



**Habitudes in the Classroom**  
Teaching the Habits and Attitudes  
Our Students Need in the 21st Century  
Angela Maiers

# Sharpening The Saw Before You Cut Down The Tree

In a world with mounting pressures to “get things done,” we may think checklists have become part of our salvation. I love them too! There is an exhilarating feeling that occurs after each mark is successfully checked off. The harder the task, the harder the checkmark, right?

Yet, I wonder, is the checklist we operate from in education—our scope and sequence of traditional skills and lessons—enough for our students to invent, create, collaborate, and solve their own problems?

Education shouldn't be about adding more to our lists of HAVE's, DO's , and BE's, but rather thinking intentionally outside the lines about the BE's, DO's, and HAVE's that matter most.

The 21st century world needs learners to BE critical, BE creative, and BE strategic. The 21st century world demands learners to DO their own thinking, rather than relying on someone else to think for them. The 21st century world expects learners to HAVE the endurance, fortitude, and courage to brave through each new challenge with confidence and competence.

So, let's forget about checklists and explore together the behaviors, the habits and the attitudes—the Habitudes—that we know with conviction will ensure our students success both inside and outside our classroom walls. I know time is short. With so many regimented rules and regulations, it's difficult to find time to add anything to our daily plate. But this is a bit like sharpening the saw before you cut down the tree. Attending to these habitudes in our own learning lives, and transferring them to our students' learning lives is a must.

*So, let's start right now!*

**A habitude is the combination of habits and attitudes.**

Successful learners embody the following:

## HABITUDE 1: Imagination

A cardboard box; a basket of unfolded laundry; an individual blade of grass. To a child, these everyday, unnoticed items become a fort, clothing for a king and queen, or a harmonica that plays symphonic music. But imagination is not just for kids. Discovery, innovation, creativity and learning all begin with imagination.

Everyone says imagination is important, but it's something we take away from students by forcing them to memorize and repeat rather than think and envision. Understanding in school and in our lives requires many different parts of our imaginations. In fact, imagination is so important it has been called "the most essential tool for human intelligence." Here's why: With it we can invent new realities.

Imagination is the foundation of all thinking. If we cannot see the possibility, we cannot achieve the outcome. **Imagination is our mind's eye, and has the capacity to jump from present facts to future possibilities.** Our capacity to dream, hope, and plan for the future is influenced and impacted by the control and understanding of imagination's remarkable power.

- Imagination helps us learn about ourselves and the world around us.
- Imagination helps us cope with and solve problems.
- Imagination helps us become more creative.
- Imagination makes it possible to experience a whole world inside the mind, enabling one to mentally explore both past and future.

When we talk to our students about their imaginations, let's not ask whether they have one, but rather what they are going to do with it.

## HABITUDE 2: Curiosity

Champion learners are curious about everything. They ask questions and get themselves involved in all stages of learning without worrying about the answer, relishing in the process. They have learned that by posing questions, they can generate interest and aliveness even in the most mundane situation. This inquisitive attitude fuels their unrelenting quest for continuous learning.

Our students start life with Einstein-like curiosity and an insatiable desire to learn. **In our current educational system, students grow to believe that answers are more important than questions.** The ones with the quickest and right answers are dubbed smartest. But aren't questions more important than answers?

Questions like "what if" and "I wonder" keep us in motion. Curious brains are active brains, and active brains become smart brains. Like any muscle, the mental exercise caused by curiosity makes the mind stronger. Curious people live full and adventurous lives as each new quest and question leads them down roads otherwise not traveled.

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## HABITUDE 3: Perseverance

I think of times in my life that it took more than “I think I can” to get me to my goal. Most recently, I completed running in my first half-marathon. Without resolve, determination, firmness, and endurance, I know I could not, and would not have physically or mentally gone the distance.

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A student's ability to perform and commit to excellence requires:

- Preparedness with clear goals in site
- Courageous Conviction
- Self-Management
- Dreaming big with passion fueling the way

We need to engage in conversations that will help students build their perseverance muscles as they train like intellectual athletes.

Persevering through a task is easy to do when nothing gets in the way. But, how often does that happen? It's the "no-matter-what" part of the habitude where difficulty lies. We all know that things get in the way and that life can be hard, right? **Real perseverance happens when we do it anyway, in spite of opposition.**

Persevering learners view failure as a learning experience, using each mistake as tuition, and each situation as an opportunity to glean something new. Stories of individuals overcoming the odds are inspiration to all, but the heart of perseverance, and the reason a very small percentage of people ever achieve their full potential is they give up after the first sign of struggle—and **struggle is the welcome mat to the door of breakthrough.**

If we can help our students to always find a goal, however small, that is worth enduring, they can experience in the classroom their abilities to clear the pebbles and, by doing that, cross the mountains in their learning lives.

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## HABITUDE 4: Self-Awareness

We all have strengths and weaknesses in regard to our learning performance and capabilities. Knowing yourself, knowing your strength, preferences, and areas of need is a critical characteristic of a successful learner. Yet, self-awareness is more than just recognition of what you can or cannot be, do or have. This innate ability to stay in tune serves multiple purposes. It allows students to foresee problems and use their strengths to overcome difficulties encountered.

Self awareness is the ability to simultaneously exist both inside and outside of ourselves. It's with this intimate knowledge that we're equipped to make conscious and deliberate decisions about the course we wish our lives to take—not just retrospectively, but proactively.

The Habitude of self awareness acts as our own built in check-and-balance system, popping up when there are conflicts that exist between our true nature and what we are actually doing or thinking. We may not always know how to reach our destination, and may from time to time become lost, but at the very least we'll understand when we're off track and be able to search mindfully for a new route.

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We shower children with awards and recognition because we hope to build confidence. This reinforcement is external and temporary. Confidence comes from within. It is a byproduct of self-awareness, a result of knowing our strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness comes from success and failure independently achieved. There are no awards for self-awareness, but it engenders strength of character. Better to nurture this in children than to fill their cabinets full with awards and trophies.

## HABITUDE 5: Courage

Courageous learners understand that safe is risky. Success is the byproduct of taking risks, closing our eyes, saying I will not let fear hold me back, and taking the plunge. I want students to understand that it takes courage to address the voices in your head that echo doubts, questions, or other paralyzing thoughts.

Courage enables us to manifest something real out of a dream. Talent and skill need courage. It is the stiff backbone that helps lift the task of promoting, depending, and making good on our sense of purpose. There is no other way to reach your potential.

We want our students to use their imagination and curiosity to dream, but they must be willing and able to do the following in order for their dreams to become a reality:

- Envision and Dream
- Be willing to work
- Stay convicted and take a stand on what is most important
- Look for strength inside, not outside of themselves
- Get uncomfortable!
- Believe they can be bigger than they are

Taking a stand for what one believes or thinks is one of most courageous actions our students can take, and they are “practiced” out of it. **Students have become programmed to respond directly to their instructors, bypassing the comments, ideas, and interpretations of one another.** When students become accustomed to asking each other for reasons and opinions, to listen carefully to one another, to build on another’s ideas, they demonstrate courage.

In order to get students to respond in deeper, more courageous ways, they need to begin listening to one another and offer their comments directly to each other rather than always through the teacher. This requires vigilant shifts in classroom discussion dynamics where the focus from *teacher asks question/students answers* moves towards *learners sharing ideas and issues with other*.



## HABITUDE 6: Adaptability

Adaptability is more than just serving change; it is using change as a growth opportunity. In fact, with anticipation of change, you can control change. This kind of development requires robust adaptivity. The world opens up for adaptable learners as they approach each task, each new challenge willing to begin again. They approach their learning and life with a beginner's mindset. These learners embrace challenge with openness and flexibility. Those who don't embrace change with adaptability usually get blind-sided by it.

On one hand, we greet innovation and new development with open hearts and hands. But, when it comes to being the one having to do the change, change becomes an enemy. Our students are no different. With steep learning curves thrust upon them, they cling to what is most comfortable.

Simply put, in our world, there is only one constant: Change. And that's why the adaptable will survive and thrive in change.

21st Century learners must be able to:

- Respond favorably to change
- Handle complexity
- Critically and creatively solve problems
- Be willing to take risks

Persistent adaptability allows students to respond rather than react, reflect rather than remember, and evolve rather than atrophy.

# Teacher, Teach Thyself

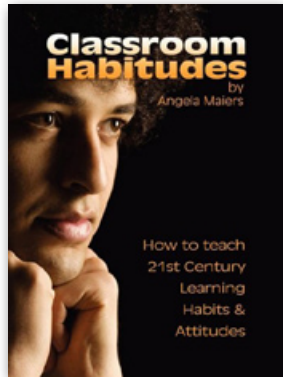
We are the CLO's, Chief Learning Officers, of our classrooms. We must be the learner we wish our students to become. As living, breathing exemplars of the Habitudes in action, we model passionate curiosity, imagination adaptability, and persevere out loud and in front of our students. This public demonstration and discussion allows students to name, claim, and sustain what is necessary for their own learning success.

Using a **“Name it, Claim it, and Sustain it”** plan allows us to systematize excellence in attainable ways. We are more apt to notice and name specifically what we ultimately want from our students.

Every student reaches their highest literacy and learning potential when they are led by knowledgeable, passionate leaders.

**Let the conversations begin!** 🗣️

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our students to become.



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Get more details or buy a copy of Angela Maier's [\*Classroom Habitudes\*](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As an author of several books, articles, and curriculum support materials, Angela Maiers continually strives to connect research and scientific theory to real world practices. For the past six years, she has created, developed, and organized multiple literacy institutes reaching thousands of educators across the United States. Her work is featured in the *National Research Council Yearbook*, multiple professional journals, and most recently in *Urban Schools Most Promising Practices*, published by the International Reading Association. You can continue this conversation on [her blog](#) or on [Twitter](#).

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