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Leadership in the Classroom: Closing the Achievement Gap through Motivation

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LEADERSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM: CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP THROUGH MOTIVATION

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MGT 495: LUBIN LEADERS AND SCHOLARS SENIOR THESIS

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SPRING 2007

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ABSTRACT

Implementing motivation strategies in elementary urban public schools can be challenging because of contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, culture, physical and emotional health, and prior learning experiences. This thesis focuses on 1) how urban public school teachers can effectively motivate their students in spite of these factors, and 2) whether their motivation efforts really influence students' desire to achieve. Interview protocols and a survey instrument will be probed, and data will be collected from New York City public school teachers and from their general education elementary school students. The results of the study can be used to customize motivational approaches for classroom leadership in this unique but critical context.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

School leadership is central to student achievement (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Teachers are the primary classroom leaders and therefore carry the responsibility of managing learning in the classroom (Lumsden, 1994). In this new era of educational accountability, where school leaders are expected to deliver bottom-line results, the skill and knowledge of teachers matter more than ever (Hess & Kelly, 2007). There are many factors that influence teacher effectiveness, including subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical preparation and experience. However, the combination of these factors does not necessarily make effective teachers. Rather, teachers' ability to motivate their students is a vital aspect that is often overlooked but plays a great role in their performance (Lumsden, 1994).

Learning and succeeding in school requires active engagement, regardless of social class, race and ethnicity (Engaging Schools, 2004). Student motivation concerns students' desire to participate in knowledge-gaining activities, and includes their "willingness, need, and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process" (Bomia et al., 1997, p. 1). Skinner and Belmont (1991) describe it further, noting that students who are motivated to engage in school "select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest" (p. 3). On the other hand, less motivated or disengaged students "are passive, do not try hard, and give up easily in the face of challenges" (Skinner & Belmont, 1991, p. 4).

Infants and young children are characteristically curious. These curiosity drives are quite intense during childhood, and can be beneficial when carried into adulthood (Luthans,

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1998). However, as children grow older, studies show that their interest in learning seems to decrease. This is particularly evident in urban public schools (Mcinerney, 2000). There are many reasons why urban students become less engaged in learning, including influences from within and outside schools. These range from family, culture, physical, social and emotional health, and prior learning experiences (Mcinerney, 2000). Although teachers have little control over many of these factors, understanding their association with urban youths' motivation in school is helpful when making an effort to inspire them to learn (Lumsden, 1994). Although motivation is not the only predictor of performance, it is an important one. Teachers who recognize that poor performance is not due solely to inadequate motivation are better able to identify and correct performance problems (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). In addition, research has shown that teachers have a lot of control over students' attitudes towards learning, and teachers' understanding of these dynamics can facilitate their ability to create a motivating classroom environment (Anderman & Midgley, 1998).

Effectively motivating urban youths in school would provide a breakthrough in bridging the achievement gap that exists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts (Skinner & Belmont, 1991). High motivation and engagement in learning are linked to lower dropout rates and higher student success (Blank, 1997; Dev, 1997; Kushman, Sieber, & Heariod-Kinney, 2000; Woods, 1995). However, keeping students interested in school and motivating them to succeed are great challenges. According to the Board on Children, Youth and Families, when students from high-poverty, urban backgrounds become unmotivated, they are less likely to complete high school and consequently face severely limited opportunities (Engaging Schools, 2004).

The link between engagement and achievement may seem obvious; however, this issue is frequently ignored in discussions about school reform and improvement (Hess & Kelly,

2007). As schools increasingly focus on helping students achieve high standards, reaching out to disengaged and discouraged learners becomes increasingly important (Mcinerney, 2000). Essentially, students who are not motivated to engage in learning are unlikely to succeed. The good news is that educators can and do affect students' level of motivation in learning (Mcinerney, 2000). Simply recognizing this power is a critical step in motivating students.

Many teachers' goals include motivating their students to learn and helping them believe they can learn in hopes of bridging the achievement gap. There is much literature discussing the importance of student motivation in regards to achievement, however, it is weak in the implementation phase (Mcinerney, 2000). Although information available on motivating people is accessible, utilizing it effectively is not a simple, one-step process. Especially challenging is managing diverse, urban classrooms (Bomia et al., 1997). Effectively implementing motivation strategies in a classroom depends on the teacher's personality and style, and the classrooms' dynamics (Bomia et al., 1997). Unfortunately, the same motivation strategies that are successfully implemented in homogenous, privileged classrooms are often unsuccessful in urban classrooms (Skinner & Belmont, 1991). Due to the different contexts between the students, motivation techniques need to be adapted to fit urban classrooms' needs. Although there is research to support using different motivation techniques for different groups, there is no research describing effective motivation strategies specifically for urban classrooms affected by the achievement gap. It is my belief that several highly accepted organizational motivation theories influence and promote achievement in these schools. This research paper will attempt to fill that gap by answering the following research questions (RQ) about teachers and students in economically challenged urban schools:

(RQ1) Are there best practices for classroom learning? → How should effective teachers in urban public schools motivate their students?

(RQ2) Does classroom leadership matter? → Do students in urban public schools feel that

motivation from teachers influences them to want to close the achievement gap?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will summarize relevant literature concerning motivation and public schools. Several theories of motivation will be reviewed, including need theories, job theories, action theories and outcome theories. In addition, factors affecting the achievement gap will be discussed. The purpose of this literature review is to derive existing insights related to the research questions in hopes that they will aid in the resolution of the questions, and in turn, the achievement gap.

Motivation

Motivation involves psychological processes that bring about an individual's desire and intentions to behave in a particular way. The outcomes of motivation are generally expressed in terms of behaviors actually exhibited, the amount of effort exerted, or the choice of strategy used to complete a job or task (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998).Actual effort or persistence are the most direct outcomes of motivation. However, the causes of behavior are broad and complex and cannot be explained by motivation alone (Luthans, 1998). Behaviors are also influenced by factors such as individual inputs, context factors, norms, and motivation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). For example, the amount of time a student spends studying for an exam depends on his motivation in combination with his abilities and goals, the quality of his notes, and his past experience taking exams (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). However, motivation is a strong process which influences, and often explains, behaviors, including learning in the classroom (Luthans, 1998). The following sections will review major theories of motivation, including their particular relevance in the classroom.

Need Theories

Need Theories of motivation are based on the premise that people are motivated by unsatisfied needs and attempt to identify factors that motivate people and how these drives or needs are prioritized (Luthans, 1998). They also discuss the types of incentives that people try to obtain in order to be fulfilled (Luthans, 1998). There are a variety of theories that aim to motivate on the basis of needs; I will outline three well-accepted need theories in the following sections, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG Theory and McClelland's Needs Theory.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's theory arranges factors that contribute to motivation in a proponent, hierarchal format. He identified five levels in his theory, arranged from the most powerful and basic, to the culmination of all human needs. Once a certain level of need is satisfied, it is no longer motivational. Instead, the individual proceeds to the next level of the hierarchy to be motivated. The three lower levels, physiological, safety and belonging, plus external esteem, are deficiency needs, or "D-needs", while the highest level of self-actualization plus self-esteem are considered being needs or "B-needs". The two set of needs are distinct because B-needs are internal motivators and are considered processes instead of end goals; they can continually be developed and can continue to motivate.

The lowest level, physiological needs, correspond to our most basic, unlearned needs that we need to survive (Maslow, 1943). Needs of food, air, water and sleep are common examples. Obviously, a student has to be fulfilled in this level before being motivated or attempting to learn. Once these needs are satisfied, a student will move to the next level, safety needs, where Maslow stressed the need to be free from physical and emotional harm (1943). Judging from this level, teachers should strive to create a classroom that is free from physical and psychological

threats. Belonging needs entail the desire for affection and belonging as well as the desire to love. The esteem level represents the higher human needs which include self-esteem and esteem from others, including reputation, self-confidence, prestige, and recognition (Maslow, 1943). In order to aid in the fulfillment of these needs in the classroom, teachers can promote a community-like setting, where students are encouraged to respect and value one another. The highest level on Maslow's hierarchy is the need to self-actualize. He described this rarity as realizing one's potential and becoming the best one is capable of becoming (Maslow, 1943). Although at the apex, this self-fulfillment need is not an end to the hierarchy as it can always be further developed.

Because of its logical approach, Maslow's hierarchy has been widely accepted by book writers and practitioners. However, research has shown little empirical support for the theory because human behavior is complex and multi-motivated, and cannot be constructed into a linear progression. One criticism is that higher needs may actually emerge before lower needs that have been suppressed or unsatisfied (Gibson & Teasley, 1973; Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). Although his theory is not absolute, Maslow did make a significant contribution in terms of identifying important concepts of motivation in the classroom. Because a satisfied need may loose its capability to motivate, students can be motivated by satisfying emerging needs. Teachers can evaluate their students' needs to better apply Maslow's theory.

Alderfer's ERG Theory

To try and overcome Maslow's deficiencies, Clayton Alderfer formulated a model that is more consistent with empirical evidence. He made basic distinctions between three core needs: *Existence* needs which are concerned with survival, *Relatedness* needs which stress the importance of interpersonal relationships, and *Growth* needs which affect the individual's intrinsic desire for personal development (Schneider & Alderfer, 1973). Because individual

needs vary, one key distinction from Maslow's theory is that Alderfer's ERG needs do not have strict lines of demarcation and it is a continuum rather than a hierarchy of proponent needs.

Alderfer classified Maslow's physiological and safety needs into his existence category, his belonging and external esteem needs into the relatedness category, and self-actualization and self-esteem needs into the growth category (Schneider & Alderfer, 1973). Alderfer proposed a frustration-regression principle where when needs in the higher growth category are not met, then individuals invest more effort in the relatedness category hoping to fulfill the higher need (Schneider & Alderfer, 1973; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). If growth opportunities are not provided to students, they may regress to socializing more with peers. Therefore, teachers should recognize that students have many needs they need to fulfill simultaneously and focusing on one need at a time may not be the best strategy to motivate.

McClelland's Needs Theory

David McClelland formulated a three-factor theory of motivation which incorporates the needs for affiliation (nAff), power (nPow) and achievement (nAch). The theory proposes that motivation and performance vary according to these needs. The need for achievement is characterized by the "desire to accomplish something difficult; to master, manipulate, or organize physical objects, human beings or ideas as independently as possible; to overcome obstacles and attain a high standard; to rival and surpass others; and to increase self-regard by the successful exercise of talent" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001, pg. 212). Teachers should keep in mind that achievement –motivated students prefer working on tasks that are moderately difficult and challenging, but not impossible. This reduces frequency of failure from attempting tasks that are too difficult, and increases the satisfaction gained by successfully completing challenging tasks (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). They like situations in which their performance is due to their own

efforts, rather than luck or other factors. Finally, they desire more feedback on their success and failures than do low achievers (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

Need for affiliation is the desire to "spend time in social relationships and activities" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001, pg. 213). Students with a high nAff orientation desire concordant relationships with others and need acceptance. They are highly motivated by work where they have significant personal interaction.

The need for power reflects an individual's desire to influence, teach, coach or encourage others to achieve. They like to work and are concerned with discipline and self-respect. Power may be expressed as personalized power or socialized power. A high need for power may be expressed as "personalized power" or "socialized power". Students with personalized power may exercise power impulsively and with selfish intent, while students with socialized power usually have effective leadership skills. They use their power in positive ways rather than solely contributing to their own status and gain.

According to the Need Theories, teachers should focus on identifying students' unmet needs and innovating ways to satisfy them to increase students' motivation to learn. In general, teachers should ensure that students' basic survival needs, belonging and affiliation needs, and growth needs are satisfied. Teachers should also keep in mind that because individual student's needs vary, they may have to individualize their teaching and motivational strategies.

Job Theories

Job theories take the approach that motivation is based on the duties and assignments performed on the job. For instance, a dull and repetitive job "stifles motivation to perform well, whereas a challenging job enhances motivation" (Ramlall, 2004, pg. 56). Job enlargement

involves increasing variety into a job by combining specialized tasks of similar difficulty. Proponents of job enlargement say that it can improve satisfaction, motivation and quality of production. However, job enlargement does not have a long-lasting effect when used by itself; it should be used in conjunction as part of a broader approach, using other job design techniques. Job rotation gives employees greater variety like job enlargement, but instead of increasing the amount of work, employees are moved around from one specialized job to another. By rotating employees, managers can stimulate interest and motivation. Job enrichment involves modifying a job through vertical loading, which consists of giving workers more responsibility. This will give the employee an opportunity to experience achievement, recognition, stimulating work, responsibility, and advancement. In the following sections I will discuss two major job theories: Job Characteristics Model and Hygiene-Motivator Theory.

Job Characteristics Model

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) developed by J. Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham, can be linked to education because it determines how workers, or students, can be intrinsically (internally) motivated and work, or lean, for their own sake, rather than for external reasons, such as rewards and incentives (Rosenholtz, 1987). Research shows that it is much easier to stay motivated for internal reasons, and it is associated with high educational achievement and enjoyment by students. According to the JCM theory, internal motivation is determined by three core psychological states: experienced meaningfulness, where the work is perceived as worthwhile or important; experienced responsibility, where the individual believes that he is personally accountable for the outcomes of his efforts; and knowledge of results, where an individual is able to determine whether or not the outcomes of his efforts are satisfactory (Rosenholtz, 1987). These psychological states generate internal motivation and are nurtured by five core job dimensions. The first three dimensions combine to determine experienced

meaningfulness of work. First, skill variety refers to the variety of tasks which requires students to use different skills and abilities. Task identity refers to the extent to which students are able to work on a project from beginning to end and is able to see a tangible result. Third, task significance is the extent to which the schoolwork affects students' lives, both within and outside the classroom. Experienced responsibility is elicited by autonomy, which is the extent to which students experience freedom, independence, and discretion in school. The last dimension of feedback fosters knowledge of result (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). Teachers provide feedback to students to let them know the strengths and weaknesses of their performance in school (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). If classrooms are designed to possess these five core elements, then high internal motivation will be promoted.

Hackman and Oldman formulated the motivating potential score (MPS), which assesses the extent to which a specific job possesses the five core job characteristics. Low MPS scores reveal that an individual will not experience high internal work motivation from the job, while high scores indicate that the job is capable of stimulating internal motivation. The MPS is computed as:

$$MPS = \frac{(Skill\ variety + Task\ Identity + Task\ significance)}{3} * Autonomy * Feedback$$

Judging from the equation, autonomy and feedback seem to be the most important job characteristics since MPS equals zero when either one does not exist (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). The JCM does not work for everyone, as not all individuals want enriched work. However, students should respond positively to tasks with a high MPS when (1) they have the necessary knowledge and skills to do the task, (2) they have high growth needs, and (3) they are satisfied with various aspects of the classroom context, such as rewards and peers (Rosenholtz, 1987).

Hertzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory

Frederick Hertzberg found separate and distinct clusters of factors associated with job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction was associated with achievement, recognition and characteristic of the work, responsibility and advancement (Prescott & Simpson, 2004). These are all related to the content of the task, which Hertzberg labeled *motivators* because each was associated with strong effort and good performance. He believed that motivators cause a person to move from being unsatisfied to satisfied. Teachers can motivate students by incorporating "motivators" into their instruction.

Hertzberg found job dissatisfaction to be associated primarily with factors in the work context or environment. Specifically, company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships with supervisor, and working conditions were frequently mentioned by those who were dissatisfied. These are *hygiene* factors that he said are unmotivational—at best an individual will experience no job dissatisfaction when he/she has no grievances about hygiene factors (Prescott & Simpson, 2004). A person in the "zero midpoint" of the dissatisfaction-satisfaction spectrum has no dissatisfaction due to good hygiene factors, and no satisfaction due to lack of motivators.

Teachers can incorporate hygiene factors into their classrooms so their students may avoid being dissatisfied. For instance, extrinsic factors such as school policies and administration, supervision and classroom conditions can be tailored to meet students' basic expectations. On the other hand, intrinsic motivator factors such as recognition, responsibility and growth can be used to motivate students.

To implement the job theories of motivation, teachers should incorporate their core concepts into their classroom management, such as assigning challenging, meaningful tasks that

students can take responsibility for, assigning tasks that necessitate the use of various skills and jobs, and offering constructive feedback and recognition.

Action Theories

Goal Setting Theory

According to Latham and Locke (1991), high achieving, successful people are goal-oriented. Goals are clear objectives or standards that an individual tries to accomplish (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). Goals work by directing individuals' attention on important tasks, regulating effort and action, increasing persistence, and fostering strategies and action plans (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). There are five insights that determine the usefulness of a goal: (1) difficult goals lead to higher performance, (2) specific goals lead to increased effort, (3) feedback enhances the effect of specific, challenging goals, (4) participative goals, assigned goals, and self-set goals are equally effective as long as the individual (5) is committed to achieving the goal (Latham & Locke, 1991; Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998).

It is important to set challenging, achievable goals that the student is committed to achieving. Students who achieve goals develop feelings of competence and success. However, not meeting goals does not necessarily lead to decreased motivation; rather, students may be further motivated to increase efforts to achieve the goal and avoid failure. In addition, students who have an internal locus of control and believe that their increased efforts will lead to positive results will have better success with this theory (Latham & Locke, 1991).

Vroom's Expectancy Theory

According to Victor Vroom's expectancy theory, people are motivated to behave in ways that lead to desired combinations of expected outcomes (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). The theory is largely based on perception because it emphasizes the cognitive ability to anticipate likely results of behaviors, and hedonism because it assumes people strives to maximize pleasure and

minimize pain. According to Vroom, motivation is rooted in making choices about how much effort to exert in specific situations. The choices are based on the idea that a certain amount of effort will lead to an expected performance result. For instance, if a student does not believe that increasing the amount she spends studying will lead to a comparably higher grade on an exam, then she will not study harder than usual. In addition, motivation also depends on a student's perceived chances of meeting an outcome as a result of meeting a performance goal. Lastly, individuals are motivated to the extent that they value the outcomes received.

Vroom devised an equation to integrate these concepts into a model that predicts motivational strength as follows:

$$\text{Motivation} = \text{Expectancy} * \text{Valance} * \text{Instrumentality}$$

Where expectancy is the belief that a certain amount of effort will lead to anticipated performance, valance is the value of obtaining the goal, and instrumentality is the connection between success and reward. In order to apply this theory in the classroom, teachers should discover what their students value and what resources they need, and utilize effective rewards.

Since the three factors are multiplied by each other, a low value in one will lead to low motivation, and all three must exist in order for motivation to be present. Therefore, if a student does not think he can successfully learn, or if he cannot connect the learning to success or if he does not value the outcome of success, then he most likely will not be motivated to participate in learning the information. All three variables must be high in order for motivation to learn to be high.

According to the action theories, there should be a balance between effort, value and rewards in order to achieve motivation. Goals are important in the classroom because they

establish a certain level of expectation from the student. Students are more likely to work towards goals that are challenging but achievable, and those that lead to positive results. Each student has a different perception of what they value, and it is up to the teacher to assess this factor and incorporate it into their motivational efforts.

Outcome Theories

Adam's Equity Theory

John Stacey Adams's Equity Theory is based upon the idea that individuals seek a balance between inputs and outputs. Inputs typically include effort, hard work, commitment, enthusiasm and skill, while outputs may include physical rewards, recognition, reputation, and sense of achievement (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Individuals form perceptions about what is "fair" by comparing their situation with others in similar situations, such as colleagues, friends and partners (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987).

A fair balance between inputs and outputs results in equity, and leads to positive, motivated students. However, if a student feels that his rewards (or other outputs) are inadequate compared to the inputs put forth by him, there is demotivation. The extent of the demotivation is proportional to the perceived disparity between the ratios of inputs to outputs and may result in reduced effort, discontent, indifference and disruption if their demands for more output are not met (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). For instance, a student will feel highly motivated after scoring highly on a very difficult test which she studied hard for. The amount of time and effort the student inputted towards studying is rewarded with a high mark and internal satisfaction of achieving despite the exam's difficulty. However, a student who perceives to have put forth the same amount of effort towards studying for the same exam and earns a low score may be demotivated if he feels that his effort outweighs the results (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987).

Reinforcement Theory

According to Reinforcement Theory, reinforcements, or rewards, condition behavior. The theory focuses solely on what happens to a person when he or she takes some action, or the outcomes of a certain behavior. In this sense, it provides a means of analysis of what controls behavior (Kerr, 1975). Research has demonstrated that people repeat behaviors followed by favorable consequences and avoid behaviors resulting in unfavorable consequences.

According to Kerr (1975) individuals will focus, or pretend, on doing activities that are rewarded, and ignore those that are not. This is an important concept for teachers to take note. Kerr (1975) notes that organizations will often reward one behavior while expecting another, unfortunately, the wanted behavior never arises. Teachers can apply this theory by rewarding achievement, rather than rewarding outcomes that do not necessarily lead to achievement. For instance, teachers may reward long hours spent studying, but this may not lead to increased effort or academic success; in other words, the act of merely sitting in front of open books does not warrant rewards.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory

According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory, increasing external rewards may decrease intrinsic motivation. The theory explains that when intrinsically motivated individuals are extrinsically rewarded, their internal desire to perform a task or behavior decreases, especially when they continue to expect the rewards (Rummel, 1988). Once the individual expects the rewards, then their internal motivation shifts entirely to external motivation and they will not perform, or do their schoolwork in the case of students, unless they receive the rewards.

Teachers who follow this theory should be sure that they are not focusing solely on extrinsic rewards to motivate their students. In addition, rewarding internally motivated behaviors with external rewards may impair performance of the behaviors (Rummel, 1988).

Based on this, students who are intrinsically motivated to learn should not be externally rewarded very often. Instead, they may fare better with praise, satisfaction, and other forms of internal incentives.

Teachers following the principles of outcome theories should take into account the ratio of inputs and outputs each student puts forth compared to one another. According to the outcome theories, effective teachers reward achievements instead of effort, while being careful not to rely solely on external rewards, which may decrease intrinsic motivation. Like other motivation theories, outcome theories are largely based on students' perception of what is considered "fair".

The Achievement Gap

The achievement gap refers to the difference in educational achievement between minority and white students, and between poor and middle-class students that is evident in the United States (Bomia et al., 1997). Large numbers of children leave school, with and without high school diplomas, barely able to read, write, and do math beyond the eighth grade level. The gap is disproportionately evident in economically challenged urban schools (Bomia et al., 1997).

The achievement gap can be observed through a variety of measures, including standardized test scores, grade point average, dropout rates, and college enrollment and completion rates. Explanations for the gap vary widely and have been linked to various factors including, students' racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, parents' education level, access to quality preschool instruction, school funding, peer influences, teachers' expectations, and curricular and instructional quality (Bomia et al., 1997). The problematic gap in achievement that separates economically disadvantaged students and students of color from less disadvantaged students has become a topic of discussion. The average black or Hispanic high

school student currently achieves at about the same level as the average white student in the lowest quartile of white achievement. Black and Hispanic students are much more likely than white students to fall behind in school and drop out, and much less likely to graduate from high school, acquire a college or advanced degree, or earn a middle-class living. Even when parents' income and wealth is comparable, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and immigrants for whom English is not a first language lag behind English-speaking, native-born, white students (Rothstein, 1994).

According to researcher Stanley Rothstein, because they have to focus on meeting certain standards, many urban teachers fail to engage in open discourse with their students, which assure that the two groups are alienated from each other (1994). The results are authoritarian teachers and students who loose their curiosity to learn, where it is unlikely that teachers will learn about their students' needs, identities, or desires (Rothstein, 1994). Rothstein explains that students are not interested in learning in what has become the norm in schools: "coercive alienating environments" (1994, pg. 157). It should be no surprise then, Rothstein states, that "millions [of students] drop out at an early age, happy to be free of this coercive schooling for the poor" (1994, pg. 157). Furthermore, students avoid the constant corrections and humiliations they receive in front of their peers from their teachers.

For years, education policy literature has been optimistic that the achievement gap can and should be bridged by reforming schools to better address to the factors that limit academic achievement (Hertert & Teague, 2003).

The Urban Public School

Urban schools and students alike are at an unfortunate disadvantage. For instance, schools lack the budget necessary to accommodate the unique needs of urban students. Structures of urban schools are inherently different from suburban schools that there are

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expected changes in student morals and beliefs. As one author describes, these schools have a higher than normal rate of scholastic failure, truancy, discipline problems, dropouts, pupil transition and teacher turnover. Poor health, inadequate motivation, malnutrition, lack of basic learning skills-all are found to a greater extent among children in urban areas than among students in suburbs" (Pinkney, 2000, pg. 375).

According to much of the research, teachers play a vital role in student achievement. However, among school resources, the level of teacher experience and the percentage of teachers without a full credential are variables that are strongly related to student outcomes. Furthermore, schools with particularly disadvantaged populations are more likely to have less-educated and less-experienced teachers (Hertert & Teague, 2003). Another study concluded that Asians and Whites are more likely to be taught by better educated and veteran teachers. Although evidence on the importance of teachers is noted, research findings are mixed as to what specific teacher characteristics are most associated with student achievement (Hertert & Teague, 2003).

Significantly lower feelings of belonging were reported in urban schools. This feeling of academic detachment may explain why many students report low motivation, under-perform academically, drop-out and engage in violent behavior (Cooney, 2002). Not all students in urban schools fit this criterion of academic devastation; many students remain motivated despite a lack of school belonging. Effective teachers can help to fill this void by providing the necessary motivational techniques that students need to keep achieving. According to Cooney, teachers can make an immense impact on student perceptions of education (2002).

Findings of school research suggest that schools that provide a safe and orderly school environment are more effective. The extent to which student learning is interrupted by disciplinary problems or unsafe and inadequate classrooms diminishes learning, particularly in schools where there is a high population of children in poverty (Hertert & Teague, 2003).

Outside School

Poverty is the single best explanation research has found for why children differ in school. Although poverty does not cause low achievement, children living in poverty are exposed to various risk factors that are thought to contribute to poor student performance. The achievement gap emerges early in children's lives as a result of physical, social, and emotional deprivations (Hertert & Teague, 2003). They often do not have access to adequate food, shelter, medical care, or cognitive experiences such as being read to. Children with few academic values usually come from a family of low socioeconomic status, as many children are in urban schools (Ad Council, 2004). One theory is that parents of low-income families are too busy working and trying to make ends meet to give much attention to their children's education (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002). The combination of low support and little affection and involvement from parents can influence already deviant students to remain academically unmotivated (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002).

One study that examined family involvement found a positive correlation between amount of home-based family involvement and the child's motivation, attention, task persistence, and conduct, highlighting the importance of family involvement on a child's academic success (Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002). Therefore, when the presence of parents is absent, teachers must work extra hard to help fill this void in the student's life. Achievement-related experiences, beliefs, and values are a critical determinant of a child's academic success (Bomia et al., 1997). Urban students in environments where parents are not present and in which they are not held to high-expectations usually do not meet these factors of academic success (Pinkney, 2000).

The participation of parents is an essential component of education reform strategies (Bomia et al., 1997). Students whose parents are involved in their education generally have"

higher grades and test scores, better attendance, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in postsecondary education." According to National PTA President Linda Hodge: "It has been proven that parent involvement transcends many of the barriers that contribute to the achievement gap, such as socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, and the parents' level of education" (Ad Council, 2004).

Many people believe that poverty or single-parent families *cause* low achievement. However, poor children in poor schools in some states perform very well (Haycock, 2001). A recent national survey found that over "4,500 schools that were in the top third of their state in terms of poverty and minority enrollment were in the top third in achievement as well" (Haycock, 2001). Therefore it seems, poverty, violence, and parental education are important, but research shows that low expectations and less-challenging classes matter more.

Learning and succeeding in school requires active engagement, regardless of social class, race and ethnicity (Engaging Schools, 2004). Motivated behaviors are influenced by: students' abilities and knowledge/skills, motivation, and a combination of enabling and limiting factors (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). For instance, it would be difficult for a student to persist on a project if s/he were working with "defective raw materials or broken equipment" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001, pg 206). Ideally, teachers who implement this framework will make advancements towards closing the achievement gap.

All in all, there are many motivation theories have been discussed. Although they are distinct, many have discussed similar principles such as rewards, internal and external motivation, goals and expectations and relationship needs. These ideas can be applied by urban public school teachers to motivate students to achieve high standards, which in turn is hoped to help close the achievement gap. The following chapter will outline the conceptual model which

will be used as a framework for this research. Several arguments and hypotheses which make a

case for motivating students using a mixture of these theories are presented.

In an effort to gain insight into the role of classroom leadership in enhancing achievement

and learning in urban public schools, and its importance in addressing the achievement gap, I

developed a conceptual model that links teacher's motivation approaches to urban public school

students and the achievement gap. This conceptual model is presented in Figure 1. This

representation of motivation efforts between teacher and student highlights the key motivation

theories and their relationship to urban public school students. Each component of the model will

be discussed in this chapter of the thesis.

**Figure 1: Teachers' Motivation Approaches Effects on
Urban Public School Students and the Achievement Gap**

**Teachers'
Motivation
Approaches**

- *Need*
- *Job*
- *Action*
- *Outcome*

RQ 1

**Urban Public
School Students**

*Students'
Perceived
Change in
Motivation*

RQ 2

**Achievement
Gap**
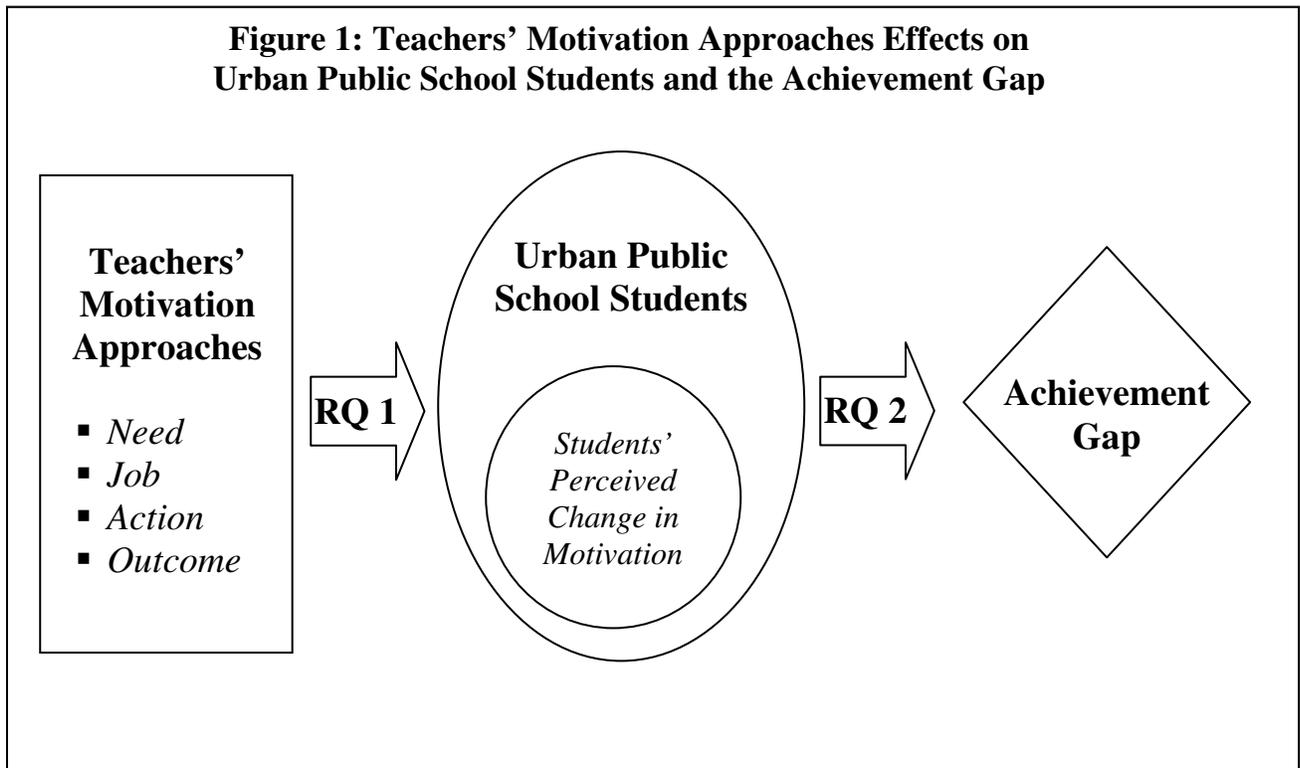
Research Question 1: Teachers' Motivation Approaches The plethoras of motivation

theories provide a puzzle of alternative explanations and recommendations that can be used in

learning environments. Teachers using *Needs Theories* attempt to motivate students by

identifying their unsatisfied needs and fulfilling them in the classroom, while teachers using *Job Theories* identify work factors, such as specific tasks, and adjust them to motivate their students. Teachers using *Action Theories* motivate students by establishing goals and expectations, while those using *Outcome Theories* motivate by using rewards and incentives.

There is not any one motivation theory that is appropriate in all situations; rather, teachers need to use a framework to select techniques best suited for each situation and students involved. Because teachers face a variety of motivational problems that can be solved with different theories of motivation, it is up to them to select the most appropriate techniques. The first question this study attempts to answer is whether there are best practices for classroom achievement. By assessing whether there are general similarities across effective teachers' motivational strategies in urban public schools, I hope to answer this question. Building upon the literature, I have formed the hypotheses discussed below.

Sense of safety and belonging are basic psychological needs according to Maslow, and should be met in order for positive outcomes occur (Anderman, 2002). Teachers should strive to create a classroom that is free from physical and psychological threats. This is important in urban public schools where students face unsafe conditions in their neighborhoods on a regular basis (Walling, 1994). Systems designed with safety in mind, such as hall monitoring, create a general feeling of security that lets students focus on learning. Teachers should provide a comfortable and warm environment where each student feels safe and willing to express his or her feelings. Sometimes a sense of security is lacking at home, so it is essential for children to feel protected and cared for at school (Brown, 2004). Teachers should also encourage a violence free learning environment by instructing students on pro-social behaviors and developing violence prevention programs (Pichler, Urban, & Bockewitz, 2005). Keeping need theories in mind, it is logical to

predict that teachers who take time to evaluate and meet their students' needs, such as safety, have motivated students. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Assessing students' needs and tailoring instruction to fulfill those needs is positively related to highly motivated students.

Sensitivity is important in urban classrooms, as students are often extremely diverse. It is important for teachers to be responsive to student's cultural needs while establishing a sense of belonging in the classroom. Keeping in mind Maslow's belongingness needs, Alderfer's relatedness needs and McClelland's need for affiliation are important when dealing with diversity in urban classrooms, as urban educational systems are largely segregated between and among schools. Students who feel out of place need relationship-oriented motivational fulfillment. Teachers can promote diverse groups during teamwork, teach about accepting various language and cultures, and encourage students to partake in each other's customs and traditions. I predict that learning and achievement occurs most often in environments that promote a sense of belonging; therefore, my second hypothesis is that

H2: Achieving a sense of belongingness and camaraderie in the classrooms is positively related to highly motivated students.

There should be challenging, but realistic goals, tailored to fit each student's past performance and needs. Classroom-specific benchmarks and goals should also be implemented to develop a sense of community and encourage teamwork in the class. For example, teachers may discuss the goal of increasing the class' overall GPA by five percent, while setting specific standards for each individual student, some of who may have the goal of maintaining their current GPA while others may strive to increase theirs by ten percent. Teachers may help students' achieve these goals by establishing after-school programs where students can get help in areas they need to work on. In addition, during the goal-setting process teachers should

discuss attribution theory and locus of control while promoting students' responsibility for demonstrating what has been learned. Often, students use the principles of attribution theory to self-handicap. For instance, students who believe they will fail a difficult test may be unmotivated and inclined to abstain from studying for the test. Using knowledge about the Goal-Setting Theory, I predict the following:

> **H3:** Establishing goals collaboratively with students is positively related to highly
> motivated students.

Teachers should set high expectations and specific standards for their each of their students. In accordance with Goal-Setting Theory, the expectations should be difficult, but not impossible, and work best when teachers enthusiastically encourage students to meet these expectations. In turn, students will be motivated to behave in ways that lead to the desired expectation and high achievement. For example, students will study harder than usual to meet the expectation of a high grade on a specific exam. If students feel that the increased input is worth the value of meeting the expectation, they will continue to be motivated and exert effort to meet teachers' expectations. However, if students feel that meeting the expectation requires an inequitable amount of effort, then they will be proportionally demotivated. In order to aid students, teachers should provide them with tools necessary to meet these expectations. Motivated behaviors are likely to be enhanced when students have access to adequate learning resources and provide effective coaching (successful role models, showing how to complete tasks, and helping them achieve high self-efficacy and self-esteem). In turn, performance is then influenced by motivated behavior. According to Vroom's Expectancy Theory, students who

> **H4:** Setting realistically high expectations is positively related to highly
> motivated students.

Teachers should focus on raising students' self-esteem by praising their accomplishments and successes, such as advancement in grades, progress in math skills, and improved cooperation. According to JCM, Hygiene-Motivator Theory, and Reinforcement Theory, people are motivated by the rewards they receive and the perceived value of the rewards. In addition to recognition, students may be further motivated through monetary rewards, such as scholarships. If students are adequately rewarded for their efforts, then they will be more motivated to learn and continue learning and increasing their performance. In addition, by being recognized for their efforts, students realize that they are autonomous and have a responsibility to learn. This is a better strategy than diminishing their sense of worth by reprimanding and humiliating students, which can disintegrate classroom relationships, a necessary factor according to Needs Theories. According to my fifth hypothesis, teachers' can motivate students by using internal and external reward and recognition practices:

H5: Equitable rewards based on students' efforts and accomplishments are positively related to highly motivated students.

In terms of instruction, by highlighting the significance of each task and its valence, teachers can relate course material to students' futures. Teachers' ability to connect instructional material to students' lives affects their motivation. For instance, teachers should not simply teach "facts" during science lessons, instead, they should use the information to answer questions and problems, and relate it to the "changing perspectives of modern science" (Rothstein, 1994, pg. 154). As implied by hypothesis six, if students perceive that what they are learning is meaningful, then they will be more motivated to engage in the education process.

H6: Linking classroom instruction and its relatedness outside of school is positively related to highly motivated students.

Urban Public School Students: Teachers' abilities to motivate their students through the mentioned motivational theories is further complicated when in a diverse and unstable environment. Because teachers' motivating efforts may not always lead to improved performance by their students, it may be beneficial to investigate the issue from students' perspectives. Students may or may not feel motivated by their teachers; if they do, it is important to know what motivates them, and if they do not, it is important to know what techniques do not work. The second research question (RQ2) will assess students' perception of teachers' motivating efforts by answering the question,

> **(Research Question 2):** Does classroom leadership matter? → Do students in urban public schools feel that motivation from teachers influences them to want to close the achievement gap?

Because motivation is an important factor in achievement, generally, students who feel motivated by their teachers should perform better than those who are not motivated. However, since motivation does not fully account for behavior and performance, some high performing students may feel motivated and will attribute their motivation to teachers' efforts, while others do not feel motivated and will not report that their teachers are motivating. To make the distinction, students may compare and contrast motivational styles of their present teachers with their past teachers. Perhaps students who currently have highly motivating teachers will feel that their teachers influence them to perform better than they have in previous years; on the other hand, students who previously had highly motivating teachers and currently do not may feel unmotivated to achieve. This viewpoint is reflected in the fourth hypothesis:

> **H7:** To an extent, urban public school students will attribute their ability to overcome the achievement gap on their teachers' motivational approach.

H7a: Higher achieving urban public school students will attribute their achievement success on their teachers' effective motivational techniques.

H7b: Lower achieving urban public school students will attribute their achievement setbacks to their teachers' lack of motivational abilities.

In summary, I predict that teachers who make strong connections with their students to find out their motivational requirements and tailor their instruction by following the suggestions in the model to meet those needs make meaningful advancements in achievement. In addition, high achieving students in urban classrooms will report that their teachers play a major role in their motivation to succeed. The conclusions of this report will agree with existing motivational theories and the conceptual framework in Figure 1. Chapter 4 will describe methods approved to test these hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4: PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This section will describe the process of developing the final proposal, from developing the initial instruments to designing the final proposed methodology. First, the original interview and survey instruments will be presented as derived from the relevant literature previously discussed. Then, these initial instruments are piloted on a small sample of participants and improvement suggestions requested after the interviews are considered. Participants' suggestions are used to modify and improve the initial instruments in the third section of this chapter leading to the final proposed methodology.

Presentation of Initial Instruments

In an effort to improve the understanding of the motivational experiences of urban public school students and their effect on the achievement gap, I propose that both qualitative and quantitative research methods should be used in this research. Individual interviews will be utilized to obtain information from the perspective of teachers. The information teachers convey will increase the understanding of the role that motivation plays in urban public schools. The discussions will center on their individual motivational practices in the classroom and how they affect the achievement of their students. Surveys will be used to acquire information from students. Surveying students will add students' perspectives to the data. The initial interview questions and student survey questions are available in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively.

Interviews. The interview questions were derived from relevant data included in the literature review. The interview questions were designed to answer the first research question. The coding sheet in Appendix 3 illustrates the link between the interview questions and the

corresponding hypotheses. The first interview questions were designed to explore teachers' basic views on motivating students (e.g., How do you go about motivating students?). In order to allow participants to elaborate on ideas they considered relevant in the classroom, later questions asked teachers to describe the specific motivation techniques they use in the classroom and their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, teachers were asked to elaborate on their goal setting and reward strategies. The probes for this set of questions included: How challenging are these expectations?, Can you describe how you utilize praise in your classroom?, and Do you think that connecting lessons to the real world motivates students? The full initial interview protocol is available in Appendix 1.

Surveys. The use of surveys is intended to identify the variables that influence students' motivation in school. Surveys are useful because they allow for the collection of a large amount of data from a large sample and are relatively easy to administer. The initial survey includes a total of ten questions, nine of which are in multiple choice format and one which is open ended. Seven of the multiple choice questions have four Likert-style choices as answers; the last question is open ended and requires student participants to respond in 2-3 sentences. The survey was designed to be easily understood by young children, therefore, simplistic language and terms were used. Appendix 2 includes the initial student survey.

Piloting of Protocol and Instruments

Participants. In order to test their validity, the instruments were tested on a small sample of participants. The participants were recruited from Pace University's undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program. All of the students report experience working in New York City public school systems as student teachers. As result of their urban placements, they have served underprivileged students who are affected by the achievement gap. The participants report that

majority of the students in the schools they serve qualify for free and reduced lunch and many did not meet New York City learning standards during the 2004-2005 academic year. However, the exact figures to verify these claims were not available.

A total of four student teachers participated in the piloting of the study. Students were not able to participate in the pilot study due to confidentiality regulations. However, the student teacher participants attempted to incorporate students' perspectives during their review of the student survey.

Recruitment. All student teachers were contacted through one of my peers, who is also a student teacher. I asked her to inquire whether any of the students in her program would be interested in participating in a pilot study about motivation in schools. She agreed and put me in contact with three other student teachers attending Pace University. I contacted them by phone and explained that I was conducting research about the achievement gap in New York City public schools, and asked if they would be interested in participating and providing their feedback on the study. I set up individual interview with them and called a day before their scheduled time to remind them of, and to confirm, the appointment.

Procedure. The interview procedure presented in Appendix 1 was used on the recruited participants described above. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, public lounge area and were timed and tape recorded. After each session, each participant was debriefed and given an explanation of the purpose of the interview. They were then asked open-ended questions about the effectiveness of the interview questions and were encouraged to give constructive feedback. In addition, they were shown the survey questionnaire designed for students and were asked for suggestions to improve it. The questions were general in nature and focused on the effectiveness of the instruments. The complete list of guiding questions and debriefing procedures is available in Appendix 4.

Results. The piloting of the instruments provided valuable information. Although I had originally expected each interview to last 15 to 20 minutes, the participants required more time to expand on their answers. Each participant shared numerous stories and examples that enhanced and further explained their answers. The shortest interview was about 24 minutes while the longest was about 42 minutes. In addition, each pilot participant provided feedback about the instruments and methodology which were taken into consideration and are presented in the next section.

Proposed Methodology

The methods used to carryout the interview with the student teachers during the piloting of the instruments for the most part are consistent with the final proposed methodology. Any changes in the methodology were influenced by participants' feedback and are noted in the following sections.

Sample. Participants will consist of state or board certified teachers who teach in urban areas severely affected by the achievement gap. In addition, they should be diverse in terms of background, age, gender, and experience. Participants should have at least one year teaching experience in the school they currently teach in. One piloting participant suggested that, for best results, teachers should have some teaching experience and should be adjusted to the environment they teach in. Additionally, another participant suggested that there may be differences in how teachers effectively motivate students of different age levels.

Recruitment. Recruitment will begin well in advance of the interview period. The student teachers suggested that the best times to interview teachers and survey their students are in the beginning of each academic quarter and immediately before and after academic breaks, when teachers are less busy. The worst times to recruit are during report times and parent-teacher

conferences, which occur at the end of each quarter, and the two weeks preceding a state or district mandated exam.

Participants will be recruited through various means. First, letters advertising the study will be distributed in school teachers' mailboxes after obtaining necessary approval from principals and other school authorities. A sample letter is available in Appendix 5 In addition to the letters, I hope that school officials will encourage teachers to participate in this research. Second, I will advance my research in the schools that I student teach in during my graduate studies by networking with mentor and other teachers.

Lastly, research collaboration will be established with Teach for America, an organization that trains diverse individuals to teach in underprivileged schools. Teach for America is a distinct organization because its primary goal is to close the achievement gap by bringing forth educational equity. The program's teachers are successful in working hard to ensure students profoundly affected by the achievement gap achieve academic success (Teach for America, 2006). Because Teach for America teachers are able to triumph in the face of educational obstacles, they are the ideal candidates to participate in this research study. By interviewing Teach for America corps members and surveying their students, I hope to obtain information regarding teachers' motivational practices and its effects on students' success.

In addition to the three main recruitment strategies, I hope to further increase the number of participants through the snowball effect. I will ask each participant to encourage their peers to. This technique has been found effective because people are more likely to participate in activities that their friends have experienced and encouraged (Werner & Parmlee, 1979).

The pilot study participants suggested that an incentive would increase the likelihood of recruitment success. As a reward, I will enter each consenting participant into a raffle for a prize. Because typical urban public schools do not have the necessary financial resources to provide

their students and teachers with adequate materials, the prize will consist of quality school supplies and equipment.

Procedure. All interviews will be conducted at each teacher's school during school hours. Schools were selected as the site for the study based on practical criteria such as access and availability. Face-to-face interviews were selected as the preferred means of interviewing, because they enable the interviewer to establish rapport with the participant and to observe body language. However, if logistical demands require, telephone interviews may be utilized. Three business days prior to each session, I will contact each teacher to thank them for their willingness to participate in the study, repeat the relevance of the study, and remind them of the session appointment. An opportunity to discuss unexpected barriers to participate and to finalize logistics details will also be presented.

All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The main sources of raw data will be teachers' quotations, which reveal their thoughts about motivation, their experiences in the classroom and their perceptions about how to best motivate students. Interviews will be analyzed by me using NVivo or other qualitative coding software. Any common or unique themes will be noted and analyzed. The student surveys will be analyzed using statistical methods with the assistance of an experienced statistician. Any final trends or correlations in students' responses will be noted in the results portion of the final paper.

Revised Instruments. Once the initial piloting phase was implemented, the revision of the instruments and general methodology was conducted using participants' suggestions. The following changes were made to the instruments upon revision:

- To accommodate those teachers who want to recount stories and give examples to enhance their responses, the interview introduction that is read to participants will include a statement explaining that teachers should feel free to express themselves

fully and not be concerned about time. The revised introduction is available in Appendix 6.

- Many of the participants expressed concern that the phrase "make you" in the student survey was very direct and would be misconstrued by young children. They suggested that "help" would be a more accurate term. They explained that children may take an "all or nothing" approach while answering the questions. For example, they may interpret the question "Does your teacher make you like school?" as "Is your teacher the only person that makes you like school?" Therefore, all of the questions in the student questionnaire were changed to reflect their insight and is available in Appendix 7.

- One participant suggested that I add an additional open ended question that enabled the student to think with a teacher's perception in mind, or to be put "in her shoes". She explained that this would help the student imagine how he would effectively motivate his students to "do their best". Therefore, I added an additional question to the student survey asking students what they would do to make their class want to do their best if they were a teacher. This is also available in Appendix 7.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

The disparity in achievement that persists between socioeconomic and racial positions is a critical issue. Most underachieving students originate from communities that face daunting problems; however, there are hundreds of students who, despite these shortcomings, are successful in school. I argue that teachers play an important role in these students' success. As leaders in the classroom, they can motivate disadvantaged students to excel. Effectively motivating urban public school students in school would provide a much needed breakthrough in bridging the achievement gap, as students who are not motivated to engage in learning are unlikely to succeed.

Although teachers have little control over many of the contextual factors that are associated with urban public school students' underachievement, they have the ability to inspire them to learn. Through this research project, I propose an innovative methodology to reveal the best practices for classroom achievement by exposing how effective urban public school teachers motivate their students. In addition, this project seeks to determine whether or not teachers' classroom leadership influences urban public school students to want to close the achievement gap by analyzing their perspectives on their teachers' motivation strategies.

This project brings forth various implications which I hope will change the way leaders approach the achievement gap dilemma in the future. In the following sections, I will present ways that this research affects leadership.

Implications for Theory

There is extensive academic and popular literature concerning motivation, especially on how to increase motivation and motivating oneself and others. These motivation theories include psychological, sociological, educational, evolutionary, and business perspectives, and focus on a

wide range of subjects, from young infants to mature retirees. Although there is great variety in the literature, a gap exists where underprivileged urban public school children's motivational requirements to achieve are not being met or examined. Questions on how to effectively handle underachieving students are left unanswered, specifically those regarding motivation. The purpose of this research is to bridge that gap and introduce novel literature to the field in hopes that it will aid in increasing the achievement scores of this unique group. Practitioners and others in the field of education will be able to utilize this information to implement effective practices in their classrooms. The proposed methodology incorporates management-oriented motivational ideas with educational contexts in hopes that school leaders will embrace the leadership challenge of motivating these underserved children.

Implications for Leaders

Teachers. Teachers are the front-runners of the classroom. They have a huge influence on their students as they lead and manage them. By learning from effective teachers' experiences and students' perceptions of the best motivational practices, urban public school teachers can tailor their teaching styles to best serve their students. I expect the results will highlight several effective strategies and techniques to motivate these students rather than one "quick fix". This will enable teachers to modify suggestions for the specific needs of their classroom.

School Administrators. School administrators, such as principals and deans, have the responsibility to effectively manage their schools and oversee that it makes adequate yearly progress according to mandated standards. Urban public school leaders who know the role motivation plays in that environment will have a vital tool that is necessary to run their institution. In addition, school administrators supervise and evaluate teachers, therefore, they need to be up to date with current trends and practices. The more knowledgeable they are about

what is and what is not effective in this context, the better equipped they will be to effectively perform their jobs.

Trainers. Teacher trainers such as university and college faculty and school districts' Human Resources Departments would greatly benefit from the information this study provides since they are the individuals who show prospective and current teachers how to execute their jobs. It is imperative that they remain up to date with current research trends and literature because of their strong impact on teachers and indirectly, students.

For example, Teach for America conducts its own research and their findings greatly influence its mission and teacher-training strategy. They note that by staying current on research results and acknowledging what works best in underserved classrooms, they are better able to train effective teachers and therefore have greater success of increasing urban public schoolchildren's achievement success in schools (Teach for America, 2006).

Implications for Myself

At the initial phase of this thesis, I focused on merging my business background with my educational interests. Motivation is a phenomenon that has always interested me and I was curious to find out what role it plays in the lives of school children. I was surprised to find a lack of academic literature addressing motivation in underachieving students. Because of my goal to serve underprivileged students as an elementary school teacher, bridging this gap became very important to me. After reviewing relevant literature, I view their struggles and their classification as underachieving as a disheartening but repairable problem. I am convinced that teachers and other school leaders can play a large role in helping urban public school students increase their achievement through motivation.

I hope to implement this research tool that I have developed during my graduate studies at the University of Michigan. Because it is a large research institution, I will be able to further

improve my methodology and obtain the necessary resources and support to complete the project.

Carrying out the proposed methodology will strengthen my desire to serve this critical population. In the near future, I hope to implement the results and findings of my study in the classroom to assist my students in achieving to their fullest potential. As a long-term goal, I hope to follow a career path that allows me to continuously improve the educational conditions of urban public school students, especially through motivation. This research will strengthen my ability to become an influential leader in the field of education.

RQ1

Initial Teacher Interview Protocol

My name is Janis Estrella and I am a Pace University student. As part of my Honors thesis I am conducting research about motivation in urban public schools. Thank you for willing to participate in this interview, it should last about 15 to 20 minutes. As a teacher, I am sure you have first-hand experiences with urban public school students' motivation, and I greatly appreciate your input. I would like to let you know that this interview will only be used for this research project; you will remain anonymous. The only other person who will have access to this information will be my advisor, a professor at Pace University and only for the purposes of this project. If at any point you want me to stop recording, let me know and I will immediately comply. In our discussion, I hope to gain a better understanding of your experiences motivating urban public school students who are influenced by the achievement gap. Do you have any questions for me? (Holmes, 2006).

1. How do you go about motivating students?

→Do you follow a system or evaluation process to motivate your students?

Can you tell me about it?

2. Are some of your students more or less motivated than others? Why?

→Have you found that students are more motivated when the class is tight and friendly, or works as a team?

3. Do you motivate different students differently?

→How do you determine what will motivate a specific student?

4. What has worked best? Worst?

→Can you give examples of the outcomes, such as increased performance, attendance,

desire to learn, etc.?

5. Do you set goals in your classroom?

→What kinds of goals do you establish?

→How do you establish these goals?

6. How do you set expectations?

→How challenging are these expectations?

→How often do your students meet these expectations?

7. Do you give recognition, rewards or incentives in your classroom?

→When/on what basis do you reward students?

→Can you describe how you utilize praise in your classroom?

8. Do your students know why they go to school? Do they appreciate the value of learning and

knowledge?

→Do you think that connecting lessons to the real world motivates students?

RQ2   **Initial Student Survey**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. This form is confidential, which means no one should know you are the one who filled it out, so **Please do not write your name on this paper!** *Directions*: For questions 1-9, please circle the answer that best describes your opinion. Be sure to only circle one answer per question. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, please skip it and move on to the next question. For questions 10, please write a few sentences to answer the question.

1. Does your teacher make you like school?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

2. Does your teacher make you feel smart?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

3. Does your teacher make you want to do all your homework?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

4. Does your teacher make you want to study?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

5. Does your teacher make you want to learn?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

6. Does your teacher make you want to earn good grades?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

7. What are most of your grades like in school?
90-100   80-89   70-79   0-69

8. Does your teacher make you want to get better grades?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

9. Do you think your teacher is the reason you're getting those kinds of grades?
Yes   No

10. In 1-2 sentences, please describe what really motivates you to learn in school and get better grades.

Coding Sheet

Test	Hypothesis	Question(s)
Teachers	H1	Q1, Q3
	H2	Q2
	H3	Q5
	H4	Q6
	H5	Q7
	H6	Q8
Students	H7	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10

Debriefing for Pilot Study Participants

Thank you for your participation. My name is Janis Estrella and I am a senior at Pace University who is conducting this research as part of my Honors/Lubin Leaders Thesis. I recruited you primarily to test the effectiveness of the interview protocol and survey questions. In addition, your responses will allow me to develop preliminary results about the best way urban public school teachers can motivate their students to achieve. As a second part to this interview, I would like to ask you several questions about the interview instruments and research procedure. I am asking you because I hope that as someone who is learning about and working in urban public school structures, you can provide me with some valuable insight about my research design.

Guiding Questions:

→Is there something you had difficulty understanding throughout this process?

→Can you give me some suggestions on how go about recruiting teachers and their students to participate in this research?

→How do you feel about the interview questions I asked you? Would you ask anything else if you were conducting this research?

→What do you think about the student survey? How can the questions be improved? What would you ask students to find out whether you were effectively motivating them to learn?

→Do you have any other feedback or suggestions?

Sample Teacher Recruitment Letter

[DATE]

Dear Teacher,

As a means of introduction, my name is Janis Estrella and I am a senior at Pace University. After graduating in May, I will be attending Brown University where I will be studying to obtain my Master of Arts in Teaching. I hope to teach elementary school students in an urban setting and would like to learn from your experiences.

I am in the process of writing my Honors Thesis, which is titled *Leadership in the Classroom: Closing the Achievement Gap through Motivation*. I have learned that teachers have the important responsibility of motivating their students, which in turn can play a vital role in students' future performance. Through my research, I hope to reach a better understanding of a teacher's influence on his or her students' motivation to achieve. I am hoping that you will be able to find some time to participate in an interview with me. Your input would be greatly appreciated.

In addition, I would like to survey your students to better understand their views on motivation.

I plan on being in [SCHOOL] on [DATE] and [DATE]. Below, please list when is most convenient for you to meet with me during those days. I will contact you to confirm the appointment.

If you are interested in participating, but are unable to meet with me on either of the two days, please contact me by phone (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email xxxxxxxn@xxxx.xxx. [information removed for privacy reasons –DC]

Please accept my sincere gratitude in advance.

Sincerely,

Janis Estrella

Teacher's Name: _____   Grade: _____

Room Number: _____   School:_____

Phone #: (____)_____   Email: _____

Preferred Appointment Day and Time: _____

RQ1

Revised Teacher Interview Protocol

My name is Janis Estrella and I am a Pace University student. As part of my Honors thesis I am conducting research about motivation in urban public schools. Thank you for willing to participate in this interview, there is no time limit to this interview, so please do not feel rushed. As a teacher, I am sure you have first-hand experiences with urban public school students' motivation, and I greatly appreciate your input. I would like to let you know that this interview will only be used for this research project; you will remain anonymous. The only other person who will have access to this information will be my advisor, a professor at Pace University and only for the purposes of this project. If at any point you want me to stop recording, let me know and I will immediately comply. In our discussion, I hope to gain a better understanding of your experiences motivating urban public school students who are influenced by the achievement gap. Do you have any questions for me? (Holmes, 2006).

1. How do you go about motivating students?

    →Do you follow a system or evaluation process to motivate your students?

      Can you tell me about it?

2. Are some of your students more or less motivated than others? Why?

    →Have you found that students are more motivated when the class is tight and friendly, or works as a team?

3. Do you motivate different students differently?

    →How do you determine what will motivate a specific student?

4. What has worked best? Worst?

→Can you give examples of the outcomes, such as increased performance, attendance, desire to learn, etc.?

5. Do you set goals in your classroom?

→What kinds of goals do you establish?

→How do you establish these goals?

6. How do you set expectations?

→How challenging are these expectations?

→How often do your students meet these expectations?

7. Do you give recognition, rewards or incentives in your classroom?

→When/on what basis do you reward students?

→Can you describe how you utilize praise in your classroom?

8. Do your students know why they go to school? Do they appreciate the value of learning and knowledge?

→Do you think that connecting lessons to the real world motivates students?

RQ2   **Revised Student Survey**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. This form is confidential, which means no one should know you are the one who filled it out, so **Please do not write your name on this paper!** *Directions*: For questions 1-9, please circle the answer that best describes your opinion. Be sure to only circle one answer per question. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, please skip it and move on to the next question. For questions 10 and 11, please write a few sentences to answer both questions.

1. Does your teacher help you like school?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

2. Does your teacher help you feel smart?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

3. Does your teacher help you want to do all your homework?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

4. Does your teacher help you want to study?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

5. Does your teacher help you want to learn?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

6. Does your teacher help you want to earn good grades?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

7. What are most of your grades like in school?
90-100   80-89   70-79   0-69

8. Does your teacher help you want to get better grades?
All the time   Sometimes   Hardly ever   Never

9. Do you think your teacher is part of the reason you achieve those kinds of grades?
Yes   No

10. In 1-2 sentences, please describe what really motivates you to learn in school and get better grades.

11. If you were a teacher, what would you do to make your class want to do their best?

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