

Working with Diverse Learners

Part 1

Hi, thanks for being a Junior Achievement volunteer and welcome to Working with Diverse Learners. We know you probably have several questions about your upcoming experience so we hope to answer those questions in this short video. Diversity in a classroom can include different learning levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, motivation levels, varying cultures, and even special education needs. Once you receive your JA kit of materials you'll see that it provides you with multiple resources that you can use when working with diverse learners. Always remember the teacher will be there to assist you so let's get started!

No two classrooms are alike, and no single session will meet the needs of all of the students. With the teachers' guidance, you can adapt sessions as necessary, while staying focused on the days learning objectives. Meeting with your JA teacher or scheduling a class visit prior to your first session is often helpful to gain a better understanding of the diversity in your JA classroom. The teacher may be able to suggest strategies to accommodate the needs of the students in a diverse environment.

At all grade levels you can expect that students will learn at different paces and in diverse ways. The most striking aspect of the class will be the variation in the student's ability, maturity and interests. You will discover that students have unique social, personal and academic needs so approach them with sincerity and respect. Learn their names and compliment them to encourage their participation. Consider asking the teacher ahead of time for a roster with the phonetic spelling of the student names.

You can greatly enrich your time in the classroom by drawing on your own experiences so try developing personal and professional examples that are relevant to each session. Personal and professional examples provide relevancy for the students. You might also try to connect the sessions to the students' current and future needs. Using videos or other visual imagery is another great way to enhance a concept.

Although you may encounter variations in the classroom, engage all students throughout the sessions—regardless of their learning level. An engaging environment with a hands-on approach to learning will help them to succeed. To improve your connection with the students, ask open-ended questions that don't have a 'right' or 'wrong' answer and help students feel comfortable sharing their responses with the class. In addition to asking questions, inviting discussion can encourage students who have a high ability to analyze, evaluate, or to think deeper about a concept. Ask a student to describe or further explain their ideas so they're encouraged to support what they think.

Learning Styles

Learning styles are different ways a student will learn or grasp a concept. Three of the most common learning styles are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. While your JA kit of materials will include resources and supplies to meet the needs of these learning styles it is important that you spend time before your JA sessions reviewing the information provided. Remember to take your

time as you deliver the content to students. Be mindful not to rush through the lessons and try utilizing the following strategies.

Visual learners learn by seeing. These students need to see body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. Visual learners think in pictures and learn best from visual displays. Your JA kit includes tools such as posters and handouts to help students with this learning style.

Auditory learners learn by listening. These students learn best through verbal instruction, group discussions, reading aloud, and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners interpret underlying meanings through listening to voice tone, pitch, speed and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. The JA Guide for Volunteer and Teachers provides helpful tips and instructions that support this learning style.

Kinesthetic learners learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for a long period of time and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration. JA sessions include hands-on activities to support this learning style.

Try to use a variety of delivery methods in the classroom in order to engage all students. Be confident that no matter the learning style, all students can learn

Socioeconomic Backgrounds

It's important to help students learn the concepts taught, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Remember that the conditions and circumstances in which students live will vary from school to school and student to student. Help students relate the session's topic to their knowledge and experiences. This allows each student the opportunity to be an active learner with the concept at hand. Each student comes from a different background so be prepared that the same age group may not necessarily be at the same learning level. You may need to be adapted to your lessons to fit their needs. Reinforce the role that education has had in your life. Share how developing specific skills such as public speaking, writing and team work have played in your personal and professional development and ways that furthering one's education can create opportunities.

Varying Cultures

Valuing diversity and appreciating the similarities and differences that exist establish a positive and purposeful learning experience for both you and the class. By recognizing students' various cultures and languages you create a learning environment that is conducive to all of the students. The students should feel comfortable and respected for their differences in culture. Acknowledge the diverse cultural groups in your classroom by telling them how diversity enhances learning opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. One way to do this is to discuss ways in which diversity benefits the work place, such as increased productivity and creativity. While planning your sessions be open to experiencing cultural diversity recognizing that different cultures may have a different view of some topics.

Language Barriers

As classrooms become more linguistically diverse it may be helpful to identify the multilingual students by asking the class questions about themselves such as, “Does anyone know more than one language?” and “If so, what languages do you know?” Then affirm how fortunate they are to be multilingual. Explain how this skill can lead to exciting career opportunities, as well as cultural and social advantages. Be careful, however, not to assume that all students know a second language!

During the lesson, encourage discussions that promote respectful interaction in the classroom. Use natural tones and language with all the students. Avoid using any slang terms and encourage all the students to ask questions during the lesson. When checking for understanding, the tendency may be to focus on multilingual students but feel confident that you’ve created an environment in which students are comfortable asking for help.

Special Education Needs

Students with disabilities who receive special education instruction and related services vary greatly in their needs and backgrounds.

It's important to be sensitive to the needs of students in a respectful way. Every student is unique and has value and talents that can contribute to the learning environment. Be sure to share your questions and observations about student engagement with the teacher. He or she can suggest ways to modify the session to meet the needs of all students. Your Guide for Volunteers and Teachers also provides suggestions such as writing key phrases on the board.

It is important to give every student the opportunity to learn and participate in the lessons.

For additional guidelines on working with students, please review the Volunteer Conduct Standards document you signed with your JA Area representative.

Conclusion

Thanks for watching Working with Diverse Learners. If you have additional questions, you can always reach out to your local JA Area representative.

As a Junior Achievement volunteer, you’re part of a network of hundreds of thousands of volunteers and you play an integral part in empowering over 10 million students globally to own their economic success—including more than 4 million in the United States. You are truly making a difference in the lives of young people and we hope to have you in the classroom again and again.

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