

Call and Response: Teacher Identities



As a performance artist (I'm a dancer outside of teaching biology), my teaching identity feels like being the emcee of the room. I'm not the main act that takes up all the space, but I am responsible for the energy of the room and what should get attention. What an emcee can do is get the room energized and allow the main acts to shine! In this case, the learning happening or the students themselves take center stage. We are all spect-actors (spectators and actors) in the classroom rehearsal space.

-Mers Tran, 2023 Fellow

My teacher identity is one of a learner and a transformer. I am continually growing in my practice to better show up for my students and for myself. I want students to take their learning from class and use it as a starting point to change the world.

-Tamashi Hettiarachchi, 2023 Fellow

My teacher identity has changed and evolved over time! In my first few years of teaching, I used to identify with the fantasy-fiction genre of teachers; they arrive at school early, maybe the first car in the lot, and then stay incredibly late, barely

seeing the sunlight. **This new teacher identity has helped me be a better teacher to my students**

Now as I reach my 10th year in the classroom, I have galvanized into a more historical non-fiction well-balanced teacher identity. I may be the first car, but I make sure to use every minute in the school building to work, hustle, and make sure I am out at a decent contract hour and have time for myself and my family out of this building. This new teacher identity has helped me be a better teacher to my students, a better colleague to my coworkers, and an even better family member to my loved ones. Why the change? I was tired of my teacher identity feeling like a sacrificial martyr melodrama.

-Anthony Stetzenmeyer, Senior Fellow

As a teacher, I'm a lifelong learner who continues to seek out opportunities to expand my understanding of how I do math, how my students do math, and how I create opportunities for us to all do math together in ways that are joyful, critical, and messy.

-Emily Blumenthal, 2023 Fellow

My teacher identity is one of relentless encouragement for students, perhaps even when they want a break from being encouraged to do more math. I am often asking students how they got that answer and refusing to tell students if they are right or wrong—except for those who really need reassurance.

While I try not to position myself as the authority on mathematical knowledge in the room, it's definitely tough for me. I want to give **Productively struggling until you understand the math idea really is the way to be “good at math.”** students feedback so that they can learn, but then they stop looking for co-created knowledge from each other and start looking at me to see if they are “right.” I am still working on refining this aspect of my teacher identity.

I also carry a lot of my identity as “someone who did well in school” to my role as a teacher. I always thought of myself as “someone who was really good at school, but not a math genius,” and I never tried out for the Math Team or majored in math. I assumed those things were only for true math geniuses. Now, I realize that

I shied away from those activities because of internalized ideas about gender! I try to show my female students that there isn't some special "genius" that they lack. Productively struggling until you understand the math idea really is the way to be "good at math."

-Rose Taylor, 2023 Fellow

I used to say that I love teaching but I didn't necessarily love chemistry—I would be okay with teaching anything as long as I was working with students. I still believe that I would be happy teaching anything, but now I've realized that I am falling in love with chemistry all over again. It was the act of sharing (sometimes faking) a love of science that gave me that genuine love back.

-Zoe Li, 2023 Fellow

I am starting to realize that teacher identity changes throughout a career. As a new teacher, I was much more able to connect and relate to my students with pop culture references and shared interests. Now in my 15th year of teaching many of my students don't even know what happens when a DeLorean goes 88mph! What I realize is that my identity is more and more connected to my approach to teaching and my expectations. As I enter the status of a veteran teacher (even though I will eternally feel like a new teacher constantly learning) I feel I am being more intentional about creating connections with my students in new ways. My identity as a teacher is changing and I'm okay with that.

-Jim Lane, Senior Fellow

My teacher identity is being a role model to my students as a lifelong learner. This includes showing them what success looks like as well as how to handle and move forward after a failure.

-Lynn Gumpinger, 2023 Fellow

My teacher identity stems from my passion for sharing knowledge. I often find myself becoming obsessively interested in various topics, **As a teacher, I have the opportunity to pass that enthusiasm on to my students.** and I love the thrill of learning the deep cuts of some new hobby or subject. As a teacher, I have the opportunity to pass that

enthusiasm on to my students. It is not the filling of the pail, but the lighting of the fire.

-Bryce Fowler, 2023 Fellow

Building relationships, providing a safe space, creating a classroom of thinkers, always being willing to try—that's my teacher identity.

-Beth Warden, 2023 Fellow

I would describe my teaching identity as I would describe myself: reflective and committed to growth. I have learned more about being my best self because I'm striving to be my best teacher-self. I strive to be the kind of teacher who can share my gifts and struggles, who is relentlessly hopeful, and who gives grace to myself and others.

-Amanda Eiting, 2023 Fellow

I am a teacher who loves co-adventuring alongside my students.

I am a teacher who is working toward a more just, peaceful, and hopeful future.

I am a teacher who supports people as they discover, stretch, and collaborate to make change.

I am a teacher who believes dad jokes are for everyone!

-Kirstin Milks, Senior Fellow

An ongoing feature in Kaleidoscope, Call and Response features short responses to a writing prompt. Do you have an idea for a storytelling prompt? Contact us at kaleidoscope@knowlesteachers.org.