

Know Yourself, Know Your Students

“We teach who we are. This is what can make our practice so powerful—even transformative—but also potentially dangerous. We bring all of our identities—and the experiences that informed them—into our teaching. So we have to interrogate the ways in which these experiences have shaped our practices and our relationships with kids.”

Tricia Ebarvia¹

This resource supports your continued reflection about yourself and the students in your class. You may want to add additional questions, revise your thinking, and revisit this resource over time as you learn more about yourself and your students.

Who am I?

Considering Identity:

- What identities do you bring² to the classroom community? How did these identities impact your experience as a student? How do they impact the way you read and teach today?
- For the grade level and students you work with, which identities or topics make you most comfortable or most uncomfortable? How are you working to learn more about identities or topics that are uncomfortable for you, and how to engage students without doing harm?³

Building Classroom Culture and Community:

- How do you define student success in your classroom?⁴ Does your definition exclusively focus on access and achievement?
- How are you working to build trust and community between yourself and students, and among students? Where is this going well, and where are you experiencing challenges?

¹ [We Teach Who We Are: Unpacking our Identities](#), Tricia Ebarvia (2018)

² In considering identity, you might think about any of the following: ability, age, body type, ethnicity, gender, home language, immigration status, socio-economic status, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other considerations important to you. For more, see [Let's Talk, Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students, Learning for Justice](#), p. 6

³ For more, see [Let's Talk, Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students, Learning for Justice](#), p. 7

⁴ Framing Equity: Helping Students “Play the Game” and “Change the Game,” Rochelle Gutiérrez (2009) in [Teaching for Equity and Excellence in Mathematics: A publication of TODOS Mathematics for All](#), p. 4

Stop & Consider

Don't presume students' identity markers—do the work to get to know them. Take care to work against the assumption that because you share an identity marker with a student, you can connect with their specific experiences.

Who are the students in the class I serve?

What do you know about individual students and their identities,⁵ for example:

histories	race	home language(s)	cultures
interests	strengths	families	gender expression/identity

For each of the above:

- How do you know those things (e.g., assumption or student/family self-reported)?
- How do you use that knowledge in instruction?
- So far this school year, who has been highlighted in classroom texts/experiences (through your own text selection or through the units/modules you are teaching)? Who has been left out?

Noting that all people hold bias, challenge yourself to consider what biases you hold about the various identities of the students you serve.

How are you continuously reflecting on and working against those biases?

How do you engage with or involve families and/or the community? What do you know about families' assets and hopes for their students' experiences in school?

"Teachers are people too. If we've been influenced by our own backgrounds and experiences and if we've never seen excellence among certain groups of kids, it's really hard to tell us, "You've got to believe this kid can be excellent." There's a fair amount of unlearning that teachers have to do about who is capable."

Gloria Ladson-Billings⁶

⁵ See footnote 2

⁶ [Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings](#), Instruction Partners (2020)