

So What, Now What?

How Identity Development Applies in Our Schools

Educators Working in Alliance with Youth Seeking to Become Themselves Within and Against Stereotypes Might Ask:

- How do the youth we're working with make sense of identity categories? How do we make sense of the same categories?
- How do youth orient their identities toward one group (or several) as they come to understand that certain contexts marginalize some and privilege others based on categories?
- How might our students' identities (and our own) be affected by racial hierarchies? What do we notice and what decisions do we make based on that information?
- What is "optimal identity development"? What is the end goal?
- How do youth (and adults) reproduce harmful stereotypical ideas? How do youth (and adults) resist or transcend them?
- What interventions might inspire deeper, more integrated, and flexible identity?
- If one has a more fully explored one's racial, ethnic, or sexual orientation (etc.) identity, might that contribute to higher levels of academic achievement? Is a student who has a complex understanding of their "Blackness" or "woman-ness" or "gayness" "Jewishness" or "working class-ness" more likely to have elevated academic potential?

A School Committed to Supporting Healthy Identity Development Might Have:

- A curriculum which examines both the tumultuous history surrounding various minority groups in the United States, as well as the social construction that has led to the current standing of these groups
- Policy, programming, and practice (as well as people who are behind them) which actively combat stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and internalized oppression/dominance within the school and its communities
- A colleague group which can discuss ideas, confusions, and potential strategies
- Training opportunities for adults and students on various racial identity development theories
- Racial and other identity based affinity groups that might support group-specific (and intra-group) identity development
- Positive responses (dialogue, discussions, explorations) when students perform identity explorations like voicing of "Gay Pride" or "Black Power" or flying of non-American flags (rather than negative responses like asking to "tone it down" or calling it "threatening, gang-related, or evidence of 'reverse racism', or, worst of all, taking disciplinary action)
- A faculty and staff body that represent various identities and whose own identity development is supported