Education Week's blogs > Vander Ark on Innovation

How Teachers and Leaders Can Promote Personalized Learning

By Tom Vander Ark on October 31, 2018 12:18 PM | No comments

Share 0

There are five important attributes of Personalized Learning:

1. Whatever is best for that learner at that time. Personalized learning is what's best for the learner rather than what is the most expedititoius for the institution.

Personalized learning weighs learner interest, learning progression (the best next unit not the easiest), opportunity (a unique local learning experience: a full moon, high tide, service need, civic event, or business trip). Personalized learning is a balance of what the learner wants to do, what the learner should do and what the learner could do.

2. Extended challenges. If you value critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, character (including agency and persistence) you can't get there with a series of worksheets. Learners need big integrated projects--some individual, some team, many community-connected and often with voice and choice in topic and product.

3. Individualized skill building. Identifying skill gaps and addressing them with targeted instruction, both by teachers and adaptive tools is a critical part of enabling all students to participate fully in **high quality project-based learning**. Skill building can occur before, during and after projects.

4. Anywhere, anytime learning. Personalized learning happens at school, after school, during the summer. As LRNG has been attempting to do, we have to unlock rich out of school learning experiences for all students; and we have to get better at capturing and signaling those new capabilities to other stakeholders so that learners can progress on demonstrated master (this is one of the reasons competency-based policies are so important, it can help unlock opportunity).

5. Social and emotional learning. Self and social awareness and the ability to navigate complex relationships are developed in trust-based communities. At **Thrive Public Schools** in San Diego, they start and end the day in the community. Founder Nicole Assis wants to make sure every child is greeted every day, that they are "Known, seen and valued." They make sure every kid has a voice.

When you do these things, learners build agency, a sense of identity as a learner, they begin to own their own learning. These are lifelong dividends.

How Teachers Support Personalized Learning

There are (at least) five ways teachers make learning personal.

1. **Recognize and celebrate jagged profiles** (**Todd Rose**).

2. Help every learner build a plan. Teachers in **Cajon Valley** help every student build a plan based on their unique strengths, interests and values. They explore these through 54 engagements with the world of work between K-8 (#CVWoW).

3. Plan extended challenges. To boost engagement, application, integration and critical success skills, learners need periodic community-connected challenge (we call this HQPBL). Do it with a partner, or a grade level team, or make it a school-wide endeavor for a week.

Senior project at Design Tech High

4. Leverage smart tools. Don't try to grade every edit of every paper yourself, use automated writing feedback systems, use adaptive math systems, give learners the chance to manage their own progress (good competency systems do that)

5. Collaborate. Personalized learning is a team sport: it's difficult, complicated, the tools aren't good enough to fully support these ideas. It still takes hard work and teamwork

10 Ways Administrators Can Help

There are at least 10 ways school and system heads can support personalized learning:

1. Build a collaborative vision. Share your own personal story of personalized learning. Help others tell their story. Weave them together into a shared vision--a concise, compelling picture of powerful learning.

2. Define success. Hold a community conversation. Define what graduates should know and be able to do. Build a graphic **graduate profile**.

3. Help teams grow into the frame. Thoughtful district leaders build an academic framework and allow schools to grow into that framework in their own way. (Great examples: **Mesa County, Colorado**; **Albemarle County, Virginia**; **Salisbury, Pennsylvania**; **Cajon Valley, California**.)

4. Support teacher leadership. Thoughtful leaders Identify and embrace teachers leading the way. Find ways to support them. Create new roles for them. **Opportunity Culture** is a network of school using new staffing strategies that leverage the talent of teacher leaders.

5. Build a fast lane and slow lane for change management. Like students, teachers need personalized and competency-based learning too. Look for ways to support teacher teams ready to move (perhaps with microschools, #6) as well as those that need more time and support.

6. Use micropilots and microschools. In Kettle Moraine, **superintendent Pat DeKlotz** sponsored the development of four microschools for teachers that were ready to move. Singapore American School **piloted new classroom** configurations to investigate and illustrate facilities plans.

7. Use opportunities. Use whatever comes your way as an opportunity to launch or expand personalized learning: new schools opening; budget, staff or policy changes. Work from the edge in.

8. Develop personalized learning infrastructure. Adopt a learning platform and a competency-based grade book. Build project rubrics. Share a library of quality prompts and quality student work.

9. Work in phases. Break the work into three phases. Make it doable with clear targets and strong supports.

10. Put the vision on a timeline. Equity requires that all learners have access to personalized learning. Organic change is comfortable but it's not equitable. Balance the desire to go slow with the need to accelerate student progress.

5 Tips on Learning Environments

1. Space: Larry Rosenstock developed all of the **High Tech High** spaces with as much "Height, light, and exposed structure" as possible to make it inspiring and inviting.

2. Exhibitions: Create permanent and pop up exhibitions of student work; welcome and celebrate contributions. (Below: High Tech Middle School, **#shareyourlearning**).

3. Flexible space: From east to west coast (e.g., **Albemarle County** and **Lindsay USD)** school districts are combining classrooms to facilitate easy movement between skill groups and project teams.

4. Seating options: Offer high and low, hard and soft flexible seating options (see featured image of Singapore American School).

5. Access: Make access to schools and programs equitable by paying attention to location, enrollment, and transportation.

There are many ways teachers and leaders can contribute to making learning personal. It starts with a shared commitment to know and care for each child.

Key Takeaways

[:54] What personalized learning is and the five main attributes of it.

[4:55] Five things teachers can do to support personalized learning.

[6:58] Ten ways administrators can help build systems for personalized learning.

[11:47] Tom closes this podcast with a few thoughts on space and architecture for personalized learning environments.

[16:48] Tom and the Getting Smart team would love to hear from you! Let them know what you think about this episode by emailing **Editor@GettingSmart.com** or leaving a review on iTunes.

Mentioned in This Episode

Todd Rose Thrive Public Schools District 51 Albemarle Public County Schools Salisbury Township School District Cajon Valley Union School District High Tech High Larry Rosenstock

Thanks for listening. Let us know what you think of this episode: rate and review the podcast; and send us thoughts about this show and suggestions for others, email **editor@gettingsmart.com**

Stay tuned for a great report from Singapore American School.

The photo above was taken by Tom Vander Ark. Stay in-the-know with all things EdTech and innovations in learning by *signing up to receive the weekly Smart Update*. *This post includes mentions of a Getting Smart partner. For a full list of partners, affiliate organizations and all other disclosures, please see our* *Partner page.*

Categories:　K-12　　Personalized Learning

Tags:　edleaders　　educators　　learning spaces　　personalized learning