

Chapter 1: Apply It to Your Practice

Working individually or in learning teams, reflect on these questions, and implement the commitments to your practice (for more information on engaging with these questions, please see the section titled Space for Reflective Practice on page 9 in the introduction). As always, strive to move your reflection to action.

React to the Chapter

What are your key takeaways from this chapter? What was surprising to read? What did you connect with?

Analyze School Community

Each school community is composed of many related and intersecting communities. Brainstorm a list of the various communities in your school. Start big, with the entire school as one type of community. Work down from there. What large communities do you notice? For example, do most families come to you from a specific neighborhood? Which smaller ones are present? Are there youth programs or faith communities that many of your students participate in? What identities are represented in your school demographics, including race, ethnicity, and country of origin? Which are best served? Which might be underserved? Use this information to guide your action steps as you help build community in your space.

Identify Community Strengths

Marilyn Toalson shared that it takes teachers, family, friends, and peers to support students in all the ways they need. Who is in your community? What community organizations might you connect with? What peers, faculty, staff, family, and friends do you know who would join you in speaking into students' lives? Who has special talents or skills to share? You may have a friend with a special talent who can be a guest speaker to interested small groups. You and another teacher might be talented in teaching different kinds of topics or skills; perhaps you could periodically trade classes to teach in your passion area and build community between classes. Remember your community extends beyond the school's faculty and staff. Seek ways to invite families and communities into the classroom not only as guests but also as experts (readers, lecturers, coaches, and demonstrators).

Build in Purposeful Individual, Small-Group, and Whole-Group Activities

As teachers develop online or blended classrooms, students need a combination of synchronous (online or real-time instruction) and asynchronous (offline or anytime practice and instruction) strategies. Use different combinations of whole-group, small-group, and independent sessions to help students master concepts, learn skills, and practice new strategies (Abadzi, 1985). Use synchronous moments to build community, talk through class material, and directly teach new concepts. Brian Stuhlman, a middle school educator featured in chapter 6 (page 163), offers guidance in the following chart on how teachers might organize their independent, small-group, and whole-group time around connection and learning.

Online Planning: Ways and Means		
Independent Time	Small-Group Time	Whole-Group Time
Individual students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read • Watch videos • Take surveys • Interview people (family or neighbors) • Design and conduct projects • Make real-world connections • Experiment • Use the writing process 	Small groups of students can experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension checks • Topic discussions • Peer review • Differentiation supports • Time management and organizational support • Feedback 	Whole groups of students can experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing moments • Lecture • Discussion • Preview of reading • Socratic seminars • Demonstrations of strategies and specific skills • Mathematics modeling

Learn With and From Your Community

In her seminal essay “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) uses the analogy of windows and mirrors as a call to diversify the books and resources teachers ask students to read. Windows transport people outside their experience into new realms. Mirrors reflect who they are. Sliding glass doors invite people to step into new realities. Use this language with students as you explore books and resources and honor the wealth of backgrounds and insights students bring to your classroom. What is a mirror to one student will be a window to another. Organize language celebration days and play games to learn about words, customs, and cultures; invite students and families to be the teachers at these celebrations. Make time to discuss what feels like home to different students, and think about how you might reflect this in your class space.

Sources: Abadzi, H. (1985). Ability grouping effects on academic achievement and self-esteem: Who performs in the long run as expected. Journal of Educational Research, 79(1), 36–40.

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Perspectives, 6(3), ix–xi.