

Identity LES

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Project Description

Identity feels to many as a concept that dates back to times immemorial. Sheron Fraser-Burgess (Smeyers, P. 2018) explains that the term identity was traced by Bernstein (2005) to “1979, associated with political activism for people with disabilities” (p. 851). Our assumption that identity has a long etymological history is reasonable because the process is evident throughout human history. Much of human history included othering and dehumanizing others. The definition and concept of identity are continuously negotiated between two thoughts; one being the perception of individualism and neoliberalism ideals of the individual’s sense of self (Descartes, 1596-1650 & Locke J, 1632-1704) and two being an intersectional sense of belonging and difference to groups as determined by social markers (Marx K, 1818-1883, Bourdieu P, 1930-2002, Hall, S. 1932-2014). This project fits well with the three aims of the Québec Education Program (2007) are, construction of identity¹ & world-view and the empowerment of students. This project has developed a LES that is our [step-by-step guide](#) to introducing students to the concept of identity.

It is important to note that this is a starting off point for teachers to weave into all their teaching practices. When students analyze the characters of a story or the theme we’re delving into the identities of the characters and ultimately the authors themselves. There is an importance of exploring our identity negotiation in order to see the invisible ties that influence us all.

Project Goals

The concept of identity has a huge impact on student success. There are many definitions for identity: self-concept, mindset, identity negotiation, but overall the concept converges into the beliefs and values that influence a person’s behavior. Many students have a very linear view of their identity and at times only focus on the hardships of their personal and educational lives. This project feels successful and provides an introduction for students' to play with the idea of identity, but also focused on self-improvement and making changes. We really focused on making a LES that could be scaled and used at many different ages. It is our belief that the content proposed in this LES allows students to demonstrate their ELA Competency by triangulating assessment via classroom discussion by use of observations, conversations, and through the [summative product](#).

¹ Identity Construction as written in the QEP suggests ignorance of the concept of unlearning and change and implies our identity. Identity negotiation implies fluidity of identity development.

Project Outcomes

During the development of the LES we brainstormed how to explore a challenging topic without being preachy. We produced a series of lessons built to scaffold the understanding that: identity is always in the process of changing, that our identity is influenced by the others around us, the it is not found, but rather it is developed or negotiated and that success is biased and individual, but that some identities are objectively negatives. Our desire was to provide hyperdocs that teachers can make digital copies of in order to adapt and show the interdependence between our identity and our behaviours.

There are many complicated concepts rarely introduced into student lives, such as, how nature and nurture impact our development, that even though our identity is influenced, and that we should take ownership of our identity negotiation. We spent some time searching for videos about identity on the internet, such as YouTube, and our results were filled with religion-based Christian content. Identity should be an obvious concept that students explore in school and is a central aim of the QEP, however, the avoidance of controversy and the focus on outcomes evaluated by exams often dominate our pedagogy.

Reinvestment

Completing this project was an eye-opening experience. Each learning objective and lesson created reminded us of interactions and student stories. This was actually the fuel that made us modify the [summative project](#) from Day 1 from a project celebrating someone succeeding in changing their identity to instead on Day 4 making fictional profiles for the students to explore. [These profiles](#) are fictionalized and don't reflect one student, but rather many students in our combined decades of teaching experience. It is imperative to remember that the concept of identity negotiation is not a one and done learning concept. We will all spend our whole adult life continuing to negotiate every moment of our lives. We put a lot of effort into making this LES adaptable to many levels and contexts and we encourage everyone to explore this LES and the concept of identity with students. We hope that anyone that uses this will consider working further with the education aim.

Lesson Plan Details:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TUGZi2ZuCbFAwvJ3BMnUbQquCVMjDiQY7IehUcQJCOU/edit?usp=sharing>

Google Folder where the materials are available:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1n08s06TuAv2pHHi0Q1CW3VHPcZoA5c1q?usp=sharing>

[Folder for LES](#)

Final Report

The included [LES](#) and [complementary materials](#) provide introductory lessons to build student capacity to self-reflect on their identity. We have attempted to create useful and realistic lessons.

We spent significant time concerned during our PDIG Project discussing how we could possibly avoid falling into the practice of simplistic labeling and stereotypes. This identity LES connects well with a need to explore contemporary, complex and controversial topics such as racism, prejudice and discrimination. A large number of students we work with live in households with trauma, violence, poverty and addiction, the identity negotiation provides a venue for students to experience their feelings rather than numb them. The book, *Hold On To Your Kids: Why Parents Need To Matter More Than Peers*, (2019) by Gordon Neufeld provides a convincing explanation about the need for adults to support students through his attachment-based developmental approach. By being their alpha compass and directing them to becoming independent and competent members of society. Identity negotiation should be seen as a tool for teachers and the education system to support children to become functioning adults in our society. The [materials](#) we've created provide an introductory guide for teachers and only scratches the surface of how teachers could guide their students.

Carole Dweck's (2006) growth mindset tells teachers to be more reflective with the language they choose to praise students with. But, we need to go further, by explicitly teaching students about identity negotiation. A positive view of school has been correlated with good mental health by quantitative research in Australia (Riekie et al. 2017). This is especially important considering the mental strain experienced by students due to COVID 19. Mercer et al. (2017) completed longitudinal quantitative research that concluded that Dutch adolescents with a negative perception of high school correlated with delinquent social behavior. Students with identities that value school and consider themselves capable of success will lower their likelihood of experiencing poor mental health and social delinquency (Mercer et al. 2017). Overall, research around the globe has concluded that academic performance and economic success are positively impacted by students who have an identity that values education (Destin et al., 2019; Mercer et al., 2017). But we need more than a theory of growth mindset to support students. Students are often asking, "why do I need to learn this?" The learning targets developed by this LES will help students understand themselves and provide understanding that regardless of the cards they've been dealt in life they have a role to play in determining the direction and growth of their experience during their life. Teachers and schools often avoid the discussion of values and identity, because there is a fine line that needs to be walked, this LES proposes a direction to consider as a starting point.

Reference

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