

Partnering for School Success Begins at Birth



An Early Childhood COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP Framework

Family Development Program Early Childhood Leadership Tool Kit



Based on Adaptation and Promotion of Life Skills Taken From
MIND IN THE MAKING
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs
Ellen Galinsky, HarperStudio (2010)

Lois Vermilya, Director 505-277-6943

<http://fdp.unm.edu/>

Partnering for School Success Begins at Birth

Mind in the Making as an Early Childhood Leadership Framework¹

Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs (MITM)² has emerged as a uniquely effective strategy for crossing boundaries and creating strong linkages across systems serving young children and their families. All over the country, unlikely groups have joined together to learn more about the most seminal research on children's learning from birth through age eight, and about how to use this research to promote better outcomes for children. A belief of the UNM Family Development Program is that these same life skills are important for leaders to practice in collaborative efforts aimed at creating urgent change that seeks to overcome inequities that perpetuate poor outcomes for children and families.

Early Childhood Leadership Tool Kit

The Family Development Program has developed a comprehensive Early Childhood Leadership Tool Kit that integrates Mind in the Making's Seven Essential Life Skills as a framework for building collaborative leadership skills in individuals, teams and community. The Tool Kit is designed to strengthen the foundation for learning, starting at birth, in support of shared goals for school readiness and children's well-being. The tools are organized as self-guided training materials that are first introduced through an Early Childhood Leadership Institute for training teams of targeted participants. The tools are designed to build collaborative leadership skills and practices along 4 Pathways for Leadership Development aimed at building strong partnerships for school success that begin at birth. (See Pathways for Leadership Development Model and Content Overview on pages 4-5 that summaries the range of leadership tools that are available.)

Leadership Defined

Leadership: The Family Development Program uses the Mind in the Making Seven Essential Skills as a comprehensive leadership framework to promote positive change for children in partnership with families, community and early childhood stakeholders, including non-traditional partners. We believe that ideas of leadership have changed from someone who has all of the answers towards a model of the leader as a life-long learner who can initiate a learning process that will engage the wisdom and energy of broader constituencies in the community to improve the quality of community life and well-being of our children and families. Leadership is seen not as a role or a position but as a collection of skills and practices that everyone can learn. It is not automatically embedded in professional or managerial roles, but calls upon knowledge and assets of anyone who is ready to be involved as a change agent.

Collaborative Leadership is defined as a process in which various stakeholders, each with different perspectives, constructively explore their differences to search for solutions which go beyond their limited vision of what is possible to make real change. The foundation of collaborative leadership is relationship building across the boundary lines that can traditionally divide educators and families, teachers and teacher aides, administrators and staff, and early childhood programs for systems change. Authentic collaboration requires trust, open communication, ability to resolve conflicts, shared vision and values. Collaboration is recognized as hard work, too often fraught with conflict and power struggles, but its practice is central to the change required to achieve thriving children in strong families supported by healthy communities. Because collaborative problem-solving is so difficult, it requires the active presence of skilled leaders who believe in and can facilitate the process of collaboration to improve the well-being of children and families.

¹ Lois Vermilya and Frances Varela: Partnering for School Success Begins at Birth, Early Childhood Leadership Development

² Ellen Galinsky (2010) *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher

Seven Essential Skills for Collaborative Leadership

Skill One - Focus and Self Control: Focus and self-control is needed in order for groups to achieve shared goals, especially when seeking to cross boundaries and forge authentic partnerships aimed at achieving results together.

Skill Two - Perspective Taking: Perspective taking is foundational for building relationships that respect diversity and cultural differences. It also is a core skill for understanding how different viewpoints, challenges and issues that too often divide groups can be bridged.

Skill Three – Communicating: Collaborative initiatives require high levels of transparent and ongoing communication to be successful.

Skill Four - Making Connections: Making connections is at the heart of learning and also is central to early childhood system change work. System change is all about making new connections among different groups, organizations and programs, neighborhoods, between families and providers, schools, and community leaders towards achieving a common goal.

Skill Five - Critical Thinking: Critical thinking requires valid and reliable knowledge, based on research, data, and frameworks to guide beliefs, decisions and best practices.

Skill Six - Taking on Challenges: Early childhood system change is full of stress and challenge. Leaders who are willing to take on challenges and embrace challenge as an engine for system change, will make more progress than those who avoid such challenges.

Skill Seven - Self-Directed, Engaged Learning: System change efforts require continuous, reflective learning. Collaborative leaders create learning communities where people closest to the problem are supported to question, explore, analyze and interact in order to develop solutions and innovative approaches.

Capacity Building Strategy: Early Childhood Leadership Development

Initial Demonstration of Early Childhood Leadership Development: The Family Development Program had the opportunity to develop and pilot test innovative strategies for using the Early Childhood Leadership Tool Kit with ABC Community School partners that has already demonstrated very promising results. The initial 3 year approach developed teams of engaged parents, teachers, and other community members as active Early Childhood Leaders who work closely with their local community school. The teams are working to identify and strengthen relationships with neighborhood families who do not yet have young children in school in order to promote positive early childhood development. They provide outreach and early learning opportunities for families as good preparation for success once these children get to school. Through community conversations, they seek to discover family needs in order to better design family-friendly services, schools and supports that can strengthen partnerships for school success that begins at birth.

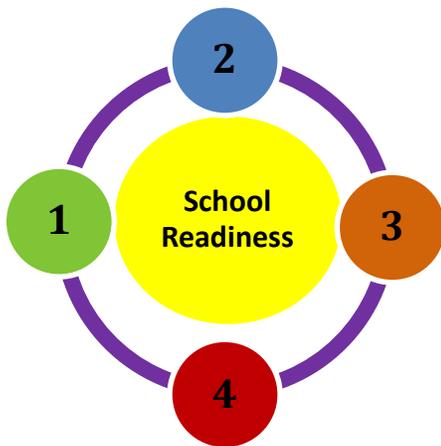
Experimentation and Adaptation for Other Early Childhood Contexts: Currently, the Family Development Program is exploring opportunities with national and New Mexico partners to adapt the Early Childhood Leadership Tool Kit in service of mutual goals for leadership development with families, community school partners, educators, and early childhood systems change agents. It is believed that the compendium of learning activities and leadership tools contained in the Tool Kit can be adapted as self-guided materials for early childhood development. Potential partners are being invited to experiment with the Tool Kit and co-create effective strategies with the Family Development that leverages this resource in support of shared goals for early childhood quality and systems change.

Partnering for School Success Begins at Birth

Early Childhood Leadership PATHWAYS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



Partnering For School Success Begins At Birth



Early Childhood Collaborative Leadership

GOAL: To build a strong foundation for early learning, birth into elementary, that strengthens partnerships between families, early learning programs, schools and the community.

PATHWAYS for Leadership Development

1) **Creating a Focus on Very Young Children and Their Families**

Why is Early Childhood Development Important?

What Are the Essential Skills Every Child Needs for Effective Learning?

How Can We Assess Our Individual, Team and Neighborhood Leadership Strengths?

Why Do Young Children Need Early Learning Advocates?

What is Our Vision for “Partnering for School Success Begins at Birth”?

2) **Building a Strong Team of Early Childhood Leaders**

What Strengths Do We Each Bring as Leaders?

How Do We Develop Facilitation Skills to Promote High Quality Results and Participation?

How Do We Make Our Meetings Effective?

How Do We Include New Members In Our Collaborative Team Efforts?

How Do We Make Collaborative Decisions and Deal Constructively with Conflict?

How Do We Continuously Reflect on Our Work and Learn Together?

3) **Strengthening Relationships with Families and Other Community Resources**

How Do We Engage Families as Full Partners?

How Do We Leverage the Assets of Early Childhood Resources in Our Community?

How Do We Make Family and Community Early Learning Engagement Fun?

4) **Improving The Community For Young Children and Their Families**

How Do We Host Early Childhood Community Conversations?

How Do We Move From Talk To Action?

How Do We Partner For A Smooth Transition from Early Childhood Programs Into School?