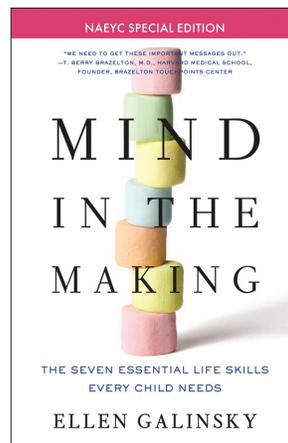


Teacher-as-Researcher

A self-study guide to enhancing your educational practice

naeyc®



NAEYC's Study Guide to Mind in the Making

by Ellen Galinsky



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About this guide

NAEYC's Study Guide to *Mind in the Making* can be part of a professional development book club or study group discussion to inform your teaching. It can support discussions with families in your program about ways they can use the book's suggestions to promote children's learning and development at home. It also can support individual self-study and reflection. This guide can be useful *before* reading, *during* reading, or *after* reading the book.

NAEYC's Study Guide to *Mind in the Making*, written specially by author Ellen Galinsky for NAEYC, is a companion resource to the NAEYC Special Edition of her book *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (HarperCollins, 2010).

About the Mind in the Making website

Author Ellen Galinsky invites you to visit the *Mind in the Making* website at www.mindinthemaking.org. Join its learning community to learn more about the seven "essential life skills" and to share some of the strategies you develop to promote them with the young children in your classroom.

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Getting Started

As an educator and through my work at the Families and Work Institute, I understand the critical need to ensure that our children learn academic content and skills. I also understand the need to provide children with ongoing and explicit, developmentally appropriate attention to the *life skills* they need to thrive in our fast-paced, technology-rich world.

Although my book was written primarily with families in mind, I intended for it to be used by educators, as well. I am very pleased that educators across the country are using it as a research-based child development resource on how young children learn best.

This NAEYC Study Guide is designed to connect the research and the lessons provided in *Mind in the Making* to your teaching practice. It is structured to reflect the steps I took as a researcher—from studying existing research to seeing themes in studies across different disciplines and concluding that the life skills are essential.

As you read the book and work with children, keep three overarching inquiries in mind:

- How can we keep the fire in children’s eyes burning brightly?
- What is happening to dull that fire that children are born with?
- If that fire has been dulled, what can we do to rekindle it?

My own observations & reflections

I see the decade I have spent on Mind in the Making as a journey to reconcile two contrasting images. The first image came from conducting interviews with children in the sixth through the twelfth grades. I found far too many young people "turned off." They rarely talked about any joy in learning, and there was little if any fire in their eyes. It became clear to me that children don't have to drop out of school to drop out of learning.

The second image came from thinking about learning in the early years. Our young children are unstoppable learners. Whether they are learning what happens when they drop something from their high chairs, asking their innumerable "why" questions, or learning why one ball rolls faster than another, they want to see, feel, and understand what is around them.

My journey as a researcher began with thinking about the first essential question: How can we keep the fire in children's eyes burning brightly?

Promoting the Skill of Communicating

This first Research in Action section focuses on just *one* of the seven “essential life skills”—as a way of modeling a self-study process of *discourse with the research, observation and action, and reflection* that uses the content of *Mind in the Making* for information and support.

That self-study process begins by using the pertinent sections of *Mind in the Making* to take an in-depth look at the life skills—here, the skill of **Communicating**. What is this skill? How does it develop as children grow and learn? What does the research say about how we can foster its development in children at different ages (for example, preschoolers are highlighted below). Next, using suggestions from the book and your own, firsthand experiences, try out some ideas with the children in your program. Observe the outcome. Finally, continuing in your role as teacher-as-researcher, think about how you might change or improve your practice to change or improve the learning outcome. Repeat this process again. Use the section “Observations & reflections” to keep track of your interactions with children.

Skill 3: Communicating

Corresponds to MitM pages 102–156

Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading, and writing—it is the skill of determining what one wants to communicate and realizing how our communications will be understood by others. It is the skill that teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.

What the research says about communicating and preschoolers

Catherine Snow, of Harvard University, outlines three effective techniques that her studies have found promote better language and literacy skills in children:

- Use cognitively engaging talk, such as asking children to consider hypothetical situations
- Use more complex vocabulary when talking, such as the word *enormous* to describe an object that is very big
- Use content-oriented curricula, such as those that engage children in learning about letters and sounds, about the world, and about how to analyze and think

Developing the skill of communicating in preschoolers

Use children’s interests as launching pads for building their communication skills. Whether it is music, animals, or rocket ships, tie these interests into your conversations with children. For example, if you are studying baby animals, you can help children learn to observe, investigate, and communicate like scientists as they explore how different animals live and care for their young. As you think and communicate like a scientist might, you can begin to introduce a more precise set of words to the children, including *habitat* and *environment*.

Promoting the Other Six Skills

As you read through the research on each of the remaining skills in *Mind in the Making*, use the self-study model provided for **Communicating** to reflect on children’s development and on your teaching. Consider the suggestions below for helping children (and yourself) develop these critical skills.

Skill 1: Focus and Self Control

Corresponds to MitM pages 12–66

Children need this skill in order to achieve their goals, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload. It involves paying attention, remembering the rules, thinking flexibly, and exercising self control.

Infants & Toddlers. Be a detective. What can you do to help each child learn to manage his or her own focus and self control? Does the child calm down when you carry her to a quiet place or when you talk to him with a soothing voice?

Preschoolers. Play a simple game like “Simon Says, Do the Opposite.” The children have to focus, remember the rules, and resist the temptation to do what the adult does, but instead do the opposite. For example, if you say, “Simon says, touch your head,” the children should touch their toes.

Early Primary. Play games like “Simon Says, Do the Opposite” (above), but make them more complicated. For example, ask children to remember more by giving two directions at the same time: “Simon says, touch your toes and jump forward.”

Skill 2: Perspective Taking

Corresponds to MitM pages 67–101

Perspective taking goes far beyond empathy; it involves figuring out what others think and feel, and forms the basis for children’s understanding of their parents’, teachers’, and friends’ intentions. Children who can take others’ perspectives are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

Infants & Toddlers. Feeling known and understood is the basis for learning the skill of perspective taking. Help infants feel known and understood by imitating a sound they are making or talking about their feelings (“I think you are hungry. Would you like something to eat?”).

Preschoolers. When children pretend, they are trying on the perspectives of others. Help children develop this skill by giving them the opportunity for make-believe (dramatic play). If the child is playing “Bus Driver,” she can be thinking about what it’s like to drive a bus. “What might the driver think or feel?”

Early Primary. Encourage children to think about people’s responses to everyday situations. “Why do you think Mrs. Peterson was upset when no one cleaned up after snack today?” Or ask them to consider why the characters in a story they are reading feel or act the way they do.

Skill 4: Making Connections

Corresponds to MitM pages 157–199

Making connections is at the heart of learning—figuring out what’s the same and what’s different, and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can google for information, it is the people who can see connections who are able to go beyond knowing information to *using* this information well.

Infants & Toddlers. Give children opportunities to explore their environments. Let them see what happens when they take a spoon and tap it on something hard (like a table) or on something soft (like a pillow). Be a guide who follows the child’s lead and helps the child learn by building on and adding to his or her interests.

Preschoolers. Play sorting games with children. Sort stuffed animals or pictures from magazines: “Put all of the pictures with yellow in them in this pile.” Even clean-up can become a sorting game!

Early Primary. There are many opportunities throughout the day to use counting in simple and more complex tasks—from counting the number of shoes children are wearing to sorting them by color or type and creating class graphs. Help them see new connections, such as how sneakers and sandals are the same and different.

Skill 5: Critical Thinking

Corresponds to MitM pages 200–247

Critical thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions, and actions.

Infants & Toddlers. Promoting children’s inborn drive to understand the world is the first step in helping them learn to be critical thinkers. We can help keep that drive alive by providing them with different experiences to explore—with new sounds, colors, and textures: “This object makes a sound when you shake it.”

Preschoolers. Help connect children’s interests to the work of scientists, mathematicians, artists, and so on. Help children create their own experiments and see what happens. Ask them questions: “Do you think your block tower will stay standing if you make it higher?” Invite scientists to visit your program to talk about their work.

Early Primary. Remember that children are developing their ability to think critically about the information they get from others. Ask children to think about how they can find out if the information they are given is true. As children get older, you can help them learn about fact checking by looking for information in a valid place (e.g., in a book or a reliable website).

Skill 6: Taking on Challenges

Corresponds to MitM pages 248–297

Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to take on challenges (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

Infants & Toddlers. Learning to take on challenges begins with children developing secure and safe relationships with adults. Teachers must work to build the kind of relationship with each infant that will help him or her feel safe and eager to explore. Individualize your responses to the infants in your care; come up with strategies for providing extra support and for helping infants learn to self-soothe.

Preschoolers. To help them learn to manage their own feelings and behavior, engage children in a conversation about what helps them when they’re upset. You can help them come up with their own solutions for dealing with stress. Is it taking deep breaths? Putting their head down on the table until they feel calm?

Early Primary. As children get older, they can be even more involved in coming up with solutions for facing challenges. Talk to them about how they react to certain experiences (e.g., taking a test or going to a new place) and ask them what will help them if they get upset or feel stressed. If they know that someone they trust is listening to them and taking their ideas seriously, most children have creative solutions for managing challenges.

Skill 7: Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

Corresponds to MitM pages 298–350

It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

Infants & Toddlers. Nonverbal communication and signals from adults can have a powerful effect on children. While you will not always be flawlessly in tune with infants, your mutual efforts to understand each other provide learning experiences and give infants the opportunity to gain a sense of mastery. Warm interactions and careful use of nonverbal signals with infants help foster their engagement.

Preschoolers. Encourage children’s desire to explore. Whether they’re discovering how water changes shape when poured from one kind of container to another or discovering a bug on the sidewalk, they are true explorers who are constantly experiencing new things. Help children explain what they have learned to others.

Early Primary. Elaborate upon and extend children’s experiences. Have conversations with children that go beyond the here and now, that include open-ended “wh” questions (why, what, where, how, or who), and that ask children to think about the past, the present, and the future. By doing this you are helping children to engage in a spirit of inquiry, and teaching them that their experiences and knowledge are valuable. As teachers, we must invite children to participate deeply in (and *co-construct*) conversations.

