

# Learning In Social Contexts Benefits All Learners

Since 1980, there has been a movement towards a more holistic approach to education in most schools as “a result of the constructivist movement which emphasizes that learning is individualized, social and occurs in context. Students construct and build upon their own knowledge via interactions with their environment. The teacher serves as a facilitator or mediator of learning as opposed to a disseminator of knowledge.”

(June Downing, pg. 15 (1996) Including Students With Severe And Multiple Disabilities)

- When you compare the style of a traditional classroom versus a constructivist classroom, we can see that the constructivist approach facilitates inclusion with its emphasis on learning within social contexts. This approach also supports our students with severe multiple disabilities as the acquisition of knowledge is based on their abilities and interests.

- Some of the following practices of recent years reflect the constructivist approach and best facilitate learning for a variety of learners:

a) **Whole-language** where the goal is for the student to use the skills purposefully and independently in other contexts

b) **Cooperative learning** where students are involved in learning in social context by actively assisting each other



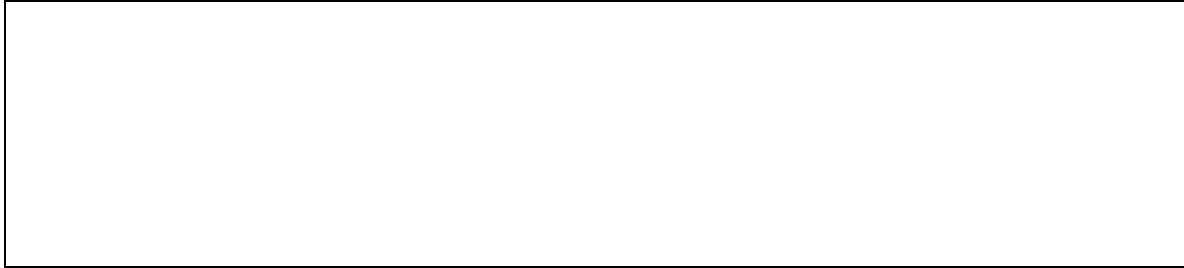
c) **Thematic teaching** units that support a holistic approach to learning and allow the student with severe multiple disabilities to participate in group activities that involve a multitude of intelligences or sensory modes rather than relying on just eyes and ears.

- All of these approaches appear to support the diversity of learners through a multiple intelligences approach with “much less emphasis on passive learning (e.g., lecture ) and more emphasis on alternative ways of learning, including movement, manipulation of objects, music, and social interactions.” pg. 29

- “Different aspects of the same activity can be used to address all learning needs. There is no need to separate students because learning objectives are different.” pg. 85  
e.g., reading may require a broader definition to allow for all students to participate and learn

- We need to focus on how the student can be an ACTIVE participant, as opposed to passive. The notion of partial participation may apply to many of our students.

Please add your themes for the upcoming year in the box below:



For more information and support on these concepts...

**Text:**

- Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms, (Practical Strategies for Teachers), by June E. Downing.  
(1996) Publisher Paul Brookes ISBN# 1-55766-239-8

**On-line Course**

- Developing Inclusive Curriculum for Students with Severe Multiple Disabilities, extremely practical distance/on-line course for mentor & support classroom, resource and learning assistance teachers. Continuing Education Branch, University of Victoria, ED-D 487 Y50 Special Topics in Education. For more information, contact instructor:  
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