

what are the core elements of your curriculum?

Chris Sciarrino, *Director of Curriculum and Product Development, HighReach Learning*

Who among us can resist the joy seen in a child's eye after he has just made a new discovery? Or the delight we witness as a satisfied child sighs and says, "There, I did it!" after persisting and accomplishing a challenging endeavor? Early childhood professionals relish these moments because they indicate a part of the wondrous process of a young child's learning. Curriculum is what we *do* and *how we are* with children *all day, every day*.

Thoughts about early childhood curriculum vary from those who 'create their own' to those who implement the approaches and theories proven to be sound and appropriate for young children. Recent years have given rise to new discussions and ways to refine (become more *intentional* about) *HOW* we interact — all day, every day with children! What is good for young children is at the heart of what we do — developing the knowledge and skills that enable them to be eager learners, poised for a lifetime of fun and learning.

High-quality curriculum provides opportunity for active exploration and discovery, creating powerful, positive interactions focused on the joy of learn-

ing. The joy of learning may be explained as qualities or approaches enabling children to become enthusiastic and competent navigators on the world's stage. We see this joy when children are involved with curriculum that provides opportunities for *five essentials*:

- developing curiosity and wonder
- learning and playfully using lots of language (understanding, using verbal/non-verbal methods)
- making meaning of the environment (how does it work, what does it do, what can I do with it, what else have I seen like this, etc.?)
- building relationships
 - with responsive, trusted adults
 - with peers
 - sense of self (emotional self; self-regulation)
- moving to integrate body and mind

Create a thriving, active learning environment by ensuring your curriculum address these five essentials!

Curry Ander, *SPIRALS Early Reading First, Belfast, Maine*

■ **Joy** — If the joy is there, so is the learning, the community, the safety (hopefully), all of it. Joy too often is missing from our classrooms and child care homes, and with its return, along with joyful outdoor play, the learning is richer, deeper, and well, JOYFUL!

Nancy Gagnon, *Sunrise Children's Center, Amherst, New Hampshire*

■ **Acceptance** — Because we are an *inclusionary* center with children of all abilities, we find that the children and families have come to expect that all children will be included in all activities. Children with disabilities play alongside their typically developing peers and friendships made at our school often last through high school and beyond. The children understand that we are all different — some of us wear glasses, some need help with reading — but we can all be friends and help each other.

Rebecca Hines, *Houston, Texas*

■ **Love** — Love has to be at the core of all programs for children and families. It must be the quality that motivates and permeates all work with and for children. Love for the child must be unconditional. The child must sense this from his teachers. Children learn to love when they are loved. Our actions toward children and families must touch the heart whenever possible. If there is not love, our labors might well be in vain.

B. L. Buddy Fish, *emotional intelligence, Jackson, Mississippi*

■ **Emotional Literacy** — The constructs of emotional intelligences are as follows:

Enhance emotional literacy, recognizing patterns of behavior, applying consequential thinking, navigating emotions, engaging intrinsic motivation, exercising optimism, increasing empathy, and pursuing noble goals. We transmit these goals to children using an authentic approach, through play, in the curriculum. They have been proven much more important than intellect in living a successful life.

Bev Schairer, *Castle Hill Academy, Medfield, Massachusetts*

■ **Nature** — Our school is located on 7 acres and includes a nature trail, a water area, a grassy field, and beautiful playground areas. We feel very fortunate to have this outdoor classroom to share with our students. Nature and all that it has to offer with the change of seasons, life cycles of plants and animals, and opportunities for motor development, to name a few, are an integral part of our daily curriculum.

Cheryl Tremblay, *Cheryl's Child Care (FCC Home), Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

■ **Curiosity** — My child care home has three main play areas — the playroom, the sunroom (art, computer, and table toys), and the yard. Equipment in all these areas are constantly changing and evolving depending on the ages and interests of the children in care at the time. I never tell the children when I've changed something — I wait for them to discover it. Some of the children make 'let's find what changed' their first activity each day.

Jeri Finch, *Learning Way School and Daycare, Seattle, Washington*

■ **Peace Making** — Our children are encouraged to handle their own disagreements. We help them with the words that express their feelings, but allow them to act on them within safe boundaries. Children have the same rights as adults to choose who to be with, share with, and fight with.

The adult in the room is the facilitator, not the referee or judge and jury. By the time the children are four, they are making choices that allow them to work together, both giving and taking in their relationships.

Elizabeth Oskin, *Community College of Allegheny County South Campus, West Mifflin, Pennsylvania*

■ **Security** — Security is a vital component of our child development program. When a child feels safe and secure in his/her environment, growth and development rates increase. A sense of security encourages children to explore the world around them. When children explore, then learning naturally occurs. With security comes a feeling of acceptance of the child for who they are, which is also a vital element for growth and development.

Amy Brandon, *The Ohio State University Child Care Program, Columbus, Ohio*

■ **Critical Thinking** — The Ohio State University Child Care Program has its foundation in research that shows play is the primary way young children develop concepts and understanding about the world. In response to their observations and experiences obtained through play, children develop the critical thinking skills needed to make evaluations and decisions and to take charge of their thinking for life.

Ammilou, *Preschool, Shenzhen, China*

■ **Involvement** — Involvement is in the heart of learning. When the teachers and children are engaged in an activity, both are learning. Involvement is what keeps the process going and continuing. It leads one to search for more . . . what lies beyond what is in front of us? When children are involved, they are not only passive recipients of knowledge or information, but they also transmit data or information through observation and their reaction.

Jennifer, *Ventura College Child Development, Ventura, California*

■ **Problem Solving** — Today's children will be solving such things as the water and oil shortage and pollution problems of the future. They need many opportunities to think critically, to try out their ideas, and to construct their own knowledge. They need intentional teachers who say, "Tell me your idea" or "Can you think of a way you could solve your problem?"

J. Humphryes, *Head Start, Lakewood, Colorado*

■ **Relationship** — Establishing/maintaining relationship is critical to curriculum. Research shows that the brain's higher learning centers cannot develop without nurturing relationships. Ensuring that adults with children are fully supported allows them to fully support children. This entails offering teachers the opportunities to be fully present with the children, avoiding over-focus on tasks, so that they can be fully responsive to children and meet their spontaneously developing needs.

Susan Sechrist-Ludwig, *Great Expectations, Newberg, Oregon*

■ **Children's Autonomy** — We plan our environment, curriculum, and policies with an intentional focus on children's autonomy. We believe that children have the right and ability to partner with their adult educators. We believe that they will thrive in a safe place where they have significant time to make choices, participate fully in routine care and classroom activities, opportunities to express their emotions and creativity, encouragement that is free from external judgement, and nurturing, interactive relationships.

Mary Hynes-Berry, *Teacher Educator, Chicago, Illinois*

■ **Play** — Play encapsulates so many of the critical elements: it is intentional and engaging; it is rooted in wonder and joy; involves cooperation, communication, language, and listening. Play is profoundly a problem-solving activity. Teachers who attend to children's play use it as a

guideline to emergent curriculum. They recognize that play fosters persistence and curiosity. To echo Piaget, when we put play at the center of the curriculum, we respect the essence of children's work.

HighScope Educational Research

Core Elements of Your Curriculum

- 1 Child-centered
- 2 Play
- 3 Problem solving
- 4 Respect
- 5 Creativity
- 6 Community
- 7 Independence
- 8 Curiosity
- 9 Love of learning
- 10 Relationship
- 11 Cooperation
- 12 Self-confidence
- 13 Language
- 14 Joy
- 15 Nature; Natural environments
- 16 Environment; Indoor/outdoor environments
- 17 Fun
- 18 Conflict resolution
- 19 Child-directed
- 20 Choice
- 21 Imagination
- 22 Acceptance
- 23 Intentionality
- 24 Flexibility
- 25 Safe
- 26 Self-regulation
- 27 Spiritual growth
- 28 Wonder
- 29 DAP
- 30 Teacher-child interaction
- 31 Child observation system
- 32 Social-emotional part
- 33 Attachment
- 34 Emergent
- 35 Active learning
- 36 Research-based
- 37 Competency
- 38 Collaboration
- 39 Persistence
- 40 Interaction
- 41 Friendship
- 42 Sensory
- 43 Family-centered
- 44 Valuing diversity
- 45 Trust
- 46 Resiliency
- 47 Caring

Foundation, Ypsilanti, Michigan

■ **Active Children/Active Teachers** — In an effective early childhood classroom, children and adults are purposefully engaged together in play and learning. Neither is 'in charge.' Instead *adult-child interactions* are characterized by shared control. Teachers encourage children's initiatives, and *intentionally scaffold* — support and extend — the knowledge and skills they are acquiring.

Organized classroom and daily routine.

The *physical setting* and a *consistent daily routine* provide the predictability for children to carry out activities independently and feel secure taking on new challenges. Teachers divide the classroom into defined play spaces, stocking each with diverse, open-ended materials that appeal to children of different abilities and developmental levels. The structure of the day's routine allows for a variety of individual and group experiences.

Curriculum Content — While the first two factors define *how* to teach, the curriculum's content defines the *what* — the skills, knowledge, and concepts children develop. Curriculum content should be comprehensive, covering all key areas such as literacy, mathematics, social-emotional development, physical development, and the arts. It should also be *integrated*, that is, recognize that early learning is connected and cannot be segmented into discrete topics or units.

Ongoing Planning and Assessment — Children's progress and program quality are systematically monitored with validated assessment tools. Teachers and supervisors together document program strengths, identify areas for improvement, and develop an appropriate professional development plan. Children are regularly observed to record their needs and interests, and teachers make daily plans to support the development of individual children and the class as a whole.

Training — Systematic and ongoing

training is built around a consistent curriculum model. The same principles of 'active learning' in children are applied to professional development for adults. All staff participate in hands-on training that includes child development information and appropriate teaching strategies. They try out ideas, share and reflect, and support one another.

Kimberly Krause, Tri Valley Migrant Head Start, Monticello, Minnesota

■ **Trust** — Trust is vital to any program that intends to achieve any of the other elements. Without trust, children cannot go on to develop their full potential. There will always be a part of them held in reserve when they go to explore, discover, and experience the joy of accomplishment if they are not confident that they can trust the environment and people around them . . . to understand, support, encourage, and challenge.

Mary Miller, Newark Campus Child Development Center, Newark, Ohio

■ **Respect** — Respect is the core of our curriculum; respect for the children, families, and staff in our center, as well as respect for other cultures and our environment. We believe children learn best when we respect their developmental stage, their interests, and their needs. They learn to respect others when the adults in their lives model respect for each other and the children. Children learn to respect and care for the environment when they have lots of opportunities to play and explore outside.

Debbie Ravacon, MCCC Children's Center, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania

■ **Intrinsic Motivation** — Children are born eager to learn. Our role is to provide an environment which feeds that — where children are encouraged to explore and be curious; where they feel safe and loved; where they can learn about their emotions and gain social skills.

Andy Barrett, MacArthur ES, Albuquerque, New Mexico

■ **Service** — Service can be to the school, to the students, their families, the staff and to the greater community, however large or however that is defined. It is important to have formal service activities planned (school and community clean-up days, canned food drives, etc.), but it is even more important that it be a defining value in the work you do. Through modeling and designing service activities, children can learn that value.

Bevette Irvis, *Family Services Morningsong Early Learning Center, Seattle, Washington*

■ **Social Emotional Development** — Social emotional development is at the heart of the curriculum at Morningsong, as we prepare the children to have success in kindergarten when they get to elementary school. All the children served by the program are homeless and many have witnessed domestic violence in their homes. Healthy relationships will help the children to feel nurtured, safe, and secure while their families are experiencing a very difficult time in their lives.

Joanne Monastiere, *Head Start, Bozeman, Montana*

■ **Attachment** — This element is so important because it builds the foundation for future relationships the child will have. To trust another, ask for help, make friends, and be a friend are just a few of the basic skills we teach children. So many children come to us scared, neglected, and abused. I feel attachment is just the beginning of a healthy social/emotional child.

Lori Thames, *Project Hope Children's Center, Dorchester, Massachusetts*

■ **Self-Esteem** — When a child has good self-esteem, you are able to help them to build upon their own self-worth in regards to others. Children with good self-esteem can confront conflict with a different set of coping skills than that of a child who feels uncertain of their own

ideas or accomplishments. Our goal is to provide a safe, nurturing environment that allows children to question and discover the world around them while feeling proud and assured of the part they play in it.

Liisa Hale, *BlueSkies for Children, Oakland, California*

■ **Respect** — Teachers respect the developmental process of each child. Teachers respect the ability of each child to construct his own learning. Teachers respect the process of learning, which will include mistakes. Teachers respect the strengths and skills of parents and co-workers. Children living in this model of respect learn to respect themselves and others.

Jan Cottrell, *Ark Angels Preschool/CC, Richland, Michigan*

■ **Character Traits for Future Successes** — Why shouldn't we incorporate these character traits into our curriculum? As educators who take this seriously, isn't it our responsibility to teach the children life long skills to be successful citizens of society? Educators should be aware of the future needs of our students and teach them these skills necessary for success as young children, young adolescents, and ultimately adults.

Sandra Duncan, *HighReach Learning Inc., Schererville, Indiana*

■ **Aesthetics** — While visiting the Reggio Emilia centres, I was fascinated with the children's bathrooms — they were spaces of beauty, places for interaction and intentionality, and seem to be considered an extension (or perhaps part) of the classroom. When you consider most children's bathrooms in the United States, they are places for 'getting a job done' and are singularly purposed. In Reggio Emilia, the bathroom seems to be considered another place to be in the classroom. They were designed for many purposes: reading a book, bathing babydolls, meeting friends, playing with funnels and scoops, washing rocks, and checking yourself out in the mirror. There were flickering candles, prisms bouncing in the sunlight, open windows letting in

the smell of freshly mowed grass, freshly cut flower buds in glass vases and bowls, and a delicate glass mobile that made beautiful sounds when the wind caught it. Reggio Emilia honors conversations and relationships — and they extend this commitment into the bathrooms. What can early childhood practitioners learn from their commitment? Perhaps we can just begin with a small step by putting a beautiful rose in a vase and setting it on the top of the toilet tank. Least we worry about breakage and everything that is associated with glass, however, the vase will probably end up being plastic . . . but at least it is a start.

Josh Thompson, *Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, Texas*

■ **Wonder** — "The world is full of a number of things . . ." So goes the poem, *The Happy Thought*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. The young child is innately drawn toward the world of wonder, and she needs a guide, an expert, a more adept peer to guide her explorations and inquiries. As long as we adults do the telling and showing, that sense of inquiry tends to shut down. As soon as we join the child in exploring, then the wonder explodes, expands, encompasses us both! Isn't it wonderful!?!?

Rachel Denee, *Daisies Early Education & Care Centre, Wellington, New Zealand*

■ **Investigation** — Investigation is a strong driver of teaching and learning for both adults and children. Children wonder about the world around them, and then they investigate. Adults wonder about the learning environment they provide, and then they investigate. "Why does that happen?" "What happens when . . . ?" Adults support children's investigations, and hopefully get carried along for the ride. Children's learning is deep and meaningful when it begins with their own thinking and questions.

Franceyn O'Connor, *Early Years of Primary School, Sydney, Australia*

■ **Spirituality** — The early learner is a spiritual being, with a natural capacity

for curiosity, imagination, and wonder. Imagination is the creative force which is particularly active in the early learner allowing them to create meaning, to integrate, to see the whole. Through the “I wonder” question framework, the early learner is encouraged to search for his/her own answer, to create meaning, and explore possibilities.

Dr. Raina Jain, *Pre-Primary, Mumbai, India*

■ **Project-Based Learning** — By project-based or hands-on learning, I mean that when children are taught about the life cycle of a plant, for example, they are asked to bring seeds and watch it germinate in their small pot. It just makes a lot of difference, as children can actually see and understand what exactly is being taught.

Peggy Ashbrook, *Preschool Science, Alexandria, Virginia*

■ **Experience Materials** — Having experience with diverse materials such as water, stones, paint, wood, wax, ice, art foam, paper, cooking ingredients, foil, bubbles, sand, soil, living plants and animals, wool, feathers, etc., educates children in the way the natural world is constructed. When children touch, smell, mix, observe, and/or care for these materials or things, they become ready to learn more about how things are grown or made, mix together, and change — all part of science learning in later years.

Zvia Dover, *TriBeCa Community School, New York, New York*

■ **Democracy** — The bigger picture of our program is to support children as active contributors in a democratic society. As a strategy, we embrace conflicts: Children are encouraged to discuss conflicts as an opportunity to learn from and negotiate with peers, while teachers deliberately avoid ‘jumping in’ with a pre-determined solution. Towards the end of the school year, our 2-year-old group finally established the

Constitution of Room #1: no biting, no knocking down buildings, no grabbing toys. These rules were set by the children, after instances of such conflicts occurred. We avoid entertaining/voting on meaningless topics that are common in many preschools such as how many like yellow vs. red, which carry little or no meaningful conflict to negotiate.

Cathryn Harvey, *BRIGANCE Product Manager, Curriculum Associates*

There are a variety of factors that play a pivotal role in nurturing a child’s growth and future academic success. Growing and refining children’s language development, literacy skills, mathematics skills, and social and emotional skills are essential for any preschool curriculum to prepare children for kindergarten. Educators have a wealth of strategies to teach and promote the above skills to students in a natural setting. A key to creating an early childhood curriculum is to keep it fun and playful for children. The attention span of young children is short and requires lots of hands-on manipulatives that allow children to play independently, and when older, with other children.

Colorful books and classroom readers that provide a variety of pictures with short sentences of four to eight syllables allow children to learn to repeat sentences, show color recognition, and learn picture vocabulary. Look for books that provide the opportunity to learn number concepts while reading. You can also create books for students with pictures of objects from either home or classroom to continue the language acquisition process. As students reach age three and four you can add books that include lower and upper case letters to help develop early literacy and print awareness.

By assessing students when they first arrive at a school, and then conducting ongoing assessments throughout the year, educators can address issues early

on and differentiate instruction even at these young ages. It is the educator’s responsibility to challenge students to learn new skills through targeted instruction designed to expand a student’s knowledge and development. By screening and continued reassessment for these skills, educators are given the data necessary to individualize instruction for every student.

Deborah Sheely, *formerly of Tabitha Intergenerational Center, Lincoln, Nebraska* ■

■ **Reciprocity** — I came to understand this word from my teacher, Dr. Edwards. I believe we ALL have a deep need to give back. I believe children need to not just be given TO, but to also to be allowed to GIVE. The idea of reciprocity is so critical to young and old, that I see its absence as being capable of producing pathology. The role of the teacher, in my opinion is to facilitate, to provide opportunities, maybe guide . . . but not direct.

Florie Reber, *Creative Learning, Tampa Florida*

■ **Relationship** — I focus my curriculum on relationship, primarily because I think this is lacking in many children’s lives and is a key area of knowledge for our future together on this planet. One of our primary needs as humans is to connect, to have a relationship. Children’s attempts to connect, to build relationships, is what drives much ‘misbehavior,’ and when a teacher can address this primary need first, she will find she has more time for teaching and the children more time for learning.

Alice Gess, *Reach for the Stars & All Hooked on Phonics, Holyoke, Massachusetts*

■ **One-on-One Learning** — I am a child care provider and I offer one-on-one direct instruction. It’s beneficial to children. They leave day care knowing how to read, write, draw, speak in two languages (Spanish & French), and simple math. These programs revealed some early LD.

Michelle Bassler, *Early Head Start, Monroe, North Carolina*

■ **Social and Emotional** — We provide social and emotional and developmental for our children ranging from 0-3 years. As they grow they become self efficient, sociable, and trustworthy to adults in the program. As young babies they are learning to walk, explore, and share with their little peers. They are learning to eat and feed themselves and become more independent. The curious stage is exciting to them because they can learn and play at the same time.

Parris Rice-Sanders, *Laparade Early Learning Center, Euclid, Ohio*

■ **Play** — Play with a purpose. What is meant by this element being a primer for our curriculum is that we believe children learn through play and their zone of proximal development is nurtured through constructive play. We have zones in our center and the zones are an intentional co-teacher for us when children are engaged in them throughout their preschool day. Play materials in the zones are purposefully placed and an atmosphere of ‘touch to teach’ is encouraged with all their experiences

Martha Garner-Duhe, *Title I PreK, Jeanerette, Louisiana*

■ **Nature** — It is extremely important to help young children connect with and understand the natural world. I take advantage of their curiosity to build science lessons that are integrated across the curriculum. Our outdoor science classroom is building children who love and respect the world around them, and will be good stewards of the Earth in the future.

Tanya Waymire, *ABEKA + Our Own, Houston, Texas*

■ **Respect for Others** — A curriculum is only as good as the discipline of the instructor. Recognizing how to draw critical thinking out of a child is essential. Asking lots of questions. Having the child respond. Informing the child

of what is real and what is not real and then asking the child more questions to see how the information has translated to them. This is part of our curriculum and develops better behavior, friendship, respect for others, and people who can think for themselves.

Lazetta Farnham, *Richland Child Development Center, Decatur, Illinois*

■ **Problem Solving** — If children are encouraged to solve their own conflicts and encouraged to make decisions, they will feel empowered and be more prepared for their future. Adults are not always going to be available as the children become older, so it is essential that they can solve problems themselves. We constantly refer to the story of “Tucker Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think,” which teaches children about remaining calm during frustrating situations and then think of options of how to solve the problem.

I sold my school four years ago and am now an assistant professor of ECE; however, I am still an advocate for beauty in the environment. Beauty both indoors and out fills the heart and mind of children and adults. Awareness and attention to detail in our world must become intrinsic. Whether it is fresh flowers adorning the lunch table, a lace doily placed under baskets of materials, or beautifully arranged artwork the message is, “I care, I honor you, I respect you.”

Lisa Ranfos, *Child and Family Development Center, Concord, New Hampshire*

■ **Intentionality** — Intentionality is a core component of our program. Teachers are intentional observers of young children, using these observations to plan for the environment, individual and groups of children, and adults. Each day, teacher reflection is integrated into each invitation that is offered for the children to ensure that each is intentional in its presentation and rationale. We believe that if there is no reason

for an invitation to exist that benefits children and/or adults, why do it?

Betsy Hoople, *Hopmeadow Nursery School, Simsbury, Connecticut*

■ **Community Building** — We are purposeful in our efforts to promote community building. We collect family photos and assemble class albums, sing to classmates who are absent, and welcome them back with a song upon their return. At our morning meetings we greet each other in song and share news from home. We have an annual pajama party for families, encourage parent involvement in the classroom, and get involved in the wider community by holding canned goods drives and collecting old sneakers for recycling.

Cindy Shillinger, *Charlestown Play-House, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania*

■ **Acceptance** — We believe that all children have gifts to share. It is only through accepting children that we are able to discover their gifts with them and their parents and nurture them. Recently, we have had children in the program with challenging behaviors. By accepting and loving these children through the difficult times, we are given and we give the gift of connection, respect (both for ourselves as educators and for the children and their parents who have many challenges to face), and community.

Shauna Schmidt, *Little Inspirations Childcare Center LLC, Appleton, Wisconsin*

■ **Curiosity** — When developing my curriculum, I try to find subjects that will pique the children’s curiosity and make them want to explore. It is critical that the children get involved and I like projects that are hands on, that they can take home and share with the family. If you can get the families involved along with the curriculum, that also makes the projects and learning more fun for the whole group.

Jane, *Daycare Quality Monitor, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada*

■ **Play** — Children learn all important life skills through play. However, in order for children to learn through play, many other aspects need to be present. Children need to feel safe in order to play and learn. It is a basic, fundamental need for all of us. Secondly, children learn best when their environment is developmentally appropriate. The teacher must be able to be flexible and offer an emergent learning environment.

Sandra Duncan, *Learning Care Group, Schererville, Indiana*

■ **Listening** — “Listening means that we recognize that we are not the truth, but only a point of view” — Carla Rinaldi, Reggio Children, April 21, 2009. Listening is sensitivity to each other. Sensitivity to differences, sameness, points of view, existence. We exist because others listen.

Lisa Jones, *MATC Child and Family Center, Madison, Wisconsin*

■ **Curiosity** — I work with two year olds and feel that so much of this world is new to them. I want to expose them to all the wonderful things their world has to offer without fear or bias. One example is snow. We live in Wisconsin so snow is a big part of our world. Some of the children I serve are from other countries and some are born right here, but whatever brings us to our classroom, snow is something we all have in common.

Nancy Shedroff, *Infant & Toddler Program Director, West Chester, Ohio*

■ **Sense of Safety** — I believe that children need to feel safe in their environment in order to learn. A sense of security is crucial for children, they must trust their caregiver and environment so that they may reach out for the opportunity to grow.

Florence Burdeny, *Dauphin School-Age Day Care Inc., Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada*

■ **Independence** — Our school-agers are growing up and developing independence. Our program tries to instill the skills promoting independence — self care taking: dressing, food choices, cleanliness and health; making appropriate decisions based on previous supervised guidance, even when under duress from peers; and successfully managing their own behaviours and responses — whatever may come — so that their adults can trust them to be alone after school — INDEPENDENT.

Leslie Slan, *Ohr Kodesh Early Childhood Center, Chevy Chase, Maryland*

■ **Sense of Belonging** — One of our core values is the sense of belonging. The children and families feel very welcome and comfortable in our school. This can be seen and felt by everyone who is part of our school community and in the environment which includes photos of the children and their families and through documentation of the children’s learning experiences which includes their words.

Anne-Marie Boveri Schlemmer, *The Learning Centers of Dr. Phillips and South Park, Orlando, Florida*

■ **Caring** — I believe that caring is at the base of all we do. If a teacher cares, building relationships with the children, the staff, and parents will happen fast. A positive experience will evolve, children will learn, and parents will collaborate. If parents care, they will learn what to do to help their child and appreciate what the teacher does for their child. From caring stems love, compassion, positive experience, proficiency, growth, learning, and many more elements of a good curriculum.

Kathy Hughes, *LittleSprouts Inc., Methuen, Massachusetts*

■ **Intentionality** — Our curriculum is designed with a purpose in mind. That is, to move each child toward their next step learning goal. We do that by knowing each child and planning activities to

build upon their learning. Our developmentally appropriate activities are engaging, fun, and purposeful!

Jean Nathanson, *Country Children’s Center, Yorktown Heights, New York*

■ **Responsive** — We pride ourselves on being good listeners of children and their families. We respond with a ‘can do’ attitude instead of being adverse-rial. The only two elements we feel we need to discuss with parents is developmentally appropriate experiences for children and safety issues.

Betsy, *Little Friends Child Care Center, Belchertown, Massachusetts*

■ **Fun** — Children need to just be and have tons of fun along the way, without all the pressure of adults trying to over-organize their lives with an overloaded, overscheduled list of activities they must do.

Soukeyna Boye Spivey, *Abyssinian Head Start, New York, New York*

■ **Intentionality** — Educators in implementing a curriculum and planning classroom activities have to consistently ask themselves why I am doing what I am doing, what is the desired impact on the children. This approach should be adopted by teachers as well as administrators to ensure that young children are adequately prepared to face the challenges of an increasingly more interconnected world in the 21st century

Elizabeth Page, *Falls Church-McLean Children’s Center, Falls Church, Virginia*

■ **Self-Regulation** — We feel that it is important for children to get guidance with learning to manage their emotions and behavior. We do this by giving them language to describe their feelings and strategies for dealing with anger, frustration, disappointment, excitement, fear, and sadness, among others. We also let them know that it is okay to have these feelings, okay to talk about them.

Naomi Black, *The Yellow School, Houston, Texas*

■ **Play** — Through play, children have the opportunity to explore, experiment, create, problem solve, cooperate, self-regulate, and more. Too many children lead overscheduled lives, are involved in too many activities in which someone tells them what to do and when and how to do it. Many of these activities are not developmentally appropriate (team sports for 3's and 4's). It's important to make give kids lots of play opportunities so they can learn how capable, creative, and resourceful they really are.

Christine Shebish, *Sonshine Child Development Center, Lititz, Pennsylvania*

■ **Teacher-Child Relationships** — At Sonshine, we realize that loving relationships between the teachers and children are vital for growing and learning. Research shows that the development of trust and attachment begins with infants and continues throughout childhood. Children need a loving, trusting, supportive relationship with adults — teachers. When this need is met, they are then able to grow and learn in other areas.

Darlene Swartz, *Black Hills State University, Spearfish, South Dakota*

■ **Curriculum** —

C ommunity/culture
U niqueness
R espect for self, others, property
R esponsibility
I ndependence
C reativity/curiosity
U nderstanding & solving problems
L anguage
U nits for learning
M athematical process/projects

Pamela Bell, *University of North Florida Child Development Research Center, Jacksonville, Florida*

■ **Social Emotional** — Unless children can learn to calm themselves, have empowerment, compassion, have a sense of belonging, learn to make good choices, and respect consequences, they will not be successful. This means the curricu-

lum needs to help teachers learn how to make an environment that is supportive of these skills for the children. Teacher training often focuses on the three Rs and misses this skill building component.

Angel Stoddard, *UW Oshkosh Head Start, Oshkosh, Wisconsin*

■ **Adult-Child Interaction** — Our focus on adult-child interactions offers an environment where control is shared. We encourage adults to form authentic relationships with children by sharing their interests with children, responding attentively to children's interests, and giving specific feedback that focuses on strengths. We promote a supportive environment that encourages children to pursue their own interests and ideas. Adults see children's behavior in terms of development so they become trusting and independent.

Debbie Frazier, *Greene Street Daycare, Piqua, Ohio*

■ **Choice** — We are a center that believes all types of curriculum have good points and we take bits from all of them. We give children choice with instruction. The themes come from the child interest. Each teacher is given what must be covered for the year (such as letters, number, shapes, etc.). The staff then plans their curriculum around the time of year or season and incorporates the concepts that need to be introduced to the children making sure that all content standards are being met.

Kathy Mikkelsen, *Gateway Academy Early Learning Center, Littleton, Colorado*

■ **Environment** — We've spent many hours examining the our school's entire environment. We paid attention to both the indoor and outdoor spaces, adding and enriching each with materials and equipment challenge, excite and arouse a sense of wonder in all children. We've attempted to follow the children's lead; so what they're interested in, so are we. One child's curiosity about volca-

noes led to two weeks of eruptions of all sorts: exploding colas, baking soda volcanoes (both indoors and out), and so much more.

Lyle Greenman, Ph.D., *First Class at UUCSR, Manhasset, New York*

■ **Autonomy** — Our program facilitates autonomy by allowing and respecting children's choices. As children become comfortable making choices, they develop confidence and self esteem.

Kristin Gould, *Bowdoin College Children's Center, Brunswick, Maine*

■ **Opportunities** — It is important to create many opportunities for children to master and then practice their skills and to feel that they have been allowed to explore fully the activities presented. This is how children build competence, which then fosters self-confidence and success. It also allows children to fail without closing the door on their opportunity to build competence.

Marsha Tannehill, *USD #383 Early Head Start, Manhattan, Kansas*

■ **Roles for Adults** — Staff and parents work together to identify children's strengths and areas of weakness and build on those abilities with appropriate activities and guidance. Additional roles are effective communication to help children reach their potential and to provide a secure, consistent, safe, and healthy environment.

Cynthia Baker, *San Antonio, Texas*

■ **Respect** — Our child-centered curriculum demonstrates respect for each child, as teachers plan and implement learning opportunities based on the observed needs and interests of each child. Secondly, teachers provide learning opportunities that develop appreciation for, acceptance of, and consequently, a respect for differences. Through group problem-solving and conflict resolution, teachers utilize teachable moments to address respect for others and for learning materials when conflict arises.

Christine Kindlesparger, *Bethel Preschool, Fort Wayne, Indiana*

■ **Emotional Literacy** — We find that when we start asking children how they feel, they don't know how to respond. Our curriculum includes putting labels to their feelings so they know how to communicate with their friends and teachers. We find once that happens, we have less frustration and conflicts in the classroom and that they will use that as they move into the elementary grades. They really love being asked how they feel, too. I think it makes them feel respected and loved.

Colleen Elliott, *Mountain Empire Unified School District, Pine Valley, California*

■ **Outdoor Environment** — Having lost our preschool in a wildfire in October 2007, we also lost half our yard. While this loss was devastating and took a long while to recover, we can now look at repairing the outdoor environment as an opportunity to develop a natural environment that we have wanted for many years . . . many good, teachable moments.

Jan Koch, *Home Ties Child Care Center, Iowa City, Iowa*

■ **Love** — We care for children who are homeless allowing their parents to work toward self sufficiency. We have a positive environment where the children can feel safe and secure. The children just blossom when they feel safe and that they are loved for being themselves. The children who are the least lovable are the ones who need the most love, and that's where the teachers step up and show great skill. A rich variety of child-centered activities is important, but LOVE is the key.

Kelly Catlett, *Preschool, Poway, California*

■ **Relationship** — You may have covered this in teacher/child interaction, but I feel the relationships are key! The warmth and acceptance a teacher gives to each child AND their parents makes for a successful program. Making

those home-school connections builds positive affect in your centers. It also makes everyone feel accepted and involved in the child's educational beginning.

Carol Alexander Phillips, *Child Development Lab School, Ames, Iowa*

■ **Valuing Diversity** — All families are welcome regardless of race, religion, cultural heritage, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, or differing ability. Diversity is immersed in anti-bias curriculum in daily planning, issues addressed, tolerance of others, class meetings, and involvement with families sharing their culture. Daily discussions, activities, materials, and experiences form the foundation.

Risa Ferdman, *Tree Tops Learning Center, Austin, Texas*

■ **Acceptance** — What is acceptance? Who and what are being accepted; why is it important? To accept others, we first accept ourselves, leading to self-esteem, confidence, independence, peace, and serenity. To practice and learn the value of acceptance involves experience, opportunity, empathy and self-knowledge, promoting caring and openness. Healthy acceptance of situations requires a sense of security, patience, faith, understanding, problem solving, and communication skills, etc. Truly adult life skills.

Heidi Szobota, *Early Childhood Laboratory School, Bridgeport, Connecticut*

■ **Intentionality** — Intentionality encompasses curriculum elements. Intentional teachers consider the children's individual needs, interests, and developmental level. How do each child's family experiences, culture, and linguistic experiences influence his/her learning? How is the child viewed in the context of the classroom and as an individual? What are the family's goals and desires for the child? These variables address intentionality and should be considered when implementing curriculum.

Leslie Gamez, *KidsPark, San Jose, California*

■ **Interaction** — One of the core elements of our daily preschool program is interaction. We encourage the children to actively interact with the environment, materials, other children, and teachers. Through these interactions, children are making choices about their learning, social play, and interests. As a result, they respond to the environment with an eagerness to learn and explore. Allowing children to interact on their own terms develops their independence and fosters their interest in learning.

Leslie, *Kids' World, Inc., Bellingham, Washington*

■ **Core Competency** — We use the Creative Curriculum®. Since we have teachers with varying degrees of education and experience within our sites, we choose one area of competency to focus on for 3 months. We include an objective every 2 weeks to focus on based on the Infant/Toddler/Twos and Preschool Creative Curriculum® which includes the physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and language/literacy domains. Each teacher will incorporate an objective for their age group throughout their bi-weekly planning.

Joyce Alvarado, *Registered Home Daycare, San Antonio, Texas*

■ **Open Ended** — The most important element in my center is that learning is open ended; concentrating on process, not product. We plan so that learning one thing sparks curiosity about another; many conclusions to the same problem; comprehensive. It's more than just something in the hands each day. It's much more than a child learning to cut and paste to create a cute little project. It's the feeding of a child's natural curiosity and genuine desire to learn about the world around them.

Deborah Komp, *ThedaCare Child Learning Center, Appleton, Alabama*

■ **Teacher-Child Interaction** —

Children are confident and comfortable when the teacher and child really know each other. Learning occurs when teacher-child interactions are maximized. This is encouraged through 'continuity of care,' using looping in our infant-toddler classrooms and preschool rooms with mixed ages. Secure relationships develop as children and their teacher are together for 2-3 years. The trust established in this positive teacher-child relationship is vital to learning.

Donna Simon, *The Evergreen State College Campus Children's Center, Olympia, Washington*

■ **Acceptance** — There is so much written about teaching tolerance. I would hope my friends and family would accept me, not tolerate me. I value acceptance rather than tolerance. It goes beyond acceptance of race and ethnicity, acceptance of those who irritate you, the habits and personalities of others. Children don't have to like everyone, but have inner controls to not react in negative ways that hurt and offend. We do not all behave the same. This is the beginning of teaching diversity.

Brint Sagle, *Clover Park Technical College, Tacoma, Washington*

■ **Child-Centered** — In our classes and in our child development center we believe the core element is always to regard the child as the subject of the curriculum. The curriculum is then child-centered, based on observations and knowledge of the child, and child initiated and directed.

Suzanne Beauchamp, *Meadowbrook Child Garden, Marlborough, Massachusetts*

■ **Love of Learning** — I am a kindergarten teacher and feel that if I am able to instill the love of learning into my students in their first year, then I have given them a gift they will carry with them throughout their academic years. Kindergarten should be FUN so that the children experience the love of learning without even knowing they are doing

so. Presenting my kindergarten curriculum via centers, units, and activities that are fun and interesting allow the child to become active learners.

Intergenerational Center, Lincoln, Nebraska

■ **Reciprocity** — I came to understand this word from my teacher, Dr. Edwards. I believe we ALL have a deep need to give back. I believe children need to not just be given TO, but to also to be allowed to GIVE. The idea of reciprocity is so critical to young and old, that I see its absence as being capable of producing pathology. The role of the teacher, in my opinion, is to facilitate, to provide opportunities, maybe guide . . . but not direct.

Sherrie, *Chappell Child Development Center, Jacksonville and Tallahassee, Florida*

■ **Acceptance** — Just as buds blossom into flowers and knowing that no two flowers are exactly alike, this holds true for the child. So no matter how long a child stands in front of the easel with a piece of paper, stroking up and down, until the paper begins to deteriorate, the child is learning. The child learns how the paint drips down the arm, dripping or splattering on the floor. The more light and nourishment that the BUD receives, the more likely it is to blossom into the Flower.

Dianne O'Dwyer, *St. Brendan's Kindergarten, Melbourne, Australia*

■ **Environment/Nature** — At our kindergarten the children help to plant vegetables, and native plants in our garden and observe creatures that live in our inner suburban playground. They collect their fruit scraps and water and put the scraps in the compost bin and water plants. I recently discussed what soil was made from, was it all compost — or something else?

Junior Primary, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

■ **Inquiry** — Our children are caught

up in the excitement and engagement of learning through inquiry. Through emergent curriculum, they are able to explore in a rich environment and play out their ideas as we watch and listen. Then, in collaboration with teachers, children become the investigators. Any stage of learning or concept can be addressed this way. From fluent readers who do research, to sensory learners who get their whole bodies into the project, they all learn.

Maureen A. Wagner, *Good Shepherd Preschool, Appleton, Wisconsin*

■ **Self Regulation** — Some of the self regulation skills I feel are important are: FOCUS — so that understanding and learning can take place; VERBAL COMMUNICATION — children need to spend time talking or listening; SHARING and DEALING WITH EMOTIONS — these skills can be difficult to learn and yet society expects them to learn them early and utilize them; FREEDOM WITH LIMITS — children need freedom to learn and explore, but also understand that there are limits as to what they can do and when.

Margaret Cohen, *North Wales Academy, North Wales, Pennsylvania*

■ **Discovery** — Children surprise themselves with how much they can learn. When it is all under their control, you cannot contain the excitement when they discover new information. Given the right materials and support, children can discover everything there is to learn.

Rachel Partin, *Northland Christian School, Houston, Texas*

■ **Multi-Sensory** — Children learn best by doing. Exposing them to different experiences by touching, tasting, feeling, smelling, and hearing can help develop higher order thinking skills in the future. Giving children the opportunity to experience life without limiting them to only teacher-directed activities can increase their interest in learning. Exposing children to experiences using the

senses makes learning more meaningful and the ideas are endless.

Thom Kermes, *Child Care Center @ Riviera Presbyterian Church, Miami, Florida*

■ **Family-Friendly** — Only five — that was tough! Our families feel welcome here. We are caring for more than the child. It is important to know what is going on in the lives of our families. It is important to them to know that we care about them.

Janet, *UNM Family Development Program, Albuquerque, New Mexico*

■ **Teacher-Child Interaction** — My observations as a former parent volunteer, teacher, director, and currently as a trainer of early childhood teachers, show that teacher-child interactions have always been the core of what makes a program effective or not. Teachers who are attentive, active listeners, who have an authentic enjoyment of children as persons in their own right, and meet families and children where they are (a strengths-based approach) create wonders for their classrooms.

Patricia Nordahl, *Cooperation Station, Grand Marais, Minnesota*

■ **Family Connections** — We are a non-profit family child care program that is run by a parent board of directors. Families are actively involved in all aspects of the program. Since we have a multi-age group, our daily interactions and routines are much like those of a family. We even have both male and female as primary caregivers. We aspire to have a home-like atmosphere.

Sue Lewellen, *First Presbyterian Preschool, Plainview, Texas*

■ **Love for Learning** — The greatest gift an early childhood educator can give a child is the love for learning. When a student's curiosity and desire for learning ceases, they become bored and lose interest in education. What a waste of a human mind!

Heidi, *ISD #621 - School Readiness, New Brighton, Minnesota*

■ **Inclusion** — Our ECSE and School Readiness programs have collaborated for several years to provide a preschool for children who have been identified and are on an IEP, and community children who have been identified as being 'at risk.' We share classrooms, materials, planning, and teaching. The children are very accepting of each other. We use the "Incredible Years" program to work on social/emotional skill development. All preschool-age children need to work on this.

Lori A Davidson, M.A., *Alpert Jewish Community Center, Long Beach, California*

■ **Ethics** — A core element of our program is teaching and learning from a book called *Ethics of the Ancestors*. It is an adult learning book that has been developed into a guide for teaching ethics and values with children. Within its lessons are all that one needs to become a moral, upright, curious, accepting, helpful, strong, lifelong learner. The program is called *An Ethical Start*. Staff attends learning sessions, parents are given books and music with which to work at home (if they choose); we have parent learning sessions, staff learning sessions, and an infinite variety of classroom opportunities. It is a fabulous tool that encourages collaboration and learning between staff, parents, and children. Some of the ethics and values that are included are: there is a difference between looking and seeing; how to determine what is really important; the wise person learns from everyone; strength is about control of oneself; being rich is being happy with what you have; honoring others honors oneself; standing up for yourself and others in a timely way; teach others and also learn from them; be a good friend; look at others and what they do with generosity for their behavior and actions; love and pursue peace; say little and do much; be part of a community; transmit tradition; keep learning; respect all creatures and

the environment for everything has its place. We are very busy and the children love their work.

Stephen, *EI/ECSE consultant (self employed), Eugene, Oregon*

■ **Outdoor Activities/Exploration** — As research has indicated, it is important for young children to explore, 'navigate,' and interact with and in a variety of environments. My observation over the years has taught me that outdoor activities are becoming more restrictive and adult-directed, especially in the areas of playful exploration (perhaps guided by adults); and active, energetic, child-directed gross/fine motor activity (often the rationale is 'safety concerns'). I know other concerns may vary — ratios, insurance coverage, legal consequences, etc. However, when no clear and present danger exists ("Mary, remember how we go up/down the slide"), only that the limitation has evolved into a 'rule,' we must, I think, step back, and reframe our thinking about which genuine skill-building opportunities are being missed.

Deborah Schein, *early childhood family educator, Cleveland, Ohio*

■ **Respect** — Respect begins at birth. How a baby is greeted begins the modeling of how relationships are built. If the infant is greeted with joy, love, and happiness, then the child has a better chance of becoming a loving, caring individual. So much is in the hands of the parent. When a child feels safe and secure, the brain grows and learning occurs through interactions, language, and exposure to the outside world. While all this is taking place, the infant is simultaneously developing a sense of self — a who I am in relationship to the world.

Samantha Edwards, *preschool, Irvington, New Jersey*

■ **Fun** — We are living in a time where all these assessments have come forward and, in my opinion, preschool is not so much fun as it should be. I think that at this stage children should have so much

care in the world, they should just be enjoying everyday without ridiculous guidelines. As a teacher I try to make my class as fun as possible. The curriculum we currently adapt lends itself to fun, but sometimes I think that there should not even be a written curriculum for these small children. I really think that more emphasis should be placed on heightening social and creative skills. These skills, in my opinion, are paramount to success — especially in the world we live in today.

Susan Houglum, *Trinity Lutheran College, Everett, Washington*

■ **Nature** — Much has been written about the educational, emotional, social, and physical development that can be enhanced by direct experiences in a natural setting. Nature offers everything we need — places to explore, beauty to behold, peace to be experienced, adventure that is unsurmountable, materials for every academic endeavor. Nature's benefits are a forgotten aspect of our development. We are outdoor people who are misplaced in an unnatural indoor environment. Pictures, DVDs, and other media cannot take the place of nature.

Jeanette LaMothe, *Family Service League North Fork Early Learning Center, Greenport, New York*

■ **Community** — Unless a child perceives him/herself as a part of a whole, larger world, the child will not rise up to the challenges that are inherent in community living. In my classroom I have a saying posted on my wall: "Maturing is the recognition that the needs of others are as important as one's own." My assistant teacher and I seek to apply this maxim for ourselves first and seek to teach this to our students on a daily basis. "Let's work on this together," is a frequent encouraging phrase to help the children know that problem solving is a shared activity. When in my classroom, I look for every opportunity to really be with the children as they play. This can be in the role of either an active observer

or participant in the children's play. We are a community, everyone is welcome.

Zvia Dover, *TriBeCa Community School, New York, New York*

■ **Democracy** — The bigger picture of our program is to support children as active contributors in a democratic society. As a strategy, we embrace conflicts: Children are encouraged to discuss conflicts as an opportunity to learn from, and negotiate with peers, while teachers deliberately avoid 'jumping in' with a predetermined solution. Towards the end of the school year, our 2-year-old group finally established the Constitution of Room #1: no biting, no knocking down buildings, no grabbing toys. These rules were set by the children after instances of such conflicts occurred. We avoid entertaining/voting on meaningless topics that are common in many preschools such as how many like yellow vs. red, which carries little or no meaningful conflict to negotiate.

Linda M. Jagielo, *currently ND state administrator for child care licensing, Bismarck, North Dakota*

■ **Security** — Children need to feel secure to learn best. Security includes consistency in scheduling and guidance; giving adequate time for children to draw their projects/play to logical closure; fairness in treatment of all children; truly listening — wanting to hear and understand what they are saying — so each child knows you care; comforting the sad or hurting; adequate and nutritious snacks and meals; explaining a potential or real upcoming change in the day/schedule; and allowing time for transitioning.

Linda Drew, *San Bernardino, California*

■ **Possibilities** — At my center, and in training I do for other child development staff at workshops and in their centers, I promote what I learned as the 'Plan of Possibilities.' It is based on throwing out standard, predetermined lesson plans and going with what the children

are interested in on a daily basis. My teachers observe their infants, toddlers, preschool, and kindergarten children to see what has captured their attention. The teacher's job is to then provide lots of environmental possibilities to accommodate the children's interests. We web out what kids show us they want to do and extend these experiences until observations of kids' play indicate they are wanting to go in a new direction. Often there are several different webs occurring at the same time. For short, we call it our 'POPs,' for Plan of Possibilities. We have as much fun with all the possibilities as the children do. Joy, wonder, and fun for both staff and children (and me, the director!) are the result of giving up the 'control' we thought we had and POPping off! Also, parents enjoy this core element of our curriculum. Seeing what their children actually did during the long day away from them adds a little sense of having been with their little ones. If a parent asks a preschooler, "What did you do today," often the answer is "I don't remember" or the ever popular "nothing." Saying to a child, "I see you played trains in the sandbox today," is much more likely to get a response.

Ann Marie, *Hinsdale Community Preschool, Hinsdale, Illinois*

■ **Self-Esteem and Trust** — I believe that we need to help a child feel loved and comfortable in the classroom surroundings so that he/she will feel comfortable to learn. This comfort helps a child know that he/she is able to be themselves so their self esteem will flourish. Once a child feels loved and comfortable learning will come, which increases self esteem. The increase of self esteem awakens the ability to learn, which increases self esteem and the learning circle continues for a strong building block for educational success.

Robin Howell, *KinderCare Learning Center, Erie, Pennsylvania*

■ **Community** — We have worked hard in the past year to develop a sense of community in each of our classrooms. We strive to include our children in decision making and in sharing what works for them when they need to solve problems and conflicts. It gives them a sense of accomplishment and “that we are all in this together.”

Carol Rossi, *LJUMCNS, La Jolla, California*

■ **Respect for ALL** — I have the honor of being an Outdoor Teacher at our little neighborhood church nursery school in La Jolla, California. I work very hard each day to facilitate an awareness of respect for not only each other but for the environment, the creatures that live in their environment, and respect for the flora and fauna. I encourage the use of natural materials on the patio (outdoor classroom). The use of wood, clippings, flowers, branches, leaves, stones from the local beach, and so on. The children and I find ways to incorporate these natural materials into their outdoor centers and projects. The use of clay and recycled materials are most appealing. This in turn teaches the children not only respect, but how to care for their world and all that it encompasses.

Terrie Buckner, *Legacy Academy for Children, Sugar Hill, Georgia*

■ **Love of Learning** — Children are naturally curious and have a built-in desire to learn first-hand about the world around them. They want to make sense out of things and find out how things work. We provide a safe, well equipped, and stress free environment. We foster exploration and self-directed learning and provide guidance and support as needed and requested. By following principles of natural learning, children retain the curiosity, enthusiasm, and love of learning they are born with.

Grace Neal, *Southern Montessori Academy, Savannah, Georgia*

■ **Observation** — We believe that if you offer a child a natural environment with inviting learning materials, you can use the observation of the child to lead you in the guidance of what they are ready to learn. Our experience has shown that if children are offered more choices for higher learning, they will excel. The teacher is there to help guide the child in their learning experience.

Kerry Mastrine, *Early Intervention: Preschool, Altoona, Pennsylvania*

■ **Differentiation** — Preschools are made up of children of varying abilities and interests. In order to effectively learn, children must be interested and able to understand what is expected of them. In a mixed classroom, this may be difficult, unless the teacher regularly takes steps to differentiate her instruction. Learning activities should cover a variety of interests and learning styles, as dictated by the children in that classroom. They should also be tiered, with the varying levels of difficulty appropriate for the varying ability levels in the classroom. This requires a change of mindset: all children do not have to produce the same outcome in the same way.

Binnie Spiegel, *Har Shalom ECEC, Potomac, Maryland*

■ **Community** — In our in-service meeting before school began, the staff created a list of the core values for the school. After much discussion we chose ‘community’ as the core value for the year to resonate throughout our program. We came up with a list of activities that would promote the feeling of community in our school. They included activities and programs for child to child, staff to child, parent to staff, etc. Now, as the year is drawing to a close, we will spend time evaluating the effectiveness of this idea and which activities were effective.