



Conceptual Model of Language Arts

The goal of all learning, including that for students with significant cognitive disabilities, is to enhance quality of life. Language arts instruction provides a unique tool for promoting quality of life through increasing communicative competence. A balanced language arts program for students with significant cognitive disabilities will include instruction in writing, reading, research, and communication. How does language arts instruction differ or augment communication instruction in general? Certainly, listening and speaking or using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) are important strands for language arts. In contrast, students with significant cognitive disabilities have historically received inadequate instruction in early literacy. While not all students may learn to read, all should have the opportunity to learn to produce and access text. In writing, this may range from the traditional form of typing or composing passages to using assistive technology to develop a permanent product. Students need opportunities to learn to produce both narrative and informational segments. In reading, all students should have the opportunity to learn to read regardless of their disability label. Besides gaining increased independence as a reader, students with significant cognitive disabilities should have the opportunity for lifelong access to literature that is both narrative and informational. While some students will learn to access this literature through reading (decoding with comprehension), others will gain access through shared stores (read alouds) or the use of technology (e.g., AAC, electronic switches). Students with significant cognitive disabilities also should have the opportunity to research topics and learn more about areas of interest that are needed for fuller participation in general education. This research may be as introductory as choosing a topic for a peer to assist with locating pictures or as complex as completing the steps of a class research project.