

CHAPTER ONE

Teaching Toward Everest

In May 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, pictured in Figure 1.1 on the next page, faced a daunting task that no one had yet accomplished: ascending Mount Everest and living to tell the tale. Unlike climbers of Everest today, Hillary and Norgay did not have the benefit of charted territory. They faced the death zone, a place where the body is actively dying. They were climbing at an altitude nearly as high as the airplanes of their day flew. The risks were many, and the reward was glory.

For two important reasons, the work that you and I try to do each year is far more challenging than what those two men faced in 1953. Sure, there's little chance that a day in the classroom will end with frostbite on our noses or our frozen corpses buried by avalanche, but our job is still tougher.

First of all, Norgay and Hillary's task was fairly simple to articulate, and ours isn't. If you were to ask one hundred random people who knew of Norgay and Hillary back in early 1953, "Hey, what are these gentlemen trying to accomplish this year?" most answers would be identical:

"They're trying to climb Mount Everest. Duh."

Clarity of purpose . . . consistently predicts how people do their jobs The fact is, motivation and cooperation deteriorate when there is a lack of purpose. If a team does not have clarity . . . problems will fester and multiply. When there is a lack of clarity, people waste time and energy on the trivial many.

—GREG MCKEOWN (2014, P. 121)

Greatness and nearsightedness are incompatible. Meaningful achievement depends on lifting one's sights and pushing toward the horizon.

—DANIEL PINK (2009, P. 58)



FIGURE 1.1 • Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, on May 29, 1953, after completing the first successful ascent of Mount Everest.

Source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edmund_Hillary_and_Tenzing_Norgay.jpg, printed under CCBY-SA 3.0.

But if I were to poll one hundred people in *your* life this year, asking them, “Hey, what is this teacher supposed to accomplish in her job this year?” I’d be shocked if there were even two identical answers, and I wouldn’t be surprised if there were some answers that seemed to describe an entirely different profession in a wholly different galaxy. Depending on whether the respondent was your administrator or one of your students or a community member or your state’s governor or your school of education professor, I’d be in for a whirlwind of ideas and expectations, wouldn’t I? There would be multiple *full-time jobs* represented in those responses.

This incoherence of purpose and its attendant avalanche of expectations is a more insurmountable obstacle than a thousand Everests on top of one another. If this book—or any book—is going to help our teaching practice, then this mountain must be demolished. We can’t ignore it. So, let’s do something crazy, shall we? Let’s place the power of purpose setting in the hands of some people who might know a thing or two: you and me, the people on the ground doing the work alongside our students. Right now, before you do anything else, I’d like you to take half a minute and, without mental editing or revision, answer something in writing:

What, in a single sentence, is your Everest this school year? What do you hope that your work will amount to?

Be as specific as you can be. Ideally, you'd like to know during a given lesson whether or not you have made progress toward your Everest.

My Everest: _____

If you visit my room and sit with my students during a lesson, you'll see, just left of the whiteboard, a simple poster that reads "We are all about becoming better thinkers, readers, writers, speakers, and people" (see Figure 1.2). And on any given day, whether you walk into a world history class or an English class, my students and I know that we had better be working toward one or more of the things on that poster or else we've lost our way. This sentence—more than an impossibly long list of standards, more than the latest list of 28 "priorities" from on high—is what informs my daily, on-the-ground work. There is no sentence that more shapes my classroom, its work, and its culture than this yellowing old anchor chart. Clarity of purpose is necessary for teachers and students alike.

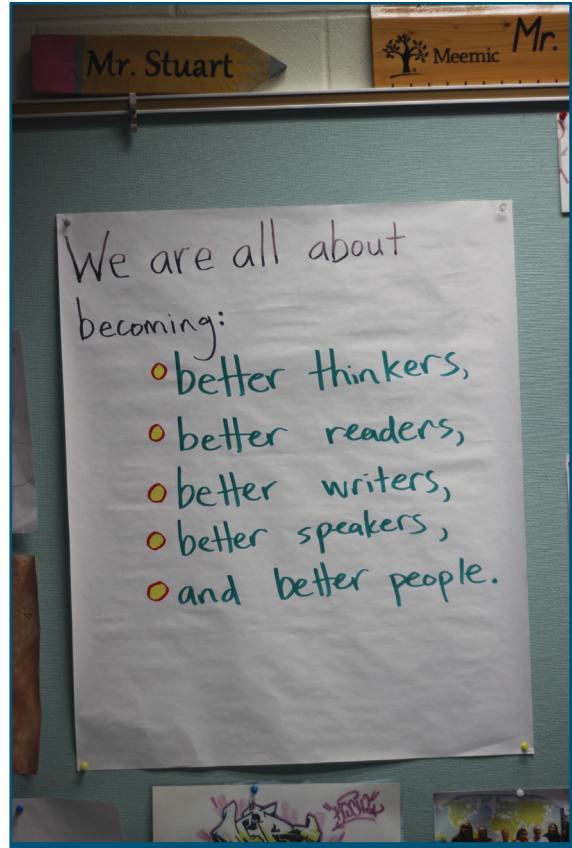


FIGURE 1.2 • "We are all about becoming . . ." Poster in My Classroom

So just do this: put that Everest sentence you just wrote somewhere you'll be forced to revisit for a few days, weeks, or months. Rewrite it from memory the next time you find yourself in a less-than-mission-critical meeting or presentation. And eventually, plaster it on your wall somewhere, introduce it to students, and tell them that this is what we're ultimately after this year—this is what we do. Figure 1.3 shows a sampling of the Everest statements I've collected over the years when doing this exercise with teachers around the United States.

The better, saner teaching life starts with a personally crafted, well-articulated, highest-level objective.

- We are all about planning, producing, and revising our writing; reading to build our knowledge; letting our mistakes guide our growth; and building our future leaders of the Navajo Nation. —Sarah Garcia Nelson, English teacher, Ganado, AZ (Navajo Nation)
- This year, my students will learn how to write and speak with clarity and purpose, develop and explain their reasoning, and understand how the work we do is critical for communicating with the larger world around them. —Bill Curtin, high school English teacher, Carbondale, IL
- As long as students give sincere effort in reading, writing, and thinking on daily basis, I'm confident students will move toward positive long-term academic and personal development. —Tom Dutkowski, tenth-grade American Lit and Language teacher, Powers Catholic High School, Flint, MI
- To instill an invested love of learning, reading, and expressing oneself clearly and passionately. —Jordan H., eighth-grade Language Arts, Tampa, FL
- My Everest is to help students understand and express their own and others' thoughts. —Akahai Lazarus, student teacher, Rexburg, ID
- Every student will be able to produce a decently constructed essay. —Diana Robinson, middle school Language Arts teacher, WI
- I want my students to think and write clearly about texts we read. —Ica Rewitz, English teacher, Orting, WA
- I am preparing students to make effective rhetorical decisions and take effective rhetorical action. —Jennifer Fletcher, professor of English and author of *Teaching Arguments*, Seaside, CA
- We are working to become skilled and independent writers and readers. —Michelle Roy, English teacher/instructional coach, Bunkie, LA
- This year, students will leave seventh grade as confident writers, thinkers, and debaters who can articulate the reasons behind America's historical and current role on the world stage. —Genevieve Gibson, seventh-grade social studies, Centennial, CO

FIGURE 1.3 • Sample of Real Teachers' Everest Statements

Long-Term Flourishing: The Peak of Peaks

We can't stop there, though. If all we do is define our work ourselves, we could easily justify "teach with your door closed," isolationist approaches to our work. Such "Everest Island" approaches concern me. Education has plenty of Lone Rangers and not enough high-functioning teams. Early in my career, my "strategy" was the "Teacher as Savior" approach: be like the guy or girl in whatever Hollywood teacher movie I had recently seen, defy the many forces

arrayed against my students and me, and single-handedly produce the glorious, odds-defying results of above-average standardized test scores.

This is a foolish waste of the change potential of our careers.

Our work is only a slice of what schools are for. So what, in a single sentence, is education about? What is its ultimate objective?

The answer is **long-term flourishing**. Long-term flourishing is broad enough to allow for each of our kids' uniqueness and substantial enough to actually mean something: Rachel may flourish as an auto body technician and car enthusiast, whereas Rashad will flourish as a member of his church and a police officer, while Saylor isn't sure what her future holds except that it's got to include reflective writing and persistent self-improvement (see the Words Matter sidebar).

Let's face it: none of us got into teaching for the impact we can make as measured by an end-of-the-year test; all of us got into it for the tiny contribution we hope our work can make to the life outcomes of our students, twenty years from now. Want to know how this school year is going for me? Ask me in a few decades when I bump into this year's students at the grocery store and find them to be middle-aged, responsible, and contributing professionals or technical workers or parents or spouses or citizens. Did my work contribute to them realizing their potential, albeit in a small, unmeasurable way? Was I 0.01 percent of the reason that things have turned out well for them? Then it was a good year when I taught them; I did good work.

But do you see how painfully immeasurable this long-term view on teaching is? That's the second way that our work is so much more challenging than Hillary and Norgay's was: they *knew* when they were done, and you and I don't. There was no ambiguity to whether or not they had achieved their goal, no room for debate. But for us, there are thirty or more Everests in view during every class period. Long-term flourishing is realized on a life-by-life basis, and it takes a full look of the womb-to-tomb journey for each student before we can know whether it's happened. There's no pretending: measuring the true impact of our work as teachers isn't simple, no matter what the policies or evaluation rubrics say. And please know

Words Matter

Long-Term Flourishing

Long-term flourishing is the first principle of education. Before we espouse our philosophies or techniques or strategies or approaches, we must all agree that what we're after is the long-term flourishing of young people. I say *long-term* because we became educators in hopes that our work might ripple—not just to the end of this school year but also to far beyond the end of what we can see.

And I say *flourishing* because it's clearer, less subjective than *success*. In an era of internet-fueled comparisons, success is an ever-rising bar. There's bound to be someone on Facebook or Instagram who is prettier than me, has more followers than me, lives in a better place than me, or has a cooler job than me. But there's plenty of room for us all to flourish. That's what I want for my students: *long-term flourishing*. It's my job to boost their chances of experiencing that.

that even as I write this paragraph, I, as a practicing teacher in a public high school, also feel the pain of it.

At any rate, with both this universal Everest of long-term flourishing and our personally drafted Everest definitions in view, we now must move into more immediate, but not more practical, realms. The distinction between immediacy and practicality is important. Too often, I find myself falling into believing that if something isn't immediately applicable to my work as a teacher, then it's not practical. But learning how to think is imminently practical. That is what long-term flourishing and defining Everest help us do: they help us think more clearly. In this way, nothing is more practical than the long-term flourishing of young people. When compared to the goal of long-term flourishing, it's standardized tests and grading systems that are impractical. Long-term flourishing isn't merely the A in the ABCs of the teaching profession; it is the entire alphabet.

The long-term flourishing we're after has two aspects: personal and societal.

The personal flourishing we want for our students seems best summarized by Marty Seligman's PERMA framework, which he explores in his appropriately titled *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (2012). (It's worth noting here that Seligman is not just some pop-culture self-help author; he's a former president of the American Psychological Association, and he's credited with kickstarting the positive psychology movement.) Here are the five components that Seligman finds indicative of the flourishing life:

- Positive emotion
- Engagement (or flow)
- supportive Relationships
- Meaningful work
- Achievement

Notice how much richer and more durable PERMA is than mere circumstantial happiness. My dad used to tell me, "Dave, I just want you to be happy in life." But in my adult years he and I have talked about how happiness alone isn't what he was talking about. He doesn't just want me walking around smiling with an

incessant experience of positive emotion. His desires for me are deeper than that. He wants PERMA.

It used to be that the personal flourishing pieces were all I saw when I conceptualized long-term flourishing. However, I've found that there's a major piece missing. Namely, PERMA doesn't pass the Hitler Test. If Hitler could have experienced Positive emotion, Engagement, supportive Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement in his life, then PERMA isn't a worthy goal all by itself. PERMA, in itself, can't be the sole goal of education; it needs a counterbalance, something beyond the individual.

The societal flourishing component, then, is about a life that *contributes to*, rather than *detracts from*, societal good. This means things like the following:

- Maintaining gainful employment
- Reproducing responsibly
- Maintaining a stable family
- Refraining from criminal activity
- Contributing to civic life (e.g., voting, volunteering)
- Managing personal finances (e.g., using debt responsibly)

There will be times in all our students' lives when some or all of these pieces wax and wane, but what we hope for and teach toward is the increased likelihood that our students will lead lives that ultimately figure as additive to society rather than subtractive.

What I love about aiming our teaching at something like these two components of long-term flourishing is that, even though they will never be buzzy, "flip the project-based twenty-first century student-directed authentic choice-driven classroom" things, they'll always be the true aims of an education. If we could all get on the same page about these ultimate targets, if we could all remind one another that these are what we hoped for when we got into teaching, these are what the parents of our students dreamed of when they first sent their kids to school, these are why society pours treasure into systems of education, then I think we'd take fewer rides on the pendulum of educational fads.

Also, school would make a lot more sense to kids.

Permission to Simplify

I need to admit something: I wrote this book for me. Or rather, for teachers like me who find themselves crushed between two conflicting beliefs. On one hand, we completely believe in the value of teaching. You don't need to convince us that teaching is a noble calling, or that it's worthy of a life's work. We count it a blessing to get to promote the long-term flourishing of kids.

But on the other hand, we've seen the movie *Freedom Writers*, and we're not interested in the whole-life sacrifice depicted in the film. We love that we are called to teach, but we also feel called in other, equally (or more) important directions. For example, I once walked down an aisle and vowed to give all of myself to my wife, Crystal. I've not done this for my students. And then there are these four little Stuart children crawling around my home who have just one father—me—while my ninth-grade students have multiple teachers. I'm all in on teaching during my working hours, but I don't want to be all in outside of them.

In short, I wrote this book for multivocational teachers: we want to be excellent at teaching, but we also want to be excellent at other things.

So here is this book's central argument: there's a way to be both a strong teacher and someone who has a life and interests outside of school. That way starts with knowing why we're here—the long-term flourishing of kids—and it will be fleshed out in the six chapters that follow this one.

I think there are thousands of teachers who, like me, long to be told, "If you and your students are working on this handful of things, repeatedly and with increasing skill, throughout the school year as you move through your curriculum, you're okay. You're not a screw-up."

Those last few words, especially, are important: "You're okay. You're not a screw-up." This might sound really negative to you if you're currently reading this from a good season in your career, but right now I'm talking to the reader who needs to hear that there's a way to focus your work, to major on the majors, and to go home every day without feeling like you're a failure or a fraud or unworthy of your paycheck. Failure marks the road to excellence; feelings of fraudulence are normal for the very public work of the schoolteacher, and you certainly do deserve to be paid for this work. But the work needs to be focused because right now teachers feel expected to do it all, endlessly, and we're hemorrhaging good people from the profession because of it.

THE LEGACY OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE OVER-SCIENCING OF TEACHING

When people subscribe to my free newsletter, I ask them to complete a single, open-ended question: What is the most stressful thing about your job? At the time of this writing, more than 13,000 educators have answered, and they've written nearly four times more words than I've written in this book—more than 250,000.

Thirteen thousand educators is not a lot when compared to the total number of educators in the United States, which is about 3.6 million (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). I'm not even looking at 1 percent of the teaching pool. Yet it's certainly enough to show clear trends that rise to the surface:

We are highly stressed. It is one thing to read Gallup poll data finding that 57 percent of educators are “not engaged” in their work (Agrawal & Hastings, 2015) or that educators are more stressed in their work than average people (Will, 2017); it is another to read a paragraph about stress and pressure and impossibility written by an earnest human being.

This stress is costly. About a hundred years ago, a couple of scientists created something called the Yerkes–Dodson curve to describe how pressure relates to performance (see Figure 1.4). Optimal amounts of pressure do help increase how



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You, too, can subscribe to my blog via this QR code.

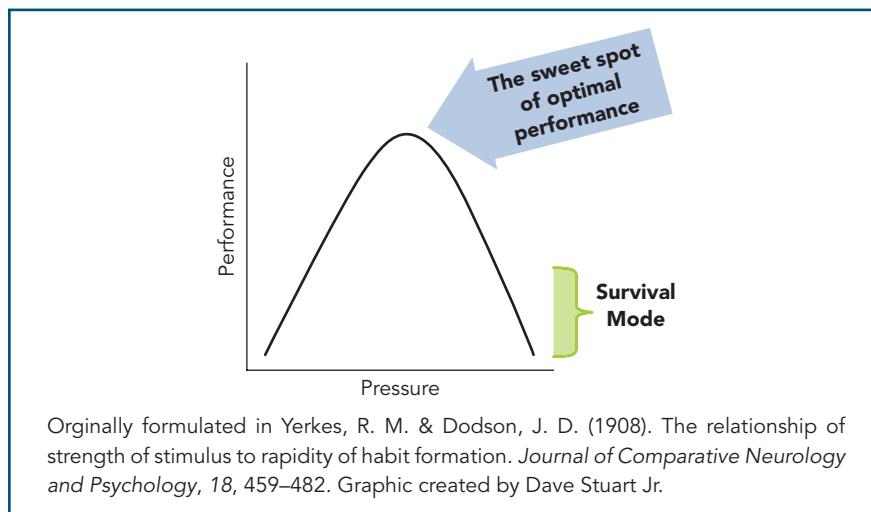


FIGURE 1.4 • The Yerkes–Dodson Law

well we do (e.g., I produce more writing when I'm on a deadline than when I'm not), but I don't know of many teachers who work within anything approaching "optimal amounts of pressure." On the curve in Figure 1.4, we tend to live in the "Survival Mode" on the far right end of the curve. This means that our stress is doubly bad: first, it harms our performance in promoting the long-term good of our students, and second, it harms our quality of life.

Much of our stress is from insane expectations. Teachers feel that they are expected to solve all of society's problems, one kid at a time. All of our students are to be well-fed, on grade level, and flourishing by March, no matter what. If the teacher isn't reaching a student, then she must not be using the latest strategy or technique correctly or documenting all of the interventions; it's her fault. If the standardized tests show an unmastered standard, we must, like Boxer in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, say with steadfast resolution, "I will work harder."

Now for some good news: **much of that stress is preventable.** Mike Schmoker (1999) writes that "our most persistent and unfortunate habit is our tendency to complicate and overload our systems and the people in them" (p. x), yet I think Mike would agree that there are few folks in education who are driven by destructive motives. The majority of teachers, administrators, and coaches live in a perpetual survival mode, which is unhealthy and bad and leads to ill-considered decisions, data for data's sake, hours studying evaluation rubrics, and "Let's learn 1,000 strategies this year" approaches to professional development. We have no sight of Everest; we've given it up long ago, trusting, instead, that data and technique and bureaucracy and technology and programs will somehow take us to the mountaintop.

But it is still possible for teachers, teams, and whole schools and districts to stand firmly on the timeless truth that **humans cannot do all things with excellence, and it is therefore wise to focus on a few things.** We can say that *because* the stakes are high and *because* the true nature of accountability in this job is so much deeper than policy measures, we will ignore the manifold distractions that assault us and fixate on the few most promising efforts. We cannot singlehandedly correct all deficits, but we can hold to the methods most likely to diminish them.

That is essentially what all of my work is about. I think every teacher should be told, "If you and your students are working on this handful of things, repeatedly and with increasing skill, throughout this school year and during those that follow, you're okay."

The material in this book grew from a desire to give teachers like me permission to simply focus on the work we set out to do when we entered this noble profession. Every one of those survey respondents is an actual person with a story, a flesh-and-blood classroom teacher or administrator, whom we desperately *need*. Professional educators are an endangered species in the United States, yet we throw them away like overused tissues, suffocating them with bloated initiatives and ten dozen “priorities.” This is beyond waste; it’s unsustainably poor stewardship.

So in this book, we’re going to focus on the things most likely to move our students toward long-term flourishing (LTF). LTF is shown in Figure 1.5 as the center of a bull’s-eye; it’s the heart of our mission as educators, and it’s what we want to always keep in focus. We won’t *ask* for permission to focus; we will *insist* on focusing, as professionals. For the rest of our time together, I’m

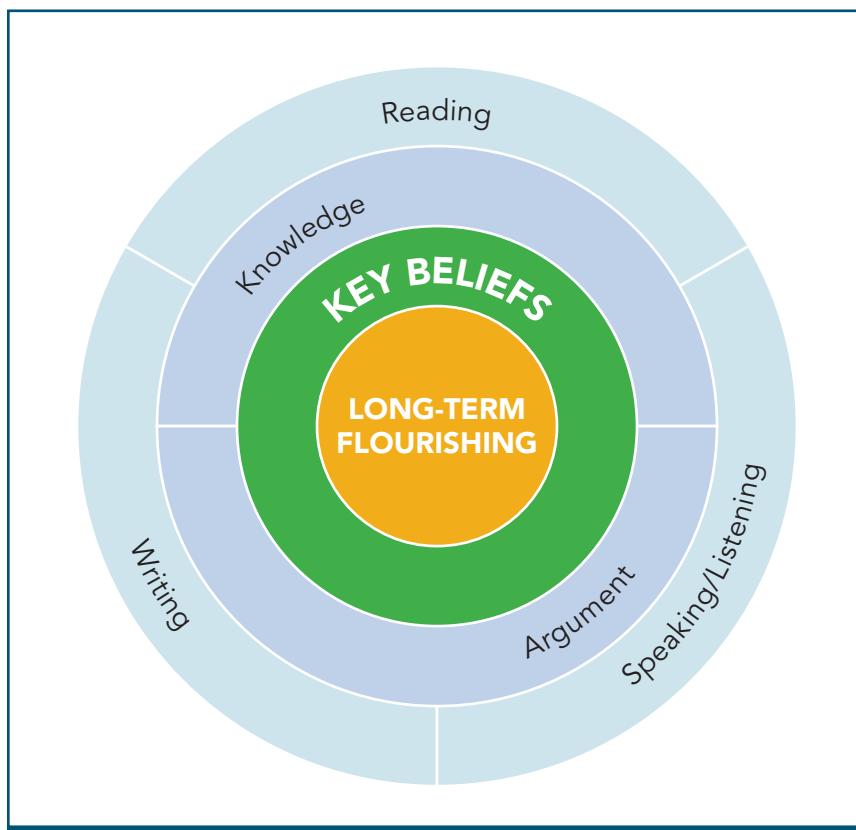


FIGURE 1.5 • The first ring of the bull’s-eye contains the Key Beliefs beneath student motivation.

simply going to advocate for six things we ought to go big on, six interwoven areas in which our schools should cultivate excellence in practice. These six things don't necessarily happen as steps or stages, but they all work together to lead to long-term flourishing students—and teachers. Let's work through each briefly.

KEY BELIEFS: START WITH THE HEART

Have you ever tried lifting a car with your bare hands? You're an intelligent person with important things to do, so I'm guessing you haven't. Well, I hadn't either until I wrote that sentence, and so I went outside and I tried it. Here's what I discovered: it doesn't work. I could stand next to my car, lifting with all my might and exerting myself until I died from it, but I still wouldn't lift my 2002 Toyota Corolla off the ground.

But with a lever, I could lift that car with minimal effort. If you sit back and think about it, it is incredible:

- me + every ounce of my effort = not lifting up my 2,500-lb car
- me + car jack + minimal effort = lifting up my 2,500-lb car

The same principle is at play in every classroom in the country, except what we're trying to move is our students as learners, and what act like levers are the beliefs our students hold about us and our classrooms. Most research points us to five Key Beliefs, which we'll explore in Chapter 2. Figure 1.5 shows this next layer of the *These 6 Things* bull's-eye.

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND ARGUMENT: MOVE THEM TOWARD MASTERY

Of course, a lever without anything to lift isn't all that useful, so now we come to the start of our heavy lifting. I argue that the next level of our work is helping students master the material. Toward this end, we're wise to target two things: knowledge building and argument.

First, we need kids to learn stuff, to build knowledge. In Chapter 3, I'll demonstrate the special criticality of knowledge: how central knowing things is to learning, thinking, reading, and the flourishing life.

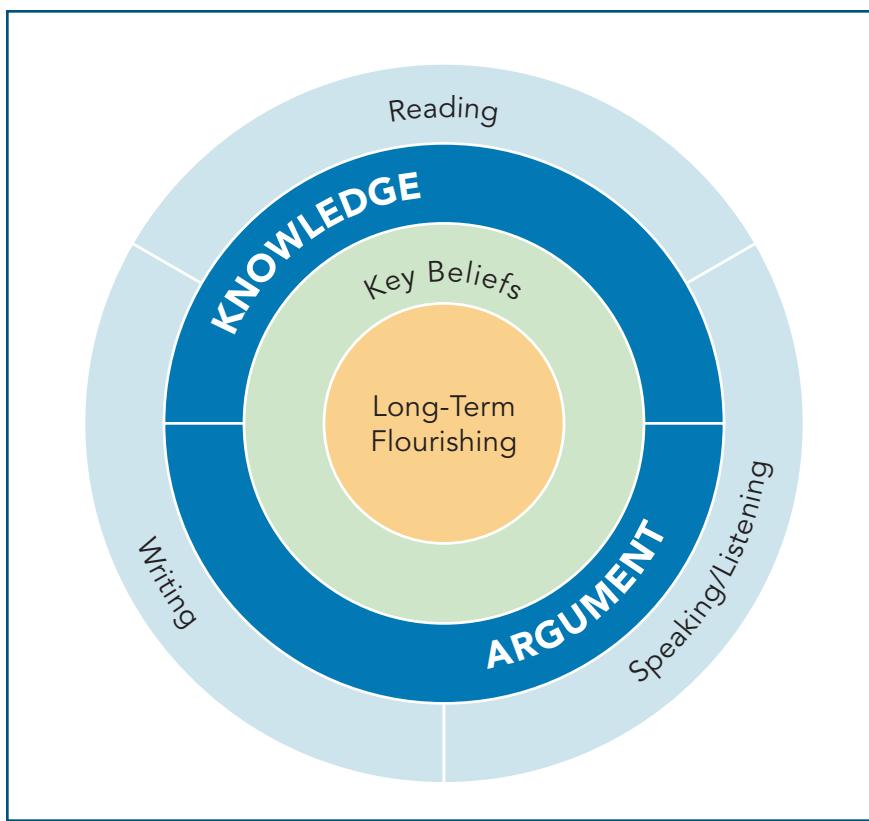


FIGURE 1.6 • The second ring is about our two-pronged approach to making kids smarter: knowledge building and argument.

And second, we need kids to be able to argue—in a winsome, amicable manner—in ways that are appropriate to our disciplines and courses. You’ll find me to be far from an argumentative purist; instead, I’m interested in how we can help our students be the kinds of people who are eager to get to the bottom of big questions, willing to roll up their sleeves as they work collaboratively to come to resolutions on tricky issues, and capable of making good decisions. That’s what argument ought to aim at throughout the school day: the cultivation of amicable arguers. This is what we’ll be exploring in Chapter 4.

Together, knowledge and argument form the next ring of the *These 6 Things* bull’s-eye (see Figure 1.6).

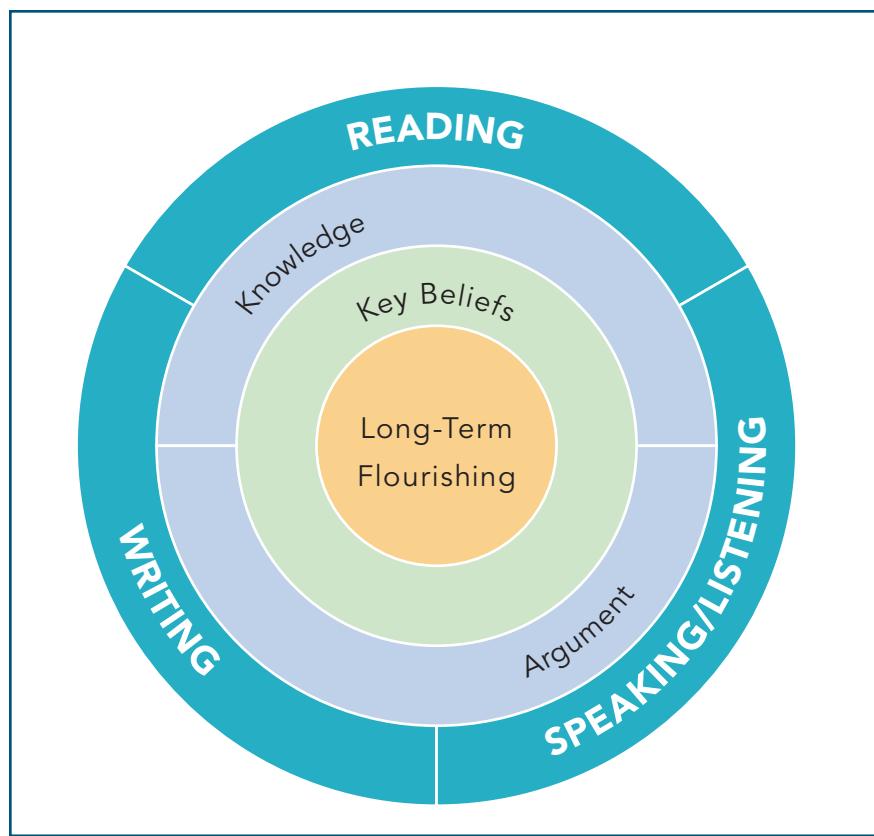


FIGURE 1.7 • The final ring of the bull's-eye involves literacy-rich learning experiences in ways that make sense throughout the school day.

MORE READING, MORE WRITING, MORE SPEAKING AND LISTENING: LITERACY AS A MEANS AND AN END

Finally, in this book I'll argue that we ought to target beliefs, knowledge building, and argument work in our classrooms through literacy-rich learning experiences. Specifically, we need to give ourselves space as professionals to get great at incorporating discipline-appropriate reading (Chapter 5), writing (Chapter 6), and speaking and listening (Chapter 7). In all of these areas, we need to consider which reading and writing and speaking/listening exercises are authentic for a given course or discipline and how we might use literacy-rich learning experiences to strengthen mastery throughout the school day.

These three aspects of literacy—reading, writing, and speaking and listening—form the outer ring of the bull's-eye (see Figure 1.7), and that completes our

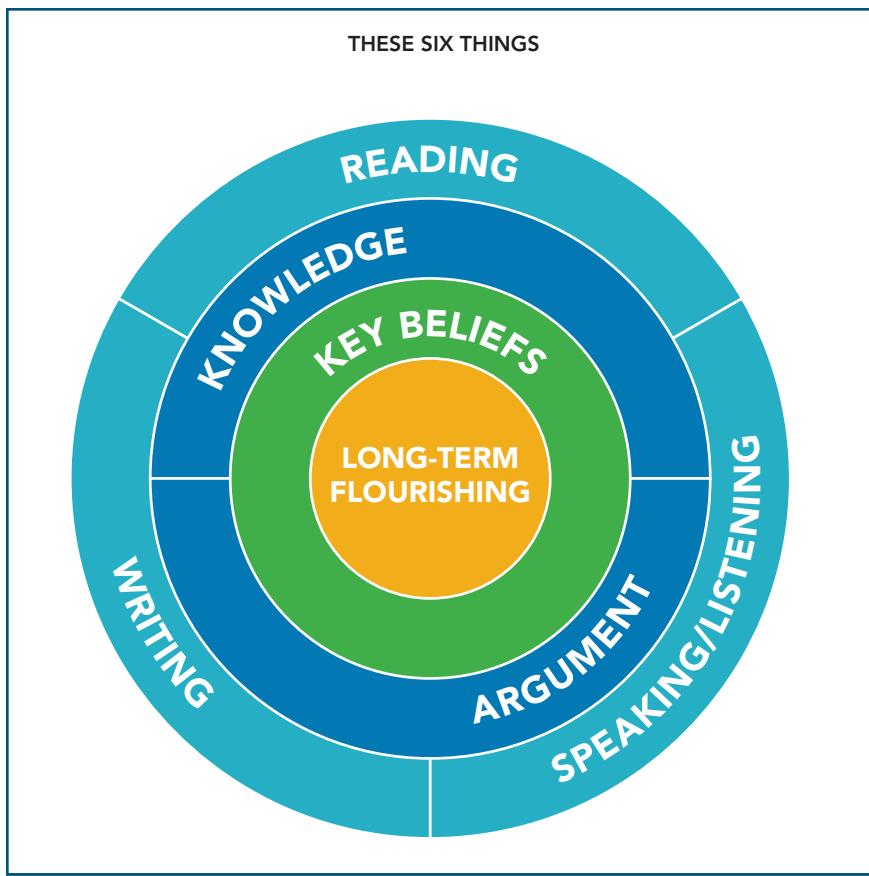


FIGURE 1.8 • Put all together, we have just these six things to focus on for the rest of the book (and perhaps the rest of our careers, too).

picture of where we should target our efforts every school year. These foundational six things (see Figure 1.8) are worth our focus as we strive to guide students toward their long-term flourishing.

Let's Focus on What We Already Know

I need to be forthright with you on a couple of key things before we go further into this book. (I'm really hoping you don't skip this part.) First, there's nothing new here. And second, I'm not naïve enough to think that focusing on six fundamental aspects will remove all our daily stressors and magically solve all teaching and learning challenges. I do hope you'll read on, however, to learn

DIG DEEPER

Even the “nothing new” bent of this book isn’t new. For a glimpse at the seminal works in my thinking here, see the following:

- Mike Schmoker’s *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning* (2011)
- Greg McKeown’s *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* (2014)
- Jim Collins’s *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t* (2001)

For a full list of the “Dig Deeper” titles mentioned in this book, go to davestuartjr.com/t6t-list.

how focusing on these things we *already know* can be powerful guiding forces in our classrooms.

NOTHING NEW, NOTHING SHINY

Five years of blogging for teachers has helped me discover that I don’t write so I can take an old idea and “rebrand” it as my own, but I do try to find the best ideas, attempt them in my classroom, and explain what works (and doesn’t work) for me and my students. I’m not an innovator; I’m a reminder and a streamliner. I actually hope that this book does *not* give you a bunch of new things to do. Rather, I hope it gives you fewer things to do so you can do them better.

When we constantly throw new things at teachers, we make it increasingly likely that they won’t master anything. If you’ve been teaching for a while, you’re going to see plenty in this book that’s familiar—that’s sort of my point. I want to show you how we can do great work by limiting ourselves to growing in the six areas laid out in this book. If you’re new to teaching, these six items may serve as building blocks as you develop your practice.

With a large quantity of work in these areas, I believe you and your students will arrive at quality.

“JUST” THESE SIX THINGS

If you’re sensing that these six areas of practice aren’t small—that mastering just one of these could take years of deliberate work—then you’re getting it. These practice areas are worthy of, and indeed require, years of our earnest efforts toward improvement. I do not mean to reduce the complexity of teaching by saying that we ought to do just these six things; rather, I want to make the complexity of our work manageable, to give it some boundaries, and to make it simple enough to productively discuss. “Reduction and complication,” Gerald Graff (2003) writes, “are not opposites, but are both legitimate moments in the process of communication” (p. 139). Yet despite their complexity, what I’m arguing in this book is that these are the six things most worthy of such time investments—more than reworking our grading systems or chasing the next fad.

The truth is, we don’t really know what lies ahead for our students; we’re preparing many of them for careers that don’t even exist yet. If I invest heavily in

my ability to promote purposeful and frequent reading in my class, am I likely to find in ten more years that these skills are irrelevant? Will there truly come a day when “Googling it” supplants knowledge building? Is the kind of open-minded, collaborative critical thinking at the heart of argumentation going to lose its value at the family dinner table or the factory floor meeting by 2030?

I don’t think so. I don’t see that my students today won’t be well served by being knowledgeable, literate, strategic thinkers.

I write this book as a colleague, not an expert. So consider this book a colleague’s call to focus, year in and year out, on developing our craft in these six key areas. If we do these things, we ought to give ourselves permission to ignore that nagging voice that tells us we’re not worthy of this work. When we focus on these six items, keeping long-term flourishing students as the ultimate goal, I think we can confidently say, “Hey, I’m doing the right work. I’m okay.”

The Gist

I made this book for teachers like me who are multivocational: we want to be excellent at our jobs for the sake of our students, but we’re not willing to sacrifice our entire lives on the altar of teaching success. To start down this path, we need to be clear on our Everests. Our personal Everests matter, and they ought to be posted in our classrooms. Our collective Everest matters, too: the long-term flourishing of kids. This book will show us how six areas of practice are our best bet to be the teachers we always hoped we’d be and stay sane in the process. They are the six areas in which we ought to invest our instructional and professional development time: beliefs, knowledge, argument, reading, writing, and speaking/listening. These are six simple yet robust paths to explore in any given lesson, unit, or school year. Becoming experts in these six pursuits is, unlike the many things expected of teachers, both manageable and exciting.



Better Together

Throughout the book, I'll include examples of ways in which these six areas of practice can be better when experienced and pursued as a group. There have certainly been years in my professional work when I felt as though I was focusing on these areas alone, and I do think that personally applying the material in this book can do much for your sanity, even if no one else around you does the same.

But consider how, even in this first chapter, the work I lay out in the book can be so much richer when done with a team, a professional learning community, a school, or a district:

- As a group, go through the exercise of defining your Everest. I've used the same prompts in this chapter with groups around the country, and the responses are always fascinating. Here's a tip: aim for sentences that point to meaningful, observable academic capacities. As Daphna Oyserman (2015) writes, "pathways to success go through school" (p. xi). We don't want our sentences to neglect the academic components of our job descriptions!
- Work to create a group Everest statement. Many schools that I visit have mission statements on their websites but no actual, functioning mission statement in the hearts of their faculties and staffs. What would it look like to collaboratively create an Everest sentence for your whole team, professional learning community (PLC), or school?
- Start meetings with this Everest prompt: Since our last meeting, how have you worked toward the Everest statement we created last time? Give a specific example. Share these with each other.

Exercises like this help to center us on what it is that we're doing. As you well know, that recentering is critical during the hectic rush that school years always seem to become.

