

3. Dispositions in Action

Defining Dispositions in 21st Century Learning

One of the core functions of 21st century education is learning to learn in preparation for a lifetime of change (Claxton, 2007). Acquiring knowledge alone does not guarantee that this learning will be used and applied. Learning in the 21st century also requires a capacity to learn that reflects a range of dispositions: to be curious, resilient, flexible, imaginative, critical, reflective, and self-evaluative (Costa and Kallick, 2000; Perkins, 1992).

Dispositions have been variously described as habits of mind, attitudes, and learning behaviors. Regardless of the term used, a disposition is a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal (Katz, 2000). Dispositions are not defined simply by the acquisition of skills. One can be proficient in a particular skill without intentionally and mindfully using it. In other words, *having* is not the same as *doing*: for example, students may know how to evaluate Web sites, but if they do not believe that evaluation is critical, they revert to mindlessly selecting the first Web site in their Google searches. Importantly, Dispositions are not inborn. They can be supported and strengthened with curriculum and teaching strategies. Instructors foster desirable dispositions by challenging students to consider not only *what* they are learning but also *how* they are learning and *why* they value the learning.

Dispositions and the Learning Process

Dispositions can be displayed at any point in the learning process. They are neither standard-specific, nor grade-level-specific. For example, *persistence* can be demonstrated at all grade levels by pursuing information to gain a broad perspective (Standard 1), posing a conclusion and testing it against the evidence (Standard 2), contributing responsibly in learning situations (Standard 3), and seeking information that answers personal questions and interests (Standard 4).

Teaching for Dispositions

Dispositions are developed over time by the way that educators structure learning experiences. For example, if library media specialists and classroom teachers give students quick assignments where they are expected to grasp whatever information they can find quickly, then they will not have opportunities to demonstrate persistence. If library media specialists and classroom teachers do not value multiple perspectives in the way they structure and grade assignments, then students will not persist in finding a broad perspective.

The following table lists sample student behaviors that express the indicated disposition and the stages through which the disposition might develop. The stages demonstrate the shift from teacher-in-control to student-in-control that is necessary for students to develop ownership over the dispositions necessary for successful learning at any age. This is not an exhaustive list, but it suggests the breadth of possibilities for teaching and assessing dispositions while students are learning.

Standard 1: Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.

Indicator 1.2.1: Display initiative and engagement by posing questions and investigating the answers beyond the collection of superficial facts

Sample behaviors

- Develop questions that relate to the essential or overarching question in the inquiry.
- Develop questions that explore the larger topic or issue to gain essential background knowledge.
- Develop questions that focus on “how do we know what we know.”
- Develop questions that require making connections between ideas and events.
- Develop questions that challenge previous thinking.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Pose questions but largely at the factual level.

Stage 2 – Pose questions at both the factual and higher levels of thinking with considerable guidance from the teacher or librarian.

Stage 3 – Pose questions at both the factual and higher levels of thinking with minimal assistance from the teacher or librarian.

Indicator 1.2.2: Demonstrate confidence and self-direction by making independent choices in the selection of resources and information.

Sample behaviors

- Preview resources to decide which best meet information needs.
- Apply evaluation strategies and criteria to select resources.
- Revise search based on information found.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Seek continual assistance from teacher, librarian, and peers in selecting resources and information.

Stage 2 – Use strategies and criteria provided by the teacher or librarian to select appropriate resources.

Stage 3 – Work independently in evaluating resources and information and revising search strategies as needed.

Indicator 1.2.3: Demonstrate creativity by using multiple resources and formats.

Sample behaviors

- Collect needed information from resources in a range of formats.
- Experiment with new ways to communicate information.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Use the same types of resources and formats for all information needs.

Stage 2 – Use an expanding range of resources and formats that have been suggested by the teacher or librarian.

Stage 3 – Use a range of resources and formats and try different ways to appropriately present information.

Indicator 1.2.4: Maintain a critical stance by questioning the validity and accuracy of all information.

Sample behaviors

- Distinguish fact from opinion.
- Detect bias.
- Use additional sources to verify conflicting information.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Tend to accept all information at face value.

Stage 2 – Examine the soundness and relevance of information with considerable teacher or librarian guidance and prompting.

Stage 3 – Critically examine the soundness and relevance of information as an integral aspect of any learning process with little prompting from teacher or librarian.

Indicator 1.2.5: Demonstrate adaptability by changing the inquiry focus, questions, resources, or strategies when necessary to achieve success.

Sample behaviors

- Modify the inquiry focus based on data collected.
- Revise questions based on new information.
- Modify search strategies to deal with emerging findings.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Tend to stick with original focus and questions even when information gathered indicates a need for adjustments.

Stage 2 – Make changes to the original focus and questions based on data collected, but need considerable help in identifying new resources and adapting strategies to move ahead.

Stage 3 – Require limited assistance to modify research focus, questions, and search strategies; independently select additional resources as needed.

Indicator 1.2.6: Display emotional resilience by persisting in information searching despite challenges.

Sample behaviors

- Brainstorm new ways of searching for information when the existing strategy does not work.
- Analyze challenges faced in the research process and identify the possible barriers.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Need continual encouragement when first attempts to find information are not successful.

Stage 2 – Identify alternative strategies to find needed information with occasional help and emotional support from the teacher or librarian.

Stage 3 – Reflect on why original search strategies did not work; determine additional possibilities independently.

Indicator 1.2.7: Display persistence by continuing to pursue information to gain a broad perspective.

Sample behaviors

- Use a range of resources to search for a broader or deeper perspective on an inquiry.
- Display continuing curiosity that fuels self-generated investigation of an inquiry.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Limit information pursuit to the requirements of the assignment.

Stage 2 – Generate additional questions and use additional resources that demonstrate more depth than required in the original assignment.

Stage 3 – Show evidence of pursuing questions even after the original assignment has been completed.

Standard 2: Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.

Indicator 2.2.1: Demonstrate flexibility in the use of resources by adapting information strategies to each specific resource and by seeking additional resources when clear conclusions cannot be drawn.

Sample behaviors

- Realize that Web searching and book searching require different skills and adapt accordingly.
- Detect conflicting information and access resources that contribute to thoughtful conclusions.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Use the same strategies for searching regardless of the format or medium and the appropriateness/comprehensiveness of the information for drawing a conclusion.

Stage 2 – Adjust search strategies depending on the format or medium being used, but tend not to resolve conflicting or unclear findings.

Stage 3 – Detect conflicting information and retrieve data to resolve or clarify findings; independently adapt search techniques to locate necessary information in different formats.

Indicator 2.2.2: Use both divergent and convergent thinking to formulate alternative conclusions and test them against the evidence.

Sample behaviors

- Explore a wide range of possible conclusions and analyze the evidence to support them.
- Bring together information to solve a problem or reach a conclusion.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Identify one possible conclusion but require considerable guidance from the teacher or librarian to come up with other possibilities.

Stage 2 – Identify more than one possible conclusion but require considerable guidance from the teacher or librarian in figuring ways to determine which conclusions can actually be supported.

Stage 3 – Identify a range of possible conclusions and determine techniques to test them against the evidence with limited help from the teacher or librarian.

Indicator 2.2.3: Employ a critical stance in drawing conclusions by demonstrating that the pattern of evidence leads to a decision or conclusion.

Sample behaviors

- Recognize fallacies in logic.
- Identify misleading information and gaps in information that lead to inaccurate conclusions.
- Read widely from varied sources to pinpoint inaccurate information.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Draw questionable conclusions based on shallow or incomplete evidence.

Stage 2 – Draw plausible conclusions but need help from the teacher or librarian to articulate how the evidence supports those conclusions.

Stage 3 – Draw conclusions or make decisions based on clearly documented evidence drawn from a range of appropriate resources.

Indicator 2.2.4: Demonstrate personal productivity by completing products to express learning.

Sample behaviors

- Establish a research plan that outlines learning goals, identifies major tasks and deadlines to achieve steps toward the goals, and documents progress throughout the research process.
- Set and meet high standards and goals for delivering quality work on time.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Develop a simple plan (goals, tasks, deadlines) for conducting research with considerable help from the teacher or librarian.

Stage 2 – Develop a detailed plan (goals, tasks, criteria to assess work, deadlines) but need periodic reminders from the teacher or librarian to complete the work in a timely manner.

Stage 3 – Develop a detailed plan and monitor own progress in completing high quality work in a timely manner.

Standard 3: Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.

Indicator 3.2.1: Demonstrate leadership and confidence by presenting ideas to others in both formal and informal situations.

Sample behaviors

- Present findings of an inquiry project in an organized, articulate, and poised delivery.
- Freely communicate ideas and opinions that are thoughtfully supported in small group and large group settings.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Share ideas and opinions comfortably in informal settings.

Stage 2 – Share ideas and opinions comfortably in both informal and formal settings.

Stage 3 – Frequently facilitate exchange of ideas and opinions in informal settings; share ideas with poise and confidence in formal situations.

Indicator 3.2.2: Show social responsibility by participating actively with others in learning situations and by contributing questions and ideas during group discussions.

Sample behaviors

- Listen respectfully and objectively; offer constructive feedback.
- Contribute opinions, ideas, and questions in a responsible manner.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Listen respectfully but rarely contribute to the group discussions.

Stage 2 – Listen respectfully and when appropriate, offer information and opinions in group discussions.

Stage 3 – Listen respectfully, contribute and ask clarifying questions, and often take the lead in encouraging others to share their ideas and opinions.

Indicator 3.2.3: Demonstrate teamwork by working productively with others.

Sample behaviors

- Take on different roles and tasks willingly within the group to accomplish shared ends.
- Help to leverage strengths of others to accomplish a common goal.
- Use problem-solving skills to influence and guide others toward a goal.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Seldom volunteer but will complete tasks assigned by the team.

Stage 2 – Assume different roles in a team to complete tasks and achieve goals.

Stage 3 – Frequently assume leadership in the team; seek consensus to achieve goals.

Standard 4: Pursue personal and aesthetic growth.

Indicator 4.2.1: Display curiosity by pursuing interests through multiple resources.

Sample behaviors

- Explore print, digital and other resources to find information on a topic of personal interest.
- Seek diverse opinions and points of view in critically investigating a topic of personal interest.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Satisfy personal information needs using the same limited resources.

Stage 2 – Satisfy personal information needs using new (to the student) as well as familiar resources in a range of formats.

Stage 3 – Satisfy personal information needs using a range of information sources; demonstrate evidence of seeking different views and opinions on these topics.

Indicator 4.2.2: Demonstrate motivation by seeking information to answer personal questions and interests, trying a variety of formats and genres, and displaying a willingness to go beyond academic requirements.

Sample behaviors

- Voluntarily generate questions that go beyond an assignment.
- Independently pursue answers to self-generated questions.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Show limited interest in reading, viewing, or listening to meet personal needs.

Stage 2 – Explore a range of resources to answer personal questions and pursue personal interests.

Stage 3 – Explore various information formats and literary genres to meet personal needs and voluntarily pursue questions generated by class assignments.

Indicator 4.2.3: Maintain openness to new ideas by considering divergent opinions, changing opinions or conclusions when evidence supports the change, and seeking information about new ideas encountered through academic or personal experiences.

Sample behaviors

- Willingly accept diverse points of views and ideas and carefully analyze them.
- Modify personal view or conclusion based on the analysis of new information and evidence.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Acknowledge opinions of other people on a particular topic or issue.

Stage 2 – Consider both documented evidence as well as other people's views on a particular topic or issue in developing a personal opinion.

Stage 3 – Develop a personal view on a topic or issue by taking into account documented evidence and views expressed by others and by pursuing additional and divergent information.

Indicator 4.2.4: Show an appreciation for literature by electing to read for pleasure and expressing an interest in various literary genres.

Sample behaviors

- Read as a voluntary, out-of-class pursuit.
- Select and enjoy a range of print and digital resources based on personal interests.
- Maintain a personal reading list.

Stages of development

Stage 1 – Read when required; tend to stick with a preferred genre.

Stage 2 – Read voluntarily for pleasure; independently explore various genres.

Stage 3 – Read voluntarily for pleasure in a range of genres; maintain a personal reading log.