

## Shazam: Empower Your Students!

Title V Symposium: Collaborating for Student Success: Building Engaging in Learning  
The University of the Incarnate Word/Northwest Vista College



According to Jo Sprague and Douglas Stuart in The Speaker's Handbook, there is a four step process to skill building:

- unconscious incompetence
- conscious incompetence
- conscious competence
- unconscious competence

Think about these steps in relation to the first 16 or so years of your life in terms of learning to drive a car.

- Unconscious incompetence – As a baby and small child, you were magically transported from place to place.
- Conscious incompetence – As a toddler, you learned what a “car” was, and you knew you were too small and didn’t know enough to drive one.
- Conscious competence – As an older child and young teenager, you began to learn about driving, even if you had not yet driven. You learned street signs, traffic flow, and the basics about how a car works. Eventually, you began to formally learn how to drive a car, but you had to think about it as you did it.
- Unconscious competence – Today, you don’t even think about how to drive—you just do it. You may occasionally be aware of what you’re doing, such as in a near-miss situation, but for the most part, driving is second nature, and you’re pretty good at it.

I believe that one of our responsibilities as instructors is to help students achieve the third or possibly fourth level of competence in their college classes, and that **the most effective way to help them is to empower them**. In other words, we can provide the initial knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes about our disciplines, but **they are ultimately responsible for achieving their academic goals**. One of the most important things we can do as instructors is to help them realize that they have the power to achieve their goals and that, ultimately, *only* they can do this—no one else can do it for them. Today, we will look at why our students often do not feel empowered, why they need to be empowered, and how we as instructors can help empower them.

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Some possible ways to empower students:

- Peer evaluations
- Self evaluations
- Have them decide how to set up the classroom for a particular activity, to reduce chatter, or to work in groups
- Ask them for ideas for class activities
- Constantly remind them that they are responsible for making their own choices and decisions based on their own priorities; for example, if you get called in to work a shift during class time, what are the rewards of the one you choose, and what are the consequences of the one you don't choose?
- Don't "give permission"
- Do help them find ways to achieve their goals
- Be available and approachable
- Don't solve their problems for them (this one is *hard!*)
- Be fair and understanding
- Don't be a pushover
- Have them write suggested essay prompts, activities, or test questions
- Have them write study guides for tests
- Let them choose their own partners or groups, when appropriate
- Have them decide the "rules" for the class (ex. cell phones, late work, discussion etiquette, food, etc.) including the consequences for violation of the rules
- Publicly recognize good work including good questions, good answers, good grades, and successful activities
- Let student "experts" help others (ex. computer experts, students majoring in your discipline, those who have had the course or a similar course before)
- Assign "non-experts" to become experts on specific items or tasks (ex. group presentations and student-led discussions, peer editors, "punch list" checkers)
- Reward them for participation
- Point out their accomplishments outside the classroom to their classmates (ex. scholarships, community service, promotion at work, new baby, etc.)—pride is an outstanding motivator
- Learn their names
- Offer to help them with time management, priority setting, and academic goals
- Tell them you believe in them, and then prove it