Oh!
The Power of
Thinking
IN THE BEGINNING,

balancing teaching and thinking about child development principles can be tough. A great place to start is to read as much as you can about how children grow and develop their brains, bodies, emotions everything's connected you know.

If you learn all you can about the principles and put in your classroom practice, you will reach a point where you cannot imagine going back to any other way of teaching.

You'll think you've arrived when you witness deep and lasting engagement on the part of the children in your classroom. But many teachers tell us that, when it comes to principle-based teaching, you NEVER truly arrive. There's always more to learn from those inspiring children.

As you learn about the principles of child development you might find yourself saying, "I don't believe in these things." Consider that gravity makes things fall to the floor whether or not you believe in gravity or understand how it works. Principles are like that. They are always at work, regardless of our beliefs or understanding. It is not possible to break or change a principle, you can only break or change yourself when you are up against a principle.

We hope you'll return to our videos and this workbook often when you need a booster shot of support or inspiration.
Throughout our videos and this workbook, we’ve included what we’ve called **SOUND CUES**. These cues were designed to help you deeply understand and remember the impact of the principles. Watch for them!

Some of your ideas will flop as you begin to apply the principles in your classroom. Mistakes will happen. Things won’t happen as quickly as you’d like. Expect it. This is what thinking looks like. Keep trying. If you’re like us, many of your life’s fondest memories and greatest learning experiences have occurred when things didn’t go as planned. Always let the principles guide your decisions. And remember what Beth tells us,

“It might not be perfect, but it will always be perfectly imperfect.”

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YOU’LL GET TO YOUR GOAL.
Beth Heimann

Beth tells a good story, and with two growing boys, we’re sure she’ll have more to tell in the future! Beth’s passion is helping early education teachers learn to unleash the power of principles in their classrooms.

Risha McLellan

Risha gets emotional about children and their vast capacity to learn. The mom of two adults, she is driven to support teachers and use her knowledge to improve early education for children AND teachers.

Kim Schroeder

Kim’s animation is everything! Watching her two daughters grow and thrive fueled Kim’s desire for all children to have the very best in early education.
Autonomy:
Self-directing freedom, the quality or state of being self-governing.

Child development:
The sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth to the beginning of adulthood.

Early Education:
The teaching of children from birth to age five.

Early Education Principles:
Timeless, unchanging truths that apply to the teaching of children from birth to age five. Over time, educators have identified a set of seven principles that apply to young children and their learning. These principles are:

- Some choice is good. Too much choices puts children into overload.
- Give children what they need to learn. Nothing less. Nothing more.
- Offer children variety. They’ll find topics they love and you’ll be amazed at how they blossom.
- Start with basics. Add detail once children understand.
- Plan for movement. Make sure it’s meaningful.
- Learning feels so good, children couldn’t dream of a better reward!
- It’s not about you. It’s about the children.

Facilitator:
A person or thing that helps make thinking visible. Someone who helps to bring about an outcome.
Observation:
A record of what one sees or hears, absent of opinion, judgement, assumption, or belief. Observations contain only facts.

Principles:
Natural laws. Timeless, unchanging truths. Gravity is an example of a principle.

Provocation:
Something that incites (provokes) interest. A provocation might be as simple as an open book, a question, a bowl of snow, or a basket of pinecones.

Thinking:
The process of using one’s mind to consider or reason about something. To direct one’s mind to someone or something, use one’s mind actively to form connected ideas.
The Things that Don’t Change.

We focus on the positive change for children when teachers’ thinking is guided by early education principles.

Principles were defined as natural laws or timeless, unchanging truths. Some principles we thought of were:

Gravity makes dropped objects fall to the ground.

Water runs downhill.

The sun sets in the west.

What other natural laws or unchanging truths can you name?

Risha challenged us with an example of a dinner party where someone decides to make chicken for dinner and then has to use all their energy to persuade their vegetarian guests to eat meat. Does that seem like doing things the hard way? What method might seem easier and more effective? How might you apply this thought process to teaching children?

“Why people see a difference in principle-based classrooms is invisible. What they’re noticing is the difference in how teachers think about children.”

-Risha McLellan
Risha and Beth often say that teaching using child development principles is a little frustrating. What do you think they mean by that? What might you do at your workplace to interest more people in teaching in this way?

Have you ever observed children in your class having “a love affair with learning” as Risha describes? What did you notice? How might you produce more love affairs in your classroom?
Do this today in your classroom:

Stand quietly and watch the children. Try to free your mind of what you know (or think you know) about the children, and simply watch what they do. Write down exactly what the children do, exactly what they say, what materials they use, and how they use them. When you finish documenting what the children do and say, reflect on what you wrote and think about what may have been revealed to you about the children’s thinking.

Going further: Find out if a class about early education principles is available near you. Sign up with a friend. Take a field trip to a classroom where principles are implemented. Take along our glossary and look for the child development principles we’ve included there.

Re-watch this video if you’ve ever had a tough day in your classroom. Principles might just give you a clue for making things better.
Read to learn even more:

- Theories of Childhood
  By: Carol Garhart Mooney

- Mind in the Making
  By: Ellen Galinsky

- Montessori: The science behind the Genius
  By: Angeline Stoll Lillard

- The Best Schools
  By: Thomas Armstrong

- Daring Greatly
  By: Brené Brown
We present inspirational evidence that babies think - and offer ideas for how teachers can use that truth to maximize learning.

Kim and Risha shared stories showing that, even though babies are not able to speak, they are capable of thinking and making complex connections. Share one of our stories with your coworkers. Ask them if they have any stories that reveal the thinking power of babies.

“When we see babies as thinkers we begin to respect them and think, ‘This is their work, I can’t interrupt.’”
- Beth Heimann

In this video, we introduce the concept of provocations: items that can be placed in the classroom to incite student interest. We use colored ice as an example of something that might be placed within a baby’s reach. Do you think this is an engaging provocation? What ideas do you have for provocations that you might place in an infant classroom?
In a reflective part of the video, Risha shared a story about a baby who made a connection between a real watch and one in a catalog. She said this knowledge blew her mind. Why do you think she became so emotional about the story? Have you experienced similar emotions when children exceeded your expectations? Share your story with your coworkers or on social media.

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Talk about a time when you successfully put this principle to work in your classroom. How did the children respond? Was there a time when you didn’t start basic enough? Share what happened and what you learned.

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DON’T MISS THE PRINCIPLE

Start with basics.

Add detail once children understand.

A classroom a-ha!

In the video, Risha says, “When teachers have a moment of realizing who their children are, we call these aha moments. In these moments we celebrate the magic of learning. We begin to see children as thinkers and because we recognize them as thinkers and honor them as thinkers, we put more complex work in their classroom environment for them so that they can discover their own greatness.” During the next week, be especially aware in your classroom. Look for an aha moment when you realize something new about the children’s abilities. Celebrate the fact that your thoughtful guidance helped the children reach this point.
Do this today in your classroom:

Provide a provocation. Stand quietly and watch the children. Try to free your mind of what you know (or think you know) about the children and simply watch what they do.

Write down exactly what children do, exactly what they say, and how they use the provocation you provided. When you are done documenting, reflect on what you wrote and think about what may have been revealed about the children’s thinking.

Compare what you documented and what you think the child is thinking about to what you are learning about child development. What did you discover? How could you use this discovery to support the children’s learning goal?

If you’ve had a terrific day in your classroom, re-watch Oh! The Power of Thinking. Re-dipping yourself in the principles will keep the good going strong.

In another video moment, Risha says that applying principles of child development is liberating. But she also acknowledges that it can be a bit lonely because a principle-based teacher’s classroom won’t match what it is seen in other’s classrooms. Ask yourself, “Do I understand enough about the principles of children’s development yet to advocate for principles? Or do I need to seek more information and support? Should I try to make my classroom look like others that I’ve seen?”
Read to learn even more:

**Brain Rules for Baby**  
By: John Medina

**Einstein Never Used Flash Cards**  
By: Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

**The Diary of Laura: Perspectives on a Reggio Emilia Diary**  
By: Caroly P. Edwards and Carolina Rinaldi

**Infants and Toddlers at Work: Using Reggio-inspired Materials to Support Brain Development**  
By: Ann Lewin-Berham


Children can be Self-Sufficient!

*We inspire with examples of children’s independence.*

Beth told us a story about her son, Henry, brewing coffee. If you had observed Henry making coffee, and you wanted to help him expand his skills, what tools or experiences might you offer him as a next step in learning?

“Children know the difference between something artificial and something real. Put both in front of them and they will always go to the real.”
- Beth Heimann

Compare this early education principle with today's culture of stickers, high-fives, and a chorus of “good job.” How might you step back and make sure that students in your classroom experience the joy of learning?

Risha uses a nut grinder as an example of an effective provocation for an early education classroom. Consider the principle above, then talk about why a child might be excited to learn how peanut butter is made. What benefit is there in helping a child understand where things come from or how they are made? Why do you think this understanding makes people happier?
This video talks about the importance of an early education teacher acting as a facilitator in the classroom. Where to start? Rather than cleaning up a spill for a child, consider how to facilitate getting the job done. What materials/equipment might you want to have available for the children? What are other simple things you could do to gain comfort in your role as a facilitator?

SOUND CUE: In this video, we see a coffee maker and hear its unique WHIR. In the future when you brew your 1st cup of the day, use the WHIR as a reminder that, with a bit of planning by teachers and parents, children can be astoundingly self-sufficient.
Do this today in your classroom:

Reflect on what a typical day looks like for a child. What percent of their day is spent playing with toys and what percent of their day is spent doing essential housekeeping? Do the children take care of everyday tasks such as preparing their own snack, cleaning up their area after snack, watering the plants, or putting on their own clothes? If you want to offer more real experiences, how might you begin to make the switch? Do you think it would be expensive?
Going further: Watch our "Miscellaneous" video for fascinating principle-based information about children and how and when they can truly learn to share. These Videos can be found on The Dekko Foundation YouTube page, they are titled Oh! The Power Of Thinking: Miscellaneous.

"Adult support in a child’s life is like salt in a well-prepared dish. Too much ruins it. Too little makes it dull.”
- Risha McEllan

Some Sunday evening, binge watch Oh! The Power of Thinking. It’ll rev you up with ideas for a great week.

Read to learn even more:

Nurture Shock: New Thinking about Children
By: Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman

Punished by Rewards
By: Alfie Kohn
Preschoolers Can!

We elevate teachers from exhausted to exhilarated.

Think about a time when you had complete freedom to choose and complete a task and another time when you were required to ask for approval each step of the way. Make a list of feelings you experienced in each situation. Do you think children would experience similar feelings? Why do you think the opportunity to initiate is so powerful?

Autonomy is powerful in a classroom

“The big difference you notice in a classroom is, are children allowed to go forward with learning and ideas? Or, do they always have to wait? It seems simple, but it’s profound.”
-Risha McLellan
We might think at first that this principle refers to classroom materials and equipment. In other words, don’t fill the classroom with distracting items. But in the video, Risha discusses the fact that giving children what they need might simply mean that the teacher steps the background and gives children the time to think and figure out what to do next. What other meanings might the principle, “give children what they need to learn,” possibly have?

Take a moment to watch Preschoolers Can! again, where Risha talks about how exhausting it is for teachers to be the judge, jury, and police in their classroom. Look for her ideas for teachers to move from exhausted to exhilarated at the end of their workday. This is a profound example of the power of thinking!

SOUND CUE: In this video, we see a cricket up quite close, and hear its unmistakable CHIRP. In the summertime, you’ll hear plenty of crickets. Let their CHIRP remind you of the need to sit quietly often and simply and thoughtfully observe your classroom.
Do this today in your classroom:

Provocations and independent learning go hand in hand because provocations spur thoughts and set children up to explore on their own. Where might you place provocations in your classroom, so that children see them when they enter in the morning? If a provocation interests a group of children on a Monday, what might you do on Tuesday to sustain their engagement and challenge them to go deeper?

Going further: Several national education initiatives today emphasize the importance of children hearing lots and lots of words. We’re saying that children need uninterrupted time to think and consider what they’re learning and how they can solve the problem in front of them. Which idea do you think is right? Are they both right? How might you balance a child’s need to hear words and still have abundant time to think?

Teachers tell us that every single time they return to a principle and study it, they learn something new.
Read to learn even more:

Introducing Malaguzzi
By: Sandra Smidt

The Girl With the Brown Crayon
By: Vivian Gussin Paley
We take this observation thing to a whole new level and explain why you’ll never be finished thinking!

Risha tells a revealing story about a teacher who labels a child as ‘sneaky’ when he takes another child’s Lego. Watch Be Clueful! (Video 5) again. Risha asks us to consider, “Why is the child taking the Lego?” “What need does that child have that is causing him to take the Lego?” Observation without judgement changes our question from “Why is this child being sneaky?” To, “What does this child need next so that he can learn?” A teacher who is primarily a thinker and a facilitator sees this subtle difference and is ready to support the child.

“If school is anything it’s a place where we learn how to think. In order for me to learn how to think as a student, I have to have a teacher who’s thinking with me. That IS the power of thinking.”

-Risha McLeJan
What does observation look like in an early education classroom?

The children go about their chosen learning.
You, the teacher, disappear into the classroom, watch the children carefully and record what they say and do.

Children offer us clues to their learning needs. A thoughtful teacher sets aside bias, past experience, and beliefs and simply observes factually. Then she uses child development principles to make sense of what she’s seen.

DON'T MISS THE PRINCIPLE

It’s not about you.

It’s about the children.

Think about your motive

Beth says, “The motive we observe children with impacts what we see. When we observe with the motive of wanting to know what a child is thinking or desiring to learn, then observations become a tool we can use to study the intricacies of the child. However, when the observations are used to see deficiencies in what children know or can do, it results in the tool being used by the teacher to fix the imperfections they see.” The message is clear. When you observe children, leave your baggage behind.
In this video, observation is described as “one of our least used and most powerful tools.” Why do you think we observe so rarely in our classrooms? How might you incorporate the use of observation more often in your classroom? If you are looking for an opportunity to observe, try documenting how a child is using materials rather than quizzing them on how many pieces they have. What other things might you stop doing to free up time for observation.

Going further: Parents and teachers repeatedly say they wish there was an instruction book for children. We have that! It’s called child development principles!

Watch Oh! The Power Of Thinking! often to refresh yourself and ground yourself on principles!
Return often to these resources on child development principles:

For early education teachers:

For parents of children birth to five:

For parents and teachers of children six to twelve:

For parents and anyone who works with teens:
There is freedom waiting for you on the breezes of the sky.
And you ask, "What if I fall?"
Oh but my darling, What if you fly?

Erin Hanson