

Tips to Help Students Develop Skills for Lifelong Learning

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville affirms that students are not simply static learners in our classrooms; rather, we seek to propel all students towards a dynamic journey of life-long learning and critical inquiry. To that end, we believe that students **“must acknowledge and come to value the potential importance and benefit that can be derived from a commitment to engaged scholarship and lifelong learning”** (University of Tennessee, 2016, p. 38).

Writing for Big Think, Kevin Dickinson puts forth several habits that lifelong learners can successfully leverage to realize their aspirations. This resource will focus on these habits and contextualize them to the higher education environment.

Habit 1: Cultivate a Growth Mindset

It is imperative that students recognize that their education does not end when they walk out of the classroom for the last time. Rather, students must focus on improving their skills and growing both personally and professionally during every season of life. Dickinson suggests that students should “recognize that they will always have room to grow, but that the process may not be easy.”

Habit 2: Set SMART Goals

Another way to push students to value life-long learning is by encouraging them to adopt SMART goals. SMART goals are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Action-oriented
- Realistic
- Time-defined

By aligning their goals within this framework, students can become disciplined and emboldened to set, meet, and exceed their expectations. This approach also promotes an attitude of continual reflection, as it allows students to view their investments of time, energy, and resources through the lens of what is most important for them to achieve their aspirations, and can provide a track-record of previous successes that can encourage them when the journey becomes difficult.

Habit 3: Spend Five Hours Each Week Learning

This is an hour a day for every work day. It isn't asking too much, but it may come at the cost of sacrificing something leisurely, like an hour of television, for the gain of knowledge that can propel you toward the attainment of a goal. Exhort your students to think about their passions and future desires, and ask them what they are willing to give up in order to reach their goals. Lifelong learning is a process, and oftentimes it is a process of persistence. However, the discipline of steady learning will prove invaluable in the long-run when they start achieving their dreams.

Habit 4: Test Your Understanding

According to Ulrich Boser (2017), people can recall information more effectively when they interact with it more actively. This is a hallmark of experiential learning, and it's the idea of learning by doing (University of Tennessee, p. 7). Students should be encouraged to engage with content and knowledge in their future careers to gain a deeper understanding of the principles, processes, and potential applications of this information in real-world settings.

Habit 5: Prioritize

It is possible to spend a lot of time on the wrong tasks. Helping students to cultivate a reflective attitude will allow them to better understand where to invest their valuable time, skills, and resources. The process of prioritizing, whether at school, at work, or in their personal lives, will push students to think about what is most important, most urgent, and most appropriate given their current context and future goals. Prioritizing effectively allows students to evaluate potential decisions through a lens born of reflective practices, which will better align the students' efforts with the trajectories most likely to achieve the goals that are important to them. This habit is closely tied to Habit 2: Set SMART Goals.

Habit 6: Find Motivation

Dickinson (2018) believes that the transition from studying course material to obtain a good grade to learning in order to attain continual self-improvement or career advancement may be the most important paradigm shift that a life-long learner will make. It is imperative that a student discovers the intrinsic or extrinsic motivation required to learn for the rest of their lives, and prioritize the cultivation of that motivation so that they will persevere.

References

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