

Critical Skills and Dispositions

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The critical skills and fundamental dispositions represent very broad categories. To help students to develop them, we need to be more specific about our expectations. To assist teachers in this regard, the Critical Skills Program has developed a set of key attributes for each skill and disposition. They are similar to the detailed goals listed under the standard content headings of *history* or *geography*, **key attributes** are those behaviors one might observe in a skilled individual or group or the personal characteristics and habits of mind that are deemed desirable by broad agreement.

On pages 40 through 51 you will find key attributes and possible coaching scripts for each skill and disposition area. In the challenge design section of this kit, starting on page 58, you will find examples of how to build in expectations for the exhibition of skills and dispositions within the same experienced you've crafted to target curricular knowledge and understanding.

Key Attribute

An observable behavior that provides some evidence of the presence of a skill or disposition in a given individual or group.

In addition to thoughtfully articulated standards for knowledge and understanding, the goal of education in a Critical Skills classroom is the development of individuals who consistently demonstrate that they:

Possess **skills** that are **critical** to the needs of the times, who:

- are skillful **problem solvers** capable of developing effective solutions to the multi-dimensional and complex problems ever-present in personal and professional arenas,
- are capable **decision makers** who can and do make responsible decisions in diverse situations,
- routinely and effectively apply **critical thinking** in a range of life roles,
- have the confidence in and capacity for the **creative thinking** that enhances both experience and results in a variety of life roles,
- are skillful **communicators** who express themselves with clarity and authenticity,
- can efficiently and productively **organize** time, space, materials, and tasks,
- can skillfully help others to optimize their work together through effective **management**,
- can recognize quality **leadership** and can assume it when appropriate,

Possess **fundamental dispositions** that bring enhanced value to their own lives and to the lives of those with whom they share in community, who:

- are responsible and invested **owners of life-long learning**,
- are reflectively **self-directed** with a strong work ethic,
- have a well-developed internal model of **quality work**,
- are trustworthy, have integrity and are of **ethical character**,
- seek to optimize work through **collaboration**,
- demonstrate a sense of **curiosity and wonder**,
- are responsible and **active members of communities**.

Critical Skills –Key Attributes and Coaching Scripts

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Problem Solving

Individuals are capable of developing effective solutions to the multi-dimensional and complex problems ever-present in personal and professional arenas.

Key Attributes:

- seeing, defining and probing the major questions of a problem
- seeking out resources— using knowledge, experience and the senses
- constructing and employing problem solving strategies
- valuing and amassing a wide range of potential solutions
- evaluating and testing ideas
- observing results and responding accordingly

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage Problem Solving

- Is there more than one solution?
- Can this problem be broken into smaller problems? What are they?
- What is the problem asking of you?
- How would you set up a plan of action?
- Can you restate the problem in your own words?
- Can you test your hypothesis? How?
- How well does your hypothesis hold up to the test?
- Compare what you already know with what you need to know.
- Where does the problem lead you? Is it where you expected?
- Does your original hypothesis require any modification?
- How might we best document the problem?
- How would someone without training or background tackle this problem?
- How could you have prevented the outcome you experienced?
- How did you arrive at that answer/result?
- What is so important about solving this problem?
- Could we design a framework for approaching, defining, and solving all our problems?

Decision Making

Individuals are capable decision makers who can and do make responsible decisions in diverse situations.

Key Attributes:

- seeing the need for a decision
- entering into the decision-making process
- reaching a decision
- looking at options, seeking advice, drawing conclusions
- seeking consensus
- being equipped to either compromise or to defend an opinion
- understanding the reasons for decisions and their consequences
- taking responsibility for decisions

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage Decision Making

- What would be the implications/consequences of this action?
- What is the basis for coming to that decision/conclusion?
- What information or evidence supports that decision?
- Was this the best way to arrive at your decision?
- Is this decision consistent with other, earlier decisions?
- Can you compare how you made that decision with how you made an earlier one?
- Could we simplify our decision making?
- Can you describe a bad way of making a decision?
- How did everyone in the group contribute to the decision making?
- What makes a decision good?
- What is your decision here?
- Where can we get help/advice about options in order to make a decision?
- What do we need to decide?
- How can we reach consensus about a decision?
- Is it possible not to make decisions?

Dispositions–Key Attributes and Scripts

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Ownership

Responsible and invested owners of life-long learning demonstrate the following characteristics:

Key Attributes:

- believe in their own fundamental capabilities and develop those capabilities
- take responsibility for the processes and outcomes of learning
- honestly account for their own actions
- feel empowered to take appropriate action on issues and problems
- engage in decision-making processes at the individual, community and societal levels
- see the importance of risk-taking and take appropriate risks

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage

Ownership

- What do you think?
- If you had to accomplish this by yourself, how would you do it?
- What skills do you have that are well suited to this task?
- What could better motivate you to do this independent research?
- Who's responsibility is it to follow through on this?
- Why is this work important to you?
- How could you make this into something of which you can feel truly proud?
- You've suggested a change in plans. Could you support your reasoning here?
- What risks might you be taking if you follow through with this idea?
- Could you describe your individual contribution to this work?
- Excellent suggestion. How will you make it happen?
- Is it important enough to you to take a stand?
- Are you satisfied with the results? Are you willing to go farther with this?
- Is this our decision? Should others be involved?

Self-Direction

Reflectively self-directed individuals with a strong work ethic show these attributes:

Key Attributes:

- value advice
- view problems as challenges or opportunities for learning and personal growth rather than as obstacles
- anticipate and explore learning required for new situations
- take responsibility for setting a course for themselves and for adjusting that course
- assess their own needs and translate them into obtainable goals
- use a variety of learning strategies
- initiate challenges for themselves—concentrating and persevering toward their completion
- develop strategies for identification and use of human and material resources
- modify learning methods and sources to achieve the most effective results
- take action from a work ethic that is defined as going well beyond what is required
- evaluate the achievement of goals

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage

Self-Direction

- If you had to accomplish this by yourself, how would you do it?
- Do you need some information before you begin?
- What information can you find out on your own?
- What are the possible places you could find information about that?
- What can you use to help you here?
- Where did that come from?
- What could better motivate you to do this independent research?

Dispositions—Key Attributes and Scripts

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Scripts for Self-Direction *(continued)*

- Is it necessary to do this independent learning?
- What have you done like this on your own?
- How can your work be shared with the group?
- How does your experience relate to what s/he said? Would you comment on differences?
- What is your plan for pursuing this inquiry?
- What are your goals here?
- Where else might you find some support on this?
- What are your sources for this information?

Quality

Individuals with a well-developed internal model of quality work display these attributes:

Key Attributes:

- desire to continuously improve
- understand and accept quality as a fundamental concept that is relevant to their lives.
- rely on their ability to set criteria and performance standards in a variety of life role situations
- take responsibility for setting their own standards
- evaluate and re-evaluate their own expectations, criteria and standards in an ongoing way
- draw from their internal model of quality to guide work and behavior
- strive for excellence

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage Quality

- What are the key characteristics of a well-designed map?
- Is this work “good enough?” Should this be reworked?
- If you had to produce this in the *real world*, what would the criteria be?
- These are my criteria for quality. How would you modify or add to them?
- What standards would you apply to this simply to please yourself?
- Were the criteria you used for this work adequate? What would you change?
- If we were to *up the standards*, what criteria would you use?
- Be sure and set quality criteria for your work before you begin.
- What is a quality audience? What responsibilities does it have?
- What is a quality presentation? What are the responsibilities of a presenter?

Dispositions—Key Attributes and Scripts

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Character

Individuals with integrity, and of ethical character are trustworthy and demonstrate the following:

Key Attributes:

- have values, commitments, convictions, and a sense of purpose—connecting the lessons of the classroom to the realities of life
- act and interact honestly and genuinely from an accurate perception of self
- demonstrate respect for others and for themselves
- make decisions that consider the common good
- do the right things as well as doing things right
- construct judgments from a foundation of strongly held ethics and principles

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage Character

- What are the assumptions/values that are driving your decision?
- Is your group aware of your opinion/feelings?
- Who benefits most from this approach?
- Is your solution environmentally sound?
- Are you willing to accept the consequences of your decision?
- Do you believe that the character behaved ethically in this instance?
- Is Microsoft an ethical corporation?
- Does *doing the right thing* underscore most legislative actions?
- Who does this benefit? Who does this hurt?
- What are the principles in which you believe?
- What are your responsibilities to your work group?

Collaboration

Individuals who seek to optimize work through collaboration have these characteristics:

Key Attributes:

- value collaboration
- see conflict of issues and ideas as an essential aspect of collaboration
- contribute to and invest in a group vision
- further themselves and others in pursuit of common goals
- value, build on and maximize ideas, abilities and perspectives of others
- engage fully in collaboration
- keep personal agendas in perspective
- defend an idea or position about which they feel strongly even if it is in conflict with the thinking of the group
- work to optimize the outcomes of a common effort
- resolve conflict by seeking new or common ground
- distinguish between *buying in* and *going along*

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage Collaboration

- How can we put our heads together to begin work?
- How will decisions be made within the group?
- What are some ways of structuring the group for this work?
- Can anyone in your group answer your question?
- How can we hear from everyone in the group?
- If you had a problem person in your group, how would you deal with him/her?
- How are we as a group?
- What have we produced as a group? How could we do it better?
- What skills are there in your group from which you can draw?
- Have you been clear in your thoughts, actions, and feelings with your group?

Dispositions–Key Attributes and Scripts

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Scripts to Encourage Collaboration *(continued)*

- On what goals did this group agree?
- What goals would you work toward in the group tomorrow?
- Did each person in the group offer suggestions?
- What roles were you playing in the group?
- How can each of us contribute something to the product?
- Could this be solved by more than one person?
- Who benefits from your collaboration?
- Has everyone *bought into* this idea?
- Does the full group support this idea?

Curiosity and Wonder

Individuals with a sense of curiosity and wonder share these characteristics:

Key Attributes:

- Inquire into the world around them
- ask “what if?”
- dream about the possible
- have a love of discovery
- show enthusiasm for new opportunities
- take the risk to do or think differently
- do the unexpected
- look for new or unique ways of thinking about or doing some thing
- take the initiative to explore possibilities
- seek to do things better, more efficiently, or more effectively

Scripts: What a Coach Might Say to Encourage Curiosity and Wonder

- How else might we go about this work?
- What other ways might you demonstrate your understanding?
- What is it that really interests you here?
- What do you want to learn from this work?
- If you could pursue anything you wanted to learn, what would you do?
- How could we do this better?
- Even if it doesn't work out, can you try doing this a different way?
- What risks did you take in working on this project?
- What is the most unique aspect of this product or process?
- What would happen if...?
- Can you reach this outcome in other ways?
- If there were no limitations of time or resources, how would you go about...?
- What is the very best way we could do.....?



Dispositions – Key Attributes and Scripts

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Community

Responsible and active members of communities share these qualities:

Key Attributes:

- see themselves as valued members of the community
- draw from an ethical foundation for community relationships
- trust others and are trustworthy within the community
- value, celebrate and tap into diversity among community members
- engage others with respect, honesty, integrity and courtesy
- work to understand and empathize with others
- work to maintain an environment of safety, confidence, mutual esteem, and mutual support
- enter into productive group work – helping others to achieve a common goal
- take responsibility for a share of the work — keeping the interest of the community in mind
- share themselves as teachers or mentors of others
- contribute and solicit ideas, opinions and resources
- take an active part in forming and supporting group decisions
- express ideas, feelings, and hunches with diplomacy

Scripts: What to Say to Encourage Community

- What are some of the unwritten rules that guide behavior in this classroom?
- Can we change the culture of this group? How?
- What kinds of diversity are represented in this class?
- What differences among your small group members could you use to better do this work?
- What guidelines do we need to assure that we are all safe here?
- What guidelines do we need to assure mutual respect?
- How are we as a community?

- Do we affect one another's learning?
- Pull yourself out and observe the interaction of your group. What do you see?
- Could you use what you know to help your group to better grasp that concept?
- How could you have expressed your idea in a way that would have been acceptable?
- Did you fully participate in making this decision with which you strongly disagree?
- What does your group think of that idea?
- What kinds of behaviors show respect?
- What do you know about your group members that you did not know before?
- What was the result of the way you resolved that conflict?
- Did you live up to your commitment here?