

Nancy Doda, Mark Springer, Ideas for Empowering our Students

1. Add lots of open-ended opportunities where students have the chance to make their thinking visible either on paper, with talk or in conversation. Spontaneous, non-graded, open-ended, and reflective writing or speaking can help students find a voice, and get practice using it.
2. Invite your students to share classroom roles and responsibilities. (eg; classroom set up, materials management, announcements, reminders, etc.)
3. Lean heavily on collaborative learning approaches that require students to make decisions, share responsibilities, and solve problems with others. This is a great way to scaffold independence and enhance student collaborative skills.
4. Plan for students to share their learning products with the class on a regular basis. In this way, they are serving the larger class community while enhancing their own understanding and skill development.
5. Frame your lessons and units with large, essential questions that demand inquiry and debate. Such questions by their nature empower.
6. Build your units of study around student questions and concerns. Invite students to generate long lists of questions they have about their own lives and the world. Have students share and discuss these lists in small groups, seeking common ground on questions. Then, have the class work to distill and synthesize these lists to narrow down the shared areas of recurring questions and concerns. Then, use these shared questions to tailor your Units or build whole Units with these questions as a place to start. These questions might also be used to help students choose independent study projects, writing topics, books to read, topics to research, and so on.
7. One way every teacher can empower students is to include steady self-assessment in the assessment repertoire. When

students are asked to reflect on what they are learning, how well they are learning, how well they can honor class norms, how well they collaborate with others, how well they present their ideas during discussion, and so on, we are empowering them to be reflective learners. Likewise, when students coach their peers on a set of desired skills or behaviors, they are similarly empowered.

8. The words we speak to students can also be empowering. When we provide feedback to students, we should seek to express with genuine certainty, our belief in their capacity to succeed. Encouragement matters and can help students take the lead when they are encumbered with self-doubt.
9. Math teacher, Dan Meyer, (TED Talk) advises teachers to *be less helpful*. One suggestion is to ask students to ask other students before asking the teacher for assistance. Another suggestion is to simply ask scaffolding questions, rather than provide answers or advice, which then helps students do the thinking.
10. One simple bit of advice is to ask yourself each time you plan: What will my students be doing? Will I be doing for them, what they can and should be doing for themselves?