

3 TOOLS FOR BUILDING AN OWNERSHIP MINDSET

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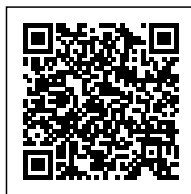


In this article you will learn...

- Students have the ultimate power to own their own learning.
- An ownership mindset is the key that allows students to become active participants in learning.
- The three most important tools for building an ownership mindset are to delegate the authority, build the capacity, and entrust the responsibility for learning to the students themselves.

Categories: [feature](#), [Teaching](#)

Tags: [learnership](#), [student ownership](#)



Reading Time: 8 minutes

Who decides what students will learn? Is it...

- National standards organizations?
- State and local school boards?
- District programs and policies?
- School administration?
- Teachers?
- Students?

The truth is that every one of these entities plays *some* role in student learning. But who plays the largest role? Who is *most* responsible for student learning? The answer is that **it's the students themselves** who decide what they will learn.

No matter what standards dictate the content students *should* learn, no matter what curriculum, materials, or programs are adopted, and no matter what teachers say or do, it is up to each individual student whether they will take an active role and do the physical and mental work required to make learning happen.

Does this mean that students alone are responsible for their learning, and everyone else can just take a long vacation? **Of course not!**

Exactly the opposite is true. Once we acknowledge that students have the ultimate responsibility for their own learning, we as educators have even *more* to do. In addition to *what* we teach, we must also teach students *why* and *how* to develop an ownership mindset.

"...it is students themselves, in the end, not teachers, who decide what students will learn. Thus we must attend to what students are thinking, what their goals are, and why they would want to engage in learning what is offered in schools." —John Hattie in [Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement](#)

What Is an Ownership Mindset?

Student ownership can best be defined as a **mindset**—a pattern of thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes

students hold about learning, which influences their day-to-day thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

All students come to school with their own mindset toward learning. Some are predisposed to think themselves capable of learning, growth, and success. Others believe that they are “bad readers” or “no good at math,” which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Other aspects of a student’s mindset have to do with their individual likes and dislikes, motivations, and sense of responsibility. For example, some students believe it’s their job to do what the teacher tells them, but it’s the teacher’s job to “give” them the learning—and the teacher’s fault if they don’t get it.



Luckily, **mindsets can change**. From the youngest children to the oldest adults, we can all learn to have a new mindset. Just like any other thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes, a person’s mindset can be taught, reinforced, and learned.

Students with an ownership mindset believe that their #1 job as students is to learn. By “owning” their learning, they become active participants in their own education. These students—

- Can state what they are learning and why.
- Can explain how they learn best.
- Can articulate when they are learning and when they are struggling.
- Understand their role in an academic setting.

It’s no surprise that students with an ownership mindset are more motivated to learn—and actually learn more—than students who don’t. But how can teachers help students develop an ownership mindset?

The key lies in giving students the **authority**, the **capacity**, and the **responsibility** to own their learning. These three essential aspects of student ownership are the best tools teachers have for fostering an ownership mindset in every student.

Delegate the Authority

What does **authority** mean in the context of an ownership mindset?

It doesn’t mean that students get to decide everything they want to learn solely based on their

interests. If that were true, they would never get the opportunity to explore new or unfamiliar content, and they would miss out on the joy of discovering new interests.

Instead, it means that students have the **authority to make decisions about how they learn**. When students are learning a new skill, they should have some input into what they will do to master that skill. They should be able to make some decisions about how much or what types of practice they need or how they will authentically apply what they have learned.

It is the teacher's role to give students the **authority** to make decisions based on how they learn best. Delegating this authority is a necessary factor if students are to take ownership of their learning.

Build the Capacity

Students have the **capacity** to own their learning when they have the knowledge and skills required to succeed as learners.

This includes, but is not limited to, the usual content-area learning we know we must teach, based on our state and national standards. But just as important (if not more so) are the **metacognitive skills** students need to analyze and reflect on their own learning.

Students need to learn the skills of how to challenge themselves, how to reflect on their growth, how to support their own learning—and to recognize why these skills are important to their lifelong success.

It is our job as teachers to empower students with these essential skills, which build in students the **capacity** to own their learning.

Entrust the Responsibility

Finally, students must have the **responsibility** for their own learning. They must understand their role in their learning and take responsibility for their successes, as well as their mistakes.

Students who have taken responsibility for their learning are **accountable for their own academic achievements**. If there is a problem, they know it is up to them—with the teacher's help—to fix it.

But students can't be held responsible for their own learning if they have little understanding of what they are learning, why they are learning it, how they will learn it, or how they will demonstrate their learning. For us to expect students to take **responsibility** for their learning, we have to give them the **authority** and the **capacity** to do so.

Ownership Mindset in the Classroom

To illustrate the difference between passive students and students with an ownership mindset, here are some questions and the answers you might hear in the classroom.

Passive students

Students with an ownership mindset

What are you learning?

"I have to read this chapter about the Middle Ages."

"I am learning how various geographic, political, economic, and religious factors influenced different civilizations in the Middle Ages. I'm drawing my own conclusions based on the text and learning how to support my conclusions using text evidence."

How are you learning it?

"I'm using the steps in the book."

"I'm using an equation and a diagram to represent the problem. Using both strategies helps me think about the problem in different ways and also check my work."

What can you do if you are struggling?

"I can raise my hand if I have a question."

"If I don't understand something, I have different strategies I can try. But what usually helps me the most is to talk it through with my learning partner."

What is your role in the class?

"I have to do all my assignments and turn them in on time."

"My role is to understand what we're supposed to be learning and why, and then to do what I need to do to learn it, including getting help when I need it."

Just imagine a classroom where **every student** can state what they are learning and why, explain the plan for their learning that leads to mastery, articulate when they are learning and when they are struggling, and willingly take risks in their learning. That's the kind of classroom that results when students learn to take ownership of their learning and have the authority, the capacity, and the responsibility to do it.

Teachers can support each and every student in developing an ownership mindset by—

- **Modeling the thinking** behind student ownership.
- **Explicitly teaching the skills** of ownership.
- Being willing to **give the authority, the capacity, and the responsibility for learning** to the students themselves.



Continue the Learning

Check out these articles and resources to continue your learning about this topic...

- [Our Article, "How to Create a Culture of Achievement"](#)
- [Our Article, "Why Is Learnership the Skill for the 21st Century?"](#)
- [Our Book, *Developing Student Ownership: Supporting Students to Own Their Learning through the Use of Strategic Learning Practices*](#)

The Learning Brief

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