

# INTRODUCTION

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*M*iles pulls up the hood of his sweatshirt in the dark morning and hoists his backpack onto his shoulder. The cool late fall air nips his face as he walks to the end of his driveway on the dirt road where he lives. He thinks about the kids in his sixth-grade inquiry group with whom he texted last night. They are so close to completing their big project to establish a nature trail on school grounds and they're excited and nervous about presenting their proposal to the school board. He's still a little stunned that they'll be assessed on their presentation, rather than taking a test or writing a report. He remembers that he still has a few things to finish on the slide deck but he's feeling good about the argument he's written, the budget tables and cost projections they've developed, and their compliance with trail safety and accessibility standards. The bus lumbers along the icy roads, rattling as it climbs the hill to where he stands and gasping puffs of air as it stops. As Miles climbs the stairs, he wonders if his friends will be already sitting together, and if there will be room for him.

While Miles has a sleepy and uneventful bus ride, his advisory teacher, Ms. Phillips, is already at school, preparing for the day. She sips her quickly cooling coffee as she reads her students' latest entries in their personalized learning plans (PLPs) on her laptop. She tries to spot patterns in their personal communication goals so she can group them for peer practice and critique as they prepare for their upcoming project presentations. In 20 minutes, she needs to be standing by the door and even a quick glance at the PLPs usually leaves her ready to greet her students, with something specific to say about each.

*Miles disembarks from the bus, is greeted cheerfully by the school principal, and walks through the door down the hallway toward his advisory period. On his way he sees the colorful self-portraits created in art class on the walls. His face, in an art deco style with cartoon eyes, stares back at him, one of only a handful of students of color in his class. He liked being able to choose a different medium for his self-portrait than many of his friends, thanks to the choices available in his teacher's art studio. He keeps walking, thinking that his portrait might be a good thing to upload to his digital PLP. After all, the PLP is his own personal website, his story.*

*At the door, Ms. Phillips, now up from her desk, greets him. "Hey, Miles. How's it going? How did the soccer game go this weekend? I know that was a tough team you were facing."*

*"We lost. They played really rough," Miles says.*

*"Sorry to hear that, bud," she says.*

*He nods, hangs up his pack and says hello to his friends, who are hanging out in a group by the fish tank. Miles walks to his desk and sees the choices on the board: check the class blog, upload identity work to PLP, meet with a PLP partner, work on a project of interest, read a book, or check in with the teacher. Miles has already made plans to meet with Maria, the fifth grader who is his PLP partner, this morning.*

*Miles heads to his table and smiles as he greets Maria, who is already seated. As the more experienced PLP partner, Miles is helping Maria prepare for the student-led conference she will hold with her family later in the month. This morning he plans to walk her through a few of the items in his own PLP to show her one way she could do it.*

*He snaps open his netbook and sees the last window still open—his PLP stares back. There is his name. He's happier with the look of the webpage since he changed its overall appearance, including the font and colors. He clicks on his identity page and smiles. *There I am*, he thinks. His favorite PLP entry is the video at the top of his identity page. In it, each member of his advisory holds up a sign that states something about them that most people don't know. This had been his friend Emma's idea, and it was created by a team of kids who are into film and video. Each sign tells a different story. Miles waits for his to go by. It reads: *I know three languages*. He's pretty proud of that. Miles then scrolls through his current goals, talking to Maria about each and informally assessing them as he does: *playing forward in soccer (check)*, *expanding the genres of books he reads this year (slow but steady progress on that one)*, and *learning to write computer code (still working on figuring that one out)*. He scrolls through some recent PLP entries. He points out a learning profile he completed in science class that explains how he prefers active, hands-on learning. He clicks into a coat of arms*

he drew in literacy block featuring the important people in his life, a special place, and his favorite hobby. He shows Maria a photo of work on the Lego robotics team that he hopes will help him toward his coding goal. And he sees the picture he uploaded last night of himself playing soccer at the clinic he attended this summer, along with the accompanying reflection on teamwork skills that he recorded on VoiceThread. He plays that for Maria as an example, since he knows that she has a hard time with writing but has plenty to say. She is inspired by this idea, sees that the classroom's homemade podcasting booth is available, and retreats to try out audio-reflecting for herself.

Miles suddenly remembers walking by his self-portrait and he asks Ms. Phillips if he can go take a picture of it to add to his PLP.

She nods, "Miles, that is a great idea! Sure, head down there now. Got a camera?"

His cheeks burn a bit at the sudden compliment from his teacher. He smiles, holding up the iPad he grabbed from the class tech station as he heads down the hall. He checked the iPad out from Sarah. Every student in the class has a job and Sarah is the technology manager because she simply loves the gear. It seems like she can fix anything: a broken camera, a locked iPad, or Chromebook that won't start. Miles's job is to make sure that the class transitions from one space to the other on time, and this is no small task. He is learning to keep track of time for the class.

Snap! His self-portrait is now captured on the iPad. He tags the image to two indicators in his Creating Visual Art proficiencies and uploads it to his PLP. He ponders for a moment how he needs to capture and tag all the learning he's done for the trail project, like graphing the budget projections and learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act. But then he sees Jordi, one of his math project partners, come speeding down the hall.

"Hey, Miles!" Jordi says, out of breath. "We've got a big problem." Jordi explains to Miles that a footbridge for the scale model of their nature trail they're building in math class has broken and that they need to go to the school's makerspace to 3D print another piece to replace it. Miles, the group's communicator, uses the iPad in his hand to update his group's online calendar, which tracks their tasks for project time and their whereabouts. He sends an update to their math teacher; nothing more is needed in that regard since they're already certified to use the 3D printer. Jordi, the group's manufacturer, texts their group's designer, Alicia, to confirm which file should be used for the printing. Once they have their assignments in order, Miles knows he can return to preparing his digital slides for the school board. But first, he has to help with morning meeting.

*He checks the time and, sure enough, it's 7:40. He rings the cowbell, a little more confidently than the last time, noticing a smile from Ms. Phillips and a thumbs-up from Dare and Ted, older classmates whose turn it is to run the meeting. With the slow migration of eighty students and teachers toward the "Kiva," their team's meeting space, he realizes he's starting to get the hang of it.*

## MEETING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

The opening vignette is an amalgam of real students and personalized learning going on in several of the fifty schools we have worked with over the past decade to implement personalized learning in the middle grades. We created it to illustrate a number of critical aspects that form the structure and purpose for this book. First, we want to vividly convey what school life can look like for young adolescents when they are authentically engaged in learning that is personally meaningful, appropriately challenging, technology-rich and driven largely by them. This is personalized learning at its best. Second, we want to demystify the critical roles and vital functions teachers carry out in such an environment. Third, we want to debunk the myth that personalization means that students work alone in front of screens all day, demonstrating instead how learning can be both personal and social, both technology-rich and active. And fourth, we want to share how teachers we've worked with in dozens of schools have leveraged larger system innovations to bring personalized learning to life for their students.

Miles's morning reminds us just how much is possible during the middle school years. And how much those years in grades five through nine matter. Middle grades experiences have a great impact on the degree to which students close achievement gaps, graduate from high school, and are prepared for and pursue postsecondary education.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, Miles's experience represents much of what we hope for all middle schoolers. After all, early adolescence is a time when many students begin to experiment with their myriad identities. Miles's day is rich with opportunities to explore his identity, whether it's creating his self-portrait or declaring proudly in his advisory's video that he speaks three languages. And while many young adolescents want to assert their individuality, they also want to fit in, craving a sense of affiliation and belonging to a group. Like Miles as he boards the bus each morning, many middle

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schoolers may be anxious on a daily basis about whether they'll be included among their peers. Yet he arrives every day to his advisory, a time specifically structured to establish and reinforce belonging, and he serves as a valued mentor to a younger student grappling with her own exploration of identity and affiliation. Advisory period also helps strike a balance since Miles, like most young adolescents, wants and needs the support of caring adults—their reliable acknowledgment, guidance, and validation—even as he works toward greater independence. Importantly, he knows that wherever he is on his quest for identity, he is honored and integrated into the larger team community. Yet his advisory program and its video project, like the self-portrait, were the product of teacher work and planning. Ms. Phillips and her colleagues recognized that knowing their students better, and helping them know themselves and each other, is fundamental to engaging and lasting learning.

Young adolescents also want learning to be personally meaningful as they grapple with life's moral and ethical questions and seek a sense of purpose in the world. Miles's inquiry group is engaged in project-based, technology-rich, collaborative work that culminates in presenting a real proposal to an authentic audience: the school board. A real proposal to improve the school's campus by establishing a nature trail for students and the community to experience and learn from. The project connects him with a small group of peers engaged in a collective effort to make an impact on their world. His job of ushering his team through their transitions, like Sarah's management of the team's technology, lends real weight to becoming more responsible. And mentoring Maria on her PLP, watching her find her place on the team, and witnessing her struggles as a learner, reminds him every day how far he has come and how everyone deserves the support he's gotten. But his exploration of shared purpose, his respite from the constant jockeying for social status that can alienate even the most resilient of young adolescents from school, is not an accident. It was intentionally designed by his teachers to create more personally engaging learning opportunities.

Further, young adolescents want to be recognized for the effort they put into the work they care most about. For Miles, that includes his soccer, his artwork, and his work on the trail project. His school's system for personalized goals, proficiency-based assessment, and digital PLPs, gives him a way to readily translate the learning he values most into a language of achievement also valued by his school and community, while also leveraging the technology he

loves. Just as he tags his self-portrait to visual art proficiencies, he can tag his summer soccer to teamwork skills, his Lego robotics to computer science, his budget projections to mathematical modeling, and his safety and ADA compliance to proficiencies in local and national governance. And in the course of figuring all that out, by experiencing how domains of human knowledge and skill are categorized and intersect, it's easy to imagine that Miles is on at least as sound a path to lifelong learning as he would be in any other setting. Miles's teachers are not the first to value young adolescent identity. Nor are they the first to see how project-based or service learning, even classroom jobs for students, can significantly increase student engagement and improve classroom culture. But as much as teachers and students know how vital these practices can be for young adolescents, the prevailing system of subject classes and traditional testing push these deeper, lasting experiences to the margins. Instead, Miles's teachers have embraced an assessment plan that allows them, along with their students, to catalog and evaluate authentic evidence derived from personally meaningful learning. Miles is not only deeply engaged in learning, he knows it matters, not just to him, but to his teachers and community as well.

We'd love to see such learning opportunities available for all young people, so we are heartened to see schools across the United States increasingly adopting these and other key aspects of effective middle grades practice. What's more, as our colleague and postdoctoral research associate Steven Netcoh observed, for the first time in our memory, these efforts are taking shape as part of a broader policy agenda to personalize learning as a way to meet the diverse needs and interests of students.<sup>2</sup> For example, "in order to make schools more personalized and improve student outcomes," thirty-three states currently require individualized learning plans for middle or high school students and another ten states have similar plans in place without a mandate.<sup>3</sup> In fact, only six states demonstrate no state-level activity or enabling policies promoting competency-based education, a key feature of most personalized learning environments.<sup>4</sup> The national trend toward personalized learning is not without its critics and contradictions, which we address directly in the pages ahead. In spite of the controversy, this book shows how educators, regardless of their school or policy settings, can channel the power of personalized learning into more effective and rewarding schooling experiences for young adolescents and themselves.

When schools are places to direct important projects, assume vital leadership roles, and safely and openly explore identity, young adolescents can discover the joy and excitement of competence and efficacy, traits that predict persistence and resilience as students confront inevitable challenges on their paths to adulthood and beyond. Middle schoolers deserve opportunities to identify issues of personal relevance; to learn about those issues in appropriately interdisciplinary ways; and to draw upon an array of experiential, technological, and human resources to promote that learning. They deserve to be supported along that learning journey by knowledgeable mentors who care about their growth and development, and merit authentic audiences to whom they can demonstrate their achievements.

## WHO ARE WE AND WHAT'S OUR CONTEXT?

### Personalized Learning in Vermont

Recently, Vermont educators and legislators recognized the need for students to assume greater authority for, and engagement in, their learning. While Vermont's consistently high secondary school graduation rate is enviable, students in poverty complete high school less often than their more affluent peers, and Vermont's percentage of students pursuing postsecondary education is well below the national average.<sup>5</sup> These challenges, among others, spurred the passage of Act 77 in 2013, known as the Flexible Pathways Bill, which called for a more personalized system of education. Act 77, the Education Quality Standards, and their accompanying policies, shifted schools away from the traditional Carnegie-unit, seat-time credits and toward personalized, interest-driven demonstrations of competency-based learning, or what Vermont refers to as Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Vermont students may now work toward high school graduation through a wide variety of pathways, including community-based internships, paid or volunteer positions, summer experiences, college courses, and online courses. One critical component of the bill is the mandating of personalized learning plans for all Vermont students in grades seven through twelve as a means of creating these personalized pathways. PLPs, developed by students in collaboration with teachers, families, counselors, and relevant community members, are meant to inform and document students' individual pathways to graduation.<sup>7</sup>

### The Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education

Designed by researchers and teacher educators at the University of Vermont, the Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education has partnered with more than fifty middle level schools and districts over the past decade. Made possible by a generous gift to UVM by the Richard E. and Deborah L. Tarrant Foundation, these institute-school partnerships vary greatly in their vision and process. Each establishes its own pathway to better teaching and learning. What they share is a set of bedrock principles for the institute's work. One, the initiatives need to be grounded in effective middle grades practices, as represented by the extensive literature on how best to serve the learning and developmental needs of young adolescents.<sup>8</sup> Two, plans need to embrace innovative technology integration to deepen and extend those practices. Three, initiatives need to reflect what we know about effective school change, like the need for coherence and collective efficacy.<sup>9</sup> Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the initiatives must incorporate effective professional development, what teachers need for their own growth in the midst of change they value.<sup>10</sup> Since the passage of Vermont's Act 77, we've helped our partners stay true to these principles as they leverage the PLP to design flexible pathways and craft proficiency- (or competency-) based assessment systems in the interests of young adolescents and their teachers.

The teacher and student work products featured in this book stem from these partner schools across Vermont. The schools represent a range of demographics that, like most schools, present both challenges and opportunities. For example, some serve a student population that includes more than 50 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, with almost 30 percent English language learners and more than 30 percent receiving special education services. Some are located in refugee-resettlement communities that speak more than thirty languages. Other schools in relatively affluent suburbs serve predominantly White populations, with fewer students who are receiving special education services or learning English. Still other schools are located in rural communities, with 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 60 percent of students receiving special education services. The dozens of schools from which we draw examples also present considerable variety in terms of building configurations, including preK-6, preK-8, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and 7-12 schools. What all of these schools hold in common is the desire to improve the learning and lives of the young adolescents in their charge.



For more than a decade, we have conducted research on various aspects of the work. We've studied various elements of personalized learning environments, such as the influences of choice and goal-setting on the student experience, and the potential for students to inform teacher learning.<sup>11</sup> We have analyzed the teacher experience, including the dispositions, roles, and professional growth related to key aspects of personalization.<sup>12</sup> We've studied the use of teacher action research as a strategy for professional learning.<sup>13</sup> We've examined promising pedagogies to couple with personalized learning, including project-based learning, service learning, and genius hour, within and across content-specific settings.<sup>14</sup> And we have learned a great deal about the intersections between effective middle grades practices and technology integration, and the implementation of 1:1 (one student, one device) laptop, tablet, netbook, or Chromebook environments in more than two dozen schools.<sup>15</sup> Over the past decade, our partner educators and students have helped us understand a great deal about what works and what does not. This book is the result of both research and practice, and, importantly, represents the hard work of Vermont educators and students during a time of considerable transition.

## MAKING THIS BOOK WORK FOR YOU

The purpose of this book is to help you create personalized learning environments for young adolescents by leveraging the PLP. Because of the strong alignment between personalization, middle schools, and the developmental needs of this age group, we believe the best of personalized learning is within reach of many teachers, schools, and districts, regardless of the context. We hope this book offers useful insights for those of you in states such as Maine, New Hampshire, Colorado, and Oregon that have already adopted student-centered approaches to competency-based education. At the same time, we offer strategies to increase classroom-level personalization that educators in states such as Massachusetts, Illinois, and Wyoming can enact despite the lack of supporting policies.<sup>16</sup> We believe that the type of personalized learning we aspire to is possible in districts with low per-pupil spending as well as in districts spending far more.

Whether you are a preservice teacher or an experienced educator, this book will expose the conceptual background and practical underpinnings of how PLPs can help engage students in meaningful learning. We describe what an

effective PLP is and illustrate how educators can create them at the middle grades, where students and schools are particularly well poised to take advantage of them. By detailing how PLPs, flexible pathways, and proficiency-based assessment work in concert, we show why and how to help students set personalized learning goals, identify flexible ways to achieve those goals, and document their learning in authentic ways.<sup>17</sup> Throughout it all, we illustrate how you can leverage technology to engage students and expand their access to learning. We introduce you to examples from successful teachers' forays into personalization, drawn from real examples of student PLPs and the practical tools and resources teachers used to scaffold success. And you'll benefit from illustrations of hard-won lessons learned as teachers tried—and sometimes failed—to launch PLPs. We hope that, upon reading the book, you'll be well equipped to take important steps toward personalization in your classrooms and schools.

While we've tried to be mindful of our readers' varied circumstances, we know we can't anticipate everything. To make this book work for you, we offer here a few suggestions. We hope they help you get as much as possible out of the concepts, strategies, and examples.

### How This Book Is Organized

The book is organized into nine chapters beyond this introduction. As with this opening chapter, most begin with a vignette that illustrates the chapter theme. Like the case of Miles, these vignettes are composites of real schools, teachers, and students with whom we work. We include these depictions of personalized classrooms for several reasons. First, teachers often ask us what personalization looks like. Second, despite the many rich, real-life examples we include in this book, no single example can possibly capture the full potential of a personalized learning environment. And third, perhaps most importantly, as you prepare to increase the level of personalization in your own classroom or school, you will need a truly ambitious vision of what's possible in order to honor the significance of steps along the way.

After each chapter's vignette, we offer ways for you to “build your rationale” by connecting this work to relevant theories and research related to young adolescents and learning. As you consider increasing the personalized—and purposeful—nature of your own classroom, team, or school, you'll undoubtedly need to communicate about (and perhaps advocate for) these changes

with various stakeholders, including other educators, administrators, boards, families, and communities. It's helpful to develop a strong rationale before doing so. You can draw upon this literature to justify to yourself, as well as to your students, colleagues, administrators, and families, the considerable time, effort, and risk that it takes for any meaningful change. Each chapter also contains examples and visuals of numerous work products that come from real students, teachers, and schools. We hope these convey both the ambition and the practical realities of their efforts.

We also invite you to consider a schema we've come to rely upon as we've dealt with the many vagaries of transitioning to more personalized learning environments: rethinking the use of time, space and roles. For this, Miles's morning is instructive once again. The vignette took place entirely outside our traditional notion of time, cutting off just as the team assembled for its morning meeting, the official start of Miles's school day. He anticipated a fluid movement in and out of his math class and the makerspace, and his presentation to the school board at their evening meeting at the town library, further stretching our typical understanding of school day, but also how we define the spaces in which learning happens. And clearly, Miles stretches our typical vision of student roles in his inquiry group, mentoring Maria, and facilitating a smooth transition for his team's launch of the day. Of course, his teachers, the school board members who agreed to hear his group's proposal, the state wildlife biologist who introduced them to nature trails, and the town lawyer who consulted on safety and accessibility, are all contending with somewhat novel roles as educators. We think resolving the understandable disequilibrium that often accompanies a shift to personalized learning lies in rethinking traditional notions of the time, space, and roles of schooling.

Chapter 1 (Personalized Learning for Young Adolescents) introduces you to personalized learning as an educational approach that encompasses many practices. We acknowledge its varying definitions in the field, describe what we mean by the term for the purposes of this book, and distinguish that from what we, in fact, don't mean. We present the three pillars of personalized learning, emphasize their interdependence, and share five key roles that educators play in personalized learning environments. Chapter 2 (Personalized Learning Plans) presents the underlying rationale for personal learning plans, helping you distinguish what PLPs do and don't do well. In it, we identify common threats for you to watch out for as you head down this path. And we offer a

set of questions you may find helpful to revisit throughout the book as you design PLPs for your own purposes. Chapter 3 (Laying the Groundwork for Personalized Learning) recognizes the need to carefully prepare the classroom or school culture prior to tackling PLPs. In it, we describe how to scaffold both the teacher and the student cultures for personalized learning. We emphasize common planning time, shared resources and a responsive platform, as well as sustainable routines for individual and collaborative behavior. And we discuss the importance of social-emotional learning and executive functioning in a personalized classroom.

Chapter 4 (Launching PLPs with the Learner Profile) launches you into using PLPs with students at the start of a school year. The central aim of this chapter is to discuss how to design learning opportunities that result in evidence to populate the Learner Profile of the PLP with an emphasis on individual and collective identity. In chapter 5 (Designing Flexible Learning Pathways for Young Adolescents), we move into creating action plans for learning and creating flexible pathways for that learning. We place particular emphasis on the role of empowering pedagogies, such as project-based and service learning, in the context of personalization, and we provide lots of examples of student and teacher work. In chapter 6 (Scaffolding for Equitable, Deeper Learning) we continue to explore flexible pathways, emphasizing the various ways teachers scaffold for successful learning. And we consider strategies such as passion projects and genius hour, blended and maker-centered learning, and playlists and micro-credentials.

Chapter 7 (PLPs and Proficiency-Based Assessment) rounds out the critical functions of the PLP with the integration of proficiency-based assessment, describing how students can document and reflect upon authentic evidence of personal growth in the midst of personalized learning. We explore the unique role PLPs can play in translating authentic evidence of learning into an accessible and universal language of academic progress. In chapter 8 (PLPs, Goal-Setting, and Student-Led Conferences), you'll come to understand the power of the student-led PLP conference as an anchor practice and explore strategies for enhancing family involvement in that process. You'll also see how students' personal and academic goals fit into the PLP while considering how to provide appropriate scaffolding without what professional development coordinator Life LeGeros and the Crossett Brook Middle School leadership team deemed "over-schoolifying" the process.

Finally, in chapter 9 (Sustaining Innovation in Your Classroom, Team, or School), we acknowledge the very real effort—emotional, intellectual, even physical—educators expend in pursuit of educational change. We discuss the roles of personal and collective efficacy, as well as the importance of milestones along the journey. And we offer strategies for maintaining momentum by drawing on the significance of seemingly modest progress and personal commitments.

In some respects, this book covers concepts, opportunities, dilemmas, examples, and much more that we would ordinarily introduce to our partner educators over the course of months or years. Along the way, we would help them make personal meaning of it all and craft implementation plans that reflect their priorities and circumstances. We would encourage them to commit to bold timelines with significant, often public, milestones to mark and celebrate progress. We would ensure that they had thoughtfully planned backward from these milestones using the best planning and implementation practices we can come up with. We do this because we learned from life without such a plan as we tried to make change in our own classrooms. We remember how our hopeful summer plans sometimes collided with day-to-day realities. How overlooked minutia could undermine our best intentions. And when moving too fast—or too slow—at times sparked blowback from colleagues, students, or families.

For sure, the change portrayed in this book is hard work. But teachers are nothing if not disciplined planners, at least when it comes to practices they're familiar with. A remarkable number of the specific practices we describe are not new. Many have been honed to a series of highly reliable action steps using readily adaptable materials. Some of those materials appear here; others are easily found online or in other resources we'll point you to. What's far harder to find elsewhere is how these practices apply and interrelate to serve the particular needs of personalized learning environments. That's what you'll learn in each chapter. We hope the wisdom gleaned from the ambitious work of others, combined with your own scaffolded planning, offers you a useful entry point into improving your practice—at the classroom or school level—and increasing the engagement of young adolescents.

### A Word about Words

Finally, if you've been looking into personalized learning, you've likely come across the term *personal learning* as well. The latter term conveys a deeper

degree of learner autonomy than the term *personalized learning*, which, for some, suggests a more institutionalized—or schoolified—approach.<sup>18</sup> Advocates of personal learning point to learner autonomy as the key distinction between the personal and the personalized. You'll find an associated debate regarding the terms *learner* and *student*, with the former implicitly suggesting that learning happens anytime, anywhere and the latter relegating learning to the school building and day. And there are certainly many terms for the education of young adolescents, including *middle school*, *middle grades*, and *middle level*. The latter two terms are often chosen to convey that students this age need, and in fact deserve, specialized pedagogy, regardless of the type of school building they're in.

Given our considerable emphasis in this book on student self-direction and anytime, anywhere learning, it's fair to say that we are aiming more for personal learning than for personalization. And we surely hope it can be embraced for all young adolescents, regardless of which grades are represented within their school buildings. Yet, throughout the book you'll see we use various terms to describe the kind of learning we hope all young adolescents can experience, such as *personal*, *personalized*, *engaging*, *meaningful*, and *powerful*. We similarly rely interchangeably on terms such as *middle grades* and *middle school*. One reason is that drawing a hard and fast rule to divide these complex approaches and perspectives risks oversimplification. Another, frankly, is that it's unnecessarily mundane to rely on the same terms throughout an entire book! Most importantly, however, we wish to speak to educators on all sides of these issues. We believe teachers can support deeply personal learning within a personalized learning environment; conversely, we recognize that the reality of schools at times demands personalization without more personal aims. This is perhaps particularly true within public education, where the majority of our work resides. Regardless of the terminology, we agree with classroom technology experts Bruce Dixon and Susan Einhorn, who observed:

We need to shift our thinking from a goal that focuses on the delivery of something—a primary education—to a goal that is about empowering our young people to leverage their innate and natural curiosity to learn whatever and whenever they need to. The goal is about eliminating obstacles to the exercise of this right—whether the obstacle is the structure and scheduling of the school day, the narrow divisions of subject,

the arbitrary separation of learners by age, or others—rather than supplying or rearranging resources.<sup>19</sup>

Whether you use the terms personal or personalized, student or learner, middle school, middle level, or middle grades, we are hopeful that you will find the right approach for your context, one that helps young adolescents become efficacious, empowered, and confident learners.