

OPERATING PRINCIPLES



## Equitable Operating Principles for Personalized Learning Approaches to Accelerate Literacy

Careful design and attention to the research behind literacy growth must rule any decision-making. Following is a set of principles that are relevant for any personalized approach—many applicable to any instructional approach—whether it is one teacher working with a small group of students, students engaging in self-directed learning alone or with peers, or a technology-enabled platform that uses sophisticated algorithms to create instructional plans for every student in a school. Central to our discussion below is that “personalization” in and of itself is not necessarily a good or bad thing for students. Instructional products and approaches that deliver low-quality content or that isolate and segregate students academically or physically must be avoided and do not deserve the mantle of personalization.

The core question to be asked of any product or approach—and it is a gateway to all others—is to pinpoint how it will advance grade-level work with the literacy accelerator(s). If the answer is it doesn’t or is only vaguely or peripherally related to the literacy accelerator(s), then move on. Don’t waste valuable student time or precious instructional dollars.

**The core question to be asked of any product or approach—and it is a gateway to all others—is to pinpoint how it will advance grade-level work with the literacy accelerator(s).**

Once you have identified that a personalized product or approach is tangibly and positively tied to each of the literacy accelerators it targets, following is a set of operating principles—prompted by the research—that must be present to develop or use personalized learning well. The principles fall into four buckets, including:

1. **Advancing the right content,**
2. **Promoting equity and counteracting bias,**
3. **Cultivating student agency and elevating student interest in their learning, and**
4. **Ensuring ease of use and implementation by teachers and schools.**

**TO ADVANCE THE RIGHT CONTENT**, there are five operating principles to meet. The personalized product or approach you select should be:

- Part of coherent instructional sequences with a priority on working in tandem with high-quality instructional materials that are coherent by design and focused on the five literacy accelerators.
- Grounded in what we know about how the brain learns to read and what contributes to the long-term flourishing of reading comprehension.
- Based on what the class is doing and studying in every instance. Personalized learning follows rather than leads on content.
- A slice of a student's education. Classrooms are centers of cultural exchange and co-learning. Reading comprehension instruction is predominantly a social rather than an individual pursuit.
- Activated in response to real-time information about what students know and can do—including qualitative and formative measures—to advance grade-level learning.

**TO PROMOTE EQUITY AND COUNTERACT BIAS**, there are three operating principles to meet. The personalized product or approach you select should be:

- Designed to promote racial, class, and language equity in both the assignment and the delivery of literacy instruction, thereby counteracting biases actively. Students who have frequently been marginalized and chronically underserved such as Black students, students experiencing economic insecurity, and English learners cannot be siloed into below-grade-level lessons that mimic tracking. Decision-making regarding the assigned content is deliberative and transparent, checked, and re-checked in light of which students are getting what content.
- Designed to honor and accommodate variations in students' language and cultural heritage in ways that affirm rather than shelve identities.
- Built to elevate student assets and challenge destructive narratives about the academic ability of traditionally marginalized students.

**TO CULTIVATE STUDENT AGENCY AND ELEVATE STUDENT INTEREST IN THEIR LEARNING**, there are three operating principles to meet. The personalized product or approach you select should be:

- Built on trust relationships and respect between teacher and student. Personalized learning products and approaches must be embedded in a coherent, humane, social, and content-rich environment.
- Driven by students' interest and choice to capitalize on student's motivation and agency, whenever possible, *within* an identified area of academic focus.
- Proven to hold the interest, curiosity, and attention of students. It is rated by students as useful to their studies and beneficial to their future.

**TO ENSURE EASE OF USE AND EASE OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS**, there is one operating principle to meet. The personalized product or approach you select should be:

- Easy to use and implement, so they are embraced rather than abandoned by teachers.

---

As an outgrowth of the findings set forth in this paper, and directly tied to these considerations, we have developed a set of concrete questions, organized as a series of action steps. These questions are intended to guide educators and designers in equitable, research based and specific decision-making. They are **Consideration Questions** ([Appendix A](#)).