

## CHAPTER 1

### Learning and the Language Arts

#### Part 1: Overview

Chapter 1 presents an overview of learning theories based on the work of Piaget and Vygotsky as they provide the foundation for the approach to language arts instruction presented in this textbook. A theory of literacy based on the work of Paulo Freire is also presented to help teachers see how language assists children in understanding their worlds—their place within society.

Components of this foundation are:

- Children learn language within a community of more accomplished and supportive language users.
- Children actively construct knowledge through experiences.
- Adults facilitate children's learning through modelling and providing scaffolds.
- Classrooms are social settings in which children develop learning together.
- Children first learn to understand their world before reading and understanding words.
- Language can be used to empower or dominate others.
- To use language well, children must also understand how language is used to influence and manipulate thinking and perceptions.
- Educators need to adopt a new view of literacy, in relation to the transformation in the literacy practices of young people.

The chapter is organized into five main topics: how children learn, language learning and culture, culturally and linguistically diverse students, what is literacy?, and finally critical literacy. The first section discusses cognitive structure including schema theory and equilibrium (from Piaget), some common learning strategies, and the importance of social contexts in learning (from Vygotsky); the second section focuses on four cueing

systems of language learning; the third section discusses culturally and linguistically diverse students, bilingualism and English language learners (ELL); the fourth section deals with multiliteracies and the relationships between technology and literacy, language arts and literacy, and teaching and learning multiliteracies; the fifth section focuses on Critical Literacy (from Freire), social contexts, oppression and power. It describes the six language arts—listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing—and core strategies and skills needed in language arts.

## **Chapter Outline**

### ***How Children Learn***

The Process of Learning

Learning Strategies

Social Contexts of Learning

Implications for Learning the Language Arts

### ***Language Learning and Culture***

The Four Language Systems

*The Phonological System*

*The Syntactic System*

*The Semantic System*

*The Pragmatic System*

### ***Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students***

Bilingual Students and English Language Learners (ELL)

*Valuing Students' First Language*

*Learning a Second Language*

Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

***What is Literacy?***

Integrating Technology

Teaching and Using Multiliteracies

***Critical Literacy***

The Teacher's Role

Culture, Gender, and Social Contexts

The Six Language Arts

*Listening*

*Speaking*

*Reading*

*Writing*

*Viewing*

*Visually Representing*

*Relationships among the Language Arts*

## **Review and Theory to Practice**

### **Insight: How do the views that teachers hold about how children learn affect how they teach?**

Our views as teachers do matter—they affect what our students experience in the classroom, even if we are not entirely self-aware about what those views are. Student teachers sometimes resist theory, pleading that they only want to know what they should do. The purpose of this insight is for student teachers to think about how they will use or reject certain practices depending upon their ideas about how learning happens, and therefore to consider how children learn language arts. Instructors can draw a chart on the chalkboard and compare/contrast Piaget's and Vygotsky's learning theories and the implications of these theories for learning and teaching language arts. Instructors might also ask students to think about how a person learns to swim, ice skate, or drive a car. It is useful to think about how learning a physical skill such as swimming is similar to, and different from, learning a cognitive skill like reading.

Our views of the power of language heavily influence the ways in which we as teachers structure and plan language activities. The work of Paulo Freire has allowed us to see teaching as a political activity. Instructors might ask students to keep a journal of their own language use and that of those with whom they associate regularly. How does the choice of vocabulary in varying contexts allow them to manipulate or be manipulated? How does this awareness influence their future teaching? What level of consciousness is necessary to best achieve their desired outcomes?

## Preview Questions

- How does knowledge of how children learn affect the teaching of language arts?
- Does knowledge of how children learn to talk relate to the teaching strategies used in elementary classrooms?
- Based on how children learn language arts, how should language arts programs be developed for elementary students?
- How can teachers today understand and incorporate the social and cultural impact of technology use in their language arts classrooms?
- Describe how the “new literacies” impact the teaching of language arts. What type of strategies and skills do we need to teach student teachers in order to effectively use the internet and related technologies as learning resources?
- How can student teachers adapt their teaching methods for culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms?
- Why do teachers need to create a learning environment that validates and values the languages and cultures of all students?
- How can the languages of linguistically diverse children be incorporated in the language arts classroom?
- What are consequences of mother tongue loss?

## **Key Concepts and Terms**

schema/schemata (p. 4)

assimilation and accommodation (p. 5)

equilibrium and disequilibrium (p. 5)

metacognition (p. 6)

model (p. 6)

guided practice (p. 6)

to reflect (p. 6)

scaffolding (p. 7)

zone of proximal development (p. 7)

cueing systems (p. 8)

phonological system (p.9)

phoneme (p. 9)

grapheme (p. 9)

English language learners (p. 9)

phonics (p. 9)

syntactic system (p. 9-10)

morphemes (p. 10)

semantic system (p. 10-11)

pragmatic system (p. 11)

cultural and linguistic diversity (p. 11-12)

mother tongue (native language) (p. 13)

valuing students' first language (p. 13)

grand conversations (p. 15)

literacy (p. 16, 18)

the new literacies (p. 16)

technology and literacy (p. 18-19)

teaching and learning multiliteracies (p. 19-20)

multiliteracy (p. 16, 19-20)

critical literacy (p. 20-21)

literacy as emancipatory, political act (p. 21)

visual literacy (p. 24)

**Literacy in Action: Integrating Digital Photography and Life Writing in a Multi-modal Literacy Project**

Grades 5 and 6 Humanities teacher, Daniel Buchanan, explains how he uses the Hope Project as an exercise that emphasizes the interconnectedness of different forms of literacy through the use of writing, photography, industrial design, and digital media. The Hope Project begins as a collaborative exercise on the definition of Hope that is followed by writing several drafts on students' personal understanding of the concept. An assessment rubric is created by evaluating successful examples from previous years. The collaborative method not only builds student empathy and self-awareness, but also demonstrates the idea that no writing project is ever entirely complete and can be transformed by subjecting it to other media. Ask students to create a multi-modal project about teaching. They might, for example, establish a personal narrative on their relationships to teaching (or teachers) or perhaps construct a project as a metaphor for how they conceive teaching as a totality that is composed of different pieces.

## **Part 2: Teaching Suggestions**

### **Before Class Activities**

#### ***Write Questions***

Ask students to identify and write a question that concerns them about the teaching of language arts, based on the teaching practicum experiences that they have had prior to this course.

Ask them to reflect upon the teaching practicum experience and recall some of the questions, issues and concerns that might have arisen about the teaching of language arts.



Then, as a whole class, group the issues or questions according to the themes presented. Further discussion topics may be formulated from these issues/questions.

Or

Ask students to come to class with written notes of questions that arose for them from reading the “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students” section of this chapter (pp. 11-16). (See “Read, Write, Discuss, Reflect” below.)

### ***Reflect on Experience***

Ask students to reflect on their experiences as elementary students. Ask them to remember their classrooms and to try to create a mental image of that space and the activities they pursued: reading sources, work activities, classroom arrangements, resources, and their personal reactions to learning. Use these for discussion after students have had an opportunity to observe in a present-day classroom.

### ***Reflect on Observations***

Have students observe an elementary classroom and make a list of ways this classroom differs from, or is similar to, classrooms they remember from elementary school.

### ***During Class Activities***

### ***Quickwrite***

Ask students to jot down quickly (give only a few minutes) either how they remember learning to read and write, or what language arts instruction (also called English) and activities they recall from their early school years.

After theories of learning have been discussed in class, ask students to indicate which theory it appears was the basis for their early instruction and why they think so. See which theories or approaches are represented amongst students.

### ***Use Read, Write, Discuss, and Reflect (RWDR)***

Have students in small groups ask each other the questions they brought to class on learning theories (see Write Questions above). Students should seek to answer each other's questions and discuss points of interest from reading. Then, have each group formulate at least one question or write at least one statement, which students would like to discuss with the whole class. Lead students in whole class discussion, clarifying misconceptions, answering questions, and expanding thinking. At the end of class, ask students to reflect on their learning by writing in their class learning log or journal.

With the reflections and observations collected, create a T-chart that will allow students to see the differences between their early literacy experiences and the present-day experiences that they have observed. Have students link specific learning models to the literacy activities described.

### ***Demonstrate the Six Language Arts***

Introduce the six language arts (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing) and discuss them sufficiently that students understand what each

is and how they relate to each other. Ask questions to draw attention to particular points; for example, that it is not necessary to spell in order to read, or that oral language normally develops first with written language development heavily dependent upon oral language competence. Choose a topic such as dinosaurs, quilts, or a picture book such as Jane Yolen's *Owl Moon*, and write the topic in a centre circle (If using a picture book, first read it aloud to students). Then draw out rays for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Ask students to suggest ways to use each language mode to teach about the topic. Complete the cluster with their suggestions.

### ***Demonstrate the Teaching Strategy***

Demonstrate the six-step teaching strategy (p. 39, Chapter 2) using a typical grade one topic or picture book (Instructors may want to bring some related trade books or other materials to share with students). It is important that students develop a good understanding of this approach to lessons, since it is used extensively throughout this textbook and students are expected to apply it in various ways.

### ***Share Journals and Encourage Students to Begin a Professional Library***

Bring copies of language arts journals (*Language Arts*, *The Reading Teacher*) to share with students and point out what such journals have to offer teachers for continuous professional development. Encourage students to become student members of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English or the International Reading Association. Membership materials can be ordered from both organizations. Most importantly, encourage students to begin developing a professional library—a collection of resources of all sorts that they can use both as student teachers and as beginning

teachers. Further demonstrate and clarify the importance of this collection by sharing your own Literacy Portfolio with students.

### **After Class Activities**

#### ***Use Online Instruction***

Communicate with your students via e-mail throughout the course to establish a closer relationship and respond to questions and concerns students may have but do not feel comfortable sharing in class. Provide links to appropriate websites that may be used for online discussions by whole-class or small groups. Provide course content, agendas, and related course material using WebCT where available (or Blackboard/Vista, Moodle, etc.) and ensure that students know how to make the most use of this technology.

#### ***Arrange Online Conversation***

Have students become e-pals with pre-service and/or in-service teachers both locally or in other parts of the country. Discover local concerns, issues, and opinions regarding teaching language arts. Or, arrange for students to each correspond with an upper elementary school child, in a kind of dialogue journal (see Chapter 6). Challenge them to be particularly conscious of their use of language to empower or control those with whom they correspond.

#### ***Access Sites Online***

Encourage students to access sites online to support their learning during the course.

Two good places to begin are the home pages for the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. You may also ask students to search online for children's sites where student writing and even art activities may be displayed (for example: The Classroom Examples provided on the Galileo Education Network site, (<http://galileo.org>), is a good source for student work generated from an inquiry-based approach to learning).

### ***Choose Theory to Practice Activities***

Choose activities from the "Theory to Practice" list at the end of Chapter 1 on page 28.

### ***Outside Readings: If You Want to Learn More . . .***

Invite students to explore one of the topics presented in this chapter in more depth by reading the journal articles or books listed at the end of this manual. Particularly, encourage students to explore the idea of inclusive education, which offers suggestions for arranging instruction and activities in such a way that all children—ESL students, students with differing abilities, etc.—can benefit.