

# Standards-Based Practices

## Going Beyond Rote-and-Remember to Deepen Children's Learning

by Edward Greene and Martha Abbott-Shim

The 2009 Program for International Student Assessment showed that the United States ranked 24th out of 34 countries in 'mathematics literacy' and 11th in 'reading literacy' (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar, & Shelley, 2010). Many organizations, including the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, came together to discuss these low rankings and to address the issue of different states using different standards. Subsequently, the Kindergarten through 12th Grade Common Core State Standards has been



Ed Greene serves as Senior Director for Educational Outreach and Partnerships at the Hispanic Information Television Network (HITN), Brooklyn, New York. Prior to his work at HITN, Ed was an instructional leadership coach for principals and PreK-2 teachers in

Detroit Public Schools for Teachscape. He has also served as a senior adviser and consultant to Cito USA and its Piramide Approach to Early Learning. Over his 40-year career, Ed has worked directly with infants, toddlers, preschool children, adolescents, and families, as well as in a variety of roles and capacities in the philanthropic, private, the public sectors and higher education. He is a former board member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, and currently serves on the Board of the Council for Professional Recognition.



Dr. Martha Abbott-Shim, Professor Emerita of Georgia State University, is a consultant providing services related to the developmental assessment of young children and the evaluation of early childhood classroom

learning environments and teaching practices. She developed the *Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs*, which is a comprehensive program evaluation instrument for early childhood programs serving children from infancy through school-age and the *Assessment Profile: Research Edition*, which has been used in research studies. She has directed federally- and state-funded research projects and has numerous publications.

adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. The Standards provide a uniform platform across most states for elementary and secondary education. The early childhood profession needs common standards for birth through pre-Kindergarten. Dr. Lilian Katz initiated a discussion of this issue in her article that discussed Standards of Experience. In this article we have extended the 'standards' discussion by examining early care and education standards and the need to 'deepen' children's learning.

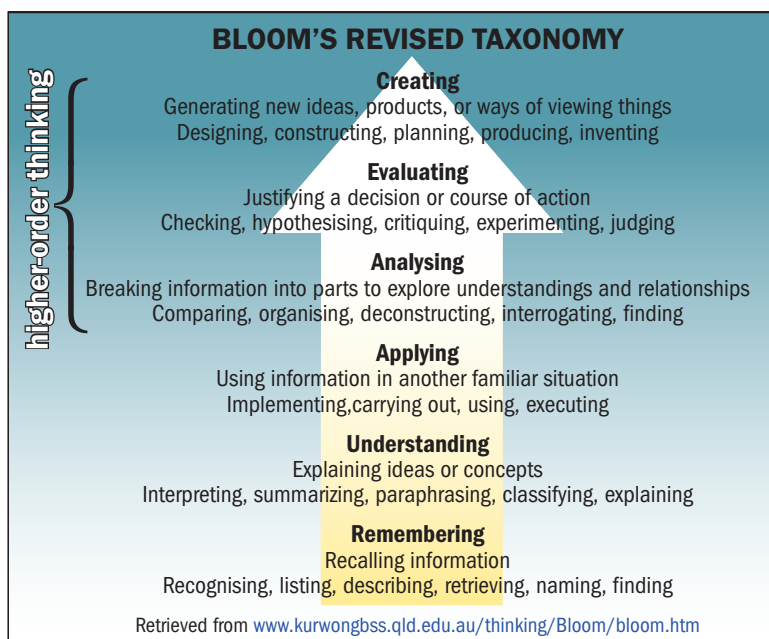
In the January/February (2013) issue of *Exchange*, Dr. Katz proposed eight Standards of Experience that children should have 'much of the time' and that are meaningful because they "... form the basis for lifelong dispositions to participate in one's community and society responsibly and helpfully." These experiences include:

- feelings of belonging and feeling welcome.
- feelings of being taken seriously and respected.
- feeling what it is like to understand some things better (or more deeply).
- experience of applying their developing skills in purposeful and meaningful ways.

- being intellectually engaging and challenged.
- experience of overcoming setbacks and obstacles.
- experience of offering suggestions to peers and helping them understand something better.
- experience of taking initiative, appropriate responsibilities, and making choices.

We agree that standards need to reflect the experiences that children should have 'much of the time,' and we were intrigued to examine the currently accepted early childhood standards in the context of Dr. Katz's "Standards of Experience." In addition, it is our belief that the standards should be applicable to a broad range of early childhood programs serving children from birth to five. Furthermore, standards that are broadly and vaguely stated, as well as standards that narrowly focus on rote and recall content, do not promote 'meaningful' and 'positive' lifelong dispositions.

We reviewed a number of standards in the context of Dr. Katz's suggestions and we were encouraged to find some helpful resources. The K-12 Common Core State Standards ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)) that has been adopted by many



states go beyond rote-and-remember content and include a broad array of skills and content. These Standards provide opportunities for early childhood educators/practitioners to reflect upon and revisit how they plan appropriate and engaging early learning experiences for children.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills ([www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org)) identified four critically important skills that young people need in order to become successful and contributing adults in their communities and workplaces. The Partnership's 4 C skills include:

- **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills:** Reason effectively, use systems thinking, and solve problems.
- **Communication Skills:** Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions.
- **Collaboration Skills:** Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal.
- **Creativity and Innovation Skills:** Develop, implement, and communicate new ideas to others effectively; elaborate, refine, analyze, and evaluate one's own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts.

The Standards of Experience that Dr. Katz suggests complement the 4 Cs and are written from the perspective of experiences that young children should have 'much of the time.'

The rote-and-remember learning activities that occur all too frequently in early childhood classrooms focus on the lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and are unlikely to promote the lifelong learning dispositions proposed by Dr. Katz. The

Common Core State Standards promote foundational knowledge as a starting point, and require teaching practices and learning experiences to build intentionally and appropriately toward higher-order thinking; moving from remembering . . . to understanding . . . to applying . . . to analyzing . . . to creating, as illustrated in the figure above.

The Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten are comprehensive and correlated with The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework ([eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov)). The Partnership's 4 Cs are essential skills that students need to succeed as citizens and workers in the 21st century. All of these resources are very useful; however, our early childhood field needs performance standards for a wider age range, birth through pre-Kindergarten.

The Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) ([www.gelds.dec.state.ga.us](http://www.gelds.dec.state.ga.us)) provide this breadth and depth. GELDS include 50 Standards of performance across five domains:

1) Physical Development and Motor Skills; 2) Social and Emotional Development; 3) Approaches to Play and Learning; 4) Communication, Language, and Literacy; and 5) Cognitive Development and General Knowledge. Each Standard is exemplified with Age-Appropriate Indicators for the following age levels, in months: 0-12, 12-24, 24-36, 36-48, and 48-60. These Indicators provide some specific examples for each Standard at each age level. However, some of the terminology in the GELDS Standards such as 'scientific inquiry skills' or 'progression of imaginative play' represent compound concepts and may need to be more specific for practitioners.

The GELDS's Approach to Play and Learning domain is critically important and its Standards are precursors to the development of the 4 Cs skills discussed above. The Approaches to Play and Learning Domain includes Standards

for children taking initiative and self-direction, showing interest and curiosity, demonstrating sustained interest and persistence, and having a flexible and cooperative approach to play and learning. In addition, the GELDS Cognitive Processes sub-domain includes Standards for children's awareness of cause and effect, use of prior knowledge in building new knowledge, and identifying a problem, exploring solutions, and communicating findings. The Cognitive Processes and Approaches to Learning domains are fairly new to our field and focus on critically important areas of development. Very young children have a natural curiosity about people and their environment and an inclination to be persistent in solving problems. The Standards for these Domains ensure that early childhood teachers foster and extend these inquisitive inclinations. The challenge for early childhood teachers is to nurture in children the feeling of "what it is like to understand some things better or more deeply" as Lilian Katz wrote in her article (2013).

The frequently used 'rote and remember' activities often found in preschool classrooms will not prepare children to think and solve problems in the ways that the new Standards recommend. Dr. Irving Siegel's Distancing Model helps teachers use developmentally appropriate practices to take the child from the 'here and now' to new information and discoveries. Dr. Siegel's work has been adapted and used in the Netherlands by the Dutch educational psychologist, Dr. Jef van Kuyk in the Piramide Method. The Four-Step Distancing process of Orientation, Demonstration, Broadening, and Deepening ([www.qassiss.com/pages/piramide](http://www.qassiss.com/pages/piramide)) provides a pathway for teachers to deepen children's learning. The 'distancing' term is used to describe the process of moving from 'nearness' (Orientation: things we know and are most comfortable with) to 'distance' (Deepening: new knowledge, skills, and experiences). The Distancing process

includes elements of scientific reasoning such as using prior knowledge, making predictions, seeking evidence, and testing predictions or creating something new, which are experiences that preschool children can and should be having.

Early learning opportunities are needed to enable young children to acquire knowledge, as well as have experiences that allow them to demonstrate what they are able to do with that knowledge. Instead of simply memorizing and repeating information, and never really using it, the Four-Step Distancing process was developed to help promote appropriate ways for teachers of young children to plan experiences that extend beyond the 'rote and remember' strategies and establish teaching/learning environments where children have a chance to really 'show what they know.' The Four-Step Distancing process provides specific strategies that enable teachers to focus on young children's development of the very important 4 Cs: Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity. With this skill set, students will be well-prepared thinkers and problem solvers who can succeed in today's global community.

Teachers of young children need ongoing professional development and support in order to achieve the higher expectations found in the kindergarten Common Core State Standards. There is not necessarily more content to be taught and learned, but rather higher expectations for a broadened and deepened ability to think and solve problems — both in how teachers teach and how they support young children's learning.

Our efforts in this article are focused on extending the discussion of Dr. Lilian Katz's lifelong learning dispositions and Standards of Experience in an examination of the Common Core State Standards, the Partnership 21 4 Cs skill set, and the Georgia Early Learning Stan-

dards. Many early childhood programs operate with professional standards prescribed by their state, funding agency, or another organization. If your program does not operate with the guidance of professional standards, we encourage a small group of teachers and the director to examine the professional standards mentioned in this article or others, and identify a set of standards that is most meaningful and applicable to your program.

Since all professional standards call for teachers to move beyond rote-and-remember activities to broaden and deepen children's learning, Dr. Irving Siegel's Distancing process provides an explicit pathway to help teachers enhance children's higher-level thinking skills. If higher-order thinking, questioning, probing, and problem solving are substantial elements of professional standards, then higher-order teaching and learning must be part of the conversation in which teachers and directors engage. These conversations about higher-order teaching and learning need to focus on an awareness of where your program's teaching and learning practices are now. And then, how you will move the bar in a direction that improves children's ability to reason at higher levels: applying, analyzing, and evaluating. These are the reasoning skills that are critically important in our new world economy.

## References

Fleischman, H. L., Hopstock, P. J., Pelczar, M. P., & Shelley, B. E. (2010, December). *Highlights from PISA 2009: Performance of U.S. 15-year old students in reading, math, and science literacy in an international context*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011004.pdf>

Katz, L. (2013, January / February). Taking a stand on standards of experience. *Exchange*, 209, 8-9.

Siegel, I. E., Copple, C., & Saunders, R. (1984). *Educating the Young Thinker: Classroom Strategies for Cognitive Growth*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

## Resources

**Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS):**  
[www.gelds.decal.ge.gov](http://www.gelds.decal.ge.gov)

**K-12 Common Core State Standards:**  
[www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

**Partnership for 21st Century Skills:**  
[www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org)

**Piramide Method:**  
[www.qassist.com/pages/piramide](http://www.qassist.com/pages/piramide)

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