In this one-stop resource for middle and high school teachers, Kristina J. Doubet and Jessica A. Hockett explore how to use differentiated instruction to help students be more successful learners—regardless of background, native language, learning style, motivation, or school savvy. They explain how to:

- Create a healthy classroom community in which students’ unique qualities and needs are as important as the ones they have in common.
- Translate curriculum into manageable and meaningful learning goals that are fit to be differentiated.
- Use pre-assessment and formative assessment to uncover students’ learning needs and tailor tasks accordingly.
- Present students with avenues to take in, process, and produce knowledge that appeal to their varied interests and learning profiles.
- Navigate roadblocks to implementing differentiation.

Each chapter provides a plethora of practical tools, templates, and strategies for a variety of subject areas developed by and for real teachers. Whether you’re new to differentiated instruction or looking to expand your repertoire of DI strategies, *Differentiation in Middle and High School* will show you classroom-tested ways to better engage students and help them succeed every day.
Differentiation in Middle & High School

Foreword .......................................................................................................................................... ix

Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................................... xiii

Introduction: Is This Even Possible? ........................................................................................... 1

1. Building a Healthy Classroom Community ................................................................. 7

2. Articulating Learning Goals .......................................................................................... 31

3. Constructing Useful Pre-Assessments ........................................................................... 57

4. Hooking Students into Instruction .................................................................................. 81

5. Providing Interactive Learning Experiences ............................................................. 103

6. Checking for Understanding Using Formative Assessment ..................................... 151

7. Differentiating According to Student Readiness ......................................................... 173

8. Designing Differentiated Transfer Tasks for Assessment .......................................... 207

9. Navigating Potential Roadblocks to Implementing Differentiation ......................... 263

Conclusion: Gauging Success and Making Progress the Goal ............................................. 282

References ..................................................................................................................................... 286

Index ............................................................................................................................................ 291

About the Authors ...................................................................................................................... 295

Related ASCD Resources ......................................................................................................... 296
I’d argue that elegant teaching is high on the list of most complex human performances. It calls on teachers to think emotionally, intellectually, logistically, psychologically, strategically, theoretically, practically, and ethically—all at the same time—and to sustain that level of thought hour after hour, day after day, year after year throughout a career. I suspect the intensity tends to cut one of two ways. It causes some teachers to chart and sustain a comfortable course that lessens the demand. It causes others to embrace the challenge and the opportunity it provides to refine and extend a teacher’s mind, spirit, and soul. Whether teaching feels like a forge or an anvil, it’s not easy—ever. It’s possible to make a case that when the students are adolescents, the challenge only expands. By almost any measure, they are likely the most diverse group of students in a K–12 system.

Differing wildly in academic readiness as well as in physical and emotional maturity, executive function, economic status, interests, and motivation, they alternately want to rebel and conform, exert their independence and curl up on the couch next to Mom—or at least the dog. They are brash and afraid, profane and naïve, jazzed and comatose.

Yet within that hash of paradoxes resides their tomorrow. In middle and high school, they—and we—construct their futures.

We have documents aplenty reminding us what it means to teach well in the face of diversity in general—and adolescent diversity in particular. The National Association of Secondary School Principals’ guide for reshaping high schools to better meet the needs of diverse adolescents is called Breaking Ranks. It proposes the following as key elements in making high school classes work for the broad range of students in those schools: differentiated instruction, personalized learning plans, environments in which students feel safe, and alternatives to tracking and grouping.
The Association for Middle Level Education advises that teaching and learning approaches should accommodate the diverse skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents; cultivate multiple intelligences; draw on students’ individual learning styles; and utilize digital tools.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards reminds us that classes don’t learn; individuals do (or don’t), and those individuals don’t need to learn the same thing at the same moment, or at the same pace.

These guides, standards, and admonitions ask a great deal of us. Indications are, in fact, that many middle and high schools don’t exemplify these practices. Yet, based on my experience, at least, most of the teachers at those schools would say they care about and respect their students.

Geneva Gay, author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, has challenged and clarified my thinking about what caring means. She suggests that there’s a profound difference in caring about and caring for students. Caring about students leads teachers to be sensitive to students, to appreciate them, to form relationships with them—a good thing, to be sure. Caring for students, on the other hand, compels teachers to do whatever is necessary to ensure their welfare, to see to their success—a life-changing thing.

Recently, I read synthesis papers written by my largely undergraduate students at the University of Virginia. In a class on differentiated instruction, they had read, abstracted, and melded key ideas from three books into a coherent framework for thinking about differentiation. As always, I was humbled by how much I learned from them. Three insights from three very different students—all preservice teachers—pushed my thinking in three different ways.

One student investigated Latin root words for *respect*, finding that noun and verb forms mean to look at, to gaze at, to consider, to care for, to provide for, and to look back often at. She said the linguistic roots of *respect* resonated with her because she had long had the sense that respect is inextricably tied to knowing. “To look back (or often) at,” she wrote, “to gaze at: these actions are characteristic of a person actively pursuing the knowledge or understanding of something or someone.”

Another student began with a cryptic quote from Arthur Koestler’s *The Act of Creation*: “For the anthropomorphic view of the rat, American psychology substituted a rattomorphic view of man.” The student went on to say, “Many American educators have settled into acceptance of a ‘rattomorphic’ view of the American Student as an entity that can be studied and taught interchangeably.” He noted that differentiation challenges this rattomorphic view by arguing that “teaching within the constraints of human differences will lead to better learning, better learners, and a more challenging and vibrant teaching experience.”

A third student came from quite a different direction, writing a lengthy letter to a teacher she’d had in high school. Full of clear thought about the books she had read, her letter also had a personal tone. Just a semester short of beginning her career...
as a teacher, the student suddenly realized that she had experienced differentiation once in her own school career. She wasn’t sure whether the teacher had known that her approach had a name, but she was able to recount instance after instance in which the teacher had used differentiation to show respect and support for her students. The student concluded, “You knew me as an individual, not just as one blurry face among the hundreds of students who passed through your classroom each week.” I think this student would say that this was a class in which she felt respected, cared for—and not at all rattomorphic.

Kristina Doubet and Jessica Hockett are no strangers to middle and high school classrooms. In those settings, they launched their careers. In important ways, those years laid the foundation of the work both of them do now—Kristina in teaching secondary preservice teachers and both of them in working alongside more veteran teachers in middle and high school classrooms. For a time, both of them were my students at the University of Virginia. Since I first met them, they have been my teachers as well. Their clarity, devotion to teachers and students, and creativity in helping teachers at all stages to understand how to abandon rattomorphic pedagogies in favor of ones that respect and care for adolescents keep me thinking and hungry for more.

I’m excited for teachers who will learn along with me from this first major publication from the pair of them—and for teachers who will continue both to learn from them and to nurture them over the years.

Carol Ann Tomlinson
Former high school and middle school teacher
William Clay Parrish, Jr. Professor & Chair of Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Policy, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA
Acknowledgments

This book was born and developed in community with many people we value. Over the past decades, we have been blessed to learn from and alongside scores of middle and high school teachers and leaders. Their insights, critiques, questions, and dedication inspired and guided this book. We hope the contents honor and strengthen the challenging work they do every day.

Students and faculty in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at James Madison University provided us with expert content knowledge as well as sound, creative examples. JMU students, in particular, pushed us toward specificity and clarity in our explanations and tools. We are grateful.

We are thankful for the diligence, flexibility, and patience of Genny Ostertag, Acquisitions Editor at ASCD, and for our copy editor Miriam Goldstein, who made sure that we meant what we said and said what we meant. Kori Hockett blessed us by graciously reading and offering helpful feedback on the manuscript in its entirety. We also appreciate the valuable feedback on our proposal and early chapters offered by anonymous reviewers; their comments helped us focus and refine our vision.

We have been fortunate to engage with many talented colleagues in the differentiation effort, including Jennifer Beasley, Catherine Brighton, Marla Read Capper, Eric Carbaugh, Cheryl Dobbertin, Holly Hertberg-Davis, Marcia Imbeau, Jane Jarvis, Tonya Moon, Chad Prather, Judy Rex, Nanci Smith, and Cindy Strickland. Their expertise, examples, and support have inspired us.

We are deeply indebted to our guide and mentor Carol Tomlinson—a wise and selfless human being who has inspired thousands of teachers to love their students and their professions by preaching that which she practices. Her tireless commitment to ensuring that school is an inviting and enriching place for all students changed the way we saw ourselves and our teaching. Her personal investment in each of us
individually, as the consummate teacher and advisor, has helped shape us both as people and as professionals. We owe her more than we could ever express or repay.

We are grateful for the unwavering support of our families, both in the process of writing this book and over decades of encouragement. Our parents, Eldon and Susan Doubet and Don and Patti Faber, have modeled hard work and perseverance in pursuit of worthy goals. And they have loved us unconditionally—the greatest gift of all.

Finally, we give our ultimate praise and thanksgiving to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher who demonstrated that teaching is serving in love and humility.
Introduction: Is This Even Possible?

The Challenge

Middle and high schools in the United States today are blessed with students from a rich range of racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This vibrant diversity expands students’ understanding of what makes us us, and helps equip them to become productive, empathetic, and ethical citizens who can thrive in an ever-changing global society.

Our country’s commitment to educating all children well has driven the push for all graduates to be “college and career ready” and globally competitive. In pursuit of that goal, we have increased the rigor of academic standards. A high-quality education is no longer the province of the few or the rich, but the right of every child in every community.

The confluence of these two factors—rising student diversity and increased academic rigor—means that today’s middle and high school teachers have greater accountability for a more diverse population of students than ever before. In many schools, appraisal of teachers’ performance is based at least in part on their ability to ensure the progress of every student, regardless of background, native language, motivation, or school savvy.

Herein lies the challenge: how do teachers capitalize on the benefits offered by the lavish tapestry of the U.S. secondary classroom while ensuring growth for such a wide range of learners?

Is it even possible?
Attempts to Meet the Challenge

U.S. school systems have historically “handled” student diversity by sorting students into different schools, course levels, or special programs based on test scores or presumed educational destination. Unfortunately, these approaches have tended to widen achievement gaps, exacerbate student status differences, and result in some students receiving a higher-quality education than others.

At the classroom level, middle and high school teachers address student diversity through the kinds of instruction they employ. Traditional instruction is the model most familiar to teachers, as it represents the kind of instruction they typically experienced as students. Featuring the teacher as center, this model has all students take in, process, and demonstrate mastery of learning in the same manner during a given time frame. Although instruction may be offered in multiple modes (e.g., audio and visual), all students move at the same pace through those modes. Groupings other than whole-class are atypical in a traditional classroom, although students may occasionally work with self- or teacher-selected partners to complete tasks assigned to the full class.

One attempt to move away from a teacher-centered classroom is cooperative learning. In this model, the teacher typically delivers the same content to all students at the same time using the same set of strategies for the whole class. Students process this information collaboratively in small heterogeneous groups, with all groups working on the same task. Although this group work is the norm in this model, the teacher rarely varies grouping configurations or tasks. Students in a cooperative classroom may occasionally receive choices for tasks or assignments, but for the most part, all students complete the same work (albeit in interactive settings).

Unfortunately, both the traditional model and the cooperative model fail to discern the nuances of students’ varying learning needs and adjust instruction accordingly.

Differentiation: A Better Solution

One-size-fits-all approaches to teaching and learning will not propel all (or even most) students toward and beyond standards. A more promising and productive way to address student differences is known as differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2003, 2014a). Differentiation is not synonymous with tracking or ability grouping. Rather than describing where students learn (i.e., in a classroom with peers who are deemed to be at the same academic level), differentiation articulates how the classroom teacher makes important curricular goals accessible to all learners within the same classroom.

Middle and high school classrooms that regularly implement differentiated instruction are characterized by certain hallmarks not typically shared by traditional or cooperative classrooms. In a differentiated classroom, teachers
• Create an atmosphere in which students’ unique qualities and needs are as important as the traits they share.
• Uncover students’ learning needs through pre-assessments and formative assessment and tailor tasks accordingly.
• Plan experiences and tasks that are bound together by common and important learning goals.
• Present varied approaches and avenues for students to take in, process, and produce knowledge.
• Vary grouping configurations frequently and strategically as a way of granting access to learning goals, providing support and challenge, and building community.

For many teachers, the cultivation of differentiated classrooms is neither natural nor intuitive; such a practice stands in stark contrast to their own experience as students, and traditional and cooperative models feel more familiar and comfortable. But used exclusively, both these models fail to meet students where they are and call them to something higher while offering appropriate levels of support and challenge. This is the goal of the differentiated classroom.

Misconceptions abound as to what “qualifies” as differentiated instruction. In this book, differentiation adheres to the criteria outlined in the bulleted list above as well as to the distinctions laid out in Figure I.1 (Tomlinson, 2003, 2014a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differentiation <strong>Is</strong></th>
<th>Differentiation <strong>Is Not</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... A philosophy rooted in effective teaching and learning.</td>
<td>... A bag of tricks or set of strategies that can be plunked into low-quality curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Regularly examining evidence of student learning and making thoughtful instructional decisions accordingly.</td>
<td>... Either an everyday necessity or a once-in-a-blue-moon “event.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Tailoring instruction in response to patterns in student needs.</td>
<td>... Writing individualized lesson plans for every student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Designing respectful tasks and using flexible grouping.</td>
<td>... Sorting or pigeonholing students into static groups or levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... A way <strong>up</strong> to standards and learning goals.</td>
<td>... A way <strong>out</strong> of standards and learning goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Critical to improving instruction for <em>all</em> students.</td>
<td>... More important for certain groups of students (e.g., students with IEPs or English language learners).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To be clear, differentiation is not a “magic bullet.” It’s not an easy fix, and it can’t immediately or neatly solve the complex problems teachers face in their classrooms.

Instead, differentiation is a proactive way of thinking. It’s systemic practice. It’s hard work. And it offers hope.

What’s Ahead

All teachers plan. Differentiation is, in essence, a way of upping the ante in the planning process by calling on teachers to purposefully and proactively think about how instruction could be more responsive to more kids. As a middle or high school teacher engages in this kind of planning, he or she may wonder,

- How do I set the tone?
- How do I determine what I have to teach?
- How do I know what students already know?
- How do I get students to care?
- How do I help students make sense of it?
- Is my teaching working?
- What if students are in different places?
- Do students get it?
- How do I keep this sane?

These key questions provide practical entry points for thinking about how differentiation influences each phase of lesson design. Their answers form the backbone of this book, which aims to be a comprehensive guide to differentiation in middle and high school classrooms. Here’s a brief look at what each chapter addresses:

Chapter 1 presents techniques to promote healthy teacher-student and student-student relationships and foster a growth mindset.

Chapter 2 shows teachers how to prioritize, focus, and “translate” the curriculum into manageable and meaningful learning goals that are fit to be differentiated.

Chapter 3 offers guidelines on how best to gather information about what students already know, understand, and can do prior to beginning a unit or lesson.

Chapter 4 features strategies designed to foster student investment by conceptually linking students to what they are about to read, discuss, see, or listen to.

Chapter 5 explains strategies for actively involving all students in discussions and other kinds of activities aimed at making sense of content.

Chapter 6 provides strategies and prompts for gauging the progress of student learning—both during the course of a lesson and at its completion—with the goal of using that information to inform future instructional decisions.

Chapter 7 focuses on low- and high-prep approaches to adjusting content, process, and product for student readiness, with an emphasis on closely analyzing and planning instruction directly from formative assessment results.
Chapter 8 features strategies that require students to demonstrate command of learning goals while allowing them to choose tasks that appeal to their varied interests and learning profiles.

Chapter 9 offers practical suggestions and tools for navigating potential roadblocks to differentiation in the secondary classroom.

The Conclusion addresses lingering questions about how and where to get started and provides additional resources to help teachers move forward in their quest to create more responsive classrooms.

This book recognizes two fundamental truths: (1) that the real world of middle and high school is characterized by pressure and time constraints that significantly influence what is feasible for teachers in terms of change, and (2) that the most powerful (and efficient) learning often happens by example. Accordingly, Part 2 of each chapter provides a plethora of tools and examples spanning a range of grade levels and subject areas that were developed by, for, or with real teachers. These can be used to support teacher growth in myriad contexts, including professional learning communities, department or team planning meetings, and instructional coaching relationships. In any of these situations, teachers will benefit from studying examples from both inside and outside their content areas, as different disciplines can learn much from one another. For added utility, select forms and templates from this book can be downloaded at http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/books/Doubet2015forms.pdf. Use the password “Doubet2015115008” to unlock the PDF.

Used well, this book and its tools have the potential to upgrade what happens in middle and high school classrooms and, ultimately, to improve the learning and the lives of both teachers and their students.

It is possible.
Building a Healthy Classroom Community

Part 1: How Do I Set the Tone? ........................... 9

Part 2: Tools and Strategies.................................17
  Relationship-Building Activities .........................18
  Strategies for Introducing Mindset ......................25
Part 1:
How Do I Set the Tone?

Relationships: A Prerequisite for Learning

“Under construction!” This sign should be flashing above the head of every middle and high school student in our classrooms. As brain experts like Eric Jensen (2005) observe, the degree of change experienced by the adolescent brain is matched only by that of the infant brain. These changes affect many aspects of learning, the most fundamental of which is dealing with emotions. Teenagers struggle to discern their own emotions as well as those of others, which frustrates the two driving goals of adolescence: to fit in and to be known (Tomlinson & Doubet, 2006).

Adolescents often devote more time and energy to worrying about whether they are safe and accepted than to caring about whether they are learning (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). This may be why teacher-student relationships have such a powerful effect on student achievement (Hattie, 2012) and why community-centered classrooms are such an important contributor to academic growth (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

The bottom line is that if teachers ignore the affective needs of teenagers, they will be less able to meet students' cognitive needs. Navigating the storm of adolescents’ competing desires—for independence and acceptance, uniqueness and conformity—requires time and commitment, but it can produce gains in both socioemotional and intellectual growth.

For teachers who want to create successful differentiated classrooms, cultivating healthy teacher-student and student-student relationships is not a matter of convenience but a necessity. As outlined in the Introduction, to differentiate successfully, middle and high school teachers must...
• Create an atmosphere in which students’ unique qualities and needs are as important as the traits they share.
• Uncover students’ learning needs through pre-assessments and formative assessment and tailor tasks accordingly.
• Plan experiences and tasks that are bound together by common and important learning goals.
• Present varied approaches and avenues for students to take in, process, and produce knowledge.
• Vary grouping configurations frequently and strategically as a way of granting access to learning goals, providing support and challenge, and building community.

Not one of these practices will be successful if students do not feel known, safe, and assured that the teacher has their best interests at heart.

If we ask students to take academic and social risks and to consistently operate outside their comfort zones, we must take deliberate steps to ensure that risk taking will be both supported and rewarded. Clearly establishing class rules and norms (with student input) is important, but it is only the beginning. As is the case with anything worthwhile, relationships take time to grow; they don’t magically mature overnight. Teachers can cultivate connections with and among students through both covert and overt measures.

Developing Relationships Covertly and Overtly

The covert, or less visible, means of developing healthy relationships is, at its most basic level, simple adherence to the Golden Rule: it is the commitment to treat students as we would like to be treated, with respect and interest. Greeting students at the door, asking about their weekends, noticing a new haircut or an injury, and connecting students to one another (“Diana, did you know Savannah moved here last year, too?”) are small gestures that can play a vital role in weaving the social fabric of the classroom, where relationships among students create the conditions for everyone to do his or her best work.

Covert methods can also be more systematic or strategic. Mr. Myles, a high school English teacher, recognized that the daily time crunch of his many classes could sometimes distract him from being as “human” as he wanted to be with his students, so he began including an extra blank at the top of every paper he collected. After students recorded their names and the date, they responded to a simple but powerful question: “How are you doing today?” As Mr. Myles collected his students’ work, he was able to see what was going on in their worlds (“My soccer team is going to the playoffs!” or “My grandma’s in the hospital. It doesn’t look good.”). In time, students started suggesting possible questions. Although they saw these questions as
their teacher’s way of making sure they wrote their names on their papers, Mr. Myles was subtly strengthening his arsenal for building bonds with and among students. His small proactive step paid off in a greatly increased sense of trust in his classroom.

The typical middle and high school schedule may tempt teachers to forgo more overt, or deliberate, relationship-building activities. But the press of time makes such activities even more important, as they yield dividends of increased trust and a better understanding of what it takes to motivate students and move them forward, which saves time in the long run. Whether used as a beginning-of-the-year survey or through periodic Exit Slips, questions such as those featured in Figure 1.1 can help teachers gather information for forming student groups according to shared characteristics, preferences, or interests that are relevant to a task. Individual student responses can also heighten teachers’ awareness of student sensitivities, experiences, or attitudes that are useful for planning and responding to student needs in general. Even if students are at first hesitant to share certain information, allotting time to intentionally ask students about themselves is a starting point for building classroom community. Without making this investment, assigning and facilitating tasks (differentiated or not), grouping students, and managing the classroom may feel like an uphill battle.

Engaging in such fact-finding about students can help teachers create motivating lessons and manage their classrooms. High school English teachers Ms. Bakum and Mr. Uyeda were able to accomplish these goals through a survey they distributed in their team-taught English class (see Figure 1.2). The teachers used students’ responses to (1) present lyrics from students’ favorite songs as examples of figurative language; (2) make references to students’ favorite shows when discussing character and conflict; (3) create class playlists to play during transitions between activities; (4) create flexible groups (such as “vacation groups” and “restaurant groups”); and (5) gather some preliminary information on students’ conception of theme. Ms. Bakum and Mr. Uyeda went beyond using their survey as a late-August get-to-know-you exercise by leveraging the information to help them establish routines and reinforce important academic content.

Part 2 of this chapter outlines a number of additional strategies for building strong classroom relationships and uncovering who students are. Teachers need not complete all of these activities with every class. Rather, teachers should choose (or adapt or create) one or two strategies that suit their personality and teaching style and begin each semester overtly sending the message that each student matters, and that all students must work together for the class to be successful.
FIGURE 11

Potential Student Survey Questions

1. Who lives with you?
2. What are your hobbies or extracurricular activities? What do you enjoy spending time on?
3. Describe how you typically spend the time between getting home from school and going to bed.
4. What are you really good at?
6. When people compliment you, it’s usually because:
7. If people complain about you, it’s probably because:
8. If you were a contestant on a “survival” reality show and were allowed to bring only one item with you to the island, what would you bring and why?
9. If you could invite three people—living or dead—to your house for dinner, whom would you invite and why?
10. What do you often wonder about?
11. When you’re feeling great at school, it’s probably because:
12. When you want to scratch your eyes out at school, it’s probably because:
13. List the last two books you read and tell . . .
   a. If they were assigned or read by choice.
   b. How you felt about each of them and why.
14. How do you like to work (circle your preference in each row)?
   a. independently        with a partner        in a small group
   b. in a quiet environment with background noise
   c. sitting still and concentrating I need to move around
15. If you could choose from the following careers, which would you select? Rank your top three, with 1 indicating the career you would most prefer. After you have selected from the list, feel free to add other choices in the space below.
   _____ Actor   _____ Engineer
   _____ Artist   _____ Musician
   _____ Builder   _____ Writer
   _____ Counselor   _____ Environmentalist
16. I learn best by . . . (rank the options, with 1 being the highest)
   _____ Seeing it   _____ Manipulating it (objects)
   _____ Hearing it   _____ Other (explain):
17. Is there anything else you would like me to know about you? If so, please explain.
FIGURE 1.2
Student Survey

Hi! My Name Is__________________. Doodle Box

Fast Facts:
Favorite Food:
Favorite Book:
Pepsi or Coca-Cola:
Goals After High School:

Doodle Box

In the section to the right, draw what your
doodles look like.

Favorite TV Show to Binge Watch on Netflix:
Dream Vacation Destination:
Least Favorite Weather:

Source: Lindsay Bakum and Grayson Uyeda. Used with permission.

Mindset: A Necessary Foundation for Differentiation

Complicating the puzzle of teaching adolescents even further is the role mindset plays in students’ motivation to learn. Carol Dweck’s groundbreaking work (2006) has revealed that

1. Students’ motivation to learn and achieve is strongly influenced by what they believe about the nature of intelligence.
2. Students who believe their intelligence is malleable (i.e., who have a growth mindset) tend to persevere in the face of hardship. Those who believe their intelligence is fixed (i.e., who have a fixed mindset) tend to be stymied by challenge (this is true whether students see themselves as high achievers or low achievers).
3. Teachers significantly, and often unconsciously, influence students’ perceptions of their own intelligence.

For academic interventions to have their desired effects on student performance, teachers must believe (and communicate the belief) that all students can grow. As is the case with building relationships, fostering the growth mindset in a differentiated classroom is a foundational imperative. None of the hallmarks of differentiated instruction outlined on page 10 will yield fruit without (1) the teacher’s unwavering belief in and commitment to student growth and (2) students’ belief in their own potential to improve with hard work. More specifically, teachers need to communicate the following truths:
• Mistakes and weaknesses are precursors to growth, not static portraits of ability.
• All students have room to grow, no matter where they begin.
• In a classroom of 30 students, there will be a great deal of variety in terms of where students are and what it will take to move each of them forward.
• It would not be “fair” or even realistic to treat everyone as the same person when this variety exists. The teacher’s mission is to discover where each student is in his or her learning as well as what he or she will need to grow.
• “Fair” will not mean everyone getting the same thing; it will mean everyone getting what he or she needs to take his or her appropriate next step.
• “Fair” will mean that all students will receive learning tasks that cause them to “feel the burn” as they lift appropriately challenging academic weights.

In other words, learning is actually strength training. Every student should expect to receive learning tasks that will make him or her work just as hard and sweat just as much as his or her classmates. When everyone is experiencing exertion in learning, when everyone is making strides in developing personal academic strength and agility—that is when the classroom is truly “fair.”

Addressing Mindset Covertly and Overtly

Clearly, this vision of fair is not the message communicated by the world, or even by school as a historical institution. Students are more likely to have been identified by their strengths and weaknesses than to have been expected to shed such labels as they progress in their learning. Adolescents, in particular, have had ample opportunity to develop the sense that fair simply means “the same.”

To challenge students’ thinking in this area, teachers must send both overt and covert messages about mindset. There are proactive steps teachers can take to help adolescents understand that what is genuinely fair is to hold the same expectations of growth for every student while varying the tools and paths used to help them achieve that growth.

Language is the most powerful tool in a teacher’s arsenal for sending growth-mindset messages. Unfortunately, it is also the tool most frequently—and most unwittingly—used to undermine growth. This primarily occurs through the use and misuse of praise. In Carol Dweck’s (2008) investigations into the link between praise and mindset, she determined that praise focused on students’ intelligence could shut students down, whereas praise centered on their effort could push them forward. Dweck observes that when we consistently tell students they are “smart!” or regularly comment on their “brilliant work,” we are communicating a fixed view of intelligence (either you have it or you don’t). Such praise can serve as a coveted reward that some students will strive to protect. These students become less likely to take intellectual risks out of fear that their mistakes will detract from their perceived brilliance.
On the other hand, praise that focuses on students’ effort or celebrates their learning process can significantly increase their willingness to make mistakes and learn from them. Ms. Ehlers, an 8th grade English teacher, makes a point to praise her students’ willingness to persevere: “I like the way you tried several strategies on that problem until you finally solved it,” and “I appreciate that you are experimenting with new vocabulary words in your writing; this word, in particular, paints a very clear picture in my mind.” Dweck’s research revealed that students who received this kind of praise were more likely to seek challenge and persist in the face of academic difficulties. For a teacher, changing the nature of praise is a subtle but powerful means of encouraging the growth mindset with adolescent learners, some of whom have already become praise junkies.

It is important to note that students of all backgrounds can come to school with a fixed mindset. Students who have a history of struggling in school may enter our classrooms with the notion that nothing they can do will override their “programmed” tendency to fail. They need to hear that they have a fighting chance and that their brains are like a muscle they can exercise and cause to grow (Jensen, 2005), no matter their academic history. If they don’t believe this, they will shut down when a task gets difficult, attributing their failure to a perceived lack of intelligence rather than to a gap in their skills and the need for the right tasks and a lot of effort. Likewise, students with a history of gliding successfully though school without much effort might balk at tasks that actually challenge them.

Because of the reward-seeking nature of many students, it can be helpful to employ overt, deliberate strategies to promote a growth mindset and encourage students to take risks. Part 2 of this chapter outlines a number of such strategies. As is the case with the relationship-building strategies, teachers need not use all of them with every class; rather, it is important for teachers to share personal stories of struggle and perseverance and to choose (or adapt or create) one or two strategies that match their personality and teaching style. These strategies can help teachers establish the important belief that each student has room to grow, that each student can grow, and that the teacher will do whatever it takes to ensure that each student does grow, regardless of starting point or past experiences.

The Classroom as an Interdependent System

As we move into the tools and strategies for this chapter, it is important to note that simply implementing these techniques at the beginning of the year or semester is insufficient to build a strong classroom community. Teachers must continually cultivate relationships and foster the growth mindset in their curriculum and instruction. Just as many of the instructional techniques presented in forthcoming chapters will rely on the establishment of these bedrock factors, they will also reinforce and develop those factors. To proclaim the importance of community while ignoring it with our teaching is careless at best, hypocritical and destructive at worst.
classroom community does require work up front, but its ultimate success relies on the caliber of curriculum and instruction we prepare for our students daily.

**A Case in Point: Ms. Rissa**

In an effort to illustrate what this book’s principles and strategies look like in action, Part 1 of each chapter will close by exploring how one of four classroom teachers implemented the strategies featured in the chapter. We will pop into all their classrooms throughout the course of the book.

This school year, English teacher Ms. Rissa and her interdisciplinary team members have agreed to focus on fostering a growth mindset in the students they share. The teachers decided to use content-related examples to ensure that (1) their examples were distinct from one another and (2) their discussions enhanced their respective curricula.

Ms. Rissa decided to weave the discussion of mindset into the Life Soundtrack assignment she uses each year with her students (see pp. 22–23). For this assignment, each student created a four-song soundtrack to tell the story of his or her life, based on the four literary elements of character, setting, theme, and conflict. Not only was the assignment an engaging way to review the literary elements, but it also helped Ms. Rissa get to know a great deal about her students, who relished the opportunity to comb their music collections “for school.”

Ms. Rissa realized that she could incorporate the discussion of mindset into students’ choices for the “conflict” song: she would ask them to pick a song that summed up how they had faced a major conflict—versus self, others, nature, or society (i.e., one of the four literary types of conflict)—and how facing that conflict had shaped their character. She would have to change her own example to reflect that emphasis, as she always shared her own soundtrack with students to provide an exemplar as well as to present points of appropriate connection with them. Sometimes she and her students shared the same taste in music, but more often, it was a mutual experience, insight, or struggle that provided common ground.

To capitalize on the assignment even further, Ms. Rissa decided to have students share their soundtracks with their classmates as a way to foster student-student connections. By discussing how conflict leads to progress in their personal lives, they would also be laying a foundation on which they could build candid discussions about their writing later in the year.
Part 2:
Tools and Strategies
Relationship-Building Activities

What They Are:
Proactive strategies for helping the teacher get to know students, for helping students get to know one another, and for establishing important affective norms in the classroom to facilitate differentiated instruction.

How They Work:
Teachers choose one or two of these activities to use at the beginning of the year to strategically discover the backgrounds and interests of students and to help them find areas of overlap with one another. Strategies can also be used throughout the school year to reignite a sense of connection and shared purpose.

What They’re Good For:
- The primary purpose for using these strategies is to help the teacher get to know what makes students “tick” so that he or she can connect with students on a personal, “human” level and ensure they feel seen, known, and cared for.
- Teachers can also use the information gleaned from these activities to target student interests in instructional situations (e.g., interest-based tasks, word problems, writing prompts, student group work).
- By participating in these strategies, students will get to know one another as well. Building these student-student connections not only facilitates student grouping and regrouping but also promotes a trusting atmosphere in which students feel safe to take risks—a necessary underpinning of differentiation.

Tips:
- Although most strategies require a setup, Piecing Together Community (p. 24) is an exception to this principle, as it is an inductive strategy. Don’t let students in on the point of this particular exercise until after it is completed.
- Aside from Attendance Questions, all strategies in this section require some debriefing with students following the experience. Do not just assume students got the point of the exercise. A combination of class discussion and individual reflection works best.
- The first five strategies work best when modeled by teachers, so share your own stories and interests first.
## Attendance Questions

**Directions:**
- At the beginning of the class period, pose a prompt (either aloud or on the board).
- Have students announce their attendance in class by stating their name and their answer to the prompt.
- Use a quick question for efficiency (e.g., Dogs or cats? Pie or cake? Pool or beach? Favorite late-night host? Favorite season? Favorite sports team?).
- Use a more involved question if it holds the potential to serve as a lesson “hook” (e.g., Whom do you most admire? to introduce a discussion of leadership styles; Favorite video game? to lead into an examination of cause-and-effect relationships).

**Variations:**
- **Greeting Graffiti.** While the teacher is in the hall on duty between classes, students enter the classroom to find the Attendance Question posted on the board. They record their answers on the board and sign it. The teacher comments on ideas and patterns before erasing the board and starting class.
- **Good-bye Gabfest.** Students use the awkward time between announcements and dismissal to answer a quick exit question (similar to the quick prompts described above) or a lengthier question dealing with afternoon or weekend plans (e.g., What are you most looking forward to OR dreading?).
### Pie Charts

**Directions:**
- Ask students to draw a circle that takes up most of a page of notebook paper or a computer screen (or distribute ready-made circles).
- Tell them this circle represents their interests. They are to turn the circle into a pie chart that represents the things they are most interested in (both in and out of school).
- Each circle must include at least five sections; the dimension of each wedge should reflect the student’s level of interest in that topic or hobby (e.g., if the student is most interested in playing soccer, the soccer wedge should be the largest).
- Students should also represent the dimension of each interest as a fraction and a decimal (either in the pie chart itself or below it).

**Follow-Up:**
- Students share their charts in pairs or groups and discuss similarities and differences. They can also pose questions to one another about the data revealed in their charts.
- The teacher uses the information from these charts throughout the year to form interest-based groups and to create word problems and prompts that will intrigue students.
### Who Is It?

**Directions:**

- Tell students they will be playing a guessing game called “Who Is It?” Ask everyone to stand, and model the activity using your own information. (See following section for how to craft this information.) Tell the class that you will present four statements in succession. Students should stay standing if a statement is true for them, and sit down if it is not. Once they are seated, they stay seated. A teacher example follows:

  “Remain standing if . . .
  — “You were born east of the Mississippi River.”
  — “You’ve been to Disney World.”
  — “You did not have a cell phone in middle school.”
  — “You saw *Return of the Jedi* in the movie theater in 1983.”

- After the last item, you should be the only one standing; at that point, reveal that the four statements describe you.

- Explain that the class will play a few rounds of the game using students’ information.

- Ask students to write numbers 1–4 on an index card. Display the following directions:
  — Next to number 1, write something about yourself that you probably have in common with *most* (about 75 percent) of the people in the room.
  — Next to number 2, write something about yourself that you probably have in common with *some* (about 50 percent) of the people in the room.
  — Next to number 3, write something about yourself that you probably have in common with *a few* (no more than 25 percent) of the people in the room.
  — Next to number 4, write something about yourself that is probably *unique to you*.
  — Make sure to write down only things you feel comfortable sharing with the class.

- Collect students’ index cards and complete a few rounds using the items on the cards. There is no need to go through all the cards in one class period. Use the cards periodically (e.g., on Fridays) at the beginning or end of class, or during a class period as a way of switching gears, transitioning between activities, or providing a chance to get up and move.

**Variation:**

Classmates can ask the last student standing questions about his or her items, and the card owner can explain or clarify any of the information from the card.
## Life Soundtrack

### Directions:

- Each student creates a four-song soundtrack that tells his or her life story in terms of setting, character, theme, and central conflict. Students should consider the following prompts:
  - **Setting:** Where and how did you grow up? What surroundings have shaped you? You can address this element in a concrete way (e.g., an area of the world or country, your neighborhood, your house), or it can be something more symbolic and metaphorical (e.g., the state of perpetually moving, the “press” of living in a large household or an urban area).
  - **Character:** Who are you? What makes you “tick”? How would people describe you? Would different people describe you differently? Why?
  - **Theme:** Describe your overarching perspective about life and people, and explain why you have this point of view. What would you tell the world if you had the chance?
  - **Conflict:** Describe your central conflict: is it big or small? Momentary or ongoing? Internal or external? Versus yourself, others, society, or nature? Explain how the conflict has caused you to grow or change.

- Each soundtrack should include a soundtrack title, a list of the songs and their artists, and some sort of cover art. Life Soundtracks can be produced in a variety of formats: PowerPoint slides, Prezis, websites, videos, or CD covers with lyric inserts, for example.
- For each literary element, students must include (1) key song lyrics that sum up that element in their lives (if necessary, edit lyrics to make them school-appropriate); and (2) detailed explanations of why they chose these lyrics and how the lyrics reflect their life experiences.
- Each student shares his or her song list and one song (including the key lyrics and explanation of how the lyrics reflect his or her experiences) with the class.
Life Soundtrack

• Criteria for success:
  — Each literary element is represented true to both its meaning in literature and its application in your life.
  — Lyric selections are school-appropriate and clearly communicate the literary element.
  — Your explanations clearly detail how the lyrics reflect both the literary element and your personal experience.
  — The product is of professional quality.

Variations:

• Add the literary elements of point of view and plot to the soundtrack.
• Rather than reviewing all four literary elements at once, introduce each element separately and have students choose only one song at a time.
• Repeat this assignment with a work of literature later in the year, using the story’s literary elements rather than students’ personal life experiences. Students can create a soundtrack of a novel, a short story, or a play, following similar prompts and evaluation criteria.
• Include additional academic supports, such as definitions or examples of the literary elements.
### Piecing Together Community

**Directions:**

- Ask students to work in small groups to assemble different portions of a complex jigsaw puzzle. No map or image of the completed puzzle is available for the first five minutes.
- During the second five minutes, allow each team to send a “spy” to gather intelligence by looking at the puzzle box cover and reporting back.
- Circulate and make observations, taking notes on individual student tendencies during group work (e.g., taking over, sitting back, facilitating) as well as group dynamics.
- At the close of the activity, ask students to reflect on what they learned about themselves and their classmates during the activity.
- Share some things you learned through your observations.
- Lead the class in discussing what classroom community should look like and developing collaborative norms and specific guidelines to govern group work.
Strategies for Introducing Mindset

**What They Are:**
Proactive, concrete, student-involved strategies used to introduce the following ideas:

- Intelligence is malleable.
- Our mistakes serve as stepping-stones for success.
- *Fair* means everyone gets what he or she needs to grow, *not* that everyone gets the same thing.

**How They Work:**
Teachers choose one or two strategies to use at the beginning of the year to purposely introduce both the expectation and the value of effort. The teacher should debrief or discuss each strategy in terms of the three guiding ideas above. Strategies can also be used throughout the school year to reignite the expectation of hard work and risk taking.

**What They’re Good For:**

- The primary purpose for using mindset-introduction strategies is to instill in students the expectation that they will experience challenge, as it is a necessary precursor to growth.
- Teachers can also use the information gleaned from these activities to reinforce the fact that students *do* have control over their learning. If students believe they can grow, they will.
- These strategies also present the teacher with the opportunity to redefine *fair* and to define *differentiation*. The more proactive we are about sending the message that difference is the norm, the less pushback we experience when different students are assigned different tasks.

**Tips:**

- Unlike the relationship-building activities, most strategies in this section do not require a setup, as they are inductive strategies. In other words, students should not be let in on the point of each exercise until after it is completed. The first two strategies are exceptions to this principle, as they take a more direct approach.
- All strategies in this section will require teachers to debrief with students following the experience to expose its purpose. Do not automatically assume that students got the point of the exercise. A combination of class discussion and individual reflection works best.
- Each strategy can be used in the context of the following before-or-after readings on mindset and the brain’s plasticity:
  - Mindset: http://mindsetonline.com. Carol Dweck’s website, including information, videos, tests, tools, and links to other media.

### Mindset Tracking

**Directions:**

- Define mindset using any of the resources described in the readings on mindset and the brain’s plasticity.
- Share three examples of growth and/or fixed mindset in action. You can use personal examples, well-known examples (e.g., athletes or historical figures), or examples from various media (e.g., movies or song lyrics).
- Give students the following prompt for their weekly journals or blogs: Keep an eye out for indications of mindset—both fixed and growth—in yourself, your friends and family, the news, and other media. For each example you find, record the following:
  - Which type of mindset is being exemplified, and how do you know?
  - How might having this type of mindset play out in this person’s life? Why do you say so?
- Students should keep track of these questions in their journals or blogs and be ready to share their favorite examples with the class.

**Variation:**

Post student examples on a bulletin board or in another visible area of the room.
Glow and Grow

**Directions:**

- Give each student an index card.
- On the front side of their index cards, ask students to record (a) their name, (b) the thing in life they do best or enjoy most, and (c) the thing in life they do worst or enjoy least.
- On the back of their cards, have students record or draw a *nonlinguistic representation* (icon or picture) of their answer to question (b) or question (c).
- Ask students to circulate through the room with their cards, holding them with the picture side out. They should
  - Try to find someone whose picture is similar or related to their own in some way (e.g., both represent a sport).
  - Meet with that person and share the information on their cards.
  - Ask their partner at least one additional question (e.g., favorite and least favorite foods, music, hobbies, or television shows).
  - Repeat the process with a new partner.
- Following the activity, discuss:
  - “Why should I assume that just because you’re in the same class, you share interests, strengths, and weaknesses?”
  - “I won’t treat you all like the same person, but I *will* expect you all to move toward expertise, no matter where you start.”

**Variation:**

To find partners more efficiently, students can create icons using technology and display them on the interactive whiteboard.
Redefining Fair

Directions:

- Ask students to define *fair* using synonyms; encourage them to go with their gut reactions. Most likely, they will propose the synonyms *same* and *equal*.
- Write their responses on the board and explain that you are going to put these definitions to the test.
- Call up two volunteers—one significantly shorter than the other (do not explain the criteria).
- Stand on a chair and hold a “prize” of some sort (e.g., a dollar bill or a candy bar) just within reach of the taller person but out of reach for the shorter person.
- Explain that you will hold the prize at the same height and enforce the same rules for both of them: no jumping, no running starts, no standing on anything, no using props, no assistance from anyone, no trickery.
- Let the shorter volunteer try first, and then let the taller person finish the trial successfully. Let the taller student keep the prize.
- Ask students if the experience was fair. When they insist it was not, explain that the exercise upheld their definition of *fair*: the prize was held in the *same* place for both students, and the *same* rules were enforced for each attempt.
- Lead a discussion about what would have made the experience fair. Explain that lowering the prize is not an option because the prize represents your high expectations, which you will not lower for anyone. Write other solutions on the board (e.g., giving the shorter person a running start or something to stand on).
- Use the discussion to come up with a new class definition of *fair* (e.g., “*fair* = everyone getting what they need to stretch and succeed”), and post it in a prominent place in the room.
- Because the first round wasn’t fair, give the shorter volunteer another chance to get the prize, this time using one of the modifications the class came up with.

Variation:

When students define *fair* as “the same,” ask everyone with glasses to take them off because it’s “not fair” for some students to have glasses when others don’t. Follow the same procedure for discussing and posting a revised classroom definition of *fair*. 
The Lineup

**Directions:**

- Call up a sampling of students (e.g., a range of last names or birthdays) and have them form a line.
- Explain that one end of the line represents “I’m an expert,” while the other end represents “I’m a novice” or “I loathe it!”
- Call out a series of diverse performance-based skills (e.g., maintaining a clean locker, playing sports, playing a musical instrument or singing, writing, reading, being patient with younger siblings, or remembering movie lines or song lyrics). You can gather information about students using strategies from this chapter, such as Attendance Questions, Glow and Grow, and Potential Student Survey Questions. This ensures that you pose appropriate criteria that will keep all students moving across the spectrum.
- For each item called, students arrange themselves where they believe they belong on the continuum, using their own personal feelings to judge rather than measuring themselves against others. For example, if the item called is “singing,” a student might think, *One of the things I do best is sing, so I will place myself near the expert end. I will not compare myself with celebrities or even friends who sing; I just want to think about my own set of skills.*
- Students do not need to remain in a line but can form “clumps.”
- Ask follow-up questions:
  - “Did everyone have a chance to be on the ‘expert’ side of the line?”
  - “Did everyone have a chance to be on the ‘novice’ side of the line?”
  - “Did everyone share the same strengths and weaknesses?”
- Finally, share the point of the activity by asking, “Why should I assume that just because you’re in the same class, you share the same interests, strengths, and weaknesses?” Then tell students, “I won’t treat you all like the same person, but I will expect you all to move toward expertise, no matter where you start.”
### Shoe Race

**Directions:**
- Call up two students with drastically different-sized shoes (do not call attention to this disparity).
- Tell them they’ll be racing against themselves to get their best time.
- The first time, have students walk a defined distance and back *in their own shoes*. Time them, and record their times on the board.
- The second time, have each student *switch shoes with the other* and walk the same distance. This twist should be a surprise; do not announce it ahead of time. Once again, record their times on the board. In most cases, students’ times increase.

**Follow-Up:**
- Compare students’ times in the first and second rounds and discuss the benefit of walking in shoes that fit.
- Explain that you’ll be ensuring students’ learning “fits,” too, so that they will perform better and feel more comfortable. Sometimes they will receive work that’s different from someone else’s; this is because you are giving everyone a task that will ensure his or her growth in both skill and efficiency. Not everyone in the class “wears” the same-size task every day.

*Source:* Catherine Brighton, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. Used with permission.
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Related ASCD Resources: Differentiated Instruction

At the time of publication, the following ASCD resources were available (ASCD stock numbers appear in parentheses). For up-to-date information about ASCD resources, go to www.ascd.org. You can search the complete archives of Educational Leadership at http://www.ascd.org/el.

Professional Interest Communities
Visit the ASCD website and scroll to the bottom to click on “professional interest communities.” Within these communities, find information about professional educators who have formed groups around topics like "Personalized Learning."

ASCD EDge Groups
Exchange ideas and connect with other educators interested in various topics, including Differentiated Instruction, on the social networking site ASCD EDge™.

PD Online
Differentiated Instruction: Creating an Environment That Supports Learning (#PD10OC118M)
Differentiated Instruction: Teaching with Student Differences in Mind (#PD10OC138M)
These and other online courses are available at www.ascd.org/pdonline.

Print Products
Assessment and Student Success in a Differentiated Classroom by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Tonya R. Moon (#108028)
A Differentiated Approach to the Common Core: How do I help a broad range of learners succeed with challenging curriculum? (ASCD Arias) by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Marcia B. Imbeau (#SF114076)
The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners (2nd ed.) by Carol Ann Tomlinson (#108029)
The Differentiated School: Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning by Carol Ann Tomlinson, Kay Brimijoin, and Lane Narvaez (#105005)
Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Marcia B. Imbeau (#108011)

DVDs
The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners DVD Series (#615049)
Differentiated Instruction in Action DVD Series (#608050)
The Differentiated School: Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning (#610008)

The Whole Child Initiative
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