

# Workshop 5

## Student Diversity

*"...You find strength within the classroom, not based simply on the commonalities....Those are there, but the strength comes through the differences...the different stories you have to tell, the different things [you] can learn from one another and about one another and then celebrate...."*

—Jan Currence, Seventh-Grade Teacher, Stephen Decatur Middle School, Berlin, Maryland

### Description

As anybody with the opportunity to know identical twins well might attest, external appearances can be deceiving. Closer scrutiny forces superficial similarities aside, and each twin presents a wide range of differences when compared with his or her sibling. So it is in our schools. Even in locations where similarities of ethnicity and geographic background create classroom populations that look homogenous, closer acquaintance invariably reveals an abundance of diversities not readily apparent to the casual eye. Even though every human being on the planet shares 99.9 percent of his or her DNA with every other human, different cultural or economic backgrounds, ability levels, physical or emotional challenges, interests, and life experiences generate the multiple perspectives that typify our complex society and enrich our interactions with one another.

Certainly the many different points-of-view students bring to the classroom present a number of challenges for teachers. How can both curriculum and instruction be designed and presented to meet the needs of such diverse populations? In full-inclusion classrooms, how can teachers ensure that every student will be able to participate fully in the instructional experiences offered? What support will students need to help them understand, accept, and appreciate the multiple perspectives they encounter, both within the classroom and in their larger society?

These are the issues examined by the teachers in Workshop 5. As you are invited into their classrooms, you will note that although the diversity of their students is readily apparent in some cases, in others, while less visible, it is no less real.

### Key Points

- Diversity means more than just ethnic and cultural differences. It encompasses a wide range of characteristics, including (among others) gender, linguistic background, socio-economic situation, family life, religion, interests, physical or emotional challenges, skills and abilities, and life experiences.
- Even the most homogenous-appearing group of students reflects wide diversity.
- Diversity is an important contributing factor in the envisionment-building classroom.
- Instruction designed to allow learners to draw on their own circumstances when interacting with texts provides the group with a rich array of personal and unique perspectives.
- For teachers, the diversity present in all classrooms provides both challenges and exciting opportunities for instruction.
- Multiple perspectives in response to a text generate multiple interpretations. In turn, multiple interpretations generate deeper and more thoughtful responses than occur when each student reads in the isolation of his or her own circumstance.
- Envisionment-building teachers make sure students know their unique perspectives are appreciated. Additionally, they may plan activities to foreground or enhance those perspectives in order to enrich discussion and broaden understandings.

- Envisionment-building teachers encourage students to share their various interpretations, explore them, and use them to enrich one another's interpretations of a text. In this way, when students recognize and understand the different viewpoints presented by their classmates, they learn from one another.
- Readers rely on their individual backgrounds as they make meaning from texts. As they share their meanings with others, their initial understandings can be enhanced or reinterpreted.
- Recognizing and exploring multiple perspectives leads students to challenge their existing beliefs and broaden their world views.
- Because it presents a vast array of human experiences, literature provides an excellent avenue for exploring human diversity, particularly in communities with somewhat homogenous backgrounds.
- Diverse texts and students' responses to them can help students discover commonalities between themselves and others who, superficially, may appear very different.
- Because of differing life experiences, everybody has opportunities to connect with texts in different ways. As a result, students working in mixed-ability groups hear many ideas that help them develop their own thinking.
- Inclusion classrooms present teachers with particular challenges as they seek to meet the intellectual, emotional, and physical needs of each student while promoting deeper understandings for every student.
- Many teachers use reading aloud to help all readers understand ways in which texts might be read while enabling them to participate fully in literature discussions.
- Buddy reading, or peer tutoring where two or three students of varying abilities work together, is another tool to blend students into a single community of learners.
- Conversation around a text that includes all students develops a classroom into a community.
- Readers' theater (story theater) is another strategy for supporting struggling readers and enabling their participation in the conversation.
- Reading aloud can help students develop their comprehension.
- Tag reading (also known as jump-in reading, or popcorn reading), allowing students to choose how to share the reading task and when to stop, is a useful way to have students read.
- Envisionment-building classrooms offer learning experiences that are broad enough and thought-provoking enough so that every student can participate and have their own thinking pushed beyond where it was when they came to class.
- Modifying texts for weaker readers is rarely an effective strategy.
- Inclusion classrooms with students with special needs benefit from additional personnel to offer needed support.

## Learning Objectives

After viewing this program, you will be able to:

- consider the multiple perspectives you encounter in your classroom as you plan instruction.
- identify the potential benefits those perspectives offer for instruction.
- develop ways to support those students whose differences present particular challenges to their learning.

## Background Reading

In preparation for this workshop, review "Literature for Students the System Has Failed" in Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, click on Workshop 5, and go to Additional Reading.

# Workshop Session (On-Site)

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## Getting Ready (30 minutes)

In this video, you will hear teachers talk about how they address the learning needs of all their students in ways that are sensitive to differences of ethnicity, social class, primary language, gender, age, religion, geographic region, and exceptionality. While such diversity presents multiple challenges, awareness of differences and their implications for teaching and learning is a crucial component of good teaching. For example, something as simple as insisting on “good eye contact” when teaching listening skills becomes insensitive to those from cultures in which direct eye contact is considered rude under certain circumstances.

As the world becomes more diverse, your classroom is likely to reflect that diversity. As you view this video, consider your students and the differences they bring to your classroom. Are you as aware of them and their implications for learning as you might be? How might you increase your sensitivity to these issues? What resources exist in your building or your community to support your efforts to address the needs of every student?

### Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- What are some of the different communities, micro communities, or cliques that your students belong to? What are some of the roles they occupy as individuals, students, athletes, family members, etc.?
- What are some of the multiple perspectives that students bring to your classroom as a result of these different “memberships”?
- How do these perspectives impact the ways in which students interact with one another? With you and their other teachers?
- Do any of these perspectives make their ability to benefit from mainstream instruction particularly difficult? What support mechanisms can be offered in the classroom or by the school to mitigate those difficulties?
- What strategies do you use that are particularly effective to ensure that every student has access to the learning experiences offered in your classroom?

**Site Leader:** Use these questions to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the reflection questions in their journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

If you have Internet access, display the workshop Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

### Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following questions in your workshop journal:

- What are the benefits of having students with multiple perspectives in the same classroom? What are the challenges?

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

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## Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

### Think About and Discuss:

**Pause** at the title card "Mixed Abilities."

- What are some of the different backgrounds your students bring to your classroom? In what ways do those backgrounds impact how and what you teach?
- What commonalities do you find among your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**Site Leader:** If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated here to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

**Pause** at the title card "Much Potential."

- What ability range do you work with in your classroom?
- What are some strategies you use to support the learning of your less-able students?
- What experiences have you had with asking students to set their own goals?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

You may select any or all of the questions to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

### View program until the end.

- Comment on the expression "kids at promise" as opposed to "kids at risk."
- What are the benefits of inclusion classrooms for all students?
- What are the shortcomings of grouping students homogenously?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

## Going Further (30 minutes)

### Work in Groups:

In your group:

- list the benefits offered by the difference assigned to you,
- list the challenges presented by your particular difference,
- list organizational techniques designed to mitigate difficulties presented by that difference, and
- list pedagogical strategies designed to support all learners while taking instructional advantage of the multiple perspectives differences engender.

**Site Leader:** Divide the participants into groups of three to five, assigning each group one of the following topics for discussion: cultural and ethnic diversity; different literacy (reading and writing) abilities; different English proficiencies (ESL); different life experiences; gender differences; other differences. Ask each group to follow the instructions at left.

# Between Sessions (On Your Own)

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## Homework Assignment

### Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- What are the multiple perspectives present in your classroom? What are some ways you can take advantage of those perspectives to enrich the thinking and learning of each of your students?
- What aspects of student diversity make you least comfortable as a teacher? What would help you feel more secure in your abilities to work effectively with such students?

### Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 6, review “Literature Across the Curriculum” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 6.

## Ongoing Activity

### Channel-Talk:

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and click on Channel-Talk.

## Extension: Classroom Connection

### Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

What are your own diversities? Use the teacher resource *Bringing Diversity to the Foreground* (found in the Appendix of this guide) to list the various characteristics that make you the person you are. How do these characteristics influence your view of the world? Of your classroom? Of yourself? Of your students? What are the implications for you as a learner and a teacher?

### Student Activities:

Try this activity with your students.

- As a whole class, brainstorm a list of characteristics that make human beings individual. This list might include things such as culture and ethnicity, family structure, siblings, likes and dislikes, hobbies, where they live or have lived, pets, important experiences they have had, and many other factors.
- Ask each student to list 10 to 20 specific characteristics that combine to portray who they are as a human being.
- Ask students to choose a way of presenting these characteristics visually or verbally to share with the class.
- Discussion should focus on how these individual characteristics combine to make us unique human beings with unique points-of-view.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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## Additional Reading

Allington, Richard L., ed. *Teaching Struggling Readers: Articles From the Reading Teacher*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1998. ISBN 0-87207-183-9.

Au, Kathryn H. *Literacy Instruction in Multicultural Settings*. Australia: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 1993. ISBN 0-03-076847-0.

Banks, James A. *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999. ISBN 0-205-27750-0.

Brownlie, Faye and Catherine Feniak. *Student Diversity: Activities and Strategies to Support Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1998 ISBN 1-5513-8101-X.

Cary, Stephen. *Working With Second Language Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-325-00250-9.

Coelho, Elizabeth. *Learning Together in the Multicultural Classroom*. Markham, ON: Pippin Publishing Corporation, 1996. ISBN 08-8751-064-7.

Day, Frances Ann. *Latina and Latino Voices in Literature for Children and Teenagers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993. ISBN 0-88751-056-6.

Day, Frances Ann. *Multicultural Voices in Contemporary Literature: A Resource for Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999. ISBN 0-325-00130-8.

Duquette, Cheryll. *Students at Risk: Solutions to Classroom Challenges*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2001. ISBN 1-55138-135-4.

Dyson, Anne Haas and Celia Genishi, eds. *The Need for Story: Cultural Diversity in Classroom and Community*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. ISBN 0-8141-3300-2.

Fielding, Elizabeth N. *Learning Differences in the Classroom*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1999. ISBN 0-87207-251-7.

Ford, Clyde. *We Can All Get Along*. New York: Dell, 1994. ISBN 0-4405-0570-4.

Fu, Danling. *"My Trouble Is My English": Asian Students and The American Dream*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-86709-355-2.

Gollnick, Donna M. and Philip C. Chinn. *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*. 2nd ed. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1986. ISBN 0-675-20573-5.

Goodman, Gretchen. *I Can Learn! Strategies and Activities for Gray-Area Children*. Crystal Springs Books, 1995. ISBN 1-884-5480-16.

Goodman, Gretchen. *More I Can Learn! Strategies and Activities for Gray-Area Children*. Crystal Springs Books, 1998. ISBN 1-8845-4818-0.

Goodman, Wendy, ed. *Living and Teaching in an Unjust World: New Perspectives on Multicultural Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00381-5.

Haniates, Helen and Betty Doerr with Margaret Golden. *Teach Our Children Well: Essential Strategies for the Urban Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00387-4.

Heath, Shirley Brice. *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983. ISBN 0-521-27319-6.

Jacob, Evelyn and Cathie Jordan, eds. *Minority Education: Anthropological Perspectives*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1993. ISBN 0-89391-937-3.

Kucer, Stephen B., Cecilia Silva, and Esther L. Delgado-Larocco. *Curricular Conversations: Themes in Multilingual and Monolingual Classrooms*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1995. ISBN 15-7110-016-4.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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Kuzmeskus, June, ed. *We Teach Them All: Teachers Writing About Diversity*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1996. ISBN 15-7110-032-6.

Lang, Greg and Chris Berberich. *All Children Are Special: Creating an Inclusive Classroom*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1995. ASIN: 15-7110-0172.

Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

Lee, Christopher and Rosemary Jackson. *Faking It: A Look Into the Mind of a Creative Learner*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-86709-296-3.

Lee, Christopher and Rosemary Jackson. *What About Me? Strategies for Teaching Misunderstood Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00348-3.

Lisa Delpit. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press, 1995. ISBN 1-56584-179-4.

Livingston, Sue. *Rethinking the Education of Deaf Students: Theory and Practice from a Teacher's Perspective*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. ISBN 0-435-07236-6.

Lustig, Myron W. and Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993. ISBN 0-06-044129-1.

McIntyre, Ellen, Ann Rosebery, and Norma González, eds. *Classroom Diversity: Connecting Curriculum to Students' Lives*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00332-7.

Miller, Suzanne M. and Barbara McCaskill, eds. *Multicultural Literature and Literacies: Making Space for Difference*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993. ISBN 0-7914-1645-3.

Moss, Beverly J. *Literacy Across Communities*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1994. ISBN 1-881303-62-4.

Ohanian, Susan. *Caught in the Middle: Nonstandard Kids and a Killing Curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00328-9.

Parkin, Fran and Felicity Sidnell. *ESL Is Everybody's Business*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-435-08724-X.

Rigg, Pat and Virginia G. Allen. *When They Don't All Speak English: Integrating the ESL Student Into the Regular Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989. ISBN 0-8141-5693-2.

Robertson, Judith P., ed., and the Committee on Teaching About Genocide and Intolerance. *Teaching for a Tolerant World*, Grades K-6. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1999. ISBN 0-8141-5183-3.

Rogers, Theresa and Anna O. Soter, eds. *Reading Across Cultures: Teaching Literature in a Diverse Society*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8077-3552-3.

Roller, Cathy M. *Variability Not Disability: Struggling Readers in a Workshop Classroom*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1996. ISBN 0-87207-142-1.

Samovar, Larry A., Richard E. Porter and Lisa A. Stefani. *Communication Between Cultures*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998. ISBN 0-534-52218-1.

Samway, Katharine Davies and Gail Whang. *Literature Study Circles in a Multicultural Classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse, 1996. ISBN 1-56110-018-0.

Scala, Marilyn C. *Working Together: Reading and Writing in Inclusive Classrooms*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-298-3.

Smith, Tom E. C., Edward A. Polloway, James R. Patton, and Carol A. Dowdy. *Teaching Students With Special Needs in Inclusive Settings*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1995. ISBN 0-205-14653-8.

Stock, Patricia Lambert. *The Dialogic Curriculum: Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-86709-365-X.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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Susag, Dorthea M. *Roots and Branches: A Resource of Native American Literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. ISBN 0-8141-4195-1.

Tatum, Beverly. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. Boulder, CO: Basic Books, 1999. ISBN 0-4650-9129-6.

Tovani, Cris. *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2000. ISBN 1-5711-0089-X.

Trimmer, Joseph and Tilly Warnock, eds. *Understanding Others: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Studies and the Teaching of Literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992. ISBN 0-8141-5562-6.

Upham, Dayle A. and Virginia H. Trumbull. *Making the Grade: Reflections on Being Learning Disabled*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. ISBN 0-435-08150-0.

Vinz, Ruth. *Becoming (Other)wise: Enhancing Critical Reading Perspectives*. York, ME: Calendar Islands Books, 2000. ISBN 1-893056-07-4.

Wormeli, Rick. *Meet Me in the Middle*. York, ME: Stenhouse, 2001. ISBN 1-57110-328-7.

Yokota, Junko, ed. and the Committee to Revise the Multicultural Booklist. *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K-8*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001. ISBN 0-8141-2540-9.

## Professional journals about literature instruction:

**ALAN Review:** The National Council of Teachers of English's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents produces a review of adolescent literature and literature instruction three times a year (fall, winter, and spring).

**CELA Newsletter:** The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring. The newsletter addresses a wide range of issues concerning literacy. The newsletter can be accessed for free on their Web site at <http://cela.albany.edu>.

**The National Council of Teachers of English Journals:** NCTE publishes many subscription journals, including *The English Journal*, high school level, *Voices From the Middle*, middle school level, and *Language Arts*, elementary and middle school levels.

## Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program include:

### Novels:

*The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

*Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick

*Holes* by Louis Sachar

*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Tatum

*Taking Sides* by Gary Soto

### Plays:

*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

*Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

### Short Story:

"Passing" by Langston Hughes

For additional resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6-8*, Workshop 5, and Additional Reading.