

Individualization Reform is Worth It

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Educational foundations throughout history have quickly been followed by educational reform. In the current fast paced global society, technological advancements have outpaced systemic educational platforms, and education is attempting to make leaps and bounds to catch up to the global market. Agricultural and smaller industrial countries continue to focus on rote memorization techniques of read and recall; creating a system of workers who are able to follow simple tasks, carried out repeatedly. Countries who are able to focus on technology as a tool for production have recently made changes in their educational systems to include provisions for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). The changes that are reflected within the education culture of a country are directly correlated to the type of workers that a country is hoping to produce. Global Prussian educational models that parallel that of a factory system are becoming a thing of a past. New educational reforms are focused on creativity and individualized learning, ditching the thought of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall."

In order to perpetuate this new culture of individualized learning, several factors need to be present. First, the

educational entity needs to decide on, communicate and reinforce any standards that need to be met throughout the educational journey of a learner. These standards are important for learner development in the areas of literacy, mathematics, science, arts, and the humanities. It is important to note that there needs to be a distinct difference between standards based learning and standardization. There are many countries that have confused this. Administrators, educators, and learners are more concerned with the standardized testing that occurs instead of the actual learning that is taking place. Standards based learning needs to focus on levels of achievement for a learner in certain areas and less focused on the pacing in which a learner achieves those levels. Not all learners are going to move at the same pace in all areas.

Second, educators need to focus on new methodology that allows for guidance of the learner. The classroom management methods of the past with desk in rows, students focused on a single task, instructor lecture, and strict content learning may not be the best to foster individualized learning. Educators need to provide various avenues of success for students through differentiated learning and assessment. Instructors need to be able to provide a set of learning tools for the learner that the learner can take with them to apply in different situations. The application of these tools is infinity more important than the individual content that is being studied. The tools, if used appropriately, will help the student to become a life-long learner.

Third, assessment needs to be focused on how the student approaches the learning in several arenas. Students need to be assessed on if they are organized, prepared for class sessions, and completing tasks on time to the best of their ability. Are students using their class time effectively, self directed in their learning, and are they able to work independently or collaboratively work with their peers? These life skills should be developed throughout the educational system so that learners are able to use these skills throughout their lifetime. The assessment of these arenas should be paired with the assessment of a student's knowledge, content skills, and thinking skills in order to fully provide feedback, and feed forward, of a student's progress. Assessment needs to be measured as a marker of where a student presently is on their path to a desired destination. It needs to not only provide feedback of past results; it needs to provide feed forward towards future success.

Lastly, learning needs to be individualized with avenues for application. Educational systems fail when they are not able to provide a purpose for the content that is being presented. Too many learners are becoming discouraged when they have the feeling that they are never going to use the information being studied. In the primary years, learners are focused on foundations for learning. In the secondary years, students frequently struggle with the thought of "When will I ever use this," especially if the information is difficult. Students begin to pursue their interests during these secondary years, and educators should provide applications to the content that is being displayed. If a student has a strong interest in visual arts, how important are multiple years of higher-level math and science, if the student doesn't visualize using the information, with purpose, throughout their lifetime? In the same breath, if a student is determined to become a physicist, how important are multiple years of higher-level literature classes, if the student cannot compute how the information is useful? Learners should be encouraged to be well rounded in their secondary years through the provision of elective classes, but the selection of these classes should be purely based on the student's interest. An educational entity should not force a student to participate in a particular unit of study during the secondary years. By this time, students should be immersed in the subjects in which they can see themselves pursuing. Often the application of individualization only starts at the university level, but it should start sooner for maximum effectiveness.

Individualization should begin in the early childhood stages of primary school. During the pre-kindergarten years, learners should be focused on play-based education. Learners should begin to be aware of how their bodies move. They should learn balance as they run, skip, and jump. Children should be able to investigate and problem solve using manipulatives, puzzles, and organization. Students should learn to work independently and in groups. Group interactions should foster cooperation, sharing and taking turns. Students should be encouraged to create through visual arts, music, and dance. Language skills should be developed through imaginative story telling and using auditory picture books.

In the primary years that follow, students should thrive in an inquiry-based program. Learners should be full of "who, what, where, when, why & how" questions and

they should be encouraged to investigate those questions to find the answer and share with their peers. Content units should be connected across the curriculum so that students can see that subject areas are interrelated. Foundations in language will be present through exploring informational and literary text through reading comprehension and creative writing. Educators should be able to assess student interest and learning through daily formative observations and feedback.

Middle school should focus on investigations. Students should be exposed to various research techniques. Students should be encouraged to present their research to their peers through formal and informal formats. Primary and secondary sources should be determined through research and students should be exploring the differences between reliable and questionable resources. Educators should continue to assess and provide feedback to student interest and encourage further investigations outside of the classroom.

By the time a student reaches the last years of secondary education, educators and students should be aware of their strengths, weaknesses and interest. When appropriate students and their families should have the opportunity to choose a technical, agricultural or arts continuance of study, if the student has no interest or chance for future success in an academic educational career. This tracking should not be considered a failure of academic prowess, but instead considered a pathway to success. Students who make this decision in secondary school have a huge advantage on future understanding in content heavy university studies.

Individualized learning is not a simple for educators to handle. New methods of guidance and differentiation are necessary if educators are to offer students avenues to success. Ultimately, the goal of individualized education is to encourage students to be life long learners. If educators are focused on providing learners with tools that they can use the rest of their lives, then educational entities can have success. Nation states can be pleased to know that they are producing workers who are passionate about their areas of work, leading employees to be innovative in various areas of the work force. Individualization is worth the effort. Effective educational reforms that provide for student driven learning is worth the effort. ■