

Personalised Learning

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When we think of student-centred learning, which is what we have been thinking of since we started here 14 years ago, we always ask the question “who are the students we teach?” For too long in education we went in with what’s the curriculum and what part of the curriculum will I teach today to the whole group. Now we’re recognising that the students we’re teaching have really changed, their world is so different, how they live outside the world is so different to within school and out of school, and unfortunately schools are one of the only places that haven’t changed an awful lot in how they operate. So we started talking about who are the students, which I think all teachers do and in doing that we’ve always asked (and we do particularly ask now) “who is this student; who are they socially, emotionally, what’s their cognitive abilities, who are they physically, spiritually and then who are they academically?”

At Bethany we talk a lot about not what is the curriculum we’re teaching the child but how we can change the delivery of the curriculum to suit each child. That takes a lot of work. When we talk about student wellbeing we really do need to look at the “who is the self of the child?” If we can help them to be better socially, emotionally, help them to be better thinkers in their cognitive arena, look at them as far as what type of learner are they, what’s their mode of operation. If we can work on all of that they’re going to be far better academically anyway which means we’re looking at their whole wellbeing. In the past in learning we’ve had too many students who believed they’d failed and yet if they look at the whole person and time had been given to their interpersonal and personal skills, that would have allowed them to be more successful with their academic learning.

As a school we’ve looked very much at what is this personalising of learning. We’ve used David Hargreaves’ ‘Nine Gateways to Learning’ and we just think it’s far more that what happens in a classroom. That’s what David Hargreaves’ ‘gateways’ taught us. He then went from the gateways to the four ‘deeps’ which are the deep learning, deep experience, deep support and deep leadership. If we look at a lot of schools and a lot of the ways we have all taught, it’s about what happens in a classroom and yet that’s too much pressure on teachers. When we think of that we think of teacher wellbeing. By auditing our school, and all the teachers did it, against the nine ‘gateways’ and the four ‘deeps’ we looked at the whole school; the organisation, how we use the workforce. What student voice; what have the students got a say in their learning? We looked at the learning to learn aspect. We looked at the whole way the curriculum is used not what the curriculum is because we know what it is and we always look at the understanding of that, but how are we delivering this curriculum to meet the different students’ needs. We looked at the interaction of the parent community and the advice and guidance that they work with within the school. We looked at our students’ connectedness to community, because that’s really where they’re going to find their greatest support in life. So part of David’s ‘gateways’ and that deep support are that he looks at that mentoring and coaching that comes from within the community and the connectedness that you have there. So it was something we needed to look at very strongly.

As leaders we had to look at, under the deep leadership, how are we using our workforce; how are we using our staff, our team? What we’re really seeing is that by personalising learning in the classroom we’re looking at changing and individualising for each student. But how are we saying that to a teacher when the school is still operating on old mode? So if we’re really going to use personalised learning the whole organisation has to change.

Where is the need? It’s not just a release need, which was our old mentality. It’s where do the students need support, who needs support, what teacher needs support. So it’s a lot of tandem teaching, a lot of small group work, skilling, so we’re scaffolding from prep the skills all the way through. So our timetable looks unbelievable and it changes, it’s just so variable depending on what the needs are that are identified. And I suppose they’re

identified at team planning; at team planning the teachers say what we need for this group, and the groups are so intermingled that it's very hard to define that this is a class and that these children belong to me.

To the end of personalising a whole school, we've really had to re-think as an organisation and re-image a lot of what we've done and it's working more effectively. We seem to have more people available for students. When we first did the school improvement report with the Catholic Education Office one thing that really hit us was that under the sphere of Student Wellbeing they had placed one of the indicators as Student Engagement. In the past I would have put Learning and Teaching Student Engagement. But it is vital and it is right that it's under Student Wellbeing.