EDTECH MAKES PERSONALISED LEARNING A REALITY

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After lengthy school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students are getting ready to return to the classroom. Although plans are in place for schools to reopen in September, many have adjusted their timetables to accommodate reduced class sizes.

Having implemented virtual learning over the past few months, a significant number of schools plan to continue using education technology, or EdTech. The impact of coronavirus has shone a light on the new forms of EdTech and the benefits they offer. In particular, the ability to enhance personalised learning has been celebrated by teachers, students and parents alike.

What is personalised learning?

The concept of personalised learning is based on the premise that everybody has different strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, every student has a unique learning style. In-depth studies have identified common learning styles, such as visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and reading/writing learning. However, most people use a combination of these learning styles, which means everyone has a bespoke method of understanding, absorbing, retaining and recalling information.

Personalised learning offers customised teaching so that every student's needs are catered for. By recognising each student's strengths, weaknesses, skillsets, learning style and interests, bespoke learning opportunities can be made available. Proponents of personalised learning believe that this customised approach facilitates more effective results, both in the classroom and outside of it.

Is personalised learning used in classrooms?

As all teachers know, delivering personalised learning opportunities in a classroom setting is tricky. Many schools split students into classes based on their ability or current attainment levels, as this helps to ensure they can be taught at the right level. Despite this, the limitations of a classroom setting mean that teachers are generally unable to deliver personalised learning opportunities.

In UK schools, the average class size is 29-30 pupils in primary schools and 21-22 students in secondary schools. With so many students to attend to, teachers are simply unable to dedicate the time, preparation and resources required to deliver truly personalised learning in a traditional classroom environment.

Can EdTech increase personalised learning?

EdTech is transforming the way students learn. Giving them access to a wider range of materials and enabling them to communicate in different ways, the standard learning experience is changing irrevocably.

The use of adaptive content in EdTech gives students control over their learning experience. Along with core content, adaptive materials will allow students to choose teaching formats that suit them, thus increasing personalised learning. In fact, Ricky Ye, CEO of robotics firm, DFRobot, believes that EdTech will soon offer 'as close to a 1:1 learning experience as possible'.

In addition to this, the option to set personalised goals allows teachers to quickly identify which areas a student might require extra help with. Furthermore, personalised goalsetting ensures that every student can achieve their potential, rather than being continually compared against peers.

When it comes to boosting student self-confidence, it's hard to beat personalised learning.

Is technology the future of education?

There's no doubt that technology is transforming the way we learn. From primary school students right up to graduate students and adult learners, we're using an increasing amount of tech when we learn new things. Although higher education institutions, such as universities and colleges, have been offering virtual courses for some time, EdTech is now even more prevalent in all educational environments.

Educational experts are already looking at the EdTech trends that are expected to gain traction in 2021. Amongst them are AI-based platforms, single sign-on and platform integration, increased virtual learning, better cybersecurity and the use of extended reality (XR). While it remains to be seen whether all of these EdTech trends will have hit the mainstream as early as next year, it seems inevitable that the use of EdTech will continue to be a vital component in every student's journey.

As schools, colleges and universities look for increasingly flexible solutions to the constraints posed by the pandemic, the potential to fast-track the use of EdTech could transform the sector more quickly than we ever imagined.