

SCHOOL LITERACY AND CULTURE PROJECT



Collaborative Professional Development for Teachers in Reading, Writing, and Culture-Based Learning

Since 1990, the School Literacy and Culture Project (SLC) in the Center for Education at Rice University has been a popular and well-respected source of professional development in early literacy throughout the Houston metropolitan area. Rooted firmly in research on the cognitive, social, and cultural factors that impact how young children become readers and writers, SLC offers a variety of opportunities to increase effective instruction. These include classroom-based learning, campus collaborations, seminars, workshops, and the Summer Institute on Reading, Writing, and Cultural Connections.

Our signature program is Classroom Storytelling. Based on Vivian Paley's work in young children's oral language development and the role of imaginative thinking in learning, this program helps teachers use young children's dictation and dramatization of original stories to bridge the distance between home and school literacies. Through research-based Classroom Storytelling practices, teachers foster children's developing knowledge of print, writing, narrative, intention, and other foundational literacy concepts.

Center for Education
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WHAT TYPE OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES DOES THE SCHOOL LITERACY AND CULTURE PROJECT PROVIDE?

TEACHER EDUCATION IN EARLY LITERACY



Classroom-Based Teacher Education

Teachers in this research-based, year-long professional development program enjoy twice-monthly visits from Mentor Teachers. Mentors help teachers implement early literacy practices proven to maximize young children's oral language and beginning reading skills.

Ongoing read-aloud, dictation, writing, and dramatization activities comprise the core practices. Mentors also help teachers with general early literacy issues as well. All teachers participate in monthly seminars organized around early literacy readings and reflections. This program can be specialized for toddler, ESL, and bilingual teachers.

Campus-Based Teacher Education

At the request of our partner schools, SLC is proud to announce a new instructional model which makes it possible for faculties or faculty subgroups to craft sessions designed to meet specific campus needs. These collaborations might include curricular analysis, approaches to early writing, or topics of specific interest to individual groups. A limited number of campus partnerships will be available outside the metropolitan Houston area.

Institutes and Workshops

Summer Institute on Reading, Writing, and Cultural Connections – In this week-long institute, teachers of young children reframe their reading and writing practices in light of new research trends. Topics include the uses of storytelling, dictation and dramatization, vocabulary development, comprehension, phonological awareness, and effective ways to teach alphabet and print knowledge. Teachers also explore how home and school cultures impact academic learning.

January Mini-Conference – This half-day gathering of early literacy professionals features a prominent keynote speaker and breakout sessions known both for their practical nature and theoretical depth. Past topics have included "Making Choices: Early Literacy Learning and the Craft of Teaching" and "Ten Books Every Child Needs to Know".

Literacy Leadership Institutes – New for the 2007-2008 school year, this advanced seminar series provides a context in which experienced teachers delve deeply into current issues in the field of early literacy education. Teachers may enroll in all four sessions or attend on a session-by-session basis.



Contracted workshops – SLC staff members conduct intensive in-services on topics popular with both teachers and administrators. Learning opportunities include sessions such as "What Teachers Say IS Important: Conversation and Vocabulary in the Early Childhood Classroom" and "Finding Minutes in the Day: Turning Classroom Routines into Educational Opportunities". Explore a complete list of titles at <http://centerforeducation.rice.edu/SLC/workshops.htm>.

TEACHING, LEARNING, AND CULTURE



Why Culture? The culture of children's homes often differs dramatically from school culture. Different expectations, different interaction styles, and different values can be confusing to both adults and children. Cultural mismatches can also profoundly impact reading and writing education. For this reason, culture-based learning is woven throughout the projects offered by SLC. We also offer a special study group designed to explore these questions in greater depth.

Cultural Conversations

This project creates a safe environment for teachers to talk about such issues as race, ethnicity, and gender. During this six-week workshop participants examine their own cultural identities and learn about the cultures of students in their classrooms. Participants also share strategies they have implemented successfully in classrooms with diverse populations.

DO YOU WORK WITH PARENTS AND CHILDREN?



PARENT EDUCATION

Parent Workshops

The School Literacy and Culture Project staff presents a variety of workshops for parents of young children. These interactive sessions include such topics as “Nurturing Readers and Writers at Home” and “Choice Words - Parent Talk that Creates Thinking and Autonomy”. Presentations are conducted in either English or Spanish at the SLC offices and on school campuses.

CLASSES FOR CHILDREN

Summer Creative Writing Workshops

Three-week Summer Creative Writing Workshops provide an opportunity for children to write stories, poetry, essays, and plays. Children discover the joy of writing, the intrigue of language, and the confidence of authorship. Workshops are team-taught by one writer and one teacher. A low teacher-student ratio ensures individual attention.

After-School Classes

The School Literacy and Culture Project staff contracts with area campuses to conduct after-school classes for young children. Classes meet once a week for six weeks and include a variety of early writing experiences that encourage children to develop a love of literature and discover their own “writer’s voice”.



HOW DOES THE SCHOOL LITERACY AND CULTURE PROJECT SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY?

RESEARCH

The SLC research team serves two purposes. First, it conducts scientific research in the fields of early literacy and culture; for instance, a recent study, to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, found that children in storytelling classrooms made greater gains on standardized measures of early literacy than their peers in control classrooms. Secondly, the research team analyzes findings of other early literacy researchers and works with classroom teachers to put new methodologies into practice.



ADVOCACY

The School Literacy and Culture Project strives to provide a voice for Houston-area children and teachers. SLC works alongside such organizations as the Houston Area Association for the Education of Young Children and Collaborative for Children to provide quality education to young children regardless of their life circumstances.

The School Literacy and Culture Project celebrates 18 years of teachers and students learning, as an outreach program of the Center for Education at Rice University. All programs of the Center for Education are solely supported by school districts, gifts, and grants. All of our funding goes back into providing resources and training so teachers can more effectively impact student learning. Consider joining our contributors in supporting the School Literacy and Culture Project. The impact will continue to enrich the lives of teachers and their students.

Special thanks to School Literacy and Culture Project contributors:
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THE SCHOOL LITERACY AND CULTURE PROJECT

What Teachers Are Saying:

"I've taught prekindergarten for fourteen years. After this year with the Storytelling Project, my children are writing more and reading more than they ever have before."



"My mentor provides lots of practical advice. I can tell she has been in the classroom for many years. It's hard to take advice from someone who hasn't a clue what it's like in the classroom. She never made me feel intimidated while visiting me."

"I know my students so much better this year, both academically and personally. Some of my struggling children turned out to be great storytellers and actors. Being successful at storytelling led to greater success in everything."

"The Storytelling Project has not only changed the children's lives academically with growth in oral language, print awareness, etc., but there's also been tremendous emotional growth, especially in their self-esteem."

"I learned to teach many of our 'essential skills' in a fun way. Children learned to trust me and each other. They took pride in their work and learned so much."

"The part of Cultural Conversations that I found most helpful was the dialogue between our group members. In each session I felt I gained professional partners, people who knew the same students and saw the same problems and were willing to work together on similar solutions."

What Experts Are Saying:

"At this time, when universities are suddenly awakening to their responsibilities to young children, the Rice School Literacy and Culture Project stands out as a pioneer effort and highly successful example of a well-coordinated, grass-roots integrated design. You combine a strong community identity with individual autonomy to the great benefit of the children and their teachers. Add to this your ongoing research, and the educational picture becomes a model for all."

—Vivian Paley, author and first educator to receive a MacArthur "genius" grant, the 2004 National Council of Teachers of English Outstanding Teacher in the Language Arts

"The (children) who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives."

—Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories*

For more information about our programs, application procedures, or fees, please contact us:



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