Superintendent's HOPE Note - December 2020

"You can only grow if you're willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new."

-Brian Tracy

What is LEARNER AGENCY?

COVID-19 has drastically increased the need for virtual learning, independent of teacher oversight. This means that now, more than ever, students need to have agency in and ownership of their learning if they are to be successful. So what is learner agency? Learner agency refers to learning through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests, and often self-initiated with appropriate guidance from teachers. To put it simply, learner agency gives learners voice and often, choice, in how they learn.
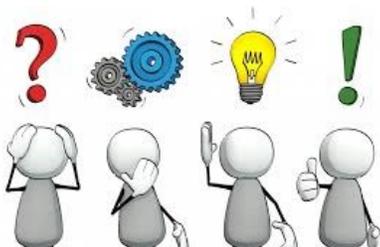
An STSD Example of Learner Agency

Our Middle School Learners

Middle school learners took the Measure of Academic Proficiency (MAP) test at the start of the school year as part of the customized learning pilot. Learners were originally assigned to core courses and placed on a learning progression based upon how they performed on the MAP test.

Once learners realized that they controlled how quickly they moved through their individual learning progressions, some asked to retake the MAP assessment in order to demonstrate what they truly knew. Wait...what??

These students had not taken the MAP assessment seriously in September. Instead, they rushed through it, viewing it as just another assigned task. Once they experienced how their **effort** impacted their **learning** and more importantly their ability to move forward, they felt **empowered** to take charge of their learning. They wanted to prove that they could **earn** a more **rigorous** placement within the learning progression.

Let me be clear, these students do *not* represent all of our middle school learners, but it is a GREAT first step! It proves that students *can* take control of their own learning when we **invite them to become genuine partners in the conversation!**

"When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

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Resources on Learner Agency and Ownership

- **What if students controlled their learning? (Video)** Keep an open mind while watching this one

- **Three Characteristics of Learner Agency (Video)**

- **The Theory of Learner Agency (Document)**

Evidence of Leaner Agency

Until we invite learners into the conversation about their own learning, we will continue to struggle to engage and motivate them. Grades do not motivate most learners. Research suggests that **autonomy**, **purpose** and **mastery** motivate us all (Pink, 2009). Learners are no different.

Below is an example of a rubric that learners in one district use to assess individual levels of learner agency. Our learners have the capacity to use similar tools, but the **belief** that they can do it must first be embedded in our language, our instruction and our norms as a district. I am committed to getting us there. I hope you will join me on this challenging, but worthwhile journey.

	EMERGING	E/D	DEVELOPING	D/P	PROFICIENT	P/A	ADVANCED
GROWTH MINDSET	• Is often hesitant to practice skills, even with encouragement • Is often hesitant to take risks in their learning, even with encouragement • Struggles to work through challenges without help or easily gives up • Struggles to identify strengths • Struggles to see failures and challenges as an opportunity for growth		• Shows a limited willingness to practice skills in order to get better at something • Takes limited risks in their learning or takes risks only with encouragement • Attempts to work through challenges but may easily give up • Struggles to build confidence from their strengths • Is beginning to see failures and challenges as an opportunity for growth		• Understands how practice and effort helps them to improve • Often takes risks in their learning (takes on challenges, goes beyond, etc.) • Works through challenges before asking for help • Builds confidence from their strengths • Sees failures and challenges as an opportunity for growth		In addition… • Actively works to improve skills through practice and effort • Independently reflects on their actions, decision-making, and learning (strengths, areas for growth, needs, etc.)
OWNERSHIP OVER LEARNING	• Is unable to complete tasks in a reasonable timeline • Struggles to see value in feedback offered • Struggles to complete tasks • Is often distracted and does not often participate in class discussions • Has not developed strategies for staying focused and on task • Is hesitant to begin work on tasks even after teacher or peer prompting • Struggles to build or maintain relationships and feels uncomfortable asking others for help		• Completes assignments at slower pace or alternative timeline • Understands the purpose of feedback and receives it courteously • Is able to complete tasks • Participates somewhat in class discussions • Has a limited number of strategies for staying focused and on task • Gets started fairly quickly on tasks after teacher prompt or direction • Maintains some relationships with others and asks a limited number of individuals for help		• Completes assignments and benchmarks on time • Accepts feedback and uses that feedback to improve their work • Is able to use a variety of strategies for tackling a task • Actively participates in class discussions and activities • Has developed a set of strategies for remaining focused and on task during work time • Gets started on tasks without prompting from the teacher • Builds positive relationships with others and feels comfortable asking others for help.		In addition… • Confidently seeks out resources and supports when needed in order to create higher quality work • Actively seeks feedback from others in order to revise their work • Monitors the effectiveness of strategies used for tackling a task and is able to adjust as needed

Piece of the Puzzle

Please let us know who deserves recognition next month! We look forward to your recommendations.

Pink, D. H. (2009). *Drive*: The surprising truth about what motivates us. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.