**Habits of Success**

*Jenny Edwards and Arthur L. Costa*

**No matter what path they choose, students need more than academic knowledge.**

As educators, we are focused on helping students acquire core knowledge that prepares them to become skillful thinkers, pass tests, and complete entry-level college courses. However, it's important for us to ask ourselves whether that's all students need to succeed in college, in careers, and in life.

David T. Conley (2010) suggests that students also need a set of *key cognitive strategies*—such as goal setting, time management, and persistence—that enable them to apply what they know and what they are learning in complex ways. We see deep connections between these cognitive strategies and the 16 habits of mind that we helped develop and implement in schools internationally (Costa & Kallick, 2000).

**Habits of Mind**

Students who develop the following habits will be ready for whatever path they choose:

1. Successful students *persist*. They focus on the task and complete it successfully. They know how to proceed when they get stuck.
2. Successful students *manage impulsivity*. They control themselves and act thoughtfully and deliberately in any situation.
3. Successful students *listen with understanding and empathy*. They devote their mental attention to others and are able to build rapport easily and quickly. They can identify with another's point of view while keeping their own.
4. Successful students *think flexibly*. They are able to view a situation from many perspectives, and their minds are open to change. Such open-mindedness helps them deal with the novelty and ambiguity often encountered in the study of new material.
5. Successful students *control and execute metacognitive processes*, such as problem solving and decision making. They are able to make a mental plan, monitor their thinking, evaluate and modify their processes, determine new ways to proceed, and learn from the experience.
6. Successful students *strive for accuracy and precision*. They know what level of precision is appropriate to the task and the subject area, and they are able to increase their precision and accuracy accordingly.
7. Successful students *ask questions and pose problems*. They are curious and know how to search for problems to solve. They seek evidence rather than simply accepting any assertion. They analyze conflicting descriptions of an event or issue. They develop and apply multiple strategies to solving both routine and complex problems.
8. Successful students *apply knowledge to new situations*. They can detect patterns and make connections, and they are able to transfer knowledge from one context to another.
9. Successful students *think and communicate with clarity and precision*, both orally and in writing. They are specific in their communications, and they avoid generalizing, dismissing, and distorting ideas.
10. Successful students *gather data through all of their senses*. They use the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and gustatory pathways to obtain information about the world around them.
11. Successful students *create, imagine, and innovate*. They look for different ideas and are able to generate original ideas of their own.
12. Successful students *respond with wonderment and awe*. They are fascinated with the world around them and are open to discovering new things.
13. Successful students *take responsible risks*. They are continually learning and growing by living on the edge of their competence.
14. Successful students *find humor* in the world around them. They are always ready for a good laugh, even at themselves.
15. Successful students *think interdependently*. They participate successfully in study groups, know how to work together collegially, and seek opportunities to work with others.
16. Successful students *remain open to continual learning*. They admit that they do not know something and are eager to find out. They are continually growing and learning.

Some preliminary research by Scott Behrens at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan, found a significant positive correlation between the habits of mind as measured on his survey and college grade point average (personal communication, April 4, 2005). The habits that were the strongest predictors of academic success in college were managing impulsivity, persistence, and metacognition.

**Making the Habits Habitual**

What can educators do to help students practice the behaviors that will lead them to internalize these habits? Working with schools around the world, we have found that the following conditions are key (Costa & Kallick, 2008):

* *Sharing a common vision*. A shared vision leads all school community members to commit to a consistent set of behaviors. The 16 habits are more likely to be internalized in students because they are encountered, discussed, reinforced, transferred, and revisited through all grades and subject areas, at home, and in the community.
* *Mapping the curriculum with habits of mind in mind*. The habits of mind are deliberately and explicitly mapped into the curriculum in three ways: (1) by naming specific habits of mind as goals and outcomes, (2) by designing instructional strategies to teach the habits directly and to infuse them into content instruction, and (3) by designing assessment strategies to collect evidence of student growth in these habits.
* *Remembering it's not just kid stuff*. The habits of mind are as good for adults as they are for students. Students, staff, parents, and everyone in the school community learn together and strive to improve in using the habits of mind.
* *Infusing the habits into school and classroom culture*. Posters and slogans remind students and staff that the habits of mind are valued at the school. School staff members model, monitor, manage, and modify their use of the habits of mind both individually and in group settings. In other words, the habits of mind are "how we do things around here."
* *Embedding the habits in school vocabulary*. The habits of mind are mindfully, spontaneously, and meaningfully heard in the vocabulary of both students and teachers in classrooms, in the cafeteria, on the athletic field, and at home. Students begin using that vocabulary as early as preschool and kindergarten.
* *Monitoring growth*. Students' progress is monitored to ensure they are becoming more strategic and skillful in each of the habits, applying them in an ever-widening array of situations and contexts, realizing the value of employing the habits, evaluating their own performance, and setting goals for themselves to continually improve in their application of the habits.
* *Providing leadership*. In most schools that have succeeded in implementing the habits of mind, someone is a "cheerleader" for the habits. It might be an administrator, department chair, mentor teacher, resource teacher, or other staff member. A team of such staff members assumes such responsibilities as communicating with parents, orienting new staff members, conducting action research, collecting archives of habits of mind–infused lessons, and providing professional development.

**Beyond Skills and Knowledge**

What if education were less about acquiring skills and knowledge and more about cultivating the dispositions and habits of mind that students will need for a lifetime of learning, problem solving and decision making? What if education were less concerned with the end-of-year exam and more concerned with who students become as a result of their schooling? (Ritchhart, 2002, p. xxi)

Ritchhart asks important questions, and the habits of mind provide one way of getting beyond academic skills and knowledge and preparing students for a variety of situations. The habits of mind were derived from studies of effective, skillful problem solvers and decision makers from many walks of life (Costa, 2001).

Although college for all is a laudable goal, the habits of mind will help students get ready not only for college, but also for life. They will prepare them to be effective employees, innovative workers, empathic family members, and successful citizens. These skills are essential for successful adults, and the earlier students can learn them, the better.

**References**

Conley, D. T. (2010). *Redefining college readiness*. Eugene, OR: Education Policy Improvement Center.

Costa, A. (2001). Habits of mind. In A. Costa (Ed.), *Developing minds: A resource book for teaching thinking* (pp. 80–86). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (Eds.). (2000). *Discovering and exploring habits of mind*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Learning and leading with habits of mind: 16 essential characteristics for success*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Ricthhart, R. (2002). *Intellectual character: What is it, why it matters, and how to get it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.