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Lessons Learned About Better Teaching During the Pandemic

If there is a silver lining to the heavy emphasis on remote and hybrid instruction during the pandemic, it is this: Students are getting more opportunities to work independently and at their own pace—and in the process, they are becoming better problem-solvers. At least that is the take of educators working in schools where personalized learning is the centerpiece of instruction. The shift to remote and hybrid instruction has given them an opportunity to deepen their commitment to learner-centered approaches and build new strategies that will continue to be applied once all students are able to return to school buildings at full capacity.

Here are some of the lessons learned so far.

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Educators have no choice but to be flexible these days, and that's a good thing.

Personalized learning has always required some degree of flexibility, but teachers must be even more agile now. In schools that are still remote, teachers have to account for students' individual situations and limitations at home. And in schools that have resumed in-person instruction, educators have to be ready to switch the mode of instruction on a dime as positive or presumed positive cases of COVID-19 occur. Teaching is a profession where teachers like to control things, and there's been a lot of letting go of control, [which is building] stronger, more-independent students."



Targeted support and explicit instructions are key.

Teachers have started recording themselves modeling tasks or delivering short lessons and posting those videos onto the school's learning platform. That's a practice that teachers will likely keep when students return to campus. Not only does it let students review instructions whenever they need to, but it'll help them work more independently without relying on teachers to answer basic questions.



Students may need extra guidance managing schedules and completing assignments.

Schools have increased the level of support students had from their teachers. There are some students who really thrive working on their own, and some who struggle a bit more and lack the skillset. If weren't for the coaching model, self-directed learning would not be successful. It gets students to the point where they can take control of their learning.



Project-based learning is still possible when done virtually.

Project-based learning is a key tenet of personalized learning, but educators say the switch to remote, hybrid, or socially distanced instruction made it difficult to do the same kind of robust projects that students previously did in person, with no social distancing limitations. Still, the transition sparked new learning possibilities, which serves schools that are engaging in personalized learning. Teachers are not limited to the resources in the school walls and now have the opportunity to reach out into the community to make connections they may not have been able to make before.



Students still need opportunities to speak up and collaborate.

Educators have to find creative ways to foster collaboration and student talk time in this unprecedented school year. It just takes a couple extra steps, an easy way out would be to say, 'Nope, everyone's going to sit there and do the same thing at the same time.' That's not what school systems believe in." With remote instruction, one initial challenge is making sure young students have enough opportunities to talk in class. Typically, they'd do "turn and talks," a classroom practice in which the teacher poses a question or discussion topic and students turn to a peer and discuss.



Remember that the challenges are helping build more independent learners.

While there have been some roadblocks over the past nine months, educators have seen students grow as problem-solvers and learners. When schools transitioned to distance learning, it emphasized the idea that students move at their own pace but once the pandemic's over, good habits of resilience, self-regulation, would be built. In fact, this transition has forced schools to take a hard look at their instruction and make sure they're centering it on students and their individual needs. "Education's future is not direct instruction, education's future is learner-centered practice and we do not want to miss this opportunity."