

**Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild@HWDSB: Building a Community of Care
Module 2 Understanding Identity and Intersectionality**

Lesson #15 Intersectionality

Learning Goal: To understand that identity is made up of many different parts that combine to make us who we are. Our intersecting identities influence how we experience the world.

Key Vocabulary

Intersectionality - Intersectionality refers to the social, economic, and political ways in which identity-based systems of oppression and privilege (such as gender, gender expression, race) connect, overlap, and influence one another.

Race - The idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on inherited physical and behavioral differences. Racial categorization schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that viewed some groups of people as superior and some as inferior. Genetic studies have concluded that race is a made-up social construct to uphold European and white standards, and not an actual biological fact. (Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2002, p.141).

Learning Disability - “Learning Disabilities” refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are a life-long condition – they do not go away – but can be coped with successfully by using areas of strength to compensate and accommodations such as technology.

Oppression - The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic, and political benefit of the more powerful social group.

Privilege - Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely based on a single characteristic. Privilege can be due a number of different attributes – race, gender, age, sexual orientation, education, status, ability.

Racial identity - An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe him or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience ([*Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*](#). Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors. Routledge, 1997)

Curriculum Connections

Ontario Curriculum, Grades 7-8 Language [Revised] 2006:

- **Overall Expectation. Reading:** 1.read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning; 2. recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how

they help communicate meaning; 3. use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently; 4. reflect on and identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading.

- **Overall Expectation. Writing:** 1. generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience; 2. draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience.

Tools and Materials

1. Teacher Resource: [Kimberle Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality \(1.54 mins\)](#)
2. My Intersectional Self worksheet
3. Infographic: Intersectionality a fun guide

Modification for Remote Learning: PowerPoint will include visuals and modifications needed for teaching this lesson remotely. Students will use whatever art supplies they have at home.

YouTube: Log into YouTube using your HWDSB account and play videos in safe mode.

Educator Pre-reflection

Before engaging in this lesson, consider/think about...

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality refers to the social, economic, and political ways in which identity-based systems of oppression and privilege (such as gender, gender expression, race) connect, overlap, and influence one another.

For example, a Black woman in *Canada* does not experience gender inequalities in the same way as a white woman, nor does this same Black woman experience racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. A queer woman does not experience oppression the same way as a cis-gendered woman. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life and experiences.

In learning about intersectionality, consider the following:

- How does intersectionality relate to identity?
- How does looking closely at ourselves help us understand others?
- What aspects of our identities give us advantages? Or disadvantages?

Furthermore, please be aware that race is a heavy burden many racialized students carry even at a very early age due to their lived experiences. If a racialized student is unwilling to share, participate, or even be present for these conversations, it may be due to personal triggers. Thus, forcing them into a conversation about race they do not feel safe to participate in may cause added harm to such students. As the expert on your

students' background history, triggers, body language, and classroom dynamics, please make informed and empathetic decisions to ensure a safe and inclusive setting to engage in these brave conversations.

Student Pre-reflection

Teacher Note: Students will need to know some personal information about themselves and their families such as religion, race and other personal signifiers. It is recommended that Lesson 12/13 - Identity and Race be completed prior to engaging in this lesson as students will need to understand identity.

Before you begin, think about...

Consider how different students in our school might experience things differently than you do, depending on certain aspects of their identities.

- What aspects of our identities give us advantages? Or disadvantages?
- What situations are we sometimes in where one part of our identity is at the forefront over other parts?

Provocation

If possible, have students refer to their self-portraits from lesson 12.

The following video presents how intersectionality influences individuals' experience, privilege and oppression.

[Kids Explain Intersectionality](#) (2:14 mins)

Things to think about while you are watching:

- What aspects of our identities give us advantages? Or disadvantages?
- How do we put others in "boxes"?
- Are there things you do not understand – like the young person in the video?

Learning Task/Activity

Before endeavoring to develop cultural knowledge and awareness about others, we must first uncover and examine personal social and cultural identities. Guided self-reflection allows us to better understand how social group memberships inform who we are. This exercise is an important vehicle in any peer conflict mediation program to help students embrace the concept of being culturally responsive and culturally sensitive.

Introduction:

The teacher should complete a *My Intersectional Self worksheet* in advance to serve as a model for students. Share your *My Intersectional Self* with the class.

Example:

Mrs. Fattori

Woman - Mother – Teacher – Buddhist – Biracial – Marathon Runner - daughter of immigrants

Share how each of your identity bubbles is a lens through which you see and interact in the world. Mrs. Fattori might share, for instance, that when she became a mother, she became stronger and more sensitive, stronger for having made and given life as well as knowing she would do anything to protect her child. But she also became more sensitive to young life of all kinds around her, whether it be other children, nature or a student just learning to love a certain academic subject. She may have also become aware of limitations on moving ahead in her career because she was a woman, a mother who was biracial (gender and racial oppression)

1. Distribute a *My Intersectional Self worksheet* to each student and give the following directions: "Place your name in the center figure. Use the identity bubbles to name aspects of yourself that are important in defining who you are." Allow students time to silently reflect on what they have written. Invite them to form pairs and share why the descriptors they chose are important to them. If time permits, invite pairs to introduce one another to the class.
2. Have students reflect on how each individual identity intersects and shapes the way they view and interact with the world. The teacher can use her own *My Intersectional Self* to illustrate this concept. Mrs. Fattori, for example, might share how being biracial allows her to be a part of two worlds, but also means she may experience two oppressions of racism and sexism.

When the teacher is sure that students understand this concept, discuss as a class or in small groups:

- How would you feel if someone ignored one of your identities?
- Can you see how ignoring one of your identities could cause miscommunication and harm? Can anyone give an example?
- Do you have more than these 5 identities?

Set up the next step by sharing with students that we have many identities that intersect. Not being aware of our own or others' identities causes us to not recognize the privilege some identities carry, or the oppression experienced by people with other intersecting identities.

(Portions of this lesson have been adapted and modified from Teaching Tolerance
<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/my-multicultural-self>)

Consolidation

Students may use their completed *My Intersectional Self worksheet* to complete any of the following writing or reading activities:

1. Create new characters for fiction with different backgrounds
2. Write a memoir
3. Conversation starter for class discussion about power structures and injustice, and potential sources of oppression.
4. Analyze characters in a novel - assess how diverse the characters are.

Educator/Student Post-Reflection

If you had to explain intersectionality to a friend or family member, what would you say?

Ideas for Going Deeper/Further Resources

[YouTube Video: Intersectionality 101\(3:03 mins\)](#)

[YouTube Video: Tiq Milan - There is enough room for ALL OF US. \(1:28 minutes\)](#)

[YouTube Video: Labels are Boxes \(1:08 minutes\)](#)

[Understanding Intersectionality PBS Lesson Plan](#)

For deeper understanding of racial identity and racial bias, a natural discussion may occur or may be prompted with the following question:

If each person belongs to a certain race, why is it that only non-white people are called “racialized”?

This may lead to conversations regarding the racism and to further inquiries about the history of anti-black racism in Canada, the colonization and mistreatment of Indigenous people in Canada, the reasons for current racial tensions and protests regarding racism in North America, the myth of white supremacy, the interconnectedness of racism and mental health, systemic inequalities due to racism, etc.