Developing the Expert Learner through the Stages of Personalized Learning

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Abstract
How can we develop learners to become expert learners? In personalized learning environments, learners understand their strengths and challenges and are able to deploy learning strategies to support their learning. On a daily basis, they are developing the skills to be self-directed learners who are able to monitor their progress and make connections with prior learning. These learners can also choose and use the technologies for the task. If learners continue to learn in these environments, the anticipated result will be expert learners who are truly prepared for their future. The continuum to develop expert learners provides the journey learners of all ages can go through to build expertise. Let’s take a look at the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments and how we can develop expert learners by helping them develop the skills at each stage along the Continuum of an Expert Learner:

Voice → Choice → Engagement → Motivation → Ownership → Purpose → Self-Efficacy

Keywords
Expert learner, agency, voice, choice, continuum, motivation, engagement, ownership, stages, personalized learning environments, purpose, self-efficacy, learners, UDL, Universal Design for Learning, access, engage, express, Personal Learner Profile, Personal Learning Plan

INTRODUCTION
First and foremost, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) lens is designed so that we see the learner in every child. It offers in-depth information about the learner and how they learn that we do not acquire through testing data. It also offers a process for learners and teachers to develop learning goals so that each learner can acquire the necessary skills to become an independent and self-directed learner; an expert learner.

If we want every classroom teacher to apply the UDL principles to practice, clear and practical terms needed to be devised, so the UDL lens of Access, Engage and Express was created. This lens can be applied by teachers not only to understand how their learners learn, but can be used in designing instructional methods and materials to meet the needs of all learners from the start. For purposes of clarification, the UDL lens includes:

- **Access** for Multiple Means of Representation
- **Engage** for Multiple Means of Engagement
- **Express** for Multiple Means of Action and Expressions

CAST re-introduced the UDL Guidelines (2014) in their publication *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*. The guidelines that are redesigned illustrate the progression that can be followed to create an expert learner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access (through multiple means)</th>
<th>Guided Practice with Skills and Strategies</th>
<th>Independent and Self-directed Practice</th>
<th>Expert Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide options for perception</td>
<td>Provide options for language, mathematical expressions and symbols</td>
<td>Provide options for comprehension</td>
<td>Resourceful, knowledgeable learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage (through multiple means)</td>
<td>Provide options for recruiting interest</td>
<td>Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence</td>
<td>Purposeful, motivated learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express (and action through multiple means)</td>
<td>Provide options for physical practice</td>
<td>Provide options for expression and communication</td>
<td>Provide options for executive functions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Adapted from CAST, Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2013]

Figure 1. Progression to Develop Expert Learners using the UDL Guidelines

Figure 1 illustrates how you can use the UDL lens of Access, Engage and Express to develop an expert learner. Notice the progression that takes place from left to right where you begin thinking about how you can provide accessibility for the variability that your learners have in their learning. In the next step of the progression, you want learners to develop specific skills and learning strategies to support their learning through guided practice. In the final progression leading to expert learners, you want learners to develop independent skills so that they can own and drive their learning. With daily independent and self-directed practice over time, the learner becomes resourceful and knowledge-
able, purposeful and motivated, strategic and goal-directed; an expert learner.

How can we develop the expert learner using the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments (PLE)?

THE STAGES OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In personalized learning environments, learners understand their strengths and challenges and are able to deploy learning strategies to support their learning. On a daily basis, they are developing the skills to become self-directed, expert learners who are able to monitor their progress and make connections with prior learning. These learners can choose and use the appropriate technologies for the task and are motivated by mastering their own learning. If learners continue to learn in these environments, the anticipated results will be expert learners who are truly prepared for college, career, and life.

The Stages of Personalized Learning Environments Version 4, demonstrates that there is a progression that occurs in the learning environment. Stage One is Teacher-Centered, but learners have more voice and choice. Stage Two Learner-Centered learners are co-designers of their own learning. Stage Three Learner-Driven learners become expert learners with agency.

Let’s take a closer look at the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments (PLE) and how we can create expert learners with agency by helping them develop the skills at each stage along the Continuum of an Expert Learner with Agency.

THE CONTINUUM OF THE EXPERT LEARNER WITH AGENCY

There is a significant and growing demand for learners to be able to do more than receive instruction, follow a learning path designed by educators and complete problems and assignments presented to them by an adult. Learners need to develop the capacity to shape and manage their learning without over-reliance on the direction and control of others. The process for learning and the role learners play must be different than most adults experienced. The continuum to develop expert learners provides the path learners of all ages can follow to develop agency.

The focus for this discussion will be on the first two elements. The continuums of voice and choice will be examined closely as they relate to the learner in each of the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments.

Continuum of Voice

The research paper, “Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice” by Eric Toshalis and Michael J. Nakkula from “Students at the Center”, explained in their spectrum on voice oriented activities, that learners can start articulating their perspectives as stakeholders in their learning to direct collective activities. They can move from offering opinions to becoming leaders of change. We adapted the work of Toshalis and Nakkula so it was more aligned with the Continuum of the Expert Learner with Agency and the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments. The continuum of voice takes the learner from a compliant position to one who takes control of their learning.

(Insert Figure 3: Continuum of the expert learner with agency.)

Figure 3. Continuum of the expert learner with agency.

The focus for this discussion will be on the first two elements. The continuums of voice and choice will be examined closely as they relate to the learner in each of the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments.

(Insert Figure 4: Continuum of voice.)

Figure 4. Continuum of voice
Most learner voice activity in schools resides in expression, consultation and participation. In Stage One Teacher-Centered, the teacher is guiding the process with the learner in developing a Personal Learner Profile™ (PLP) to get to know the learner and how they learn best. The teacher then consults with the learner to develop their Personal Learning Plan™ (PLPPlan) that includes learning goals (access, engage and express), personal goals, citizenship goals, and college and career goals.

In Stage Two Learner-Centered, the learner is developing more ownership as they participate in the learning, identifying and articulating to their teacher how they plan to meet learning goals. When the learner is more confident about how they learn, then they are more open to collaborate with others. They also want to contribute to what they learn.

In Stage Three Learner-Driven, the learners realize they do have a voice and what they say matters so they can advocate for something they believe in. There are learners who take voice to a different level and become leaders guiding the change process. They understand that their voice can lead others, make change happen, and take responsibility for the outcomes.

**Continuum of Choice**

Providing choice can be confusing. Teachers believe if they create a menu of options, it provides enough choices for their learners. If learners are choosing from a set of pre-planned choices from a list of options from the teacher, then the teacher is ultimately the one responsible for the learning not the learner. The goal to move from participant who chooses from a menu of options to a self-directed expert learner who chooses their purpose for learning takes time and a process for both the teacher and learner. When you move to learner-centered environments, learners take more responsibility for their learning and the choices they make.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Centered</th>
<th>Learner-Centered</th>
<th>Learner-Driven</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant</strong></td>
<td><strong>Co-Designer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Designer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
<td><strong>Advocate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Entrepreneur</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides menu of options</td>
<td>Provides choices to access, engage and express</td>
<td>Is a guide for options and then gets out of way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides choices in access, engage and express</td>
<td>Invites input from learners</td>
<td>Invites input from learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides choices in access, engage and express</td>
<td>Chooses topic based on interests or question</td>
<td>Identifies ideas for designing activities, tasks, and rules for projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chooses topic based on interests or question</td>
<td>Identifies or questions</td>
<td>Identifies learning challenges or problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies learning challenges or problems</td>
<td>Engages learners</td>
<td>Identifies challenges or problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages learners</td>
<td>Uses strategies and people to develop action plan for advocacy</td>
<td>Identifies challenges or problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses strategies and people to develop action plan for advocacy</td>
<td>Identifies challenges or problems</td>
<td>Identifies challenges or problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies challenges or problems</td>
<td>Self-directs learning based on passions and purpose</td>
<td>Self-directs learning based on passions and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directs learning based on passions and purpose</td>
<td>Explores purpose by inquiring product or creating</td>
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(Source: Personalize Learning, LLC)

**Figure 5. Continuum of Choice**

In Stage One Teacher-Centered of the Continuum of Choice, it begins with the participant. This is where the teacher offers the learner choices to access content through images, videos, text-based resources, audio, hands-on activities, or interactions with peers. The choices for the learner to demonstrate their strengths can include showcasing what they know by writing a paper all the way to creating a performance.

As the learner moves to Stage Two Learner-Centered as a co-designer, the teacher guides the learner then gets out of the way as learners make choices in their learning. The teacher collaborates with the learner to brainstorm ideas for lesson design, strategies for peer and self-assessment, types of tools and resources to use with activities and ways to demonstrate evidence of learning. During Stage Two, the learner chooses topics and direction for what they plan to design based on personal interests and questions generated individually or with peers. The learner acquires the skills they need to choose the appropriate tools and resources for developing and creating their design and then guides the design of their learning to explore their interests, talents and passions to discover their purpose.

In Stage Three Learner-Driven they are an expert learner, becoming an advocates for their learning. They choose a challenge or problem that they are passionate about and soon they discover their purpose for learning. When they identify the challenge or problem, they then own an authentic voice with a clear purpose for the choices they will make to advocate for what they believe. At this stage, the learner can become an entrepreneur where they self-direct and adjust learning based on what they want to do with their lives. They take their ideas and passion to create a business or join a cause. Even young learners may invent or come up with an idea that improves a product or invent something that has never been done before. This is the driving force that becomes their purpose. They build a support system as their personal learning network (PLN) that helps guide them on their path to learn, build, design, create, develop, and promote an idea or product.

**REFERENCES**


