

Preface

Great is defined as powerful, excellent, skilled, and influential. When I use this word throughout the text, I am absolutely convinced that a great teacher has the capacity to execute every trait as defined to make a lifelong impact on the lives of his or her students.

Teaching is not an easy profession. Being a great teacher involves many factors, which, when combined correctly, result in a highly effective classroom and productive students. Each of the “ingredients” listed in this book is essential to achieving the goal of being a great teacher, but the “recipe” for excellent teaching requires the right mixture of all the ingredients.

Students come to the classroom with a variety of skills, talents, challenges, and experiences. Teachers come to the classroom only after navigating their way through an extraordinary number of school, district, and state policies; state-adopted textbooks; mandated reading and math programs; inclusion requirements; high-stakes standardized tests; standards-based instructional programs; and administrative pressures. Teaching is obviously not a “piece of cake.”

The true test of great classroom learning has to start with the teacher as “chef”: setting out the ingredients on the table, measuring the value of each, and determining daily how best to “serve it up” to meet the unique and individual academic, social, emotional, and moral needs of each student.

This effort requires ongoing reflection by the teacher to determine how to season each dish to suit each student’s taste. A great teacher knows that the classroom is not a “cattle call” where everyone gets the same information in the same way at the same time. What works for one child may not work for the

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next. Instead, a pinch of this and a dash of that will allow students to experience a different flavor for each lesson, appropriate to the student's individual "palate" of intelligences, strengths, and learning modalities.

This book is not a cookbook or encyclopedia that answers every question for every teacher. But it is an opportunity for you to visit the workplace and go inside the heart and mind of a seasoned teacher who heard a "call to greatness" in the classroom and successfully mastered the art of creating a learning environment in which students experienced a nourishing and well-balanced academic feast.