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ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

SO WHY DO OUR CLASSROOMS HAVE SO MANY LIMITS?

THE WHOLE POINT OF FORMAL EDUCATION IS TO PREPARE FOR OTHER TIMES AND OTHER PLACES, NOT JUST TO GET BETTER IN THE CLASSROOM. WHAT WE LEARN TODAY IS NOT FOR TODAY BUT FOR THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW. SOMETIMES THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW IS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME AS TODAY, BUT IT VERY OFTEN ISN'T.

—DAVID PERKINS (2012, P. 12)

I now sit on an airplane with my laptop connected to airline-friendly high speed Internet. From a tiny chair thousands of feet in the air, I'm tweeting casually with colleagues in South Carolina, Indonesia, and Philadelphia while watching the latest viral video on YouTube.

Through a chance meeting on a New York City subway, I found an educator who was as passionate about career-focused curriculum as I was. We quickly connected

using a Google Doc and sketched out an entire taxonomy of competencies linked to the most popular careers as defined by the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Recently, Google created glasses that record, search, and compute in response to your verbal cues. Named Google Glass, each pair has more power in a tiny, wearable chip than the computers that put a man on the Moon. I snagged a pair and used them to capture teaching and learning through an educator's eyes.

See? Anything is possible.

Just a few years ago, the things that we currently consider to be normal, everyday activities would have seemed outlandish or odd. Digital networks across the world have enabled the masses to communicate, share, and publish their ideas with unfettered fervor. We live in a world where access to the global community is available via the click of a button. Such uncertainty and unbridled progress can be wonderful. Consider this insightful tweet from David Warlick (see Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1   A TWEET FROM DAVID WARLICK

David Warlick
@dwarlick

From yesterday's backchannel: "Uncertainty is not bad. 'When anything can happen, then anything is possible.'"

2:37 AM - 19 Feb 2013

SOURCE: Used with permission of David Warlick.

However, our classrooms haven't kept pace with the empowerment that has infiltrated modern reality. In many cases, students attend schools and classes that erect barriers to engagement with meaningful work.

Consider this:

Every day, students go home and hear this question from their parents: What did you learn today?

Often, the answer is "NOTHING."

Perhaps this anecdotal evidence doesn't convince you. Unfortunately, there's more to this story than parents' dinner table reports. According

to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's 2002 "Education at a Glance Report," one out of every two students worldwide reported that they feel bored at school. In America specifically, 61% of students reported feeling bored at school very often.

In many cases, our desire to protect and manage students has fostered the cultivation of schools that more closely resemble prisons than incubators of innovation.

On a recent walk through a school in Ohio, I noted the following signs posted prominently throughout the building:

- No cell phones!
- No food or drink!
- No iPods or iPads!
- No groups in the hall!
- No talking while the teacher is talking!

At the end of my visit, the only question I had was this: What can you actually *do* in this school?

The limits we have created in schools, albeit well meaning, hold our students back and stifle motivation and mastery.

And while this information might tempt us to blame the institution of school, the kids themselves, or the policy makers, naming an enemy doesn't generate a solution.

But, don't despair. There's a lot that *we* can do to fix this situation *now.* As teachers, we have direct control over the design of our learning setting and the design of our instruction. This is the most powerful weapon we have against boredom and disengagement. Knowing that most teachers I meet are amazing people, I bet you're already making some powerful changes to help your students find connections between their lives and your classroom.

The goal of this book is to provide you with ways to unleash the superpowers of your students. Through specific instructional journeys that fit into the course of your regular day, you can effectively tear down unnecessary limits and show your students that just about anything is possible. I use these instructional journeys (or variations of them) all the time, and it has changed the way that I feel about school, learning, and education.

The student superpowers are as follows:

- Wondering
- Curating
- Connecting

- Digital inking
- Designing
- Gaming

Emphasizing the student superpowers shared in this book isn't difficult, and it doesn't require more preparation than traditional lessons. Using the superpowers just reframes many of our long-held assumptions about what teaching and learning looks like. In short, they require students to do the heavy lifting instead of the teacher.

So join me as we explore ways to have students develop their learning superpowers while realizing that school *is* a place where anything is possible! But first, we must consider why we go to school at all.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF SCHOOL?

Let's start at the beginning by considering a simple question. Why do we go to school?

I actually asked this question to a random group of K–12 students. My favorite responses included:

- "I go to school so my parents don't get in trouble. I actually like my parents."
- "I go to school because I have to."
- "I go to school because I don't have a job yet."
- "I go to school to see my friends."
- "I go to school because I like to play sports after school, and I can't play sports if I don't go to school."
- "I go to school so that I can move out of this town and go to college!"

As these student responses suggest, students aren't seeing the links between school and the real world. Will Richardson, respected blogger and author, recently questioned conventional schooling in his book *Why School?* He said,

> I'm suggesting that this moment requires us to think deeply about why we need school. Or to ask, more specifically, what's the value of school now that opportunities for learning without it are exploding all around us? There is an important, compelling answer to that question. It is most definitely not the same one. (Richardson, 2012)

As the world changes, so does the role of school. Instead of school being a place where we *get stuff,* it must become a place where we

create powerful stuff. This simple shift will keep school relevant for our students and our society.

To this end, we need to alter our instructional strategies and beliefs about the classroom to better meet the needs of what the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (n.d.) describes as "school leavers," or those who finish school and go forth to make society better.

So, take a moment of pause right now. Why do we have school? Answer this question in the space below:
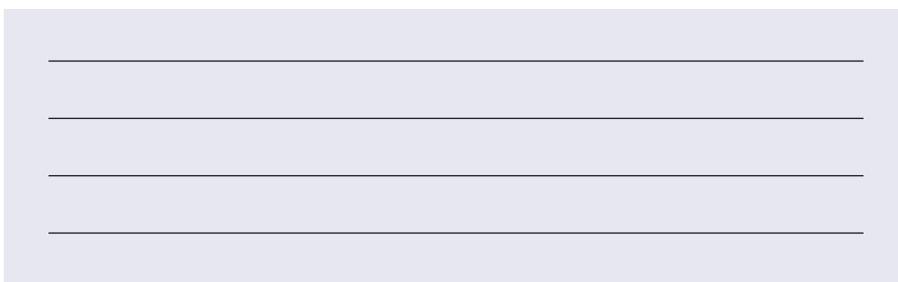
THE KNOWING-DOING GAP

It's likely that everything you've read up to this point is familiar to you in some way. Perhaps you recognize the superpowers that your students have, and you regularly encourage them. Given the things shared in the news each day and the ways that our students behave, these ideas and concepts are likely familiar to you. However, there is often a considerable gap between what we know and what we actually do in our classrooms.

For example, many years ago I learned that popcorn reading was bad for learning and bad for kids. I had read the research, and I was acutely aware that it did not promote deep thinking for students. However, I continued to use it as a strategy for about 5 months after learning this. Why did I do this? In short, it had become a habit, and the kids *seemed* to like it. However, one day, a student came up to me after class and asked me to reread the entire science selection to him. "Why?" I asked. He calmly said, "When we popcorn read, I get so nervous that I can't remember anything." Well, that instantly broke my bad habit! Sometimes, the literature refers to this phenomenon as the *implementation gap.*

One of the things that can decrease the implementation gap is having a clear plan with short-term wins. Consider this book as your day-to-day plan to narrow the chasm between what you know about students and what you do in your day-to-day practice. Each superpower you foster in your students should be celebrated as a short-term win that creates lasting change for your students!

TEACHERS ARE DESIGNERS

IDEO, a nationally renowned product design company, has recently been using its design process with teachers to help them think flexibly while making constant adjustments for their end users (students!). IDEO's work has affected many of the common products that we use today, and it has also influenced the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, authors of *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2013). I consider assuming the role of a teacher-designer to be an essential part of the modern teaching profession.

On their website for teachers, IDEO (n.d.) describes the design process for teachers as follows:

> Design Thinking is the confidence that everyone can be part of creating a more desirable future, and a process to take action when faced with a difficult challenge. That kind of optimism is well needed in education.

> Classrooms and schools across the world are facing design challenges every single day, from teacher feedback systems to daily schedules. Wherever they fall on the spectrum of scale—the challenges educators are confronted with are real, complex, and varied. And as such, they require new perspectives, new tools, and new approaches. Design Thinking is one of them. (© IDEO LP 2014. All rights reserved.)

Each journey within this text was developed and tested using the design process described by IDEO. This means that each journey in its current state should be considered as a starting point for further refinement and polish. Designers never complete a task; they simply find a point where they're ready to share their ideas with the world. We can improve our classrooms and our instruction by tinkering like a designer.

I'M BUSY! WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Today, there are more demands on a teacher's time than ever before. In many cases, schools and districts have imposed pacing guides, interim assessments, and rigid, scripted curriculum materials on teachers. If you feel those pressures in your current teaching situation, you are not alone. So, how can the instructional journeys and student superpowers presented in this book be used in your classroom?

As every teaching situation and classroom is unique, it is important to note that there is no "single correct way" to use the ideas and materials presented in this text. In fact, you are encouraged to adapt and tweak each

instructional journey to meet your needs. Consider the following principles to guide your implementation:

- **Start small.** You don't have to begin by implementing an instructional journey or student superpower from this book in its entirety. Find a lesson or series of lessons that you'd like to try as a starting point. Experiment with at least one thing that resonates with you. Small successes will encourage you to keep going!

- **Begin by choosing a superpower that complements and satisfies your current requirements.** It's not necessary to teach the superpowers presented in this book in any particular order. Take all the constraints of your current curriculum into account. What units have specific links to the ideas presented in this book? For example, could you teach the Digital Inking Superpower during the time when you normally teach personal narratives as dictated by the pacing guide? Finding these connections can help you satisfy the district requirements while allowing students to truly do the heavy lifting.

- **Use specific content from your pacing guide or curriculum map as a specific focus for one of the superpowers.** Do you have to teach a unit on the regions of your state? Or plants? Or rocks and minerals? Well, then, use these content areas as a lens for one of the superpowers. For example, teach the "questioning superpower" by exploring everything there is to know about plants. Or, teach the "connecting superpower" when you are scheduled to teach the regions of your state. You can accomplish the same goals in many different ways. Consider the superpowers in this book as an engaging way to spice up your requirements!

- **Think about ways to use time flexibly by teaching literacy, science, and social studies at the same time using the student superpowers.** Each instructional journey within this book provides students with several opportunities to demonstrate a complex performance that incorporates many different standards. So, if you only have a very brief allotted period in your day for science or social studies, consider using one of these instructional journeys during *both* your literacy and your science/social studies block. Not only will this give students longer periods of time to grapple with meaningful tasks, but it will also make the day seem more connected and relevant to students.

By thinking flexibly, you'll find many ways to use the materials presented in this book within the constraints of your current situation.

RESEARCH REMINDERS

All of the superpowers in this book have been heavily influenced by leading voices in the field of education, including Ralph Tyler, David Perkins, Robert Marzano, Mike Schmoker, and John Hattie. Each of these authors stresses the need for students to spend more time *actively doing* than *passively listening.* After reading and rereading the works of these authors at different points in my educational career, I've arrived at five fundamental research-based beliefs about teaching and learning that strongly influence each superpower in this book.

1. THE PERSON DOING THE WORK IS DOING THE LEARNING.

If you analyzed each action in your classroom for an entire day, who would be the busiest? Would it be you? Would it be your students? The research tells us that our students should be doing as much of the work as possible. John Hattie, respected researcher and author of the iconic text *Visible Learning,* has dedicated his life to measuring which teacher moves and student moves generate the highest levels of academic achievement. He summarizes his research saying,

> What is most important is that teaching is visible to the student, and that the learning is visible to the teacher. The more the student becomes the teacher and the more the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes. (Hattie, 2009, p. 25)

Hattie (2009) also reminds us that student self-assessment is the single most powerful strategy to accelerate student achievement. As students learn to use their superpowers, they will learn to self-assess and self-monitor their growing strength and capabilities.

2. FOCUSING ON THE ACQUISITION OF FACTS DOESN'T WORK.

Although many of the tests and assignments that we administer in school simply require students to memorize and regurgitate facts, this strategy doesn't lead to lasting learning. Decades ago, Ralph Tyler warned of this very problem, saying,

> Hence, it is more economical to set up learning situations in which the information is obtained as a part of a total process of problem solving than it is to set up special learning experiences just to memorize information. Furthermore, when information is acquired as a part of problem solving, the use of the information and the reasons for obtaining it are clear. This is less likely to result in rote memorization. (Tyler, 2010, p. 73)

3. TRANSFER IS THE POINT OF EDUCATION, AND TRANSFER IS HARD.

Transfer is defined as one's ability to use skills and information independently in a novel context. It's why we teach: so our students can use what we've taught them long after they leave us. However, the path to transfer has been riddled with failure over the last 100 years. A review of the research reveals that transfer is difficult to achieve, but it's not impossible. A recent meta-analysis report from the National Academies Press called *Education for Life and Work* states: "Research to date suggests that despite our desire for broad forms of transfer, knowledge does not transfer very readily, but it also illuminates instructional conditions that support forms of transfer that are desirable and attainable" (National Research Council, 2012, p. 71).

It is important to note that there are two different types of transfer: specific and general. Specific transfer, sometimes called near transfer, happens when learning is used in two different situations, but commonalities exist. General transfer, on the other hand, happens when the initial learning broadly applies to lots of different situations or contexts. Obviously, general transfer is the ultimate goal, and it is no easy feat!

4. ASKING QUESTIONS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FINDING ANSWERS.

In school, we often reward students who generate the correct answers. (Or perhaps, more specifically, the answers that we're looking for.) This certainly doesn't promote divergent or creative thinking. To this end, we need to value problem finding more than problem solving. Consider the wise words of David Perkins (2012):

> Problem finding concerns figuring out what the problems are in the first place. It also involves coming to good formulations of problems, formulations that make them approachable. Often it also involves redefining a problem halfway through trying to solve it, out of the suspicion that one may not be working on quite the right problem. (p. 26)

5. AUTHENTIC LITERACY HAS TO HAPPEN ALL DAY, EVERY DAY.

Fads come and go in education, but authentic literacy never goes out of style. Engaging students in reading and writing for real purposes is almost always a factor that distinguishes successful classrooms from mediocre ones. Citing the need for literacy to touch every subject area, Mike Schmoker wrote a book called *Focus* that explored the unparalleled need for teachers to help students read, write, and discuss. In the text he says, "Literacy is still the unrivalled, but grossly under-implemented, key to learning both content and thinking skills. But authentic literacy is categorically different from the

so-called 'reading skills' and pseudo-standards that have wrought such havoc in language arts" (Schmoker, 2011, p. 11).

Authentic literacy happens when students have choice over their texts, they passionately debate the ideas in the text, and they write thoughtfully about it. All of these things should happen regardless of the subject area.

Which research reminder or researcher really resonates with you? Jot your ideas in the space below:
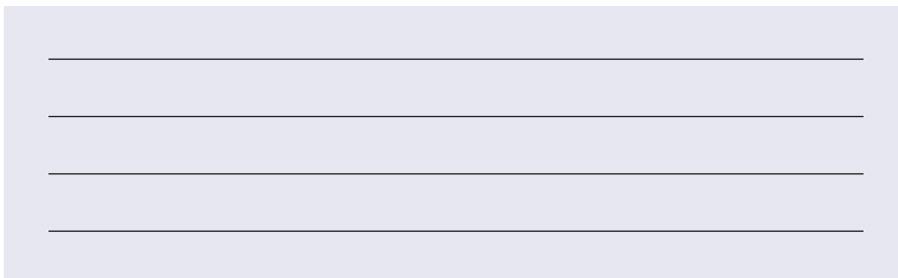
WHAT ABOUT THE STANDARDS?

Regardless of where you teach, you are likely accountable to a set of academic standards. However, the standards tell us *what to teach*, not *how to teach.* Think of the standards as final destination on your GPS. You, as the teacher, can choose any road, route, or path to get to that destination. This is a critical distinction. Educators have the right to use any strategies, methods, or protocols they deem fit to meet the demands of the standards. That's why teaching is so much fun!

Each of the day-to-day instructional journeys in this book is aligned to both the Common Core State Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening and the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Also, there are connections within each journey to several Common Core State Standards of Math Practice.

ALL ABOUT THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The creation of the Common Core State Standards was a state-led effort that included input from teachers, administrators, and experts. The National Governor's Association for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers coordinated the effort. The standards were designed based upon the strongest components of existing state standards as well as cutting edge research. They are also informed by the practices of other top-performing countries to intentionally reflect the needs of our existing global

economy (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Honestly, this is an incredibly exciting time in education. After years of diluting the standards at the state level in an effort to comply with the regulations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the stakes are finally rising again. To use the words of Marzano (2003), "All kids deserve a guaranteed and viable curriculum." The Common Core State Standards seek to provide *just that.*

The authors of the Common Core State Standards have shown a strong movement away from basic acquisition. Instead of focusing on the facts and discrete qualities of literature (Really, how many syllables does a haiku have?), the Common Core State Standards focus on analysis and the derivation of meaning. For example, instead of a focus on identifying different types of figurative language (as is common in most state standard documents), the Common Core State Standards require students to "Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone." In many cases, the demands of the Common Core State Standards hearken back to deep comprehension or expression (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

In many ways, this is a huge relief as well as a call to action. Growing students' superpowers will help them meet Common Core benchmarks and expectations.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR READING, WRITING, AND SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Standards that are prioritized throughout an entire instructional journey are labeled as "FOCUS," and standards that are referenced are marked with an "X." Use Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 as an easy reference for lesson planning.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

Standards that are prioritized throughout an entire instructional journey are labeled as "FOCUS," and standards that are referenced are marked with an "X." Use Figure 1.5 as an easy reference for lesson planning.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS OF MATH PRACTICE

The Common Core State Standards of Math Practice help students engage in problem solving, visualization, and perseverance. Each instructional journey is connected to several Standards of Math Practice. Use Figure 1.6 as an easy reference for lesson planning.

FIGURE 1.2 *COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR READING*

	Wondering Journey	Curating Journey	Connecting Journey	Digital Inking Journey	Designing Journey	Gaming Journey
Reading Anchor Standard 1	FOCUS					
Reading Anchor Standard 2				X		
Reading Anchor Standard 3						
Reading Anchor Standard 4						
Reading Anchor Standard 5						
Reading Anchor Standard 6						
Reading Anchor Standard 7	FOCUS					
Reading Anchor Standard 8						
Reading Anchor Standard 9						
Reading Anchor Standard 10		X	X			X

FIGURE 1.3 COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR WRITING

	Wondering Journey	Curating Journey	Connecting Journey	Digital Inking Journey	Designing Journey	Gaming Journey
Writing Anchor Standard 1						
Writing Anchor Standard 2						FOCUS
Writing Anchor Standard 3						
Writing Anchor Standard 4			FOCUS	FOCUS	X	FOCUS
Writing Anchor Standard 5			X			X
Writing Anchor Standard 6			FOCUS	FOCUS		X
Writing Anchor Standard 7	X	FOCUS				
Writing Anchor Standard 8	X					
Writing Anchor Standard 9						
Writing Anchor Standard 10						

FIGURE 1.4   *COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING*

	Wondering Journey	Curating Journey	Connecting Journey	Digital Inking Journey	Designing Journey	Gaming Journey
Speaking and Listening Anchor Standard 1	X	X	X	X	X	X
Speaking and Listening Anchor Standard 2	X	X	X	X	X	X
Speaking and Listening Anchor Standard 3	X	X	X	X	X	X
Speaking and Listening Anchor Standard 4	X					
Speaking and Listening Anchor Standard 5					X	
Speaking and Listening Anchor Standard 6						

FIGURE 1.5 NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

	Wondering Journey	Curating Journey	Connecting Journey	Digital Inking Journey	Designing Journey	Gaming Journey
Culture		X	X	X		
Time, Continuity, and Change						
People, Places, and Environments			X			X
Individual Development and Identity		X	X	X		
Individuals, Groups, and Institutions						
Power, Authority, and Governance						X
Production, Distribution, and Consumption					FOCUS	
Science, Technology, and Society	X					
Global Connections	X					
Civic Ideals and Practices	X					

FIGURE 1.6 COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS OF MATH PRACTICE

	Wondering Journey	Curating Journey	Connecting Journey	Digital Inking Journey	Designing Journey	Gaming Journey
SMP 1	X	X	X	X	X	X
SMP 2	X					
SMP 3						
SMP 4					X	
SMP 5		X				
SMP 6						
SMP 7						
SMP 8						

LOOK BACK AND STEP FORWARD

By the end of this introductory chapter, you should feel confident with the following concepts:

- Schools don't always reflect the promise and the problems of real life.

- The student superpowers and instructional journeys in this book can narrow the gap between what we know about learning and your specific classroom experience.

- The design of each student superpower and instructional journey is heavily influenced by educational research and can be implemented within the current constraints teachers face.

- The student superpowers and instructional journeys are aligned to the standards.

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A QUESTION TO CONSIDER AS YOU REFLECT

- What do our classrooms need to look like to prepare students for the realities they will face after graduation?