Motivation to learn: teacher-student relationship

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 over the last several years showing that education of the next generation in the U. S. is lacking. The long-standing super power 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 because that is what the nation is crying for. However, while the belief that U. S. students are falling behind the world academically is wide-spread, and fact that this is an undesirable circumstance to be in is unanimous, no single concrete solution has emerged.

The leading approach is currently raising standards as can be measured according to standardized tests. The idea is that without a quantifiable measure of progress schools cannot know whether they are improving and that by seeing how they are doing in comparison to other schools, they will be motivated to make even greater strides. It has been suggested that an emphasis on student motivation may be far more valuable than an emphasis on which specific facts they've memorized from American 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 beside the material the students are expected to learn, many studies have shown that this very well might be the case. This is, in brief, due to the fact that motivated students learn more, learn better, and learn themselves. That is to say, the 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 was invested in conventional transfer of knowledge methods, or far worse, test preparation.

Accordingly, many researchers have conducted a considerable number of studies on student's academic motivation and student's goal orientation, particularly those 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 students' academic engagement. In the last forty years, researches (e. g., Pintrich, 2001, Skinner, 1995, Stipek, 1988) have studied student motivation and, have found a great deal about: " What moves students to learn and the quantity and quality of the effort they invest?", What choices students make?, What makes them persist in the face of hardship?, How student motivation is affected by their relationships with significant adults?, How motivation develops?, and " How the school environment affects it?". Accordingly, educators, parents, and students have paid substantial attention to the importance of motivation in school because of significant contributions to students' academic learning, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and school readiness.

Motivation to learn is a competence acquired through general experience however, it is mostly 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, driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and discover

their environment. In the classroom settings, the content covered and the social context can vary continuously. Therefore, children are frequently involved in unfamiliar learning environment. This can create ambiguity for some students; however can crate challenge for other students. 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 process (Brophy, 1987). Motivational belief also refers to the students' opinions of the efficacy or effectiveness of learning and 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 (e. g., achievement goals, self-schemata, beliefs about science (Wigfield, 1994). Similarly, motivational beliefs act as a frame of reference that guides student's thinking, feelings, and actions in any subject area. For example, motivational beliefs about mathematics determine which strategies and motivational goals students develop. It is crucial that a student's beliefs about a domain may be 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 transition to middle school (Davis. 2003; Pianta, 1999). Teacher may operate as social agents, and they can affect the

students' intellectual and sociemotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates both students' motivation and learning. Moreover teacher-student relationships serve as 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 increase students' motivation to learn. On the other hand, conflictual teacher-student relationships are associated with lower achievement and self-esteem as well as ongoing relational conflict with both teachers and peers (Pianta & Hamre, 2005; Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Damme, & Maes, 2008). Research has further indicated that children with whom teachers report positive relationships are outgoing and socially competent (Pianta, et. all., 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1998). Moreover, the teachers believed that high quality relationships between teachers and their students enhanced 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 (Pianta, et al., 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1998). Similarly, the beliefs teachers hold about teaching and learning, and the nature of expectations 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.

The various studies examined the influence of family, academic, and personal factors on the student's 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 learning activity itself (Stipek, 1998; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). Similarly, the students themselves attribute to poor performance to low ability and to luck (Stipek, 2002) and an improvement in performance to motivation (task-goal orientation), to self-regulating behaviors, and to competence as a function of task characteristics (Stipek, 2002). 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.

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, the implications of poorly motivated young students on their social and academic life. Firstly, two relevant theoretical frameworks are introduced: self-determination and expectancy and value theory. These theories provide the basis of the rationale for the present study and frame the possible bridging point from the problem to where the attempted solutions until this point failed, and what is worth trying next.

Theoretical Considerations

Further understanding of the topics of motivation and learning is facilitated through the lenses of various theoretical frameworks. These frameworks shed insight on the bigger picture of motivation and learning and are helpful guides in developing practical new approaches to the classroom. Three major relevant theories are discussed below: self-determination and value-expectancy 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 for which they and significant others (i. e., teachers, families) in their social environments are reinforced. When these values are accepted as their own (internalization), students begin to choose to engage in activities that are consistent with their own feelings (Deci & Ryan, 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 in the 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) posits 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 individuals' 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 (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2002). The teacher-student relationship is a very important and a 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 studies showed that students, who believed that they are competent academically, are more likely to be interested in academic and school tasks (

Stipek & Daniels, 1991; Skaalvik & Rankin, 1995). Similarly, for teachers, supporting children's basic psychological needs and provide a healthy classroom environment also promote more positive teacher-student relationships. Within this type of environment, students report greater levels of competence, autonomy, and positive relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2005; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation

Another important alternative and complementary theoretical view of students' motivation to learn in educational settings is expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, Adler, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983). Eccles and her colleagues (1983) studies values in the context of an expanded expectancy- value theory. This model is consisted of two components: a psychological component which focuses on cognitive factors such as expectations for success and the values placed on successful attainment, and a socialization component which explains individual differences that occur within the variables of the psychological component (Eccles et al., 1983). A major premise of this model involves the influence of parental socialization on children's 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). Similarly, they proposed that there are three kinds of values (e. g., attainment value, utility value, intrinsic value) relevant to achievement (Jacobs & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Attainment

value refers to the relevance of an activity to a person's actual or ideal self-concept, and it is determined by how tasks satisfy people's needs (Eccles et al., 1983). Accordingly, attainment value is the most closely related 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, as a task has intrinsic value , people engage in 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 that humiliation if failure occurs.

Motivation for Academic Achievement

If testing is not the way to get students to learn, what is? It has been proposed that the single factor with the greatest impact on whether a student learns is his or her motivation. As mentioned above, motivation is considered one of, if not the, most important factors influencing students' learning. Qin Xiaoqing (2002) found that the presence of absence of motivation is in large part what determines success or failure in second language learning. This is because motivated students use learning strategies more frequently, have a stronger will to learn and so set more and higher goals for themselves, and they are more persistent in learning. Qin (2003) found that learning motivation influences the learners' autonomous learning ability, and determines the learners' confidence in overcoming learning difficulty. These theories on motivation demonstrate that

motivation, as one of the crucial factors determining the success in language learning, attracts much attention of the researchers (Li & Pan, 2009).

What is motivation? While different theorists define motivation differently, motivation 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 which causes the exertion of intellectual and physical effort towards 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, etc.

What role does motivation play in achievement? It has been argued that motivation is not only the key ingredient for outstanding work, but also in extraordinary achievement. The claim is 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 (Runco, Nemiro, & Walberg, 1998). However, on the other hand is the widespread believe that accomplishment, and especially outstanding accomplishment, is about innate talent. People who believe this somehow ignore the fact that Mozart, Darwin, Michal Jordan, and Tiger Woods practiced feverishly and single-mindedly for years, and

instead believe that they were simply born with a talent that if one is not born with cannot not be achieved regardless of how motivation or any other factor controllable (Dwek, 2002).

Proponents of the first belief however, that motivation and not talent is the core ingredient for success, have developed various ways to bring that motivation to the classroom towards students' academic achievement. One major school of thought is called " progressive education." This approach is centered on the importance of the genuine interest of the students (Simmons & Page, 2010). A student's interest or motivation can stem from innumerable factors and vary depending on the student, of course. Researchers in the field have categorized stuent motivations 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 comits to a task in order to receive a reward from a source external to him or herself such as from the teacher (Macabudbud, Alba, Jestony, Dadis, Diaz, Realiza, & Ventura, 2009). Understanding these different motivations is important when translating the theoretical ideas of the importance of 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. Similarly, Goldberg (1994) pointed out that young children enthusiastically seek novel and challenging school tasks and therefore, 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 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 a 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 (1985) found that children, who are more intrinsically motivated, are more successful learners than those with more extrinsically motivated. Accordingly, inhibiting the development of intrinsic motivation in early childhood education and schools have been criticized (Broophy, 1998). It is noteworthy to first understand how motivation relates to education and how motivation affects the children's social and academic competence. Similarly, Fortier (1995) examined the effects of autonomous academic motivation on perceived academic self-competence and perceived academic self-determination. He showed that perceived academic competence and perceived academic self-determination positively influenced autonomous academic motivation, which in turn had a positive impact on school and the development of intrinsic motivation. Moreover, Boggiano, Shields, Barrett, Thompson, Simons, and Katz (1992) found that motivational orientation is significantly related to children's standardized achievement scores. Specifically, young students with an intrinsic motivational orientation got higher reading and math achievement scores than their classroom mates with extrinsic motivational orientation

(Boggiano, et al., 1992). Together, this indicates 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 indication of a child's ability to be successful in school settings. In previous research with older children (e. g., Stipek, 1998; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Harter, 1992), motivation has showed as an important factor for learning, academic success, and social development. 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, 1998). Achievement goal theory provided insights in order to examine student's motivation and achievement-related outcomes (Ames, 1992 ; Walters, 2004). Achievement goals can be defined as the purposes and reasons for a person's pursuit in achievement situation. Different purposes and reasons lead to different emotional, cognitive, and affective patterns (Dweck & Leggett, 1988 ; Urdan & Midgley, 2003). There have been considerable amount of researches (e. g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot & Thrash, 2001) that showed the effects of achievement goals on students' motivation to learn. For example, Kaplan, Gheen, and Midgley (2002) examined the relationship between classroom goal structure and student disruptive behavior. They (2002) found that student perceptions of a

mastery goal structure were related to lower incidence of behavioral problems and disruptive behaviors whereas student perceptions of a performance approach goal structure were related to 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 and thereby, mastery orientation increases the individual's intrinsic motivation, then in turn, motivation to learn.

Previous researches examining children's expectancy-related beliefs about different achievement tasks showed that children's expectancy-related beliefs play a central role in their 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 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 themselves are most directly affected by children's achievement goals, their self-schemata, and their task-specific beliefs. Values also influence students' intentions and decisions about the 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 how learning and performance goals are determined by children's subjective values. For instance, the kind of achievement situation the child is in influence the child's 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 and so competence belief and expectancy for success are directly related (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). For examples, achievement values in school tasks (i. e., mathematic) can influence self-perceptions of competence (Covington, 1992). Previous research also suggested 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, activity choices (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Meece, Wigfleld, & Eccles, 1990). 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, there is paucity of investigation of effects of motivation to learn on young children's learning. Accordingly, focusing on young school children's expectations and values using the expectancy-value model and the effects of may contribute to our understanding about children's development of motivational values and expectancy and in early school years.

A number of researchers (e. g., Stipek & Mac Iver, 1989; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991) also showed that young children's

beliefs about their ability and expectancies for success are overly optimistic and are not realistic. Young children perceive themselves as competent and they nearly always think that they will be successful on the 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, 1984; Wigfleld & 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, classroom achievement goal structure also play a significant role in young students' motivation to learn and their motivational belief (Eccles et al., 1983; Pianta, 1999; Stipek, 2002). Therefore, it is very crucial to further investigate and demonstrate the effects of aforementioned factors in young children motivation to learn, and in turn, how young children's motivation to learn influence the development of social and academic competence.

Teacher-Student Relationship and Young Children's Motivation to Learn

It is widely recognized that when children enter school or transient to next level, they encounter a variety of new challenges. These include 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 (Pianta et al., 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Baker, 2006). 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). Teacher may operate as social agents, and

they can affect the students' intellectual and sociemotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates both students' motivation and learning. Moreover teacher-student relationships serve as a regulatory function for the development of social, emotional, and academic skills (Davis, 2006). Similarly, young children who enjoy taking positive supports 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 examined the effects of the quality of teacher-student dyadic interaction on students' academic motivation (e. g., Davis & Ashley, 2003; Pianta, 1999). In fact, 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 as well as peer relationship (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, et. all., 1995). For example, Davis and Ashley (2003) reported that positive teacher-student interaction enhanced classroom learning and student's motivation by building a safe and supportive context for students to motivate for learning and take intellectual risks. In addition, teachers believed that students tended to work hard if they liked their teachers and had caring relations with their teachers. Therefore, teachers in Davis's and Ashley's study (David & Ashley, 2003) preferred to invest the time and effort for the development of supportive relations with their students. In addition, those positive and caring relations helped the teachers to be creative in their instruction.

Accordingly, Davis (2006) found that middle school students and teachers, who perceived their relations as a supportive and positive, reported enhanced motivation, more facilitative classroom settings, and higher

grades. Similarly, Birch and Ladd (1997) found that supportive teacher-student relationship plays an important role in developing school adjustment competencies including attention, motivation, problem-solving, and self esteem. Together, when teachers provided more autonomy and the instruction addressed students' personal interest and personal relevance, they were more emotionally and behaviorally engaged in school works and they had more supportive relationships with their teachers. Similarly, those students, who reported higher levels of autonomy provided by their teacher, showed more adaptive patterns of learning (David & Ashley, 2003; Stipek, 2002).

Accordingly, previous researches (e. g., Patrick, Hicks, & Ryan, 1997; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001) have indicated that there is a significant relationship between student's adaptive motivation for academics and a number of social factors within the classroom. These include teacher-student relationship, teacher support (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Ecles, 1988), and teacher practices that foster respect among students (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). Similarly, Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, and Midgley (2001) examined how teacher-student interaction influences both students' classroom's goal-orientation structure. They found that teachers' apparent support and enthusiasm toward students' progress and their confidence in students' ability to learn were accompanied by teachers' recognition practices and their teaching styles. Their relationships with students were characterized by supporting students' academic engagement and giving warm praise. Teachers encouraged their students to focus on task and informational feedback. In mastery-approach classroom,

all teachers perceived learning as active process in which classroom

involvement, positive interactions, understanding (not memorization),

student engagement are key requirements of student academic

achievement and motivation. On the oth