learned. In fact, early studies conducted by Ausubel and his associates (e.g., Ausubel & Fitzgerald, 1961; Ausubel & Youssef, 1963) provided evidence that this was true. When learners already possessed organized and stable cognitive structures, however, such materials made no difference in what else they learned (Ausubel & Fitzgerald, 1961).

Royer, Perkins, and Konold (1978) provided evidence of a different sort to support Ausubel's claim that cognitive organization influences learning. They gave students passages to read, labeled with either the name of a fictitious person or the name of a famous person (e.g., Adolf Hitler). After studying the information, students rated sentences as to whether the sentences were old (i.e., from the passage) or new (i.e., never seen before). Subjects' judgments were quite accurate when the passage they read was ostensibly about a fictitious person. Having no anchoring information into which to meaningfully subsume the new information, students essentially learned the new ideas by rote. When they thought the information was about Adolf Hitler, however, learners typically had prior knowledge about Hitler to which they could attach the new ideas. As a result, they tended to misidentify as "old" sentences that were new but were thematically related to Hitler, such as, "He hated and persecuted the Jews."

To be ready for learning new material, then, learners of all sorts must possess a relevant, stable, and organized cognitive structure. Ausubel acknowledged, however, two additional influences on readiness that are important to mention. The first has to do with age differences among learners, and the second concerns culturally diverse learners.

According to Ausubel et al. (1978), "the cognitive organization of children differs mainly from that of adults in containing fewer abstract concepts, fewer higher order abstractions, and more intuitive-nonverbal than abstract-verbal understandings of many propositions" (p. 140). This simply means that children have a greater reliance during learning on concrete-empirical experience. Perhaps more so than adults, then, children should be taught in concrete ways. By extension, adults should be taught concretely when they know very little about the subject matter.

Accounting for the effects of culture on learning, Ausubel claimed, can be done within the same theoretical framework established for learning in general. That is, children who are culturally diverse relative to their classmates have different cognitive structures owing to the differences in their life experiences and prior learnings. This means that some learning tasks are likely to exceed the cognitive readiness of these children (Ausubel et al., 1978). What should be done about it? According to Ausubel, the basic principles underlying appropriate teaching strategies are essentially the same, regardless of who the learners are. To repeat the principle he considers most important: Ascertain the cognitive structures of your learners and teach accordingly. How one might do this most effectively is discussed next.