

HOW TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY



**A GUIDE FOR
PARENTS AND
STUDENTS**

By Michael Petty, PhD

About the Author



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After National Service in the British Army where he was a marksman, and a stint as a pilot in the RAF, Michael was a professor and senior lecturer. He taught and carried out research at the Centre for Educational Research at the University of New South Wales, the University of Calgary and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Michael was a Canada Council Doctoral Fellow and held other fellowships including a Shaw Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He also achieved a 4.0 grade point average. He is the author of over thirty papers and books and numerous articles in professional journals.

Michael is the CEO of TASK Research in Australia and chairman of Lanka Statistics and IT Research (Pvt.) Ltd, an international company based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He was principal of S.M.A.R.T Research in Australia.

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* The cover photo shows Diluni, a statistician who developed a conjoint analysis package which is available on-line. That is a huge international achievement. Diluni comes from a rural area of Sri Lanka and she studied at rural schools and a rural university. Diluni is studying for an MsC. She uses brainwave entrainment.

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This e-book helps students to achieve success in school and university.

It dispels the myth that some people are born no-hopers, as Australians say.

We show that everyone can achieve success in school and we show students and the parents of students how to foster high levels of achievement.

Myths about Teaching and Learning

Surprisingly, a lot of educators know little about learning. And when they do, what they know does not always find its way into schools.

An example: people have believed for at least half a century that a foreign language is best learned at a young age. Yet in schools in the USA and Australia a foreign language was not taught until high school. This seemed counterproductive if not outright stupid. Now evidence starts to emerge that perhaps we had no idea of when it is best to teach languages.

New research shows:

It is a common belief that younger children learn second languages more easily and more rapidly than both adolescents and adults. Implicit in decisions to lower the age of first instructional exposure to an additional language is also the belief that the greater the number of years of academic study devoted to foreign language learning, the better the outcomes.

However, there is surprisingly little research evidence to support these beliefs. ... Research is therefore needed to inform policy makers of the respective advantages of an early start and different time distributions as well as of the different ways in which age may affect proficiency.¹

¹ Carmen Muñoz, Laura Collins, Joanna White, Mia Victori Blaya, Maria Rosa Torras Cherta, Teresa Navés, Luz Celaya Age, *intensity of instruction, and metalinguistic awareness in EFL learning*, <http://www.tirfonline.org/Munozetalreport.pdf> (extracted 16th September 2010)

Perhaps foreign language instruction in US and Australian schools was based on misinformation. Chances are that it still is.

Unfortunately a lot of educational practices are based on myths and fads. New theories about teaching and learning spring up like mushrooms after rain.

What we aim to do in this e-Book is to reveal some of the more pervasive myths and to provide real information based on good research.

Robert A. Bjork, a psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, speaking about current research into learning says:

“We have known these principles for some time, and it’s intriguing that schools don’t pick them up, or that people don’t learn them by trial and error ... Instead, we walk around with all sorts of unexamined beliefs about what works that are mistaken.”

It is particularly distressing that so many educators are misinformed about learning. This makes it very difficult for students to know how to succeed in school. We are all students, and some of us are parents of students, at some time in our lives. We need to know more about how to learn effectively.

Our goal in this e-Book is to provide parents and students with solid information on how to succeed in school and university.

Student Motivation

Washington Post economics columnist Robert Samuelson asked why America has spent so much money on school reform and yet has so little to show for it. The answer he said lies not necessarily with schools and teachers, rather:

“The larger cause of failure is almost unmentionable: shrunken student motivation, ... The unstated assumption of much school ‘reform’ is that if students aren’t motivated, it’s mainly the fault of schools and teachers.” Wrong. “Motivation is weak because more students (of all races and economic classes) don’t like school, don’t work hard and don’t do well.”

It is easier for politicians and policy makers to blame teachers than to blame parents or students.

How Motivation Overcomes Disadvantage

One cause of student failure, then, is poor motivation. Fortunately cognitive science can help develop motivation.

Years ago a friend and colleague at the University of New South Wales, Dr. Phil Mead, did some interesting research that showed that the children of non-English speaking immigrants to Australia performed better in school than their native-born Australian peers. The way Dr Mead explained this was to hypothesize that immigrants are more highly motivated to succeed than others, which is why they take the major leap into the unknown that immigration implies, severing ties with all they knew and left behind them.

Immigrants passed their motivation on to their children, Dr Mead postulated, and it was this high motivation that enabled them to overcome disadvantages such as low social status and their parents' lack of an English language education. And this motivation was great enough to propel them well beyond what their teachers expected of them. It was ambition and motivation, not greater intelligence, which propelled these children from immigrant families to achieve in school and university at a level beyond their native-born Australian peers.

There is a great deal of evidence that parents' attitudes and support and encouragement have more impact on students' performance in school than any other factor, including IQ and teacher aptitude.

The Secrets of Success in School

Research shows that you can beat the odds. In the USA, Canada and Australia Asian students outperform others as if they had an IQ advantage of 10 points, though of course they do not. What is their secret? The answer can be expressed in four words: ambition, confidence, hard work. It is the ambition that drives the hard work. It is confidence that makes the hard work successful.

- You must *want* to succeed, and
- You must know that you *can* succeed.

How Parents can Help Their Children Succeed in School

Education is important; it is a major determinant of life chances. But education is not a given, parents can do much to foster educational achievement in their children.

- First parents need to know that every child has the potential for educational success. Your children almost certainly have the ability to succeed in school. There are common stereotypes about educational achievement that are false, such as that girls are not as good at mathematics or science or engineering as boys, or that the daughter of a single mother who works as a hospital cleaner cannot aspire to become a brain surgeon.

These stereotypes are dangerous myths and as a parent you have to examine whether you believe them. If you do believe them you need to re-examine your beliefs. Social class is a better predictor of performance in school than IQ; this is because working class parents and teachers believe that working class children are less likely to succeed in school than middle class children.

But Asian children in North America and Australia succeed in school not because they are intellectually or socially superior to Americans, Canadians or Australians of European origin, but because they are more highly motivated to succeed. It is the motivation and the belief that they can succeed that result in them topping university entrance exams and university courses year after year. And the motivation is provided by their parents.

As Professor Phil Mead showed in Australia, the children of non-English speaking immigrant parents perform better in school than their native Australian peers despite the fact that they are from disadvantaged working class families, because they inherit their parents' will to achieve.

Teachers often, unfortunately, propagate the myth of working class disadvantage, giving working class or minority children in their care the idea that they should not aspire to higher occupations.

I knew this in theory but I came across it face to face when I went with my family to Australia to teach at university. At first, my son attended a working class school and his teacher, assuming he came from a working class background similar to that of the other students in the school, advised him that his career aspirations should not include anything higher than a trade or driving a truck. I went and had words with that teacher. Our son went on to win a university medal.

There are role models such as President Obama which show that such stereotyping is wrong. Introduce your child to appropriate role models – you do not have to like President Obama to present him as a role model, he is an African American from a single parent family who became a Harvard professor and president against the odds. Your child too can beat the odds, with your help.

- **Parents need to foster a winning attitude in their children.** They have to convince their children that they can succeed. It is the subconscious mind that needs to know this and the subconscious mind is negative and difficult to access. There are certain principles that derive from mental programming that should be followed in encouraging your child:
- **Provide role models for educational achievement.** You, your child and his teachers must not think that working class, African, Hispanic, or poor children cannot succeed in school. This is untrue. There are plenty of people from disadvantaged backgrounds that have achieved in school against the odds. Look for such role models.
- **Make goals realistic.** Encourage your child to aim for the top ten percent of his or her class in mathematics, not necessarily for the top position.
- **Ignore the problem – focus on the solution.** Do not for instance say ‘you must not watch TV while doing homework’. Avoid negatives, be positive; say ‘do your homework in a place free of distractions’, and name that place. Set aside an area where the child can do homework free of the distractions of TV.
- **Repetition.** Advertisers know the value of repetition. Repeat your mental programming even after the rules seem to have been learned, this will reinforce desirable behaviors and attitudes.

- **Keep it simple.** Do not try to achieve everything at once. And keep your instructions and advice simple, simple words will be processed more rapidly by the subconscious mind.
- **Belief and confidence.** Believe in the abilities of your child and yourself and have confidence in them. The human mind is infinitely powerful and it has few limitations. If you have confidence in the ability of your child to achieve then you will instill that confidence in your child also, and your child will achieve what he or she believes he or she can achieve.
- **Hire a tutor if you feel you must.** If you can afford a tutor then it may be a good thing to hire one, but it is probably not necessary as long as your child has the learning materials they need. And having a tutor may give your child the idea that they are less than competent, otherwise why do they need a tutor?
- **Meditate.** Learn meditation with your children, it will benefit both you and them. Meditation improves mental focus and thinking in general. Meditation is made easier with brainwave entrainment. It also improves general health.



- **Use brainwave entrainment technology.** Brainwave entrainment technology is surprisingly inexpensive and there is plenty of university research to show that it works. It is also simple to use. Your child sits and studies while playing the appropriate mp3 track on headphones or speakers. Brainwave entrainment technology, including will enhance the learning experience. Brainwave entrainment can also help with meditation. There is no risk to you, the products are guaranteed.

What is Intelligence?

Often when people think of intelligence they think of IQ, but IQ is not intelligence, it is supposedly a measure of intelligence. IQ is short for Intelligence Quotient and in the early days of IQ testing if you asked a psychologist what IQ tests measure they would respond with “IQ tests measure intelligence”. Nowadays psychologists are more likely to say: “IQ tests measure what IQ tests measure” or perhaps “IQ tests measure IQ”.

At best IQ is a measure of performance, but it is a very poor measure. Howard Gardner has devoted his career as a psychologist to the study of intelligence. Gardner defines intelligence as 'the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings'.²

Clearly intelligence is a capacity or potential to perform, that capacity may be measured, though imperfectly, in terms of IQ or academic tests, college admission tests, and so on.

Howard Gardner is best known for his work on multiple intelligences. The theory implicit in psychometric testing, is that intelligence is a single entity, that it results from a single factor, and that it can be measured simply via IQ tests. Gardner, however, has devoted a career in psychology to exploring the idea that there are multiple intelligences, not a single underlying factor.

According to Gardner's latest formulation there are seven kinds of intelligence, they are:

Linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence - understanding other people, and intrapersonal intelligence, which is understanding oneself.

² Howard Gardner, & Hatch, T. (1989). Multiple intelligences go to school: Educational implications of the theory of multiple intelligences. *Educational Researcher*, 18(8), 4-9.

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