

Personalize Learning

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SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2016

Personalized Learning Through the Eyes of a Child

Guest Post by Pam Lowe, Educator, Marketing Associate, and Personalized Learning Coach



We're learners even before the moment we are born. Nearly every observation made as babies is tucked away as a memory of a lesson learned. We all begin as learners naturally making our own discoveries. We are curious about how things work, and experiment with our own ideas. Our inner spirited learner says, "Get out of my way!" as we yearn to take command of our learning.

Recently for my birthday, my husband enrolled us in one of those painting party/classes where you can paint a picture with an instructor who demonstrates how to paint it. It was a thoughtful gift, both in theme and in the idea that it was the gift of time together creating a shared memory.



When we arrived, everything we needed for the class was laid out for all the participants, from paints to canvas to brushes. While waiting for the class to begin, my phone rang. It was my four-year old niece, calling to wish me a happy birthday. During the course of our conversation she asked where we were as she could hear people talking and laughing. I described where we were. She was quite intrigued because she loves making art, all kinds of art, but especially painting. Naturally she asked what we were painting and I explained that we were painting a picture with branches and flowers. Her next question was if everyone was painting the same painting. I replied yes, that the instructor would show us how to paint the picture and everyone was expected to follow along. Her mind was reeling with this information and she began questioning:

"Why does everyone have to paint the same thing?"

"Why can't people paint what they want to paint? "

"Can people choose their own paint colors? "

"Why do you have to paint the way the teacher says? "

For a little background, this is a child, who is so curious that at three years old and unable to read; taught herself how to find YouTube videos in order to learn how to pull teeth in dentistry videos, how to create Play Dough masterpieces, and how to fix her own hair. She has many interests and she has learned how to use technology to learn about them. She, and young learners like her, already know what some may not realize or may have forgotten and that is; learning doesn't have to happen within the walls of a school building. Learning can occur anywhere, everywhere and at any time. She is a learner. She does all this, of course; with supervision of her parents and the blocking of unsavory websites.

It occurred to me while she was talking on the phone that her queries about the painting class translate to the following questions that all learners in a factory-model learning atmosphere are sure to ask themselves:

"Why does everyone have to learn the same thing? "

"Why can't learners learn what they want to learn? "

"Can learners choose their own learning tools? "

"Why do learners have to learn the way a teacher says? "

Basically at the wise old age of four, the question my niece was asking me that currently many educators and schools are struggling to comprehend was,

"Why can't learning be personalized?"

When a child can recognize the need for personalized learning, why can't our education system? My niece is not viewing personalized learning as a buzzword or a fad. She is viewing personalized learning as a right that is due her as a learner. She was earnest in her questioning that inherently asked, why can't there be voice and choice in learning? Why can't learners "access, engage and express" their learning in ways that are meaningful to them? (Access, Engage, and Express TM; Personalize Learning, LLC).

As a preschooler, she is already absorbing how to play the "game of school" with rules and schedules that teach compliance. What I hope for her and for all learners, is that she will have teachers and a school culture that will encourage her as a learner and won't suppress her questioning, wonder, discoveries, and uniqueness.

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We are born learners. Somewhere along the way, the current education system can abduct the inner spirit of learners and their curiosity about the world. It's time we stop viewing personalized learning as just a buzzword and in the ideas of a four-year-old, realize it's the right of every learner to have voice and choice in their learning.



Pam Lowe has been in education for 22 years as a teacher, and curriculum director. She is the author of [Missouri Then & Now: Activity Book](#), University of Missouri Press and has written for the [Huffington Post](#) and [TechLearning](#) magazine.

During her career she has assisted schools in leaving their school improvement status and in areas of assessment, inquiry-based /student-centered learning, educational technology, data analysis, and Depth of Knowledge. She served as a Missouri STARR Teacher and was named Teacher of the Year twice at O'Neal Elementary in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, and Poplar Bluff R-1 District Teacher of the Year. She was designated a semi-finalist in Technology & Learning's Leader of the Year in 2005 and served on a National Advisory Board for Macmillan Mathematics.

Pam facilitates #plearnchat as @plearnchat, is a coach and moderator for the 5W's of

Personalized Learning eCourses and is Marketing Associate for Personalize Learning. You can contact Pam on Twitter: @prlowe91 and email: prlowe@gmail.com.

at 3:36 PM



Labels: [creativity](#), [education system](#), [learners](#), [painting](#), [Pam Lowe](#), [personalized learning](#), [school culture](#), [Transform Learning](#)

17 comments



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Oliver Maurice 8 months ago - Shared publicly
You probably should try out this application - <https://topspying.com/xnspy/>

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Hal Portner 1 year ago - Shared publicly
So true, Pam. This reminded me of a few years ago, when my daughter (she was in 3rd grade at the time) was writing a homework assignment on the desktop we just bought. "Hey Dad", she called. "How do I get back a sentence that got accidentally erased?"
Read more

1



Marcy Waldner 1 year ago - Shared publicly
Pam, morning. I can't see how to reply to your reply.
Yes, my school and division have PL learning in several degrees though after doing some research I'm coming back to the conclusion that PL is the new catch all phrase a lot of people are using without understanding what it truly means and
Read more (35 lines)

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Marcy Waldner 1 year ago - Shared publicly
Greetings. My question or observation is that this seems a flawed analogy to personal learning in schools. The painting activity you went to was a painting lesson - to try to learn a type of modelled art yourself. We have examples of that in the school system; students have to follow the guided modelling of writing
Read more

1 · Reply



Marcy Waldner 1 year ago

 Oh and I forgot to mention... there are other places where you can go and choose your own materials, canvas etc and just play with being creative. We have those times in Ed too. Maybe next year your husband can buy you a gift certificate to one of those places instead!

 **Pam Lowe** 1 year ago
 Marcy, Thank you so much for your comment. I love hearing different perspectives. That's what blogging is all about. I'm wondering if you have examples of personalized learning in your schools or classrooms. Certainly [Read more](#)



Robert Schuetz 1 year ago - Shared publicly
 Thank you Pam. I thoroughly enjoyed reading your perspective, as well as, the insightful perspective of your niece. A majority of our life is spent learning "informally". Our traditional, formal education constructs are being challenged, and rightfully so. In this world of information abundance everyone is a teacher, [Read more](#)

+2

 **Pam Lowe** 1 year ago
 Robert, Thank you so very much for taking a few minutes to share your thoughts on this post. I agree, it's good to be challenged. It's how we all grow. Young children have a way of seeing straight to the heart of a matter sometimes, not even knowing they are being profound.



Kathleen McClaskey 1 year ago - Shared publicly
 Be inspired by this incredible story of how a young child views learning. I love the insight this young learner has and that her perspective of the world is unfiltered. We could all learn so much by looking at learning through the eyes of this child. Thank you Pam in bringing this story to life!

+1 · Reply



rw team 1 year ago - Shared publicly
 Wonderful article. Everyone should give this a read. Laid out beautifully and the comparison to the painting class was spot on. It made me wonder why, as adults, we go to classes like that. Socialization? "Just tell me what to do" attitude? The need for a "pretty" product? What I do know is that the Ms. Lowe is spot on with a child's view of this. Their divergent thinking must be cherished and cultivated at all costs!

+2 · Reply

 **Pam Lowe** 1 year ago
 Thank you, first, for taking the time to post a comment; I truly appreciate it. I hope this post sparks a deeper conversation about the fact that personalized learning is not a buzzword, and even children realize this.



Charles Beliew 1 year ago - Shared publicly
 Excellent article, simply phrased through a child's eye's!

+1 · Reply

 **Pam Lowe** 1 year ago
 Thank you, Charlie. Children have a way of seeing straight through to the heart of things.



Barbara Bray via Google+ 1 year ago - Shared publicly
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