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Rethinking How We Do School—and for Whom

"Just leave me alone to teach my way" is the common mantra. We see the increasing numbers of disengaged students as problems of the students or their families, or of society, not of teachers or schools. It is nigh on impossible to legislate changes to the conception of teaching and learning. . . . So often, the policy changes have little or no effect. The effect of the storm on the ocean is that "the surface is agitated and turbulent, while the ocean floor is calm and serene (if a bit murky). Policy churns dramatically, creating the appearance of major changes . . . while deep below the surface, life goes on, largely uninterrupted."

John Hattie, *Visible Learning*
(quoting from Larry Cuban's *How Teachers Taught)*

Some may think that differentiating instruction is a relatively new idea, hatched from wherever it is that educational "innovations" begin. Actually, its baseline principle is quite old—found in the writings of Confucius and in ancient Jewish and Muslim scriptures: *people differ in their abilities and strengths*. Differentiated instruction simply takes into account those differences.

In more recent history, one-room schoolhouses in the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world practiced differentiation. Six- and 16-year-olds came each day to the same classroom. Teachers planned around the reality that it made little sense to use the same reading book or math problem with everyone in the room, and around the truth that a 16-year-old might require more fundamental mathematics instruction and practice than a 6-year-old. Today, our understanding of what we call differentiated instruction stems from expanded insight into the human brain and how children learn. A brief look at this evolution of knowledge about teaching and learning in recent decades is useful for understanding the foundations of differentiation.

Changes in Education

Think back to what you know of how people lived 75 or 100 years ago. Now, fast-forward to today. In many ways, those years reflect more change for humans than all the prior years of recorded history. For example, think about farming 100 years ago and today. Think about the practice of medicine 100 years ago and today. Consider transportation 100 years ago and today. Consider the 21st century's changes in engineering, entertainment, and communication. The transformation is dizzying Although many of us succumb to occasional nostalgia for the "good old days," few of us would opt for yesterday's physicians, communication systems, fashions, or grocery stores.

Although we may think of school as a static enterprise—and regrettably, sometimes our practice is static—as educators we understand today many things about teaching and learning that we had no way of knowing a century or even a few decades ago. Some of these insights stem from psychology and the science of the brain. Others come from continuing observation in classrooms. Whatever their genesis, these educational changes are every bit as revolutionary as moving from the pencil to the typewriter to the personal computer—from stone tablets, to paper tablets, to electronic tablets.

Current Knowledge About Teaching and Learning

Our expanding understanding of how children learn, and the implications of this knowledge for teachers, could fill volumes. Capturing all that information is far beyond the scope of this book, but sketching out a few recent,

pivotal insights about teaching and learning will enhance our discussion of the differentiated classroom.

Practiced with fidelity to the model, differentiated instruction would always be an outgrowth of our best scientific and experiential insights about teaching and learning, not an end run around them. Our current understanding of learning provides strong support for classrooms that recognize, honor, and cultivate individuality. Following are four contemporary understandings about learners and learning that educators have not always had available to guide their professional practice. All of them are central to the philosophy and practice of differentiation.

Intelligence Is Variable

The study of intelligence over the past half-century points us to the realization that intelligence is multifaceted, not a single entity. Howard Gardner (1991, 1993, 1997) suggests that humans have eight intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic—and likely a ninth: existential. That number, of course, has changed from Gardner's initial proposal of seven intelligences. Robert Sternberg (1985, 1988, 1997) suggests three kinds of intelligences: analytical, practical, and creative. Before them, other researchers, such as Thorndike, Thurstone, and Guilford, identified varied types of intelligence. Although the names of intelligences vary, educators, psychologists, and researchers have drawn three significant, consistent conclusions:

- We think, learn, and create in different ways.
- The development of our potential is affected by the match between what we are asked to learn and how we are able to apply our particular abilities to the process of learning.
- Learners need opportunities to discover and develop their abilities in a range of intelligence areas.

The Brain Is Malleable

A powerful and relatively new understanding is that human beings can grow and strengthen our brains just as we can grow and strengthen our muscles. In other words, intelligence is not a characteristic fixed at birth or even solidified in the early years of life. Providing children with rich learning experiences can amplify their ability, and denying them such richness of

experience can diminish their intelligence (Caine & Caine, 1994; Dweck, 2000; Sousa, 2010). Neurons grow and develop when they are used actively; they atrophy when they are not used. Vigorous learning literally changes the physiology of the brain (Caine & Caine, 1994; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Sylwester, 1995; Willis, 2010; Wolfe, 2010). It is not the case that we are born "smart" or "not smart" and predestined to live out our days as servants to that reality; rather, we have the capacity to expand our intellectual reach throughout our lives (Dweck, 2000, 2008; Sousa, 2011; Willis, 2010).

These findings have numerous clear implications for educators. Teachers must be effective in recognizing, valuing, and developing many types of intelligence, not just one or two. Students who come to school lacking rich learning experiences can make up lost ground if they find rich experiences in their classrooms. Indeed, all students must continue vigorous, new learning or they risk losing brain power. Key roles for teachers, then, include both ensuring that students are appropriately challenged from their particular points of entry into a given topic of inquiry and helping students understand and become increasingly involved in the attitudes, practices, and habits of mind that contribute to positive brain development.

The Brain Hungers for Meaning

Thanks to progress with imaging technology in the field of medicine, we can now look inside the human brain and see how it functions. Such observations have rapidly expanded the understanding of teaching and learning. We now know important details about what works best for the brain in learning (Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Jensen, 1998; National Research Council, 1999; Sousa, 2011; Sylwester, 1995; Wolfe, 2010).

The brain seeks meaningful patterns and resists meaninglessness. Although the brain retains isolated or disparate bits of information, it is much more efficient at retaining information that is "chunked"—organized around categories, concepts, and ideas that increase the information's meaningfulness (National Research Council, 2005). The brain constantly seeks to connect parts to wholes, and individuals learn by connecting something new to something they already understand (Ben-Hur, 2006; Erickson, 2007; Sousa, 2011; Willis, 2006; Wolfe, 2010).

The brain learns best when it can make its own sense out of information rather than when information is imposed on it. The brain doesn't respond much to things that carry only a surface meaning. It responds far

more effectively and efficiently to something that carries deep and personal meaning—something that is life shaping, relevant, or important or taps into emotions (Sousa, 2011; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Willis, 2006; Wolfe, 2010).

Brain research tells us much about the individuality of learners and about the nature of effective curriculum and instruction. It tells us that each learner's brain is unique, and educators must provide many opportunities for varied learners to make sense of ideas and information. Research also reminds us that when we set out to have students connect the novel to the familiar, what is novel to one child may already be familiar to another and vice versa (Sousa, 2011; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Willis, 2006).

Our takeaway from this research is that curriculum must cultivate meaning making. It should be organized around categories, concepts, and governing principles. A meaningful curriculum is characterized by high interest and high relevance, and it taps into learners' feelings and experiences. If we want students to retain, understand, and use ideas, information, and skills, we must give them ample opportunity to make sense of or "own" these ideas, information, and skills through involvement in complex learning situations (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Willis, 2010; Wolfe, 2010).

Brain research also strongly suggests that if learning is a process of connecting the unfamiliar to the familiar, teachers must create abundant opportunities for students to link the new with the old. This is a three-part task. First, teachers must identify the essential concepts, principles, and skills of their subjects. Next, they must become experts about their students' learning needs. Finally, they must use this information about learning needs to provide differentiated opportunities for students to construct understanding by connecting what they know with the essentials they are trying to learn (Ben-Hur, 2006; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Willis, 2006).

Humans Learn Best with Moderate Challenge

Through increased understanding of both psychology and the brain, we now know that individuals learn best when they are in a context that provides a moderate challenge (Bess, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Howard, 1994; Jensen, 1998; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Willis, 2006). That is, when a task is far too difficult for a learner, the learner feels threatened and "downshifts" into a self-protection mode. A threatened learner will not persist with thinking or problem solving. On

the other hand, a task that is too easy also suppresses thinking and problem solving, encouraging the learner to coast into a relaxation mode.

A task is appropriately challenging when it asks learners to risk a leap into the unknown but they know enough to get started and have support for reaching a new level of understanding. Put another way, both students who consistently fail and those who succeed too easily lose their motivation to learn. For learning to continue, students must understand that hard work is required and have confidence that hard work generally leads to success. Teachers also must remember that what is moderately challenging today most likely won't offer the same challenge tomorrow. Challenges must grow as students grow in their learning (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Willis, 2006).

Again, this new knowledge offers important guidance for educators. What is moderately challenging and motivating for one learner may offer far too little challenge (and therefore little motivation) for a classmate. The same task may be too stressful for yet another classmate. Learning tasks must be adjusted to each student's appropriate learning zone. Further, tasks must escalate in complexity and challenge for students to learn continually.

Thinking About the Students We Teach

There was a time when school was not the diverse mix it is today. Children with physical and severe cognitive challenges stayed home. Children from poor homes, including new immigrants, worked in factories or at other jobs to help support the family. Farm children worked the fields and only attended school during the seasons when crops didn't require planting or harvesting. Girls often were excluded from advanced education because of the perception that their natural role—to marry, raise children, and run a household—did not require much academic study. Children of the very rich often had tutors or went to exclusive boarding schools.

Not too long ago, most children who came to school had two parents at home. At least one of those parents usually was there when the child left for school in the morning and returned in the afternoon. We now teach many children whose homes have only one parent. It's rare that our students have a parent at home at both ends of the school day. Although this fact alone is not necessarily negative, it complicates children's lives. Sometimes children are frightened by this isolation. Many lack a steady hand to monitor school progress or homework—or even to listen to the events of a school day.

We teach children who, for better or worse (and probably both), spend a good amount of time living in cyberspace. Their world is both larger and smaller than that of their parents and grandparents. They know more things but may understand less of what they know. They are accustomed to quick and ready entertainment, yet their imaginations may be less active. They have to cope with realities and problems that once would have been unknown to children, and yet many have markedly smaller support systems for wisely navigating these problems. They are aware of all sorts of positive possibilities in the adult world, but they have little sense of how to build bridges to reach them. These young people are at ease with and itching to use technologies that frighten many of the adults "in charge" of their worlds.

Today, more kinds of children come to school and stay in school, bringing with them a greater range of backgrounds and needs. Many of these children lack the "givens" of early life that a teacher once took for granted. Many are at once enriched and impoverished by their environments. Further, there is a chasm between children who have benefited from enriching childhood experiences and those who haven't had the same opportunities.

The Struggle for Equity and Excellence

In every classroom, no matter the degree of homogeneity, students will inevitably represent a significant range of readiness variance, a broad spectrum of interests, a full complement of approaches to learning, and quite different motivations to learn—or at least to learn the subject being taught. Quite simply, students in any learning context learn better when teachers persistently study their students as people, ascertain the proximity of their students to essential content goals, and use that knowledge to modify instruction in ways that support growth (readiness differentiation), motivation to learn (interest differentiation), and efficiency of learning (learning profile differentiation). The full potential of differentiation, however, is realized when educators understand and draw on its potential to create schools and classrooms that promise equity of access to excellence for the full range of young people whose futures pivot, in large measure, on sustained success with learning and motivation to continue learning.

Too many of today's students come to school from homes where support for academic success is in short supply. Most often this is the case because the parents, although they care deeply about their children, lack savvy about school success or do not have the resources or time to provide the kind of

support that would be beneficial. Sometimes students arrive at school without the security provided by parental love. In either scenario, we have children whose immense learning potential is blunted by a lack of the experiences, supports, models, and plans that, if present, would make school success a fundamental expectation of life. On the other hand, many other learners come to school with abundant adult support and with their skills and knowledge months or years ahead of where their learning is expected to be, according to a standard curriculum.

The promise of schools must belong, in equal measure, to all of these children. Educators often speak of equity as an issue for children of the former group and excellence as an issue for the latter. In truth, both equity and excellence must be at the top of the agenda for all children. We cannot achieve equity for children who come to school at risk of falling behind in learning unless we ensure that the best teachers are ready to help them build the sorts of experiences and expectations that the world outside the classroom may have been unable to build for them. We cannot achieve excellence for children at risk of school failure without emphatically, systematically, vigorously, and effectively seeing to the development of their full potential, which implies helping them succeed with dynamic, invigorating curriculum. We must dream big dreams with them and be persistent partners in helping them soar toward those dreams. Both equity and excellence must be a part of our road map for these students.

Children who come to school advanced beyond grade expectations in one or more areas also require equity of opportunity to grow from their points of entry, with teachers doggedly determined to ensure that their potential does not languish. These children need teachers who model, commend, and command excellence—teachers who help them dream big, who cause them to experience, accept, and embrace personal challenge. Both equity and excellence must be a part of our road map for these students, as they must for every learner who comes to us.

Every child is entitled to the promise of a teacher's optimism, enthusiasm, time, and energy, a teacher who will do everything possible, every day, to help students realize their potential. It is unacceptable for any teacher to respond to any group of children (or any individual child) as though the children were inappropriate, inconvenient, beyond hope, or not deserving of focused attention. Providing equity of access to excellence is the great moral challenge of contemporary schools.

Grouping and the Quest for Equity and Excellence

Schools have tried to meet the needs of the full range of learners in one of three ways. First, and most commonly, schools have placed nearly all learners of a given age in a room together where teaching occurs with modest, if any, attention to individual learning needs. Second, schools have separated out students who don't fit the norm because they struggle to learn one or more subjects, know more than the grade-level curriculum asks of them, aren't fluent with the language of the classroom, and so on. These "atypical" students work outside the general classroom for part or all of the school day in special classrooms with similar students whom educators deem to have similar needs. The idea is that, in these settings, teachers can better meet these students at their level of knowledge and skill. In full accord with what common sense would suggest, however, research suggests that, especially for students who struggle with one or more aspects of learning, such homogeneous learning experiences go awry (Gamoran, 1992; Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore, 1995; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1987, 1993).

Too often in settings designed to benefit learners whose school performance lags behind grade-level norms, teachers' expectations for the students decline, materials are simplified, the level of discourse is uninspiring, and the pace slackens. When students look around at their peers, they see only other students who are discouraged or who have given up on school. Too few students escape these arrangements to join more "typical" or advanced classes. In other words, remedial classes tend to keep remedial learners remedial (Gamoran, 1992; Gamoran et al., 1995). As van Manen (2003) reflects,

> Once I call a child "a behavior problem," or a "low achiever," or once I refer to him as someone who has a specific learning style, a particular mode of cognitive functioning, then I am immediately inclined to reach into my portfolio of instructional tricks for a specific instructional intervention. What happens then is that I forgo the possibility of truly listening to or seeing the specific child. Instead, I put the child away in categorical language, as constraining as a real prison. Putting children away by means of technical or instrumental language is really a kind of spiritual abandonment. (p. 18)

Some researchers (Allan, 1991; Kulik & Kulik, 1991) suggest that advanced learners who are placed in accelerated, homogeneous classes benefit from a brisk pace, stimulating discourse, raised teacher expectations, and enriched materials. In other words, they continue to advance. These studies,

however, compare outcomes for advanced students in homogeneous settings where their learning needs are recognized and addressed with outcomes for advanced learners in heterogeneous settings where their learning needs are *not* recognized and addressed.

There is a modest amount of research on outcomes for students in heterogeneous settings where their learning needs are recognized and addressed. These studies suggest that this latter option can be a viable alternative to homogeneous classes for advanced learners; it is not homogeneity but rather attention to advanced learners' academic needs that matters most (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Burris & Garrity, 2008; Rasmussen, 2006; Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2011; Tieso, 2002; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008). In addition, highly selective school settings for high-ability students may actually result in reduced self-concepts for these students, with repercussions for student aspirations and course-taking decisions many years into the future (Marsh, Tautwein, Lüdtke, Baumert, & Köller, 2007; Seaton, Marsh, & Craven, 2010).

In theory, creating academically heterogeneous classes should address equity of access to excellence for all learners simply because of the presence of advanced learners; the full range of learners in the classroom would benefit from the high-level curriculum and instruction designed for advanced learners. There are three major flaws with this assumption, however, at least as schools function to this point.

First, struggling learners will not experience more long-term success by being placed in heterogeneous classes unless teachers are ready and able to meet them at their point of readiness and to systematically escalate learning until these students are able to function as competently and confidently as other learners. Including struggling learners in heterogeneous classes may represent high expectations for all students, but not if students are left to their own devices to figure out how to "catch up" with the expectations. Such an approach does not result in genuine growth for struggling learners.

Another challenge is that in heterogeneous classrooms, advanced students often are asked either to do a greater volume of work than they already know how to do, to ensure the success of other students through much of the school day by serving as peer teachers, or to wait (patiently, of course) while students with less advanced skills continue to work for mastery of content that they themselves have already mastered. Implicitly—and sometimes even explicitly—we suggest that advanced learners are fine without

special attention to their needs because they are "up to standards" already. In other words, curricula and instruction in many classrooms tend to be aimed at "average" students and do not account for the nature and needs of advanced learners. This approach clearly can't achieve genuine growth for students whose performance surpasses the aspirations of curriculum designed to teach them what they already know.

A third problem with heterogeneity as it is typically practiced is the assumption that what happens in heterogeneous classrooms for "typical learners" works for virtually all students of a given age. The premise has often been that everyone can benefit from standard, grade-level classrooms. In fact, it is often the case that this standard fare is less than the best we know to do, even for students who perform at or near grade level. Well into the 21st century, heterogeneous classrooms still usually follow a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning, where a standardized learning plan swallows some learners, pinches others, and fails to inspire most. Such an approach provides for neither equity nor excellence for anyone.

By contrast, differentiation offers the possibility of creating effective heterogeneous communities of learning governed by flexible classroom routines that allow and invite attention to students' diverse learning needs. In these classrooms, complex curriculum is the beginning point for instructional planning for virtually all learners, and for all learners there is the possibility for community, equity, and excellence.

What We Know Versus What We Do

Despite compelling new knowledge about learning, how the brain works, and what constitutes effective classroom groupings, classrooms have changed little over the past 100 years. We still assume that children of a given age are enough like each other that they can and should traverse the same curriculum in the same fashion. Further, schools act as though all children should finish classroom tasks as near to the same moment as possible, and that school year should be the same length for all learners.

To this end, teachers generally assess student content mastery via tests based on specific chapters of the adopted textbook and summative tests at the end of designated marking periods. Teachers use the same grading system for all children of a given age and grade, whatever their starting point at the beginning of the year, with grades providing little if any indication of whether

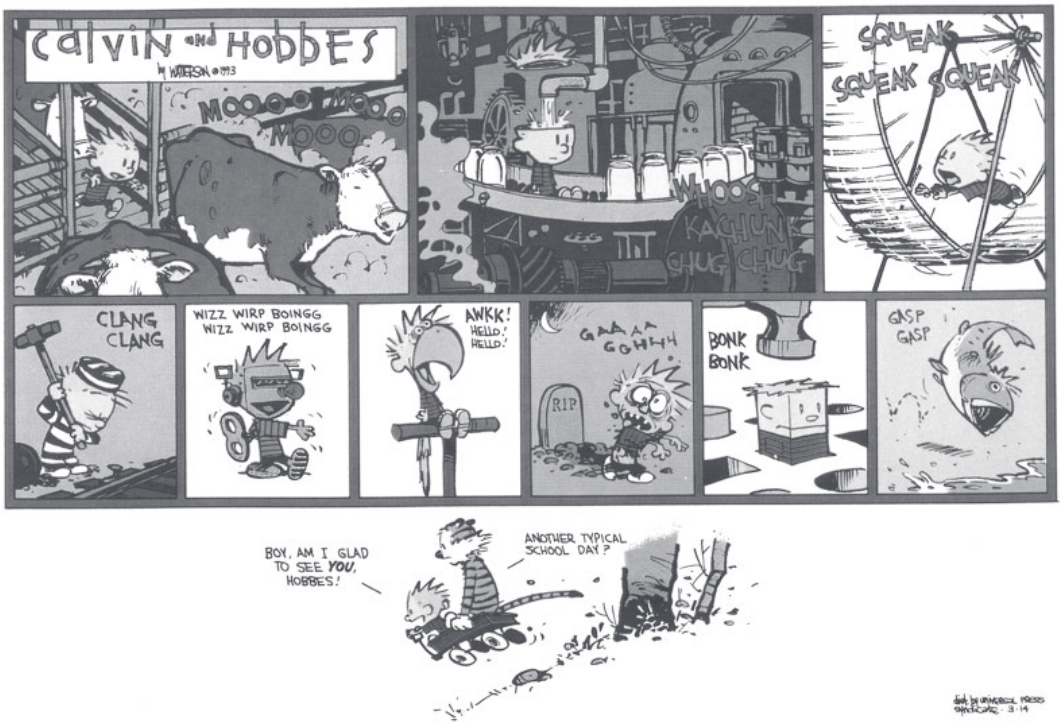
individual students have grown since the previous grading period or the degree to which students' attitudes and habits of mind contributed to their success or stagnation. Toward the end of the school year, schools administer standardized tests on the premise that all students of a certain age should have reached an average level of performance on the prescribed content by the testing date. Teachers, students, and schools that achieve the desired level of performance are celebrated; those that do not perform as desired are reprimanded, without any regard to the backgrounds, opportunities, and support systems available to any of the parties.

Curriculum often has been based on goals that require students to accumulate and retain a variety of facts or to practice skills that are far removed from any meaningful context. Drill-and-practice worksheets are still a prime educational technology, a legacy of behaviorism rooted firmly in the 1930s. Teachers still largely run "tight ship" classes and are likely to work harder and more actively than their students much of the time.

To the degree that schools actually focus on developing intelligence, the status quo reflects a belief that only narrow, analytical slices of verbal and computational intelligence are really important. This is almost the same as nearly a century ago, when the public believed that a bit of reading, writing, and computation would serve learners well in an adulthood dominated by assembly-line and agrarian jobs. Schools prepare children for tests more than for life. Sometimes, cartoonists make the point more powerfully than serious prose; see Figure 3.1.

When the lockstep approach to learning does not work well for many children (and it does not), we separate them by what we perceive to be their ability, with virtually no acknowledgment that the instruments and processes we use to sort students are seriously deficient for that purpose and with scant discussion, if any, about the impact labeling and sorting has on either students as individuals or society at large. We then systematically ensure that the most advanced learners get the most experienced and energized teachers and the quality curricula designed to prepare them as thinkers and problem solvers. At the same time, we assign the most vulnerable students to the newest or most discouraged teachers and teach them curricula that require little more than persistent practice of the same low-level, decontextualized skills year after year. After a few years, when the pendulum of attention swings to the awareness that students in the high-level classes are learning more vigorously and successfully than students in the low-level ones,

Figure 3.1 "Another Typical School Day"



we shift again to more heterogeneous arrangements but seldom pay diligent attention to addressing students' needs in the "new" settings.

Moving students is not and will not be the solution to creating schools that work for all comers. The solution lies in finding the will to support teacher expertise in creating classrooms where "high-end curriculum" is the standard and differentiation is the mechanism for helping a broad range of students to achieve or even exceed the standards for that level of rigor. Figure 3.2 summarizes what we know to be sound educational practice versus what we often do despite that knowledge. Clearly there are exceptions to the pattern, but the pattern predominates.

Many observers have written wisely and well about why schools seem so resistant to change (Duke, 2004; Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Kennedy, 2005; Sarason, 1990, 1993). The point here is that whereas many professions have innovated and embraced progress over the last century, the practice of education has remained static.

To align our practice with current best understandings of teaching and learning, we need to begin our investigation of how to differentiate instruction with some important assumptions:

- Students differ in experience, readiness, interest, intelligences, language, culture, gender, and mode of learning. As one elementary teacher noted, "Children already come to us differentiated. It just makes sense that we would differentiate our instruction in response to them."
- To maximize each learner's potential, the teacher needs to meet all students at their own starting points with critical content and ensure substantial growth during each school term.
- Classrooms that ignore student differences are unlikely to maximize potential in any student who differs significantly from the "norm." This is an issue even in "homogeneous" classrooms.
- To ensure maximum student growth, teachers need to make modifications for students rather than assume students must modify themselves to fit the curriculum. In fact, children rarely know how to differentiate their own curriculum successfully.
- Best-practice education should be the starting point for differentiation. It makes little sense to modify practices that defy the best understanding of teaching and learning. As noted educator Seymour Sarason (1990)reminds us, any classroom efforts that aren't powered by an understanding of what keeps children eagerly pursuing knowledge are doomed to fail.
- Classrooms grounded in best-practice education, and modified to be proactively responsive to student differences, benefit virtually all students. Differentiation addresses the needs of both struggling and advanced learners. It addresses the needs of students for whom English is a second language and students who have strong approach-to-learning preferences. It addresses gender differences and cultural differences. It attends to the array of strengths, interests, and approaches to learning that inevitably accompany learners to school. It pays homage to the truths that we are not born to become replicas of one another and that, with intelligent support, all students can accomplish much more than they (or we) dreamed they could. Howard Gardner (1997) reminds us that even if we could figure out how to make everyone a brilliant violinist, an orchestra also needs top-quality musicians who play woodwinds, brass, percussion, and other strings. Differentiation is about high-quality performance for all individuals and giving all students the opportunity to develop their particular strengths. Differentiation

Figure 3.2 Understanding vs. Reality in Education Practice

What We Know	What We Often Do
Students are more diverse today than at any time in our history. Diversity is normal and beneficial.	We tend to see student variance as problematic.
Intelligence is fluid, not static. Virtually all students can learn what is necessary for school success if they work intelligently, diligently, and with strong classroom support.	Schools tend to have a preference for determining which students are smart and which are not in order to separate them for instructional convenience.
Classroom environments that are rooted in strong teacher–student relationships and that build communities of learners have a highly positive impact on student outcomes.	Teachers often feel they have too many students and too many demands to know students well. Classrooms are often collections of individuals rather than teams of learners.
Curriculum should help students understand how the disciplines are organized to make sense, be engaging, focus on student understanding and transfer of knowledge, be relevant to students' lives, and cast them as thinkers and problem solvers.	Curriculum is often dictated by standards, pacing guides, and texts. It rarely connects with students' lives or helps students make sense of the world around them. Emphasis on "right answers" discourages deep thinking and meaning making.
Formative assessment that is used to provide quality feedback, to guide instructional planning, and to develop student autonomy has a powerful impact on student learning.	Formative assessment is often used to give grades and infrequently used to modify instruction in response to varied learner needs. Students infrequently use formative assessment feedback to plan for their own success.
Student differences matter in learning, and attending to those differences is necessary for sustaining learning.	We tend to teach as though all students of a given age are essentially alike.
Instruction that is responsive to student readiness, interest, and approach to learning supports success for more learners.	We tend to persist in one-size-fits-all approaches to teaching, learning, materials, pacing, etc.
Classroom management facilitates growth best when it balances predictability and flexibility, fosters student self-direction, and is built on sound student–teacher relationships.	Classroom management tends to be compliance oriented—rigid, stressing "right answers" rather than the "messiness of thinking," and rooted in distrust of students.
Labeling and sorting students has not proven effective in raising student achievement and carries a significant price in terms of student perception of their own ability and that of others.	We tend to prefer labeling and sorting rather than creating inclusive classrooms designed to ensure that a broad range of students learn and work well together.

supports students in mastering the fundamental competencies and habits of mind and work of successful people that undergird positive outcomes in virtually every area of life.

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At its core, differentiation asks teachers to grapple with a few simple questions. First, why do we assume that children of a given age are "interchangeable" in the way that they learn? What evidence do we have that they come to our classroom with the same skills, knowledge base, attitudes, habits of mind, strengths, inclinations, motivations, confidence level, support system, and approach to school? And without this evidence, why would we ever conclude that it makes any more sense for all of them to learn the same content in the same way and at the same rate than it does for all of them to wear the same shoe size, eat the same amount of dinner, or require the same amount of sleep? The answers to these questions have—or should have—far-reaching implications for how we think about and plan for teaching and learning.