What is Personalized Instruction and What's Needed to Make it Work?

A recent article from Hechinger states:

Personalized learning has, in recent years, become one of the most talked-about trends in education. Fueled by donations from Silicon Valley philanthropists, the instructional approach has spread to classrooms around the country and more than 40 states are exploring it in some form. As education leaders cast about for solutions to the performance gaps exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, some are hitting upon the idea that more personalized methods could help schools better serve students who've had wildly different experiences with education this year.

Given this, we thought we should once again highlight a *whole child/whole school* view of personalized instruction and what a school needs to do to make it work.

See: Chapter 3 "Personalizing Learning: Making it More than another Buzzword" in *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* (the book is available as a free resource at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

From the Chapter:

Personalized instruction defined: The terms individualized and personalized instruction often are used interchangeably. However, these are two different concepts. Both concepts call for knowing when, how, and what to teach and when and how to structure the situation so students can learn on their own. And the two concepts overlap in their emphasis on *developmental* differences. Indeed, the major thrust in most individualized approaches is to account for individual differences in developmental capability.

In contrast, we define personalization as the process of accounting for individual differences not only in capabilities but also with respect to *learner motivation*. We all know individuals who have learned much more than we anticipated because they were highly motivated; and we certainly know others who learn and perform poorly when they are not invested in the work. So as essential as differences in capability are, motivational differences often are a primary consideration in creating a good set of learning conditions.

From a psychological perspective, we also stress that it is the learner's perception that determines whether the instructional "fit" or "match" is good or bad. This has fundamental implications for all efforts to assess students, manage behavior, and enable learning.

> **For motivated learners, either individualized or personalized instruction can be quite effective. For students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, however, low and avoidance motivation for classroom learning is likely and must be addressed. In such cases, the concept of personalization provides the best guide to practice (and research).**

Making it Work: To frame what is involved, the chapter outlines:

- A sequential and hierachical framework for enabling classroom learning
- What is involved in addressing barriers to learning in a classroom
- Personalized Structure for Learning
- Learner-Valued Options and Mutual Decision Making
- Flexible Interest Grouping to Enable Personalization
- Homework that Motivates Practice and Everyday Use
- Conferencing
- Response to Intervention (RtI): Assessment to Plan; Feedback to Nurture

Let us know what's happening locally with respect to personalizing instruction. Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu .