

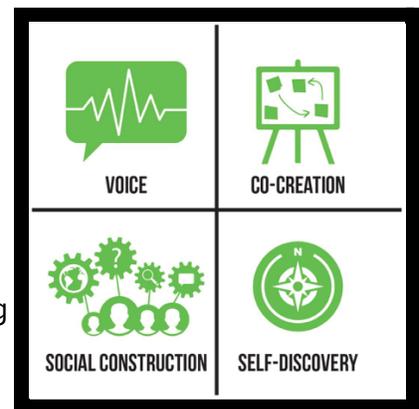
Four Attributes To Grow a Personalized Learning Culture

By Bena Kallick and Allison Zmuda

What we value in a culture is reflected in its language, feelings, behaviors, and actions. We often live by the metaphors that we use. So, for example, when we use metaphors such as “in the trenches” we are signaling a combative culture. Whereas, if we use such metaphors as “inventing” or “innovating”, we are bringing forward not just thoughts of survival but also thoughts of our capacity to creatively face our challenges.

As we continue to interact with educators from around the globe, we continue to look for the ecological metaphor as it is represented in the signs and signals of their schools. When a school is growing a continuously personalized learning environment, we look for indicators and opportunities for the adults as well as the students to express their voice, co-create and design, recognize the significance of socially constructing learning, and discover who they are as learners.

- VOICE: Increasingly more open to share their thinking
- CO-CREATION: Thinking interdependently to construct and take actions on ideas
- SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION: Building networks and connections to seek out and share expertise
- SELF DISCOVERY: Reflecting on learning and gaining insights through self-knowledge



Kallick and Zmuda (2017)

As we consider these four attributes, new metaphors spring to mind such as a system of inventors, entrepreneurs, discoverers, gardeners. When we say we want to personalize learning, we need to create a culture that is personal, relational, and encourages each member of the school community to aspire for an environment that harvests the seeds of ideas and nurtures them to grow with an eye to the future of the entire culture as well as to the benefit of each individual. We suggest that these four attributes serve as a catalyst for attending to a culture for personalized learning with Habits of Mind. We celebrate the inclusion, equity, and respect that is demonstrated as we observe the struggle of transforming the practices that will sustain such a culture.



VOICE

In a personalized learning culture, each member is seen as a respected and valued participant; they are the stewards of their own learning.

- Empowerment comes from an environment in which students recognize the power of their own ideas and recognize the shift that can happen by being exposed to others' ideas. Regular participation and engagement in co-creating performances and actions constitutes an opportunity for students to flex their innovative and creative muscles.
- In a personalized learning culture, educators, family and community members are invited to share their perspectives on new initiatives, participate in focus groups in which they hear their own thinking as well as the thinking of others, and offer new ideas to be considered. The atmosphere is one of discourse in which multiple perspectives are encouraged. The community learns and appreciates the complexity of adhering to the values and mission of the school as an organization.
- Reflective prompts to consider:
 - In what ways do you invite students to express their thoughts and opinions?
 - In what ways do you create an environment of safety for students to respectfully disagree with one another (and you)?
 - In what ways do you give students the opportunity to advocate for a position?
 - In what ways do you encourage students to raise questions that are skeptical or out of the box?



Co-creation is an invitational act — one that signifies respect and trust in others at the design table. They are the actors not merely the recipients of innovation, adaptations and change. This suggests a collaborative relationship among learners when they sit down at the design table to imagine, strategize, and draft new ideas and actions.

- Learners are invited to co-create a personalized plan using “backward design” principles. The learner can work with the teacher to develop a challenge, problem, or idea, clarify what is being measured (*learning goals*), envision the product or performance (*task*) with key criteria, and/or outline a plan to be successful on that performance so that the desired results are achieved (*learning actions*).
Co-creation can extend throughout all aspects of schooling, when, for example, they set the rules of engagement or help to design the spaces in which they work.
- Community is invited to become a part of the design of innovative projects. They offer support, generate expansion of ideas, and make connections to external resources.
- Reflective prompts to consider:
 - To what extent do you provide choice for students in WHAT they can pursue (e.g., question, topic, or idea)?
 - To what extent do you provide choice for students in HOW they can pursue it (e.g., collaboration with peers, consulting outside expertise, seeking out and using resources)?
 - To what extent do you provide choice to learners for HOW they demonstrate learning (e.g., selection of forms for performance, public vs. private audience)?
 - To what extent do you provide the opportunity for learners to develop checkpoints and monitor progress in relation to their goal?
 - To what extent do you create exhibitions for learners that focus on what they learned — about the topic and about themselves?



Learners build ideas through relationships with others as they theorize, investigate, and develop in pursuit of a common goal. There is real power in feeling that you are not alone, a sense of camaraderie when you are working to cause a change, create a performance, or build a prototype. The synergy of individual bits of knowledge, ideas and actions that produce a bigger impact that is so much larger than that of one individual is magical.

- Social construction occurs as learners seek out information, ideas, and perspectives to guide task development by consulting experts or peers who have intimate knowledge of the topic and using others as a sounding board to work through ideas or roadblocks. Learners also share the results of their work— their creations, synthesis, and conclusions — to guide others, illustrate thinking, and offer perspectives.
- Educators and community members see the value of collaboration as they move forward in this journey. They reach out for expertise, realizing that they won't know what they don't know. They work to define what they mean using descriptive language rather than labels and acronyms. That clarity helps the group remain clear and true to their goals. Including community increases the possibilities for relationships, engagement with outside resources, and deeper understanding.
- Reflective prompts to consider:
 - In what ways do you encourage students to seek others to help give their work more meaning?
 - In what ways do you offer opportunities for students to seek outside of the expertise that is within the classroom?
 - In what ways do you provide students with the opportunities to test their ideas and see whether they hold up to the scrutiny of other's perspectives?



SELF-DISCOVERY

Learners need to know enough about themselves to be able to make wise decisions as they navigate through the turbulence of a rapidly changing environment. This comes about as learners uncover how they navigate through the challenges they've set for themselves: how they start making sense of a problem or how they generate an idea, how they handle the frustration of not getting it quite right for the umpteenth time, and how they work through revisions or dead ends by analyzing what happened. They develop the capacity to articulate areas of strength and concern and view this as a proactive opportunity to grow.

- Our ultimate aim is for learners to become self-directed and capable of managing themselves in a variety of situations. Learners come to understand themselves and their learning process. They envision more about what they might want to do in the world now and in their future. They reflect on the development of ideas, skill-sets, knowledge, and performances to help envision what might come next.
- Educators learn more about themselves as they continuously are challenged by new ideas, technologies, and diverse populations. The community learns alongside the educators as they discover more about themselves as much as they discover how the system adheres to its values and mission.
- Reflective prompts to consider:
 - In what ways do you provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their learning and how it affects who they are becoming as a learner?
 - In what ways do you provide the opportunity for students to know more about the ways that they learn best?
 - In what ways do you provide the opportunity for students to see the growth of their work over time?
 - To what extent do you create exhibitions for student performances or products that focus on what they learned — about the topic and about themselves?