



The Agile Educator Guide

An Agile Framework for Modern Education

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The **Agile Educator** Guide

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Guide Overview..... | 2 |
| The Learning Sprint..... | 2 |
| Visible Learning Artifacts | 3 |
| Learning Sprint Routines..... | 4 |
| Learning Backlog Refinement | 4 |
| Planning | 5 |
| Check-In | 6 |
| Review | 6 |
| Retrospective | 7 |
| The Spectrums of Choice and Collaboration | 8 |
| Overview | 8 |
| Spectrum of Choice | 8 |
| Spectrum of Collaboration..... | 10 |
| Acknowledgments | 12 |
| Certification..... | 12 |
| Licensing..... | 12 |





Introduction

So much of how educators currently teach is based on pedagogical models and practices commonly used in classrooms of the last century. Information can be unidirectional as it flows through the classroom: the teacher serves as the conveyor of knowledge, with students receiving, replicating, and duplicating knowledge. In both traditional and non-traditional classrooms, we see the prevalence of strict adherence to a rigid curriculum, set deadlines, and teacher-defined assessments.

Students are entering a fast-paced, dynamic, and uncertain world, and they will be tasked with addressing increasingly complex problems. They need to develop skills and a mindset that will help them navigate this changing environment. Agile Education more effectively prepares students for the 21st-century lives and careers they are destined to enter.

This guide will help you move your students along a continuum toward increased agility in your classroom. Agility gives students the capacity to self-direct their learning and collaborate effectively. Agile in the classroom can manifest in a variety of ways, including in individual projects, project- or problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, or as the main vehicle for students to meet content standards aligned with curriculum.

Guide Overview

The Agile Educator Guide provides educators a quick-start approach to implementing agility in the classroom. This guide is divided into two major sections: **The Learning Sprint** and **The Spectrums of Choice and Collaboration**.

In The Learning Sprint, you will receive an overview of the structures and cadence of an agile classroom. By learning in-depth about each of the five primary self-directed learning routines, you'll gain insight into how to implement agility in your classroom. Each routine includes an overview as well as targeted Student Learning Objectives. In addition, this section provides guidance on seven Visible Learning Artifacts that support students throughout the Learning Sprint.

The Spectrums of Choice and Collaboration provide guidance on scaffolding the implementation of these two primary components of an agile classroom. In this section, you will gain insight into how to incrementally work toward increased choice and collaboration, starting at a level that is comfortable for you and your students.

The Learning Sprint

The Learning Sprint is an iterative and timeboxed learning cycle composed of five self-directed learning routines:

1. **Refinement** - The routine of clearly expressing, prioritizing, and breaking down objectives into smaller achievable chunks. This can happen at any time within the Sprint to prepare for future sprints.
2. **Planning** - The routine of determining what will be achieved by the end of the Sprint and how the work will be accomplished.
3. **Check-In** - Short and frequent conversations around the learning to align, check progress, adapt, address impediments, and provide support.
4. **Review** - The process of assessing, validating, and providing feedback on the learning in the Sprint.
5. **Retrospective** - The process of reflecting on the Sprint and identifying actionable commitments to improve how we learn and collaborate.

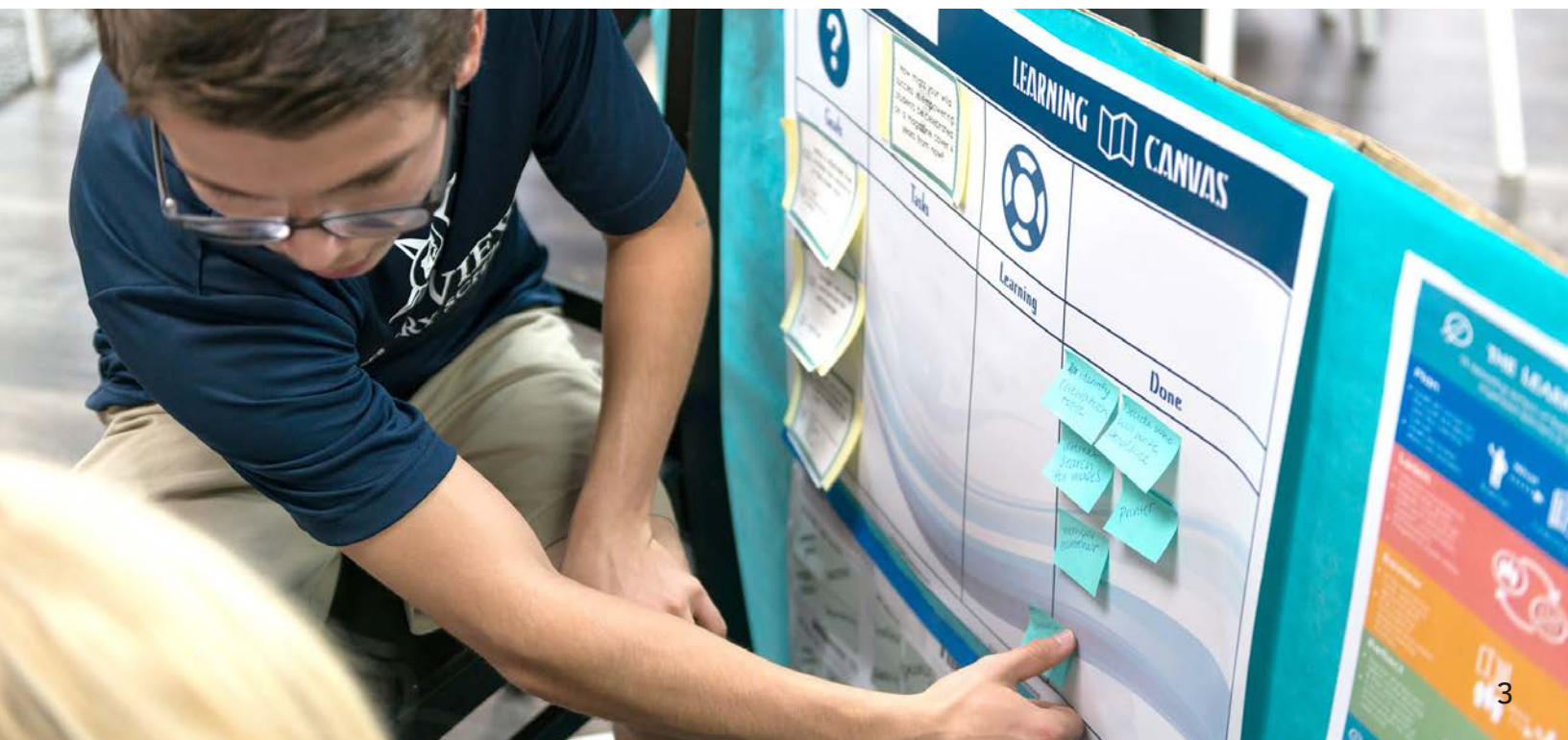
Educators find it helpful to follow the structure above, but the particular cadence of the self-directed routines in your classroom may vary based on context. Each routine in the Learning Sprint is an opportunity to build clarity, choice, and collaboration.

A Learning Sprint should not exceed four weeks so that students can practice the routines frequently. It should be short enough for frequent feedback and improvement, while long enough for incremental progress to occur. When one Sprint ends, the next begins.

Visible Learning Artifacts

An Agile Educator ensures visible artifacts are used to support learning, choice, and collaboration throughout the Learning Sprint. There are seven visible learning artifacts:

- 1. Learning Backlog** - The Learning Backlog is an adaptable, prioritized, and visible list of goals, skills, and/or products to be accomplished by students.
- 2. Learning Backlog Item** - Everything in the Learning Backlog is considered a Learning Backlog Item. Items may take many forms, such as learning objectives, standards, skills, and/or project deliverables/outcomes. Learning Backlog Items are progressively refined to ensure clarity and achievability in a Learning Sprint.
- 3. Success Criteria** - Success Criteria are the evidence that must be provided to demonstrate achievement of a Learning Backlog Item. Each Learning Backlog Item should have Success Criteria before being pulled into a Learning Sprint.
- 4. Sprint Backlog** - The Sprint Backlog is the visual representation of the plan for what will be learned and how it will be accomplished by the end of the Sprint. The Sprint Backlog is updated throughout the Sprint to reflect current progress.
- 5. Progress Increment** - When students complete a Learning Backlog Item and it meets the Success Criteria, the result is a demonstrable Progress Increment. Each Sprint should result in a Progress Increment that builds off the last. Progress Increments are helpful for gauging overall progress and eliciting feedback.
- 6. Spectrum of Choice** - The Spectrum of Choice is a taxonomy for student choice, categorized as five levels, from less to more. It is used to define, measure, monitor, and adjust student choice.
- 7. Spectrum of Collaboration** - The Spectrum of Collaboration is a taxonomy for student collaboration, categorized as five levels, from less to more. It is used to define, measure, monitor, and adjust student collaboration.



Learning Sprint Routines

Learning Backlog Refinement

Overview

The Learning Backlog is an adaptable, prioritized, and shared list of goals, skills, and/or products to be accomplished by students. All elements in the Learning Backlog are considered Learning Backlog Items. A Learning Backlog Item can include, but is not limited to: learning objectives, standards, skills, and/or project deliverables/outcomes.

Each Learning Backlog Item should have clear Success Criteria to determine success.

The Learning Backlog is continually assessed for relevance and adapted as needed. This process is called Learning Backlog Refinement, which can happen at any time. Learning Backlog Items may be reprioritized, broken down, combined, or removed.

Student Learning Objectives

In **Learning Backlog Refinement**, students will grow in their capacity to:

- Set their own goals and objectives
- Evaluate and choose the order of their learning
- Revise the learning backlog, by adding, adapting, or deleting items as work evolves
- Use insights from prior learning to inform future learning goals



Planning

Once the Learning Backlog is initially built and prioritized, students move into a Learning Sprint. The Learning Sprint begins with Planning, which consists of three steps:

Why, **What**, and **How**.

Step One: **Why** is the learning valuable?

A Learning Sprint Goal is determined to make learning cohesive and relevant to students throughout the Sprint. The Sprint Goal often takes the form of an essential question, big idea, unit objective, or “the big why.” If needed, the Learning Backlog is reprioritized to reflect the Learning Sprint Goal.

Step Two: **What** can be accomplished during this Sprint?

Learning Backlog Items are selected from the top of the Learning Backlog. The number of Learning Backlog Items should be achievable during the Sprint based on perceived student capacity.

Step Three: **How** will the Learning Backlog Items get done?

Each Learning Backlog Item selected for the Sprint is broken down into smaller, more actionable tasks. Tasks should be sufficient for meeting each Learning Backlog Item’s Success Criteria, resulting in a demonstrable Progress Increment by the end of the Sprint. The time it will take to complete each task may be estimated to check whether the plan is achievable by the end of the Sprint.

The **Why**, **What**, and **How** are visibly expressed in the Learning Sprint Backlog.

Student Learning Objectives

In **Planning**, students will grow in their capacity to:

- Interpret what they want to learn and what they need to learn
- Deconstruct larger pieces of work or information into smaller, more manageable chunks
- Formulate a goal based on prior learning or completed work
- Demonstrate prioritization skills
- Develop self-awareness of capacity
- Estimate effort of work
- Manage scope of work/learning in relation to time constraints
- Apply initiative and self-direction

Check-In

The Check-In is a timeboxed routine, often 5-15 minutes, to monitor and adjust the progress toward the Learning Sprint Goal. This routine gives students a frequent opportunity to reflect on their individual contributions, hold themselves and others accountable, and provide support to others. This routine is also used to address any impediments that may prevent the Learning Sprint Goal from getting done. During this time, updates to the Sprint Backlog may occur.

A Check-In format may include the following three questions:

1. *What work was done since the last Check-In?*
2. *What work will be done before the next Check-In?*
3. *Is there a roadblock? What help is needed?*

Student Learning Objectives

In the **Check-In**, students will grow in their capacity to:

- Monitor and articulate the progress of work during the Learning Sprint
- Identify impediments
- Articulate need for support through self-advocacy
- Be accountable to self and others
- Provide support to others
- Adjust their learning plan

Review

The Review is an informal opportunity, but not the only opportunity, in the Learning Sprint for students to demonstrate evidence of learning and receive feedback. Each Learning Backlog Item is demonstrated and assessed against pre-established Success Criteria. Learning Items that have met the Success Criteria produce a validated Progress Increment and are considered “done.” Based on the feedback of the Progress Increment, the Learning Backlog is refined to determine what to do next.

Student Learning Objectives

In the **Sprint Review**, students will grow in their capacity to:

- Present work that has been completed and meets Success Criteria
- Assess completed work against Success Criteria
- Provide constructive feedback
- Filter most valuable feedback to use for improvement
- Iterate and improve work based on feedback
- Effectively refine the Learning Backlog based on feedback and progress

Retrospective

In a Sprint Retrospective, the goal is to explore what went well and what could be improved in order to create actionable commitments for future work. While the Review is an opportunity to reflect on Learning Items, the retrospective is a time to reflect and improve on the learning process, student choice, and collaboration. In this way, the retrospective is a powerful opportunity for students to build metacognition, practice self-reflection, and exercise self-agency toward continuous improvement.

Student Learning Objectives

In the **Sprint Retrospective**, students will grow in their capacity to:

- Practice effective conflict resolution skills
- Develop strategies for giving and receiving critical feedback
- Curate a toolkit of introspective tools
- Objectively evaluate group dynamics
- Reflect on their learning and fail forward
- Plan improvement strategies
- Apply problem-solving strategies



The Spectrums of Choice and Collaboration

Overview

Agile Education integrates the growth of student choice and collaboration throughout the learning process. To this end, the following principles are utilized:

- Student capacity to make choices and collaborate is developed through practice and support.
- Choice and collaboration are articulated as levels within a spectrum.
- Using these spectrums, the level of choice and collaboration are tailored to the classroom.
- The levels of collaboration and choice can be iteratively adjusted to scaffold growth while mitigating cognitive overload.
- The Learning Sprint and Visible Learning Artifacts are used to support and scaffold students through these spectrums.

Spectrum of Choice

The Spectrum of Choice is an artifact to help answer the following questions:

- *What level of choice does a student have?*
- *What is the teacher's level of involvement?*
- *In what area(s) of the learning process is the student given an opportunity of choice?*

It is a taxonomy for student choice, categorized as five levels, from less to more. The Spectrum of Choice describes how the students and the teacher are involved at each level. It also describes what level of ownership students have in running the Learning Sprint. By selecting the appropriate level for each routine of the Learning Sprint, classrooms can define, measure, monitor, and adjust their degree of student choice. Agile classrooms, regardless of which level the class is currently operating at, can utilize the Learning Sprint and Visible Learning Artifacts. These provide structure, support, and scaffolding across all levels of choice.

Table 1 - Spectrum of Choice

| # | Students | Teachers | Description |
|---|--------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Observing | Demonstrating & Clarifying | <p>Teacher directs students on what to do, choosing for them. Students follow the teacher's directions. Students do not provide input or make any decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher models the Learning Sprint Event and explains why and how it is being used. Students are aware of where they are in the teacher-driven Sprint and how it works. |
| 2 | Actively Imitating | Modeling & Guiding | <p>Teacher shares different paths the students may take. Students give feedback. Teacher listens to student input and ultimately chooses, explaining the decision-making process throughout.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher instructs and guides students through the Learning Sprint Event. Students actively imitate the teacher's demonstration of the Learning Sprint Event. |
| 3 | Contributing | Partnering & Facilitating | <p>Both teacher and students provide options. Teacher and students both agree on the choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher facilitates the Learning Sprint Event by leading the process, with limited direct instruction, providing feedback on student contributions. Students work through the Learning Sprint Event, using teacher guidance while taking a more active role in the process. |
| 4 | Choosing | Empowering & Coaching | <p>Teacher and students both provide options. Students choose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher engages in conversation with students to help them make choices. Teacher asks reflective questions to students in order to deepen their self-discovery and growth. Students execute the Learning Sprint Event independently. Students receive feedback on how they are facilitating the Learning Sprint Event, on their execution, and on their decision-making process. |
| 5 | Creating | Observing & Supporting | <p>Students identify options and choose. Teacher is pulled in by students if needed for consultation and support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher tracks how students are learning and working together, seeking opportunities for growth and celebration. Teacher gives space for the emergence of possibilities. Students drive the entirety of the Learning Sprint Event. They can choose which teaching style and level of support they need from the teacher. |

Spectrum of Collaboration

An agile learner hones their ability to solve increasingly complex challenges. The need for collaboration grows to support the increasing complexity. An objective of Agile Education is to build students' capacity for collaboration. In order to do so, the following principles of collaboration are held:

- Collaboration is a skill that can be grown through frequent practice.
- Agile Education integrates the practice of collaboration throughout the Learning Sprint.
- Skills practiced may include openness to others' ideas, empathy, conflict management, group decision-making, mutual support and encouragement, peer feedback, and leveraging each other's strengths toward shared learning outcomes.
- Cross-strength groups, in which each student brings unique and complementary strengths, are most adaptable to varying challenges.
- Groups composed of 3-5 members allow for the inclusion of multiple strengths, while mitigating the unwieldy communication that often results from larger groups.
 - Stable group membership is preferred because:
 - Trust grows from knowing one's team members well.
 - Rotating membership frequently creates volatility in team dynamics, which leads to fragility of trust.
 - Resilience strengthens as groups work through successes and failures over a significant enough time span.
 - Peer accountability and support mature with trust and resilience, leading to high-performing teamwork.
- Healthy collaboration is never fully mastered. It requires continuous attention and improvements to meet the dynamic needs of individuals and the group.
 - Students may progress through successive levels of collaboration. These levels are depicted in the Spectrum of Collaboration.
 - One intent of Agile Education is to grow students' capacity to collaborate.

This may mean starting out at lower levels if it is appropriate for the classroom, and incrementally progressing through higher levels.

- Regardless of which level students are working at, the classroom utilizes the Learning Sprint and Visible Learning Artifacts. These provide structure, support, and scaffolding throughout all levels of collaboration.
- The Spectrum of Collaboration describes the relationship among students. It assumes there is always some level of collaboration with the teacher.

Higher levels of collaboration can be inclusive of some elements from the prior levels.

Table 2- Spectrum of Collaboration

| # | Collaboration Level | Description |
|---|---------------------|--|
| 1 | Individual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students work mostly alone. Students may inform others of their work, insights, and progress. There is little to no peer support and feedback. |
| 2 | Supportive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each individual is responsible for all work. Students receive some support and feedback from peers. Transitory membership forms and dissolves based on the duration of a learning activity. |
| 3 | Cooperative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups are temporary, lasting at least one Learning Sprint. <i>Divided Responsibilities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group may have a shared Learning Sprint Goal. Individuals own specific parts/activities as they work toward the Learning Sprint Goal. Students receive some support and feedback from group members. Individual work may be integrated with other members to meet the shared Learning Sprint Goal. Individuals may be assigned fixed/static roles. Students usually work in a group of 3-5 members. A group facilitator role may be helpful. |
| 4 | Collaborative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams are stable. <i>Shared Responsibilities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members work toward a shared Learning Sprint Goal. The entire team shares accountability for all work toward achieving the Learning Sprint Goal, rather than only individual members. Student roles, if used, are fluid and open. Students work in teams of 3-5 members. <i>A team facilitator role is necessary.</i> |
| 5 | Communitive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple teams work toward a shared purpose, coordinating and integrating with one another. Teams stay intact while finding opportunities to cross-pollinate with and support other teams. One or more facilitators are necessary. |

By selecting the appropriate levels in the spectrum, classrooms can define, measure, monitor, and adjust their student collaboration. The level of collaboration is set for the entirety of a Learning Sprint. Collaboration may be evaluated and adjusted to the appropriate level before the start of each Learning Sprint.

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- [The Agile In Education Compass](#), the set of guiding principles behind Agile Education. This guide strives to actualize these principles by offering a concrete framework anyone can apply.
- [The Scrum Guide](#). Although the Agile Education Guide is not Scrum, you will see inspirations from Scrum that have been cross-pollinated and adapted for the world of education.
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Certification



Educators looking to deepen their understanding and the application of Agile Education can pursue full certification through CAL K-12 Certification, found here: scrumalliance.org/get-certified/more-certifications/certified-agile-leader-k-12

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