



Preface to the Second Edition

Since our first edition (1998) of *Creating and Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom*, the mandates and pressures of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, in addition to the continued development and implementation of state learning standards and standardized testing, have changed classrooms, teacher behavior, teacher morale, and children's school lives. Teachers are under continuing and growing pressure to teach and assess in particular scripted ways and for particular purposes which may have little or nothing to do with real *learning*. There is nothing new in teachers, parents, government officials, and members of society in general disagreeing over what constitutes *learning* or what constitutes appropriate *assessment and evaluation*. But many teachers have become paralyzed, alienated, confused, lethargic, and/or robotic since the onslaught of these draconian, restrictive, and unsupported mandates. In Chapter 5 of this new edition, we do as we promised in the first edition—we address these two complex issues of understanding and managing the student learning standards and assessing and evaluating student learning in a constructivist classroom. This chapter also includes a special section on *the trouble with rubrics*. Our hope is that Chapter 5 will give teachers the support they need to speak their voices and use approaches to teaching, learning, and assessing that are consistent with what they recognize and understand as *real student learning*.

Where Are We Now?

In general, our purpose in this second edition is the same as the first: We have written this practical guide to constructivism to help pre- and in-service teachers understand the tenets of constructivism more clearly and to implement more easily and effectively constructivist approaches in the classroom, regardless of the external pressures *du jour*. In addition to adding the new and necessary chapter on standards and assessment, we have divided the original chapter on diversity into two, Multiculturalism and Inclusion, to better address the multitude of connected issues. With new readers and all the teachers and principals who have acknowledged the usefulness of our first edition in mind, we have updated every other chapter and added experiences from teachers who have implemented constructivist approaches in the era of standards.

Why Now?

Mounting research, our own experiences as educators, and reports from pre- and in-service teachers support our belief that constructivist, active learning programs are not only more engaging, but promote elaborate knowledge construction; encourage empowered, informed, and independent thinking and doing; foster deeper understanding of concepts; nourish more enduring learning; AND lead to greater command and ownership of content. But even when teachers recognize the value of and want to and try to use constructivist approaches in their classroom, their efforts often produce less than what they expect.

The first problem in trying to implement constructivist approaches is that although constructivist propositions can seem fairly simple, hundreds of observations of, and questions from, pre- and in-service teachers over the past 15 years show that they are not. For example many teachers ask questions such as: What does it mean to have students construct their own knowledge? How is *understanding* different from *recalling*? What does it mean to have students demonstrate their understanding? What does past experience have to do with learning? Does constructivism mean students do what they want? If students are sitting in a circle, does that mean it's constructivist?

The second problem is figuring out how to begin. This translates into questions including the following: How can I change my classroom when there is increased and increasing pressure to conform to top-down mandates? What if the students think constructivist approaches mean they can do what they want? What can I do if the principal and other teachers don't even understand what constructivism means? How can I sustain a vision if the School Board and community do not understand it? What if the school board rewards my principal for encouraging teachers to adopt practices that are not constructivist?

How This Book Is Different From Others

Creating and Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom continues to provide the only *consolidated* discussion on the foundations, research-based results, and practical issues of constructivism. Additionally, our book provides guidelines, practical tips, and models to help both new and experienced teachers to create and sustain a constructivist classroom. We bring together and clarify for educators the theoretical foundations and key issues pre-service and in-service teachers raise about creating and sustaining constructivist classrooms; we give educators the tools to make a mental and practical shift from a traditional to a constructivist format; and we help teachers negotiate the complexities of establishing constructivist classrooms in any school environment, in any grade level, and regardless of whatever new mandate arrives. Checklists will help teachers determine where they are now, where they are going, and how they are doing along the way. Additionally, we include reports on attempts, successes, and problems from teachers at different grade levels and from one special teacher—Susan Jackson.

The Book's Structure

We have, from the beginning, conceived of *Creating and Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom* as a working book; it is designed to be useful, and we expect and hope that copies will be written in and dog-eared. Several of the chapters contain checklists, sidebars, and exercises for student and novice teachers; some of the chapters contain a section we call Tough Questions. These questions are designed to provoke discussion and debate about the challenges and dilemmas active learning environments pose for pre- and in-service teachers and education professors.

As in the first edition of this book, we begin with a cautionary tale about the dangers of trying to do too much too soon. In Chapter 1, you will meet Susan Jackson, a beginning teacher with big ideas and big problems. Chapter 2 provides a definition, and explains the historical roots, of contemporary constructivism; additionally Chapter 2 looks at how early active learning movements have come of age. Chapter 3 provides the research-based rationale for creating the constructivist classroom and reviews and summarizes the learning standards recommended by the professional teacher organizations: NCTM, NSTA, NCTE, and NCSS. The fourth chapter challenges and allows teachers to self-assess by reflecting on current practice with regard to the use of language, student teacher roles, classroom management, the classroom communication system, and understanding of motivation. These self-assessments lay the groundwork for creating a constructivist classroom.

New to this edition is Chapter 5, which focuses on the extent to which current reform efforts, particularly those concerned with standards and assessment, are or are not consistent with constructivism. Look for the special section on Rubrics. Chapter 6 provides suggestions for preparing students, parents, and administrators for classroom changes and then introduces and defines four specific, practical active learning models ready for implementation. In Chapter 7, teachers and students in different academic levels describe their experiences with creating, sustaining, and/or succeeding in, constructivist classrooms.

The next three chapters address special issues. In Chapter 8, Technology, we explore the potential of technologically supported and driven schools and classrooms and also provide a framework for integrating current and future technologies to enhance student learning. Chapter 9, Multiculturalism, raises and addresses the challenges connected to working in classrooms that include new immigrant and refugee groups and the increasing number of students who live in poverty. Chapter 10, Inclusion, offers practical guidelines and tips for understanding and working with the issues that arise in mixed ability classrooms.

We return in Chapter 11, the Epilogue, to the beginning—for an update on Susan—and then turn to the future for your journey.