

# Through the Student's Eyes



## A Perspective on Personalized Learning and Practice Guide for Teachers

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Center on Innovations in Learning  
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*The most important observation you can make is when you become a glimmer in the child's eyes and he becomes a glimmer in yours.*

— Albert Trieschman, quoted in Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002)

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## Abstract

The standard definition of “personalized learning” stresses instruction that is varied in pace, method, objectives, and content for each student and tailored to the student’s interests and preferences. Technology is seen as a means to efficiently manage this level of differentiation, access a cornucopia of learning opportunities and resources, and give the student greater control over his or her learning. This paper expands upon the standard definition of personalized learning to assert a multidimensional role for the teacher and vivify the place of motivation, metacognition, and social and emotional competency in personalized learning. Although this more comprehensive approach to personalized learning may be facilitated by technology, its tenets may be applied without technology or, more likely, in a blended context. Following an explication of this broader view of personalized learning, a lesson plan format is provided as a structure for personalizing learning.

## A Personal Story

Taking roll, I scanned the classroom to match a name with a face on this first day of school in my first year of teaching. “Anita Killebrew,” I read from the class list. “Here,” a heavy-framed girl in the second row responded, clicking her aluminum cane against the side of her desk. “Jimmy Lester.” Silence. “Jimmy Lester?” “He can’t hear you,” a girl’s soft voice offered. Just then a high-pitched screech filled the room and sent every student’s hands to cover his or her ears. A boy in the front row elbowed Jimmy and pointed to his ear. Jimmy twirled a tiny wheel on his hearing aid and the screech ended. His row-mate shoved him on the shoulder and, getting his attention, pointed to me. Jimmy responded in a too-loud voice, “I heeer.” Bending toward him and looking directly into his face, I slowly and with exaggerated lip movements said, “Thank . . . you . . . Jimmy.”

“Douglas McCain,” I went on. Silence. “Douglas McCain?” Another hearing problem, I thought. The room became eerily quiet, and I cast a beseeching stare into mid-distance, waiting for Douglas to be identified. I saw a hand move, slowly, and the soft-voiced girl pointed to the boy in front of her. He was about 16 years old, I estimated, wiry, not tall, with a pimpled face and an unruly shock of dirty blond hair covering half his left eye. He sat in a semi-coiled position, his hip turned outward as if to shield him. “Are you Doug McCain?” He glared back at me without opening his mouth. “Yes, he is,” the girl said in a whisper. “Regina Peterson,” I went on.

Roll taken, I proceeded to lay down the rules for how this class would operate. Lesson one from student teaching was to establish order on the first day. I had my list of six classroom rules and began reading them one by one. “Rule number three: Raise your hand and ask permission before leaving your seat. Rule num. . . .” I stopped in mid-rule. Doug McCain was on his feet. He walked deliberately across the room and stood by the pencil sharpener, raising a pencil in his hand as he flicked the hair back from his eyes. “Doug, you need to ask permission before leaving your seat,” I clarified. He inserted his pencil into the sharpener and began turning the sharpener handle. I walked toward him and, placing my hand under his bent elbow, nudged him toward his desk and said, “Doug, please return to . . .” Under his breath, so that only I could hear, he said, “I’m going to kill you, Redding.” I let him sharpen his pencil.

For the rest of that day, and the two days that followed, Doug didn’t openly defy me. And he didn’t kill me. He also rarely looked me or anyone else in the eye or cracked a smile. Doug completed portions of his assigned work, scrawled a large, florid signature across the page, and pushed the paper to the edge of his desk for me to retrieve. Outside of the classroom, he was a loner, separating himself from other students in the lunchroom, leaning against a locker in the hallway, scrunching down in his seat on the school bus. The students walked around him as if he were a porcupine. Entering the classroom one morning, he nearly stumbled for a step or two, tarnishing

his otherwise unfailing, tough-guy persona. Before diverting my eyes so as not to embarrass him, I caught a glimpse of his shoes—oversized loafers, scuffed and worn at the heels.

By Friday of that first week, I was feeling comfortable with the class, and they were feeling comfortable with me. Or at least that is how I perceived it. Doug and I had not connected in any positive way, not so much as an exchanged smile. But, we had avoided confrontation. Then the situation changed. No sooner had the students settled into their desks that Friday morning, than Doug was out of his chair. He paced slowly across the classroom, pencil in hand, straight toward the pencil sharpener. But before I could say a word, he pivoted and walked out the door into the hall. What now? I wondered. Do I chase after him? Send someone to the office to fetch the principal? Let him go?

I opened the classroom door and saw him standing just outside it. I stood facing him and closed the door behind me. The hallway was empty and quiet. I felt perspiration bead up on my forehead. My heart raced. I could think of nothing to say to defuse the situation, so I stood in silence waiting for Doug to make the first move. He did. Without looking up, he pointed to the floor just beneath him. He was wearing a shiny new pair of shoes, with the shoestrings untied. “Teach me,” he said in a childlike whisper.

Over the years, reflecting on that first week as a teacher, I have tried to distill meaning from my interactions with Doug. Did I learn a classroom management strategy that I could apply whenever a similar situation arose? Perhaps, but, in fact, I never had another student exactly like Doug nor a situation like our face-offs at the pencil sharpener and in the hall. My strategy with Doug that first week was primarily to avoid a confrontation. That was a strategy born of a first-year teacher's ignorance about the right thing to do, but in retrospect it may have been the best possible approach.

Thinking of that first classroom of students, troubled kids in a small high school in a rural county, I picture their faces in their rows and remember stories about each of them. I first saw them that late-summer day when school began, and from that day forward I was eager to know more about each of them, to understand them. What I realize only now is that, while I looked at them through my eyes, they looked back at me through theirs. They tried to understand me. I wonder how that first week of school looked through their eyes, from their perspective.

## Introduction

*Personalization refers to instruction that is paced to learning needs [i.e., individualized], tailored to learning preferences [i.e., differentiated], and tailored to the specific interests of different learners. In an environment that is fully personalized, the learning objectives and content as well as the method and pace may all vary.*

The U. S. Department of Education (2010, p. 12)

Personalized learning is enjoying a new day in the sun. Its advocates see technology as a way to efficiently connect instruction to each student's interests, preferences, and needs and to make practical the advocates' philosophical predilection for personal discovery and experiential education. "Personalization has and can take place without technology, but not at scale," writes Mary Ann Wolf. "Technology dramatically increases a teacher's ability to identify and manage the needs of many students, and for students to access a large variety of interventions, content, resources, and learning opportunities everywhere at any time" (2010, p. 10). The advent of the Internet as a door to massive amounts and varieties of information revitalizes the hopes of those who want to liberate the curriculum and place the student in a more commanding role in directing learning. Learning management systems enable a teacher (and the student) to connect learning goals with student portfolios, online assessments, and searchable resources in multiple formats. Sophisticated algorithms predict each student's probability of success with different curricula and match instructional paths to data on the student's characteristics, learning habits, and interests. All of this technological power is aimed at personalization, making learning more personal for the student.

If, indeed, personalized learning is meant to make learning more personal for a student, then seeing it through a student's eyes is an important perspective. Underlying the U.S. Department of Education's (USDOE) definition of personalized learning is the assumption that personalization contributes to the student's self-direction and enhances the student's motivation to learn by linking instruction to student needs and interests. Further, the USDOE definition suggests that, by individualizing and differentiating instruction, each student's learning is enhanced. This definition is sound as far as it goes, but it is too narrowly constructed to convey the full potential

of personalization. It also lacks a sense of the personal, oddly enough. Especially, it neglects the power of the personal relationship of a teacher and a student. A broader, more fecund definition is that *personalization refers to a teacher's relationships with students and their families and the use of multiple instructional modes to scaffold each student's learning and enhance the student's motivation to learn and metacognitive, social, and emotional competencies to foster self-direction and achieve mastery of knowledge and skills.* Or more simply, *personalization ensues from the relationships among teachers and learners and the teacher's orchestration of multiple means for enhancing every aspect of each student's learning and development.*

This comprehensive definition of personalized learning does not conflict with the narrower USDOE version, but adds elements to it. The following four points, each denoting one of the added elements, summarize the sections that follow in this paper:

1. The teacher's ability to positively influence a student because of his or her relationship with the student and the student's family is a means of personalization.
2. A student's personal aspirations and self-efficacy perception affect his or her motivation to learn and open windows to expanded interests.
3. A student's metacognitive competencies are critical to self-directed learning and mastery and are built through multiple modes of instruction and the teacher's example.
4. A student's social and emotional competencies are significant goals for personalized learning.

In expanding the definition of personalized learning, the perspective of the student and the role of the teacher are drawn into sharper relief. Personalized learning's success depends as much on how students respond to the teacher's instructional practices as the assumed efficacy of the practices themselves.

Student response to instructional practices is demonstrated, in part, by the effect the practices have on the student's motivation to learn. Older theories of motivation (see, for example, Maslow, 1954, 1970) emphasized hierarchies of need, typically structured within developmental categories that could be applied universally to understand why people engage and persist with particular tasks. We now know that we are motivated as much by our aspirations and sense of self-efficacy as by our current needs and interests. We also have a greater appreciation for the relationship between academic and social/emotional learning; each affects the other in ways that make the distinction artificial. A broader understanding of personalized learning bears upon the way each student is taught as well as the cumulative effects on the performance of a school.

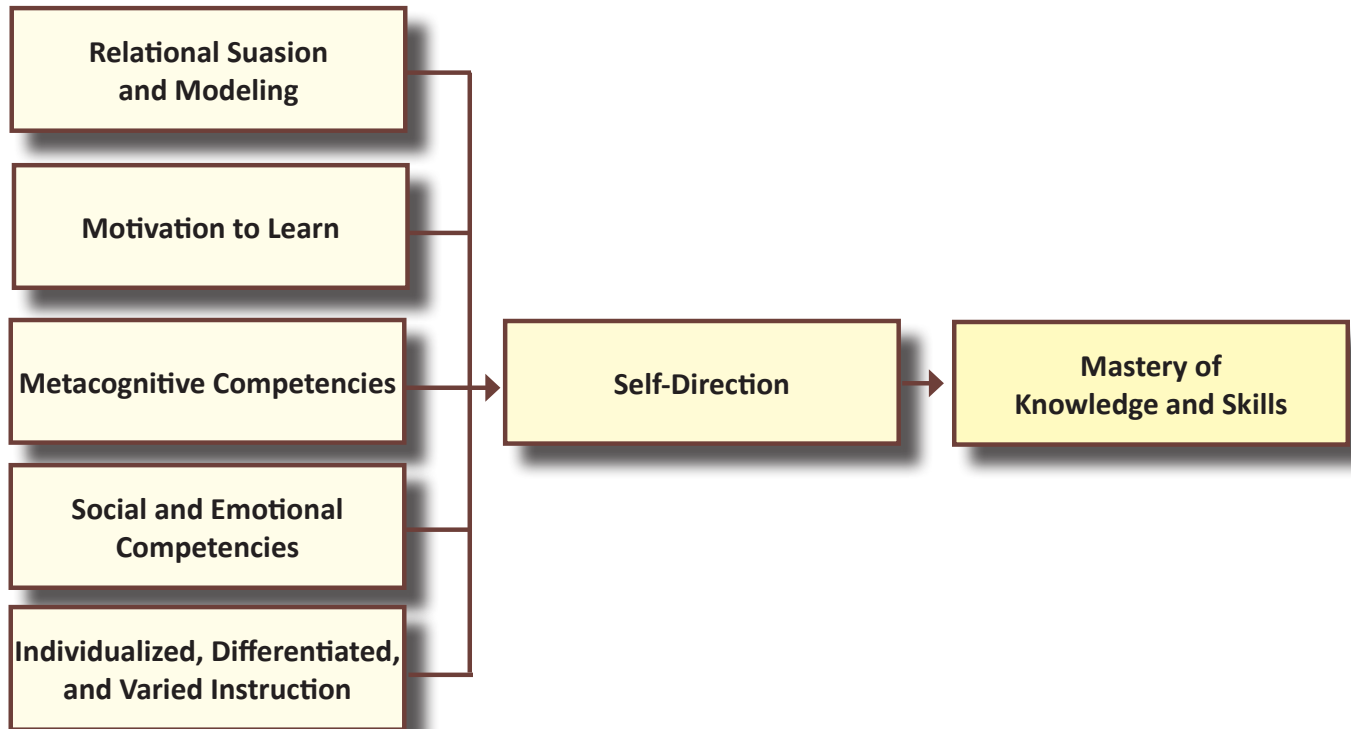
School improvement and school turnaround efforts rest largely on the shoulders of school leaders and teachers. That is fitting because these are the people who can most immediately effect change and the ones who create the culture of the school and engage directly with the students. Still, we will miss something important if we don't look at things through the eyes of a student and attempt to understand more about what motivates students to pursue and persist with learning and the skills they need to learn efficiently.

The teacher's role in personalized learning is more than merely connecting a student with a path to discovery, technological or otherwise. The teacher is more than a facilitator for a student's learning. The teacher organizes an infinite mass of potential content into an orderly and discernible curriculum, explicitly teaches new concepts and skills, enlarges the student's scope of interests, and fosters logical thinking through questioning and dialogue. The teacher possesses the power of relational suasion that technology cannot match. Through the teacher's example and her instruction, the student learns to value mastery, to raise expectations, to manage learning, and to



broaden interests. The teacher is singularly capable of teaching social and emotional skills and engaging families in their children's academic and personal development. Figure 1 illustrates the four components added to the standard definition of personalized learning and their relationship to one another.

**Figure 1: A Comprehensive Model of Personalized Learning**



No two children are alike, but we gain something in understanding the spectrum of childhood needs and aspirations, even as we must consciously accommodate our preconceptions to the idiosyncrasies of the individual. Sometimes our fondness for conceptual frameworks obscures our ability to see the child who stands before us, who more often than not resembles in remarkable ways the child that we once were and the children with whom we grew up. Knowing that is what inspires teachers to reach each student in ways they would have wanted to be reached.

### Questions for Reflection

1. How does the broader definition of personalized learning fit with your own philosophy of teaching and learning?
2. How do you use technology to manage your curriculum and instruction and to target learning tasks for individual students?
3. What is your personal story about a first encounter with a student that proved to not reflect your later understanding of him or her?

## **Relational Suasion and Modeling with Students and Their Families**

Relationships matter. Bryk and Schneider's (2002) study of 400 elementary schools showed the connection between high levels of relational trust among principals, teachers, students, and parents and the school's performance on standardized tests. Far from being "the guide at the side," the teacher bears responsibility for what the student learns and the student's ability and desire to pursue learning. "Teacher effectiveness has the largest impact of school effects on student learning, and research indicates that top-quintile teachers produce learning gains three times that of bottom-quintile teachers" (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). Very simply, the teacher is the prime contributor to all students' learning, and the teacher exerts an especially powerful influence on students' motivation to learn, acquisition of learning skills, and personal development.

### **The Teacher and the Classroom Culture**

Through the student's eyes, the teacher, by virtue of her role, is worthy of respect. By her actions, she adds to or subtracts from that appraisal. While the student is in her class, she is the most significant adult in his life, and her influence reaches far beyond the class period or the school year. The teacher's ability to use this influence optimally to further the student's learning depends upon her pedagogy, to be sure, but it also stems from her personal relationship with the class as a whole and the student in particular. Every classroom assumes its own culture through its rituals and routines and, largely, through the teacher's personality and interactions with the students. Nested within a healthy classroom culture, each student feels a sense of belonging, of being in a good place with good people. Individualization in learning has its place, but so does attachment to the group, being part of its collective pursuits, and interacting with other learners. The whole-class environment, orchestrated by a masterful teacher, abounds in reinforcement for learning, from the teacher's simple smile of acknowledgement to the students' ready responses to her queries.

Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1997), in a meta-analysis of factors influencing learning, reported strong effect sizes for the teacher's classroom management and social interactions with students. John Hattie's 2012 reflections on his meta-analyses observed that, "The importance of climate was noted as among the more critical factors in promoting learning. The positive climate factors included a teacher's proficiency in reducing disruption to each student's flow of learning, and having 'with-it-ness' or being able to identify and quickly act on potential behavioral or learning problems. There is a certain mindfulness by teachers in the classroom about how what is happening and what is likely to happen can affect the flow of learning for each student" (p. 77).

Classroom culture reflects the teacher's preparation prior to entering the classroom, her orchestration of the learning activity, and the students' understanding of the procedures and routines that facilitate purposeful learning. Classroom culture, however, also emanates from the personal relationship of the teacher with her students and the relationships among the students themselves. Relationships affect how and what students learn (Elias et al., 1997).

### **The Teacher and the Students**

The teacher imparts knowledge, makes connections to the students' prior learning, and outlines the goals to be achieved through their mastery. Through her relational suasion, the power of her person, and through her modeling of attitudes and behaviors, she exerts an influence on her students that a lesson plan can only sketchily reveal. The teacher's very mindset pervades the classroom and touches each student. "When we are asked to name the teachers that had marked positive effects on us, the modal number is usually two to three, and the reasons typically start with comments about caring, or that they 'believed in me'" (Hattie, 2012, p. 78).

Teachers exhibit their belief in their students through their words and actions, and these words and actions flow from their personal mindsets. Carol Dweck (2000) articulates the underlying impact of a student's or teacher's mindset about intelligence and social traits. She explains the detrimental effects of seeing intelligence and social traits as "fixed" rather than malleable. Viewing intelligence and social traits as malleable provides the motivational impetus for a "mastery orientation" that enhances both academic learning and social coping. Jere Brophy (2004) proffers a similar theory in promoting the intrinsic motivation that accrues to a student who derives satisfaction from the mastery and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Satisfaction from mastery shows on the faces of students when the whole class responds in unison to a teacher's prompt and in each student's "thumbs up" expression when she solves a problem or grasps a new concept.

Teacher-student interaction (both social and academic) contributes to a student's motivation to learn (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). When teachers exhibit the right blend of caring and expectation, showing that the teacher knows the student and thinks there is something special about him or her, students respond positively. Brophy (2004) challenges teachers to not be blinded by social class differences, cultural differences, language differences, and other potential barriers when forming close relationships with at-risk students. Students are motivated by the personal connection they derive from the teachers' devotion to helping them achieve academic success.

### **The Teacher and the Students' Families**

The literature on the home's influence on school learning is substantial (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), but intervention strategies have typically focused on the school-home relationship and school-level programs for parents. More fundamental is the teacher's personal relationship with each student's family. That relationship sets the stage for the teacher to influence parenting practice and enables the teacher to better understand the student. Through the student's eyes, the teacher-parent relationship demonstrates the mutual interest of the teacher and the parents in the student's learning and well-being as well as the teacher's deep interest in the student herself.

Patricia Edwards (2011) asserts that differentiation in a teacher's approach to families is as important as differentiation in instruction. Simply, each family is unique, and a teacher's relationship with his students' parents begins with that understanding. Edwards suggests that, to understand a family, a teacher must know their story, and that requires listening. Knowing the family's story positions the teacher to differentiate her supports for parents.

This is not to say that parents' goals for their children vary greatly (they all want their children to succeed in school), but it's clear that their situations, perspectives, and abilities affect their capacity to support their children in particular ways. For example, asking parents to read to their children appears to be a simple request. But some parents never experienced proper modeling of how to read interactively with children. They might not know what materials are most appropriate for children to read. They may also underestimate the positive effects of talking with their children about what the children have read. (Edwards, 2011, p. 113)

Edwards bases her idea of differentiated parenting on her research and her experience as a teacher in a high-poverty school in Louisiana. She stresses that differentiated parenting is much more than merely responding differently to parents' request for assistance. Teachers must be proactive in knowing enough about each family to know what a parent may need but cannot express. Parents' needs, she reminds us, are not static. They change over time with changes in the ages of the children and the life experiences of the parents.

Mart, Dusenbury, and Weissberg (2011) attest to the importance for students of consistent expectations for academic learning and social and emotional behaviors across the school and

home contexts. Inconsistent signals from parents and teachers put students at greater risk of academic failure (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Arriving at consistency between the school and the home arises not only from the school's clearly expressed expectations, but also from each teacher's ongoing conversation with each student's parents. In differentiating supports for parents and arriving at mutual expectations for students, the teacher takes into account the extent to which parents sense that they are up to the task (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). This parental sense of self-efficacy varies greatly according to the models for parenting experienced by the parents themselves and their understanding of what is expected of them by the teacher. In differentiating supports, the teacher, over time, brings into closer alignment what the student needs, how the parent views her role, and what the parent is prepared to do.

### Questions for Reflection

1. How would you describe the culture that you establish in your classroom?
2. What students of yours come to mind when you think of how you have connected with them in special and personal ways that inspired them to learn?
3. How do you get to know the story of each of your students' families?

### Motivation to Learn: Aspirations and Self-Efficacy

Expectancy value theory (EVT) holds that a person's willingness to engage in an activity is a function of how much one values the activity, coupled with one's expectation for success in the activity, and compared with how much one values and expects success in other activities (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Value is sometimes understood as the potential for learning to pay off in the future—in education, for making students college- and career-ready. But the nation's alarming dropout statistics strongly suggest that future benefits are not enough. Forty-seven percent (47%) of dropouts report that the reason they left school was that classes were uninteresting (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). That is, students forego future benefits based on priorities in the here and now (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Engagement in the here and now is sometimes interpreted as making learning relevant to students' current interests, but that is a tragic limitation, especially for students whose exposure to a range of topics outside the classroom is narrow. Making learning interesting rather than merely relevant is the real challenge for teachers.

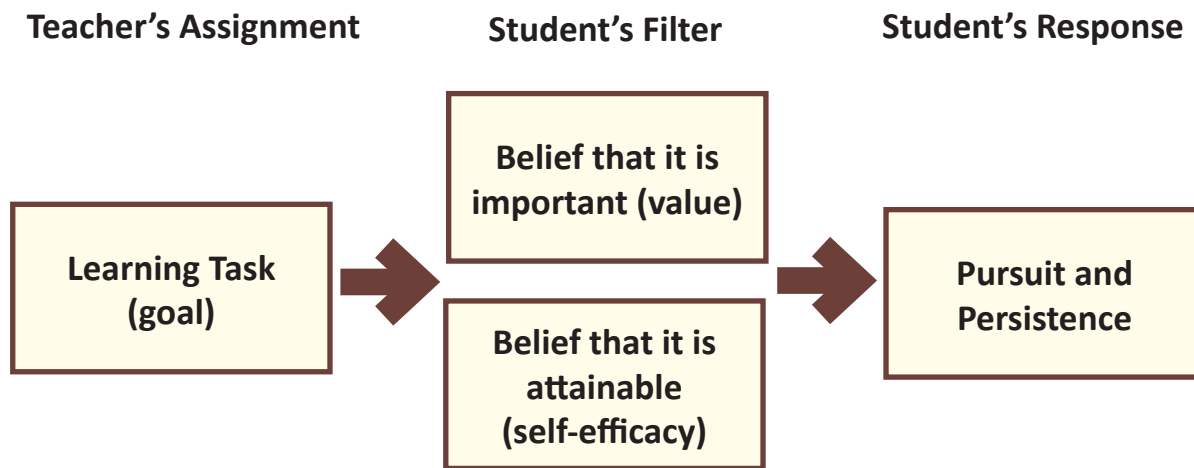
Expectancy value theory is similar to other theories of motivation in linking motivation to the person's value for the task at hand and his or her expectation for success. But EVT adds the dimension of opportunity cost to this equation. All students are motivated toward something, if not necessarily toward tonight's algebra assignment. Completing the assignment, then, competes with the other activities in which the student may choose to engage, and the cost of working on the assignment is foregoing the other activities. There is a trade-off. The ingenious teacher attempts to increase the value of algebra in the student's eyes so that he will trade away time with video games in order to do his homework.

### Beliefs and Goals

A sense of self-efficacy influences academic motivation, learning, and achievement (Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1995; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). A student's self-efficacy perception, the anticipation of success (Bandura, 1997), is derived from the student's assessment of his or her own level of skill, the relative challenge of the task at hand, and the task's value to the student

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993). Given a mindset that achievement is a consequence of effort and mastery and not fixed intelligence or social traits, as Dweck (2000) advises, we can look at other aspects of motivation to learn. Motivation research typically rests upon the interplay of beliefs and goals. Beliefs include mindset as well as values and a sense of personal efficacy in achieving a goal. Goal attainment includes both the immediate goal of achieving the learning task at hand and its connection to personal aspirations. Figure 2 is a simplified depiction of the relationships among a teacher's assignment, the student's motivational filter, and the desired student response.

**Figure 2: A Learning Task, Through the Student's Eyes**



Seeing through a student's eyes how the value of a task is interpreted, Smith and Wilhelm's (2006) study of the literate lives of boys (both in school and out) quotes this student's perception of the value of what his teacher presents:

I mean, you are a teacher; I assume that you teach, I am going to assume—obviously you have some amount of homework, that there is going to be some amount of homework involved in teaching no matter what happens. That is a given, but my teachers will just give out thousands and thousands of pages of homework and expect that to teach you. They don't teach. It is just like do chapters, questions 1–5. And then they are going to assume that you know it because you do the questions 1–5 and even if you talk with somebody, you aren't going to know it. But if you actually get up there and teach it to people and ask questions they are going to know it. That is why [this] is stupid. (p. 16)

This student no doubt presents an exaggerated and biased view of teaching that is not typical, but it also demonstrates that a student's perception of the value of learning impacts the student's motivation for engagement. The student does not see a connection between his goals or aspirations and the teacher's assignments. Also, the student does not believe he has been taught, suggesting a diminished perception that he is up to the task.

### **Mindset and Motivation**

We sometimes forget that a child's behavior is influenced as much by what the child hopes for as what the child has experienced. Carol Dweck (2000) distinguishes between a student's assessment of his or her ability to achieve a performance goal or not based on the student's belief that goal attainment is a function of (a) "smartness," (b) current level of skill, or (c) ability to improve skill to achieve the goal. Though all students tend to view a learning challenge through the lens of their current level of skill to some extent, more successful students give greater weight to their



potential for improving skill, as opposed to their static “smartness,” than less successful students. Dweck explains that a teacher's perceptions of a student's ability to achieve a performance goal also varies according to the teacher's reliance upon the student's past performance as the basis for judgment rather than a forward-looking anticipation that the student will change in a positive way.

Applying this logic to the achievement gap, Dweck describes the burden of “stereotype threat” that members of minority groups carry. Conscious of the low academic achievement ascribed to their “group,” a student may attribute the cause to fixed qualities. To avoid a confirmation of the stereotype, a student may “make low-ability attributions for any difficulty [he or she] may be having, create distracting doubts when...trying to perform intellectually, or foster a defensive withdrawal of effort” (p. 37).

Connecting performance goals (learning tasks) to personal aspirations rather than to past performance or group stereotypes frees both the student and the teacher to engage in constructive learning. This appreciation for what Dweck calls “incremental intelligence,” the notion that intelligence and the ability to achieve are not fixed but are incrementally improved, contributes to a student's motivation to learn and a teacher's more effective response to the student's learning needs. We tend to place great emphasis on data that demonstrate a student's past learning but give little attention to the power of aspiration to fuel incremental improvement.

Successfully linking academic performance with personal aspirations is more than helping a student envision his or her future (Hoge, Smit, & Crist, 1997); it is connecting that desired future to the tasks at hand. The desired future may be going to college and getting a good job, but the student must see the pathway on which the tiny steps of today's learning tasks lead to the aspirational results. More immediate goals, aligned with aspirations, are particularly relevant to student motivation to learn. Social and personal goals are as significant as academic goals, which means that teaching students social and personal skills contributes to the student's immediate desire for self-management and satisfying social relationships, competencies that readily align with longer-range aspirations.

In discussing motivation and aspiration, there is a tendency to slip into an easy discourse on self-esteem as the magic elixir. Dweck discredits the “self-esteem” approach that is exhibited through constant praise that weakens the student's resolve in mastering difficult tasks and in meeting life's challenges:

We want our children to have a basic sense of worth and to know that they have our respect and love, but after that, self-esteem is not something we give them. It is something that they are in charge of, and we can simply teach them how to live their lives so that they will experience themselves in positive ways. In this view, self-esteem is not a thing that you have or don't have. It is a way of experiencing yourself when you are using your resources well—to master challenges, to learn, to help others. (p. 128)

Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002) explain that self-confidence, a more reliable characteristic than self-esteem, is achieved through mastery, the satisfaction that comes with competence. “When the child's need to be competent is satisfied, motivation for further achievement is enhanced; deprived of opportunities for success, young people express their frustration through troubled behavior or by retreating in helplessness and inferiority” (p. 49). A healthy school culture provides many opportunities for a child to gain competence, to achieve mastery, to grow in the expectation that he can achieve that to which he aspires.

## Motivation to Master

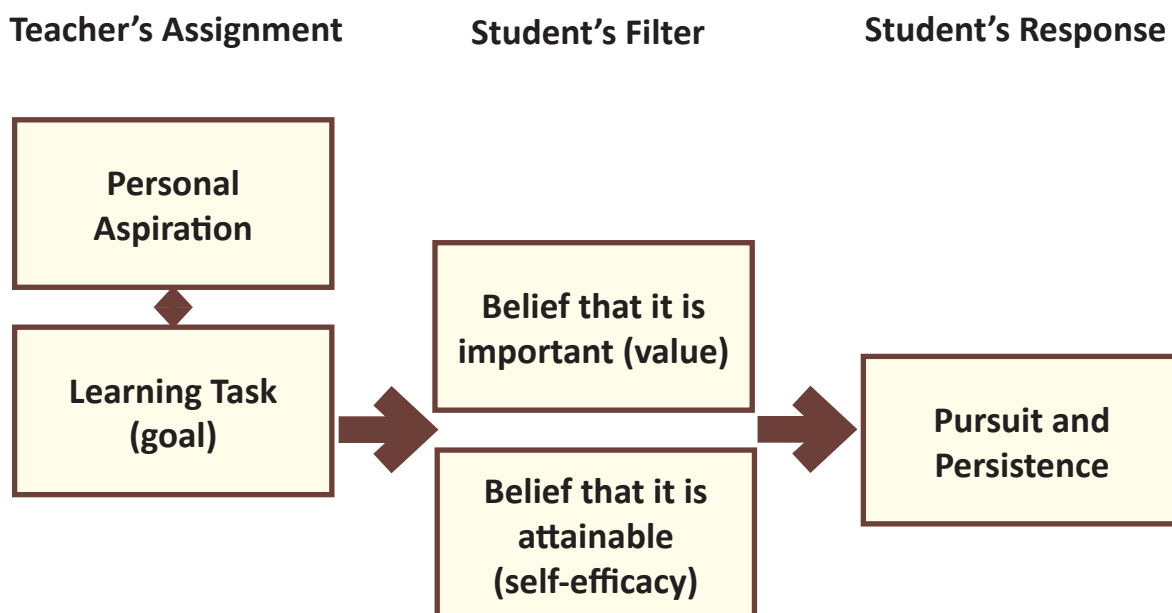
Teachers build students' motivation to learn by celebrating the end result—what the student now knows and can do (Brophy, 2004). The celebration arises from mastery and is not the same as the constant praise that Dweck warns against. Innovative technologies and new forms of measurement, analytics, and instructional methods enable students to track their own mastery and receive continuous reinforcement for it (Campbell, DeBlois, & Oblinger, 2007). Mastery itself can be the fuel of motivation and the goal to be attained. Some schools enable students to track their own progress on short-cycle (unit) tests, benchmark assessments, and teacher-determined mastery of objectives as a means for helping students set goals and see their progress toward their goals. With graphs that illustrate their progress, students clearly see the concrete results of their efforts, and this feedback is itself a motivating factor.

## Aspiration as a Source of Motivation to Learn

Aspiration as a driver of goal-directed behavior was a topic of interest for psychologists early in the 20th century, with studies aimed at measuring a person's level of aspiration in relation to that person's attainments in life (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). Later in the century, that topic was superseded by studies of achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961, 1978; McClelland, Atkinson, & Clark, 1949). In recent years, interest in aspiration as it relates to student motivation to learn has been revived by cognitive psychologists. Quaglia and Cobb (1996) define aspirations as "a student's ability to identify and select goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals" (p. 130). Jeynes (2010) found that parental guidance for their children to articulate aspirations, and their reinforcement of day-to-day behaviors in light of those aspirations, positively affects student achievement in school.

The student's connection between a future aspiration and a present goal is especially significant for teachers. Figure 2 shows the learning task as a goal, but a short-term goal is not the same as a personal aspiration. Figure 3 adds an aspirational dimension to this scheme.

Figure 3: Personal Aspiration Linked to Learning Task



An aspiration is a desired future state, a situation in which a person hopes to be. Most students have vague and ill-defined notions of their desired future states, so part of the teacher's job is to help them arrive at some clarity about their aspirations, realizing that such projections are, and should be, fluid. Class discussions and small group activities can include opportunities for students to express their aspirations and consider alternatives. Once a student has arrived at some clarity about his aspirations, the teacher can press the student to consider alternatives and then rank their current priority. Next, the student is asked to outline the pathway that will lead to the desired future states, leading back to this class. Finally, as the teacher differentiates learning tasks, she allows each student a choice in selecting among a few options. The teacher instructs students to select the option that is most consistent with the student's outlined pathway to reach her desired future state.

Teachers in schools that serve student populations in poverty, and often in cultural isolation, take on extraordinary challenges in fostering constructive mindsets, building student perceptions of self-efficacy, and elevating the value of learning by connecting it to personal goals and aspirations. Comparisons with other student subgroups (socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, for example) may be enlightening, but such comparisons may also distract school personnel from a sharp focus on the particular learning needs of their own students and their students' personal aspirations. Teachers' perceptions of a student's (or group of students') potential for learning affect their expectations for the students and their behavior in relationship with that student, but of equal (or perhaps greater) importance are a student's own aspirations and how these aspirations are heightened, clarified, and reinforced by that student's teachers and family.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What is your mindset about the malleability of intelligence and social competence?
2. What is the prevailing mindset of your colleagues about the malleability of intelligence and social competence?
3. What is the prevailing mindset of your students about the malleability of intelligence and social competence?
4. Do you see that some students are motivated by goals incompatible with their learning in school?
5. How do you help students clarify their aspirations and connect them to current learning goals?
6. How do you encourage students to value mastery for its own sake?
7. How do you individualize instruction to build each student's self-efficacy perception?



## Metacognitive Competencies

Being motivated to learn does not ensure that the student knows how to learn effectively and efficiently. Metacognition is thinking about thinking, knowing what one knows, previewing what is to be learned, selecting the right strategies for mastery, and responding to feedback by making adjustments in strategies. Teachers who model a metacognitive approach to learning by “thinking out loud” benefit students (Wirth & Aziz, 2010) by promoting the learner’s ability to know what he or she knows and to adapt learning strategies in order to reach desired ends. Cognitive research and “mind science” are producing new understandings about how a learner regulates learning activity, adjusts strategies, and solves problems. Samford University’s Stephen Chew, a psychologist and expert on metacognition, has created a series of videos to explicitly teach students effective metacognitive skills (Chew, 2011). In 2011, Chew was named U.S. Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

It is important here to distinguish between learning strategies (approaches to mastery) and learning styles or preferences (modes of learning, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic). Hattie concludes his review of learning styles and preferences in his 2009 research synthesis with this: “Learning strategies, yes; enjoying learning, yes; learning styles, no” (p. 197). Brophy (2004) is equally skeptical of learning styles and preferences as considerations for teachers. “I do not see validity in the claims made by those who urge teachers to assess their students with learning style inventories and follow up with differentiated curriculum and instruction,” Brophy writes. “The research bases supporting these urgings tend to be thin to nonexistent” (p. 345). Critics of learning styles and preferences, in addition to their assertion of the insufficient research for making such distinctions, express the need for students to exercise all of the available modes for learning rather than focusing on those assumed to be their preference.

The teacher builds students’ metacognitive competencies in three ways, by (a) modeling metacognitive processes through “thinking out loud,” questioning, and making appropriate attributions for success with mastery; (b) directly teaching learning strategies and including self-check routines into learning assignments; and (c) employing a variety of instructional modes to enable students to exercise multiple approaches to learning. In building students’ metacognitive competencies, the teacher is giving her students a gift that lasts a lifetime. A student, confident in his ability to tackle a learning task with a full quiver of strategies, possesses the sense of self-efficacy that enables him to persist toward mastery.

### Modeling, Questioning, and Attributions

When presenting a new topic or learning objective, the teacher might model metacognition by assuming a contemplative stance and voicing her thinking process in addressing it:

Let’s see, what do I already know about Ecuador before I try to understand its political system? Not much. Perhaps I should do a little research, maybe check out information on the Internet and review the chapter in the textbook. That would be a start. I will take some notes. I can highlight the parts about the political system. Then I can write a paragraph or two, in my own words, that will help me know if I am getting it.

The teacher can take a step beyond modeling by questioning students along the same lines:

So, we are learning about Ecuador’s political system. What do you already know about Ecuador? How might you find more information to increase your background knowledge? How will you sort out the information that applies to Ecuador’s political system? How will you work with this information and know that you have a good understanding of it?

Always the teacher attributes gains in understanding and mastery to effort and application of the right learning strategies. When recognizing a student's mastery or a student's struggle for mastery, the teacher is careful to not attribute the level of success to "smartness," but to hard work and wise selection of strategies.

### Directly Teaching Metacognitive Skills

To directly teach metacognitive skills, the teacher instructs students in various methods, such as accessing information, organizing material, taking notes, outlining, summarizing, determining what must be committed to memory, using mnemonic devices, self-checking for understanding, seeking help, and checking understanding with a peer. The teacher also incorporates tools into her assignments, such as a simple four-step approach:

1. **defining the task:** What am I expected to learn, and what do I already know?
2. **goal-setting:** How will I know when I have completed the task? What strategies will I apply?
3. **applying learning strategies:** How will I use research, practice, questions, memorization, outlining, and other strategies?
4. **monitoring:** What new information do I need? Is this a simple or difficult task? How do I approach it? How am I doing? Should I try a different strategy?

### Multiple Modes of Instruction

Varying the mode of instruction impacts the students' likely mastery of the content and exercises their learning strategies to build their skills with self-regulated learning. "When students do not learn in one method, it is more likely that it then needs to be re-taught using a different method; it will not be enough merely to repeat the same method again and again. We, as teachers, need to change if the students do not change in their learning" (Hattie, 2012, p. 96). The most common modes of instruction are:

- a. **teacher-directed**, whole class;
- b. **teacher-directed**, small group (typically homogeneous groupings);
- c. **student-directed**, small group (including peer-to-peer and cooperative learning);
- d. **technology-assisted** (which may be in combination with other modes);
- e. **independent** (individual assignments, with differentiation); and
- f. **homework** (including differentiated assignments).

It should be noted that the modes of instruction do not specify the nature of the assignment. For example, project-based learning typically resides within the modes of student-directed, small group, or independent work. Blended learning marries various modes with technology (online delivery) and differentiates through "some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace" (Staker & Horn, 2012, p. 3).

Employing multiple modes of instruction is also a means for expanding students' interest. Many students do not enter the classroom with a strong current interest in algebra, so how does the teacher help the student acquire an interest in the subject? One way might be to point out the algebraic algorithms that video gamers employ, thus banking on the student's current interest in video games. The value of algebra is enhanced by its association with video games. Now, if the teacher can discover such a trigger for each student, she is home free. Maybe. Playing the video game may still be more attractive than solving quadratic equations, especially if algebra doesn't come easily for the student. Seldom does such an attempt at relevance have a lasting effect.

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Of more lasting effect would be to increase the student's interest in algebra itself rather than relying on the connection to the student's current interest in video games. For some students, the distant aspiration of success in college may stir interest in algebra as a necessary stepping stone. But for most students, such distant goals have minimal facility in motivating learning today. Stimulating interest in algebra and igniting the motivation to lock into its rigors might be achieved through the following three methods, demonstrating an intentional mixture of instructional modes:

- 1. Explicit instruction in small doses.** Explicit instruction calls to mind the math teacher lecturing away while scratching formulas on the white board until the class has ended and then sending students home to work their problems. That is explicit instruction in a large dose, uninterrupted by opportunities for students to respond and get feedback. Explicit instruction in small doses is an efficient way to present new material, and it can be delivered by the teacher with enough concentrated flare to keep the students engaged. Some quick question-and-answer drills will drive home the points and check for understanding. Then it is time for point two, see below.
- 2. Small group and independent work.** Following each small dose of explicit instruction, students can be grouped for several purposes. The teacher might pull together a few students for a teacher-directed small group to reteach and check understanding. Student-directed small groups include simple dyads and triads for peer learning and larger groups for cooperative learning. Of course, the groups need specific assignments to focus their work on the new material. Differentiated, independent work assignments include paper-and-pencil practice and computer-based practice. Again, the assignment is connected to the small dose of new material. Homework is another form of independent work and can be differentiated based on the teacher's assessment of each student's level of mastery. Differentiation allows the teacher to elevate the difficulty of the assignment for more advanced students and provide building-block work for students struggling with mastery.
- 3. Incentives and progress tracking.** The body of psychological research provides guidance on how and why appropriate incentives, used to increase and sustain learners' efforts, can foster learning (Hanushek & Jorgenson, 1996). Internet-based programs, including the much touted Khan Academy, use badges to reward students for their accomplishments, much as a video game would do. Incentives tied to near-term accomplishments provide frequent feedback to the students and reward their success. Rewarding success contributes to the student's motivation toward mastery, an end in itself. Student progress tracking, with charts and graphs, another Khan Academy technique, provides its own reinforcement for accomplishment and contributes to metacognitive competencies. Student progress tracking is also a bridge from extrinsic rewards, such as badges, to the intrinsic reward of mastery for its own sake.

The three instructional methods described above are meant to stimulate interest and enhance goal attainment through an incremental progression of new learning, practice, mastery, and reward. This approach is well suited for breaking the ice in accommodating a student to subjects and topics that are not initially of great interest, ratcheting up the student's confidence through acknowledged mastery, and setting the stage for more expansive exploration. Once that plateau of student readiness has been achieved, larger projects that require self-direction and discovery may be introduced. Still, the teacher must detect when it is time to return to the basics, especially when introducing new content that is foundational to informed exploration. Thus, the teacher's facile alternation of multiple modes of instruction is effective instruction, reinforcement for

metacognitive skills, and a means to increase students' interest in the topic and motivation to persist in mastering it.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Do you intentionally plan lessons to include "thinking out loud" to model metacognition?
2. Do you include metacognitive skills in your instructional plans?
3. How do you vary your instructional modes and assignments to exercise students' metacognitive skills?
4. How important are verbal attributions in forming students' understanding that mastery comes from effort and strategy rather than "smartness"?

### Social and Emotional Competencies

Children differ in ways other than their personal aspirations and facility with learning, of course. They differ in their skills in navigating social situations, making decisions, managing their emotions, and dealing with frustration. The difference, however, is not due to innate characteristics, and social and emotional competencies can be taught and learned. Through a student's eyes, the challenges of school work may seem no more daunting, and no more important, than relationships with family and peers. The tug and drain of emotion can distort a student's perception of his world and the demands it places on him. Surely, personalized learning should address the most personal aspects of a student's development.

For every student whose life is burdened and constricted by life circumstances, another student displays a resiliency that overcomes all obstacles. We can learn from the resilient ones and aid the others with what we have learned. Murphy (1987), as cited in Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002), characterized a resilient youth as one who:

- builds bonds with adults and peers based on care and mutual concern;
- thinks for him- or herself and can solve problems creatively;
- can tolerate frustration and manage emotions;
- avoids making other people's problems one's own;
- shows optimism and persistence in the face of failure;
- resists being put down and sheds negative labels; and
- has a sense of humor and can "forgive and forget" (p. 106).

Martin Brokenleg and his colleagues at Reclaiming Youth International (see the website link in the References), in their work to reclaim at-risk youth, root their philosophy in Native American tradition and culture. Their Circle of Courage® is a model of youth empowerment supported by research and consistent with Native philosophies of child care. The model is encompassed in four core values: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The central theme of this model is that a set of shared values must exist in any community to create an environment that contributes to resiliency.

Knowing the characteristics of a resilient youth and the values of a school and community culture that fosters resiliency does not automatically translate into a formula for building resiliency in less resilient youth. These characteristics are laudable aims for all children and are consistent with social and emotional competencies as advanced by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Founded by Daniel Goleman in 1994 and now headed by Roger Weissberg, CASEL promotes evidence-based programs for social and emotional learning (SEL) and explicitly connects SEL to academic learning. According to CASEL:

SEL teaches the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively and ethically. These skills include recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. (2007, p. 1)

CASEL summarizes its aims as the pursuit of five core competencies:

- a. self-awareness;
- b. self-management;
- c. social awareness;
- d. relationship skills; and
- e. responsible decision-making (n.d.).

CASEL asserts that these competencies can be explicitly taught, reinforced through the school's culture, and evidenced in children's behavior.

Durlak and colleagues (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of research on social and emotional learning programs and their impact on academic as well as social and emotional learning. They found that schools' intentional implementation of evidence-based social and emotional learning programs not only improved social and emotional competencies but also yielded an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement. The study's authors outlined four conditions that are foundational to successful social and emotional programs and approaches:

1. peer and adult norms for high expectations and support for academic success;
2. caring, teacher–student relationships;
3. student engagement through the teacher's classroom management practices and cooperative learning; and
4. safe and orderly environments that teach, encourage, and reinforce positive behaviors.

Again, the teacher–student relationship is central to the advancement of social and emotional competencies, but that relationship must be evidenced in intentional, programmatic efforts to build and reinforce social and emotional skills. A school culture that provides an overlay of emphasis on the interrelationship and importance of academic, social, and emotional development enables individual teachers (and all teachers) to implement social and emotional learning in their classrooms.



### Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think about intentional fostering of values such as belonging, independence, mastery, and generosity?
2. How are social and emotional competencies taught and reinforced in your classroom?
3. What students of yours come to mind when you think of social and emotional barriers that inhibit their school learning and personal development?
4. How have you intentionally contributed to the social and emotional learning of particular students?

### Lesson Plan Template for Personalized Learning

Personalized learning is a concept advanced from the more fundamental ideas of individualization and differentiation. Individualized instruction is paced according to the learning needs of different learners, as in mastery learning (Bloom, 1971). Differentiated instruction is tailored to the interests and readiness of different learners and guided by what research shows is best for students like them (Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008). Personalized instruction encompasses both individualization and differentiation, adapting for both pace and approach. Personalized instruction also adapts learning objectives and content as well as method and pace, remaining cognizant of the objectives' relationship to content standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This practice guide expands upon this narrow definition of personalized learning by adding the elements of teacher–student–family relationships, motivation to learn (aspiration and self-efficacy), metacognitive competencies, and social and emotional competencies.

This practice guide introduces a definition and framework for personalized learning that includes five large concepts: relational suasion, motivation, metacognition, social and emotional learning, and differentiation. There is far more for teachers to know about these concepts than has been presented here. Personalized learning also requires a huge investment in the teacher's instructional planning, most efficiently achieved in highly functioning teacher instructional teams. This teaming requires significant training for the teachers, time for planning, and rigorous instructional systems and processes.

While teachers are boning up on the five concepts in the personalized learning framework and finding time for heavy-duty team planning, personalized learning can be jump-started in the school through the use of a lesson plan template. If teachers use the template to design one lesson a week, they get their feet wet with personalized learning and have experience to share with each other.

The following pages offer a template for teachers to apply in developing lesson plans that include key elements of personalized learning: (a) implications for the student's aspirations, (b) application of metacognitive skills, and (c) social and emotional aspects of learning. The lesson plans will include multiple instructional modes. This lesson plan template assumes the teacher has previously discussed the idea of personal aspirations with students and has established classroom management procedures for transitioning between instructional modes.

**Personalized Learning Lesson Template  
For a Lesson in Two 45-Minute Sessions  
With Explanations**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level or Course Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Lesson Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**Session 1**

**A. Defining and Aligning the Lesson**

<b>Standard(s) / Grade-level Benchmarks Addressed</b>	Short reference to standards/benchmarks addressed.
<b>Objective (Student will be able to . . . )</b>	Aligned with the standards/benchmarks.
<b>Criteria for Mastery</b>	How teacher and student will know that objective is met.
<b>Social/Emotional Learning</b>	Consider CASEL's five SEL competencies and/or RYI's four core values; how might one or more be intentionally addressed in this lesson? Consider the connection to the lesson's objective, your comments and instructions for students, the student-directed group activities. On other lessons, make an SEL objective the primary objective and connect to academic learning.

**B. Whole-Class Presentation and Engagement (20 minutes)**

	Notes
<b>Behavior Check (1 minute)</b>	Set the psychological climate in the classroom; cue students to focus in; reinforce attentive behaviors. Be sure homework has been collected. A behavior check may be repeated later in the class period to reinforce engaged learning.
<b>Review (1 minute)</b>	To connect prior learning with new learning, briefly review previous lessons as a bridge to the new lesson.
<b>Think (Story) (3 minutes)</b>	As a "hook" to stimulate interest in the topic, tell a brief story that includes a nugget of the lesson topic. A story includes one or more characters, sets the stage in the beginning, presents a problem in the middle, and resolves the problem in the end. At the end of the story, briefly state what the students will learn in this lesson—the objective.
<b>Know (10 minutes)</b>	Directly teach the lesson, "thinking out loud" to reveal your metacognitive strategies as you go. Pepper the presentation with a few questions to stimulate student engagement with the topic, but maintain an active pace.
<b>Show (5 minutes)</b>	Find out what students have learned and rehearse their learning through questions and responses, verbal drills, recitations, or a quiz game. Reiterate metacognitive strategies by asking students to self-check what they have learned.

**C. Student-Directed Groups of 3 Students Each (10 minutes)**

	Notes
<b>Purpose</b>	<p>In a student-directed group, the teacher provides the group of students with instructions, and the group does the work. The teacher will establish and explain the group's goal, and it will include the opportunity for each student to express how the lesson/topic of the day is useful to that student's personal aspirations. During group time, the teacher moves about the room, reinforcing positive group behaviors, clarifying the goal, but not intruding on the conversation. The teacher's instructions include the topic and goal to get started. The topic is related to the objective for the lesson. The goal is what the group is to achieve together. Consider the integration of social/emotional learning. It is a good idea for the goal to be a work product, such as a drawing or paragraph summary of the group's conclusions. However, there should be individual accountability determined for completion of the goal. Optimum work habits are reinforced by the teacher who monitors the progress while offering guidance, corrections, and coaching. Instructions may be written or given verbally.</p>
<b>Instructions</b>	
<b>Group Goal (Task/Product)</b>	

**D. Differentiated Independent Work (10 minutes): Student Choice**

	Notes
<b>Activity 1 Instructions</b>	<p>For this first session in the lesson, each student chooses one of three assignments. The assignments are differentiated by topic. The students are asked to select the assignment that is of most personal interest, which the teacher may explain is connected with the student's aspirations. Consider the integration of social/emotional learning. Work is collected and used as a formative assessment to determine teacher-assigned differentiation in session 2. The independent work may include technology-assisted work, pencil and paper, or other work done by the individual student.</p>
<b>Activity 2 Instructions</b>	
<b>Activity 3 Instructions</b>	



**E. Self-Check and Tracking (5 minutes)**

	Notes
<b>Instructions</b>	<p>The teacher restates the objective and asks each student to record in the student portfolio if he/she thinks he/she has mastered the objective. A simple chart to track for each objective:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I got it</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I need to learn more</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I need more help from the teacher</p> <p>In primary grades, the teacher may assist the student in checking the response on the chart, and the chart may be columns of symbols rather than words. In upper grades and high school, the teacher may institute a more sophisticated charting and graphing of mastery for each of the lessons/objectives.</p>

**F. Engaging the Family**

	Notes
<b>Purpose</b>	<p>The homework assignment for this lesson requires the student to interact with one or more adults in the home. A typical assignment would be to explain to the family member(s) the lesson of the day and the student's connection to his/her aspirations. Consider aspects of social and emotional learning. The next day, the student briefly notes in his/her portfolio the name(s) of the family member(s) and a reflection on the conversation. In primary grades, the teacher may ask students to tell about their conversations rather than record them.</p>
<b>Instructions</b>	

**Session 2****A. Whole-Class Presentation and Engagement (15 minutes) (Re-teaching)**

	Notes
<b>Behavior Check (1 minute)</b>	<p>Same steps in this presentation as in session 1, but briefer, re-teaching and hitting the high points.</p>
<b>Review (1 minute)</b>	
<b>Think (Story) (2 minutes)</b>	
<b>Know (8 minutes)</b>	
<b>Show (3 minutes)</b>	

**B. Student-Directed Groups of 3 Students Each (10 minutes)**

<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p><b>Instructions</b></p> <p><b>Group Goal (Task/Product)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Notes</p> <p>Mix the groups so that students are with different students than in session 1. Different activity than in session 1. Also consider the integration of social/emotional learning.</p>
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**C. Differentiated Independent Work (15 minutes): Teacher Assigned**

<p><b>Activity 1 (Enhanced)</b></p> <p><b>Activity 2 (Target)</b></p> <p><b>Activity 3 (Prerequisite)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Notes</p> <p>Based on teacher's observations and formative assessment from session 1, the teacher creates three activities, each aimed at the objective. The enhanced activity is for students showing early mastery; the target activity is for students showing adequate progress; and the prerequisite activity is for students needing a building step to reach target mastery. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to differentiate the three activities. The independent work may include technology-assisted work, pencil and paper, or other work done by the individual student. Also consider the integration of social/emotional learning. With additional preparation, the teacher may provide a choice of activities within each of the three groups. The work is collected, used as additional formative assessment, and may be counted toward the student's grade.</p>
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**D. Self-Check and Tracking (5 minutes)**

<p><b>Instructions</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Notes</p> <p>Same as in session 1. Then ask students to compare their results between the two sessions.</p>
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**E. Homework (Differentiated)**

<p><b>Assignment 1 (Enhanced)</b></p> <p><b>Assignment 2 (Target)</b></p> <p><b>Assignment 3 (Prerequisite)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Notes</p> <p>Based on teacher's observations and formative assessment from session 1, the teacher creates three assignments, each aimed at the objective. The enhanced assignment is for students showing early mastery; the target assignment is for students showing adequate progress; and the prerequisite assignment is for students needing a building step to reach target mastery. This may be graded work, depending upon the teacher's practices, and should be checked, marked with comments, and promptly returned to the students. The assignment may include technology-assisted work, pencil and paper, or other work done by the individual student.</p>
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**Personalized Learning Lesson Template**  
**For a Lesson in Two 45-Minute Sessions**  
**Completed by Teacher**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level or Course Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Lesson Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**Session 1**

**A. Defining and Aligning the Lesson**

<b>Standard(s) / Grade-level Benchmarks Addressed</b>	
<b>Objective (Student will be able to . . . )</b>	
<b>Criteria for Mastery</b>	
<b>Social/Emotional Learning</b>	

**B. Whole-Class Presentation and Engagement (20 minutes)**

	Notes
<b>Behavior Check (1 minute)</b>	
<b>Review (1 minute)</b>	
<b>Think (Story) (3 minutes)</b>	
<b>Know (10 minutes)</b>	
<b>Show (5 minutes)</b>	

**C. Student-Directed Groups of 3 Students Each (10 minutes)**

	Notes
<b>Purpose</b>	
<b>Instructions</b>	
<b>Group Goal (Task/Product)</b>	

**D. Differentiated Independent Work (10 minutes): Student Choice**

	Notes
<b>Activity 1 Instructions</b>	
<b>Activity 2 Instructions</b>	
<b>Activity 3 Instructions</b>	

**E. Self-Check and Tracking (5 minutes)**

	Notes
<b>Instructions</b>	

**F. Engaging the Family**

	Notes
<b>Purpose</b>	
<b>Instructions</b>	

## Session 2

### A. Whole-Class Presentation and Engagement (15 minutes) (Re-teaching)

	Notes
<b>Behavior Check (1 minute)</b>	
<b>Review (1 minute)</b>	
<b>Think (Story) (2 minutes)</b>	
<b>Know (8 minutes)</b>	
<b>Show (3 minutes)</b>	

### B. Student-Directed Groups of 3 Students Each (10 minutes)

	Notes
<b>Purpose</b>	
<b>Instructions</b>	
<b>Group Goal (Task/Product)</b>	

### C. Differentiated Independent Work (15 minutes): Teacher Assigned

	Notes
<b>Activity 1 (Enhanced)</b>	
<b>Activity 2 (Target)</b>	
<b>Activity 3 (Prerequisite)</b>	

**D. Self-Check and Tracking (5 mintes)**

	Notes
<b>Instructions</b>	

**E. Homework (Differentiated)**

	Notes
<b>Assignment 1 (Enhanced)</b>	
<b>Assignment 2 (Target)</b>	
<b>Assignment 3 (Prerequisite)</b>	

## Introducing the Lesson Plan Template

One way to introduce this lesson plan template in a school is to conduct a faculty workshop on personalized learning and explain the template. Then ask each teacher to use the template for one lesson each week. Based on this experience, teacher instructional teams may adapt the template and include its elements in their routine lesson planning processes. A follow-up workshop in which teachers share their experiences with the template is a valuable next step. This template is not meant to preclude the use of technology and blended learning techniques, which may be a part of any instructional mode.

## Beyond the Lesson Plan Template

On the way to more universal utilization of technology to personalize learning, the lesson plan template provides a step in the right direction. It also emphasizes the broader definition of personalized learning that calls for a multidimensional role for the teacher. The template allows for the use of technology without depending upon it. The template, in other words, is a means for building teacher understanding of the potential of personalized learning and immediately introducing important elements of personalized learning into classroom instruction.

The lesson plan template shows how to integrate several components of personalized learning into a conventional instructional format bound by the time parameters of class sessions and the curricular restraints of standards-based learning. The template serves as a bridge to greater personalization, but it falls short on three important elements of personalization: (1) true individualization rather than limited differentiation, (2) robust blended learning (inside and outside the school) that breaks down class-period and school-day time barriers, and (3) variation in pace of learning rather than variation in task. The template provides for only limited student choice and direction. The template also requires a great investment in teacher (and teacher team) planning time.

These shortcomings demonstrate why technology is seen as the great enabler for personalized learning. Instructional planning software adds significant efficiency to teachers' planning and allows for the management of individualized learning plans. Internet-based platforms for virtual learning give access to the student's personal portal, and through it to vast resources, from any location—school, home, public library, community center, for example. Instructional software that includes feedback algorithms adjust the pace and content of learning tasks in response to the student's ongoing work.

Though the lesson plan template prompts the teacher to intentionally vary the instructional mode, address social and emotional learning, and facilitate metacognitive competencies, the teacher's capacity for relational suasion and connection with each student (seeing through the student's eyes) is only structurally promoted and not ensured. Engaging the family through interactive homework assignments is a one-way interface with parents and gives the teacher only a glimpse at the family's "story." Greater use of technology to efficiently manage and individualize instruction frees the teacher to attend to the interpersonal dimensions of learning.

So, why offer a lesson plan template for personalized learning with such inherent deficiencies? As previously stated, the template introduces teachers to components of personalized learning within the constraints of a typical school schedule. The template allows for a considerable degree of personalization without technology, while opening the door for greater incorporation of digital learning within the conventional class period. In other words, the template is a bridge to rich, technology-assisted personalization, and it is a bridge that can be accessed immediately.

*Through the Student's Eyes* is a polemic, of sorts, an argument for caution in reaching solely for technological means for personalization. The role of the teacher can be enhanced with appropriate incorporation of technology in instruction, but it should not be diminished. The best of algorithms can serve up to a student a pathway to learning that nimbly reflects the student's interests and progress. But software cannot see into the student's eyes, press the student to tackle the uninteresting and expand interests, know the student's family, wipe a student's tear, wink a knowing response to a student's smile, or impress upon the student that someone important to him cares a great deal about him. Badges and smiley faces on the screen are weak substitutes for the teacher's knowing assurances. Would there be a Plato without a Socrates? Must something personal not also be interpersonal?

### **Comments and Suggestions**

The author encourages teachers and school leaders to provide feedback on this document and their experience with the lesson plan template.

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## Appendix: Social and Emotional Learning Indicators

The Social and Emotional Learning Indicators are applicable for any school. The indicators provide a convenient checklist by which a school can assess its current level of implementation of the practices and set objectives and plans for improvement.

### A. Leadership

**Effective Practice:** The principal and leadership team promote, plan, and evaluate social and emotional learning.

#### Indicators of Effective Practice

- a. The principal and school leadership team convey in written materials that promoting the social and emotional learning of all students is a school priority.
- b. The principal and school leadership team have established a multi-year plan for implementing planned, ongoing, coordinated programming for social and emotional learning.
- c. The school leadership team regularly looks at multiple measures (e.g., behavior data, aggregated classroom observation data, and school climate surveys of staff, students, and parents) and uses this data to make decisions about student social and emotional learning.
- d. The principal acts to ensure that learning outcomes include social and emotional learning objectives.
- e. The principal regularly monitors implementation of evidence-based social-emotional programs.
- f. The principal celebrates individual, team, and school successes, especially related to student academic and social-emotional learning outcomes.

### B. Professional Development

**Effective Practice:** The school provides to the staff professional development on evidence-based approaches to promote social and emotional learning.

#### Indicators of Effective Practice

- a. Professional development for the school staff includes social and emotional learning objectives, skills, strategies, and conditions for learning.
- b. Professional development includes on-site coaching for teachers who implement classroom-based instruction for social and emotional learning.

### C. Teaching and Learning

**Effective Practice:** Teachers and teacher teams plan, implement, and assess student mastery of social and emotional learning objectives.

#### Indicators of Effective Practice

- a. The school has established a formal assessment system to track students' social-emotional skill development over time.
- b. Instructional teams use student data that show current levels of mastery of social-emotional objectives to plan social-emotional skill instruction.
- c. All teachers are guided by a document that aligns social-emotional objectives, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

- d. Instructional teams develop units of instruction that include social and emotional learning objectives at all grade levels.
- e. Instructional teams integrate strategies and materials to enhance social and emotional learning across academic areas of instruction (e.g., language arts, social studies, physical education, arts).
- f. All teachers seek student input about their interests in topics as a way to increase motivation to learn.
- g. All teachers use learning activities aligned with social and emotional learning objectives to meet the individualized learning needs of all students.
- h. All teachers work collaboratively with students to develop and ensure classroom rules and procedures.
- i. All teachers use misbehavior as an opportunity to re-teach and reinforce previous social-emotional skill instruction.
- j. All teachers model, teach, and reinforce social and emotional competencies.

#### **D. Learning Environment**

**Effective Practice:** The entire school community supports social and emotional learning through communication, education, and association of its members.

##### **Indicators of Effective Practice**

- a. The school has a vision or mission statement that supports a learning environment that is emotionally safe and conducive to learning.
- b. The principal promotes a sense of community, cooperation, and cohesion among teachers and staff to support the work of learning.
- c. Staff interactions in all meetings (staff, problem solving, committees, planning, conferences, etc.) and in the instructional setting reflect a climate of trust, respect, and collaboration that is focused on norms and adult social and emotional competencies.
- d. The school's discipline policy outlines developmentally appropriate consequences, endorses positive behavior management strategies, and guides teachers in using misbehavior as an opportunity to reinforce social-emotional learning concepts and skills.
- e. The school's compact outlines the responsibilities/expectations of teachers, parents, and students.
- f. All staff members cultivate positive relations among students and teachers to promote student motivation and higher levels of engagement in academics and school life.
- g. The student report card shows student progress toward meeting the social-emotional learning objectives.
- h. Students are encouraged to apply their social and emotional skills in co-curricular activities.





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