

Involving Learners in Decision-Making

Inviting students' input into the content, processes, and products of learning

The content of learning

- ▶ Ask students **what they think they already know and what they would like to know** about a topic at the beginning of a unit. Post their responses in the room and look for opportunities to refer back to them.
- ▶ When learning something new (letters, words, maps, geometry, current events, music, etc.), ask students **what they are most interested in learning about**.

The learning process

- ▶ Ask students to **recall a time they learned something really well**, either in or outside of school. Ask them to write down what helped them learn it so well and share it with you and/or the class for future reference.
- ▶ **Give learners a choice** about when to complete an academic task, the agendas for class meetings, where to sit, whether to sit or stand, with whom to work, what is on the walls, how to line up or be dismissed, the clean-up song, snack procedures, break time, etc.
- ▶ Invite students to be **“teacher for a day”** or part of a day. With your support, children might take over tasks like taking attendance, keeping track of the schedule, or teaching a particular skill or topic.
- ▶ Ask students to **create a game to teach their peers** about a skill or concept that requires practice, such as vocabulary, geography, math or history facts, elements in chemistry, etc.
- ▶ Invite students to **design their own homework assignments**. Pose questions such as: What do you need to work on? How do you know? How will you work on it? When and for how long? What will you be able to do when you are done that you cannot do now?
- ▶ **Co-create classroom rules and norms** with learners to foster a sense of belonging and investment in the learning community. Let students know that the rules can be changed through thoughtful discussion and involve them in negotiating new rules as needed. The School Reform Initiative Website contains a helpful norms-construction protocol¹. See also Reinventing Rules in Outdoor Games from Opal School² (U.S.) for an example of creating and disrupting rules.

The products of learning (showing what you know)

- ▶ Ask students **what markers or signs they would look for to show they had learned something**. How would they (and you) know that they had learned?



- **Co-create an assessment rubric** with your students.
- At the beginning of a topic of study, **invite learners' ideas about how to share what they have learned** with others. Consider different formats (e.g., poster, skit, music composition, etc.). If the medium is nonverbal, ask for an accompanying verbal or written “artist’s statement” (a written explanation about the visual creation).
- Ask students **what type of product might contribute to the group’s knowledge** as well as individual learning?

Tips for Using This Tool

- Use this tool when planning a lesson or unit to identify ways to involve students more fully in the teaching and learning process.
- If one or more students seem disengaged, or if you feel like your class has hit a roadblock socially or academically, use one or more of the ideas in this tool to engage your students in problem-finding and solving.
- Give students a **License to Hack Card**³ that says, “This card gives me license to direct my learning with regard to the [content, process, or product—choose one] of learning.”

More Than One Way

- Ariela Rothstein, a secondary school student in Lexington, MA (U.S.), formed a Best Practices Club⁴ to harvest student feedback on improving teaching and learning at her school. After securing approval from school leaders, the club created a classroom observation protocol on effective teaching practice in four areas: student understanding, the student’s role, the teacher’s role, and classroom atmosphere.

Notes

1. The **School Reform Initiative Website** contains a helpful norms-construction protocol: www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/norms-construction-a-process-of-negotiation/
2. **Reinventing Rules in Outdoor Games** from Opal School: www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/reinventing-rules-in-outdoor-games
3. **License to Hack Cards**: www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/license-to-hack-cards
4. **Best Practices Club**: www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-students-as-coaches/2006/02