

# Identity Development in School: The Critical Role of Teachers

Rainbow History Month Colloquium  
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DIVED

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Kieli- ja kulttuuritietoisen  
opettajuuden ja opettajankoulutuksen edistäminen

# DIVED

sukella kieleen ja kulttuuriin

- Intentional infusion of linguistically responsive and culturally sustaining understandings and practices.
- Explicit recognition of interplay of external socio-political context and student outcomes and success





sukella kieleen ja kulttuuriin

## 3 Central Themes

- Schools are a site for identity development
- Teachers' play a critical role in supporting or undermining students' identities
- Everything takes place within the lines of power and privilege of the larger social context

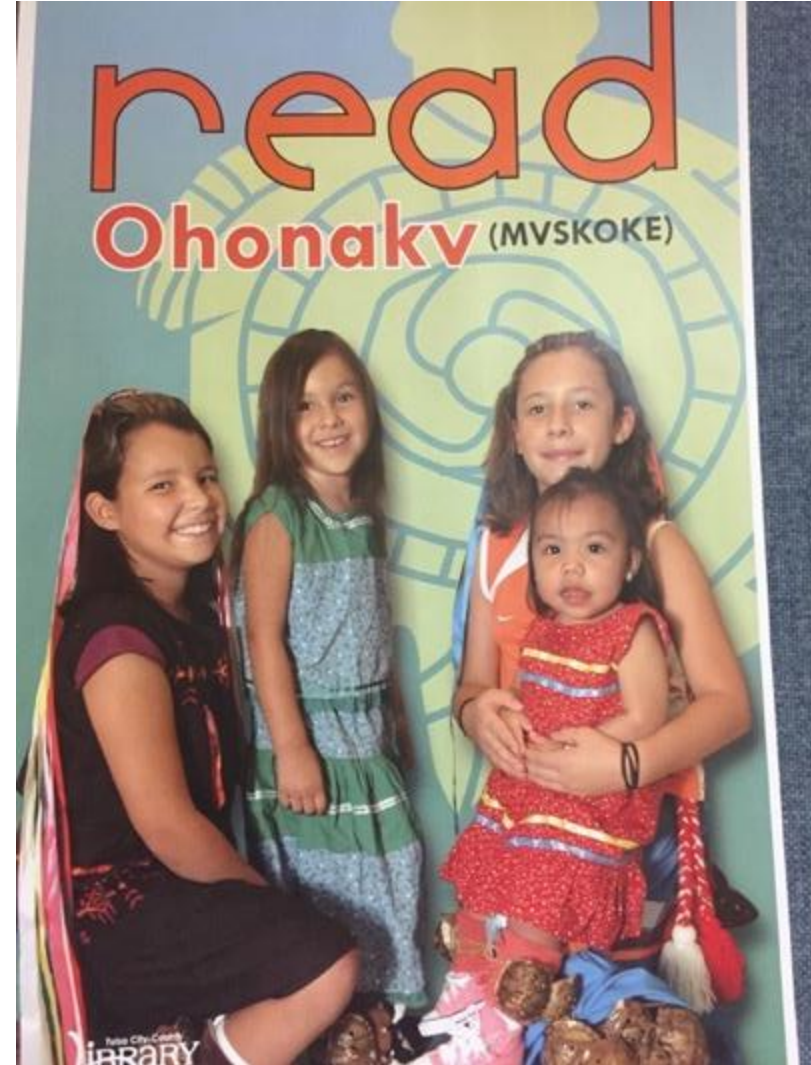
# Assumptions about Schooling

- Nothing about teaching is neutral
- Teaching is political
- Linguistic and cultural diversity is the norm for which all teachers must be prepared
- The dominant culture's values and interests frame our behaviors
- Schooling is a process of identity development

# Equity in Education

Linda Darling-Hammond – 2016  
Conference Presentation

- Addressing the academic, psychological, emotional, social needs **[and assets]** of all students
- Recognizing differences
- Compensating for disadvantages **[structural inequities]**
- Responding to the needs **[and assets]** of all students”





# Equity Focused Teachers

Learn about...

Interact with...

Connect to...

Care about...

Advocate for...

**All** of their Students



# What is IDENTITY? Margaret Wetherell (2010)

## Sage Handbook of Identities - Introduction

- Elusive and difficult to define
- ‘Names & looks’ and what is done with these
- Us vs them
- Binaries vs fluidity
- Social organization of memory
- Assemblages and re-assemblages
- Intersectionality
- Assumed and imposed
- Essentialism vs social constructivism
- A sense of self in relation to others



# Different Paths in the Field

Subjective individual achievement – A felt sense of personal place, continuity & location – field has move to seeing these personal and subjectively felt identities as mobile, flexibly negotiated, practically oriented and jointly accomplished with others.

Study of social divisions and social solidarities and the practices of marginalization, exclusion, inclusion, resistance, segregation, denigration linked to belonging. P. 4. Social categories

The ethical and political. How to live and how to act brings personal and social together.

## How is your identity constructed?

- Heritage culture
  - Language
  - Ethnicity
  - Gender Expression
  - Religion
  - Geography

- Home culture
- School culture
- Professional culture
- Age, gender, hobby cultures
- Classroom cultures



## The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory

Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke

*Social Psychology Quarterly*

Vol. 63, No. 4, Special Millenium Issue on the State of  
Sociological Social Psychology (Dec., 2000), pp. 284-297

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Identity refers to an internalized set of meanings attached to a role played in a network of social relationships, with a person's self viewed as, in important part, an organization of the various identities held by the person" (p. 6).



From Kaylyn William's 2017 Capstone Definition of Identity

Tracy Robinson

Individual identity is

“both visible and invisible domains of the self that influence self-construction.

They include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual ability.”

Edward Taylor: Cultural identity is “one’s understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values, and behaviors that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives.”



## Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2018)

- Identity—as with any other higher order psychological process—is essentially social in origin. People actively appropriate discourses, narratives, and visions or models of identity, but this is always cultural material.
- Identities comprise all those people, skills, knowledge, practices, and resources that people have acquired and now use through their involvement in their various activities, in diverse social interactions.
- These artifacts are internalized as well as externalized. People form their identities (visions of themselves) by engaging in social activities and by observing how members interact.

# Funds of Identity



Not always visible  
A process that takes place in interaction with the environment, with people (family, friends, community) and things, with signs and tools distributed among artefacts and with the funds of knowledge available; all of this across various different places and times.

Lived experience, funds of identity and education *Culture & Psychology* 2014, Vol. 20(1) Moisés Esteban-Guitart & Luis C Moll

The multiple  
dimensions of  
identity affect how  
we act and are  
perceived





# A site of Continuous Unsettled Argument

I am not here to argue for a particular position coming from the complex and nuanced field of identity

I come as an educator who has spent her entire career as an educator seeking equity for traditionally marginalized students.



Art by Alexander Reichstein photo taken at Salon Taidemuseo

Move from either / or  
to neither / both  
something else.

Allow students to be recognized as a person, as  
part of a community, a polity, a family or any other  
kind of human group.

# Why do teachers need to pay attention to identity development?

.....[c]hildren live in a world that is not yet a place where all of them have equal opportunity to become all they could be.

We know children need to feel safe and secure in all their many identities, feel pride in their families, and feel at home in [school].

We also know that children need tools to navigate the complex issues of identity diversity, prejudice, and power in their daily lives so that they may learn thrive and succeed.

From: Julie Olsen Edwards and Louise Derman-Sparks (2010) *Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. NAEYC

# The importance of MESSAGE

As a teacher you send powerful messages about the worth of each student by what you say and do about cultural and linguistic diversity.

You can disrupt or perpetuate oppression and discrimination by how you treat your students and model for them how to treat each other.



# The nature of teacher-student relationships is central to student learning

“The way students are thought about and treated by society and consequently by the schools they attend and the educators who teach them is fundamental in creating academic success or failure.” Sonia Nieto

Pg. 167 *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities*. Teachers College Press

# My Belief

Every child

no matter their background

no matter their circumstances

Deserves a teacher who

Cares deeply about them as an individual and  
their success as a learner

and

Sees their potential to contribute to society as a  
whole when they become adults

# Teachers' Actions Matter

Only thing truly within control of a teacher:  
the relationships they construct with and among  
their students.

- Teachers have to power to make students feel loved or unlovable, a part of the class family or an outsider.
- Must insist on the intrinsic worth and dignity simply for being human



Maximize academic and social opportunities, rather than reproduce social inequities in our communities

Nurture a healthy psychological frame of mind in all students regardless of gender expression, sexual orientations, language, social status, ability, religion, race or interests



Students have to work out who they are (and are not) within the constraints of the particular institutions (physical and virtual) in which they spend their time.

You can only be who you are  
**But you can still combat  
both actual and symbolic violence**

# An Example: Gender Stereotyping

- Coercive behaviors on the part of teachers to insist that students who present themselves as representing one gender / sex or the other must perform in particular ways
- Fixed gender separation in toys, clothes where to set, how to talk.

# What happens when a feature of your identity is marginalized in school?

from Louise & George Spindler (1993)

- **Enduring Self** – sense of continuity of experience, meaning & social identity
- **Situated Self** – contextualized and instrumental, changes selectively to meet the demands of the context
- **Endangered Self** – sustained violation of enduring self – damaged identity

[Pathways to Cultural Awareness](#): Cultural Therapy With Teachers and Students



Author Robin Stevenson wrote an open letter to Wheaton Warrenville Unit District 200 after officials canceled her school visit. Here's what it said, edited for newspaper style:

From Daily Herald. Suburban Chicago. November 6 2019

[https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20191106/read-authors-letter-to-wheaton-warrenville-district-200-after-her-school-visit-was-canceled?fbclid=IwAR0ZqIJ8HAYqsKri85Za1OtN1jH25hBolVy-r9vzIF35IL8hrLf-ihAj\\_4U](https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20191106/read-authors-letter-to-wheaton-warrenville-district-200-after-her-school-visit-was-canceled?fbclid=IwAR0ZqIJ8HAYqsKri85Za1OtN1jH25hBolVy-r9vzIF35IL8hrLf-ihAj_4U)

# Advocacy for Students

Need to be willing to take action to improve students' access to social and political capital and educational opportunities







# Resilient Students:

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Adapt to disturbances to functioning and development

Respond to stress in a way that does not impact an individual behaviorally or psychologically

Use resources towards positive outcomes

Function in a positive way after adverse events

Are vulnerable to adverse events

From; "Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13." National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015.



Help students feel welcome and connected to their teachers and peers

Show children that we see and value all aspects of them—including attributes related to gender expression, sexual orientation, race and culture

This means integrating their identities into the materials, pictures and actions in the classroom



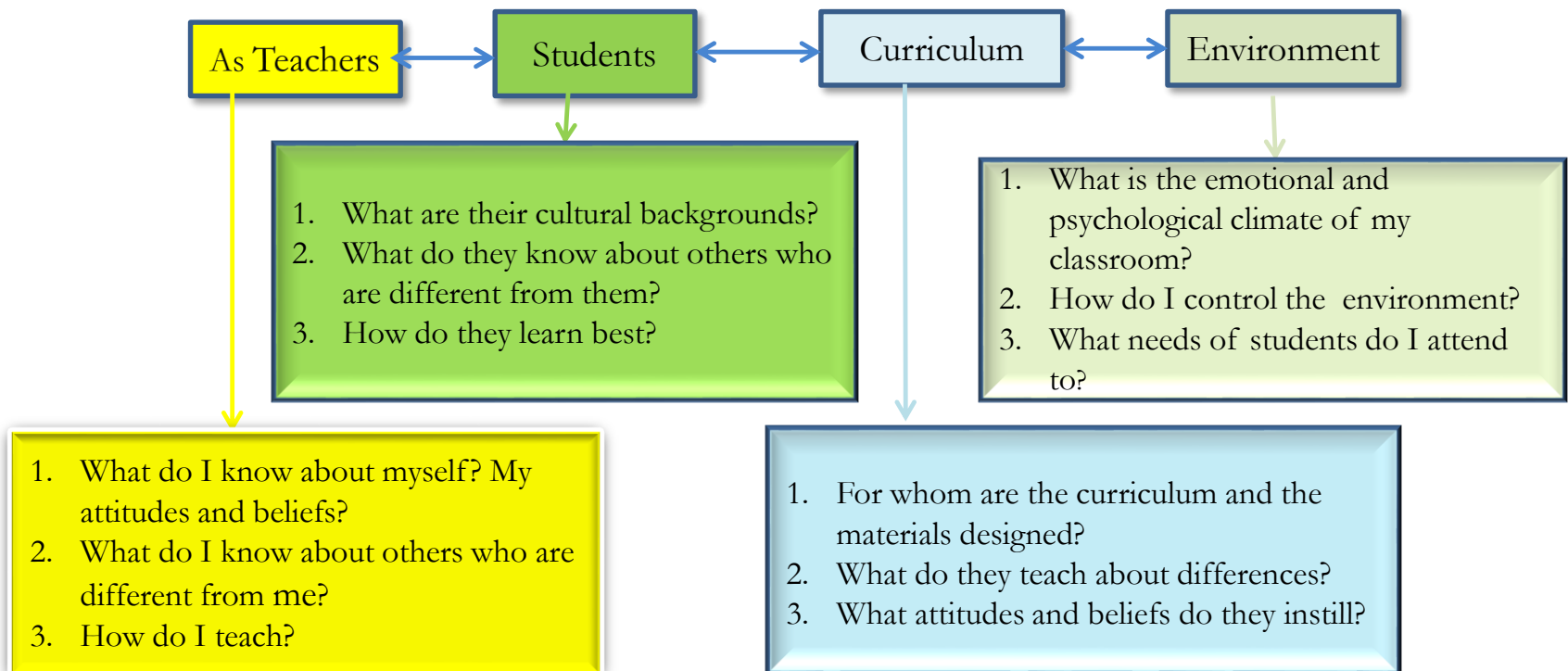
NAEYC Wanless & Crawford (2016) p. 3

## Why don't most people from the dominant group fight oppression?

- They don't know it exists in the first place
- They don't have to
- They think it's just a personal problem - individuals usually get what they deserve
- They want to hang on to their privilege
- They're prejudiced – racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist, classist
- They're afraid

*Johnson, Allan G. (2001). Privilege, power, and difference. Boston: McGraw-Hill,*

# KEY QUESTIONS RELATED TO IDENTITY & EDUCATIONAL EQUITY



# Key Questions for Educators: Ourselves

- What do I know about myself and my attitudes and beliefs?
- What do I know about others who are different from me?
- How do I teach and do I reach all students?
- Are there some students I'd rather work with more than others?

# Key Questions for Educators: Students

- What is their cultural background (along multiple dimensions of identity)?
- What do they know about others who are different from them?
- How does each student learn best?

# Key Questions for Educators

## Curriculum

- Who are the curriculum and the materials designed for?
- What does the curriculum teach about difference?
- What attitudes and beliefs do they instill?

# Key Questions for Educators

## Environment

- What is the emotional /psychological climate of my classroom?
- How do I control the environment?
- What needs of the students do I attend to?



# We Are All the Same We Are All Different

Project with Class 5C  
Turun Normaalikoulu  
Kevät 2012

Based on Guidelines from the Anti-Defamation League  
<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/anti-bias-curriculum-guides>

# Goal of the Research

- Determine if students' attitudes towards others change / improve after focusing on intercultural competence. Open up a global perspective within the context of ethical behavior.
- What brings us together?
- What divides us?
- What can I do to make a difference?

# Overview of Activities



Week 1 Shields & Flowers  
Who are We?

Week 2 Cooperation

Week 3 We can be Allies

Week 4 Role Plays - Going  
Deeper

Week 5 Synthesize  
understandings into  
class quilt. “We Can  
Make Norssi a Great  
Place to Learn”

# Why are we doing this project?

When you grow up, the most important skills will be to

- Get along with
  - Care about
  - Learn From
  - Work For
  - Respect

People who are  
different from you

**NO MATTER  
WHO YOU ARE**



# Week 1: Introduction

- Each student got two letters to decorate for “We are all the same, we are all different.”
- Introduced myself. Talked about why important.
- Modeling of Shield and discussion. Students create own shields which are put on display
- 3 things in common, 1 different (What you like to eat for a special meal. What you do on the weekends. How your families celebrate birthdays
- It makes me happy when, It makes me sad when. When someone is sad I can...





# What do you know about different people?

## Where do you get your information?

People from the U.S.  
Poor people

People in wheelchairs  
Roma

FOR EACH GROUP: Have you had Personal Contact YES /  
NO

If no, have you heard the term, do you know what I am talking about?

If I were a visitor from outer space (from the moon), how would you describe \_\_\_\_\_ to me?

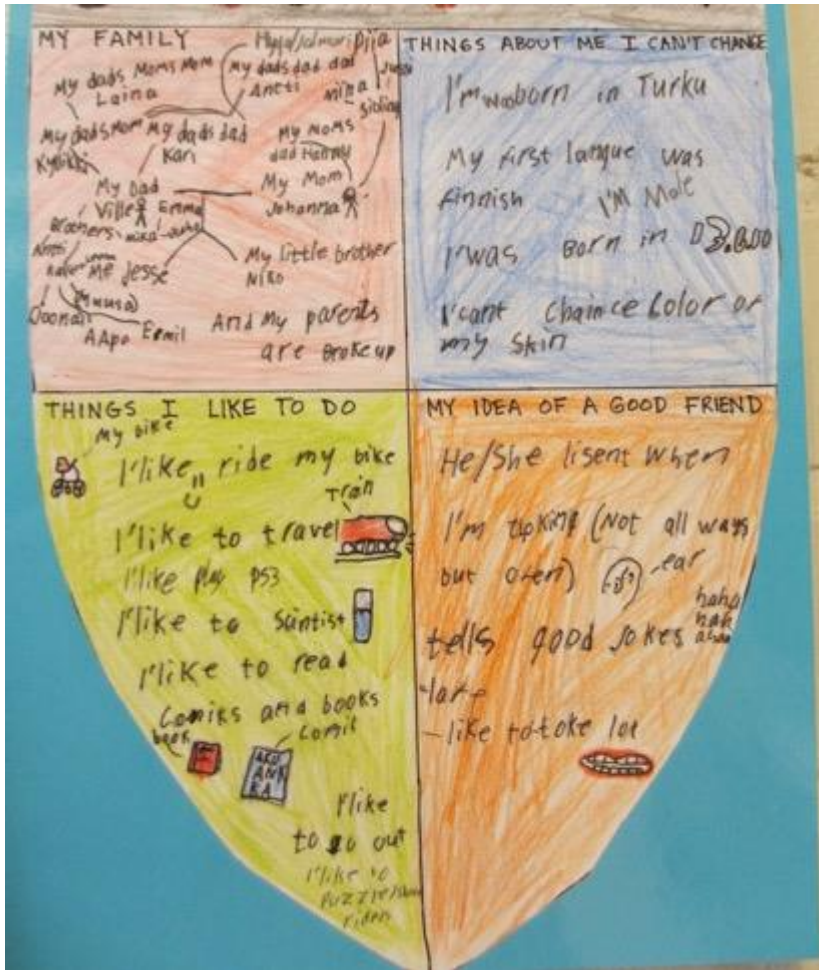
- What have you heard?
- What have you seen?
- What has your own personal experience taught you?
- How certain do you feel the information is accurate?

Where did you learn most of your information and what did you learn from which source?

Parents- family  
TV  
Movies  
Books  
Magazines- comics  
School  
Personal experience



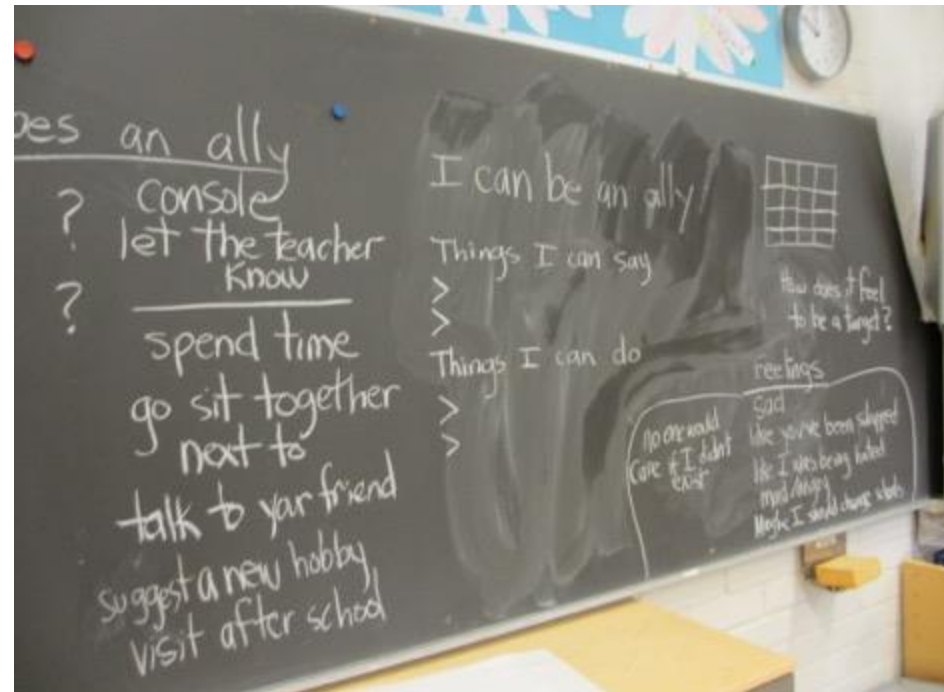
# Week 3 Identity & Cultural Practices –



- Cultural practices - Over generalization - Stereotypes
- Use shield to look at aspects of own identity
- Read story “A New Girl” to introduce concepts of Target, Perpetrator, Bystander and Ally
- Tie to Respect for Others from Religion class
- Create role plays in small groups based on scenarios given in Reading to End Racism materials.

# Week 4: What Does an Ally Do or Say?

- Review “Why are we doing this project.”
- Go deeper into the roles. Write in journals “When you have been a target, how did you feel?. What did people do to make you feel better ?
- Final reflection: “Things I can do, things I can say.”  
Homework: Think about how we can make Norssi a better school.





# Bring It Together With A Class Quilt



“Inside/Outside Circle” - generate ideas on how to help  
Started simple  
Began with “When someone is sad” and then expanded.

# Constructing the Quilt







Before you leave, take a  
moment to reflect:  
How will you take these  
understandings forward  
in your work?

