



A young girl outside on a swing, smiling with a therapist

# Active Learning: Creating Motivating Learning Environments for Children with Multiple Special Needs

Kirstyn Martino, CTRS  
Active Learning Specialist

Penrickton Center  
for Blind Children  
Taylor, MI 48180  
[www.Penrickton.org](http://www.Penrickton.org)



Daycare, 5-day residential, and consultative services

Ages 1-12 with VI and additional disability

Free of charge to families

Developed  
by Dr. Lilli  
Nielsen

- Born in Denmark, second of seven children, four of whom were born blind
- Psychologist, Teacher, and special education advisor at Refsnaesskolen, National Institute for Blind and Partially Sighted Children and Youth in Denmark
- Received her PhD – spatial relations in congenitally blind infants
- Awarded the Knight [Order of the Dannebrog](#) for her contributions and work in the field of special education

# Everyone Can Learn!

An individual learns:

- Throughout life
- Gradually according to his/her
  - Physical capacity
  - Cognitive capacity
  - Emotional capacity
- No matter how young/old
- No matter what type of disability has influenced or is still influencing the individual's ability to learn.

## Active Learning is an Approach

- Active Learning establishes enriched environments so that learning can occur.
- Through learning, step by step, an individual will achieve the pre-requisites that will enable him/her to learn at higher and higher levels.
- Learning occurs in a variety of positions.

# Some Factors that Limit Learning!

- Learning is restricted by
  - A lack of learning opportunities
  - An insufficient learning environment
  - Mobility: An individual who is unable to grasp or move in his/her environment is unable to make full or ample use of the impressions he/she is experiencing (Impacts cognitive awareness and processing of information).



# Active Learning Involves

- Active participation
- Repetition
- Developmental Learning
- Reinforcement/Motivation
- The limiting or appropriate response to interruptions



# ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

A boy about 8 years old, seated in a feeder seat, smiling and reaching for chimes with both hands that are hanging in front of him.

















DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES







FOCUS ON THE  
CORRECT  
REINFORCEMENT









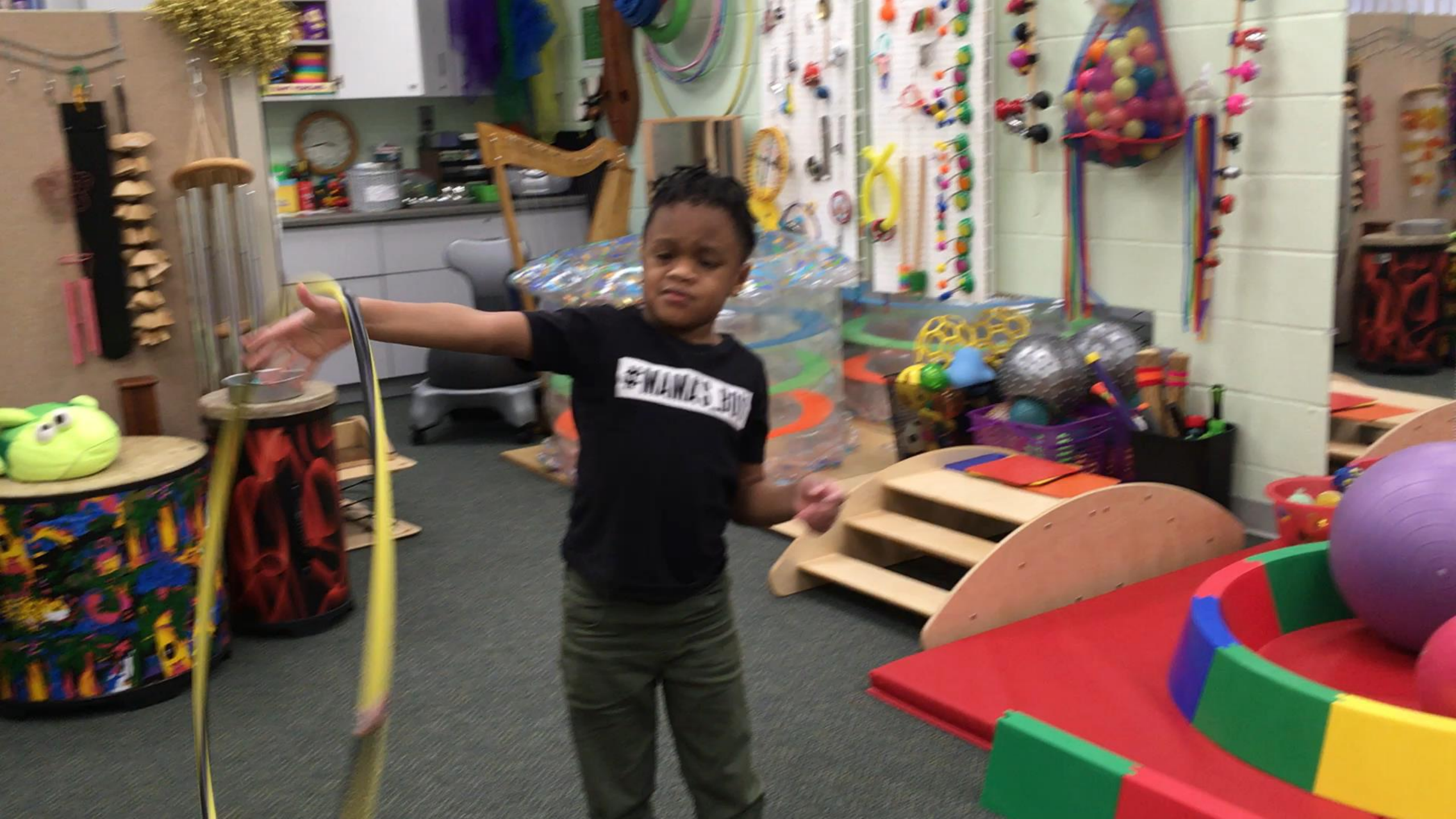


LIMIT AND/OR  
RESPOND  
APPROPRIATELY  
TO DISTRACTIONS



A young boy laying supine on a resonance board, smiling with bowling pins and various balls surrounding him





# Pathways to Learning

Evaluate the properties of materials related to abilities

Sight

Smell




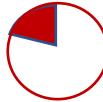


Taste

Touch







Hearing

Movement

## VI & Spastic CP

- Sight 
- Smell 
- Taste 
- Touch 
- Hearing 
- Movement 

## VI & ASD

- Sight 
- Smell 
- Taste 
- Touch 
- Hearing 
- Movement 



# Design Activities Around Function

Use equipment/materials that facilitate learning.

Think of ability level of the hand, movements of the head, trunk, and legs.



A child seated in a wheelchair with an elastic grasping tray in front of him and a magnetic board to his left. He is smiling and grasping a pan lid with his right hand





**Activity Belt**



**Position Board**



**Velcro Vest**



**Magnetic Boards**

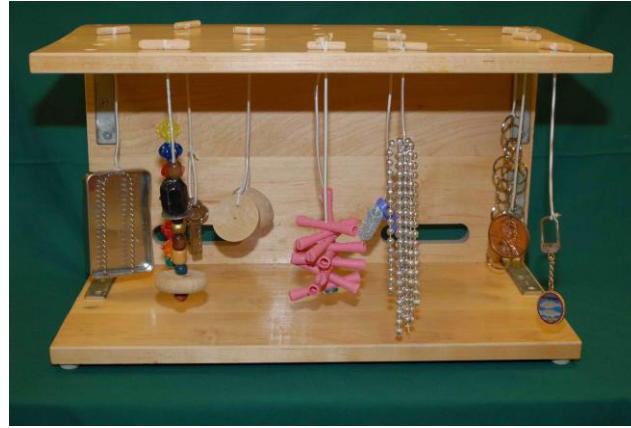


**Activity Book**





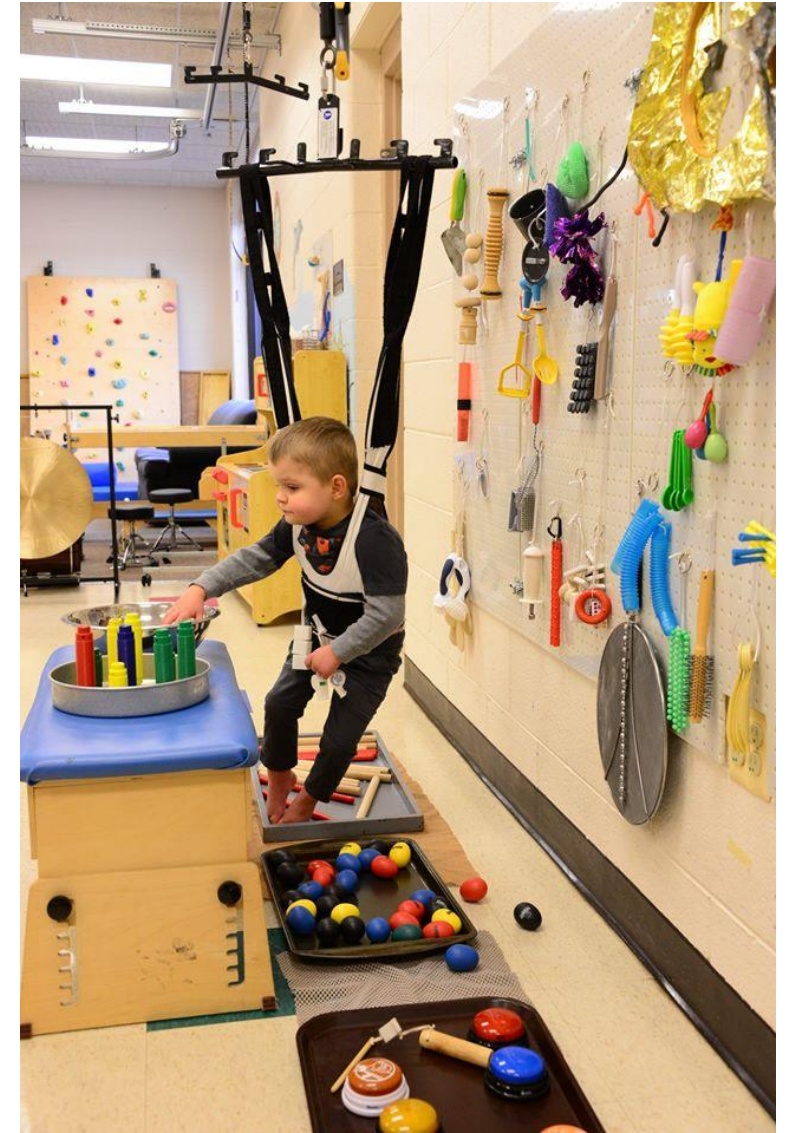
**A child using a Little Room**



**A tabletop mobile**



**Velcro gloves**



**A child in a HOPSA-dress**





**Velcro Board, Tray or Vest**



**PVC Mobile**



**Metal or Wood Containers/Beads**



**Scratching Board**



**Elastic Board**

How can you  
implement  
these concepts  
in the  
classroom?

- Active participation
- Repetition
- Developmental Learning
- Reinforcement/Motivation
- The limiting or appropriate response to interruptions
- Pathways to Learning



“Spontaneous attention is fundamental to all learning. We cannot force the [special needs] child to attend, for attention is a selective activity of the mind.”

Mary Reilly, 1974











## For More Information

- [www.Penrickton.org](http://www.Penrickton.org)
- [kirstyn@penrickton.org](mailto:kirstyn@penrickton.org)
- [Activelearningspace.org](http://Activelearningspace.org)