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Education Update | 3

BELONG CONNECT

Developing Self-Motivated, Lifelong Learners

Teachers want their students to be ready to learn and determined to overcome their own challenges; unfortunately, educators may be unsure about how to make this happen. According to the experts, teachers can take several steps to encourage students to take ownership of their learning.

The best place to start is by understanding students' motivation. "Even the kids we describe as unmotivated are motivated," says Bob Sullo, an education consultant and former teacher and school administrator. "They may be motivated to talk with a friend, to disrupt your class, to sleep, or to text a friend in another class. But make no mistake—they're highly motivated."

In his ASCD book *The Motivated Student: Unlocking the Enthusiasm for Learning,* Sullo writes that in order to engage young people in lessons, teachers must allow them to connect

with one another; develop increased competence; make choices; and enjoy themselves in a safe, secure environment. "When students satisfy their needs by immersing themselves in the productive academic challenges you create, they will behave appropriately and perform better," says Sullo.

For each planned activity, Sullo recommends teachers ask themselves three questions:
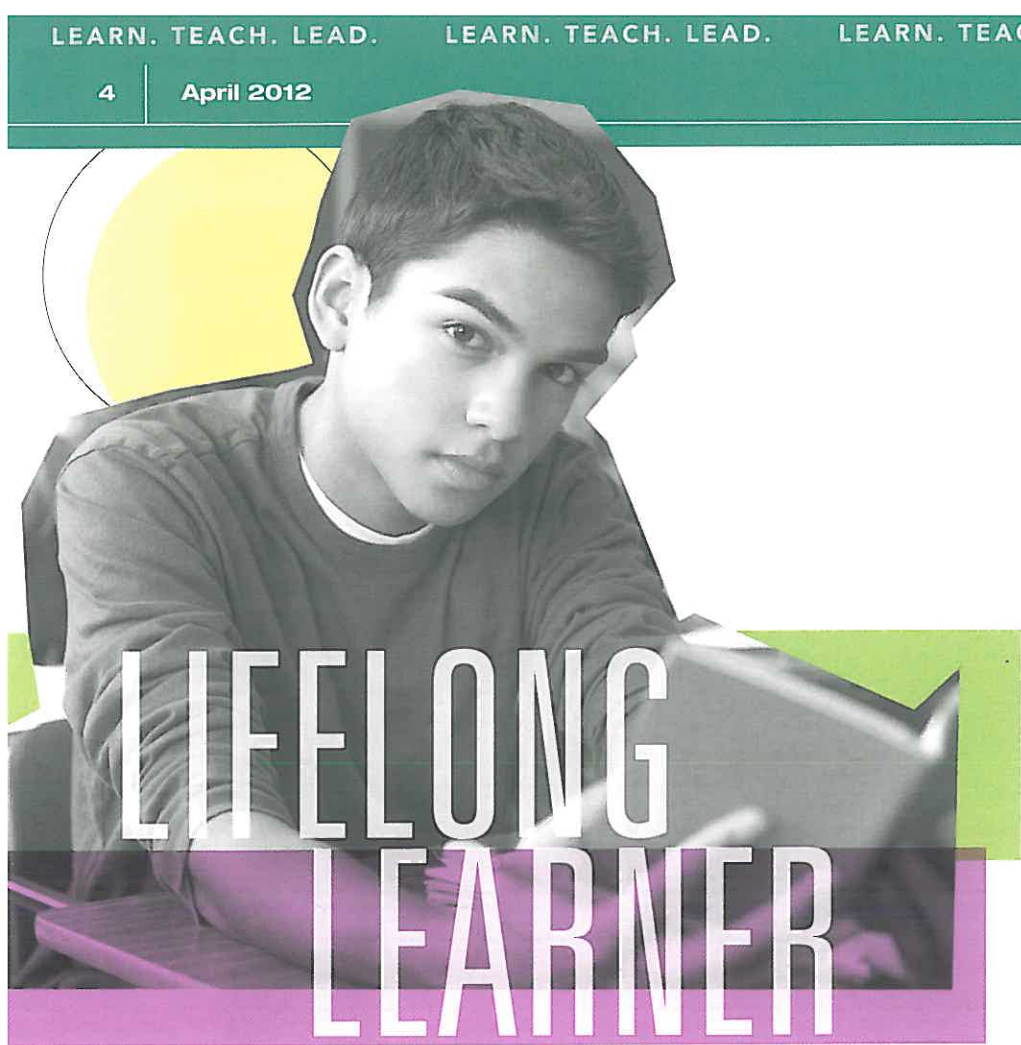
1. If the students do what I ask them to do, will they be able to satisfy the need to connect/belong?
2. If the students do what I ask them to do, will they be able to have some choice, allowing them to responsibly meet the need for freedom?
3. Do I believe the students will enjoy this activity?

Although it's not important to answer "yes" to every question for each

activity, Sullo advises that teachers look at all the activities they are asking students to do and realize that when students' needs aren't being met, they will typically fulfill them their own way, and one should expect more disruptions and less learning.

Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, professor emeritus of psychological sciences at the University of Northern Colorado and author of *Human Learning and Educational Psychology: Developing Learners,* says teachers need to give students strategies to encourage them to become self-motivated learners. Don't just tell them to read 10 pages of a book, she says; instead, give them questions to think about as they read. This will help them to focus and connect with the material.

Some children develop negativity about learning because they've never been taught some of the basics that

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4 | April 2012

LIFELONG LEARNER

Developing Self-Motivated, Lifelong Learners

many of us take for granted. David Ginsburg, an education consultant who worked in urban schools for 17 years, had to teach his students how to get organized. Many didn't even know how to take notes, he says. After Ginsburg gave his students a system for note taking and encouraged them to use their notes on his quizzes, the students began experiencing success, which led to more positive attitudes.

"We need to set students up for success, to stop enabling the self-defeating behavior by coaching [them] and providing resources to [help them] overcome that behavior," says Ginsburg. "Whether they are successful or they fail, they need to take credit. We can set the tone by

acknowledging our own fallibility and modeling the right behavior."

Teachers should also demystify the learning process, says Robyn Jackson, an education consultant, former teacher, and author of *Never Work Harder Than Your Students*. "We need to take the soft skills that go into [learning] and show them to our students," she says.

For Jackson, this message hit home when she was still teaching. She struggled with being on time to places,

and time-management techniques did not work for her. After reading an obscure paragraph that said people don't understand how long it takes to do things, Jackson began timing her trip to work and discovered that what she thought took 5 minutes actually took 12 minutes. When her students didn't finish reading a novel on time, she wondered if they too were underestimating the time required. She timed them reading in class so they could determine how long it would take to read the novel. The next time they had a book to read, all but three kids finished on time, says Jackson.

"I had never thought to teach that piece, but it is a huge issue," she says. "We assume they know the soft skills, but they can't take ownership of their learning if they are missing essential components."

Jackson says rigor is another key element for encouraging student ownership of learning. "When I teach you how to think about the material, you can't own it. And if you don't own it, you haven't mastered anything." Instead, it's important to help children learn how to process information and own it.

Equally important is helping children believe in themselves. "If you believe you have the ability to do something, you're more likely to want to do it and to do it," says Eric M. Anderman, director of the School of Educational Policy and Leadership and an educational psychology professor

→ MINING THE RESEARCH

Although many middle schools sell soft drinks, candy, and other "junk food," a recent study concludes that selling foods like these at school may not necessarily affect student obesity. Read *Competitive Food Sales in Schools and Childhood Obesity: A Longitudinal Study* and other recent reports at www.ascd.org/miningtheresearch.

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Education Update | 5

at The Ohio State University. "A lot of reasons kids get turned off is that they develop a belief that they're not good at something, whether it's writing or learning a foreign language or playing sports." Teachers have to get kids to believe they have the ability. One way to do this, suggests Anderman, is

a bit more and give them the time they need, they will experience success and be more engaged."

Finally, many of the experts say that children have to be allowed to make—and learn from—their mistakes. Kids who simply replace wrong answers with the right ones never

higher education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, agrees that mistakes can be informative if the child focuses on what to do to make it better the next time. "If a child is using the wrong strategy, a teacher can say something like, 'Why do you think you're having a problem with this?' or 'Why don't you try this method and see if that works better?'"
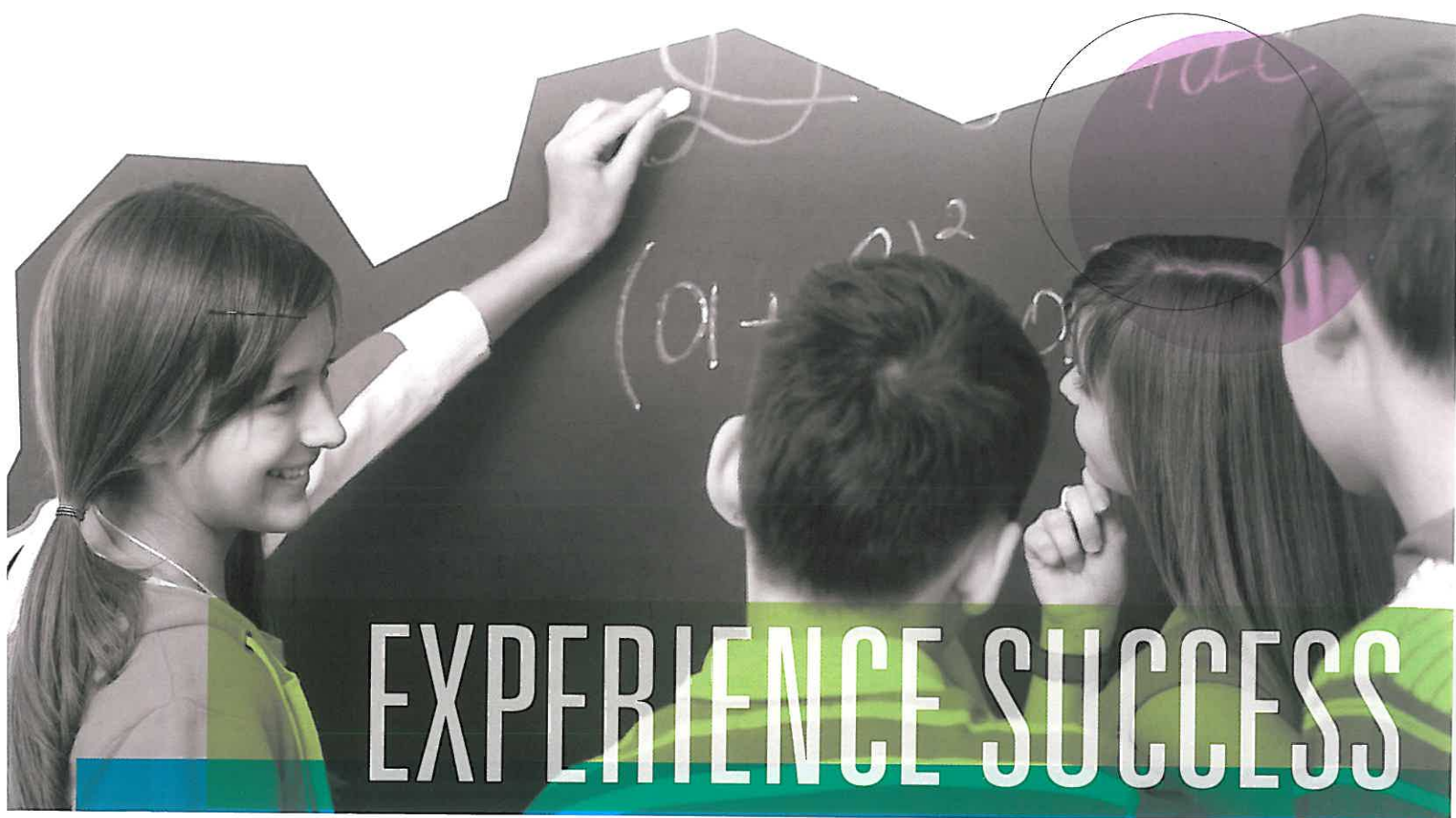
> "Even the kids we describe as unmotivated are motivated. They may be motivated to talk to a friend, to disrupt your class, to sleep, or to text a friend in another class. But make no mistake—they're highly motivated." *Bob Sullo, education expert*

to set short-term, reachable goals so students can feel proud about their accomplishments. Never start with something that doesn't allow students to experience success.

Anderman also notes that kids need time to succeed. He believes timed tests or assigning work to do in a certain amount of time is frustrating. "Some simply need more time," he says, "or they get stressed, don't finish, and feel unsuccessful. If we bend the rules

learn what went wrong. "You can't erase your own thought and replace it with someone else's because you won't understand the connection between where you went wrong and how to get the right answer," says education consultant Allison Zmuda, author of *Breaking Free from Myths About Teaching and Learning: Innovation as an Engine for Student Success.*

Dale Schunk, a professor in the department of teacher education and

Schunk encourages teachers to help the child understand that if the problem is something he or she can change, such as effort, strategy, or time on task, it may lead to a better outcome next time. The problems arise when the student attributes a mistake to something he or she can't change—for example, "I'm not smart enough" or "I can't do this." When that happens, says Schunk, teachers need to tell students, "Yes, you can do this! Let's try a different method and I think the outcome will be better." EU

—ELLEN ULLMAN

EXPERIENCE SUCCESS

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6 | April 2012

It's Complicated

→ *continued from page 1*

the real problem for teachers won't be identifying complex texts, but rather "staying true to the demands of the standards, without overscaffolding, and in heterogeneous classrooms where teachers may have students reading three levels below proficiency." To that end, experts advise focusing interventions on what causes students the most difficulty—vocabulary and complicated sentences. Despite their essential role in determining students' success in reading comprehension, vocabulary is the least systematic and least intensive part of English/language arts instruction, and syntax is virtually absent from U.S. K–12 education, says David Liben, a consultant with Student Achievement Partners, a nonprofit founded by three of the Common Core State Standards' contributing writers.

In a more general sense, students working with complex texts need to know how to do a close reading, and this is a skill teachers can explain and model to help students internalize the process. "It's really important to be explicit about the steps, strategies, and tools that support interpretive and critical reading, especially as the texts become more complex," says Jay McTighe, coauthor of *Understanding by Design*. For example, he says, you can teach students to notice and understand the function of text structures like headings, bullets, bold type, sidebars, and chapter organization. Also, story maps and character analysis charts can help make the invisible visible and give kids a concrete structure for understanding abstract ideas.

Although strategies are important for students to understand and use, experts caution teachers to be mindful of how much time they spend teaching strategies versus teaching the actual texts. "There are some classes where strategies themselves seem like the point of instruction, not becoming better readers," says Meredith Liben, who is a researcher and coordinator of the text complexity project at Student Achievement Partners. "The shift we're trying to get people to make is that strategies serve kids when they need to use them to better understand the text, as opposed to the text serving the strategy."

When kids stumble, she says, try simply having students reread the text, instead of getting in the weeds with strategies instruction. McTighe suggests having students periodically summarize text as another basic way to aid comprehension and check for understanding. Good readers ask questions of the text; that's a strategy you can teach, model, and encourage, says McTighe. Other complex text supports he recommends include

- The stance framework developed by Judith Langer: four stances (Global, Interpretive, Critical, and Personal) that prompt students to analyze the gist of a text, implied meaning, source, and connections.
- A perspective chart: a graphic organizer that helps students identify multiple viewpoints in a historical text and ask questions such as, Whose story is this? Is this the full story? What's missing?
- A character analysis frame: a graphic organizer that helps students record what literary characters say or do in a text so that students can identify patterns in behavior and relate them to broader themes within the text.

Wiggins and McTighe agree that overscaffolding—whether by the teacher or the textbook—has watered down expectations of students. Teacher-led reading strategies are like training wheels that eventually get taken off, says McTighe. "The goal is independent meaning making of text, that's what the Common Core calls for—but it rarely happens on its own."

Don't Take It Personally?

Another phenomenon that may also need reining in is overemphasis on students' personal impressions of complex texts. So-called "text-to-self" questions are absent from the standards, reflecting a push away from personal meaning making and toward more rigorous, evidentiary analysis. "The mantra of a good middle or high school English class is, 'Where is that in the text?'" says Wiggins.

"We're not automatons," says David Liben. "The standards are supposed to be 80 percent of what you teach; it would be absurd to say you don't ever want to connect a text to kids' lives

→ MORE ONLINE

An arsenal of online tools provide guidance to publishers, curriculum developers, and teachers in the quantitative and qualitative measures needed to assess a text's level of complexity and make the appropriate match to reader and task. For additional resources, go www.ascd.org/eu-april-2012-resources.