

Five Factors That Most Affect Student Success

A young child watches mesmerized as Olympic gymnasts perform incredible feats of balance, precision, and flexibility. The following morning the same child is mimicking the champion athlete's movements, images from the television still fresh in her mind.

Struggling in school, a child withdraws from anything that resembles competition, yet he is drawn to woodworking, and exhibits an eye and a hand for the craft.

What factors most affect student success in school? As these brief vignettes suggest, understanding what makes learning happen with children is individual and complex.

Yet there are certain factors which are the foundations of successful learning, and examining them one at a time may help us succeed with our own children and those in our community.

First, motivation is key. The child watching the skilled athlete is drawn to imitate. Watching a craftsman or artist, seeing the magic of drama, hearing a musical instrument or a human voice in song – all can captivate the attention of a child or young adult. Motivation comes when a child chooses something to value. Motivation can be extrinsic (“Do it because I told you so!”), resulting in spurts of success. But sustained

success comes only with intrinsic motivation (“I want to learn that!”)

Second, ability is important, but it is a more complex concept than you may realize. All children have abilities, but each child is unique in how those abilities are developed. Learning styles

affect the degree to which an ability is enhanced. For example, one child may learn by listening and remembering, another by questioning and interacting, and another by observing and imitating.



Third, support is critical.

Whatever ability and intrinsic motivation a child possesses will flourish in an environment of encouragement, genuine praise, and positive feedback.

Overwhelming evidence shows that the support of parents, teachers, coaches, and others makes a real difference in a child's success.

Fourth, children need to clarify and identify goals. Often these are obvious, such as learning to read, mastering math facts, or learning to write. Many goals, however, require intermediate steps, such as learning to add and subtract before multiplying and dividing, or learning letters and sounds before starting to read.

As children get older, especially in high school, they will begin to distinguish between the final goal – for example, good grades – and the necessary strategies to achieve that goal. They will also encounter competing priorities that will distract them from the academic task. At this point it is very helpful for students, parents, and teachers together to set priorities, identify goals, and commit to specific strategies for achieving them.

The last factor in student success is focused practice. Little is achieved permanently if learning is not reinforced by practice, repetition, and attention to the details that matter; correct spelling,

accurate number facts, completed homework assignments, and so forth. When the other factors of motivation,

ability, support, and clear goals are present, focused practice comes more naturally.

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“Success is that old ABC – Ability, Breaks, and Courage.

~Charles Luckman