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Empowering Teachers through Confidence, Creativity, and Collaboration

The responsibilities of today's educators are not for the faint of heart. With unexpected surprises at every turn, the continuity of engagement and equitable learning has never been more important, or challenging, to provide. Education leaders, and those they partner with, can help teachers meet this challenge by empowering them with meaningful content, up-to-the-minute support, and ultimately, the confidence to take creative risks that drive engagement for all learners.

Teacher empowerment starts with building trusting relationships between those who lead and those who teach. With trust comes the confidence teachers need in their leaders to support them, along with confidence in themselves to take creative risks with their craft. A culture of confidence naturally inspires professional collaboration and innovation. The culmination of all these elements helps to create learning experiences that are engaging, personalized, and equitable.

Among the numerous schools across the country that focus on empowering teachers through confidence, one school exemplifies this: Pebblebrook High School in Mableton, GA. Dr. Dana Giles, Principal, and Khristian Cooper, Assistant Principal, have built a culture of confidence and creativity between the administration and their teachers that puts them, and their students, in a position to win.

Creating a Culture of Confidence

Empowerment starts with a very present, supportive administrative team. We expect teachers to be involved and invested, but we provide them a platform to do so, celebrating them often and encouraging them to share their strategies as exemplars. This creates a culture that allows teachers to be confident and comfortable in taking risks. They feel empowered to try something new because they feel supported by us and can rely on the content and resources that we provide them. It's also about us fostering our teachers' creativity to personalize the instruction and meet the needs of each learner.



Dr. Dana Giles
Principal, Pebblebrook
High School

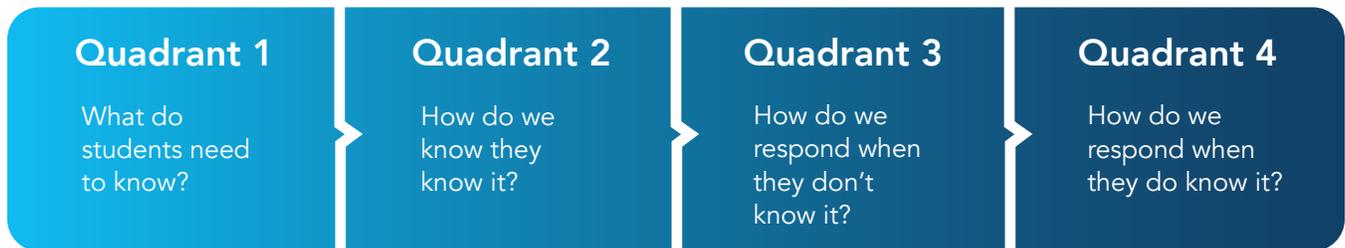
Empowerment is putting teachers in a position to win. The Discovery Education strategies and resources are very practical in that we've inspired our teachers to use them "to win" with their students. They have a platform where they feel comfortable taking a risk, be experimental in their classroom, and take creative ideas to their colleagues. They know we support them and that the resources do too. Lastly, we're always looking for ways to celebrate our teachers and the amazing work they do; one of these ways is to give them leadership opportunities so they can share their best practices.



Khristian Cooper
Assistant Principal,
Pebblebrook High School

Spotlight on Pebblebrook High School

Pebblebrook High School's professional learning community, known as the Pebblebrook Collaborative Community (PCC), follows their district's model (Cobb Collaborative Community, or CCC). This professional learning community inspires collaboration between teachers and leaders by giving everyone a voice to address student learning needs. The PCC is driven by the following framework, which is founded on Richard DuFour's essential professional learning community questions:



"We are careful in selecting resources that support teachers' ability to answer the questions in the CCC framework, especially Quadrant 3, and that are flexible so they can differentiate learning effectively and creatively." – Dr. Dana Giles

"The leaders at Pebblebrook have refined the use of the CCC framework to such an art. I'm seeing amazing collaboration in teams that focus on the same content but are also able to differentiate among team members their tasks based on unit instruction, remediation, and enrichment. This saves time and promotes unity. The rich resources in Discovery Education support this model because it empowers teachers to address every need. It can take a lot of time to find the right resources, but Discovery Education has it all in one place."



Dr. Cheryl Crooks
Personalized Learning Supervisor,
Cobb County School

Kathleen Richert, a High School Teacher from Lancaster School District in South Carolina also recognizes the importance of trusting relationships. "When I think of empowering teachers, I think about the relationships I have had with administration, other teachers, parents, and students. I feel empowered when I feel heard, when I'm trusted to do my job, and when I am supported."

LeAnn Simmerman, Teacher of the Gifted and PLB/STEM Coach at Mary County Public Schools in Tennessee emphasizes how confidence can drive motivation: "empowerment begins with establishing confidence. Leaders must take steps to create an atmosphere of confidence in their schools, including having confidence in their teachers. It's also about equipping teachers to not only do their jobs but excel and thrive in them. There is an inherent motivation to push forward that comes with empowerment."

Supporting Teachers to Create Equitable, Engaging Learning Experiences

A culture of trust and confidence makes it easier for teachers to rely on the supportive content and resources that leaders provide them. Especially if the support gives teachers choice, flexibility, and the chance to take creative risks in their approach to student engagement—they know their students best.

"We really focus on the support piece," says Khristian. "We meet with teachers regularly to discuss goals and let them share their needs. We encourage them to explore resources, even beyond Discovery Education, that they feel will help support their instruction and approach. When the right content is combined with instructional resources, it allows a broad spectrum of teacher types to use the resources to the best of their abilities. It's all about teachers knowing they have a safe place to go for what they need, so differentiation can truly happen in a timely manner."

"We're also asking our teachers to increase the level of instruction to meet the growing needs of their students. That's where Discovery Education comes in," Khristian continues.

"I don't think I could create as many equitable engaging learning experiences as I do without Discovery Education content. These resources often give me a lens into topics that I simply don't have. For example, I took my students on a Virtual Field Trip from Discovery Education, "Our Stories are Stronger Than Hate." This powerful lesson embodied several different voices and helped students to recognize similarities with others and celebrate and respect their differences."



Kathleen Richert
Teacher, Lancaster
School District, SC

"From the strategies that can apply across all content areas to the content-specific opportunities with interactives and such, it gives teachers a platform to start pushing students to that distinguished, higher learning level. The myriad of resources in Discovery Education opens the door for teacher creativity and imaginative instructional environments."

For LeAnn, "high-quality content elevates the quality of the instruction. But access to consistently high-quality content frees the educator to focus more on the students and less on the search for and validation of the content. And, **when educators have high-quality content they can trust, they have more time and energy to devote to equitable, engaging learning experiences.**"

Rita Mortensen, Educational Technology Coach at Verona Area School District in Wisconsin agrees. "High-quality content and resources are an absolute necessity. It gives the teachers what they need to reach all their learners. When teachers have access to high-quality content, it is a game changer."

Promoting Collaboration and Professional Growth

Teachers today are looking to connect more with each other and to have a stake in their professional learning. Creating a culture that promotes confidence and creativity, just like Pebblebrook High School, naturally fosters teacher collaboration to share best practices and try innovative new ideas that ultimately help students succeed.

Just like Pebblebrook's leaders, LeAnn emphasizes the need to feel connected. "The single best

action I feel an educator can take is belonging to a professional learning network (PLN). Education is no place for isolation. Sharing ideas, strategies, and new discoveries enables everyone to be better. I found my place within the Discovery Educator Network (DEN Community). The important factor is consistent connection."

For Denise Henry-Orndorff, an Instructional Technology Coach from Frederick County Public Schools in Virginia, it's about focusing on teacher-led professional learning. "We have all been in situations where we felt "forced" to participate, so I prefer my professional learning to focus on what my teachers' and students' needs are. When teachers come to my sessions they leave saying, 'this was exactly what I needed,' or 'I can totally go back and do this in my classroom!' I respect their time, which is valuable, and our relationship grows stronger."

Today's education landscape may have its challenges, but teacher empowerment is critical to overcoming these challenges and ensuring all students are engaged with equitable learning. Luckily, there are many avenues to empowering teachers. But when asking teachers what they need to feel empowered, the common theme is the trust between those who lead and those who teach, a culture of confidence, creativity, and collaboration, and finally, uninterrupted access to high-quality content and resources. This foundation not only supports teachers in such a strong way by giving them the opportunity to be their best, but also helps them to focus on why they became a teacher in the first place—to empower students.

Looking for more ways to empower educators and engage all students in and out of the classroom? Reach out to us today at Education_Info@discoveryed.com or 1.800.323.9084.

DiscoveryEducation.com/Virtual-Demo