



# Developing **STUDENT OWNERSHIP**

**SECOND EDITION**

Supporting Students to Own  
Their Learning through the Use of  
Strategic Learning Practices

**ROBERT CROWE AND JANE KENNEDY**

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# FOREWORD

In the five years since we first published *Developing Student Ownership*, we have had the opportunity to share this work with countless partners who in turn have been working diligently to develop student ownership in their schools and districts. It has been exciting to see the increase in the understanding of how vital it is to develop learners that own their learning.

During this time, we also all experienced the impact of the pandemic which led to distance learning, which led to a hybrid model, and then back to face-to-face learning. That experience only increased our understanding of the importance of this work. Through all of this, it became clear to everyone that in order for students to continue learning, they needed to better understand their role in the process. *In other words, they needed to develop student ownership now more than ever.*

We have met this challenge through this expanded edition. You will notice stronger examples, a deeper understanding of the value of integration, and, most importantly, how to develop student ownership in daily lessons. You will notice in the new Chapter 5 that we lay out the sequence for developing the skills of student ownership. We all know that this cannot be taught in a single day. In the new Chapter 6, we share a learning model for daily lessons that keeps student ownership at the forefront. We hope these practical ideas clarify the ease with which student ownership can be developed and continues to support you and your students.

Bob and Jane



# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## **Robert Crowe**

Bob is a cofounder of Elevated Achievement Group, a professional development company dedicated to helping educators develop student ownership at all grade levels. The focus on student ownership is reflective of his experiences in the professional development world. Bob began his tenure in education as a bilingual teacher in California in 1993, when he taught English learners at all proficiency levels. He then began working directly with teachers with a national company. He has worked across the United States supporting administrators, teachers, students, and parents at all school levels to implement standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It was during these eighteen years as an instructional coach that he saw the value in motivating students to own their learning.

## **Jane Kennedy**

Jane is a cofounder of Elevated Achievement Group. She founded this professional development company with the express desire to focus on supporting educators as she feels they need to be supported—with a collaborative approach instead of a top-down approach. Jane began her career in 1991 on the East Coast as a self-contained classroom teacher in a diverse setting with a majority of her students receiving Title I support. This initial experience infused Jane with a passion for educational equity that has influenced her subsequent career focus. This focus led her to begin consulting work with a national textbook publisher, where she supported adults at all levels in the educational system.



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# DEDICATIONS

To Jolene Combs,  
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To the friends, family, and colleagues  
who have supported me on this journey

THANK YOU, JANE







# INTRODUCTION

## The Look and Sound of Student Ownership

Imagine walking into a third-grade classroom and asking a student, “What are you learning today?”

The student says, “We’re reading *Charlotte’s Web*.”

It’s a perfectly acceptable answer but one that does not convey much about the context, content, or skills associated with the learning.

Now imagine asking the question again and hearing this: “Today I am learning how to describe characters by their traits, motivations, and feelings. We are reading *Charlotte’s Web*, and I am describing Wilbur in chapter 3. I will know that I have done a good job taking notes on this by filling out my character map accurately. I am learning how to do this because, when we finish the book, I am writing an opinion essay on which character was most admirable: Charlotte, Wilbur, or Fern. I will take notes on all of the characters to use as details in my essay. I am checking with my friends in my group because they will help me figure out if I have left any important information out of my notes. I will help them because that’s how we help everybody in the class get smarter. I like working in groups because the talking helps me better understand what I am thinking. I like this classroom because I get smarter every day.”

Imagine if that were the response from the majority of the classmates.

Is such an in-depth understanding of one’s learning achievable, or is it merely a pipe dream? Do you believe that a child could know that much about what they were learning and how they were learning it? Or know if

they were struggling and how to help others with the same learning? Do you believe a student could take this much ownership of their own learning?

We do.

## Why Taking Ownership Matters

After over twenty-five years in the classroom, we have seen all types of students take *ownership* of their learning. They are not merely passengers in their education but active participants. Taking ownership allows them to increase their academic achievements across the board—not just in a specific content area.

Years ago, John Hattie (2009) showed us that students who own their learning are more motivated to learn, and those students who are more motivated to learn actually learn more: “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.” (p. 240)

But student ownership is almost impossible to develop without teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that students recognize their role in learning.

The most effective way for students to understand their role in learning is to get them to take ownership—a skill that can be directly taught and mastered. This book answers the following fundamental questions about teaching students to own their learning:

- ▶ What is student ownership?
- ▶ What does ownership look like and sound like in the classroom?
- ▶ What is the teacher’s role in student ownership?
- ▶ What are the most critical supports needed to develop student ownership?

We are sharing the information in this book because we want you to imagine a scenario in which every student in an algebra class is able to report not only that they are learning how to interpret mathematical expressions but also that they are doing so while building on prior knowledge in an environment of collaboration and support, with the result being a learning product that clearly shows their mastery of the skill.

We want you to imagine the same level of ownership from an eighth-grade history class in which students are learning how to cite textual evidence from a primary source or from a high school biology class focused on constructing an evidence-based model and explanation of the structure of DNA.

We want you to imagine the best for your students.

## Moving Beyond Doing and Understanding

As teachers, we mentally categorize students into those who do the work and those who do not. Translated into academic language, students are either motivated or not. It follows that students are similarly categorized into those who achieve and those who do not. Commonly heard complaints include the following:

- ▶ “When I ask them if they understand or have any questions, they just stare at me.”
- ▶ “They wait for me to give them the answer.”
- ▶ “Juliana is the only one who raises her hand, so I always call on her.”
- ▶ “If they don’t get it right the first time, they give up.”
- ▶ “Good luck trying to get them to do work at home.”

Motivation, to many, is a finite trait. Some kids have it and some don’t. But this thinking maintains the status quo. This type of thinking ignores that motivation can be cultivated, so students aren’t taught to be motivated. They are left to their own devices rather than shown a better way.

In other words, rather than taking ownership of their learning, many students coast through their education *doing* school. Some begin *understanding* school, but most are unclear about *owning* their learning.

All too often, students are just *doing* school. They come most days, they attend class, they do the work (most of the time), but they don’t have a clear reason why they are there—aside from the fact that they are supposed to be there. This is a passive student—they “get” or “don’t get” a certain subject, they don’t *earn* grades but are given them, and they graduate (or not) based on outside forces. This is a student who knows how to do school but not that their role is to learn.

In addition, some students are better at *understanding* school. They attend classes and finish all of the assignments because they know that this is how to get a good grade. These students are focused on content knowledge and do well when asked to share information and facts. A student who understands school does well in almost all classes because they know what is expected from them. These are students who feel successful in school but have little clarity about learning. They'd struggle explaining the skills they are learning, why they are learning these skills, or how they will use these skills in the future. In other words, they are missing the thinking piece that is going to advance their learning.

True success in education requires that students to go beyond just *doing* or *understanding* school—they must *own* their learning. A student who owns their learning 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, and understands their role in any academic setting. Asking a student who is fully invested in the ownership of their learning will give an answer like that third-grade student reading *Charlotte's Web*.

Thus, student ownership is best defined as a mindset. Students with an ownership mindset know they have the authority, the capacity, and the responsibility to own their learning.

## **Building Authority, Capacity, and Responsibility**

How can we as teachers support our students to cultivate an ownership mindset? By delegating the authority, the capacity, and the responsibility to them.

Successful students will have the **authority** to make decisions regarding their own learning. This doesn't mean that they are free to decide what they want to learn solely based on their interests. This would not prepare them to explore content they have never been exposed to. Instead, this means that, when they are learning something new, they have the authority to determine what they need in order to master that skill—for example, frequency and types of practice, specific opportunities to authentically apply learning, and more opportunities to transfer learning into new situations. It is the role of teachers to ensure that students have the authority to make decisions about how they learn.

Students must also have the **capacity** to own their learning. They have capacity when teachers provide them with the knowledge and skills to challenge themselves and self-reflect on their growth. These are the skills that lead to metacognition. Capacity is built by supplying students with the skills needed to succeed, sharing why they need them, and explaining how they will use them in their current and future learning. Once students have the authority to make decisions about how they will learn, it is the role of teachers to ensure that they have the capacity to analyze and reflect on their own learning.

Finally, students must have the **responsibility** to be held accountable for their own academic achievements. Students must understand their role in their own learning and take responsibility for their successes as well as their mistakes. But they can't be held responsible if they have no understanding of what they are learning, how they will be taught, and how they will demonstrate their learning. Educators cannot demand that students take responsibility of their learning if they have not given them the authority and the capacity to do so.

So, how does a teacher build the authority, capacity, and responsibility needed for student ownership? A teacher must model the thinking behind the ownership, explicitly teach the skills of ownership, and, most importantly, be willing to delegate the authority, capacity, and responsibility to the students.

So much has been written about the need for students to be more motivated and how, if this singular goal can be achieved, motivation will lead to greater academic success. We couldn't agree more. However, not much has been written about how students can be explicitly and directly *taught* to be more motivated. That is where this book comes in. It will directly show teachers how to increase motivation, and thus achievement, by increasing student ownership.

## **The Strategic Learning Practices of Student Ownership**

Using a variety of research about what best supports students to increase ownership of their learning, we have developed a set of strategic learning practices to be offered to students on a daily basis.

These practices are the actions that offer students the most opportunities to increase their learning—they offer support for students as they are given the

authority, capacity, and responsibility to own their learning. These practices are strategic because the teacher must strategically and methodically determine when and how to offer these supports. Because the teacher is the person in the school who knows the most about the students, it is important that the teacher be allowed to determine when to offer supports to the students. These practices focus on increasing learning. While there are hundreds of actions a teacher must take in a day, this book focuses on those practices in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate that actually increase the opportunities for learning—and increase the opportunities for student ownership.

Chapter 1 will focus on the best practices regarding curriculum. Curriculum is defined as what the student needs to know and be able to do at the end of a lesson, unit, or course. To demonstrate increased student ownership in curriculum, the goal is for each and every student to clearly articulate answers to the following questions:

- ▶ What am I learning?
- ▶ Why am I learning this?
- ▶ How will I demonstrate I have learned it?

This means that the teacher must begin by determining the answers to the following questions:

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

Curriculum begins with understanding the content and skills a student needs to master in order to be successful. In terms of the state standards, curriculum is the content and skills students must master to be ready for college and a career. Thus, curriculum includes the standards and the learning outcomes constructed from the state's expectations. However, curriculum is more than the standards. It also includes the materials and resources students will interact with to master that content and those skills.

Curriculum must also include the demonstration of learning that shows a student has mastered that standard or skill. This demonstration must be measurable and observable so that both the teacher and student can monitor progress.

In order to answer the preceding questions, teachers must decide which standard (or standards) 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.

Chapter 2 will focus on the best practices in instruction. Instruction is defined as the strategies students will use to learn the skills determined in curriculum. To demonstrate increased student ownership in instruction, the goal is for each and every student to articulate the following:

- ▶ How will I learn this?
- ▶ How will this strategy help me learn this?
- ▶ How can I use this strategy in the future and in different situations?

Understanding the process for learning leads to increased metacognition and allows students to own their most effective and efficient learning style. Thus, the teacher must decide the following:

- ▶ 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?

Instruction begins with understanding that different methodologies can be employed to deliver information to students. Because there is such a variety in the content and skills students need to learn, delivery can fall anywhere on the continuum from structured to open-ended. While the decision regarding the delivery method is the teacher's to make, it cannot be made without a clear understanding of the learner.

In order to answer the preceding questions, teachers must decide which delivery method best addresses the content or skill of the standard or learning outcome, the needs of the students, the various learning styles in the classroom, and the sequence in which the learning falls (in the lesson, unit, or course).

Chapter 3 will focus on the best practices regarding in-class assessment. Assessment is defined as the student's ability to know when they are learning and when they are struggling. To demonstrate increased student ownership

in assessment, the goal is for each and every student to clearly answer the following questions:

- ▶ How will I know I have learned it?
- ▶ How will I know I am progressing in my learning?
- ▶ What can I do if I am struggling?

Thus, the teacher must decide how to answer the following:

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

Assessment begins with understanding that mastery of a specific skill or content must be concrete to both the teacher and the student. A teacher will have a difficult (if not impossible) task if they are trying to teach something that does not have a clear and defined end. A student will struggle (if not give up) when the end is unclear or when they are unaware of what they have to do to show that they have learned. However, assessment is more than just the end or final product. It also includes knowing what each step along the way looks like and how supportive each step is to the mastery of the broader content or skill.

In order to answer the preceding question—“How will my students know they have learned this?”—teachers must decide what mastery of that content or skill looks like, the different ways students can independently demonstrate this mastery, which way best expresses mastery of the standard or learning outcome at a discrete level, and which way best expresses mastery of the standard or learning outcome at the application and transference level.

In order to answer the other questions—“How will my students know they are progressing in their learning?” and “What can my students do if they are struggling?”—teachers must decide how to periodically check for understanding; offer constructive, affirming, or corrective feedback; and adjust the instruction when it isn’t working for the students. 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.

Chapter 4 will focus on the best practices to build a positive academic climate. Climate is defined as a student-centered environment that accelerates



student learning. To demonstrate increased student ownership in climate, the goal is for each and every student to answer the following:

- ▶ What is my role in the class?
- ▶ How will I support others in their learning?
- ▶ How will I take risks in my learning?

This means the teacher must form answers to the following questions:

- ▶ 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?

Building a positive classroom climate is crucial if students are to take risks in their learning. And taking risks is a demonstration that students are increasing the ownership of their own learning. This positive climate determines how students receive feedback from the teacher and one another, how students work together to enhance one another's learning, and how students support one another to take risks with their learning.

In order to answer the preceding questions, teachers must decide 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.



Figure A: A Framework for Developing Student Ownership

All student learning is driven by a standards-based **curriculum** with measurable and achievable outcomes.

**Each and every student is supported by:**

- Relevant standards with measurable and achievable outcomes that are accessible and that drive all learning.
- Units and lessons that provide an integrated approach and that support conceptual redundancy of the learning outcomes.
- Access to curriculum materials that match the content and rigor of the learning outcomes.

curriculum

All student learning is driven by a positive academic **climate**.

**Each and every student is supported by:**

- A respectful academic environment that recognizes and promotes scholarly behaviors.
- A cooperative academic environment that encourages risk-taking.
- A collaborative academic environment that enhances student productivity.

climate

Figure B: The Strategic Learning Practices for Developing Student Ownership

All student learning is driven by highly engaging, effective, and efficient **instruction**.

**Each and every student is supported by:**

- Opportunities for meaningful engagement using structured student-to-student communication.
  - Opportunities for meaningful engagement using effective instructional strategies.
  - Opportunities for meaningful engagement in which instructional time is used efficiently.

instruction

All student learning is driven by regular **assessment** that guides instructional decision-making.

**Each and every student is supported by:**

- Data that is used to monitor current understanding and provide feedback.
- Data that is used to monitor current understanding and adjust as needed.
- Data that is used to differentiate based on predetermined student needs.

assessment

## Strategies for Implementing the Practices

Learning about each of the strategic learning practices in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate is an excellent start to developing student ownership. But, as illustrated in figures A and B and as you will see throughout this book, the power of the strategic learning practices lies in their integration of one with the other, because each practice directly impacts the others. We therefore would be remiss if we did not provide you with additional support and examples for integrating the practices, a sequence for developing the skills of student ownership, and a model for developing daily lessons that support student ownership. Thus, you see the need for the new chapters in this second edition.

Chapter 5 will focus on why it is important that the strategic learning practices be integrated and provides support for an integrated implementation. It begins with an overview of the practices followed by examples of what integration looks like and questions to support teachers as they think about where their students fall in the *doing-understanding-owning* continuum. It ends with support for how the skills of student ownership can be taught and learned through a sequence of mastery.

Chapter 6 will focus on how a focused Learning Model intentionally guides a teacher's decisions to integrate the strategic learning practices before, during, and after daily lessons. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that students own their learning. They are the key decision-makers for establishing effective learning designs before, during, and after instruction in the classroom.

This chapter will support a teacher's decision-making in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate so that their students can articulate, each and every day, their ownership in...

**Curriculum** by answering:

- ▶ What am I learning?
- ▶ Why am I learning this?
- ▶ How will I continue to use what I learned?

**Instruction** by answering:

- ▶ How am I learning this?

**Assessment** by answering:

- ▶ How am I showing I am learning it?

**Climate** by answering:

- ▶ What is my role in the learning?

## **Why Increasing Ownership Elevates Achievement**

Not one of these decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate can be made in isolation. Each decision will impact other decisions. It is the teacher's job to decide how these four areas work together to ensure that there is the highest likelihood of student learning. Thus, the teacher's greatest power is in their decision-making. 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 the teacher's hands. That these decisions support increased student ownership is paramount.

With increased student ownership comes elevated student achievement. Focusing on and being strategic with the practices that will support student ownership will allow students to achieve more and to a higher degree.

Let's revisit that third-grade classroom. This is a clear example of a class where students own their learning. These students can articulate what they are learning, why they are learning it, how they will demonstrate they have learned it, how they are learning it, and how they will work as a class to support one another.

As the student said: "I like this classroom because I get smarter every day."

For each and every student, that's the best motivation.