

The Anglo-American School of Moscow

# Dispatch

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# Personalized

an interview with Grade 4 teacher  
Ms. Laurie Bartels

# LEARNING

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# Personalized LEARNING

an interview with...  
Ms. Laurie Bartels

Ms. Laurie Bartels is a Grade 4 teacher. This is her 12th year at AAS and her 14th year of teaching overall. Ms. Bartels grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She studied psychology, Russian studies, music therapy, and special education. In 1997, Ms. Bartels started at AAS as a teaching assistant. Afterwards, she returned to Michigan to complete a master's degree in teaching focused on inquiry, and taught for two years in Detroit before returning to AAS. Ms. Bartels thinks of herself as a "professional learner."



## What does personalized learning mean to you?

Personalized learning means allowing children to figure out who they are as learners so they can develop their own interests, take responsibility for their own learning, and develop a love of learning. We all have different learning styles. If a child is having trouble learning a particular topic, personalized learning can help him/her approach that topic from a different angle.

When I first started teaching in Detroit, I saw old-fashioned teaching. Very little creativity was allowed, either for the teacher or the student. Personalized learning and inquiry change all that.

How do your  
students  
benefit  
from personalized learning?

When a school focuses on personalized learning, students benefit in several ways. First, they see that everyone can learn. Some students come in thinking "I'm just bad at that subject," but then they realize that maybe the subject hasn't been explained in a way that catches their interest or that makes sense to them. Second, they become accountable for their learning by doing extra work if needed or asking questions that show their thinking process. Third, students learn to help each other more, as they see their classmates as a diversity of learners trying different things. Then the students realize that they can use their own experiences and interests to enrich the learning process for everyone.

One way that we use personalized learning is in spelling practice. In my class, we have about ten different spelling and word study lists circulating at the same time.

# How is personalized learning used in Grade 4?

All five Grade 4 teachers meet frequently during common planning time to share ideas with each other and develop projects that the whole grade will do together. For example, Grade 4 students recently did a unit on migration patterns where teachers would move students from one class to another to show them what it might feel like to be an immigrant. During common planning time, if a teacher is puzzled about a particular student, he or she can get ideas from the other Grade 4 teachers. And for reading and math, groups of students might work with a different teacher and students from other classes.

## How does personalized learning prepare your students

as they move up to Grade 5  
particularly as they get ready for the PYP exhibition?

Personalized learning helps students develop accountability, critical thinking skills, and an understanding of themselves as learners, which all help as students move up in school. The PYP exhibition is all about students working in groups and directing their own independent learning projects.

Once students know that other people learn differently, they learn how to be accepting of other people's learning styles and figure out how to contribute to the strengths of the group. The skills they develop through personalized learning helps them ask good questions and motivate other students in their PYP exhibition group.



### Do you have a story about how personalized learning helped a particular student?

One subject that is always personalized is reading, because students are all at different reading levels and have different interests. I'm very well-read in children's literature and many students keep coming to me for book recommendations, even after they leave Grade 4. A 12th grader recently came up to me in the library and said that I had made her love reading.



A boy in my class a few years ago had trouble staying in his seat in his previous classes. My classroom is very kid-friendly, so as long as he was learning, he didn't have to sit in a chair –this student could sit on his desk or with the stuffed animals on my couch. Once he could learn the way he wanted to learn, he made great progress that year.

Personalized learning helps us look at each child, see what they need, and make changes in the class so that each child is supported. Personalized learning requires a concerted effort from everyone, including the child.

**School administrators, teachers, parents, and the child all need to be on board with personalized learning in order for it to work.**