In today’s classroom culture, there is a beginning of a recognition that student learning is far more individuated than can be represented by a strategy of teaching to the normative ‘average’. The consequence of this recognition is an attempt to meet each student where they are in their own learning process, and several learning theories reinforce this understanding and provide techniques that are helpful to these ends. Namely, constructivism, multiple intelligences, and situated learning are all attempts to tailor the presentation of educational experiences to the learner and subsequently increase retention and mastery. I personally identify with a combination of all three of these learning theories, and feel they offer a strong methodology towards classroom success.

Constructivist theory, generally attributed to Jerome Bruner, purports that ‘learning is an active process in which leaners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current or past knowledge.’ [[1]](#endnote-1) Specific pedagogical approaches proposed by this learning theory include instruction that encourages students to discover principles on their own, with the instructor acting as a translator and interlocutor, taking information and formatting it to a form most appropriate the learner’s current state of understanding. In this way, the student is given the opportunity to exercise critical thinking and pursue knowledge that integrates with what they already understand, either through assimilation or accommodation (as described by Piaget).[[2]](#endnote-2) Combining this approach, with the theory of multiple intelligences and their application to pedagogical approaches (Gardner, 1993)[[3]](#endnote-3) [[4]](#endnote-4) gives the educator a more complete toolkit to reach students where they are and in the way they most prefer to be taught. This combination of approaches is more likely to engage the student and to achieve buy-in to the educational process.

In addition, having an understanding of the learning theory of *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1990)[[5]](#endnote-5) can allow an educator to utilize a pedagogical approach that aims to create learning experiences that embed the learning objectives into an overall set of activities that encourage learners to collaborate in ‘communities of practice’[[6]](#endnote-6) and embeds the knowledge learned into real-life useful experiences that relate to the subject domain and the lives of the learners. It creates an environment of engagement and concern for the subject matter, and the other participants in the community that are learning in parallel, and are sharing their knowledge with one another through the products of their work.

Given the focus of the Common Core State Standards on critical thinking, and deeper understanding, these learning theories offer a road towards knowledge that isn’t isolated and ultimately forgettable after assessment, but rather integrates more firmly in the cognitive structure of the learner, and in turn provide in themselves more solid hooks for future learning to attach.

1. http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/constructivist.html [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/assimacc.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Gardner, H. (1993). Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice. NY: Basic Books. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gardner, H. (1993). Creating Minds. NY: Basic Books. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1990). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/situated-learning.html [↑](#endnote-ref-6)