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In this Issue

Learning and Leading
with Habits of Mind:
16 Essential Characteristics
for Success

Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success is a book edited by Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick synthesizing numerous studies conducted by researchers, theorists, and practicing educators, with a total of twenty-one contributing authors. All quotes for this Translations piece are taken from *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind* unless otherwise noted. Copies of the book are available through major literary suppliers.

ABOUT THE ARTS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE TRANSLATIONS SERIES

The Arts Education Collaborative is committed to strengthening education by making the arts central to learning through collaboration, research, and advocacy. To that end, the Translations Series provides arts educators with highlights of prominent research pieces in education and ways in which that research can be realized in their classroom, school, district or arts and culture environment in a practical way.

For more information or to provide feedback, please contact the Arts Education Collaborative at info@artsedcollaborative.org or 412-201-7405.

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WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Built on more than thirty years of research, the Habits of Mind (referred to throughout this document as the Habits) provide a framework for student learning based on an understanding of what qualities allow people to be successful, regardless of their career or focus in life. Through an internalization of these behavioral patterns, it is projected that students will find themselves equipped to handle a variety of professional and personal situations throughout their lives.

The work is designed not only to encompass immediate and practical considerations that promote using the Habits in classrooms and schools every day but also to stimulate the creation of learning cultures that consider the Habits as central to building a thoughtful community and world. To achieve these goals, and assimilate the research that has been done, the book is laid out in five parts:

- 1 Discovering and Exploring Habits of Mind: setting the context for and history of the work, back to the initial idea conceived in 1982.
- 2 Building a Thought-full Environment: cultivating the Habits in students.
- 3 Assessing and Reporting on Habits of Mind: designing assessment processes and reporting instruments for student learning around the Habits.
- 4 Leading Schools with Habits of Mind: incorporating the Habits individually and organizationally.
- 5 Learning from Mindful Schools: examining case studies of schools that have implemented the Habits of Mind.

In Part I the Habits are described as, "...characteristics of what intelligent people do when they are confronted with problems, the resolutions to which are not immediately apparent." (15) This description is intentionally designed as a means of understanding student learning in areas that are not investigated through convergent questions – questions that have a limited number of right answers. Instead, the Habits as a whole explore how students respond when they do not know the answer. From the outset, the editors make it clear that the Habits are seldom executed in isolation and that while 16 habits are listed, their intent is not to limit the number of ways people display intelligent behavior. Specifically, the 16 Habits of Mind are: (18-38)

- 1 Persisting
- 2 Managing Impulsivity
- 3 Listening with Understanding and Empathy
- 4 Thinking Flexibly
- 5 Thinking About Thinking (Metacognition)
- 6 Striving for Accuracy
- 7 Questioning and Posing Problems
- 8 Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations
- 9 Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision
- 10 Gathering Data Through All Senses
- 11 Creating, Imagining, Innovating
- 12 Responding with Wonderment and Awe
- 13 Taking Responsible Risks
- 14 Finding Humor
- 15 Thinking Independently
- 16 Remaining Open to Continuous Learning

These particular 16 Habits, along with the accompanying instructional strategies, assessment examples, activities, and stories in the book, are the result of, "vast research on effective thinking, successful people, and intelligent behavior by people flourishing in all walks of life: lawyers, mechanics, teachers, entrepreneurs, physicians, athletes, entertainers, parents, scientists, and artists." The Habits describe areas in which student learning can be enhanced when they build knowledge, rather than when they reproduce knowledge. (16) It is also important to recognize that each of the Habits is important and that they are not to be ranked or emphasized one over another. Instead, each Habit is important in its own way and the interplay between and among the Habits is equally significant.

Following an in-depth description of each Habit in chapter one and exploring ways in which the Habits may be cultivated in students in chapter two, chapter three is devoted to describing how the Habits may be incorporated into curriculum. The authors emphasize that:

"The habits are not another layer that is added on to an already overcrowded curriculum. Rather they are a significant part of the generative curriculum – a curriculum that engages students so that they are thinking beyond the test or the final exam to find application in other subjects, in their future careers, and in their lives." (45)

Moving through the layers of understanding embedded in the Habits and throughout work, the reader is constantly reminded that developing the Habits of Mind is not an incident with a black or white result, but is a process of growth to engage in throughout one's life. In continuing to learn, there are five non-sequential dimensions of growth that can be used to assess the rate at which someone is becoming more effective in using the Habits. These dimensions are: exploring meanings, expanding capacities, increasing alertness, extending values, and building commitment. (60-62) In each of these dimensions, growth is seen as a process of internalization of these patterns of behavior into habits, from a beginning of a happenstance response in uncertain situations to a consistent and routine application of these behaviors and a strong desire to see the Habits developed in others. Additionally, these dimensions of growth can be used as a framework for both teaching and assessing learning of the Habits of Mind.

A major component of understanding and internalizing the Habits of Mind is reflection, and the authors challenge educators to respond to the question:

“Is your instruction habit forming?” In considering this challenge, three approaches of instructional design are described; when combined, these approaches create a “thought-full” environment for learning. They are:

- 1 “Teaching for the Habits of Mind” – “...creating the classroom conditions in which the Habits of Mind will be encountered, labeled, recognized, and reinforced...” through cognitively demanding tasks and building intuitive awareness. (70)
- 2 “Teaching of the Habits of Mind” – “...because the habits become explicit goals and outcomes of the instruction...” through exploring meanings of the Habits of Mind; strategic application of the Habits of Mind; and building depth, complexity, and elegance. (71)
- 3 “Teaching with the Habits of Mind” by diagnosing and assessing students’ level of mastery of the Habits of Mind, as well as modeling the Habits of Mind. (71)

After laying a foundation of understanding regarding both the history and intent of the Habits of Mind, the remaining sections of the book explore applications of the Habits, focused on creating environments where they flourish and outlining the impact that they have on students and communities.

In Part II, through examining classrooms and schools where the Habits of Mind flourish, the authors explore ways of creating, developing, and reinforcing “thought-full” environments through incorporating the Habits of Mind. An emphasis is placed on educators monitoring their own behavior, the language used in everyday dialogue both in and out of the classroom, and how teachers can use intentionally complex questions to build and reinforce “thought-full” environments. (95-96)

Part III specifically addresses assessment and reporting of students’ learning of the Habits of Mind. “The most important persons collecting and reflecting on that evidence [of students’ increasing capacities and propensities for the Habits of Mind] are the students themselves.” (175-176) The editors included possible indicators of achievement in each of the Habits, as well as a wide range of assessment strategies and techniques. Reflection is again stressed as critical for students and teachers alike. Additionally, the authors discuss the importance of communicating student growth and increasing maturity in the Habits to others, and provide potential strategies for doing so.

Concentrating on school leaders’ perspectives, Part IV focuses on how leaders can use and have used the Habits of Mind to benefit students and staff. The three chapters in this section cover the infusion of the Habits into a district through creating a culture (“Creating a Culture of Mindfulness”), viewing a system’s use of the Habits (“Habits of Mind for the Systems-Savvy Leader”), and modeling behaviors (“Leading Is a Habit of Mind”). The systems approach seems ideal for implementing and sustaining the Habits of Mind, as there is a common vision and common language among students, teachers, administrators, and community members regarding the Habits of Mind, which includes a shared understanding for how the vision will be developed and maintained in the community.

Part V contains case studies of schools that have used the Habits of Mind effectively. These chapters are intended to be a starting point for brainstorming possibilities for implementing the Habits and understanding their possible effect on school culture and student learning. Each story is different in its specific application of the Habits and process for doing so. However, each story clearly demonstrates the impact of the Habits of Mind when students, staff, and community members have fully internalized the Habits. In this way the people involved have “become their shared vision” as a community filled with people who frequently, consistently, and intuitively use the Habits. (318)

The appendices are filled with additional suggestions and resources for exploring and utilizing the Habits of Mind in schools and classrooms.

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WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE ARTS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE AND ITS CONSTITUENTS

With work thirty years in the making, the influence of the Habits of Mind on the Arts Education Collaborative (AEC) has been almost imperceptible, as many of these behavioral patterns have been interwoven with many of our programs, processes, and publications from the beginning.

Applications for the Habits begin with modeling them in each program that we provide. An example is with “listening with understanding and empathy,” which we strive to do particularly during our Leadership Academy for arts educators. During follow-up seminars throughout the school year, each participant has an opportunity to share with the group regarding the progress of his or her project’s implementation plan. While frustrations or joys may be expressed, it is everyone’s job to give each individual undivided attention and thoughtful responses of either support or suggestions after an update is provided. Another example is with “thinking and communicating with clarity and precision,” something that we address constantly with the development and consistent use of a common language among participants in any of our programs.

Additionally, the AEC uses many techniques and strategies outlined by the authors when designing each professional learning experience – particularly “questioning and creating environments safe for appropriate risk taking,” as well as “encouraging lifelong learning and ongoing discovery.” Further, AEC programming emphasizes reflection for educators and administrators: we provide for it at the beginning, middle, and end of each event through techniques such as mind mapping, written musings, and group discussion. The reflection component of the AEC’s work is critical to building trust among the members of each cohort as a professional learning community.

Other opportunities exist in providing specific workshops around the Habits of Mind or embedding them overtly in programming for educators and administrators. This is an avenue that we intend to explore in the future.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EDUCATORS

Being mindful and creating a “thought-full” culture are two threads woven throughout this book and through each piece of research supporting it. Reflection by administrators and teachers is critical for creating and sustaining an environment that is ripe for learning. Particularly, considering the three approaches to instruction for, of, and with the Habits of Mind seems to be a way to ensure consistent messaging about the value of the Habits of Mind to students and community members. Again, the authors are adamant that the Habits not be added on to curriculum; instead, they can be the basis of a new, redesigned curriculum where they are the organizer for content. For example, students might take a “Persistence” course that would start with students solving and/or analyzing problems that require persistence and incorporate content from multiple disciplines.

At every level, attention must be given to creating a space where students can take safe risks and where ‘failure’ is recognized as an opportunity for learning, rather than a time of rejection and humiliation. Verbal and non-verbal cues from teachers, administrators, and other students contribute to the overall tone of any learning environment and must be attended to with the respect that becomes such influential factors. Modeling the Habits, and celebrating them, will impact the degree of success to which the Habits of Mind are implemented, assimilated, and internalized by each member of the learning community.

Further, the use of intentionally complex questions to guide students to build knowledge and prompt them to utilize the Habits of Mind has great potential to increase the depth of learning that students experience over time. Unlike convergent questions, complex questions require students to make connections, think critically, and make meaning from experiences, regardless of the specific content area. Through complex questioning, students have the potential to learn the habits, skills, and knowledge necessary for the wide range of things they will ultimately encounter, from state-mandated tests to living alone for the first time to a range of job and career opportunities that are continually in flux. In other words, they will be more fully equipped to navigate the rest of their lives.



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