



## SUSTAINING OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS: SOS

By Michael J. Boyle, Ph.D.

*Over the past year, the focus of this column has been on the work of Art Costa and Habits of the Mind. The first column introduced a framework for understanding and using the Habits of Mind approach. The remaining columns present a focused look at three specific Habits of Mind and how to implement them within the classroom.*

### Exploring Habits of the Mind— Encouraging 21st century students to respond with wonderment and awe

In order to effectively prepare students for 21st century learning, schools need to fortify students with the ability to “know how to act on information, know what questions to ask...and be able to think critically about content and origin” (Costa and Kallick, 2000). Costa describes a constellation of dispositions (or attitudes), referred to as the Habits of Mind, that provide a useful framework to describe these behaviors that shape effective inquiry and encourage independent learning. Habits of Mind are not necessarily thinking strategies; rather, they are a set of attitudes or dispositions that “incline one to adopt a thinking tool or strategy.”

The use of this framework helps to create a set of commonly agreed upon dispositions or attitudes that can help to address the passivity in learning observed by many school personnel. Schools can use this framework systematically to create supports and structures to foster the development of these dispositions.

Sometimes in this environment of accountability, schools have responded with a lock-step scope and sequence of curriculum that must be strictly followed. Now, scope and sequence shouldn't be bad words. In fact, having a systematic and organized approach to the sequence of learning yields valuable learning results. However, sometimes with such a focus on “coverage” of curriculum, we may miss some other important learning opportunities that can enhance the essential learning that is identified in the scope and sequence.

As a result of this over-emphasis on the coverage of curriculum, students can become passionless about their learning, waiting for the next topic to be “checked off the list.”

In addition to mastering important content, it also should be a goal that students are passionate about their learning in order to connect learning to real life. Having students respond with wonderment and awe is one of those Habits of Mind that could help make this bridge possible.

“Responding with wonderment and awe” refers to being “intrigued by the world's beauty, nature's power and the vastness of the universe; having regard for what is awe-inspiring and can touch my heart; open to the little and big surprises in life I see in others and myself (Costa and Kallick, 2000). This particular Habit of Mind gives rise to helping students enjoy problem solving and to become curious about the world around them. Certainly, this disposition is consistent with the tenets of Catholic education, such as the focus of Ignatian pedagogy.

#### Steps for implementing

The framework for incorporating Habits of Mind within a school relies on the mode of enculturation, making this a part of the culture of the school. To this end, Costa and others suggest the following factors to consider when using this approach.

#### Placing personal value on this framework

Art Costa describes this disposition, “responding with wonderment

and awe,” as being the habit that is “caught, not taught.” This habit certainly can be fostered by having students see their teachers “fall in love” and be passionate about ideas and concepts in their content area. Reflecting on current classroom practice, teachers can report on times when they “respond with wonderment and awe” to the content areas.

Using a “Think Aloud” process, teachers can share their internal dialog with a class to show their thinking process and how ideas/concepts intrigue them. Having students take time to reflect and also demonstrate how they can “respond with wonderment and awe” can help to foster the development of this disposition.

#### Models/connections to real world

Using real life models also can be a way to foster this Habit of Mind. Examining the biographies of eminent thinkers can provide real-world examples of people who responded to work with wonderment and awe and were able to use this disposition to foster their life's work. Also, let's not forget about the lives of the saints, which can provide a number of rich examples where individuals routinely use this habit to view the world around them and respond to God's creation.

#### Explicit language

Because of the internal nature of “thinking,” this process can look magical to many students, especially learners that are younger or those that

may be inexact in their thinking. Using concrete vocabulary can help put a label on an internal state and help to remove the mystique of the process. Teachers then can use this vocabulary to cue more efficient thinking.

### Cultural artifacts/cues

Review the learning environment in which the students spend their instructional day. It is hard to foster the habit of “responding with wonderment and awe” in a sterile learning environment! One example is a high school world culture classroom that is full of artifacts (flags, three dimensional replicas, etc.) that reflect the course content. On the surface, it may look like a strange collection of memorabilia. However, students have volunteered to make these creations and to dig into the content by researching (beyond the classroom walls) and developing these creations to be shared with the classroom. The artifacts seem to inspire future class members to respond in kind.

### Pitfalls to avoid

#### Hurrying through complex tasks

Complex thinking tasks are very important to fostering all of the Habits of Mind. However, one of the most important aspects, the critical reflection of the process, is glossed over because there is not enough time to engage in that process. To encourage true meta-cognition, students must be asked directly to reflect on their thinking process. In this case, students can be encouraged to reflect on how they were able to “respond with wonderment and awe.”

#### Not being sensitive to the world around us

In these times, where there is imminent pressure for curriculum coverage, staff can have the tendency to “put their nose to the grindstone” and forget to stand back and enjoy. Take time to pause and re-discover when you first fell in love with your content area or that idea.

### Avoiding messy problems

Messy problems (or problems without readily apparent solutions) can be a great context to support the development of “responding with wonderment and awe.” However, some staff are reticent to engage in this complex kind of thinking because it does not always clearly resolve in the standard 42-minute classroom period. Integrating this kind of problem over a period of time can help students persist (another one of the Habits of Mind) and then reflect on how they might have become awe-inspired with the process.

### Implementing together

Suggestions for schools:

Read and discuss the SOS article and support materials at a faculty or team meeting.

Become aware of the Habit of Mind of “responding with wonderment and awe.” Name it and observe it in practice. This can be helpful

when you are engaged in solving a complex problem or in a meeting situation.

Audit classroom tasks to increase number of tasks where answers are not readily apparent and to promote complex thinking. In this audit, document the opportunities that you allow students to engage in reflection. Explicitly cue students to think how they are “responding with wonderment and awe.”

Engage in journaling and track your use of wonderment and awe. Describe how you have become curious about the world around you. ✦



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### References:

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

### New Publications from NCEA

**Changing the Ending** by Kevin Baxter, Ed.D. As superintendent of elementary schools for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Dr. Baxter has implemented several new approaches to enhance marketing strategies and avoid school closings that other schools and dioceses can adapt.

**Ten Simple Steps for Cultivating Donors** by Jeremy Belsky. In a simple and easy-to-read format, administrators and development directors will discover how to cultivate donors, solicit major gifts and increase their donor base.

**The Twentieth Anniversary Compendium of “Legal Issues” from NCEA Notes: 1990-2010** by Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN, J.D., Ph.D. For twenty years, Sister Mary Angela has written the “Legal Issues” column for NCEA Notes. Here are all of her articles arranged by subject – a great resource for school administrators.

**The Internet and Social Media: A Legal and Practical Guide for Catholic Educators** by Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN, J.D., Ph.D. and Michael L. Huggins, Ed.D., MSN, APRN. Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are a part of everyday life for many people – including our teachers and students. The responsible use of social media for communicating with students and parents can be a valuable tool, but inappropriate use can lead to a host of problems. This guide will be useful for all principals to use with their faculty.

**The Internet and Social Media: What Parents Need to Know** by Michael L. Huggins, Ed.D., MSN, APRN. This companion volume is designed to provide guidance to parents to ensure their children’s appropriate use of technology.

**No Know Special Education in This School!** by Ellen Wedemeyer, Ed.D., M.B.A. Many of you are familiar with Dr. Wedemeyer’s monthly column in the Elementary Department Newsletter. In her new publication, she provides practical strategies to accommodate students with special needs in all schools.