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“This time, it’s personal!” *Personalised learning*

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Introduction

Children and young people deserve to be successful, achieve their potential, and become active citizens within safe and secure environments. Governments have sought to achieve this by using a ‘one size fits all’ approach to compulsory education, meaning that systems have given little recognition to individuality, personal needs, or aspirations. However, our understanding of learning is changing. As such, world class schools are now embracing ‘personalised learning’ as a way of transforming their provision so that children and young people at every stage have opportunities to grow and develop, and their individual needs are addressed (see space for Personalised Learning, n.d., pp.4-5). This short article will consider what personalised learning is, how it works, and how educators can embrace it in their classrooms.

Personalised learning: a short explanation

Early Education (2012, p.6) asserts that ‘[c]hildren develop at their own rates, and [learn] in their own ways.’ Educators who recognise this offer personalised learning in their classrooms, this being described by Main (n.d.) as ‘an educational approach that considers specific needs, interests and strengths of each pupil and provides a unique learning experience to learners on the basis of those individual student traits.’ This means that teachers do not lead all of their students through the same lessons; instead, they guide each student on an individualized learning journey. An illustrative example and explanation of this is offered in the box:

Example: A teacher provides learning material with proper (relevant) content and context, and in the best way for the learner.

Explanation: By using the existing knowledge the teacher has of the pupil, the teacher can ‘connect’ the pupil’s previous experiences and abilities to the new information, building links between existing knowledge and new information

in a way that the pupil is able to acquire the new information easily, e.g., the type of material (video, text, or interactive games), the time spent, the amount of material covered in each lesson, and the order in which new information is explained. This will vary for each pupil *because it is personalised to them*.

Of course, the example above is not a scalable idea (applicable to the whole class), but it is the simplest way to explain how personalized learning can be actioned. This raises the question as to how personalised learning can be implemented ‘at scale’ (i.e., for the whole class).

Personalised learning for the whole class

The day-to-day interactions between the teacher and their pupils provide the basis for the effective development of personalised learning in the classroom. Table 1 offers some quality *personalised* teaching and learning strategies that teachers can use:

Strategy	Detail
Questions	In discussions, teachers can use inclusive questions which establish a common understanding in the class, then increase the level of challenge to draw on the thinking of more-able pupils.
Flipped learning	Teachers can pre-teach children who might struggle with key ideas by getting learners to watch audio-PowerPoint presentations or online videos as homework so that they arrive at the lesson more prepared and more able to contribute.
Guided work	Teachers can offer guided work by working systematically with groups of children during the lesson (this is a good use of the teacher’s time and assures a fair distribution of time for all children).
Other ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer catch-up classes and one-to-one tuition.• Use teaching assistants/parent helpers, simplified resources, and give learners ‘a head start’ on tasks.• Give personal advice as part of marking and feedback systems, introduce peer and self-assessment, or invite pupils to work on tasks together to show how they go about it (all adapted from DCSF, 2008, pp.10-11).

TABLE 1: Personalised learning strategies for the whole class.

Personalised learning: concluding comments

Having ownership of their learning, being able to engage in learning at their own pace, boosting their learning stamina and potential, and improving academic achievement all serve as benefits to the personalised learning approach. Naturally, some aspects make it a rather burdening method, such as teachers having to adjust their pace, engage in a lot of preparation, and learn to understand each student's needs by engaging with them appropriately. Whilst the process is time-consuming, promising results *can* be assured with teacher commitment to this empowering approach to the future of 'learner growth'.

References

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