

The Bezos Family Foundation Expands Early Learning Initiatives by Joining Forces with Mind in the Making

On April 15, 2016 The Bezos Family Foundation (BFF) announced that Mind in the Making (MITM) has become a BFF program. This arrangement includes the transition of both the MITM program and its team, led by Ellen Galinsky. MITM has been a partner of Vroom, an initiative of BFF, since its inception, including overseeing the writing of Vroom Tips.

Mission

Children are born with tremendous potential, with a fire for learning in their eyes. But gaps—like the achievement and the opportunity gap—emerge as early as infancy and continue to widen as children grow. The fire for learning dims for too many children. The question we at Mind in the Making have pursued is **how can we keep the fire for learning burning in children's eyes and keep their engagement in learning strong?**

Mind in the Making is an unprecedented effort to share the science of children's learning with the general public, families, and professionals who work with children and their families and to translate this research into action. The overall goal of Mind in the Making and its partner Vroom is to use the knowledge from developmental research to promote engaged learning and executive function based life skills in adults and children.

In close to a decade of reviewing the research, interviewing researchers and filming their research in action, four key findings stand out. It is essential to:

- Foster **positive relationships** with caring adults;
- Promote back and forth or **serve and return** interactions where adults build on and extend children's learning;
- Promote **executive function based life skills**; and
- **Begin early but continue to promote children's skills and engaged learning as children grow.**

Executive function skills are ways of actively and intentionally controlling attention in order to accomplish a goal, and they are typically measured behaviorally as working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control (Miyake, Friedman, Emerson, Witzki, Howerter, & Wager, 2000; Diamond & Ling, 2015). Executive function skills make it possible to keep information in mind so it can be used (working memory), to think flexibly in response to changing circumstances (cognitive flexibility), and to resist going on automatic (inhibitory control) so that one can engage in goal-directed problem solving (e.g., Gathercole, Pickering, Knight, & Stegmann, 2004; McClelland, Pointz, Messersmith, & Tominey, 2010; Rueda et al., 2005; Zelazo, Carlson, & Kesek, 2008).

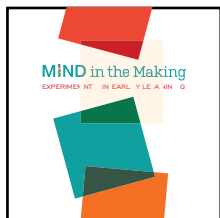
These skills, which provide a foundation for learning and adaptation across a wide range of situations, can improve considerably during childhood and the teen years, especially if promoted. Executive function skills measured in childhood predicts a wide range of important outcomes. In fact, these skills have been seen as critical for life success and are sometimes more predictive than IQ or socioeconomic status (Diamond & Ling, 2015).

Children with better executive function skills learn more from educational experiences and practice (e.g., Hassinger-Das, Jordan, Glutting, Irwin, & Dyson, 2014), are more likely to graduate from college (McClelland, Acock, Piccinin, Rhea, & Stallings, 2013), and to have better health and wealth in adulthood regardless of their intelligence or social class at birth (Moffitt et al., 2011). If we are going to make a difference in the lives and learning of children, executive function life skills are an important place to intervene in ways that are consonant with the research and that also address the needs and the well-being of the whole child and the whole family—their physical, social, and emotional needs (Diamond & Ling, 2015).

Mind in the Making has identified seven life skills that depend on and promote executive function skills. They are focus and self control, perspective taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, and self directed, engaged learning.

Resources

Mind in the Making is dedicated to creating programs and materials, based in the latest science, that turn research into action. Resources include:



Mind in the Making Experiments in Children's Learning DVDs: This is a set of 2 DVDs with videos of 42 experiments conducted by top child development scientists including the hypotheses, the methodology, the key findings, the implications, and references.

Videos and Blogs: The Mind in the Making team has continued to produce a series of videos on the best research for the Bezos Family Foundation. We are also creating a series of blogs where we interview researchers, including emerging researchers, on their latest studies.



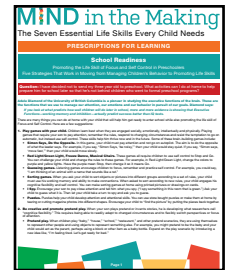
Mind in the Making Library of Books and Tip Sheets with First Book: We have selected a library of 89 books for infants and toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children and created free tip sheets that help families and professionals promote executive function skills while reading with children. The tip sheets are available in English and Spanish and, since September 2013, there have been 443,994 downloads of the tips (270,365 in English and 173,629 in Spanish). First Book, which has distributed more than a million books in this library, makes these books available at greatly reduced prices for programs serving low-income children.

Overview

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Mind in the Making Prescriptions for Learning (PFLs): We have written 98 tip sheets that address parents' frequently asked questions with strategies that help parents move from managing children's behavior to promoting life skills. PFLs are available for free download in both English and Spanish for children of all ages.



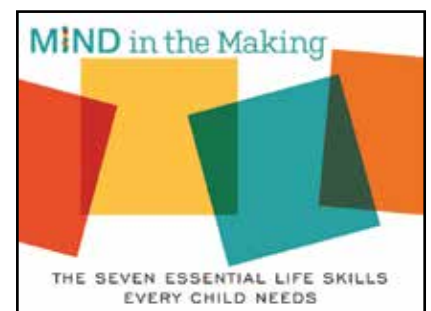
Vroom: Mind in the Making has been a partner of Vroom since its inception, including serving as a liaison to the Vroom Scientific Advisory Board as well as creating and overseeing the writing of the tips.



Seven Essential Life Skills Modules: We have created 8 Modules designed to share research on promoting life skills based on executive functions in adults and children. These Modules are unique in that 1) they promote skills in children by promoting them first in adults; 2) provide adults with first-hand experiences with child development research; 3) reframe adults approach to challenging behavior by providing opportunities to promote life skills; 4) foster goal setting among adults; 5) use an evidence-based theory of teaching and learning; 6) create linkages and alignments among sectors in the birth through 8 continuum; and 7) redefine family engagement by having families and professionals learn these Modules together.

There are several versions of these Modules:

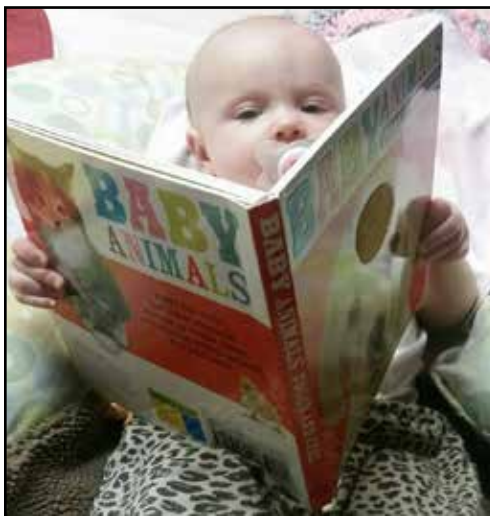
Seven Essential Life Skills for Community Leaders: The Seven Essential Life Skills are introduced to communities through three-day Institutes in which community leaders across sectors learn about the Seven Essential Life Skills by directly experiencing them as a prelude to teaching them in their communities. These Modules take participants on a learning journey that shares the research and helps them apply their knowledge of the skills in their personal and professional lives. The Seven Essential Life Skills Modules for Community Leaders are now being used in 18 states and communities across the country.



Seven Essential Life Skills for Museums and Libraries: In partnership with the Boston Children's Museum and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, we have created these Modules and trained Museum and Library educators in 30 states.

Seven Essential Life Skills for Health Care Professionals: In partnership with the Mount Sinai Parenting Center at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, Mind in the Making is working to adapt the Seven Essential Life Skills Modules for pediatric residents and medical professionals, and are creating a variety of materials with Vroom to transform the health care experience for families and children.

- Future adaptations are planned for home visiting in partnership with Every Child Succeeds.



Evaluations

The Mind in the Making Modules, Vroom, and Circle Time Games are currently being evaluated in a school-based random control study in Evansville, Indiana. In this intervention, teachers are receiving training in the Modules, children are participating in the Circle Time Games designed to provide practice with EF skills (Tominey & McClelland, 2011), and parents are receiving daily tips via the Daily Vroom app and Take Home Friday tips on how to promote the healthy development of EF skills.

A small feasibility study recently conducted with this population of children in Indiana (N=33) showed promising results with researchers finding that gains after six weeks of the MITM Modules, Vroom and Circle Time Games on two tests of EF skills (MEFS and HTKS) and the Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems subtest were on par with what is typically seen in six months of development (Carlson & Zelazo, 2015; McGrew & Woodcock, 2001). A larger randomized controlled trial has been completed and analyses are being conducted. (Zelazo, Carlson, McClelland, Distefano, Miao & Diaz, 2015).

The Modules have been chosen for implementation as a part of a Department of Education Race to the Top grant in Oregon.

In addition, thanks to a grant from the Investing in Innovation (i3) fund from the Department of Education, Ready to Learn Providence, in collaboration with Providence schools, is using Mind in the Making as the centerpiece approach to family engagement in all 21 elementary schools in Providence. Beginning in the registration office when families register their child for kindergarten up to third grade, families are recruited to participate in Mind in the Making, as are the faculty and staff who work in these grades. The project will examine changes in

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parent involvement in children's learning and parent communication with teachers and staff, along with examining changes in children's engagement, academic outcomes, and EF.

To date, almost 2,000 people, including over 1,500 family members, have completed Mind in the Making. The Wellesley Center for Women is serving as the external evaluators for the project.

In Conclusion

Through our work with Vroom and our ever-expanding reach in communities and states all over the country, Mind in the Making continues to implement and create unique resources and programs that are effectively sharing and using the best research on children's development, children's learning, and life skills based on executive functions in ways that help children and their families thrive.

