

# MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

## Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF): 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.

### Principles of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

- Establish a trustworthy relationship with your child.
- Help children set and work toward their own goals.
- Involve children socially, emotionally and intellectually.
- Elaborate and extend children's learning.
- Help children practice, synthesize and generalize.
- Help children become increasingly accountable.
- Create a community of learners.

## Suggestions for Self-Directed, Engaged Learning for Ages 9-12

### Tip:

Ask your child to talk about what each of the children in the book—Noah, Ethan, Nadia and Julian—was particularly good at. How did these strengths help them become a team that worked and learned well together?

You can make a list with your child about his or her strengths. You can also talk about how these strengths may be used to work toward goals.

### Skill:

Children are more likely to be **engaged learners** if the learning builds on their strengths.

### Tip:

Julian's father says, "The Souls have all returned from a journey." He goes on to say each of the children found something on their journey.

Ask your child:

- "What do you think Julian's father meant by that statement? What did each of the children find?"
- "How did these journeys lead them to become friends?"

You can talk about how finding things in common can help build trustworthy relationships. Ask your child what he or she looks for most in a friend and why. Share your thoughts, too.

### Skill:

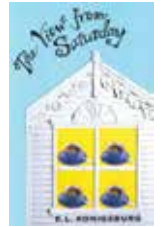
Each of these children was involved in a meaningful personal learning journey—a journey that promoted their **Executive Function** skills. This kind of deep learning is most likely when children can learn from people whom they **trust**—both children and adults.

## The View from Saturday

By E. L. Konigsburg

*The View from Saturday* is about the journeys of four children to become a group they call The Souls. They are, somewhat unexpectedly, chosen by their sixth grade teacher to compete in the Academic Bowl team against seventh and eighth graders. Their teacher, Mrs. Olinski, was often asked why she had chosen these four children and she didn't have a good answer.

The book is about her journey, too—a journey of returning to teaching after a crippling car accident ten years earlier.



High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from *Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky



Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. [www.fbmarketplace.org](http://www.fbmarketplace.org).

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

**Serve and Return**, like a game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

**Executive Function** skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

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## Suggestions for Self-Directed, Engaged Learning for Ages 9-12

### Tip:

The children could answer some of the questions asked in the Academic Bowl because they had had meaningful experiences where they had learned this information. For example, Nadia learned about the Sargasso Sea from rescuing turtles.

Ask your child:

- “How do you learn best?”
- “Which question would you like to be asked in an Academic Bowl? Why?”

You can share a time when you learned something and then were able to use it. You can also ask:

- “What do you think Mrs. Olinski meant when she said, ‘... sometimes to be successful, you have to risk making mistakes?’ ”

### Skill:

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is promoted through real experiences and through opportunities to use the knowledge we have gained. It involves making mistakes and learning from them, too. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “**serve and return**.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

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