

What Should Our Children Learn?

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The logo for 'KidsTalk' features the word 'Kids' in orange and 'Talk' in blue, both in a bold, rounded, sans-serif font. A small blue speech bubble icon is positioned above the letter 'i' in 'Kids'. A thin orange horizontal line is drawn underneath the entire 'KidsTalk' text.

KidsTalk

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Learning To Make Good Decisions



What should we teach our children?

Research shows that 80% of the facts we learn for tests are forgotten in a month. We remember best that information with which we have an emotional connection. It's a lot easier to remember your birthday than the year of the Battle of Hastings. 1066, in case you're wondering.

If we don't emphasize memorizing facts in our teaching, what should we teach?

First, let me say that facts are important. Having a base of knowledge gives us some tools with which to think and do things. Actually, I've told students, we don't have to learn our math facts. We could carry around a

chart with the facts or carry a calculator. But if we don't have our chart or calculator with us at a critical time, what do we do?

If not knowing is painful, and knowing helps us, we discover that memorizing key bits of information makes us more efficient in our thinking and doing. Having certain information and skills at our fingertips makes doing more fun.

Teaching and learning. Two entirely different activities. Remember, we are rearing adults, not children. What we teach in our schools too often depends on what we want our students to know instead of what they need to know.

That raises the big question: what do our children need to learn to become fully functioning adults?

Helping our children possess certain qualities might serve our job best, qualities such as the following:

- Having the ability to make good decisions,
- Loving to learn,
- Understanding how one learns,
- Dealing with change,
- Making choices,
- Setting goals, and much more.

With these qualities learning becomes like breathing, something we don't even have to think about.

Here we'll address those qualities our children should learn and how we might teach them. We'll start with learning to make good decisions.

Learning to make good decisions is acquired by making poor decisions, and figuring out on our own how to turn it around.

We learn far more from our mistakes than we do from our successes.

When confronted with a problem that we have to figure out over the course of a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, or a few months, we gain not only knowledge but wisdom.

By allowing our children to get clear and accurate information about their interactions with their environment of people, tools, nature and ideas, (which may be learning the hard way that the stove is hot), we start them on a path of learning to decide independently how they will act.

With our young children we've removed many feedback loops for learning and thus to making decisions, good or bad. Preschool administrators comment on the growing number of 3-year-olds who aren't toilet trained. Comfortable diapers remove feedback to the child about their actions or lack of action. Plastic tip-proof covered cups prevent spills along with preventing feedback on the fine motor control necessary to drink from a glass. A diet of finger foods prevents learning how to use a fork, knife and spoon, perhaps for a lifetime.

Within the limits of safety, learning to make good choices begins with clear and accurate information about personal interactions within one's environment.

Learning to make good decisions is based on having good information.

Take a few minutes today and think about how you might change a child's environment in order to give the child clear, accurate and timely information. Wise decision-making is at risk.

Learning To Love To Learn



Trying to keep our children frustration free by controlling the consequences of movement prevents our children from getting necessary and accurate feedback for optimal learning.

When we can prepare a child's indoor and outdoor spaces with a variety of activities that match skill and will, we also create a place where a child is eager to try new pursuits, as well as repeat familiar activities in order to absorb the skill.

For example, we don't hand a 3-year-old a copy of *Tom Sawyer* and expect him to read it. Yes, we want the child at some point, perhaps by age 10, to have the skills to read at that level. Spoken language is a key to being a successful reader. We keep language in the air by reading aloud every

day. We involve our children in conversation, as well as limiting or eliminating television and video game time.

With the goal of literacy, we teach our three-year-old the sounds of the alphabet, and later introduce the shapes of the letters with their corresponding sounds, one by one.

Next, we show how to spell a word by sounding it out and writing the word with loose letters organized in a box. In isolation from a book, we introduce short words on cards, such as "cat".

Then we introduce cards with two words at a time, "big cat", followed over the course of weeks by three-word exercises, such as "big yellow cat", then on to sentences, "The big yellow cat ran." These exercises are placed in baskets and left on a shelf in order that the child can choose to repeat when he so desires.

Slowly, the eye and the mind are trained to start at the left-hand side and move to the right in order to decode the symbols. Instead of asking the child to read out loud, we ask him to act out a collection of sentences written on paper strips and placed in a basket, an activity he can do anytime independently without adult interaction. When we see that he is acting out the sentences accurately, the child is introduced to longer sentences or two sentences on a page, "The big yellow cat ran after the brown-spotted dog."

As the child becomes more familiar with the words, he begins to memorize that certain letter combinations make certain words, and doesn't need to

decode each sound for each word. Reading becomes faster and more fluid.

As each stage of learning to read is met with a favorable outcome the child experiences a success cycle, where learning creates a desire for more learning.

All these steps describe an indirect preparation for learning to read a book like *Tom Sawyer*.

If we want to help a child love to learn, we prepare him indirectly for the next step of accomplishment in such a way as to assure success. We then allow the child to take the step independently.

By creating a place where a child can choose activities that create the next step in a continuum of learning through indirect preparation, we help a child love to learn.

By making the tasks neither too easy nor too hard—by creating a Goldilock's spot of "just the right" task—we provide the nourishment for a life-time of loving to learn.

Begin with the end in mind. Start giving lessons where the child is at the edge of his skill level by giving an adequate challenge, and prepare for the next step as the young child repeats various activities to gain competency. Using indirect preparation is a key teaching skill to help children love to learn. It makes learning, as Goldilocks would say, "Just right!"

Learning To Deal With Change



Learning to deal with change has become one of the critical life skills of our times.

The amount of new information that we can access through the internet grows in such a geometrical progression that it staggers the mind.

In 2010 Eric Schmidt, then CEO of Google, commented that every two days we now create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up until 2003. *"I spend most of my time assuming the world is not ready for the technology revolution that will be happening to them soon,"* Schmidt said.

We are awash in a world full of user generated instant messages, tweets, pictures, videos and more. Our interactions with our environment, that consists of people, objects, nature and ideas, seem to be dominated by

electronic objects and the ideas that flow through them. People and nature appear to take a back seat to oh-so-many electronic interactions. **We deal best with change when we feel safe and know that we possess a skill set that will help us navigate uncharted waters.**

Interestingly, the skills that might serve us best in dealing with change are best learned from people and nature:

- Being aware of change.
- Facing feelings.
- Knowing when to accept or reject change.
- Having an attitude of anticipation.
- Knowing that you can choose to act, not react.
- Learning to relax.
- Setting smart goals.
- Having a support system.

Without learning how to deal with change and making conscious choices of how to act, in times of uncontrollable change feelings of helplessness, as well as feeling trapped and victimized, occur.

Nature helps us show our children the nature of change.

Day and night. The phases of the moon. Weather. Seasons. Seeds.

Growing. Dying. Wind. Weather. Caterpillars. Tadpoles.

Being aware of the changes that are occurring all around us every day and seeing the patterns of change helps us learn to put our lives in perspective. A rock filled with stromatolites sets on our bookcase, and acts as a reminder to put everything in perspective. Geologists believe the stromatolites to be the oldest living thing captured in the fossil record, 3.5

billion to 1 billion years ago. Yes, a reminder that, yes, change happens, and this too shall pass.

Learning to be aware of our feelings and having a vocabulary to name those feelings is important with dealing with change. Feelings are our natural signs that our needs are or are not being met. Being in touch with our physical emotional reactions helps us meet our needs, and deal with change.

Some change is good. Some is bad. Change for change's sake is not always what we should accept. Knowing the nature and patterns of change, along with our underlying emotions and needs, help us discern if we should welcome the change or choose something else.

Learning to relax will help us avoid fighting change when perhaps struggling with change is not the wisest option. Being in nature, exercising, and learning to breathe, again, are all things we learn from other people.

Anticipating change can be fun. It can feel like Christmas. A birthday party. A vacation. Our attitude makes a difference. We always have a choice of how we will act or not act in face of change. Attitude and choice are abilities we learn from the people around us.

Young children, as all of us did, need knowledgeable adults to guide them to learn the essential skills to deal with a lifetime of change and growth.

We need to provide our children a safe place to experiment and make mistakes in order to learn to make good decisions. Our children need adult guidance to point out interpersonal skills of communication and

intrapersonal skills of how to read emotions and how to make informed choices.

Learning to deal with change is about learning to see the world change around you and having skills that will allow you to go boldly where no one has gone before.

That's life. We should be helping our children prepare for it.

Learning To Question



Information is an avalanche.

Technology experts tell us that every two days we now create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up until 2003.

To be able to dig ourselves out of this morass of words and images, in order to find our way and to live our lives, learning to ask questions becomes an essential skill.

First, we have to ask big questions such as, "What is truly important to know?"

These answers will be as varied as there are people on this planet. All of the answers will be right for each and every person asking the questions and hunting for the answers. Maybe not the right answer for me. Maybe not for you.

What is vital is asking the questions. And continuing to question.

It is possible to build a life based on erroneous information, so we need to keep on questioning.

Daniel Pink in his book, *DRiVE: The surprising truth about what motivates us*, suggests that to help us find our purpose in life, we need to ask a big question: *What's my sentence?*

Pink makes the point that our lives can be summed up in a sentence:

- He was a wonderful father who gave his children wings.
- She helped people regain their health.
- He helped everyone he met see his or her potential.

Once we know our sentence—for our life at this very moment—then we know what is important to know.

Our questions become a search for vital and true information upon which we will build our lives.

Pink explains three qualities are necessary for us to tap into our potential as individuals.

- We need to have autonomy.
- We need to have a sense of purpose.

- We need to have a level of mastery of essential skills related to our purpose.

Autonomy means we have a choice of the activity in which we engage.

The choice is based on internal motivation and not extrinsic rewards or punishments. When we can be curious and self-directed in the way we use our time, we create more powerful results than those obtained through stick and carrot methods.

In short, autonomy means we have the freedom to question, to find those answers in our own way, and in our own time.

The by-product of asking the big questions and knowing our sentence is that we have a sense of purpose that guides our actions and provides a backdrop where we can consider plans and decisions. Understanding our purpose creates a personal value system. As we make our independent choices for activities central to our purpose, we start on a lifetime path of mastery.

To keep us on-track, Pink offers a little question:

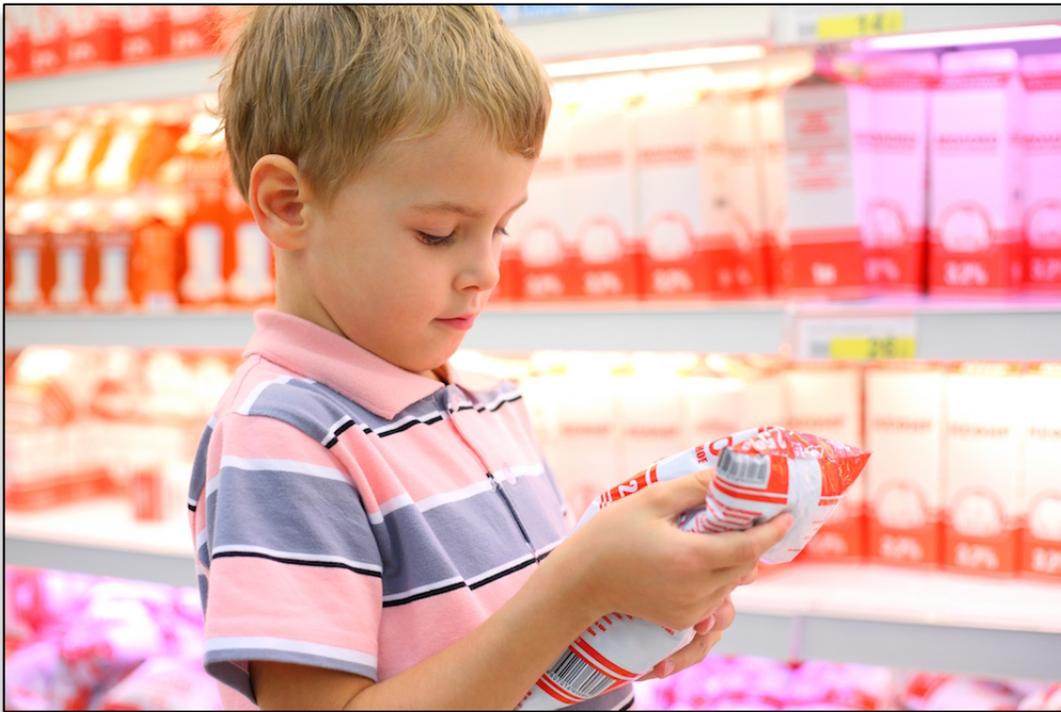
Was I better today than yesterday?

Learning to question begins with asking the big questions to understand our purpose in life, to understand our sentence. For once we understand our purpose, we focus on developing essential skills and core knowledge that relates to our big questions.

Asking everyday if we have improved acts as a directional trim tab for reaching our objectives. Asking helps us maintain altitude and attitude.

To help children learn to question, we have to allow them the freedom and time to ask and answer the big questions in their unique way. We have to allow children to have important choices in their learning and living activities. We have to give them the gift of deep time—time with people, time with tools, time with nature, time with ideas—to explore, make connections and develop mastery of essential skills and knowledge. Most importantly, and the most difficult—we have to give ourselves as adult models of fearless questioning.

Learning To Make Choices



Our children's world is changing at a pace that is difficult to comprehend. The jobs that are here today probably won't exist in ten, much less twenty years. We need to teach and help our children learn a skill set that will

enable them to navigate the fast-moving changes they will inevitably encounter during their lives.

A situation we are seeing with twenty-somethings has been named “a failure to launch.”

The shift in our economy's infrastructure has limited the number of job opportunities for those entering or trying to re-enter the work force. For many it feels safer to play video games in their parents' basements than to make a conscious effort to create a different opportunity for their futures.

In my observations, people who have had the opportunity since early childhood to make important choices in their daily routines seem to have the resourcefulness to choose to do something different.

Yes, the world is not what they were told it would be, but these young adults who are comfortable with making choices have the ability to respond to new circumstances. Their years of practice with making choices is a habit.

Learning to make choices and living with the consequences of those choices also creates a sense of commitment within an individual. Those young adults without years of practice lack the creativity to see things differently, and are paralyzed by their inability to see or make a choice to step out of the expected.

How do we help our children to learn to make choices?

- We can start with the one-year old by laying out two sets of clothes and asking, “Which outfit would you like to wear now?”

- For our two-or three-year-old who has dressed himself with a plaid shirt, striped pants, argyle socks, and a polka-dotted stocking cap, we acknowledge and appreciate his efforts by saying, "I see you got dressed all by yourself."
- On shopping trips we can ask, "Which would you prefer this week for dinner, broccoli or green beans?"
- At bedtime, perhaps we offer simple choices such as, "Would you like to brush your teeth before or after your bath?"

Whenever we can let our children make a choice, we do.

We need to bring a deep respect for the child's work in learning how to learn to live, day-by-day, choice-by-choice.

With years of experience our thirteen-year old will choose the right friends; our seventeen-year-old will confidently choose a college; our college-graduate will build a career.

We also need to understand that sometimes for the novice, choice is about satisfying curiosity.

We can't truly choose what we don't know. How can we choose between cherry or coconut pie unless we know how each one tastes?

To help our children know we need to offer our children bits of knowledge and experience in order for them to make choices they can live with.

Using the correct name for objects is one help. It's not a thinga-ma-jiggy. It's a Phillips screwdriver.

We offer tastes and smells of new foods. This is a bell pepper. This is a carrot. This is cinnamon. This is ginger.

The names and the experience with items that have sensorial qualities of texture, sound, movement, shape and much more can be introduced to our children three or four items at a time.

We can give short demonstrations on how to do tasks, such as how to turn a page, to carry a breakable item, or to wash a glass.

Being able to choose confidently requires that we have the experience and knowledge to not only know *how* to choose, but to know *what* we are choosing.

We help children learn to make choices by respecting their need to learn to make choices and live with those choices. Being confident in their ability to choose well allows our children to live their lives creatively, to develop self-discipline, and to work cooperatively with others, because they respect others' right to choose.

Remember, the child is always asking us to "help me help myself" if we will only stop to listen.

Allowing choice is a good place to begin our help.

Learning To Be Good At Doing Things



Recently I read an article by a father of a three-year-old boy discussing his son's prowess in the kitchen, and what a surprising amount of tasks his son could accomplish—washing vegetables, stemming mushrooms, cracking eggs and kneading dough.

The dad observed, "I'm not pushing him. He's pushing himself."

Our under seven's are in a developmental stage where they are absorbing information and skills from the people, objects and tools in their environments.

Now that we know about mirror-neurons, it's perhaps easier to understand that children learn by watching people perform tasks.

If we give our children the tools and time to duplicate that task, they learn to do it quite well.

A child with an interesting job to do will do it again, and again and again.

Repetition is a learning characteristic of this age child. Our over seven's get bored at doing the same task over and over, day after day, but not the younger child.

Young children love the familiar of family, and are learning foundational skills for later learning. The young child's inner teacher directs the child to copy tasks he sees others in his environment doing. The will to do is very strong.

And the will develops the skill.

The will needs to be nourished by giving the child appropriate tools, time and a safe place in which to repeat and repeat an activity.

That's one way a child learns to be good at doing things.

Another way to learn to be good at doing things is by being presented incremental challenges that enlarge a child's scope of activity.

Once a child can crack an egg successfully, perhaps the new step would be to introduce a hand whisk or fork and show how to stir the eggs for scrambled eggs. Or perhaps show the child how to peel a boiled egg and slice it.

The key is the adult watching to know when the next challenge needs to be introduced, and making sure the challenge is not too hard or not too easy.

In the case of the egg, we can add more tasks until the child can cook scramble eggs independently, put them on a plate with sliced fruit and a piece of toast.

I've known many five and six-year-olds that could prepare this type of simple meal for their entire family. And clean up afterwards!

It all began with their interest in kitchen activities at age two or three.

The way we help our children learn to be good at doing things is by showing them and allowing them to do many activities, adding challenges along the way.

It may seem simplistic, but our children learn by watching and then doing. Too many children, rich or poor, live their lives in homes and schools that offer little in the way of rich, interesting and life-affirming activities with the time and tools necessary to perfect a skill.

Let's offer our young children opportunities to develop practical living skills from learning how to care for themselves, others, the indoors and outdoors, as well as learning how to interact with others.

From washing hands to washing windows, our young children want to learn how to do things well. As the dad said, "I'm not pushing him. He's pushing himself."

Let's make sure our children have a place to push themselves.

Learning How to Care



Many things in life seem to be a closed system, as if certain concepts flow through an electric circuit.

- To get respect, give respect.
- To have a friend, be a friend.
- Care for others and they'll care for you.

The key to success in learning to care is in understanding what actions constitute caring, just as we might ask what actions show respect or friendship.

Friendship, respect and caring all begin with an individual's taking responsibility for their own needs and desires.

At some point a child comes to the realization that others have needs and desires that may or may not be similar his or her needs.

It becomes important for us, then, to help young children under the age of six to learn how to do for themselves. Our young children are capable of doing so many caring tasks, from caring for their personal needs, caring for their homes and schools both indoors and out, and caring for others.

The word manners comes from the Latin *manus* or hand.

Manners or caring for yourself and others begins with personal skills that involve the hands. Manners are about how we use our hands to help.

Three to four-year-olds should be able to dress themselves, comb their hair, wash their face and hands, and check in the mirror to see if they are presentable.

They should be able to set the table, load the dishwasher, fix a simple snack, use child-sized scissors, sweep the floor, and much more. Children should be shown how to handle a fragile object, how to look at a fragile object, and how to ask for assistance if they want to do something but don't know how.

Knowing how to ask for assistance keeps a lot of "mischief" from ever happening, as well as forging strong child/adult partnerships.

Learning to care is fueled by learning how to take care of the objects and people in one's immediate environment. J.M. Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, wrote that *"for them that has china plates themsel's is the maist careful no to break the china plates of others."*

It might follow that those who know how to take care of themselves will be careful with others.

As adults we need to model how to perform certain activities as well as give clear and concise one-on-one directions with many opportunities for the child to repeat the activity at will.

We have to childproof our homes, but more importantly we need to "adult-proof" our homes.

We need to make our homes and schools child friendly spaces where our children can continually see how to care, learn how to care, and practice taking care of themselves, their living spaces, as well as other people.

Learning to care is a learning cycle that begins with adults preparing their hearts and their homes to be places to show our children how to take care of themselves.

In turn our children learn how to care for their families, their friends, their community and their world.

Children learn to care by giving their heart opportunities for expression through their hands.

Learning to Set Goals



Goal setting seems to be an adult-oriented skill set. How do we help our children learn to set goals?

Having given adult workshops on goal setting, I realize that many adults lack basic understanding on how to formulate goals along with the strategic and tactical steps to achieve a goal.

In my elementary classroom my students set goals and objectives with me for developing each of their eight intelligences as described by Howard Gardner:

- Linguistic,
- Logical-Mathematical,
- Musical,
- Bodily-Kinesthetic,

- Spatial,
- Interpersonal,
- Intrapersonal, and
- Naturalist.

For our purposes, let's think of a goal as a place where we want to go.

Let's say our goal is to visit the Grand Canyon. After a few minutes of contemplation trying to set objectives, or the steps necessary to achieve our goal, we should discover that this is actually an unfocused goal and that we need to be more specific.

To start setting objectives we ask questions. *Why do we want to go?*

Perhaps there is someplace else that upon greater thought is more desirable.

When do we want to go? Our timeframe determines most of the objectives.

Where exactly in the Grand Canyon do we want to go and how do we get there? By foot, horse, boat, plane, helicopter, etc.?

Who do we want to go with us?

What does our trip look like, feel like?

How much is it going to cost?

After we have asked all our who, what, when, where, why and how questions many of our tasks become evident along with the order in which they should be executed.

Perhaps who goes with us is more important than when we go, and we work to coordinate scheduling with those people we want to take the trip with us.

Perhaps costs need to be minimal and we plan everything based on a fixed cost basis.

Perhaps certain activities are important in setting our goal and we are willing to wait and save our money to be able to do those things.

Clarifying our goals through questioning not only focuses the goal but help us determine the steps for success and when they should be accomplished.

Once the goals and objectives are determined they should be written up and put in a visible place where they will be seen on a daily basis.

Our goals and objectives are guidelines for action and can be changed at any time. Life has a funny way of changing and perhaps our goal to go to the Grand Canyon becomes less of a priority than something else.

Changing a goal is not a failure, but failing to plan is a big mistake.

Learning to set goals and objectives at a young age can help our children:

- Learn about managing money well,
- Set health goals,
- Learn to achieve their dreams,
- Manage themselves
- Feel in control of their lives,
- Work well with other people, as well as
- Be organized.

Our goal setting should be about our whole being and encompass our physical, mental, emotional/spiritual and social well-being.

Take a few minutes once a month to determine your personal goals and objectives in each of these areas. Model planning and execution, and help

your child set their personal goals in these four vital areas. The goals may be as simple, such as learning to roller skate.

Roller skating or rolling successfully into adulthood—the process of goal setting is the same.

Learning to Engage



Knowing and not doing, is really not to know at all.

To truly know and experience something, we must engage.

We can watch all the football games in the world, but until we learn to throw an accurate pass, run past a halfback, or have been tackled, we really don't know football, we only know about football.

If we really want to learn something, we have to engage with our environment—the world around us. Our environments consist of people, objects, tools, ideas and nature.

What is it that our children need to learn?

The simple answer is our children need to learn who they are and who they can be.

To live life to the best of their abilities, engagement is essential.

Engagement requires time, deep time. Time to explore. Time to make deep connections and interconnections. Time to cloud watch. Time to dream. Time to make dreams come true. Time to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

Mistakes are at the cutting edge of learning. We should be friendly towards errors—our children’s and our own.

Engagement means that a decision to act has occurred. My high school years were spent in Heidelberg, Germany and I walked back and forth from school through the castle gardens. Overlooking the Old Town is a bench with a plaque that commemorates the fact that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe liked to sit and think at this spot. Goethe is credited with writing this piece that speaks of the importance of engagement.

Lose this day loitering –twill be the same story

Tomorrow—and the next more dilatory.

Each indecision brings its own delays,

And days are lost lamenting over lost days.

Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute—

Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

Only engage, and then the mind grows heated—

Begin it, and the work will be completed.

Goethe would tell us that learning to engage seems to be the antidote to regret. "Begin it, and the work will be completed."

We loiter in our lives because we feel we don't have the time, the money, the right tools, the right people, the right space to fulfill our dreams.

Engagement—deciding to act—brings to itself the power to connect us to all that is necessary to fulfill our dreams.

"Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

Engagement for young children begins when we have prepared a place where they can decide to interact with objects, tools, people, ideas and nature to have vital experiences in a space of deep time—hours, days, months, and years.

A place where there is uninterrupted time.

A place where there are people who can provide guidance to the learning experience.

A place where there are objects and tools that engage the hand and the mind and offer connections between seemingly unrelated concepts.

A place where nature is experienced as engagement with life.

Helping our children learn to engage in a prepared environment of meaningful activities is a huge help to life as our children learn who they are and who they can be.

Learning to Speak Effectively



We've been discussing tools for our children's success in a future that we may have difficulty imagining.

We do know that there are timeless learning tools that have enabled humans to adapt to new challenges.

We are in the middle of a decade of uncommon problems. Unfailing tools are needed.

Learning to speak effectively is a tool that was revered by the ancient Greeks, who in turn, taught oratorical skills to the Romans. Cicero (106–43 BC) is perhaps best known for his speeches and his teaching of others to speak publicly.

Speaking effectively brings with it the idea that you have something worth saying and worth someone's time to listen.

In today's electron world of blogs, tweets, and social networking where seemingly trivial personal details are constantly expressed, our children

are in danger of being inundated in waves of unimportant information, drowning in drivel.

Today it becomes ever more critical to be able to logically present your ideas in a clear and concise way that will inform, enlighten or persuade others.

First, you have we have a knowledge base of something meaningful to say.

Everyone is entitled to his opinion, but not every opinion is worth listening to. Celebrities are often asked for their opinions on subjects on which they have no expertise. A well-known actor questioned a reporter who wanted his opinion on the economy. "I'm an adult male who wears make-up, dresses in costumes, and pretends to be somebody else. Why would you want my opinion?" This celebrity realized he needed to earn the right to speak by being well informed, not just by being well known.

We also need to have an understanding of the underlying problem we are addressing.

Too many pundits and politicians go on and on in confusing ways never answering the question they have been asked. Before we can speak to an issue, we need to ask a lot of questions to gather pertinent information, as well as have an empathetic understanding of the issue and the people affected.

Once we know our subject and the relevant issues surrounding that topic, we need to form a logical plan to speak to it.

Cicero taught a memory device of organizing a talk as if you were walking through various rooms of a house.

According to this technique, as you organize a talk, you mentally walk through the rooms in a specific order “placing” certain items in each room that will provide a mnemonic device for the points of the presentation.

Cicero’s technique creates a logical process where the speaker can literally “walk” his audience through a thinking process to an orderly conclusion.

Learning to communicate our thoughts to others effectively begins with becoming knowledgeable.

Even a six-year-old can become an expert on some topic, for example, how to take care of goldfish. Even a six-year-old can ask questions of others about what they personally want to know about goldfish. Even a six-year-old can consult various sources—books, videos, websites and people—for information. Even a six-year-old can be guided to create a logical presentation of accumulated information.

Speaking effectively is a skill we need to help our children learn for the challenges they will face today and all of their tomorrows.

Learning to Stop and Think



Impulsivity is a sign of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and probably most 36-month-olds' behavior would meet the criteria for being ADHD.

Some of the criteria follow:

- Makes careless mistakes,
- Has difficulty sustaining attention in work or play activities,
- Does not seem to listen,
- Does not follow through on instructions,
- Has difficulty organizing tasks,
- Avoids tasks that require sustained effort,
- Is easily distracted,
- Is forgetful about daily activities.

What happens during years three, four and five of a child's development determines whether that child learns to self-regulate behavior.

Mastering certain key skills during this first six years of life makes a huge difference in a person's life.

Learning to stop and think is one of those key skills.

When I was a six-year-old my teen-age neighbor taught me a singing cheer: Stop, look and listen. I've sung this cheer many a time with my preschool and elementary students to get the point clear and in the air when ADD behavior was everywhere.

It really does boil down to those three words.

We need to help our children learn to stop, look and listen.

Stop.

One of the simple games I recommend for helping direct and redirect a young child's behavior is the Verb Game. Helping your child integrate thought and movement, i.e. having the body obey the will, is a great help to the young child.

Directions for the Verb Game:

On 3" x 5" index cards, with one word per card, write the following words: jump, walk, sit, stand, twirl, spin, squirm, wiggle, laugh, smile, nod, shake, blink, smack, stomp, tap, clap, click, rub, pat, crawl, freeze and stop.

I suggest writing these words down because in a moment of great need, I can never think of enough action words. But I can usually find the stack of cards.

Play the game by telling your child that you are going to play the Verb Game, that you'll say a word and both you and your child will do it together.

Read "jump" out loud, and begin to jump. Jump for about ten seconds with your child, and then give the next command. After the fourth or so command, say, "Don't jump." Wait about ten seconds, and see what happens.

What you more than likely will see is your child jump or do whatever you've instructed him or her to not do. Continue on with rest of the commands, and then offer your child a chance to give the commands. Play on a daily basis to help your child learn to follow directions by connecting mind and body, thoughts and actions.

Look.

Helping your children to notice the world around them can be done with a game I call "What Do You See?"

Take a detailed filled object—perhaps a photo from a magazine or an art postcard. Invite your child to play the "What Do You See?" game. Sit in a comfortable place and place the object in sight and say, "We are going to sit silently for 30 seconds and look at this picture. When 30 seconds is up I am going to ask you what you see."

On small slips of paper write what your child tells you he or she sees in the picture. Try to elicit ten items, placing the labels around the picture.

Review and re-read each label.

"You looked at this picture and you saw a girl, a bike, a bike helmet, a pink dress, a black dog, a boy, roller skates, a fence, red flowers, green grass, a big tree."

Point at each label as you name the items. Gather the labels, read them one at a time, hand the label to your child and let them place on the picture. Afterwards place the picture and the labels in a basket and place on an activity shelf for your child to repeat by either looking or, looking and labeling. Needless to say, this looking exercise is also an early reading activity.

Listen.

Children love quiet. All they need is to learn how to listen. Children enjoy a listening game where everyone gets quiet for about two minutes, which is a very long time for three-and four-year-olds, and for some 34-year-olds, too.

In my preschool class I'd set an hourglass-type egg timer in the middle of our group to give the children a focal point and concept of how much longer they should sit and listen. In the quiet the children heard each other sigh, squirm and change positions.

In short, the children became aware of how a simple movement disrupts the mood of the group.

At the end of the two-minute period, I would go around the group and ask each child what they heard as they listened.

Without exception, the children were amazed at what they could hear.

Birds outside even though all the doors and windows were shut. Cars at the stop sign a block away. A fire truck leaving the station a mile away.

The rumble of a train. The neighbor's tractor or leaf blower. The refrigerator. The heat clicking on. The air going through their noses. The clock ticking in the adjoining room. The faucet dripping in the bathroom. In the quiet the children listened.

After this five- to ten-minute listening exercise the children appeared more confident and controlled in their actions, left the group lesson with tranquil smiles and worked the rest of the morning with deeper concentration than before the lesson.

Stop, look and listen. Cheer your children on to learn how to stop and think, essential skills for a lifetime.

Learning To Be Friendly with Error



If failure is not an option, neither is success.

An interesting idea. But isn't it true that we learn most effectively when we've had to figure out a problem through trial and error?

On my typewriter (remember those things?) during my early 20's I had a saying taped to it that read: *Babe Ruth struck out 1330 times.*

Goodness, was I afraid of failure.

Somehow, I had snuffed out any risk taking in my life, or looking like I didn't know something.

The quest for the good grade or the recognition for a job well done created a sickening feeling of fear in the pit of my stomach. A highly critical boss, who today we would say was verbally abusive, didn't ease my situation. I was terrified of making a mistake.

Luckily, I had friends who could fall flat on their faces doing something new, laugh, and get right back up. I admired their verve and I tried to model some of their unflappability.

When I started looking for and believing in ways to be friendly with error for myself, I began to see an imperfect world that struggles towards perfection, but never actually arrives to that point. Everybody made mistakes.

The important work I learned through my trials and errors was to engage in new activities with new ideas and new people. I discovered that learning and growth occurred at the leading edge of my experimenting. As we experiment with the new we should try to minimize risk, control variables as well as understand the consequences and opportunities of our endeavors.

I think we used to call this common sense.

Of course, when we are trying something new we want to minimize the risk for failure or injury. We want to ensure success.

Want to learn how to climb a hundred-foot rock wall?

First learn to tie a bowline, how to put on a climbing harness, and find an experienced teacher. In short, learn to play safe and the next step seems challenging but headed in the right direction—up!

We also need to control the variables when we are learning so that we can focus and maximize what is put in our brain.

This is one of the reasons for the advice to study with the radio/tv/computer/music off. Memory works differently in every person, and what may seem like background noise to one person may be the main attraction for another. Studying for an algebra test with Lady Gaga in the background? You might learn more lyrics than linear regressions.

Clarity supports positive learning experiences. If we know what we are supposed to be learning and why, the variables for learning can be addressed.

To be friendly with error means understanding the consequences of our actions. In Montessori classrooms we show three-year-olds how to use glassware and other fragile items. Yes, objects get broken, but the child who breaks a glass learns to self-correct by moving more carefully. The child who witnesses a breakage also learns about consequences.

As adults, we realize that the crystal bowl may break, but recognize that when an accident occurs important learning follows.

True learning occurs at the edge of experimentation and we should create opportunities for children's investigation and exploration in a wide variety of situations that includes tools, people, ideas and nature.

We prepare a place for this experimentation, *aka learning*, that can be directed through minimizing risk, controlling variables and understanding consequences.

We want to create places where ideas, tools, people and the outdoors can be explored, experienced and evaluated.

We want to create places where everyone wants to be in the game of life, even if they've struck out 1330 times.

Life is a ball. Play ball!

About Maren Schmidt, M. Ed.



With Maren's Kids Talk newsletters and workshops you'll find tools to use immediately to strengthen your relationships with children.

In her *Kids Talk Newsletters and Workshops*, Maren offers you practical, put-it-into-action advice and insight about children.

You'll discover time-tested techniques based on proven child development principles that you can start using right away!

If children could verbalize what they need from the adults in their lives, the information

in Maren's newsletters, workshops and books is what our children would want us to know.

Working with children may be the most important adult role we'll ever have.

Kids Talk Newsletters and Workshops help you create adult-child relationships that are joyful, satisfying and productive for a life-time.

Sign up at MarenSchmidt.com to get time-tested tips to start using today to create loving relationships.