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Motivation to Learn and Teacher–Student Relationship

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When children enter school for the first time, they encounter a variety of new challenges that include creating positive relationships with peer groups and adults as well as learning to meet the demands of a wide range of cognitive, social, and academic tasks (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). Infants and young children appear to be mobilized by curiosity and driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and discover their environment Therefore, understanding and documenting the importance of young children's motivation to learn is very important. Motivation to learn refers to a competence acquired through general experience that is predominantly stimulated through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant others (Brophy, 1987). This review of the literature focuses on the importance of young children's motivation to learn in their academic and social competencies, the effects of the quality of teacher-student relationships on their motivation to learn, and the implications for students who exhibit poor motivation in the early years at school years through the lenses of Self-Determination and Expectancy-Value for Achievement Motivation theories.
Keywords: motivation to learn, teacher – student relationship, academic achievement, school adjustment

Introduction

It is a generally accepted truth that the future lies in the hands of the next generation and that the success of the next generation is based largely on education. Increasing numbers of reports and articles in the media have been published in recent years showing that education of the next generation in the United States is lacking. The long-standing superpower stands to lose its status on the global playing field, threatening the way America has come to see itself and its role in the world. These trends have caused panic, and politicians have claimed a rededication of their efforts in this arena. However, while the belief that U.S. students are falling behind the world academically is widespread, no single concrete solution has emerged.

The leading approach to improve the U.S. education system currently centers on raising standards that can be measured through standardized tests. The idea is that without a quantifiable measure of progress, schools cannot know whether they are improving; similarly, by comparing their results with those of other schools, it is reasoned, schools will be motivated to make even greater strides. It has been suggested (Thompson, 2010) that an emphasis on student motivation may be far more valuable than an emphasis on which specific facts students have memorized from U.S. history or which functions they can calculate in mathematics.

While it may be somewhat counterintuitive to argue that education is best improved by focusing on something other than the material the students are expected to learn, many studies have shown that this very well might be the

case. The idea states, in brief, that motivated students learn more, learn better, and learn by themselves. That is to say, a tradeoff is more than worth it: To dedicate some percentage of a teacher's time and efforts to motivating students will translate at the end of the day to those students having learned a lot more than if that same time and effort had been invested in conventional transfer-of-knowledge methods, or far worse, test preparation.

Accordingly, many researchers have conducted studies on student academic motivation and student goal orientation. In particular, those researchers who concentrate on the dynamics of motivation within classroom settings have started to emphasize the potential role of relational variables (e.g., Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999) and teacher behaviors (e.g., Skinner & Belmont, 1993) in student academic engagement. In the last 40 years, researchers examined student motivation, focusing on several questions (e.g., Pintrich, 2003 Skinner, 1995; Stipek, 1988): What moves students to learn? What influences the quantity and quality of the effort they invest? What choices do students make? What makes them persist in the face of hardship? How is student motivation affected by children's relationships with significant adults? How does motivation develop? How does the school environment affect it? Thus, educators, parents, and students have paid substantial attention to the importance of motivation in school because of significant contributions it has been shown to have on student academic learning, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and school readiness.

Motivation to learn is a competence acquired through general experience that is predominantly stimulated through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant others (Brophy, 1987). Infants and young children appear to be mobilized by curiosity and driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and discover their environment. In the classroom setting, the content covered and the social context can vary continuously. Therefore, children are frequently involved in unfamiliar learning environments. This can create ambiguity for some students but can challenge others. Accordingly, students try to make sense of novel learning situations by referring to their motivational beliefs (Brophy, 1987). *Motivational belief* refers to the opinions, judgments, and values that students hold about objects, events, and learning processes (Brophy, 1987). Motivational belief also refers to students' opinions of the efficacy or effectiveness of learning and the teaching process. For example, children's beliefs about their academic experiences have important implications for their school adjustment and academic achievement (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Accordingly, expectancies and values are directly determined by other achievement-related beliefs such as achievement goals, self-schemata, and beliefs about science (Wigfield, 1994). Similarly, motivational beliefs act as a frame of reference that guides students' thinking, feelings, and actions in any subject area. For example, motivational beliefs about mathematics determine which strategies and motivational goals students develop. Significantly, a student's beliefs about a domain are predominantly optimistic or pessimistic, thus providing a positive or negative context for learning (Skinner, 1995; Stipek, 1988; Vermeer, Boekaerts, & Seegers, 2000).

Teacher–child relations play a prominent role in the development of competencies in early school-age years (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Pianta & Walsh, 1996) and during the transition to middle school (Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999). Teachers may operate as social agents, and they can affect students' intellectual and socioemotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates both student motivation and learning. Moreover, teacher–student relationships serve a regulatory function for the development of social, emotional, and academic skills (Davis, 2006). Studies have shown that positive teacher–student relationships can lead to a warm classroom environment that facilitates successful adaptation in school and thereby increases student motivation to learn. In contrast, conflictual teacher–student relationships are associated with lower achievement and self-esteem as well as ongoing relational conflict with both teachers and peers (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Van Damme, & Maes,

2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Research has further indicated that children with whom teachers report positive relationships are outgoing and socially competent (Birch & Ladd, 1997 Pianta et al., 1995). Moreover, in these studies the teachers believed that high-quality relationships between teachers and their students enhance classroom learning and motivation by building a safe and supportive classroom context for students to open up and listen to the teachers and take intellectual risks (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995). Similarly, the beliefs teachers hold about teaching and learning, and the nature of expectations they have about their students also exert a powerful influence (Stipek, 1988). These findings support the key role of teacher–student relationships on children's motivation to learn and school adjustment.

A variety of studies have examined the influence of familial, academic, and personal factors on student academic failure and poor motivation to learn (e.g., Covington, 1992). Among personal variables most studied are self-concept, unfavorable motivational beliefs, low ability, and personal goal orientation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stipek, 2002). For example, unfavorable beliefs impede the learning process because they direct the learner's attention away from the learning activity (Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998; Stipek, 1988). Most students believe their ability and effort are the main reasons for school achievement. By the same token, if asked whether they would prefer to be called smart or hard-working, they will choose smart almost every time. Why? Because they believe that hard-working students risk being considered either excessively ambitious or of limited ability, both of which they would find embarrassing (Stipek, 1988; 2002).

The following literature review covers the significance of young children's motivation to learn, the effects of the quality of teacher–student relationships on their motivation to learn, and the implications of poorly motivated young students on their social and academic life. Firstly, two relevant theoretical frameworks are introduced: self-determination and expectancy - value theory of achievement motivation. These theories provide the foundation upon which the rationale for the present study.

Theoretical Considerations

Further understanding of the topics of motivation and learning is facilitated through the lenses of various theoretical frameworks. These frameworks shed light on the bigger picture of motivation and learning and are helpful guides in developing practical new approaches to the classroom. Two major relevant theories are discussed below: self-determination and expectancy-value for achievement motivation. As children continue their social, emotional, and physical development during school years, they broaden their familial and extra-familial relationships (Marvin & Stewart, 1990). Participation in family–child, teacher–child, and peer–child systems supports the development of play, social interaction, and conflict resolution skills for those children (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta, 1999).

Self-System and Self-Determination Theories

Self-determination theorists (e.g., Ryan, Connell, Deci) claim that children start to value the behaviors that they see reinforced, both their own behaviors and those of the significant others in their social environments (i.e., teachers, families). When these values are accepted as their own (internalization), students begin to choose to engage in activities that are consistent with their own feelings (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Similarly, according to self-determination theory, children learn from their parents and other significant adults that achievement behaviors and motivation to learn are valued by society. Some children internalize these values and behaviors as their own and begin to behave in ways that are consistent with them (Connell, 1990). Accordingly, Connell (1990) posited that the need for relatedness, the need for competence, and the need for autonomy are the most important psychological needs in the framework of self-system processes. The self-system theory of engagement assumes that human beings have basic psychological needs and can be motivated to engage in activities passionately and voluntarily when those needs are met (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). In addition, in the self-system process, the self evaluates the degree to which psychological

needs are met, and this evaluation may affect relationships with others (Connell, 1990). Self-determination theory shares this perspective (Davis, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and has also contributed to the construct definition of relatedness by proposing that an individual's innate needs (e.g., the need for competence, the need for relatedness, and the need for autonomy) must be fulfilled to achieve self-regulation, motivation, and personal well-being. Deci and Ryan (1985) defined the need for relatedness as feelings of security or belongingness in the social environment that motivate individuals to follow norms and rules. Moreover, all three needs are interrelated. For example, relatedness provides the security that is necessary for student initiative, independence, and autonomy in completing tasks that promote competence.

Competence enables students to feel confident, accepted, and related to those around them. The healthy fulfillment of these basic needs provides a social environment that regulates the amount of acceptance and success a student feels (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). The teacher–student relationship is an important and powerful motivator for the development of the need for competence and autonomy within this social environment because school, as a complex and unique system, asks students to accomplish various intellectual and social tasks. For example, a growing body of research shows that students who believe that they are competent academically are more likely to be interested in academic and school tasks (Skaalvik & Rankin, 1995; Malcver, Stipek & Daniels, 1991). Similarly, when teachers support children's basic psychological needs and provide a healthy classroom environment, they are simultaneously promoting more positive teacher–student relationships. Within this type of environment, students report greater levels of competence, autonomy, and positive relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2005; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation

Expectancy-value theory offers an important alternative and complementary theoretical view of student motivation to learn in educational settings (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983). Eccles and her colleagues (1983) studied values in the context of an expanded expectancy-value theory. Their model consists of two components: a psychological component that focuses on cognitive factors, such as expectations for success and the values placed on successful attainment, and a socialization component that explains individual differences that occur within the variables of the psychological component. A major premise of this model involves the influence of parental socialization on child motivation (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994). Like Atkinson (1957), they posited that people choose to engage in tasks that they value and in which they expect to be successful. However, Eccles et al. (1983) conceptualized and defined values more broadly than Atkinson (1957).

They proposed that there are three kinds of values relevant to achievement: attainment value, utility value, and intrinsic value (Jacobs & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). *Attainment value*, which refers to the relevance of an activity to a person's actual or ideal self-concept, is determined by how tasks satisfy people's needs (Eccles et al., 1983). Thus, attainment value is the most closely related of the three to internalized motivation in self-determination theory. *Utility value* is related to the usefulness of a task as a means to accomplish goals that may not be linked to the task itself. *Intrinsic value* is defined as the immediate enjoyment people get from doing a task. In other words, when a task has intrinsic value, people engage in it for its own sake, rather than for some other purpose (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Furthermore, Eccles et al. (1983) pointed out that values need to be considered in the context of costs such as humiliation if failure occurs.

Motivation for Academic Achievement

Previous research proposed that the single factor with the greatest impact on whether a student learns is his or her motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Stipek, 1988, 2000). As mentioned above, motivation is considered an important, if not the most important, factor influencing student learning. Qin & Wen (2002) found that the presence or absence of motivation is in large part what determines success or failure in second language learning. Motivated students use learning strategies more frequently, have a stronger will to learn, and thus set more and higher goals for themselves, and they are more persistent in learning. Stipek (1988) pointed out that learning motivation influences the learners' autonomous learning ability and determines the learners' confidence in overcoming learning difficulty. These theories demonstrate that motivation, as one of the crucial factors determining success in language learning, attracts much attention from researchers (Li & Pan, 2009).

What is motivation? While different theorists define motivation differently, it is commonly thought of as an inner state of need or desire that activates an individual to do something to satisfy them. In other words, motivation is the force that accounts for the arousal, selection, direction, and continuation of behavior (Li & Pan, 2009). Williams and Burden (2000) proposed the definition of motivation as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal that leads to a conscious decision to act and that causes the exertion of intellectual and physical effort toward reaching a previously set goal. In day-to-day language, motivation is why we do what we do. Therefore, it is clear why so much education research is focused on motivating students: If motivation is why we do what we do, only a motivated student will learn. It is increasingly accepted in the literature that motivation is more important to a child's education than any other single factor, including the teacher's skill/experience, classroom resources, and so forth (Stipek, 1988, 2002).

What role does motivation play in achievement? It has been argued that motivation is not only the key ingredient in outstanding work but also in extraordinary achievement. Runco, Nemiro, and Walberg (1998) claimed that creative genius grows out of the ability to sustain intense commitment for very long periods in the face of obstacles—in other words, motivation. In contrast, a widespread belief holds that accomplishment, and especially outstanding accomplishment, is about innate talent. People who believe this somehow ignore the fact that Mozart, Charles Darwin, Michael Jordan, and Tiger Woods practiced feverishly and single-mindedly for years, instead believing that they were simply born with a talent that cannot be achieved through motivation or any other controllable factor (Dweck, 2002).

Proponents of the former belief — that motivation and not talent is the core ingredient for success—have developed various ways to bring that motivation to the classroom to benefit student academic achievement. One major school of thought is called "progressive education." This approach is centered on the importance of genuine student interest (Simmons & Page, 2010). A student's interest or motivation can stem from innumerable factors and, of course, will vary depending on the student. Researchers in the field have categorized student motivation into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. A student who is intrinsically motivated commits him or herself to a task for its own sake, that is, for the enjoyment of it, the learning it allows, and for a feeling of accomplishment. A student who is extrinsically motivated commits to a task in order to receive a reward from a source external to him or herself such as from the teacher (Macabudbud et al., 2009). Understanding these different motivations is important when translating theoretical ideas about motivating students into practical ways to do so.

The Implications of Young Children's Motivation to Learn

Many young children begin school with a thirst for learning. Goldberg (1994) pointed out that young children enthusiastically seek novel and challenging school tasks, concluding that motivation is key to successful school adjustment. Motivation can be defined as the process that helps instigate goal-directed activity and enables that activity to be maintained

(Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Positive motivational patterns are as crucial for learning in early childhood as they are for later learning (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to participate in a task only for the pleasure derived from the task itself, whereas extrinsic motivation refers to the desire to participate in a task for the sake of a desirable outcome such as teacher praise or a reward (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Gottfried (1985) hypothesized that academic intrinsic motivation is positively and significantly related to school achievement. Gottfried found that children who are more intrinsically motivated are more successful learners than those with more extrinsic motivation. Accordingly, scholars have criticized education programs that inhibit the development of intrinsic motivation in early childhood (Brophy, 1998).

Researchers have sought to understand how motivation relates to education and how motivation affects children's social and academic competence. Fortier, Vallerand, and Guay (1995) examined the effects of autonomous academic motivation on perceived academic self-competence and perceived academic self-determination. He showed that these perceptions positively influenced autonomous academic motivation, which, in turn, had a positive impact on school success and the development of intrinsic motivation. Moreover, Boggiano et al. (1992) found that motivational orientation is significantly related to children's standardized achievement scores. Specifically, young students with an intrinsic motivational orientation received higher reading and math achievement scores than their classmates with extrinsic motivational orientation. Together, these studies indicate that intrinsic motivational orientation contributes to a range of achievement-related behaviors and cognitions.

School readiness, as a multidimensional concept, includes children's approaches to learning (i.e., emergent literacy and math skills) (Kagan & Neuman, 1997). Moreover, school readiness is a significant indicator of a child's ability to be successful in school settings. Previous research with older children has shown motivation to be an important factor for learning, academic success, and social development (e.g., Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski 1992; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Stipek, 1988). Similarly, Carlton (1999) showed that children's motivation to learn is an important predictor of school readiness and the development of social skills.

Another important alternative and complementary theoretical view of students' motivation to learn in educational settings is achievement goal theory (Miserandino, 1996). Achievement goal theory provides insights for examining student motivation and achievement-related outcomes (Ames, 1992). Achievement goals can be defined as the purposes and reasons for a person's pursuit in achievement situations. Different purposes and reasons lead to different emotional, cognitive, and affective patterns (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Urdan & Midgley, 2003). Considerable research has shown the effects of achievement goals on student motivation to learn (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot & Thrash, 2001). For example, Kaplan, Gheen, and Midgley (2002) examined the relationship between classroom goal structure and student disruptive behavior. They found that student perceptions of a mastery goal structure were related to a lower incidence of behavioral problems and disruptive behaviors; in comparison, student perceptions of a performance approach goal structure were related to a higher incidence of behavioral problems and disruptive behaviors. Ames (1992) pointed out that mastery orientation is associated with depth engagement with the task and greater perseverance in the face of failure or barriers; thus, mastery orientation increases the individual's intrinsic motivation and, in turn, his or her motivation to learn.

Previous research examining children's expectancy-related beliefs about different achievement tasks showed that these beliefs play a central role in children's achievement motivation and contribute to their behavior and learning (Eccles et al., 1983; Meece & Courtney, 1992). For example, young children who have positive ability beliefs and who approach achievement tasks with a high expectancy of success consistently show high levels of persistence and performance on achievement tasks (Eccles et al., 1983). Similarly, children's expectancies and values are most directly

affected by their achievement goals, their self-schemata, and their task-specific beliefs. Values also influence college students' intentions and decisions about course enrollment (Meece & Courtney, 1992). Furthermore, values affect the perception of self-competence and self-esteem (Eccles et al., 1983). Accordingly, Dweck and Elliott (1983) posited that learning and performance goals are determined by children's subjective values. For instance, a child's achievement environment influences his or her subjective values. The child who believes he or she is competent at a certain task believes that achievement of similar tasks in the future is possible and easy, showing that competence belief and expectancy for success are directly related (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). For example, achievement values in school tasks (i.e., mathematics) can influence self-perceptions of competence (Covington, 1992).

Previous research also suggests that early achievement and socialization experiences and cultural norms can influence how elementary and high school students understand, interpret, and approach achievement (Eccles et al. 1983; Meece, Parsons, Kaczala, Goff, & Futterman, 1982). Similarly, studies of junior and senior high school students demonstrated that the subjective task values adolescents attach to school subjects are related to their course plans and activity choices (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984). For example, in their study of junior high school students, Meece and colleagues (1990) found that the importance students attached to mathematics predicted their intentions to continue taking mathematics. Eccles and Harold (1991) examined adolescents' self-perceptions of ability, subjective task values, and activity choices in sports. They reported that adolescents' self-reports of free-time involvement in sports was significantly related to their subjective task values of sports. However, few studies have investigated the effects of motivation to learn on young children. Accordingly, focusing on young school children's expectations and values using the expectancy-value model may contribute to our understanding about children's development of motivational values and expectancy in early school years.

A number of researchers have also shown that young children's beliefs about their abilities and expectancies for success are overly optimistic and are not realistic (e.g., Stipek & MacIver, 1989; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). Young children perceive themselves as competent, and they nearly always think that they will be successful on upcoming tasks. However, as children progress through elementary school, their ability beliefs and expectancies for success may demonstrate a substantial change, and their beliefs about their ability and expectancies become more accurate and realistic (Stipek, 1988 Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Although there can be age-related differences in children's motivational belief, perceived academic self-competence, perceived academic self-determination, the quality of teacher–student relationships, and the classroom achievement goal structure also play a significant role in young students' motivation to learn and their motivational beliefs (Eccles et al., 1983; Pianta, 1999; Stipek, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial to further investigate and demonstrate the effects of these aforementioned factors on young children's motivation to learn, and in turn, how young children's motivation to learn influences the development of social and academic competence.

Teacher–Student Relationships and Young Children's Motivation to Learn

It is widely recognized that when children enter school or transition to the next level, they encounter a variety of new challenges, such as creating positive relationships with peer groups and adults in the school environment and learning to meet the demands of a wide range of cognitive, social, and academic tasks (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995). Teacher–child relationships play a prominent role in the development of competencies in the preschool and early school years (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Teachers may operate as social agents, and they can affect students' intellectual and socio-emotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates both student motivation and learning. Moreover, teacher–student relationships serve a

regulatory function for the development of social, emotional, and academic skills (Davis, 2006). Similarly, young children who enjoy receiving positive support from teachers and having warm and close relationships with them appear to demonstrate social and academic competence at school (Pianta, 1999).

A growing body of research has examined the effects of the quality of teacher–student dyadic interaction on student academic motivation (e.g., Davis & Ashley, 2003; Pianta, 1999). The degree to which children develop social and academic competencies in their school lives is a good indicator of successful school adaptation and positive teacher and peer relationships (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995). For example, Davis and Ashley (2003) reported that positive teacher–student interaction enhanced classroom learning and student motivation by building a safe and supportive context for students to become motivated for learning and take intellectual risks. In addition, teachers in this study believed that students tended to work hard if they liked their teachers and had caring relations with them. Therefore, teachers in Davis and Ashley's study preferred to invest time and effort in the development of supportive relationships with their students. In addition, those positive and caring relationships encouraged the teachers to be creative in their instruction.

Davis (2006) found that middle school students and teachers who perceived their relations as supportive and positive reported enhanced motivation, more facilitative classroom settings, and higher grades. Similarly, Birch and Ladd (1997) found that supportive teacher–student relationships play an important role in developing school adjustment competencies including attention, motivation, problem-solving, and self-esteem. When teachers provided more autonomy and the instruction addressed students' personal interests and had personal relevance, students were more emotionally and behaviorally engaged in school work and they had more supportive relationships with their teachers (Birch & Ladd). Similarly, other studies have found that students who report that their teachers provide higher levels of autonomy show more adaptive patterns of learning (David & Ashley, 2003; Stipek, 2002).

Previous research has also alluded to a significant relationship between student adaptive motivation for academics and a number of social factors within the classroom (e.g., Patrick, Hicks, & Ryan, 1997; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). These include teacher–student relationships, teacher support (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), and teacher practices that foster respect among students (Patrick et al., 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001;). Similarly, Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, and Midgley (2001) examined how teacher–student interaction influences both classroom goal-orientation structures. They found that teachers' apparent support and enthusiasm toward students' progress, and their confidence in students' ability to learn were accompanied by teachers' teaching styles such as child-centered and teacher-centered.

Their relationships with students were characterized by supporting student academic engagement and giving warm praise. Teachers encouraged their students to focus on task and informational feedback. In the mastery-approach classrooms, all teachers perceived learning as an active process in which classroom involvement, positive interactions, understanding (not memorization), and student engagement were key requirements of student academic achievement and motivation. On the other hand, one teacher in a low-mastery classroom did not show respect in his interactions with students, and he always voiced negative expectations about his students. Similarly, Ames (1992) reported that mastery-oriented classrooms offer an environment where the teacher focuses on improvement, effort, and individual mastery; in contrast, extrinsically oriented classrooms (performance approach and performance avoidance) emphasize grades, social comparison, and correction without informational feedback.

Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan (2007) pointed out that a sense of autonomy within classroom settings helped both the student and the teacher. Roth and his colleagues (2007) found that when the teachers supported student needs of self-determination and self-perception within a classroom with a degree of autonomy, students were academically more motivated to learn mathematics.

Additionally, a teacher's sense of well-being and success within the classroom climate influences the quality of the teacher–student relationship. This relationship, in turn, has positive effects on student outcomes, teachers' and students' perceptions, and motivational strategies, contributing to improved effective outcomes and goals. Previous researchers have shown that teachers' individual perceptions and the differences they bring to their classroom environments are becoming increasingly recognized as fundamental contributors influencing the way they teach and how they motivate and engage their students (Brophy & Good, 1974; Hardré & Sullivan, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Hardré and Sullivan (2008) noted that differences within teachers' own qualities and experiences and the way that they interact with their students influence how they motivate their students. Of increasing interest to researchers is the relationship among a teacher's motivational style, the specific teaching strategies they use, and the influence these have on the motivation and engagement of both students and the teacher within a learning experience (e.g., Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006.

In sum, positive teacher–student relationships can contribute to a warm classroom environment that facilitates successful adaptation in school and thereby increases students' motivation to learn. On the other hand, conflictual teacher–student relationships are associated with lower achievement and lower self-esteem as well as ongoing relational conflict with peers (Buyse et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Moreover, the teachers' beliefs regarding high-quality relationships with their students enhance classroom learning and motivation. Establishing a safe and supportive classroom context for students helps them to open up and listen to the teachers and to take intellectual risks (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995). Therefore, teacher–student relationships play a key role in children's motivation to learn and school adjustment.

How Can Young Students Be Motivated?

The first step to motivating students is encouraging their belief that they have the potential to succeed. A student who believes, for example, that intelligence is a fixed trait that cannot be developed will not be motivated to work hard—why bother if his or her potential is predetermined and capped? It is the educator's responsibility—as much as it is to convey information on academic subjects—to convey the idea that intelligence is a malleable quality, a potential that can be cultivated. Teachers who show students that the latter is true set the groundwork for student motivation (Dwek, 2002).

One approach to showing students that they are capable—"progressive education"—involves transferring the power to learn to the students. Progressive education is based on the theory that a democratic classroom will lead to more engaged students. It follows the pretense that unless students are given power, they may exert what little power they have to thwart learning and achievement through inappropriate behavior and/or mediocrity. The solution, according to progressive education, is for teachers to give students a voice. This is particularly important in the current educational climate, which is dominated by standardization and testing. This democratic classroom can be created by giving students opportunities to ask questions, create knowledge, examine social issues, and further engage in critical thinking (Simmons & Page, 2010). Objections to progressive education include that students allowed to take charge will be undisciplined, will not do homework, will refuse to take tests, and otherwise will turn a potentially productive unconventional approach into a detrimental lack of decorum. However, evidence suggests that at least in most mainstream classrooms, this would not be the case.

One team of researchers set out to test these objections. They constructed heterogeneous groups to promote a democratic environment and motivate students in the class and gave the students the power to set academic standards for themselves. The class created a grading system and the students set high standards for themselves. They did not use the opportunity to set the low standards or slack off; rather, the students set the bar high and were motivated to

reach it because it had value to them—it was not arbitrary in their eyes or imposed on them by force. Further, because they came up with the standards, students held their peers accountable for meeting those standards. These results were unprecedented, even among motivated students who are aiming to reach externally imposed standards (Simmons & Page, 2010).

An essential element of this experimental democratic classroom was motivation through creative freedom. At the beginning of the experiment, students, out of habit, sought permission for everything they did, but the teachers were told to direct it back to the group. In other words, when a group of students would ask if they could do something, the teachers asked the students if they thought it was a good idea. If the students wanted to take their project in a certain direction, they were encouraged to make that decision on their own. This motivated students to answer their own questions by anticipating the teacher's questions. Additionally, this approach kept the students more engaged because they were in control. The creative freedom granted them made room for productive exploration. The most important finding in this research was that when students were left to design their own learning, not only did they not avoid learning, they set their standards higher and worked harder because they were more motivated (Simmons & Page, 2010).

The lessons learned in this experiment can be applied in classrooms in simple yet effective ways, such as simply allowing students to work with their peers, to choose how they want to present their knowledge of a subject, and to have a voice in their grade and the grades of their peers. By using these methods in the classroom, teachers can motivate their students to become active participants in their own education instead of bystanders waiting to be told what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done (Simmons & Page, 2010).

A similar model of teaching is called autonomy-supportive teaching. In this model, teachers provide students with choice; encourage student experimentation and self-initiation; foster students' willingness to take on challenges, explore new ideas, and persist at difficult activities; offer optimal challenges (neither too easy nor too difficult); provide feedback that is not evaluative of the person; give a meaningful rationale for requested behavior, acknowledging feelings; and set up cooperative learning opportunities. Researchers have found that students in autonomy-supportive classrooms as compared with students in classrooms with controlling teachers are more likely to stay in school (Vallerand, Fortiet, & Guay, 1997) and are more likely to show greater perceived academic competence (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinmann, & Ryan, 1981), higher academic intrinsic motivation (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981), better academic performance (Boggiano, Fink, Shields, Seelbach, & Barrett, 1993), and higher academic achievement (Fink, Boggiano, Main, Barrett, & Katz, 1992).

Poor Motivation in the Early Years of School

When students are motivated, they learn better; when student are not motivated they are at a disadvantage that is difficult if not impossible to compensate for with high-quality teachers and other resources. For example, Stipek (2002) examined mathematics learning in elementary school and found that students with more motivation always achieved greater success; those lacking motivation did not put forth the effort required to succeed and often failed exams. Again, if a student is not motivated, he or she is unlikely to achieve academic success regardless of the teacher or curricula. In contrast, highly motivated students can succeed in a wide range of conditions, including sub-optimal conditions in external areas such as lack of resources.

The aforementioned research has shown that motivating students is a basic, integral part of teaching—without it very little, if anything will be learned. Motivation, together with increased competency, allows a student the will to apply him or herself and the tools with which to do it, making motivation at least as essential to academic achievement as presenting the material to be learned (Eccles et al., 1983; Stipek, 2002). Research shows that motivated students not only learn better but also use power responsibly (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Meece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990; Simmons & Page, 2010; Stipek, 2002). Having a real sense of

control prevents students from exerting a feeling of lack of control in inappropriate ways.

Achievement goal theory proposes that the goal structure of the classroom environment may influence student motivation to learn, cognitive engagement, perceived academic competence, and academic achievement in the school setting (Ames, 1992; Midgley et al., 2001; Wolters, 2004). Midgley and colleagues (2001) and Barron and Harackiewicz (2001) showed that the performance goal approach can be detrimental to cognitive engagement and can contribute to poor motivation in student learning. On the other hand, Wolters (2004) found that the performance goal approach did not predict students' reported use of cognitive and academic engagement. In other words, a focus on doing better than others did not interfere with secondary student learning strategies.

However, Church, Elliot, and Gable (2001) examined the relationship among perception of the classroom environment, achievement goals, and achievement outcomes among college students. They demonstrated that perceived classroom environment influenced achievement goal adoption, in turn, directly influencing student intrinsic motivation. Specifically, performance avoidance goals were related to the presence of an evaluation focus and harsh evaluation, which directly decreased students' intrinsic motivation and academic engagement. Previous studies mostly have focused on elementary, high school, and college students to investigate the effects of perceived classroom environment and achievement goal orientation on their motivation and learning. However, there is a paucity of research regarding the impacts of achievement goal orientation on young students' motivation to learn. Therefore, there is still the need to further investigate the effects of a performance-approach goal structure on young students' learning and academic engagement.

Research on the effects of classroom climate indicate that the quality of teacher–student relationships is associated with young students' academic and social competence and their academic motivation and attitudes toward learning (e.g., Patrick et al., 1997; Patrick et al., 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Some classroom conditions are more likely to support an external locus of control. For example, students are most likely to develop an external locus of control when grades and acknowledgment are not closely related to students' skills and performance (Stipek, 2002). In other words, if students cannot experience their teachers as warm and have negative beliefs and expectancies about their control over their own academic achievement and tasks (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998), those students could lose their motivation to learn and may turn to procrastination and learned helplessness.

Focusing on U.S. culture, Covington (1992) proposed that students' sense of self-worth is partially based on their perceived academic competence because children begin to learn that competencies are valued and rewarded (mostly extrinsic) in school. Therefore, self-esteem is strongly related to children's academic and social competence (Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996). Therefore, supporting constructive and collaborative classroom environments contributes to intrinsic motivation and engagement in learning tasks (Stipek, 2002). Accordingly, Deci and Ryan (1985, 2002) pointed out that extrinsically motivated behaviors are the least autonomous and externally regulated. Experiencing externally regulated behaviors as controlled and alienated leads to an external perceived locus of causality and control (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Students decide how much effort they will put into learning tasks based on their self-concept of ability and their effort beliefs (Covington, 1992). Aforementioned, young children can exaggerate their own performance, and they have a rather naive theory of effort (Stipek, 2002). However, low self-efficacy also leads to low task engagement and conflictual student–teacher relationships and loss of academic and social motivation in early school years (Pianta, 1999; Stipek, 1988). Therefore, poor motivation in early childhood years can influence a range of academic and social competencies (i.e., the quality of the teacher–student relationship, low academic competence, and being at risk of failure).

As noted before, unfavorable motivational beliefs and expectations can impede learning and teaching (Covington, 1992; Stipek, 1988).

For instance, children who perceive that their poor performance is a result of lack of or low ability in specific learning tasks expect failure. Similarly, Stipek (1988) posited that negative thoughts and feelings (consistently related to a task or activity) influence similar learning situations, in turn, leading to poor motivation and loss of academic interest.

Conclusion

In summary, U.S. students are falling behind global educational standards, a very ominous trend for the country at large. In response to this, the government and the education system as a whole have implemented rigorous testing. However, testing has not only failed to improve education, it has lowered the quality of education students are receiving as teachers are pressured through merit pay and other systems to "teach to the test." This forces them to leave out important topics such as current events and inherently undervalues subjects that do not lend themselves to testing such as music and art (Paulson, 2010).

Instead of investing time and money in further developing, administering, and analyzing the results of tests, it would greatly behoove the U.S. to invest in motivating students. Motivation has been shown to be an important, if not the most essential, element in academic success. No matter how many tools students are given to learn, they will make no progress if they are not motivated to apply them.

As discussed throughout this paper, much research has been conducted on student academic motivation and student motivation to learn; of particular interest here, studies that concentrate on the dynamics of motivation within classroom settings have started to emphasize the potential role of relational variables (e.g., Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999) and teacher behaviors (e.g., Skinner & Belmont, 1993) in student academic engagement. Various classroom models including autonomy-supportive approaches and progressive education have been developed based on the beliefs that motivation is of utmost importance and can be created where it is lacking. Transferring control to the students themselves is an element common to all of these models. These approaches are supported by theoretical frameworks including self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2002) and expectancy-value for achievement (Eccles et al., 1983). It is essential that the United States change its approach to education, especially among younger children whose feelings and beliefs about school are still quite malleable.

As noted before, a growing body of research pointed out that young children enthusiastically seek out novel and challenging school tasks, and therefore, motivation is vital for successful school adjustment (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Goldberg, 1994; Stipek, 1988, 2002). Positive motivational patterns are as crucial for learning in early childhood as they are for later learning (Carlton & Winsler, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), perceived academic competence and perceived academic self-determination positively influence autonomous academic motivation, which, in turn, has a positive impact on school adjustment and the development of intrinsic motivation. Similarly, children's beliefs about their academic experiences have important implications for their school adjustment and academic achievement (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Thus, expectancies and values are directly determined by other achievement-related beliefs such as achievement goals, self-schemata, and beliefs about science (Wigfield, 1994). Therefore, young students' feelings, expectancies for success, and task values are crucial indicators of the development of academic and social competencies. However, research is still needed to examine the implications of those motivational constructs for younger children because most studies that focus on student motivation look at elementary or high school students. Therefore, through a variety of theoretical lenses, we need to document and understand the implications of motivation to learn among young children.

When children enter school or transition to the next level of schooling, they encounter challenges such as creating positive relationships with peer groups and adults in the school environment as well as learning to meet the demands of a wide range of cognitive, social, and academic tasks (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd,

1997; Pianta et al., 1995). Teachers may serve as social agents, and they can contribute to students' intellectual and socio-emotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates student motivation and learning. Studies have shown that positive teacher–student relationships can lead to a warm classroom environment that facilitates successful adaptation to school and thereby increases student motivation to learn (Baker, 2006; Davis, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial to understand and document the effects of the quality of teacher–student dyadic interaction on young students' motivation to learn.

Motivation together with increased competency allows a student the will to apply himself or herself and the tools with which to do it and is therefore at least as essential to academic achievement as presenting the material to be learned (Eccles et al., 1983; Stipek, 2002). Studies have found that motivated students not only learn better but also use power responsibly (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Meece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990; Simmons & Page, 2010; Stipek, 2002). Several factors, however, can contribute to poor motivation in early school years: conflictual teacher–student relationships, a performance (avoidance)-based classroom structure that extensively emphasizes the extrinsic value of learning and includes an external locus of control and ability, and a teacher and/or classroom structure that ignores the importance of effort (Pianta, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Stipek, 1988, 2002).

In conclusion, young children learn from everything they do. They are naturally curious; they want to explore and discover. During these early years, children develop attitudes about learning that will influence their school life. When we provide the right sort of support and encouragement during these years, students will be more creative, adventurous learners throughout their lives than children who do not receive this support. Therefore, it is essential that the U.S. changes its approach to education, especially among younger children whose feelings and beliefs about school are still malleable. Educators should emphasize the importance of motivation to learn in the early school years.

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