

# Is Your School a Habits of Mind School? Part 2

Guiding Students Toward Self-Reflection



***“The most important practical lesson that can be given to students is to teach them what to observe: How to observe, what symptoms indicate improvement, what is the reverse, which are of importance, which are of none, which are the evidence of neglect and of what kind of neglect. Reflect, reflect and reflect again: Never stop!”***  
 –Adapted from Florence Nightingale

## Practice Fields for Mentoring and Coaching

***“The first step is to take responsibility for yourself.”***  
 John Edwards

Take some time to read this girl’s metacognitive reflection and the teacher’s response. Reflect on how she is taking responsibility for her progress and her teacher is supportive of such actions and thinking. This follows from the rubric displayed in part one. (See Teachers Matter, number 41). This has taken several weeks as she needs first to learn that it is her responsibility to make the decisions and then act on them. There is no teacher coercion: no adversarial setting, just mentor or coaching support.

METACOGNITION BY DIALOGUE	
Student’s Metacognition	Teacher’s Response
<p>This week, I did not do much until today. This shows that my transition from novice to apprentice is still in progress as I left it to the last minute. However, I did do the planning on paper rather than in my brain so that is an apprentice characteristic.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the procrastination that happened this weekend is not. I found myself floating into the fourth box of covey doing things that were both unnecessary and not urgent. (#)</p> <p>To avoid this in future I am going to actively write down what I need to achieve so I can cross it off as I go along and if I need to switch activities ( because I can’t concentrate on what I am doing because I have been doing it for a while) I can flip between the tasks on my list above my desk. This has worked previously, and I am going to try it over the next week.</p>	<p>The reference to the rubric is the right way to look at what you are doing. For next week start off with a paragraph saying exactly why you put it all off to end: i.e. what were the quadrant three or four things you were doing?</p> <p>Then state a way or ways you can control this. You might still want/need to do some of these things, so it may be a case of control rather than cutting out completely. Think about being proactive, quadrant two, and thus secure the future.</p> <p>Habits of mind are very important because we think in patterns. One of the H of M is applying past knowledge, and this what is happening here as you say, “This has worked previously.”</p> <p>There are 16 Habits in all, and you are working here with metacognitive reflection as you think/reflect carefully on what you have been doing; and there is also precision and accuracy in that you are working toward getting your homework and study patterns right as you show by reference to the rubric. In doing this you are persisting too, which is working things out (experimenting with different strategies as you do when you discuss switching activities) so you can accomplish something and not give up or doing the same old thing over and over and convincing yourself you can’t do it. Flexibility in thinking is also part of this, as you seek solutions to your study needs by looking for better alternatives. Finally, you are also managing impulsivity as you grapple with those quadrant four distractions.</p>

The first teacher response is a positive affirmation. Words and sentences and the implications of what is said in them will always provide an emotional context. Provided that emotion is positive, we learn. If it is negative, we may stop learning.

This second comment encourages the student to own the problem and find the solution. The teacher has not stolen the learning from her by telling her what to do. Such a message would have told her that she does not know the answer, but the teacher does.

There is a major intervention here. As thinking skills, the Habits are a superior road map. Therefore, the opportunity is taken to match the theoretical ideas to her personal practices, thus individualising the instruction. The reference to prior learning and actions is especially important. Costa and Kallick call this scaffolding, much like a building foundation upon which new structures are built. Then there is precision and accuracy. The plan previously agreed in the rubric directs this. Flexibility is the Habit that encourages changing our approaches, or even having found one that works, refining it. Managing impulsivity leads to strategies for getting started. Note “strategies” is plural. We brainstorm for alternatives, rather than impulsively selecting the first one.

## Metacognition by Dialogue: Many Sided

**“If small holes aren’t fixed, then big holes will bring hardship.” —Chinese proverb**

In a Massey University research report on the use of Habits of Mind at St Georges School, the team labelled this metacognition by dialogue to emphasise that this was much more than metacognitive reflection. “The children’s comments revealed a capacity for thinking at a very deep, intense and, in some cases, emotional level... The pupils engaged in this activity were involved in directing, organising and actively constructing their own knowledge” (Ball et al 1999).



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Deep learning occurs because both the teacher and the student are able to develop a mutual mindfulness resulting in camaraderie and rapport. The rubric provides a growth continuum especially important when new techniques like Mindset are introduced. The teacher-student interaction is individualised, in a non-stressful process for every child in the class. The teacher and student mental models are challenged and further developed.

Metacognition by Dialogue is a superior formative assessment method based on the student’s actions, taken as near to the moment as is practicable. This enables the teacher to view where the student is at in their learning and in their understanding. For more information on this, see Graham Nuthall, *The Hidden Lives of Learners*. In this, he describes the three worlds of learners: the public world of the teacher, the powerful world of their peers and their own private world. His research highlights how traditional assessment obscures what is going on in the student’s mind, so teachers have no idea of the workings of students’ minds.

*“Metacognition by Dialogue makes these inner worlds of the student available to the teacher.”*

A final word for those pursuing Mindset with their classes: Metacognition by Dialogue, is a powerful Mindset Mover. 

