MICROMESSAGING
to Reach and Teach Every Student™

Research Nuggets

NAPE

National Alliance for
Partnerships in Equity

Topic   **Intersectionality**

Unit   **Influence of Culture**

Intersectionality is a theory showing how social and cultural identities, such as race, class, physical ability, age, and gender intertwine. (Knudsen, 2007)

Introduction

We often think of our social identity (our race, class, gender, etc.) as one dimensional. Intersectionality recognizes the multiple identities that each of us possesses and how our identities overlap and intersect depending on the social situation. With its roots in ethnic studies, women's studies, and African American studies, the term intersectionality is credited to legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her seminal article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991). Intersectionality originally acknowledged the intersections of individuals' experiences with inequality based on their race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, but today intersectionality can also reach to many other identities, such as spirituality and physical ability. The goal of the study of intersectionality is to provide a model for understanding the complexity of dimensions that make up who we are perceived to be in our culture. Intersectionality is an emerging area of education research and helps educators understand the multidimensional ways in which students experience life, see themselves, and are treated by others.

Illustrations and Examples

Example 1:

Johnson et al. (2010) examined the experiences from elementary/middle school through graduate school of three women of color who completed advanced degrees in science-based professions. Using intersectionality, the researchers found that the women faced more challenges in their pathway to a STEM career than other students because they had to balance competing identities: scientist, woman, and minority. They felt they had to compromise components of their identity in order to adopt a science identity, and actively discredit unwanted ascriptions to their identities.

Example 2:

Thomas and Stevenson (2009) investigated how intersectionality illuminated the challenges confronting African American boys in inner-city schools. Their findings highlighted the impact of racial socialization, cultural identity formation, internalized messages from parents, anger expression, and teachers' negative perceptions and expectations. This study demonstrated that boys and girls experience differential treatment in classrooms, which is further complicated by race and class. This study also highlights the importance of attending to the emotional coping strategies, socialization processes, and behaviors that result from intersections of identities.

National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
91 Newport Pike, Suite 302, Gap, PA 17527 | 717.407.5118 | www.napequity.org

1

Successful Research-based Strategies

- Become aware of the many identities we have that intersect to make us who we are.
- Be careful of "helpful" classifications that may inadvertently alienate students. For example, "all girls like to shop" or "all boys like sports."
- Teach individuals to affirm all aspects of their individual, which may be an intersection of many elements.
- Teach critical thinking about the way in which the media narrowly portray STEM and CTE programs and careers by selecting actors with or without specific characteristics.

References and Bibliography

Bowleg, L. (2008). When Black + lesbian + woman ≠ Black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research. Sex Roles, 59, 312-325.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. Stanford Law Review, 43, 1241-1299.

Dill, B. T. and R. E. Zambrana. (2009). Critical thinking about inequality: An emerging lens. Pp. 1-21 in B. T. Dill and R. E. Zambrana (Eds.), Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Knudsen, S. (2007). Intersectionality—A theoretical inspiration in the analysis of minority culture and identities in textbooks. Pp. 61-76 in E. Bruillard, B. Aamotsbakken, S. Knudsen, and M. Horsley (Eds.), Caught in the Web or Lost in the Textbook: International Conference on Learning and Educational Media. http://www.iartem.no/documents/caught_in_the_web.pdf.

Luft, R. E. (2009). Intersectionality and the risk of flattening difference: Gender and race logics, and the strategic use of antiracist singularity. Pp. 100-117 in M. T. Berger and K. Guidroz (Eds.), The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, & Gender. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Johnson, A., J. Brown, H. Carlone, and A. K. Cuevas (2010). Authoring identity amidst the treacherous terrain of science: A multiracial feminist examination of the journeys of three women of color in science. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 48(4), 339-366.

Thomas, D. E., and H. Stevenson, H. (2009). Gender risks and education: The particular classroom challenge for urban low-income African American boys. Review of Research in Education, 33, 160-180.

NAPE is an alliance of federal and state agencies, local school districts, colleges, universities, businesses, and corporate foundations working to ensure that every student can realize his or her potential in high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers.

National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
91 Newport Pike, Suite 302, Gap, PA 17527 I 717.407.5118 I www.napequity.org

2