Every student who walks through the door of the classroom brings special gifts to the learning table. He may have unkempt hair and stare down at his shoes, or she may speak another language and hop around the room like a grasshopper. But each one has some hidden strength that enables her to learn. In preparing to differentiate, you have to find out who your learners are—what abilities, interests, and experiences have shaped them. In addition, you must honor the unique developmental needs of young children.

During the toddler years and even beyond, children learn by exploring their environment; they finger, touch, taste, and shape whatever they can get their hands on (Morrison, 1997). Gradually, their explorations become more focused as they seek to understand the world around them through more systematic experiments. As higher level thinking advances
and they enter school, young primary students create and improvise with any materials at hand, inventing the world from their own imagination (Belgrad, 1998, p. 373).

It is this constructive behavior of young children that has become the foundation of teaching in preschool, kindergarten, and, to some extent, the primary grades (Cohen & Jipson, 1998, p. 405). Drawing on the work of Piaget (1977, 1980), a “constructivist” or “developmental” model evolved, based on how children construct their understanding of the world through continuous contact with and adaptation to their immediate environment. This constructivist model not only responds to the unique learning needs of young children but also stimulates growth in their reasoning and thinking ability (Cohen & Jipson, 1998, p. 406).

Teachers play a key role in anticipating students’ learning needs and guiding the process of thinking, applying, and inventing. Vygotsky (1962) and Feuerstein (1980) theorized that teachers need to become active mediators in the learning process and lead development, rather than just provide contexts that may stimulate it. They design learning experiences that are slightly ahead of the child’s development but within reach of his ability and understanding, thus stimulating cognitive growth.

This kind of educational program for young children emphasizes play, exploration, risk taking, and creative problem solving. Children advance at their own rate and teachers use learning contracts and planning sheets to assess strengths and weaknesses and to monitor each student’s progress.

In the developmentally appropriate classroom, the role of the teacher has changed. Formerly, the teacher was someone who told and imparted all of the knowledge. Now the teacher is one who extends, engages, questions, affirms, and challenges children as they are constructing knowledge. (Cummings & Piirto, 1998, p. 383)

Many primary teachers already have features of a differentiated classroom in place: ways to discover the learners’ special abilities and characteristics, a variety of work areas in the classroom, a diversity of resources, and an active class of eager students who are used to doing different things. If this is your case, you already have a strong foundation to create a supportive environment for differentiating. On the other hand, if your school emphasizes direct instruction in the primary grades, introducing new changes may take more time. In this case, you can integrate the strategies of differentiated instruction more gradually, beginning with those areas where your students have the greatest need.

2 • Differentiating for the Young Child
KNOW THE CHILD

Differentiated instruction grows from your understanding of the children before you. As the second chapter will show in more detail, assessing your students’ talents, learning styles, and other attributes provides the means to make the changes they need to grow. Here are some examples from a kindergarten class:

Alma is a bilingual child who grew up in the United States. She speaks Spanish to her parents and English to other relatives. She knows many stories told by her grandmother. Some are family stories; others are tales that come from the village where her parents grew up.

Brendan spent a great deal of his childhood hanging around his father’s garage because his mother had to work. Sometimes, his father let him carry some of his tools, and when he wasn’t playing outside, he would sit on a tall stool and watch his father fix the cars that came in. His father pointed out a lot of things while he worked, and Brendan came to know a lot about car engines.

Simon has traveled all over the United States. During the summer, the family packs up their tent and visits a new forest, mountain, or coastline. Simon’s mother taught him a lot about birds and plants on these trips, and on the second day of school while looking out window, Simon spontaneously yelled out, “Yellow-bellied sapsucker!”

Madeleine has two dogs, three cats, a couple of rabbits, and a tank full of fish. One day at school, she released the gerbil from its cage. When her teacher finally recaptured the animal, she asked, “Madeleine, why did you do this?” She whispered, “He had to find his friend.” The teacher hadn’t told the children that one of the gerbils was returned to its original owner the day before because she didn’t think anyone would notice right away.
Each one of these children has special strengths gained from the lives they have lived so far. Alma has a wealth of stories—a wonderful source for literacy. Brendan understands engines and through this has developed an ability to construct things and improvise with a variety of objects. Simon brings his observation of the natural world to the study of science, and Madeleine’s experience with animals has given her a sensitivity to and knowledge of other species.

Becoming aware of specific skills, experiences, and abilities that young children carry within them opens the door to new teaching options. Instead of focusing most energy on what the students lack, teachers become more familiar with what they have, how they work, what materials they gravitate to, and what they most enjoy doing. These are the tools that enable the children to extend their knowledge and also strengthen skills when needed. Unlike remedial instruction, differentiating actively draws on students’ interests, experiences, and abilities.

Educator-anthropologist Luis Moll believed that discovering the hidden strengths (the knowledge, skills, and abilities) of bilingual communities should guide the education of their children—an approach he called “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992). In an effort to break away from the deficit approach to bilingual students, he did an ethnographic study of the Mexican American communities that fed into some of the barrio schools in Tucson, Arizona (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1994). He discovered that the families and communities possessed a great deal of expertise on such subjects as agriculture, economics, mining, and science. Those with rural backgrounds shared what they knew about cultivating plants and animals and ranch management; others knew mechanics, carpentry, masonry, and electrical wiring. Many in the communities had entrepreneurial skills and knew specific information about archeology, biology, and mathematics.

Most schools knew little of these “funds” of experience and knowledge and therefore could not create meaningful bridges between the children and the curriculum. Bilingual children, Luis Moll argued, need to be able to use the strengths that have come to them within their first-language community to overcome the limitations they experience in their second-language community. This principle applies to all students, as all bring hidden “funds” through which teachers can make meaningful connections to the curriculum.

Preparing for the journey of a more differentiated curriculum, therefore, involves finding out the best way to get the most useful information about your students. Young children come to you with little formal schooling and a wide variety of home situations, cultural environments,
Preparing for the Journey of a Differentiated Classroom • 5

and community learning experiences. Working with parents and community members (see Chapter 2) will enrich your approach to differentiating as you will have a much clearer sense of where your students have come from and what resources, processes, and catalysts for learning will develop their latent abilities. Many of you already do this. Here are three examples from primary teachers:

I make the most of the moments when parents come to pick up the kids. I will jot down a few things I noticed in class and get the parents talking. Over time, I find out a lot and they will now volunteer information that helps me understand why their child reacts a certain way to an activity in class.

—Second-grade teacher

Over the first month or two, I sit down with a parent from each family and we talk about their child. They bring something the child has done and I explain my philosophy and how I like to work with the students. This helps me because I can then call on them later when I need support for a project or I can suggest ways they can help their kids at home.

—Kindergarten teacher

The biggest enemy of education, I feel, is television! I start the year with a letter to the parents (in both Spanish and English) requesting that they try to limit television viewing on school nights. I ask (nicely!) if they would work with me on a book list and other projects. Some parents resist, but I’ve found that many are grateful and admit that the whole family needs a break from the monotony of television.

—Third-grade teacher

In the course of the school year, I’ve had about 15 parents in my room. At the beginning of the year, I try to find out what special areas of expertise the kids’ parents have and I keep a
file. When we move on to a new topic, I look in the file to see what parent might have a special skill or interest that relates to what we’re doing. This has created a greater sense of community between my classroom and the families, and I’ve learned a lot more about the kids this way.

—First-grade teacher

The more you can learn about your students, the more you can differentiate. Because differentiating adjusts the content of a lesson or unit (what they are to learn), the process (how they are to learn it), and the products (what results they are to produce), you obviously have to know your students well to determine what kinds of changes they need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHANGES TO CURRICULUM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the level and pace of the content match his ability and interest? Does he fall behind in any area? Does he finish assignments quickly and well?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**UNDERSTAND THE JOURNEY**

Differentiating enables children to draw on their learning preferences, life experiences, and special strengths to advance through the curriculum.
Although you would certainly find a wide variety of approaches to differentiating from classroom to classroom, consider the following general principles as you prepare your own curriculum, students, and classroom.

**What the teacher does:**

- The teacher identifies essential content (knowledge, concepts, skills, proficiencies) that he or she wants everyone in the class to master.
- The teacher begins instruction with student differences and modifies the curriculum based on the most important content within that curriculum and individual learning needs.
- The teacher assesses individual student achievement and the effectiveness of differentiated curriculum as she or he teaches (rather than at the end of a unit).
- The teacher adjusts content, process, and products (materials) in response to student learning profiles, strengths, problem areas, and interests.
- The teacher employs a range of strategies for differentiating the curriculum such as learning stations, curriculum compacting, tiered instruction, interest groups, cluster groups, creative activities and materials, and so on.
- The teacher maintains a high level of flexibility in modifying aspects of the curriculum to create maximum growth and learning for each student.

**What the students do:**

- Students actively participate in their own learning and make choices within structured assignments and activities.
- Students move flexibly from one level of complexity to the next, and from one kind of process to the next, rather than following a lock-step sequence.
- Students gradually assume more responsibility for their own learning and take an active part in such tasks as setting up and storing materials, arranging chairs, and forming groups for assigned work.
- Students participate in their own assessment and become knowledgeable about how they learn, what they do well, and where they need more practice.
Students focus more on their own growth and work than on how they compare with other students. Here are several examples of teachers who adjusted their curriculum in different ways.

Because of the different kids mainstreamed into my room, I usually have quite a range of skill and ability—anything between 2 years below grade level to at least 2 above. Differentiating helps me deliver the curriculum so that I can be sure everyone is getting the important stuff and getting it in a way that works for them. One of the strategies I use regularly in math is separate learning stations where the kids take new information and apply it at different levels of complexity and with different kinds of materials. At the beginning of the year, I familiarize the kids with the three stations. The first one has a lot of manipulatives, drawing paper, rulers, pencils, etc. This is where students prove the math facts and rules they’ve learned and show their partner why their solution to a problem works. I give them suggestions for how they might demonstrate their answers. Another station is for practicing computation where they need more help. Materials at this station could be worksheets, computer programs, and other supports that help the students become more confident. In the third station, children do math-related projects, which tend to be long-term, and they have the option of working alone or in small groups. I work out their projects with them, depending on their individual interests and learning needs.

—Third-grade teacher

A pattern I developed with my kids was to begin with direct instruction and then branch off into creative applications. For kindergarteners, this worked really well. The class had been learning a number of different words from a series of stories we’d read together. On index cards, I wrote a number of words from these stories (one on each card) and mixed them up in a basket. The children took five words each and also selected a picture from a large stack of prints I keep in a box. The print gave them a setting. I asked them to think up
Preparing for the Journey of a Differentiated Classroom • 9

a story using the five words and the picture they had chosen. After some time, I had volunteers tell me their story while I wrote it down on the board. Other, more advanced kids wrote theirs; still others accompanied their story with sketches of their own. This experience gave everyone a chance to invent a story using words I wanted them to use and understanding more about what goes into a story. Creativity is a great differentiating source because of its flexibility. Everyone at every level can participate, and they can go as far as their ability and ideas allow.

—Kindergarten teacher

Last year, I had a gifted child who came from such substandard schools that he was more like a first grader in terms of skill and knowledge. I started off by creating a list (with him) of all the things he could do and what he was good at. I explained that this list was his “engine” for moving ahead. In every unit, I figured out the areas where he would have trouble, and when the rest of the class was practicing a skill or working on problems together, I would take him aside and instruct him. I would then give him an assignment related to what the other students were doing but simplified, with reinforcement in skills where he needed extra help. With the parents’ active support and a lot of encouragement from me, the child progressed rapidly and soon caught up with the rest of the class. Differentiating gave me the tools to deal with a situation that, in the past, might have resulted in this child being placed back a year.

—Second-grade teacher

IDENTIFY WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN YOUR CURRICULUM

An important step in differentiating the curriculum is to identify the essential concepts, knowledge, and skills of subject areas. The reason for this is clear. A narrower goal (e.g., teaching children a vocabulary list from a specific book) does not give you the flexibility you need to adapt assigned work as does a broader goal (teaching children how to identify
what’s most important in a text—an essential reading strategy). The latter gives you many options: assign books at different levels of complexity, ask students to read different kinds of books (nonfiction, science fiction, fantasy, biography, etc.), or allow different ways to express what they think the main idea of a book is (art, theatrical event, essay, diagram).

Because the curriculum typically exceeds what you can teach in a given year, you have to make choices. Think carefully about what you want all students to learn—concepts, skills, information, and thinking strategies. What enduring knowledge, concepts, and skills do you want to leave your students with by the end of a week, month, and year? What topics and units will enable your students to explore essential concepts and knowledge?

The following are four useful criteria for selecting the most essential content (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, pp. 10–11):

1. To what extent does the idea, topic, or process represent a “big idea” having enduring value beyond the classroom? In other words, what fundamental concept undergirds this lesson? For example, a unit on the relationship between people and the oceans would focus, in different ways, on the interconnectedness of ocean ecology—the big idea.

2. To what extent does the idea, topic, or process reside at the heart of the discipline? To learn science, young children need to do science, not just read or think about it. In a language arts class, students write stories, poems, and essays; interpret literature through movement and theater games; and discuss ideas in favorite books. Learning correct rules of grammar, usage, and spelling are inherent in this process but not goals in themselves.

3. To what extent does the idea, topic, or process require uncoverage? Think about those areas of a subject that students often find difficult. What central concepts in math require more time and reinforcement? Do the reading activities you’ve designed help them grasp what’s most important in a story, a poem, or a book on butterflies?

4. To what extent does the idea, topic, or process offer potential for engaging students? A key concept or idea may hold no interest for students, however essential it is to a subject. You need
to choose interesting topics that connect to a big idea and provide access to meaningful exploration and discovery. For example, you can teach about double-digit numbers through story and simulations.

As you review your curriculum, ask yourself two levels of questions—“essential” and “unit” (Heacox, 2002). Essential questions involve overarching themes, concepts, and principles. An example might be, “What is a folktale?” Unit questions evolve from this broad question and target specific information, concepts, and skills. An example would be, “Where do folktales come from? Why are they called folktales? How are they different from other stories?” Often, these questions tie in with curriculum standards. Keep the number of questions relatively low (no more than five) and write them in simple, child-friendly language. These questions not only guide you but also create a conceptual structure for the students to follow.

I kind of like sitting down with a notebook, flipping through books, and figuring out what I want my kids to understand about science or reading or whatever. I often start by asking myself, “What is science really about anyway?” Then words will come to me that get me started, like patterns, cycles, forces. If I were to give advice, I’d say, don’t just look at education books to come up with essential concepts and questions. Go to sources that will really inspire you. I hover around the stacks in bookstores or libraries, thumbing through nature books, books on astronomy. I go to cultural institutions (many of which have materials for teachers) like observatories, art museums, technology museums, aquariums, historical societies, and cultural organizations.

—Second-grade teacher
I think of essential content as the forest. The unit, a tree in this forest. If we were to go to a national forest, we would naturally want to know what forest we were in. So I see this part of differentiating as a way of saying to the kids, “This is the forest we’re going to be exploring. And over here is a tree and we’re going to learn about this tree. . . . Or here is a river and these are the things we’re going to learn about the river.” Sharing this with kids motivates them more because if they can see the big picture, they’re likely to also see the value of exploring a smaller section of this forest. Before we get into a new unit, I often ask the kids what they’d like to learn, and it’s amazing what they come up with. Last week, the students asked so many interesting questions about poetry (which we are studying now) that I had a pretty clear sense about what “big ideas” I wanted to focus on and how we would explore the different poetic traditions and literary conventions.

—Third-grade teacher

My school is always hammering away about state curriculum standards. These standards are pretty concrete. But there’s a way you can look at these as a guide. I write down the ones I feel most apply to my grade and my students and then work back up to a “big idea.” For example, in math we have this standard: “Demonstrate knowledge and use of numbers and their representations in a broad range of theoretical and practical settings.” I ask myself, “What do kids need to know about numbers?” Then I consider things like quantity and size, and comparisons of quantity and size. From there, I might have as a key question, “How can you make a quantity larger or smaller?” This of course leads to addition and subtraction, fractions, and other mathematical concepts.

—First-grade teacher
DESIGN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Most primary teachers have seen what a difference the learning environment can make in bringing a subject alive for young students. They understand that the environment is not just a place for learning but a medium for it. In the days of straight rows and worksheets, even children who did well in assigned tasks applied themselves to subjects that held no life for them. Teacher-directed instruction was the rule of the day. In large part due to the early influence of Maria Montessori (1964, 1966) and the emphasis she placed on “following the child” and the “prepared environment,” as well as the work of Piaget (1977) and others, classrooms began to change.

As part of this historic shift toward a more child-centered classroom, differentiating also emphasizes the environment as a catalyst for learning—responsive to the unique needs of the children anticipated. This sort of classroom is as dynamic as the students and teacher who live in it, continually adapting to new needs and circumstances. In such a situation, you cannot always anticipate exactly what preparations will work best for your class. And this brings us to an important point that will simplify your life: You don’t have to do all the work! One of your richest resources are the children and their families, as this teacher discovered:

There wasn’t much of anything in my school other than textbooks, paper, a few commercially made (and rather ugly) charts, and some scrappy art supplies. More overwhelming than this, though, was the sterile feel of the classroom. I ended up bringing things in from garage sales and my own home—a rug for one area I was creating for quiet reading and some stuffed animals from my own collection. I brought in colored things—anything—that would diminish the overall drabness of the room. One day I met one of the bilingual teacher aides and she said, “You don’t have to do it all, you know. The kids and their families will help you!” I’m so glad I listened to her. I no longer supply everything I need. After putting key elements in place, I always have my students bring in things that they think will work well in particular activities. I am continually amazed at their resourcefulness and how they can figure out ways to use materials in so many different ways. Also, as far as color goes, this is no longer an issue. Now that the mothers know I love color, they
Differentiating for the Young Child

have contributed wall hangings (made by hand) and posters from their native Mexico.

—First-grade teacher

Children love to contribute to the environment where they learn: by doing so, they make the space their own and the classroom becomes a safe haven for them to grow. You have probably experienced this yourself. In a class about the environmental changes of autumn, a teacher might have students bring in different kinds and colors of leaves that have fallen from their neighborhood trees, rather than supply leaves themselves.

In the naturally open and creative environment of most early childhood and many primary classrooms, the tools for responding to different learning needs are already in place. The following design will help you think about how you can best prepare your classroom space and the materials you have. Who your students are, what they need, and the curriculum you are planning will guide you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual stimulation</th>
<th>Resource areas</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement and flexibility of seating</td>
<td>Resource areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Independent use of centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-class to small-group transition</td>
<td>Available resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation from simple to more complex</td>
<td>Variety of materials and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Engaging ways to begin your day

- Clear behavior standards and expectations
- Parental input on students

### ATMOSPHERE

- Interest, engagement, risk-taking demonstrated
- Encouragement and respect for students
- Positive peer relationships fostered

### Learning centers with materials for different learning styles

- Colorful and diverse materials that are modified frequently
- Area for extended activities to promote higher level thinking and creative problem solving

### CLASSROOM

- Space for teacher supplies and resources
- Small group work areas
- Adequate spaces for storage of long-term projects and portfolios
EXPLORE RESOURCES

If you’re a primary teacher, you already know that resources are everything in a classroom for young children. To accommodate students’ unique learning needs and styles, you probably have resource centers of your own. Some of them may have a variety of materials (e.g., books, art materials, displays, maps, games, construction materials) for exploring specific concepts in a unit. Others may be areas of the room where particular kinds of activities happen. An example of this might be a semi-enclosed quiet area with rugs and pillows where children can read, write, or sketch their ideas away from the bustle of the classroom. Or you might discover that you have a number of performers in your class who need a space, equipped with costumes, props, and construction paper, so that they can work on dramatic presentations, a mime piece, or a creative dance piece.

There is no need to have any more centers than the ones you really need. They will evolve naturally from your understanding of the children before you and from your work together. In this regard, Howard Gardner’s (1993) research on “multiple intelligences” can shed light on those students in your class who may require different kinds of resources to progress in your classroom (see Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 1997, pp. 33–37). Children from other cultures often need alternative ways to process new learning and express the strengths of their heritage. The following list offers some ideas on how you can create learning centers focused on specific “intelligences.”

**Linguistic Center**—Linguistically oriented students learn best through the written word. They exhibit mastery in language (sometimes in a dialect) and often have a verbal wit and an ease expressing themselves verbally or on paper. A linguistic center should be located where it is quieter and have comfortable floor pillows, chairs, and tables.

**Resources:** Books; magazines; encyclopedias; dictionaries; paper for writing and drawing stories; books on tape; magnetic letters with board; spelling materials and games; alphabet games; sentence blocks with articles, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs; computer software for word processing and story writing; taped stories from oral traditions around the world; taped poetry.
Musical Center—Musically able students learn through rhythm and melody—by singing, humming, rapping, or tapping a pencil, foot, or finger. They often express a deep love for music, have an ability to compose catchy tunes of their own, and recognize a wide range of melodies easily.

Resources: Piano, keyboard and headset, other musical instruments, drums, rhythm instruments, cassette player and taped music, blank tapes for children’s music, instrument picture cards.

Logical-Mathematical Center—Children with special abilities in the area of logic and mathematics are drawn to numbers and to discovering the logic and pattern of numbers. They often enjoy exploring other ways of calculating to understand how patterns work. They love logic and applying reason to solve complex mathematical problems.

Resources:

Math materials—felt board with felt objects and numerals; peg boards with colored pegs; pattern cards; puzzles; dice; number cards for sequencing and matching; math facts cards; number games and projects; tangrams; attribute blocks; Venn diagrams, graphic organizers, and matrices; codes to decipher; computer software for math activities.

Science materials—simple machines (e.g., pulley, gears), magnifying glass, microscope, telescope, mirrors, prisms, thermometers, models of planets, paper and pencil to record and draw data, computer software for computer-based science activities.

Visual-Spatial Center—Some gifted children gravitate toward the visual. They feel most at home in activities that involve seeing, representing, and manipulating lines, objects, and spaces. You might find them working out an idea in a diagram or sketching a word problem so they can “see” it and solve it. They are often the first students to notice any subtle changes in the classroom (a new poster, the addition of a few more desks, etc.) and prefer to sketch, diagram, or map out their thinking process.

Resources: Paints, paintbrushes, and easels; finger paints; clay; cookie cutters to make prints; markers; crayons; colored pencils; paper in various sizes and colors; scissors; scraps of ribbon, fabric,
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and yarn; glue, paste, and tape; old catalogs and magazines; pictures; photographs; mazes; picture puzzles; posters; camera and film; illustrated books, maps, charts, and diagrams; computer software (CD-ROMs) showing famous works of art or museum tours.

Bodily-Kinesthetic Center—Gifted children who learn best in a bodily-kinesthetic mode express this through hands-on activities and by doing. They enjoy touching, building, and moving and often express an exceptional gross or fine motor control—in sports, dance, or mime. They may be the class clown or the theatrical children who can’t resist acting out the stories they tell or imitating (to perfection) the different people in their stories. They play roles that imitate real life and often solve problems and deal with abstractions using their imagination.

Resources: Trucks and cars, equipment and materials for crafts, large blocks, cardboard bricks, dress-up clothes, a variety of hats and props, masks, kitchen equipment, dishes, pots and pans, workbench and tools, puppets, stuffed animals, manipulatives to sequence, puzzles.

Interpersonal Center—Children inclined toward the interpersonal domain relate well to others and are leaders, organizers, and mediators. This doesn’t mean they are necessarily outgoing. They may be the unassuming students who quietly diffuse arguments or anticipate problems in group projects. This center could be an area for group activities or even total group work. Activities might include brainstorming, cooperative tasks, collaborative problem solving, mentoring and apprenticeship, and group games. It could also include biographies of great leaders from around the world.

Intrapersonal Center—Students with intrapersonal intelligence tend to be introverts. They are often independent and have keen insight into their own thoughts, feelings, and personal growth. They know what they need and where their strengths lie, and they are equipped to deal with their emotions and personal goals. These students tend to be quiet and prefer working alone. A center could simply be a couple of desks where students engage in independent assignments.
journals, self-paced projects, problem solving, time alone, reflection, or computer software for word processing, or it could have a few relaxing chairs where children can listen to audiotapes or think quietly.

Naturalist Intelligence—There are children who have a close affinity with the natural world. They have a deep sense of connection with both flora and fauna and demonstrate an extensive (in some cases, an encyclopedic) knowledge of certain species. Their responses to nature often embrace a poetic as well as scientific sensibility. They enjoy classifying and identifying species and exploring natural phenomena such as climate, ecological change, and environmental conservation.

Resources: Rocks; seeds; pots and soil for planting; garden area (e.g., potting soil in suit boxes lined with plastic); live animals; variety of leaves, fossils, and seeds; pictures of plants and trees for classifying and comparing; pictures of mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, and insects; plastic creatures; dinosaur models; paper and pencils for drawing and recording data; database software; bird feeders (hopefully, one outside); nests.

Structured experiences at a few centers such as these will give you a chance to observe where your students’ strengths lie. Having a rich collection of materials that are suited to different learning styles also enables you to honor what is unique about the children and to create a bridge to new ideas and information in the curriculum. Knowing where you want all your students to be in terms of essential learning, you can use the environment and resources to design how they will get there.

LOOKING AHEAD

The next chapter is about assessment. This includes how you can find out the most useful information about your students as learners, how to monitor their progress while they are learning, and how to determine whether you need to make other adjustments at the end of a unit or lesson. Without knowing your students, you cannot really plan the most suitable activities for them. And without being able to determine if the changes you’ve made are benefiting them, you are teaching blind—
never a good position in a profession where accountability is a constant issue.

Below you will find an overview of the steps used in this book to differentiate in the four major subject areas (language arts, social studies, science, math). The diagram offers a useful and simple way to structure this journey:

**THE JOURNEY OF A DIFFERENTIATED CLASSROOM**

1. **Who are my students?**

   *Determine student readiness and preparedness for the journey by assessing*
   
   - Abilities
   - Cultural traditions and strengths
   - Learning preferences
   - Special challenges

2. **Where are they going to be by the end of this journey?**

   *Identify what you want students to understand and master by considering*

   - Children’s strengths, passions, and backgrounds
   - Essential concepts, knowledge, and skills
   - Curriculum goals
   - Curriculum standards

3. **How will I know when they’ve reached the destination?**

   *Identify evidence of understanding, such as*

   - Behaviors
   - Comments and discussions
   - Observed processes
   - Products
4. How do my students get there?

Design teaching strategies, learning activities, and resources through

- Catalysts for introductory activities
- Learning environment
- Adjustments in content
- Adjustments in process
- Adjustments in products

5. How do I monitor their progress?

Assess students through

- Ongoing observations
- Conferences with students
- Lists of criteria for peer evaluations
- Rubrics