



February 12, 2021: Reflecting on Identity

Dear CDS Community,

Over my life I have celebrated the “new year” as the start of school. My calendar from childhood to today is focused on the planning and work that aligns with an August start. Summer is packed with envisioning and then planning the strategy for new initiatives and the first day of school, my new year’s day!

Ten years ago, when I moved to Korea, the Lunar New Year took on personal significance as my family and I participated in beautiful celebrations of the new year with all children wearing hanboks, making dduk, and celebrating the change of year with fireworks, parades and drums. Over time, Korean culture became part of our family identity as my children thought they were Korean, having spent over half of their lives in a Korean immersion experience.

This year, Lunar New Year has been hard as I watch friends celebrating in ways that became typical to me without the opportunity to “really” celebrate here. Certainly we can all appreciate and learn about the changing year and the positive energy that comes from the Ox. Happy Lunar New Year to all who honor the lunar calendar. I look forward to seeing what the year of the Ox brings to us.

Identity is a theme that comes up frequently in our classrooms as we explore the ways we are similar and unique. In the preschool, there is a focus on the family through family shares and conversations about what makes people's families special. It could be a tradition or special book, it could be music or language. Melanin comes up in classrooms, leading to conversations about skin color where students compare their levels of melanin. This conversation often leads to students finding their color in our special skin-tone crayons or creating their own shade by mixing paint. Affinity groups support exploration of certain parts of identity and give space for conversations to unfold with a shared context. I know that for me, talking through the past year in different white affinity

spaces that focused on social justice allowed me to show up in other conversations having explored my own feelings and learning in spaces where I was not adding trauma to marginalized folx.

Prior to the winter break, our seventh grade students did a project on identity by reflecting on the social identity wheel. Their reflections were honest, refreshing, and optimistic.

As a community, we have been talking about how to connect family and parent learning to the student experience. We know that this specific identity learning can be connected and amplified in homes. Here is your opportunity - I invite you and your family to use the social identity wheel to reflect over the February break. [Here](#) is a document with both the wheel and some prompts you can use to talk in your home about identity.

As usual, our students are the true teachers and sources of inspiration. Below are some excerpts from the 7th grade reflections. Thank you, Chris, for setting up this opportunity for students to reflect on their identity.

I look forward to hearing how these conversations unfold in your homes.

Which aspects of your social identity feel especially meaningful to you and why?

- Age, because it is the only one that will change so I have to enjoy it while it lasts.
- My gender I feel is the most important because it is what I feel people most see me as and I feel proud about being a woman because now even though there are some stereotypes the gender norms are changing and I am happy to be in a world where its ok if you are a man, woman, or anything else.
- My religious identity is the most meaningful to me. It is something I really care about and wish more people knew what is typical in the culture. I also am very proud of it.
- My identities that seem important to me are my race, and gender. I am white and male and those are both very privileged identities.
- My F.L (first language) because that is how I grew up and learned how to speak in that language.

What part of your identity are you most comfortable sharing with other people? Why?

- I am most comfortable sharing about my gender for many reasons. First, gender is partially based off of appearance so it is more clarifying than sharing when you tell somebody your gender. It is also important for other people to know your gender so they know your preferred personal pronouns instead of guessing.
- My race, age and gender
- I am comfortable sharing my ethnicity so people can know my ethnicity.

What part of your identity are you least comfortable sharing with other people? Why?

Note - the comments were almost completely connected to socioeconomic status, religion, and sexual orientation.

- I'm least comfortable with sharing my SES with others. This is because I think my family is wealthy, and we are so privileged to live in our own home and go to great schools, it sometimes feels shameful that we get such luxury while others don't.
- I am least comfortable sharing my SES, as it has nothing to do with my personality and I wish it were different.
- I am the least comfortable sharing my SES with other people. I don't want to make people treat me differently because I am poor or rich. It is also difficult to bring up your SES in a conversation without it sounding like bragging or asking for empathy.
- My sexual orientation, because i haven't wanted to label myself yet.

What part of your identity do you feel most comfortable with at CDS?

- I am the most comfortable with everything because CDS is a great place where judgements aren't placed on things like skin color and SES. Therefore, I feel comfortable with everything.
- I feel most comfortable with my gender at CDS.
- My first language bc i can speak Spanish so i can help my classmates.
- I think I'm comfortable with all of it. CDS is a very welcoming place and I think they make me feel ok to share.

What part of your identity do you feel least comfortable with at CDS?

- I am least comfortable sharing my SES because everyone has a different one and everyone has different opinions.
- I think I'm least comfortable with my religious affiliation.
- SES, because there is just such a range at school.

- I don't really feel uncomfortable with anything in cds
- Ability/disability because i just don't like talking about that
- The least comfortable part of my identity at school is my SES because I did nothing to earn it, I don't want to offend anyone

How does it feel to discuss and learn about identity? Why do you feel that way?

- I enjoy being inclusive at CDS.
- It feels sometimes enlightening and sometimes awkward to talk about identity. Especially when talking about SES and race.
- I think it's important to learn about identity and I think it is better to learn about it now and recognize problems in our society.
- For me it depends on the place. Like at CDS i am so comfortable. But some other places i don't want to share as much

Is there something about identity that you want to learn more about? If so, what is it you want to explore?

- Yes: physical, emotional, and developmental (dis)abilities.
- The difference between race and ethnicity like with definitions from scholars/smart people who have studied it.

Have a nice weekend and a restful week.

Warmly,
Shelly