

*democratic life skills* are social-emotional capacities that children need to be prepared for. As a teacher, Dan is the author of *The Power of Guidance, A Guidance Approach for What the Kids Said Today*. Society: How Guidance Teaches Young Children Democratic Life Skills,

the ramps again." Wyatt has quieted, listening to Jen, but cries again.

Jen says to Wyatt, "It looks like you aren't done with the ramps. Do you want to put them someplace where you can get them at work time?" Wyatt walks away carrying one ramp. Still holding Atreyu's hand, Jen takes the other ramp and says, "Let's go with Wyatt to help him find a place for the ramps." Jen and Atreyu walk together, holding the second ramp. The three put the ramps in a special place until work time. Atreyu still looks sad. Wyatt goes on to the next activity.

Later, during work time, both Wyatt and Atreyu play with the ramps, using cars then balls. Wyatt enjoys the activity nonstop for 40 minutes. Atreyu smiles for the first time that morning when his car goes down the ramp. When a third child, Mark, later takes Atreyu's ball, Jen coaches Atreyu to say, "That's my ball." Mark gives Atreyu his ball back, and Jen asks Atreyu if he can help Mark find his own ball. Atreyu nods and goes with Mark to find a second ball.

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The first democratic life skill has two parts: finding an acceptable place as a member of the group and finding oneself as a worthy person. In young children, the two are closely linked. Within the family group, through secure attachments with one or more family members, the child feels safe and loved. With basic safety needs met, infants feel worthy and face new experiences with a sense of trust. The same dynamic applies in early child-

agan and Reid (2009) suggest that additional resources, including those kinds the Yale study called for, still are greatly needed. This means that in many programs, teachers would be dealing with the behaviors shown in the vignette—commonly called “challenging”—on their own, without support. (Atreyu had experienced trauma before he and his mother came to this community and was dealing with the aftermath on a daily basis. Jen reports that this was a typical day for both boys.)

In programs attuned to developmentally appropriate practice, and with adequate support for a teaching staff (as in Jen’s class), teachers help children like Wyatt and Atreyu with democratic life skill 1 every day. But due to the resource issues indicated, along with pressures to get preschool children ready for the academic and behavioral expectations of public schools (Rose 2004; Wolk 2008), some preschools would consider these two boys to be liabilities, and they might fall into psychological, and perhaps physical, rejection (Gilliam 2005).

Tyre (2009) and Gurian and Stevens (2004) suggest reasons that a new education gender gap disfavoring boys tends to start in the early childhood years: Most preschool boys do not have the sensory integration and task-persistence skills of most young girls. Many boys are geared for active/interactive learning experiences, involving big body movement on a sustained basis (Carlson 2011). In reaction to an emphasis on narrowly defined academic achievement prevalent nationally at the K–12 levels (Wolk 2008), some preschools feel pressure to emphasize “readiness” skills such as following directions, listening and responding in large groups, and doing extended seatwork.

Adults in these preschools may be influenced toward a skewed interpretation of developmentally appropriate practice, as pertaining to most children in the class but not to those unable to master the emphasized skills (Wolk 2008). Rather than look for reasons these children cannot master the skills,

preschool personnel may dismiss them as “not ready” for their programs.

Nelson and Shikwambi (2010) make the case that male teachers, since they were once boys themselves, may be intuitively responsive to young boys with respect to developmental characteristics, activity levels, curriculum adaptations, and patterns of conflict. Johnson (2008) makes the case that more male teachers at all levels would benefit both boys and girls.

But this is not to say (in any way) that many female teachers do not relish having active young boys in their classes. They do, and they adjust their curriculum and responses accordingly—just as Jen did. To help all children find a place in the classroom and see themselves as worthy individuals (particularly young boys), educators of both genders need to bring classrooms into the twenty-first century (Thomas & Seely Brown 2011).

To this end I suggest the following:

- Readiness is a state of mind, more than a state of knowledge.
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