ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed and reported experiences of a regular education teacher and her class of first grade students as they engage in using the constructivist approach to learning in their mathematics classroom. The study defines constructivism as a learning theory in which students are actively engaged in their own experiences. The study examines the students' use of manipulatives and hands-on techniques when used along with the school's traditional math curriculum. The study explores the participants making meaning of their own learning and applying what they learned in their real world experiences.

All the students were actively involved in the study however, the author focused on the low level learners in the classroom. The study suggests that low level students are able to be successful at mathematical tasks when given the opportunities to explore using manipulatives other than just pencil and paper to show their understanding of that task. The study documents the students' ongoing use of mathematical centers that used hands-on activities to approach the mathematical tasks that are required in first grade. Finally, the author questions whether using a single method such as constructivism is beneficial to all learners or if a combination of both constructivism and traditional math best suits all of the learners that enter the classroom.