



BUILDING STUDENT AGENCY THROUGH FEEDBACK AND SELF-REFLECTION



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**SUMMIT VIEW
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
TUCSON, AZ

“We’re looking for a child who can really articulate what they understand about the learning, a child who can self-reflect and think, ‘I know this, but I don’t know that.’ So as a practitioner, you have to be watching or listening to evidence. And you have to be thinking, ‘Am I asking the right questions, to really develop agency in our kids?’”

MARY MONTAÑO
Principal

Agency is the concept of taking ownership of what you learn. However, students don’t develop agency automatically; teachers and staff must present students with active opportunities to develop agency. One strategy for developing agency is offering feedback and encouraging self-reflection. These can help build metacognition, growth mindset as well as agency.

The staff at Summit View Elementary in Tucson, Arizona, have provided such opportunities for feedback and self-reflection as part of a broader culture of trust and care that deliberately develops student agency. A school culture like this can help create deep learning for students as well as allow teachers to reflect on how they might strengthen their own teaching practice.¹

Building students’ metacognition

Providing and receiving feedback is a core [formative assessment](#) practice that teachers can use to help students recognize and demonstrate their own thinking while they are learning, also known as metacognition. In formative assessment, teachers move from “being the keepers of assessment information, to supporting students themselves to be active participants in noticing, interpreting, and using evidence to gauge where they are in their learning.”²

At Summit View, teachers ask questions that explicitly encourage students to self-reflect on where they are in their own learning process. This allows them to not only observe and elicit evidence of students’ learning, but also encourage each child to do their own thinking and learning. The resulting learning environment at Summit View supports individual students as they build their own metacognition over time, which in turn builds student agency.

Teachers at Summit View understand that a student's ability to recognize their own thinking through self-reflection is at the heart of learning. When students reflect, learning isn't happening to them, but with and by them. They are developing metacognition.

The power of a growth mindset

The culture of student reflection at Summit View also supports the development of a growth mindset, which refers to the understanding that one's abilities, talents, and understanding can be developed through one's own efforts. Seminal research on growth mindset has shown that praising students' efforts, rather than their intelligence or the outcome of their efforts, can make students more likely to pursue difficult challenges.³ To become comfortable as active learners, students need to feel it is safe for them to struggle with new content and skills.

Summit View teachers emphasize the process of learning, rather than the outcome. Teachers at Summit View have learned that their own ability to model different levels of feedback is essential to supporting students in providing this feedback to their peers. Summit View staff and students use a [feedback continuum tool](#) to move from promoting thinking (the beginning stage) to developing, progressing, then extending learning. As a result, over time Summit View students can use their own understanding of the levels of feedback to help promote each other's thinking in peer-to-peer learning activities. This strategy makes self-reflection visible and transparent for students, while also creating a learning culture in which it is safe for students to grapple with content alongside their teachers and peers.

"If you've received feedback, it's because someone is paying attention to what you are doing and wants to support your learning."

MELANIE MARTINEZ
Academic Behavioral
Support Specialist

Summit View Elementary School BY THE NUMBERS

Number of Students	427	Student Demographics	83% Latinx*
Geographic Setting	Suburban		<1% Black
Grades Served	K–6		16% White
School Model	Traditional public school		0% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Conditions for Equitable Learning & Development	Personal & Learning Environment		0% Native American*/Alaska Native
			0% Multiracial
			68% Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch

*Student Demographic data sourced from nces.ed.gov. NCES lists Latinx as "Hispanic" and Native American as "American Indian." Percentages of students with disabilities and English language learners not available.

As a result, students at Summit View are accustomed to both giving and receiving feedback, making students more comfortable with taking risks as they stretch themselves to learn new things.

Teachers at Summit View also practice a growth mindset for themselves. For example, they learn together through video study groups in which they watch each other's teaching practice to learn new strategies for utilizing feedback to build students' learning. This has helped teacher teams not only learn new ways to promote agency for students but also use feedback among themselves in a non-evaluative way that helps them reflect on their own growth.



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Consider while you listen . . .

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Feedback and self-reflection can work as a cycle. Where in your own teaching journey have you received feedback that led to self-reflection and changes to your own teaching practice? How might you integrate peer feedback that gives your students this opportunity for self-reflection?

EXPLICITLY BUILDING AGENCY

Teachers at Summit View use several strategies to build student agency. Is developing agency something that you explicitly try to do in your teaching practice? What else might you do to shift ownership of learning to students to help them develop agency?

ELICITING EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

Eliciting evidence is a core formative assessment practice. What are the major sources of evidence that you use to understand where students are in their learning? Are there additional ways you might elicit evidence of learning during instruction?

Related Resources



For more information and tools on how to develop agency and feedback, check out these related resources from WestEd: [Guiding Adult Learning of Formative Assessment](#), [9 Things You Can Do to Support Student Agency With Formative Assessment](#), [Peer Feedback Continuum Tool](#), and [Self-Assessment Continuum Tool](#).

Conditions for Learning and Development

In their work, school leaders and educators must attend to a range of conditions that can promote — or inhibit — learning and development.⁴ These include Personal Conditions, Learning Environment Conditions, and System Conditions.

PERSONAL CONDITIONS

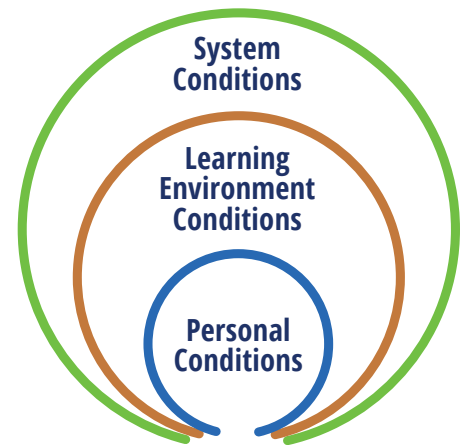
Conditions that bolster and ensure health and well-being within individuals in school communities, including social and emotional health and well-being as well as the physical, mental, and behavioral health of students and the adults who care for them.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS

Conditions that foster safe, supportive environments and responsive, reliable relationships. These conditions include school climate and trauma-informed and restorative practices, as well as the policies, structures, and systems in place at the district, school, and classroom levels. Together, these can promote resilience, provide protective factors, and ensure that every person — regardless of background, circumstance, or identity — can learn, grow, and thrive.

SYSTEM CONDITIONS

Conditions stemming from the complex community and social factors that can influence health and well-being. Here, cross-sector collaboration between schools and other sectors — such as health, mental health, justice, child welfare, housing, and anti-poverty efforts — can accelerate schools' positive impacts on the development and well-being of students and families.



¹ Birenbaum, M. in Wyatt-Smith, C. et. al. eds. (2014). Designing Assessment for Quality Learning. *The enabling power of assessment*. Springer Science.

² Gerzon, N. (2020). Student agency through formative assessment. *Formative Insights, Assessment for Learning*. WestEd.

³ Dweck, C. S. and Yeager, D. S. (2019, May). Mindsets: A View From Two Eras. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 14, 3. 481–496.

⁴ Garcia Coll, C., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H. P., Crnic, K., Wasik, B. H., & Garcia, H. V. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development*, 67(5), 1891–1914. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131600>



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