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Classroom Community: Getting to Know Me, Myself, and Us

STRATEGY 1

Autobiography: All About Me

Autobiographies, assigned at the beginning of the school year, not only help the teacher know the student's family background, but also the likes and dislikes that motivate. Sharing portions of autobiographies within the classroom also stimulates students to get to know each other for the development of a classroom learning community. As a result, research strongly suggests that students benefit academically and socially in such a community (Garcia, 2002; Heath, 1983; Slavin, 1990; Schmidt, 2005). English Language Learner (ELL) students find this strategy particularly empowering (Cummins, 1986; Igoa, 1995). They may bring information to the classroom not found in texts as primary sources. This can inspire a greater depth of understanding and appreciation of the curriculum.

ELA Standard: 9

Beginning Learners—All About Me

1. One or two students are given brown grocery bags to take home and fill with their favorite things. Suggestions are family pictures, toys, clothing, or gifts from grandparents or other people they care about.

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2. During the daily sharing time, the student takes one item at a time out of the bag and talks about it. The item may be passed around or put on a special table for the day.
3. After the sharing, the rest of the class may ask questions for the student to answer.
4. When the students finish questioning, they write about their classmate and make a picture about him or her. These writings and drawings are shared throughout the day.
5. At the end of the day, the student takes home the class's written records in the form of a book with a cover designed by one of the classmates.

Intermediate Learners—Life Timeline

1. Students are given a roll of paper to create a timeline of their life stories.
2. They place significant remembered events along the line.
3. They may draw pictures or add snapshots of the events.
4. They may add a measurement line (like an EKG) along the timeline that depicts the highs and lows of their 12 years. A dip occurs with the loss of a grandparent. A peak occurs when given the first cat or dog.
5. Hang the timelines around the room.
6. Each person gets to tell his or her story.

Advanced Learners

1. Students write their autobiographies, starting from their earliest memories.
2. Students include family history, education, religion, holidays, celebrations, travels, pets, friends, victories, and defeats.
3. Students may want to share a special family artifact, like a military uniform, pottery, jewelry, toy, quilt, or recipe.
4. Students compare and contrast their stories with the biographies of famous people from several ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups. Web sites of these famous people can inspire more research and a greater depth of understanding.
5. Discuss the biographies and explain what is admired about the people's lives.

Curriculum Connections

This strategy lends itself to any language arts or social studies program for beginning, intermediate, and advanced learners, at the start of the school year. From the beginning of class course work, students can situate themselves in specific eras studied during history and literature classes. Beginners start to

think of themselves as part of a community. This relates to the study of community helpers. Intermediate learners study other nations and cultures within the United States as well as around the world. For advanced learners, who have the opportunity to be involved in social studies and English interdisciplinary thematic units, the autobiography is especially powerful. Autobiographies serve as a means for comparing and contrasting the past, present, and future with historical and literary periods.

Teachers' Comments

“Students like to talk or write about their favorite topics, themselves, and their communities. Even students with difficult family histories show pride in their discussions.”

“What might seem unmentionable to us may be spoken or written without fear if the classroom is safe.”

“Knowledge gained . . . places greater responsibility on the teacher, but gives a deeper understanding for working with students.”

STRATEGY 2

Biography: What Do You Like?

Interviewing classmates to discover what they like at the beginning and throughout the school year would help students get to know each other and start an appreciation of each other. Television has provided many models for interviews, so students enjoy trying this themselves. The interview process also acts as a means to promote inquiry learning, where students are active classroom participants who connect with their learning environment and formulate questions (Chaille & Britain, 1991; Slavin, 1990). After the interview, using multicultural crayons, magic markers, paint, or other art forms, students may draw or color the persons interviewed, showing the individuals enjoying what they like. The pair helps each other throughout the process. Questions might include asking about favorite foods, television shows, music, games, people, places, holidays, or academics. Actually, students are not only learning about others but also participating in a form of character education related to compassion and empathy, higher-order processes (Berkowitz, 1998).

ELA Standard: 9

Beginning Learners

1. The teacher models the activity by selecting a student and asking the student what he or she likes. The teacher then writes a sentence and draws a simple picture showing one activity or thing the student enjoys.
2. Next, the students are paired and the students ask each other about the things they like.
3. Together, they select what to draw.
4. Then students may write/dictate a sentence about the person to be placed under the drawing.
5. Students may introduce their buddies and read the sentences and talk about the pictures.

Intermediate Learners

1. The teacher explains the interview process and models it with students.
2. Students and teacher create interview questions. Examples follow:
 - What foods do you like? Why?
 - What places do you like to go? Why?
 - Who are your favorite people? Why?
 - What is your favorite television show? Why?
 - What is your favorite thing? Why?
 - What is your favorite game? Why?
 - What is your favorite part of the school day? Why?
3. Students interview their partners and write the information.

4. Students draw pictures of their partners enjoying their favorite things, using multicultural crayons, paints, or magic markers.
5. Students write a paragraph about their partners.
6. Pictures and paragraphs are placed on a bulletin board, either inside or outside the classroom.
7. Time may be taken to read and discuss each person.

Advanced Learners

1. The teacher may model the interview process: What does a good interviewer do? What does the interviewee do? Lead a discussion concerning the importance of listening carefully to the person and writing what he or she says is important. The teacher can demonstrate by interviewing a person in the class, such as a teaching assistant, principal, parent, another teacher, or a special guest from the community.
2. Class discusses appropriate interview questions and composes a lengthy list of about 10 or more questions concerning “likes.” Students are paired for interviews and the process begins, allowing for about 5 to 10 minutes for each interview depending on the size of the class.
3. Using multicultural media, such as magazines, students create a poster (2" × 3") of the person interviewed. Drawings, photos, etc. may be used to celebrate the person interviewed. Students work in pairs throughout the process.
4. Then the “likes” biography is written/typed and placed under the poster. Class discussion of each poster follows.

Curriculum Connections

This language arts or social studies activity includes reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. Students will be able to monitor their own stories as well as be a special person among other special people. This is a positive way to build classroom learning communities where people actually know a lot about each other and are presented in a positive light. Of course, students may want to categorize the likes of certain people, showing how we are similar and different in our likes.

Teachers' Comments

“ELL students like this opportunity to share. Their parents sometimes join them.”

“This is a nice way to get students to know each other. They’ve seen interviewing on television, and pretend to be Oprah or some other famous person.”

“This strategy can be completed by all students, no matter what their learning differences, and they like it.”

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STRATEGY 3

Physical Differences

By age three, children notice human differences and actually realize what is most acceptable in society. Numerous studies have shown that children are well aware that being from European American or the white culture in the United States gives one a better chance (Barrera, 1992; Jensen, 2005; Tatum, 1992). Therefore, the appreciation of different perspectives and different physical appearances is important to emphasize in the classroom where reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing are developed (Schmidt, 1998a).

This strategy focuses on the physical dimensions of diversity among people. Making the noticeable differences in height, skin tone, and hair and eye colors explicit to students, they may come to be more consciously aware of the great diversity existing among their peers and in U.S. society at large. Although some may be initially uncomfortable talking about physical differences, open and explorative discussions by the students, with the teacher's guidance, may help the young minds to accept themselves and to accept each other as they are. Accepting attitudes as such may help students' social and emotional development. While implementing this strategy, the teacher needs to guide the students to be sensitive to others' feelings.

ELA Standard: 12

Beginning Learners

1. The teacher may begin by showing a picture of the Houston Rockets star Yao Ming and ask the students to guess his height (7 feet, 6 inches). The teacher may then use a yardstick to indicate how high 7 feet, 6 inches is on the wall, then invites volunteers to tell their height (or to measure their height using the yardstick) so as to show how much shorter the volunteers are in comparison to Yao Ming.
2. The teacher explains that people differ not only in height, but also in skin tone, hair, and eye colors.
3. The teacher asks the students to look around at each other and tell all the different hair colors they can find or think of, and the teacher will write down all the color words. For example, *auburn, blond(e), black, brown, brunette, chestnut, golden, grey, red-haired, sandy, etc.*
4. The teacher then asks the students to tell the skin colors they can find or think of. Again, the teacher will write down all the words for skin tone. For example, *albino, black, dark, fair, freckled, light, olive, pale, tan, white, yellow, etc.*
5. Similarly, the teacher asks the students to come up with words for eye colors, which the teacher writes down on the board. For example, *black, blue, brown, gray, green, hazel, etc.*

6. The teacher then explains that, although people have all these different physical features, we can still work together and become friends.
7. Finally, each student shakes hands with other classmates and says, "Let's be friends."

Intermediate Learners

1. Repeat Steps 1–7.
2. The teacher adds that the different races living in the U.S. tend to have different physical characteristics. For example, people of European backgrounds often have pale skin tones and a variety of hair and eye colors, whereas people of African backgrounds tend to have black or dark skin, hair, and eyes, whereas many Asian people have tan or light brown skin, and black eyes and hair.
3. Each student draws a portrait of him- or herself and shares the portrait with other students.

Advanced Learners

1. Repeat the above Steps 1 and 3.
2. The teacher explains that people's height and eye, hair, and skin colors are determined by the genes we inherit from our parents when we are born. (The teacher may add that, when they enter high school, the students will study more about genes in their biology class.) Therefore, it is normal to have this or that physical characteristic, because we are all different individuals.
3. Explain that, in spite of these physical differences, we still can and need to get along and work together as a learning community and as contributing citizens in the society.
4. Class will gather data about class physical differences and graph the results.

Curriculum Connections

This strategy may be used in social studies class, especially when topics related to cross-cultural relationships and conflicts are dealt with. In art class, the students may draw a colorful portrait to express their unique appearances. In addition, ELA teachers may use this strategy to encourage all students (especially students with physical disabilities or from diverse backgrounds) to feel comfortable about their physical appearances through descriptive discussions about all the physical differences. To facilitate students' writing development, the teacher may ask students to write an essay to describe their (another person's) appearance, adding vivid details and using other forms of expressions or writing devices (e.g., figures of speech) they have learned. Finally, the graphing experience relates to mathematics.

STRATEGY 4

Abilities and Capabilities

This strategy moves from considering the differences in physical dimensions to exploring differences in people's abilities and capabilities (cf. Strategy 3). As Gardner's (1999) work suggested, people have multiple intelligences. Therefore, open and explorative discussions of different ways of knowing the world and expressing themselves may help the young students to recognize their own special skills and talents, and to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. Examining diverse abilities and capabilities may also help students' cognitive, social, and affective development. Teachers who have students with low self-esteem may need to plan ahead. They should be prepared to address the talents of individual students.

ELA Standard: 1.2

Beginning and Intermediate Learners

1. The teacher may begin by explaining that people may be good at learning and doing different things, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, mathematical calculations, drawing, coloring, athletics, music, interacting with other people, thinking, and self-reflection.
2. The teacher may share what he or she is good at with the students. For example, the teacher may be good at writing poems, singing songs, playing a musical instrument, speaking a foreign language, playing basketball, etc.
3. The teacher explains to the students that they may have some skills or talents that are special and meaningful, but may not have been realized by themselves or others.
4. The teacher brainstorms with students about their interests. If there are English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in the class, the teacher may encourage them to share a few words in their first language. The teacher writes what the students think are their abilities and capabilities.
5. The teacher explains (after identifying some students' strengths in the class) that people may have different abilities and capabilities, just as they may have different physical differences. For example, John may be skilled in using words to express his feelings and thoughts, Kate may be good at playing violin, Lucy may be strong at drawing, and Matt may be quick at solving math problems. It is perfectly fine (and natural) if any of them has skills or talents different from those of someone else. It is most useful to find out what one's genuine interests and abilities are in order to further develop them and make them even stronger.

Advanced Learners

1. Repeat Steps 1–5.
2. The teacher may provide the students opportunities to display their special skills or talents by writing a poem, drawing a picture, singing

a song, speaking a foreign language, playing a musical instrument, creating artwork, or doing whatever skill they are capable.

3. Based on the results of the above step, the teacher may organize a talent show by the students.

Curriculum Connections

This strategy may be used across the curriculum. In ELA class, the teacher may ask students to write an essay on what they think about the multiple ways of sense-making and problem solving and to celebrate the various abilities among them. In social studies class, the teacher may use the strategy to highlight the importance of recognizing people's abilities and at the same time of working with others of various abilities at school and in the society at large. In math class, the teacher may give students easy but tricky questions to promote their mathematical thinking and learning (cf. Strategy 24).

STRATEGY 5

Graphing Different Ethnic Groups in the U.S.

Central to this strategy is an awareness of the diverse peoples living and working in the United States and calling this land their country. Providing opportunities for students to search for the number of people from different ethnic backgrounds and to document the figures, using a variety of visual tools, helps to cultivate in the young learners a keener awareness of the diversity among the U.S. population (www.census.gov). Such an awareness contributes to a more accepting class/school culture, and is congruent with the societal goal of ethnic and racial tolerance and respect for a more harmonious multicultural society.

ELA Standards: 8 and 12

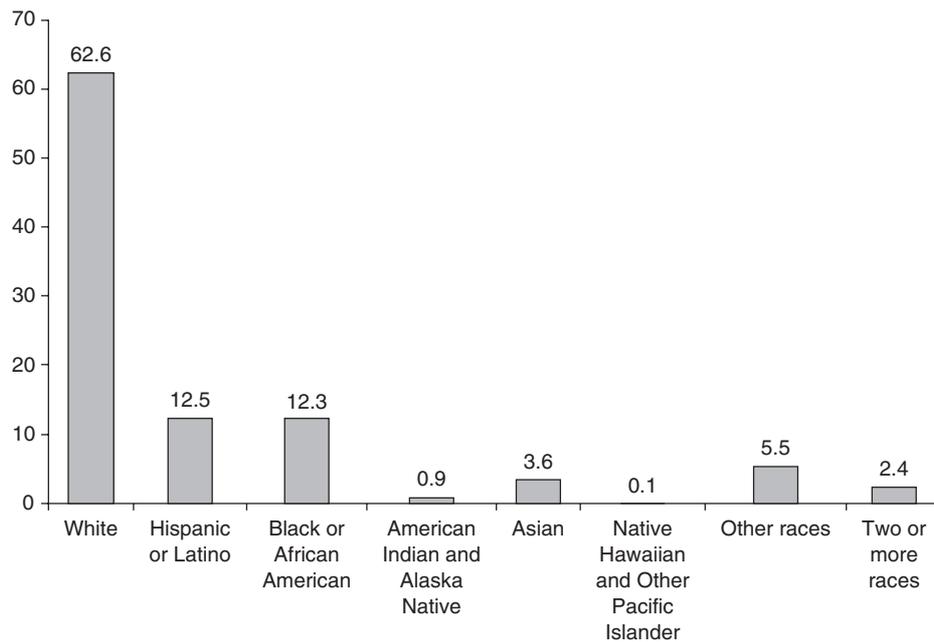
Beginning Learners

1. The teacher may begin by showing the U.S. Population Clock, explaining that in the United States there is one birth every 8 seconds. (The teacher may ask the students to all be quiet for 8 seconds, saying “This is how long it takes another baby to be born in the U.S.”). One international migrant comes to the U.S. every 26 seconds, and the U.S. has a gain of one person every 13 seconds.
2. The teacher explains that the U.S. population is made of people from many racial backgrounds and geographical regions. For example, there are people originating from Europe, Africa, and Asia, as well as Native Americans. That is part of the reason why the U.S. has been known as “a nation of nations.”
3. The teacher explains that all students should be able to accept work and play with the other students in the class.

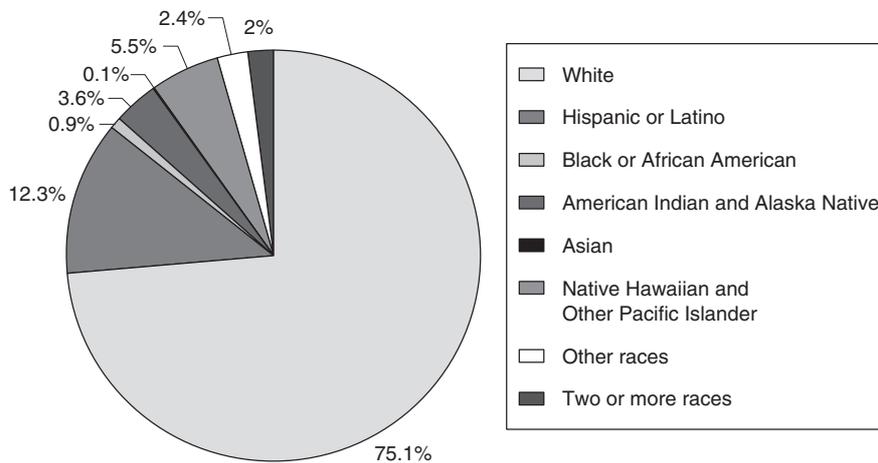
Intermediate Learners

1. Repeat Steps 1–3.
2. The teacher adds that, according to U.S. Census 2000 data, the U.S. population was 281,421,906, of which Whites made up about 62.6 percent, Hispanics or Latinos about 12.5 percent, African Americans about 12.3 percent, Asians 3.6 percent, American Indians and Alaska Natives about 0.9 percent, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders about 0.1 percent, and other races about 5.5 percent. (These figures were based on the U.S. census data and the authors’ research.)
3. The teacher helps the students use Excel to create a bar or pie chart to represent the numbers obtained from the U.S. population data.

Racial Distribution of U.S. Population



Racial Distribution of U.S. Population



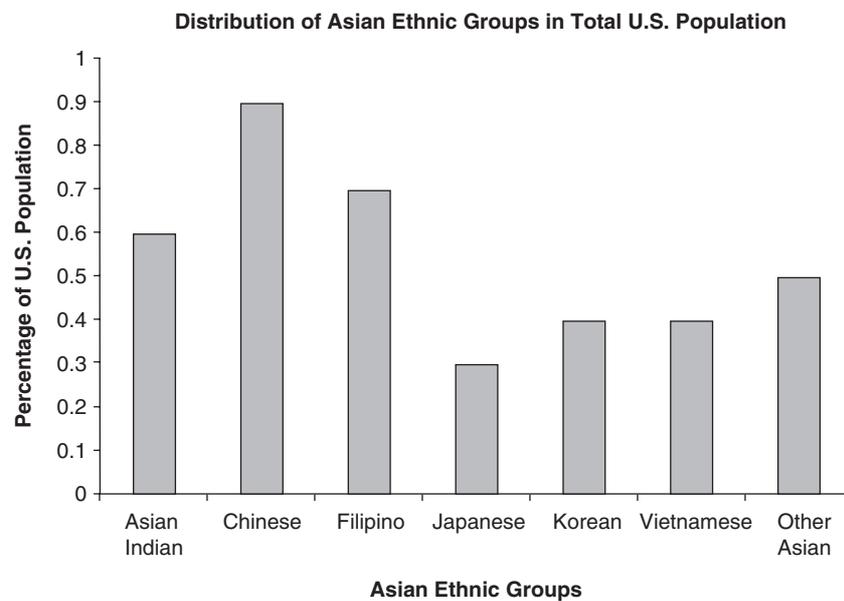
Advanced Learners

1. Repeat the above Steps 1–3.
2. The teacher divides the class into groups of four students for more detailed research. For example, the teacher asks the students to break down some of the big categories such as *Asian* into smaller categories such as *Asian Indian*, *Chinese*, *Filipino*, *Japanese*, *Korean*, *Vietnamese*, and *Other Asian*. The students then search for the specific numbers and percentages of the people for the smaller categories. The results are summarized below.

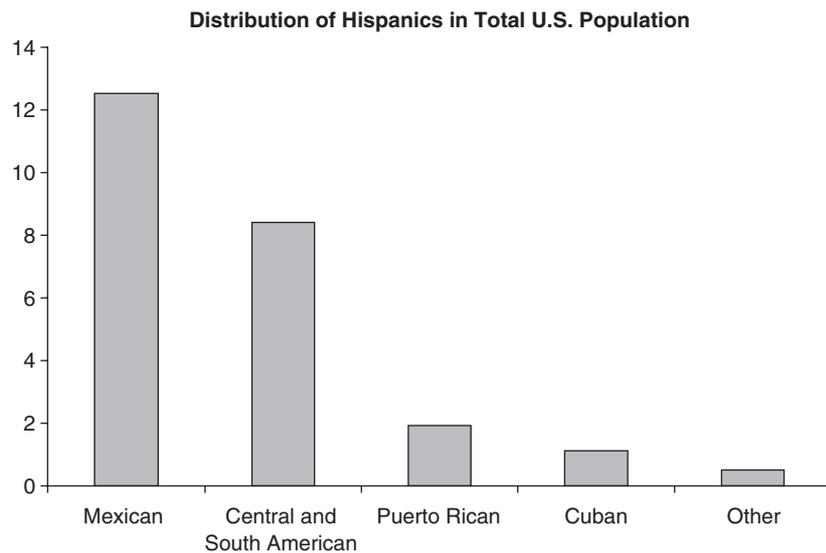
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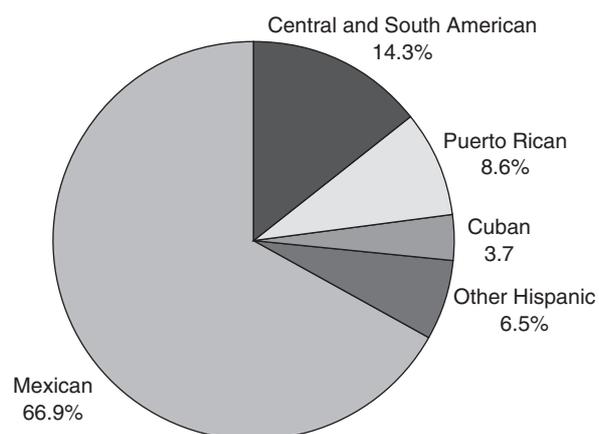
Asian U.S. Population	10,242,998	3.6%
Asian Indian	1,678,765	0.6%
Chinese	2,432,585	0.9%
Filipino	1,850,314	0.7%
Japanese	796,700	0.3%
Korean	1,076,872	0.4%
Vietnamese	1,122,528	0.4%
Other Asian	1,285,234	0.5%

3. Each group then uses a bar chart to visually represent their findings, as illustrated below.



4. Similarly, students could create bar or pie charts about the distribution of Hispanics or Latinos in total U.S. population or the Hispanics in the U.S. by origin, shown below.



Hispanics in the U.S. by Origin**Curriculum Connections**

This strategy can be used in the social studies or math classes. Through searching for and graphing the numbers of people in the U.S. population from varied racial backgrounds, students may develop a clearer understanding of the diversity in the U.S. population and in U.S. society. Learning how to use the bar and pie charts to visually represent the numbers may also help students use these visual organizers for math problems and for reading and writing informational texts. Moreover, the teacher may ask students to write an essay on what they have learned about racial and ethnic diversity.

STRATEGY 6

Graphing Differences for Analysis

This strategy aims at introducing techniques for graphing information about various forms of diversity among people. For example, the teacher may use this strategy for students to make comparisons with one another, or between characters in books or across content learned over time. The interpersonal comparison not only helps to promote a deeper understanding of the differences and similarities among students, but also involves useful skills for synthesizing informational texts. The following steps focus on making comparisons and contrasts to showcase how the strategy may be applied for different purposes.

ELA Standards: 8 and 12

Beginning Learners

1. The teacher facilitates each student to create a personal profile. Each student lists his or her physical characteristics (height, hair and eye colors, and so on), age, schooling, special talents, personal interests, etc.
2. Each student talks to a good friend or a classmate to obtain similar information about that individual's profile.
3. The students fold a page top-down in the middle. On the left-hand side, each student enters the things gathered from Step 1; on the right-hand side of the page, enters the things gathered from Step 2. The students may draw pictures or use symbols to illustrate their ideas instead of writing everything in words.
4. The teacher divides the class into groups of four, and each student takes turns sharing the results with other members.
5. After group sharing, the teacher wraps up by explaining to the students that it is nice to be different and that diversity is normal.

Intermediate Learners

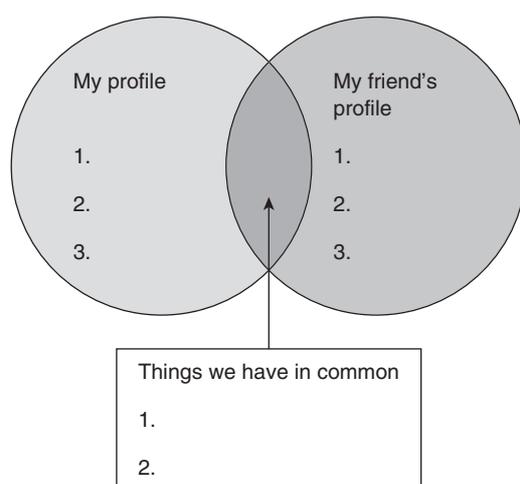
1. Repeat Steps 1–5.
2. The teacher explains to the students that there are different types of computer software (e.g., Microsoft Word) that may be used to make visual organizers for comparison and contrast. The teacher demonstrates to each group about how to use Word to make a contrast table or a Venn diagram, as illustrated below.
3. Each group works on the computer to graph a contrast table or a Venn diagram and to enter the accompanying text for comparison.

Advanced Learners

1. Repeat the above Steps 1–3.
2. The teacher asks the students to choose two characters from a novel they have recently read, and use either a Venn diagram or a contrast table to highlight their differences and similarities.

Table 1.1 Contrast Table

My profile	My friend's profile
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Venn Diagram

3. Based on the information, the students write a short essay to explain and interpret the results.

Curriculum Connections

This strategy may be used in math class. While the beginning learners may just hand-draw charts to compare and visually present their ideas about who they are and who a friend is, the intermediate and advanced students will learn to use word processing software to make a Venn diagram or contrast table for such an analysis. The hands-on experience of using the computer to make visual representations of textual information may also help their development of computer literacy. In addition, the skills to use visual organizers such as a Venn diagram or contrast table to synthesize informational texts are useful in ELA and social studies as well, as shown in the above steps with the advanced learners.

STRATEGY 7

What's in a Name?

The sweetest thing a person hears is his or her own name. Names reveal family cultural identity, family ideas, ideals, and/or histories. Students at all ages enjoy activities around their names. Studying names at all grade levels reveals human similarities and differences and assists the teacher in developing culturally responsive lessons starting with student names. ELL students will be helped by the teacher or a study buddy to complete the activity. This is actually a way to learn English adjectives (Igoa, 1995). A kindergarten child from India who was learning English enjoyed making ornate designs of flowers around his name. His was very different from the other children's and was greatly appreciated for its beauty (Schmidt, 1998a).

ELA Standard: 6

Beginning Learners

In the early grades, learning to write the entire name is an important accomplishment. Students may learn to write their names in large letters in the middle of a 9" × 12" sheet of unlined paper. Then they may decorate around the name, with crayons or other media, showing pictures of what they like to do. They can then share their pictures with the class. The teacher may pin up the name creations and send home notes asking family members to tell the students about their names. The following is an example of a survey to be sent home to families.

MY NAME IS SWEET TO HEAR

We are studying the names of the students in our classroom to help them see and appreciate differences and similarities. Please complete this survey and talk about it with your student tonight. Then send it to school with your student. Thank you so much for helping us show our students how important they are!

Who named your student?

Why was your student given that name?

If your student was named after a close friend or someone in your family, would that person come to visit our classroom?

Adjectives	Jacquil Keever's	Verbs
J Jubilant		Jumps
A Anxious		Acts
C Cute		Cleans
Q Quick		Quivers
U Understanding		Understands
I Intelligent		Inquires
L Lively		Likes
K Knowledgeable		Knows
E Exciting		Energizes
E Extraordinary		Explains
V Vital		Values
E Envious		Enlivens
R Raucous		Reads
S Studious		Studies

Intermediate Learners

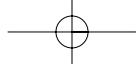
1. Students write their complete names, and then in pairs, they help each other associate adjectives describing each other with each letter of the name. Pairs change, and then complete names are written again, associating verbs that describe each other with each letter of the name.
2. Now, have students write a sentence using each adjective and verb that describes Jacquil and talks about the way he behaves.
3. Homework: Have students find out who named them and why they were given that name.

Advanced Learners

1. Have students complete the above activity and homework. Then research their name. Have them find out as much information as possible concerning their complete name. Ask them to discover the origins of their name, historically and linguistically. For example, Irene comes from a word meaning "serenity." Patricia or Patrick comes from a word meaning "aristocrat."

Curriculum Connections

Students in the earliest grades are learning to write their own names. There is research that supports the idea that learning to write your name before school actually assists in literacy development (Morris, Bloodgood, & Perney, 2003). Students learn that their name is a group of symbols that create a word. In later grades, adjectives and verbs can be associated with personal characteristics and assigned to various names providing a grammar lesson. Finally, researching the historical origins of a name provides a means for studying culture,



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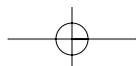
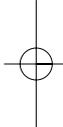
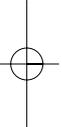
language, and history. For example, Smith and Schmidt were names given to those who were blacksmiths, in England and Germany, respectively.

Teachers' Comments

“There is no doubt in my mind that this strategy inspires all students to think about adjectives and remember what they are.”

“Students love talking about themselves, and their names give them permission to do just that.”

“It is the simplest way to get everyone involved and begin to get students thinking about who they are and where their countries of origin might be. I think it helps develop an understanding of our great country.”



STRATEGY 8

A Web Page: An Electronic Book About You

This strategy combines print literacy with multimedia literacy. Each student will create his or her own Web page using words and multiple forms of expression, including (but not limited to) pictures, design, and music. In some ways, it is almost like making an interactive electronic book about oneself. At the end of the class project, students may combine their work into one volume or post them on a safe online site. In addition, this strategy may be adapted for other computer-based learning activities, such as for students to explore a variety of topics on the Internet, which are presented in the last section of this book. Important: teachers need to be cautious about possible risks involved in students using the Internet. We suggest strongly that, before students post their personal Web pages online, teachers learn the school policy regarding online access and use, and school-approved safe sites for students (cf. Strategy 46).

ELA Standards: 8 and 12

Beginning Learners

1. The teacher helps the students brainstorm ideas about themselves, such as name, age, pets, hobbies, etc. Then each student enters his or her information on the computer.
2. As most beginning learners have not yet grasped the needed literacy skills, they may use some common icons or symbols instead of complete sentences to express their ideas.
3. The teacher may need to work one-on-one with some students who are less proficient in using the computer to complete their Web pages. In general, different levels of sophistication should be allowed for different students' Web pages.

Intermediate Learners

1. To get students started, the teacher may ask each student to write short paragraphs about some of the categories to be included on the Web page, such as *My Favorite Sports, Foods, Books, or Music*.
2. Each student may also be asked to write a brief account about his or her personal characteristics, such as nickname, age, gender, height, hair and eye color, etc.
3. While working on their Web pages, they can make use of these sources of information in their creation. Additionally, they may form study groups to discuss issues or problems related to wording different categories or using different designs.

Advanced Learners

1. The teacher and the whole class brainstorm categories to be included on the Web page. Possible categories may include pseudonym, age, personal characteristics, school, city, talents, favorite sports/foods/books/music, best friends, favorite school subjects, hobbies, interests, etc.
2. Based on the results of class discussions, the teacher prepares a worksheet that includes all these categories. The teacher explains that each student may write down the relevant information under each category to be entered on the Web page, but he or she may include additional information about himself or herself.
3. The students will enter the relevant information using hypertext markup language (HTML), Publisher, or PowerPoint. It is important for the teacher to encourage the students to be creative. For example, the student may use online communication icons, scan and insert pictures, add music, make use of color backgrounds or different fonts, or use pop-ups for interactive or special effects. In addition, students may be encouraged to write long and rich accounts about some of the categories.
4. Each student will have an opportunity to present his or her Web page to the whole class using a projector. Students may provide feedback on each other's creations for sharing and for revision.
5. After presentation and revision, the teacher may ask the students to print out their work and put them into one volume as a class project. The teacher may also help the students post their Web pages on a school-approved, password-protected site.

Curriculum Connections

This strategy combines reading and writing with computer-based media literacy. Through these multiple forms of hands-on literacy experiences, students are provided with opportunities to think about who they are and what they like, thus helping them to learn literacy, as well as get a better understanding of their developing identity.

STRATEGY 9

ABC's of Communication: Getting to Know You in a Few Minutes

This strategy helps to build classroom community from the beginning of the school year. It can be completed in about 5 to 10 minutes. There are four steps that can be completed in small groups and pairs on a daily basis until all students have personally shared with each other. Similarities and differences can be celebrated every day. Students at all levels benefit from this strategy. This strategy is based on the model known as the *ABC's of Cultural Understanding and Communication* (Schmidt, 1998b; 2000; 2001; 2005). Those who experience the model's process write in-depth autobiographies (Banks, 1994), interview those who are culturally different (Schmidt, 2000; Xu, 2000), complete cross-cultural analyses (Finkbeiner & Koplín, 2002) and design home/school/community connections, and create culturally relevant lesson plans (Schmidt, 1999b, 2005). The major premise of the model is the adage, "Know thyself and understand others."

ELA Standard: 5

Beginning Learners

1. Early learners may choose to talk about something they like or some event that has happened with a classmate, while practicing listening, sharing, and reporting to the whole group. The teacher may record similarities and differences each day. The class may read them together and then write their own.

Intermediate Learners

1. **Autobiography**—Have students close their eyes and think about their earliest memories that have to do with family, education, religion, happy times, anything that they remember that they can share with another person-1 minute.
 2. **Biography**—One person shares his or her own memories for a minute while the other listens. Then the listener shares for a minute.
 3. **Compare and Contrast**—Sharing partners or groups talk about similarities and differences in life experiences.
 4. **Describe this brief experience to the rest of the group in a word or a phrase.** Each student shares a word or phrase, like "fun" or "interesting" to sum up related experiences or "new ideas about playing" to describe new learning about each other that came from sharing.
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Advanced Learners

1. Students write their autobiographies, including as many memories as possible about many aspects in their lives—family, celebrations, pets, school, victories. (Teacher models with his or her own life experiences.)
2. Students pair up for the interview process—questions to ask are created by the class to ensure that they will not be too personal.

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3. Students then fill in Venn diagrams or charts that compare and contrast similarities and differences.
4. Next, students write compare-and-contrast paragraphs regarding themselves and their partners.
5. Finally, students share these writings in class and throughout the school year whenever there are discussions concerning point of view and perspectives.

Curriculum Connections

The ABC's activity can be used periodically throughout the school year in any class to discuss differences in perspectives and backgrounds. This helps students become aware of similarities and differences and develop an appreciation of differences in all aspects of people and learning. This is especially helpful when dealing with inquiry learning in science and mathematics, with perspectives on major historical events, and with reader response when interpreting literature.

Teachers' Comments

"Teaching students to look at other perspectives can be challenging, but this model seems to help them get started."

"What makes the ABC's so good to use in the classroom is that you can adapt it easily."

"There is something about the ABC's that helps the students quickly see similarities and differences easily. They wrote great compare-and-contrast paragraphs."