



HOT TOPIC

Personalized or Adaptive Learning

Which should my school strive for?

More and more devices are making their way into classrooms, outfitted with the best software available, often with the goal of providing students with a more personalized approach. The plethora of devices and platforms should make differentiation easier for educators to implement. But then you run into an app that advertises an “adaptive” system. What does that mean? Are “personalized” and “adaptive” the same thing?

In a word: No.

Personalized learning is a catch-all term, referring to anything that a teacher or software does to differentiate instruction for individual learners. This could apply to curriculum, content, method, and/or pace. The teacher who prescribes a slightly different curriculum for Mason because he is a struggling reader is providing personalized learning. So is the software allowing Mason to make the screens in the program blue because that’s his favorite color.

Teachers inherently know when a student requires extra help or when they need to be challenged, and then strive to provide what that student needs. Therefore, personalized learning is probably happening in your school consistently (although you can always help teachers improve their practice).

The question, then, becomes: What level of personalization do you want out of your learning systems? Is changing the color of the screen enough, or

MYTWOCENTS

What’s your best advice for new principals?



Kathryn Crawford (@FE_Ambrose): Use every person in the building optimally and get into the classroom so you stay connected to the needs of the school.



Sandra K. Intrieri (@ski626): Communicate purposefully & regularly; listen actively; make connections; let teachers & students know that you care!

do you want an experience that grows with the learner?

Enter adaptive learning. According to “Learning to Adapt: Understanding the Adaptive Learning Supplier Landscape,” the data-driven process functions by “adjusting to a learner’s interactions and demonstrated performance level and subsequently anticipating what types of content and resources learners’ need at a specific point in time to make progress.”

An adaptive learning system is usually in a constant state of formative

assessment in an effort to provide the right “next step” in students’ learning processes. This type of responsiveness is only available through technology, but not every learning product has these capabilities.

Implementing an adaptive learning program takes a lot of consideration. Budget is obviously a concern. So far efficacy studies are promising, but preliminary, due to the relative novelty of these solutions. Finally, some educators simply don’t want to cede that much control to technology.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

Down to Earth Education

With the help of parents, students, and community members, a trash-filled, overgrown lot behind the school was reclaimed as a garden. Presently, it has a green house, raised beds for planting, and open areas for outdoor gatherings and study. In this environment, children are allowed to explore and discover via hands-on interactions with nature. Project-based studies provide a more scripted approach to environmental education. Acting on the expressed interests of the students, teachers facilitate topics of study such as weather, composting, parts of plants and the life-cycle of plants, ecology, and conservation.



—*Mary-Elaine Leake, principal of Astoria Lutheran School in Astoria, New York, and a 2014 National Distinguished Principal*

Gladden Middle School is one of 12 schools in Georgia that merges the local farmers/producers with the School Nutrition Program. Farm to School connects schools (K-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; providing agriculture, health, and nutrition education opportunities; and supporting local and regional farmers. In this program, students grow food in the onsite greenhouse that is served in the cafeteria.

—*Ardith M. Bates, principal of Gladden Middle School in Chatsworth, Georgia, and a 2014 National Distinguished Principal*

3 Tips for Difficult Conversations

Whether they are with teachers or parents, principals experience more than their fair share of difficult conversations. Jennifer Abrams, author of *Having Hard Conversations* and a pre-conference speaker at NAESP’s 2015 Annual Conference, offers tips to turn those conversations into growth opportunities.



1 BE CONCRETE. This isn’t the time for fuzzy concepts and managerial buzzwords. Demonstrate a firm grasp of what is currently going on (with metrics, if possible) and a proposed plan for moving forward. Key phrase: “These are the standards that are currently not being met.”

2 IT’S ALL ABOUT “WE.” For such small words, pronouns can have a big effect on a conversation. “I” sometimes asserts authority. “You” is sometimes accusatory. Try to use a lot more “We” in these sorts of conversations. It will help the other person feel a part of a unit. Key phrase: “We can really move forward with this if we...”

3 REMEMBER THE STUDENT. Students themselves are often overlooked in favor of how the parent, teacher, or other party is affected. If you’re having a meeting about a student, the goal of that meeting should be to help the student improve and grow. Key phrase: “We’ve noticed that Ayanna’s problems usually occur during class transitions, so we’re going to help her be more successful during those times.”



Chad Prosen (@drprosen): Listen three times more than you speak was great advice I got as a new principal.



Justin Tarte (justintarte): Get to know your students & focus on building relationships w/ them. It’s trust that makes a positive school culture.

+ Are you a new principal? Get ideas and resources by joining the National Panel of New Principals @ www.newprincipal.org