

Notice the ELA CCSS anchor standard focused on **reading informational text**, an anchor standard for **writing**, and another for **speaking and listening**. These standards fit well with teaching science and social studies. You can weave science and social studies texts into your designated ELA time (the literacy block) to ensure students are getting content area instruction along with literacy instruction.

Literacy instruction doesn't happen in a vacuum—you must have a **context** and **purpose** for reading. Indeed, literacy should be viewed as tools for learning beyond the school walls. Consider reading and writing as the hub of the school curriculum. In math, we prompt students to read the problems (numeric and word problems) and write answers with explanations of their thinking. Science requires observations with journals; lab work involves reading directions and writing hypotheses, steps, findings, and so forth. Social studies instruction involves reading about certain topics, navigating timelines and maps, and creating written products that demonstrate understanding.

**HOW DO STANDARDS FIT WITH EMERGENT LITERACY THEORY?** We've presented two concepts that may seem contradictory. First, students develop literacy uniquely as they experience reading and writing through their lives. As a teacher, you'll be helping your students develop literacy by giving them developmentally appropriate experiences. Therefore, you'll need to learn where students are in their literacy experiences and provide activities to promote learning.

Standards are something different. Standards were developed to determine whether students have learned what is expected at each grade level. Whether students have learned what is expected by the end of that grade level or not is something you should know. Say for example, that you have provided Daniel, a first-grade student, with many literacy activities. You know what Daniel knows and can do. However, that information doesn't tell you how Daniel compares with other first-grade students. Standards are a measure that let you know whether Daniel's literacy skills are below expectations, meet expectations, or are above expectations. Standards are a measuring stick, but you should still organize your teaching according to your students' developmental needs. As you will learn, students are diverse, and you need to tailor instruction so that each student can succeed.

## The Diversity of Students in Your Classroom

Have you ever been compared to your sibling, cousin, or other family member? Maybe you had a teacher who remembered them, and they expected you to be the same, or family members point out how different you are from your sibling or cousin. For instance, your brother or sister may have been a star athlete, and you may be clumsy. Consider how unfortunate and unfair it is to have these kinds of comparisons because we are unique individuals and should be appreciated for our different talents. The same is true for our students.

As advocates for developmentally appropriate practices, we understand that students have wide-ranging abilities. Our goal is to design our instruction to meet students where they are and move them all forward, so they become proficient readers and writers who also choose to read and write. This kind of instruction requires teachers to know about and make decisions to use a variety of methods for teaching reading and writing and to be equipped with teaching strategies to help every student learn to read and write (Afflerbach, 2016; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Malloy, Marinak, & Gambrell, 2019).

Differences in reading abilities mean that some students will be considered to be reading below grade level, some will be considered on grade level, and others will be considered above grade level in their literacy development, regardless of the age range or grade level. Some students will not be ready for the materials provided by your school, such as reading books (e.g., basal readers, reading

anthologies, leveled readers) or other subject area resources (e.g., math, science, social studies), because they are too difficult. Some students will find those same materials too easy, whereas others may find them to be just right for their reading levels. This book will help guide your thinking about how you can plan and implement reading instruction that is appropriate for each student in your classroom using various **grouping practices** and specific **teaching strategies**.

**FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE.** Consider the many differences that children have (e.g., linguistic, socioeconomic status, background) and how that matters in teaching them to read and write. Instead of seeing these differences as what students are lacking, let's recognize them as strengths. Every child

**Margin Note 1.8: Funds of Knowledge Video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWS0YBpGkkE>



knows something about the world around them, but their knowledge may not be academically oriented. Moll et al. (2005) introduced us to the term **funds of knowledge**, which means every student has riches of knowledge that we can tap into as we teach. Students are not deficient if their knowledge is different from ours. Students are naturally curious beings who want to learn; moreover, they can learn, if we provide them with **student-centered** classrooms. In the short video in Margin Note 1.8, Professor Luis Moll describes the concept of funds of knowledge. Watch the video and think about what it means to you as a teacher candidate in a placement as well as the implications for your future teaching.

**KNOWING STUDENTS AS INDIVIDUALS.** As a teacher, you need to know students as individuals so you can plan instruction that meets their unique learning needs. Getting to know your students as people who have interests and areas of strength will help build the classroom community while allowing you to consider ways to support individual students and their families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). For example, knowing that Bobby is fascinated by rocks, Nakia is a walking encyclopedia about dinosaurs, Samer loves anything related to space, and Sarah brought a bag of cicada casings to share with the class provides you with important information about the topics, materials, and texts you promote in your classroom. By vocally recognizing students as experts in their topics of interest, you boost their sense of belonging and demonstrate that you value their contributions in the learning community. More importantly, you have this opportunity to turn a reluctant reader into an avid reader because tapping into students' interests motivates them to want to read more, especially when they can choose what they want to read (Springer, Harris, & Dole, 2017).

Providing students with opportunities to share their expertise on their topics through creating their choice in written products (e.g., brochures, posters, picture dictionaries) and sharing with others, such as with peers or special visitors, promotes reading and writing for authentic purposes (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Guthrie & Barber, 2019; Kissel, 2017). For instance, you could ask another teacher if your class can visit on a specified date so students can share their written products, and you could invite family members to the classroom to celebrate your students as young authors. These experiences are powerful ways to build and embrace students' identities and differences as individuals who want to read and write.



**Connection to the Field: Learning Students' Interests**

Work with your mentor teacher to learn about your students' interests outside of school. For example, you might spend a few minutes with each child asking them about the kinds of things they like to do when they leave school for the day. After you meet with each child, write down notes so you remember each child's interests.

**LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES.** In addition to discovering students’ interests, you also need to learn about their linguistic differences. Understanding that some students are learning English provides you with essential information because you will need to use additional strategies to support them and their families. For example, Jovi, Chunbo, and Erik are three students in the same classroom, and they speak three different languages. Do their family members speak and/or read English? Sending a newsletter or other communications home with them translated into Spanish won’t help them or their families because their native languages are Russian, Chinese (Cantonese), and Swedish. Tapping into students’ interests while promoting their use of native languages to demonstrate what they already know will help them gain confidence with being part of the learning community while building knowledge of how English works (Domínguez & Gutiérrez, 2019; Helman, Rogers, Frederick, & Struck, 2016).

### Engaging with Families: Language Spoken at Home

Work with your mentor teacher to learn what languages are spoken in the students’ homes and whether parents or guardians are literate in their home language. English may not be the first language of a family, but it’s possible that they have more resources to read English communications than any other language. For example, a family from Guatemala may speak the Mayan language of Kaqchikel but cannot read it. The family might, however, have a member who can read English and translate the English into Kaqchikel. Find out the preferred language families want for communications from school.



## Teaching for Equity

A major component of becoming a learner-ready teacher is being able to effectively teach students from all backgrounds. There are many terms for this kind of teaching, but we use **culturally relevant teaching (CRT)** in this book. As educators learn more about how to teach students from diverse backgrounds, ideas and terms change, and you’ll find that some terms you learn this year will change during your career. That’s the case with CRT. Some educators call it culturally responsive pedagogy (Sleeter, 2012), and others call it culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), depending on their focus. Regardless of the term used, effective teachers recognize potential in every student and strive to provide experiences that build on students’ individual strengths while connecting to their lives beyond school. In this way, effective teachers tailor their instruction to meet students’ learning needs while respecting students as individuals who bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to school with them.

When teachers use CRT—making connections between cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices that students bring from home and the content they are teaching—diverse students’ academic performance and school experiences improve (Gay, 2000). However, CRT is not merely a set of teaching practices, but instead is a central belief—a mindset—about teaching, learning, students, families, and communities and an “unyielding commitment to see student success become less rhetoric and more of a reality” (Howard, 2010, p. 67).

According to Gay (2013), assumptions about ethnic, racial, and cultural differences are often embedded in instructional practices. That means we need to learn to recognize and appreciate different experiences that students bring to school so every student in our classroom has opportunities to flourish as a learner, especially in reading and writing.

**EXAMINING YOUR OWN CULTURE.** Pause for a minute and make a list about who you are as a **cultural being**. You might consider these categories: ethnicity, marital status, gender identity, religion, family, nationality (perhaps including region), and other memberships (e.g., academic or social clubs, hobbies, sports). Also include messages you heard while growing up, such as the importance of family, the role of respect and responsibility, and the balance of work and play.

Now that you have your list, think about your classmates. Every person's background is unique. Your classmates look, dress, talk, eat, worship, and think differently than you. They have heard different messages growing up. You may have similarities, but you also have differences.

**STUDENTS ARE DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER.** Now turn to the students you see in your clinical placement. Each child is different, and they may have very different cultural experiences from the ones you had. Perhaps your students live in houses, apartments, trailers, tents, shelters, or cars. Maybe they are being raised by two parents, a single parent, a family member, friends of the family, foster parents, or perhaps they live in a group home. Don't assume anything by glancing at the class and by reading statistics posted on the school's website. Instead, get to know your students and understand who they are as individuals because they all need your careful guidance and attention.

If you enter the classroom with the attitude that everyone will be treated exactly the same way, that's malpractice. Think of it this way: Two men walk into the Emergency Room. One has a knife wound and the other is having symptoms of a heart attack. Do you give them both stitches? Or do you give them both an aspirin? That would be treating them the same. Although that is a medical scenario, it also applies to teaching, because each student comes to you with different learning needs. If you give them all the same instruction, then some will do well whereas others will not progress as rapidly as possible. Instead of thinking along the lines of equality, let's adopt a stance for equity. Treating students the same is not equity. **Equity** is when you know your students as individuals, you respect who they are as people, and you provide them with **differentiated instruction** that meets their learning needs.

## This Is Just the Beginning

In this book you'll learn how to be a learner-ready teacher—a teacher who is ready to effectively teach on Day 1. However, this won't be the end of your learning. As you progress through your career, you'll refine the strategies that are successful for your students, and you'll learn new ways of teaching reading and writing. In addition, researchers will learn new ways of teaching that you'll want to add to your teaching repertoire. This book and your corresponding coursework will help you be prepared to be a good beginning teacher. However, you'll need to continue learning new things as you progress through your career to become even more effective.

Teaching students how to read and write is not the same as following a recipe. When you carefully follow a recipe, you get the same result each time you make the dish. Teaching reading and writing should never be like following a recipe because your students have vastly different needs. Instead of following curriculum materials rigidly, consider them as guides that you supplement based on your students' learning needs. By adopting a flexible approach to teaching reading, you will be using your own **professional judgment** to make instructional decisions for your students.

You'll learn many great ideas in this book about how to teach reading and writing as well as the foundational theories that underpin the teaching strategies. How you organize the ideas presented will vary depending on the school in which you teach and the curriculum or literacy program they use. You'll learn that there is no one right way to teach reading and writing. Instead, you'll be asked

to use the school's materials and programs, the ideas from this book, and apply them to the individual students you teach. The danger of simply following program materials with the whole class is that not every student is developmentally ready for those materials, and those materials are too easy for some students. You must know who your students are as individual learners so you can tailor instruction to meet all your students' learning needs.

This book promotes **effective literacy teaching** by providing you with knowledge and strategies to equip you for success. You could simply read this book to complete assignments and activities for your literacy methods course. However, your students need you to internalize the concepts and consider your impact as a teacher of literacy and as a lifelong learner. In that way you'll become a **learner-ready teacher**.

## Closing Thoughts

At the beginning of this chapter, we introduced you to Dena and Kofi at the start of their literacy methods course, and we learned about how they are readers and writers for different purposes. Just like Dena and Kofi, you and your classmates have different views on purposes for reading and writing. Regardless of those differing views, you have the potential and promise to be an effective teacher of reading and writing, a learner-ready teacher. Consider what you already know and open your mind to learning as much as possible about how to teach reading and writing in and beyond your literacy methods course.

## Takeaways from Chapter 1

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- We have different views on the purposes of reading and writing.
- Reading is constructing meaning from text.
- Students develop as readers and as writers at their own pace.
- Students have different strengths and learning needs.
- There is no one right way to teach reading.
- Reading and writing are the hub of the curriculum.
- The ELA standards are a framework you can use to know what to teach.
- Apply what you know about your students' cultural backgrounds to your lessons.
- Your goal is to become a learner-ready teacher.

## To Learn More about the Focus of Reading and Writing

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### Books about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Equity in Education



Delpit, L. D. (2012). *"Multiplication is for white people": Raising expectations for other people's children*. New York, NY: The New Press.

<https://thenewpress.com/books/multiplication-for-white-people>

This book is a frank view on the need for culturally relevant teaching (CRT) and equity in education. As you read this book, consider your experiences as a student and as a teacher candidate in a placement classroom, and what this means for you as a future teacher.