

THE MOST CRUCIAL DECISION TEACHERS MAKE EVERY DAY

by Robert Crowe



In this article you will learn...

- Our greatest power as teachers is in our decision-making.
- Teachers make important decisions across four broad areas: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate, which make up an integrated learning framework.
- The most crucial decision teachers make is how to share this information with students.

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

Tags: [framework for elevating student achievement](#), [learnership](#), [roles in learning](#), [student ownership](#), [teacher decisions](#)



Reading Time: 8 minutes

As educators, we make hundreds of decisions every day. In fact, our greatest power as teachers is in our decision-making. Being mindful of the decisions we make can help us focus on providing the essential supports that increase student ownership and help students achieve at a higher level.

Among the many decisions we make daily are those which can profoundly influence the opportunities for developing student ownership and the elevated achievement that follows. These are the decisions that relate to:

- **Curriculum**—what students are learning,
- **Instruction**—how they are learning it,
- **Assessment**—how well they are learning it, and
- **Climate**— what is their role in the classroom and their learning.

However, if we keep these decisions to ourselves, we're missing the greatest power as teachers.

If students are to truly develop an **ownership mindset**—that is, to know that they alone have the authority, capacity, and responsibility for their own learning—the teacher must model the thinking behind the ownership.

That's why the **most crucial decision we make every day is: *How will I share this information with my students?***

Curriculum

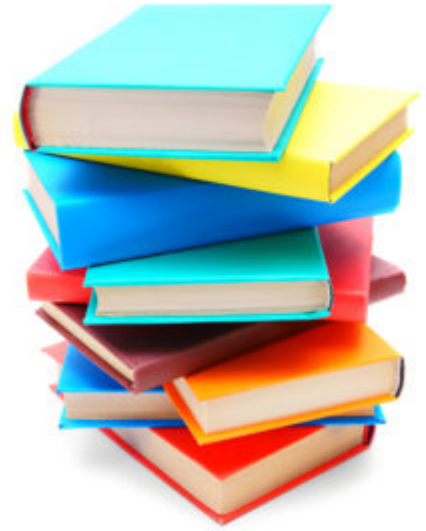
Curriculum includes all the content and skills we expect students to learn. It is **what students are learning**. It's true that some of our curriculum decisions are made for us by our district or school administration. But it is teachers who make the critical day-to-day decisions about what students will learn. Every day, we are deciding:

- *What will my students learn?*
- *Why are my students learning this?*
- *How will my students demonstrate that they have learned it?*

Contrary to what some students think, we don't just pull these decisions out of a hat. In order to make these important curriculum decisions, we also need to think about:

- Which standard/skill (or standards/skills) to focus on,
- Which learning outcomes students will master and in what order,
- What mastery looks like and sounds like,
- What materials and resources students need to use and interact with, and
- How this learning connects to previous and subsequent learning.

And remember, if we want students to own their role regarding Curriculum, we must ensure they know how we made these decisions. That's why the **most crucial decision we make every day is:**
How will I share this information with my students?



Instruction

Instruction refers to **how students are learning**. It includes what strategies we use, as well as what strategies students use, to learn the content and skills set forth by the curriculum. Each day we are teaching, we have to ask ourselves:

- *How will my students learn this?*
- *How will this strategy help my students learn this?*
- *How will my students use this strategy in the future and in different situations?*



In order to make these instructional decisions, we also need to factor in a number of other considerations, including:

- Which delivery method best addresses the content or skill of the standard or learning outcome,
- The specific needs of my students,
- The various learning styles in the classroom, and
- Where in the sequence of the lesson, unit, or course, this learning falls.

And remember, if we want students to own their role regarding Instruction, we must ensure they know how we made these decisions. That's why the **most crucial decision we make every day is:** *How will I share this information with my students?*

Assessment

Assessment includes anything that helps us know **how well our students are learning**. It is something that takes place throughout the learning process and should make it clear to students as well as teachers when students are learning and when they are struggling. For assessment to be valuable, we as teachers need to decide:

- *How will my students know they have learned this?*
- *How will my students know if they are progressing in their learning?*
- *What can my students do if they are struggling?*



To answer the first question, we need to think about:

- What mastery of that content or skill looks like,
- The different ways students can independently demonstrate this mastery, and
- Which way best expresses mastery—at the discrete level, application level, and transference level.

To answer the other two questions, we must also determine:

- How to periodically check for understanding,
- How to offer constructive, affirming, or corrective feedback, and
- How to adjust our instruction when it isn't working.

This supports students by acknowledging that new learning is not achieved in a straight line but that new learning can be circuitous, even daunting, at times.

And remember, if we want students to own their role regarding Assessment, we must ensure they know how we made these decisions. That's why the **most crucial decision we make every day is:** *How will I share this information with my students?*

Climate

Climate is the **academic environment** that exists in a class, school, or district. As teachers, we are instrumental in developing the academic climate in our classroom. To maximize student ownership and achievement, teachers should strive to build a student-centered environment that accelerates student learning. The decisions we make that influence climate are:

- *What is the student's role in the class?*
- *How will my students support others in their learning?*
- *How will my students take risks in their learning?*

In making these decisions, we also need to consider:

- How to directly teach cooperation and collaboration,
- How to offer authentic opportunities for students to work together,
- How to model that making mistakes is an integral part of learning something new, and



- How to deliver feedback that is respectful, supportive, and that promotes the student's self-worth while moving the student toward accuracy and understanding.

And remember, if we want students to own their role regarding Climate, we must ensure they know how we made these decisions. That's why the **most crucial decision we make every day is: How will I share this information with my students?**

A Framework for Learning

Not one of these decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate can be made in isolation. Each decision impacts others in an **integrated learning framework**.

It is our job as teachers to make the important decisions across all four areas of the learning framework. Decisions such as the sequence of a course, the focus of a unit, the goal of a lesson, the selection of an instructional strategy, and the assessment of student mastery lie in our hands.

However, the power of our decisions is diminished if we neglect to share our thinking with our students.

When our decisions work together and we communicate them to our students, the results will be greater learning, increased student ownership, and elevated student achievement.



[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 Downloadable Resources for Developing Student Ownership](#)
- [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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