

SS: Personalization

Merinda M. Davis



9.1 The Importance of Personalization in a Social Science classroom

When we personalize our classes, we give our students some control over their learning.

As mentioned in the Data Practices chapter (chapter 7), social studies students vary widely in their abilities to think critically, employ evidence from multiple sources, organize information, read critically and analytically, and use various types of media. Students are on different reading levels, or English may not be their native language. Some have strong skills in writing; others do not. Some know how to lead a group but not how to participate in one. Others might have strong analytical skills but not know how to communicate their ideas in either writing or speaking. Some might need to develop collaborative skills or editing or rewriting skills.

Because students vary in essential social studies and historical literacy skills, personalization becomes a way to help students develop their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. It allows students to focus their attention on areas where they can really grow and not spend time doing exercises in areas they have already mastered. It allows students to use their time efficiently for their own growth. It can also help students gain confidence in their ability to communicate in a variety of different media and in their ability to have something to contribute.

One of the challenges with personalizing a social studies curriculum is the teacher's mindset that students must all memorize and repeat back the same information, such as names, dates, places, and events. When teachers can move past this mindset, the advantages of personalizing learning become more apparent. Recognizing the inherent advantages of the social studies curriculum will allow for a more engaging learning environment for students.

Here is how Merinda Davis allowed her students to show their knowledge through research and simulation, rather than through memorized facts or tests.

Teachers Talk: Model United Nations and Model European Union (3:40)



MUN and MEU Projects

Merinda Davis
~ Innovative Learning Coach

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Reflection Questions: What historical skills did these students use in the simulations? How did they show their knowledge? What effect did these activities have on students?

Students can be involved in the same or similar activity but be working on different areas of growth. For example, in a unit on the American Revolution students can study key groups and people. They do not all need to research the same group or person to learn the same concepts. Students can work on developing their individual skills as they conduct and record their research. Some students could focus on identifying quality sources, while others focus on using corroborating sources to support their analyses, or contextualizing their evidence. Still others could be honing skills on a multimedia presentation, videos, infographics, or podcasts. Personalization looks a little different for each student, but it can benefit all of them. In this next video, Mark Stevens explains how and why personalization benefits students.

Teachers Talk: Benefits of Personalization (4:22)



The video player interface is divided into two main sections. On the left, a portrait of Mark Stevens, a man with a grey beard and glasses wearing a plaid shirt, is shown. A large red play button is overlaid on the right side of this image. On the right, a dark blue background contains the title 'Personalization' in white. Below the title, the name 'Mark Stevens' is displayed in white, followed by '~ Social Science Teacher' in a smaller font. Underneath is an orange circular icon with a white person silhouette and arrows. The word 'Personalization' is written in orange below the icon. At the bottom left of the interface is the 'EdTech Books' logo and the URL 'https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended2'. At the bottom right, it says 'Licensed under CC BY' next to the Creative Commons BY license logo.

Personalization

Mark Stevens
~ Social Science Teacher

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Reflection questions: Which of the benefits that Mr. Stevens mentions means the most to you? How can you create that benefit in your classroom? What do you need to change in your thinking for this to happen?

It takes time and a mind shift to figure out how personalization will work for your classroom. Once you have figured out how to manage and effectively use personalization, you will be happily surprised with the results. You will see increased student engagement and learning.

One of the great advantages of personalization is that it allows students to participate in different ways as their circumstances allow. In this video Brooke Davies tells how blended learning allowed her to include a student who was unable to attend class.

Teachers Talk: Reaching the One (4:22)



Reaching the One

Brooke Davies
~ Social Studies Teacher



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Reflection Question: How could you use blended teaching to increase the participation of students in your class?

Ashley uses personalization to engage students through their choice and input.

Teachers Talk: Personalize My Blended Classroom (5:47)



Personalize My Blended Classroom

Ashley Brown
Social Science Teacher

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Reflection Questions: How does Ashley use student feedback to personalize her classroom? What other methods does she use? Would any of these methods fit your classroom?

Understanding what personalization is and what it is not can help you prepare your blended class to be effective. Below are the definitions of differentiation and personalization. Both can be used effectively in a classroom, but they are not the same. Recognizing the differences will help you use both to increase learning.

Definitions: Differentiation vs. Personalization

Differentiation and personalization are similar but not the same. As you think about the activities and ideas in this chapter, decide if the activity is differentiated or personalized. Both have an important place in classrooms, but personalization with its extra emphasis on student (not teacher) choice tends to foster greater growth in areas such as student ownership and self-regulation.

Differentiation: The teacher tailors instructional materials, pacing, and path to address student needs. She makes significant decisions for and about the student.

Personalization: Student makes their own decisions about their goals, time, place, pace, and path, giving them increased ownership over their learning.

It is helpful to approach personalization and the idea of student control in two different ways: through allowing students to personalize along the dimensions of personalization and through allowing students to personalize the learning

objectives, assessments, and activities we use in our teaching.

9.2 Personalization Dimensions in a Social Studies Classroom

One way to think about personalization is to examine the ways students can personalize. The five dimensions of personalized learning are guidelines for ways or methods we can apply to allow our students to personalize their learning. These dimensions are goals, time, place, pace, and/or path.

Figure 1

Five Dimensions of Personalized Learning



In the sections below we will explore each of these dimensions.

9.2.1 Personalizing Goals

Goals are a means of making choices specific and purposeful. Facilitating goal setting increases student ownership of their learning, encourages lifelong learning skills and attitudes, and increases motivation and self-regulation abilities.

In order for students to personalize their goals, you and they need to understand something of their needs and proficiencies as learners. This is where you can use the data you have gathered from the activities mentioned in the Data Practices chapter.

Information from such sources helps you understand where students are in their abilities, skills, and aptitudes. Learning outcomes and standards give focus for where students are expected to be. The difference between where students are and the course outcomes is the place for growth—and goals.

Teachers Talk: Discovering They Couldn't Reach Their Goals Together



Merinda Davis

One year I had three boys who always sat in the back and just sat back and laughed and joked around. On one particular project, the students were going to work in groups, and I gave them the choice of who they wanted to work with. They chose to work together, but as I checked up with them on their deadlines and asked how they were doing on their goals, they were not getting much done. Eventually, partway through the project, they decided, yeah, we're not as successful together as we could be. We like each other, but we don't work well together. They came to that conclusion themselves and ended up doing similar but separate projects. One of them did a prototype for a water filter straw before they were widely available on the market. Another one did the math and created his own water filter. He went and found all the parts and made his own filter. He got really excited because he was like, wow, I actually did this! He felt really accomplished. This kid went from being the kid who just goofed off in the back of the class to actually being a leader in the school.

Goals are not goals if they are just aspirations. Writing goals down and tracking them are important processes for achieving them. Here are a few ideas about goal-setting conferences and how they might be used in a social studies classroom.



In-Class

- Teach and discuss the purpose for setting goals.
- Help students develop a growth mindset; create a culture of growth.
- Introduce a goal-setting process such as SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound).



Conferencing

- Some teachers meet with a few students a day or week, taking several weeks to meet with every student.
- Others plan a station or lab rotation, where students are working independently, then pull students out individually for a short consultation.
- Use these conferences to review current data and areas of growth.
- Invite the student to evaluate where new growth can take place in your content area and make goals for that growth.
- Record progress toward previous goals and new goals. Include a chart to help students visualize progress.



Monitoring & Tracking Progress (Between Conferences)

- Pair and share—place students in pairs (which either you or the students choose). The students share their goals with each other weekly and help their partner revise the goals if necessary. They also report their progress.
- Collaboration—Students can keep an online daily or weekly journal in which they reflect on and record their progress toward their goals or struggles they are having. Teachers check in weekly and address individual student needs.
- Consistency—Students turn in an online exit ticket daily, reporting that day's progress, struggles, or need for help.
- Tracking—Create charts to record student progress during the year.

Teachers Talk: Goal Setting



Merinda Davis

When I taught Utah studies, we blended it with *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (Sean Covey, 2014), which included weekly goal setting. Each week they wrote two weekly goals—one academic goal and one personal goal. We would follow up on that goal at the end of the week. We also had daily starter goals, especially when we were doing projects. Each group would set a goal for the day, what they would be able to accomplish that day, or when they would be able to have something finished. Then I held them to their own deadlines.

9.2.2 Personalizing Path

When you allow students to personalize their learning path in your classroom, your students are not all doing the same assessments and activities. You may find that you have become a curator of resources and activities that will best help your students. These resources/activities can be compiled in playlists or choice boards, which give the students choice about the order in which they complete the activities or about which activities they choose to do.

While this may take time to figure out a system that is appropriate and manageable for your classroom, personalized pathways allow students to take ownership of their learning. This also allows you an opportunity to build positive relationships with your students, thus increasing teacher efficacy, which has the highest impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2017).

Teachers Talk: Choosing Media



Mark Stevens

There are so many ways to give students choices. We just finished studying the Holocaust. I gave the kids all kinds of resources. They could choose a brain pop video or a text-based resource like a Newsela article. And if they chose Newsela, there were four or five different Lexile levels; they could pick the one that works best for them. I also gave them the choice to use one resource or both of them. Or maybe they needed to have the article read to them. Instead of just listening to a machine voice read it to them, sometimes we had the teachers take the text of one of the mid-level Lexile levels and record the audio for them to listen to. The students make the decision that works best for them. Is it all three modes? The audio, the video, and the text? Or is it one or two of them?

Teachers Talk: Environmental Entrepreneurship (4:29)



Environmental Entrepreneurship

Merinda Davis

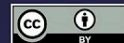
~ Innovative Learning Coach



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Reflection Question: In what ways was this project personalized?

9.2.3 Personalizing Pace

Personalizing pace means allowing students to take more or less time to master content, based on their own ways and pace of learning as well as their personal and family life circumstances. It often includes giving students a window of time on due dates for completing activities, assignments, and assessments. Personalizing pace encourages students to manage their time. They know what they need to do and when it needs to be completed, but they also know the other demands on their time (sports, school, play, and family and work obligations) and learn to plan for these situations. While students are still learning how to manage their time, it is important that you provide scaffolding and support.

Teachers Talk: A Year of History in One Semester



LeNina Wimmer

We allow students to progress through the US History content as fast as they want to. We grade on content and cognitive skills. Cognitive skills are 70% of their grade and content is 30%. If students finished their entire content work by the end of first semester and they demonstrated excellent cognitive skills, we let them be done with US history. We had many students finish the year's content in one semester. They were able to take another semester class, maybe US government or some other elective. Because those students were able to work so well on their own, I was able to spend more time helping students who needed more help in developing skills and learning the content. Flexible pacing helped all of my students.

Teachers Talk: Personalizing Pace



Brooke Davies

Personalization helps me and my students not waste time. I don't have to have my students do busy work or wait while others catch up. The online format has allowed them to move a little bit more at their own pace because I can give them choice, I can extend it a little bit easier. I can give them opportunities to go deeper if they finish earlier; if they're working slower I can also sometimes see that and assess it faster than if we were doing just like a paper and turning it into me at the end of the class period. I've seen engagement increase and greater authenticity in what we're doing. With blending we have this chunk that's all together that hopefully they'll get, and then they can move at their own pace to finish the work.

9.2.4 Personalizing Time

In a traditional classroom, students may have a class period to finish an assignment. In a blended classroom, this time can be expanded to include time outside the class. Because activities can be accessible outside of the classroom, students can choose times that work well for them. For example, some students may have a difficult time learning in the morning, when they have class. But because they can access the assignment later in the day, they are able to complete it and do a good job. Time is closely related to pace. Because students are not bound to a specific time to do an assignment, they can increase or decrease their pace according to their own preferences, needs, and abilities. Remember learning doesn't just happen in the timeframe of your class period, which may not be the optimal time for some students.

9.2.5 Personalizing Place

Personalizing place revisits traditional practices about classroom space and where students learn. Because blended courses often include online instruction, students can choose to do activities at home or at school. Remember, your classroom is not the only place where students can learn. In addition, they can access instruction when they have to miss activities because of illness, travel, or extra-curricular activities. Another aspect of place is the configuration of the classroom. Classrooms are often viewed as rows of desks or sometimes desks grouped into tables. But classrooms don't have to look this way. They can be made more comfortable, inviting, and conducive to the kinds of activities that take place in a blended classroom.

Flexible seating allows students to recognize where they learn best. "The students in the classroom need to be comfortable in the place they are learning which will lead to students being more engaged. The students will then be more attentive and will be more likely to participate in discussions that create a more meaningful, impactful learning experience" (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012, p. 700).

Teachers Talk: Flexible Place (4:29)



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Reflection Questions: What advantages did these students receive from learning in a flexible classroom? What is a first step you could take to make your classroom more flexible?

Merinda found these same benefits from providing a flexible classroom.

Teachers Talk: Flexible Spaces



Merinda Davis

I tried something last year, and it actually kind of worked. I got swivel chairs, and I made more space in my classroom for students to move around in groups. I put desks along the back wall. The students' backs were to the front and their faces were to the wall. Each desk had a clipboard, so if they wanted to take notes about what was going on in the front of the classroom, they could turn toward the front with their clipboards. The majority of the time, however, they are working on the computers, and I can see their computer screens facing the front. I also have small groups of tables in the middle of the class for collaborative work or small group instruction.



9.3 Personalizing Activities and Assessments

Approaching personalization through the five dimensions is one way of planning to personalize. Another way is to look directly at what you already do in your classroom. Typically teachers plan assessments and activities around learning objectives to make sure they cover the material they are mandated to cover. Finding ways for students to exercise choice in some or all aspects of these activities and assessments is another way to foster personalization in your classroom.

9.3.1 Personalized Assessments

What do assessments look like in your classroom: A multiple-choice test? An essay exam? A final paper? A presentation? Do all your students do the same thing?

Personalizing assessments means giving students choices in the ways they demonstrate mastery of a learning outcome. Often this means creating a list of ideas that students can choose from, while also allowing them to suggest their own ideas.

If your students need to take a multiple-choice test consider using frequent formative assessments, then have a summative performance-based assessment. This allows students to show their learning in different ways especially if they are given a choice for how they achieve the performance-based assessment. The video below shows how one teacher supported personalized assessments in her classroom.

Teachers Talk: Developing Skills through WWII and the Cold War (4:06)



WWII and the Cold War

LeNina Wimmer
~ Social Studies Teacher

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Reflection Questions: What kinds of skills could LeNina Wimmer have evaluated in her students presentations? What are some ways you can give students choice when you want to evaluate skills and content?

The following video shows an example of a personalized assessment. The online space gives students more variety for tools to use as they choose and create the project they want to do.

Teachers Talk: The Peace Project (3:41)



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Reflection Questions: How did Merinda connect history with the students' lives? Why was this project so powerful for them?

Link to video referenced in this video: [Roman Kent](#)



Blended Teaching Workbook

In your Blended Teaching Workbook, create a few ideas of personalized *assessments* that students can choose from in order to show mastery of the content area you chose earlier.

If you haven't already opened and saved your workbook, you can access it [here](#).

9.3.2 Personalized Activities

Personalized activities are based on data and goals. Students can choose activities that help them accomplish their goals from playlists and/or choice boards that give them choice in path, pace, time, and place. They may include online interaction as well as online integration of activities that are personalized or differentiated for individual students.

Mary Catherine differentiates her assessments and activities to fit the unique needs of her students.

Teachers Talk: Differentiating for Struggling Students



Mary Catherine Keating

I have a large number of ELL learners and IEP students. With blended teaching there's so much more I can do to help them succeed. For me that has been the greatest benefit of blended teaching. It involves doing really simple things—like giving them the ability to listen to a device read out loud to them. Or modifying a multiple choice quiz. I can easily change a quiz to meet the needs of a student by having only two answers to choose from instead of four or using pictures as answers instead of text. I also have more time to teach these students because I'm not spending time erasing answers or finding pictures in a book. I can give them more things that are appropriate for their learning level.

Table 1 contains more ideas for personalizing activities in a social science classroom.

Table 1

Personalized Activities

Personalized Activities

Create a choice board of activities for exploring a concept; person, place, or event, etc.

Corroboration—Introduce comparing and contrasting activities by providing links to several different artistic renderings of a text in different forms: film, poetry, art, music, graphic novel, etc. Students choose two and fill out a compare/contrast chart.

Students create a PSA to teach others about how we can apply lessons from history to our lives today. This can be in any format of the students' choice.

Students identify and develop a solution to an issue. Then they present their solution to appropriate stakeholders in the format that is most applicable to them.



Blended Teaching Workbook

In your Blended Teaching Workbook create a few ideas of personalized *activities* that students can choose from in order to show mastery of the content area you chose earlier.

If you haven't already opened and saved your workbook, you can access it [here](#).

Personalization is a powerful pedagogical tool. It allows students to grow where they need to grow and in a way that is meaningful to them. It combines all the other competencies of blended learning— online integration, online interaction, and data practices—to create a unique learning experience for each student. Throughout these chapters, you have

learned how to use these competencies in a social studies context. Now it is up to you! You are ready for that first small step.

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