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Thirteen Principles of Best Practice

In 1998, Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels and Arthur Hyde published, *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH). The authors suggest that a new, coherent educational philosophy is reaching across the curriculum and up through the grades. They believe this philosophy embodies best practices in teaching and learning and present thirteen interlocking situations and processes that underlie the movement. The principles with brief explanations are offered below.

1. *STUDENT-CENTERED*: The best starting point for schooling is young people's real interests. Across the curriculum, investigating students' questions should always take precedence over studying arbitrarily and distantly selected content.
2. *EXPERIENTIAL*: Active, hands-on, concrete experience is the most powerful and natural form of learning. Students should be immersed in the most direct possible experience of the content of every subject.
3. *HOLISTIC*: Children learn best when they encounter whole ideas, events, and materials in purposeful contexts, not by studying sub-parts isolated from actual use.
4. *AUTHENTIC*: Real, rich, complex ideas and materials are at the heart of the curriculum. Lessons or textbooks that water-down, control, or over-simplify content ultimately dis-empower students.
5. *EXPRESSIVE*: To fully engage ideas, construct meaning, and remember information, students must regularly employ the whole range of communicative media including speech, writing, drawing, poetry, dance, drama [storytelling], music, movement and visual arts [and visual displays of information including charts, graphs, pictographs and diagrams].
6. *REFLECTIVE*: Immersion in experience and expression must be balanced with opportunities for learners to reflect, debrief, and abstract from the experiences what they have felt, thought and learned.
7. *SOCIAL*: Learning is always socially constructed and often involves social interaction.
8. *COLLABORATIVE*: Cooperative learning activities tap the power of learning better than competitive or individualistic approaches.
9. *DEMOCRATIC*: The classroom is a model community. Students learn what they live as citizens of the school.

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10. *COGNITIVE*: The most powerful learning comes when children develop true understanding of concepts through higher-order thinking associated with inquiry and self-monitoring of their thought process. (For one example of higher-order thinking skills, see Marzano's *Dimensions of Learning*.)

11. *DEVELOPMENTAL*: Children grow through a series of definable but not rigid stages. Educational institutions should align their activities to the developmental level of students.

12. *CONSTRUCTIVIST*: Children do not just receive content; in a very real sense they re-create and reinvent meaning for every system they encounter including language and mathematics. Teachers need to provide activities and interactions that structure or scaffold learning so students can create meaning in incremental segments.

13. *CHALLENGING*: Students learn best when faced with genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility for their own learning.