

Personalized Learning in Action
West Broadway Middle School, Providence, RI

From a Teacher's View: Hilary Lundgren

For 5th grade ELL teacher Hilary Lundgren, a single training on personalized learning had her hooked. The experience showed her a new way that she could reach all of her 5th grade students, from those ahead of grade level to those still struggling to add. Initially, Lundgren added blended learning tools to her teaching practice, and now she has moved fully to a station-rotation model in her classroom.

Based on regular analysis of student progress, Lundgren groups students and assigns differentiated learning activities. During the station rotation, one group receives direct instruction, another works collaboratively on practice drills to reinforce the concepts they just learned and the final group works on computers, using technology to work on targeted skills at their individual level. Students regularly complete online formative assessments, providing Hilary real-time data on how her students are progressing toward mastery, which she uses in combination with teacher observation to regroup students on a daily basis. Throughout class, Lundgren monitors student progress and data on a laptop sitting next to her to inform her instruction as students rotate. Lundgren implements this model in both her math and ELA classes. While the learning activities may differ, for example substituting literature performance tasks for math manipulatives at a station, the class structure remains the same.

Implementing this personalized learning model has led to a huge increase in student learning and engagement. In Lundgren's math classes of 50 students in 2015-2016, only 24.4% of students began the year on or above grade level. By the end of the year, 31.4% were on grade level, and 45.1% were above grade level. Despite the challenges that students at her school face, Lundgren has almost no need for traditional discipline such as detentions and referrals. The extensive small group interaction the station-rotation model allows has helped her build deep relationships with her students and instruct them not just on academics but also facilitate vital social-emotional learning as well. Students have also exercised increase agency and choice over their instruction. They are able

to choose what resources they want to use to learn or practice a given skill, and they receive reports regularly so they know what they still need to work on. Lundgren's students have even advocated for this model to be implemented in other classes.

From a School Leader's View: Bill Black

Implementation of personalized learning at West Broadway Middle School did not happen overnight. Principal Bill Black describes the transition to the station-rotation model as "rough...but the tipping point was the middle of the year data. [Our teachers] were moving all kids." Initially teachers struggled with understanding the differences between blended learning and personalized learning, especially that using technology alone without a pedagogy shift did not constitute personalized learning. By purposefully working through building this understanding with his teachers, the station-rotation model gathered momentum, eventually paying off in the middle of the year. Students who struggled made tremendous academic gains as did students working above grade level, both groups of students who can be underserved in a traditional school model.

Principal Black updated professional development and culture to support the transition to personalized learning. From years of observing ineffective one-off workshops, he knew that his teachers would need more help making the significant shift from a traditional classroom to a personalized learning environment. He brought in additional professional development resources to support staff and had each teacher develop individualized implementation plans. Black ensured teachers always had coverage for meetings, assisted teachers to implement their personalized plans, and pushed teachers to observe their colleagues' in action either classroom observations or through videos. As teachers developed their expertise, they received recognition for successful elements of personalized learning Principal Black saw throughout the day.

The support provided at a whole-school level is building enthusiasm and momentum for personalized learning. Teachers who at first hesitated to participate in the workshops for personalized learning now serve as teacher-leaders helping their colleagues to make the same transition.

