

**2022**

# Core Elements of an Empowered Learner Program

Redwood City School District  
in collaboration with Stanford Graduate School of Education



# Table of Contents

Introduction	<b>2</b>
Core Elements	<b>3-12</b>
Samples and Suggestions	<b>13-18</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suggested Timing and Size of Cohort</li><li>• Sample Calendar and Session Goals</li><li>• Activity Descriptions</li><li>• Coaching Tips</li><li>• Examples of Participant Projects</li></ul>	
Supporting Research	<b>19-20</b>

# Introduction

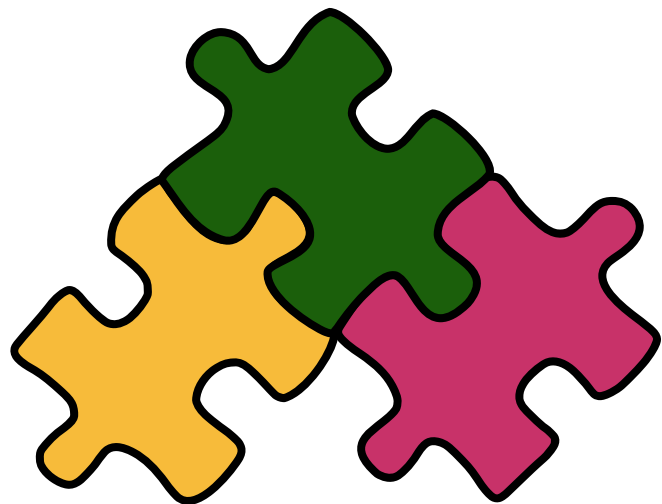
The guide you are reading was developed through a collaboration between the Redwood City School District and Stanford University during the 2021–2022 academic year.

Following several years of positive feedback about the "Digital Lead Learner" program in the Redwood City School District, district leaders wished to identify the core elements of the program in order to support other teams, departments, and nearby school districts in developing their own "Lead Learner" program (now called the "Empowered Learner Program").

This guide is a collection of the core elements of the program, supported by observation, teacher feedback, and program documents.

# Core Elements

- Collaborative
- Focus on Equity
- Learner-Centered
- Promotes Learner Agency
- Promotes Technology-Enhanced Learning
- Reflective
- Strengths-based
- Sustained (with Coaching)
- Voluntary Participation



# Collaborative

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers collaborate on projects in groups of various sizes during workshops and collaborate with their coach during 1-on-1 or small group coaching sessions. Collaboration is done in a manner that promotes trust and honest, supportive feedback.

"I really appreciate the [Digital Empowered Learner] meetings and gain meaningful insight from each of our meetings. Having the time to collaborate with my fellow educators from different school sites has been most impactful for my development." (Teacher)

"Students are starting to ask each other questions and learn from each other. They are pushing themselves to be active listeners and empowered learners." (Teacher)



Supporting research includes:

- Bakhshaei et al. (2018)
- Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)

# Focus on Equity

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers are supported to focus on equitable social, emotional, and academic outcomes in their classroom. This includes building upon each individual's strengths, considering how collaborative structures can allow students to complement one another, and supporting intentional participation from all students.

"It is important to give [students] their unique voice in learning, and let them know they all play an important role, and have important contributions. They are active and not passive learners." (Teacher)



"My students feel valued to know that all voices are heard. Not just the students who raise their hands or the students whose names are called from the popsicle sticks." (Teacher)

"I think its important to emphasize [...] the importance of SEL and equity, and have some top strategies that teachers can use district wide and implement, to support English language learners, and students who need support, such as ones with 504s and IEPs, and special needs." (Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Darling-Hammond et al. (2014)
- Rose and Meyer (2002)

# Learner-Centered

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers participate as learners without infantilization – adult learners are treated like adults while engaging in similar ways to how their K-8 students could be expected to participate. This allows teachers to develop a deeper understanding of how the modeled lessons and structures might impact their students' learning and engagement.

"[The Digital Empowered Learners program] shifted my teaching practice because students when they feel empowered, they are more enthusiastic and happy to learn, and they will remember the lessons, because they played a crucial role in learning."  
(Teacher)

"Students were extra engaged, which was really wonderful to see. It makes me want to ensure moving forward I am even more putting students at the center-- incorporating what they feel is relevant and engaging--and empowering them to make choices and monitor their own learning." (Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)
- Desimone et al. (2002)
- Lai and Jin (2021)
- Scharber et al. (2021)



# Promotes Learner Agency

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers select their own learning goals connected to key components of the program and determine how they incorporate the goal into their instructional practice. This, in turn, promotes providing similar agency to their students.

"[Digital Empowered Learners] is reanimating me professionally. It's been a difficult year in which I have felt really siloed. This work is helping me rediscover my passions and excitement. It's pushing me to become a better educator, to thoughtfully curate student-created evidence, to center students and empower them to teach their teachers, and to think of next steps for myself professionally and academically." (Teacher)



"[Practices from Digital Empowered Learners] encouraged students to take part in the process as they really enjoyed being leader[s] and having more control." (Teacher)

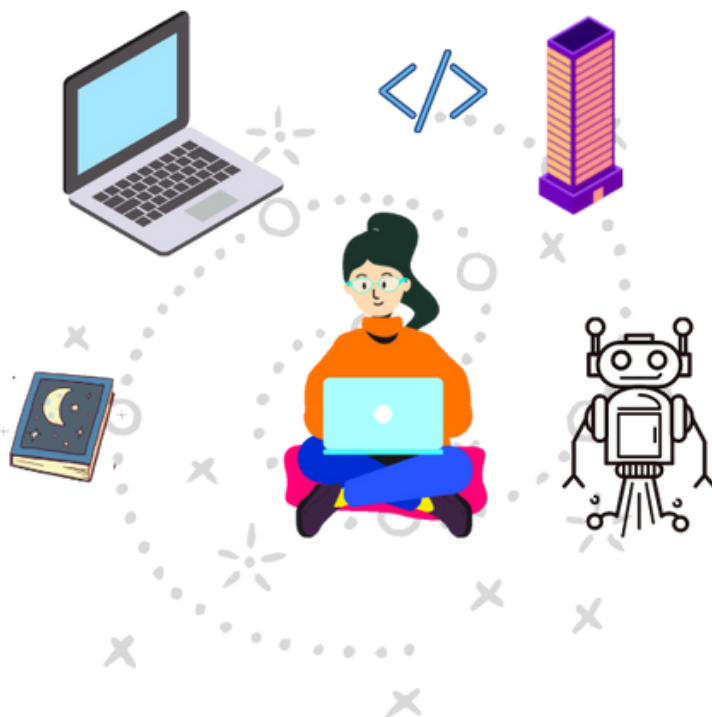
Supporting research includes:

- Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)
- Desimone et al. (2002)
- Lai and Jin (2021)
- Scharber et al. (2021)



# Promotes Technology-Enhanced Learning

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers utilize new and familiar digital technology to accomplish shared learning goals, rather than simply learning about how to use the digital technology. Facilitators lead with the pedagogical goals and select a variety of tools which can support those objectives, encouraging teachers to do the same in their classrooms.



"Scholars definitely have voice and choice for all their different assignments for me. Now I embrace new technology instead of shy away from it."  
(Teacher)

"I think that when other teachers who are trepidatious about working with tech see what this cohort has done, it may help others want to get more involved."  
(Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Dexter and Richardson (2020)
- Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2013)
- Hamilton et al. (2016)

# Reflective

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers reflect on their learning through group conversations and 1-on-1 coaching conversations. Coaches allocate time following most activities to consider how teachers experienced the activity and how they might adjust for utilizing similar structures in their own classrooms. By seeking student feedback through structures such as empathy interviews, teachers promote similar reflection amongst their students.



"I think [using practices from the Digital Empowered Learner program] helps the students solidify the concepts more because it makes them have to think and be more aware of what they are learning [...]" (Teacher)

"The empathy survey/Jamboard was important for me as I learned more about the internal struggles that some students were facing while giving them the option to tell me in a private, less intimidating setting." (Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)
- Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al. (2020)



# Strengths-Based

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers begin by identifying their own strengths to draw from throughout the program. Coaches support teacher growth by identifying additional strengths for teacher to build upon. Teachers then apply the approach to their own classroom by using structures such as empathy interviews to better understand the strengths their students bring and how those strengths could support their learning.



"It's only been a couple of weeks, but I think I'm more cognizant of what students think and how I will structure the lessons to meet their needs and skillsets." (Teacher)

"[The empathy survey] helped me see what things students enjoy about the school day and how to incorporate that into this project." (Teacher)

"I found the feedback [from my coach] very helpful, and it was positive and encouraging." (Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Dexter and Richardson (2020)
- Moll et al. (1992)

# Sustained (with Coaching)

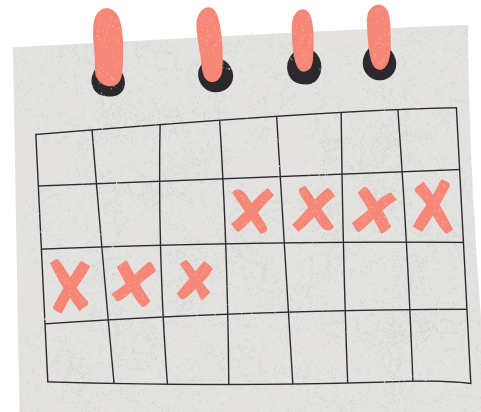
In an Empowered Learner program, teachers engage in learning and reflection over a sustained period of time, often including multiple workshops/meetings and 1-on-1/small-group coaching sessions. Coaches support a teacher's development over time, with multiple opportunities for checking in and providing just-in-time prompts and resources.

"I liked the 1-1 coaching experience to get detailed focus and attention to my presentation, and how to adjust it, make changes, edit, and improve it. I found the feedback very helpful, and it was positive and encouraging. It also helped me to stay on track, on finishing it by the due date, as I had a more clear vision because I had homework to turn in and share."  
(Teacher)

"I love that we had both group meetings and one-on-one meetings, which is helpful for hearing ideas."  
(Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)
- Dexter and Richardson (2020)
- Ehsanipour and Gomez Zaccarelli (2017)



# Voluntary Participation

In an Empowered Learner program, teachers voluntarily apply to participate in the program and select their own learning goals based upon the objectives of the program.

"I loved having the opportunity to be a part of this cohort and I am really looking forward to continuing my work with the coaches as well as the other educators in our district." (Teacher)



"I was so delighted with all the process in itself, since I felt really supported and my needs were met. Thank you [Coach]!!!" (Teacher)

Supporting research includes:

- Bakhshaei et al. (2018)
- Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)

# Samples and Suggestions

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The following pages include samples and suggestions developed over several years of leading Empowered Learner programs. Please adopt and adapt as applicable to your own community, content area(s), and core concept(s) or goal(s).

# Suggested Timing and Size of Cohort

Recruitment can vary, based on the availability of coaches, the content of the Empowered Learner program, and the duration of the cohort. Two samples are included based on a year-round and a quarter or trimester cohort duration.

The suggested number of participants lowers based on shorter duration of the cohort due to the ability of a coach to meet multiple times with each teacher during a compacted window.

	<b>Year-Round</b>	<b>Quarter/Trimester</b>
<b>Recruitment</b>	Occurs once a year, within approximately first two months.	Occurs approximately twice a year, once in first two months for first cohort, once in December for second cohort
<b>Number of Participants</b>	Up to seven per coach	Up to four per coach
<b>Workshop Spacing</b>	Approximately one meeting per month for five months	Approximately every other week for two months, followed by a fifth meeting one month later

# Sample Calendar & Session Goals

	Activities	Goals
Session # <b>01</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Building Icebreaker</li> <li>Assets and Allies*</li> <li>Collaborative board describing a core concept**</li> </ul>	The goals of the first workshop session are to establish a collaborative network, to create shared understandings and to build upon strengths.
Session # <b>02</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create infographic on core concepts</li> <li>Introduction to Empathy Interviews</li> </ul>	The second session continues the focus on collaboration and shared understandings while promoting learner agency and empowerment.
Coaching # <b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review Empathy Interview results</li> <li>Develop aspiration statement(s)</li> <li>Examine edtech tools to support aspiration statement(s)</li> </ul>	The first coaching session focuses on input from students to allow the participant to develop their own aspiration statement for the program as a whole.
Session # <b>03</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflection on "remixed" lessons</li> <li>Small-group discussion supporting individuals' aspirational goals</li> </ul>	The third session focuses on participants sharing their practices and learning from one another as they refine their individual goals.
Session # <b>04</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"See/Hear" chart of classroom enactment of core concepts</li> <li>Connect core concepts to equity, and social-emotional learning</li> </ul>	The final session before the work shifts to individualized coaching, the goal of this meeting is to explicitly connect the core concepts to supporting the whole child.
Coaching # <b>2-4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support with project</li> <li>Observation and feedback on technology use</li> <li>Providing space for reflection</li> </ul>	The goal of the coaching sessions is to help the teacher enact their aspiration statement, drawing upon practices and core concepts from the meetings.
Session # <b>05</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share out projects</li> <li>Feedback on projects</li> </ul>	The goal of the final session is to allow each participant to share their learning with the rest of their peers, empowering each participant as a learner and leader.
Additional Session(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support with presentation skills to share project in a workshop/conference format</li> </ul>	Additional sessions may be held to support participants with how to adapt their short project presentation into a full workshop or conference session.

\* A description of Assets and Allies, along with other activities, can be found on the following page.

\*\* "Core concepts" are the pedagogical concepts the program is structured around. In this example, the core concepts were Empowered Learner, Effective Collaborator, and Knowledge Constructor.



# Sample Activity Descriptions

## Community Building Icebreaker

- To start off some workshop sessions, the facilitators would pose a question to the group related to one of the core concepts and how it applies to the participant's personal life or classroom experience.

## Assets and Allies

- An individual project where each participant designs their own "room" in a presentation slide which contains images of people, places, things, and ideas which the participants view as making themselves feel empowered.

## Collaborative Board or "See/Hear" Chart

- A co-designed slide or digital space utilizing a mix of text and images to define or further explore a topic. A "see/hear" chart is similar but includes descriptions and images of what one might see or hear in the classroom related to the selected core concept.

## Empathy Interviews

- Drawing upon empathy seeking in design thinking, empathy interviews are used in this program to gather input from students about their empowerment in the learning process or how they experience learning related to a core concept of the workshop. Adapted from Co-Designing Schools Toolkit, available at <https://www.codesigningschools.com/toolkit-phase-three>.

## Aspiration Statement

- A participant's goal intended outcome for the program, focused upon how their own learning will support student outcomes tied to the core concepts of the program. Adapted from Co-Designing Schools Toolkit, available at <https://www.codesigningschools.com/toolkit-phase-two>.

## "Remixed Lesson"

- A classroom lesson that was modified, mildly or robustly, to incorporate practices or ideas previously covered in the program.

# Coaching Tips

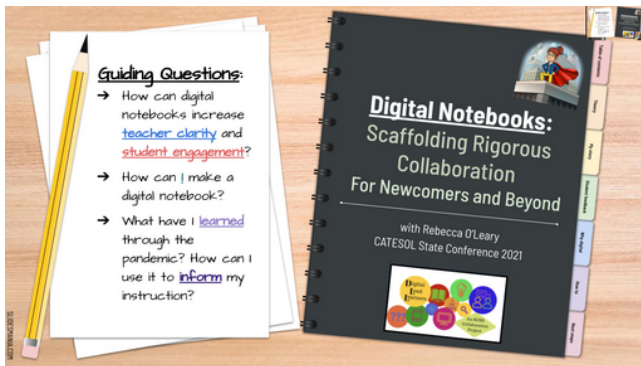
The level of coaching provided to each participant can vary based on multiple factors, including expectations placed on the coach outside of the Empowered Learner program, the number of participants assigned to each coach, and the depth of understanding each participant brings to the program.

Additionally, technology and social distancing constraints may keep a coach from being able to observe and provide feedback on classroom instruction.

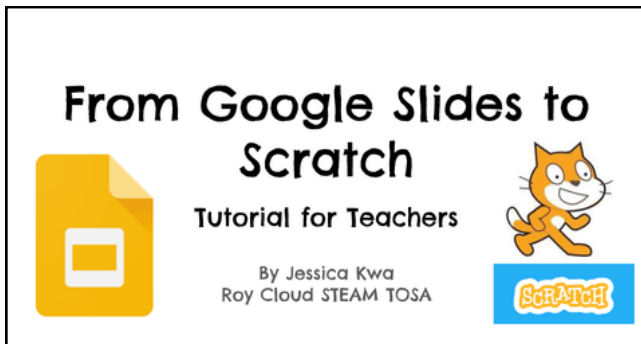
While coaching is especially individualized within an Empowered Learner program, semi-frequent meetings amongst all the coaches to share progress and roadblocks may allow for stronger support to be provided to each participant.

# Examples of Participant Projects

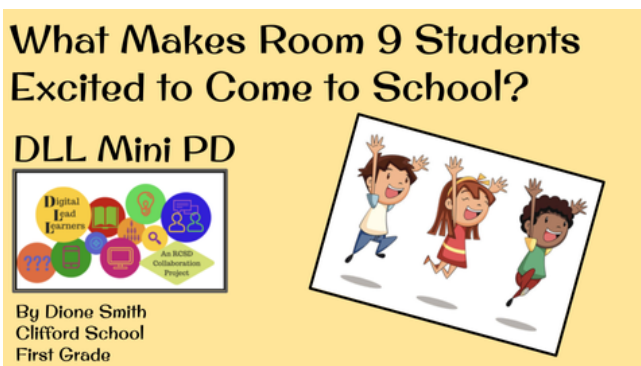
Three examples of participant projects are described and linked below. The first example is intended as an interactive conference workshop, whereas the other two examples were intended as shorter and more self-guided.



Learn how digital notebooks can help you engage students and improve clarity. Discover how to make your own digital notebooks and embed elements that will support your students' learning needs. Available at [https://montage.stanford.edu/the-efficacy-of-student-notebooks/](https://montage.stanford.edu/the-<u>efficacy-of-student-notebooks/</u>).



Empower your students by introducing them to Google Slides and the features it has to offer. Then transfer those skills into coding with Scratch. Available at [https://montage.stanford.edu/from-google-slides-to-scratch/](https://montage.stanford.edu/fro<u>m-google-slides-to-scratch/</u>).



The focus of this project was for first grade students to learn how to create their own Google Slide to answer the question: What makes you excited to come to school? Available at [https://montage.stanford.edu/google-slides-creating-with-first-graders/](https://montage.stanford.edu/go<u>ogle-slides-creating-with-first-graders/</u>).

# Supporting Research

Bakhshaei, M., Hardy, A., Francisco, A., Noakes, S., Fusco, J. (2018). Fostering Powerful Use of Technology through Instructional Coaching: Results from the Pilot Year of the Dynamic Learning Project. Digital Promise.

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Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: Results from a three-year longitudinal study. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, 24(2), 81-112.

Dexter, Sara, & Jayson W. Richardson (2020) What does technology integration research tell us about the leadership of technology?, *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 52:1, 17-36, DOI: 10.1080/15391523.2019.1668316

Ehsanipour, T., & Gomez Zaccarelli, F. (2017). Exploring coaching for powerful technology use in education.

Ertmer, P. A., & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A. (2013). Removing obstacles to the pedagogical changes required by Jonassen's vision of authentic technology-enabled learning. *Computers & Education*, 64, 175-182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.10.008>

Hamilton, E.R., Rosenberg, J.M. & Akcaoglu, M. The Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) Model: a Critical Review and Suggestions for its Use. *TechTrends* 60, 433-441 (2016). <https://doi-org.stanford.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s11528-016-0091-y>

# Supporting Research

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Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into practice*, 31(2), 132-141.

Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A., Liao, Y.-C., Karlin, M., Lu, Y.-H., Ding, A.-C. E., & Guo, M. (2020). Year-long implementation of a research-based technology integration professional development coaching model in an elementary school. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 36(4), 206-220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2020.1804494>

Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2002). Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal design for learning. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1703 N. Beauregard St., Alexandria, VA 22311-1714

Scharber, C., Peterson, L., Baskin, K., Cabeen, J., Gustafson, D., & Alberts, J. (2021). A Research-Practice Partnership about K12 Technology Integration: Technology as a Catalyst for Teacher Learning through Failure and Creative Risk-Taking. *TechTrends*, 65(4), 626-635.

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