

3.3 Introduction to Identity – Legal and Personal Identity: What is the Difference?

Objectives

- To distinguish between legal and personal identities and to explore how they interrelate
- To introduce the concept of birth registration
- To test the students' reading and comprehension

Previous Preparation

- There are two resources associated with this module, an article on identity theft and a case study on the importance of birth registration. The aim of the module is to get the students thinking about the difference between their personal and legal identity. You may wish to ask the pupils to read one or both of the resources before class. If you do not think these resources are appropriate for your class you can gather other materials which highlight the same issues.
- If there are students in your class who are not legally registered it is important to deal with the issues sensitively so that they do not feel that it is something to be ashamed of.

Introduction (20%)

Whole Group

Explain to the students that they will be reading material on the importance of legal identity. Ask the students what they think legal identity means. You may wish to note down some of their answers on the board.

Development (50%)

Individual

Ask the student to read your chosen material and answer the associated questions. You can add to the list of questions to better suit the level of your class. Students can also be divided into pairs for this exercise.

Conclusion (30%)

Whole Group Discussion led by Teacher

Ask the students for their opinions on the difference between legal and personal identity? What have they learned? Why is legal identity important? Compare their new answers with answers given earlier.

Thinking Ahead

If you are doing the module on 'conflicting identities' you may wish to ask the students to look at some of the web links before the class. Be sure to check yourself if you think they are suitable.

The large numbers of paper left by those who evacuated quickly — birth certificates, bank statements, Social Security cards — guarantee that the problem will spread.

Teenagers and young people are more vulnerable to identity theft than adults because most do not have established credit records that can be monitored.

“If you don’t have a credit file, whatever someone first submits under your name becomes the basis of the credit file. Thieves can rack up charges on a clean record and when it’s time for these kids to take out a loan for college, they cannot because of the charges racked up on their record,” explained Jay Foley, co-executive director of the nonprofit organization, the Identity Theft Resource Center.

Most teens discover they have fallen victim to identity theft when they apply for a driver’s license and are denied because one has already been issued under their Social Security number. At this point it may already be too late:

“I’ve seen devastating effects,” said Foley. “I’m currently working with a young man now who had his identity stolen at age 14. He is now 22 years old and is \$300,000 in debt.”

Questions:

1. What is your legal identity and how might someone steal it?
2. What kind of documents do you have to prove who you are?
3. Where do you keep them?
4. Why are young people likely targets for identity thieves?
5. How would you feel if someone stole your identity?
6. What is the difference between your legal and your personal identity?

Case Study – The Importance of Birth Registration

Seven out of ten newborns in Sub Saharan Africa have no birth certificate and therefore no official identity, giving the region the highest rate of unregistered children in the world.

Without a birth certificate a child is seen as a "non-person", unable to prove their age, nationality or who their parents are. They can then be denied their rights and privileges as citizens, such as education and health care.

Eyram Dossah who is 12 years old is proud to hold her birth certificate. She knows that without an official identity, many doors would be closed; she would be unable to complete her final examinations at school and have restricted access to some health facilities, and would be unable to vote and express her opinions. Unfortunately, thousands of children in Togo are still denied this fundamental right.

As Eyram says: “With my birth certificate, I will now be able to pass my school exam and take the first step to reaching my dream. I want to be the Prime Minister of Togo and help all the children in my country.”



Eyram with her birth certificate



Eyram's friends with their certificates

Questions:

1. Do you think that it is true that you are a “non-person” if you are unable to prove your age, nationality or who your parents are?
2. How important is your legal identity to who you are?
3. Who decides who you are?
4. What is the difference between your legal and your personal identity?