

THE 12

TOUCHSTONES

OF GOOD TEACHING

**A CHECKLIST FOR STAYING
FOCUSED EVERY DAY**



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Introduction

“Ladies and gentleman, the plane is safe,” flight attendant Michael von Reth reassured the frightened passengers of Qantas airlines flight QF32. “Please take your seats. The captain will speak with you soon,” he added, more hopefully than factually as the phone to the cockpit had gone dead (de Crespigny, 2012, np).

Moments before, as the aircraft climbed into a clear sky above Singapore en route to Sydney on the morning of November 4, 2010, a tremendous explosion had rocked the cabin, followed by what sounded like “marbles rolling across a corrugated tin roof.” Looking out the window, it was apparent that one of the aircraft’s four jet engines had exploded with enough force to rip the right wing open like a sardine can, spraying shrapnel into the fuselage. Flumes of fuel were now streaming out of the disabled engine.

None of this was supposed to be happening, of course. Von Reth and 468 other passengers and crew members were flying in one of the newest, largest, and most advanced aircraft ever.

In the flight deck, a cacophony of alarms was sounding. Red lights flashed everywhere as Captain Richard Champion de Crespigny and three other pilots tried to maintain their composure and make sense of what was

happening. Engine 2 had blown. Engines 1, 3, and 4 were degraded as well. According to de Crespigny, that wasn't even the biggest of their concerns. Their fuel pumps had also failed, leaving them with no way to transfer fuel from the failing engine to the others. With fuel streaming out of the aircraft, it was unclear whether they would have enough to make an emergency landing back in Singapore.

On the ground, locals who witnessed the explosion in the air and saw the fiery Qantas plane in the sky began tweeting about it. Their tweets quickly went viral. Within 13 minutes of the explosion, Qantas's stock price began falling as a result.

As flight QF32 approached the airport, de Crespigny realized that even as one crisis—the loss of too much fuel—was averted, it had created another. The enormous craft was coming in fast and heavy—as much as 42 tons overweight for the landing. Due to hydraulic system failures, the brakes were down to 64 percent of capacity, and reverse thrusters were unable to reach full power. Even if de Crespigny could safely land the plane, would he be able to stop it?

As the plane approached the runway, the stall warning sounded; the plane was now flying too slow and in danger of losing lift beneath its wings. Somehow, the computers and flight instruments on the plane had been wrong, directing them to throttle back too much (Sexton, 2012).

It was too late to make any adjustments, though, so de Crespigny had no choice but to aim for the near end of the runway to give the plane and its damaged brakes as much room as possible to stop. As the plane touched down, de Crespigny jammed his back against the seat and stomped the brake pedals hard to the floor. Somehow, miraculously, the damaged plane hit the runaway smoothly, and after a long heart-in-the-throat moment, it managed to roll to a safe stop. As it did, Michael von Reth came over the intercom: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Singapore. . . . I think you'll agree that was one of the nicest landings we have experienced for a while" (de Crespigny, 2012, np).

Afterward, Captain de Crespigny was lauded as a hero in Australia. Certainly, his 15,000 hours of flight time and training in the Royal Australian Air Force had left him with the experience and composure he needed to land the aircraft safely and allow all of his passengers to walk away unharmed from what could have been one of the worst disasters in aviation history.

However, another unheralded component of the miraculous saga of QF32 was a simple technology that worked when all of the equipment, sensors, and computers on board the multimillion-dollar aircraft did not: checklists.

Altogether, de Crespigny and his first officer, Matt Hicks, worked through some 120 checklists to respond to the aircraft's system failures as a string of problems cascaded into one another. Throughout the whole ordeal, the checklists kept the flight crew calm, allowing de Crespigny and Hicks to stay focused on what mattered most so they could land the jet safely (Sexton, 2012, np).

Could checklists help teachers?

This book starts with a simple question: Could the simple “technology” of checklists, which are so effective in the aviation industry, be applied to teaching?

Preposterous, you might say. Teaching is nothing like flying an airplane. Children aren't machines that function or malfunction, nor do they respond to step-by-step procedures, no matter how many if-then branches you might hang from a decision tree.

Agreed. Yet consider, for a moment, hospital operating and emergency rooms. Patients often arrive with unspecified maladies. Unexpected complications result from even the most straightforward procedures. Surgeons cut into patients expecting to operate on one problem yet find another. Doctors and nurses must make life-or-death decisions, regularly acting on limited information.

In *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*, surgeon Atul Gawande (2009) describes his effort to apply aviation-style checklists to the chaotic environment of the emergency room, where smart, well-educated people sometimes make deadly mistakes that could have been avoided had they only taken a moment to reflect on what they were doing. The results of his experiment were stunning. In the eight hospitals where Gawande and his team applied checklists, major complications from surgery fell by 36 percent, and deaths dropped by 47 percent (Gawande, 2009). In all, 150 lives were saved—all from using checklists. At The Johns Hopkins Hospital, a simple, five-step checklist was used when administering IVs to patients (e.g., wash hands, treat patient skin with antiseptic, put sterile drapes over patient, wear a mask and sterile clothing, and put a sterile dressing over infection site), which resulted in the infection rate from IVs dropping from 11 to 0 percent. When a battery of checklists was applied throughout the state of Michigan, some \$175 million in costs and 1,500 lives were saved (Gawande, 2009).

Again, we ask, could checklists have a similar positive effect in classrooms?

What if doing things differently made a difference?

All of these data from the medical world are impressive. Still, educating a child isn't a step-by-step procedure like surgery. It's more complex. Teachers must get to know their students and respond to each according to his or her individual needs. There's no prescribed formula or process to follow for that.

However, it's often the most complex situations where simple checklists can be the most useful. Checklists help doctors and nurses not because they're slow-witted or absent-minded but because of the staggering volume of information they are expected to assimilate into their practice.

Like medicine, education has had less-than-stellar success rates. Nationwide, nearly one-quarter of all students fail to graduate with their

peers (Aud et al., 2012). Among those who do graduate, more than one-third are ill prepared for either employment or college (Greene & Foster, 2003), thereby leaving the United States with one of the highest college dropout rates in the world—40 percent (Schneider, 2010).

Teachers are not to blame for all of these problems. Nevertheless, decades of research suggest that effective teachers can have a tremendous, positive effect on student success. A great teacher—one in the top fifth of all teachers, statistically speaking—can help students gain as much as 18 months of learning for every year they are in the classroom (Hanushek, 2002). That’s pretty impressive.

It would be one thing, of course, if we had no idea what great teachers do to get these kinds of results. Fortunately, decades of education research have given us a great deal of insight into what works in the classroom, allowing us to identify specific teacher behaviors and practices that can make a big difference for students.

Stated differently, what research also suggests is that teachers can devote time to the wrong things, engaging in practices that simply don’t work—or that don’t work as well as other practices. Consider for a moment that pilots don’t necessarily need to exert more effort to land a plane safely and nurses don’t need to put in extra hours to prevent hospital infections. They simply take different actions and engage in more thoughtful behaviors when they’re in the cockpit or operating room.

To a large extent, the same thing could be said of education. Effective teachers do not operate on different school calendars or with longer class periods; they simply do things differently with the time they’re given. Any teacher might therefore wonder: What different actions could I take in my classroom to help more students become more successful?

If there were one thing you could do differently each day to help even just one student do a little better, would you do it? What about three things to help three students? What if there were 12 things you could do every day to help all of your students? Would you do them?

If we know better, why don't we do better?

Given everything we know about good teaching practices (and the fact that none of it has been kept a secret), we might expect to see research-based practices universally applied in most, if not all, classrooms. Unfortunately, that's not what we see. Generally speaking, teachers appear to be struggling to apply what we know from research in their practices. In some classrooms, research-based practices are simply absent; worksheets, true-false quizzes, and simplistic recognition-and-recall questions dominate. In other classrooms, teachers may attempt best practices but fall short in their implementation. For example, they may create clever assignments that do little to advance student learning.

Robert Pianta, a researcher from the University of Virginia, and his colleagues closely examined the educational experiences of 994 students from across the United States in grades 1, 3, and 5, and they concluded that 9 percent of students received poor-quality instruction and emotional support in all three grades. Conversely, only 7 percent of students received the benefit of high-quality instruction and emotional support for all three years (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, & Morrison, 2007). If we know so much about how teachers can improve student learning, then why isn't it consistently applied in all classrooms? To put a finer point on it, "If we know better, why don't we do better?" (Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004, p. 5).

How can we overcome information overload?

Educators might take some solace in knowing that they are not the only group that struggles to apply the known science of their profession. It takes the medical profession up to 17 years to apply some research findings with at least half of all patients. The "reason for the delay is not usually laziness or unwillingness," Gawande (2009) observes. "[It] is more often that the necessary knowledge has not been translated into a simple and usable

form” (p. 133). In medicine, doctors are subjected to a “deluge of 700,000 medical journal articles per year” (ibid.). As a result, as “know-how and sophistication have increased enormously across almost all our realms of endeavor, so has our struggle to deliver on them” (ibid., p. 11).

Sound familiar?

In a previous book, *Simply Better*, Goodwin observed that educators experience a similar distracting deluge of information.

In some ways, the countless studies, articles, and reports on education seem to create a phenomenon similar to what radio broadcasters refer to as signal-to-noise ratio, a measure of how much the true signal—be it Beethoven’s *Moonlight* sonata or late-night talk radio—is corrupted by static. Like the crackles and whistles that break up the signal of a faraway AM radio station, the preponderance of reports, information, and ideas in the field of education may have the effect of drowning out the big ideas—the key underlying principles of what’s most important when it comes to improving the odds for life success for all students. (Goodwin, 2011b, p. 2)

It is precisely for this reason—the complexity of teaching—that we first became interested in the idea of providing a checklist for teachers. Educators who found the five elements of effective schooling (as captured in the What Matters Most framework) to be helpful in clarifying and arranging their thinking made us wonder if we might do the same for teaching.

The aviation industry has developed a very different—and far more effective—way to condense new knowledge into practical application for pilots, as the following anecdote from Gawande (2009) illustrates. In January of 2008, the engines of a British Airways flight from Beijing to London unexpectedly seized up and shut off two miles from Heathrow Airport. The plane dropped like a stone from the sky and hit the ground at 124 miles per hour a mile short of the runway, but miraculously, no one was seriously

harm. Safety investigators carefully sifted through the damaged aircraft and eventually determined that the cause of the accident was ice crystals forming in the fuel line as the jet crossed over the Arctic.

In response, the Federal Aviation Administration issued a lengthy advisory, informing pilots how to avoid the problem and what to do if it occurred. A team at Boeing spent two weeks mulling over the advisory and translating it into practical guidance in the form of revisions to the standard checklist used for transpolar flights, which were subsequently sent out and uploaded into the cockpit computers of all Boeing aircraft.

Months later, when a transpolar flight from Shanghai to Atlanta experienced ice crystal-related engine failure while 36,000 feet above Great Falls, Montana, the crew immediately knew how to restart the engine and prevent the other engine from failing. As a result, the checklist likely saved the lives of 247 people.

This concept of checklists that are updated, in real time, into an eminently practical and usable knowledge base is compelling. Can educators take a first step in the direction that the aviation industry has already taken? Could we offer a simple, practical tool—distilled from thousands of research reports, books, and articles—that educators could take and immediately apply in their classrooms?

How do we put the pieces together and stay focused?

The profusion of knowledge and science available to educators creates another challenge: it can be difficult to see how the various bits of knowledge fit together. As Gawande (2009) has observed about the medical field, “We’re obsessed in medicine with having great components—the best drugs, the best devices, the best specialists—but [we] pay little attention to how to make them fit together well” (p. 184). He cites Donald Berwick of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, who has observed that current

medical practice is akin to building a car by combining the best automotive components available: “The engine of a Ferrari, the brakes of a Porsche, the suspension of a BMW, the body of a Volvo. . . . What we get, of course, is nothing close to a great car; we get a pile of expensive junk” (ibid.).

A similar phenomenon may be at work in education. Teachers are expected to assimilate and integrate dozens of individually worthy, yet disparate, ideas that are thrown at them by well-meaning administrators, consultants, and authors. Try differentiated instruction! Implement response to intervention! Back-map your lessons! Teach to learning styles! Be culturally responsive! Scaffold learning! Have a courageous conversation! Engage parents! Integrate technology! Use brain research! These may all be fine ideas in and of themselves, but without some scheme for putting them together in a meaningful way, they may wind up resembling a complicated (if not expensive) pile of junk.

An added complication, of course, is the fact that, like pilots in jet aircraft hurtling through the air, teachers often don’t have enough time to be contemplative or reflective while on the job. Claudia Meek (2003) captured the daily stresses of a classroom teacher with the following internal monologue:

Let’s see. I need to collect money for yearbooks, plus those Valentine letters from parents, and homework. I also need those permission slips so I can take the Accelerated Reader contest winners to lunch with me on Friday.

“Who has their pizza permission slips signed?” It’s so easy for them to remember the things they really want to do! Oh, and I need to remember the box tops for PTA.

“Kids, put your Valentines away for now. Our party will start at about 9:30.” I wish we could have the party after lunch, but then we have the awards assembly. “First, we work, then we’ll play.” Didn’t my grandmother say that?

Maybe I can at least get through our spelling words for this week. “Kids, please go to the word wall. This week all our words have a long e. How does the e get long?” I’ve got to hurry to get this done before recess. We really have a lot to cover today.

I’ll try to reach Brandon’s family during recess. I’ve got to finish his paperwork for the meeting. Poor little guy; he’s really trying hard. He’s doing well in his small reading group, but he’ll never pass those new grade-level competencies. Wish I could get in touch with his family by phone. I’ll write a letter tonight if it’s still disconnected. (p. 594)

This likely reflects what many teachers feel every day as they struggle to balance good instructional practice with the logistical demands of managing two dozen or more students in a classroom. Given the complications of fragmented and impractical information bombarding teachers who already have their hands full managing the daily challenges of their classrooms, is it any wonder that educators struggle to translate research into practice in their classrooms?

Why this checklist?

This is not the first or only checklist created for teachers, of course. The Internet is replete with them—a fact we were well aware of when we set out to create this checklist. Most of these checklists, however, focus on very specific tasks, such as unpacking standards, planning lessons, assessing student leadership qualities, or ensuring classroom orderliness. Thus, we felt we might contribute something far more valuable to educators if we could provide something of a master or meta-checklist—one that encapsulates and balances the big ideas about what it takes to be a great teacher: the ability to be demanding, supportive, and intentional.

Using Research to Identify What Matters Most

Of the many checklists available to teachers, some are more research-based than others. Professional wisdom has its place, of course, but for an initial effort to create a master checklist, we wanted to ensure that it was based on more than just what people *think* teachers should do and that it had a solid research base. The latter was informed by the following research efforts:

- In 2009, a McREL team, with funding from the Stupski Foundation, launched a major, yearlong effort to capture what's currently known about what it takes to ensure the success of all students—especially children of color living in poverty. To wrap our arms and minds around all that has been written and offered to educators in the name of improving student outcomes, we scanned thousands of research articles, books, and studies and eventually identified and digested more than 1,000 studies and reports related to seven components of school systems and the learning needs of underserved students, including pedagogy and curriculum. These reports formed the basis of both *Changing the Odds for Student Success: Doing What Matters Most* (Goodwin, 2010) and *Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to Change the Odds for Student Success* (Goodwin, 2011b), which in turn served as part of the foundation for this work.

- In 2010, McREL researchers updated our meta-analysis of research on instructional practices that formed the basis of *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). This new peer-reviewed research study (Beesley & Aphthorp, 2010) examined 512 studies of instructional strategies using meta-analytic research techniques. Results from the new research findings were translated into a revised, second edition of *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012).

- Since 2010, Bryan Goodwin has been writing a monthly column focused on research synopses for ASCD's *Educational Leadership* magazine.

As of this writing, more than 20 such columns have been published. Much of the research underlying this book has come from that work.

While creating our checklist, we looked for practices that, in essence, jumped off the pages of research journals for their significant effect on student achievement. We were mindful of what John Hattie (2009) calls “hinge-point” effect sizes—those effect sizes that are significant enough for educators to see “real-world change” in student achievement. Accordingly, we don’t dwell on things such as classroom configuration or parental communication. Although both are important (certainly, there’s no case to be made for cluttered classrooms or stonewalling parents), there’s not an abundance of data that suggest they are so important that educators should strive to do them *every day*. Moreover, they may be better conceived as secondary behaviors or as practices that support other, more critical components and deep principles of effective teaching.

Connecting to the Deep Principles of Teaching

As we noted earlier, the deluge of information bombarding educators can create a weak signal-to-noise ratio in which the signal (i.e., what matters most) can easily get lost. Rather than add to the noise, this book aims to cut through it by signaling the deep principles of effective teaching. In other words, we aim to help teachers understand the deep *whys* that underlie what they should be doing in the classroom.

Formative assessment, for example, is important. However, we don’t test students for the sake of testing them; we test them for deeper purposes, such as setting expectations for learning, checking for understanding, and guiding instruction. That’s why you won’t find a “test kids” item on this list. Instead, you’ll find assessment practices embedded in checklist items related to setting high expectations for students, understanding student learning needs, and adapting instruction according to learning needs. These are the real reasons—the *whys*—for classroom assessment.

Another way to view these deep principles might be as the universals of teaching that apply across grade levels, subjects, and cultures. While writing this book, we found ourselves traveling across the United States, Australia, Canada, and East Asia to speak to and work with educators in a variety of schools (elementary, middle, and high school), geographic settings (rural, suburban, and urban), and student populations (including indigenous students and those learning English as a second language). These experiences informed our thinking about these deep principles. We wanted a list that would apply to all of the educators with whom we've had the pleasure of working over the years.

Providing a Do-Confirm List, Not a Read-Do List

For some, teaching by checklist may conjure up images reminiscent of George Orwell's *1984*—of teachers mindlessly following edicts from central command. Checklists, however, don't tell us what to do. They are not formulas. Rather, they help us ensure that we've got all the information we need to help us become more systematic about our decision making and not overlook anything important. Indeed, when it comes to endeavors with “true complexity—where the knowledge required exceeds that of any individual and unpredictability reigns,” Gawande (2009) cautions that dictating every move “from the center will fail” (p. 79).

If you're a teacher who has picked up this book hoping to follow simple, step-by-step formulas that will take the thinking out of teaching for you, then this book will likely disappoint you. If you're an administrator hoping for a “Teaching for Dummies” book that you can use to prescribe your teachers' every action, then please set this book down. That's not what you'll find in these pages.

Indeed, from the outset, one of the key ideas that guided the creation of this checklist was that it should be what Daniel Boorman of Boeing Flight Operation describes as a Do-Confirm list, as opposed to a Read-Do list. A Do-Confirm checklist assumes that people mostly perform their jobs from

memory but benefit from occasionally stopping and referring to a list to make sure they've done everything they're supposed to do. A Read-Do checklist, on the other hand, "is more like a recipe. People carry out the tasks as they check them off" (Gawande, 2009, p. 123).

We have no intention of creating step-by-step instructions for educators to follow mindlessly. We believe teachers would (and should) find that insulting. There's simply no way to boil everything teachers must do in the classroom down to simple, step-by-step directions. In fact, as Hall and Simeral (2008) note, sometimes teachers labor under the misperception that checking boxes is what the job of teaching is all about. Bulletin boards decorated? *Check*. Attendance taken? *Check*. Homework assigned? *Check*. Lessons planned? *Check*. Grades turned in? *Check*. "In their minds, good teaching is about completing these 'teacher tasks'—checking off a set of prescribed activities" (ibid., p. 60). Simply doing activities misses the point, of course, of good teaching.

This book does not aim to be that kind of a Read-Do list. Rather, it aspires to be a bigger-picture, more universal Do-Confirm checklist that helps teachers become more mindful in their thinking about the big ideas of teaching, providing touchstones of great teaching for them (and their colleagues) to come back to, time and again, and ensure that they're doing what matters most in the classroom.

Keeping It Simple

Finally, we knew from the beginning that for this checklist to be effective, it would need to remain simple. When Gawande (2009) and his colleagues first developed a checklist for hospital emergency rooms, they discovered that it was too complicated to be useful. "The checklist was too long. It was unclear. And past a certain point, it was starting to feel like a distraction from the person we had on the table" (p. 113).

As we developed the teacher's checklist, we pictured the daily experiences of our readers being similar to Claudia Meek's, where it would be

impossible to consult a checklist while keeping control of the classroom and responding to the ever-changing needs of two dozen or more students. We knew from the outset that a 70-item checklist, for example, would be counterproductive; it would likely distract teachers from the students in front of them. What makes more sense is a shorter list that teachers can eventually internalize.

This checklist, then, doesn't aim to be exhaustively detailed or thorough—identifying every little (and perhaps obvious) thing a teacher might need to worry about (e.g., Are the lights on in my classroom? Are the kids in their seats? Do they have writing utensils?). Instead, it aims to help teachers focus on the big things that absolutely, positively must be done every day. Certainly, there are many things teachers should attend to; we believe the concepts presented in this checklist are the most important.

Finally, it's worth noting that simplicity should not be confused with shallowness or vapidness. Our aim is not to dumb down the practice of teaching or gloss over its complexity. This book has been inspired by the remarks of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., who said, "I would not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." We hope that these 12 things to do every day are precisely that: simplicity on the other side of complexity.

How should I use this book?

As former teachers ourselves, we have written this book with teachers in mind, hoping to create a resource that we wish we might've had when we were in the classroom—something that could help us make better sense of our professional practice and chart a course for our own professional growth. To that end, we envision this book being most helpful to teachers in a few important ways.

Developing a Teaching Theory of Action

One of the key differences between professionals and amateurs in any practice is that professionals have well-developed mental frameworks for arranging the key concepts and approaches of their profession. We're reminded of the story of Douglas MacGregor, father of the concept of Theory X and Theory Y organizations (which, incidentally, remains one of the most influential concepts in organizational theory and design). As a young professor at Harvard University, he asked a veteran professor to observe him in the classroom. Afterward, the professor told MacGregor to "stop jingling the coins and keys in his pocket, stop putting his feet up on the desk, and get a theoretical framework into which to put things" (Deutschman, 2007, p. 99).

In keeping with the advice of this sage professor, teachers also need a theoretical framework into which to put things—not only the content of their teaching but also their approach to teaching. We hope this checklist provides you with a way to develop (or refine) your own mental framework, theory of action, and deep sense of what you believe (from experience and research) to be true about good teaching and your personal approach to putting those ideas into practice in your classroom.

Having a theory of action for your teaching can help you filter and assimilate the barrage of new ideas coming at you all the time. Instead of feeling overwhelmed or confused about how to assimilate new ideas, you might instead have an "aha" moment such as the following:

- "Teaching these new Common Core State Standards will help me challenge my students more."
- "These ideas about culturally relevant instruction give me some additional ways to better engage my students."
- "This response to intervention approach will help me move from teaching to actually coaching my students."

In other words, instead of feeling like every new idea you encounter requires you to start over with new teaching practices, you can begin to see

how those new ideas enhance what you're already doing. At the same time, you'll be better equipped to filter new ideas, determining whether they're likely to improve upon what you're already doing. When they do not, you then feel more confident in disregarding them.

Staying Focused on What Matters Most

One way to free ourselves from letting urgent but unimportant matters—such as Valentine's Day parties, parent permission slips, and attendance sheets—consume our time is to first call out what matters most and then evaluate our daily activities against what we know ought to be our priorities. Later in this book, we'll discuss how teachers and whole-school teams can review classroom and school time to see how much of it is devoted to doing what matters most. It's entirely possible, of course, that you may view the items on this checklist and say, "I simply can't do all of those things in a single day; there's not enough time." If that's true, then ask yourself this: Which of the 12 items can I skip? You'll likely find this a difficult decision to make, which may prompt another question: If I can't do all of the important stuff I should be doing, what should I stop doing? We understand, of course, that many demands placed on teachers come from outside your classroom, which means you may need to negotiate items on your "stop-doing" list with others, including administrators and colleagues. This brings us to the third way you can use this book.

Supporting Professionalism Among Colleagues

"Just ticking off boxes is not the ultimate goal" of checklists, Gawande (2009) writes; rather, it's to "embrace a culture of teamwork and discipline" (p. 160). We hope that school teams will use this checklist to foster professional conversations about what good teaching looks like in every classroom. Doing so, and getting everyone on the same page about what great teaching looks like, can make it easier for you and your colleagues to share best practices. Indeed, it's possible that no teacher in your school

will immediately serve as an exemplar for all 12 items on this checklist. However, it's likely that among your school faculty, individuals may serve as exemplars for different items. Someone may do a terrific job interacting with students. Another may have expertise in using formative assessments and checks for understanding to adapt instruction methods. Yet another may have developed thoughtful rubrics for every major assignment that challenges students and helps them understand what's expected of them. You should learn from one another; there's no need to reinvent these wheels.

You may also determine that to really accomplish some of these items in a consistent way, you will want to develop checklists within this larger checklist. For example, you and your colleagues might decide that it would be beneficial to use a common checklist for translating standards into lesson plans. You might develop a schoolwide template for lesson plans that would itself serve as a checklist of sorts. Similarly, you might develop a common approach to grading or create a checklist to review before assigning homework. We believe that these additional checklists (some of which could be of the Read-Do variety) will be most useful and powerful if they come from educators working together—not handed down from an administrator or from afar by authors.

Finally, being clear about what matters most for great teaching can help school teams become more conscious and thoughtful about the new programs they decide to bring into their school. This checklist can help you and your colleagues ask questions such as the following: Will XYZ initiative support great teaching? If so, which component or components? Will it just create a shiny new distraction that will keep us from doing what we need to do?

How is this book organized?

The 12 daily touchstones presented in this book are the hallmarks of effective instruction. Highly effective teachers

- Challenge their students. Great teachers set high expectations for all students, challenging them with instruction that develops critical-thinking skills.
- Create positive classroom environments. Great teachers develop positive rapport with students, creating engaging classrooms that motivate learning.
- Are intentional about their teaching. Great teachers are clear about what they're trying to teach and deliberately use a broad repertoire of instructional strategies to help students accomplish their learning goals.

For this checklist, we've articulated these touchstones as the following imperatives for teaching:

- Be demanding: Align teaching with high expectations for learning.
- Be supportive: Provide a nurturing learning environment.
- Be intentional: Know why you're doing what you're doing.

The book is thus arranged into three sections—by imperative—with a chapter devoted to each touchstone. (See Figure 1.) Each of these checklist items is introduced with an overview of the research to help readers understand not only the importance of the item but also why it's important. This overview is followed by a number of suggestions, resources, examples, and anecdotes to help teachers understand what these 12 touchstones actually look like in the classroom.

Are you ready to really do it this time?

We assume that, for most readers, the 12 ideas presented in this checklist will not be earthshaking in their originality. Few may elicit a “Gee, I’ve never thought of that” response. However, if you take these items in the Do-Confirm spirit in which they’re offered, we believe readers may find themselves thinking, “You’re right. I do need to remember to _____ on a more consistent basis in my classroom.”

Figure 1 12 Things to Do Every Day	
Imperatives	Touchstones
Be Demanding	<p>Item 1 ☒ I use standards to guide every learning opportunity.</p> <p>Item 2 ☒ I ensure students set personal learning objectives for each lesson.</p> <p>Item 3 ☒ I peel back the curtain and make my performance expectations clear.</p> <p>Item 4 ☒ I measure understanding against high expectations.</p>
Be Supportive	<p>Item 5 ☒ I engage student interest with every lesson.</p> <p>Item 6 ☒ I interact meaningfully with every student.</p> <p>Item 7 ☒ I use feedback to encourage effort.</p> <p>Item 8 ☒ I create an oasis of safety and respect in my classroom.</p>
Be Intentional	<p>Item 9 ☒ I make the most of every minute.</p> <p>Item 10 ☒ I help students develop deep knowledge.</p> <p>Item 11 ☒ I coach students to mastery.</p> <p>Item 12 ☒ I help students do something with their learning.</p>

In short, these 12 items may appear to be somewhat vanilla and unremarkable. Indeed, you might look at them and say there's nothing terribly new about any of them. After all, hasn't something like checking for understanding been around since, well, Socrates?

We would counter, however, by asking if it would be new for *every* teacher in your school to do all 12 of these things well, *every day*. How new would it be for you? Herein lies the larger point of this book: for some time now, policymakers have fretted over finding some new approach, program, or innovation that could “fix” education. We wonder if perhaps the real solution might lie not in doing anything new but in a relentless focus on doing what we know must be done and doing it well in every classroom, with every student, every day of the week.

The aviation industry seems to have learned a thing or two about getting their jobs right every day. Consider what it would look like if the success rate for air travel were as low as 99 percent: 870 planes would fall out of the sky every day in the United States alone. If that were true, no one would dare fly anywhere.

What if the “fix” for schools isn’t a new program or set of policies but, rather, an incredibly simple approach—one that we benefit from every time we board an airplane or visit the doctor? What if all we need to do is find a better approach to identifying and sharing what we know we must do and then see that it gets done? What if it were that simple?

“When we look closely, we recognize the same balls being dropped over and over even by those with great ability and determination,” Gawande (2009) observes. “We know the patterns. We see the costs. It’s time to try something else. Try a checklist” (p. 186).

What do you think? Is it worth a try?

SECTION 1

BE DEMANDING



Articulate and Maintain High Expectations for Learning

In a now famous experiment conducted in 1965, researchers Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1992) told a group of teachers that some students in their classrooms had been identified on a Harvard test as being on the brink of rapid intellectual development. Unknown to the teachers, however, was that the test didn't actually exist; the students had been randomly labeled as having special aptitudes. A year later, those same students demonstrated higher IQs than their peers. The general principle that emerged from the study—dubbed the Pygmalion effect—has been confirmed in other studies (e.g., Hattie, 2009), and it has been demonstrated by such famous teachers as Marva Collins, Rafe Esquith, and Jaime Escalante: when teachers expect more, students rise to their expectations.

The Pygmalion effect, however, is not Dumbo's magic feather. Simply believing in higher student performance doesn't make it so. For starters, teachers must make their expectations for learning explicit to students. As we'll see later in this section, there's a science to doing this. Done well,

teachers can increase student motivation and achievement; done poorly, they can inadvertently undermine both.

Similarly, teachers must translate high expectations into unit and lesson plans that give students the opportunity to learn challenging content. If teachers fail to help students understand what “high performance” actually looks like, then students will struggle to visualize success and meet the high bar set for them. If measures of student learning don’t reflect teachers’ high expectations, then students may be receiving the tacit message that they aren’t capable of high achievement.

In the following chapters, we highlight four touchstones that, when addressed together, can help teachers articulate and maintain high expectations for learning in the classroom and, thus, translate a belief that all students can meet high expectations.

SECTION 2

BE SUPPORTIVE



Provide a Nurturing Learning Environment

In 1969, a Harvard University doctoral student named Judith Kleinfeld (1994) traveled to Alaska, “eager to do research that mattered, to find ways of improving education for children who were not doing well in school” (p. 151). Hoping to identify which teaching styles had the most positive impact on Alaska Native students, she spent a year observing classroom interactions between teachers and students in two boarding schools. Over the course of the year, she identified four types of teachers:

1. Traditionalists set high expectations for students but gave little thought to developing relationships with their students. A few students excelled in their classes, but many did not, especially Alaska Native students.
2. Sophisticates were aloof and undemanding, floating like an inert gas in the classroom with little impact on students or their learning.
3. Sentimentalists were warm but undemanding, perhaps out of a misguided sense of sympathy for students. As a result, students were unchallenged and didn’t learn very much.

4. Warm demanders—originally labeled “supportive gadflies”—combined “high personal warmth with high active demandingness.” As a result, students actively participated in class and were willing to work hard for their teachers (Kleinfeld, 1972, p. 29).

Since 1972, when Kleinfeld first coined the term *warm demander*, dozens of scholarly articles have used it to describe this widely affirmed quality of effective teachers—the ability to set high expectations while simultaneously nurturing student growth. Hattie’s (2009) recent examination of 800 meta-analyses on student achievement lends further credence to this concept, finding that one of the strongest correlates of teacher effectiveness is teacher–student relationships. In short, research appears to affirm the old adage that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

In this section, we highlight four checklist items that, when addressed together, can help add warmth to teachers’ demandingness and provide the kinds of supports for learning that research shows students need to be successful learners.

SECTION 3

BE INTENTIONAL



Know Why You're Doing What You're Doing

For many teachers, understanding what to do in their classrooms is relatively straightforward. They leave preservice programs with several teaching strategies in their “bag of tricks.” They know about cooperative learning, they’ve worked with students to create concept maps, and they may have even become adept with using advance organizers and asking students to complete KWL charts. Knowing what to do, however, is really only part of the equation. The other half is knowing when and why to do it.

Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) relates the following anecdote. She observed a teacher ask her students to read a book, draw a character, write alternative endings, and design a new cover. After the lesson ended, she politely asked the teacher why she had designed her lesson the way she did. After a faltering explanation, the teacher suddenly understood what she had been missing: intentionality. “Oh my gosh!” she exclaimed. “I thought all they were supposed to do was read the story and do something with it!” (p. 37).

It's time for a true confession. As beginning teachers, the authors were probably guilty of the same thing. Had you walked into our classrooms during our first year or two of teaching, you likely would have seen us doing some of the "right" things, such as engaging students in cooperative learning. Had you asked us, however, to explain why we had chosen to use that particular practice at that particular time, our answers would probably not have been very sophisticated. We might have said something along the lines of "I feel the need to mix up instructional strategies a bit" or "Because that's what we learned during our training." (A better answer, as we'll discuss in this section, would have been in line with wanting to help students deepen the knowledge we had previously introduced to them through reciprocal teaching.)

In the following chapters, we focus on the importance of teachers reflecting on their own practices, continually asking themselves why they are doing what they're doing in the classroom, and being able to provide research-based rationales for every instructional strategy they choose. This, in fact, is the third leg of our three-legged stool—without which no teacher can realize his or her full potential. In addition to being demanding and supportive, teachers must also be intentional.

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