The first graders in Mrs. McNeal’s classroom are rereading their collaborative retelling of Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* (2003). It’s written on large charts, one for the beginning, one for the middle, and one for the end:

**Beginning**

Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief. His mother called him, “Wild Thing!”
He was sent to bed without any supper!

**Middle**

Max went to his room and a forest grew. Max got into his private boat and sailed to where the wild things are.

**End**

Max wanted to go home to where somebody loved him best of all. When he got home his supper was waiting for him and it was still hot!

Mrs. McNeal used interactive writing for the retelling so that all of the words would be spelled correctly, and the children could easily reread it. The “middle” chart is shown on page 4; the boxes around some letters and words represent the correction tape that Mrs. McNeal used to correct spelling errors and poorly formed letters.

Japmeet holds the pointer and leads the class in rereading the “beginning” chart, moving the pointer from word to word as the children read aloud. Next, Henry leads the rereading of the “middle” chart, and Noelle does the “end” chart. As they finish reading, the children clap their hands because they’re proud of their retelling of a favorite story.

Mrs. McNeal’s students are learning about stories; they know that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. They can pick out the three parts in stories that Mrs. McNeal reads aloud, and they try to include all three parts in the stories they write.
The first graders participate in a 60-minute writing workshop each day, beginning with a 15-minute word work lesson that involves reading and writing high-frequency words. The first graders sit on the floor in front of the word wall, a bulletin-board display with 20 sheets of construction paper on which the letters are printed in alphabetical order and word cards with high-frequency words are posted according to beginning letter. Currently, 52 words are posted on the word wall, and several new words are added each week.

The lesson begins with a quick review of the words. First, Hanna holds the pointer and leads the children in reading the words. Next, Mrs. McNeal passes out small whiteboards, pens, and erasers, and they play a word game: The teacher gives phonological, semantic, and syntactic clues about a word on the word wall, and the first graders identify the word. Mrs. McNeal says, “I’m thinking of a word with three letters. It begins with /y/ and it fits in this sentence: _____ are my friend. What’s the word?” The children identify you and write it on their whiteboards. They hold up their boards so Mrs. McNeal can check their work. Then they erase their boards, and the game continues.

Next, Mrs. McNeal teaches a 15-minute minilesson on a writing concept, such as adding details, writing titles, or using punctuation marks correctly. Today, she reviews beginning, middle, and end. She asks Sachit to read his draft aloud. He reads:

I love school. I have lots of friends. One is Yaman. He is a good friend to me. We play with Alex. We play basketball. We are good friends. I can’t get a ball in the hoop.

The children pick out the beginning and middle sections of the story but notice that Sachit’s story needs an ending. After several children suggest possible endings, Sachit decides to use Yaman’s suggestion and finishes his story this way: But I still play basketball anyway.

A 25-minute writing period follows. On most days, children write stories independently, but sometimes they work together to write collaborative compositions, as they did to retell Where the Wild Things Are. Today, some children are beginning new stories. They sit
knee-to-knee with a classmate and plan their stories by telling them aloud. Some children work on stories they began the previous day, and others meet with Mrs. McNeal to share their writings. They read their stories to the teacher and talk about them, checking that they make sense and have a beginning, a middle, and an end. If the story is ready to be

Children's Retelling of the “Middle” of the Story

Max went to his room and a forest grew. Max got into his private boat and sailed to where the wild things are.

Noelle’s Story

The Birthday Party

Once it was my grandpa’s birthday. We had a party. We played lots of games. My dad played and my sister played and my cousin played. All of us had fun.
published, Mrs. McNeal types it on the computer, leaving space at the top for an illustration and correcting spelling and other mechanical errors so that the children can read it.

For the last 5 minutes of the workshop, children share their newly published compositions. Noelle reads aloud her story, “The Birthday Party,” which is shown on the previous page. The children tell her that they like her story because it reminds them of the time they spend with their grandparents. Mrs. McNeal ceremoniously hangs Noelle’s story in a special section of the bulletin board for everyone to reread.

Today, teachers face new challenges and opportunities. The students who come to your classroom may speak a different language at school than they speak at home, and they’re growing up in varied family structures: Many live in two-parent families, but others live with single parents or grandparents, in blended families, or with two moms or dads. Far too many children are growing up in poverty, some with parents in prison and siblings in gangs. Still others are homeless. Sadly, some have lost sight of the American dream, believing that a college education is out of reach. Clearly, the way you teach language arts must address not only your beliefs about how children learn but also the language and culture of the students you teach.

HOW CHILDREN LEARN

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1886–1980) radically changed our understanding of how children learn with his constructivist framework (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000). He described learning as the modification of children’s cognitive structures as they interact with and adapt to their environment. He believed that children construct their own knowledge from their experiences. Related to Piaget’s theory is the information-processing theory (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 2001), which focuses on how learners use cognitive processes to think about what and how they’re learning.

The Process of Learning

Children’s knowledge is not just a collection of isolated bits of information; it’s organized in the brain, and this organization becomes increasingly integrated as their knowledge grows (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). The organization of knowledge is the cognitive structure, and knowledge is arranged in category systems called schemata. (A single category is a schema.) Within the schemata are three components: categories of knowledge, features or rules for determining what constitutes a category and what’s included in each category, and a network of interrelationships among the categories.

These schemata can be likened to a conceptual filing system in which people organize and store the information derived from their past experiences. Taking this analogy further, information is filed in the brain in “file folders.” As children learn, they add new file folders to their filing system, and as they study a topic, its file folder becomes thicker.

Children enlarge existing schemata or construct new ones using two cognitive processes—assimilation and accommodation (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000). Assimilation takes place when information
is integrated into existing schemata, and accommodation occurs when schemata are modified or new schemata are created. Through assimilation, children add new information to their picture of the world; through accommodation, they change that picture to reflect new information.

Learning occurs through the process of equilibration. When children encounter something they don’t understand, disequilibrium, or cognitive conflict, results. This disequilibrium typically produces confusion and agitation, feelings that impel children to seek equilibrium, a comfortable balance with the environment. In other words, when confronted with new or discrepant information, children are intrinsically motivated to try to make sense of it. If their schemata can assimilate or accommodate the new information, then the disequilibrium caused by the new experience will motivate them to learn. Equilibrium is then regained at a higher developmental level. Here’s the three-step process:

1. Equilibrium is disrupted by the introduction of new or discrepant information.
2. Disequilibrium occurs, and the dual processes of assimilation and accommodation function.
3. Equilibrium is attained at a higher developmental level.

The process of equilibration happens again and again during the course of a day. In fact, it’s occurring right now as you’re reading this chapter. Learning doesn’t always occur when we’re presented with new information, however: If the new information is too difficult and we can’t relate it to what we already know, we don’t learn. The new information must be puzzling, challenging, or, in Piaget’s words, “moderately novel.”

**Learning Strategies**

We all have skills that we use automatically plus self-regulated strategies for things that we do well—driving defensively, playing volleyball, training a new pet, or maintaining classroom discipline. We unconsciously apply skills we’ve learned and thoughtfully choose among strategies. The strategies are problem-solving mechanisms that involve complex thinking processes. When we’re learning how to drive a car, for example, we learn both skills and strategies. Some of the first skills we learn are how to make left turns and parallel park. With practice, these skills become automatic. One of the first strategies we learn is how to pass another car. At first, we have only a small repertoire of strategies, and we don’t always use them effectively; that’s one reason why we get a learner’s permit that requires a more experienced driver to ride along with us. With practice and guidance, we become more successful drivers, able to anticipate driving problems and take defensive actions.

Children develop a variety of learning strategies, including rehearsal—repeating information over and over—that they use to remember something. They also learn to use these strategies:

- **PREDICTING.** Children anticipate what will happen next.
- **ORGANIZING.** Children group information into categories.
- **ELABORATING.** Children expand on the information presented.
- **MONITORING.** Children regulate or keep track of their progress.

Information-processing theory suggests that as children grow older, their use of learning strategies improves (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 2001). As they acquire more effective methods for learning and remembering information, children also become more aware of their own cognitive processes and better able to regulate them. They can reflect on their literacy processes and talk about themselves as readers and writers. For example, third grader Mario reports that “it’s mostly after I read a book that I write” (Muhammad, 1993, p. 99), and fifth grader Hobbes reports that “the pictures in my head help me when I write stuff down ‘cause then I can get ideas from my pictures” (L. Cleary, 1993, p. 142).
Children become more realistic about the limitations of their memories and more knowledgeable about which learning strategies are most effective in particular situations. They also become increasingly aware of what they know and don’t know. The term *metacognition* refers to this knowledge that children acquire about their own learning processes and to their regulation of these cognitive processes to maximize learning (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

Teachers play an important role in developing children’s metacognitive abilities. During large-group activities, teachers introduce and model learning strategies. In small-group lessons, they provide guided practice, talk with children about learning strategies, and ask them to reflect on their own use of these cognitive processes. Teachers also guide children about when to use particular strategies and which strategies are more effective with various activities.

**Social Contexts of Learning**

Cognitive development is enhanced through social interaction. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) asserted that children learn through socially meaningful interactions and that language is both social and an important facilitator of learning (Vygotsky, 1986, 2006). Experiences are organized and shaped by society, but rather than merely absorbing these experiences, children negotiate and transform them as a dynamic part of culture. They learn to talk through social interaction and to read and write through interaction with literate children and adults (Dyson, 1997, 2003). Community is important: Students talk with classmates about books they’re reading, and they turn to classmates for feedback about their writing (Zebrorski, 1994).

Through interactions with teachers and collaboration with classmates, students learn things they couldn’t on their own (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Teachers guide and support students as they move from their current level of knowledge toward a more advanced level. Vygotsky (2006) described these two levels as the *actual developmental level*, the point at which learners can perform a task independently, and the *level of proximal development*, the point at which learners can perform a task with assistance. Students can do more difficult things in collaboration than they can on their own, which is why teachers are important models and why students often work with partners and in small groups.

A child’s “zone of proximal development” is the range of tasks that the child can perform with guidance from others but cannot yet perform independently. According to Vygotsky, children learn best when they’re attempting to learn within this zone. He believed that children learn little by performing tasks they can already do independently—at their actual developmental level—or by attempting tasks that are too difficult, or beyond their zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner (2004) used the term *scaffold* as a metaphor to describe adults’ contributions to children’s learning. Scaffolds are support mechanisms that teachers, parents, and others provide to help children successfully perform a task within their zone of proximal development. Teachers serve as scaffolds when they model or demonstrate a procedure, guide children through a task, ask questions, break complex tasks into smaller steps, and supply pieces of information. As students gain knowledge and experience about how to perform a task, teachers gradually withdraw their support so students make the transition from social interaction to internalized, independent functioning.

**Implications for Learning Language Arts**

How students learn has important implications for how they learn language arts. Contributions from the constructivist, information-processing, and sociolinguistic theories include these ideas:

- Students are active participants in learning.
- Students learn by relating the new information to prior knowledge.
Students organize their knowledge in schemata.
Students apply strategies consciously as they learn.
Students learn through social interactions with classmates and the teacher.
Teachers provide scaffolds for students.

Think about these implications and how they'll affect your teaching.

**LANGUAGE LEARNING AND CULTURE**

Language is a complex system for creating meaning through socially shared conventions (Halliday, 2006). Before children enter kindergarten, they learn the language of their community. They understand what community members say to them, and they share their ideas with others through that language. In an amazingly short period of three or four years, children master the exceedingly complex system of their native language, which allows them to understand sentences they've never heard before and to create sentences they've never said before. Young children aren't taught how to talk; this knowledge about language develops unconsciously.

**The Four Language Systems**

Language is organized using four systems, sometimes called cueing systems, which together make communication possible:

- The phonological, or sound, system of language
- The syntactic, or structural, system of language
- The semantic, or meaning, system of language
- The pragmatic, or social and cultural use, system of language

The four language systems and their terminology are summarized in Figure 1–1. Children have an implicit understanding of these systems, and they integrate information simultaneously from them in order to communicate. No one system is more important than any other, even though the phonological system (sometimes called the visual system) plays a prominent role when young children are learning to read and write.

**The Phonological System.** There are approximately 44 speech sounds in English. Children learn to pronounce these sounds as they learn to talk, and they associate the sounds with letters as they learn to read and write. Sounds are called *phonemes*, and they're represented in print with diagonal lines to differentiate them from *graphemes*, or letter combinations. For example, the first letter in *mother* is written m, and the phoneme is represented by /m/; the /ð/ phoneme in *soap* represented by the grapheme oa.

The phonological system is important in both oral and written language. Regional and cultural differences exist in the way people pronounce phonemes. For example, John F. Kennedy’s speech was typical of New England. Similarly, the English spoken in Australia is different from American English. English learners must learn to pronounce English sounds, and sounds that are different from those in their native language are particularly difficult to learn. For example, Spanish doesn't have /θ/ sounds, and children who have immigrated to the United States from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries have difficulty pronouncing this sound; they often substitute /d/ for /θ/ because the sounds are articulated in similar ways (Nathenson-Mejia, 1989). Younger children usually learn to pronounce the difficult sounds more easily than older English learners do.
Children use their knowledge of phonology as they learn to read and write. In a purely phonetic language, there’s a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, and teaching students to sound out words is an easy process. But English isn’t a purely phonetic language, because there are 26 letters and 44 sounds and many ways to combine the letters—especially the vowels—to spell some of the sounds. Phonics, which describes the phoneme-grapheme correspondences and related spelling rules, is an important part of early literacy instruction, because students use phonics to decode words. They also use their understanding of the phonological system to spell words. Second graders, for example, might spell school as skule, based on their knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relationships and spelling patterns. As students learn more, their spellings become increasingly sophisticated and finally conventional.

The Syntactic System. The syntactic system is the structural organization of English. This system is the grammar that regulates how words are combined into sentences. Here the word grammar means the rules governing how words are organized into sentences, not the parts of speech or the conventional etiquette of language. Children use the syntactic system as they combine words to form sentences. Word order is important in English, and English speakers must arrange words into a sequence that makes sense. Young Spanish-speaking English learners, for example, learn to say, “This is my red sweater,” not “This is my sweater red,” the literal translation from Spanish. Students use their knowledge of the syntactic system as they read. They anticipate that the words they’re reading have been strung together into meaningful sentences. When they come to an
unfamiliar word, they recognize its role in the sentence. For example, in the sentence “The horses galloped through the gate and out into the field,” students may not be able to decode the word through, but they can easily substitute a reasonable word or phrase, such as out of or past. Many of the capitalization and punctuation rules that students learn reflect the syntactic system. Similarly, when they learn about simple, compound, and complex sentences, they’re learning about the syntactic system.

Another component of syntax is word forms. Words such as dog and play are morphemes, the smallest meaningful units in language. Word parts that change the meaning of a word are also morphemes. When the plural marker -s is added to dog to make dogs, for instance, or the past-tense marker -ed is added to play to make played, these words now contain two morphemes because the inflectional endings change the meaning. The words dog and play are free morphemes because they stand alone; the endings -s and -ed are bound morphemes because they must be attached to a free morpheme to convey meaning. As they learn to talk, children quickly learn to combine words and word parts, such as adding -s to cookie to create a plural and adding -er to high to indicate a comparison. They also learn to combine two or more free morphemes to form compound words such as birthday, sailboat, and grandfather.

Children also learn to add affixes to words. Affixes added at the beginning of a word are prefixes, and those added at the end are suffixes. Both kinds of affixes are bound morphemes. For example, the prefix un- in unhappy is a bound morpheme, but happy is a free morpheme because it can stand alone.

The Semantic System. The third language system is the semantic, or meaning, system; it focuses on vocabulary. Researchers estimate that children have a vocabulary of 5,000 words by the time they enter school, and they continue to acquire 3,000 words each year (Stahl & Nagy, 2005). Children probably learn 7 to 10 words a day, many of which are learned informally through reading and through social studies, science, and other curricular areas.

At the same time students are learning new words, they’re also learning that many words have multiple meanings. Meaning is usually based on the context—the surrounding words. The common word run, for instance, has more than 30 meanings! The meaning of run in these sentences is tied to the context in which it’s used:

- Will the mayor run for reelection?
- The bus runs between Dallas and Houston.
- The advertisement will run for three days.
- Did you run in the 50-yard dash?
- The plane made a bombing run.
- Run to the store and get a loaf of bread for me.
- The dogs are out in the run.

Students often don’t have the full range of meanings; rather, they learn meanings through a process of refinement.

Students learn other sophisticated concepts about words as well. They learn about shades of meaning—for example, the differences among these sad words: unhappy, crushed, desolate, miserable, disappointed, cheerless, down, and grief stricken. They also learn about synonyms and antonyms, wordplay, and figurative language.

The Pragmatic System. The fourth language system is pragmatics, which deals with the social and cultural aspects of language use. People use language for many purposes, and how they talk or write varies according to purpose and audience. Language use varies among social classes, cultural and ethnic groups, and geographic regions; these varieties are known as dialects. School is one cultural community, and the language of school is Standard English; this register, or style,
is formal—the one used in textbooks, newspapers, and magazines and by television newscasters. Other forms, including those spoken in inner cities, in Appalachia, and by Mexican Americans in the Southwest, are generally classified as nonstandard English; these nonstandard forms are alternatives in which the phonology, syntax, and semantics differ from those of Standard English, but they aren’t inferior or substandard. They reflect the communities of the speakers, and the speakers communicate as effectively as those who use Standard English in their communities. The goal is for students to add Standard English to their repertoire of language registers, not to replace their home dialect with Standard English. Interestingly, researchers have found regional differences in how people spell words on Twitter (Eisenstein, O’Connor, Smith, & Xing, 2011). For example, cool is spelled coo in southern California but koo in northern California, and in New York City suttin is shorthand for something.

**Academic Language**

The type of English used for instruction is called *academic language*. It’s different than the social or conversational language we speak at home and with friends in two ways. First, academic language is more cognitively demanding and decontextualized than social language in which speakers carry on face-to-face conversations about everyday topics (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002). Teachers use academic language when they teach language arts and other content areas and when they give directions for completing assignments. It’s also the language used in content-area textbooks and standardized achievement tests.

Second, academic language has semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic features that distinguish it from social language. The ideas being expressed are more complex; the meaning is less obvious and takes more effort to understand. The vocabulary is more technical and precise; many words are unfamiliar or are used in new ways. The sentence structure is different: Academic language uses longer, more complex sentences that may be difficult to understand. Academic language has a different style, too: Speakers and writers present detailed, well-organized information about complex and abstract topics, usually without becoming personally involved in the topic. The contrasts between social and academic language are summarized in Figure 1–2.

Even when students are proficient users of social language, they’re likely to have difficulty understanding and using academic language in the classroom without instruction (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002). Through instruction and frequent opportunities to use academic language in meaningful ways, students develop the knowledge, vocabulary, and language patterns associated with academic English. Although learning academic language is essential for all students, the challenge is greater for English learners.

**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students**

The United States is a culturally pluralistic society, and our ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity is reflected in classrooms. Today, more than a third of us classify ourselves as non-European Americans, and the percentage of culturally diverse students is even higher: In California, more than half of school-age children belong to ethnic minority groups, and in New York state, 40% do. Given current birthrates and immigration patterns, researchers estimate that within a few years, Hispanic American and Asian American populations will grow by more than 20%, and the African American population by 12%. These changing demographic realities are having a significant impact on schools, as more and more students come from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Because the United States is a nation of immigrants, dealing with cultural diversity isn’t a new responsibility for public schools; however, the magnitude of diversity is much greater now. In the past, the United States was viewed as a melting pot in which language and cultural differences
would be assimilated or combined to form a new, truly American culture. What actually happened,
though, was that the European American culture remained dominant. That idea has been replaced
with cultural pluralism, which respects people’s right to retain their cultural identity within Ameri-
can society, recognizing that each culture contributes to and enriches the total society.

Children of diverse cultures come to school with a broad range of language and literacy
experiences, although their experiences may be different than those of mainstream or European
American children (Samway & McKeon, 1999). They’ve learned to communicate in at least one
language, and, if they don’t speak English, they want to learn English to make friends, learn, and
communicate just like their classmates. Brock and Raphael (2005) emphasize that teachers must
take students’ diverse backgrounds into account as they plan instruction, making sure to provide
a variety of opportunities for students to participate in classroom activities.

**English Learners.** Learning a second language is a constructive process, and students learn
English in a predictable way through interactions with classmates and adults. Jim Cummins
(1989) theorized that English learners must develop two types of English proficiency. First, children
learn social or everyday language, which Cummins called Basic Interpersonal Conversational Skills
(BICS). Social language is characterized as context embedded because context cues that make
the language easier to understand are available to speakers and listeners. This type of language
is easy to learn, according to Cummins, because it’s cognitively undemanding and can usually
be acquired in only two to three years.

Cummins’s second type is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). CALP is
academic language, the type of language that students need to understand and use for school
success, and it’s much harder to learn because it’s context reduced and more cognitively demand-
ing. Context-reduced language is more abstract and less familiar, and because technical terms,
complex sentence structures, and less familiar topics are involved, it’s less cognitively demanding.
English learners require five to seven years or more to become proficient in this type of English,
and too many English learners never reach proficiency.

How quickly English learners learn academic English depends on many factors, including
their native language proficiency, school experiences, motivation, and personality. The family’s
literacy level, socioeconomic status, and cultural isolation are other considerations. In addition, when families flee from social unrest or war in their native countries, children often take longer to learn English because of the trauma they experienced. So that students grow in their knowledge and use of academic language, Courtney Cazden (2001) challenges teachers to incorporate more academic language in their instruction and classroom activities.

**Critical Literacy**

It’s easy for teachers to focus on teaching language arts without considering how language works in society, but language is more than just a means of communication; it shapes our perceptions of society, justice, and acceptance. Standard English is the language of school, but today, many students speak a different language or nonstandard English at home. These language differences and the way that teachers and classmates respond to them affect how students think about themselves and their expectations for school success. Some students are more eager to share their ideas than others, and research suggests that teachers call on boys more often than girls. Also, classmates encourage some students to participate more than others. These language behaviors silence some students and marginalize others.

Language isn’t neutral. Both children and adults use language for a variety of purposes—to entertain, inform, control, and persuade, for example. Language used for these purposes affects our beliefs, opinions, and behavior. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, for example, had a great impact on American society, calling people to action during the civil rights movement. Essays, novels, and other written materials also affect us in powerful ways. Think about the impact of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1995): The madness of the Holocaust appalled us.

Critical literacy focuses on the empowering role of language. This theory emphasizes the use of language to communicate, solve problems, and persuade others to a course of action. It emphasizes the interactions among students in the classroom, and the relationship between language and students in the context of the classroom, the neighborhood, and society.

Critical literacy grew out of the critical pedagogy theory that suggests that teachers and students should ask fundamental questions about knowledge, justice, and equity (Wink, 2010). Language becomes a means for social action. Teachers do more than just teach students to use language; both teachers and students become agents of social change. The increasing social and cultural diversity in our society adds urgency to resolving inequities and injustices.

Language arts instruction doesn’t take place in a vacuum; the content that teachers teach and their instructional approaches occur in a social, cultural, political, and historical context (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Grammar instruction is a good example. Some people argue that grammar shouldn’t be taught because it’s too abstract and won’t help students become better readers or writers; however, others believe that not teaching grammar is one way the majority culture denies access to nonstandard English speakers. Both proponents and detractors of grammar instruction want what’s best for students, but their views are diametrically opposed. Think about these issues related to teaching and learning:

- Does school perpetuate the dominant culture and exclude others?
- Do all students have equal access to learning opportunities?
- How are students who speak nonstandard English treated?
- Is school more like family life in some cultures than in others?
- Do teachers interact differently with boys and girls?
- Are some students silenced in classrooms?
- Do teachers have different expectations for minority students?
- Are English learners marginalized?
- Does the literature that students read reflect diverse voices?
Language arts isn’t just a body of knowledge; instead, it’s a way of organizing knowledge within a cultural and political context. Giroux (1997) challenges teachers not to accept the status quo, but to be professionals and to take control of their own teaching and consider the impact of what they do in the classroom.

Implications for Learning Language Arts

Language and culture have important implications for how students learn language arts in school:

- Students use the four language systems simultaneously as they communicate.
- Students need to understand and use academic language.
- Students from each cultural group bring their unique backgrounds of experience to the process of learning.
- Students’ cultural and linguistic diversity provides an opportunity to enhance and enrich the learning of all students.
- Students use language arts to reflect on cultural, social, and political injustices and work to change the world.

Think about these implications and how they’ll affect the way you teach language arts.

How Students Learn Language Arts

Language arts instruction is changing to reflect the greater oral, written, and visual communication needs of the 21st century. The Steering Committee of the Elementary Section of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 1996) identified seven characteristics of competent language users, which are presented in Figure 1–3; students exemplify them as they perform these activities:

- Compare the video and book versions of the same story
- Interview community resource people who have special knowledge, interests, or talents in connection with literature focus units and thematic units
- Examine propaganda techniques used in print advertisements and television commercials
- Use the Internet to gather information as part of thematic units
- Assume the role of a character while reading a story, and write journal entries from that character’s viewpoint
- Use the writing process to write stories, and share the stories with classmates
- Analyze an author’s writing style during an author unit
- Create multimedia projects involving digital technology

These activities are meaningful, functional, and genuine; they represent the characteristics of all worthwhile language arts experiences. First, they use language in meaningful rather than contrived situations. Second, they’re functional, or real-life, activities. And third, they’re genuine rather than artificial activities, because they communicate ideas.

A Community of Learners

Language arts classrooms are social settings. Together, students and teachers create the classroom community, and the type of community they create strongly influences students’ learning.
Effective teachers establish a classroom community in which students are motivated to learn and actively involved in language arts activities. Teachers and students work collaboratively and purposefully. Perhaps the most striking quality is the partnership that teachers and students create. Students are a “family” in which all the members respect one another and support each other’s learning. They value culturally and linguistically diverse classmates and recognize that everyone makes important contributions to the classroom (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

Students and teachers work together for the good of the community. Consider the differences between renting and owning a home. In a community of learners, students and teachers are joint owners of the classroom. Students assume responsibility for their own learning and behavior, work collaboratively with classmates, complete assignments, and care for their classroom home. In contrast, in traditional classrooms, the classroom belongs to the teacher, and students are renters. This doesn’t mean that in a community of learners, teachers abdicate their responsibility. On the contrary, teachers retain their roles as organizer, facilitator, participant, instructor, model, manager, diagnostician, evaluator, coordinator, and communicator. These roles are often shared with students, but the ultimate responsibility remains with the teacher.

Researchers have identified the characteristics of effective classroom communities. These characteristics, which are described in Figure 1–4, show how the learning theories presented earlier in this chapter are translated into practice.

The process of establishing a community of learners begins when teachers make deliberate decisions about the kind of classroom culture they want to create (Whitney & Canalis, 2002). School is “real” life for students, and they learn best when they see a purpose for learning. The

**FIGURE 1–3 Characteristics of Competent Language Users**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Expression</th>
<th>Students use oral, written, and visual language to express themselves, to make connections between their experiences and their social world, and to create a personal voice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Appreciation</td>
<td>Students use language aesthetically to read literature selections, view illustrations and artistic productions, talk with others, and enrich their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Exploration</td>
<td>Students use language as a learning tool and to work in collaboration with classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Language Use</td>
<td>Students use strategies as they create and share meaning through oral, written, and visual language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Communication</td>
<td>Students use text forms, genres, and artistic style as they share ideas through oral, written, and visual language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Interpretation</td>
<td>Students use language to organize and evaluate learning experiences, question personal and social values, and think critically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful Application</td>
<td>Students use oral, written, and visual language to solve problems, persuade others, and take action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
social contexts that teachers create are key. Teachers must think about their roles and what they believe about how students learn. They must decide to have a democratic classroom where students’ abilities in reading and writing develop through meaningful literacy activities.

Teachers are more successful when they take the first 2 weeks of the school year to establish the classroom environment. They can’t assume that students will be familiar with the procedures and routines used in communities of learners or that they’ll instinctively be cooperative, responsible, and

**FIGURE 1–4 Effective Classroom Communities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Responsibility</strong></th>
<th>Students are responsible for their learning, their behavior, and the contributions they make. They’re valued and contributing members of the classroom community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td>Students participate in language arts activities that are meaningful, functional, and genuine. They read real books and write books for authentic audiences—their classmates, parents, and other community members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Students are motivated to learn and to be actively involved in language arts activities because the activities are interesting, and they often choose which books to read and which projects to create.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk Taking</strong></td>
<td>Students explore topics, make guesses, and take risks. Rather than thinking of learning as the process of getting the right answers, teachers promote students’ experimentation with language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Teachers are expert language users, and they provide instruction through minilessons and differentiate instruction to meet students’ needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstration</strong></td>
<td>Teachers demonstrate procedures, concepts, and strategies—with modeling and scaffolding—as part of minilessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
<td>Students respond to literature through writing in reading logs, participating in discussions called <em>grand conversations</em>, and taking part in dramatic activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choice</strong></td>
<td>Teachers offer choices because students are more motivated to work and value their learning experiences when activities are meaningful to them. Students often choose books to read, topics for writing, and multimedia projects to create within parameters set by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Teachers need 2 to 3 hours of uninterrupted time each day for language arts instruction, and it’s important to minimize disruptions during this time, especially in the primary grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Students take an active role in assessment. Teachers and students work together to establish guidelines for assessment, and students monitor their progress and self-evaluate their achievement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Cambourne & Turbill, 1987.
respectful of classmates. Teachers explicitly explain classroom routines, such as how to get supplies out and put them away and how to work with classmates in a collaborative group, and they set the expectation that students will adhere to the routines. Next, they demonstrate literacy procedures, including how to choose a book from the classroom library and how to provide feedback in a revising group. Third, teachers model ways of responding to literature, respecting classmates, and collaborating with classmates on multimedia projects.

Teachers are the classroom managers. They set expectations and clearly explain to students what’s expected and what’s valued in the classroom. The classroom rules are specific and consistent, and teachers set limits. For example, students might be allowed to talk quietly with classmates when they’re working, but they aren’t allowed to shout across the classroom or talk when the teacher’s talking or when classmates are making presentations. Teachers also model classroom rules themselves as they interact with students. The process of socialization at the beginning of the school year is planned, deliberate, and crucial for establishing an environment that’s conducive to learning.

Not everything can be accomplished quickly, however, so teachers continue to reinforce classroom routines and procedures. One way is to have student leaders model the desired routines and behaviors and encourage classmates to follow the lead. The classroom schedule is consistent because students feel comfortable, safe, and more willing to take risks in a predictable environment. This is especially true for students from varied cultures, English learners, and struggling students.

Self-Efficacy

Students who are engaged, or interested, in learning activities are intrinsically motivated, and they’re more likely to succeed (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). They have self-efficacy, the belief in their capability to succeed and reach their goals (Bandura, 1997). They have high aspirations, and each achievement increases their self-efficacy. Students with high self-efficacy are resilient and persistent, despite obstacles and challenges that get in the way of success. Teachers play a crucial role in engaging students by planning instructional activities that are interesting, incorporating authentic materials, and often involving students in small collaborative groups. Pressley, Dolezal, Raphael, Mohan, Roehrig, and Bogner (2003) studied nine second grade teachers, examined the most engaging teachers’ instructional practices, and identified these teacher behaviors that engage students:

- Establishing a community of learners
- Creating a positive classroom environment with books, charts, and posters used as teaching tools, colorful bulletin board displays, and a display of student work
- Setting clear expectations for learning and behavior so students know what’s expected of them
- Encouraging cooperation rather than competition
- Providing positive feedback and giving compliments for good behavior and learning
- Encouraging students to take risks and be persistent
- Planning instruction thoroughly with little “downtime” between activities
- Using authentic, hands-on activities
- Scaffolding or supporting students’ learning
- Teaching strategies through a combination of instruction and modeling
- Monitoring students’ learning and behavior
- Stimulating creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking
- Emphasizing depth over breadth as they teach
- Making home–school connections
- Modeling interest and enthusiasm for learning
Emphasizing the value of education
Enjoying being with students and communicating that they care for them

Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) found similar results when they interviewed students in prekindergarten through fifth grade.

Often students' engagement diminishes as they reach the upper grades. Penny Oldfather (1995) conducted a 4-year study to examine the factors influencing students' engagement and found that when students had opportunities for authentic self-expression as part of activities, they were more highly motivated. The students she interviewed reported that they liked having ownership of the learning activities. Specific activities that they mentioned included choosing their own topics for writing and books for reading, expressing their own ideas and opinions and talking about books they’re reading, sharing their writing with classmates, and pursuing authentic activities—not worksheets—using the language arts.

Students with low self-efficacy often adopt defensive tactics for avoiding failure rather than strategies for success (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). They give up or remain passive, uninvolved in activities. Some students feign interest or pretend to be involved even though they aren’t or focus on other curricular areas—math or physical education, for instance. Others complain about feeling ill or that classmates are bothering them. They place the blame on anything other than themselves. The solution? The immediate solution is to engage students in authentic activities that interest them and provide enough support so they can be successful. At the same time, teachers should examine the climate in their classrooms and incorporate the suggestions for engaging learners described in this section.

The Six Language Arts

Traditionally, the language arts were defined as the study of the four modes of language—listening, talking, reading, and writing—but more than a decade ago, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (Standards, 1996) proposed two additional language arts—viewing and visually representing. These new language modes reflect the growing importance of visual language.

Listening. Beginning at birth, a child’s contact with language is through listening. Too often listening instruction is neglected at school because teachers assume that students already know how to listen, and they believe that instructional time should be devoted to reading and writing. This text presents a contemporary view of listening instruction and focuses on these key concepts:

- Listening is a process of which hearing is only one part.
- Students listen differently according to their purpose.
- Students use listening strategies and monitor their understanding in order to listen more effectively.

Talking. As with listening, teachers often ignore talking because students already know how to talk, but research has emphasized the importance of talk in the learning process (Dwyer, 1991). For example, students use talk to respond to literature, provide feedback about classmates’ writing in revising groups, and present oral reports as part of thematic units. You’ll learn more about these concepts as you continue reading:

- Talk is an essential part of learning.
- Students participate in grand conversations as they respond to literature.
- Students create oral projects, including reports and PowerPoint presentations.
Reading. Reading is a process, and students use strategies to decode words and comprehend texts. Students vary how they read according to their purpose: They read for pleasure differently than they do to locate and remember information (Rosenblatt, 2005). I focus on these key concepts about reading in this text:

- Reading is a strategic process.
- The goal is comprehension, or meaning making.
- Students vary how they read according to their purpose.
- Students participate in different types of reading, including independent reading, shared reading, and guided reading.

Writing. Like reading, writing is a strategic process (Dean, 2006). Students use the writing process to write stories, reports, poems, and other genres (D. Graves, 1994). They also do informal writing, such as writing in reading logs and making graphic organizers. You’ll learn about these concepts as you continue reading:

- Students use the writing process to develop and refine their writing.
- Students apply the writer’s craft to make their compositions more effective.
- Students write compositions representing a variety of genres.
- Students use informal writing to develop writing fluency and as a learning tool.

Viewing. Visual media include film and DVDs, print advertisements and commercials, photographs and book illustrations, and the Internet. These media have become commonplace in 21st-century life, so students need to learn how to comprehend visual language and to integrate visual knowledge with other learning (T. Williams, 2007). You’ll read more about these visual-language concepts in this text:

- Viewing has become an essential part of literacy in the 21st century.
- Students view visual media for a variety of purposes.
- Students use similar strategies in reading and viewing.
- Students learn about propaganda techniques to critically analyze commercials and advertisements.

Visually Representing. Students create meaning using multiple sign systems such as video presentations, digital photos, dramatizations, posters, and illustrations in books they’re writing (Burmark, 2002; Moline, 1995). Projects involving visual texts are often completed as part of literature focus units and thematic units. I develop these concepts about visually representing:

- Students consider audience, purpose, and form as they create visual texts.
- Students create visual texts to share information learned during literature focus units and thematic units.
- Students use drama as a learning tool and a powerful way of communicating.
- Students combine real and virtual worlds to make successful presentations.

The six language arts can be characterized in several ways: Listening and talking are oral, reading and writing are written, and viewing and visually representing are visual. Also, three of the language modes—listening, reading, and viewing—are receptive because students receive or take in language. The other three modes—talking, writing, and visually representing—are productive because students compose or create language.
**Relationships Among the Language Arts.** Discussing the language arts one by one suggests a division among them, as though they could be used separately. In reality, they’re used simultaneously and reciprocally, just as Mrs. McNeal’s students in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter used all six language arts during writing workshop. In fact, almost any language arts activity involves more than one mode. In a seminal study, researcher Walter Loban (1976) documented the language growth and development of a group of 338 students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Two purposes of his longitudinal study were to examine differences between students who used language effectively and those who didn’t, and to identify predictable stages of language development. Three of Loban’s conclusions are especially noteworthy. First, he reported positive correlations among listening, talking, reading, and writing. Second, he found that students with less effective oral language abilities tended to have less effective written language abilities. And third, he found a strong relationship between students’ oral language ability and their overall academic ability. Loban’s study demonstrates clear relationships among the language arts and emphasizes the need to teach oral, written, and visual language.

**Language Arts Strategies**

Students learn strategies through language arts instruction. Strategies are problem-solving methods or behaviors, and students develop and use both general learning strategies and specific strategies related to language arts. Although there isn’t a definitive list of language arts strategies, researchers have identified some strategies that capable students use (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2007). These 25 strategies are highlighted in this text:

- **ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE.** Students think about their knowledge and prior experiences related to a topic and vocabulary related to it.
- **CONNECT.** Students make connections between texts and their personal experiences, world events, literature, and media.
- **CONSIDER THE AUDIENCE.** Students adapt their oral, written, and visual presentations to meet the needs of their audience.
- **DETECT BIAS.** Students are alert to propaganda and other types of bias in oral, written, and visual language.
- **DETERMINE IMPORTANCE.** Students use their knowledge of genres and text features or nonverbal cues to identify the big ideas, and they emphasize these important ideas in oral, written, and visual projects.
- **DRAW INFERENCES.** Students use clues in the text and their background knowledge to deepen their understanding about oral, written, and visual texts.
- **ELABORATE.** Students add details and examples to develop ideas more completely in projects they’re creating.
- **EVALUATE.** Students assess how well they’re meeting the goals they set.
- **FORMAT.** Students arrange the presentation of ideas to enhance their effectiveness.
- **GENERATE.** Students brainstorm topics, ideas, or vocabulary for a project.
- **INTEGRATE MULTIMEDIA.** Students combine oral, written, and visual language in projects.
- **MONITOR.** Students ask themselves questions and evaluate their work to monitor their progress.
- **NARROW.** Students limit the breadth of topics they’re developing in oral, written, and visual projects.
- **NOTICE/ APPLY NONVERBAL CUES.** Students understand a speaker’s use of gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice to highlight big ideas and recognize artistic elements in visual
presentations. They also highlight big ideas using gestures, expressions, and tone of voice when they’re giving oral presentations and incorporate artistic elements in visual projects.

**OBSERVE.** Students examine visual presentations, identifying artistic elements to deepen their understanding.

**ORGANIZE.** Students create a structure for the ideas they’re developing in oral, written, and visual projects.

**PLAY WITH LANGUAGE.** Students use language playfully by creating rhymes and riddles, inventing words, crafting metaphors, and adding alliteration or onomatopoeia.

**PREDICT.** Students make predictions while they’re listening, reading, and viewing, based on the text, knowledge of genre characteristics, and prior experiences with literature.

**PROOFREAD.** Students use a special reading procedure to identify mechanical errors in their writing.

**RECOGNIZE/INCORPORATE GENRE CHARACTERISTICS.** Students notice characteristics to determine the genre of a text, and they apply their knowledge about a genre when they make projects.

**REPAIR.** Students use a variety of techniques to fix problems they encounter while using the language arts.

**REVISE.** Students make changes to clarify and extend meaning in their written and visual presentations.

**SET GOALS.** Students identify why they’re involved in an activity and what they hope to accomplish.

**TAKE NOTES.** Students write big ideas and draw diagrams to highlight relationships among ideas to learn the information more easily.

**VISUALIZE.** Students form pictures in their minds to make texts more vivid and easier to understand.

These strategies are listed according to language mode in Figure 1–5. You’ll notice that some strategies, such as activating background knowledge, evaluating, and monitoring, are applied in all six language arts, but others are more specialized. Also, compare the receptive and productive modes, and you’ll see that students use many of the same strategies for listening, reading, and viewing and others for talking, writing, and visually representing.

Skills, in contrast, are techniques that students use automatically and unconsciously as they construct meaning. Many skills focus at the word level, but some require students to attend to larger chunks of text. For example, readers use skills such as decoding unfamiliar words, noting details, and sequencing events, and writers employ skills such as forming contractions, using punctuation marks, and capitalizing people’s names. Researchers agree that skills and strategies aren’t the same thing; however, controversy continues about what the terms mean. The interpretation used in this text is that the important difference between skills and strategies is how they’re used: Skills are used unconsciously, and strategies are applied deliberately (Paris et al., 1991).

Teachers use minilessons to teach students about strategies. In these brief, 15- to 30-minute lessons, they explicitly explain a strategy, model its use, share examples, and provide opportunities for practice. Teachers also take advantage of teachable moments to reexplain a strategy to a student or clarify a misconception. Both types of instruction are necessary to ensure that all students are successful.

Teachers plan strategy instruction that grows out of language arts activities using a whole-part-whole sequence: The language arts activity is the first whole, the minilesson is the part, and having students apply what they’re learning in new activities is the second whole. This instructional
## FIGURE 1–5 Language Arts Strategies According to Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>Activate background knowledge, Connect, Detect bias, Determine importance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draw inferences, Evaluate, Monitor, Notice nonverbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play with language, Predict, Recognize genre, Repair, Set goals, Take notes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talking</strong></td>
<td>Activate background knowledge, Consider the audience, Elaborate, Evaluate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generate, Highlight big ideas, Incorporate genre characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrate multimedia, Monitor, Narrow, Organize, Set goals, Use nonverbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Activate background knowledge, Connect, Detect bias, Determine importance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draw inferences, Evaluate, Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play with language, Predict, Recognize genre, Repair, Set goals, Take notes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Activate background knowledge, Consider the audience, Elaborate, Evaluate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Format, Generate, Highlight big ideas, Incorporate genre characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrate multimedia, Monitor, Narrow, Organize, Proofread, Revise, Set goals,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set goals, Visualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Viewing</strong></td>
<td>Activate background knowledge, Connect, Detect bias, Determine importance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draw inferences, Evaluate, Monitor, Notice nonverbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observe, Predict, Recognize genre, Repair, Set goals, Take notes, Visualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visually Representing</strong></td>
<td>Activate background knowledge, Consider the audience, Elaborate, Evaluate, Format, Generate, Highlight big ideas, Incorporate genre characteristics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sequence ensures that instruction is meaningful and that students learn to use the strategies independently (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003). The goal is for students to be able to use strategies independently. Dorn and Soffos (2001) identified four behaviors that teachers use to develop self-regulated learners:

**MODELING.** Teachers demonstrate how to use strategies and skills.

**COACHING.** Teachers direct students’ attention and encourage their active engagement in activities.

**SCAFFOLDING.** Teachers adjust the support they provide according to students’ needs.

**FADING.** Teachers relinquish control as students become more capable of using a strategy or performing an activity.

It’s not enough to simply explain the strategies or remind students to use them. Teachers must actively engage students, encourage and scaffold them while they’re learning, and then gradually withdraw their support, if they want their students to be able to use the language arts strategies independently.

**INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY**

The Internet is rapidly changing what it means to be literate. Students are increasingly becoming involved in online activities such as these:

- Reading electronic storybooks
- Crafting multimodal stories
- Writing blogs about books
- Creating video podcasts
- Emailing messages
- Researching nonfiction topics
- Exploring the websites of favorite authors
- Collaborating with students in other schools on projects

These students are excited about literacy because the World Wide Web fosters their engagement with language arts.

Some students learn to surf the web, locate and read information, and communicate using email and instant messaging outside of school; others, however, haven’t had as many experiences with new technologies. Teaching students how to use the Internet has become a priority so they can become fully involved in today’s digital world (Henry, 2006).

Internet texts are different than books (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006). Print materials are linear and sequential, but online texts are a unique genre with these characteristics:

**NONLINEARITY.** Hypertext lacks the familiar linear organization of books; instead, it’s dynamic and can be used in a variety of ways. Readers impose a structure that fits their needs and configure the organization when necessary.

**MULTIPLE MODALITIES.** Online texts are multimodal; they integrate words, images, and sound to create meaning. Students need to know how to interpret each type of text and appreciate how it contributes to the overall meaning.

**INTERTEXTUALITY.** Many related texts are available on the Internet, and they influence and shape each other. As students read these texts, they prioritize, evaluate, and synthesize the information being presented.
INTERACTIVITY. Webpages often include interactive features that engage readers and allow them to customize their searches, link to other websites, play games, listen to video clips, and send emails.

Because of these features, the Internet requires students to become proficient in new ways of accessing, understanding, and communicating information, which are referred to as new literacies.

Four Internet strategies are navigating, coauthoring, evaluating, and synthesizing. Students navigate the Internet to search for and locate information; coauthor online texts as they impose an organization on the information they’re reading; evaluate the accuracy, relevance, and quality of information on webpages; and synthesize information from multiple texts (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Because the Internet presents new ways of using the language arts, it’s essential that teachers prepare students to use the Internet and other information communication technologies successfully (Karchmer, Mallette, Kara-Soteriou, & Leu, 2005).

Communicative Competence

The goal of language arts instruction is for students to develop communicative competence, the ability to use language appropriately in both social and academic contexts (Hymes, 1972). Communicative competence is context specific: This means that students may participate effectively in classroom conversations but not know how to give a more formal oral presentation. Similarly, students may know how to read nonfiction books but not how to write a report to share information. At each grade level, teachers expand students’ abilities to use the six language arts in new contexts. Through language arts instruction, students acquire the characteristics of competent language users. They become more strategic and more creative in their use of language, better able to use language as a tool for learning, and more reflective in their interpretations.

ENGAGING ENGLISH LEARNERS

When teachers work with English learners, they scaffold students’ language development at the same time they’re teaching language arts. Teachers adapt instruction and engage students in language arts activities in these ways:

- Create a stress-free environment in the classroom
- Show genuine interest in students, their language, and their culture
- Build students’ background knowledge using artifacts, videos, photos, maps, and picture books
- Use oral language that is neither too hard nor too easy for students
- Embed language in context-rich activities
- Highlight important words on word walls and encourage students to use these words orally and in writing
- Have students dramatize vocabulary words they’re learning, stories they’ve read, and other topics to enhance their learning
- Demonstrate how to do projects, and show samples so students understand what they’re expected to do
- Read aloud to students every day
- Avoid forcing students to speak
- Expand the two- and three-word sentences that students produce
- Have students work together with partners and in collaborative groups
- Have students share ideas with a partner as a rehearsal before sharing with the whole class
- Provide many opportunities for students to use English in low-risk situations

Teachers don’t lower their expectations for any group of students; instead, they create a nurturing classroom environment, differentiate their instruction, and engage English learners in meaningful, functional, and genuine oral, written, and visual language activities.

**SUMMING UP**

The goal of language arts instruction is to develop students’ communicative competence in all six language arts—listening, talking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing—and the best way to achieve communicative competence is through instruction that’s based on theories about how children learn combined with meaningful, functional, and genuine activities. Language and culture also influence achievement, especially when students aren’t fluent English speakers or don’t live in middle class communities. The language used at school is academic language; it’s cognitively demanding and decontextualized.

**MyEducationLab™**

Go to the topic Reading in the MyEducationLab (http://www.myeducationlab.com) for Language Arts: Patterns of Practice, where you can:

- Find learning outcomes for Reading, along with the national standards that connect to these outcomes.
- Complete Assignments and Activities that can help you more deeply understand the chapter content.
- Apply and practice your understanding of the core teaching skills identified in the chapter with the Building Teaching Skills and Dispositions learning units.
- Examine challenging situations and cases presented in the IRIS Center Resources.
- Check your comprehension of the content covered in the chapter with the Study Plan. Here you will be able to take a chapter quiz, receive feedback on your answers, and then access Review, Practice, and Enrichment activities to enhance your understanding of chapter content.

On the MyEducationLab for this course, you’ll also be able to:

- **A+Rise** Go to the topic A+Rise, an innovative and interactive database of strategies that differentiate instruction across the language arts and provide particular insight into research-based methods to meet the needs of English learners.
- Explore the topic Literacy Portraits—yearlong case studies of second graders, complete with student artifacts, teacher commentary, and student and teacher interviews, tracking the month-by-month language arts growth of five students.
- Gain practice with the Grammar Tutorial, online guided instruction to improve your own ability with grammar.