

Four Characteristics of Constructivism

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.

From *Best Practices: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools* by Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (Heinemann, 1998). The authors present thirteen principles in total. Constructivism is the twelfth principle.

Constructivist teaching and learning requires that students make meaning by:

1. using **higher order thinking skills**
2. showing **depth of knowledge** (not covering the curriculum)
3. understanding and making **connections to the world** beyond the classroom
4. engaging in substantive **conversation and discussion**

Constructivism also requires a network of **social support for student learning and achievement** that includes more than the teacher's response and feedback.

Constructivism places emphasis on **big ideas and concepts** and requires students to engage in a meaning-making process with these ideas and concepts. In classroom practice constructivist teachers begin with **WHOLE** concepts and work toward the parts, unlike textbook curriculums that usually begin from parts and work toward the whole.

The constructivist practices are a direct challenge to traditional forms of assessments. In the constructivist classroom assessment of student learning is interwoven with teaching and occurs through teacher observation and student exhibitions and portfolios as well as other collections of student work.

Adapted from *Designing Alternative Assessments for Interdisciplinary Curriculum in Middle and Secondary Schools* by Richard E. Maurer; Allyn and Bacon, 1996