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Analysis of the Habits of Mind Program

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The following is part of The Cardinal Newman Society’s series of analyses of secular materials and programs used in Catholic education. Such materials and programs must be carefully evaluated to ensure that their underlying philosophies, content, approaches, and activities are not contrary to the mission of Catholic education and, if used, what adaptations might be needed.

The Newman Society’s “Policy Guidance Related to Secular Materials and Programs in Catholic Education” offers a framework for such evaluation and is the basis for this particular analysis.¹

Overview

Catholic education integrally forms students in mind, body, and soul so they might know and love God and serve their fellow man. Because of this mission, Catholic education has a long tradition of excellence in harmoniously forming students’ intellects and characters through instruction in knowledge and formation in virtue. Nevertheless, Catholic educators may find some benefit in adapting parts of secular programs, while continuing to emphasize Catholic intellectual and moral traditions.

The “Habits of Mind” is one such secular program that has attracted the interest of Catholic educators and accrediting agencies. However, it is important to recognize the limited scope of the Habits of Mind program and to avoid making it central to a Catholic school’s curriculum. The Habits of Mind program is not designed for Catholic education and, while it bears resemblance to several virtues that are important to Catholic formation, it substitutes its own framework for authoritative Catholic sources and neglects other important virtues. It also does not address the Catholic educator’s commitment to modeling virtue as a Christian witness to students. Therefore, while Catholic educators might usefully adapt elements of the program, we cannot recommend

¹ <https://newmansociety.org/secular-academic-materials-and-programs-in-catholic-education/>

it; their primary inspiration should remain firmly based in the Catholic academic and moral tradition, especially as supported by Catholic academic resources such as the Newman Society's *Catholic Curriculum Standards*.²

The Habits of Mind program, whose materials are promoted by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, originates from The Institute for Habits of Mind, which has several organizations in the U.S., United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Singapore.³ It is built on a set of 16 intellectual behaviors to help students make productive choices, especially when faced with dichotomies, dilemmas, or uncertainties.⁴ The emphasis is on helping students discover new knowledge “under those challenging conditions that demand strategic reasoning, insightfulness, perseverance, creativity, and craftsmanship to resolve a complex problem.”⁵

Originally formulated in 1991 by Arthur Costa, the collection started out as 12 attributes of “Intelligent Behavior.” The list has since grown to 16 intellectual behaviors identified by Costa and collaborator Bena Kallick, and they invite educators to add additional behaviors.⁶ The Habits of Mind, as presented in Costa and Kallick's *Cultivating Habits of Mind*,⁷ include:

1. Persisting – Stick to it! Persevering on a task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.
2. Managing impulsivity – Take your time! Controlling yourself; thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.
3. Listening with understanding and empathy – Understand others! Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas. Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.
4. Thinking flexibly – Look at it another way! Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.

² See the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* available at <https://newmansociety.org/educator-resources/resources/academics/catholic-curriculum-standards/>

³ See <https://www.habitsofmindinstitute.org/about-us/organizations-supporting-hom/> (accessed on Jan. 5, 2021).

⁴ Arthur L. Costa, “Describing the Habits of Mind,” in Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick (eds.), *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind* (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2008), par. 6 at <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108008/chapters/Describing-the-Habits-of-Mind.aspx> (accessed on Oct. 15, 2020).

⁵ Arthur L. Costa, “What Are Habits of Mind?” at https://www.chsvt.org/wdp/Habits_of_Mind.pdf (accessed on Sept. 18, 2020).

⁶ Costa (2008) par. 3. See also the Habits of Mind Institute chart of the 16 Habits of Mind at <https://www.habitsofmindinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HabitsofTheMindChartv2.pdf> (accessed on Oct. 15, 2020).

⁷ Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick, *Cultivating Habits of Mind* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2018) 2.

5. Thinking about thinking – Know your knowing! Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.
6. Striving for accuracy – Check it again! Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.
7. Questioning and posing problems – How do you know? Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed and developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.
8. Applying past knowledge to new situations – Use what you learn! Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.
9. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision – Be clear! Striving for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.
10. Gathering data through all senses – Use your natural pathways! Pay attention to the world around you. Gather data through all the senses; taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.
11. Creating, imagining, innovating – Try a different way! Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality.
12. Responding with wonderment and awe – Practice being excited! Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.
13. Taking responsible risks – Venture off! Being adventurous; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.
14. Finding humor – Laugh a little! Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at oneself.
15. Thinking interdependently – Work together! Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Teamwork.
16. Remaining open to continuous learning – I have so much more to learn! Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.

These behaviors are not displayed in isolation but may be integrated as needed by students to answer questions and solve problems. To acquire habits that support these behaviors, students are instructed in the 16 Habits of Mind and strategies to achieve them.

The Habits of Mind program is concerned with behaviors that students use to find answers to challenging problems. Teachers present each Habit of Mind to students through explicit

instruction, definition, and examples. Students are asked to identify each of the Habits of Mind and recall them easily when presented with a problem. This type of knowledge is called explicit, declarative knowledge, or the ability to recall knowledge about the facts of things.⁸

Next, the teacher instructs the student in ways to actuate each Habit of Mind. These strategies are considered types of procedural knowledge which involve “knowing how to do things” and knowing “how to respond under different circumstances.”⁹ For instance, when teaching a student to use the habits of “thinking flexibly” and “communicating with clarity and precision,” a student might be instructed to use a visual thinking map as a process or task organizer. To teach the behavior of “applying past knowledge to new situations,” a student might be trained to use a set of thought-provoking questions or follow a procedure of thinking about a similar past situation and identifying the components of similarity with their causes and consequences. Training a student to “think interdependently” might involve having them employ the skill of refraining from speaking or refraining from dominating conversations to allow everyone an opportunity to share their ideas.

Once these skills, capacities, or strategies are learned, through repetition they can become “pattern[s] of intellectual behaviors that lead[s] to productive actions”¹⁰—which is how the program defines “habits.” For instance, once the procedure is learned for “thinking flexibly”—perhaps through the use of visual schema, thought-provoking questions, or simply looking at issues from different perspectives—then through practice the habit of flexible thinking can be acquired and strengthened.

Situating Habits of Mind Within a Catholic Paradigm

The branded Habits of Mind, intended to promote “productive” behavior, is not the only available compilation of intellectual behaviors. In recent years, these include Robert Marzano’s “productive habits of the mind” for “self-regulated,” critical, and creative thought¹¹ and even the “studio habits of the mind” proposed by the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Project Zero.¹² Decades earlier, Father Antonin Sertillanges, O.P., wrote more substantively of the habits and behaviors of the Christian intellectual in his important work, *The Intellectual Life*.¹³ St. John Henry Newman in the 19th century described education as cultivation of the “philosophical habit of mind,” developing greater understanding of both the parts and the whole of knowledge. And

⁸ Jeanne Ormrod, *Human Learning* (5th Ed) (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008) 233-235.

⁹ Ormrod (2008) 182, 234.

¹⁰ Costa (2008) 16.

¹¹ Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering, *Dimensions of Learning: A Teacher’s Manual* (2nd Ed) (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1992), Ch. 5, Dimension 5: Habits of Mind.

¹² See <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/eight-habits-of-mind> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2021).

¹³ A. D. Sertillanges *The Intellectual Life* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1960) at <https://archive.org/details/a.d.sertillangestheintellectuallife/page/n1/mode/2up> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2021).

St. Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages reflected on the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's writings on habits, both moral and intellectual.

In the Catholic paradigm—and indeed in the classical terminology that has been foundational to both secular and Christian education for more than two millennia—we call good habits “virtues” and distinguish them from vices, which are consistent bad habits. The *Catechism* defines virtue as “a habitual and firm disposition to do the good.”¹⁴ The development of virtue leads a student to both human flourishing and to Heaven. Sertillanges identifies “studiousness” as the key intellectual virtue, but it is a part of temperance; indeed all the virtues that support academic and intellectual work flow from the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

The Habits of Mind are not moral habits in the sense of the virtues, but instead behaviors that can be helpful to education—and in some circumstances, they may not be virtuous at all. Many of the Habits of Mind do tend to correlate to moral virtues, such as: taking responsible risks (prudence), finding humor (affability), thinking interdependently (circumspection), remaining open to continuous learning (docility), managing impulsivity (temperance), and persisting (fortitude). However, finding humor in things is not always affable, prudent, or charitable. Docility may invite more learning, or it might require abiding by a known truth that a teacher denies. Persistence might display fortitude but is not always prudent. In general, there is a danger in the Habits of Mind program's emphasis on celebrated behaviors without a deeper formation in moral virtue.

The act of selecting and using any one or several of the Habits of Mind to solve a dilemma falls under the virtue of prudence as applied to the intellectual life, by which reason is habitually trained to choose the proper path. Prudence means not only knowing the right thing to do but also doing the right thing habitually.

In Catholic education, virtues overlap and occur throughout all levels and types of student formation. Learning a “pattern of intellectual behavior that leads to productive actions”¹⁵ may have some utility, but a liberal education aims for much more, and even productive actions have an ethical dimension.¹⁶ These virtues help students do more than problem-solve; they help students seek and find the truth of a thing. In Catholic education, this inquiry into the truth ultimately leads to Truth Himself: God. This is a path which secular education cannot fully pursue. Our nature is designed to pursue truth through the inquiry of things, but in Catholic education, this truth is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. When illumined by God's grace,

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993) 1803.

¹⁵ Costa (2008) 16.

¹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 57, Art.1 at <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2057.htm> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2021).

we not only understand and determine the interconnection of things, but we also learn something of the higher causes of things.

There is a superficial correlation between the Habits of Mind and the formation of a student in Christian virtue, but the latter project is more encompassing and designed to lead students on the right path not only for this life, but also the next. It requires much more than a focus on 16 Habits of Mind. In Catholic education, the formation in moral virtue is not only part of the written curriculum¹⁷ but is modeled and taught through the lives and witness of its teachers and others who exhibit virtues such as faithfulness, docility, humility, piety, gentleness, compassion, and kindness, among others. Catholic schools are all about formation in virtue, as these dispositions are considered the means of gaining heaven. Our Lord made explicit to us in his teaching of the beatitudes the result of acquiring specific dispositions: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied...Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:3-10).

A Catholic school can attempt to adopt the 16 Habits of Mind and then make sure to link them back to the virtues at some point, or it can make a concerted effort to teach the virtues and carefully structure intellectual training around them. While either course is possible, it would be much better to invest time in a solid virtue framework in keeping with the Catholic intellectual tradition. This conforms to the holistic approach of Catholic education, which seeks integral education of mind, body, and soul.

Catholic education forms young people with a Catholic worldview and shows them that virtue has positive real-world consequences in this life and real teleological value concerning the true end of man. It teaches that virtues such as prudence are applicable to intellectual, moral, and physical challenges that may come their way. Most important, Catholic education teaches the virtues as the way of Christ and guides along the path to sainthood.

Situating Habits of Mind Within Intellectual Virtues

The Catholic intellectual tradition—developed by St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and many others—distinguishes intellectual virtues. They focus on what one knows and how that knowledge is used, always with moral purpose. These five virtues are art, prudence, understanding, science, and wisdom.

Art and prudence are considered practical virtues because they are concerned with two forms of action: making and doing. Art directs the intellect in the application of certain rules or methods to make things which can be useful, practical, beautiful, and pleasing. It is the capacity of

¹⁷ See the Dominican Sisters of Mary Mother of the Eucharist, *Disciple of Christ: Education in Virtue* program’s list of virtues to learn in a Catholic school at <https://golepress.com/welcome/education-in-virtue/> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2021).

knowing how to do something or knowing different techniques of how to do something, such as knowing how to use a computer program or how to make a kite fly. Prudence directs the intellectual powers toward knowing what is best and assessing what ought to be done. It involves analyzing and evaluating the proper means of action and is the foundational intellectual virtue necessary for all the moral virtues. According to St. Thomas, prudence is the “form” of the moral virtues, and the human passions and actions are the “matter.”¹⁸ Thus, in any particular situation, “it is prudence that determines what the just, temperate and brave act is.”¹⁹

Understanding, science, and wisdom are considered speculative virtues which are connected by nature to man’s desire to seek and know truth. Understanding cultivates knowledge of first principles or truths that are self-evident. This knowledge is intuitive and easily attainable, such as the law that something cannot both exist and not exist at the same time under the same conditions.²⁰ Science uncovers “knowledge of conclusions acquired by demonstration through causes or principles which are final in one class or other.”²¹ Science therefore is the evident knowledge of something through demonstration, but much more, it is human reason acting upon knowledge to draw conclusions from sound premises and thereby multiplying knowledge of creation, humanity, and God. Wisdom is the knowledge of conclusions to life’s deepest questions. Its object is truth and is generally identified as the study of philosophy or metaphysics. It seeks the answers to the questions of humanity’s existence and that of the universe, such as, “Why is man the only rational creature?” and “Why are the planets ordered the way they are?”

Although the Habits of Mind include a category of “wonderment and awe” which comes into play at this point, the program takes a simplistic and emotional approach to wonder which does not move beyond natural law or even simple fascination. This falls short of the type of wonder which Aristotle called the beginning of a love of wisdom—the highest understanding of things, their first causes and principles. Wonder begins, he says, “in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too, e.g., about the changes of the moon and of the sun, about the stars and about the origin of the universe.”²² Wonder is about ascending. But authentic wonder should not artificially stop in the material world. St. John Henry Newman points out that while materialists can experience fascination, wonder is fully experienced when it causes us to “Rejoice with trembling”²³ and focus not just on creation but also the Creator. There is a depth and mystery to creation and

¹⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* 27, 5 ad 5.

¹⁹ Sr. Teresa Auer, O.P., *Called to Happiness: Guiding Ethical Principles* (Third ed.) (Nashville, Tenn.: St. Cecilia Congregation, 2013), 163.

²⁰ See Auer (2013) 156 for examples.

²¹ See Martin Augustine Waldron, “Virtue,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 15 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912) at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm> (accessed on Oct. 23, 2020) for definitions of the intellectual virtues.

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.982b.

²³ Newman frequently references this passage from Psalm 2:11 in his works.

reality and to our relationship to God which evokes “a feeling of awe, wonder, and praise, which cannot be more suitably expressed than by the Scripture word fear; or by holy Job’s words, though he spoke in grief, and not as being possessed of a blessing. ‘Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him. Therefore, am I troubled at His presence; when I consider, I am afraid of Him’ [Job xxiii. 8, 9, 15].”²⁴

Wonder should lead reason to “ascend,” as Newman says, above the actual fact or experience and above the strictly material. It should look not only to material causes, comparisons, relationships, classification, and principles, but should also evoke a sense of humility and a sense of our powerlessness and adoration before the glory of God, the author and end of all that is true, good, and beautiful. Catholic education teaches students the use and skills of reason to rise toward the transcendent. We teach students to be formed in habits of reasoning that elevate thought above information and experience. Secular education leaves students short of ascent, and a Catholic school that teaches religion but fails to form students with skills and habits of philosophical reason is leaving students unable to contend with the issues of post-modernity, where they can quickly fall prey to ideology despite conflicts with their consciences and sense of natural law. They can have years of experiencing God’s love and mercy in Catholic education, the sacraments, and the family, but then they turn away because their inadequately formed minds cannot find God in reality, and they are lost in confusion.

The Habits of Mind fails to meet the more targeted speculative intellectual virtues championed by authentic Catholic education and the nature of human learning that ascends toward wisdom. A greater emphasis on these true Catholic intellectual and moral virtues and on the transcendent can help ensure development of habits to assist in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and cultivating wisdom for human perfection in the light of faith. These are critical goals in Catholic education, which understands that human nature is oriented toward unity with God the Creator, and man’s gift of reason is intended to serve the free search for truth about God, humanity, and creation. Without appeal to truth, man’s free will and reason lack purpose, and human dignity is not respected. The Habits of Mind, by their emphasis on problem solving, serve public education’s mission of preparing students to be useful workers and citizens, to “move beyond the test or the final exam to find application in other subjects, in their future careers, and in their lives,”²⁵ but they are inadequate by themselves to achieve Catholic education’s goal of virtuous living and sainthood.

²⁴ St. John Henry Newman, “Sermon 2: Reverence, a Belief in God’s Presence” 26 at <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume5/sermon2.html> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2021).

²⁵ Costa (2008) 45.

Additionally, Catholic educators should ensure that their curricula and course plans form students in the many habits of thinking that include but go well beyond the Habits of Mind and promote complete formation that respects students' dignity and purpose. These may include, but are not limited to, memorization, seeking knowledge from sound testimony, identifying first principles, asking about essence, asking about causes, division and composition of ideas, classification, analogical thinking, communicating with proper language, communicating with elegant language appropriate to the circumstances, discerning the unity of knowledge and bearing of knowledge upon other knowledge, following the methods that are proper to each academic discipline, right use of freedom in intellectual pursuits, and concern for the common good. There are, in other words, important habits of the mind and intellectual goals that the branded Habits of Mind leave unaddressed.

Including Additional Catholic Habits of the Mind

If Catholic educators choose to use the Habits of Mind program, they should at minimum add three more habits to the existing list to protect the mission of Catholic education.

17. Thinking with Faith

An area in which the secular Habits of Mind program does not venture is faith as a valid way of knowing. Faith is the trust we have in something we do not see, based on the authority and credibility of the source, which is generally a person.²⁶ An example of human faith is to believe that Alaska exists without ever having been there, based on the credibility of others and their testimony. Certitude is not personally confirmed, but the will and the intellect join to assent to the truth that Alaska is a place based on the credibility of witnesses.

Faith becomes supernatural when we are disposed to it through the sacraments and grace, and the matter is based on Divine Revelation from God Himself. Here the will and the intellect are turned toward God, the evidence being the witness of holy men and women, the prophets, the saints, the Apostles, and Jesus Christ. St. John Paul II in his discussion of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans writes:

According to the Apostle, it was part of the original plan of the creation that reason should without difficulty reach beyond the sensory data to the origin of all things: the Creator. But because of the disobedience by which man and woman chose to set themselves in full and absolute autonomy in relation to the One who had created them, this ready access to God the Creator diminished. (*Fides et Ratio*, 1998, 22)

²⁶ St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998) 33.

While we have not seen the eternal kingdom, we believe, with the supernatural help of grace through faith, that it exists and so we continue to journey toward that deeper, fuller understanding of God's plan for us as imparted in Divine Revelation. In faith, the indivisible unity between the intellect and will is more easily discerned. It was St. Augustine who is credited with saying, "believe so that you may understand."²⁷ This is the goal of a Catholic education: to open the door of faith for students to behold the transcendental realities through learning, discussion, experience, service, and sacraments. It is essential that students cultivate the intellectual and moral habits of being that predispose them to an encounter with faith through learning opportunities and discussions of the importance and validity of faith as a way of knowing.

In public education, the discussion of faith is limited. The material sciences are held up as the highest and most privileged ways of knowing, and students are taught that knowledge of truth is limited to what can be physically seen, weighed, or measured. While this is a valid way of knowing, it is not the only means of knowing.

Whereas modern society and most of secular education today define truth according to consensus and experience, especially in the course of scientific investigation, the Catholic educator understands that truth is the conformity of the mind and reality and all truth proceeds from God. The human intellect is intended to be ordered to truth, and reason allows the intellect to rise above consensus and experience to better know God, His ways and His creation.

Aquinas says that both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, and both work to contribute to the understanding of Divine Revelation and ultimate truth. St. John Paul II writes:

Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason. Illumined by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge of the Triune God. (*Fides et Ratio*, 43)

What more fitting place to champion faith as a means of knowing than in a Catholic school? Enlightened by faith, Catholic education teaches habits that form students not only for knowing but also for apprehending the transcendental realities that give ultimate meaning to this life as souls are prepared for the next.

²⁷ Fr. David Pignato, "The Primacy of Faith and the Priority of Reason: A Justification for Public Recognition of Revealed Truth," *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 12.2 (Spring 2017) 52-65.

18. Thinking Philosophically

Saint John Henry Newman taught that the essence of education is cultivation of the intellect for its own sake. He argued that education should cultivate a “philosophical habit of mind” that reasons upon knowledge, rather than simply accumulating information from experience and creatively expressing one’s feelings and desires. Education teaches the student to “ascend” above knowledge to new levels of understanding by the right use of reason. He wrote, “. . .in order to have possession of truth at all, we must have the whole truth; and no one science, no two sciences, no one family of science, nay, not even all secular science, is the whole truth. . .” (Discourse 4). Instead, God is “a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable.”

Reason needs to be cultivated not only as a logical tool for problem solving, but also as a means of attaining truths that are foundational to reality and larger than experience—as in contemplation of the natural and eternal law. The Habits of Mind promote collaboration to find solutions, and communication is judged by clarity, but a Catholic school will want to put additional emphasis on dialectic²⁸ and persuasion for the purpose of reasoning toward higher truths.

Many of the Habits of Mind align with the Topics of Invention, a method taught in classical rhetoric of examining all aspects of a subject in the context of its circumstances and attributes and in relation to other subjects. But the Habits of Mind neglect the development of sound reasoning in support of a thesis, and they also lack emphasis of knowledge from authoritative sources—not least the Catholic Church. Adding the habit of thinking philosophically allows for rational dialogue and “ascending” to the higher truths of God, which ought to be the outcome of an integrated Catholic education.

19. Valuing and Seeking the Transcendent

Catholic education should also ensure that student thinking is oriented toward assigning value and meaning to what is being considered, and students should recognize that transcendent realities are among those things. Pope Francis has noted that:

For me, the greatest crisis of education, in the Christian perspective, is being closed to transcendence. We are closed to transcendence. It is necessary to prepare hearts for the Lord to manifest Himself, but totally, namely, in the totality of humanity, which also has this dimension of transcendence.²⁹

²⁸ Dialectic is a method of dialogue that aims to arrive at truth instead of defeating or persuading an opponent. It is associated with the Socratic method and the methods of medieval scholastics including St. Thomas Aquinas.

²⁹ “Pope’s Q and A on the Challenges of Education,” ZENIT (Nov. 23, 2015) at <https://zenit.org/2015/11/23/pope-s-q-and-a-on-the-challenges-of-education/> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2021).

Traditionally, in Catholic education, subjects are taught not merely as vehicles for the conveyance of content knowledge and technical skills. Catholic education helps “the pupil to assimilate skills, knowledge, intellectual methods and moral and social attitudes, all of which help to develop his personality and lead him to take his place as an active member of the community of man.”³⁰

In Catholic education, the Catholic faith increases students’ understanding, and moral formation increases learning. Processes and methodologies should not thwart the opportunity for students to go beyond the pragmatic, utilitarian, and material world. Church documents are filled with discussions regarding the formative value of all education. For instance:

The Catholic teacher, therefore, cannot be content simply to present Christian values as a set of abstract objectives to be admired, even if this be done positively and with imagination; they must be presented as values which generate human attitudes, and these attitudes must be encouraged in the students. Examples of such attitudes would be these: a freedom which includes respect for others; conscientious responsibility; a sincere and constant search for truth; a calm and peaceful critical spirit; a spirit of solidarity with and service toward all other persons; a sensitivity for justice; a special awareness of being called to be positive agents of change in a society that is undergoing continuous transformation. (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, #29-30)

Catholic education focuses on the formation of the intellect, will, and soul of the student. It allows opportunities for students to ponder God’s omnipotence and love and His personal relationship with them. It is a specific charge for Catholic teachers to teach to the transcendent in a way that goes beyond abstraction, naming, listing attributes, and so forth and prepares a human soul for an encounter with real things—something secular schools cannot do.

The integral formation of the human person, which is the purpose of education, includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, together with preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, [and] becoming aware of the transcendental, and religious education. (*The Catholic School*, #17)

The transcendentals of truth, beauty, and goodness can assist in determining value.

Transcendentals are timeless and universal attributes of being. They are the properties inherent to all beings.³¹

³⁰ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (Vatican, 1977) 39.

³¹ See “Educating to Truth, Beauty and Goodness” from The Cardinal Newman Society at <https://newmansociety.org/educating-to-truth-beauty-and-goodness-2/>

The pursuit of truth, defined as the mind in accord with reality,³² is a foundation of Catholic education and is a significant component of the Newman Society’s *Catholic Curriculum Standards*. From the Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) we read, “Various school subjects do not present only knowledge to be attained, but also values to be acquired and truths to be discovered. All of which demands an atmosphere characterized by the search for truth” (#14). Man, by his nature, is made to seek the truth.³³ While the Habits of Mind are simply focused on the process of discovery, they fall short of the disposition championed in Catholic education. For instance, the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* expect students to “Analyze how the pursuit of scientific knowledge, for utilitarian purposes alone or for the misguided manipulation of nature, thwarts the pursuit of authentic Truth and the greater glory of God.”

What is true is also beautiful. As a timeless and universal attribute of being, beauty helps evoke wonder, awe, and delight of the soul leading to philosophical and theological questions like, “How can something so beautiful exist?” “Is this beauty only meaningful to me?” “Who created all of this?” and so forth. Catholic education—with its focus on the transcendentals of truth, beauty, and goodness—already teaches the Habit of Mind of “responding with wonderment and awe,” but it is much more than an emotional response; it is an invitation to think beyond creation and seek the reality and wisdom of God, who created all that we know and experience.

Finally, in Catholic education we know that the true and the beautiful are also related to all that is good. A thing is “good” when it exercises the powers, activities, and capacities which perfect it. In Catholic education, we also call human action good when all components of the action are noble and virtuous. Habits of Mind tends toward some of these same ends in an aspirational sort of way, but a robust Catholic education can thoughtfully and wholly fulfill the mission of intellectual formation within its own paradigm that looks to the transcendent.

Consideration of the Catholic Curriculum Standards

Catholic educators who may be interested in using the Habits of Mind might first consider incorporating the intellectual and dispositional standards from the *Catholic Curriculum Standards*. As shown in the Crosswalk below, the *Catholic Curriculum Standards*, in addition to a Catholic school’s virtue and catechetical program, cover all the Habits of Mind and then some. The *Catholic Curriculum Standards* purposefully include content for transmission of Catholic traditions and a Catholic worldview. Standards such as, “Evaluate how history is not a mere chronicle of human events, but rather a moral and meta-physical drama having supreme worth in the eyes of God,” and, “Display personal self-worth and dignity as a human being and as part of

³² Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q.1, A. 1-3; cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 16.

³³ See Fr. Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God* (Grand Rapids: MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010) 259-266.

God’s ultimate plan of creation,” elevate a student’s thought from the here and now to the eternal.

Catholic schools choosing to highlight the transcendental concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness, which are also embedded in the *Catholic Curriculum Standards*, will naturally use and develop many of the intellectual behaviors in the Habits of Mind list, particularly striving for accuracy and questioning and posing problems. The *Catholic Curriculum Standards* have 10 specific standards that address these two Habits of Mind (see crosswalk below).

In addition to covering the 16 Habits of Mind within the higher context of virtue and the Catholic intellectual tradition, the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* seek to form dispositions in the following overarching categories:

- demonstration of Catholic moral virtues;
- ardent pursuit of the truth of things and the rejection of relativism;
- value of the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit;
- dignity of the human person and primacy of care and concern for all stages of life;
- care and concern for the environment as part of God’s creation;
- appreciation of the beauty of well-crafted prose and poetry, historical artifacts and cultures, the order of creation, and the proportion, radiance, and wholeness present within mathematics; and
- appreciation for the power of literature, the story of history, and the discoveries of science and how through interaction with them one can identify and choose the personal and collective good.³⁴

Conclusion

When choosing specific approaches to Catholic education, it is important to understand the nature of the human person and use that understanding as the foundation for any education program.³⁵ Humanity has been gifted with faculties that work in specific ways. Education works best when it follows a natural order and engages the student’s will and emotions in the learning

³⁴ As the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* are primarily dispositional, the reader is invited to view the Standards in their entirety on the Cardinal Newman website at <https://newmansociety.org/catholic-curriculum-standards-full-resource/>

³⁵ For further reading, we recommend the following resources: Auer (2013); Luigi Guisanni, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995); Curtis Hancock, *Recovering a Catholic Philosophy of Elementary Education* (Mount Pocono, PA: Newman House Press, 2005); and St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998).

endeavor. As an embodied soul, it is essential that the whole person—the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual—be ordered so that students can better understand themselves as effective and flourishing human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and heirs to the eternal kingdom.

The Habits of Mind program, on its own, is not designed to accomplish this end—and even when used as a supplemental program, it can tend to overshadow or even contradict habits that should be central to Catholic education, such as the dispositions articulated by our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount (the Beatitudes) and other dispositions advanced in the Bible such as humbleness, gentleness, patience, faithfulness, goodness, godliness, joyfulness, modesty, and love (see Gal 5:22, 2 Peter 1:5 and Eph 4:2). Generations of Catholic educators, having partaken in the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic virtues have successfully formed students toward greater heights, and future generations of educators can rely confidently on this experience without seeking faddish secular programs. The goals of the Habits of Mind program are surpassed by education that is firmly grounded in the Catholic academic and moral tradition. Educators can find guidance in Catholic academic resources such the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* that embrace the full mission of Catholic education.

Catholic schools using elements of secular programs such as Habits of Mind should consider adaptations to the program as recommended below.

- Use the *Catholic Curriculum Standards*, including the elements encouraged by the Habits of Mind and other habits and emphases which are appropriate to a Catholic education, in lieu of a supplemental program or in its support.
- Institute a school-wide virtue program or curriculum to ensure that moral and intellectual virtues are taught, developed, and applied. Focus especially on the virtue of prudence to inform intellectual development.
- If using the Habits of Mind or a similar program, tie each habit back to its virtue (see crosswalk).
- Ensure the engagement of a student’s emotion and will, in addition to their intellect, in the formation of habits.
- Institute the habit of “Thinking with Faith.”
- Institute the habit of “Thinking Philosophically.”
- Institute the habit of “Valuing and Seeking the Transcendent.”

Crosswalk Between Habits of Mind, Catholic Curriculum Standards, and Virtues Commonly Taught in Catholic Education Programs

Habits of Mind	Catholic Curriculum Standards and Virtue Program
Persisting	M.K6.DS4, M.712.DS3; virtue of fortitude: perseverance under trial, overcoming fear, effort
Managing Impulsivity	Virtue of prudence: right reason in action, taking time to seek counsel before acting, subordinating the passions to the right use of reason.
Listening with Understanding and Empathy	ELA.K6.IS7, ELA.K6.IS14, ELA.K6.DS1, ELA.K6.DS8, ELA.712.DS2, ELA.712.IS14, ELA.712.DS6, H.K6.DS2, H.K6.DS3
Thinking Flexibly	ELA.712.GS3, ELA.712.IS6, ELA.712.IS11, ELA.712.IS14, H.K6.GS2, H.K6.IS11, M.712.DS3, H.K6.DS3, H.712.IS7, H.712.IS10, H.712.IS14
Thinking about Thinking	M.K6.DS5, M.712.DS3, M.712.DS7, M.712.DS8, M.712.DS9
Striving for Accuracy	Not just accuracy, but truth in all disciplines; M.K6.DS4, M.712.DS1, M.712.DS5
Questioning and Posing Problems	M.712.DS4, M.712.DS9, M.712.IS1, M.712.IS2, M.712.IS3, M.712.IS7, M.712.IS8
Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations	ELA.K6.DS6, ELA.712.DS6, ELA.712.IS11, H.K6.IS9, H.712.DS4, H.712.DS5, H.712.IS11, H.712.IS12
Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision	ELA.K6.WS2, ELA.K6.IS12, ELA.712.WS2, ELA.712.WS3, ELA.712.WS4
Creating, Imaging, Innovating	M.K6.GS2, M.712.GS2, M.712.IS3, M.712.IS4
Gathering Data Through All Senses	ELA.K6.DS3, ELA.K6.DS9, ELA.K6.IS13
Responding with Wonderment and Awe	ELA.K6.DS7, ELA.712.DS7, S.K6.DS1, S.712.DS1, M.K6.DS1, M.712.DS1

Taking Responsible Risks	Virtue of prudence
Finding Humor	ELA, K6.DS7, ELA.712.DS7; virtue of affability
Thinking Interdependently	S.712.GS2, S.K6.GS2; virtue of docility, Catholic social teaching on dignity of the person
Remaining Open to Continuous Learning	M.K6.DS3, M.712.DS3; virtue of docility

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