

Workshop 7

Many Students: Many Voices and Abilities

“If I had a homogenous classroom with all the same kids, all at the same reading level, I’d be disenchanted. But every day is a new surprise with kids bringing to the table and discussions new material and new thoughts.”

—Jonathan Holden, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Nathan Hale Elementary School, Roxbury, Massachusetts

Introduction

Diversity in American classrooms comes with many faces. While it may be tempting to think of diversity only in terms of ethnicity and culture, the term embraces many other characteristics as well, including economic backgrounds, language, ability levels, physical or emotional challenges, interests, and life experiences. Even in classrooms where the population appears homogenous, a tighter lens reveals multiple diversities invisible to the casual onlooker.

As a nation, it is crucial that we learn to live with—and appreciate—these differences. While the complexities a diverse population brings to our classrooms present challenges, responding to those challenges may well be our most important educational responsibility.

The teachers in this workshop believe that every child, no matter what his or her background or ability level, deserves to be in classrooms where he or she can and will learn—and thrive. In this video, you will listen as they discuss ways in which they work to create such classrooms—often through literature instruction—for their students.

Key Points

- Diverse student populations bring a richness of experience to the classroom that benefits teachers and students alike.
- Creating a classroom in which each student knows that his or her voice is accepted and valued is central to envisionment-building instruction.
- Helping students celebrate their own diversities helps them develop their individual voices, recognize their own perspectives, and understand those perspectives as positions from which they approach literary experiences.
- It is important that students learn to confront and think about literary interpretations different from their own.
- A teacher may select literary texts to help students understand their own perspectives or choose titles that expose students to perspectives alien to their own.
- Teachers working with bilingual children may find themselves walking a fine line between honoring a child’s home language and making sure they can navigate the educational process in English.
- Research suggests that, with comprehension support, students with limited English proficiency can explore ideas, interpretations, and perspectives in response to the content of literary texts.

- The read-aloud is a central pedagogical strategy for teachers working to include all students in literary experiences.
- Read-alouds allow students access to titles that might be too difficult for their individual reading levels, and they offer students experience with the sounds and rhythms of the English language.
- In diverse classrooms, teachers offer students a wide range of literature to suit a wide range of reading levels.
- Teachers in diverse classrooms find it useful to have students support one another's reading and learning through social reading activities.
- In a classroom that embraces all voices, all students—including those with learning disabilities or physical challenges—are provided opportunities to make thoughtful and important contributions.
- One strategy used by teachers in inclusion classrooms is to present the same materials to all children and then find ways to support each child's approach to them.
- Looking for what each student does well helps teachers support each individual as a valued contributor to the classroom community.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Appreciate the benefits a diverse student population brings to the envisionment-building classroom.
- Incorporate a number of ways to accommodate the needs and include the voices of all students, as portrayed in this video.

Background Reading

In preparation for Workshop 7, read "Literature for Students the System Has Failed" in Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 7.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Accommodating the needs of students of many backgrounds and many ability levels is a challenge. Creating classroom environments that go beyond accommodation to thoughtful incorporation is more challenging. In this video, you will listen to workshop teachers discuss ways they create classroom experiences to benefit all students, regardless of backgrounds or abilities.

Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- How can differences among members of a classroom community benefit the community as a whole?
- What are some of the difficulties diversity has brought to your classroom? How have you resolved them?

Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- What kinds of diversity do you typically encounter in your student population? What kinds of accommodations do these differences provoke?

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss:

Pause at the title card "Many Backgrounds, Many Visions."

- What kinds of differences do you encounter in your student population? What challenges do they present?
- Have you encountered situations in which a child or a group of children has had difficulty responding supportively to points of view voiced by others? How have you addressed the issue?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Diversity and Language."

- How do you help students learn that their contributions to discussion are accepted and valued?
- How do you help students value the diverse voices of each of their classmates?
- How does your classroom support second-language students working to learn English?
- How do you choose appropriate materials to use with students who are not yet proficient users of English?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Site Leader: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few. If you have Internet access, display the companion Web site to this workshop at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

Site Leader: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below 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.

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

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Pause at the title card "Including All Voices."

- What values do you find in reading aloud to students?
- How do you choose books to read aloud to your students?
- What instructional strategies do you combine with read-alouds?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "The Challenges of Literature."

- What specific difficulties have you encountered when helping students with physical or learning challenges become full participants in the life of your classroom?
- What strategies have you developed to help students with physical or learning challenges participate fully in your classroom?
- How have you used literature as a tool to help students understand and appreciate such challenges?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Why We Need Many Voices."

- How do you help students reading at many different levels approach literary study successfully?
- What strategies did you see the workshop teachers using that you might apply to your classroom?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

View program until the end.

- How do you help students voice their disagreements in discussion?
- How do you help students accept situations in which they cannot reach a shared interpretation of an issue?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

Discuss:

Divide into groups and take a few minutes to jot down a quick list of the diversities in your classrooms. Share ways you have found to help your students benefit from these diversities.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- How effective are your efforts to include all students in the activities of your classroom? What difficulties complicate your efforts? What might help you resolve those difficulties?

Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 8, read "Strategies for Teaching" in Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

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, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and click on Channel-Talk.

Extension: Classroom Connection

Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Suggest to students that reading does not have to be a private, individual activity all the time. Introduce them to one or more of the social reading activities such as conversation partners, book buddies, or reading experiences portrayed in this video. Use the Teacher Tool Social Reading Strategies found in the Appendix of this guide for suggested approaches.
- Offer students alternate ways of responding to their reading such as Sketch to Stretch, collage building, and dramatic interpretations of the story or parts of it. Consult the materials related to Workshop 5: Using Art and Other Disciplines To Enrich Classroom Conversations for other suggestions.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

In your workshop journal, tell a story of diversity in your teaching life. You may wish to focus on a student or a group of students learning to appreciate differences in others; you may remember a moment where you bridged differences between yourself and a peer or a student; you may remember a time where difference presented unanticipated complexities. Reflect on your story and consider what insights it might offer others about managing diversities.

Additional Reading

- Allington, Richard L., ed. *Teaching Struggling Readers: Articles From the Reading Teacher*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1998.
- Au, Kathryn H. *Literacy Instruction in Multicultural Settings*. Australia: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 1993.
- Banks, James A. *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999.
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- Cary, Stephen. *Working With Second Language Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.
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- Duquette, Cheryll. *Students at Risk: Solutions to Classroom Challenges*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2001.
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- Fu, Danling. *"My Trouble Is My English": Asian Students and The American Dream*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995.
- Gollnick, Donna M. and Philip C. Chinn. *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*. 2nd ed. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1986.
- Goodman, Wendy, ed. *Living and Teaching in an Unjust World: New Perspectives on Multicultural Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Haniates, Helen and Betty Doerr with Margaret Golden. *Teach Our Children Well: Essential Strategies for the Urban Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
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- Kucer, Stephen B., Cecilia Silva, and Esther L. Delgado-Larocco. *Curricular Conversations: Themes in Multilingual and Monolingual Classrooms*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1995.
- Kuzmeskus, June, ed. *We Teach Them All: Teachers Writing About Diversity*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1996.

Additional Reading, cont'd.

- Lang, Greg and Chris Berberich. *All Children Are Special: Creating an Inclusive Classroom*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1995.
- Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.
- Lee, Christopher and Rosemary Jackson. *Faking It: A Look Into the Mind of a Creative Learner*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.
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- Lustig, Myron W. and Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
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Additional Reading, cont'd.

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Weaver, Constance, ed. *Success at Last! Helping Students With AD(H)D Achieve Their Potential*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

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Professional journals about literature instruction:

CELA Newsletter: The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring addressing a wide range of issues concerning literacy.

The National Council of Teachers of English Journals: NCTE publishes many subscription journals including *Language Arts* for the elementary school level.

The Reading Teacher from the International Reading Association typically includes excellent articles about literature instruction as well as regular reviews of new children's literature titles.

Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program:

The Big Bike Race by Lucy Jane Bledsoe
The Pinballs by Betsy Byars
The Jacket by Andrew Clements
The Skin I'm In by Sharon G. Flake
"The Wall" by Langston Hughes
The Color of My Words by Lynn Joseph
Afternoon of the Elves by Janet Taylor Lisle
A Family Apart by Joan Lowery Nixon
The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson
Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco
Behind the Bedroom Wall by Laura E. Williams
Dragon's Gate by Laurence Yep

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