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THE **School**
AS A
Home
FOR THE **Mind**

*Creating Mindful Curriculum,
Instruction, and Dialogue*

FOREWORD
BY
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SECOND
EDITION



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CHAPTER THREE

Habits of Mind

Learnings That Last

When we no longer know what to do we have come to our real work and when we no longer know which way to go we have begun our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Wendell Berry

A critical distinction of *intelligent* human beings is that they not only have information, they also know how to act on it. They know how to perform effectively under those challenging conditions that demand strategic reasoning, insightfulness, perseverance, creativity, and craftsmanship to resolve a complex problem. While they may be deemed “smart” because they possess many answers, they also know how to behave intelligently when they *don't* know answers. As educators, therefore, we should focus on teaching students how to *produce* knowledge rather than merely how to *reproduce* knowledge.

By definition, a problem is any stimulus, question, task, phenomenon, or discrepancy the explanation for which is not immediately known. What behaviors are indicative of the efficient, effective problem solver? What do human beings do when they approach and resolve problems intelligently? Considerable research by Ames (1997); Briggs (1999); Ennis (2001); Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman, and Miller (1980); Glatthorn and Baron (1985);

SOURCE: Reprinted by permission. Costa, A. L. (1991). *The Search for Intelligent Life in Developing minds: A resource book for teaching thinking* (2nd ed., pp. 100–106). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Goleman (1995); Perkins (1985, 1995); and Sternberg (1984), indicates that there are some identifiable characteristics of effective thinkers. These are not necessarily “geniuses” or the wealthy who demonstrate these attributes. These characteristics have been identified in successful artists, physicians, engineers, auto mechanics, teachers, entrepreneurs, salespeople, and parents—people in all walks of life.

We call these characteristics “Habits of Mind” (Resnick, 2001). They are patterns of thinking and behaving in intelligent ways and are displayed when confronted with life’s complexities and ambiguities.

DESCRIBING HABITS OF MIND

To learn new habits is everything, for it is to reach the substance of life. Life is but a tissue of habits.

Henri Fredric Amiel

A Habit of Mind means having a disposition toward behaving intelligently when confronted with problems. When humans experience dichotomies, are confused by dilemmas, or come face to face with uncertainties, our most effective actions require drawing forth certain patterns of intellectual behavior. When we draw upon these intellectual resources, the results that are produced are more powerful, of higher quality, and of greater significance than if we fail to employ them.

Employing Habits of Mind requires a composite of many skills, attitudes, cues, past experiences, and proclivities. Being in the habit of using one or more of these patterns means

- *Valuing it:* Choosing to employ a pattern of intellectual behaviors rather than other, less productive patterns. It means that we value one pattern of thinking over another, and therefore it implies conscious choice making about which pattern should be employed at this time.

- *Being inclined to use it:* Feeling the tendency or proclivity toward employing a pattern of intellectual behaviors. Greater satisfaction and feelings of efficacy, power, and control are enjoyed when the behaviors are employed.

- *Remaining alert to situations:* Being sensitive to, perceiving opportunities for, and appropriateness of employing the pattern of behavior. There is an alertness to the contextual cues that signal this as an appropriate time and circumstance in which the employment of this pattern would be useful.

- *Applying capabilities*: Possessing the basic skills and capacities to carry through with the behaviors. A level of skillfulness is required to employ and execute the behaviors effectively over time.
- *Making a commitment*: Constantly striving to reflect on and improve performance of the pattern of intellectual behavior. As a result of each experience in which these behaviors were employed, the effects of their use are reflected upon, evaluated, modified, and carried forth to future applications.

Sixteen Habits of Mind

Following are descriptions and an elaboration of 16 attributes of what human beings do when they behave intelligently. We refer to them here as Habits of Mind. These habits are seldom performed in isolation. Rather, clusters of such habits are drawn forth and employed in various situations. When listening intently, for example, one employs flexibility, metacognition, precise language, and perhaps questioning.

Do not think that there are only 16 ways in which humans display their intelligence. This list is not meant to be complete. It should serve to initiate the collection of additional attributes. Although 16 Habits of Mind are described here, you, your colleagues, and your students will want to continue the search for additional Habits of Mind by adding to and elaborating on this list and the descriptions.

1. Persisting

If I had to select one quality, one personal characteristic that I regard as being most highly correlated with success whatever the field, I would pick the trait of persistence. Determination. The will to endure to the end, to get knocked down 70 times and get up off the floor saying, "Here comes number 71!"

Richard M. Devos, businessman

Efficacious people stick to a task until it is completed. They don't give up easily. They are able to analyze a problem, to develop a system, structure, or strategy to attack a problem. They employ a range and have a repertoire of alternative strategies for problem solving. They collect evidence to indicate their problem-solving strategy is working, and if one strategy doesn't work, they know how to back up and try another. They recognize when a theory or idea must be rejected and another employed. They have systematic methods of analyzing a problem, which include knowing how to begin, knowing what steps must be performed, and what data need to be

generated or collected. Because they are able to sustain a problem-solving process over time, they are comfortable with ambiguous situations.

Students often give up in despair when the answer to a problem is not immediately known. They sometimes crumple their papers and throw them away saying, “I can’t do this,” “It’s too hard,” or they write down any answer to get the task over with as quickly as possible. Some have attention deficits; they have difficulty staying focused for any length of time, they are easily distracted, they lack the ability to analyze a problem, to develop a system, structure, or strategy of problem attack. They may give up because they have a limited repertoire of problem-solving strategies. If their strategy doesn’t work, they give up because they have no alternatives.

2. Managing Impulsivity

Goal-directed self-imposed delay of gratification is perhaps the essence of emotional self-regulation: the ability to deny impulse in the service of a goal, whether it be building a business, solving an algebraic equation, or pursuing the Stanley cup.

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*

Effective problem solvers have a sense of deliberativeness: They think before they act. They intentionally form a vision of a product, plan of action, goal, or destination before they begin. They strive to clarify and understand directions, develop a strategy for approaching a problem and withhold immediate value judgments before fully understanding an idea. Reflective individuals consider alternatives and consequences of several possible directions prior to taking action. They decrease their need for trial and error by gathering information, taking time to reflect on an answer before giving it, making sure they understand directions, and listening to alternative points of view.

Often students blurt out the first answer that comes to mind. Sometimes they shout out an answer, start to work without fully understanding the directions, or lack an organized plan or strategy for approaching a problem. They may take the first suggestion given or operate on the most obvious and simple idea that comes to mind rather than considering more complex alternatives and consequences of several possible directions.

3. Listening to Others—With Understanding and Empathy

Listening is the beginning of understanding. . . .
Wisdom is the reward for a lifetime of listening.
Let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance. . . .

Proverbs 1:5

Highly effective people spend an inordinate amount of time and energy listening (Covey, 1989). Some psychologists believe that the ability to listen to another person, to empathize with, and to understand their point of view is one of the highest forms of intelligent behavior. Being able to paraphrase another person's ideas, detecting indicators (cues) of their feelings or emotional states in their oral and body language (empathy), accurately expressing another person's concepts, emotions, and problems—all are indications of listening behavior (Piaget called it "overcoming egocentrism"). They are able to see through the diverse perspectives of others. They gently attend to another person, demonstrating their understanding of and empathy for an idea or feeling by paraphrasing it accurately, building upon it, clarifying it, or giving an example of it.

Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, and Kleiner (1994) suggest that to listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the "music," but also to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but also for what he or she is trying to represent. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed and hear beneath the words to their meaning.

We spend 55 percent of our lives listening, yet it is one of the least taught skills in schools. We often say we are listening, but in actuality we are rehearsing in our head what we are going to say next when our partner is finished. Some students ridicule, laugh at, or put down other students' ideas. They interrupt, are unable to build upon, consider the merits of, or operate on another person's ideas. We want our students to learn to devote their mental energies to another person and invest themselves in their partner's ideas.

We wish students to learn to hold in abeyance their own values, judgments, opinions, and prejudices in order to listen to and entertain another person's thoughts. This is a very complex skill requiring the ability to monitor one's own thoughts while, at the same time, attending to one's partner's words. This does not mean that we can't disagree with someone. A good listener tries to understand what the other person is saying. In the end he may disagree sharply, but because he disagrees, he wants to know exactly what it is he is disagreeing with.

4. Thinking Flexibly

If you never change your mind, why have one?

Edward deBono

An amazing discovery about the human brain is its plasticity—its ability to "rewire," change, and even repair itself to become smarter. Flexible people are the ones with the most control. They have the capacity