

# CONNECT: *Making Learning Personal*

Reports from the Field by the League of Innovators

## On the Ground: SEA Examples of Innovation in Action

Gregg Dionne and Jeuné B. Provost

The **Center on Innovations in Learning** developed its “**Conversations with Innovators**” event as a forum for its **League of Innovators** to engage in intimate discussions with author/experts on selected topics. In addition, this year, we added a session where we heard from practitioners implementing innovative approaches to personalized learning. The 2017 event was held at Temple University on June 14th and 15th. In a series of sessions, pairs of experts made brief 5–7 minute presentations on the designated topic, after which the floor was opened for participants’ questions and discussion. The lively oral discussion was enhanced by participants’ postings on Padlet, an online virtual bulletin board. In two issues of *Connect*, the conversation from each session continues, with author/experts responding to the overflow of questions and comments. In Session 1, Mark Williams and Karen Mahon discussed **Student Autonomy and ESSA: A Voice for Choice?** (click [here](#) to view that issue of *Connect*).

In this issue of *Connect*, Gregg Dionne and Jeuné B. Provost respond to questions raised in Session 2, devoted to the topic **On the Ground: SEA Examples of Innovation in Action**. Gregg Dionne is currently the supervisor of the **Curriculum and Instruction Unit** at the **Michigan Department of Education (MDE)** in the Office of Education Improvement and Innovation. The C&I Unit focuses on the innovative delivery of instruction to students through multiple pathways in multiple venues, allowing for a focus on student mastery independent of seat time. His work has focused on personalized learning and teaching, competency-based education, and flexible learning options at the state level. Through this work, he has engaged higher education and workforce partners, including CIL, to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary options for students by leveraging policy on behalf of students.

Jeuné B. Provost serves as Program Manager for Professional Development, where she facilitates professional learning training and job-embedded support to teachers in the St. Thomas–St. John School District in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This role allows her to mentor peer educators in designing their own high-quality lessons and classroom experiences focused on creativity, critical thinking, arts integration, and collaboration. While serving in this role, Jeuné has participated on several district task forces to improve accountability and streamline the

This field report is the twelfth in a series produced by the Center on Innovations in Learning’s League of Innovators. The series describes, discusses, and analyzes policies and practices that enable personalization in education. Issues of the series will present either issue briefs or, like this one, field reports on lessons learned by practitioners recounting the successes and obstacles to success encountered in implementing personalized learning.

Neither the issue briefs nor the field reports attempt to present in-depth reviews of the research; for those resources readers are encouraged to access the Center on Innovations in Learning’s resource database. Topics should be of particular interest to state education agencies and district and school personnel.



district's improvement plans in an effort to improve teaching. She was also part of the **Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE)** team that joined with the Center on Innovations in Learning and the **Florida and the Islands Comprehensive Center (FLICC)** in conducting the year-long Virgin Islands Personalized Learning Academy, after Virgin Islands Governor Kenneth Mapp endorsed VIDE's new strategic direction, which calls for more personalized learning in its schools.

Below are the questions asked by attendees, followed by the speakers' responses.

### 1. How do you leverage partners to bolster your personalized learning initiative?

**G.D.:** Working with the field is paramount. Teachers and school administrators are able to provide concrete examples of what personalized learning could look like and how curriculum and assessment are used to personalize learning for students. Additionally, professional organizations and comprehensive centers, including the Great Lakes Comprehensive Center and the Center on Innovations in Learning, have been very helpful in compiling research, refining messaging, and promoting practices in personalized learning.

**J.P.:** Insuring that all stakeholders are included in the process is critical. Making connections within the education community is critical.

### 2. What are the goals of our district and how can personalized learning make it a reality?

**Vision > Capacity > Classroom level. In St. Thomas, we are starting small. Development of Lesson Plan Platform: Lesson Design Studio.**

**J.P.:** The goal is to improve instructional practices within the district to promote student success. Beginning with lesson design, we can focus on making small changes. [Click [here](#) to learn about the **Lesson Design Studio**.]

### 3. Is personalization something that is “done to students” or do/should students have some responsibility in their own personalization of learning?

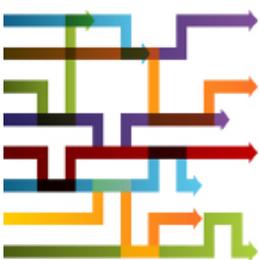
**G.D.:** In Michigan we stress student ownership and responsibility in our definitions, and the role of the teacher is one of collaboration and coaching with students. Instructional approaches can vary from whole group instruction to personalized learning. Collaboration between the teacher and the student along with student choice allows for the connection of student's interests, experiences, and abilities to the instruction in a way that fosters ownership among students.



Gregg Dionne describes a program called Top 10 in 10 Years, for which the Michigan State Board of Education adopted seven Strategic Goals to help make Michigan a top 10 education state in 10 years.

**J.P.:** Students should take an active role. Lessons should be student centered and allow students the opportunity to make choices.

### 4. Would whole-class instruction need to be seen as an opposite of personalized learning on a continuum? Or could personalized strategies be embedded into whole-class instruction so that students can pull personal meaning from the content?



**G.D.:** Personalized strategies can certainly be embedded into whole-class instruction and there are many circumstances where whole-class instruction is appropriate. An important factor to consider is that, even during whole-class instruction, the teacher is aware of the learning goals of each student and is able to monitor student progress in that setting. The use of formative assessment during whole-class instruction is critical to allow teachers to modify instruction.

**J.P.:** Whole-class instruction is not the opposite of personalized learning but rather one instructional strategy that can enhance learning when executed correctly. I agree that embedding personalized learning strategies into whole-group instruction is important to providing meaningful experiences for students. Strategies such as choral responding can engage students and make learning fun.

### 5. What's the WHY behind personalized learning for your district? – meeting students where they are – safe environment – strategies for students to solve problems.

**G.D.:** The WHY ultimately boils down to career and college readiness, but more specifically the need to prepare students to be able to solve complex problems, communicate effectively, use technology and tools, and be able to perform research in a manner that allows them to participate in self-sustaining employment. When considering what our statewide data tell us about student performance and anecdotally what districts are sharing with us, personalization becomes a solution in closing achievement gaps and improving overall outcomes.

**J.P.:** The “why” behind personalized learning for the St. Thomas-St. John District is the success of our students. Personalized learning helps to create more student-centered schools where students strive and thrive.

### 6. Where does personalized learning live in your state context?

**G.D.:** In Michigan, we have state-wide definitions for Personalized Learning, Personalized Teaching, and Education Technology that were developed as part of our State Board of Education goals for 2013–2015. Since then, the Michigan Department of Education has worked with local educators to provide examples and align these definitions with components of emerging state priorities and initiatives such as competency-based education.

**J.P.:** Personalized learning is married to the vision and goals of the state.

### 7. Would it be on track to think of personalized learning (like developmentally appropriate practices for little ones) as an approach rather than a program or a “thing”?



Jeuné Provost stresses the importance of showing teachers how personalized learning aligns with all the other state or district initiatives, and of really making teachers understand that alignment.



**G.D.:** Personalized learning is definitely an approach and would be difficult to categorized as a program. The instruction can be complex and uses multiple forms of data to determine student needs and interventions that would be difficult to do in a “program”.

**J.P.:** Correct, personalized learning is an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students, builds stronger relationships between the community and school as well as improves student achievement.

### 8. In Michigan, how is *Top 10 in 10 Years* operationalized?

**G.D.:** The state continues to develop the operational components of the Top 10 in 10 goals and strategies. Currently, initiatives are being aligned to the goals and strategies. Additionally, Michigan has developed a strategic plan. More information on the Top 10 in 10 Years can be found here: <http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-80635---,00.html>.

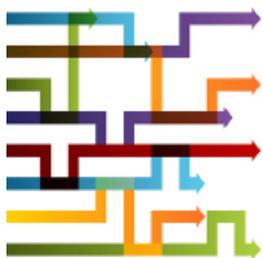
### 9. How do you show personalized learning as “not just another thing”? – either it is the umbrella of all we do, or need to show how it fits into all other valid and important initiatives.

**G.D.:** As policy and legislation emerge over time, it is necessary to ensure that personalized learning is aligned with new initiatives and that it fits into an overall system of education for students. Alignment documents and messaging about how these are sound instructional practices help demonstrate the connections. After all, we are talking about good core instruction that meets the needs of every student.

**J.P.:** In making connections between the vision and goals of the department, programs, resources, and even the teacher/principal evaluation, we can show that personalized learning is not just another “thing”. A cross walk has been helpful in helping others make connections.



Jeuné Provost says she uses personalized learning to teach her teachers, thus modeling personalized learning at the professional development level so teachers have firsthand experience with it.



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The **League of Innovators**, a network of state education agency and Regional Comprehensive Center personnel with an interest in learning innovations, is organized and administered by the **Center on Innovations in Learning**.

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