

# ClassroomLeadership

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## Potential in Action

### Teaching Students to Reach for Their Dreams

by Robert Marzano

We can all remember a time when the actions of others inspired us. Then, once inspired, we moved into action. We set goals and started working toward them. As we did so, we felt a fresh vitality. We discovered skills and abilities we didn't know we had. We approached problems and decision making differently. New aspects of our personalities were revealed to us. Perhaps most importantly, while working on our goals, we realized a new level of satisfaction and fulfillment.

We need to ensure that our students also experience the delight of accomplishment. The Pathfinder Project, a flexible life skills curriculum, is designed to help students identify goals of intense importance to them and supports them in achieving those goals. Through a series of inspirational stories, students learn about the great accomplishments ordinary people have made and discover their own potential for greatness.

### Stories, Quotes, and Projects

One of the purposes of presenting inspirational stories to students is to help them realize that people who accomplish extraordinary things follow similar patterns of behavior—patterns that become a framework for students to follow as they set and pursue their own personal goals. The stories also provide a venue for teaching and reinforcing literal and inferential comprehension skills and for presenting self-analysis questions to students.

In addition to the stories, the curriculum provides a series of more than 900 inspirational quotes that can be used to motivate students and remind them of the importance of pursuing their passions and the actions they must take to do so. The centerpiece of The Pathfinder Project is the personal project, which helps students identify a personally relevant goal they would like to achieve; learn a process they might follow to achieve such a goal; and develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve this goal and function successfully in life. These skills include

- Information gathering and synthesizing skills.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Decision-making skills.
- Imagery and memory skills.
- Critical thinking and reasoning skills.
- Self-control and self-regulation.

### Success Stories

The Pathfinder Project was piloted in more than 500 U.S. elementary, intermediate, and high schools during the 2003–04 school year. It is also being implemented in the New York State Department of Corrections. Initial reports about the curriculum are promising.

For example, an intermediate school in Newtown, Conn., integrated the inspirational quotations from The

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Pathfinder Project into a 5th and 6th grade unit on Chinese culture, language, symbols, and writing. Each student chose a quotation that was personally meaningful and translated it, as literally as possible, into Chinese characters. This required students to demonstrate a high level of synthesis and interpretive skills because they really had to think and communicate with one another to find the closest Chinese characters to communicate the meaning of their quotation.

Meanwhile, in 4th grade classrooms in Plano, Tex., students involved with The Pathfinder Project created their own inspirational quotes. Here is a sampling of these students' words of wisdom:

*"The apple might be rotten on the outside, but it still might be good on the inside."*

*"Aim your rocket and shoot to the stars."*

*"Knowledge is honey, so follow the bee through the book."*

*"Be the city lights and shine together."*

*"Be careful which ladder you climb. One might have a slide at the top."*

As educators, we strive to teach our children well. We teach them arithmetic, science, history, and physics. We help them achieve on tests and secure scholarships. What we often fail to do, however, is teach them the skills that may lead to the richest expression of their individual potential: the ability to self-examine, discover their personal passions and gifts, overcome negative thinking, and reach fearlessly for their dreams.

## The Pathfinder Project

The Pathfinder Project is founded on four general principles:

1. Everyone has deeply held desires to accomplish something that is highly meaningful to them and intensely personal.
2. When pursuing these accomplishments, individuals tap into and use energy and abilities that are otherwise difficult, if not impossible, to access.
3. When pursuing these accomplishments, individuals frequently learn a great deal about themselves.
4. Commonly, an inspirational event awakens these deeply held desires.

The Pathfinder Project is designed to be highly flexible. The classroom teacher can implement the curriculum in a variety of ways, including

- A unit or course that lasts a few weeks.
- A unit or course that lasts a quarter or a semester.
- A language arts course that focuses on writing.
- An after-school program.
- A home study course that parents and children can engage in together.
- Individual Pathfinder components embedded into an existing curriculum.

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More information about The Pathfinder Project can be found at [www.PathfinderEducation.com](http://www.PathfinderEducation.com).

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