduced volume, or quiet speech.
ALL CAPS	Capitalized text	Indicates shouted or increased volume in speech.
Underline	Underlined speech	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
:::	Colon or colons	Indicates prolongation of sound.
(text)	Parenthesis	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
(( <i>italic text</i> ))	Double parenthesis	Annotation of non-verbal activity.
(# of seconds)	Timed pause	Time in seconds of a pause in speech.
[	Square bracket	Denotes a point where overlapping speech occurs.
[ ]	Two square brackets enclosing word(s)	Indicates which parts of the speakers' utterances occur simultaneously.

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