

Element 9

Personal Learning & Adaptive Groupings

Many learning systems deliver personalised learning. This is essentially pre-arranged learning rather than something a learner directs themselves. The Learnlife model constructs an ecosystem where learners are guided to become self-determined, by directing themselves - something truly personal. Agile groups are created to help support a learner's immediate needs to guide them towards self-determination.



Personal Learning and Adaptive Grouping

Traditional learning systems continue to deliver a learning style that might be best described as learning done to the student. Students sit at desks and content is delivered to them in a teacher-at-the-front scenario. This is personalised, pre-arranged learning, decided by someone else rather than the students themselves. The success of this control model depends largely on the interest that the learner has in the content and whether the learning style engages them. Learning however, should never be based on luck.

For learning to truly reflect the needs of every individual, students must be empowered to decide on what best suits their interests. Moving from a control to empowerment model for learning supports the development of the skills and competencies required to succeed in the 21st century and can foster learning throughout one’s life. Educators in a new learning paradigm must consciously and strategically make this shift so learning is placed into the hands of the individual.

The role of content as the central focus for learning in the 21st century is fast-changing. We live in a world where technology enables us to access any information we wish and where machines can out-smart humans with their ability to store information. This means learning must shift priority from content acquisition to skills and competencies. Content remains relevant but becomes a by-product of the overall learning process.

Learners must develop the skills and competencies that are lifelong, equitable and transferable in multiple contexts. This includes soft skills; intelligence that machines cannot develop and those which humans must cultivate to outsmart their information-counterparts. This will best prepare students for a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world, and one where agility is essential to success.

A learning community in a new learning paradigm must shift its focus from control to empowerment. This is a delicate process requiring skilled professionals to work closely with learners to ensure their needs are consistently met. The ultimate goal would be to empower learners to become self-determined; where learners set the course for their own lifelong learning journey.

Every learner is on their own unique pathway and a learning community must facilitate these needs using adaptive groups where students are supported in whatever those needs might be. Agile groups guide individuals towards self-determined learning because, although learning in a new paradigm should be highly personal, becoming a lifelong learner requires a collaborative community with a clear, shared vision for overall success, where each of its unique students can succeed.

Then	Now
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The educator controlled the learning experience. • Every learner learnt the same content, in a teacher-at-the-front scenario. • Learning was designed by the teacher. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners are empowered to develop the skills needed for lifelong learning. • Students use technology and the learning community to support their personal learning journey. • Students can design their own learning, guided and mentored by experts.

Starting Questions

1. Do you believe that the current learning model is fit for purpose?

2. Does your learning community control or empower its learners? Or, do you believe improvements could be made towards empowering your students? What might they be?
3. How is your learning community set up to offer support in a variety of forms for your students?
4. How much agency do you give the students in your learning community in designing their own learning experiences?
5. Are the learning groups in your learning community fixed or agile?

Key Initial Actions

1. Ensure all learning experiences begin with 'why'. For effective learning to occur, learners must firstly understand their purpose or their 'why'.
2. Create a learning community where key actors design and deliver learning programmes that foster the critical skills for self-determined, lifelong learning.
3. Make sure all students are clear of their learning goals and have a good idea of how they can reach them.
4. Create a culture of SMART goals for learning. Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic and Time-defined. Goals should be easily attached to these criteria.

On-going Actions

1. Make sure students are aware of all the resources available to them. This is not just tangible materials, but should include a collaborative support network, experts, digital resources or help from educators.
2. Empower learners to consider the most appropriate learning pathway to suit the tasks they undertake.
3. Develop a learning culture that supports every single learners' needs. This means that educators must understand and be able to implement learning experiences that encompasses pedagogy to heutagogy (self-determined learning).
4. Ensure the learning community supports a culture of self-reflection. Learners must actively and continuously evaluate their learning. Evaluation can happen in any number of ways - alone, in group contexts, guidance from learning guides, experts and parents.

Further Reading

[Rethinking Education: Self-Directed Learning Fits the Digital Age](#)

[Autodidact: 8 Reasons Why You Need To Become a Self-Taught Master](#)

[The Difference Between Pedagogy, Andragogy, And Heutagogy](#)

[15 Examples of Student-Centered Teaching](#)

[15 Ways of the Successful Self-Directed Learner](#)

[How to Put Self-Directed Learning to Work in Your Classroom](#)

[Children in Charge: Self-Directed Learning Programs](#)

[How to Help Students Become Self-Directed](#)

[How to Create your own Self-Directed Learning Plan](#)

Watch

[Most Likely to Succeed: A Film About What School Could Be](#)

Find out More

Delivering a truly personal learning model fit for 21st century purposes, requires a shift in pedagogical design and delivery - from control to empowerment.

The control paradigm for learning was a model that served society from the industrial revolution to pre-internet times, when knowledge acquisition was facilitated through the dissemination of content. From post-internet to the present day, technology now enables individuals access to any information they wish. Machines continue to replace humans as the more effective purveyor of information, therefore the need to learn and store content to succeed in today's society is fast diminishing.

The challenge for 21st century learning is to strengthen the role humans will play in a changing economy.

The brief video clip below featuring business magnate and philanthropist Jack Ma, highlights the challenges we face:

[Jack Ma: World Economic Forum](#)

'If we do not change the way we teach, thirty years from now we will be in trouble.'

Jack Ma, World Economic Forum 2018

The aptitudes learners ought to acquire must include critical areas such as creative thinking, problem-solving, leadership, teamwork and self-management. Learners must develop skills and competencies that are lifelong, equitable and transferable in multiple contexts.

'What century will your students enter on their first day of school?'

Anonymous

Key Ideas

1. If learning is to become more personal and support a pathway towards self-determined, lifelong learning, then there needs to be a deliberate shift to support it.

2. Self-determined learners possess several observable attributes.
3. The role of the educator must change to facilitate and support the development of self-determined, lifelong learning.
4. Adaptive groups can provide a learning community with a network that fosters the development of self-determined, lifelong learning.

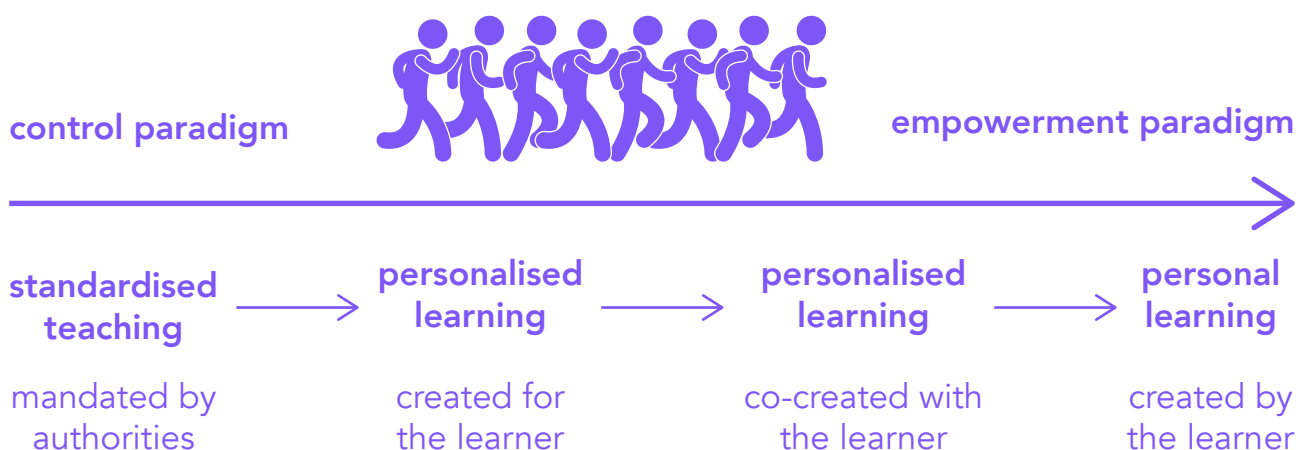
Questions

- How does the learning community adequately prepare its students for life after formal education?
- Does the learning community deliberately help its students to foster the skills to become a self-determined, lifelong learner?
- Is learning in the community highly personal to each individual? Do they have opportunities to choose what they want to learn and how they want to learn it?
- How does the learning community create adaptive groups to support learning to suit each individual in any context?
- If educators were, for whatever reason not available, would the students in the community have the autonomy to learn on their own?

1. If learning is to become more personal and support a pathway towards self-determined, lifelong learning, then there needs to be a deliberate shift to support it.

The infographic below illustrates the overarching goal for the journey of learning at Learnlife: *Making learning personal*

Schools talk about personalised learning. *Learnlife* does too. But it is the starting point. Personalised learning is something that is done to you. Personal learning is when you can choose and create the best plan for yourself.



If learning is to become authentic, personal and self-determined by nature, deliberate shifts from teacher-centred pedagogy, to andragogy, then to heutagogy - a method where learners are placed at the centre of their own learning - must occur. This process requires considerable understanding of the unique development of every learner from both the individual and educator's perspective, with the acknowledgement that all individuals are in unique stages of development.

The table below highlights the stages of progression and implications on key aspects of learning:

Control  **Empowerment**

	Personalised learning	Personalising learning	Self-determined learning
Learning method	<i>Pedagogy</i> 'Top-down' learning with the educator controlling the learning experience.	<i>Andragogy</i> An adult-focused method where learners can participate in directing their own learning.	<i>Heutagogy</i> Self-determined learning that focuses on the importance of knowing how to learn in order to foster autodidactic, lifelong learning.
Dependence	Educator-led, where dependence is decided by the educator.	Dependence is decided with the educator.zvv	Learner is entirely autonomous.
Resources for learning	Educator decides on the most effective resources.	Educator and learner decide on resources together.	Learner decides on resources independently.
Motivation to learn	Externally provided by educator & parents etc.	Educator & parents etc work with the learner to motivate them.	Learner motivation is entirely self-driven.
Reason to learn	Educator creates learning experiences for learners to advance to the next stage.	Learner and educator discuss reasons to learn in each context.	Learner self-efficacy drives learning through self-driven passion and purpose.

Role of educator	Design learning experiences.	Design learning experiences with the learner.	Develop learner capacity to learn independently.
Learning focus	Content and subject-driven, and prescribed by educator.	Learning is decided by both the educator and learner.	Learner creates Individual, creative, innovative, dynamic & self-determined learning experiences.
Learning structure	Highly structured, controlled by educator.	Learner and educator structure to best suit learning needs.	Learner independently structures their own learning to best suit their needs.
Collaborative and adaptive group learning	Educator decides and organises group learning scenarios and activities.	Educator and learner decides and organises group learning scenarios and activities.	Learner enters collaborative and group learning scenarios at will to support their learning or support others.
Evaluation of learning	Educator disseminates feedback measured on performance related to content.	Educator and learner discuss learning outcomes and feedback is delivered in a shared manner.	Learners are self-reflective, capable of evaluating their own learning. They also seek feedback from others to grow their learning.

2. Self-determined learners possess several observable attributes.

If time spent with learners is finite, then the impact educators have must continue beyond those periods of direct contact. The skills a self-determined learner possesses must set the course for lifelong learning after the years spent in formal education settings, and educators are crucial to cultivating those skills.

'Self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.'

Malcolm Knowles

The following paragraphs describe the specific attributes that a self-determined learner possesses:

Autonomy

Self-determined learners are masters of directing their own learning. They are motivated by self-interest, know what their purpose is and seek learning opportunities to cultivate it. They are able to apply relevant critical thinking skills for deep inquiry, judging the credibility of information and their own learning by assessing both their impact and validity. Self-determined learners are self-aware and can deploy any number of learning methods to suit their context.

A love for learning

Self-determined learners love learning. It is their passion, and they possess the capacity through this passion to strive towards mastery. They thrive on the process of learning and know it is not entirely about reaching a successful outcome, but rather the journey that the learning takes them on. They are inspired by the pursuit of knowledge, are curious, and are constantly seeking out new challenges or problems to solve.

Organisation

Self-determined learners are meticulous planners. They understand the importance of goal setting, yet remain agile and willing to amend if and when required. They can arrange their own learning tasks, set their own deadlines and manage their own time. They also seek out and utilise any learning resources they might need.

Self-discipline

Self-determined learners are masters of self-initiative and motivation. They are intrinsically motivated by the internal rewards they gain from pursuing their learning passion, and their effort transcends the approval of others. They are extrinsically motivated and willing to learn anything that will enhance their overarching purpose and passion for learning. Self-determined learners possess a combination of grit and resilience, and a growth mindset to keep striving.

Effective communication

Self-determined learners can communicate their learning using a variety of methods. They are equally skilled at applying talking, listening, reading or writing skills and can use their guiding senses or emotional intelligence to ensure effective communication with others. They can communicate independently, interdependently, collaborate and seek help from others when necessary.

Champions of self-reflection

Self-determined learners never cease to self-reflect. They are capable of self-reflecting independently, yet seek feedback from others to enhance the reflection process. They are not dissuaded by constructive criticism and use it to amend and enhance their future decision-making to grow their learning capacity. They are willing to revisit aspects of their learning which require improvement and can self-monitor to make the appropriate amendments.

The short Ted talk below, offers an accurate description of the skills and behaviours of a self-determined learner, and why it is becoming more crucial in today's global society.

[Sean Bengry Ted Talk: The Revolution of Self-Directed Learning](#)

3. The role of the educator must change to facilitate and support the development of self-determined, lifelong learning.

Educators are a critical, fundamental support and guide for each learner, and crucial to influencing and promoting self-determined learning. Their impact is felt in every area that influences learning experiences. The statements below highlight the key areas of influence that educators have on self-determined learning:

In the learning community

The learning community is set up to create an inclusive, growth-oriented community to suit every individual. Educators set it up to foster the independence of every individual by empowering them to use it to suit their learning needs.

Learning styles

Educators design learning experiences to develop the key skills required to become self-determined. They put the onus on the learner to take action and responsibility for their learning through; active listening, active learning, active engagement, active self-reflection, active ownership and the active application of skills. Educators empower learners to 'learn how they learn' to foster autonomy.

'A teacher does not have to give any answers, the answers are everywhere. Learners who find answers for themselves retain it better than if they are told the answer.'

Sugata Mitra

Feedback

Research by John Hattie highlights feedback as one of the most powerful influences for advancing learning¹. Feedback delivered in the correct way has a profound influence on helping to shape a strong learning culture and cultivating pathways to self-determination. The following statements encapsulate what feedback should look like in a learning ecosystem committed to lifelong, self-determined learning:

- Feedback includes growth mindset language.
- Learners continuously self-reflect about their approaches to learning.
- Feedback is a never-ending process.
- Coaching and mentoring styles are used to guide learners to take ownership.
- Appropriate questioning is used to encourage learners to figure out problems for themselves.

4. Adaptive groups can provide a learning community with a network that fosters the development of self-determined, lifelong learning.

Becoming autonomous does not happen by just learning solo. It happens through the influence of others, so using adaptive groups will benefit all learners at various times.

¹ John Hattie and Helen Timperley, 2007. 'The power of feedback' in Review of Educational Research: 81.

Adaptive group collaboration enables learners to build key relational skills that are fundamentally important to effective learning. Peer learning opportunities in groups enable the sharing of ideas and exposure to key skills and competencies by observing others and through demonstration. A body of research indicates that the best learning occurs in peer situations, therefore learners must support each other to optimise learning outcomes.

The Learnlife model provides an agile ecosystem where individual and adaptive group learning opportunities depend on unique individual needs. Learning guides use previous evaluations and professional judgements to encourage and guide individuals to engage in adaptive group learning when required.

Adaptive groups enable learners to collaborate in a rich network that supports them. Learning guides coach and mentor learners on the most effective ways they can use adaptive groups. They encourage self-determined learners to support all learners in the community. Self-determined learners gain vital collaborative learning experiences and skills during these interactions.

'The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, "The children are now working as if I did not exist.'

Maria Montessori

The short animation video below, explains the impact a collaborative network has on learning, and how capturing and sharing learning is critical to inspiring self-determined learning: [Continuous Learning explained by Charles Jenning](#)

Building a community that cultivates self-determined learning skills, and designing and delivering learning programmes inspired to support heutagogy, offers an equitable platform which enables learners to continue on a lifelong learning path beyond formal education and long into their future.

'Collective autonomy has more impact than individual autonomy. Or, to put it another way, the social capital of the group and how it works together adds value to the accumulated human capital of individuals.'

Andy Hargreaves

It is a marathon, not a sprint.

“Education is really aimed at helping students get to the point where they can learn on their own.”

Noam Chomsky

Act Now

Creating a learning culture to support self-determination and adaptive group learning requires input from the learner and educator. The interrelationship between the two must be highly effective. Learners and educators must understand and trust one another to create an emerging learning culture that promotes heutagogy and self-determination.

Below is an action plan from the point of view of the learner and educator. Any learning community implementing personal learning and adaptive group programmes should ensure both are given full consideration.

Learner

1. Start with why

For effective learning to occur, learners must firstly understand their purpose or their 'why' for learning.

2. Take initiative

Learners must be motivated intrinsically or extrinsically when they set out on a new learning endeavour. Understanding why they are learning something will increase initiative. Learning through individual passion and purpose automatically injects initiative into learning.

3. Set goals and diagnose learning needs

Planning for learning is a critical component to reaching a successful conclusion. In planning, individuals should be clear of their learning goals and have a good idea of how they can reach them. The plan should remain agile to allow for new ideas and opportunities to emerge.

SMART goals

The best self-determined learners set SMART goals. SMART is an acronym that

stands for Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic and Time-defined. Goals should be easily attached to these criteria.

4. Choose the best resources

Learners should consider the resources they might use before initiating a task. Resource planning attaches creative thinking to learning and helps individuals to consider new learning pathways. Resources for learning are not just tangible materials, but might include a collaborative support network or experts, digital resources or help from educators.

5. Implement appropriate learning strategies

Learners should consider the most appropriate learning pathway to suit the tasks they undertake. The more independent a learner is, the better equipped they will be to implement their learning strategies. A good place to start is with the question - how might I communicate my learning? Answering this might enable learners to consider the talking, listening, reading and writing skills they can apply to communicate their learning.

Furthermore, learners might want to apply design thinking, problem-solving, critical thinking or decision-making processes. Understanding and applying appropriate active listening, learning, engagement, reviewing, ownership and active application of learning skills will improve outcomes. Finally, learning how to learn increases autonomy.

6. Find a learning network to collaborate with

A supportive network improves learning. Learners should actively involve themselves in the learning community and seek out individuals who might assist them in developing their skills or competencies. Learners should also actively involve themselves in helping others requiring support.

7. Self-reflect

Learners must actively and continuously evaluate their learning. Evaluation can happen in any number of ways - alone through self-reflection, in group contexts, guidance from learning guides, experts and parents.

Educator

1. Build student enthusiasm

Educators must initially develop positive relationships to inspire enthusiasm for learning. This means building the rapport and trust to help learners navigate them-

selves towards what their learning passions are and inspiring them to go deep into potential areas of interest.

2. Evaluate learners

Educators should continually monitor and evaluate the behaviours and skills of the learners in their community. They should collaborate with their professional peers to create a forum for discussion around individual learners. This ensures all learners in the ecosystem are best understood and that their pastoral and learning needs can be addressed.

3. Create a learning community that fosters self-determined learning

Educators must design and deliver learning programmes that foster the critical skills for self-determined, lifelong learning. They must consider the equitable skills and competencies that individuals need to learn throughout their lifetime.

Adaptive groups should be agile and serve the overarching purpose of learner growth, not just used as an organisational function. No longer should an individual learner be placed in a group that is a 'fixed' position for them. Learners should be encouraged to decide how they can best use adaptive groups and collaborative networks to grow their learning.

4. Provide effective feedback

Educators must provide learners with feedback that promotes and encourages the skills of self-determined learning. Adopting growth mindset language when delivering feedback and using coaching and mentoring strategies can facilitate learner autonomy. Feedback should always encourage a continued desire to learn.

5. Reflect

The 21st century educator, like today's learner, will witness monumental changes in education throughout their career. To meet those challenges and to stay relevant, they must be willing to join their learners on the self-directed, lifelong learning pathway, requiring continued reflection to succeed. Just like learners, educators should be in the habit of considering how their actions and interactions impact on learning. They should practice what they preach and adopt the actions and behaviours they actively encourage.

Examples in Action

Below is a list of schools, organisations and individuals who champion and inspire self-determined, lifelong learning.

Schools

[Democratic Schools](#)

'Children are beautifully designed, by nature, to direct their own education. Coercive schooling is not good for children. Real alternatives already exist and have been proven to work.'

[Sudbury School](#)

The students, members of the school community, are trusted to manage their time and make their own decisions. At the same time, all members of the community are given full responsibility over their own lives, and an equal share in responsibility for the school as a whole, by means of the school's democratic framework.

[A typical day in a Sudbury School](#)

[High Tech High](#)

High Tech High is guided by four connected design principles—equity, personalization, authentic work, and collaborative design—that set aspirational goals and create a foundation for understanding our approach.

Organisations

[Khan Academy](#)

A nonprofit whose mission is to provide a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere.

[The Alliance for Self-Directed Education - Bush Foundation](#)

Organization dedicated to informing people about the benefits of, and methods for, allowing children and adolescents to direct their own education. The Alliance's ultimate goal is a world in which Self-Directed Education (SDE) is embraced as a cultural norm and is available to all children, everywhere, regardless of their family's status, race, or income.

[Danone: One Learning a Day](#)

Video from Danone which demonstrates the power of collaboration to deliver individual learning paths in a new digital age.

Self-determined Learners - Autodidacts

[Barbara Oakley Ted Talk - Learning how to Learn](#)

Inspiring Ted Talk which offers insight into the journey of becoming a self-determined learner.

[Leonardo da Vinci](#)

Polymath whose areas of interest included invention, drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, science, music, mathematics, engineering, literature, anatomy, geology, astronomy, botany, paleontology and cartography. Da Vinci is one of the truest examples of self-determined, lifelong learning.

[Malcolm Knowles](#)

A champion of andragogy, self-direction in learning and informal adult education.

Further reading

[Education and the Fourth Industrial Revolution](#)

[Most Likely to Succeed: A Film About What School Could Be](#)

[Rethinking Education: Self-Directed Learning Fits the Digital Age](#)

[Autodidact: 8 Reasons Why You Need To Become a Self-Taught Master](#)

[15 Examples of Student-Centered Teaching](#)

[The Difference Between Pedagogy, Andragogy, And Heutagogy](#)

[Independent studies: unit planning decision guide](#)

[15 Ways of the Successful Self-Directed Learner](#)

[7 habits of the best self-directed learners](#)

[20 Steps Towards More Self-Directed Learning](#)

[Self-Directed Learning: A Four-Step Process](#)

[How to Put Self-Directed Learning to Work in Your Classroom](#)

[How Great Coaches Ask, Listen, and Empathize](#)

[Blooming teachers](#)

[Children in Charge: Self-Directed Learning Programs](#)

[How to Help Students Become Self-Directed](#)

[How to Create your own Self-Directed Learning Plan](#)

