

# Developing the Expert Learner through the Stages of Personalized Learning

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## Abstract

*How can we help learners become expert learners?*

*In personalized learning environments, learners understand their strengths and challenges and are able to deploy strategies to support their learning. Daily, they are developing the skills needed to be self-directed learners, able to monitor their progress and make connections to prior learning.*

*These learners can also choose and use the right technologies for the task. As they progress, the anticipated result will be expert learners who are truly prepared for their future. The continuum toward mastery provides learners of all ages with a blueprint for building expertise. Lets 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 not available 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 need to be devised. 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 also be used in designing instructional methods and materials to meet the needs of all learners.

For purposes of clarification, the UDL lens includes...

**Access** for Multiple Means of Representation

**Express** for Multiple Means of Action and Expressions

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

	Accessibility for Variability in Learning	Guided Practice with Skills and Strategies	Independent and Self-directed Practice	Expert Learners
<b>Access</b> (through multiple means)	Provide options for perception	Provide options for language, mathematical expressions and symbols	Provide options for comprehension	Resourceful, knowledgeable learners
<b>Engage</b> (through multiple means)	Provide options for recruiting interest	Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence	Provide options for self-regulation	Purposeful, motivated learners
<b>Express</b> (and action through multiple means)	Provide options for physical practice	Provide options for expression and communication	Provide options for executive functions	Strategic goal orientated learners

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

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

Figure 1 illustrates how the UDL lens of Access, Engage and Express can be used to develop an expert learner. Notice the progression that takes place from left to right, beginning with thinking about how to provide accessibility to address variability of learning styles, In the next step of the progression, learners develop specific skills and learning strategies to support their learning through guided practice. In the final progression leading to expert learners, learners 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 knowledgeable, purposeful and motivated, strategic and goal-directed; an expert learner.

## THE STAGES OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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

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 tasks 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 a progression that occurs in the learning environment from Stage One (which is still Teacher-Centered, but where learners have more voice and choice) to Stage Two Learner-Centered (where learners are co-designers of their learning) to Stage Three Learner-Driven (where the learner becomes an expert learner with agency).

**Stages of Personalized Learning Environments (version 4)**

Stage One Teacher-Centered	Stage Two Learner-Centered	Stage Three Learner-Driven
<b>The teacher...</b>	<b>The learner...</b>	<b>The learner...</b>
understands how each learner learns based on Personal Learner Profile (PLP) and data.	with teacher guidance updates PLP by recognizing how learning changes.	monitors and adjusts PLP as he or she learns. The teacher is a partner in learning.
makes instructional decisions on methods and materials based on four diverse learners' PLPs to create a Class Learning Snapshot.	identifies learning strategies and skills with teacher to create action steps for learning goals in Personal Learning Plan (PLPlan).	is an expert learner with agency who applies learning strategies and skills to support and update learning goals in PLPlan.
re designs the learning environment by changing the physical layout of classroom.	co-designs the learning environment with multiple learning zones with teacher.	expands the learning environment in and outside of school to include the larger community.
revises lessons and projects that encourage learner voice and choice.	and teacher are transforming lessons and projects together to include learner voice and choice.	designs challenging learning experiences based on interests, passions and talents.
universally designs instructional methods and materials and guides learners in establishing learning goals in Personal Learning Plan (PLPlan).	with teacher decides how he or she will best access information, engage with content and express what they know based on learning goals in PLPlan.	self-directs how he or she accesses information, engages with content and expresses what they know by monitoring and adjusting learning goals in PLPlan.
uses existing or designs formative and summative assessment strategies and leads learner conferences with parents.	contributes to design of peer and self-assessment strategies, reflects on learning, and leads conferences with parents, teachers and peers.	designs assessment strategies and showcases evidence of learning through exhibitions that involve parents, peers, teachers, and community.
is introduced to competency-based learning. Learning is still part of a standards-driven, time-based grade level system.	demonstrates mastery of learning standards that may or may not be in a grade-level system transitioning to or are in a competency-based system.	learns at his or her own pace and demonstrates mastery with evidence of learning in a competency-based system.
or counselor suggests after-school and extra-curricular activities to learners based on learning goals in PLPlans.	and teacher work together to determine extended learning opportunities based on college, career and personal goals in PLPlan.	selects extended learning opportunities based on college, career and personal goals and interests, passions and purpose.
designs activities to include tools and strategies that effectively instruct and engage all learners in the classroom.	with teacher acquires skills to choose and use the appropriate tools and strategies to access information, engage with content and express what they know and understand.	chooses and uses the appropriate tools and strategies to access information, engage in learning, to express what he or she knows, and support them along learning path.

Stages of Personalized Learning Environments Chart v4 by Barbara Bray & Kathleen McCluskey is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). For permission to distribute copies or to use in a publication, please contact Personalize Learning, LLC at [personalizelearning@gmail.com](mailto:personalizelearning@gmail.com) or use the contact form at [www.personalizelearning.com](http://www.personalizelearning.com)

**Figure 2. Stages of Personalized Learning Environments (Version 4).**

Let's take a closer look at the Stages of Personalized Learning Environments (PLE; See Figure 2) 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 (See Figure 3).

## 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 go through to develop agency.



[Source: Personalize Learning, LLC]

**Figure 3. Continuum of the expert learner with agency.**

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

### Continuum of Voice

Toshalis and Nakkula (2013) describe and explain their concept of a voice-oriented activity spectrum, where students start articulating their perspectives as a stakeholder in their learning by directing collective activities. Students move from offering opinions to becoming leaders of change. Personalized Learning adapted the continuum, aligning it 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 passive participant, to one who takes control of their learning.

Teacher-Centered	Learner-Centered			Learner-Driven	
Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>offers opinions and answers questions</li> <li>creates Personal Learner Profile (PLP) on how they learn best</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>takes surveys</li> <li>provides input and feedback.</li> <li>shares PLP and works on PLPlan with teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attends activities with role in decision making.</li> <li>articulates action steps to meet learning goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>collaborates with teachers and learners.</li> <li>contributes to design of lessons, projects, and assessments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifies problems and generates solutions.</li> <li>advocates for change in and outside of school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>guides group as leader of change.</li> <li>co-plans and makes decisions.</li> <li>accepts responsibility for outcomes.</li> </ul>

[Source: Personalize Learning, LLC adapted from research from Toshalis and Nakkula, 2013. Students at the Center]

**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 to develop 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™ (PLPlan), which helps the teacher include 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 their learning, identifying and articulating to their teacher how they plan to meet learning goals. When a learner is more confident about how

they learn, they typically become more open to collaboration, and they also want to contribute to what they learn.

In Stage Three Learner-Driven, the learner gains awareness of the authority of their voice, that what they say matters. They can advocate for something they believe in. There are also some learners who take voice to a different level, and become leaders guiding their change process. They understand that their voice can lead others, making change happen and taking 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 in a list of options provided by the teacher, then the teacher is ultimately the one responsible for the learning, not the learner. Moving a student from a participant who chooses from a menu of options, to a self-directed expert learner who chooses her purpose for learning, takes time and is a collaborative between teacher and learner. When moving to learner-centered environments, learners take more responsibility for their learning and the choices they make.

Teacher-Centered --> Learner-Centered ----->Learner-Driven----->

Participant	Co-Designer	Designer	Advocate	Entrepreneur
<i>Teacher...</i>	<i>Teacher...</i>	<i>Learner...</i>	<i>Learner...</i>	<i>Learner...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides menu of options</li> <li>provides choices to access, engage and express</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is a tour guide for options and then gets out of way</li> <li>invites input from learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>chooses topic based on interests or questions</li> <li>identifies ideas for designing activities, tasks, and roles for projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifies challenge or problem</li> <li>chooses strategies and people to develop action plan for advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-directs learning based on passion and purpose</li> <li>expands purpose by inventing product or creating business</li> </ul>

[Source: Personalize Learning, LLC]

**Figure 5. Continuum of Choice**

Stage One Teacher-Centered of the Continuum of Choice, 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 available to the learner to express their strengths and showcase what they know, can include writing a paper to creating a performance.

As the learner moves to Stage Two Learner-Centered as a co-designer, the teacher provides guidance, then steps out of the way, allowing the learner to make choices. 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 achieve an expert learner status, becoming an advocates for their learning. They choose a challenge or problem that they are passionate about, and soon discover their purpose for learning. When they identify the challenge or problem, they own an authentic voice articulating a clear purpose for the choices they will make, enabling them to advocate for what they believe. At this stage, the learner becomes an entrepreneur, where they self-direct and adjust learning based on what they want to do with their lives. They harness their ideas and passions to create a business or join a cause. Even young learners can invent or come up with an idea that improves a product or invent something novel. 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.

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