

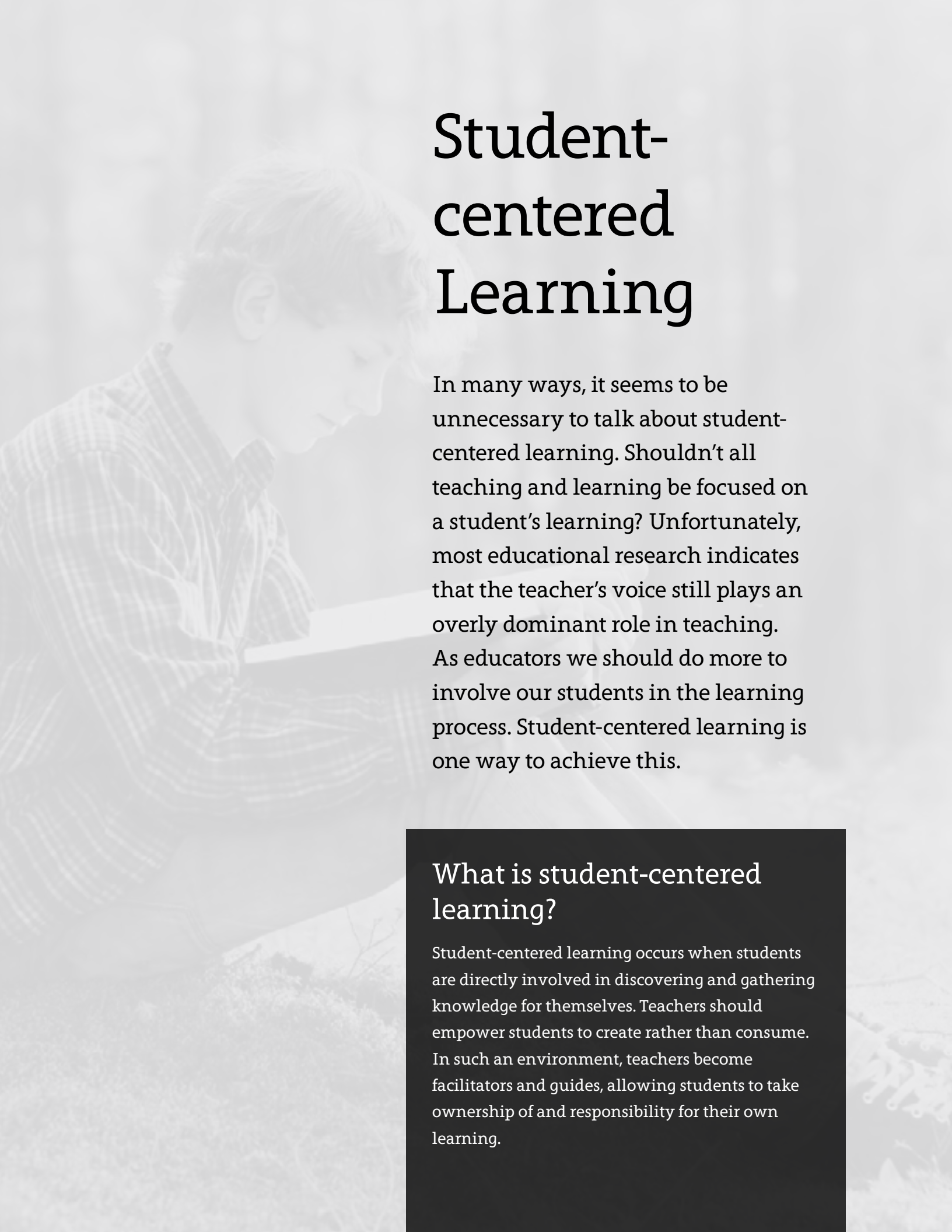
# STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING WITH A LEARNING PLATFORM



How to make your teaching  
more focused on your learners

its learning

a passion for teaching

A young boy with light-colored hair, wearing a plaid shirt, is looking down at a book or tablet. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a fence.

# Student-centered Learning

In many ways, it seems to be unnecessary to talk about student-centered learning. Shouldn't all teaching and learning be focused on a student's learning? Unfortunately, most educational research indicates that the teacher's voice still plays an overly dominant role in teaching. As educators we should do more to involve our students in the learning process. Student-centered learning is one way to achieve this.

## What is student-centered learning?

Student-centered learning occurs when students are directly involved in discovering and gathering knowledge for themselves. Teachers should empower students to create rather than consume. In such an environment, teachers become facilitators and guides, allowing students to take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning.

## Focus on learning

There is seldom doubt in the classroom as to whether or not students have been taught. What is difficult is to determine how much students have actually learned. Student-centered learning increasingly emphasizes what students learn over what teachers teach. In a student-centered learning environment, student voice and choice should be a central focus. Teachers must find ways to apply learning to the things that students value and find interesting. There are many strategies relevant to creating a more student-centered learning environment.

This whitepaper outlines three strategies that are relatively easy to implement and lead to a more student-centered learning environment.

1. Encourage collaboration
2. Enable student voice & choice
3. Empower students to be creators rather than consumers

## In this whitepaper, you will:

Learn three strategies for implementing student-centered learning in your classes

See how some of these strategies are being put into practice by real teachers

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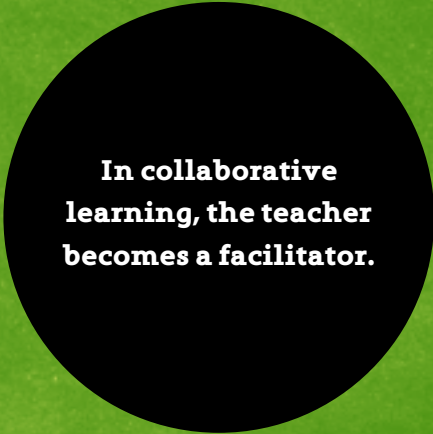
# Strategy 1

## Encourage collaboration

Collaboration is a key to student-centered learning environments. When the learning is focused on the student, desks won't be in rows facing the teacher because the teacher is not the focus of attention. Students take ownership of their learning and they are able to work flexibly at their own pace. The strategy described here enables you to shift focus away from the teacher and instead, onto how much

your students actually take ownership of their learning.

In practice, this can be achieved by promoting interaction among learners. Students should be able to collaborate on projects and analyze teaching materials rather than listen to lectures. In collaborative learning, the teacher becomes a facilitator, guiding students to approach their learning in a strategic way.



**In collaborative  
learning, the teacher  
becomes a facilitator.**

The teacher must help students monitor their own progress and construct meaning from the content and each other. Learning truly happens when students are given opportunities to reflect on their own work and the work of others.

**The following  
scenario shows how  
one teacher has  
achieved this. »**

# Strategy 1

/ TEACHING SCENARIO

## Student collaboration with Mr. Mark Walsh

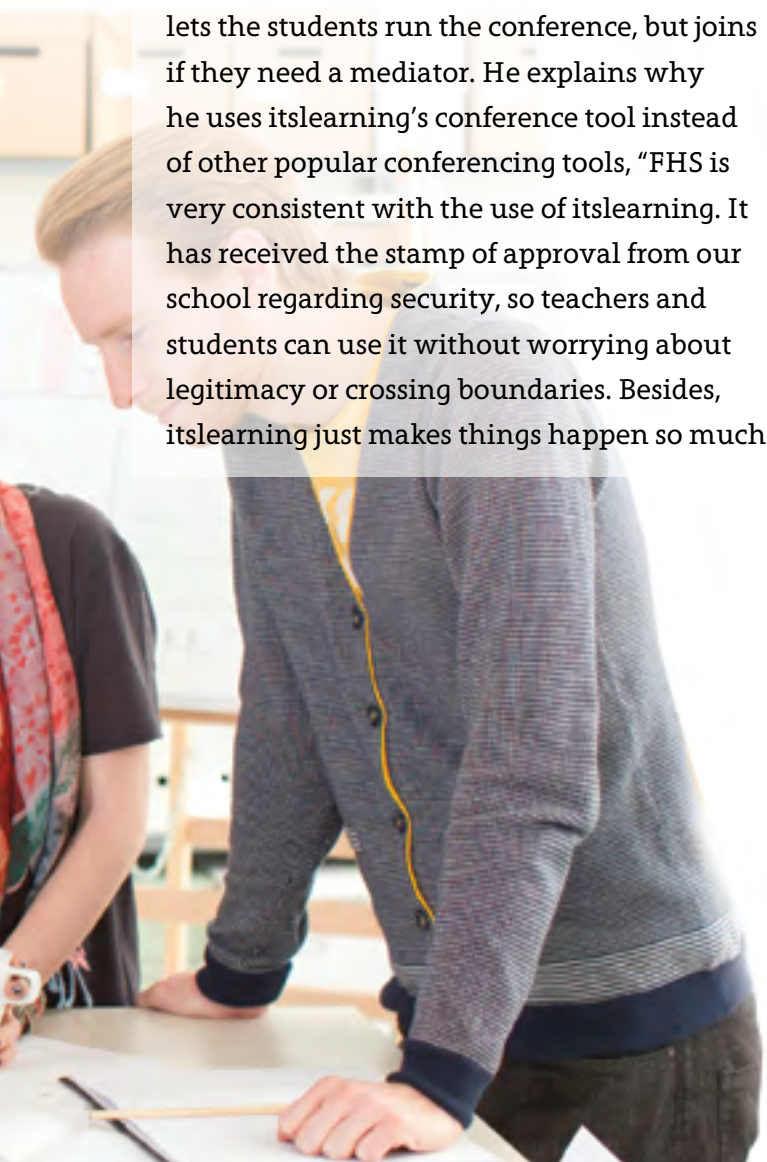
Mr. Mark Walsh teaches US History, National Government and Politics, and coaches the extracurricular Mock Trial team at Franklin High School (FHS) in Massachusetts. Mr. Walsh uses the itslearning platform to help students take ownership of their learning. He encourages them to collaborate and acts as a facilitator when necessary.

The Mock Trial team provides students with public speaking and debating experience, as well as skills relevant to the practice of law. Mr. Walsh uses itslearning's Communities to provide Mock Trial team members with a safe online space for collaboration.

"All team members join the itslearning Mock Trial Community: a closed area where students can collaborate and teachers can guide them. It is through the community that Mr. Walsh's students have taken ownership of their learning. Students upload trial resources, like police and witness reports, to the community. They also share their cross examination questions so that others can substitute for them if they can't make it to practice.

"My students are better at using itslearning than I am," Mr. Walsh told me. They were the ones who suggested starting discussions in their community." itslearning discussions allow students to share thoughts about specific topics while reading and responding to each other's posts. The discussions often include multimedia elements and links to student-created content. Collaboration is at its best when students are able to assess and reflect on each other's work through communities and discussions.



The typical Mock Trial member at FHS is a busy student who's involved in many extracurricular activities. Students try to meet several times a week to practice but it's hard to find a time when everyone is available. Therefore, they often communicate through itslearning's conference tool. "It's been great," Mr. Walsh raves, "It provides real-time, text-based communication."


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Mr. Walsh sometimes schedules conferences in which all 50 team members can join. He lets the students run the conference, but joins if they need a mediator. He explains why he uses itslearning's conference tool instead of other popular conferencing tools, "FHS is very consistent with the use of itslearning. It has received the stamp of approval from our school regarding security, so teachers and students can use it without worrying about legitimacy or crossing boundaries. Besides, itslearning just makes things happen so much

faster. Kids can log in wherever they are."

In the Mock Trial Community, students add events to the calendar notifying members of upcoming meetings. During stormy winters in Massachusetts, meetings are often cancelled due to inclement weather, and team captains send out Tweets asking the team to check itslearning for more information. Work can continue online when team members can't meet physically.

itslearning provides students with a safe online space for collaboration and empowers them to take charge of their own learning. Students are able to shift from consumers to creators as they work together in communities to build learning experiences.



**itslearning provides  
students with a safe  
online space for  
collaboration.**

# Strategy 2

Enable student voice and choice



The single most important thing that a teacher can do to better enable student-centered learning is to let go of control. A teacher must of course provide a vision and goals for learning, but then allow students the autonomy to create their own learning experiences. One of the key tasks for teachers, therefore, is to ensure that students understand both the content of the teaching and its goals. The American educational experts Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe have developed a framework and methodology for planning that provides teachers with a systematic approach to helping students understand the content and goals of teaching. The concept is called Understanding by Design (UbD) and, according to McTighe, there are two primary intentions embedded in the title:

**- Focus on understanding and the ability for students to demonstrate and apply what they have learned**

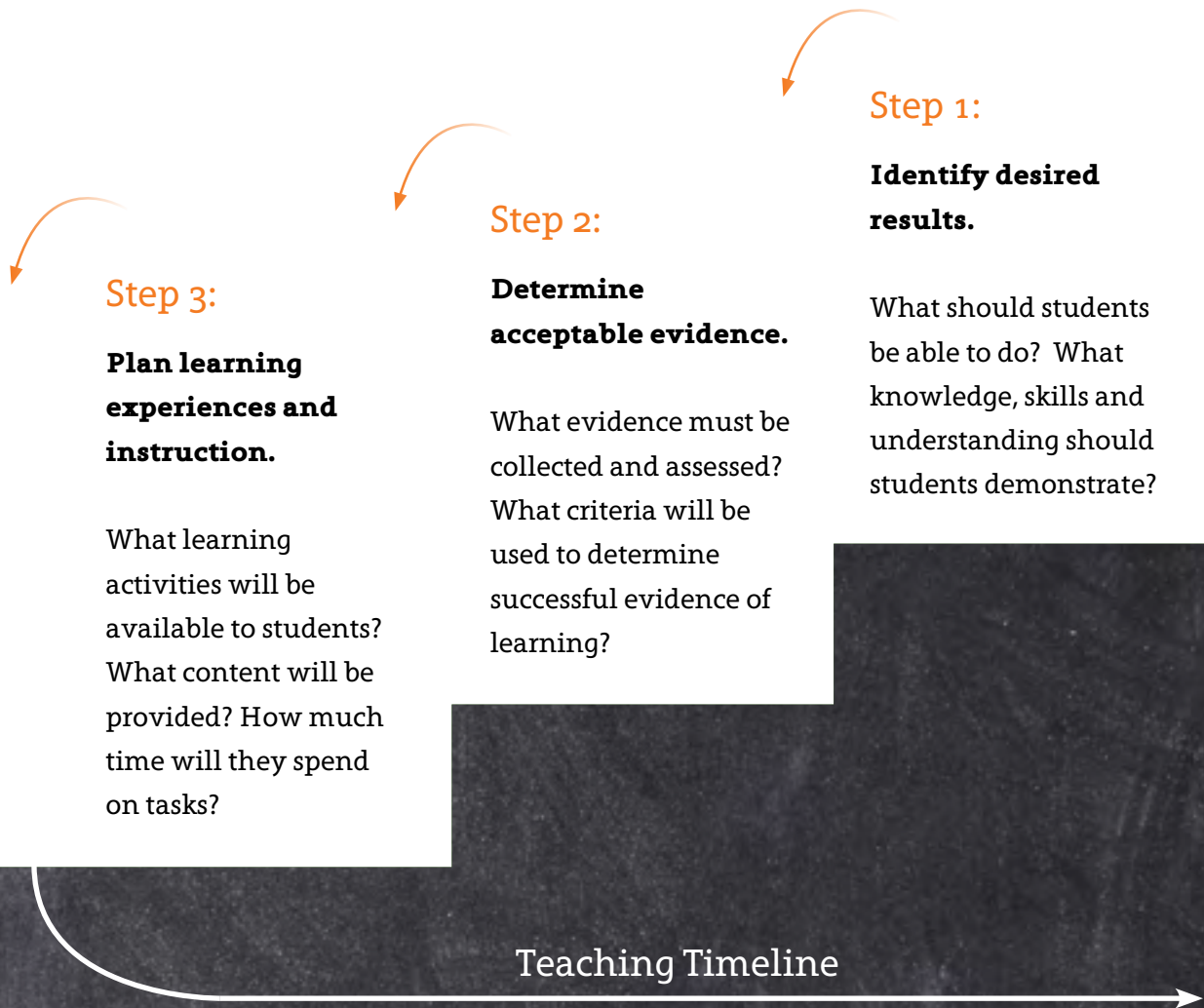
**- Design of appropriate experiences based firmly on learning goals**

UbD emphasizes the teacher's role as the designer of student learning. It helps clarify the learning objectives, document student understanding and develop efficient and engaging learning activities. It is within this process that students are given voice and choice regarding how to demonstrate their learning. This method gives you a three-step way of prioritizing activities during your planning.



# Backward design

{ Planning }



**The following scenario shows how one teacher provides voice and choice to ensure students are capable of applying the knowledge and skills they acquire. »**



Student voice and  
choice with Ms.  
Delaney Lego

# Strategy 2

## / TEACHING SCENARIO

Ms. Delaney Lego, of the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation in Columbus, Indiana, uses the itslearning platform to create student-centered experiences with her second grade students.

As many elementary teachers do, Ms. Lego uses learning stations to maximize learning time for her students. Her learning stations are certain areas of the classroom where students gather to perform designated learning tasks. Ms. Lego often makes some of the stations technology-driven; with mobile devices, laptops or desktop computers.

**In this activity, Ms. Lego provided three experiences using itslearning's assignment tool to differentiate student learning:**

- An Initial Learning Experience
- A Must Do Assignment
- An Extension Activity

For the initial learning experience, Ms. Lego provided a link to a game so that the students could learn about equivalent fractions. She ensured that they were able to work independently during this activity by providing both text and audio directions in advance.

Once the students felt comfortable with equivalent fractions, they were asked to complete the following Must Do assignment:

“You and a friend are discussing how to divide and share a pie. Your friend says that you should each get three sixths ( $\frac{3}{6}$ ) of the pie. You think you should each get one half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of the pie. Who is correct, and why?”

In the must do assignment, Ms. Lego allowed the students to choose how to present evidence of their learning. The rich text editor in the assignment tool allows for student choice. Students could demonstrate their understanding through a video recording, an audio recording or text. By designing the learning experience this way, Ms. Lego could easily provide her students with feedback. After reviewing the written answers and recordings, she could choose to write comments to individual students within the assignment tool, or make an audio/visual recording of her feedback for a more personal touch.

Once the students finished their assignments, they were given the opportunity to complete the extension activity, which was a fraction game.

By providing all of the learning experiences within the assignment tool, Ms. Lego made it easier for her students to complete the tasks. Students had multiple opportunities to choose how they consumed information and how they presented evidence of their learning. Ms. Lego released control to the students, giving them ownership of their learning.



# Strategy 3

/ EMPOWER STUDENTS TO BE CREATORS NOT CONSUMERS

When teachers empower students to be producers, not just consumers of knowledge, students are fully engaged in the learning process and able to internalize information. Today's students have a plethora of information at their fingertips. The term "Google it" has become the norm when searching for unknown answers. With all of the information available to students today, the teacher plays an important role in helping students create meaning from information.

Sir Ken Robinson is an internationally recognized leader in the development of creativity and innovation in education. In his 2013 TED talk, he states that "The key to [educational] transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions." This can be done

**"Google it" has  
become the  
norm**



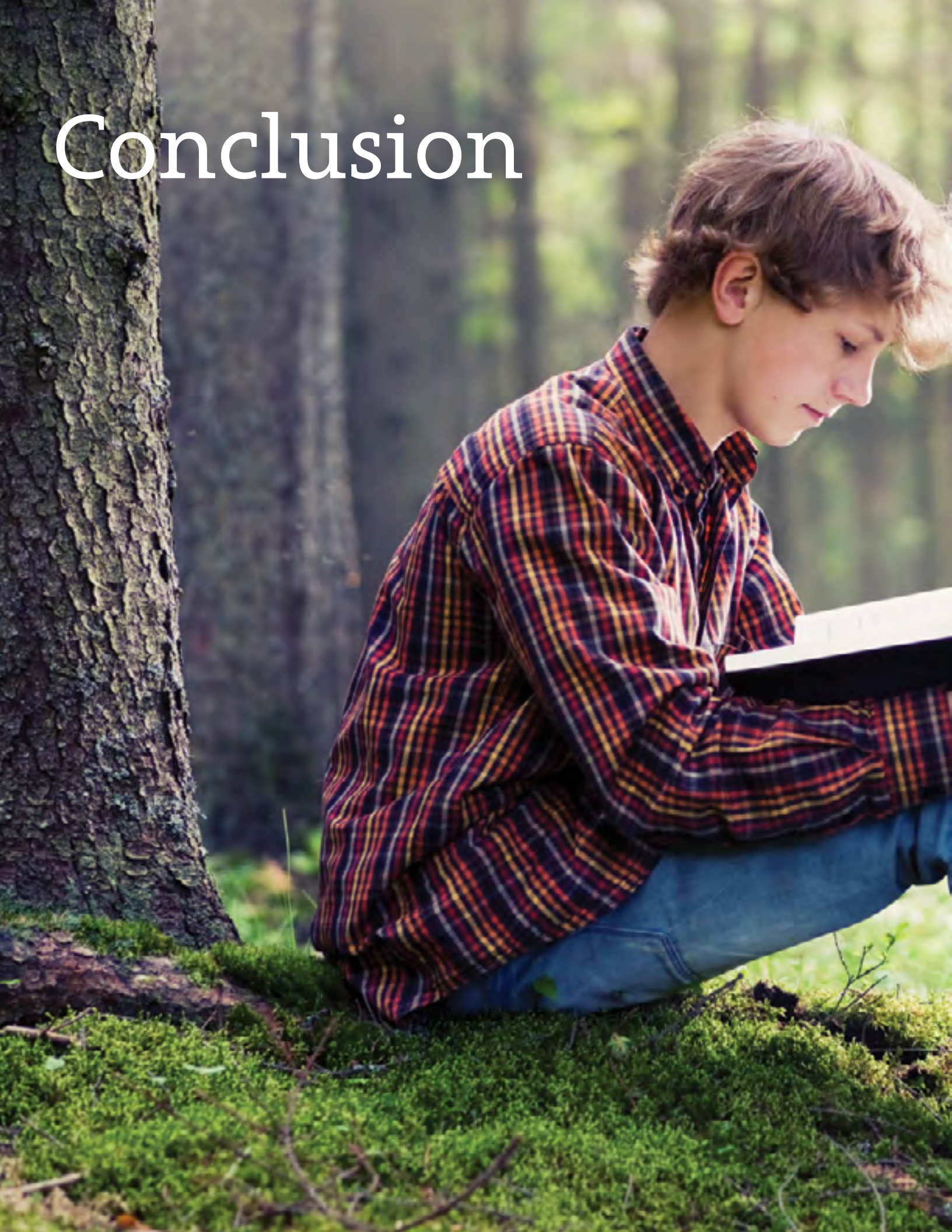
**"The key to transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it"**


when teachers allow students to express their ideas and apply their learning in creative ways.

The flipped classroom is one technique that applies this strategy. The principal intention of flipped learning is to make better use of classroom time. Students are asked to investigate content outside of school and then use class time to make meaning of the information. Students are able to spend class time generating ideas and creating content to demonstrate their understanding of the information. This effective use of time allows the teacher to identify students who need more advanced materials and students who need more personalized, one-on-one support.



# Conclusion



A person is sitting on the grass in a forest, holding a book. The person is wearing blue jeans and brown shoes with white laces. The background is a blurred forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

## Choosing your own path to student-centered learning.

While this whitepaper highlights three strategies you can use to increase the level of student-centered learning in your classroom, the focus must always be on the student and not the teacher. As you make adjustments to your instructional approach, the following questions will help you to evaluate your own student-centered learning environment.

- Am I allowing students to actively participate and make decisions about their own learning?
- Are my students constructing knowledge and building on existing knowledge through authentic and collaborative learning experiences?
- Are my students equipped to self-assess and monitor their own learning while generating original ideas and content?

"We wish you great success in involving your students in your educational practice!"

Designed for teachers and how they want to teach, itslearning is a cloud-based learning platform that connects teachers, students, parents and school leaders – both in and outside the classroom. It gives teachers countless ways to create engaging lessons and resources, makes sharing materials easy, and automates routine tasks so teachers have more time to focus on their students.

A cloud-based platform that's easy to set up and maintain, itslearning is used by millions of teachers, students, administration staff and parents around the world. It can be found at all levels of education, from primary schools to universities, helping teachers make education more inspiring and valuable for today's students.

At itslearning, we pride ourselves on understanding the needs of education. More than 20% of our staff have worked as teachers and we can often be found in the classroom, learning from teachers.

We provide a full range of services to educational institutions, from simple training sessions to full-scale implementation projects. Established in 1999, we are headquartered in Bergen, Norway, and have offices in London, Birmingham, Berlin, Paris, Mulhouse, Malmö, Enschede, Helsinki, Boston and Atlanta.

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a passion for teaching

Helping teachers  
create individual learning paths for students

