



## Preface

*Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick*

Donna Norton Swindal, a resource teacher in Burnsville, Minnesota, shared an interesting story about a 4th grader who brought a newspaper clipping to class. The article described genocide in a troubled African country. After a lively discussion about what was happening there, one concerned classmate stated, “If those people would just learn to persist, they could solve their problems.”

His philosophical colleague added, “If they would learn to listen with understanding and empathy, they wouldn’t have this problem.”

Yet another young activist suggested, “We need to go over there and teach them the Habits of Mind!”

What are the “Habits of Mind” these concerned young citizens were so eager to share? They are the overarching theme of *Leading and Learning with Habits of Mind*, and they are the heart of the book you hold in your hands.

### The Beginning

The idea for the Habits of Mind started in 1982. In our beginning conversations, we referred to them as “intelligent behaviors.” In our daily work with students and staff, these ideas flourished into rich experiences. We soon realized that these concepts and experiences needed to be documented and disseminated to others. We discovered that we needed a

common terminology for the behaviors that would be expected from one another if, indeed, we were living in a productive learning organization. In 1999 we became entranced with Lauren Resnick's statement (1999) that "one's intelligence is the sum of one's habits of mind." That's it, we thought! We don't want *behaviors*; we want *habits*. Learning the behaviors of problem solving, for example, is not the goal. We want to *habituate* effective problem solving. Performing a behavior once is not enough. We want students to appreciate the value of and to develop the propensity for skillful problem solving using a repertoire of mindful strategies applied in a variety of settings. So we came to call these dispositions Habits of Mind, indicating that the behaviors require a discipline of the mind that is practiced so it becomes a habitual way of working toward more thoughtful, intelligent action.

In 2000 we created a developmental series of four books, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, to inspire the work of others. They were

- *Book 1: Discovering and Exploring Habits of Mind*
- *Book 2: Activating and Engaging Habits of Mind*
- *Book 3: Assessing and Reporting on Habits of Mind*
- *Book 4: Integrating and Sustaining Habits of Mind*

The intent of Habits of Mind: A Developmental Series was to help educators teach toward these Habits of Mind, which we see as broad, enduring, and essential lifespan learnings that are as appropriate for adults as they are for students. Our hope was that by teaching students (and adults) the Habits of Mind, students would be more disposed to draw upon the habits when they face uncertain or challenging situations. And, ultimately, we hoped the habits would help educators develop thoughtful, compassionate, and cooperative human beings who can live productively in an increasingly chaotic, complex, and information-rich world (as the 4th graders in the anecdote at the start of this preface so aptly demonstrate).

That was 10 years ago. Since that time the Habits of Mind have been embraced by school faculties around the world. The word is spreading to universities, businesses, parents, and other community members. Research has been conducted to demonstrate the positive impact of the



## Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations

I've never made a mistake. I've only learned from experience.

—Thomas A. Edison

Intelligent humans learn from experience. When confronted with a new and perplexing problem, they will draw forth experiences from their past. They often can be heard to say, “This reminds me of . . .” or “This is just like the time when I . . .” They explain what they are doing now with analogies about or references to their experiences. They call upon their store of knowledge and experience as sources of data to support, theories to explain, or processes to solve each new challenge. They are able to abstract meaning from one experience, carry it forth, and apply it in a novel situation.

Too often, students begin each new task as if it were being approached for the first time. Teachers are dismayed when they invite students to recall how they solved a similar problem previously—and students don’t remember. It’s as if they had never heard of it before, even though they recently worked with the same type of problem! It seems each experience is encapsulated and has no relationship to what has come before or what comes after. Their thinking is what psychologists refer to as an “episodic grasp of reality” (Feuerstein et al., 1980); that is, each event in life is separate and discrete, with no connections to what may have come before or no relation to what follows. Their learning is so encapsulated that they seem unable to draw it forth from one event and apply it in another context.



## Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision

I do not so easily think in words. . . . After being hard at work having arrived at results that are perfectly clear . . . I have to translate my thoughts in a language that does not run evenly with them.

—Francis Galton, geneticist

Language refinement plays a critical role in enhancing a person's cognitive maps and ability to think critically, which is the knowledge base for efficacious action. Enriching the complexity and specificity of language simultaneously produces effective thinking.

Language and thinking are closely entwined; like either side of a coin, they are inseparable. Fuzzy, vague language is a reflection of fuzzy, vague thinking. Intelligent people strive to communicate accurately in both written and oral form, taking care to use precise language; defining terms; and using correct names, labels, and analogies. They strive to avoid over-generalizations, deletions, and distortions. Instead, they support their statements with explanations, comparisons, quantification, and evidence.

We sometimes hear students and adults using vague and imprecise language. They describe objects or events with words like *weird*, *nice*, or *OK*. They name specific objects using such nondescriptive words as *stuff*, *junk*, *things*, and *whatever*. They punctuate sentences with meaningless interjections like *ya know*, *er*, and *uh*. They use vague or general nouns and pronouns: “*They* told me to do it,” “*Everybody* has one,” or “*Teachers* don’t understand me.” They use nonspecific verbs: “Let’s *do* it.” At other times, they use unqualified comparatives: “This soda is *better*; I like it *more*” (Shachtman, 1995).

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## Habits of Mind: A Journey of Continuous Growth

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Developing our Habits of Mind is a lifelong journey; a journey in which we continually explore and deepen our understanding of the habits; a journey of continuously becoming more attuned to situations in which the habits would benefit our own behavior as well as the behavior of others; a journey of a growing capacity to be more skillful and strategic as we use the habits; a journey of developing our ability to critically self-reflect as we focus on our own behavior and the behavior of others.

It is easy to think of a Habit of Mind as something that we either use or don't use. It would be more accurate, however, to refer to how well or poorly we use the habit. Most people will engage in the habits to a degree, but they sometimes lack the skills to execute them well. They may not understand or appreciate the benefits that accrue when the habits are mindfully applied. They may be unaware of opportunities or not have the sensitivity to recognize opportunities to engage one or more of the Habits of Mind as well as to encourage others to use them.

As we observe students in our schools and classrooms, we quickly recognize that some are more adept, more skillful, and more effective at applying one or more of the habits than are others. As we observe students over time, it is our desire that they move through schooling and into adulthood getting better at using the habits. A description of exactly how this journey takes place may be quite elusive.