

CHAPTER ONE

TEACH STUDENTS TO LEARN FOR LIFE

This student's first memory is of standing in the living room of his house at age two. Tears streamed down his tiny cheeks. That was the day the divorce went through, and his mother was walking out the front door. Four crazy years later, his father remarried for the second of four times. The first of his three stepmothers was violent, abusive, and an alcoholic. Both of his older sisters quickly moved out of the house. One lived with the neighbors, and the other escaped to live in the garage. For ten of his thirteen school years, he was terrorized by his violent stepmother. Blood and broken glass were commonplace in the house. Every time things got *really* bad, the children moved away to stay with relatives or to live on their own. Then his stepmother would promise to be good, and they'd move back. This student lived with his grandmother, with his aunt, with his uncle, then on his own again. The cycle repeated itself every couple of years.

School was a train wreck. He went to nine schools and had 153 teachers. In class, he usually sat in the back and often acted out. He could never do homework; his home environment was a war zone. He had no parental support, and his only friends were even worse troublemakers than he was. He was truant often, arrested twice, and constantly disciplined in high school. He struggled with grades in high school, but finally graduated. His first two years at a local state college were not

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much better. The drinking started soon after, and things were not looking good. At this stage, would you place a bet on this student to succeed?

WHAT LEARNING FOR LIFE IS ALL ABOUT

We're wondering if you have students who haven't seemed to find their way in school. We also wonder if you have students who seem to struggle every single day you see them. If you do, then you may be interested to know how the student mentioned in the preceding story turned out.

We told you that it's a real story, and it is. It's Eric's own story, and it's the "G-rated" version. What's hard for many to believe is that small, targeted interventions made all the difference in Eric's world as a student. Two secondary teachers changed his life. It did not take some monstrous life-changing moment; it took the right things at the right moments. Learning, just like life, is not a sprint. Learning and applying what you learn to life is a constant, ongoing process. This book is about creating a mind-set in your students that *life is not a race*. It's all about putting pieces in place that empower you to become your best self. Never, ever give up on your students; Eric is writing this book today because even though 90 percent of his teachers treated him like an annoyance in their lives, there were two teachers who refused to give up on him. They kept their expectations high while establishing a positive relationship with him. They had total belief in his ability to be and do more, and this belief was exhibited on a daily basis. Will you be that kind of teacher for your kids?

As in Eric's case, the life of a struggling student can be filled with almost insurmountable challenges and disappointment. Eric was one of the fortunate ones. He got the help he needed, academically and personally, and his life changed forever. Many students will not have such a favorable ending to their story without your intervention. There can be countless reasons students struggle, and countless teachers who have worked diligently to help them. You probably are one of those teachers, and would like more answers to that age-old question of how to transform students into true lifelong learners. Here's how this book will empower you to succeed in transforming students daily.

STRUGGLING STUDENTS



Intervene with your struggling students before the tide closes in on them.

THE BIG FOUR

The entire focus of this book is on change. A host of things can change a person's life. In fact, if you read enough, you can get overwhelmed by all the self-help options as well as “teacher help” books out there. But we're going to make it easy. We're going to predict that you know many of the basics already. We're going to assume that you're looking for *what you don't already know*. We're also going to guess that you'd only like to hear about things over which you have a high degree of influence. For example, there's not much you can do about the peers kids hang out with (outside of school) or their parental or caregiver influences. But there are things over which you do have a great deal of influence—and we'll show you what they are. We'll reveal the research and give you specific, easy-to-apply strategies to ensure optimum success for every student, focusing on these “big four” factors that can play a part teens' lives:

- 1. Attitude.** This factor matters because it influences how much effort students put in as well as their willingness to try diverse learning strategies, and it influences how they think

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and feel about their ability to learn. Students with a positive attitude usually go far. The fabulous news is that such an attitude is far more teachable than you thought, and we'll show you how to do it.

2. **Cognitive capacity.** This factor matters because it influences self-esteem, the amount of effort students will invest, the strategies they try, and their attitude. The good news is that every part of cognitive capacity, including attention, memory, processing speed, deferred gratification, and other components, is fully teachable. Students with strong cognitive capacity have a good shot at success, and we'll reveal to you the simple steps to place every student on this positive pathway.
3. **Effort.** The fact is, kids who work hard have a good shot at success. This factor matters because it greatly influences the other three factors listed here. The amazing news is that sustained effort is teachable, and we'll show you how to do it.
4. **Focused strategy.** This factor matters because all the effort in the world won't give you success unless a student is using the right strategy, has the right attitude, and has sufficient cognitive capacity. The stellar news is that focused strategy is teachable, and we'll show you how.

For students to succeed, they'll need to become consummate lifelong learners. The term *lifelong learner* is certainly not a new one, and yet there is a lasting quality

to it. Its conciseness, its implications, and its universal use all lend credence to its importance. It can define the difference between a life of mediocrity and one of success. One of the primary benefits of learning for life is acquiring the ability to grow and meet the changes and challenges that are ever present at any age. This type of lifelong learning begins now—not after graduation from high school or college, but now. When a student employs the four drivers just listed, he or she will enjoy present academic success as well as success later in life. Academic success and lifetime success are not two separate entities, but rather form a continuum of achievements. This book is a guide for you as you continue your quest for current academic success—and, ultimately, lifetime success—for each of your students. It will strengthen your capacity to influence these teachable success drivers: attitude, effort, cognitive capacity, and focused strategy. Although we'll go into much greater detail in the upcoming chapters, let's give a quick overview to the big four here.

ATTITUDE

How often have teachers or parents said, “Don’t give me that attitude.” Words like these usually refer to a negative attitude. The student is seen as arrogant, demanding, ungrateful, lazy, selfish, or a host of other uncomplimentary adjectives. So how important are attitudes, and can they be changed? Attitudes matter! Attitudes are somewhat like moods, except they are more pervasive—with much greater intensity and duration. A mood can change quickly, but an attitude changes only through awareness and a true desire to choose a different one.

Attitudes influence and flavor a student’s every thought and action. An attitude held on to tenaciously will have a significant impact on a student’s life. In fact, one of the primary components of school burnout among students is a cynical attitude (Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2012, January 31). Academics can be tough, but nurturing a negative attitude toward school will only lead to complications, not solutions. For a student struggling academically, it is often easier to develop the “I don’t care” attitude, which can be a camouflage for his or her lack of needed skills for succeeding in school. The negative attitude only perpetuates the problem. This is why a sagacious teacher will search for possible reasons for the negativity toward school and help the student discover solutions.

Seeing the relationship between negative attitudes and poor school performance brings us to the insight that students can get stuck in a vicious cycle. Many things in life may be out of a student’s control, but he or she still has substantial choices. Attitude is one of the most important choices the student will make. This is the key—attitude is a choice. The real power lies within a student, not outside, in that

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his or her responses to life always determine the outcomes of that life. Students can never escape from themselves; their lives are always guided by their thoughts, actions, and attitudes—all of which are well within their control.

So where do student attitudes originate? One source is the family's attitudes in regard to school, academics, and behavior (Alonso-Tapia & Simon, 2012). Attitudes can be somewhat contagious and often begin in the home. Having little control over family life but enormous control over the classroom, teachers can focus on establishing positive attitudes within their classroom and school. Because many students are oblivious to having negative attitudes and have no idea how to change them, education becomes essential in effecting desirable change. Once a student learns more about a situation or groups of people, his or her attitudes can shift (Dell & Holmes, 2012). For example, once a student understands that a classmate stole his power bar simply because the other student is getting no lunch from home, his attitude might change about the incident. Teachers can assess dominant negative attitudes and determine a course of action to facilitate students' movement from negative attitudes to more positive ones.

Attitudes can and do change with learning and experience (Rodgers & Gilmour, 2011). Simply telling a student to change his or her attitude results in minimal change. Teaching, discussion, and modeling of a positive attitude constitute a great starting place. As students begin to comprehend that a positive attitude can often tip the scales in their favor, striving for a metamorphosis becomes vital and exciting for them. With a positive attitude being one of the major determinants of lifelong learning and success, it is certainly worth the effort to instill such an attitude in students. Students lacking a positive attitude tend to view all of life through a negative lens, which can undermine academics as well as respect of self and others.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE REQUIRED

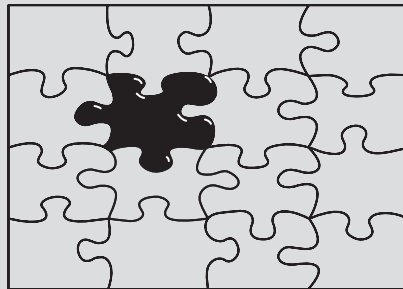


1. **Teach coping skills.**
2. **Discuss the advantages of a positive attitude.**
3. **Model a positive attitude.**

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Teach coping skills for managing stress, which can sustain positivity in that kids are highly susceptible to stress and are very unlikely to have adequate coping skills.
- Establish an overwhelmingly positive classroom atmosphere so that no matter what's going on at home for your kids, your class is an emotional and social oasis.
- Model how you reframe life events and put them in perspective. Sharing your techniques permits students to see how you deal with the world and gain insights into self-regulation and optimism.

THE EFFORT PIECE IS VITAL



- **Persistent effort**
- **Focused effort**
- **Purposeful effort**

Persistence combined with focus and purpose maximizes effort.

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EFFORT

All students, and especially struggling students, need to cultivate persistent, purposeful, focused effort to be lifelong learners. On the one hand, a student can rely too heavily on talent and natural abilities, resulting in little effort because he or she is already “good.” On the other hand, some students refuse to try because they feel their situation is hopeless. Students tending toward either of these extremes have not grasped the simple fact that they can change where they are and where they are going through sustained effort.

In a classroom, it is the student who puts forth this sustained effort who will achieve. There are many variables affecting achievement, but the effort piece is always part of the puzzle (Miñano Perez, Castejón Costa, & Gilar Corbí, 2012). Effort is, of course, irrelevant if the task is not challenging. It takes little effort to have friends if one is outgoing and friendly. It takes little effort to achieve in classes that do not stretch the mind. It is the effort put forth under the hardship of doing that which seems unreachable, unachievable, and just too far out of one’s comfort zone that produces substantial growth. Most students have no idea what they can achieve inside and outside the classroom, simply because they have never really tried. Afraid of failure, starting a challenging activity becomes a monumental task. Step one is movement. Take some action and start, turn off the nonstop doubting, and begin. Asking students to devote a set amount of time to an arduous task on a daily basis can get them moving, working.

Working with a real purpose can help the buds of success blossom into real achievement. Effort with a true purpose can result in significant gains in reaching the desired outcome (Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011, Winter). A purpose can be as simple as a deadline, but even a deadline can become a true purpose for many students. Ultimately, an individual’s true life purpose will be much loftier, more personal, and dream satisfying, but for now most students are in a state of transition when it comes to finding their true purpose. Help them out by offering lessons that hold relevance for them. Discover their world and apply what you learn from that world to your teaching. For example, in a science class, while studying plants, discuss some plants that are known to the students. Connecting their world to lesson objectives can provide many with the impetus for sustained effort.

Will there be setbacks or even failures? Yes! Missed shots, mistakes, even failures are all part of the bumps on the road to success. It is not the failure that is important—it is one’s response and what has been learned that merit attention. In fact, the student who never experiences any failure or makes any mistakes is

probably doing the bare minimum. Jumping into assignments, projects, and tasks with enthusiastic effort will result in some failures. A failure can be a good thing, especially when the student learns from the mistake, gets up, and keeps persevering with determination and focused effort. In advance of the upcoming Chapter Five on effort building, you can begin to build and develop effort in your students with these appetizers:

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Reframe and redesign lessons to increase their relevance. Kids who are more invested in the learning do better. Find out what kids care about, then tie that into what you're doing.
- Show how setbacks are usually short term and beneficial. This will help students see that sustained effort will produce the desired results for them.
- Share a personal success you achieved through your sustained effort, such as getting a bachelor's or master's degree.

COGNITIVE CAPACITY

If one of your students is not a high performer, ask yourself, “Am I going to wish the student had more going for him (or her), but continue doing the same as before? Or am I going to learn how to build cognitive capacity and have the best school year of my life (simultaneously giving this kid a real shot at success)?” Some teachers label kids based on their alleged “smarts.” Calling a student “smart” or “slow” might make sense if his or her cognitive capacity were fixed . . . but it's not. Yes, you can change the cognitive capacity of your students.

Cognitive capacity has only a small genetic influence—much of it is learned in school and at home. In a large meta-study on IQ by top cognitive scientists, the results were revealing: IQ is malleable (Buschkuhl & Jaeggi, 2010). For example, a group of sixty-five abused and neglected four- to six-year-old children with low socioeconomic status and an average IQ of seventy-seven were placed in adoptive homes. Eight years later, the children showed a documented *average*

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gain of fourteen IQ points, and some boosted their IQ by nearly twenty points (Duyme, Dumaret, & Tomkiewicz, 1999). In fact, school has a measurable impact on a student's IQ as well (Ceci & Williams, 1997). These home and school studies exemplify the immense impact of environment on IQ.

Researchers often use a tool called effect size as a measure of the potency of any newly introduced factor. Effect size is an accepted and standardized format used across similar studies to denote the strength of an effect on a particular outcome. Although an effect size can be negative (some factors, such as constantly changing schools, have an adverse effect on student achievement), the range of effect sizes is more typically from 0.0 up to 2.0. Small effects might be in the 0.20 to 0.40 range, whereas moderate to strong effects would be in the 0.40 to 0.80 range. Anything below 0.20 would have a minimal effect, and anything over 0.80 can have a dramatic effect on student achievement. Teaching thinking skills ranks a massive 0.69 in effect size, and teaching study skills sports a strong 0.59 ranking. These effect sizes are very impressive, given that an effect size above 0.4 is considered above average in educational research (Hattie, 2009). Students were trained using a format similar to playing a video game, which focused on working memory skills. This skill building actually boosted fluid IQ. In fact, the more hours of training students received, the greater the IQ effects (Jaeggi, Buschkuhl, Jonides, & Shah, 2011). This fluid IQ can be raised by purposeful practice *within nineteen days*. Kids are not stuck with the intelligence they have. There are, however, some teachers who are stuck in their thinking in regard to their students' intelligence due to their belief that intelligence is fixed. Building cognitive capacity means you have the knowledge, skill, and will to alter your students' ability to think—their processing speed, sequencing, attention, self-control, working memory, and vocabulary. You can't build their skills in these areas with occasional fun activities. You must discipline yourself to foster thinking skills with ten to sixty minutes of skill building per day, using existing content, over a period of one to three months.

We must not assume that students are limited to the skills and “smarts” they bring to school. We'll show you how to build cognitive capacity in Chapter Four, but for the moment, try these steps:

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Begin to notice what gets students' attention in class and why. You'll need this information for the chapter on building cognitive capacity.

- Pay attention to *what* kids can hold in their head (working memory); *how much* they can hold (a word, a number, a formula, a sentence?); and for *how long* they hold things in their head. Can they hold the information long enough to manipulate symbols for math, science, or language arts? This background will serve you well when learning how to develop students' skills later in this book.
- Watch closely what happens when students are assigned work that involves processing information (reading, solving problems, writing a summary, and so on). Notice how they approach the task and how well they follow through. Processing skills are teachable, and we'll show you how later in this book.

FOCUSED STRATEGY

Strategies are necessary for maximum success. One of the areas of focus in this book is the application of strategies to setting, managing, and reaching goals. Truly internalizing the necessity of having a goal-reaching strategy or strategies is an enormous first step in becoming a lifelong learner. The real challenge for students is to determine which strategies are most effective to promote lifelong learning for them. Selecting a strategy is a very personal choice. Make no mistake: without a strategy or plan, students will never achieve to their fullest potential, and many will never comprehend how implementing success strategies could have made all the difference.

The simple truth is that for many students, contemplating the use of specific success strategies is not part of their mind-set. Some know that focused, hard work will benefit them, whereas others drift along, thinking and hoping some magic will happen to propel them to success. Focused, hard work is certainly a plus, yet the successful student needs even more. The strategic piece of the puzzle entails the student's executing specific success strategies to achieve a desired outcome.

Take the time to remind students of some fundamental success strategies for school. These can include such basics as having a dedicated work space, working with no distractions, budgeting time, completing homework, and coming to class prepared and on time. Before a student can advance to making more personal choices for success, he or she must already have taken the basic steps. A student with weak academic skills may never have mastered these fundamentals,

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or these strategies simply may not have worked. It is essential for students to begin recognizing what does and does not work for them.

As a teacher, you have a role that is similar to that of an emergency room physician. For each student, you must make a quick but thorough assessment of the situation and begin treatment. You may be thinking, “They’re in high school, they should already know how to implement basic school success strategies.” The simple fact is that any needed skills that are lacking must be taught. Even university students can benefit from programs that teach them study skills and improved learning strategies. At Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, thirty-two medical students chose to participate in an optional course on learning and study skills. When compared to a control group of students who did not take the course, the students who participated in the course showed a marked improvement in time management, information processing, main ideas selection, and use of study aids (Haghani & Sadeghizadeh, 2011). This study demonstrates that even students in medical school benefitted from increased knowledge of effective implementation of success strategies. As unique as students and strategies can be, there are also some basic commonalities in each student’s process of selecting and implementing success strategies:

1. The student acknowledges the need for success strategies.
2. The student evaluates old strategies, and selects new ones if needed.
3. The student implements the strategies for a sustained amount of time.
4. The student evaluates the effectiveness of the strategies.
5. The student makes adjustments as needed.

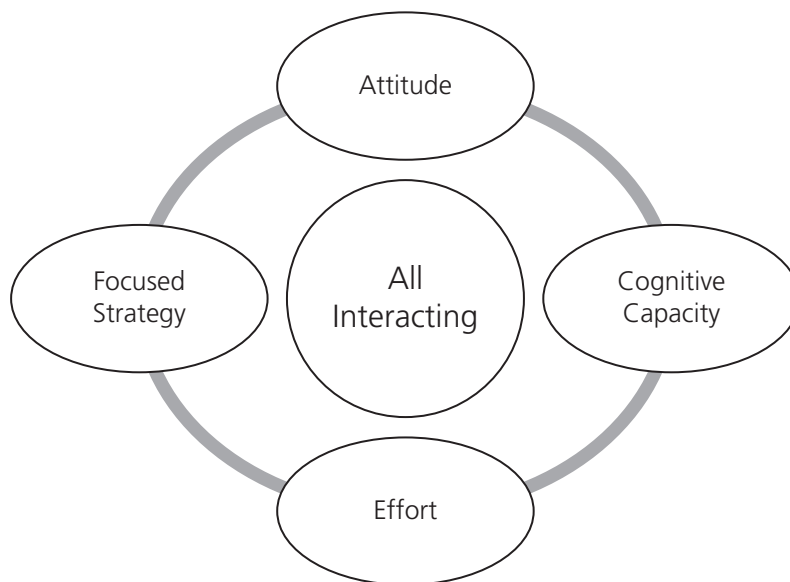
For a student to become a true lifelong learner, implementation of success strategies will always be crucial. If a student hasn’t chosen strategies, he or she doesn’t really have a plan for success. Beginning success strategies should be easy to implement. Consider, for example, the widespread use of pedometers as a strategy for increasing physical activity. Pedometers are affordable, accessible, and simple (Tudor-Locke & Lutes, 2009). Initial success strategies for students should be the same. A struggling student can be so overwhelmed by the complexity of a strategy that he or she totally forgets the desired outcome. You can start small and build from there. Remember the focus: first learn the application of strategies to setting, managing, and reaching goals.

When students have personal success strategies in place, they can handle with more finesse the unexpected events that are an integral part of life. With careful, continued implementation of well-selected strategies, students can begin their journey of lifelong learning and discovery no matter how tough their challenges

may be. They will learn who they are, and will strive to remain true to themselves on their path to sustained academic and personal success.

You might argue that learning the right strategies is a by-product of life experience. We would support that theory, with one exception, and that is the amount of time spent in school. Teens only get thirty hours per week of life experience in school. This is why we need to make those few hours count. Let's review the primary drivers we've introduced so far.

The Four Lifelong Learning Drivers



In each of this book's chapters, you'll get tools that will last for a lifetime. For now, consider the following:

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Ask for and listen to your students' big dreams. If they don't have any, start introducing them (through biographies) to the big dreams of others.
- Encourage your students to set simple, short-term goals, and help kids learn how to develop monthly goals. In Chapter Eight, we'll show you how to assist them in managing these goals.

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- Ask questions of your kids about how they deal with obstacles. This will plant the seeds for later, when you'll help them arrive at a plan for selecting strategies. Students will need a working model for how to develop microstrategies and succeed.

TO SUM UP

For students to develop the lifelong learning habit, it is essential to help them focus on how they can enhance the four success drivers introduced in this chapter. Having a positive *attitude* is a core competency that's not usually part of any required curriculum. That it is not in the curriculum in no way lessens the importance of having such an attitude—in fact, without a positive attitude, a meaningful, productive life is doubtful. Having a status quo mind-set is really moving backward: students are either growing or shrinking, and it is almost impossible to remain the same. All of the drivers for success are teachable skills, and it is wise to take classroom time to assess and teach in these areas. Academics will improve!

Continued *effort* is a necessity for growth. Students should put in a genuine effort, giving 100 percent, not 99 percent. Yes, these numbers are high, but greater effort produces greater results. For students not exhibiting this effort, you, as their thoughtful teacher, can pause and seek reasons for their inadequate effort—and help them gain forward momentum.

Cognitive capacity, once falsely assumed to be fixed according to genetics, can be changed through teaching—and it can signify the difference between success and failure. Cognitive capacity should be strengthened, so take the time to learn how to use teaching to do this. It will change kids' lives.

The fourth driver, *focused strategy*, is woven throughout this book. Each chapter has been designed to increase your understanding of students and their brains, and the book points to specific competencies to augment learning. Each year, as you truly get to know your students, you will easily determine which kids need which strategies. As a dedicated professional, you will love the positive changes you see in your students when these strategies are implemented.