

Attending to Identity in Interactions With Students and Families

Overview of attending to identity in interactions with students and families

A teacher's outward communication style, markers of identity, and views about children and their families can play a major role in their capacity to connect with and instruct others—and also influence others' connections to them. When interacting with students and families, teachers attend to the ways their identities, habitual patterns of talk and behavior, and expressive communication styles (e.g., tone of voice, body language, etc.) show up. They think critically about how they and their communication styles are “read” by students or their families. Teachers then make adjustments so that the impact they have on others is positive and strategic, and conveys appropriate feelings of respect, welcome, and engagement.

Advancing justice through attending to identity in interactions with students and families

Teachers' identities and the ways those identities manifest in their everyday interactions with students and families can play a crucial role in their capacity to connect with, motivate, instruct, and engage students (and their families). But teachers' identities and interactional styles can also impede those connections. Because teachers and children do not always share a common understanding of unstated norms and rules of communication and interaction in the classroom, misunderstandings of one another can be common. To that end, teachers should attend carefully to the self and how it is read by others, and consider ways to make adjustments to how they show up in interactions.



Decomposition of attending to identity in interactions with students and families

Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Attending to Identity in Interactions With Students and Families

Areas of work for attending to identity in interactions with students and families	Techniques for attending to identity in interactions with students and families
Considering context and purpose	• Consider the context (one-on-one, in a group) of the interaction(s). • If applicable (for example at an IEP conference), also identify the goal of the particular interaction in question.
Accounting for the self	• Consider one's visible markers of identity (e.g., race, gender, age, etc.) and how they might be read by others. • Consider what personal information about oneself is appropriate to share in a school context, and what is not. • Consider how, in general, others might “read” you based on your identity, personal background, or assumptions about your background. • Consider habitual expressive behaviors (e.g., tone of voice, body language) and how they might be read or interpreted. • Consider habitual interactional behaviors (e.g., questioning styles, praise behaviors) and consider how they may be read or interpreted.
Accounting for with whom you are interacting	• Learn about the person/people. • Consider the assets, expertise, and sources of information others bring and how you might learn more about or leverage that in your interaction(s) with them. • Consider and plan for ways your “known” markers of identity might be read, both positively and negatively. • Consider how your communication style is typically read by others. • Support others to acknowledge/articulate their identities and any needs that would facilitate a safe and productive interaction.



Areas of work for attending to identity in interactions with students and families	Techniques for attending to identity in interactions with students and families
Constructing an outward identity	• Be intentional around expressive behaviors (voice, body language, etc.) and “habitual” interactional patterns (questioning styles, participation facilitation, praise behaviors). • Monitor one’s own contributions to an interaction to ensure equity in how/by whom/when contributions are made. • Monitor how one’s own body language and behavior is being perceived (e.g., through eliciting, feedback, exit tickets, gauging conversational dynamics in the moment, etc.). • Monitor the power dynamics at play in the reaction (e.g., between teacher and child, racial or cultural power dynamics, etc.) and consider how to support in interactions with uneven dynamics. • Think about one’s own identity when clarifying and/or co-constructing the goals of the interaction.
Monitoring and revising	• Check in with students, parents, and others about how they feel their interactions with you are going. • Invite feedback from observers about how your interactions are going. • Observe and correct any erroneous assumptions made about the others’ identity, needs, or motives. • Adjust habitual behaviors and interactional style to accommodate new information about child(ren). • Adjust habitual behaviors and interactional style to compensate for problematic, inconsistent, or privileging patterns.

