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🤹 PLIX Personas Activity

The MIT Media Lab Digital Learning and Collaboration Studio's Public Library Innovation Exchange (PLIX) works with public libraries and Media Lab researchers to integrate the ideas of creative learning into library programs. One key component of all of our work is the role of the facilitator. We see becoming a good facilitator as a process, one that requires constant practice and opportunities for reflection. We've developed a variety of professional development activities that are designed to help beginners get started building out their personal facilitation practice.

One such activity is a **personas activity** for practicing facilitation of creative learning experiences, developed with the Akron-Summit Public Library system in Ohio. The purpose of this activity is two-fold:

1. Build empathy among facilitators for learners who may approach an activity differently than they would.
2. Practice facilitating an activity while not feeling like an expert.

How to run this activity

This activity is ideal for groups of around ten, with one to two designated "facilitators" and eight or so designated "participants." The facilitator(s) should be given the supplies to run the PLIX Paper Circuits activity and a pre-crafted workshop prompt (e.g. "make a light-up greeting card").

The participants should each be given one of the eight persona cards from the last page, cut as shown to the right.

The group then spends ~30 minutes or so running the paper circuits activity. Here is a sample agenda for a one-hour session:

15 min: Introduction to activity; set-up and assign roles
30 min: Practice facilitation!
10 min: Dedicated reflection time within in pairs or trios
5 min: Final thoughts (full-group share-out)

Example Instructions *(to paraphrase out loud as you introduce the activity)*

Facilitator Persona	**Participant Personas**
You are a facilitator for a creative learning workshop using the paper circuits kit. As a facilitator, you need to communicate with the participants and try to find out what they are struggling with and especially why they are struggling. Treat this as if you are facilitating the activity. The point is not to guess what the participants' persona instructions were, but to work to make this a successful session for all people involved. Maybe try to pair people to work together, or offer guidance in other ways. You will have 30 minutes for this session.	*Act the part on your card. Work alone or with someone else.* No matter what your persona is, you want to participate in this activity—you may just have issues connecting with it. Do you connect with this persona? Have you ever felt this way before? Read the card but also try to complete the backstory of your persona. Come up with justifications for why you would feel a certain way during the activity. For example, if you are frustrated, try to think of why you are. Avoid turning your persona into a caricature. Rather, try to be yourself as much as possible with some guidance from the card. Try to picture someone who reminds you of this description. Your goal isn't to "stump" the facilitator, but rather to help create an environment for practice.

Reflect in Small Groups

After the activity, take some time to call "And... Remind all role-players that facilitation is a practice and that it's always important to give time for reflection in order to keep improving.

Start with a quick round where people reveal their persona.

Break the room into groups of 2–3. Invite people to reflect on their experience, using no more than 3 of these questions of these questions as prompts for the group:

What did you notice during this activity? What was interesting?
What questions do you have of/as the facilitator?
If you were the facilitator, how would you have supported your persona?
What is something you would have liked to do differently?
How is this experience the same as your usual programming? How is it different?
Something I saw during the session was....
Something I felt during the session was....
Something I heard during the session was....

Facilitators:

How well do you feel like you've practiced the facilitation techniques?
Was there an issue with timing? For example, some personas' issues are more apparent earlier or later on in the session. How did this play out for everyone?
How did everyone feel: Reading their cards? During the session?
At what points were you: Excited? Frustrated? Confused? Engaged?

Participants:

Do you feel you learned anything about facilitation?
When were you enjoying it most?
When were you most stressed out?
What skills were most helpful in assisting each other?

Reflect as a Full Group

Bring everyone back together to talk about anything that stood out in their small group reflections.

Adopting the Personas

These personas were crafted very thoughtfully, based on PLIX Team experiences facilitating and participating in creative STEAM activities. We understand people are not monoliths, so we made sure to design our personas more as guides. We also avoided making personas that were strictly "positive" or "negative," but rather based on traits, comfort levels, and approaches to learning (which can all be expressed in many different ways). The personas also all strive for a path toward resolution: none of them are designed to simply "stump" a facilitator.

😬**Persona 1: You copy the example, make a basic project, and decide that you are done.**

- There is still plenty of time left in the workshop. You are interested in the activity, but you believe that you are "done" once you've copied the example.
- You finish creating the example and then just sit around, doing nothing.
- You struggle to envision ways to integrate your own interests with the activity.
- You may want to talk through your ideas with a peer or with the facilitator in order to figure out what to try next.

😵‍💫**Persona 2: You are intimidated because you have never worked with electronics before.**

- You sit and look around, having trouble getting started while others are tinkering.
- You feel more comfortable with the creative or design aspects of the activity, but struggle to understand how the STEM elements interact with these ideas.
- You may feel more comfortable drawing a scene or character, rather than constructing a circuit.
- You may feel relieved to partner with someone who seems more comfortable with circuitry, and you mainly observe and learn from them.

🧐 **Persona 3: You have a clear goal in mind but you struggle to create what you envision.**

- When you encounter a roadblock, you are easily frustrated, and you don't realize that there is a lot of support (like examples, guides, peers, etc.) around to help.
- You may ask multiple questions about the same problem you are having. You may need something explained to you in a few different ways before you understand.
- When something doesn't work as expected, you may blame it on the material being broken, rather than trying to troubleshoot. You may need someone to show you the variety of support materials and resources available before you try to use them.

🥺**Persona 4: You are unsure of expectations.**

- You are expecting (and waiting on) clear instructions from a teacher on exactly what to do. You are having trouble moving forward since the prompt seems more open-ended than you are used to.
- You may copy an example step by step, and then declare that you are "done." You may tinker with the materials for a long time without a clear goal in mind.
- You may ask questions to the facilitator like "What am I supposed to make?" "What do *you* want me to do?"
- Once you realize that you have creative freedom, you try out an idea of your own.

😇**Persona 5: You are engaged and inspired by the project.**

- You feel very connected to the activity. You are doing well with the program: connected, engaged, understanding concepts. You're ready to take the next steps to make it more challenging.
- You may challenge yourself to use more than one LED.
- You may try to hide the circuit on the back of the paper, showcasing your art on the front.
- You may try to help other people.

🥳**Persona 6: You are excited to collaborate with your peers.**

- You find working in pairs or in groups more fun than working alone.
- You are open to suggestions and ideas.
- You may be inclined to spend less time making and more time talking or discussing ideas.
- You are eager to help your peers where you can, as well as to share your group's successes with others.

🤩**Persona 7: You're very passionate about a specific interest**—maybe it's basketball, or Beyoncé, or Pokémon, or the color green.

- Your top priority is to make sure your creation showcases this interest.
- You may be excited to bring peers into your project who also care about your interest.
- You may focus more on the interest itself than the circuit-building aspects of the project.
- You might be very successful in making a paper circuit or become frustrated if it doesn't work.

😳**Persona 8: You're very focused, quiet, and a bit shy.**

- You're succeeding at the activity by making something you're excited about.
- You prefer to work on your own.
- You need minimal help from peers or the facilitator, so you don't speak up much.
- You're open to talking about what you're making or what your ideas are when other people directly ask you about it.
- When you've completed your creation, you admire it quietly to yourself, but you'd love to show it off to others if they seemed interested.