DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS CENTRAL TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Learning and evaluation situations (LES) are part of an educational approach used to promote diversity and social justice. One of the aims of this approach is to value the differences among us in order to contribute to a more inclusive society. Another is to understand the mechanisms of oppression to better combat them.

This approach unfolds in three stages:

A Developing awareness

B Improving understanding

C Identifying courses of action

The concept of diversity refers to the idea that society is composed of individuals with different characteristics such as sex, race, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity, social class, age, disability or appearance. Each individual has several of these characteristics, and depending on the context, some will take on more or less importance in their own eyes or in the eyes of others. Not all differences operate from the same basis. For example, while a person's sexual orientation is not an identity category that can be contested, the existence of social class distinctions might be disputed. Regardless, both situations give rise to similar mechanisms of oppression.

"We should all know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value, no matter what their color."

Maya Angelou–Poet, author, educator, actress, filmmaker and civil rights activist, 1928 – .

Coalition des Familles LGBT
LGBT Family Coalition

You can accompany your students in developing awareness and improving understanding of the following mechanisms. A few examples are provided.

A   DENIGRATION OR VALORISATION
- "White trash is a derogatory expression referring to poor Caucasians. It suggests that these individuals are of a lower social class, living on the fringe of society and largely responsible for their own problems.
- Individuals with trim, athletic bodies are assumed to have better self-control.

B   STEREOTYPES
- Individuals with mental health disabilities are considered dangerous to others.
- Girls are sweet and emotional, whereas boys are strong and competitive.

C   INVISIBILIZATION OR OVER-REPRESENTATION
- LGBT individuals and families are largely absent from school manuals.
- In children school manualsies are atioies are over-represented as compared to other types of families such as single-parent, adoptive or blended families.

D   DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES
- Refusing to let a trans individual register for a dance class.
- Not inviting Arab neighbours to a party because they are Arab.

E   BULLYING AND VIOLENCE
- Treating someone as a faggot repeatedly.
- Intimidating or threatening to rough-up an individual.

F   SPLASH EFFECT

Even witnesses to bullying experience stress, guilt and fear that they will become the next victim. One solution is to avoid any association with the victim and to conform to social norms, even though this may be to the detriment of their personal growth.

Individuals who are not necessarily part of a minority group may be disadvantaged by association. Indeed, mechanisms of oppression affect everyone who has a family member or friend who is gay, black, handicapped or poor, to name a few.

THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF OPPRESSION

	INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL	CULTURAL/SOCIAL
Conscious	Making remarks on women's physical characteristics.	Preventing illegal immigrants from having access to health care.	Stating that a child cannot develop optimally without the presence of parents of the opposite sex.
Unconscious	Checking the contents of your bag after walking by a black person	Imposing different school uniforms for girls and boys.	Interpreting the cries of baby boys and baby girls differently.