Principles of Early Childhood Education

adapted from Lillian Katz

1) Activities should be culturally relevant. Children should first be acquainted with their own cultures and then made aware of other cultures. Education should help children make sense of their world.

2) Activities for young children should first be horizontally relevant, which means that what they learn is useful to the child today, as opposed to vertically relevant, which means that it will have use for the child at some future time.

3) Educators must be concerned not only with knowledge and skills, but also with feelings and dispositions toward learning. It makes no sense to teach a child the skills of reading if, at the same time, he/she decides never to read again.

4) Curriculum must address knowledge and skills, but also feelings and dispositions toward learning.

5) The Damaged Disposition Hypothesis states that if we teach too early, too intently and too abstractly, the children will learn at the expense of the disposition to ever use what they have learned.

6) Just because children can do something does not necessarily mean that they should.

7) Whenever we force children to behave as if they understand something that they, in fact, do not, we undermine their faith in their own thinking processes.

8) Teach children how to tell you when they do not understand something and teach them that it is OK not to understand things.

9) If you teach children how to tell you that they do not understand something, some children will abuse it. If you do not teach that, many will not understand and you will never know it. You need to "choose the error" which does the less damage.

10) Just because children want to do something is not sufficient reason for them to do it. Enjoyment is a side effect of good teaching - not a goal.

11) The younger children are the more they learn through interaction and first hand experience.

12) The younger children are, the more important it is to have them apply skills in a meaningful context.

Questions to ask when designing an activity for children:
1) What else could they be doing?
2) Does the activity help them look at and understand their world?
3) Does the activity engage the children's minds?