

From Dr. Linda Farr Darling:

Dear Teachers,

I have always been captivated by conversations about ethics, so when Dr. Karen asked about the meaning of the word principle, I thought first of moral principles, those broad normative [established] statements about what's right or wrong, what's good or bad, fair or unfair, and so on. Moral principles are bedrock [core] beliefs held by groups of people who see them as guides, or even laws that tell them (in a very general sense) what they ought to do. So the statement, "Don't treat anyone merely as means to your own ends," is one specific way to interpret the general principle, "Respect others" or "Respect others' autonomy".

There are other kinds of principles, too, of course. Sometimes they are scientific or mathematical principles like laws of nature, or rules of cause and effect. Or they are psychological principles about human behavior, or widely held beliefs about how people learn. It is likely that every deliberate human endeavor can point to a set of principles behind its practices.

Principles can be useful and explanatory and illuminating, but held too tightly and without regard to the virtues of humility and open-mindedness they can sometimes be oppressive and rigid, clouding our sight rather than clearing it.

I hope this helps you think about principles of teaching,

Dr. Linda