

NZEI Primary Principals' Sabbatical Report

To explore the meaning of, review the literature and view the use of a personalised learning pedagogy in schools, and to then reflect on how this approach to teaching and learning could be used to develop a more student driven curriculum at our school.

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Amesbury School
Opiki School
Bombay School

Te Kowhai School
Wairakei School
Taumarunui High School

Purpose

To better understand what a personalised learning approach might look like in our school, and thus move our current practice from a teacher driven one, to a learner driven practice.

The key areas I explored were:

- What does the literature say about personalised learning?
- What does personalised learning look like in the classroom?
- What are the barriers and possible solutions to implementing a personalised pedagogy?
- How can digital technology support a personalised learning pedagogy?

Background

I have spent the last 10 years as a teaching principal at Kaitieke School. In that time, we have developed a school curriculum, together with teaching practices that support it, that without doubt, have provided every one of our students the opportunity to achieve to a high standard. This fact is supported by our last two Educational Review Office reports: “The principal is well organised and plans for multi-level teaching. She has identified that the quality of teaching is having significant impact and has adopted innovative ways of teaching to students’ needs. This is evidenced in students’ progress and achievement.” (2012) “...commitment to providing high quality education contribute to a culture focused on success.” “Kaitieke School should continue its practice of well-considered evaluation to sustain the high quality education provided for students.” (2016)

Over the last few years, the school has moved forward from a place where ‘Inquiry’ was a subject area, to one where inquiry is a disposition that underpins all teaching and learning, in both staff and students. From a teaching perspective, we consistently use the ‘Teaching as Inquiry’ cycle, to improve learning outcomes for our students. However, we have also worked to develop an inquiry disposition within our students. The purpose behind this has been to nurture students who are active participants in the learning process, rather than passive. Through an inquiry approach to learning, we wanted them to develop the transferable skills of questioning, critical thinking, self management, communication, creativity etc. To achieve this, I have been a great supporter of Kath Murdoch’s work and her text “The Power of Inquiry”. Kath refers to many strategies that ‘teachers do’ such as “link investigations to authentic contexts”, “frame teaching around open ended questions”, “use a layered or split screen approach to the lesson” and so on.

Our students have, as a result of this ‘developing an inquiry disposition’ focus, built a foundation of skills that enable them to work both independently and collaboratively. They are able to use higher order thinking skills and they show solid engagement in the processes of learning. However as I continued to reflect on our classroom practice, I came to realise that most of the learning was still being driven by me -the teacher. Our students were starting to get more choice and voice. Their individual learning needs were being met. But it was us, as the teachers determining their next steps, choosing contexts for learning, asking the questions, fixing the timetable and so on. So, whilst there was lots of evidence that quality teaching was taking place, and our children were achieving well, evidenced by standardised assessment results and National Standards data, I began to question whether the learning was ‘quality’ learning and the sort of learning necessary for our students to achieve as “confident, connected, actively involved and lifelong learners”, as the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum outlines.

Thinking more about the idea of quality learning, and not just quality teaching, and thinking about the qualities and skills our children will need in an uncertain future, led me to think about how to shift what happens in the classroom from being teacher led to be more student led. Whilst I would label myself as a 'quality teacher', I realised that I want to nurture students that can be responsible for their own learning and success, whether I am there or not.

I am extremely grateful to be able to have taken a term away from my sole charge role, and the business of the day to day teaching and leadership role that I have. I am very aware, that to make such a shift in practice, will require research, observation, reflection and time. The aim of this sabbatical, is to solidify my understanding of personalised learning and how it will enable our students to become both responsible for and the drivers of their own learning, and to construct the foundation on which I can build this change in pedagogy.

So why do we need a changed pedagogy?

No one I am sure, will disagree with the fact that our world has changed considerably, even since the start of this century. Neither are you likely to disagree with the fact, that it continues to change at a pace, that can be difficult to keep up with and at a pace that will result in a future we currently are unaware of. So we need to ask ourselves, what do our children need to learn, to be able to succeed in this future where possibly the only thing we can predict, is that there will be change?

A quick review of what qualities employers are seeking in employees, using the Forbes website and the Careers.govt.nz website, include qualities such as having a positive attitude, can self manage, thinking skills, communication, team work, a willingness to learn, have ambition, like to problem solve, know their strengths and have resilience. So if we work backwards from these, what does this mean we need to be focusing our attention on, as we support our tamariki to achieve?

Our children are growing up in a world where they have a digital device at their finger tips. They can find the answer to any knowledge based question with the press of a button. They find out for themselves how to do something - whether it be to use a social connection platform, use an app, or to Google how to make ice-cream! So where does that place us as their teacher?

So the 'Why' we need change is clear. Students of today need a different kete of knowledge and skills compared to those that were required in the last century. It is summarised well in the Education Counts report 'Supporting future-oriented learning and teaching: A New Zealand perspective.

During the latter half of the 20th century, international thinking about education began to shift to a new paradigm. This shift was driven by an awareness of massive and ongoing social, economic and technological changes, and the exponentially increasing amount of human knowledge being generated as a result. International thinking began to seriously examine questions about the role and purposes of education in a world with an unprecedented degree of complexity, fluidity and uncertainty.

As I thought about the questions above, I realised we could no longer just 'tweak' what we were doing to change the teaching and learning taking place in our classrooms, and provide an education that is more appropriate for our 21st century learners. We need a much more radical change to both the 'what' and

'how' of what we do. Developing a personalised learning pedagogy, I believe will support the change required.

What is Personalised Learning?

It became evident, as I visited different schools, that there were many different understandings of what personalised learning meant. These differences were not only across schools, but also across staff within a school. We could ask the question -Does this matter? I think the answer to this is - yes. If teachers and school leaders do not fully understand what is meant by personalising learning and how to achieve this at both a systems and classroom level, then the significant change required to meet the needs of today's learners will not happen.

“Change in practice, requires leaders who understand how to lead change management and who have a deep knowledge of pedagogy” Emma Tolmie

Personalising learning is not a new idea. Back in 2006 Steve Maharey spoke at the New Zealand Principals Federation Conference, about “Personalised learning: students at the heart of education”. He refers to the idea that the “biggest impact on learning comes from what happens in the classroom” and that “evidence tells us that to be most effective a teacher must engage in personalised learning”. However, with reference to ‘How we teach’, he only refers to a need for effective teaching, and makes no link back to a personalised teaching style. As he talks about ‘What we teach’ he refers to a revised curriculum that will support teachers to have greater flexibility to create contexts for learning that are most relevant for their students. Whilst a step in the right direction, I see this idea as being only on the periphery of what personalising learning is all about. Steve Maharey also referred to the importance of knowing the strengths and needs of our students very well, through the use of assessment for learning and use of evidence and dialogue. Again, these are important ideas, but only a small step towards personalising learning and could be equally applicable to for example, differentiated learning.

Leadbeater uses the following definition *“Personalised learning means differentiated provision to meet differentiated needs. All the resources available for learning – teachers, parents, assistants, peers, technology, time and buildings – have to be deployed more flexibly.”* This definition captures the idea that we are not differentiating what we do to support all students to achieve the same. He also refers to ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ personalisation. He sees ‘shallow’ personalisation as being non-transformational. It is where we make those ‘tweaks’ to our current practice. Where as ‘deep’ personalisation is about our learners having more responsibility for their learning. They have ownership over what they learn, how they learn, and their learning pathway, and engage in learning contexts that are authentic to them. If we want transformational change, then we need to be understanding what deep personalisation of learning looks like. The key difference between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ personalisation is about the extent to which the teacher or the student holds the power and control over the learning.

The above is not to suggest that we can ‘do away’ with teachers. But the role of the teacher changes in a genuine personalised learning environment. Rather than being the ‘sage on the stage’, the teacher becomes more a director of learning. The teacher is no longer developing lesson plans for the class but instead supporting individuals to learn what they need to meet their self identified learning goals.

“In our version of personalised learning we envision a transformation in how children are taught and how the system organises for learning. Each child is treated as a unique individual and his or her education

begins with the development of a personalised education plan." (Domenech 2016) This view again supports the fact that change needs to occur at the systems level and that teachers need to step back and take a good look at not only their effectiveness for learning, but their effectiveness for supporting students to become self directed, independent learners.

On a practical classroom level, the work of Barbara Bray and Kathleen Mc Claskey is clear about personalised learning. "*Personalized learning helps learners become intrinsically motivated to learn, so they own and drive their learning.*" "*Learners take responsibility for their learning and become self-directed, independent learners.*" As I suggested earlier, there is a belief by some schools and staff, that they are practicing a personalised pedagogy. However, analysis of their practice would indicate that in these classrooms, it is the teacher that is generally taking the lead, suggesting that they are using strategies that support practices of differentiation and individualization, more so than personalisation. Bray and Mc Claskey's have charted the differences between personalisation, differentiation and individualisation, which emphasises that in a personalised learning environment, it is the learner that leads. Within their text, *How to Personalise Learning*, Bray and Mc Claskey deliberately refer to 'the learner' throughout, rather than 'the student'. Whilst this may seem like a minor difference, with each word being interchangeable, they each have a different connotation. Using the word 'student' suggests someone to whom something is being done to or being taught. Whereas 'learner' implies someone who understands how and what they are learning and takes responsibility for their learning, and therefore this term supports a personalised learning environment. Building a common language and understanding of what we mean by the term personalised learning, is necessary if we are to make a transformational change in schools.

What might personalising learning look like in the classroom?

The Physical Environment

During my school visits, I saw environments that ranged from traditional single cell classrooms, to newly built modern learning environments, and schools that included a mixture. Whether a school was a MLE or not, did not in my view, impact directly on the extent to which personalised learning was being used. It is definitely not the case that a school has to be purposely built as a MLE to be able to deliver a personalised pedagogy.

However there were some features of the physical environment that supported personalised learning. There was a range of furniture in the classroom areas. These included some tables and chairs /stools, with some tables being standing height. There were often other places to sit such as on beanbags and couches. Some rooms had individual pods within the room, enabling students to sit alone. Most schools had breakout areas and students also used the immediate outdoor areas.

There was a range of technology being used across the schools. Generally greater use was being made of digital TVs than interactive whiteboards. Classrooms often had a mix of other devices, including I-pads, Chrome books, laptops and in the secondary school visited, phones. Particularly in the lower primary classes, resources were stored and clearly labelled to maximise students' ability to find things for themselves.

Relationships and Knowing your Students

To develop deep personalised learning, requires knowing the learners well. Many of the schools I visited used mixed year groups within a single cell room and also across a MLE, where there might be 90 or so children. But as I talked to teachers, there was a common belief, that we need to know more about each one of our students, than we might have done in the past.

To personalise learning we need to know where our learners are in terms of their academic levels. But we need to know much more about them too. We need to know about their interests and their passions, and what their dreams are. We also need to know about how they learn. Are they a visual learner or a kinaesthetic learner for example? Although ultimately, we want our learners to understand how they learn best for themselves and therefore be able to make their own choices around how they access and engage with content. If we know our learners well, we can provide the necessary 'just in time' bits of teaching in a way that will maximise outcomes for the learner.

The term 'personalisation' can also be used to describe the type of relationships between teachers and learners we need to have, if we are going to move towards deep personalisation. As learners take greater control over their own learning, this can free up the teacher to have one on one time with learners, or small groups, where it is needed, whether that be to give some specific teaching, to mentor, to reflect on how their learning is going and discuss next steps or perhaps to just talk. The time, and the way that time is spent with a learner, becomes an outcome of what is needed. That is, it is personalised to the need at the time.

Personalising learning could be confused with the idea of each learner working on their own. But this is not the case. Within a personalised environment, support for learning may come from a range of sources, of which the teacher is only one. Peers are very important. In "The Hidden Lives Of Learners", Graham Nuthall's research indicates that much of what students learn comes from their peers. Therefore, in a personalised classroom, we need to ensure that we co-construct opportunities with our learners to work together. We already do this in our classrooms but the difference in a personalised classroom, would be that we would not expect every student to achieve the same learning at the end of the task. So they may be working collaboratively towards either a common goal or towards their own goals through the same task.

John Spencer describes personalisation of learning as being like a jam session.

"However, true personalization is much more like a jam session where people go in and out between solo and group, trusting one another, making their own tunes while changing what's already there. It is inherently creative and it is inherently human. What it isn't is a flat menu or choices for consuming content." John Spencer

His simile captures the idea that personalisation does not require a 'lead from the front' view, but that instead, we can learn from one another. Teachers and all other adults within the school community, need to see themselves as learners, together with the students. Through strong trusting relationships, the whole school community has an opportunity to become a learning community in which anyone might

lead and we all have an opportunity to learn. And the more the community is involved, the greater are the opportunities for personalised learning pathways, because there is a greater wealth of resource and experience to draw upon. Community might be the school's immediate area, or we can think of community in a much wider sense, with digital technology giving us the ability to communicate world wide almost instantly.

Developing Learner Agency

If personalising learning is about enabling our students to take ownership of their learning, then we need to develop learner agency. Learner agency is about moving the ownership of learning from teachers to students. Bray and Mc Claskey refer to seven elements that contribute to learner agency. These are, voice, choice, engagement, motivation, ownership, purpose and self efficacy. I would say there is often some mis-understanding (as I had before my professional reading) about these terms. But more importantly it is worth considering what each element would look like, if it is contributing to a deep personalised learning environment. This is because these elements can be present in the classroom, but at a level, or in a way which still supports teacher led practices rather than the student led practice we are seeking. Bray and Mc Claskey in their text "How to Personalise Learning", show these elements on continuums, moving from what they might look like in a teacher centred environment, moving to learner centred and then learner driven environment. By matching what is happening in our own classrooms, to a place on the continuums, we can begin to tease out, what we might need to change to develop a more learner driven practice.

The way choice is provided is a good example. In many of the classrooms I visited, having choice, often set up as 'Must Dos' and 'Can Dos' lists, were described as a personalisation strategy. However, in this 'menu of options' scenario, it is still the teacher responsible for setting the learning. To move to a more learner centred and then learner driven environment, the learners themselves need to be choosing the topics and tasks, linked to what they know about their own learning needs and based on their passions and what they want for their futures.

In the past, we have often referred to the fact that we want engaged students in our classrooms. But having a class of engaged students, is not in itself, an indicator of personalised learning. Students may be 'busy' working in a classroom, following directions given by a teacher, and they may be learning. But they may not be making any connection to the learning and are merely conforming to instructions. To support deep personalisation we need to strive for a level of engagement, in which the learners are pursuing their own interests and passions and are in control and responsible for the learning within these. The term most recently being used for this idea is "flow".

"Flow is when learners are fully immersed in what they are doing because there is a balance and relationship between the challenge of the task and the skill of the learners." (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)

Ownership of the learning links strongly with both the elements of engagement and motivation. Learners that have ownership of their learning are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and to engage in learning. To take ownership, learners need to have developed the skills of how to learn and need to be able to monitor their own progress towards goals, adjusting these as required. Purpose is important, because it is purpose that creates drive and meaning in what we do.

“Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.” John F. Kennedy

Previously teachers have aimed to create purpose in lessons. For example, ‘We are learning to write persuasively, so that we can write to the Board for funds for a new sandpit.’ But to move to a learner driven environment, learners need the opportunity to find their own purposes based on their own interests and needs.

As I visited classrooms, one common area of change I noted, being used to support personalised learning, was the way in which learners were more able to access learning progressions, so that they could determine for themselves their next steps. This is one way in which learner ownership can be supported. In one school, they were working on making goal progressions more readily accessible to their youngest students, by adding pictorial support to written goals. Some schools, had progression frameworks visible on the walls, for children to refer to, and in some cases student names were added to these so that they could be used by the teacher for quick reference, if they were ‘pulling’ a group together for a needs based teaching session. In some schools, technology was being used to both track student achievement through progressions, but also these were open to the students to view, to support them to make their own decisions around next learning steps.

Self efficacy was a phrase I was unfamiliar with. It refers to one’s belief in their ability to succeed, or put more simply, confidence. Personalisation of learning requires that students will have the perseverance to achieve their goals.

“The most difficult and challenging learner to teach is the learner who believes he or she cannot succeed.” Bray and Mc Claskey

There is lots of evidence that this is the case. For personalisation of learning to work, students need to accept challenges gladly, view mistakes as learning episodes, and be willing to take risks and have resilience. These are all areas of learner development that would need to be explored and developed in students, to build a foundation for successful implementation of personalised learning. In many schools I visited, as well as the academic progressions for reading, writing and maths, there were learning qualities frameworks to support the development of, for example, the key competencies and what might be considered 21st century learning skills.

Use of Technology

The amount of technology around now is huge, and is expanding all the time. It is because of the availability and wealth of digital tools and resources, that we now have the potential to personalise learning on a scale that may not have been possible previously. Mary Ann Wolf in her text “Leading Personalized and Digital Learning” suggests that “*Digital learning is the game-changer in making personalized learning a reality.*” But it is important to realise that increased access to technology alone does not equal personalised learning and will not lift achievement on its own.

“The technology currently exists to fully personalise learning, but there is more to it than just the technology. We need a total transformation of how we currently organise for teaching and learning.” (Personalizing 21st Century Education)

Teachers and school leaders need to be well supported with professional development and time, to understand how to use digital technologies, for the successful implementation of a personalised learning

pedagogy. My visits to schools, identified how technology and digital tools are being used to support personalised learning in different ways.

Schools were using a variety of systems for gathering and analysing student data. These included student management systems such as e-tap, Hapara, e-asttle reports, as well as schools developing their own systems, based on a framework of progressions. It is then the analysis of this data, that has the potential to lead to personalising learning. Teachers need to become expert data analysers, to know exactly what each child might need at any point in time. Together with knowing what a student might need, we also need to know the student well enough to know how they might best learn it.

If students are going to drive their own learning, they need to be able to identify where they are at and what their next step will be. Digital tools were being used in some schools, to move the ownership of analysis and next steps to the learner. Students were deciding their own next goal from a framework of progressions and then recording evidence of learning against the goal. Although generally only in the beginning stages, some schools had started to build lists of possible resources for each goal, for learners to link to, as they work their way through the progressions.

The range of digital resources available online that directly teach content are vast. Learners can go to any one of a number of tutorial like sites, to learn a particular skill or idea. Some of the sites I saw being used were Khan Academy, Youtube, Studyladder and IXL. There are many advantages for students, being able to access and find the learning they need on these sorts of sites. Unlike in a teacher led lesson, they can watch an online clip multiple times. They can pause it whenever they want to and go back to it at a later stage. They can go to multiple sites to understand the same content. These all provide greater flexibility for the learner, and support the idea that learning can take place when the learner is ready for it, it can happen at their chosen pace and in a learning environment that suits them, as well as them being able to choose a particular delivery style, all supporting a personalised learning pedagogy.

Whilst we are aiming for students to drive their own learning, the availability of digital technology enables teachers to present learning and engage learners differently. Students today are not only spending considerably longer in front of screens out of school hours, but the content they choose to watch and use is very attention grabbing multimedia. Therefore teachers have to learn how to use multimedia more effectively in school.

“Progressive educators realize that interactive multimedia holds vast potential to enhance student engagement, encourage creativity, offer differentiated learning experiences, provide richer assessment opportunities, and deepen students’ abilities to connect that which takes place in the classroom to the circumstances of their daily lives.” Dawn Wilson.

Digital technologies have greatly increased the opportunities learners have for ‘connection’ and collaboration. This is an important part of personalising learning. The teacher is no longer seen as the provider of all knowledge. Instead they take on the role of facilitator, part of which could be supporting students to connect with those who can support them towards their learning goals. Examples might be connecting with an expert through a one to one Skype session, or perhaps participating in a Google Hangout with a number of students from different countries. If students are being encouraged to follow

their own interests and passions, then technology supports them to become expert learners in their own chosen areas. Whilst the teachers become experts in prescribing the best strategy, resource, or mini lesson to support the child at any one particular time as needed. Technology also opens up the opportunities for authentic audiences which leads me on to the next area in which technologies support personalised learning.

A key part of the transformational change personalisation of learning offers us, is the shift from being consumers of knowledge to creators of knowledge. This is far more than 'coming up with a new idea'. It is very much accepted that we learn best by doing. Promoting and developing creators of knowledge, is about our learners actively engaging in their own learning and encompasses many of the skills often now associated with 21st century learners such as create, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, problem solving and reflection. As students create knowledge, linked to their own interests and passions, digital technologies offer them multiple ways to express their learning and gives them the ability to share it with a wide variety of audiences. Creation of websites, movies, slideshows, and blogs are just a few examples.

One other area in which digital technologies play a part in supporting personalising learning, is in assessment. If our aim is to develop deep personalisation of learning then we need to focus on assessment for learning. If we are personalising learning then we need to personalise assessment. This involves the student knowing their own goals and self monitoring their progress towards it. Digital technology can support learners to do this in different ways. It may be through them doing an online assessment to check if they have mastered a concept. They might seek feedback from a teacher or peer in the form of an online comment. They could make a self assessment against pre determined criteria, that is recorded online for future reference. Assessment may be the product of learning, expressed in any one of a number of forms, such as a piece of writing, a speech, an artwork etc. All of these examples of assessment, support the learner to have ownership of their learning and promote assessment that is helpful to the learner. This is quite different to the traditional assessment or testing programmes we have often undertaken, where groups or even whole classes are assessed at the same time, and just because you haven't reached a particular level at that point in time, you are labelled as failing.

Central to the practice of assessment for learning (formative assessment) is the concept that students who truly understand and are involved in their learning will experience accelerated rates of achievement. Students who are involved in their learning can be thought of as assessment-capable or active learners. They know what they need to learn, where they are with that learning and what their next learning steps are. To enable students to take charge of their learning, they need to be deliberately and systematically taught how to be assessment capable and active in their learning. (Assessment.tki.org.nz)

In one school visited, digital technology was being used by assessment capable students to gather evidence of meeting learning goals. This evidence, which was then reviewed by the teacher, to check for mastery, took a range of forms. This evidence included things like a screen shot of an online test result, a photo of a product, a written reflection on a piece of work, a Google slide demonstrating a learnt concept, a blogpost or a link to something like an Explain Everything clip. The teacher having reviewed

the evidence would feedback to the child, providing more support or having a learning conversation if they felt the child had not demonstrated the required achievement.

Possible Barriers to Implementing a Personalised Learning Pedagogy

1) Infrastructure

My visits to schools indicated that it was not necessary for classrooms / schools to have been built as modern learning environments. Some of the best personalised learning I saw, was in more traditional classrooms that had been adapted. What came across as being important, was having both a range of furniture within the space and also having alternative spaces that students could remove themselves to, such as a corridor, an outside deck area or a break out space. If a teaching area was unable to provide this variety, then this could hinder (but not prevent) a personalised pedagogy. This is because the environment needs to cater for the fact that students do not all learn most effectively sitting at a desk. Neither will one way always suit that child. If they are reading on their own, a beanbag somewhere quiet might be their choice of location and furniture. Where as if they are working with another student on a maths problem, lying on the floor in any space might work best for them. The key is choice.

Both my reading and visits, identified the importance of digital technologies to support personalised learning. I see there is a need for both a reliable fast connection, together with one to one devices. This is not to suggest that one to one devices are essential. But with the way technology can now enable independence in learning, communication, collaboration, engagement, presentation, assessment and reporting, then ready accessibility to a device becomes more important. For some places such as low socio-economic areas and rural areas, access can still be an issue. The lack of technology and a connection at home also becomes a barrier, when we are trying to promote the idea that learning should be an anywhere, anytime, with anyone activity.

Some schools visited, were ensuring access to technology, through implementation of a BYOD programme. Other schools, referred to an ICT or digital technology plan, one aim of which was to ensure the ongoing updating and purchase of hardware.

2) People

When making a considerable shift in practice, there are many stakeholders to consider. As I talked with school leaders, there were two main groups, that came up, that need careful consideration as to how to bring them onboard with the change successfully. The first group is staff. One hurdle to cross is how to convince people to make a change to a system, that isn't 'broken'. Our own school fits in to this category. We already achieve very good results - so why do we need to change anything? It is important that all staff understand the 'Why?' of a change to a personalised learning pedagogy. To support successful change, staff need to work together from the beginning to develop a shared vision. As well as undertaking professional development together and holding many staff meetings before any change even took place, many schools I visited had provided opportunities for their staff to visit other schools, to see personalised learning happening. For myself, seeing a variety of personalised learning taking place across a number of schools, and being able to talk with professionals who are already undertaking the journey, has been a considerable support factor.

The second group identified by leaders, that could be considered to be a barrier to implementation, are parents. Both staff and leaders talked about how parents were educated in quite different classrooms, and therefore can struggle to understand how students can be learning when they are lying on the floor, or when they are working in groups with no direction from the teacher for example. Teachers commented that often, younger parents, who perhaps had had greater access to technology themselves, and experienced less traditional classrooms, were more open to the change. To overcome parental concerns, leaders were employing a number of strategies including holding information sessions, regularly reporting and explaining ideas in newsletters, sharing student learning (both the teachers and the students themselves) considerably more regularly through apps such as Seesaw and through blogs and websites, and by inviting parents to come and visit during the school day.

One group that could be a barrier to change, not discussed by leaders, but that I identified through my visits, were the students themselves. Some students were finding the change to a more student driven curriculum difficult to cope with whilst others were managing the change well but not convinced that it had improved their learning. I found most interesting a Year 7 student, who was working in a classroom with some strong personalised learning systems in place, and who explained their system for learning very capably. She described how the changes meant that when she worked with the teacher, the learning was now always at the appropriate level. She no longer had to participate in groups where the learning might be too easy or difficult. She also referred to how she could select her own learning goals and knew where to access the necessary support to meet these. But when asked by me if she was therefore learning better than before the changes were initiated, she thought not. I am quite convinced that this was not the case. But what it does show, is that we need to include the students themselves in the whole process of explaining the 'Why' and the 'How' and support them to identify and recognise all the learning they are doing, not just the 'What'. That is, we may need to make more explicit that what we learn through the process or 'on the journey', is as important as the outcome or 'the destination'.

There is also a whole lot of building skills and dispositions within the students themselves, that needs to take place, prior to, or alongside the implementation of personalised learning. For students to have the capability to drive their own learning effectively, they need solid independent learning skills. For example they need to be able to self manage their time. They need to be able to reflect on their own learning. They need to be able to set goals and monitor progress towards them and the list goes on. The schools I visited were exploring how to teach and develop these learner qualities, to support successful implementation of personalised learning. One school was using a 'driver license' analogy, with the idea that students were either at a learner stage, restricted, full licence, or experienced. Together with providing students with the information they needed to progress, it gave teachers the knowledge of where students were at and therefore the level of support required by each student. Another school was using a rubric, moving through stages from dependent, to assisted, to independent, to self guiding. These learner qualities were linked back to the key competencies. If schools have not thought through how they will develop these learner qualities, necessary for driving their own learning, in the students, then successful implementation will be impacted.

The need to work with everyone involved in the change process, both from the beginning before change has begun, and then as an ongoing part of the change process, is summed up in the statement below.

*“One of the biggest mistakes leaders make is causing stakeholders to feel as if something is being done **to** them instead of **with** them.” (Leading personalized and digital learning)*

3) Current Culture and Systems

As I have previously discussed, to achieve deep personalisation, tweaking what we currently have and do, will not create the change we need. We could keep with the analogy of driving. It doesn't matter what changes we make in terms of how clean we keep the car, whether we keep it in a garage or not or the extras we add inside like a radio or bluetooth, it can still only go as fast as its design will allow it to go. To get a different performance, we need an improved modelled car or in the case of education, to get every child to reach their own full potential, we need to change the system.

Many of the systems we currently have in place do not necessarily support personalised learning. Having a timetable is one good example. Timetables support teachers to manage students. They do not support learners and are a barrier to personalised learning. Many of the classrooms that were successfully implementing personalisation, had removed a fixed timetable and students were planning their own time.

Requiring students to be at a certain level by a certain time based on age, and removing students for remedial support, are counter productive or barriers. If personalisation is about providing students with the instruction they need to progress to the next stage at the time they require it, then the idea of remediation becomes defunct. We need to “prioritise equity, not equality” and “Move away from business models of data management in favour of individualized student progress monitoring.” (Personalising 21st Century Education.) We need to let go of our current system of standardised practice and assessment if we are to achieve personalised learning. Assessment needs to become personalised in a way that puts the learner at the center of the learning process. It needs to focus on how each individual is progressing in relation to their own learning goals. The current ‘need’ to gather and report standardised scores, not only inhibits a personalised approach but results in students being labelled the moment they walk through the school door.

Our system of moving students from one class to the next at the end of each year is also a barrier. Personalisation requires that teachers know their learners well: where they are at in their learning, how they learn, how they ‘fit’ within their peer group and their passions and interests. The regular movement of students, is a barrier to building this knowledge and understanding of each individual. A number of classrooms I visited, had mixed age groups, allowing a teacher to spend two or three years with the same students, and therefore having time to build a really full picture of them as an individual.

One other barrier to the successful implementation of change, that both leaders and staff talked about is the willingness to give up ‘control’. Many of us have worked for years, in classrooms where to some extent, successful teaching was measured by the degree of conformity, with all students following our instructions and doing what was asked of them. The ownership for learning, fell largely to us the teachers. Personalisation requires us to give up that control and share the ownership of learning with the students, with the balance sitting much further on the side of the students. It requires a change in the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship. This involves considerable risk taking on the part of teachers and leaders. We have to be prepared to give up the ‘support’ of using what we’ve done before

that has worked. Therefore there needs to be alternative support added. In the schools I visited, successful implementation of change, was definitely supported through strong leadership and high levels of support and collaboration among staff. There was also support from outside of their own school such as visiting and working with other schools following a similar journey and support from other agencies such as professional learning contracts and online networks.

Conclusion

Whilst personalised learning is not a new idea, it is often a misunderstood one. Many teachers believe they are already personalising learning, when in fact they are implementing classroom strategies that either individualise or differentiate learning. This is not to say that these strategies are wrong or bad in any way. They go a long way to support student achievement. However, they are strategies led by the teacher. Deep personalisation of learning is different. It is about the learner taking responsibility for their learning. It is about them becoming self directed and independent learners, as they use their own interests, curiosity and passions to connect with the learning.

To achieve the change to a personalised learning pedagogy, requires more than just an adaption of what we are already doing. It requires a radical change, a re-imagining of school and learning. We need to be willing to challenge many of our current beliefs and systems, to change the system. Only then will we begin to achieve equity for our learners, rather than equality, and see each one achieving to their own full potential. Together with personalising learning, we will need to personalise assessment. Student achievement needs to be measured not by standardised testing, but by learners monitoring their own progress in multiple ways.

For change to happen, we need to start with a vision and curriculum that describes an education that is appropriate for learners of today: learners that require a different skill set from the one of the past, and one that will prepare them for **their** future. We need to work to ensure all stakeholders understand why we need the change. Then, all those involved, students, staff, parents and community can support one another on the journey.

Personalised learning is not about students having the freedom to do whatever they want to do. In fact one of the greatest challenges we have ahead, is to understand how to personalise learning whilst ensuring our learners gain the foundational skills and knowledge necessary for them to drive their own learning. But it is about there being a change in the level of control they have over the what, how and when of learning. It is about increasing learner agency, so that they can engage strategically in their learning without waiting to be directed. It is about developing learners who are literate in not only content but also in the process of learning. It is about learners understanding how they learn, owning and driving their learning and being co-designers of their curriculum and their learning environment.

Technology is not a silver bullet and will not improve achievement for all just because we increase its use. However, with what is now available, and used differently, digital technologies have the potential to make personalising learning more of a reality.

Change is never easy, and to make a substantial change to the practice you have used for years (and got good results with) requires courage, the willingness to take risks and resilience. By becoming aware

of some of the possible barriers to such a change, it may be possible to plan ahead to minimise the impact of them. It will not be a journey that can be taken alone, and it will be necessary to access support along the way. But it will be a journey that will lead to a destination full of passion, and life long, active learners who are confident and connected in tomorrow's world.

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