

Introduction

For Teachers

The widely held belief that intelligence is the primary determinant in school success discounts the key roles that motivation, focused effort, and effective study skills play in the academic achievement equation. Although it's true that the ability to grasp concepts, understand abstractions, perceive relationships, and recall information can facilitate learning and enhance school performance, it's also true that a superior IQ does not guarantee superior academic achievement. Intellectually gifted students may perform marginally in school while their less gifted classmates may do exceptionally well.

That *natural or inherited intelligence* (IQ) isn't the exclusive determinant in academic success is apparent to anyone with teaching experience. Another key factor must be added to the scholastic achievement equation. This factor, which is best described as *applied intelligence* (AI),* involves the practical, strategic, and tactical utilization of available resources. Students who have good academic and study skills, who target personally meaningful goals, who develop a functional plan for proceeding from Point A to Point B to Point C, and who work diligently to achieve their objectives invariably excel in school. These students are clearly identifiable, and the benchmark that distinguishes them is that they're in school to learn. They have a sense of purpose and direction. They possess the requisite learning tools, and they deliberately and consistently use these tools.

Successful students share a range of key characteristics that distinguish them from marginally performing and nonperforming classmates. These students

- Identify and capitalize on their learning preferences, strengths, and natural aptitudes.
- Manage time efficiently.
- Plan ahead.
- Organize their study environment.

**Applied intelligence* (AI) is a term coined by the author. As yet, no quantitative, standardized instrument exists for measuring AI.

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- Record homework assignments accurately.
- Complete their work.
- Meet deadlines.
- Proofread their work carefully.
- Read with good comprehension.
- Identify important information when studying.
- Develop an effective system for recalling key data.
- Take effective notes from textbooks and lectures.
- Study and learn actively.
- Anticipate what's likely to be asked on tests.

In addition to these functional scholastic capabilities, achieving students also share other key success-enhancing characteristics. They

- Establish personally meaningful goals.
- Set priorities.
- Develop strategies and tactics for attaining their objectives.
- Consider the potential consequences of their attitudes and behavior.
- Avoid or neutralize problems.
- Handle setbacks.
- Learn from mistakes.
- Weigh their options.
- Manifest good judgment.

Can students be taught these success-oriented study skills and life skills, and can the instruction be integrated into the curriculum without teachers having to make major content area sacrifices? You bet they can! Virtually all students can be trained to learn more efficiently and study more productively. The payoffs for students possessing these capacities are immense and include improved academic self-confidence, enhanced pride, superior motivation, expanded educational and career opportunities, and elevated expectations and aspirations.*

As a frontline educator, no one need tell you that students who study effectively have a major advantage over those who spin their wheels with little traction and forward momentum. Successful students, in effect, join an elite club whose members are on a track leading to higher education and rewarding careers, and their achievements significantly increase the likelihood that they'll ultimately take their place at the top of the economic and vocational food chain.

Unfortunately, many potentially capable students never make it into the elite club because no one has taught them how to learn and study productively. These marginally performing, and in many cases demoralized, defeated, and resistant, teenagers are destined to muddle through high school in a cerebral haze. They're also destined to arrive at the end of the educational production line with dulled intellect, substandard skills, tenuous self-confidence, and limited educational and career prospects.

*Please note: Life skills are addressed in the *Life Skills Workbook* (Greene, Corwin Press, in press).

Is the Ability to Achieve Inherited?

Some students discover on their own how to learn effectively without requiring formal study skills instruction. Whether these “natural” students acquire their insights intuitively, through careful observation, or by consciously or unconsciously modeling their behavior and attitudes on those of their achieving parents, siblings, role models, or peers is open to debate.

Natural students represent a relatively small percentage of the high school population. Those who don’t figure out how to learn productively are often tagged as lacking in ability or as underachievers, and those who become resistant to learning are usually identified as having “an attitude.” Left to their own devices, these students typically tread water for four years and do little more than go through the motions of learning. Some turn off and shut down. Some do little more than take up space in the classroom. Others act out and become behavior problems. Before these students can realistically be expected to work conscientiously and function at a level commensurate with their actual ability, they must be furnished with the tools they need to succeed academically.

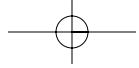
You may be thinking, “Hold on! Given content area curriculum requirements, is it realistic to expect already overburdened teachers to carve out time for instructing students in how to study more productively?” The answer to this question is *yes*. The teaching can be done quickly and efficiently and with minimal disruption. Teachers can pick and choose the specific components they want to teach, and they can devote as few as four hours to as many as twenty hours during the semester to providing the instruction. The payoffs in terms of enhanced learning and performance will more than justify this investment in time and effort.

Passive Learning

Many nonperforming and underperforming students share a notable trait: *They learn passively.* Studying translates into little more than a mindless procedure of turning the pages in their textbooks while occasionally glancing at their class notes, assuming, of course, they’ve actually bothered to take decipherable notes. The consequences of this passive learning are predictable and include deficient skills, minimal mastery of course content, and poor grades.

Students who muddle through four years of high school often bear emotional scars that attest to their less-than-stellar academic experiences. Frustration, test anxiety, learning phobias, and deficient self-confidence are the common by-products of this struggle. Having no evidence to the contrary, these ineffectual learners are likely to devalue their intelligence, discount their abilities, and reduce their ambitions. They’re also like to conclude, consciously or unconsciously, that they’re inadequate.

Marginally performing students often choose the path of least resistance and do everything possible to avoid studying. Deluding themselves that they aren’t really doing poorly if they aren’t really trying, they simply deny that they have any problems. The litany of excuses, responsibility-deflecting complaints, and rationalizations frequently includes the following:



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1. School is dumb.
2. The information is useless.
3. The teacher is a jerk.
4. The tests are unfair.

Wizened teachers are not fooled by these transparent justifications for minimal effort and marginal performance that ironically call attention to the very insufficiencies that these students are attempting to hide.

It's axiomatic that students with the greatest need to study are usually the most resistant to studying. They're often disorganized and unmotivated. They procrastinate and submit sloppy, incomplete assignments. They miss deadlines and blame others for their difficulties. Their maladaptive attitudes and behavior magnify their deficiencies, but they're too enmeshed in their defensive system to perceive this. One doesn't require a crystal ball to see that these students are destined to crash against monumental barriers not only in school, but also in the harsh and demanding world beyond school.

A compelling argument can be made for providing all students with systematic study skills instruction as an integral component in their education. Logic suggests that this instruction be furnished in elementary school before self-defeating habits, counterproductive attitudes, and self-sabotaging behaviors become entrenched. Unfortunately, logic doesn't always prevail in our educational system, and every year vast numbers of teenagers enter high school with abysmal study habits.

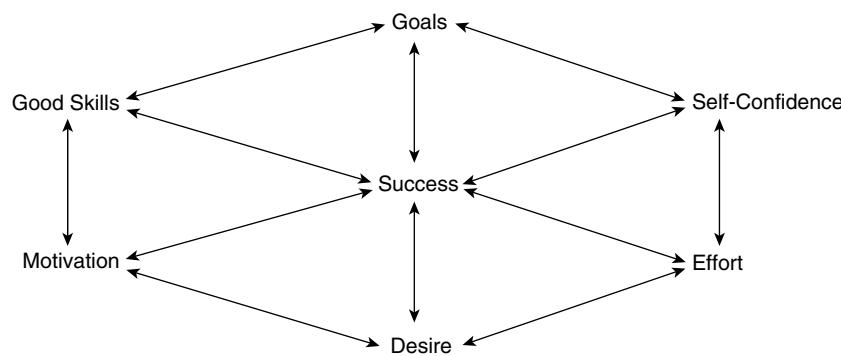
Perhaps as many as 40 percent of high school students are functioning below their full academic potential. Some spin their wheels without generating forward momentum. Some don't study. Some don't complete their homework or submit their assignments on time. Others express their frustration and demoralization by acting out in class and being disruptive. Others suppress their frustration and demoralization and retreat into their daydreams. That these students often identify with and gravitate toward peers who are also doing poorly in school should not surprise us. The subculture functions as an oasis from pressure to perform and expectations that cannot be met and reinforces shared negative attitudes, maladaptive behavior, and nihilistic values.

The Achievement Loop

Academic achievement is, in effect, a recycling loop. Good skills in tandem with goals, motivation, effort, desire, and self-confidence produce successful students. This success, in turn, encourages students to establish new goals and generates motivation, effort, desire, and self-confidence. The more students accomplish, the more they believe in themselves, and the more they believe in themselves, the more they'll want to continue achieving. The resulting pride and sense of personal efficacy are addictive. Students will want to continue achieving because they enjoy the feelings associated with achievement and desire more of the same. Once they're acclimated to success, they'll conclude that they *can* succeed and that they *deserve* to succeed.

The interactive dynamics of the achievement loop can be graphically represented as follows:

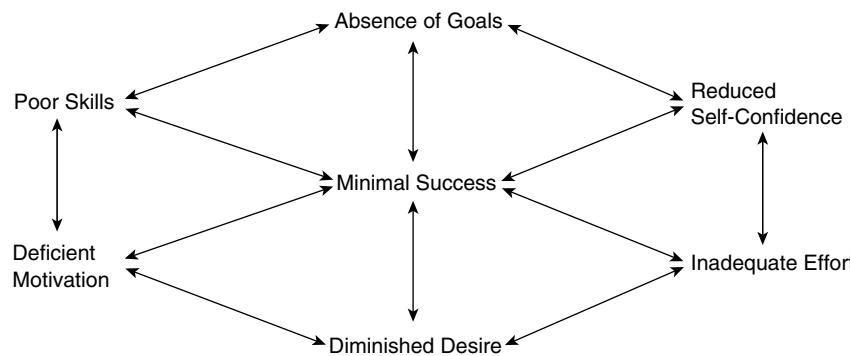
The Achievement Loop



Just as achievement is a recycling loop, so, too, is nonachievement. Poor skills, the absence of goals, deficient desire, inadequate motivation, diminished self-confidence, and little effort produce little or no success. Little or no success, in turn, generates diminished self-confidence, deficient desire, and inadequate motivation, which, in turn, guarantee continued marginal performance. In other words, the more students do poorly in school, the less faith they have in themselves and the less willing they are to assert themselves and stretch for the academic brass ring. To extricate themselves from this nonachievement loop, marginally performing and nonperforming students must be provided with the tools they need to get the job done.

The interactive dynamics of the nonachievement loop can also be represented graphically:

The Nonachievement Loop



Note that the arrows connecting the components in both loops point in two directions and that an arrow from each component also points to the center of the loop. This representation underscores how each element in the dynamic has an impact on the other elements.

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Students who have faith in their ability to solve problems, meet challenges, and achieve academically are motivated, goal directed, and emotionally resilient. They radiate self-assurance, bounce back from defeats and disappointments, prevail over challenges, and attain their goals.

Students who are academically defeated are at the opposite end of the potency continuum. They are dispirited, unmotivated, frustrated, uninvolved in learning, emotionally fragile, and psychologically defended.

Description of Content

The **Study Max** Program provides a step-by-step methodology for helping students become fully engaged learners. The program is based on the premise that students can be taught virtually fail-safe procedures for achieving academically.

The reproducible components consist of an introduction and three instructional sections. In the **Introduction**, students complete a comprehensive study skills profile, interpret their responses, evaluate their performance in each subject, and list their personal improvement goals. This procedure permits students to acquire insight into their academic modus operandi and provides baseline data that can be compared with subsequent data after students complete the program.

Part 1: Learning Styles and Preferences consists of a single unit that's designed to help students identify their learning strengths and their intelligence type. **Part 2: Getting Organized** consists of Units 2–5 and focuses on helping students create an organized, time-efficient study system and a conducive environment for effective learning. **Part 3: Turbo Charging Reading and Studying**, consists of Units 6–10 and focuses on helping students acquire the specific academic skills that are requisite to productive studying and effective test preparation. Students learn how to speed read, improve their reading comprehension, take effective textbook and class notes, identify important information, understand concepts, recall facts, anticipate what is likely to be on tests, and write powerful, well-organized essays that clearly express and encapsulate key information.

The Study Max Program contains more than one hundred highly focused exercises and activities that concentrate on providing practical skills with immediate applications. These exercises and activities encourage students to become introspective and more aware of their own proclivities when studying. Repeated opportunities for practice, reinforcement, and mastery are integrated into the instructional methodology. Students are "set up to succeed," and these intentionally engineered successes are designed to generate self-confidence and stimulate effort and motivation. The objective is to empower students by teaching them easy-to-learn and easy-to-apply skills, stimulating their strategic thinking and energizing their intellectual development.

As previously stated, you can choose the specific components of the program that you want to integrate into your curriculum. Another option is to offer a dedicated study skills program as an elective, a summer school program, or an after-school tutorial program. Although most students should be able to

complete many of the activities independently or with minimal guidance, the program is designed to be teacher-student interactive, and the content is intended to be examined and discussed in class.

The Instructional Method

The **Study Max Program** incorporates an instructional method called **cognitive behavioral change**. This teaching technique is based on six teaching principles:

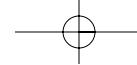
1. *Relevancy*—the skills directly relate to the challenges that students confront every day.
2. *Insight*—the program demonstrates that the skills being taught can make school easier, more productive, and more rewarding.
3. *Instruction*—the methods are presented systematically and sequenced to ensure comprehension.
4. *Reinforcement*—the program offers repeated opportunities to practice to ensure mastery and assimilation.
5. *Behavior Modification*—the methods develop productive behaviors through methodical practice and carefully orchestrated opportunities for success.
6. *Application*—the program offers repeated opportunities to use the skills being taught to ensure habituation.

The goal of this systematic instructional process is to guide students to the realization that the skills they're learning are valuable and that mastery of these skills can make their lives easier and more productive and rewarding. This critically important paradigm shift from passive learning to active learning is essential to improved academic performance.

How to Use This Resource

In the teacher section that precedes each unit, the underlying pedagogical issues that relate to the topics being presented are succinctly examined. You'll find an overview of the objectives for the unit, a lesson plan, and a description of each activity.

In the student sections, case studies are designed to help students acquire insight through a methodical examination and analysis of the modus operandi of students with whom they can most likely identify. This use of anecdotal surrogates is intended to make the self-examination process less threatening to teenagers who are defensive and resistant to introspection. The reproducible exercises provide repeated opportunities for students to practice each skill being taught until the skill has been fully mastered and assimilated. The goal is for students to integrate the insights and skills and to develop a highly functional and personalized study system.



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You may choose to read certain sections aloud to the class, or you may prefer that students take turns reading aloud. Some exercises are optional and can either be done in class or assigned as homework. These optional exercises can be used to reinforce concepts and skills or can be used for remedial purposes with students who are struggling.

This program deliberately encourages students to “stretch” intellectually. This stretching process is intended to stimulate academic and intellectual growth, but it can also produce frustration and discouragement if at-risk students are initially asked to reach too far. Struggling students who have decoding, focusing, reading comprehension, or vocabulary difficulties may require more individualized help and monitoring to master certain of the targeted skills and concepts. By avoiding excessive demands, reducing the number of assigned activities, and extending completion deadlines, you can significantly reduce the likelihood of undermining their self-esteem and triggering defensiveness and resistance.*

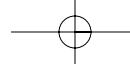
Recommended Instructional Guidelines

1. Examine the content of each chapter carefully before presenting the material.
2. Resist being highly critical or judgmental.
3. Show respect for students’ viewpoints even if they appear off target. (If these viewpoints indicate maladaptive thinking, you’ll want to reorient this thinking incrementally while being aware of and sensitive to differing cultural values.)
4. Encourage students to think analytically, critically, and strategically and require that they be able to defend their position logically. (This will develop and enhance reasoning skills, insight, and communication skills.)
5. Provide support, encouragement, and affirmation for progress and communicate positive expectations!

The **Study Skills Profile** in the Introduction is designed to help students assess their current study skills, attitudes, performance, and goals. Classes comprising highly motivated and academically advanced students might benefit from discussing their completed profile at the onset. This discussion could lead to their targeting more precisely what they want from the program.

If students respond to the self-assessments forthrightly, a considerable number of those in mainstream classes (as distinct from advanced placement classes) will probably indicate deficient study habits. These students may be self-conscious and embarrassed and may not want to discuss their profiles in front of their classmates. Those who are psychologically defended may even try to make a joke out of the self-assessment exercise, and any attempt to examine their attitudes and behavior at the onset could cause them to become even more defensive

*See *Winning the Study Game* (Greene, 2003). This study skills program is specifically designed for students participating in middle school and high school resource programs.



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and resistant. For these reasons, you may elect not to initiate immediately an in-depth class discussion of the self-assessments. If you do decide to proceed with a class discussion, student participation should be voluntary.

If you have a core of reluctant or resistant learners in your class, it's recommended that you put off discussing the profiles until after the class has completed the components you've selected. At the end of the program, students could complete the profile again and compare their initial responses with their subsequent responses. The comparisons are likely to trigger a lively class discussion. Once students have assimilated more productive behavior, attitudes, and skills, they should be more willing to examine and compare their pre- and postprofile responses.

It's time to get started.

