

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITIES

Years 10-12

EXPLORING KEY FACTORS THAT SHAPE IDENTITY

Understanding how factors that shape identity impact wellbeing

Identity is a complex concept and one that is incredibly important to a person's sense of wellbeing. Think about how we identify ourselves and what we might list as the most important aspects of our identity. Students might reply that identity is all about someone's cultural background, nationality, age, physical abilities, gender, religious beliefs or political persuasion. Our biological makeup plays a part in our identity but so do the values and beliefs we live by within the larger picture of social and historical contexts.

Providing opportunities for young people to explore how their own identities, as well as those of others, are constructed and influenced enables them to appreciate the impact of external forces on how others experience the world.

Lesson aims

By the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- understand how the concept of identity is socially and historically constructed
- recognise the role of power, value systems, ideas and the media on shaping identities
- appreciate how individuals can impact the identities of others

Curriculum links

Health and Physical Education: Personal, Social and Community Health Strand; Being healthy safe and active

[ACPPS089] Evaluate factors that shape identities and critically analyse how individuals impact the identities of others.

General Capabilities: Intercultural Understanding, Ethical Understanding

Understanding identity

Focus setting

Identity: what makes you 'you'.



You may like to show one or more of these video clips to introduce the concept of identity and to outline how our identities are socially constructed:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CLun4FpqR8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHwVypIU3Pg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uluJT1n2vRY>

Students might jot down questions, comments or points for later discussion.

Defining identity

‘Who am I?’ from my perspective

Students consider their response to the question ‘Who am I?’ by completing this quick activity. They may feel comfortable about sharing these with others.

1. Think about what makes you, you. Jot down words or phrases that you think define who you are.
OR
Select images, animations or shapes from a digital library that capture the essence of who you are.
OR
Create a short poem or word picture that conveys those elements that make you who you are.
2. Experiences have a role to play in defining or shaping our identity. Think of a memorable experience from a time in your life. Describe this event. A significant experience will have influenced you and how you think about the world in some way. Can you explain the impact this experience had on you? Students may share their responses verbally or in writing.

‘Who am I?’ from others’ perspectives

Now have students consider how other people might describe or define them.

1. In pairs, students jot down words or phrases to describe their partner's identity.

Discuss any discrepancies between students' own definitions of their identity and those of their partners. They may be able to suggest reasons for these differences.

Factors that influence identity

Ask students to consider which, if any, of the following influence or shape a person's identity. They will need to give reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.

- socio-economic status
- cultural background
- religion
- gender
- health status
- special talents
- abilities
- employment status
- (others can be added)

1. Read through the list of some factors that shape a person's identity. Think about each one and how it might influence, or impact on, someone's sense of who they are. Jot down some initial ideas.
2. Write down your responses to the following questions:
 - a. Are any of the factors in this more list more important in shaping someone's identity than others? Why/why not?
 - b. Could these factors have both negative and positive influences in the creation of someone's identity? Eg *socio-economic background* – could this either contribute to an identity characterized by such things as high self-esteem, social prestige, feelings of belonging or one of low self-worth, a sense of isolation or alienation and powerlessness?
3. Would you add other factors to this list? Explain your choices.

The role of the media in creating identity

The internet and media we consume are important components of everyday life.

A recent American study revealed that young people spend 7.5 hours on average per day engaged in some form of media, in particular social media platforms.

Activity

Students work in small groups to investigate how the media influences identity. They could negotiate their choice of format for presenting their investigation.

1. Select one or more forms of media (eg Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, WeChat, Pinterest etc)
2. Conduct a quick survey amongst the class to find how many students use this platform.
3. Describe in detail how this platform operates and who is the target audience
4. What content is conveyed on this platform and in what format?
5. Who controls the content on this platform? Is it filtered or monitored in any way? Why/why not?
6. Is the content always authentic and believable on this platform? How do you know?
7. Is there direct advertising on this platform? Describe.
8. What kinds of interactions does the platform enable?
9. Identity creation is a feature of online platforms. Can you create different accounts as different identities? What are the advantages or disadvantages of doing this?
10. Reflection: have you been influenced in any way by the content on this social media platform? Consider such things as:
 - Lifestyle (eg fashion, leisure activities, career)
 - Wellbeing (eg fitness, health, nutrition, exercise)
 - Relationships (eg ideal partners, friends)
 - Appearance (eg body image, makeup, hairstyles ...)
 - Other