



# Social Justice Standards | Unpacking Identity

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOPIC: CLASSROOM CULTURE, INSTRUCTION

SOCIAL JUSTICE DOMAIN: IDENTITY **Objective**

Learners will:

- Define what shapes our identities;
- Understand the five identity anchor standards in the Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards; and
- Relate how identity has many characteristics and affects relationships within the school building and classroom.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

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1. What is identity?
2. How is identity developed?
3. How does identity affect our relationships?

This is the first in a series of self-paced presentations for individuals, easily modified for a group.

You need:

- ability to access audio and video on your device;
- pen and paper;
- and about one hour.

## Learn

What is identity?

- The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing or person is definitively recognized or known.
- The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.

Source: *Websters II New College Dictionary*

## Go Deeper

Think about how a person's different identity categories might create sameness as well as uniqueness.

- Our identity consists of the various characteristics we use to categorize and define ourselves and the various characteristics that are constructed by those around us. Sometimes people only think of identity as those visible characteristics of a person, but sometimes our identity characteristics are invisible.
- Read the following identity characteristics list:
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity
  - Race
  - Religion
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Language
  - Marital/relationship status
  - Parent or childless
  - Family size and composition
  - Sexual orientation
  - Education
  - Career

Think about which of these characteristics are visible, and which are invisible?

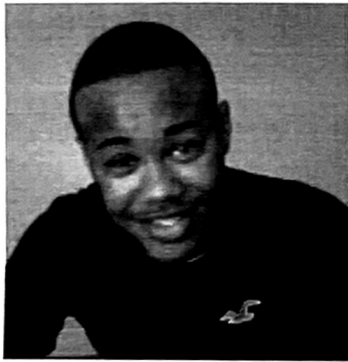
## Apply

Think about the list of characteristics again. For each image, use the categories to describe the subject.



Look at the picture. Complete the table below.

| Identity Category           | Description |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Gender                      |             |
| Ethnicity                   |             |
| Race                        |             |
| Religion                    |             |
| Socioeconomic Status        |             |
| Language                    |             |
| Marital/relationship status |             |
| Parent or childless         |             |
| Family size and composition |             |
| Sexual Orientation          |             |
| Education                   |             |
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| Career                      |             |



Working in a cohort? Share your thoughts with a partner.

## Go Deeper

Match the picture to its story.

Name: Elizabeth

I am a high school student. Everyone thinks that I am a Hispanic female. I am skinny and have long brown hair, and I wear glasses.

Name: Brandon

Everyone thinks that I am in high school. I am athletically built. I always get complimented on my smile, and people tell me that I must be happy all the time because of it.

Name: Guadalupe

I am Guadalupe. Everyone thinks that I am in grade school and a child. I am short and Latina. I have dark brown eyes and long brown hair. People always compliment me on my manners and say that I am very nice and polite.

Let's learn more about each of the subjects in the previous pictures.

## Reflect

Take a few moments for reflection using these questions:

1. Did you match Elizabeth, Brandon and Guadalupe to their respective pictures?
2. What were the identity characteristics you established for each of their stories?
3. Why do you think you were successful or not successful in defining those categories for someone else?
4. What assumptions did you make in order to do that? What do those assumptions tell you about yourself?
5. What did you learn from their individual stories?



Working in a cohort? Share your answers with the group.

Now, let's spend some time thinking about our own identities.

The following activity will take you through a series of statements about your identity.

Step 1—Create a two-column chart like the one below on a sheet of paper.

Step 2—For each statement, offer one to three different endings. For example, if the statement begins with “I am,” you can complete the sentence by saying a teacher, happy, a runner.

| Statement:    | My Answers |
|---------------|------------|
| I am...       | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |
| I can...      | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |
| I have...     | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |
| I remember... | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |
| I like...     | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |
| I will...     | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |
| I believe...  | 1.         |
|               | 2.         |
|               | 3.         |

## Go Deeper

You now have a list of approximately 21 statements that contribute to your personal identity. These are all important pieces that contribute to who you are.

Next, add a third column to your chart. Identify if each statement is visible/invisible/both.

| Statement:    | My Answers | Visible/Invisible/Both |
|---------------|------------|------------------------|
| I am...       | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |
| I can...      | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |
| I have...     | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |
| I remember... | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |
| I like...     | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |
| I will...     | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |
| I believe...  | 1.         |                        |
|               | 2.         |                        |
|               | 3.         |                        |

How many of the characteristics you included in your list fit neatly into one of the following categories: Gender, Ethnicity, Race, Religion, Socioeconomic Status, Language, Sexual Orientation, Education, Career, Relationship Status?

## Reflect

Take a moment to look back at the statements about yourself.

1. Were you surprised by any of your answers?
2. How do these statements help you to better understand who you are as a person?
3. What are the visible characteristics of your identity?
4. What are the invisible characteristics?

## Learn

Now that you have begun to think about the many different pieces that make you unique, we will look at how we have developed this identity or how this identity is socially constructed.

Watch the Geneva Gay video then answer:

1. What does Gay say about the social construction of identity?
2. What does Gay say about the individual's capacity to independently construct him or herself?
3. What identity characteristics are socially constructed and which are independently constructed?



Working with a cohort? Share your ideas whole group.

## Go Deeper

Geneva Gay talks about the many different characteristics of identity and how these characteristics can be used as baselines for the creation of identity. However, she is careful to warn that these baseline concepts should never be used as descriptions for specific individuals, but as a place to begin the conversation around the different categories and groups that we use to define others and ourselves.

Let's consider how this relates to Learning for Justice's Social Justice Standards.

Learning for Justice's Social Justice Standards establishes the following five standards within the Identity domain.

Students will:

- ID.1.** develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society;
- ID.2.** develop language and historical and cultural knowledge that affirm and accurately describe their membership in multiple identity groups;
- ID.3.** recognize that people's multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals;
- ID.4.** express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the value and dignity of other people; and
- ID.5.** recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture and other cultures and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces;

Consider what these standards might look like in a school setting through the following scenarios:

### SCENARIO 1:

For show and tell, Joi brings in a picture of her family on a church camping trip. "My family goes camping a lot. I like camping," she says. "I'm a Christian, and sometimes my family goes camping with church. I'm also a big sister, so I have to help my parents take care of my little brother, especially when we go camping."

Which of the five identity standards are demonstrated in Joi's story?



Working with a cohort? Share your ideas with a partner.

**SCENARIO 2:**

Omar's mother is serving as a chaperone on her son's field trip. On the bus ride, the teacher, Ms. Robin, overhears a conversation between Omar and Peter. "What is your mother wearing on her head?" Peter asks.

"It's called a hijab," Omar replies. "Many Muslim women wear them."

"Why does she wear it?"

"Our religion teaches us that the hijab is a way of being humble and modest. Muslim women wear it to show they love God."

Which of the five identity standards are demonstrated in Omar and Peter's discourse?



Working with a cohort? Share your ideas with a partner.

**SCENARIO 3:**

Patrick is being raised in a traditional Christian home. This year in Mr. Sanderson's social studies class, he has been learning about the world's different beliefs systems. Patrick enjoys the company of friends from different religions and is interested in their beliefs and practices. Though he remains devout, he wonders if being curious makes him a bad Christian. Patrick talks to his Sunday school teacher Mrs. Patterson who assures him that he can be Christian and befriend and learn from people of different religions as well. In fact, her best friend of thirty years is a Jewish woman she grew up with!

Which of the five identity standards are demonstrated in Patrick's story?



Working with a cohort? Share your ideas with a partner.

**SCENARIO 4:**

As part of a class project, Rebecca completes the following personal mission statement: "I am more than one identity. I will celebrate all of my in-group and out-group identities and work to understand how they overlap to make up who I am as an individual. I will not allow others to put me into boxes." Rebecca explains to her peers in small group discussion that being a student, sister, female, Latina, Spanish speaker and dancer are all interconnected and equally important. She displays her personal mission statement on the outside of her class binder.

Review the identity anti-bias standards. Which identity standards are present in Rebecca's scenario?



Working with a cohort? Share your ideas with a partner.

## Apply

Stop and think about your students.

How do your students display the identity anti-bias standards? How can you help your students develop these skills?

One way to help students develop these skills is by exploring the anti-bias standards through text.

The following text illustrates Identity standard 2: *Students will develop language and historical and cultural knowledge that affirm and accurately describe their membership in multiple identity groups.*

“The black woman’s role has not been placed in its proper perspective, particularly in terms of the current economic and political upheaval in America today. Since time immemorial, the black man’s emasculation resulted in the need of the black woman to assert herself in order to maintain some semblance of a family unit. And as a result of this historical circumstance, the black woman has developed perseverance; the black woman has developed strength; the black woman has developed tenacity of purpose and other attributes which today quite often are being looked upon negatively. She continues to be labeled a matriarch.” (“The Twin Jeopardies of Race and Class” Shirley Chisholm)

The following text illustrates Identity standard 3: *Students will recognize that people’s multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.*

“I really had this idea that I could do everything a hundred percent. You know like you can be a hundred percent worker, a hundred percent mother, a hundred percent wife. And you can’t. It’s impossible. And you have these terrible decisions to make: Do you stay home? Do you work? Do you go after the brass ring in your career? What do you do with your children? You unconditionally love them and you would give anything for them. You would give up your life, you career, your home. It’s complicated. It’s complicated.” (“StoryCorps: Job Interview” Tia Smallwood and Christine Smallwood)

## Reflect

How can you use one of these texts in your class to facilitate the growth of students’ understanding of identity?

Evaluate your materials.

Pick a text you currently use. Reference the text directly or think about the text, depending on your familiarity with it.

Evaluate the text’s effectiveness to help students develop identity by answering the following question:

Which identity standard(s) is illustrated in this text and how?



Working in a cohort? Share your ideas as a group.

Learn

Let’s examine identity in the classroom. Think about the following while watching the video.

What is unique about Anna’s students? How does Anna’s practice help her students develop positive identity?

Think about the following while listening to Robert.

What does Robert learn is important about the teacher’s influence on student self-identity during his people colors activity?

Think about the following while listening again to Anna.

What is key to understanding the Social Justice Standard: “Students will recognize that people’s multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals”?



Working in a cohort? Share your ideas as a group.

Go Deeper

Complete the following matrix thinking about what you observed from Robert’s and Anna’s videos. Return to watch the video(s) a second time if necessary.

| Question                                                                       | Robert | Anna |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------|
| What does Robert/Anna do to help his/her students develop positive identities? |        |      |
| How are students able to step across in-group and out-group boundaries?        |        |      |
| What reflection is used to improve teaching practice?                          |        |      |

Apply

Our identities are ever changing. Let’s take a minute to revisit our goals and objectives for this module:

- Define what shapes our identities
- Understand the five identity anchor standards in the Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards
- Relate how identity has many characteristics and affects relationships within the school building and classroom

Set a SMART goal for your practice.

What specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and relevant, timely goal can you set for yourself in your practice that will help to facilitate identity understanding in your students?

## In Summary

Although we construct our identities to some extent, society does, too.

Our identities affect the way we interact with the world.

Our identities affect the way the world interacts with us.

*Meredith Schilsky is president and chief creative director of the Warehouse Project & Gallery.*

X



# Welcome to Learning for Justice—Formerly