Personalization

Personalization →
- Activation of existing expertise and knowledge
- Personal goal-setting and individualized support
- Perceived relevance
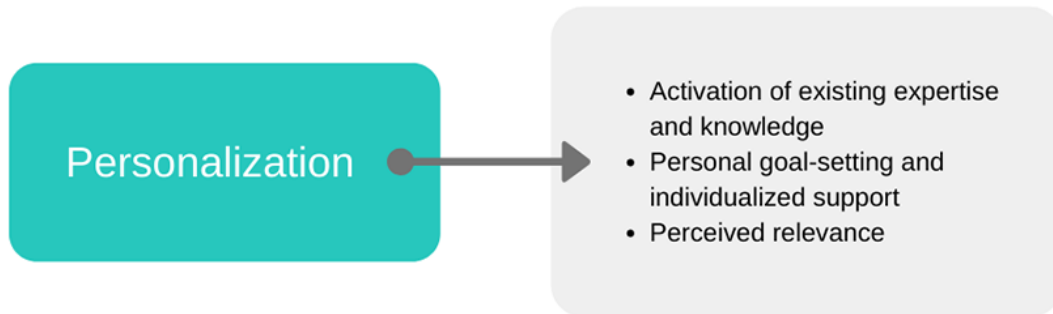
Let's be clear. There is no one single definition for personalization. From platforms that organize movies and serve up recommendations based on interests to career sites that offer job opportunities tailored to a user's profile—the term holds varied connotations for the public. When it comes to education, the term is no different. Ask educators across the country what "personalized learning" means to them and there will be no shortage of interpretations. But typically there's a common thread: personalizing learning usually entails content and instructional approaches that are tailored for each learner based on his or her distinct background, interests, needs and goals.

That theme carries over for asynchronous learning platforms; platforms that personalize the learning experience tailor content to the learner's specific needs and interests to increase relevance in the hopes of deepening understanding.

A key ingredient of personalization for asynchronous platforms is the diagnostic assessment. Most platforms launch their experience with a diagnostic designed to either gauge baseline knowledge or help a learner focus on a few specific goals. Typically, platforms use the data to build a personalized plan of study, or to help the learner set goals and then structure the learning experience to meet those goals. Each platform does this differently.

Learners using the 2gnoMe platform start with a competency-based assessment aligned to a predetermined learning framework or set of standards. Based on the assessment, learners follow a personalized pathway generated by the platform, which includes various resources to support identified gaps across skills and knowledge. The resources, however, are primarily determined by the purchasing institution, which often leverages the assessment data to make informed decisions about how to focus additional training and professional development opportunities.
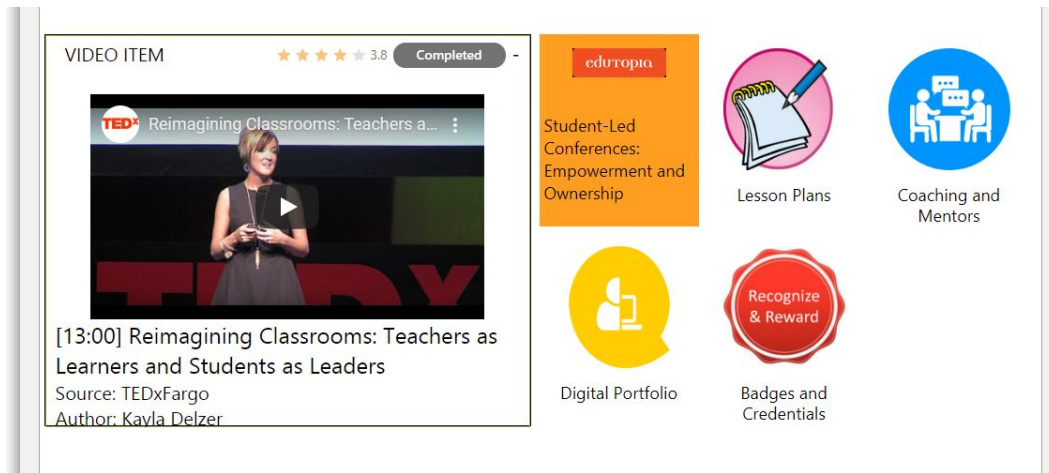
An example of the personalized resources provided in 2gnoMe (Source: 2gnoMe)

Baseline assessment in BloomBoard looks different. On this platform, learners start every micro-credential with a reflection exercise, which is an introspective analysis of their current knowledge base and how it shines through in practice. Learners acknowledge that this helps them understand what they know and where there's room to grow.

Alternatively, in vPeer, learners complete a goals assessment immediately after they first sign into the platform. The assessment is designed to identify what the user wants to learn and what the user wants to teach; responses are then used to connect each learner to a mentor. Piloting in extracurricular clubs on university campuses, learners report that the goals assessment is particularly beneficial for first-year and transfer students, as it pairs them with a peer mentor who can provide support and resources tailored to their needs.
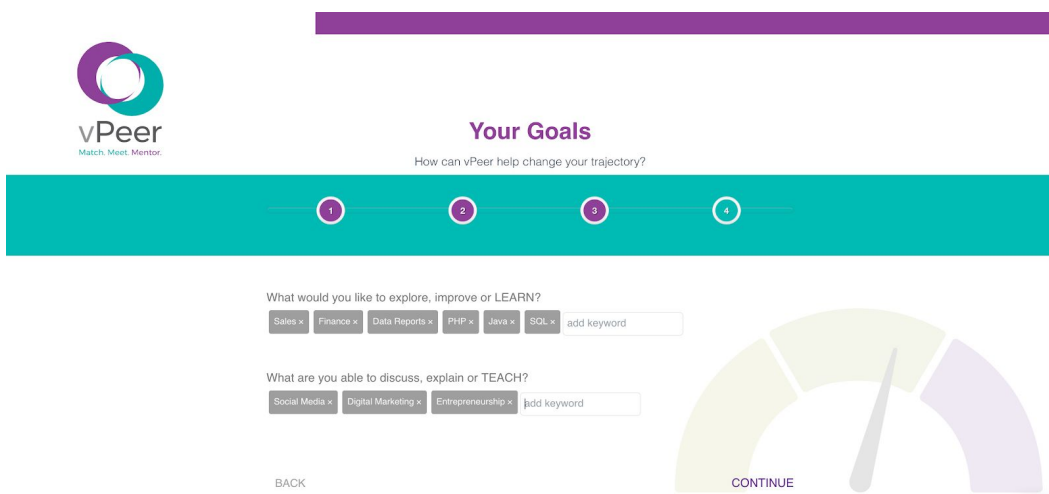

Goal-setting around what users want to learn and what they want to teach in vPeer (Source: vPeer)

Some platforms include both types of diagnostics: those developed to establish baseline knowledge and those designed to support goal setting. In Pivot Professional Learning, for example, a platform specifically designed for teachers, users pinpoint areas of strength and growth by leveraging two types of data: a self-assessment and a student survey. The survey is tied to teaching standards, and students provide anonymous feedback about individual teachers. Teachers then use a goal-setting feature in the platform to document their goals based on students' feedback and their self-assessment. Institutions that purchase this platform for their teachers rave that the surveys give students agency and the data help teachers generate conversations with their students about how they can improve in their practice.
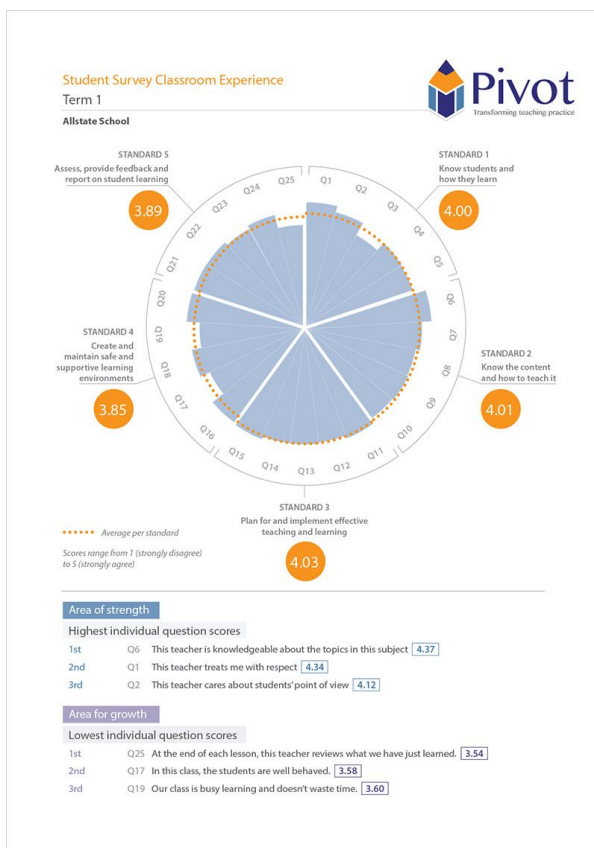
Survey results identifying areas of strength and areas of growth on the Pivot Professional Learning platform (Source: Pivot Professional Learning website)
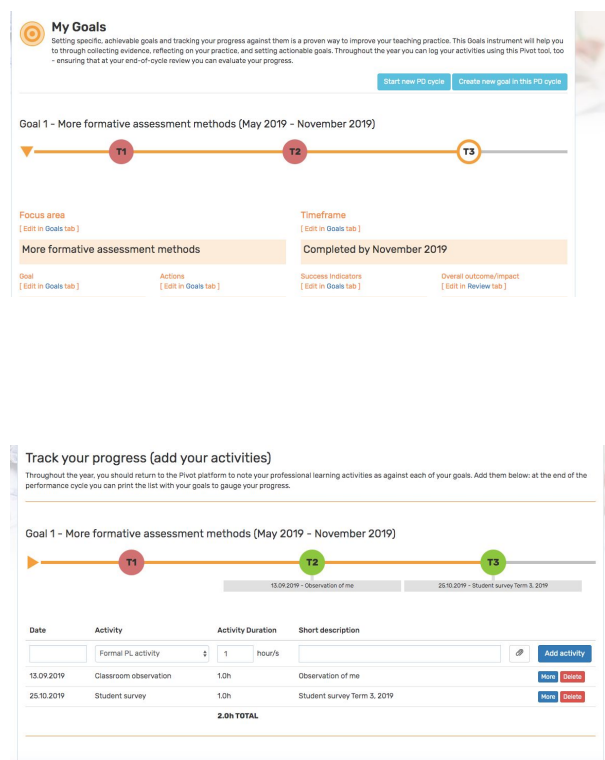
Goal-setting and tracking features on the Pivot Professional Learning platform (Source: Pivot Professional Learning)

LINCspring also includes both types of diagnostics, but the design looks different. Learners complete a survey to identify their learning goals and based on the results, the platform automatically generates a personalized playlist of "cycles" aligned to the goals. Then, at the start and the end of each cycle, learners engage in self-reflection. Many learners believe that the

pre-cycle assessment provides the opportunity to be open and honest with themselves in order to generate a playlist that actually meets their needs.
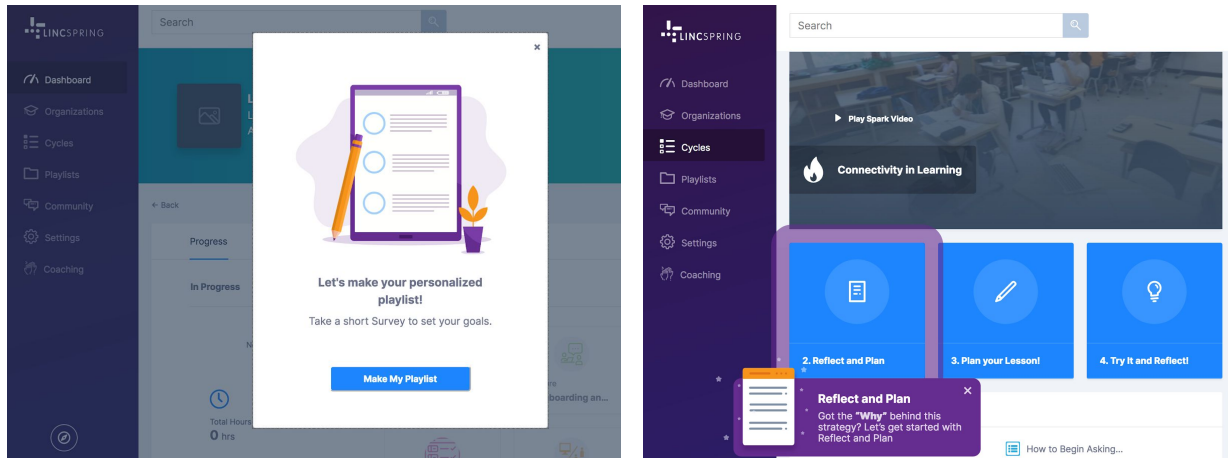
Learners complete a survey to identify their learning goals upon first entering LINCspring. (Source: LINCspring)

Learners complete a reflection at the start of each cycle in LINGspring. (Source: LINCspring)

In the classroom, personalization can look drastically different from one learning experience to the next. It comes as no surprise, then, that asynchronous learning platforms with features that support personalization vary widely in how the learning experience is relevant for their users. The promise in personalization is to deepen a learner's understanding by providing targeted content that meets each learner's interests and needs.