Persona Project

Grow Your Own Center

GROW YOUR OWN

Partnerships to Strengthen Tennessee's Educator Pipeline

TN Department of .Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE SYSTEM

60%

of aspiring apprentices have some undergraduate credit but no bachelor's degree

80%

of aspiring apprentices are adult learners (> 25 years old)

BACKGROUND

After establishment in March 2022, the Tennessee Grow Your Own Center (TNGYOC) started collecting profile data from aspiring apprentices in the fall of 2022[1]. Data collected from over 650 interested candidates reveal a few key themes. Over 60% of aspiring apprentices (AAs) have some undergraduate credit but no bachelor's degree and are interested in becoming teachers; over 80% are adult learners (> 25 years old); and all have a need to work full-time while earning college credit. Traditional teacher preparation programs do not always serve the working learner population well because coursework is scheduled during work hours, and student teaching traditionally conflicts with a full-time work schedule.

Registered apprenticeship as a model for adult education has a lengthy track record of success in vocational trades and more recently in fields like information technology and healthcare. Tennessee's first-in-the-nation registered teacher apprenticeship program has prompted a group of leaders from across campuses to rethink the needs of this learner population specifically. Following human-centered design principles, the first step in designing a coursework pathway that more particularly meets the needs of apprentices is to understand their need – to empathize with the user[2] by creating and exploring personas.

1 https://www.tn.gov/education/grow-your-own.html
2 https://www.ideou.com/pages/design-thinking

"Personas encapsulate the most critical information about apprentices in a way that all team members can understand and relate to."

PERSONAS

A **persona** is a representation of a type of user/learner based on data[3]. Personas are important because they provide the TNGYOC, Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs), Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), and Tennessee school districts (collectively, "developers") and their teams insight into their target audience. This insight provides a deep understanding of the apprentices' needs.

Additionally, by utilizing personas, developers build empathy with apprentices by gaining their perspective and identifying with the apprentice the design is for. Personas also provide a direction for making design decisions; a deep understanding of the apprentice's behavior and needs makes it possible to define who a product is being created for and what is necessary or unnecessary for them from a user-centered point of view. Keeping the personas in the forefront also helps prevent developers from designing for a generic apprentice. Personas encapsulate the most critical information in a way that all team members can understand and relate to.

THE TEAM AND PURPOSE

A cross-institutional team was formed in December 2022. Membership includes directors and licensure coordinators from teacher education programs, leaders of adult learning, leaders of online course design, education faculty members, TNGYOC members, and representatives from TDOE. Meeting twice a month, the purpose of the workgroup is to help every aspiring apprentice take the next steps toward a bright future for themselves and for the students they want to serve. Specifically, this means exploring a wide variety of program and course design adjustments to better address the needs of this learner population.

THE PROCESS

Members of the workgroup articulated the challenges often faced by Grow Your Own (GYO) learners. They then met to brainstorm potential solutions across five causal categories.

3 https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/personas-why-and-how-you-should-use-them

PERSONA A: MEET ANDI

Challenges

- Has an associate's degree or 60 credit hours; licensure requires a bachelor's degree.
- Andi finds that the coursework doesn't account for what she already knows how to do. It begins to feel like busy-work, and she soon considers dropping out because she already has a full-time job and full-time family commitments.
- Her program includes a student teaching requirement. It isn't clear to Andi how an apprenticeship and student teaching are different or the same.
- Andi knows that her mentor is evaluating her competencies, but her coursework instructors are evaluating those same competencies. It isn't clear to Andi whether or not they both need to evaluate every competency.
- Andi has always struggled with test anxiety and worries that after all of this work, she still won't be able to pass the Praxis exam.

Homelife

- Cannot leave employment for any length of time to go to college.

Worklife

- Currently employed in a Tennessee school as a teaching assistant.
- Has opportunities to demonstrate teacher competencies through her job.
- Has already developed many valuable teaching competencies.
- Has strong letters of recommendation from her building principal.

Data

- 65% of current spiring apprentices have 57 credit hours or more and no bachelor's degree.

Benefits

- Stay employed while working toward licensure (earn while you learn).
- Apprenticeship provides a no-cost pathway to licensure.

Solutions

- Create a case study that shows how a GYO apprenticeship program is similar and different from more familiar models.
- Create opportunities for district staff to serve as adjunct faculty for EPPs. Utilize EPP staff to fill mentoring gaps in local schools.

PERSONA B: MEET BART

Challenges

- Has 12 college credit hours; licensure requires a bachelor's degree.
- Has not been to college for at least 5 years.
- Never attended college as a full-time student.
- Bart has a lot of general education requirements to fulfill before he can earn his degree. These courses are difficult to fit into his full-time work schedule and home life as a baseball coach in the community.
- Bart has email fatigue. He has a mentor for his apprenticeship, instructors for courses, and advisors. He gets so many emails that pertain to on-campus college students or emails about fees to be paid (that he was told to ignore) that now he just ignores all emails.
- Bart dreads course registration every semester because the general education course schedule and the teacher education course schedules don't align with each other or with his work schedule.

Homelife

- Cannot leave employment for any length of time to go to college.
- Is very involved in his community as a coach.

Worklife

- Has a role in K-12 school as a detention supervisor.

- School instructional leader has committed to finding Bart consistent opportunities to develop and demonstrate teaching competencies in the classroom.
- Has strong letters of recommendation from his building principal.

Data

- 20% of current aspiring apprentices have fewer than 12 credits.

Benefits

- Stay employed while working toward licensure (earn while you learn).
- Apprenticeship provides a no-cost pathway to licensure.

Solutions

- Encourage Bart to use technology to streamline communication. This could be taught/reviewed via Orientation or a 1 credit course.
- Work with EPP office of technology to define a user group for learners who are 100% off campus.
- Change availability of courses to meet needs of adult learners, offering more online; specific naming of course and modality offered to support students; condensing classes into 1 week (summer) or part term 1, 2; Gen Ed- offer asynchronous and define for students; equitable opportunities for registering.

PERSONA C: MEET CALLIE

Challenges

- High school graduate where she participated in a teaching cadet program, which included some dual credit from high school; licensure requires a bachelor's degree.

- Callie's apprenticeship is in a school where the majority of students' and teachers' experiences do not reflect her background and experiences. This is contributing to her feelings of isolation.

- Because of her young age, Callie could benefit from a lot of the career planning, personal development, mentoring, and leadership opportunities provided to on-campus students her age. Either doesn't know about these wrap-around supports or she isn't sure if they're meant for her.

Homelife

- Not interested in being a traditional college student living on campus.

- Very interested in a no-cost pathway to becoming a science teacher.

Worklife

- Does not have a job yet.

- Willing to work in any district close to her home that has an apprenticeship job opportunity available.

Data

- 30% of current aspiring apprentices (when TAP programs are included in the count) have no college experience.

Benefits

- GYO helps match Callie with a school district that has openings for Teacher Apprentices.

- Gains employment in her field of study starting out of high school.

- Apprenticeship provides a no-cost pathway to licensure.

Solutions

- Create a two-semester GYO seminar model for required 1-hour credit each term during the student's first year. The course instructor could invite guests/departments and build in cultural competencies. Follow an FYS model with a framework curriculum and ensure consistency across programming.

- Provide access to a range of mentors and former apprentices from other districts through a teacher mentoring network.

BRAINSTORMED SOLUTIONS BY PERSONA

Persona A: Andi

- Intentionally teach learners professional language that is included on the PRAXIS.
- Provide access to Study.com early and often to reduce test anxiety.
- Utilize optional pre-assessments that, upon successful completion, allow learners to skip assignments that cover competencies they can already demonstrate.
- Create a standardized one-pager that clearly defines the differences between an apprentice's learning journey and a non-apprentice's learning journey.
- Use a platform like BuildWithin or Craft to provide a shared space where the learner, mentor, and faculty member can all stay aligned with the competencies attempted and successfully demonstrated by the learner.

Persona B: Bart

- Organization of what he needs to do, timelines, calendars.
- Clear/defined pathway for students like Bart who may need more direction – he knows what he wants to do: how do we get him there as quickly and efficiently as possible?
- Define specific courses at the same time each semester (courses for ed. Majors, professors that work well with ed. students).
- Provide access to a consortium of affordable, accessible general education courses available via distance learning.
- If there's a bottleneck course but they can't get into it, are there other courses that would align with curriculum?
- Using tools within email (go to certain file, folder for specific people).
- Work with OIT to define a student type for apprentices or distance learners and take them out of the distribution lists for in-person students.

- Clear contact people for AAs- who is the go-to person or team for AAs at each EPP?
- Proactive approach to reach out to AAs- weekly check-in email or 15-minute phone call for AAs with the person who may oversee AAs.
- In-person touch points (monthly or bi-weekly) to follow up on goal setting and any issues discussed previously.
- Meeting (zoom or teams) to meet with apprentices to problem solve – Provide a calendly or other service for AAs to self-schedule as needed.
- Mentor opportunities (professional or peer).

Persona C: Callie

- Create teams of people on each campus who will be helpful to GYO students.
- Review policies for attendance reporting and scheduling.
  - Example: If a student has not paid his or her balance or created a payment plan by the first day of class, the student's schedule is purged. These students are not responsible for paying their balance, so the team could potentially review these policies and ensure that the AAs are not expelled from courses.
  - Example 2: If a student does not show up the first day of class, instructors can drop students from the course. Intentionally define what it means to "show up" as an apprentice. Is it enough to be present at the apprenticeship classroom location? Is there an online course involvement expectation? Is there a synchronous or in-person course attendance expectation?

ARTIFACTS

Overall, the team has defined the following as potentially helpful resources to develop and distribute:

For Apprentices

- Learning Module: Time management and organization skill development.
- Learning Module: Administrative requirements for apprenticeship and teacher licensure.
- Contact person: An informed programmatic point of contact who proactively supports.

For Mentor Teachers

- Initial training in administrative expectations for reporting on competencies and progress.
- A guide for ongoing reference and Q&A.
- A point of contact for the apprentice's EPP coursework – whole program.
- Access to progress, and alignment of supports with the EPP coursework provider.

For College and University EPPs

- Technology solutions provide visibility into the assessment of competencies, attendance, progress, learning needs, communication updates from the field.
- Training implementation guidelines for mentor teacher training from the EPP.
- Technical support documents for university departments: financial aid office, advisors, student services, registrar, etc.
- FYE coursework that specifically prepares GYO apprentices.