



This Time It's Personal

The Gilbert Report laid out a blue-print for expectations within personalised teaching. To make the vision a reality, teachers need to shift their focus from what they teach, to learning about those they are teaching it to.

Open to wide interpretation, Personalised Learning can mean:

- Addressing the capability of each student – stretching the gifted and talented and ensuring the less able are not left behind.
- Making teaching material relevant and of interest to the students.
- Matching teaching to individual learning styles (VAK) and so much more.



Tipping points in education and skills – personalised learning

In this extract from his keynote speech to the QCA Annual Review, Ken Boston discusses personalised learning as a pivotal issue in education and how teachers should be equipped to implement tailor-made teaching.

What are the mega-trends, the educational equivalents of global warming, which will alter the very landscape of education and skills development?

One will be the point at which we have successfully brought together personalised learning and diagnostic assessment as envisaged in the Gilbert Report on vision of teaching and learning in 2020.

Teaching is effective only when it is sufficiently precise and focused to build directly on what the individual pupil knows, and takes him or her to the next level of attainment. If the learning task is beyond the zone of achievable challenge, no learning will occur, and the child will be frustrated and disaffected. If the learning task is too easy and does not extend the child, again no learning will occur, and the child will be bored.

At the present time, the curriculum - and much teaching - is aimed at the middle ground of average students. But even these children miss out, because all students have different needs. Personalised learning has a big part to play in shifting the D grade student to a C, the C to a B, and the B to an A grade.

In order to focus the teaching in this manner, the teacher needs three things: a curriculum designed to support personalised learning; the assessment tools needed to measure individual performance and progress; and the skills to bring the two together to shape the learning programme.

The Secondary Curriculum Review is under way. It will provide a curriculum foundation at key stages 3 and 4 on which focussed teaching can be built. It combines flexibility with clear specification of content.

Ken Boston,
Chief Executive QCA



In terms of assessment tools, teachers need constantly at hand a range of simple, easily administered tests to measure achievement whenever it suits. Many of these tests could be on-line, and could be taken at the pupil's choice if he or she felt ready. The objective is precision and timeliness: teachers do not want masses of data, but focussed diagnostic information when it is needed. And the purpose of the testing is to produce better learning tomorrow, not some time in the future.

The skills to bring personalised learning and incidental testing into the daily routine of the classroom involve replacing the concept of professional development for teachers with that of professional learning – learning in the settings in which they work. It means knowing how to use precise formative assessment to identify the learning needs of each child, and knowing how to shape the response. Clearly, support for teachers to do this is needed at school, local authority and national level.

We should run, not saunter: the nation cannot wait until 2020 to get there.

For a full transcript of Ken Boston's speech to the QCA Annual Review 2006 visit www.qca.org.uk.

Richard Bowett, Bourne Grammar School "I use Assessment for Learning approaches to try to diagnose the primary learning barriers for each student, and set targets and work accordingly. Often, the barriers are more affective than cognitive, and the most useful thing to be done is to promote self-belief, coupled with some techniques, often not subject specific, to ease the student's progress eg better reading techniques. I talk to students individually around once a fortnight."

"One particularly successful activity is to ask students to create tasks such as exam questions. Even if the resulting task is unusable (occasionally there is the bonus of a free resource!) the student generally learns a great deal metacognitively about how intellectual problems work."

Alex Savage, AST and SSAT Lead Practitioner in ICT at Notre Dame School, Norwich examines the role that ICT can play in helping teachers conform to the needs of the learner, rather than the learner conforming to the system.



Personalised Learning

Achieving the vision with ICT

Young people are already using technology informally to learn about issues that interest them and share their ideas with online communities. The challenge for schools is whether they can catch up with their students!

Practical Examples

Schools are moving towards putting their schemes of work online. For example, Notre Dame High School, has put their KS3 ICT Scheme of work onto the web. Consequently, students can access guidance on demand whilst at home as well as at school. Students can work at their own pace and when appropriate they can choose which level of activity to do.

The internet can enable students to learn and demonstrate skills whilst researching issues that interest them. The BBC Newsround website gives students the freedom to choose from a wide variety of real issues relevant to the curriculum.

Some schools are exploring sites such as learnerblogs and wikispaces to encourage students to collaborate and learn from each other. However, the issue of how to moderate these online communities does need to be addressed.

E-assessment tools such as Hot Potatoes and Yacapaca can be used to tailor assessment, providing an ongoing picture of each student's individual needs.

Nicola Pearce, Salisbury High School "Working with ICT allows differentiation by input and output. The task can be created in the form of a word document 'workbook'. Then the same basic task can be created at three different levels, with the detail of input and complexity of output balanced to allow all students to complete the task. Lower ability students will benefit from highlighting keywords and ideas, and more able students are provided with hyperlinks to the source information to encourage them to develop the ideas for themselves. This works very well in BTEC courses where students are encouraged to self select their level."

Mary Newcombe, Luton Sixth Form College "Make it very relevant to the students and their environment and culture - they would much rather talk about Nike as a business than John Lewis!"

Personalised Data

How much does it cost to feed a penguin?

Designing a budget for a zoo is an easy way to demonstrate how to calculate totals and profits using formulae, but why study a place that does not exist using data that is probably made up?

According to 2020 Vision Gilbert Review and research produced by EPPI Centre 'pupils are more likely to be engaged with the curriculum if they believe it is relevant and if they take ownership of their learning.'

Instead of creating a model for an imaginary zoo, our students calculate how much water they use in an average day. We then tell them that the water budget for a child at our link school in Malawi is only 20 litres. They interrogate the model to find ways to reduce their own water budget. This really engages the students and highlights the importance of using less.

We used to teach correlations by making scatter charts plotting height against shoe size of 100 fictional children. Now, our students use web sites such as the World Factbook to access a wide range of national statistics. They explore the data independently to look for possible correlations such as life expectancy and GDP, or literacy rates and GDP etc.

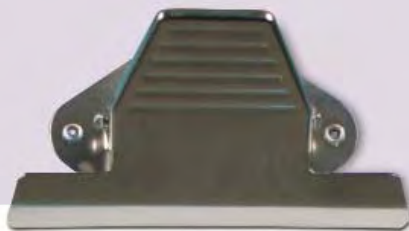
A good way of generating real data is by using an online survey tool such as SurveyMonkey or SurveyAtSchool. Our students create their own surveys on energy use at home. They analyse the data, then suggest ways of using less energy. Our KS3 students learn about confusing marketing in mobile phone contracts. They are able to create models and use online databases to work out the best deal for the number of minutes they use. At KS4 we go on to teach students about personal finance using software called Adding Up To A Lifetime. Activities explaining how to understand interest rates and compare bank accounts have proved useful not only for students but their teachers too!

Making the 2020 Vision a reality

It is clear that technology has a significant role to play to inspire and motivate our learners. WWW stands for World Wide Web. Many schools have yet to realise its true potential for bringing the real world into the classroom and personalising the learning experience.

For links to all references and resources mentioned within Alex's article visit his blog at

www.communcity.org



Personalised Learning in the Classroom

Advanced Skills teacher Sue Pritchard, St Bonaventure's School, Newham, is an advocate of customised teaching to suit multiple ability levels and individual VAK learning styles. Here she shares her practical advice on how teachers can implement a personalised learning strategy in the classroom.

Sue is the subject of a 15 minute video on **Implementing Personalised Learning**, which can be viewed at www.teachers.tv

- Gather as much information as possible about the students in the class including target minimum grades, learning styles, IEPs.
- Share this information with the students at the beginning of the course and then on a regular basis throughout.
- Make time every half-term for a one-one review.
- Devote time to familiarising students with exam marking criteria, then mark all key tasks in line with the mark scheme. Students should keep their own records so they can track the progress they are making.
- Mark work with an exam grade (as far as possible), a positive comment relating to previous targets, a future target. It is preferable to mark one or two pieces per half term thoroughly, than mark more regularly but not have time to give sufficient individual feedback.
- In order that students are able to improve, they need to be taught explicitly how to learn. Teachers should try to identify what strategies students need to be able to succeed in their particular subject area.
- As part of the learning objective refer to specifications and NC levels/grades so students can see the relevance of what they are learning and can track their own progress.
- As far as possible plan to ensure visual, kinaesthetic and auditory learners are catered for at some point during the lesson or during a series of 2/3 lessons e.g. for visual learners a mind mapping/brainstorming activity, film, use of textbook. For kinaesthetic learners an activity involving walking around the room¹, games, role-play, competitions. For auditory learners discussion, pair work, interviewing, presentations.
- When explaining activities, use a variety of different styles to cater for all learners – show examples, talk it through, ask students to put cards in a particular order as you are talking.
- Take into account the different ways students retain new information – visual learners often need to write down the word/concept over and over again, auditory learners need to repeat the word aloud and/or talk through the concept and kinaesthetic learners prefer to “play” with the words/concepts.
- When organising group work, create a variety of roles and, when allocating tasks, encourage students to think which task suits their learning style. For example students produce a poster incorporating a card sorting activity for kinaesthetic learners, a spider diagram/table for visual learners and a written task for the auditory learners who could then present the poster to the rest of the class.
- Incorporate more group, pair and individual work (less teacher centred approach) which frees up the teacher to work with students who need feedback.
- Provide thinking time in lessons so that pupils of all abilities and also less confident students have equal access to the lesson.
- Implement a no hands up policy so that all students participate.

¹ Rather than give students worksheets, display the information around the room on different pieces of card so students have to get up and walk around to find the answer.