

What the Research Suggests About Developing Adaptive Expertise: Summary Points for Practice

While deep understanding can be empowering and provide an important launching point for innovation, it is also important for learners to know how to work in areas of unfamiliarity and uncertainty, to work across domains, and to chart paths for new learning despite lack of familiarity. Adaptive experts know how to develop deep understanding of new domains. They work at the edge of their competence, engage in progressive problem-solving, and view failure or errors as steps in a process towards success. They focus on techniques for upping their game/process and they set evolving and revisable paths for learning.

What can workforce educators do to encourage the development of adaptive expertise? Research suggests that helping learners to develop the six tendencies of adaptive experts will support their ability to deal with unfamiliar and uncertain terrain.

- 1. Cognitive Flexibility involves using skills creatively and seeing beyond ritualized applications of knowledge.**
Encourage learners to seek ways to use their skills in and across new domains. Point out examples of when someone has demonstrated cognitive flexibility. (“Did you notice how so and so used the routine that we were using to brainstorm topics when considering ways to solve a problem? This is a good example of cognitive flexibility.”)
- 2. Metacognitive Self-Regulation involves reflectively thinking about and regulating one’s thinking, learning, and actions using skills and strategies.**
Present skills and strategies that encourage metacognition and self-regulation, such as taking metacognitive pauses, and creating time and space for learners to be reflective. Point out instances when learners engage in and share metacognition.
- 3. Seeking Future Oriented Feedback involves seeking out feedback that helps improve future ability and performance over mere evaluation.**
Focus on feedback that supports future learning and encourage students to do that, too. Help learners to realize that past performances are valuable for what we can learn going forward and that an over-focus on the past can be debilitating.
- 4. Building Progressive Learning Paths involves leveraging feedback to develop learning paths towards improved outcomes.**
Use forward facing feedback to help learners develop their own learning paths. Engage them in conversations that support their ability to think about possible ways to gain the information that they need.
- 5. Developing a User’s Manual to One’s Mind involves gathering information about how human minds work to support enhanced performance.**
Support learners by offering information and experiences that help them to know how their minds do and do not work. Help to point out when misconceptions about the mind arise.
- 6. Capacity for Navigating Cultures involves awareness of cultural processes in places of learning and work and seeking information relevant to navigating them well.**
It is difficult to recognize aspects of one’s own cultural assumptions when one is immersed in it. Supporting learners in navigating culture involves making their own assumptions apparent to them through experiences and discussion and helping them to experience and reflect upon cultural assumptions that differ from their own.