

## WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

“Rick Stiggins has done an amazing job capturing in plain language and heartwarming stories what so many organizations, think tanks, school districts, and others have been struggling to articulate. That is, the importance of cultivating student self-efficacy through transparency, ongoing feedback, and quality assessment methods. He does a masterful job articulating what many practitioners and school leaders have long been saying—we have to stop treating the process of assessment like a ‘gotcha’ and create systems that value transparency and fuel student motivation and confidence. With appropriate standards and guidelines, we can create processes alongside our students (and even families and communities) to assess and drive student learning.”

—**Chris DonFrancesco**

Senior Policy Analyst

Education Policy & Practice, NEA

“With a career that has consistently challenged our traditional thinking about assessment, Rick Stiggins lays out a compelling vision for assessment with students at the center of the action. The core of the is assessment FOR learning, where the student monitors and manages their own understanding and growth, not just the teacher. This book is an amazing read, especially in the way it speaks directly to students, teachers, school leaders, families, the community, and policy-makers. Stiggins also humanizes assessment by digging into emotions, confidence, and relationships . . . and by telling his own learning story! In doing so, he makes us all think about our own journey and how we have been impacted, in both good and bad ways, by curriculum, instruction, and assessment.”

—**Timothy Dohrer**

Director, Teacher Leadership

Northwestern University

“Last year Dr. Stiggins conducted a professional development seminar in my district. I attended that session after which he invited me to provide feedback on a draft of his new book. I was surprised to discover that his manuscript

perfectly described the same assessment for teaching and learning strategy used by the U.S. Army since 1980 to evaluate and train each individual and unit. I am a retired Army officer, with 30 years of experience training and leading US Army combat units. As a commander, operations and training officer, and director of a major US Army school, I know that Dr. Stiggins's assessment strategy works. His book describes assessment based on research in a manner that is understandable and compelling to the board members so we can allocate resources for training for administrators and faculty with little prior understanding of complex assessment practices. In short, this book should be provided to every school board member interested in a coherent strategy to improve student academic performance."

—Richard P. Geier,  
Colonel, US Army (Ret)  
School Board Member  
Beaufort County School District

"For students, confidence comes from understanding what you are required to know and be able to do to master the standards being taught. Formative assessments FOR learning, as Rick Stiggins defines and applies it, can give them that understanding. This puts students in control of their learning. I have been a teacher, school administrator, district director of transformation schools, assistant superintendent, regional superintendent and now as a current sitting superintendent trying to accelerate student learning after the COVID pandemic and its impact on students. What I find profoundly impactful in Rick Stiggins's book is the power that my faculty and I can derive from making sure that we build student confidence by making sure that they understand the end goal of their instruction, where they are now in relation to those expectations, how they can close the gap between those two keys to their success. If students have a clear understanding of these, it will reduce their anxiety, the key to building confidence. As Rick Stiggins so aptly puts it, 'successful learning in any context is as much about emotion as it is about cognition and good teaching

is as much about managing student emotions as it is about managing instructional strategies.”

—**Frank Rodriguez**

School District Superintendent  
Beaufort County School District School

“This book is a must-have for parents, teachers, intervention teams, school leaders, and educational policy makers seeking to define the path to success for our children and students. Rick poignantly weaves real life experiences and years of research into simple logical tools for teachers, parents, and intervention teams to empower the student to be successful, confident, resilient, self-reliant, and approach learning with joy and enthusiasm. The simple tools for success are clearly outlined giving parents, teachers, students, and intervention teams an approach to learning by supporting our students through clear goals, transparency, and guidance in the path to reach those goals, as well as ample successes along the way leading to confidence resulting in the student’s ability to be responsible, passionate, resilient, and successful lifelong learners. It’s a must-read for every educator and parent simplifying how we can align to truly give our children the gift of confidence.”

—**Kim Harley**

Parent, Beaverton OR

“Based on his own personal experience, Rick describes how the often overlooked dynamic of the emotional health of the student affected his confidence, ability to learn, and overall self-esteem. This was especially relevant to me since my own grandson broke down in tears when extensive testing revealed he had severe dyslexia and was otherwise highly intelligent. He tearfully admitted that he had always considered himself to be ‘stupid.’ Knowing that his intelligence was normal and after receiving the tools and support to overcome his dyslexia, his anxiety went away, his sleep improved, his self-esteem skyrocketed, and he became much more comfortable and successful in school. This book is crucial reading for all teachers and administrators,

but it is especially important for those involved in serving students with special needs. Rick describes how the self-inflicted hopelessness of a struggling learner can affect not only their academic future, but also their perception of their place in society. He speaks for teachers and parents who want educational leaders to supply them with the tools they need to prevent potentially devastating loss of self-esteem and to build in students the desire to pursue the knowledge they will need to succeed in life. This is a critically important book that will motivate and guide parents, teachers, and PTA leaders to join with their students to advocate that local, state, and federal educational policymakers supply teachers with strategies to recognize learning disorders and teaching methods to help every student reach their targets with confidence, self-esteem, and pride.”

—Roger Wickland

Grandfather, Portland OR

# Give Our Students the Gift of Confidence

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*This book is dedicated to the teachers of my life for showing me that student well-being is the essential mission of schools.*

# Give Our Students the Gift of Confidence

It's Essential for Learning Success

Rick Stiggins

CORWIN

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Thousand Oaks, California 91320  
(800) 233-9936  
www.corwin.com

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London EC1Y 1SP  
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SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.  
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Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044  
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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

23 24 25 26 27 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Foreword

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Rick Stiggins based this wonderful book on three fundamental premises. Each of these premises has a long history of coming in and going out of fashion in education. At times, each has been at the forefront of educators' consciousness, and at other times, nearly forgotten. Each offers profound implications for how we think about teaching and learning, the way we organize schools, and the criteria by we judge our success as educators.

The first premise stems from the way we define "curriculum." Learning in any subject area or academic discipline is infinite. There is no limit to what knowledge and skills an individual can acquire in any area of study. However, a curriculum is finite. When educators and subject area experts set forth a curriculum, they specify the specific subset of content and skills within that infinite body of knowledge that they believe are most important for students to learn. Having delineated that finite curriculum, the job of educators is to ensure that all students learn that curriculum excellently. Not just some. Not just those who are gifted or have special academic talents. Not just those who are privileged or economically advantaged. Not just those who come from stable homes with supportive parents and families. All students! It makes no sense that educators and subject area experts would develop a curriculum that includes things that some students would not be expected to learn well.

Of course, this idea that all students can and should learn excellently is not new in education. Its roots can be traced to the hallmark work of Benjamin Bloom over a half century ago. Rather than focusing on equality of educational opportunities, Bloom argued we should focus on equity in education results. Although students enter school with vastly different backgrounds and experiences that require different approaches to instruction, our task as educators

is to ensure that all students learn well, regardless of those initial differences. In developing the instructional process that the labeled “mastery learning,” Bloom (1968) showed that with sufficient time and appropriate help, nearly all students could reach a high level of mastery. The primary responsibility of educators, therefore, is to provide the time and appropriate help needed to guarantee that all students do learn excellently the knowledge and skills described in the school curriculum.

The second premise is that success yields confidence. This pervasive human trait is frequently missed in modern education programs that emphasize student differences rather than qualities that all students share. Regardless of their age, race, gender, economic, or cultural background, students want to succeed and feel confident in their ability to learn. Success is the most powerful motivational device available to educators today. Students persist in activities at which they experience success, and they avoid, with passion, those activities at which they are not success, or believe they cannot be. Students who experience success on learning tasks feel good about themselves and their ability to learn. They feel confident in learning situations and persist in challenging learning tasks because they believe their efforts will bring success.

The importance of incremental success has been recognized for decades by video game developers. Take, for example, Pac-Man, one of the earliest and most popular of all video games. When the Japanese arcade game manufacturer Namco Limited introduced Pac-Man in 1980, it became an overnight sensation. People of all ages throughout the world began playing the game, all vying to improve their scores. The goal of the game was simple: gobble up the dots in a maze while avoiding capture by ghosts. To this day, it remains one of the highest-grossing and best-selling video games ever developed, generating more than \$15 billion in revenue.

Pac-Man’s popularity is certainly not explained by the task. There is nothing inherently interesting about gobbling up

dots. It also has nothing to do with cultural relevance or innate appeal. Pac-Man was equally popular among men and women, young and old, in countries throughout the entire world. Nor does it have anything to do with attaining a tangible reward. If you succeed in gobbling up all the dots in Pac-Man, your reward is to be presented with another game with more dots in a more complex maze and faster ghosts. That's like saying to a student, "If you solve these 10 problems correctly, I'll give you 10 more to do, and this time, they're going to be more difficult!" That's some reward!

Pac-Man is popular because players experience success on a challenging task. Every time you play the game, you have the chance to improve your score. When you succeed, you feel better about yourself, more confident, more assured, and better prepared for the next challenge. Most importantly, that success isn't based on doing better than others, but by seeing your own progress and the pride you feel in becoming better.

The challenge for educators is similarly to ensure that students experience learning success. And just like is true with video games, those successes don't have to be constant. Sometimes you fail. Even in Pac-Man, players get to "die" three times before the game ends. But those successes must come early, they need to be recognized, they need to be regular, and they need to be seen as the result of students' efforts.

The third premise is that students should have a major role in determining their success. According to Rick, this starts with helping students unlock three interconnected gifts: (1) a clear understanding of their learning targets, (2) access to information that allows them to monitor their learning progress, and (3) specific learning strategies that help them close the gap between where they are and what they want to achieve. Students who know how to unlock these gifts are more likely to feel in control of their learning success, take corrective action when needed to ensure greater success, and become more confident learners in any learning environment.

Based on these three premises, Rick then describes how to accomplish these noble goals in today's modern classrooms. But unlike so many other authors of current books about improving student learning, who are long on opinions but short on evidence, Rick writes from the unique perspective of a well-informed researcher who is also a highly skilled and experienced practitioner. Through personal stories of his own discouraging and confidence-building learning experiences, he describes his vision of "student-involved classroom assessment FOR learning" in practical ways that will make sense to teachers at all levels of education, school and district leaders, education policy makers, parents and families, and other school community members. He then goes on to outline how to structure "learning success teams," combining the knowledge, skills, and energy of these important stakeholders, in order to build educational programs that promote the individual well-being of all students.

I believe you will like this book for two reasons. First, there is a clarity and freshness about the insights Rick offers that will have you constantly saying, "Wow, I never thought about it in that way." But second and more importantly, you are likely to conclude each chapter saying, "I know we can do this!" What more could any dedicated educator ask of a book?

Thomas R. Guskey, PhD  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Kentucky

## REFERENCE

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Bloom, B. S. (1968). Learning for mastery. *Evaluation Comment* (UCLA-CSIEP), 1(2), 1-12.

# About the Author

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Rick Stiggins has devoted his professional life to understanding keys to student academic success in the classroom. His mission has been to help teachers, school leaders, policy makers, and school communities apply research-based policies and classroom practices that help all students experience the highest possible levels of learning success.

His preparation to fulfill this mission began as a psychology major at the State University of New York at Plattsburg followed by doctoral studies educational psychology at Michigan State University. Rick's focus on keys to student success was sharpened with early career experiences at the University of Minnesota, on the research staff of the Northwest Regional Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) in Portland Oregon, and as a visiting scholar at Stanford University. During this phase of his own development, Rick spent over a decade in classrooms with students and teachers researching and striving to understand (1) the task demands teacher face in managing the day-to-day classroom assessment process, and (2) how that process can positively impact students' motivation, actions, and achievement, as well as their sense of themselves as learners.

With this foundation of understanding in hand, Rick founded the Assessment Training Institute (ATI) in 1992 in Portland, a professional development company whose mission was to promote the "assessment literacy". He and his team developed and disseminated print, video, and online offerings that help educators, parents and school communities in general learn to gather dependable evidence of student achievement and use that evidence effectively to develop truly effective instructional practices. Rick and the ATI team turned the spotlight onto the breakthrough practice of using "assessment FOR learning" or of engaging

students in ongoing self-monitoring and management of their own growth while it is happening.

Primary among the materials Rick and his team created has been an award-winning professional text for teachers entitled, *An Introduction to Classroom Assessment FOR Student Learning*, now available in its seventh edition. In addition, he has authored numerous books, articles, and other writings on sound practice for pre- and in-service training, community outreach, and educational leadership that have helped literally hundreds of thousands of teachers, school leaders, and community leaders around the world improve their classroom practice, educational leadership capabilities, and professional confidence. Through these channels, it is safe to assume that Rick's work has impacted the learning and self-confidence of millions of students over the past forty years.