Chapter 1 Identity Work

Jenice L. View

George Mason University, USA)

Elizabeth K. DeMulder

George Mason University, USA

Stacia M. Stribling

George Mason University, USA

Laura L. Dallman

George Mason University, USA

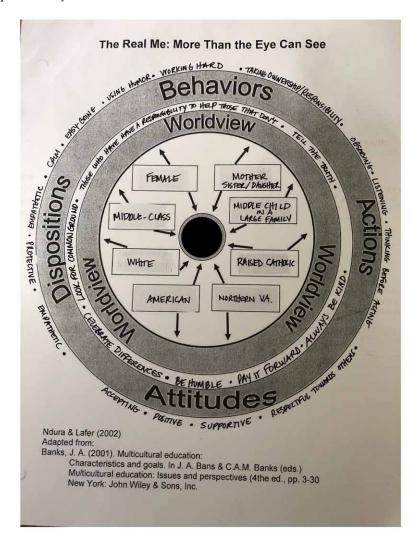
ABSTRACT

The authors describe the first crucial step in antiracist teacher professional development – developing a deep understanding of one's identity. After providing the theoretical framework behind this approach and sharing their own stories of their identity development as antiracist educators, the authors describe the curricular approaches they used to engage teachers in exploring the self. They also share the outcomes of these efforts and the tensions and dilemmas that arise when supporting teachers to examine their identities in the process of becoming antiracist educators.

As Kendi (2019) reminds us, "...racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be racist one minute and an antiracist the next" (p. 10). In other words, the work is on-going and requires constant reflection on the self. We need to be aware of the identities we claim related to race, gender, ethnicity, language, etc. and how these complex interconnected identities drive our worldviews, dispositions, behaviors, attitudes, and actions (see example identity web in Figure 1). Furthermore, it is imperative that we deepen our understanding of the role our experiences play in shaping these identities and ultimately how these identities we bring to our classroom then impact students' learning. Through deep reflection, we can become more aware of the ways in which our actions in the classroom are (or are not) "supporting an antiracist policy...or expressing an antiracist idea" (Kendi, 2019, p. 13).

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Figure 1. Example Identity Web



Scholars (e.g., Brookfield, 2012; Eryaman, 2007; Mezirow, 1990; Schön, 1983; Wink, 2011) have become ready references for practicing classroom teachers (both P-12 and higher education teachers) seeking to develop their reflective practice. Teacher professional development programs that expand the spaces for teachers to engage in critical reflection, including on issues of identity (their own and that of their students), support teachers in discovering the power of their own voices and in re-envisioning their roles as critical educators who empower their own students (Howard, 2003; Milner, 2003; View, De-Mulder, Stribling & Kayler, 2009). There is substantial evidence that interpersonal relationships provide support for individual development and learning. In particular, the adults in a child's life influence the extent to which that child thrives in a learning environment (Briggs, 2012; Mendes, 2003; Heick, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2016; Townsend, 2012). We wanted teachers to understand the importance of relationships in their lives and then make connections with their own students. We also wanted teachers to recognize through their own practice the importance of interpersonal connections for supporting students' development and learning.

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