



Course check in: 1pm-3pm
Course begins: 4pm
Course concludes: 1pm on the final day
Schedule your travel appropriately.

PERSONALIZING LEARNING

For Your Students

London 11-15 July 2016

BRING

SAMPLES FROM YOUR SCHOOL (Digital access or print)

- One unit of instruction from your grade level. This can be in any curricular area and should include all the learnings taught including outcomes, standards, and benchmarks, assignments, activities and strategies used, and assessment methods/instruments.
- A sample of work from a student who is currently experiencing academic difficulties within the classroom.
- A collection of data (i.e. anecdotal, numeric, rubrics, standardized assessment results) that you have used to make instructional decisions.

PROBLEM OR ISSUE

In preparation for the reflection sessions in the afternoon, please bring a short written description of each of the following (half a page):

- A problematic area related to personalizing learning in your situation or at your school
- A learner or a specific lesson for which you feel you need to provide greater personalized learning

READ

In advance of your arrival, please read and reflect on the following articles, which will give you an overview of this course.

- Dweck, C. "[Mindsets & Equitable Education](#)" (online)
- Tomlinson, C. A. (October 2003). [Deciding to Teach Them All](#), *Educational Leadership*, (61)2, pp. 6 – 11. (attached)
- Powell, W. & Kusuma-Powell, O. (2011). [Introduction, How to Teach Now: 5 Keys to Personalized Learning in the Global Classroom](#). Alexandria, Va.: ASCD (attached)
- Powell, W & Kusuma-Powell, O. [Personalizing learning and teacher expectations](#) (online)

As you read the articles, please consider the following questions:

- Why personalize learning?
- What are some generic principles of personalizing learning?
- What personal and professional capacities can teachers develop to enhance personalized learning within their classes?

PREPARE

Watch a [short video](#) to prepare for your course.

SURVEY

Please complete the pre-course Google survey [here](#).

BRING A LAPTOP (REQUIRED)

Your course materials are digital. Hard copies of the materials will not be available on site. Bring a laptop computer with appropriate adapters and wireless internet capability. [Click here](#) for more information about iPads and tablets.

- Download [Adobe Acrobat Reader DC](#) now in order to be able to access your materials properly. Note: Mac users can use Preview.

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...your online portal for everything related to your course. You should have received an email with signup instructions and enrollment information for your course. Use that email as a guide to login and set up your account. If you have not already registered, you can do so [here](#). Your access code for the course is immediately below. If you need help with this process, please contact us at registrations@theptc.org.

Access Code: **6JV9P-S47WN**

We look forward to seeing you this summer!

Sue Easton & Jennifer Swinehart



October 2003 | Volume 61 | Number 2

Teaching All Students Pages 6-11

Deciding to Teach Them All

Carol Ann Tomlinson

Asking the right questions has an enormous impact on how we pursue equity and excellence in our classrooms.

Several years ago, I was talking with a colleague who was teaching in a center-based school for students whose IQ scores registered above 140. She thought deeply about how to stretch her students, whose ceilings of possibility often go unexplored in heterogeneous classrooms. She was a good teacher in that setting. She knew it. Her students knew it. Their parents knew it. So I was surprised by what she said that day.

“I want to go back to a general education classroom next year,” she began.

I want to see what would happen if I tried teaching this curriculum to a varied group of students. I believe I could make it work, and it's important to me to know whether I can.

She got her wish. Her new group of 5th graders in a different school the following year was certainly diverse. She had students with identified special education needs, students who could not yet read in any meaningful way, students who were learning to speak English, students who were working at grade level, and students who were more capable than many in her previous school. She taught them—all of them—the high-challenge curriculum that she had been using with her class of very advanced learners.

To say that no problems emerged and that everyone rose fairy-tale-like to the challenge would be satisfying. But it would not be honest.

The truth is that my friend had to make many adaptations in her new classroom that were not necessary in her former setting. She had to find time to work intensively with students who were not yet literate to ensure their growth in the gatekeeper skills of reading and writing. She had to find ways to support some students whose caregivers could not provide transportation, Internet access, or project materials. She had to teach inquiry skills to many students who had not previously encountered them. She even had to figure out new ways to extend the advanced curriculum for students whose reach already exceeded its parameters when the year began.

In many ways, this veteran teacher felt like a novice. She wasn't always sure how to arrange time to work with small groups of students with particular needs. She often wasn't certain how to express abstract ideas so that the concrete thinkers could confidently approach them. But from the beginning of the year, one fact was clear: Her classroom was a magnet for each student who spent 5th grade with her.

Discovery was a given. Doing was a way of life. Students learned to do better than what they perceived to be their best. Skills had an identifiable purpose. School was the place to be. Learning was the thing to do. No one wanted the year to end.

We could say that this teacher decided to “differentiate instruction in a mixed-ability classroom”—that she decided to “teach them all” in a heterogeneous setting. It would be tempting to say that she was a poster teacher for differentiation of instruction.

But I learned something more important from her and her students. As I watched their journey, I realized that she was asking a set of questions about teaching different from those we often ask—a profoundly important set of questions.

Framing the Questions

My colleague had already posed the most fundamental of the questions related to academically diverse populations: Do I intend to teach each individual child?

Although there seems to be only one answer to the question, the reality is more complex. The circumstances of teaching make it far more likely that we respond by saying, “I intend to teach the curriculum in as reasonable a way as I know how, and I hope that most of the students will respond.”

My friend's answer signaled her willingness to accept responsibility for the success of each individual, regardless of the circumstances of that student's life.

To teach each student from his or her point of entry into the curriculum and perspective as a learner is more than difficult. It is a goal beyond the grasp of even the most expert teacher. The outcome for students who are outliers, however, is likely to be vastly different when a teacher pursues that elusive goal than when the teacher—by intent or default—abandons it. This particular 5th grade teacher elected to teach in pursuit of that goal, and her commitment made a world of difference in her classroom.

My colleague asked other questions about her academically diverse learners and how she would respond to them. The way she framed her questions was different from what I suspect is customary, and the subtle differences yielded powerful distinctions in her work.

This teacher did not ask, What labels do my students have? Rather, she asked, What are their particular interests and needs? Because needs rather than labels guided her instruction, students moved freely among peers and opportunities. Both her teaching and her students seemed less restricted, freer.

She did not ask, What are my students' deficits? Instead, she asked, What are their strengths? Although she clearly understood the need to “patch holes” in the fabric of their proficiency, beginning with what students *could* do changed the tone of the classroom and the will of reluctant learners.

In place of asking, How do I remediate students?, she pondered, What can I do to ensure that each student works at the highest level of thought and production possible? She understood that purpose propels human beings and that rich, purposeful curriculum propels students to master whatever skills they need to succeed.

This teacher did not ask, How can I motivate these students? Instead, she wondered, What releases the motivation born in all humans?

She did not ask, What do I do if a student cannot accomplish my agenda? She asked, How might I adapt the agenda to work for the student?

I also came to understand the subtle but crucial distinction in one other common school question. My friend did not ask, Where should we put this student? Instead, she asked, What circumstances will be the most effective catalyst for this student's development?

Taken singly, the questions are interesting and fruitful. Taken as a group, they are transformational. They are questions in search of equity and excellence for each learner.

Seeking Equity and Excellence

The United States has always balanced precariously on the twin values of equity and excellence. As a people, we believe that birth in a log cabin should not be a barrier to the boardroom or the Oval Office and that all citizens should have access to the opportunities that will help them realize their potential.

Similarly, we cling to a vision of the United States as representing the best. We stand for the fastest cars, the tallest buildings, the finest medical care, and the most innovative technology. We are committed to excellence. Let the world generate a problem: We will solve it.

To lose either equity or excellence as a guiding value would be to lose our identity. To maintain both, however, is a balancing act of the highest order. And the challenge is perhaps greatest in the schools that shape young people to be good stewards of these values. Although we don't often think about the impact of education decisions on the balance between equity and excellence, many decisions push the fulcrum in one direction or the other—for individual learners, groups, or schools as a whole.

A curriculum furthers excellence when it opens doors to a promising tomorrow. Instruction furthers excellence when it moves a learner as effectively as possible toward expertise as a thinker, problem solver, and producer. And procedures, policies, and practices further equity when they maximize the likelihood that each learner will be a full participant in an excellence-based education.

The 5th grade teacher's questions were her guideposts to achieving equity and excellence for the widest possible range of students. Her decision to move from a school where a complex, dynamic curriculum was a given to a classroom where that was less likely was an excellence-based decision. She wanted to ensure that a maximum number of students see themselves as worthy of wrestling with ideas and issues, just as adults do.

Had she made any other assumption in her mixed-ability classroom, her most able students would have experienced “excellence” devoid of challenge and sweat. For such students, this sort of pseudo-excellence is at first seductive but ultimately crippling. She refused to be a thief of challenge for her most advanced learners. Beginning with high-quality curriculum and instruction is a precursor to excellence for any student. For this teacher, labels did not define access to quality of thought or production. Rather, quality was the foundation from which learning for all students could emanate.

Equity in this teacher's classroom was also central. Her pivotal, equity-based decision was determining that a wide range of learners should have access to excellence. Then she immediately began asking herself, How do I support each student's persistent movement toward excellence and expertise? Equity not only grants access but also supports success. A plan to teach students skills that they had missed in the past was in operation, but never as an end in itself. Such “remediation” was always in the service of “acceleration.”

Grappling with the Messiness of Teaching

Uncertainty is inherent in teaching. Although we can seldom guarantee the results of our decisions, we must make decisions, nonetheless. In a time when we find our student populations becoming exponentially more diverse, we still find ourselves asking such questions as, What is the right label for this child? Is the general classroom best or is a resource setting preferable? Can differentiation meet the specialized learning needs of students? Should specialists focus their energies on students or teachers?

The reality is that these questions lead us nowhere. Labels often stigmatize without offering a counterbalancing benefit. Some general classrooms cripple students, and other general classrooms are almost holy in their capacity to evoke the best in a wide range of learners. Likewise, some resource rooms become prison-like in limiting options for students who become dependent on them, whereas other resource rooms open access to a better future.

Differentiation can reinforce status, or differentiation can liberate students from stereotypical expectations. One specialist can touch hundreds of lives through successful collaboration with a single teacher, whereas other specialists are wasting their time attempting collaboration. Students, even of a given “category,” differ greatly. The contexts in which we might provide services for them defy generalization.

If we reframe the questions that we ask, a tectonic shift might occur in how we make decisions on behalf of academically diverse learners. Not, What labels? but, What interests and needs? Not, What deficits? but, What strengths? Not, How do we remediate? (or even How do we enrich the standard curriculum?) but, How do we maximize access to the richest possible curriculum and instruction? Not, How do we motivate? but, What would it take to tap the motivation already within this learner? Not, Which kind of setting? but, What circumstances maximize the student's full possibilities?

Ultimately, just one question might best serve diverse learners, their teachers, and their society. What can we do to support educators in developing the skill and the will to teach for each learner's equity of access to excellence?

Principles for Fostering Equity and Excellence in Academically Diverse Learners

Good curriculum comes first. The teacher's first job is always to ensure a coherent, important, inviting, and thoughtful curriculum.

All tasks should respect each learner. Every student deserves work that is focused on the essential knowledge, understanding, and skills targeted for the lesson. Every student should be required to think at a high level and should find his or her work interesting and powerful.

When in doubt, teach up! Good instruction stretches learners. The best tasks are those that students find a little too difficult to complete comfortably. Be sure there's a support system in place to facilitate the student's success at a level that he or she doubted was attainable.

Use flexible grouping. Find ways and time for the class to work as a whole, for students to demonstrate competence alone, and for students to work with varied groups of peers. Using only one or two types of groups causes students to see themselves and one another in more limited ways, keeps the teacher from “auditioning” students in varied contexts, and limits potentially rich exchanges in the classroom.

Become an assessment junkie. Everything that a student says and does is a potential source of assessment data. Assessment should be an ongoing process, conducted in flexible but distinct stages, and it should maximize opportunities for each student to open the widest possible window on his or her learning.

Grade to reflect growth. The most we can ask of any person—and the least we ought to ask—is to be and become their best. The teacher's job is to guide and support the learner in this endeavor. Grading should, in part, reflect a learner's growth.

Adapted from *Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades 5–9*, by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Caroline Cunningham Eidson (ASCD, 2003).

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How to Teach Now

William Powell and Ochan Kusuma-Powell

Introduction

Over the last four decades, we, Ochan and Bill, have taught children and young adults in the United States, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. We have worked with student populations that were very diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, linguistic background, socioeconomic status, and religious faith. These students also brought remarkable learning diversity to our classrooms. Some were in the early stages of learning English. Others had learning disabilities, remarkable talents, academic gifts, or attention issues. Many were experiencing profound relocation stress as they moved from country to country and school to school.

More recently, we have devoted our time to the professional learning of teachers in international schools around the world. We have had the pleasure and privilege of working with thousands of teachers in more than 40 countries. From Tashkent to Tianjin, from Siem Reap to São Paulo, all of the teachers we have met enriched our institutes with their unique experiences and backgrounds.

Amazingly, amid all this diversity, a clear pattern has emerged. Irrespective of nationality, culture, religion, gender, or the type of school in which they work, all of the most effective teachers we have met teach with both a local and a global context in mind. They focus on knowing the individual student and personalizing instruction to match that student's needs. At the same time, they teach in a way that considers the whole diverse community of students and prepares them for living and working in our modern, complicated world. We believe this approach is fast becoming what is needed in schools everywhere.

While international schools have always enrolled students with different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, globalization and massive immigration trends are making the student populations of nearly every school increasingly diverse. What was once the particular challenge of international school teachers now faces us all. To accommodate the new makeup of classrooms and the disappearing distances between cultures, teachers need to focus on each student's learning needs while simultaneously imparting global competence—the ability to understand other cultures, to respect and appreciate differences, and to move gracefully and graciously between cultures. To see our students succeed, we all must embrace this paradox of personalizing learning in the global classroom.

Before we move on to discussing what personalizing entails, let's first remember the way classrooms used to be and how many of us were taught to think about them and about our students.

The Way We Were: The One-Size-Fits-All Classroom

Bill entered the teaching profession in the mid-1970s, accepting a job as an English teacher at a high school in a small town north of New York City. The school was located in a solidly blue-collar community, and its enrollment was almost entirely homogeneous. Ninety-nine percent of the students were white, Roman Catholic, and Italian American. There were two African American students in the school, but they were segregated in a special education program and rarely seen. If there were Jewish students, the teachers didn't know about them, and there were certainly no Asian or Latino students. The homogeneity was further exaggerated by the fact that it was the year of the Farrah Fawcett hairdo, which made virtually all the female students look alike.

At the start of the school year, the Italian American principal, who had grown up in the surrounding community, called a faculty meeting and spoke at length about the subculture of the majority of the school's students. The previous year there had been a number of disciplinary problems, and he was keen not to have them repeated. He explained that students from the local working-class community were used to firm rules and absolute limits. He warned that attempts to negotiate classroom expectations with students would invite disruptive behavior. These students respected strength, the principal stressed, and they would respond poorly to anything they interpreted as weakness or "giving in."

In many respects, the typical classroom at that school resembled a factory assembly line. Control was external, the classes were often repetitious, and many times skills were taught in isolation. Content coverage prevailed over conceptual understanding. The idea that children might have different learning styles and different combinations of intelligence preferences was still a decade or more in the future. It was a one-size-fits-all learning situation, and if children didn't learn, the responsibility was placed squarely on their shoulders.

The Way We Are Now: Teaching Unique Learners in the Global Classroom

Our classrooms and professional perspectives have changed a lot since the 1970s—and thank goodness for that! Around the world, seismic demographic shifts have made monocultural enclave schools, such as the one that Bill began teaching in, increasingly rare. Today it is common for neighborhood schools in cities like Boston, Vancouver, London, and Melbourne to have 30 or 40 nationalities represented among their students.

The last 20 years have also changed our understanding of learning and how the brain works. Educators now recognize that students bring to the classroom different learning styles, intelligence preferences, and interests, and the most effective teachers incorporate these factors into their instructional planning.

To help illustrate the new learning dynamics of the global classroom, we would like to introduce you to four students. Although each student's story is unique, together they represent the types of challenges facing 21st century teachers, who must work to understand all the children they teach, the complexity of these students' specific cultural backgrounds, and the ways in which they learn.

Rupa: A Success Last Year

Rupa is a very bright girl, or she used to be, when she was a 4th grader in Nairobi, Kenya, and earned straight As. But since Rupa's family moved to the United States six months ago, her school achievement has taken a nosedive. Rupa's parents have visited her teachers almost every other day and are hiring a private tutor for math. Rupa's television and computer privileges have been suspended indefinitely.

Although Rupa is ethnically Indian, she has never lived in India. She was born in Africa but doesn't feel any sense of being Kenyan or African. Her family is Hindu, but because of her education in a Roman Catholic school, she knows more about the catechism than she does the Vedas. Her father and mother retain some ties to their traditional Indian culture, but Western values and commercialism are part of their lives now, too.

Rupa's father owns and runs a successful furniture company, but he doesn't believe that he will be able to afford to send Rupa to an American university. He sees Rupa going to India for university-level study, even though he is aware of how competitive admission to Indian universities can be, and even though Rupa doesn't speak Hindi. The medium of instruction in the convent school she attended in the Nairobi suburbs was English, and the language of the playground was a patois of English, Gujarati, and Kiswahili. The emphasis in her previous school was on rote memory. Her American school demands that she engage in critical thinking. Rupa's teacher expects her to apply knowledge and demonstrate conceptual understanding. All this is new to Rupa, and it baffles her.

Ten-year-old Rupa remembers being a success at school last year and grieves for her past life.

Frank: Culture Shock in the International Baccalaureate

At the conclusion of Frank's valedictory speech, the entire audience at his international school in Tanzania is on its feet. Thunderous applause echoes through the commencement hall, capturing the enormous pride the school community takes in his accomplishment: a four-year scholarship to Harvard, where he plans to study as a pre-med student.

Frank is a local boy—a scholarship student and the son of two teachers at the Tanzanian government school who would otherwise have never been able to afford the international school fees. The centerpiece of Frank's valedictory speech addresses the culture shock he experienced when he was first awarded his host-country scholarship ... and first discovered the difference between studying in a traditional government school and meeting the intellectual demands of his new school's International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program.

For the first three or four months I was at this school, I didn't say a word in class. I was in a state of total confusion and shock. It was as though I'd landed on a different planet. I didn't understand what the teachers wanted. I was used to a school in which there were right and wrong answers. You were rewarded for right answers and punished for wrong answers. But here, the teachers wanted you to think. They expected you to have ideas. They were interested in your opinions. You were evaluated not on a basis of right and wrong, but on the basis of how well thought out your answers were. If you have never been in a traditional government school, you have no idea of the magnitude of this change! You have no idea how terrifying it is to appear before a teacher who expects you to think. Now, I recognize it as the greatest gift that anyone can ever receive!

May Ling: Multilingual, but Not Making It

Thirteen-year-old May Ling is visibly nervous during the admissions interview at her new school in Kuala Lumpur. She answers questions softly, using single words or short phrases. For most of the time, she scrutinizes her shoes and holds one hand firmly in front of her mouth. She is easily flustered and, at least once, appears on the verge of tears.

Although she has been in an English-language school in Macao for the past five years, the ESL placement-test results included in May Ling's admissions portfolio put her at Level One—a beginner. At home, May Ling's Chinese mother speaks to her in Cantonese; her Danish father speaks to her in English.

When May Ling is not so nervous, her social, spoken English seems competent—fluent, even. However, her written work in both English and Chinese reveals that she is struggling with abstract expression in both languages. The fact is that May Ling doesn't have a strongly developed mother tongue. She is not just wrestling with the acquisition of English; she is wrestling with the *acquisition of language*.

Matt: A Study in Loneliness

Both the middle school counselor and the learning specialist are concerned about Matt. He has had several psycho-educational evaluations and, despite his parents' persistent denials, his learning disability is well documented. He is reading three grade levels below his age group. His handwriting is almost illegible. In a one-to-one situation, Matt can exhibit surprising flashes of insight, and his critical thinking skills can be astute and penetrating. However, in his 7th grade classroom, he is silent and withdrawn.

Matt is an American citizen attending an international school in São Paulo, Brazil. There are 15 nationalities represented in his homeroom, and on the playground, Portuguese is heard as frequently as English. Matt isn't sure how to go about making friends across the various cultural divides, and over the past semester, he has become the target of teasing. A group of children in the 7th grade have taken to calling Matt "retard." This name-calling has extended to graffiti appearing on both Matt's locker and his loose-leaf binder. Unfortunately, Matt's thick prescription glasses and his poor hand-eye coordination add to the impression of general awkwardness.

On one occasion, the learning specialist observed Matt in the cafeteria carrying his tray to a table already occupied by a group of his classmates. When he arrived at the table, his classmates stared at him incredulously. Their body language spoke louder than their unspoken words: Do you really think you're going to sit with us? Realizing that he had forgotten a fork and spoon, Matt placed his tray on the table and went back to the serving line. When he returned to the table, all of his classmates had disappeared, as had his tray of food.

Personalized Learning Basics

What Rupa, Frank, May Ling, and Matt require is a teacher who expects, recognizes, and appreciates student learning differences and incorporates these differences into instructional planning. There is nothing new or "faddish" about personalized learning. In one form or another, it has been with us since the first cave-dwelling Magdalenian mother recognized the differing talents of her brood of children. What is new is educators' concerted and systematic effort to identify and use these differences to maximize children's learning.

Teachers often have three basic yet important questions about personalized learning. Let's take them in turn.

What Is the Purpose of Personalized Learning?

Personalized learning is about making the curriculum as attractive and relevant as possible to the widest possible audience. This is accomplished by providing multiple access points to a high-quality curriculum—access points that will entice students with different readiness levels, interests, cultural backgrounds, intelligence preferences, and learning styles. Once students connect with the curriculum, personalized learning aims to keep them engaged, maximizing their understanding and achievement.

Who Is Personalized Learning For?

It's for students who are culturally diverse, students who are learning English as a second or third language, students with special learning needs, and students with special gifts or talents. In short, personalized learning is for every student, and it serves all students well.

What Do Teachers Need to Do to Personalize Learning?

In our experience, to effectively personalize learning, teachers need to engage in five ongoing inquiries. We must work to know our students as learners, know ourselves as teachers, know our curriculum, know our assessments, and know our collegial relationships.

Knowing our students as learners entails systematically and deliberately exploring our students' cultural identities, linguistic backgrounds, family circumstances, learning styles, intelligence preferences, readiness levels, interests, and many other individual learning traits and then using that information to address specific needs by providing meaningful and appropriately challenging work.

Knowing ourselves as teachers includes probing our own cultural biases and assumptions, discovering our preferences in learning style that may have translated into our preferred and dominant teaching style, and recognizing submerged beliefs and expectations that we have about children in general or about students specifically—all of which should help us to more clearly understand and serve our students.

Knowing our curriculum at a conceptual level means being able to discriminate between content and transferrable concepts. Concepts are overarching and applicable to many areas of specific content, offering flexibility in choosing access points for students with a variety of cultural backgrounds and learning preferences.

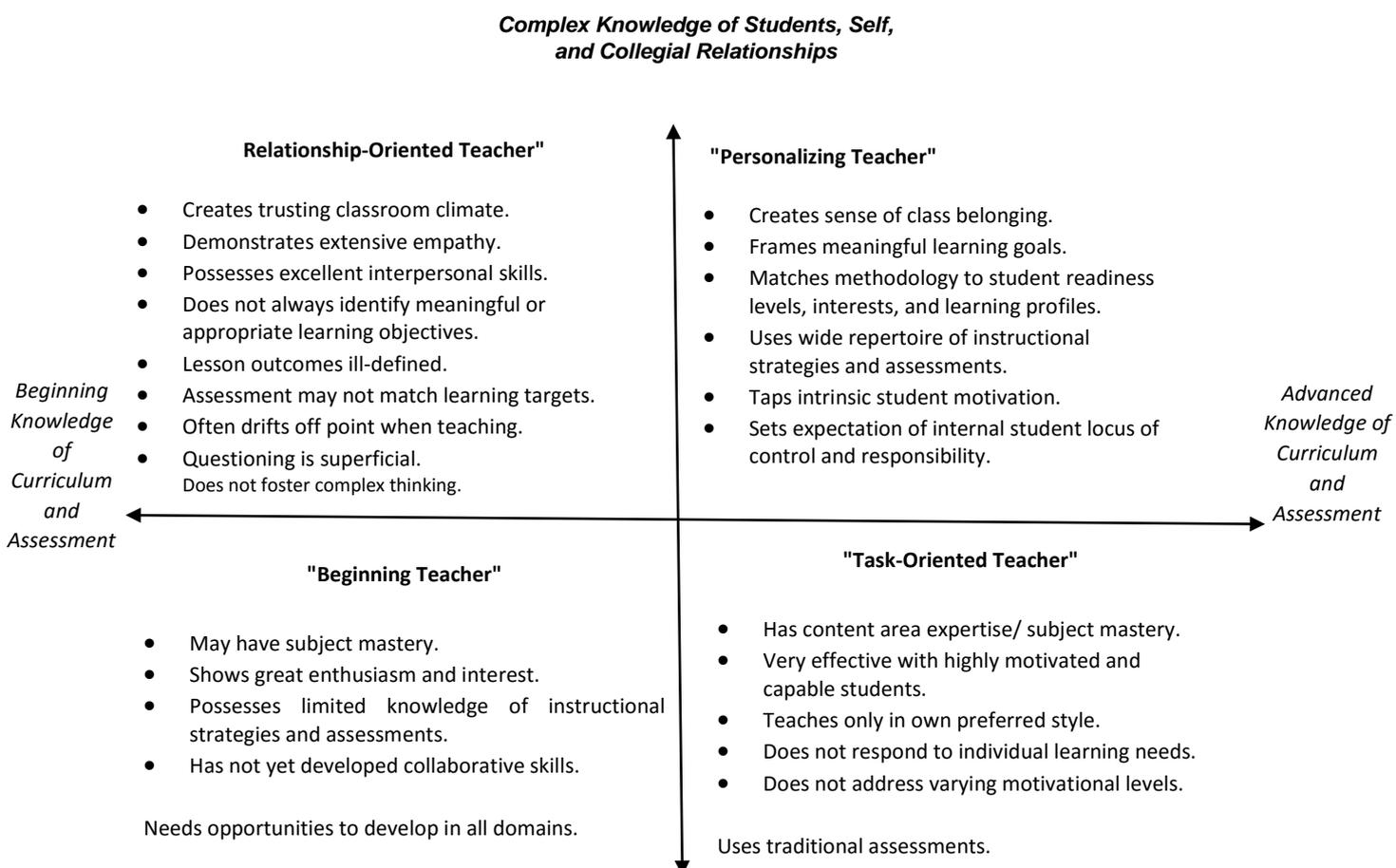
Knowing our assessments encompasses selecting and designing tools to match the learning objectives we want to measure, offering students some choice in assessment in order to increase engagement, and bringing students inside the assessment process so that they become the end users of assessment data.

Knowing our collegial relationships involves enlisting the help of other professionals with different experiences, backgrounds, skills, and perspectives to support us in planning how to best serve the diverse needs of our students. Education today is a most complex field. As

such, it is absurd and counterproductive for teachers to "go it alone." The most enlightened schools are promoting co-planning, co-teaching, and the collective analysis of student work.

Pursuit of advanced knowledge in all five domains of personalized learning is critical to success. Teachers can fall into focusing on one or two domains, which will limit the effectiveness of instruction. We have created Figure A to show how only exploration of *all five domains* results in the ability to personalize learning.

Figure A. Relationship Between Teacher Knowledge and Personalized Learning



Limited Knowledge of Students, Self,

& Collegial Relationships

Most teachers have some knowledge in all areas, but we have chosen the extremes of limited focus to make the relationship between domains clearer. For example, a teacher who knows his students and himself well but doesn't know his curriculum is likely to be trusted and popular, but he may not have the most robust or meaningful learning outcomes. A teacher who knows her curriculum but doesn't know her students may have limited success reaching students who are not highly motivated or highly capable.

Personalized learning does not mean the teacher creates a separate lesson plan for every student. It does, however, presume that the teacher ensures enough flexibility of instruction, activities, and assessment to enable a diverse group of learners to find a good fit most of the time (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). This work requires keen and empathetic observation and listening; careful monitoring of student activity and interactions; and continual assessment and instructional adjustment. Nothing in the classroom can be so rigid that it cannot be adapted to facilitate greater learning. In other words, instructional strategies, use of time, use of materials, approach to content, the grouping of students, and the means of assessment all need to be *flexible*. The teacher is the architect of that flexibility.

Everything in the learning environment of the personalized classroom is *purposeful*. The teacher identifies precise learning goals and determines clear indicators of success. The teacher knows her students as learners, and her planning is thoughtful and rigorous. She is deliberate about how students are grouped and the way furniture is arranged. She understands why Jack needs to get up and move after

10 minutes of seat work and why Zahara benefits from "think aloud" activities. In the personalized classroom, the teacher assumes the role of designer—purposefully selecting and orchestrating the multitude of classroom variables to maximize the learning of all students.

Perhaps most importantly, the personalized classroom is *respectful*. The origin of the word "respect" is the Latin *respectus*—a combination of *re*, meaning "again" or "back," and *specere*, meaning "to look." Thus, respect literally means "to look again"—to deem something worthy enough, important enough, to attend to a second or third time. A respectful classroom dignifies the differences that students bring with them to the learning experience. While students have different readiness levels, cultures, languages, interests, and strengths, respectful pedagogy means that every child is presented with tasks, activities, and challenges that are equally interesting and engaging and is provided equal opportunity for the development of conceptual understanding.

To illustrate the effect personalizing instruction can have, we would like to share a significant experience that Ochan and her co-teacher, Alex, had with a student named Nicolas.

Nicolas: A Portrait of the Power of Personalized Learning

Nicolas caused his teachers to lose sleep. He entered the general 7th grade humanities class at the English-language International School of Kuala Lumpur in January after completing a sheltered immersion ESL program. Ochan and her teaching partner, Alex, started the class out with a study of Malcolm Bosse's novel *Ordinary Magic*. It's a story about Jeffrey, an American boy who grows up in India. When Jeffrey's parents die suddenly, he has to be repatriated to the United States. The story explores Jeffrey's transition from Indian culture to the culture of America.

Ochan and Alex set the first journal prompt for the novel: "Have you ever thought about what it might be like to lose a parent? How do you think you would feel if you were Jeffrey?"

In his journal, Nicolas wrote this response:

Well yes I will not support to lose one of my parents. I would feel really bad and sad and also lonely.

Ochan and Alex were concerned about the impoverishment of Nicolas's writing. He had had 15 minutes to write, and he produced just 2 sentences, 22 words. In his writing there was virtually no content, the syntax was very simple, and the vocabulary was extremely limited.

In the next few days, Ochan and Alex assigned another journal entry, again based on the novel study. This time the prompt was "Jeffrey is struggling to define himself. Culturally he is Tamil, but ethnically he is American. How do you define yourself, and what do you base this self-definition on?"

Nicolas wrote this response:

I define myself as Mexican because all well most of my family are Mexican and also I was born in Mexico, my culture is from Mexico and I speak Spanish that the language of Mexico and also my passport is Mexican.

Ochan and Alex had a lengthy conversation. If anything, Nicolas's second writing sample was even more worrisome than his first. They could not tell what, if anything, Nicolas was understanding from the novel. The vocabulary and syntax were very simple, and the content superficial. Did Nicolas's poor writing reflect an ESL issue, or something else—maybe a language disorder or learning disability? They also worried that it might be a reflection of Nicolas's intellectual ability.

At the end of their conversation, Alex suggested to Ochan that since they had been assigning a great deal of writing, perhaps they should give the students some other way of demonstrating their understanding of the novel's various themes. They agreed that in the next class session, they would add a visualization activity to the usual journal entry. Students were told to take any scene from the book and show what they understood from the book by drawing it. Figure B is what Nicolas produced.

Figure B. Nicolas's Scene Illustration



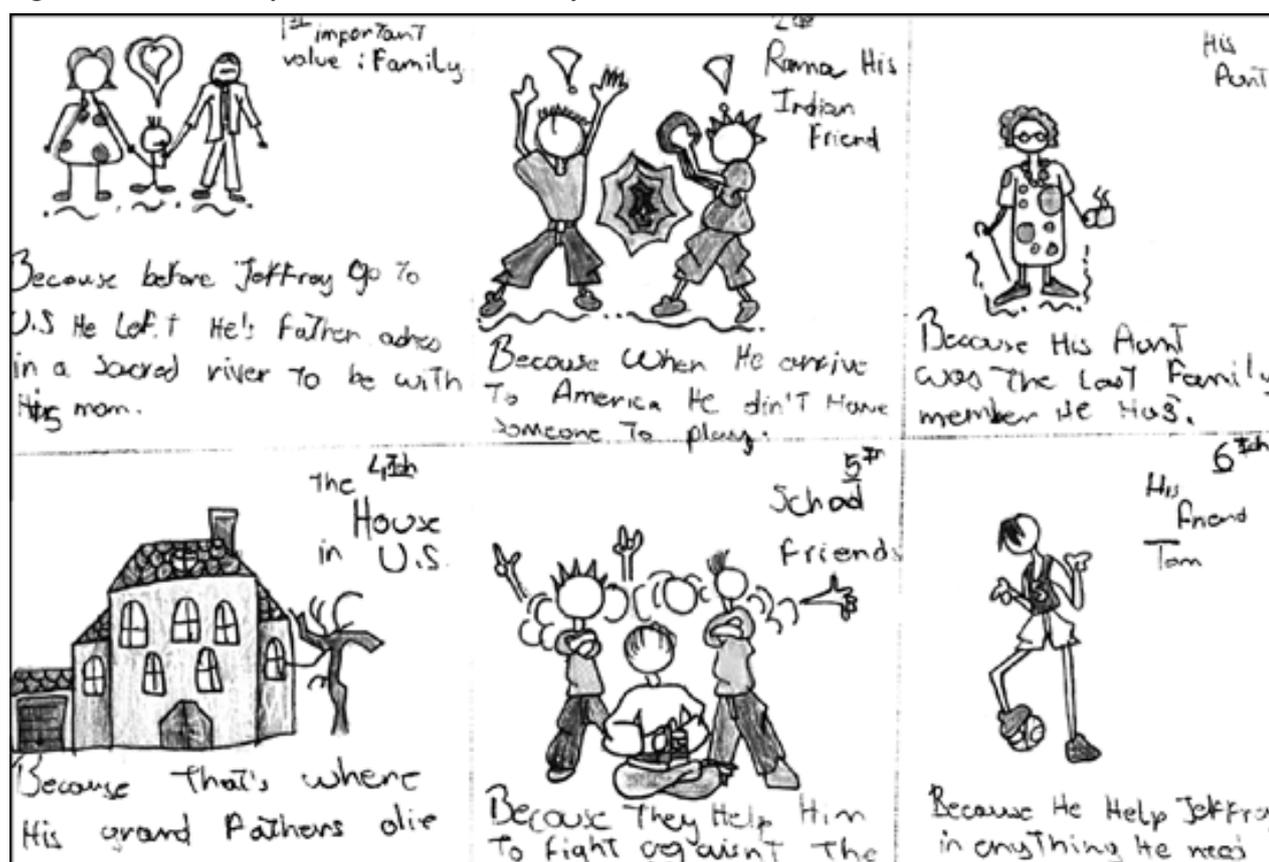
The scene depicted is the death of Jeffrey's father. His father is in the bed, and the priest is sitting on the chair. Jeffrey has just run in from school. As you can see, Nicolas's drawing captures both motion and emotion. And it demonstrates a profound understanding of this poignant scene in the novel. But the drawing was not the only surprise in store for Ochan and Alex. There was also Nicolas's journal entry, written to accompany the drawing and respond to the prompt, "Discuss some of the issues that Jeffrey faces in his move to the United States."

Nicolas wrote the following entry:

Some of the issues that Jeffrey faces in his move to US is that when he want to make friends and invite them to his house he don't know how to make them happy so they can't get bored. Because in India when he was with his friends he just looked at the sunset or kill vipers and swim but in America the kids want to do more things and listen to hard rock music. Also how to behave in class and with his friends so he can be there friends. And also how to play basketball and all the sports his friends play because in India he didn't have that kind of games so he need to learn them so he can do more friends and get used to American life.

While there were certainly problems with grammar, spelling, and syntax, Nicolas's writing had taken a quantum leap forward in terms of volume and complexity, and he had identified one of the novel's key themes—transition from one culture to another and how this change affects social relationships. Figure C is Nicolas's visualization of some of the important values represented in the novel.

Figure C. Nicolas's Depiction of the Novel's Key Values



Ochan and Alex had a hunch that there was a connection between Nicolas's improved writing and his drawing. Over the four weeks of the novel study, they provided Nicolas with numerous opportunities to use his artistic talents. It became apparent that Nicolas had benefitted tremendously from nonverbal, prewriting activities. Ochan and Alex speculated that the nonverbal brainstorming Nicolas engaged in while drawing provided him access to the English vocabulary stored in his long-term memory, which he could then use in his writing. They believed that Nicolas was basically drawing his way to thinking and writing. (We have noticed that boys often benefit greatly from this kind of nonverbal brainstorming.)

At the end of the four-week novel study, feedback from Nicolas confirmed Ochan and Alex's hypothesis. All the students were asked to address three questions:

1. How have you enjoyed this instructional approach?
2. What has gone well for you?
3. What advice do you have for the next novel study?

Here is how Nicolas responded:

1. I found this way of learning interesting because you can get to define yourself more and because the book can teach you about a person that change religion and don't have all his family. Also it tells that he don't know if he is from India or from U.S.
2. What has gone well for me in this class is that we needed to do a lot of drawing. Because I am good at drawing and also it make me write much but a lot more and I like that. That is good. Also I have good grades and good notes.
3. My advise that I have for the next one we are going to do is to read a lot more, write a lot more so that I can get better grades and also do more work and put more effort.

It was interesting for Ochan and Alex to note the personal connection that Nicolas had made to the novel in his first response, in which he highlighted the search for identity that is at the heart of every middle school child, and the confusion that may result from relocation. This underscored for both Ochan and Alex the need to be sensitive when working with students transitioning into a new classroom.

We followed Nicolas's progress for many years. On the midyear writing assessment in grade 8, Nicolas chose to write on the topic of terrorism. He filled the margins of his paper with small iconic drawings of terrorists and weapons. The same habit of drawing his way to thinking and writing continued in high school. The reverse side of his mock IB examination papers were covered with drawings. In 2006, Nicolas graduated from the International School of Kuala Lumpur with the full IB diploma. He was accepted at a prestigious university in Canada, where he is studying industrial design. Our hunch is that Nicolas is still drawing his way to thinking, and that when he is 40 and the CEO of a large company, or the Mexican ambassador to some country, the first draft of his reports will be full of small, iconic drawings.

Teachers can learn a great deal from our students, and Nicolas taught Ochan and Alex many lessons. He taught them how colleagues reflecting and planning together often have insights that would not have been available to them individually. He underscored how important it is to examine assumptions about students and suspend premature evaluation. He taught them that a personalized and culturally relevant entry point to the curriculum can mean the difference between sustained and sustainable achievement and frustration and failure. In short, Nicolas helped illustrate the power of personalized learning.

A Paradigm Shift for the New Global Reality

At the heart of personalized learning is a teacher's commitment to teach all of his or her students. Too often in the past, the prevailing attitude has been that in every class there will be a few unreachable children—students who are too lazy, too emotionally disturbed, too ESL, too learning disabled, too inattentive, or too lacking in intelligence or self-control to learn. Too often teachers have assumed tacit license from colleagues and administrators to dismiss or disregard the learning of some students. In the high school where Bill started his teaching career in the 1970s, responsibility for the learning of "difficult" students was placed not on the teacher but on the students.

Embracing All

In her article "Deciding to Teach Them All," Carol Ann Tomlinson (2003) writes about the power of a teacher embracing the challenge of teaching *all* students in the class—not some or even most, but *all*. Tomlinson suggests that when teachers make the decision to teach each individual child, our perceptual framework undergoes a fundamental shift. We turn from looking at a student's "labels" to searching for that student's interests and needs. We shift from focusing on the child's deficits—what he or she cannot do—to looking at the child's strengths. We move away from the question "How do I remediate this student?" and toward "What do I do to ensure that this student works at the highest level of thought and production?"

Individual teachers and entire schools must make this commitment to equity. It is easy for educators to be drawn into dichotomous thinking—to pit the pursuit of excellence against the desire for equity. This often occurs at a subconscious level. We see it when private schools define themselves as college preparatory and exclude children with special educational needs. The unspoken assumption is that children who learn differently will somehow lower the standards and impede the learning of other, brighter students. How often have we heard someone say, "We can't be all things to all people"? Instead of such restrictive thinking, we need to embrace what De Bono (1991) calls *water logic* (as opposed to the either/or thinking of *rock logic*); it's what our Asian colleagues refer to as "the search for the middle way."

The creative tension of embracing both excellence and equity is the defining quality of great schools. Good schools often choose to focus on one or the other—either excellence or equity. Some, by practicing selective admissions policies, sacrifice equity. Others embrace a social-reconstructionist agenda at the expense of critical thinking and high academic standards. *Great* schools, however, refuse to compromise either excellence or equity. The International School of Brussels (ISB) is a case in point. It accepts over 1,500 children from more than 40 nationalities, and these students range from extremely capable learners to those with intensive learning challenges. The mission of ISB is *Everyone included. Everyone challenged. Everyone successful. 1,500 ways of being intelligent*. At graduation, a student with cerebral palsy who was born in Ireland will walk across the stage next to a student from the United States who is destined for Yale.

A starting point for integration of excellence and equity is an understanding that neither is mutually exclusive. In fact, we would argue that they are complementary. The startling recognition is that cultural and learning diversity have enormous potential for enriching our classrooms. Inclusive education is not only more humane; it is actually more effective for all students (Florian & Rouse, 1996; Mittler, 1995; Stainback, Stainback, & Jackson 1992; Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1995). Unfortunately, most of the world's education systems have been designed to be deliberately exclusive and to serve needs other than those of students.

Historical Purposes of Education

For the last two centuries, schools have had three primary purposes. The thinking behind all three of these traditional purposes is now entirely outdated.

The first purpose was *to sort children and young adults into categories* so they would "fit" into a fixed social and economic order. When Bill was growing up in Britain, the 11 Plus exam was still in place. The examination was administered annually to all 11-year-old students, and the results were used to sort children into those who would continue with an academic education and those who would be shunted into vocational training. It served, in many cases, to perpetuate a rigid class structure. Much of education worldwide continues to fulfill this outdated and antidemocratic function.

The second purpose of schooling was *to instill a sense of national identity and patriotism*. In countries as diverse as China, Tanzania, Malaysia, and the United States, we still see the influence of national identity in the classroom. Until recently, both Tanzania and Malaysia had strict regulations that prohibited its citizens from attending international schools. The idea seemed to be that citizenship and allegiance to the nation-state would be learned in the classroom. China continues to have such prohibitions. While such restrictions do not exist in the United States, a number of states prohibit non-U.S. citizens from teaching in the public schools. This may be a legacy from the xenophobia of Joseph McCarthy's 1950s, but as late as 1979, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the right, if not the wisdom, of New York State to ban noncitizens from teaching in public schools. The largest group affected? Teachers of French from nearby Quebec!

Historically, there has been little international perspective to national education. More disturbing was the fact that instilling a sense of national identity was often accomplished by perpetuating prejudices against and animosity toward other nationalities and cultures. In other words, students were taught to rally around a flag not to celebrate their national culture, but to feel more secure when they felt threatened by someone else's culture. Such narrow provincialism is antithetical to the interdependent reality of the modern global village. The membership of the United Nations now stands at just under 200 countries. Of those, only about 20 have any real claim to being "nation-states" in the 19th century sense of containing within their boundaries people of common descent, language, religion, and history. Increasingly, nationality is not associated with a single ethnicity or culture. Over 50 percent of the population of Vancouver is ethnically Asian. So what does it mean to be Canadian?

The third historical purpose of education was *to serve the economic interest of the nation state*. In 1998, when Tony Blair, the prime minister of Britain, declared that the first three priorities of his government were "Education, education, and education," he was not referring to the education of French or German children. When U.S. President George W. Bush signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) into law, he was not concerned about schools that were failing young people in Indonesia or Uganda. Education has always had vested national and economic self-interest firmly in its back pocket. But our modern, highly interdependent economic world makes such thinking completely archaic. When the sudden decline in housing values in the United States causes the stock markets in London, Hong Kong, and Tokyo to plunge, how can we think of the health of any national economy in isolation from the world economy?

Schools must make a paradigm change to catch up with the new global reality. Education must keep pace with our rapidly changing classrooms and world and give all students the tools for working in a global context. Climate change, renewable energy, and the other great challenges of the next generation do not have national borders. In 1918, before the advent of commercial air travel, the Spanish flu took less than a month to spread from its first documented appearance in the United States to the presence of documented cases in every state of the union. How much faster has been the recent spread of the H1N1 flu and how inadequate have been the attempts at evoking national sovereignty as a means of protecting citizens. Slowly, we are perceiving the necessity of global interdependence. Slowly, we are understanding the importance of appreciating and understanding cultures other than our own. These are the crucial messages of the global classroom. Education systems, schools, and teachers have an urgent and undeniable obligation to inculcate "international mindedness" in their students.

Some national education systems are starting to move in the right direction. In January 2007, the British government released a report titled *2020 Vision*. The centerpiece of this report was a clear vision that students learn in different ways, and these different learning proclivities are influenced by culture, gender, societal factors, learning styles, and biology. The report called on schools and educators to engage in personalized learning, to focus in a more structured and systematic way on each child's learning in order to enhance progress, achievement, and participation: "In personalized learning, teachers use their understanding of achievement data and other information about their pupils to benefit particular groups, for example, the gifted and talented, by matching teaching and opportunities for learning more accurately to their needs" (Department for Education and Skills, 2007, p. 14).

Questions for Today's Educators

As teachers and schools push past old thinking and outdated purposes in an attempt to meet the new demands of a global classroom and interconnected world, new questions arise:

- How does a child's culture affect how he or she thinks and learns?
- How can a teacher come to know students as learners in a truly global classroom?
- How does a teacher build robust learning relationships with children from a multitude of cultural backgrounds and with many learning styles and intelligence preferences?
- How does a teacher's knowledge and perceptions of culture affect the learning of students?
- What should the curriculum for the global classroom include?
- What might culturally sensitive assessment look like?
- How does a teacher bridge cultural divides when collaborating with colleagues?

Although much of culture is intangible, it nevertheless provides the framework for personal identity. We trample upon another person's culture—even inadvertently—at our own peril. And when we as educators ignore the cultural backgrounds of our students or pretend that these cultural backgrounds do not influence learning in the classroom, we set ourselves up to be perceived as arrogant and disrespectful or, worse yet, alienate our students and erode their sense of membership and belonging in our class community.

Pursuing knowledge in the five key domains of personalized learning— *knowing our students*, *knowing ourselves*, *knowing our curriculum*, *knowing our assessments*, and *knowing our collegial relationships*—will yield insights into accommodating cultural and learning diversity in the classroom. We will discuss each domain in subsequent chapters of the book, and we have included an Action Advice section at the end of every chapter to get you started in personalizing learning in your own classroom. Although there is no question that a broad repertoire of instructional strategies is an essential component of effective teaching, this "bigger toolbox" is not enough in and of itself. We hope this book will help inspire the deep and inclusive thoughtfulness that underlies all meaningful learning outcomes.

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