

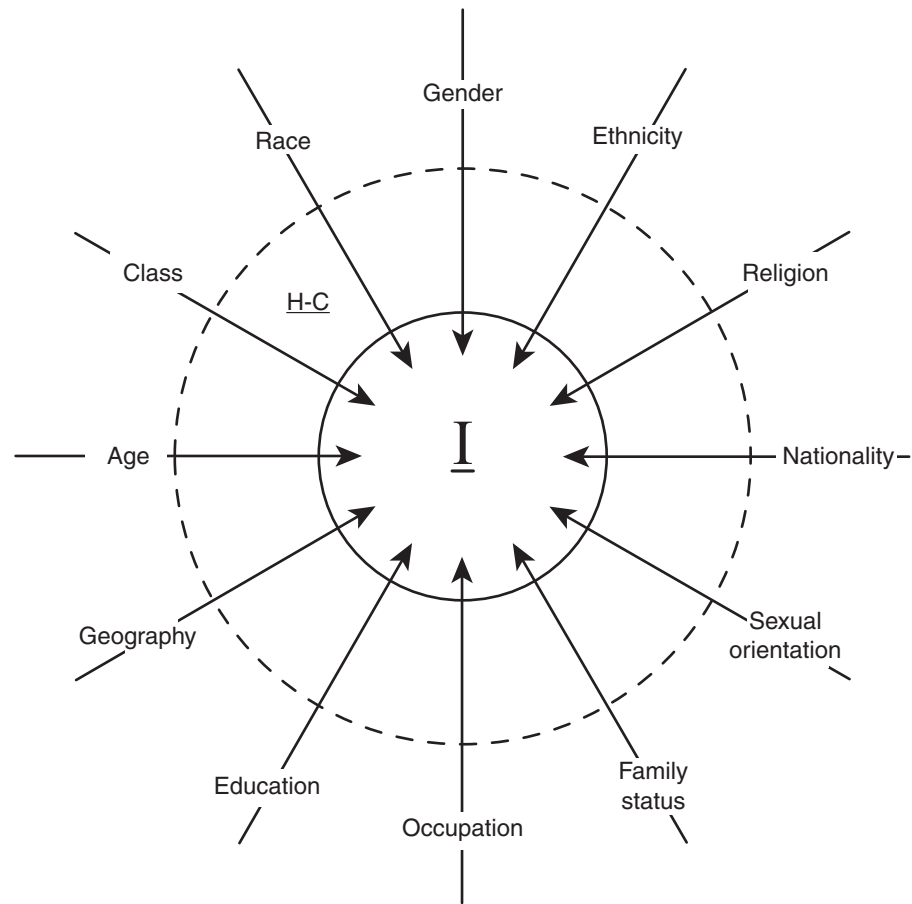
SECTION

I

Individual Identity and Self-Awareness

Like each organism in the ecosystem, each student is a complex individual with the potential to both contribute to and benefit from interactions with others. Each is shaped by the many social and cultural influences in his or her life to become a distinct human being rather than a stereotype (see Figure I.1). For these reasons, all the strategies in this section are designed to reveal and explore the complex identities of individuals in the diverse classroom, necessary first steps toward building a successful, sustainable ecosystem classroom.

Figure I.1 Influences on Individual Identity Creation



I = the individual teacher or student, bounded by a dotted line/semipermeable membrane through which these influences pass

H-C = the home and communities in which the individual lives outside school; where the I comes from literally

Arrows = features of home and communities from which the individual's values, attitudes, and beliefs come; where the I comes from figuratively

Strategy

1

My Life as a _____

RATIONALE

Every student—and teacher—has a life outside the classroom door. They are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, friends and teammates, and so many other personas who, though not always evident, are always present when they are. In the college or university classroom, students are not often asked to think about who they are or who they are being, which allows them to believe their other-than-student identities are at least private, if not irrelevant. Becoming a teacher, however, requires that you consider the impact all aspects of your personal identities have on your developing professional self.

Consider the two of us. It is impossible for Andrea to deny, for example, that her life as the mother of a son affects her thinking and her teaching. Or to deny that being born and raised in New York City, being a baby boomer, an amateur chef, a newspaper junkie, an iPod novice, an online shopper, a stepmother, and an only child do the same. Likewise, it is impossible for Mary to deny that being the oldest of 10 children; being born and raised in a rural setting; being the mother of two children, a grandmother, an avid reader and traveler, and a dog lover; and leaving home in the East for 25 years in New Mexico inform her teaching and thinking.

This strategy begins making such personal disclosure gently, allowing you to articulate your own multiple identities and to bring more of yourself into the classroom. It acknowledges the many dimensions of your life not included in your identities as “student” and “classmate,” and goes beyond the stereotypes associated with more usual identity markers—for example, white boy, black girl, Jew, lesbian—introducing the idea of multicultural identity in an inductive, easily accessed way.

When we do this strategy with students or with teachers, they often react the same way: “I didn’t know you _____!” they exclaim to classmates or colleagues, even when they have known each other for years.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Write “My life as a _____” at the top of a notebook page. Then list as many ways as you can to fill in the blank.

2. Participate in a class read-around, sharing one item from your list. As you listen to your classmates, add items you forgot until someone else said them. (Don't be surprised if the "Me, too" light goes on frequently as others share. That is exactly what this strategy intends to elicit.)
3. After each student has shared once, repeat the cycle as many times as possible before you or one of your classmates says, "I'm out," meaning he or she has nothing that has not already been said.
4. Pair-share: What did you notice as we did this? What did your partner notice? Jot down a shared list of what was surprising, reassuring, upsetting, puzzling, or any other reaction you experienced.
5. Whole-class discussion: You and your partner share one item from your list. Listen as the other pairs do the same. In what ways is your class diverse? In what ways is it homogeneous?
What impact have your various identities had on your work as a student? What impact might they have on your work as a teacher?
6. Put your list in your professional portfolio.

LOOKING BACK/LOOKING AHEAD

What was it like to do this strategy? How might you use "My Life as a _____" in your own classroom?

CONTENT-AREA EXTENSIONS

English/Language Arts: This list can be the first page in a writer's notebook, the source of possible topics for any mode of writing.

Reading/Literature: These lists can suggest ways into multicultural literature beyond the usual race, gender, or ethnicity paths.

Social Studies: These identities provide ways to begin talking about how communities are formed and how they interact.

English Language Learners (ELLs): ELLs, those with learning disabilities (LD), and otherwise "identified" students become more than their labels and the expected identities attached.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION

This strategy helps new teachers meet their colleagues, whether in an induction program or a mixed staff setting. It helps veteran teachers get to know each other in new ways. For both groups, it builds community, making room for more aspects of each person in the building or department. In addition, it helps all teachers consider aspects of their identity that may help—or work against—building relationships with students as well as colleagues.

Strategy

2

I Come From _____*

RATIONALE

While preservice teachers like you are able to self-identify in terms of your roles (as the “My Life as a _____” strategy demonstrates), many students say they have no identifiable culture. This strategy expands the notion of diversity by acknowledging that everyone comes from somewhere specific, particular, different, and special. From the ecosystem perspective, this strategy reveals the interaction of individual and social environments, acknowledging that no one is a self-creation, that everyone is a part of an ecosystem that creates and is created in return.

NOTE TO INSTRUCTOR

When we begin this strategy, we brainstorm with the class before asking students to brainstorm alone. We do this to ensure that students realize that the experiences, people, places, and things we want them to think about are what’s special and meaningful to the individual and may range from salad dressing to salvation.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Divide a notebook page into four columns or quarters. Label them People, Places, Experiences, and Things.
2. Brainstorm people, places, experiences, and things from your own life that are meaningful to you. They can be big or small, commonplace or unusual. List them in the appropriate categories.

*From George Ella Lyons.

For example, under “People,” Andrea might include her tenth-grade English teacher as well as her immigrant grandfather. Under “Places,” she might list her grandmother’s kitchen as well as the summer camp she attended for many years. “Experiences” might include riding her bike through the neighborhood, riding the subway alone for the first time, and reading Nancy Drew mysteries. “Things” could be her grandmother’s afghan and her son’s first-grade school picture, in addition to other possibilities.

3. Read the sample “I Come From” poems at the end of this strategy.
4. Using your brainstormed ideas as a place to begin, write the first draft of an “I Come From” poem, using the format modeled by the examples.
5. Share your poem with classmates by reading it aloud in a small group or any other way your instructor directs.
6. Whole-class discussion: What do you notice about where your class comes from? What similarities and differences enrich your classroom community?
7. Place your poem in your professional portfolio.

LOOKING BACK/LOOKING AHEAD

What was it like to do this strategy? How might you use “I Come From _____” in your own classroom?

CONTENT-AREA EXTENSIONS

Language Arts: This strategy can be a poetry-writing experience. It can also be a literary analysis strategy when written from the point of view of a character in a piece of literature being studied.

Social Studies: This strategy helps students understand what life is like for people in particular communities or cultures.

Science: “I Come From” poems can be written about animals, plants, even geographic and geologic formations being studied.

Foreign Language: “I Come From” poems can help students explore what it would be like to live in the land of the language being learned.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION

For new teacher induction programs, this strategy builds a sense of who we in this district are and what we bring to the new shared endeavor. It does the same for veteran teachers, while also helping to explain shared but unexamined history together.

SAMPLE EXCERPTS FROM "I COME FROM" POEMS

I Come From

I come from the rolling hills
Beautifully tinted green
I come from the smell of wet wool
As the sheep pass you on the roads
I come from ruddy faces
Loud laughter pouring from the pubs
And the clunk of your shoes on cobbled streets
I come from a broken nation. . . .
I come from Ireland

I Come From

I come from a baseball team wanting to win
I come from a family not ashamed of their skin

I come from a red-brick ranch house
I come from a family strong at the mouth

I come from a house where my best friend is my brother
I come from a room where I was one with "my cover."
I come from a house full of my hopes and my fears.

Strategy 3

My Name*

RATIONALE

Andrea’s maiden name was Vigderman. This had two consistent results: She sat in the last row, closer to or further from the back depending on how many Wilsons, Youngs, and Zeiglers there were, and she guessed how much her teachers cared about her by whether they learned to pronounce her name correctly. Even her first name told her that: Those who accented the second syllable were more interested in what they thought than in who she was. Then there was the French teacher who decided she looked “more like a Denise” and called her that for all of ninth grade, much to her consternation.

Individuals are not just names on a roster, nor is classroom learning a solitary pursuit. Each student in a room contributes to—or distracts from—the shared work of sustaining the ecosystem, so the foundation for sharing should be laid early and explicitly. This strategy helps build community early in the semester, allowing you to get to know your classmates both individually and collectively, laying the foundation for more effective communication, interaction, and support throughout the term.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read “My Name,” by Sandra Cisneros, found at the end of this strategy.
2. Write about your own name for 8–10 minutes.
3. Pair-share what you’ve written by reading it aloud to your partner and listening to what he or she has written.
4. Introduce your partner to the class.
5. Whole-class discussion: What did you learn about each other from doing this? What did you learn about yourself?
6. Place your writing in your professional portfolio.

*This is a National Writing Project favorite.

LOOKING BACK/LOOKING AHEAD

What was it like to do this strategy? How might you use “My Name” in your own classroom?

CONTENT-AREA EXTENSIONS

Language Arts: This strategy can be used in the study of nomenclature, as connected to semantics or literature.

Social Studies and Foreign Language: This strategy can help students understand the connection between people’s names and the cultures they live in.

Science: This strategy can help students understand how different plants, animals, and species got their names.

English Language Learners: These students’ more unusual names become explicable and valued, whether in their own or in an inclusion classroom.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION

This strategy serves the same community-building purpose with any group that will be working together over time. New teachers need to feel seen and known as they begin work in a district. It is also surprising how often veteran teachers, even in the same building, do not know more about their colleagues than what grade or subject they teach. Getting to know each other by name in a meaningful way enhances the shared nature of community and goals, making it easier to work and problem solve together.

MY NAME*By Sandra Cisneros*

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse—which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female—but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window all her life, the way so many

women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name Magdalena which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

Source: From *The House on Mango Street*. Copyright © 1984 by Sandra Cisneros. Published by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., and in hardcover by Alfred A. Knopf in 1994. By permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services, New York, NY and Lamy, NM. All rights reserved.

Metaphorical Me

The Grab Bag

Strategy

4

RATIONALE

Just as people often make snap judgments about others based on appearance and superficial behaviors, we often do the same to ourselves. The fraternity sweatshirt or team hat that you wear, and the people you sit with in the cafeteria or party with on Friday night, may provide a mirror image of—but not a window into—who you are.

This strategy uses metaphor as a heuristic to expand your self-awareness beyond the obvious. You will reflect upon your personal attributes in terms of an inanimate object, which will help you to move beyond surface features to deeper characteristics of which you may not be as aware. While our students often have fun with this strategy, they also begin to appreciate the diversity of personal attributes among their classmates who might appear to dress, look, and speak the same language.

In addition to asking you to consider your own personal attributes, this strategy demonstrates the importance of looking beyond the surface features of your future students in order to create a classroom ecosystem that is responsive to all individuals. You will explore multidimensional aspects of yourself, so that you will be better prepared to look beyond the physical and outer appearances of your future students to see the person within each and every one of them.

NOTE TO INSTRUCTOR

This strategy requires some variation of the household objects listed below. You may require students to bring an object to class as noted in the Step-by-Step Instructions or bring in enough objects for the entire class yourself. You will need to bring a tote bag, box, or some receptacle in which to place the objects—preferably, a receptacle in which the objects are not visible.

MATERIALS

Bring an object from home or use an object from your backpack. The objects may be as common and disparate as a light bulb, key, pet leash, conch shell, duct tape, rock, mug, spool of thread, stapler, or a pad of Post-it notes.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place your object in the box, tote bag, or other receptacle provided by your instructor.
2. When the receptacle is passed to you, without looking inside, select an object other than your own.
3. Study your object. Note both the surface attributes and the unseen attributes.
4. List as many attributes of the item as you can in your notebook or journal.
For example, Mary's student selected a roll of gray duct tape and listed the following attributes: gray, soft, sticky, round, strong, reliable, utilitarian, practical, useful, holds things together, covers cracks, and so on.
5. List some similarities between your object's attributes and your own personality/attributes that might not be obvious to someone who doesn't know you. For example, this student wrote "gray," and next to it she wrote, "Sometimes I have gray days (moody); practical = I am a practical person. I don't rush into things. Holds things together = my family tells me I hold them together." You may also list ways in which you are *not* like your object, e.g., not practical, not gray like the duct tape.
6. Develop an analogy using five or more sentences in your notebook.
For example, here's an excerpt from the above student: "Some people may not realize just how much I am like this duct tape. On certain days I feel a bit gray just like the color of this duct tape. I also might seem a bit moody and cranky but like the outside of the duct tape I'm also soft and sensitive . . . I hold things together, and I'm also very strong like this duct tape. My family tells me that I hold them together through thick and thin times. I'm also reliable, steady, and strong. However, I'm not round but straight and narrow when it comes to my physical appearance."
7. Pair-share with classmate or in small groups, by reading—not telling—what you wrote.
8. Whole-class discussion: What surprised you about your pair-share partner or other classmates? What similarities and differences enrich your classroom ecosystem?

LOOKING BACK/LOOKING AHEAD

In a few sentences, reflect upon your experience with this strategy. What did you notice? What surprised you? Now explain how you might use this strategy in your future classroom.

CONTENT-AREA EXTENSIONS

Science/Math: In a science or mathematics unit on crystals and their properties/attributes, display a variety of crystals that the students have studied. Possibilities include the following: barite, pyrite, silver, gold, diamond, garnet, galena, topaz, calcite, gypsum, turquoise, quartz, and zircon.

Science: When studying the animal or plant kingdom, ask students to choose one or two animals or plants on which to become experts. Then ask them to draw comparisons between the attributes of one of the animals or plants and themselves.

Math: Have students choose the vocabulary or objects from a math lesson, e.g., triangle, rectangle, octagon in Step 1 above; skip Step 2.

History: Have students choose artifacts from the era the class is studying in Step 1; skip Step 2.

English Language Learners: The above lesson is an excellent way to reinforce vocabulary and deepen understanding of figurative language, which often poses problems for non-native speakers.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION

New and veteran teachers can use this strategy in a variety of ways. It can serve as an ice breaker and community builder. They can consider how they might use it in their own classrooms or make connections to other strategies they use or have observed.

Professional Identity Collage

Strategy

5

RATIONALE

Whether on Facebook, MySpace, or some other 21st-century web venue, many of you may share facets of your identities with friends and strangers alike. From blog postings to pictures to podcasts, personal identity is made public via the web. This collage strategy shifts the focus from the personal self with which many students are so comfortable to the professional self, which you may have yet to consider. This strategy recognizes the complexity of integrating those two identities in constructive ways, providing an opportunity to visualize the emergence of a professional self and a basis for beginning discussion of the following questions: Who do I want to be as a teacher? What values, attitudes, and beliefs do I want to model? Which theories do I plan to take with me to the classroom ecosystem? What is too personal in the classroom?

When Mary does this strategy, she shares the beginnings of her own professional identity collage in order to focus the strategy. She includes pictures of books because she teaches writing and literature courses and because she's a book lover. She includes words like *respect*, *diversity*, and *honesty* on her poster because she values these concepts in her own classroom. She includes lines from favorite authors and favorite theorists because those, too, are personal choices directly connected to her professional life. A picture of herself—or another woman—in a suit would suggest how she literally sees herself in the classroom. She might also include artwork because she thinks integrating the curriculum is so important.

Creating professional collages allows you and your classmates to continue to expand and examine your perspectives on your own multidimensional selves while broadening your perceptions of the world and your place in it, so that you—in turn—can do the same for your future students.

From an ecosystem perspective, this strategy reveals how different ecosystems require that we foreground different aspects of ourselves in order to navigate different systems successfully. In the case of your professional life as a teacher, there will be some aspects of your life and yourself that you will move to the foreground and others that you will keep in the background in order to create a culturally responsive classroom. Creating your professional collage further demonstrates the importance of providing your future students with the opportunities to learn about and from each other.

NOTE TO INSTRUCTOR

You may want to check out the sample collages on the companion website: <http://www.sagepub.com/buckelew>.

MATERIALS

Poster board, magazines, glue sticks, markers, 3 × 5 index cards. If technology is available, you may want to create a computer-generated collage rather than a paper poster and save it to a DVD so that you can share it with your classmates. See <http://www.sagepub.com/buckelew>, noted above, for student samples.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brainstorm a list of anything that you think might in some way inform your professional teaching life. For example, a student might list his love of music and its connection to his teaching life. Other possibilities might include quotations that will inspire your teaching life; the names of educational theorists or content-area gurus; as well as the values, attitudes, and beliefs that you will take to your classroom ecosystem.
2. Find pictures, symbols, words, or quotations that will convey your professional self to your classmates in a colorful and artistic manner.
3. Create your professional collage on poster board or on the computer (DVD).
4. Exchange your collage with a classmate. Interpret your classmate's collage. On the 3 × 5 card, write your interpretation or understanding of your partner's professional self.
5. Share your interpretations and your explanations. Discuss commonalities and differences in how you see your professional selves.
6. Display collages. Place around the room.
7. Whole-class discussion: Discuss anything you noticed.
8. Place collage in your professional portfolio.

LOOKING BACK/LOOKING AHEAD

In a few sentences, reflect upon your experience with this strategy. What did you notice? What surprised you? Now explain how you might use this in your future classroom.

CONTENT-AREA EXTENSIONS

English/Language Arts/History: The professional identity collage can be used with literature, both fiction and nonfiction, to create character/historical figure collages that demonstrate student comprehension of the multidimensional aspect of characterization or the individual.

Science: Students can create organism collages that illustrate the features of a variety of objects of scientific study.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION

This strategy gives new and veteran teachers the opportunity to learn more about each other while also engaging in self-analysis. The collage strategy also functions as a community builder.