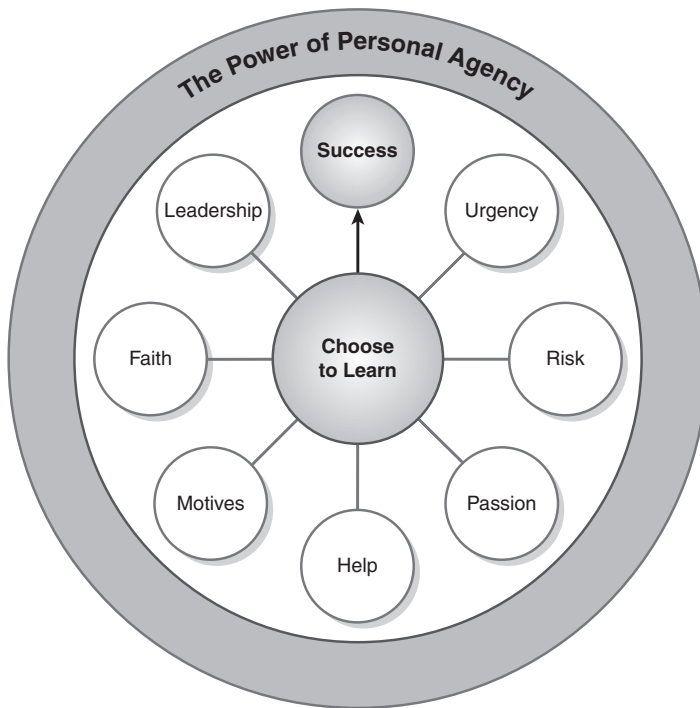


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The Three D's of Success



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Slightly overweight and somewhat awkward, Shawn liked video games more than real games, even though he wasn't very good at either. After school he went downstairs, closed his bedroom door, chose a game on his computer, and tried to make it to the next level. He didn't feel comfortable with most people, especially adults. He hated his fourth-grade teacher. She just asked him to do things he didn't want to do. Like reading. Computer images he could handle, but words were not his thing. Still reading on the first-grade level, books were intimidating, and his life didn't get much better as he went from elementary to secondary school. We actually met him when he was nineteen. We asked him one day if he had ever succeeded at anything—"skateboarding, skiing, anything?" Afraid to look us in the eye, he mumbled, "No." We then told him that his days of constant failure were over: "You're going to see what it feels like to succeed."

Shawn is like so many of our young people. Each year the Commissioner for the National Center for Educational Statistics produces a report about the state of education in the United States. In the spring of 2007 his report showed that fourth and eighth graders' reading ability has varied little during the past fifteen years. Fewer than one-third of the students performed at the proficient level, and twelfth graders' reading performance has decreased significantly, from 40 percent to 35 percent at the proficient level.

Likewise, fully 39 percent of these twelfth graders in 2005 performed below the "basic" level in mathematics. This means that at the end of their high school education these students did not even possess "partial mastery of fundamental skills."

How did students do in science? Quite similarly. The fourth graders showed some improvement during the past ten years, the eighth graders stayed the same, and the twelfth graders did worse. So it appears that even when students show slight gains in the early grades in reading, math, or science, those gains eventually lead to deficits by the time the students graduate from high school (see Schneider, 2007).

What happens to students as they complete a college education? Again, the data are deeply disappointing. Romano (2005) laments that only 31 percent of college graduates in 2003 read at the proficient level, significantly down from 40 percent ten years earlier. The one clear conclusion from all the data on education, the No Child Left Behind Act, and undergraduate education in the United States is that we are not improving. Policies and programs the nation has implemented to raise literacy rates in reading, math, or science are not working. In short, most students are not succeeding. Many are graduating and getting degrees, but they are not succeeding, because their desire to learn has weakened and diminished rather than grown stronger and brighter.

We argue that addiction to failure is one of the primary causes of such disappointing results from our system of education. Shawn was obviously addicted to failure. He did not expect to succeed at anything he tried. There may have been some teachers in his life who were also addicted to failure—teachers who did not expect to succeed with Shawn when he was in their class. There might also have been parents, administrators, and policymakers with similar addictions. Why? Because they were not experiencing success in their role—whatever that role was. Those in leadership positions who develop addictions to failure express their frustration in cynical remarks.

A Chinese student once asked me to define the word *cynic*. I read her the dictionary definition: “one who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*). A cynic is someone who always focuses on the negative. Cynics, in fact, are *addicted* to the negative. One of our favorite remarks about cynicism follows: “When I was a young man and was prone to speak critically, my father would say: ‘Cynics do not contribute, skeptics do not create, doubters do not achieve’” (Hinckley, 1986, p. 2).

Students can fall prey to cynicism but so can teachers and educational leaders. Just listen sometime to educators talk

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about the policies that govern their practice. The policies might be at the school, district, state, or national level, but rather than focusing on legitimate flaws in a policy and suggesting strategies to improve it, the conversation often turns toward hopelessness and pessimism.

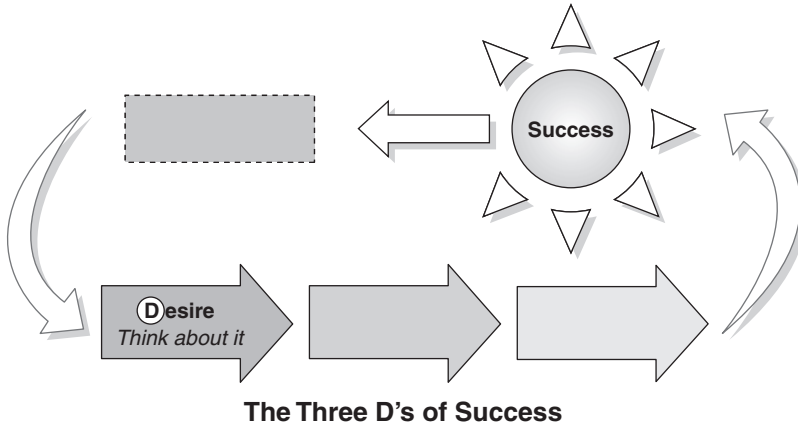
What we offer in this chapter is an alternative to cynicism, a way out of negativism, an antidote for failure: we call it the Three D's of Success—*desire*, *decision*, and *determination*. We are convinced that when teachers, students, and leaders practice the Three D's, addictions to failure and negativism gradually disappear, and learning for everyone—both students and teachers—increases.

DESIRE

The first “D” in the success equation is *desire*. As Mager and Pipe (1997) put it, “you really oughta wanna.” If students don’t want to learn, they won’t learn. If teachers don’t want to improve, they won’t improve. If leaders don’t have the will to change and help others change, everything will remain the same or worsen. Desire must be present. The word *desire*, however, can be viewed in several ways. Many focus on its emotional meaning—a longing, a yearning, an attraction. We define *desire* quite differently.

When we speak of desire in this book, we are emphasizing the end result of the word. For us the most apt synonym for desire is the word *goal*. The person wants to *do* something or *be* something. A student might want to learn how to read well enough to read the Harry Potter books. This is a definitive goal, and the goal itself is the best expression of the student’s desire. Using this definition, the word *desire* is no longer simply an emotion that we cannot get our arms around. It’s a thought, an aim, a determiner of personal conduct. Figure 1.1 shows that desire is the beginning of success.

Notice that below the word *desire* is the phrase *Think about it*. Whatever a student or teacher is thinking about is the most powerful determinant of what that student or teacher will do.

Figure 1.1 Desire

"We are always moving in the direction of our most dominant thought" (Waitley, 1985, p. 126). Another way of saying that is: "Our thinking determines our behavior." The thing we *desire* most or *think about* most—our *goal*—will always drive our actions. So when a student laments, "I really don't have any desire. I don't want to do anything right now," as educators we should not believe the student. It's actually not true. The student wants to do *something*. We just don't know what that something is, and the student might not know either. The only way to proceed is to go to the next step in the three D's—to help the student *decide* to do something.

DECISION

A teacher typically reacts to a student who is lethargic by trying to identify the underlying cause of the malaise—then, supposedly, desire will increase and the student will be reenergized. We assert that there is a more effective way of motivating seemingly impossible to motivate students: helping them do the task at hand, helping them decide to perform—even if they don't feel any desire at the moment. The principle

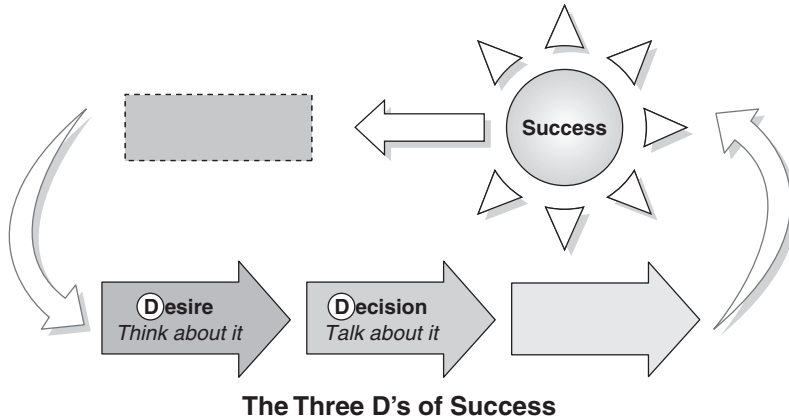
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upon which the Three D's is built is that desire will increase following success. The idea is akin to what Albert Bandura calls "the empowerment model" (Evans, 1989, p. 16). So as educators we don't need to waste time trying to pump up students' desire while waiting for them to become engaged in the learning task. The learning task itself—if it is designed effectively—will do the pumping up automatically. Helping students set goals that they want to achieve is much easier than psychoanalyzing each student's lack of desire.

So once students have defined the goals they want to achieve, they then must *decide* to achieve them. The student who wanted to improve his reading ability so he could read a Harry Potter book must now decide to *do* things that will lead to the achievement of that goal. This is where the educator has the most power to influence learning: helping the student set realistic, appropriate learning goals that will lead to the accomplishment of the student's desired outcome. Bandura (1994) calls this type of instruction "guided mastery."

Students who are addicted to failure never really decide to do anything. They sit and wait for the teacher to direct them. Teachers or educational leaders who are addicted to failure likewise avoid making the decisions they need to make (decisions that involve risk) because they are afraid of failure. For example, they implement district or state mandates without deciding how those mandates can actually benefit specific students in their classroom or school. Figure 1.2 shows that *decision* is the second step toward success.

A noneducation example helps illustrate our point. The American Heart Association (2007) reports that more than four out of five smokers wish they could quit. So when they say, "I'm addicted," a friend might ask: "Do you really want to stop?" "Oh yes, but I've tried, and I can't." The next question the friend could pose is: "Have you ever actually *decided* to stop?" Most smokers will admit that they can't bring themselves to make the decision. One smoker described it to us this way, "There's still something inside me that wants to keep smoking." In other words, "I can't go against my own desire, so I just won't make the decision to stop, because there's

Figure 1.2 Decision

always the chance that my inner desire might take over again and cause me to smoke." As Schaler (2000) asserts in his book by the same title, "Addiction is a choice." We recognize that genetic tendencies can predispose people to certain types of addictions, but we assert that people still have power over their own conduct. They can choose to overcome an addiction to failure. They can choose to succeed.

Students and teachers are not very different from the smoker who avoids making a decision to quit. Every human being is born with a powerful inner strength: the power to choose, or the power of personal agency. It is the most important attribute anyone possesses. A student can choose to focus her attention on the teacher or on a book or on a text message that just arrived. A teacher can choose to focus his attention on helping a student overcome a hurdle or on how to avoid the next inservice meeting. The power of choice is always with us, and that power is far greater than most realize. When one exercises this inner power, one begins *talking about it*, as shown in Figure 1.2. Decision making is more than the thought process identified in the *desire* stage of the Three D's. When we make a decision, we eventually share it with someone else.

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The example of Shawn, the young adult with a reading disability, points to the power of talking about one's decision. He had to decide to change. He had to decide to submit himself to a peer tutor who wanted to help him. He had to decide to try, and not until he made those decisions public (to "talk about it" with his tutor and others), did he see any success. Deciding can be a scary thing. When anyone decides on a new course of action, an old way of being must be left behind. After becoming more proficient in reading, Shawn could no longer describe himself as "disabled." He might still have felt the effects of learning problems he had suffered in the past, but he could no longer accept sympathy from others because of his difficulty with reading. Why? Because he became more proficient at the task. He *decided* to change. He exercised his personal power of agency to *do* something different and to *be* someone different. As he made these decisions, he began talking to others about them.

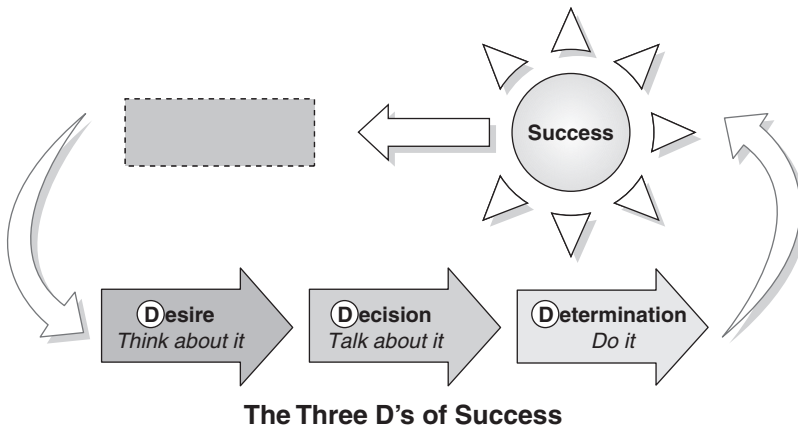
In this book, when we discuss personal agency or the power to choose, we are talking about a particular kind of choice making. *Educare*, the Latin root of the word *education*, means to "draw out." The process of education, then, is to draw out the good that is already inside students—to amplify the positive characteristics, talents, and abilities that define them. So as educators help students make a decision, the quality of the decision matters. It is not just a process of helping students make *any* decision, good or bad. It is trying to draw out the good (see Hansen, 2001). It is helping students learn how to make decisions that empower them to be more effective contributors to society. The addict makes decisions every day to remain addicted. An effective teacher is one who helps others make decisions that lead them away from harmful addictions, particularly the addiction to failure.

DETERMINATION

The process of leading others away from harmful behavior and toward a worthy goal demands determination. This is the third of the Three D's. This is the hard work part of success.

This occurs when a student cannot resist the pull to move toward that good goal. The student or teacher has progressed beyond “thinking about it” and “talking about it.” Now it’s time to *do* it, as shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Determination



The story of Coach Jim Ellis’s swim team in inner city Philadelphia shows the effects of determination, as depicted in the movie *Pride* (see Rainer, 2007). With their recreation center about to be shut down, Coach Ellis invited a group of young people who lacked direction in their lives to become swimmers. During their first swim meet they lost every race to the opposing team. Then on the way back home, they joked about their opponents and made light of their own failure.

Coach Ellis then gave them a stern lecture and asked if they wanted to change or if they wanted to continue to experience failure as they always had. He chastised them for making light of their own poor performance and helped them face reality. The next day they all came to the pool ready to work, ready to *do it*. They became *determined* not only as swimmers but as students. With Ellis as their guide, their determination paid off. Their skills developed. Their confidence increased, and their ability to win meets changed dramatically. They

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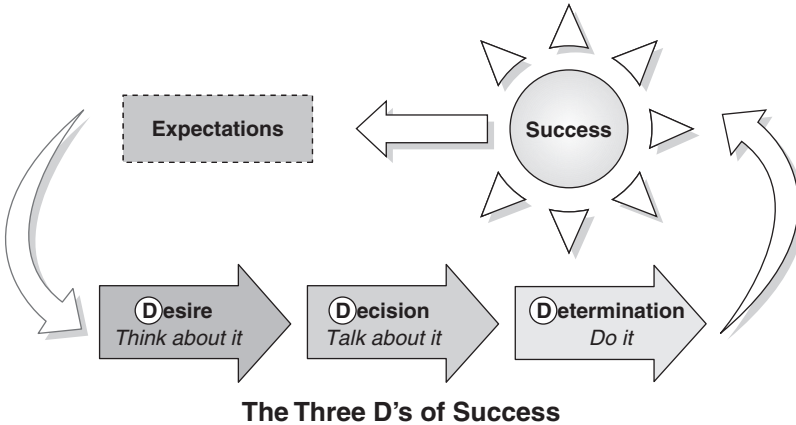
eventually placed first in a national swim meet, and some of the team members went on to enter the Olympic trials.

This coach and his swimmers developed an understanding of the Three D's of Success. They had a *desire*, expressed as a goal: to win meets. They exercised their personal agency by *deciding* to give up unproductive ways of behaving and trade them in for more effective ways. They then became relentlessly *determined* to succeed, and every time they succeeded, their expectations rose. As their expectations rose, their desire to achieve more also increased. Coach Ellis did not need to infuse them with new desire. The desire came naturally as their expectations expanded. They knew they could achieve what they had achieved at the previous meet, and so they then wanted or *desired* to achieve more so they could advance to the next level.

EXPECTATIONS

The *Expectations* box in Figure 1.4 is perhaps the most critical part of the Three D's model. This model focuses primarily on the expectations of the learner. Until students' expectations of themselves increase, their performance will remain the same. We are not referring to a mercurial type of hope that comes and goes. When we say *expectation*, we mean a firm belief that the goal will be achieved (see Bandura, 1994). Given that the goal is something that the student has never achieved before, such expectations can be daunting. Because the former goal has already been achieved—however small that goal was—the new goal is clearly attainable. We talk more in later chapters about how the teacher's expectations also rise as a result of students' expectations rising.

If you begin examining your own conduct as an educator, you will see how apparent each of the Three D's is in your own life, as well as in the lives of your students—simple yet powerful. When a student is failing, that student is lacking in one or more of the Three D's. When students are succeeding, they are following the complete path outlined in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4 Expectations

Each student experiences the Three D's differently. One student may have the most difficulty with the decision phase, while another may struggle most with determination. Each may need a different type of help while moving through the Three D's, but each of the D's is present when someone is continuing to improve. The model constitutes a tool that teachers can use every day in their practice. Whether the student is a young child, an adolescent, or an adult, the Three D's apply equally to all.

The power of the model is that it proposes a way to lift the unmotivated student. Rather than searching for reasons for a student's poor performance, the teacher helps the student set achievable goals, make decisions to go after those goals, become determined to achieve the goals, and finally attain success. By focusing on a student's self-generated success, expectations increase, desire grows, personal agency expands, and determination strengthens. It is a cyclical process, as Figure 1.4 illustrates. The student who succeeds once wants to succeed again and again.

When a student is not progressing through the cycle of the Three D's, the student becomes susceptible to an addiction to failure. How can a teacher recognize such a tendency? Simply

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think of the Three D's cycle in reverse. When a student lacks desire, has trouble making a decision to accomplish a task, and gives up easily, the student's expectations decrease, desire suffers, decisions become even more difficult, and determination evaporates. When these symptoms become apparent, the student is at risk for developing an addiction to failure.

APPLYING THE THREE D'S OF SUCCESS

At the beginning of the school year, Samantha, a sixth-grade student, scored in the fourth percentile on a national comprehension exam. The results of the criterion-referenced test also showed serious deficiencies in reading, language, and comprehension. She appeared to have attention deficit disorder (ADD) but was always well-behaved and often tried very hard to stay on task even though it was difficult for her.

When I presented her parents with the facts, they agreed to have her tested but were reluctant to consider medication for ADD. Even though her test scores were low, the results of the entire battery of assessments showed that she did not qualify for special education services. Her parents had a deep desire to help her improve but did not know exactly how to proceed. I trained the parents to tutor Samantha every day for one hour. The training focused on comprehension strategies taught in school. I also administered extra comprehension quizzes to Samantha at school and helped her select books that were below sixth-grade level—books that would ensure incremental success. I also worked with her for a few minutes each day on vocabulary and comprehension skills in addition to regular classroom instruction on reading. Each time Samantha experienced success—which was often—her desire to try harder increased and she became more determined.

The family carried out its commitment, and every week Samantha took a comprehension test on each book she read. Success brought more determination to read more difficult books, and by the end of the year Samantha was reading on a sixth-grade level. Samantha's desire to read increased each

time she experienced success. She became more empowered to make decisions about her learning. As she became more empowered, her determination strengthened significantly. Each time following her success I could see her expectations rise. As her expectations rose, her desire to read increased incrementally. She was experiencing the Three D's of Success.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Like most of the ideas in this book, using the Three D's of Success in a classroom requires teachers and students to make a perceptual shift. Regardless of how success oriented teachers or students might view themselves, focusing on the Three D's will increase the types and amounts of success in the classroom. Likewise, the fear of becoming addicted to failure will definitely decrease. How to make it happen? Every teacher will find a different way. We suggest the following strategy, based on research and our own lived experience:

- **Try the Three D's yourself.** If you plan to convince your students that the Three D's will help them find more success in their learning and in their lives, you will need to experiment with the model yourself. Identify one of your own goals—a goal that you want to achieve but one that has seemed impossible—and go through the Three D's. Choose a goal that you will be able to share with your students. Think about it. Imagine yourself achieving it. Decide to do what is necessary to achieve it. Talk about your decision with others. Then do it. Become determined. Once you have found some success (however small at first), see what happens to your expectations. As your expectations rise, note that your desire to do more increases. Keep working through the cycle until you experience each phase of the Three D's.

- **Share your experience with your students.** Once you have experienced the Three D's in helping you reach what seemed to be an unreachable goal, share your experience and

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a copy of the Three D's model with your class. You can use stories from read-aloud books or brief video clips from movies, such as *Hoosiers*, *Remember the Titans*, *Chariots of Fire*, or *Pride*. You might also consider stories of sports heroes or news articles depicting people who have succeeded where success seemed impossible. Before doing this, think of some class goals that you could set as a group—goals the class has never before reached. Ask students to come to consensus on one of those goals that they would like to achieve together. Help them see that if they want to achieve the goal, they will need to **desire it**, focus on it, and think about it, especially when they are not required to think about it. Encourage them to talk about the goal with each other to demonstrate that they have really **decided** to achieve it.

- **Develop a class plan for achieving the goal.** For students to become **determined**, they will need to develop and agree on a plan for achieving the hard-to-reach goal. You can do this with different levels of participation from the class members depending on their age and development. The more contribution they make, however, the greater will be their determination to achieve the goal. Enlist all students in the development of the plan. You can begin by asking for written suggestions that you combine and redistribute. The aim is to leave no one out of the process. Make certain that the plan includes natural, easy ways of tracking class members' progress. For example, in a math class, track the mean, median, and mode scores for each chapter assessment. Discuss with students the desired goal for each of these measures and show progress toward the goal on a chart viewed by all members of the class.

- **Implement the plan and track success.** To keep students working toward the goal, find successes, however small, every day and talk about those successes with the class. If you notice a day or two when the class seems to regress—moving away from the goal—avoid mentioning their poor

performance. Rather, use the data to help you restructure your own teaching so that the next day can yield better performance. The key here is to find positive progress every day. This does not mean that you should manufacture good performance where none is to be found. The Three D's is not about pretending good things are happening when they're not. It is about focusing relentlessly and constantly on real success, even when the success comes in small increments.

- **Talk about the Three D's with individual students.** Build a culture of success in your classroom by talking about the Three D's with individual students, as well as with the whole class. For example, when a student who has been reluctant to focus on an assigned task finally exerts appropriate effort, you might say, "I can see you've really *decided* to do it. You've made a *decision* to succeed." Or when a student is working particularly hard to complete an assignment, you might say, "You seem really *determined*." Of particular importance, when a student is making obvious progress, you should reinforce that progress by saying, "It seems like you are *expecting* so much more of yourself than you did last week." The point is that the Three D's model is not something to be read and set aside. It's a way of teaching and learning. It needs to be built into the fabric of the class. When students begin using the terms *desire*, *decision*, *determination*, *success*, and *expectations* themselves, you will know that you are building a culture of success in the classroom.