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Executive Summary
Learning Independence Continuum

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We know that the attitudes, dispositions and beliefs of the learner play a key role in learning success. Learners who are interested in what they are learning are more likely to remember what they have learned. Learners who act on their interest and behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively engage in learning activities are more likely to build understanding. Learners who see themselves as having the power to learn and succeed are more likely to focus on selecting the best strategies, persisting until they prevail, and marshaling the resources that will be most helpful to achieving their goals. Learners who see learning as something they do for themselves, rather than adults, and as something they own and control, are more likely to see meaning and purpose in their learning efforts. Further, learners who possess all of these characteristics tend to be less dependent on others to stimulate, manage, organize, and press them to learn. In short, they are more likely to become independent learners.

What may not be as clear are the relationships among these learner characteristics and the power they hold to create highly proficient, consistently motivated learners. We too often think about how to motivate learners, engage them in their learning, build self-efficacy, promote ownership for learning and foster independence as separate efforts. Consequently, we focus on each characteristic in isolation, hoping that somehow they will lead to learners that are persistent, independent problem-solvers.

Yet, there exists among these characteristics potential synergistic power that can make a determinative difference in the learning and long-term success of our learners. The presence of motivation gives us access to the attention and potential energy of the learner, regardless of whether the motivation is inherent or ignited by an external source. When motivation is acted upon, it becomes engagement; engaged learners participate in activities, attempt to understand and act on the challenge or learning task. The process of engaging in learning tasks positions learners to see the connection between their efforts and strategies and the learning results they experience. This understanding is key for learners to build a sense of self-efficacy, or power to have an impact on their environment, overcome challenges and influence their own success. As learners gain confidence and understanding about their potential to influence and even determine learning outcomes through effort, strategy and resources, they often choose to take more ownership for their learning, a key to long term learning success. The cumulative impact of tapped motivation, engaged learning, self-efficacy and ownership for learning equips learners with many of the crucial tools to become independent – the life-long outcome formal education seeks to achieve.



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