

## Thirteen Principles of Best Teaching Practice

In 1998, Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels and Arthur Hyde published, *Best Practices: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann). The authors suggest that a new coherent philosophy and spirit of teaching is reaching across the curriculum and up through the grades. They present thirteen interlocking situations and processes that underlie this movement toward best practices in teaching and learning.

1. **Student-Centered:** The best starting point for instruction is young people's real interests: all 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 disempower students.
5. **Expressive:** To fully engage ideas, construct meaning, and remember information, students must regularly employ the whole range of communicative media--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 their experiences what they have felt, thought and learned.
7. **Social:** Learning is always socially constructed and often involves interaction.

**"The nature of knowledge and therefore, learning, has emerged over time as an essential line of inquiry."**  
Brooks & Brooks, 1993

8. **Collaborative:** Cooperative learning activities tap the power of learning better than competitive and individualistic approaches.
9. **Democratic:** The classroom is a model community; students learn what they live as citizens of the school. The capacity to make choices is at the heart of democracy.
10. **Cognitive:** the most powerful learning comes when children develop deep understanding of concepts through the higher-order thinking (For one example see Dr. Robert Marzano's *Designing a New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, 2001.) associated with inquiry and self-monitoring of their thought process.
11. **Developmental:** Children grow through a series of definable but not rigid stages, and school should fit its instructional 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 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.

Adapted from *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*  
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