16 Habits of Mind
Fostering Successful Language Learning

How can the Habits of Mind help foster language learning?

The Habits of Mind framework, a series of 16 problem-solving strategies, can help an individual throughout life. Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick have been promoting the Habits of Mind through books, articles, seminars and online venues. Developing Habits of Mind in Elementary Schools and Developing Habits of Mind in Secondary Schools by Karen Boyes and Graham Watts provide expert strategies for implementing the Habits of Mind in student learning. The 16 dispositions, developed over the course of several years, serve as a support system that can help motivate both students and educators within language studies and assist them with self-actualisation.

1) Persisting
Practice over and over to learn the vocabulary, verb conjugations, noun declensions and pronunciation of the target language. Try to think in the target language and speak even when you are unsure. Learn by continuous practice and persistence.

2) Managing Impulsivity
Study vocabulary, structures and pronunciation of target language to improve your knowledge base. Focus on the intonation patterns of the target language.

3) Listening with Understanding and Empathy
Listen to the teacher and classmates as they speak in the target language and embrace their contribution to your language learning. Appreciate what others have to say.

4) Thinking Flexibly
When writing an essay in the target language, think of your options of how to best present your thoughts when doing a project. Brainstorm with one or more classmates to explore the possibilities.

5) Thinking About Thinking (Metacognition)
Keep a journal about your language learning experiences with comments about what you have learned in the language, about the culture, and insights about the language learning process.

6) Striving for Accuracy
Check over a quiz, test or essay before submitting it. Self-monitor your speaking and writing in the language.

7) Questioning and Posing Problems
Ask questions in the language and ask questions about the language. Both are important in language learning.

By connecting languages with Habits of Mind, we can see that they are perfectly in step with our main goal as language educators: to promote successful language learning in our students. At all levels of language instruction, students and their instructors can embrace the 16 Habits of Mind. Thus, the Habits have implications for beginning, intermediate, pre-advanced and advanced levels. Students in grades K-12 as well as undergraduate, graduate and adult learners can benefit from the dispositions. From FLES students to doctoral students undertaking their dissertations, the Habits of a Mind invite students to solve problems and innovate with instructor assistance.

Two main questions are at the essence of Habits of Mind:

- How can Habits of Mind foster successful language learning?
- How is using Habits of Mind applicable to learning languages as well as other subjects and for solving life problems?

Languages Tied to the 16 Habits of Mind

The following chart presents the 16 Habits of Mind with examples of how they foster successful language learning. This represents only a fraction of possibilities with the numerous themes, vocabulary, structures and content that come up on a daily basis in our language classes. The Habits of Mind can clearly be utilised when learning and mastering languages and I invite teachers to share these Habits with their students. Language educators can post the Habits of Mind in their classrooms, share them on a handout or have a digital version available on line.
Remind students that through Habits of Mind, they can be active language learners and build their knowledge and proficiency. Students cannot rely on looking up every word or structure that they need to communicate in the language. They must commit themselves to memorising language to be truly proficient.

Specific learning scenarios can be enhanced by using Habits of Mind. Some examples include studying a poem, short story or novel and see which Habits of Mind spring out from the pages. A group or individual project whereby students create a menu in the target language can undoubtedly benefit from giving the project a Habits of Mind focus. Watching a travel segment, what are the smells coming from the restaurants, cafes and shops? What does the weather feel like? Imagine that you are touching the architecture, countryside, flora, and fauna. What do the foods in the target culture taste like?

Creative language educators can think of countless ways to bring the Habits of Mind dispositions into lessons, units and projects.

Summary

Habits of Mind has impacted the way we approach a number of school subjects. The 16 Habits can be fostered in numerous ways to learn and master languages. The Habits of Mind can help bring language study to the forefront in student learning while simultaneously reinforcing the 16 thought-provoking Habits of Mind. Students can also use the Habits in their other subjects and their lives as new challenges arise.

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