

PERSONALISING LEARNING

in the
Primary Classroom

Homework

A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR TEACHERS AND
SCHOOL LEADERS

Behaviour
Management

Multiple intelligences

Motivation



Dr Elaine Wilmot

Personalising Learning in the Primary School

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CHAPTER 1

What is Personalising Learning?



Perhaps it would be best to start by saying what personalised learning is not. It is not about abdicating, as teacher, the responsibility of planning and delivering learning activities and the assessment of your pupils. It is not about allowing pupils to do exactly what they want, when they want, how they want, if they want. It is not about a return to the 'laissez-faire' attitudes of the 1960s.

It is about focusing attention on what makes effective learning for every individual learner within your institution, at child (and adult) level and making provision accordingly. It is a shift in emphasis from examining the quality of teaching to looking at how we can provide quality learning. It is a shift in emphasis from curriculum content at the centre to the child's development as a confident and competent learner at the centre of the learning process (this will entail looking at the development of the whole child and not just their cognitive development).

Traditional education in this country is built around a one-size-fits-all model. The curriculum is fixed and delivered in a particular style and the pupils are tested at the end of the system in order to grade their ability (or inability) at regurgitating facts and formulae. My model of PL shifts the starting block from the curriculum to the child and what they can do, and then builds upon their skills at learning and abilities to learn, supporting them in tailoring a curriculum to fit their developing needs.

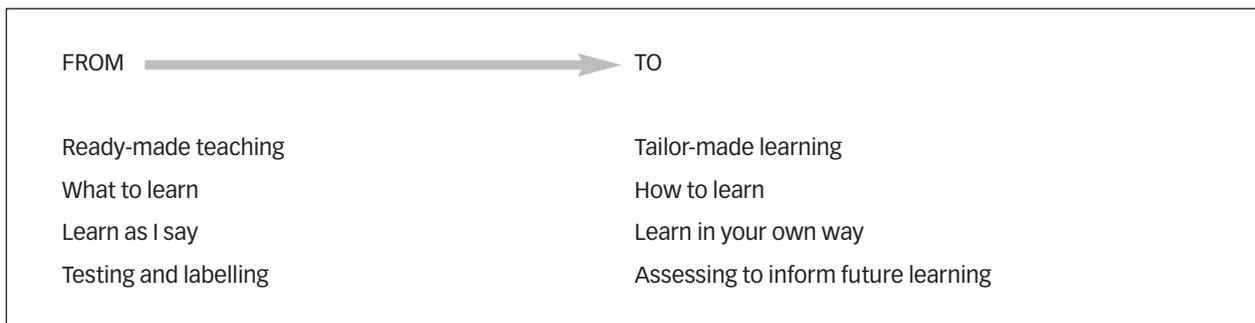


Figure 1.1

Because what is learning for, anyway? Are we in the business of merely schooling our pupils so that they can ensure that we do well in the league tables? Or are we in the business of preparing them for their lives in a future that is shifting faster than we can keep up with? We need to be moving away from a curriculum based on subject knowledge to a skills-based curriculum, so that our children are prepared for all possible futures.

We should be making the learning fit the learner and not what seems to have been the shift in focus in the education system in the last fifteen years with the advent of the National Curriculum – making the learner fit the learning. As much as we want all our pupils to succeed as learners, we are in a situation in our current system whereby we are still producing too many who are seen as ‘failures’ because they are unable to access the curriculum for a myriad of reasons. Pupils are opting out because they see the current curriculum and ways of learning as irrelevant to them and their world.

We need our children to be successful as learners but we can’t do the learning for them. They must construct their own meaning through their interactions with their environment and other learners around them. We can guide and coach, mentor and support and provide a rich, stimulating environment in which learners can learn and provide an abundance of opportunities for learning, but we can’t learn for them. Therefore, we need to examine more closely how we can make learning more accessible to all of our learners.

For me personalising learning is about:

- teachers, or other learning facilitators, knowing each of their learners as an individual;
- knowing each learner’s strengths and areas that need further development;
- sharing that knowledge with the learners, through constructive feedback so that they begin to understand themselves as learners and develop the language to describe their learning needs;
- working alongside the child, devolving some of the responsibility for their learning, increasing their independence, over the period of time that the child is in formal schooling;
- supporting children and encouraging them to develop the skills of lifelong learning;
- the teacher (or learning facilitator) really knowing her pupils, as individual people as well as individual learners because learning is about the whole child, not just their cognitive abilities;
- not being a ‘slave’ to a curriculum, of whomever’s design, but working with pupils to create a flexible learning path that will meet their changing needs as they develop;

- looking at systems within our schools to ensure that they provide the flexibility to ensure that we can meet individual needs;
- extending learning beyond the five-plus hours a day for 190 days per year spent in a school – it's about 24/7 learning; and
- trying to do our best for every single child and supporting them in being the best they can be; but
- most of all it is about not tolerating failure for our children.

Our ultimate aim should be for learners to become responsible for managing their own learning and assessment; they should be able to describe themselves in terms of their learning attributes and should be forever seeking new opportunities to develop themselves as learners – learning from their mistakes and from working closely with others.

Knowing how to learn, understanding how to understand and learning how to learn are at the heart of the key skills for lifelong learning. It is not just about mastering a few study skills: it is more about developing a set of positive attitudes to learning.

Where has the notion of personalising learning come from?

The notion of personalising learning first appeared in the public arena in a party conference speech made by Prime Minister Tony Blair in autumn 2003. It was then developed in a speech by David Milliband, then a minister of state, at the National College for School Leadership in October 2003:

The goal is clear. It is what the prime minister described in his party conference speech as 'personalised learning': an education system where assessment, curriculum, teaching style, and out of hours provision are all designed to discover and nurture the unique talents of every single pupil ... the most effective teaching depends on really knowing the needs, strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils.

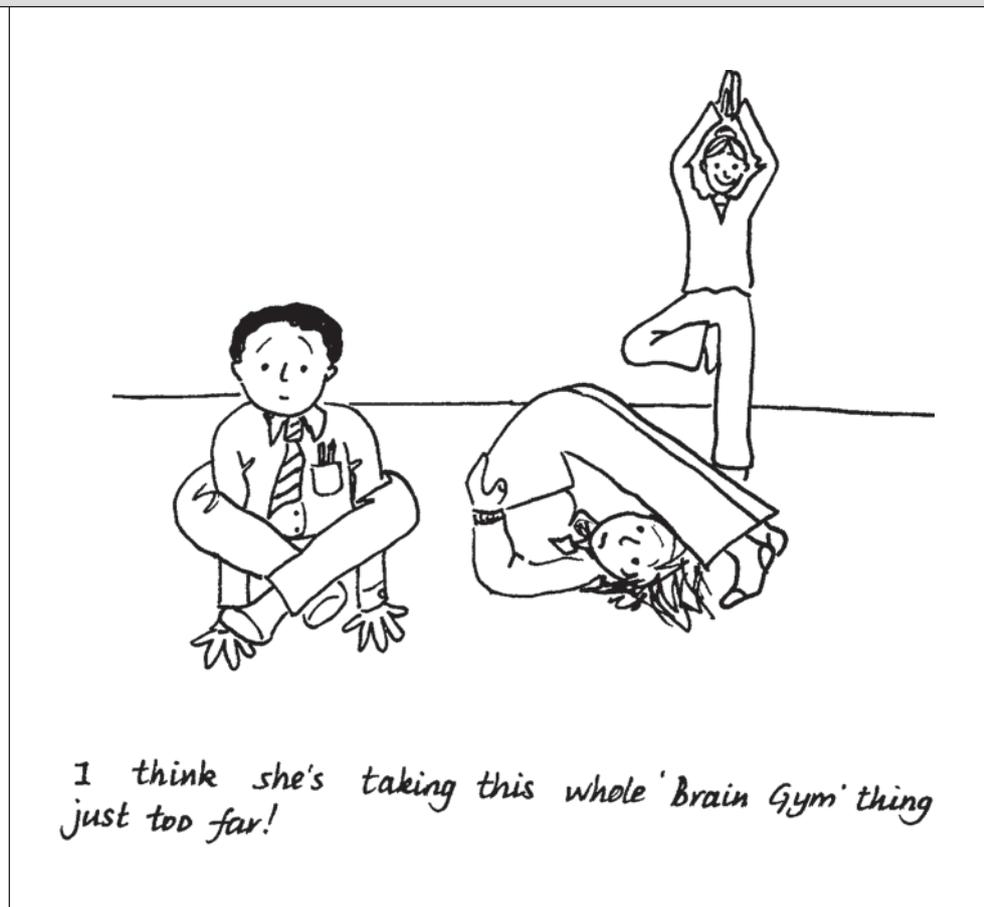
Personalised learning is seen by the prime minister as part of the wider political context of the personalisation of all public services. It is supported by the advent of 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) and 'Excellence and Enjoyment' (DfES, 2003b), where a focus on individual children is pushed to the fore in both documents. Personalisation is also at the heart of the new 'Five-Year Strategy' from the DfES (2004a) and in the White Paper (DfES, 2005).

The 'New Relationship with Schools' (DfES, 2004c) also supports and underpins these initiatives. The government is proposing a cluster of interlocking changes that will affect school inspection, schools' relations with local and central government, schools' self-evaluation and planning, data collection from schools and communication with schools.

But it is not only policy and the legislative framework that are being developed to support personalisation. We are also beginning to see that it is impacting in other areas that affect schools. For example, the National College for School Leadership is starting to develop resources to support personalised learning; the Schools for the Future initiative is looking at building design to accommodate these new ways of working; the National Remodelling Team are supporting schools in developing greater flexibility within the schools' workforce, which

CHAPTER 3

Whole-School Systems



Assessment for learning

You will need to adopt a system of assessment that complements your approach to personalising learning. There has been some powerful research into the impact of formative assessment on raising achievement (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Clarke, 2001). It provides a sound basis for providing meaningful feedback to pupils in order to support them in improving their performance, which in turn will impact on standards of attainment.

Clarke provides an excellent framework, starting with planning, sharing learning intentions with pupils, pupils' self-evaluation, feedback and target setting, underpinned by the most vital aspect of her work, raising children's self-esteem.

Clarke's focus marking strategy will enable you to ensure that every pupil receives the same amount of feedback, regardless of their ability. She says that you should always mark to the learning objective, highlighting three places where the child has met the success criteria and one place where they could make some improvement.

Behaviour management

In order to support PL, you will want to put into place a positive behaviour-management system that supports the development of self-discipline in the pupils.

The trick is to catch the children doing things well, or doing the right thing and praise them for it. Celebrate good behaviour during plenary sessions and at assembly time, just as you would celebrate good work. If it is your school policy to award stickers and certificates, then these should be awarded for good behaviour just as they would be awarded for good work.

Wherever possible, ignore low-level bad behaviour so that the child learns that they will receive no attention for disrupting learning. Do not even make eye contact with the child. Instead, praise the good behaviour of the children sitting around them. Give the badly behaved child eye contact and praise only when they do the slightest thing right.

If you have to intervene because the behaviour could be harmful to the child or others around them, do it quietly and sensitively, to the child alone, not publicly in front of the whole class. Discussions can be held about 'what would you do if...' scenarios during circle time to assist the children in developing their sense of right and wrong and airing their feelings about making the right decisions.

Brain Gym®

Brain Gym® involves simple movements, which, it is claimed, have the effect of integrating the left and right brain hemispheres, making learning more effective. It can be used to improve almost any skill, whether mental or physical, and to bring emotional and physical wellbeing into balance.

Brain Gym® activities help form a bridge between the two sides of the brain and help children to stimulate the whole brain to be ready for learning. You can use the exercises as part of your daily teaching programme to reinvigorate children if they are beginning to flag or as a bridge between activities. It helps to focus children's attention and reoxygenate the brain. (You can use them with adults too.)

Circle time/bubble time

Children need to feel that their voices can be heard. You need to have systems in place in your school to help children learn to manage difficult situations, handle conflict and talk about their feelings. Jenny Mosley's (1998) circle time and bubble time provide a whole-school framework to enable these discussions to take place.

Your staff will need to plan systematically for circle time and ensure that every child is given the opportunity to contribute to the discussions. Circle time can play an important part in your discussions about social and moral issues and often helps the children work through difficulties that they are experiencing at home, with the support of their peers.

Bubble time is used for individual pupils who need to have some one-to-one time with an adult (of their choice) to discuss issues that are causing them concern or distress. Children can either ask discreetly for this time or there can be

Classroom provision and use of resources

Classrooms come in a variety of shapes and sizes and in a variety of locations; but, if you are considering embarking on personalising learning, then note that there are certain elements of classroom provision and the use of resources that you will need to consider:

- adult–pupil ratio;
- the types of resources to provide;
- the storage of resources; and
- the use of display.

Adults are a significant influence on the learning of children and the more adults that you are able to have in a classroom supporting and facilitating learning, the more effective the learning should be.

The kind of resources you provide and how they are stored will impact on the types of activity in which the children can become engaged. If you buy toys and resources that have limited use, children will be limited in their play and learning. If you provide resources that can be used in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes, you are creating opportunities for the children to be creative and make choices.

Resources need to be stored so that the children can readily access them, so that they are developing their independence.

Display not only makes the learning environment look more attractive and appealing, but can also support learning and help young children make the link between home and school. You can also use display to enhance the positive self-image of the children by valuing their work and displaying it for others to see.

Adult–pupil ratio

In most early-years settings it is usual to have two adults to thirty pupils. If you want to develop personalising learning, you will need to consider whether you have the resources to increase the number of adults that you have available so that you can staff all of your learning spaces and have at least one person designated as the ‘observer of learning’. I would suggest that you need at least three adults: one to work indoors, one to work outdoors and one to observe. This system runs on a rota so that everyone has an opportunity to work in all areas across the working week.

You can, of course, always use additional adults such as students and volunteers or parent helpers to boost your ratios even further. But, before any of these additional adults are ‘let loose’ in your learning space, they should have some understanding of the way in which you are working. It takes only one careless word or intervention to undo all of your good work in developing your children as independent learners.

This can be done informally, by chatting to the early-years staff or by formal observation followed by discussion of the way in which you work, or by an even more formalised training course that you could offer. It is up to you to decide the best way forward to ensure that all the adults working alongside your developing learners are going to be supporting the way you work and not undermining it.

top tip

To assist additional adults working with you, you can put up learning posters next to learning areas that will support them in what they are looking for in terms of extending the learning within that area. They should always be asked for feedback at the end of the session so that their observations can be fed into your records.

BLOCK PLAY		
Physical development	Intellectual development	Social/Emotional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can lift and carry large bricks • Can place bricks in tall structures • Can place bricks to make linear structures • Makes enclosed structures • Can balance blocks • Combines different sizes and shapes effectively • Makes complex constructions • Can place small bricks accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can talk about their constructions and how they made them • Can explain about what has been built • Can think of solutions to problems that arise • Can sort the blocks by shape and size • Can use appropriate language to describe their construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can share materials and space • Shows interest in the ideas of others • Seeks adult support or reassurance • Concentrates well on task • Can play cooperatively with others • Willingly helps to tidy up
ART-AND-CRAFT MATERIALS		
Physical development	Intellectual development	Social/Emotional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good hand–eye coordination • Can control materials • Can manipulate tools with accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning to solve problems • Can find materials required and tidy them up • Can estimate size and shape • Can measure, match, sort, count • Listens well and interprets instructions • Observes and copies • Can adapt ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can share materials and ideas • Can communicate ideas and feelings • Can share work space and tools • Developing aesthetic awareness • Can appreciate other people’s ideas and work • Shows satisfaction at completing a task
SAND AND WATER PLAY		
Physical development	Intellectual development	Social/Emotional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can manipulate tools with dexterity • Has good hand–eye coordination • Can tip and pour accurately • Developing muscular strength to lift and carry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can sort out materials • Can remember what has been done • Can add new ideas • Experiments with materials • Discovers important properties of materials • Describes what they have done • Makes deliberate choices over materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watches other children at work • Works alongside other children • Shares work space and materials with others • Negotiates over use of equipment • Concentrates on activity • Replaces materials and tools after use • Involves others in their discoveries

Figure 4.5 Learning posters

Learning posters

Learning posters can be made to be placed in each working area of the nursery or reception classroom. The posters can contain information about the type of learning behaviours that may be displayed in that area. They can assist the adults in recording their observations. Figure 4.5 shows a few examples of posters.

Materials and resources

If your classroom is set up in a way that prevents the children from being able to access materials and resources as and when they need them, they cannot become independent. So, here are a few ideas about resource storage.

- Resources must be stored in low, accessible places.
- Resources must be labelled with word and picture (you can cut these out of catalogues) so that the children can see what is in the drawer or box.
- Boxes and drawers must not be overloaded so that they are too heavy for children to lift and carry for themselves.
- It helps the child to become independent at tidy-away time if there are silhouettes stuck onto places to which resources should be returned – tidying up then becomes a matching exercise.

There should be a range of resources made available to the children so that they can have whatever they need to fulfil their self-determined learning tasks. The learning resources should not only be the shiny, plastic, expensive toys and equipment that you find in early-years shops and catalogues, but there should be a range of natural materials and everyday objects for the children to use imaginatively and creatively too. These should include:

- cards, envelopes, range of writing papers, forms, magazines, notepads, catalogues, etc.;
- conkers;
- corks;
- curtain rings;
- hair rollers;
- junk materials – small bags and boxes;
- leaves;
- old keys;
- ribbons, buttons, wool, material offcuts;
- shells;
- tins and containers of all sizes;
- wooden laundry pegs;
- wrapping paper;
- wood, nails, screws, nuts and bolts, etc.

Children can be involved in collecting these materials for their school or nursery. Whenever they go to the bank or post office, they could bring back some forms. They can bring in magazines and catalogues from home. They can bring in junk materials from home and add them to the school collection.

It is also a good idea to have larger items for children to use in their play too. For example,

- bread trays;
- milk crates;
- plastic pipes;
- logs;
- old sheets, tarpaulins, blankets, etc.;
- planks.

You can ask your DIY enthusiasts or local tradespeople to bring in pipes, planks and the like, left over from their projects. If you make links with your local supermarket or dairy, they will let you have bread trays and milk crates.

top tip

Music can be used to great effect to help you 'frame' tidying-up time. It also saves the adults' voices, because they don't need to give the instruction to start tidying up: they just press 'play' on their CD or tape player. We found that our foundation-stage children responded really well to 'A Spoonful of Sugar' from *Mary Poppins*. The music signifies that it is time to tidy up and you have the length of the piece of music to complete the task. The adults can then be part of the tidying-up team, modelling good tidying-up behaviour for the children.

CHAPTER 6

Key Stage 2



Transition to Key Stage 2

Transition to Key Stage 2 should be a much more straightforward process. The children are that much more mature and are developing positive self-images and high self-esteem and you can talk to them about their feelings about the move into Year 3.

This does not mean that you should ignore the transition, because for some children any change is painful and they need to feel confident that the process will be managed for them. This can be done as in the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1:

- with visits to their new classroom;
- with meetings with their new teacher and support staff;
- by having their new teacher visit them in their Year 2 class; and
- through story-swap sessions or class exchange for other lessons.

Transfer of information

Proper transfer of information ensures continuity and progression for the children in their learning. The learning profile that has been building up since the

child entered the school should be the core of the information-transfer process. Other records, such as the developmental-reading record should also be passed into Key Stage 2.

My staff found it useful for the children's books of their recorded work to transfer with the children. This gave staff a first-hand experience of the level of work that the children had been engaged in during the previous class. This ensured that there was no opportunity for the children to 'try it on' with their new teacher, insisting that they could not work at the expected level. It also helped the children to see that learning is a continuum, it is about building on from what they can already do, developing new skills as they develop.

Some staff still found it useful to have a face-to-face meeting with the previous teacher in order to ensure that each child could be discussed in detail.

Getting to know your learners

It is important to get to know your learners so that you can continue to build on prior learning and support each pupil in their individual development as a life-long learner.

By the time the children enter Key Stage 2, most of them are at the level of maturity that ensures that they are beginning to develop a clear picture of how they learn best. With continued support throughout the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 they have been developing the language to describe their learning preferences and needs. So, in order to get to know your learners in Key Stage 2, ask them to tell you about what they like to learn, how they like to learn and with whom they learn best. This can be done individually and in whole-class discussions so that the pupils have a chance to hear about others' preferred ways of learning.

Observation will also still play its part in getting to know your learners. The beginning of the new school year will still be the focus for your observations of your children at their learning, but you will need to continue to observe regularly across the year to ensure that your assessments of the children remain up to date and accurate.

Continuing the relationship with parents

Although it is true that the older the child gets generally the less involved the parent becomes in their education, this does not need to be the case. Parents still have a crucial role to play in the education of their children and therefore should be kept fully informed about what is being learned and the progress that their child is making. They should also be engaged in discussions about future learning plans to continue to ensure that learning is facilitated beyond the school gates.

Meeting the parents formally

As in Key Stage 1 classes, it is important that you meet with the parents as early as possible in the new school year, so that you can discuss their child's progress. At this stage, it is useful for the child to be invited to be a part of the discussion, too. Expectations can be discussed and this could also be the time that targets could be agreed between all parties.

Personalising learning is a powerful solution for reforming our education system. While current thinking places personalising learning firmly in the secondary sector, the author believes that for personalising learning to be successful, children must start making real choices about their learning from an early age and must be guided and coached through their primary years.

Personalising Learning in the Primary Classroom will:

- Cover all aspects of teaching and learning in the primary school
- Challenge your thinking about how you teach
- Address individual needs and raise standards
- Encourage you and your school to put the learner at the heart of the educational agenda and support you to meet this challenge

This book is packed with practical ideas that have been tried and tested and have proved popular with staff, parents and pupils (and Ofsted). It provides useful questions for you to consider your own working practices in the context of personalising learning.

“*Personalising Learning in the Primary Classroom* is an important contribution to the growing literature on personalising learning. Elaine Wilmot’s book will support strategic planning and policy making, team planning, CPD activities and, most importantly, teachers’ work in the classroom.”

John West-Burnham, Honorary Professor of Education, University of Hull

“This is an important book with a host of crucial messages for individual teachers as well as for our educational system.”

Dr Eva Hoffman, Author, Founder and Director of Inspired Learning

“... a pragmatic, de-mystified approach to personalising learning. Well informed and well structured, *Personalising Learning in the Primary Classroom* gathers together the best of current primary practice in a coherent, readable and workable way.”

Paul Ginnis, Author of *The Teacher’s Toolkit* and *Covering the Curriculum with Stories*

“Dr Wilmot is to be congratulated on her dedication and generosity in offering a practical and user friendly guide to primary practitioners on the nuts and bolts of personalising learning for primary pupils. ... this book has been thoroughly “road tested” in real classrooms, and offers workable strategies to the busy teacher.”

Susan Moss M.Ed, CPCC, Professional Coach, Trainer and Consultant

Dr Elaine Wilmot, now an independent education consultant, spent her teaching career in Doncaster and Enfield where she held three headships. Her final headship saw her open a new school. This gave her the opportunity to build a school for the future based on her beliefs about Lifelong Learning.

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