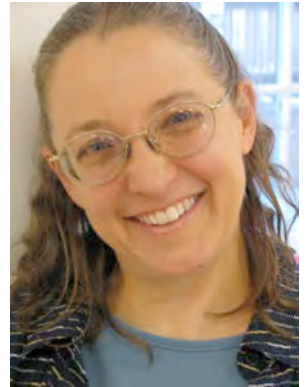


Director's Corner: Healthy Mind & Body



This year, we chose the whole school theme of **HEALTHY MIND & BODY** so that together we can learn how to take good care of ourselves and others. We will explore balanced strategies for healthy eating, exercising, sleeping, keeping ourselves clean and safe, etc. We will also talk about the ways we can feed, exercise and rest our minds so that we can do our best thinking and learning at home and at school. We invite you to join us in focusing our own efforts so that we can help the children build healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

As part of our staff preparation for the new school year, we read and discussed Dr. Wendy Mogel's book, ***The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*** (Penguin Compass, 2001). Though our staff comes from diverse religious backgrounds, we all found that our experience resonated with Mogel's key points. Here are some of my personal favorites, all of which relate both to parenting and educating children.

"The only things that are certain to be valuable are character traits such as honesty, tenacity, flexibility, optimism, and compassion – the same traits that have served people well for centuries." (p. 44)

"The family is the laboratory, and you are teaching the science of living." (p. 83)

"Your most lasting legacy, the only one that really matters, is how your children will treat their fellow creatures and the world you're leaving them. It begins and ends with honor." (p. 88)

"Real protection means teaching children to manage risks on their own, not shielding them from every hazard." (p. 95)

"Chores give us a unique opportunity to teach our children family citizenship, self-reliance, responsibility, and a sense of the holy potential in every action." (p. 157)

"We are offering them ourselves, and we are showing them the path to a rich and meaningful life." (p. 234)

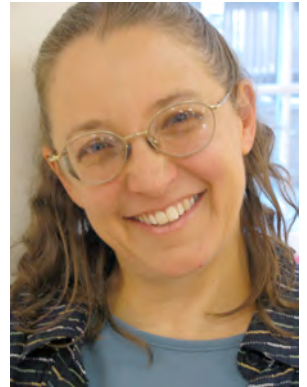
"Building strength and self-reliance in our children requires an investment of our time and thought, it requires planning and discipline, it requires a long view both backward to our heritage and forward to the future." (p. 258)

At this point in our individual and family journeys, we have the opportunity to collaborate to enhance our children's living and learning. Watch the monthly newsletters for ideas you can use at home, as well as opportunities for involvement in the school and the community. Enclosed with this newsletter is the Pennsylvania Department of Health guide for children and grownups, entitled "Let's get MOVING! With Healthy Snacks and Play."

In my future columns, I'll discuss how educators and parents can together foster the "seven essential life skills every child needs", as proposed by Ellen Galinsky in ***Mind in the Making***. We hope you'll join us in pursuing a healthy lifestyle for our minds and bodies this year!

Director's Corner: Focus/Self-Control

As part of our whole school theme of **HEALTHY MIND & BODY**, I've been reading Ellen Galinsky's book *Mind in the Making* to see how she has synthesized current developmental research to reveal the "seven essential life skills every child needs" to learn and live well at all ages. Galinsky notes that all seven skills are rooted in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, the locus of executive functions that help us "to manage our attention, our emotions, and our behavior in order to reach our goals" (p. 4).

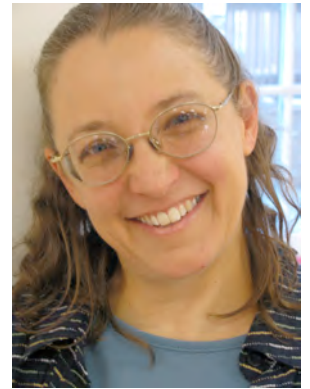


Helping children to develop Galinsky's first essential life skill, **focus and self-control**, is one of the primary objectives of early childhood education. In a review of longitudinal studies, the only reliable predictor of later success in reading and math, besides the obvious early skill in reading and math, was **attention skills**. The ability to focus amidst distracters maximizes the information children gain from instructional activities. Applying this skill for selectively ignoring distracters in order to comprehend a story read to a group is exactly what graduate student Karrie Godwin is testing in The Classroom Game that she is running this fall and will run again in the spring with our kindergartners (see October's newsletter). **Inhibitory control** is a related skill for resisting "a strong inclination to do one thing and instead do what is most appropriate" (p. 23). In order to focus effectively, one needs to be appropriately alert, orienting attention in the right direction, and able to shift attention to adjust to different speakers in a conversation, changes in the task, etc. The inhibitory control is what helps us pull attention away from what's interesting outside the window in order to focus on work or away from the computer when someone we value is talking to us.

Part of the Ellen Galinsky's rationale for writing the *Mind in the Making* book is that her review of the developmental research led her to the conclusion that **both parents and educators should be more intentional** about fostering children's development of all seven essential life skills. The relationship between parenting strategies and inhibitory control skills is the focus of senior Brandee Feola's study described in this month's Research Spotlight. At the Children's School, we use a wide range of purposeful approaches to help children learn both focus and self-control. We start with age appropriate, meaningful, educational content with a wide range of options so that children's natural interest will guide them to engage in learning. In addition, our educators gradually lengthen the stories they read, discussions they lead, number of direction steps in projects, etc. so that children are challenged to extend their attention. They purposely play observation games, such as I Spy and What's Missing from the Memory Tray, and self-control games that require listening to directions and changing movements accordingly. Giving children choices about how they sit or do an activity also helps them choose among the appropriate options while avoiding the negative ones – even if a peer is not currently making a positive choice. Learning in a busy laboratory school naturally gives us all plenty of chances to selectively attend to one task amidst distracters and to flexibly shift as circumstances change. We also encourage children to practice waiting patiently ("just a minute") while we talk with another individual rather than interrupting. We work with families to ensure that the children are well fed, well rested, and experience minimal stress, because both focus and self-control function better when one's body feels well. I encourage you to consider how you are fostering your children's focus and self-control in your daily life.

Stay tuned for reflections on the other six essential life skills: perspective taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, and self-directed, engaged learning.

Director's Corner: Perspective Taking



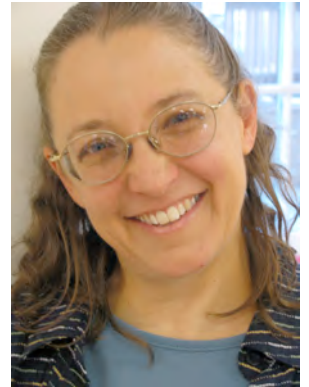
Continuing my reflection on the “seven essential life skills every child needs” as framed by Ellen Galinsky in *Mind in the Making*, I turn to the skill of **perspective taking**. Once again, the essential nature of this skill is evident in its central focus in the early childhood curriculum. For example, the Children's School developmental objectives set includes empathizing with others, asking for help appropriately, comparing and contrasting others features with respect, handling oneself well when choosing not to participate, sharing and taking turns, politely interacting with visitors, respecting others' rights, feelings, and belongings, responding well to winning and losing, generating alternate perspectives, negotiating and compromising to solve problems, etc. - all of which are part of developing versatility in understanding and responding to others' perspectives.

According to Galinsky, perspective taking involves “the intellectual skill of discerning how someone else thinks and feels; it requires assembling our accumulated knowledge of that person, analyzing the situation at hand, remembering similar situations, recalling what others have told us about such situations, putting aside our own thoughts and feelings, and trying to feel and think as another person must feel and think” (p. 71). One way that even 3 year olds develop their perspective taking skills involves practice “reading, anticipating, and responding to the feelings and plans of their baby siblings” (p. 73). Dramatic play with baby dolls provides similar opportunities, as does care for pets at home or in the classroom. For example, when last year's kindergartners designed and constructed a coop for the chickens they were hatching, they considered the chick's need for food, water and warmth, as well as their desire to see their surroundings, have fun climbing, etc. They learned that they had not anticipated the chicks' desire to stay together in one part of the coop, nor the challenge the coop would be for those cleaning it. Galinsky also notes that children with strong perspective taking skills adjust better to school because they more easily understand what their teachers want and expect. Similarly, when learning strategies for comprehending text, children can leverage their perspective taking skills to both process what has happened and predict what might happen next.

As with focus and self-control, the point of acknowledging the importance of developing perspective taking skills is that **both parents and educators should be more purposeful** about fostering them. At the Children's School, we intentionally emphasize strategies for identifying others' perspective, both in the context of play and when reading stories. We verbalize aspects of our own thinking and our predictions about what others might be thinking. For example, when offering the children an opportunity to carefully touch a precious artifact, a teacher might say, “This xxx is special to me because my sister gave it to me. It is very fragile and I would be sad if it gets broken, so please touch it very gently.” To invite the children to predict thinking, an educator might ask the children how a friend who is getting ready to move might feel (including possible excitement and fear or sadness) and then invite them to suggest ways to encourage the child. Allowing children to choose among activities, graph their preferences, etc. allows them to observe that individuals have different points of view. Our laboratory school context also provides many chances for the children to interact with a wide range of peers and adults with different backgrounds, talents, needs, and goals, so they can become sensitive to a wide range of perspectives on both life and learning. Holidays offer a perfect opportunity for families to discuss what is important to them, as well as how we can best honor those we love and respond to the gestures they offer. I encourage you to be alert for chances to discuss others' perspectives with your children, as well as to brainstorm possible responses.

Director's Corner: Communicating

Communicating is next on Ellen Galinsky's research-based list of "seven essential life skills every child needs" in *Mind in the Making*. In this case, the Children's School developmental objectives set for preschool and kindergarten includes an entire category for Communication to cover comprehension and expression skills beginning with oral (listening and speaking) and progressing to written language (reading and writing). Galinsky's similarly broad view of communicating emphasizes the use of **language tools**, "the ability to comprehend, speak, and read words – but then ... to use those tools with power and precision – i.e., to communicate" (p. 105).



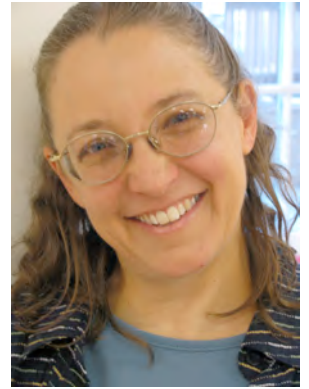
Babies are prepared at birth to selectively focus their attention on the words, expressions, and gestures that the significant adults in their lives intuitively exaggerate to reduce the complexity of language learning (parent-speak, parent-look, and parent-gesture in Galinsky's terms). For example, American infants quickly learn many nouns for labeling objects because adults who care for them commonly use simple sentences with raised pitch to introduce a new word (e.g., Look at the **BALLOON!**) while gazing directly at it and pointing. For infants and young toddlers, these strategies are perfectly matched to the developing brain's capacities, so the language development progress is impressively rapid.

Interestingly, the strategies shown by research to be most effective for preschoolers are *almost the opposite* of those tailored to infants and toddlers. Rather than greatly simplifying communication, adults who shift to highlighting the breadth and depth of communicative possibility foster stronger language and literacy skills by early elementary school. As was true with focus & self-control and perspective taking, **both parents and educators can be more intentional** about fostering communication by adopting the research-based approaches, specifically mealtime conversations and book reading that "go beyond the here and now" to discuss causes, explanations, predictions and other "extended discourse", use of "meaningful, grown-up words", and support for children's literacy exploration by both modeling personal reading and writing, as well as by providing diverse written materials and writing tools (p. 127-129). Similarly, researchers who study preschool programs recommend that, "Teachers use 'cognitively engaging talk', ... more complex, sophisticated words when talking to children, and ... have a content-oriented curricular plan" (p. 130).

The research literature also suggests a broad approach to promoting literacy at both home and school, rather than narrowly emphasizing drill and practice of the literacy mechanics, during the preschool years. At the Children's School, we purposefully focus on comprehension and expression, using a variety of enjoyable activities, sound games, and open-ended explorations to teach and reinforce the key concepts, incorporating visual representations with the verbal, and emphasizing effort and improvement – all so that children's experiences with language and literacy are meaningful to them, which will motivate them to engage fully in further learning.

January will be an opportune time to discuss communication explicitly with our children because we will be spending three weeks hosting South Korean educators and practicum students. We can observe the unique sounds and symbols of Korean, and we can highlight the importance of our gaze, facial expressions, and gestures to support communication. Always, children benefit when parents take the time to talk, read, and write with them about their areas of interest so that they can both learn from others and share their ideas with others via oral and written communication.

Director's Corner: Making Connections



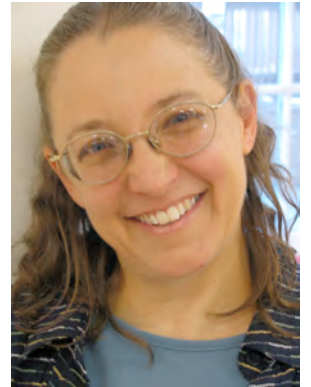
At the heart of effective learning is the skill of **making connections**, according to Ellen Galinsky's research-based list of "seven essential life skills every child needs" in *Mind in the Making*. Galinsky describes making connections as, "putting information into categories as well as seeing how one thing can represent or stand for something else" (p. 160). She further highlights the importance of managing your own thinking to notice "what's the same or similar, what's different, how one thing relates to another, and unusual connections", with the latter as especially crucial for promoting creativity. This skill is evident in many aspects of the Children's School developmental objectives, such as comparing and contrasting features of people, objects, stories, art forms, etc., applying rules or procedures in new situations, linking actions to consequences, relating stories to personal experience, identifying what's missing, sorting, classifying, and ordering objects, events, etc., using symbols, graphs, maps, and other representations, identifying and generating patterns, creating new stories and combinations in dramatic play, art, music, etc.

Using novel techniques for revealing babies' thinking, researchers have discovered that babies are born ready to notice important properties of objects, space, and number, much in the same way as they selectively attend to key elements of language. The **object sense** helps babies go beyond the visually available information to learn how things work in their everyday world, the **space sense** focuses on the geography of their environment to guide their navigation, and their **number sense** provides an early means of noticing quantities relating to objects, events, etc. In early childhood, many of the games children play facilitate their learning of more sophisticated connections related to objects, space, and number. Dr. Robert Siegler, a professor in CMU's Psychology Department, has conducted a series of studies demonstrating the important role of playing board games in children's developing understanding of numerical magnitude. Young children who play more board games (as opposed to card or video games) develop a clearer sense of the linear relationship between numbers (i.e., that the difference between 3 and 4 is equivalent to the difference between 36 and 37). This linear understanding is a foundation for numerical estimation, judgments of relative size (e.g., which is bigger, 7 or 8?), and beginning mathematical operations, such as addition and subtraction.

In similar ways, **both parents and educators can more purposefully** encourage children to make connections by playing a wide variety of games requiring children to learn and follow increasingly complex rules, think flexibly about possible moves, and reflect on the outcomes of their strategies. Continuing our focus on mathematical connections, we start with games like UNO in preschool and progress in early elementary school to games like Yahtzee. "Hiding and finding" games foster the space sense, while games with balls and other moving objects strengthen the object sense. Another way to foster children's creative connections is to engage them in open-ended play wherein they can combine and recombine elements in novel ways. Block play, imaginative play with cars, animals, etc., and diverse arts experiences all invite children to apply their knowledge in new contexts and to invent solutions to the challenges they encounter. As with communicating, children benefit from experiences related to their areas of interest because their attention is most focused and their motivation to learn is highest in those areas. In these situations, the adult's role is not to direct the exploration but rather to help bridge between the experience and the core concepts by labeling the concepts, highlighting relationships, etc. Take the time to engage in such guided play with your children while thinking about the connections they are making. You'll be amazed!

Director's Corner: Critical Thinking

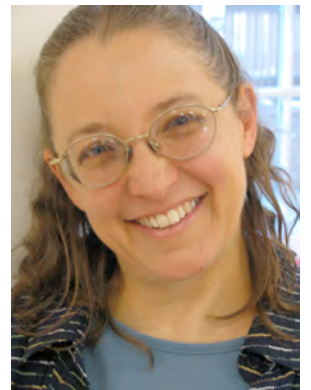
According to Ellen Galinsky in *Mind in the Making*, the fifth of “seven essential life skills every child needs” is **critical thinking**. Galinsky defines critical thinking as, “the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide our beliefs and actions” (p. 204). Critical thinking depends on the first four essential skills because one needs **focus and self-control** to keep the essential elements of the situation in view while avoiding defensiveness and easy answers in the search for solutions to our dilemmas, **making connections** while seeking alternate solutions, **perspective-taking** to consider how our alternatives might affect others, and **communication** when seeking information and working with others in the decision-making process. At the same time, critical thinking goes literally above and beyond these foundational skills because it requires “thinking about our thinking” by reflecting, analyzing, reasoning, planning, and evaluating” (p. 204). So-called “*metacognitive*” processes are essential for discerning which people and what messages to believe.



This skill is evident most clearly in the Children's School developmental objectives for discovery and exploration, which includes the positive, proactive and resourceful approaches to learning, together with the basic scientific method of questioning, predicting, observing, and explaining how the world works. By providing broad opportunities for exploration in life, earth, and physical science contexts, as well as in the social sciences and arts, plus occasions for more in-depth studies of interesting themes, we engage children's natural motivation to learn. Children begin very early in life by noticing patterns of evidence and using them to explain non-obvious causal relationships, such as what makes people happy or sad or what makes a worm move or a machine work. Fortunately, in terms of “naïve psychology”, children have innate biases that prepare them to pay attention to people's intentions and goals, so they quickly learn to cooperate with cooperative people and to ask for help from those who have been knowledgeable and helpful in the past. Research shows that even preschoolers categorize expertise such that they ask for help with people issues from those who they've seen to be good with people and for help with mechanical objects from those who have previously demonstrated knowledge of tools, vehicles, etc. Young children also know that people can make mistakes or might not know certain facts, but it takes longer for children to understand that people may have biased perspectives or be intentionally deceitful.

Preschoolers are naturally more curious and will spend more time exploring situations with non-obvious mechanisms, which can lead them to opportunities for learning critical thinking skills IF adults interacting with them respect their *Why?* questions. In these situations, **both parents and educators can intentionally** promote critical thinking by modeling effective inquiry processes as we help them find answers. Because of both attention and memory constraints, young children need our help to focus on the most important features of the evidence, to try varying just one aspect of the situation to gather new evidence, and to then interpret the pattern of evidence. At the same time, remember to let the child's interest lead and to gently guide with questions, such as, “What do you think would happen if ...?” You can also start helping children evaluate information quality, such as with rumors vs. reality or in product advertising, by asking, “How can we discover if this information is true?” Here again, modeling your own decision-making processes in the context of child-appropriate dilemmas, such as meal, gift, or activity choices, you'll help them learn that for most decisions there is more than one “right” answer, so there's value in weighing alternatives and considering their consequences. After pursuing the final choice, be sure to reflect on the outcome to best learn for future decisions.

Director's Corner: Taking on Challenges



Taking on challenges is the sixth of “seven essential life skills every child needs” according to Ellen Galinsky in *Mind in the Making*. Galinsky describes the essence of this skill as, “being proactive rather than reactive when difficulties arise” (p. 283). Once again, such a stance requires one to utilize the previously discussed five skills of **focus and self-control, making connections, perspective taking, communication, and critical thinking**. In addition, taking on challenges requires us to manage novel situations that are on the edge of our capacity to handle; that’s how we learn, stretch, excel – basically “rise to the challenge”. Children’s temperament biases them to be more reserved or more relaxed in new situations and to respond with high or low intensity, which means that they will take more or less time and need more or less support in order to effectively regulate their responses to manage the situation and return to their calm, comfortable state. The key for everyone is to be able to manage the stress of novel challenges both individually and with the support of caring others.

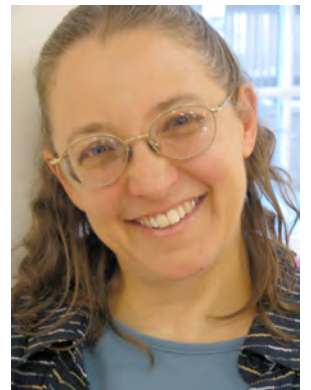
The skill of taking on challenges is evident in many aspects of the Children’s School developmental objectives, primarily because there are challenges in personal, social, cognitive, and physical development. We intentionally promote children’s ability to regulate their emotions, persist with a task, and to ask for help when they need it (i.e., rather than quitting, whining, crying, etc.). With respect to social challenges, we emphasize ways for children to appropriately stand up for their rights, deal with hurt feelings, manage winning and losing respectfully, etc. With respect to cognitive and physical challenges, we help the children practice learning from their mistakes, seeking multiple solutions, and applying solutions that they know from prior challenges to new situations – all while taking initiative and appropriate risks within the safe boundaries that we set for them.

During our recent Healthy Mind & Body unit, we talked explicitly with the children about ways to cope with challenging circumstances, including stress, anger, etc. We have noticed the children relaxing effectively by doing yoga, breathing deeply, making creative patterns in the Zen gardens, and choosing calming activities (such as those in the “peaceful room” at the Family Festival). As adults, we are often tempted to shield children from challenges and other stressors, but, in the long run, we serve them better by helping them learn to cope effectively in ways that fit their unique dispositions.

To help in that process, **both parents and educators can purposefully** model ways to take on challenges, while articulating our process in developmentally appropriate ways. “Wow, this task is harder than I thought ... I’m going to have to try again ... I’m getting frustrated, so I’m going to take a break for a minute ... then I’ll try it a different way or ask so and so to help me ... Look, I finally got it ... I’m glad I kept trying ... I love a challenge.” Galinsky reports research demonstrating that children fare best in challenging situations when adults take a calm and positive approach with only as much guidance as absolutely necessary. It’s also important to reinforce the value of children’s efforts so that they develop a **growth mindset**, rather than emphasizing their talents or intelligence. In studies where adults commented that children’s success meant that they were smart vs. that it meant that they had worked really hard, those given “intelligence” feedback subsequently chose easier tasks than those given “effort” feedback. They were also more likely to lie about their performance when asked to share their scores with others. Included with this newsletter is an article about a project that involved Children’s School parents pilot testing workshops to help them promote a growth mindset in their children. I look forward to hearing about your efforts to implement these ideas!

Director's Corner: Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

The final skill on Ellen Galinsky's list of "seven essential life skills every child needs" (Mind in the Making, 2010) is **self-directed, engaged learning**. All of parents' and teachers' educational efforts are geared toward children becoming motivated, lifelong learners who have mastered the other six life skills that support effective learning (focus and self-control, perspective taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, and taking on challenges).



Galinsky offers seven principles necessary for self-directed, engaged learning, each of which both parents and teachers can intentionally foster and collaboratively support.

- In the context of environments where young children experience safety, security, and appropriate structure, they are highly motivated to imitate adults and learn from their conversations, both of which accelerate their learning.
- Children are most engaged and self-directed when they are encouraged to identify goals that are meaningful to them and then to plan ways to meet those goals via exploration and discovery.
- Children cannot learn without remembering, and memory is best when young children have multiple direct experiences with concepts, both in verbal and visual forms, and in real-world contexts.
- Memory, language, and understanding all benefit from adult support to elaborate and extend children's experiences in ways that challenge them to appropriately stretch their capabilities.
- Long-term retention and application of what children learn depends on their practicing and explaining new concepts and skills in ways that help them consolidate and generalize them.
- In order to focus their learning, children need clear expectations, guidance in utilizing their strengths to improve on weaknesses, and affirmation for efforts toward mastery rather than innate intelligence.
- Finally, children learn best from parents and teachers who are themselves learning more about children and about learning, from adults who are practicing what they are preaching, and from leaders who involve children in contributing to the learning community from the beginning.

As we prepare to celebrate Teacher Appreciation Day, I share my gratitude for the amazing team of lifelong learners who create the warm and caring learning environment that we offer to researchers, university students, children, families, practicing and pre-service teachers. I appreciate the opportunity to share the learning journey with you all, value the ways that you support and challenge my learning, and eagerly anticipate the new adventures ahead.



Though the school year ends for our students in mid-May, our educators have 8 days of professional development time to reflect on their progress and document their program characteristics according to the NAEYC standards of excellence, as well as explore the themes for the upcoming school year. The staff also begins working two weeks before the students return in the fall. We spend time in seminars targeted to areas the staff flagged for improvement, in refresher courses related to health and safety, and in collaborative groups planning thematic units and other program enhancements. The summer months offer the opportunity for both educators and parents to read more about children's development, perhaps starting with **Mind in the Making**. Feel free to share interesting resources with me as you discover them!