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Humanities

12 October 2023

<div align="center">The Future of Individualized Learning in Classrooms</div>

Imagine a classroom where students are forced into a set timeline and regardless of their skill level, stay boxed into a specific curriculum, unable to challenge themselves or seek out extra help if they are falling behind. Now, picture a class where students can freely pursue challenges and learn material relative to their personal skill level to succeed academically. To keep with the traditional flow of a classroom, many schools opt for the first option to some extent. Knowing this, how can we alter the classroom dynamic to create a learning environment that takes each student's academic level and strengths into account? The answer is personalized learning. In order to optimize the idea of personalized learning while maintaining an organized classroom environment, teachers should look to build and emphasize a strong teacher-student connection as well as implement adaptive assessments.

Fostering a teacher-student connection is crucial in promoting a student's confidence, which will ultimately lead to increased student performance. Making sure the student is comfortable with the teacher and vice versa can play a big role in promoting more personalized work for the students. Alyson Klein discusses this topic in her article in *Education Week* as she states, "[w]hen teachers know more about each student, they know what works for the student. So, they can create more effective learning experiences for the student" (Klein). With a closer connection, the student not only knows the teacher's typical teaching style, but the teacher also

knows the student's typical learning style. Having this knowledge will encourage cohesiveness in classrooms which gives the student a better learning experience.

To enhance student-teacher connection, many schools have opted for teacher looping. Teacher looping is a method where teachers teach the same students for multiple years. As a whole, some parents do not support this idea. The College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota brings up these parents' perspectives as they state, "[t]he top three concerns parents have are personality conflicts, dysfunctional class, and being 'stuck with a bad teacher'...Looping will not be effective, and can be detrimental if the student is assigned to an ineffective teacher for two or three years in a row" (University of Minnesota). However, for the majority, teacher looping can be extremely beneficial in the sense that students get more accustomed to the teacher and can perform their best in the class. In the same way, teachers will observe the students' performance accordingly and adjust lesson plans and assignments to fit better. Klein further supported this argument as she explained how "[t]eachers in high-performing schools considered more characteristics of students in developing personalized-learning plans, stayed more years with the same students, and assessed more non-academic competencies such as social skills and work ethic…" (Klein). Klein brings up the point of how, regardless of the teacher, getting better accustomed to the students' characteristics and learning preferences played a big role in improved student performance and an overall higher-performing school. This goes to show that as a whole, teacher looping is an effective strategy that is beneficial for building a better classroom environment and promoting personalized learning.

An undemanding and effective way to place more emphasis on the student-teacher connection is by arranging frequent conferences that allow for the teacher to be updated on the progress of the student. Having these conferences can help teachers establish a baseline of where someone is as well as provide insight into what has been working well, what has not, and more. State University of New York professor Peter Johnson highlights this argument in his article, "Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning," when he argues that students "[d]iscussing where they are and how to get where they need to be produces 'emotionally and relationally healthy learning communities—intellectual environments that produce not mere technical competence, but caring, secure, actively literate human beings'" (Johnston). While students may feel like conferences are a waste of their class time, in reality, this is a great opportunity to discuss progress and plan for future steps. Teachers can use these conferences as a direction to plan personalized work that will truly challenge the students to help them improve.

Furthermore, an efficient way to allow students to assess their skills while aiding in academic motivation is by implementing adaptive difficulty tests. The goal of these adaptive tests is that "[s]tudents have clear learning goals and objectives each day…Once a student shows that they learned the specific knowledge or skill, they can move on to their next goal." (Getting Smart). Some schools worry that allowing students to test in this way will cause a lack of collaboration in classrooms. They believe that students will be more focused on their improvement and a gap will form between students depending on their skill level. Not only that, but many argue that the changes in question difficulty can have negative psychological effects on a student. Co-founder and COO of Code Signal, Sophia Baik, emphasizes this as she discusses, "if the questions all of a sudden start getting easier (or the perception is they're getting easier)

then the test taker may become nervous that they're failing. It can create a psychological barrier because the nerves overwhelm the test taker and result in a poor performance" (Baik). That being said, it is important to realize that having a tailored exam in place of the traditional one-fits-all approach allows students to truly test themselves, assess their skills, and see what parts they specifically need to work on and what parts in which they excel. While it may seem more stressful at the moment, when looking at the bigger picture, it will help them greatly improve in the future. Having the test adjusted depending on the student's skill level is solely to accurately evaluate where the student is and where their strengths lie.

For many students, there are times when it feels like they are always going over things they have already gone over. While for some people this kind of learning environment can be beneficial, it is not the case for others. The Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Cambridge brings light to how adaptive testing can resolve this as "students do not need to struggle with questions that are too difficult or spend time on questions that are too easy…They are given a test which is challenging but not overwhelming. Therefore, matching the student's ability level promotes a more student-friendly test-taking experience" (Cambridge CEM). Being able to show your comprehension and move on to the next goal is taking time and learning ability into account. It does not matter if person x gets through only a few things but person y gets through many more, as long as by the end of the day, both students are confident with the skills they have mastered. Through adaptive testing, students are assessed fairly and have the opportunity to show what they know and what they need to work on.

The best way to set up a learning environment that will truly benefit students is by implementing personalized learning in classrooms. This can be done by emphasizing student-teacher connections and substituting traditional assessments for adaptive difficulty tests.

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