

Sarah Stein  
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Learning about Learners

A. I looked at Yvonne's fabulous website. Yvonne directly speaks about her students and clearly thinks it's very important to know her students well. It is also quite clear from the website that she does in fact know her students - as both people and students. She speaks about the diversity of her students. About seventy percent of her students are African American, about twenty percent are Latino and the other ten percent are composed of a variety of ethnicities and racial categories. Her school is a magnet school, in which the students apply to gain admittance into the school. The school is located near the lower income areas of Watts and Compton and a small percentage of the student slots are allotted for students from those areas. She directly states that her students are traditionally oppressed people who need to gain a sense of self and their place in society. She wants to help them understand the forces working against them and also learn what they can take advantage of. She also states that students have different abilities and skills. A vast number of her students know how to read, but only at the surface. They have never learned how, nor been challenged to delve beyond the surface and truly understand the meaning of words. She pays a great deal of attention to who her students are. She understands that they are a diverse group of students that are passionate about identity and about learning. She obviously believes that her students are extremely capable and powerful beings who are aware of differences and want to talk about real issues in class. From what Yvonne says, I think it is clear that her students want to be both asked about their opinions and have the opportunity to be heard.

B. Watching the students in the video clips on Yvonne's website, it is clear that they are a passionate group of students who are learning a great deal about both the subject matter at hand and life itself. These students are grappling with issues of identity on all fronts. They want and need opportunities to speak their minds in a safe space. They need practice in speaking out loud, and practice in voicing their thoughts. They are capable of discussing complex and "touchy" issues with a maturity not all adults have. Yvonne has created a space in which the students are encouraged to interact with everyone else in class, not just their best friend or seat neighbor. Challenging students to "wake up" on the first day of school, as Yvonne does by naming their racially segregated seat selections and challenging them to re-integrate themselves, makes for a powerful beginning on a journey of learning together. From the beginning she made it clear that her

classroom is a safe space for exploration. Yvonne always tells students to find a partner who is both different from themselves in some aspect and not in their clique outside of class, fostering the ability to positively interact with people who are different in some way. The video clips of students in her class clearly illustrate that adolescents struggle with issues of identity and truly need support in forming their own identities. Yvonne helps her students believe in themselves as writers, performers, and thinkers, as well as young adults who can achieve greatness. All students need and deserve teachers like Yvonne.

C. Yvonne seems to be using many different ways to get to know her students. One of Yvonne's core beliefs that were represented on her website was her belief that literacy is the road to freedom. She wants to challenge students to think, to respect themselves, and to appreciate others, especially those who may differ from them in some aspect. She is also responsible for teaching them content, her subject matter. Going forward with those guidelines, or hopeful outcomes, she designed fabulous activities to get to know her students as both students and people. For example, she wants students to become better public speakers, which probably relates to both her personal class goals as well as some class standards. She has a daily class scribe who has to report back on what happened the day before. This helps the students gain practice in public speaking, gain practice in observation skills, and improve their abilities to report on and describe activities that happened in the past. This activity also helps Yvonne learn about how students experience a day in her class. Her anticipation guides enhance student comprehension by helping students become actively involved in making predictions about concepts covered in the text. They stimulate curiosity and motivation to learn. They also give the teacher an opportunity to learn about what the students care about and what they know about a topic before delving into the subject matter. Another example is about the questions she has students ask about the class reading material. She has them ask, rather than answer, questions at different levels. The first level is simple facts that can be gleaned from the reading. The question levels progress up to making connections between the book reading material and larger social issues. This activity helps the students learn how to think critically and how to make connections between class material and life at large. It also provides Yvonne with an opportunity to learn about the students' understanding of the text as well as insight into her students' thinking process.