

Children's Voices
on Ellen Galinsky's
Mind in the Making:
The Seven Essential Life Skills
Every Child Needs

Rosalie Cooperative School of Young Children, 2010

Protagonists: Dylan, approx 2.5
 Julia, approx 4.5
 Maya, approx 4.5
 Ryan, approx 2
 Grayson, approx 2.3
 Eleanor, approx 6.5
Emily Holzkecht, teacher
Lisa, mother
Kirsten, mother

Skill 1: Focus and Self Control

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.

Mini Story: The Image of a Strong Child









You can see the children regulating their comfort level in the photo story. Maya modifies her design to make it safer and easier to climb. Dylan further modifies the design, having decided that Maya's high step stool was too high for him. When he then can't reach the grapes, he solves the problem by being lifted the rest of the way. Ryan regulates his own safety by not trying the step stools at all. In regulating their safety, the children must regulate their frustration.

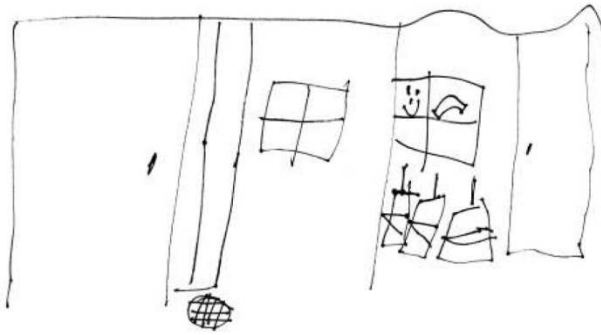
Maya could have gotten frustrated when her first design did not work. Instead, she modifies the design several times to create something that does work. Dylan could have gotten frustrated when he couldn't climb as high as his sister, but instead came up with design modifications that allowed him to be successful. The whole endeavor required focus and self-control.

Skill 2: Perspective Taking

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.

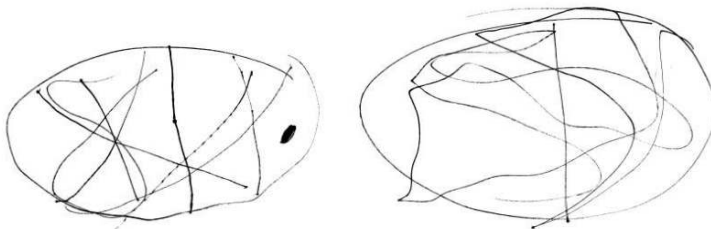
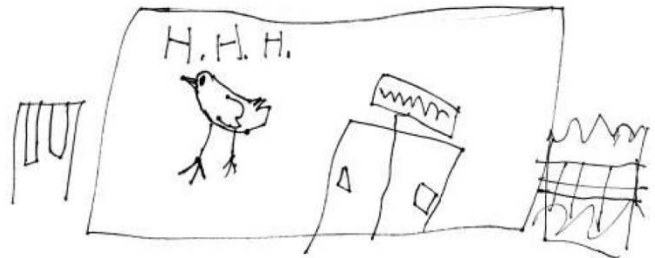
Mini Story: Sister's Perspective, Reader's Perspective

When Eleanor was interviewed for the book *The Brain is the Queen of the Body: On School, Learning and the Brain*, she took into consideration the perspectives of a number of different people.



When designing a school for her 2.5yr old sister, Eleanor puts smiley faces and rainbows in the window because "she would like that kind of stuff."

She adds a symbol to her drawing of the school, so that the reader will know that the kindergarten building is shown in more detail on the back of the page.



A. Back of Daddy's Broken Brain

B. Front of Daddy's Broken Brain

She labels the front and back of daddy's brain "A" and "B" so that people will know the pictures go together.

Finally, she indicates in her closing comments that what her sisters know is different than what other children know.

Skill 3: Communicating

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.

Mini Story: Getting Our Voices Heard

Ryan has something important to tell Julia. However, his two-year-old voice is fairly quiet and his words sometimes come in stops and starts. Furthermore, his big sister is used to tuning him out. What will help her hear him?



“Julia. Julia. Julia. Julia. Julia...”

Later Julia also adjusted her communication in order to get her voice heard. She began talking to Maya in a frustrated, almost crying voice, but then paused, recovered her composure, and began to tell Maya in a calm, clear voice.

Skill 4: Making Connections

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.

Mini story: Perils on the Playground



“I’m in the alligators! Save me!” shouted Dylan, from the pinecone pit.

“I know what we could use,” shouted Maya, and ran to get a jumprope to rescue her brother.

Grayson looked into the pit and said, “Alligators.” He seemed to accept the transformation of the spikey pinecones into alligators.



Maya pulled Dylan out of the pit using the jumprope. Then it was Maya’s turn to be rescued by Dylan. “I tugged her right up,” said Dylan triumphantly.



The story is a retelling of a similar playscript from the 11th, which Dylan now has taken to a new setting both on the playground and in fantasy. June 11th, an empty sandbox and a running hose inspired Maya to call out in distress, “I’m stuck in the sea! I’m sinking in the sea! I need a rope fast! I need a real rope!” Maya’s mother Kirsten was the first to come to her rescue, then Dylan. Later Julia also joined the game as the children took turns with drowning and saving.



The ability to take information from one setting and apply it to a new setting is a very valuable skill, demonstrated here by young children.

Mini Story: Camel Packs

Julia and Maya make an unusual connection when they decide to make camel backpacks out of recycled materials available on the playground. Maya had seen her father wear a camel pack during a race, allowing him to take a drink while racing without using a water bottle.



Skill 5: Critical Thinking

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

Dylan had found an egg in the nesting box. On previous days, he had tap-tap-tapped the egg he found on various surfaces until the shell gave way and the runny insides poured out. I reminded him that if he drops his egg onto a hard surface or if he taps it too hard, it will break. Dylan looked at his egg and then asked, “What if it was a boiled egg?”



Dylan is searching for valid and reliable knowledge to guide his decisions and actions concerning the egg he has found. He has applied previous knowledge of boiled and raw eggs to the reminder I have given and found a possible inconsistency. He is thinking critically rather than simply accepting what I say as truth. The next school day, we set up an activity through which he could explore boiled and raw eggs himself in his quest for valid and reliable information.

Skill 6: Taking on Challenges

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.

Mini Story: Head Over Heels during Feet Painting

Dylan had been cataloguing all the things he could do with his feet, so we decided to invite the children to see if they could paint with their feet. Maya and Julia took turns walking from the end of the paper with the blue pool of paint to the end of the paper with the yellow pool of paint. At either end they slid their feet back and forth while enthusiastically shouting, “I’m blue water skating!” “I’m yellow water skating!” Maya chose to hold on to the chair or the walker that held down the ends of the paper. This kept her from falling as she “water skated.” Julia chose to try to balance without holding on. She fell many times. Each time she fell, she cried and received comfort from the adults, and then got right back up to “water skate” again. The pain of the fall and the paint she got on her clothes was not going to deter her from the challenge of balancing on the slippery paint.



Skill 7: Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

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.

Mini story: Hidden Patterns of Study in Play

Sometimes children's interests are difficult to pinpoint, and seeing patterns between the actions that highlight their topic of study can be challenging. Since the beginning of school (and probably well before then), Dylan has been exploring how objects and liquids move through space. He has been doing this mostly without having specific activities set up for this purpose. He throws balls, pompoms, rocks and dirt, but his explorations are more complex than this.



Above, Dylan is unsatisfied with exploring glue simply while sitting at the table. He has his mother, Kirsten, lift him up so that he can see the glue move further through the air from a greater height. Similarly, when given the opportunity to paint with a brush, he finds ways to use the brush as a tool to propel liquid (either paint or water) as far as possible.

How can we honor and support his research?...

Sometimes children's self-initiated research can be mistaken for misbehavior. For many days now, as part of his research into how objects move through space, Dylan has been experimenting with placing objects on top of the garbage can in the classroom and then pressing the pedal on the can to make the lid fly open and thereby launch the objects (demonstrated to the right by Maya and a purple rubber band). Teacher Emily has been quietly observing this activity and considering the significance it holds for Dylan. When she shared this observation with Kirsten, Kirsten was moved by the respect Dylan is being shown when adults – rather than reacting and judging too quickly – pause, step back and try to understand what is meant by his actions and how best to support him.



“At other schools, he would get in trouble for doing this. Even at home, I would probably tell him to stop, but here you try to figure out how to extend the possibilities for him.”

Emily invited engineer Jay to help build a catapult that Dylan could use to continue his inquiries into how objects move through space.



Jay's craft stick catapult held together better than the Tinker Toy catapult Emily built. It worked great for launching foam shapes through the air.

Dylan was so excited, both by the new opportunities for launches and by having Jay visit, he needed some help to calm his body down. After refocusing, he came up with even more possibilities for moving objects through space, shown to the right.



