

Mind in the Making: Seven Essential Life Skills Overview and Community Application

Mind in the Making (MITM), a program of the Bezos Family Foundation, is an unprecedented effort to share the science of children’s learning with the general public, families and professionals who work with children and families.

The Mind in the Making Book

Every decade or so, a book comes along that completely changes our thinking about how children learn and develop and dramatically transforms how we nurture their social, emotional and intellectual growth. *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (HarperCollins, 2010) by Ellen Galinsky, has been heralded as such a book.

For more than a decade, Galinsky has worked with the top researchers in the field, filming their experiments and studying their results to bring the science of children’s learning to families and the professionals who work with them.

Life Skills all involve what researchers call “executive functions of the brain”—functions that take place in the prefrontal cortex and that weave together social, emotional and intellectual capacities, enabling us to use what we know in pursuit of our goals.

Typically, learning and teaching have focused on the content that children need to learn, but there has been much less attention to Life Skills. Galinsky found that this must not be an either/or. Children need both content and Life Skills.

The decisive factor for selecting these Skills was that the evidence be based in the research that shows how these Skills help children thrive now and in the future. For that reason, they are called Life Skills. The Seven Essential Life Skills are:

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.
2. **Perspective Taking** – Children who can figure out what others feel and think are less likely to get involved in conflicts.
3. **Communicating** – Children need to be able to determine what they want to communicate and how. This is the Skill teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.
4. **Making Connections** – Children who can make unusual connections are more creative and can go beyond knowing information to using information well.
5. **Critical Thinking** – Children need to be able to search for reliable knowledge to guide their beliefs, decisions and actions.
6. **Taking on Challenges** – Children who can take on challenges instead of avoiding or simply coping with them will do better in school and in life.
7. **Self-Directed, Engaged Learning** – Lifelong learners are able to change as the world changes in order to reach their full potential.

The Mind in the Making Seven Essential Life Skills Learning Modules

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Marks Family Foundation, Mind in the Making created eight Modules from the book called the Seven Essential Life Skills Modules. These are PowerPoints with embedded videos. These eight Modules are based on the following premises:

- We begin by engaging families and professionals in an experiential process of self-reflection and self-discovery where they experience their own competence in each of the Skills, probe why the Skill is important in their own lives and take responsibility for proposing strategies to improve the Skill in themselves.
- We then connect the adults' experiences to the research on the Skill in children's lives—why it is important and how it can be promoted—through videos that present the most respected and compelling child development research on the Skill in an accessible way.
- We provide specific evidence-based activities that Participants can use to promote the Skill in children.
- Each Participant then makes specific plans to promote the Skills in themselves and in children, which they report on in subsequent Modules.

The Mind in the Making Community Facilitator Institutes

The Seven Essential Life Skills are introduced to communities through Community Facilitator Institutes. These are three-day Institutes in which community leaders learn about the Modules by directly experiencing them as a prelude to teaching them as Community Facilitators.

Objectives

As a result of the Institute, Facilitators will meet the objectives below and be prepared to implement them:

1. **Principles of Facilitated Learning** – The Institutes are based on promoting a different vision of teaching and learning called Facilitated Learning that is based on research in children and adults. These principles are described and modeled in each of the Modules and form the basis of the evaluation of Community Facilitators. Community Facilitators will have the opportunity to see the Principles in action during the Institute, as well as time to discuss them and the chance to practice them.
2. **Research** – Facilitators will watch videos and experience in-depth conversations about the research that support the promotion of each Life Skill and Executive Functions.
3. **Learning Journey** – The Learning Journey is consistent throughout each Module. The Journey begins with the Skill definition, focusing first on the adult, looking at and discussing the research, participating in activities that demonstrate/promote the Skill and

then looking at the importance of the Skill for children and actions to take to promote the Skill. The Learning Journey is built upon the notion that learning is relationship based and each Module builds upon the previous one.

4. **Application of Knowledge** – Facilitators will identify activities and strategies that they can employ to foster Life Skills that promote Executive Functions. Facilitators will also be given the opportunity to practice and/or plan how they will implement the Learning Modules in their communities and lives.

Materials

Each Participant will receive:

- a printed copy of the Facilitator Guidebook;
- a thumb drive containing the PowerPoints for each Module with embedded videos;
- an Evaluation and Survey Monkey link for Participants to complete the Evaluation;
- a sample Participant Guidebook, (the complete Participant Guidebook can be printed from the thumb drive);
- a copy of the book, *Mind in the Making*; and
- a Terms of Use contract to sign and return.

Upon completion of the Institute, each Participant will receive:

- an invitation to a networking social media platform that connects Facilitators throughout the country to share resources and receive cutting-edge information;
- an opportunity to apply to be a Community Learning Facilitator and/or a Master Facilitator;
- an invitation to regularly scheduled conference calls with the researchers and other experts to ask questions and hear firsthand about new and innovative research; and
- a certificate of completion issued by the Bezos Family Foundation.

Requirements/Expectations

Implementation – Each Participant is required to offer two complete trainings for at least 12 people within two years of attending the Community Facilitator Institute. Upon completion of the Community Facilitator Institute, participants are certified to offer the Modules to Constituents in their Community. They are not certified to train other people to offer the Modules. In order to become a Master Facilitator, a separate application process is required.

Fidelity to the Learning Journey – The Modules must be offered sequentially and completely for each series.

Evaluation – Facilitators are required to distribute the Evaluation via the survey link provided by Mind in the Making after the third Module and the eighth Module. For those without email, Facilitators will distribute paper copies and send them directly to the Mind in the Making team.

Process for Becoming a Local or National Master Facilitator – If Participants are interested in becoming a local and/or national Master Facilitators certified to train others as Facilitators of the Modules, it is required to request a Master Facilitator Application from the Mind in the Making team. This process includes a written application, submission of a video of the Applicant facilitating and a phone interview.

Community Application

Mind in the Making Seven Essential Life Skills Community Facilitator Institute

Mind in the Making and the Bezos Family Foundation are committed to partnering with communities or systems that are aligned with the key aspects of our work. The Mind in the Making team will review this application and a follow-up phone interview may be requested.

Community Lead Organization Name (Applicant) and Mission:

Contact Person Name and Title:

Email:

Address:

Phone:

Please answer the following questions as briefly as possible. We don't expect long answers, but do need to better understand your community and its ways of working together.

- 1. Key Stakeholders** – Mind in the Making believes that it is important to have key community leaders involved in this initiative.

Please describe the primary partners who will support and/or participate in bringing the Mind in the Making Seven Essential Life Skills to the community and how they will work with you. Include how they have worked together in the past and how they plan to work together in implementing the Modules.

- 2. Facilitators** – A goal of Mind in the Making is for the people who become Community Facilitators to come from the different systems that affect the lives of children in their community—across age groups and types of organizations. We also expect these people to work together across systems to implement the Modules.

Please provide examples of the people (and their affiliations) whom you expect to invite to the Institute to become Facilitators. Please also describe if they have experience in or are open to working together across systems to implement the Modules and if they are experienced in facilitating adult learning.

- 3. Family and Professional Partnerships** – Mind in the Making believes that it is important for families and professionals to experience the Modules together.

Please describe your approach to working with families. What have you done in the past to engage families and professionals together and/or how do you expect to do this in implementing the Modules?

- 4. Approaches to Learning** – Mind in the Making believes that it is important to have an asset and evidence-based approach to teaching and learning.

Please briefly describe your vision of teaching and learning. What has led you to consider bringing the Modules to your community?

- 5. Surround Strategy** – Mind in the Making believes that it is important to embed the Seven Essential Life Skills in communities where there are integrated programs to meet the needs of children and families, especially those in the greatest need.

Please briefly describe how your community provides services to children and families who need them and how this process will support the implementation of the Seven Essential Life Skills.

- 6. Systems Alignment** – Mind in the Making sees the Modules as a way to create better alignment among systems for children, beginning with the youngest children into the elementary school years.

Please describe where you are in the process of creating better system alignment in your community and how you see the Seven Essential Life Skills affecting this process.

- 7. Sustainability** – Mind in the Making looks to work with communities that have plans for the sustainability of the Seven Essential Life Skills.

Please describe your plans to ensure this endeavor will be sustained, expanded and impactful—have results—in your community.

Please send submissions and Print copies of applications to:

ATTN: Erin Ramsey,
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