Chapter 5
Balancing Literacies:
UDL/CSP-Infused Elementary Reading Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines an approach to whole learner education in an elementary school literacy classroom by building upon the work of scholars in Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP). It begins by introducing the connections between whole learner education, DSE, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and CSP, demonstrating how these theoretical frameworks overlap and how they can be used in tandem to enhance the work already done in each field. After providing this theoretical background, the chapter outlines the components of a balanced literacy block in a third grade classroom, demonstrating how elementary school educators can work to meet the individual learning needs of developing readers in the various areas of balanced literacy (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), while also attending to student identities and making instruction accessible to students with learning variations.

INTRODUCTION

There's a busy hum of conversation on the rug. Students are gesturing animatedly with their partners, acting out a bit of the read aloud <u>Leila in Saffron</u> (2019) by Rukhasanna Guidroz. Students take on the roles of Leila and her Naani as the characters try on silk scarves in a rainbow of colors. Ms. Yi and Mr. Walker, the teachers in this third-grade co-taught classroom, move from partnership to partnership, listening in. Mr. Walker carries a clipboard and jots notes about which students are keeping their dramatizations grounded in the text, and which students are extending beyond the text. He pays special attention to the triads he and Ms. Yi have previously established to support their emergent bilingual learners (EBLs), Emile and Angela. Mr. Walker encourages these students to join in the conversations of their proficient language partners, offering a sentence stem to facilitate their participation.

Ms. Yi provides a one-minute warning for students to wrap up their conversations. Pointing to the co-created anchor chart on her easel, she reminds them that they can use tone of voice and body language to communicate their character's feelings effectively. A moment later, she begins a countdown from five to bring students back together, narrating as students turn their bodies from their partnerships to face into the center of the circle. Ms. Yi calls on a partnership she has pre-selected while circulating amongst students to share their interpretation with the class, asking other students to attend to the ways in which the partnership effectively conveys character feelings. Mr. Walker monitors student learning by noting which students volunteer to respond, and those who are able to effectively identify the strategies used by the selected partnership.

With a hand signal, students know that the minilesson is over. They look up at the pocket chart to note what center activity they will be engaging with for that day. Some students move towards the classroom library to begin book shopping from the genre, level, and student-generated bins, while a handful of others grab their pencils and head to the kidney-shaped table for a Collaborative Strategic Reading small group facilitated by Ms. Yi. Other students move to the corner of the room to begin recording their FlipGrid book reviews on tablets, and others settle in to focus spots with their independent reading books. Mr. Walker readies materials to begin assessing students' fluency one-on-one; once finished, he'll confer individually with students engaged in independent reading. Though there are a variety of activities happening at once, everyone in the classroom settles in to his or her work.

In this classroom, each student has ownership and choice. There are a variety of learners, and the teachers have identified the strengths and needs of each one. The educators intentionally design instruction to align to what they know about their students. How did the teachers get their third-graders to this point of independence

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