



HNET - Hofstra Network of Elementary Teachers

“We go farther faster when we go together.”
– Martin Luther King, Jr.

What is HNET?

HNET is a group of Hofstra University pre-service teachers and alumni of Hofstra’s undergraduate and graduate elementary education programs, as well as their colleagues.

What is the purpose of HNET?

Teaching is, to borrow from the Peace Corps motto, “the toughest job you’ll ever love.” In addition, teaching is, all too often, a lonely profession where we go into our rooms and shut the door, away from the companionship of and professional sharing with our fellow teachers. HNET exists to provide a professional community for elementary teachers and teachers-to-be associated with Hofstra. (Please note: “Associated with Hofstra” means that if you are a colleague of a Hofstra alumnus, have worked with a Hofstra participant-observer or student-teacher, or supervised a Hofstra student, you may certainly be a part of HNET.) HNET allows us to support each other professionally, in person and on the Web, so that we can learn from each other and grow together as teachers.

What kinds of activities does HNET offer?

- Annual conference with workshops given by members of HNET
- In-service credit programs
- Discussion get-togethers to talk about common new and veteran teacher issues
- Resource recommendations on the Web site
- Links to suggested materials on the Web site
- Special programs to address gaps in content or pedagogical knowledge identified by HNET members
- Newsletter
- Book discussion groups

As you can see, the possibilities are exciting for all of us!

Web site: <http://www.hofstra/hnet>
Click on “Subscribe to HNET” to become a member!

E-mail us at: HNET@hofstra.edu

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HNET 3rd Annual Conference, 2005

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Dean Johnson presents Jennie Kuhn with the Hofstra Teacher of Excellence award in honor of being named the 2004 Outstanding Early Childhood Practitioner of the Year by the National Association for Early Childhood Teacher Educators.

Managing Discussions With Socratic Questioning: Socratic Seminar in the Primary Classroom

Presenter: Beth Lawatsch

By: Kimberly Fendt

Beth Lawatsch began her workshop by identifying the various benefits of Socratic questioning. Ms. Lawatsch noted that Socratic discussions both encourage students to draw meaning out of a text or a picture and facilitate the development of listening skills; she also pointed out how they mandate that students formulate their own opinions and support them with hard evidence. Perhaps most important, Socratic discussions provide today's busy teachers with an effective method to truly get to know each student in their classrooms.

During the workshop, Ms. Lawatsch modeled a Socratic discussion. She assumed the position of the teacher, and all the attendees became participants. She presented two renderings of New York City: "Black Manhattan" and an image from the book *Tar Beach*. The essential question of our discussion was, "Do these two artists share similar opinions of New York City?" As we discussed this issue and our interpretations of the pictures, Ms. Lawatsch performed the role of the leader. She encouraged all to share, inviting quiet participants into the conversation by asking their opinions. If there was hesitation to answer the question because of a lack of understanding, she stepped back and scaffolded up to the essential question. By doing this, she clarified exactly what it was that she was asking. If the discussion hit a lull, she prompted our thinking by raising tangent

questions. All the while, Ms. Lawatsch praised each contribution and thanked all participants for sharing their thoughts and opinions.

Rather than dominate the discussion, Ms. Lawatsch demonstrated how, after presenting an essential question, the leader steps back and allows the discussion to follow the thoughts of the participants. She did not pull the conversation back toward her essential question, but instead gave us the freedom to explore what we found intriguing about the images. As she pointed out, it is crucial that the teacher allow his or her students to make personal connections to the discussion topic, even if it involves straying slightly from the main theme.

While the title of this workshop was potentially intimidating, Beth Lawatsch successfully encouraged all attendees to embrace the challenge of conducting Socratic discussions with primary students. She provided clear, in-depth information about leading Socratic discussions and asking Socratic questions. We left her workshop armed with a rationale for Socratic seminars, a list of their benefits, step-by-step instructions, the guidelines of the roles of the leader and participants and, most important, the inspiration to experiment with Socratic discussions in our own classrooms.

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, October 22, 2005

Speaker: Jane Elliott

**Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes Revisited:
Power, Perception, and Prejudice**

Scott Skodnek

Business Development Center

Room 246

South Campus

11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Register at: HNET@hofstra.edu

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, March 18, 2006

Speaker: Steven Levy (*Pilgrims '92*)

HNET Annual Conference

Details to follow.

Watch the HNET Web Site:

<http://www.hofstra.edu/hnet>

Integrating Math, Science and Technology Into the Curriculum

Presenter: Meghan O'Connor

Article by: Maria Conte

Meghan O'Connor introduced project-based learning as a tool to integrate math, science and technology (MST) into the curriculum. She detailed how to create a project where the children take ownership of what they are to accomplish. She provided helpful handouts that we all could use in creating a project that involved MST. Ms. O'Connor emphasized that much planning needs to go into these projects before introducing them to the class, and teachers' goals must be specific.

Although project-based learning involves much planning, the teacher can step back and become the facilitator when the project is underway. The students are in charge of their own learning, which allows them to be creative. The projects, or "challenges" as she calls them, connect learning with real experiences while meeting the needs of all kinds of learners.

When Ms. O'Connor introduced project-based learning, I found the task daunting. She did a wonderful job of breaking down the roles of the students and the teacher. The students are responsible for organizing and planning their own projects as well as defining the criteria for the projects and how they will be graded. Her presentation neatly outlined, step by step, how to plan a project-based learning unit, including how to assess the students' learning. The students must work well in groups and are responsible for their own research and ideas, thereby reducing the possibility of some students not pulling their weight.

I left this session feeling confident that I could put together a unit that will not only challenge my students but also get them motivated about learning.

Classroom Management in an Inclusion Classroom

Presenter: Monica Zenyuh

Article by: Danny Wittich

I had the pleasure of attending and facilitating the workshop presented by Monica Zenyuh. This workshop was very informative and helpful to me and to all in attendance.

Ms. Zenyuh distributed handouts that contained many effective ideas that she used in her classroom. Her first comments during the workshop were about the first week of school. She discussed how it is important to start the school year with a blank slate. However, she pointed out that it is important to meet with the students' previous classroom teachers to check on relevant medical and educational issues. I liked her idea of reading silly poems during the first week as a way to create a relaxed atmosphere and introduce poetry into the classroom. She reads poems during the first week, and then each student has an opportunity to create and read original poems every week. Students make up their own classroom rules because this

provides a sense of ownership for the students. If a student breaks a rule, the teacher can ask why he or she broke a rule that the students themselves created.

Ms. Zenyuh sends a letter to parents at the beginning of the school year introducing herself to them. I see this as a way to develop a line of communication with my students' parents and let them know my goals for the year, and how to contact me. Ms. Zenyuh also talked about what she does when pullout students leave the classroom during the day. She has a "What I missed while I was out" sheet that the students have to give to a classmate to fill out and keep track. I thought this idea was unique and could be very effective in the classroom.

Monica Zenyuh's workshop was very helpful and informative. I hope to use many of her ideas in my future classroom.

Write us at hnet@hofstra.edu and tell us where you're teaching!

Social Studies and Language Arts That Let Students Think (Upper Elementary)

Presenter: Karen Phua

By: Wende Russo

There is a point in every student teaching assignment that requires us to change gears from a primary grade to an upper level grade over the course of a weekend. As most of my colleagues will tell you, the shift in thought processes is a bit daunting. So, when I saw that the HNET conference workshop choices contained a module on critical thinking for upper elementary students, I thought, "Perfect! Absolutely perfect!" I didn't realize how accurate this sentiment was until I had the pleasure of sitting in on Karen Phua's presentation.

Ms. Phua, a sixth grade teacher in the Oceanside School District, comes to us with nine years of teaching experience and the life experience she has accumulated from a previous career. She took the tedious exercise of compiling and comparing statistics about many different countries and turned it into an engaging, higher level exercise in thought. I can still remember charting statistics as a child in my social studies classes; it was nothing more than a lot of regurgitation of facts and meaningless memorization of vocabulary lists. Ms. Phua took the same material and turned it into a life lesson. The memorization of vocabulary was unnecessary, as she believes that you should "elicit rather than deliver vocabulary." She helped us to see that vocabulary really is only formal words for ideas we already know.

Within the context of this statistical comparison, Ms. Phua reinforced research skills, such as how to find information on the Internet, how to enter data into a spreadsheet, and how to use Excel to generate graphics. Once the information was gathered, we were divided into small groups of four or five, and asked which is the best country to live in and why. It challenged

us to think beyond the data, and to question the things that are important to us. Children start thinking beyond the data, connecting the statistics. There are layers of thinking available or, as Ms. Phua put it, "something for everyone."

Ms. Phua walked around during our small group debates and occasionally presented a challenging question or answered one of ours. She also gave us a tip: she records each small group discussion as it is developing, with the children's full knowledge, so that she can be a "fly on the wall." It allows her to recognize the students who may not be well written or do not speak out much in a whole class discussion by listening to their insights in a small group discussion. She brought in a transcript of one such conversation among her students, and placed it on the overhead projector for all to see, as she read aloud. It was enlightening and often humorous. She pointed out the comments of several students whom she would not ordinarily think of as critical thinkers. During this exercise they expressed some interesting and thought-provoking conclusions.

Our groups demonstrated skills such as debate, justification of a point of view using supporting text, and analysis of data. Ms. Phua extended this exercise to other areas as well. She makes connections to geography by having the students find out where the countries in question are located. Then she has them analyze cartoons and write about what they have learned. By doing all of these tasks "in context," it makes it easier for the children to take assessments "out of context." I've heard it said that you cannot study for the ELA in a meaningful and relevant way, while still learning the skills that are necessary in order to do well on these assessments. This is incorrect. Karen Phua showed us the way.



HNET presenters, 2005.

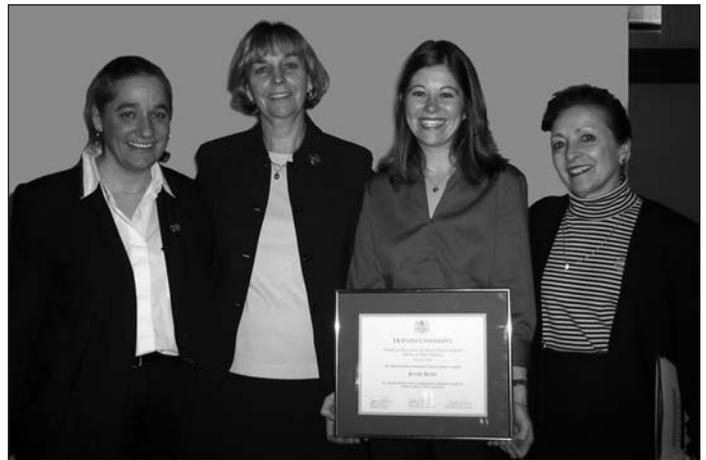
Workshop: Thematic Units K-1-2

Presenter: Jennie Kuhn
By: Stephanie Bonserio

Jennie Kuhn began her workshop by zoning in directly on the theme of communities. Throughout her presentation, Ms. Kuhn discussed the benefits of including the community as part of the curriculum, as well as the benefits of having a community in the classroom. Ms. Kuhn explained that with communities as a theme, the personal experiences of the students become real. She noted that working with the other teachers is “like a pinball machine”; they bounce ideas off each other to find what works best.

She began the workshop by telling the audience that it is important to establish expectations from the beginning. Ms. Kuhn makes it clear to her students that respect must always be present in the classroom; she shows her students respect, and her students show her and each other respect. Ms. Kuhn also establishes the expectations of organization, responsibility and individuality in her classroom. The students help her plan the week; this way they have ownership of the classroom. She also leaves it up to the students to take inventory of the classroom. Together, she and each student go through the workbook to check for the supplies he or she needs, and then the student fills in the letter to go home. Ms. Kuhn believes that the students should always know what is going on; she tells them what is going home and what has to come back. This gives the students the chance to fulfill her expectations of responsibility and organization.

Ms. Kuhn gives her students complete responsibility for themselves. She gives them clear expectations, and, more often than not, they exceed them. She has a problem-solving box within the room so that the students are responsible for solving their problems without her help. Ms. Kuhn also has badges that say “I took the initiative,” which are given to students who are observed doing something that they were not told to do, like cleaning up, helping others, or picking things up off the floor. She also develops jobs within the classroom so that the students have ownership of



Andrea Libresco, Linda Davey, Jennie Kuhn, Doris Fromberg.

the room, and she is not left cleaning at the end of the day. The students know that it is their room, too, and they do not want to leave it a mess. Some of these jobs are room inspectors, pattern leaders, and custodians for after snacktime.

Ms. Kuhn’s most important unit focuses on creating an actual community in the classroom. The students are responsible for designing and building it, and we were allowed to view it at the end of the workshop.

Although the topic of the workshop, “Thematic Units K-1-2,” makes one think that the discussion would consist of various units that can be done in kindergarten, first and second grade classrooms, Ms. Kuhn took communities, a major unit in all three grades, and showed us how this unit transcends the curriculum to all areas of study, the home, and the students themselves. All the members of the audience left the workshop filled with ideas on how to develop a classroom community and a rich unit on community at several grade levels.



The New Teacher Book: Finding Purpose, Balance and Hope During Your First Years in the Classroom

Presenter: Kelly Dawson Salas

Article by: Amy O'Keefe

Kelly Dawson Salas is a fourth grade teacher in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at La Escuela Fratney, a bilingual school focusing on English and Spanish. Ms. Salas started teaching in 1999 with big dreams and visions as a first-year teacher. *The New Teacher Book – Finding Purpose, Balance, and Hope During Your First Years in the Classroom*, which she co-authored, is a collection of writings that helps us answer questions such as “What kind of classroom do you want to create for students?” and “What kind of teacher do you want to be?”

Ms. Salas spoke to us about her experiences as a first-year teacher in Milwaukee. Her vision as a first-year teacher did not equal her reality; over that year, she discovered areas she wanted to improve on in her classroom. She formulated a vision and then a plan to work on that vision. For example, she attempted to improve the social studies curriculum in her classroom because she felt it was dry and boring, and also because it had little connection to her students' lives. She gave her students reason to stay focused. This was the beginning of Ms. Salas' small steps toward her vision as a successful teacher.

Ms. Salas discussed multiple ways that helped her become an effective teacher. Inside the classroom, Ms. Salas works on establishing a classroom routine, and teaching activities that help students express and explore who they are. Outside the classroom, she fights to change conditions that hurt students, and encourages her students to become active members of the community. Ms. Salas believes in and practices these things in her classroom every day. She also mentioned not forgetting about bringing humor into the classroom and life, and the importance of making time for yourself.

Establishing a classroom routine stood out most to me because I believe an effective teacher has to know his or her students.



Kelly Dawson Salas

Ms. Salas shakes all of her students' hands as they enter the classroom every morning and as they leave every afternoon. This establishes a tone of appreciation and a connection with the students each day. They have classroom meetings every day to share what is going on in each of their lives, which allows the students to connect with one another. Also, they have a “song of the week,” which sets a tone for the classroom, depending on the theme. One example Ms. Salas gave us was a song called “I Will Be Your Friend,” which she used recently.

She shared with us many pictures of different projects her students worked on in the classroom. It gave her presentation more meaning to be able to see her students working together, happy to be in school.

SAVE THE DATE!

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

HNET Book Club

Hagedorn Lobby/Couch Area, 7 p.m.

Book to be discussed:

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Book 6)

Discussion open to this and other books in the series.

2005 HNET Book Discussion List

The View From Saturday by E.L. Konigsburg

Kira-Kira by Cynthia Kadohata

Bad Boy: A Memoir by Walter Dean Myers

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Book 6)
by J.K. Rowling

More to come!

Teaching Rich Curriculum in the Context of Testing (Grade 4)

Presenters: Paula Marron and Diane Provvido

Article by: Gina Paino

Paula Marron and Diane Provvido work together in Oceanside UFSD. Ms. Marron is the lead teacher for social studies and science in the Oceanside elementary schools. Ms. Provvido teaches fourth grade and presents at conferences on Long Island, most recently at the BOCES Math Consortium for Nassau and Suffolk.

Ms. Marron suggested that when creating a lesson and/or unit, you need to create an essential question by asking yourself, “What is it that we want to know?” This question will be your guide as you build a unit of study. For example, Ms. Marron handed out a chart that used the essential question, “Did exploration (in NY and the Western Hemisphere) result in progress for all?” The chart listed Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans. The students would then have to list how these people were affected geographically, culturally, and economically. They would then have to say if the change was positive or negative, and why. At the end of the activity, the students would then be able to answer the essential question using the information they collected.

Another way to use the essential question is through writing. “Teaching writing means teaching thinking,” Ms. Marron said. It is also a great way of “putting children’s voices back in their writing,” added Ms. Provvido. They explained that using an

essential question on top, with an outline format underneath, could serve as a simple way for students to construct an essay. For example, when asking an essential question such as “Why?” a student can say, “Well, here are my outline notes. I can construct an essay quickly because the ‘why’ is answered in my notes.”

They also brought this idea into document-based questions (DBQs). They demonstrated how to use essential questioning with maps, documents and photographs. The idea behind this is to show students how to look at these sources and take clues from them. “That is how historians do it. That is how we do it,” said Ms. Provvido. “Showing them will help students become secure in knowing how to do this DBQ job,” explained Ms. Marron. Through this pedagogy, students will be able to look at maps, pictures and primary source documents and answer DBQs easily because they are already familiar with the sources.

All of these ideas were great examples of how to teach rich curriculum without teaching to the test. When a teacher promotes this type of learning and discovery, he or she is providing students with a real opportunity to learn. The most important idea I acquired from this workshop is that we as educators do need to teach skills necessary for testing, but we should not let our curriculum be overshadowed by it.



Attendees at the 2005 HNET conference.

Teaching to the Individual Within a Uniform Curriculum

Presenter: Rich Parlini

Article by: Shelley Leibusor

The two words “curriculum differentiation” seem rather intimidating to many educators, but those of us who attended Rich Parlini’s workshop now know that those two words shall frighten us no longer. This workshop provided those in attendance with great insight into the many ways that we can meet the needs of our students in classes that are academically, socioeconomically and ethnically diverse.

A huge component in meeting the needs of our students in diverse classrooms is working with those students who Mr. Parlini dubbed “the needy and speedy.” With the increased prevalence of inclusion in classrooms nationwide, our classes are filled with students whose academic levels cover a very wide range. Every classroom has those students who finish every task in half the allotted time and those who need extra help and extra time. In order to prevent the “speedy” students from feeling bored and unchallenged, encourage them to keep a book in their desks to read, visit the classroom library, or work on critical thinking/problem-solving activities. Those students can also work on a long-term, independent study project, and use the classroom computer to conduct research. Keep these students engaged and interested! A word to the wise: Be prepared for the administration to question why Bobby is working on a different activity than the rest of the class. Don’t fret; just have necessary documentation available that proves Bobby’s mastery of the material and shows that his activity is related to the material.

As for those “needy” students, make sure that you set aside time each day for conferences. This crucial part of your day allows you to address the individual needs of your students and evaluate their academic progress. Mr. Parlini values both formal and informal assessment before, during and after school. He suggests that you let your students help you decorate your bulletin board. While they work, you can listen to them talk to each other, and find out more about their interests and hobbies. Those are key pieces of information that can be the basis of exciting extension activities and projects. If we appeal to students’ interests, then we will be able to turn even the most uninterested, needy or speedy students into motivated learners. Finally, make sure to give students time to do group work, perhaps assigning them roles to ensure participation by all members. Just make sure that you don’t spend this time grading papers. Monitoring students’ work habits in group settings is a valuable means of assessment.

Mr. Parlini also warns that both new and experienced teachers are faced with this challenge daily ... making the administration happy. He says that although this is a priority, don’t grant the administration happiness at the expense of your creativity! The easiest way to please the administration is to make your



classroom appearance suit their desires. If they want to come into the room after lunch every day to see centers, give them centers! If they want to see the desks arranged in groups of four, give them groups. Do what you can in terms of physical appearance to appease the higher-ups, and set a positive tone. Another way that you can please the administration is by being prepared. Know your material inside and out. Know what your students are learning and why they are learning it. More important, know why you are teaching the material to your students in that creative, Hofstra University way that promotes information discovery and exploration. Don’t fall into the trap of teaching out of the coveted teacher’s guide just to make sure you are following the curriculum guidelines. Those books contain great information, but you will become a unique and successful teacher by looking at the material in the textbook in different ways; expand upon it and make it engaging and exciting for your students.

Always, it is necessary to praise effort, not products. We must have realistic and different expectations for our students. Mastery is not always the goal. For our “needy” students, completing half of a book report by the due date may be amazing and should be rewarded. Just make sure not to celebrate too much, or the praise won’t seem as wholehearted to your students. Building up students’ self-confidence is a necessary ingredient in the recipe for success.

Those of us who attended this workshop are less fearful of curriculum differentiation. As for myself, I look forward to differentiating my curriculum in the near future because that would mean that I finally have a classroom of my own. So bring it on!

Science and Social Action: A Case Study for Your Classroom

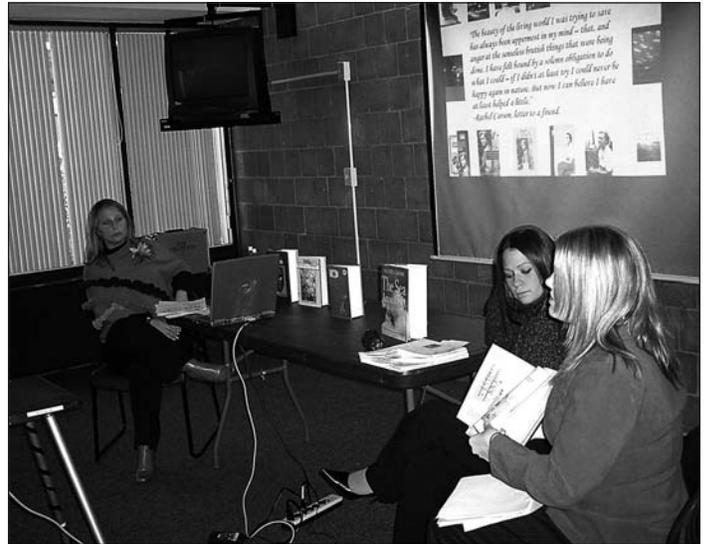
Presenters: Candice Roggenkamp, Liza Martino and Jill Griesmeyer
Article by: Lauren E. Brown

Candice Roggenkamp, Liza Martino and Jill Griesmeyer's workshop was well planned, informative and inspiring. Each of these teachers is pursuing a master's degree in math, science, and technology at Hofstra and teaches in early childhood classrooms. The workshop began with a number of intriguing questions, including whether we had experienced a number of symptoms, everything from puffy eyes to nausea to hyperactivity and depression. We talked about our habits with produce — whether we have been known to sneak a few (unwashed!) grapes at the super-market, and whether we wash our produce when we get it home. We also pondered the fact that landscapers wear protective gear and clothing, and leave signs on the lawn saying, "No pets, no bare feet, no children," but we do not think twice about walking in bare feet very close to the grass, and most people do not give any thought to what those chemicals might do to our ground water (etc.). Finally, the key question was asked: How do pesticides affect us and the world we live in?

At this point, I became excited. I am an organic food nut, and swear I can feel a third eye growing every time I eat an omelet that was not made with organic eggs (and do not get me started on BHT and all the chemicals that are injected into cows). Ms. Roggenkamp, Ms. Martino, and Ms. Griesmeyer brought the point home with some staggering statistics: 91 percent of apples were found to have pesticides in them. Some apples were so toxic that one bite could deliver an unsafe dose of chemicals. These statistics are based on consumption by an adult — imagine the toxicity of pesticides in children. These statistics, and more information, can be found at www.foodnews.org. rachelcarson.org is also a great source of information. It is also speculated that cancer, birth defects, ADHD, hormone problems and nervous system disorders can be linked to pesticide exposure.

Before we discussed classroom application of this information, we talked about the fact that pesticides and lawn care chemicals affect drinking water as well. We even did a blind taste test of bottled vs. tap water, and every participant identified the bottled water as being much cleaner tasting. Water sample results for some areas are available at <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/dwinfo/index.html>.

There are many benefits in using this information in the classroom. It allows for one of the best possible kinds of learning experience: Students research, learn, and then act. They



assimilate newly acquired information into decisions about themselves and their world. Some of the recommendations for using this information in the classroom were to research pesticides, drinking water quality and Rachel Carson, whose work with pesticides created an awareness of their effect on humans and the environment. Researching Rachel Carson provides a basis for the entire unit. Other "earthkeepers" who can be considered for a research project include Chico Mendes, Heather DeWitt, Deland Chan, Dennis Weaver, George Schaller, Jean-Michael Cousteau and Fin Donnelly. As a part of the research process, the presenters suggested having the school's water tested. (You can buy a water testing kit at a hardware store for around \$20.)

This workshop began as a research project on Rachel Carson, led to a heightened awareness of the possible negative effects of our food and water supply, and ended with each presenter becoming an activist at her own school, trying to convince the cafeteria to at least wash the apples before they are served each day. The Web sites www.thanal.org/id17.html and www.panna.org have suggestions on pesticide-free living.

I leave you with the same question that ended the workshop: Although chemicals are making your grass greener and your produce prettier, do you really want to be exposed to their potential hazards?

Connecting With Bilingual & ESL Students In Your Class

Presenter: Christine Vargas
Article by: Michelle Cherpock

We live in an ever-changing and diverse society, and these changes are reflected in the students that come into our schools and classrooms. Schools are becoming more and more diverse, and teachers must become more knowledgeable and familiar with all cultures. One of the fastest growing populations now found in schools are students who speak a language other than English. In Nassau County there are 56 districts with ESL/bilingual students, and in Suffolk County that number grows to 72 districts. In New York as a whole, 28 percent of people who live here speak a language other than English at home. Because of this, we are no longer simply classroom teachers; we must become ESL teachers as well.

Knowing this, Christine Vargas initiated a wonderful discussion on how we can connect with these students; she offered several wonderful ideas on how to make their assimilation into the classroom and knowledge of English a success. She began by explaining the many things a teacher with ESL students in his/her class must keep in mind. We must remember that some ESL students are here willingly and some are not, that some are living here temporarily and some will remain permanently. Some students will be eager and enthusiastic to learn, feeling like they are in a more positive place and receiving a wonderful opportunity, while others may withdraw or not connect at all because they know they are not staying here. We must keep all of these factors in mind as we try to understand students' attitudes toward learning in a new environment.

To acquire a second language, students typically go through a series of stages. These stages are usually not linear, and what is learned one day may quickly be forgotten. It takes time and patience for students to acquire a new language. Quite often the first and most predictable stage is that of silence. This is manifested by the initial exposure to a new language and may last anywhere from a few days to a few months. Instead of forcing the student to speak, have him or her point at or draw answers to questions. During this time we should never assume the students are not learning; it is actually the exact opposite because they are taking everything in and trying to make sense of their new surroundings. From here, students may speak one or two words and then move on to simple sentences. Often students will make grammatical mistakes such as "I talkeded" for "I talked," and this is OK; they are simply testing out the language. It is also imperative for us as teachers not to correct every spoken error the students make. We need to allow the students to try out what they know without interruption, as constantly correcting the students will discourage from talking and taking chances with acquired language skills.

In thinking about language and how ESL/bilingual students learn, it is also important for teachers to be aware that there are two main types of English language proficiency: social and academic. Social language proficiency, which is often referred to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), allows students to function and speak in everyday social situations. It takes from two to five years to develop and often begins as students repeat common phrases they hear from their peers. Academic language proficiency or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is associated with literary and cognitive development. These are the language skills needed for reasoning, problem solving or the processing of academic subject matter. This may take five to seven years to develop, although it may be acquired in a shorter time period if students already have CALP developed in their first language.

As a teacher with ESL/bilingual students in your class, you may be wondering what you can do to help. Ms. Vargas offered a number of ways in which we can provide support and a positive learning experience for these students. She first suggests creating a "comfortable, low anxiety atmosphere – a learning community." To do this we need to learn the students' names and correct pronunciation. We can pair up the student with a buddy, ideally a child who speaks the same language because they will learn and interpret for one another. As a classroom community, you can embrace cultural and linguistic diversity by learning new words in each student's language and/or by creating a multilingual print environment. Most important, we should never discourage the use of the native language in the classroom.

Ms. Vargas also recommends "providing support for understanding – scaffolding." She believes that exposure to English is insufficient, and teachers must make the language understandable. When speaking and teaching she suggests keeping language simple, paraphrasing, using visual aids and actions, including all four language modalities (reading, writing, listening, speaking), allowing time to internalize, slowing down and varying the type of assessment used.

Ms. Vargas suggests creating a classroom environment that "maximizes opportunities for language use." We can do this by developing thematic units where the same language appears over and over again. For example, if you are doing a science unit on the solar system, use the names of planets in math problems or incorporate books that use the same scientific vocabulary. We can also do this by creating hands-on, learning-centered activities and by designing activities to promote higher order thinking, which forces students to use the vocabulary. Teaching language through content promotes cognition, mastery and language acquisition all at once.

Continued on page 11.

Connecting With Bilingual & ESL Students In Your Class

Continued from page 10.

Teachers should also “provide authentic, meaningful activities that engage students.” It’s important for us to constantly question the teaching and learning going on in the classroom. We need to be sure that it is relevant to our students’ lives and draws upon background experiences. It should also be meaningful to them, and students should have choices in how/what they learn and how to demonstrate what they have learned. This type of environment allows all students, not only ESL/bilingual students, to demonstrate and learn in their own way.

Ms. Vargas presented a number of ideas and methods that are extremely helpful to first-year teachers, as well as experienced teachers who are now finding their classrooms filled with ESL/bilingual students. While her suggestions are geared specifically toward ESL/bilingual students, they can easily be applied to enhance success for any student in the class. As Ms. Vargas says, “Most of all, enjoy the diversity of your classroom and never forget that learning language is a lifelong process.”

Preparing for an Interview

Presenters: Dr. Gertrude Karabas and Stephanie Bonserio
Article by: Vicky Guadagno

It was a privilege and benefit to witness a small part of what might transpire during an interview between a recent graduate and a member of district administration.

The format of the presentation was appealing because it allowed the audience to participate and interact in the process and then view the final exchange between the two panelists.

Dr. Gertrude Karabas, director of curriculum and instruction for the Wyandanch School District, reminded all of us in attendance that when we are interviewed, there are specific qualities the interviewer is seeking. We must be prepared to demonstrate knowledge of both the district we are being interviewed for, as well as the curriculum content. However, perhaps beyond these requirements, it should be kept in mind that districts are looking for teachers who are authentic, dedicated individuals who can pre-empt problems and prepare for success.

Both Dr. Karabas and Hofstra student teacher Stephanie Bonserio began to develop a certain rapport right before our eyes, and we should strive to attain this rapport in our own interviewing experiences.

The presenters demonstrated an excellent strategy to use in answering questions about how to handle conflicts. Let us remember that one way to answer these types of questions is to explain how you would avoid getting into such situations in the first place.

Before your interview, mentally review specified examples and anecdotes from your own units, lessons, and personal education



encounters that you could specifically draw from as needed in “multidisciplinary” ways when answering various types of questions. This will help to personalize your answers as well as illustrate your experience.

To summarize, as interviewees, we should exhibit clearly that we can envision ourselves as productive, communicative educators in the district – and that our leadership skills will enable us to take responsible action to problem-solve for our students and the school community.



The HNET Book Club: Join Us!

By Vicky Guadagno

Members of the new and growing HNET Book Club had their first meeting on April 6, 2005. Many interested HNET members had indicated "Children's Literature" as a choice, so we started with that for our first series of selections.

The book we discussed was *The View From Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg. Hearing from faculty, current teachers and students made for an interesting combination of observations and connections.

An interesting contrast was that while one special guest observed the writing as very straightforward, another had focused on metaphors that had been meaningful and, for her, stood out. In addition, it was good to hear that, in classrooms, boys and girls alike have had positive reactions to this story about a sociable, sensitive and intelligent circle of adolescent friends.

In addition, for many of us it was an introduction to Konigsburg's works.

Our second meeting focused on *Kira-Kira*, by Cynthia Kadohata. This book was the winner of the 2005 Newbery Medal. It tells a touching and engaging story of a Japanese-American family.

While the story includes the themes of prejudice and hardships, it also is a testament to the strength of a loyal and supportive family unit. We learned about the author, received a discussion outline, and reviewed ideas on how to use this book in our classrooms.

As a group we decided it would be of great value for our next book to have a male protagonist, preferably an African American. Our third meeting was in mid-June, where the topic of our discussion was *Bad Boy: A Memoir* by Walter Dean Myers. This book introduces us to an important award-winning author in the form of his own memoir for young adults.

Award-winning author Walter Dean Myers travels back to his roots in the world of Harlem during the 1940s and 1950s. We found this autobiography to be an amazing example of how someone can rise above his ascribed circumstances. We left the discussion eager to read additional works by Myers.

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, September 28, 2005, at Hagedorn Hall. We gather in the couch area at 7 p.m. The book to be read for this session is *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Book 6) by J.K. Rowling. The entire Harry Potter series will also be open for discussion.

We look forward to future discussions, the expansion of the club, and the inclusion of additional genres. For responsible educators on Long Island, the HNET Book Club is a great opportunity to keep up with children's literature in a friendly and welcoming space, where we can broaden our perspectives on how these works can be included in our classroom communities. Each discussion expands our awareness and knowledge of important books and authors that we as teachers need to know about.

We hope to see you at our next meeting!