

Launching the Innovation Unit's Next Practice Project: Resourcing Personalised Learning

Thank you very much for inviting me to launch the Innovation Unit's Next Practice Project on Resourcing Personalised Learning.

The American historian William Pollard once said that "Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow."

There is no doubt that we have had considerable successes in raising standards over the past few years.

More children and young people than ever before are achieving remarkable results, thanks to their hard work and the dedication of our teachers.

But not everyone has shared in that success. The effects of geography, class and gender can still be seen in those results.

We must heed Pollard's warning. The system does not yet meet everyone's needs and certainly won't be sufficient for the increasingly competitive, technological society of tomorrow.

Instead, we need a system which enables every single child to realise their potential, whatever their starting points, talents and circumstances. That means a vastly more sophisticated system, relying on sharing creativity and innovation to enable every school to reach the standard of the best.

That's where this project comes in. Pollard's wise words about learning and innovation going hand in hand could have been written with the Innovation Unit in mind.

Although in its infancy as a separate company from the DfES, the Unit is already gaining a strong reputation for identifying and supporting the most exciting and constructive practice across the country.

Their four major projects in the Next Practice series will tackle the topical issues which most concern teachers and which will make the greatest difference in the classroom.

Projects on engaging the whole community and involving parents will follow later in the summer.

Critical to the Innovation Unit's success is their approach to partnership working.

Their first project brought together the NCSL, DfES and leading practitioners across the country to test out new approaches to leading change across communities.

Similarly, this next project could not be successful without the involvement and support of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, and I am delighted that their Chief Executive, Liz Reid, is with us this evening.

I know that some of you will be taking part in the SSAT's annual conference on innovation tomorrow, where you will have a further chance to discuss the latest developments in policy and practice.

The theme of this evening, and of this second project in the Next Practice Series, is personalised learning.

More specifically, how schools can reconfigure their existing resources to make personalised learning more than an aspiration – a practical reality in every classroom.

Although the Gilbert Review has offered schools greater clarity about the ambitions of personalised learning, and the practical steps needed to deliver it, there is still some confusion among the workforce about what this actually looks like.

Some think they have heard it all before and are doing it already. Others are worried that it means individualised teaching for everyone, all the time.

The 2020 review defines it as focussing in a more structured way on each child's learning in order to enhance progress, achievement and participation.

And it reminds us that "Personalisation is a matter of moral purpose and social justice".

So personalised learning isn't a something nice to have. Rather it is an essential component of modern education – what every parent wants and what every child deserves.

But achieving it isn't necessarily straightforward. It means rethinking a lot of classroom practice in the way along the lines of the issues you are testing.

What kind of learning environment will best support personalised learning? How can we make best use of time in the classroom? How should we involve young people in shaping their own learning? How can we harness the power of technology to support personalised learning?

Some of these questions have quite radical implications and it is very exciting that so many schools are seizing the opportunity to work with the Innovation Unit on this.

I'm delighted that one of these schools is from Dorset. Thomas Hardye already has an excellent reputation for aiming for the best from every student.

Like all of you here tonight, they aren't complacent and are continually looking for new ways to engage their pupils. Their ambition to improve confidence and motivation among students most at risk of underachieving really is inspirational.

But each of your individual projects is as interesting as Thomas Hardy's – and I look forward to seeing the results.

And I am also pleased that David Wise and David Hargreaves, who played an integral role in the 2020 review are continuing to work with the Innovation Unit and the SSAT to share the benefit of their experience.

It is you in schools who are blazing this trail for us. This is not the old fashioned, top down, command and control approach to schools, with diktats being rained down from on high by government.

We need schools to become much more flexible and responsive to the needs of their local communities and parents and you are doing exactly that.

But however exhilarating it is to be a pioneer, it is not easy – we don't expect you to do it alone. The Innovation Unit and the SSAT are committed to supporting and encouraging your ingenuity and creativity – both for the benefit of the pupils in your schools, and over time, for pupils across the whole country.

It's well known that innovation is the ability to see change as an opportunity – not as a threat. All the schools here tonight have that ability. The Gilbert Review has set out a vision for the year 2020, but you can make it happen in 2007. Thank you very much.