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## Learners and Learning: A Research Synthesis

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### Introduction

This review is designed to familiarize educators and policymakers with the great variety that exists among accounts of how “learning” happens. We begin by introducing the familiar model of classroom teaching and learning known as the “traditional model” and then laying out some of its assumptions. Next, we use these assumptions as starting points for showing how theories of and ideas about learning in classrooms can go far beyond this common conception. In other words, we will take one specific and common idea of how learning happens in the classroom and use it to reveal levels of complexity that may have gone unnoticed. These other ideas will be formulated around five “General Statements on Learning,” which will first be described in brief and then again in greater depth.

**Principle 1:** Learning is an active process, and it changes both the learner and that which is learned.

**Principle 2:** Learning, being an active process, requires that the student play a role, and thus the student’s motivation is important.

**Principle 3:** Learning is different for each learner, both in the way they learn and in what they bring to the learning process.

**Principle 4:** Learning takes place within social and cultural contexts which are central to the learning process.

**Principle 5:** Learning is a connected, conceptual process, dependent on multiple ways of knowing.

### Summary

The traditional model of classroom learning was adopted as a starting-off point so that those who were familiar with it could see the many, many other possibilities that have been put forth. The General Statements portray learning as an active process where motivation is important, uniformity cannot be assumed, social and cultural contexts are relevant if not central, and the questions of transfer and quality of experience must be confronted. Even these observations about learning do not cover all the possibilities, but they are a beginning, and they do touch on some vital issues. The educator or policymaker who would study learning so as to try something new is clearly confronted with a massive task. We hope that the tools supplied in the full report will, in some measure, help them to tackle it.