
Making Learning Personal

Educational Practices That Work

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During the year 2000, teams of field researchers from the Lab at Brown traveled to seven high schools in New England noted for their attempts to personalize learning for high school students. The research teams wanted to assemble a definition of “personalized learning” based on events occurring in a regular school day, aiming to assemble those events into categories that might explain how high schools can organize themselves to personalize learning for all students. Our strategy was to “shadow” a representative selection of students to see when and how these students became personally engaged in their daily work. Applying New England Association of Schools and Colleges guidelines for “shadowing” during school accreditation visits, we wanted to see how different students became personally involved in different program options during their high school experience. At the end of each day, the researcher teams regathered to share their notes, debrief with school teachers and administrators, then try to characterize “personalization” within the whole school, generating from all visits a list of strategies for personalizing learning.

By shadowing twenty-one students in seven different high schools, the teams aimed 1) to characterize developmental needs that students may meet through personal engagement; 2) to describe the many structures schools can organize to meet those needs; and then 3) to characterize the interactions between students and high schools that constitute personalized learning. After outlining one student day from our sample of twenty-two, we will explain how personalized learning may result

from the interaction of young adults with aspects of school life arranged to encourage student interaction with a wide community, with illustrations of high school practices that increase personal engagement in learning.

BART'S DAY: FIELD NOTES FROM A HIGH SCHOOL VISIT

As the other researchers follow their assigned students out of Guidance into the teeming halls, I meet Bart in the main office, a bright and courteous junior, friendly and anxious to please. Off the teeming halls, I become a hulking, gray mass, lurching behind Bart's slight frame. I try for that easy banter I recall as "peer interaction" from my own schooling more than forty years ago.

Homeroom

We recite the Pledge of Allegiance, listlessly.

We take our assigned seats.

Announcements on the PA feature looming PSAT exams.

Our home room teacher hands out school pictures so kids can write their own blurbs.

Aesop's fable comes in over the intercom: Lion and Mouse = "cooperation."

It's weird hair and hat day, so the teacher counts weird hats to win a Home Room Prize for the competition. I see unique hair and hats in our homeroom, but probably not enough to bid seriously for the award. The bell rings. We're in the halls again.

Period 1: Communications

To support musical composition on computers, the class was planned to begin with playback of student work. Technological difficulties with the playback machine halt the planned critique. So, the teacher assigns students to listen and match scales and tones programmed on their MIDI machines, a process known as dictation. Bart tells me he has been identified as learning disabled, with clear limitations on his ability

to decode symbolic forms. After twenty minutes of dictation, the hyperactive student at the next MIDI station has racked up twenty-six points; Bart, with his decoding disability, has none. Still, he hits the keys forcefully with the hope of identifying the notes that appear randomly on his computer screen.

Two kids teamed at another station surreptitiously tap into Bart's computer to work up some interesting "discord." Cacophony ensues, until Bart shoos them off, fearing that the teacher might spot them.

I decide to mediate frustration with some questions about Bart's interest in music. "I write and play classical music," says Bart. "A couple of recitals so far, mostly Beethoven and Christmas songs. I have taken nine years of music training . . . piano." Bart comments that media is where he gets "hooked in," but no one in school seems to know he plays Beethoven. As the exercise ends, Bart submits no points for his dictation.

The media teacher turns on a videotape showing how "producers" during the '80s used a mixing board to fuse a popular song from scraps of noise. The class watches until the bell rings and the lights go on. We're off to bio.

Period 2: Marine Biology

The teacher has organized a guided tour of a local marsh.

She is remarkably knowledgeable about flora and fauna and the history that shaped their present distribution. We walk down to the marsh in the bright sunshine. At several places in the tour, we listen as she describes the indicators of salt/fresh water incursion.

As we walk and listen, Bart describes his adult contacts and personal involvement in the high school:

Media: "I got hooked in freshman year," he says, "We made advertisements and short programs."

Science club: an afternoon activity.

Costa Rica trip: collected samples from the rainforest.

Sailing club: summer only.

Eagle Scout: after 6–7 years of concentrated work, he earned the highest rank in that organization.

No one but his bulging "shadow" talks with Bart as we tour the

marsh, but other kids find amusing things to do along the road, most of which attract a stern warning. We return to the school as the bell sounds.

Period 3: Learning Center/Resource Room (Special Education)

Bart starts some worksheets for his marine bio class. I look at the kid next to me, who is slouched down in his seat, staring at a pile of grammar review sheets. He is angry. “This is bullshit,” he tells me. I ask to take a look at the worksheets piled on the desk. “Bullshit,” he says, loud enough for all to hear.

By necessity the special educator and I focus on him, a 17-year-old sophomore with a history of resistance. “Why are we doing this?” he repeatedly asks the teacher. She tries to explain the importance of skills development for his regular classes, but he folds his arms defiantly. The struggle continues for fifteen minutes. A serious educator, his teacher sends a note out to parents each biweek—and Dana’s next note has now been defined by this interaction.

“Dana is talented with computers, but he doesn’t seem to use his talents around here,” she tells me. Bart has abandoned his bio worksheets to listen in as the bell rings.

Period 4: School-to-Work Class: “Journey of Introspection”

The blackboard contains indications that the group is using the Meyers-Briggs Type indicator to compare learning and thinking styles within the class and to speculate on the fit between individuals and the demands of work.

At the teacher’s request, two kids explain without energy their Meyers-Briggs profiles, as if fearful of responses from others. There is no response from teacher or class, though one scores “introverted” and the other “extroverted.”

The teacher reads a new article on current job pressures and trends.

Student heads hit the desks. “The traditional workplace was designed by Ford for mass production, not for people who think on their own—like today’s workplace.” No students respond.

The teacher turns on a video about Japanese/American conflict in the workplace. Individual kids have conferences with the teacher on their midterm “Progress Notes.” The class watches TV until the bell rings.

Lunch

Bart waits in line, then goes to a table and talks to a few other kids, without passion. I let him have some peace until the bell rings. Besides, I have a headache.

Period 5: English

Class starts with ORBs (Outside Reading Books). Kids read independently for thirty minutes. The teacher hands out the day’s newspaper: Kids read, looking for articles in categories: sports, politics, world. . . . No interaction occurs about the articles. Kids write in their journals on the articles they have read.

As the period draws to a close the teacher reads aloud an article on working.

“Work sucks,” says Melissa, next to me in the circle of desks.

“I hate working,” says her friend.

“It’s like bees,” says Cathy, who works afternoons at the local Shop & Save, “Buzz, buzz buzz . . . die.”

“The better you do in school, the more you earn in a lifetime,” explains the teacher, as the bell rings and kids rush to the gathering buses. Bart runs, too, and I wave, admiring from a distance his forthright courage and determination. He is aiming for a communications major in college.

Researcher’s Impression

Students run by the bells.

The bells run the day.

The schedule runs the bells.

The curriculum runs the schedule.

The curriculum is designed to convey a core of knowledge to all kids, divided into career clusters that help them choose electives and

aim roughly for their future. Bart has not had a meaningful interaction with any adult all day, or with any student, from what I have seen.

Debriefing and Team Conclusions

We believe we have discovered that personalization is not the same as individualization. Personalized learning requires the active direction of the student; individualization lets the school tailor the curriculum to scaled assessments of interest and abilities. The difference between individualization and personalization lies in control. “How much does the student direct the process of his own learning? The answer to that question plays out in student commitment. We have seen few students committed to their learning in this school, except as an expression of their hope to attend college. Despite Bart’s interest in music, media, and nature, events of the school day are organized to fit generalized career tracks, rather than his individual hopes and dreams. The structure and process of the day are controlled by others. If students want to go to college, they comply. If not, they resist, probably without effect. Even Senior Seminar, a required inquiry project, inspires student dread; it is a set of written requirements jammed into a nine-week quarter. The block schedule, designed to promote engagement, has the detrimental effect of forcing kids to change their classes, teachers, and acquaintances twice a year, filling their days with strangers who become familiar only when the semester is about to end. We did not see a great deal of personalized learning today.

IMAGES OF PERSONALIZATION

In fact, the shadowing visits as a group revealed a great deal more about depersonalization than personalization. Still, by gathering descriptions of engaging events during a high school day, we began to recognize essential elements of personalized learning across our sample schools that could characterize the ideal of a personalized high school experience. From all the shadowing visits, the research team assembled long lists of specific events that engaged high school students personally. From each of those lists, several hundred items in

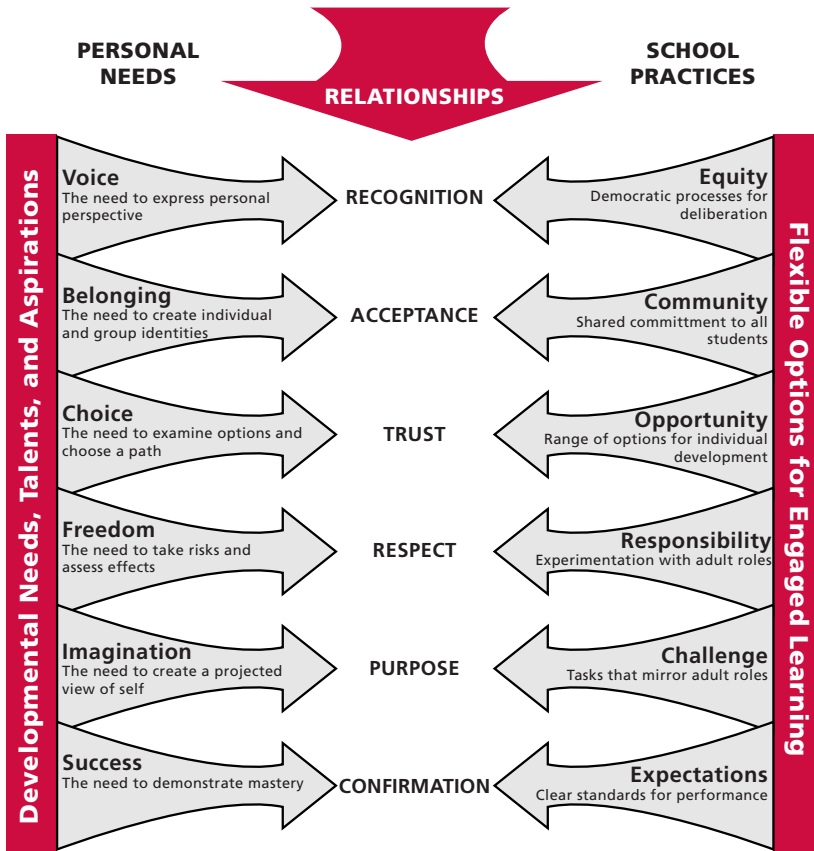
length, Edorah Frazer began to group similar events into categories representing:

1. The developmental needs that students appeared to express through the event;
2. The school practices that allowed students to meet those needs;
3. Descriptors for interactions between students and school professionals that may characterize personalized learning.

We identified six categories of supportive interactions across all schools, each reflecting a developmental need of high school students that could be associated with a set of school practices organized to meet that need. The following summary illustrates each of the six interactions, with selections from field notes for both developmental needs and school practices. Figure 10.1 represents the six developmental needs, six areas of practice that respond to those needs, and six principles that describe the effect of interactions between the developmental needs of young adults and supportive school practices.

1. Recognition

A large number of events in our field notes represented the young adult's need to test her voice among peers and adults. School practices that allowed students to test their "voices" required a platform of equity; democratic processes established within the community, school, and classroom. In such settings each student could receive recognition for a unique perspective, contributing to the larger group process. Recognizing the individual's unique contribution to school life was clearly apparent in a large number of events from our shadowing visits. Although many schools arranged formal award ceremonies to showcase student achievement, personal recognition with the power to keep students engaged appeared moment-by-moment in the daily interactions among students, teachers, and administrators in all aspects of school life. The most powerful moments of "recognition" occurred during fleeting interactions in the halls, classrooms, and central areas, usually as students and teachers greeted each other with deep familiarity. When students, educators, and adults in community-based projects



PERSONAL LEARNING: Using information from the school experience to direct one's own life and to improve the life of the community

Figure 10.1. Personalization rubric.

responded to each other with shared concern, as in a continuing but fragmented conversation, mutual engagement was likely to occur.

In personalized settings, students and teachers knew each other, often using first names in greeting. By far, recognition exerted the most powerful force in the interactions between students and their teachers. As one field note says directly, “I ask K—— why this is her favorite class. ‘Because my teacher loves me!’ she beams. Teacher smiled. (It’s clearly true.)” Momentary and evanescent, such moments accumulate

during a school day, lending the whole school a friendly atmosphere. When students wanted to show us their work, we came to believe that they were being recognized for a unique expression of personal perspective. When the school arranged schedules, classes, advisories, schools meetings, and student travel equitably to promote individual success, the chance to be recognized pervaded the whole school day, reducing the need for control by adults. The team proposed (see table 10.1) that the need for “voice” and the practice of creating democratic processes created a changing array of opportunities for gaining recognition.

2. Trust

Students in all our schools expressed their need for real choices, not in course selection, but in the daily work of school learning. Personalized schools responded with challenges that mirrored the challenges of adult life in the community. When students made choices to meet those challenges, they earned trust from the whole community. When mutual trust marked student/faculty interactions, shared purpose took the place of force, suspicion, and resistance. Instances of mutual trust between adults and students reinforced a sense that both were committed to school learning, but that students would have to take the lead. Teachers and administrators developed structures in which students would have to take on a challenge, then seek support from within the whole community, school, businesses, and local agencies. The mark of effective teaching was not command of academic material, but commitment to student control over information. “Mr. M _____? He’s a genius, that man. He has so many ideas about how I could improve. . . .” Our research team talked about how much schooltime was wasted on command and control efforts in schools where personalization was not prominent—and how much learning time appeared when students were pursuing their own questions and finding their own answers with wide access to adults in the community (see table 10.2).

In relation to personalized learning, trust at the secondary level seems to require an appreciation of the age or developmental stage of the young people being taught. Young adult learners need to experience

Table 10.1. Comparison of voice and equity.

<u>Developmental Needs</u>	<u>School Practices</u>
VOICE: the need to express a personal perspective	EQUITY: Democratic processes that encourage all to take a personal stand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ He was greeted with a handshake and they began their time with Paul saying, “Show me what you got.” J. maneuvered his way through the HTML language with Paul and maintained focus for the entire hour. ◇ <u>Student presenter</u> continued to lead class and rest of class listening -- engaged, and taking notes as she presented. ◇ Halls and classrooms <u>are filled with student murals</u>; all the murals were beautiful and unblemished ◇ M_____ tells me she has lunch with her English teachers sometimes; they <u>know her best</u> of any adults in the school. ◇ One student is doing a short movie on Thoreau, can you imagine; it <u>came from him</u> and so he is thrilled. ◇ Two kids in wheelchairs are frequently <u>greeted by other kids</u> ◇ He glows with pride as he shows me a “light-saber” fight scene from <u>his movie</u> that looks nothing short of Spielberg. ◇ She showed me her photography portfolio <u>and her working notebook</u>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Then after a moment of thought the advisor suggested that he might want to modify <u>his goals</u> to include his work on the family house. ◇ Individual kids have <u>conferences</u> with the teacher on their grades and Progress Notes. ◇ <u>Student work</u> used as a basis for discussion in class and among teachers. ◇ <u>Advisories flex</u> to allow students to pursue their own interests ◇ Many of these students have been together <u>with each other</u> and the teacher for two years ◇ School <u>structure</u> based on <u>smaller</u>, two-year “divisions” ◇ The <u>high school funded</u> all three to attend the Women’s LEADS conference at Dartmouth last weekend. ◇ Senior projects, junior research papers, <u>portfolio presentations</u> celebrate unique passions and gifts ◇ The principal commended everyone <u>involved naming the kids</u> who had been fighting and spoke of them as if they would be familiar to everyone.

some of the autonomy that marks adulthood and adult decision-making. They need to experience “knowing things” as an essential prop to their own autonomy. This autonomy does not mean teachers make no claims to authority, but it does mean that teachers must consciously create scenarios in which students are called upon to exercise judgment and to take ownership for a task.

Our schools had devised many ways to endow their students with trust. For example, schools can give students control over the funds they need to pursue their own learning: one school gave \$50 to a student interested in photography to help that student set up a darkroom at the school; another responded to three students’ requests by paying

Table 10.2. Comparison of choice and challenge.

Developmental Needs	School Practices
<p>CHOICE: The need to choose a path and test choices against results</p>	<p>CHALLENGE: Tasks that ask students to take the lead & help each other</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ “I feel like I have a lot of control now, especially in this school. <u>You aren’t limited</u> and that really helps.” ◇ “Students have tremendous freedom of expression and movement in this class,” M. says. “I can do <u>what I want when I want</u> and I am not sitting at a desk listening to a teacher talk.” ◇ choice in demonstrating learning: <u>choice of final project</u>, presentations, ◇ student involvement in designing rubrics to assess work ◇ <u>no bells or halls passes</u> or other indicators of external controls ◇ <u>teen culture</u> allowed to stretch and breathe in hallways (music, chatter, light jostling about and horse-play) ◇ The girls work on the floor of the PLP coordinator’s office. Two other students enter individually during the period, one to use the counselor’s computer, the other to talk with these girls. The counselor never appears. ◇ J. and friend D. look over database list of possible placement sites in business and <u>discuss who they want to call</u> and what they will say. D. calls and makes them an appointment for an interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ “Yeah, that’s what I like about my Community <u>Service placement</u>. I’m not good with a schedule. Freedom is good. I like freedom.” ◇ Lots of <u>computers</u>, kids working independently on them and helping each other (kids have passwords) ◇ I like Mrs. _____’s World History class. She tells us what we need to do and <u>sends us off to do it</u>. I do not like things that are structured . . . the same-old, same-old. ◇ Teacher hands out evaluation rubrics that students will use to <u>evaluate each other</u> ◇ Teacher says of the class, “It always amazes me how interested they are if they pick what they want to do.” ◇ Teachers enter and leave classrooms <u>without concern</u> for student behavior. ◇ S. had “<u>Independent Study</u>.” She told me she uses this time to get extra help in music ◇ In every way students are encouraged to <u>do independent projects</u>, either as a group or as an individual activity ◇ The <u>program office</u> helps people become more independent in their learning.

for them to present at a “Women LEADS” conference at Dartmouth College. Financially, these are minor expenditures, but it is striking to think of how atypical it is for students to have any input into even the tiniest portions of a school budget.

3. Respect

High school students also expressed their need to take control of the situations they faced during a school day, assuming responsibility for their own direction. Personalized schools responded by offering a wide

variety of opportunities for students to take responsibility, in small projects, in leadership roles, and in defining problems for solution within the community. During moments of student engagement, mutual respect removed the tension and strain that characterizes interactions between young adults and their older teachers in many high schools. Feeling control over their own destiny, students turned to the faculty for guidance and support, but not for admonition or direction. Students come to see that there are many ways to earn respect. As one commented, "In my ninth grade year I did a community project with some other kids by teaching an elementary school class about racism. I was proud to see how the kids felt about themselves afterwards and how much they learned about racism. This was the first big project I had ever done in my life." Students need to take control of their learning. Self-respect, like mutual respect, needs time and a wide assortment of opportunities to develop. The research team proposed that students who wanted to take responsibility needed the opportunity to experiment with adult roles within the adult community (table 10.3).

4. Acceptance

The adolescent need for belonging has been featured in most descriptions of young adult development. As the persistence of high school cliques may attest, students crave a sense of belonging, even if they belong to a small group that is angry, rebellious, sullen, or violent. In response to the need for belonging, personalized schools in this study deliberately fashioned community roles and processes that allow all students to become personally engaged (table 10.4). Through engagement in many aspects of school life, each student could gain acceptance as an identifiable member of the school community. High schools that successfully personalize learning provide all students with a means of gaining acceptance from the school community, not for conformity but for achievements that are unique, self-organized, and carried out independently, often with other students working as a team. To support acceptance, schools can announce a shared commitment to all students, offering an audience prepared to recognize and applaud contributions of any kind to the life of the school. When students complete a task with others that reflects the community's shared hopes, the

Table 10.3. Comparison of responsibility and opportunity.

<u>Developmental Needs</u>	<u>School Practices</u>
<p>RESPONSIBILITY: The need to take control of the personal situation</p>	<p>OPPORTUNITY: Access to tasks relevant to adult roles</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ “I’ve been to a lot of schools, and this is the school that I feel caters most to the individual, because if they see that you have motivation they’ll support you and let you run with it.” ◇ S _____ good-heartedly gets out of her seat, walks up to the map in front of the room and says, “I’ll show you.” She goes up and shows him kinesthetically on the map to get her point across. Teacher says, “Oh, okay, I can explain this.” ◇ Rubric on board that was <u>developed in class with students</u> ◇ For her photography independent study, a teacher found H _____ a very small room that she could use as her own darkroom. The school provided her \$50 for supplies. ◇ The <u>advisor</u> opened the class with an apology. “Its one thing to be under stress, its another thing when you allow yourself to be disrespectful because of your own circumstances. <u>I’m sorry.</u>” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Food consumption is seen as a normal human activity ◇ Permission to move about as if school were home ◇ Teacher tells students to use assessment rubric to evaluate him. S. focuses on the sheet and completes it. Students give their comments. Class discusses his weaknesses/strengths. ◇ Teachers not “on duty” watching students ◇ allow students to individualize all or part of their program ◇ Adjusting deadlines to meet student needs ◇ No bells or hall passes or other indicators of external control ◇ <u>State of the Community Day:</u> Group comments and open mike in gym at end of day. Last year resulted in students presenting a new smoking policy to the school board ◇ Natural Helpers program, <u>a one-on-one support for kids</u> (20 kids have been trained so far)

“vision” that organizes school life grows more robust, more flexible, and more personal for all.

5. Confirmation

Despite wide differences in purpose and style, all our shadowed students seemed to need successful moments during the school day during which they could recognize and test their growing individual competence in areas of the sharpening interest. Successful school practices appeared to spring from widely held and very high expectations for performance, not emanating from written standards and guidelines alone, but from a shared sense of how good things happen within the school, a subject of general conversation. When students were experi-

Table 10.4. Comparison of belonging and community.

<u>Developmental Needs</u>	<u>School Practices</u>
BELONGING: the need for identity within a whole school.	COMMUNITY: Public support available to all students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ As she moves through the school, T _____ greets many people in a very warm way, often touching them and asking how they are. She seems to <u>know everyone</u> and be well loved, authentically or not, in a social butterfly kind of way. ◇ Kids were <u>cheerleading</u> each other all over school ◇ “<u>Everyone’s voice</u> should be heard. I’ll start with Chris,” says Mrs. M _____. “Travis, what did you pick?” “Marybeth, how do you see it?” ◇ Students are set on task of performing a fellow student’s “one act” play or at least as much as he had written so far. Then they are to dress up in costume and improve so that <u>he could get ideas</u> for more characters and further plot. ◇ Lots of banter as kids try to use the calculators in a new way; people calling out questions and <u>helping each other</u>. ◇ <u>Kids encourage</u> one of the boys to practice a lift with the smaller girls. They hoot and clap, and he grins for a long time afterward ◇ Kids easily get in pairs for swing dancing. Teacher circulates and helps couples, taking the place of one partner in each couple and demonstrating the rhythm. When she dances with kids, she makes them <u>all look great</u>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ At some point in the class, uses <u>every student’s name</u> and walks over to each student, engaging with each about her work. ◇ teacher reinforcement of student behavior (“I <u>was proud</u> of you when . . .). <u>A Socratic Seminar</u> brings many minds together in the search for depth. ◇ <u>House system</u> designed to help people know each other better ◇ Two student reps are elected to the school board ◇ Academic <u>events to celebrate</u> unique passions and gifts of students ◇ Postcard program: postcards are given to each parent to write to school about what they’d like the <u>school to know</u> about their child. ◇ When I first started going to school and really getting to know Amy (<u>my advisor</u>) for the next fours years, she was the greatest. Our classes were very diverse. But it didn’t take long before we were called “Amy’s Clique.” ◇ The school <u>feels small</u> to her (800-900 kids), because she at least recognizes everyone, and knows most ◇ <u>Small group work</u>, with students choosing roles within groups

encing success in class, hallways, community settings, or common areas, they were able to confirm the trajectory of their own hopes and beliefs for the future (table 10.5). Moments of confirmation underscored the unique talents an individual could bring to the situation, celebrating the discrete individuality of each student. Summer programs, community-based learning, senior projects, and community service all represented opportunities for students to confirm for themselves and others the direction of their own aspirations.

D———— got up to talk about a summer program he participated in which had taken him to Alaska. He did community service work there.

“I’m from the ghetto and ain’t nobody in my neighborhood that can say they went to Alaska for free and had a good time. . . . Try Summer Search. It’s about whatever you’re about, whatever you like, whatever you do.”

A student asked him, “What did you learn about yourself as a person?” His reply: “Whatever I’ve got here I’m really glad to have, even though I don’t have that much.”

Advocates of yearlong schooling should look carefully at options for learning and work in a wide variety of settings beyond the high school walls and throughout the school year.

6. Relevance

Unlike the idea of “relevance” in earlier decades, relevance in a personalized school allowed each student to imagine herself engaged in an adult role, wrestling with the real and complex problems that shape human experience. In such experiences, students could imagine themselves working in an adult context, using skills and information to propose workable solutions. Academic classes that personalized learning often aimed to clarify issues of concern to the community: insect trapping to “map” the ecology of the school setting, for example, or estimating road curves and angles to reduce traffic accidents, then modeling and testing alternative designs in a design competition. Schools with active independent study, community service, and school-to-work options were most powerfully “personal” when students used their adult work to stretch their academic skills, and to represent their accomplishments in portfolios or roundtable presentations. Schoolwide requirements for active engagement in adult roles made each student an “expert” in a distinctive context related to his or her hopes, empowering students to relate their learning to others who could learn from their experience (table 10.6). Students described community-based learning as an opportunity to be treated as “equal,” though free to ask probing questions and try new approaches. Relevance, in short, was a chance to practice voice, choice, and responsibility to

Table 10.5. Comparison of success and expectations.

<u>Developmental Needs</u>	<u>School Practices</u>
<p>SUCCESS: The need to extend competence</p>	<p>EXPECTATIONS: High standards pervading school life</p>
<p>He showed me the <u>flyer</u> he had designed and that had been approved <u>for distribution</u> by the director of the center who also serves as his official mentor. proudly shows me <u>her book</u>, which includes a front cover made by her and a back cover made by her friend just before she moved away. decides on a topic <u>and shoots a scene</u> with a friend. They are laughing and enjoying this work tremendously. They do not go off task the entire time. R _____ brings me in the Horizons office; she wants to physically <u>show me her PLP</u>. The entire period is used <u>to play music</u>; very little is spent in conversation, and the band sounds very good. When he got back from Alaska, he realized that everyone in his neighborhood was doing the same things as when he left. <u>They hadn't grown, and he had.</u> He then goes into detail <u>showing me the pain-staking process of creating the special effects</u>. It is clear he enjoys this work. He described how his LTIs at <u>several Providence restaurants</u> had shaped his selection of a college program and, relatedly, his selection of a career trajectory.</p>	<p>School vision explains <u>six common expectations</u>, featuring mutual respect. Independent studies involve <u>a contract of study</u> linked to several Standards, a reflective journal, a daily log of activities, and a final presentation <u>rubric for grading</u> that fairly clearly identified the level of expectation for the work. The girls <u>reference independent studies in bioethics</u> says “favorite class is English, a student <u>seminar that runs itself</u>. The teacher only interrupts us if the conversation stops.” <u>Rubrics for each course</u> are distributed at the start of the school year. Senior projects become part of the <u>portfolio</u>, a course-based collection of best work linked to the “Maine State Learning Results” by reflective papers. All students take <u>Seminar</u>, which is used for portfolio and junior exhibition/senior project preparation. <u>A checklist</u> on the classroom wall outlines the due dates and Senior Seminar requirements, including 20 hours of community service, which A _____ completed with no trouble.</p>

achieve and document a success where it counts—among adults in the community.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Even if depersonalization is more acutely a problem in some schools than others, we believe that it is a problem in nearly all high schools (those in our study and nationwide). As a consequence, student learning falls short of what it could be and in nearly all cases means some students fail to achieve high standards. (Although school failure is dis-

Table 10.6. Comparison of imagination and complex tasks.

<u>Developmental Needs</u>	<u>School Practices</u>
<p>IMAGINATION: Projected view of the self succeeding in the future</p>	<p>COMPLEX TASKS: Adult roles in problem solving & communication</p>
<p>J. initially sat furthest away from the table but then <u>jumped into the mix to assist</u> the teacher in an experiment.</p> <p>Each day of the week M. comes down to the A.R.T. program (Votec) for the morning school hours. Here he works on <u>his independent study ‘Star Wars’ type movie</u>, which he wrote and directs.</p> <p>we do have internships and we go out and help the Middlebury College Sports Info Office doing public relations. I really like it because now I <u>know how good it is for you</u>.</p> <p>In his words, “I have to teach middle school teachers about materials that they have to use. So I have to know how to use everything first so I can help them learn by <u>doing</u>.”</p> <p>Visiting student says he serves on a technology board for the R.I. governor, and that he has written and <u>received grants</u> for his technology work.</p> <p>You can do internships like the one I’m doing now by helping teach 3rd graders Phys Ed. At the beginning of the class you talk a lot about yourself and you do a lot of community service. It gives you a <u>head start and good background information</u>.</p>	<p>physics class was doing a noisy experiment off the front balcony with pulleys, toy cars, <u>inventions of various kinds</u>;</p> <p>They begin to ask questions and realize that they can do anything they want to with all these cool machines</p> <p><u>advisories flex</u> to allow students to pursue their own interests</p> <p><u>team time</u> set aside for individuals to work on completing projects</p> <p>Students come <u>in and out</u>, making phone calls related to LTIs:</p> <p>Setting: 4th floor of a building housing a <u>college and other businesses</u>. Individual kids coming and going on elevators.</p> <p>loves the internship and plans to major in political science at Colby or George Washington U. and become an attorney.</p> <p><u>Challenge Diploma</u> - You need to do readings or writings each quarter and you set your own deadline but you still need to follow the dates for the evaluation committee</p> <p>If he was learning about plumbing and carpentry he could incorporate the learning into his program as long as he kept a <u>daily account of his progress</u> and his learning.</p> <p>They will have a <u>public booth</u> on December 14th on sexual violence and hope to get a professional in the field to be at the booth.</p>

proportionately consequential for the student, the student is only one contributor to failure, with teachers, peers, schools, and/or larger society at least sharing culpability.) We have found that the personalization of learning requires substantial engagement by teachers and students, parents, and administrators, who must share a different vision of their work in order to develop their schools toward higher performance. Personalized learning, as illustrated in the six areas mentioned here, promises to improve student learning within a given student’s interests and sociocultural context, even if that learning is not specifically included

in whatever standards are formally measured in standards-based testing.

Personalization appears to increase performance, rather than detract from it. In personalized high schools, high expectations for all students and staff form basic assumptions, diversity is viewed as an asset to learning, and multiple talents are brought to bear on real challenges. At such schools, we saw administrators being academic leaders and lead promoters of a collaborative culture of school management, involving both faculty and students. They expected intellectual curiosity and application on the part of students, teachers, and themselves. Upon entering personalized high schools, we saw students coming and going from internships in the community, or community-based mentors and parents arriving for specific meetings with students and staff; community-centered learning creates access to multiple partners for inquiry and learning. We noticed students and teachers actively engaged in informal discussions in hallways and classrooms. These conversations were friendly and personable but also learning-centered, probing issues and discovering options for students to explore. “Mentor and mentee” (“Manatee” in the student parlance of one of our schools) or “advisor and advisee” better describe relationships in personalized high schools than “teacher and pupil.” Sizer’s (1996, p. 96) expression “caring rigor and rigorous caring” describes the interactions that support the development of skills, knowledge, and habits high school students need as they clarify their hopes for their future lives.

Our six categories of personalized learning did not appear as separable elements of the high school experience.

- recognition
- trust
- respect
- acceptance
- confirmation
- relevance

Instead, they formed a general framework for understanding a wide array of interconnected practices and beliefs. Each of the six descriptors of personalized learning emerges from personal relationships built

through daily interaction among students and adults in their community, primarily between instructor and student, bounded by curriculum and current systems. However, the relationship between the student and the sociocultural context in which she or he is growing also influences personal commitment (Ogbu, 1987); some students have many reasons to be skeptical of school and schooling. Expecting students to defer gratification until college acceptance, college success, and distant economic rewards is inadequate, particularly for the many students who hold no hope for further education. Learning requires consent. Consent requires trust, but trust is not singularly coconstructed by teacher and student. Students look to peers, to parents, and to other role models (local or pop culture, real or fictitious [FisherKeller, 1997]) as they try to determine what and who is trustworthy. Recognition and acceptance depend on relationships with the whole community (at school and outside it) that high school students are hoping to join.

The idea of personalized learning, as outlined previously in figure 1, suggests a wide assortment of solutions to a nearly ubiquitous high school problem. A high proportion of students in low-achieving high schools, and even in high-performing schools, feel disenfranchised, disconnected, and disengaged from schooling, and they perform accordingly. They comply, they resist, or they rebel. Withdrawal of personal commitment is more often characteristic of students who are placed at risk due to poverty, cultural differences, and/or the challenge of learning a new language, but it is hardly unique to them. The size, structures, traditional orientations, and practices of the high schools these students attend contribute to students' alienation and academic failure. Large and impersonal school settings, low expectations for student performance, and a continued overemphasis on teacher-directed instruction may all act as barriers to reform and as inhibitors of many students' academic success. Curricula guided by external mandates that emphasize coverage or manic test preparation rather than comprehension, or curricula determined by academic departments that do not ensure interdisciplinary coherence, also depersonalize schooling, leaving students suspicious, confused, and/or detached. Finally, philosophically inconsistent school policies (generated internally or externally) and public and administrative impatience with new reforms (in lieu of

those reforms' steady incubation) can further interfere with personalized teaching and learning.

Personalized learning requires allotting time and means for students to reflect; such reflection is practically a prerequisite for tasks like autobiographical writing and also in the coproduction of a personalized learning plan with a teacher (and often a parent). However, creating powerful contexts for reflection can be realized through other less orthodox ways.

As an example, one shadowed student described his school's active encouragement for his participation in a "Summer Search" program in Alaska. That experience was potent for the involved student. In his words, through the experience of traveling "from the ghetto" to Alaska and then returning, he could see how much he had grown and changed in relation to his neighborhood peers who had passed the summer in the neighborhood. He had gained the perspective of one who has seen how things work a different way. He was also fortunate to be at a school that had faith in the positive prospects of away-from-school learning (so much so that it was willing to coordinate that learning with what happened within its walls).

From our study and our experience, we also believe that new institutional rearrangements are needed to support collaborative teaching and learning, decreasing student anonymity and increasing students' deliberation and control over how standards were to be mastered. Our lists of school practices that support personalized learning suggest that such arrangements have been developed widely but have rarely been organized so all students perform to high expectations. One urban, multi-ethnic high school included in our study embodies our belief in the feasibility of high school personalization: last year all of its graduates were accepted at four-year colleges, raising more than ten thousand dollars per graduate in scholarship support. Assuming high schools are committed to serving all their students, other very differently situated high schools could also gain substantially by exploring and developing personalized learning.

The collision of young adults (who vary along many dimensions) with school processes (which are products of different social structures, regional and community contexts, and different patterns of resource allocation) generates dynamic tension. Personalized learning

occurs as students with different needs and perspectives respond to this dynamic tension by using multiple and varied talents to assert their own aspirations and address their own shortcomings, while checking their progress with adult mentors (usually teachers) who help them understand both common standards and their own hopes. The ability to relieve tension between personal aspirations and the larger context—by gathering information and solving problems—may be the most important outcome of high school learning. Managing tension between aspiration and expectation in behalf of personalized learning may provide a key to high school renewal.

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