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**Critical Multicultural Education
as an Analytical Point of Entry
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A Focus on Race, as Well as Class, Gender,
Sexuality, Dis/Ability, and Family Configuration**

*Christine Clark, Mara Sapon-Shevin,
Mark Brimhall-Vargas, Tarryn McGhie, & Sonia Nieto*

Abstract

This article examines the uses of intersectional analysis in three research arenas: the school-to-prison pipeline, religious identity and curriculum development, and inclusive education. More specifically, this article explores how scholarly inquiry shifts, even when all three arenas use an overlapping dimension of analysis (race), as well as when they use other unique dimensions (class, gender, religion, sexuality, dis/ability, and family configuration). The research on the school-to-prison pipeline explores white female teacher disciplinary practices with minority male students. The religious identity and curriculum development research examines

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the false separation of state and religion, and constructed conflict between religion and sexuality in teaching and learning. The inclusive education-focused research problematizes ability grouping in schools, especially for so-called non-traditional families. The article explores how scholarly inquiry shifts, even when all three arenas use an overlapping dimension of analysis (race), as well as when they use other unique dimensions. Intersectional analysis is revealed as always uncoverable in scholarship, once researcher intersectional consciousness emerges.

Keywords: Race, Critical Multicultural Education, Intersectional Scholarship, Socioeconomic Class, Religion, Dis/Ability, Family Configuration.

God[dess] made us different nations and tribes that we may come to know one another.

—Qu’ran 49:13

Sociopolitical Multicultural Education as an Analytical Point of Entry into Discussion of Intersectional Scholarship

In 2013, Samoa Air became the first and, to date, the only airline where passengers weigh in and pay by the pound. Self-described as a “national carrier” and “100% locally owned,” Samoa Air flies routes connecting the Samoan Islands (Samoa Air, 2013, para. 1). These islands are home to some of the world’s largest people measured by weight. The World Health Organization reports that 86 percent of Samoans are obese, and 93.5 percent are overweight, making Samoa the “fattest” country on earth (Cunningham, 2010, para. 7). Chris Langton, a white Australian, average-sized, male, and Samoa Air’s chief executive officer, developed the pay-by-the-pound or “pay as you weigh” policy which he defends as follows: “It has to be a fair system no matter what you’re shipping—whether it’s people, whether it’s cargo. An airline only has weight [not seats] to sell. That’s its product. And you’re asking people to buy as much weight as they need” (Tracy, 2013, para. 2).

In reconsidering the U.S. Civil Rights Movement from an intersectional posture, Fayazpour (2013) described it as seeking to bring about the *Right* [of people of color] to *Move* freely in society. From this analytical perspective, Samoa Air’s airfare schema clearly disproportionately limits the movement of people whose identities converge at the intersections of race, class, and gender—people of color, the poor, and women (CDC, 2009; Nevins & Hoffman, 2012). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), social class, measured by income and education, is a more powerful predictor of obesity than genetics. Blacks, Latinas/Latinos, and Native Americans are 5-18 percent more likely to be obese and 30-50 percent more likely to have a lower median income than Whites and Asians, and these trends are more pronounced for women in all of these groups (CDC, 2009, Figure 19.2).

Restricting peoples’ movement/s also allows for heightened surveillance of them. In 2012, Alexander described the current era of mass incarceration in the United

States (and related global implications) as a new form of Jim Crow segregation. According to Alexander, not only does a permanent under caste, largely comprised of people of color, live in actual lock down (prison), even when “free,” various forms of physical and psychological border patrol mechanisms operate in society to continuously hyper-segregate the world’s poor into geographically demarcated urban and rural badlands.

Alexander’s analysis extends into the public educational arena. Building on the work of many other scholars examining what has become known as the “school-to-prison pipeline,” Alexander reviews how zero tolerance policies are used to systematically deny students from historically under-represented social identity groups (including those from religious and sexual minority groups and non-traditional family structures), especially those marked as having a disability, from accessing a quality education (Ball & Harry, 1993; Bell, 1992; Brimhall-Vargas, 2011; Clark, 2004; Ervelles, Kanga, & Middleton, 2006; Ervelles & Minear, 2010; Ferri, 2010; Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012; Sapon-Shevin, 1994; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999). For example, when students from more affluent, predominantly white schools exhibit acting out behaviors, the institutional response has been to improve the quality of education; whereas, when students from lower income and higher minority school communities behave in the same manners, policy responses have focused on increasing disciplinary protocols (Clark 2012; Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Born and reared in the everyday and academic borderlands from which intersectional consciousness emerged, sociopolitically-located multicultural education has long argued that if public education were to do for all students what it has historically done for primarily white, at-least-middle class, male, Christian, heterosexual, and, among other signifiers, abled students, gaps in educational outcomes between various student groups would erode (Adams, Griffin, & Bell, 2007; Banks, 2004; hooks, 1993; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter, 1996). Through sociopolitically-located multicultural education, all students can come to meaningfully find themselves in the curriculum, and through the curriculum, in history and in the contemporary world. In bridging the divide from academic freedom to lived freedom in the everyday, educational justice engenders social justice.

Using Intersectional Analysis in Intersectional Scholarship

In this article, intersectionality—the systematic study of the intersections of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, dis/ability, family configuration, and the other dimensions of difference (Crenshaw, 1989)— can be understood as a shifting, changing concept that is flexible enough to encompass both the large-scale historically constructed and hierarchical power systems that organize our social life, and the micro level politics of interpersonal interactions. Growing out of *outsider-within* sociologies (Collins, 1998; Giroux, 2013), multiracial feminisms (Weber, 2007; Zinn & Dill, 1996), and *border* and *diaspora* studies (Anzaldúa,

1999; Shukla, 2003), intersectionality has become a way of examining difference in a number of fields of study—increasingly, including *sociopolitically-located multicultural education* (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

An intersectionality-based approach to scholarship views outsider-within and border aspects of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, dis/ability, family configuration and other dimensions of difference as interlocking inequalities and, therefore, aspects that must be simultaneously considered in conceptual and theoretical analyses of liberation, as well as in practical efforts to achieve social justice. Intersectional scholarship requires a commitment to re-thinking and re-shaping concepts and theories that have treated these systems as discrete, as well as to the practice of these newly articulated concepts and theories in the everyday.

Accordingly, this article reviews intersectional scholarship in multicultural education that is intentionally sociopolitically-located, thus, explicitly anti-oppressive in its point of entry to analysis. Specifically, it examines the uses of intersectional analysis in three research arenas: the school-to-prison pipeline, religious identity and curriculum development, and inclusive education. Each arena engages racial identity, but in a different analytical location—primary, secondary, or tertiary—relative to two other intersectional identity dimensions. The article explores how scholarly inquiry shifts, even when all three arenas use an overlapping dimension of analysis, as well as when they use other unique dimensions.

Our research on the school-to-prison pipeline uses race relative to class and gender to explore white female teacher disciplinary practices with Latino and black male students (Clark, 2004, 2012; Clark & McGhie, 2013). The religious identity and curriculum development research prioritizes religion, while also exploring race and sexuality, to examine the false separation of state and religion, and constructed conflict between religion and sexuality in teaching and learning (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011; Brimhall-Vargas & Clark, 2008; Clark & Brimhall-Vargas, 2003). The inclusive education-focused research uses dis/ability to also explore family configuration and race in problematizing ability grouping in schools, especially for so-called non-traditional families (Sapon-Shevin, 1994, 2007, 2010; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999). In this research the phrase “ability grouping” is used to describe what gifted, general, and special education do: group students by perceived abilities or lack thereof, without questioning whether those groupings are, first, based on accurate assessments of students’ knowledge bases and skills, and, second, based on social constructions/false reifications of “ability” altogether (e.g., what counts/is counted as ability, and who decides). Additionally, a non-traditional family configuration can mean single parent, same-sex parent, blended, intergenerational/extended, foster/adopted (formally and informally), or mixed (e.g., cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, cross-nationality, etc.).

Because each research arena also engages the discrete dimensions of the other two in some way (for example, dis/ability factors into the school-to-prison pipeline arena with respect to special education over-referral, and religion and sexuality are

integrally connected to family configurations, etc.), intersectional analysis is revealed as *always uncoverable* in scholarship, once researcher intersectional consciousness emerges. This article calls attention to this consciousness in considering the implications of it for the researcher as well as the “researchee.” If researchers are unaware of how their identities and related standpoints and positionalities inform their scholarship, the veracity of the evidence articulated in their scholarship cannot be ensured, even in the most non-traditional, as well as, critical, emancipatory, etc., research contexts.

Intersectionality as an analytical tool is not simply focused on the cross-section or bi-section of two or more dimensions of identity or fields of study (Crenshaw, 1991). Having two or more (multiple) dimensions of identity—for example as a black, working class woman, with a learning disability, or as a white, middle-class, able-bodied male—while interesting to tease out in scholarship contexts, is not the same as having an intersectional identity. Likewise, conducting research from a shared (interdisciplinary) point of entry of—for example, African American studies, sociology, Women’s studies, and disability studies—while, again, may be intellectually engaging, is not intersectional scholarship and may not employ intersectional analysis. This is because, according to Crenshaw, the purpose of intersectionality is to reveal the interests of those who are rendered invisible by ‘the system’ precisely because they lack power in that system. So, for example, if the system ‘sees’ white and male interests, it can be made to also see white female interests buoyed by race (whiteness), and black male interests buttressed by gender (maleness). In so doing, it reveals that it cannot see blackness and femaleness. With this purpose in mind, in engaging the concept of intersectionality, drawing from and building on intersectional scholarship, and employing intersectional analysis...the interests of those who are persistently unseen in education can be brought forth... (Horsford & Clark, 2015, p. 62).

In this article those interests are particularly, but not exclusively, race-based, and engage understanding of racial identity as inextricably linked to racial standpoint and positionality, meaning that how people identify and how their identities are perceived is sociopolitically-located (situated relative to systems of power over time).

School-to-Prison Pipeline: Teacher Disciplinary Practices and Student Success

The “school-to-prison pipeline” (STPP) refers to the formal and informal educational and law enforcement processes and policies (and the prejudices—acknowledged, covert, and denied—that underlie both) that have the effect of pushing PK-12 students, predominantly Black and Latino males, out of school and into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Clark, 2012). The research on the STPP discussed here is intentionally intersectional in examining the ways in which race, class, and gender reciprocally inform each other, at the same time prioritizing the issue of race, thus making it the primary research concern.

Purposes and Objectives

This research examines the STPP through analysis of teacher disciplinary practices, broadly considered to include the nature of their relationships with students, non/engagement with parents, pedagogical approaches, and classroom management techniques. The primary research questions examined are: *What, if any, correlations between students' race, class location, and gender and teacher disciplinary practices can be discerned?* and, *How do these correlations relate to the STPP?* Ancillary research questions also considered in this article are: *For whom is school rarely or never a pipeline to prison, and why?* and, *What are the disciplinary practices that lead to this inevitability, and why?* In this research, race, class location, and gender are complexly understood and, thus, carefully discerned in manners that intersect with skin color, ethnicity, nationality, and first language; zip code/neighborhood, family configuration, and student/parent employment status; and, gender identity and expression, respectively.

Framework, Modes of Inquiry and Data Sources

This research uses a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to surface how whiteness, and the privileges flowing therefrom, operates in PK-12 public schools to perpetuate racism in education, chiefly manifest in the racial performance gap for especially black male youth (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This research describes the critical ethnographic study of PK-12 teachers in a large school district in the urban Southwest that was undertaken to ascertain credible answers to the afore-referenced research questions. Through analysis of teacher disciplinary practices gleaned from classroom observation notes, patterns in teacher disciplinary practices are identified and discussed as evidence that the real or perceived race, class, and gender of PK-12 students, impacts teacher mis/understanding of student behavior and, thus, teacher decision making regarding the need to engage (or not) student behavior from a punitive posture.

Discussion of Findings

As a part of a course-based research project on racial and gender disparities in teacher disciplinary protocols in PK-12 public schools, five research teams, comprised of two or three graduate student researchers, each identified a public PK-12 school teacher to observe in their daily teaching routine. The project sought to determine if any correlations could be drawn between the teachers' classroom management practices and the subsequent overrepresentation of especially black men in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems through what the course defined as the STPP. This pipeline emerges as a result of teacher, curricular, administrator, and policy biases that operate to unfairly advantage white and least middle class students, and erroneously disadvantage students of color and/or working class students (Alexander, 2012; Clark,

2004, 2012). For example, a group of white students engaged in typical “horse play” are often ignored, while a group of black students similarly engaged are written up for behavioral misconduct. This example is particularly salient as the major finding in this research was that the one teacher observed who had strong classroom management skills did not contribute to the STPP; the other four, all of whom had poor classroom management skills, created a climate for student misbehavior that did or could eventually, through disciplinary referrals, contribute to the STPP.

Each research team’s teacher was identified using pre-existing connections (familiarity sampling) within a single, large, school district in the urban southwestern United States. Research teams only disclosed—to the teachers and, where relevant, principals—an interest in observing teacher classroom management practices, but nothing further to avoid impacting teacher behavior in ways that might undermine the study. While this non-disclosure of the full observational purpose can be viewed as subversive (and, consequentially, further viewed as necessary or problematic, etc.) on the part of research team members, the purpose of this work was to document practices in order to assist teachers, school leaders, and educational communities to do a better job serving students in high needs schools, not to shame, demonize, and/or lay blame for the systemic failure to serve.

Each research team developed a critical ethnographic research-based framework (Carspecken, 1996; Dunbar, 2009; Fettermen, 1998; Frank, 1999; Hammersley, 1990; Madison, S., 2013; Madison, D., 2005; Soyini Madison, 2005; Spradley, 1979; Thomas, 1993) to structure their classroom observations. While these observations were the focus of the research, educational practices not exclusively at the classroom level, nor solely related to teacher instructional habits, that fed the STPP were also identified. In short, teacher classroom management strategies, whether they fed or starved the STPP, did not operate in isolation of the larger school climate and culture.

Team 1. Team 1 was comprised of two Asian women and one Latina; one of the Asian women was a liaison to the elementary school site chosen for volunteers from her place of employment. This school is a “turn around” school; high minority, low income, and historically poor performing according to district metrics, thus targeted for improvement (NVDOE, 2013). Since becoming a turn around school (in 2004), attendance, parent involvement, homework completion, grades, and test scores have improved, largely attributed (by the school community as a whole) to the *autonomy given to the principal*, a black woman, the district hired and charged with realizing improvement, and *given by the principal* to the school’s teachers. It is troublingly of note that part of the turn around narrative of this school was the promotion of it, by school leaders, teachers, and district reports, as more racially diverse or “less black” (only 66%) than it appeared to research team members to be “in person” (90+%). Similarly, teacher demographics are *verbally* described as “predominantly white,” while *visual* representations suggest a predominantly black teaching force, other teachers of color, and white teachers.

This team chose a black male teacher, hypothesized that his teaching pedagogy would not feed the STPP, and was able to confirm this through observation. This teacher demonstrated highly effective classroom management skills, including the use of specific culturally responsive praxis. For example, the teacher addressed all of his male students as “son” and all of his female students as “young lady,” and he grouped students by gender when assigning them in-class work to complete. He also disciplined students using humor, without raising his voice, and in an efficient manner (he did not dwell on incidents), strategies he considered to be “good” teaching practice. He has never made a disciplinary referral.

Team 2. Team 2 was comprised of one white woman and one white man, both were teachers at the middle school site chosen. This school’s student demographic is predominately Latina/Latino (41%), with 28% white students, 17% Asian students, and 10% black students; these students are taught by a majority of white, female teachers (NVDOE, 2013).

This team chose a white female teacher, hypothesized that her teaching pedagogy would feed the STPP, and was able to confirm this through observation. This teacher is known for her hyperbolically enthusiastic training of other teachers in the use of a pre-packed curriculum aligned with various teaching standards and touted to improve standardized test scores. After three years of school-wide implementation of the curriculum there has not been any measurable improvements in these metrics. This teacher is generally considered to be a “good” teacher by school leadership, but known to be the opposite by many teaching colleagues. While this teacher does not make frequent disciplinary referrals, her over-reliance on formulaic approaches to teaching clearly bores students. Determined not to be deterred in using these approaches, she continues to teach “the curriculum” while her students, albeit quietly, disengage from her and individually occupy themselves (reading, writing, and using personal or classroom media). Though this teacher makes only occasional disciplinary referrals, largely proportional to school racial demographics, though disproportionately male, her pedagogy creates fertile ground in her classroom from which STPP trends could emerge and proliferate.

Team 3. Team 3 was comprised of two white women and one black man; one of the women was a teacher at the elementary school site chosen. This Title I school has a majority white student population (42%), but, combined, black (19%), Latina/Latino (22%), and Asian (5%), and “other” (12%, including mixed-race) students comprise over half of the entire student body (NVDOE, 2013). The majority of the school’s teacher workforce is white and female. Upon entering the school for observations, the black male research team member was required to show identification, but the non-school affiliated white female team member entered the school without being asked for identification. During observation visits, all research team members observed that the school exhibited obvious class crowding and a pattern of isolating students of color in part-time “pull-out” and/or special education classes. Several minority

male students were also repeatedly observed roaming, even playing, in the school halls for extended periods of time without adult supervision or engagement.

For this team, the school principal identified a white male teacher considered to be a “good” teacher and willing to be observed. Observations revealed this teacher to be wholly unprepared to differentiate instruction for different student needs; he also expressed frustration that all students were not learning at the same pace. The teacher spoke to white female students much more frequently than others, and only complimented white student performance on assignments. The behavior of one minority male (Latino) student was socially constructed in the classroom as “bad” and other students were instructed to report his behavior to the teacher if it bothered them. The teacher also isolated students, across race and gender, with various special education designations (RTI, IEP) in one corner of the classroom.

Going into their research, Team 3 did not have a specific hypothesis as to what their observations might reveal to them relative to the STPP. However, though their teacher was not known for making disciplinary referrals, like Team 2’s teacher, his pedagogy creates classroom conditions that clearly favor the emergence and proliferation of STPP trends.

Team 4. Team 4 was comprised of two white women and one Latina; one of the white women was a teacher at the high school site chosen. This tech-focused school is touted in district marketing materials as having 100% “highly qualified” teachers, the majority of whom are white women; 70% of the student body is comprised of students of color (including 8.5% who identify as bi- or multi-racial), and just less than half of the student population qualifies for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), which is relatively low for schools in the district (NVDOE, 2013).

For this team, the school principal identified a white male teacher with the highest disciplinary referral rate, who was also the most receptive to being observed. This teacher is well known to have poor hygiene, and regularly self-identifies to others that he is “ADHD” (has an Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). He is also casual to the point of being inappropriate. For example, he makes stereotypical comments ostensibly to try to engage students of color and female students. These comments appear to be dismissed by students as a function of the teacher’s obviously poor social skills and ill attempts at humor. Because the teacher assigns seats based on student last name order and periodically reverses these assignments, he believes that all of his students have equitable access to him in the classroom. However, the teacher was observed to be inconsistent in interactions with students—some students, regardless of their assigned seats, got a lot of his attention, others almost none. The classroom itself was observed to have “no life” (e.g., decorations), which negatively differentiated it from other classrooms, especially science classrooms, in the school.

Like Team 3, Team 4 did not have a specific hypothesis as to what their observations might reveal to them relative to the STPP. Their teacher turned out to be textbook example of how teacher disciplinary practices (and the lack thereof)

aggressively feed the STPP. Despite this teacher's obvious significant challenges, school leaders and teaching colleagues alike consider him to have "good" content knowledge in a high demand content area (advanced science). This led research team members to wonder not only if the same problematic behaviors would be considered so incidentally in teachers from other demographic groups and/or in other content areas, but also if the bar for success would be much, much higher.

Team 5. Team 5 was comprised of one mixed black and white (European) woman, one Asian woman, and one white woman; none had a school, administrator, or teacher connection at the high school site chosen, but one had a district-level connection that facilitated their access. The school was chosen for its demographics. According to publically accessible district data (NVDOE, 2013), in 2012-2013 the school had a 20% role out of students to behavioral schools, 700 for suspension and 10 for expulsion. For suspension, black students were represented at 2.5 times (10.7%), and Latina/Latino students at 2.1 times (19.6%) of their proportions in the school population (4.25% and 9.22%, respectively). For expulsion, black students comprised 50%. Overall, the school has only a 5% minority student enrollment, proportional to the demographics of the immediate community that hosts it (USDC/USCB, 2013).

For this team, the school principal identified a white male teacher who was in his first year of teaching, thus used to being, and perhaps therefore willing to be, observed. This teacher exhibited very poor classroom management skills that he tried to counter with highly didactic, teacher-centered approaches to teaching. Despite his obviously poor teaching ability, students in the classroom largely behaved as if nothing was wrong.

Team 5, similarly to Teams 3 and 4, did not have a specific hypothesis as to what their observations might reveal to them relative to the STPP. But, they did anticipate that blatant discrimination toward students of color would have become visible to them in some way given the combination of the school's overall rate of behavioral referrals and the teacher's teaching challenges. Upon reflection, research team members expressed the sense that the teacher's novice status provided the principal advance "cover" for responding to any concerns she may have anticipated they would surface regarding his classroom management. Further, precisely because of the school's role out rates, there were very few students of color left in the school—the pipeline was, in essence, dry because the "crude" had already been exhausted. This left research team members to conclude that the proclivity to refer students out of the school had an impact on controlling the behavior of the few who remained; demographically even more isolated, they were more apt to conform, to be "good." In the end, the team was left feeling as though the school sent them away saying, "There's nothing to see here, because everything here is fine, just fine."

Conclusions and Significance

A unifying theme in this research is described by Juárez and Hayes (2012) as

the “problem of good” (p. 183). This problem shows up in teaching in the perpetual credentialing of educators who are unprepared to effectively teach students of color. These educators, and those who prepare them, are, perhaps, well meaning, have command of their subject areas, and can recite chapter and verse about the latest classroom management strategies being discussed in the educational research, but they cannot meet the educational needs of students from high minority/low income communities. Ascribed with formal power in the classroom and lacking sociopolitically-located multicultural educational training, teachers, especially white teachers, often fail to recognize how their classroom disciplinary practices disproportionately erroneously target and, thus, negatively impact their minority students in their classrooms. However, when these same teachers are made aware of their identity-based, standpoint-based, and positionality-based biases and, further, learn alternative strategies for engaging *with* these same students as their educational *allies*, instead of continuing to amplify the STPP, they become dismantlers of it (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Howard, 2006).

Religious Identity and Curriculum Development: The Lived Experience of Spirituality in Schooling

The role of religion in public education had long been the source of tension. Avoiding or proscriptively limiting the discussion of religion in schooling precludes students and teachers from bringing their full selves into schools and classrooms, and from seeing their religious, spiritual, and/or secular identities reflected back to them through curricular engagement (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011). The research on religious identity and curriculum development discussed here is intentionally intersectional in examining the ways in which religion, race, and sexuality reciprocally inform each other, at the same time prioritizing the issue of religion, and locating race as the secondary research concern.

Purposes and Objectives

This research takes up challenges and extends existing and unfolding simplistic discourse on identity politics, prejudice reduction, and anti-intellectual theology. Using intersectional analysis to reconsider human identity formation beyond ‘either/or’ constructions in traditional research on religious identity, this research seeks to rename identity so as to capture the wholeness and movement of it in a manner akin to how poetry seeks to bring forward complex of experiences of truth (Allport, 1950; Allport and Ross, 1967). In developing curricula informed by student and teacher co-created identity narratives, identity becomes a more fluid concept, negotiated in ways that avoids false dichotomies and oppressive relegation to silent spaces. Thus, this research seeks to enable educators to actualize an *allied vision* of religious, racial, and sexual curricular identity (Crenshaw, 1991).

Framework, Modes of Inquiry and Data Sources

Grounded in the philosophical work of Derrida (1978, 1982, 1989), Gadamer (1989), Heidegger (1962), Levinas (1979), and Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), the research at focus here engages the concept of phenomythology—the existential weaving of myth and phenomenology together to uncover and illustrate that what may be a universal search for ultimacy and liminality in life’s small events, is revelatory of the larger significance and deeper inward meaning of life itself (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011). It borrows from Seidman’s (1996) overall concept of “queerness” as a dispositional element where participants freely expand their intersectional religious identity through the *phenomythological* process. Van Manen (2003) iterates a process by which intersectional identity-based philosophy can be used to conduct phenomenological research: evidence is amassed through iterative processes of single and group structured conversations that also contain periods of reflective writing as well as non-traditional forms of phenomenological expression such as art, poetry, and music (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011; VanManen, 2003). Resultantly, the identity narratives discussed are drawn from single and multi-person conversations, reflective writing assignments, and an art project. This is consistent with phenomenological study.

Discussion of Findings

When considering the various junctures of identity (religion, race, and sexuality, among others) of this study’s participants, their narratives make clear a strong resistance to having their identities *overly* reduced in any form of research, and by extension, in other taxonomic environments, such as education. Indeed, these participants identity meta-narratives that are not simply logical, sequential, and perfectly coherent from which generalizations can be drawn (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967; Campbell & Moyers, 1988).

Accordingly, the use of an intersectional analytical lens to explore their religious identity allows for a “queer” expression of religion that emerges from and maintains an unfinished and evolving nature in which a key element of this queerness is the consistent desire for freedom from identity label constraints, and where identity is understood as having a “potential” future existence (Heidegger, 1962; Seidman, 1996). Participants suggest that this freedom is derived from a purposely-unmoored positionality that is often misunderstood relative to a centralized (and privileged) norm. Without a doubt, “queer” demands an exacting a price for the freedom it gives, but a balanced approach to this term yields a broader and more perfect image of those possibilities.

The implications for curriculum here are equally complex. Though curricular engagement with religious identity is often considered to be fraught with especially legal dangers in the public PK-12 educational context, the costs of non-engagement are usually paid by those students whose religious identities are misunderstood, mi-

noritized, or openly demeaned. Thus, providing space for religiously queer expression of such identities lends to the creation of a more democratic classroom experience for all students (Brimhall-Vargas & Clark, 2008; Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003).

In seeking to engage students with sociopolitically-located multicultural curriculum, this study suggests that educators need to remain aware of four crucial intersectional identity dynamics often only made visible through religious conversion: (1) religion and race are often conflated to a degree that allows little room for dissent or nuance by in-group members in either their religious or racial identity to the point of erasing some peoples' experience altogether; (2) intersectional experiences provide a unique standpoint from which to understand polarizing aspects of race and religion; (3) religion/race intersectional identities are further differentiated by overlaying oppressions based on gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and heteronormativity; and (4) many of these specific religious identity dynamics exist in a larger context of all religious identities (and, by extension, all theologies) enveloped within the larger racial system of whiteness.

When observing religious identity closely, it appears that religion cannot be adequately defined through racial narratives or histories. Yet, those who deviate from religious/racial norms are often placed in a quandary of needing to "settle" the dissonance of an interior religious reality that is threatening to sever the relative safety of their membership in their racial group, or even more importantly, in their family. This process can be particularly difficult for those individuals who, despite experiencing racial subordination, nevertheless experience religious privilege through membership in Christian faiths. Two participants in the study, Juanita, a Filipina Hawaiian who was raised Catholic, and Mujahid, an African-American man who was raised Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal (AME), recount narratives of racial disconnection and isolation when they decided to become a member of a different religion. Juanita's narrative suggests that to simply *be* Hawaiian in her town and, thus, a member of that Hawaiian community meant that she had to be Catholic. This dissonance with religion had a corresponding effect on her connection to her racial community, so much so that she felt she needed to physically *leave* Hawaii altogether in order to enact a more complex, and more meaningful, religious identity. Juanita's analysis of these circumstances makes clear that she believes this was a "choice" was forced upon her. She says, "See, the Catholic Church was taken away from me, and I think I had huge resentments about it, about the way it was taken away from me." Mujahid expresses a similar sense of disconnection from his racial community when he pursued a non-Christian religious journey. He describes this disconnection as a kind of death, an extremely painful one, though, in retrospect, he describes it through a seemingly comforting metaphor. "What looks like death to a caterpillar is actually a butterfly." Here he indicates the extreme fear of separation and disconnection, but understands that it provides him a new and different kind of fulfillment.

It also becomes apparent that religious conversion narratives offer unique insights

into the interplay of religious and racial identity by providing an “outsider-within” perspective and standpoint from which to examine race in particular (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991). When religion and racial identities become highly conflated, Mujahid and Juanita suggest that they need a new standpoint from which they can analyze and understand their own religious and racial identities. When asked whether he might have joined another Christian group, Mujahid suggests, “I’m not sure now if I had known Christianity [then] the way I know it now, whether I would have converted to Islam.” But then I said, “Yes, I would have—because *I needed to convert in order to be able to see it. I couldn’t have seen it while I was there*” [emphasis added]. Juanita considers Buddhism as a place where she was able to truly “see” Catholicism and her racial identity. She says, “Later in years, *after I became a Buddhist and really understood the Catholic Church*, I thought, ‘How stupid.’ I mean, I would have left it [anyway], so why resent the fact that that was done to [me]?”

Deep exploration of the multiple dimensions of queerness of religious, racial, sexual, and gender identity can be drawn forth (as in educare) through appropriate comparison to mythological fiction. Specifically, this research makes use of *phenomythology* (the phenomenological exploration of identity through the genuine engagement of myth as “truthful fiction”) to illustrate complex interplays of identity not visible elsewhere. Juanita’s and Mujahid’s narratives are reflected through the story of the Mayan twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, as they traversed a heroic journey through difficult trials called “houses” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988).

One such trial illustrates the crucial nexus of religion, sex, and gender identity and expression for Juanita, who in addition to being a Filipina Asian-American is also an openly post-operative trans woman. Juanita’s story suggests a similar theme to the story of the Mayan twins where Hunahpu’s body needs to be transformed to move forward in the trials. Despite coming out early as gay (and having a boyfriend in her early teen years), Juanita’s Catholic upbringing, coupled with the promptings of an inner voice, told her that she could not be male and engage in sexual relations with another man. Thus, she concluded that she needed to become a woman to be consistent and whole in her religious upbringing and told her priest of this decision during confession. She was then excommunicated.

Juanita’s engagement with the Catholic Church was sincere on some level. She was trying to resolve what she saw as the conundrum presented by church dogma and her emerging sexuality and gender identity and expression. But, the negative reaction she received from her priest when she revealed her decision to seek sex reassignment meant that she would no longer be considered Catholic by the church, even as she, personally, was attempting align herself with Catholicism. Juanita’s struggle here was in deciding which part of her identity she would keep, Catholicism or maleness. In considering what Juanita would give up, she weighed her options carefully and ultimately chooses to reify her religious identity through physical transformation. Ultimately, Juanita suggests that the choices she saw before her were limiting, leaving her with less than what she might have been with more religious options. Now in

her sixties, she says she would not have undergone sex reassignment, because she feels she could have been trans or gay without it. Juanita is clearly at peace with her life choices and does not live in anguish over past decisions. Yet, her narrative is one which gives clear insight into the power religion and religious identification have in defining parameters one's own engagement with one's own body.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque were born when their mother, Xquic, communicated with the severed head of their father, Hun. Another trial they endured involved them retrieving the buried remains of their father, after which Hunahpu attempted to rebuild him. Although Hun's body was made whole again he was not the same and was unable to function as he had previously. When observing the Gordian knot that is religious/racial identities, it becomes clear that such struggles inevitably happen within a larger context of whiteness. As an African-American Muslim convert, Mujahid wrestles deeply with what it means to be African-American and not a Christian, in wondering about his own racial "place." A particularly poignant memory of this dynamic centers around a conversation he had with his mother over popular representations of Jesus as white that she keeps framed in her home among pictures of their African American family. Mujahid says to his mother: "Ma, you know the white man is out of place. He just don't seem to fit in the family photo gallery right here." [Mom replies:] "Boy, that's my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Not deterred, Mujahid presses that the picture is an object of racial education to younger generations of African Americans where white people are placed into the image of God. He illustrates this point by calling a niece to come and identify the picture. He asks his niece "who is this white man," she replies, "Him? God." The impact was clear. Over time, Mujahid's mother removed the racially white picture of Jesus—once metaphorically decapitated, this "father" could not be made whole again as white. In this exchange, Mujahid indirectly reveals a major reason why he chose Islam in his religious conversion: Islam's aversion to having God depicted in human form. This had the effect of making God more equitably available across human differences such as race, which had particular importance for Mujahid's experience in which so much racial iconography is covertly and overtly racialized as white.

Conclusions and Significance

The identity narratives suggest that intersectional identity development must be deeply understood as a complex phenomenon often mirrored in the mythological *heroic journey* commonly found in cultures around the world (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011). Linking this journey to education, curricula must be extended to explore the (dis)connections between ontological and sociopolitical identity, especially at the intersections of religion, race, and sexuality. Such curricula is more responsive to the needs of all students, particularly those whose identities, standpoints, and positionalities situate them at the center of these intersections, yet still in the margins in public schooling.

Inclusive Education: “I’m Complicated So It’s Complicated;” Intersectionality and Advocacy Across Differences

Inclusive education is an educational model that affirms, as a right, every child’s full access to the general education classroom, no matter the extent to which any child may need modifications, adaptations, or support to learn in this classroom (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). The research on inclusive education discussed here is intentionally intersectional in examining the ways in which dis/ability, family configuration, and race reciprocally inform each other, at the same time prioritizing the issue of dis/ability, and locating race as the tertiary research concern.

Purposes and Objectives

In seriously considering the ways in which the intersections of dis/ability, family configuration, and race complicate understandings of inclusive education, the question of and how best to advocate *with and for* students with multiple marginalized identities, standpoints, and positionalities becomes immensely complicated and seemingly impossible to adequately answer. The research at focus here engages this question, first from an historical vantage point in seeking to make it more manageable, and, second, in the context of everyday life in school communities in identifying a durable strategy for realizing the advocacy goal.

Framework, Modes of Inquiry and Data Sources

The concept of advocacy in the inclusive education arena has been limited by its failure to take into account intersectionality. This research uses grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to examine why attempts to address discrimination in schools at the intersection of dis/ability, family configuration (including same-sex parents), and race often fail. These attempts are re-considered through an *ally-building* lens (Broido & Reason, 2005). More specifically, through secondary data analysis a grounded theory emerges about the role that intersectionality-informed allyship can play in improving educational inclusion for students with different abilities, especially those from non-traditional families and/or who are of color, that takes into account the complex deficit orientations in schools that particularly negative impact the students at the junction of these multiple identities.

Drawing connections between anti-oppression and inclusion advocacy points of entry into research, this work analyzes historic and continuing tension between and across dis/ability, family, and race. Historically, there has been little discussion about the role of dis/ability within the larger discourses of diversity (Pugach, Blanton, & Florian (2012) and, similarly, those advocating for the inclusion of persons with disabilities often neglect to name or consider other forms of identity which impact participation and representation within the broader society. Although Erevelles, Kanga,

and Middleton (2006) and others have argued for the need to critically explore the connections between “historically disenfranchised groups within educational contexts” (p. 77), the over-simplified linking of dis/ability and other dimensions of diversity can be highly problematic. For example, children of color in the foster care/adoption system are most likely to be taken in by same-sex couples if they are to be taken in at all (Raible, 2012). Students of color are also routinely over-referred to special education (Harry & Klingner, 2006). These linkages beg scholars and activists alike to more deeply consider how discrete prejudices become inter-tangled and, thereby, confound assumptions about capacity (physical, developmental, and psychological) with those related to sexuality and race, among others. In so doing, these prejudices are reified as causal or deterministic (Ferri & Connor, 2006).

This work examines attempts to “fix” differences, rather than address one’s own and others’ limited, dangerous, and damaging responses to perceived differences and putative disabilities. This examination is undertaken intersectionally (e.g., to examine how children with Down’s syndrome are subjected to facial surgery, how narrow legal definitions of “family” particularly limit non-traditionally-configured households, and how covert racial identifiers are used to systematically track students of color) to reveal deeper understandings of oppression, concomitant with explicating the manners in which advocacy and related ally-building can mitigate oppression.

Discussion of Findings

How do various identities become conflated and what are the effects of that conflation on the subsequent advocacy that occurs? This secondary data analysis uncovered four such conflation trends that serve to ground a theory of allyship by examining how identity concerns are engaged and continuously sought to be resolved (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These trends are described under the following sub-headings: Totalizing, Desirability, Erasure, and Facile Solutions. Following these descriptions, underlying motivations for all four conflation trends are discussed.

Totalizing. Although most people, including PK-12 teachers, would acknowledge that every person/student has multiple identities, sophisticated advocacy across multiple identity dimensions is limited by the notion of a master identity or a totalizing narrative. For example, a student has two moms, is African American, and uses a wheelchair because she also has cerebral palsy. Often, the disability image is so overpowering to “viewers” (parents, teachers, other students) that they fail to “see,” much less recognize and consider this student’s other identities, discretely or intersectionally (in sum) (Adams, Griffin, & Bell, 2007; Lawrence, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012; Pugach & Seidl, 1998; Weber, 2007).

Desirability. Again, though the reality of multiple dimensions is generally understood, it is considered desirable to render some identities invisible as a form

of so-called advocacy for them. This is an especially common occurrence in elementary special education classes and often considered “good” inclusion practice. For example, some might argue, albeit problematically, that a high quality inclusion classroom is one in which the students with disabilities cannot be distinguished from those who have none. Of course, a high quality inclusion classroom might have some universal elements—for example, every student is engaged, no student is isolated in the corner of the room with a Velcro fastener appended to their side, and every student’s name is on the classroom job chart. But, the tendency toward totalizing, and the invisibility it can lead to, abound in reading between the lines of definitions of so-called “good” inclusion classrooms. In sum, if a good inclusion classroom is one in which students with known disabilities are not visible, then inclusive educational space in which students’ disabilities are extremely obvious would, ostensibly, have to be characterized as bad or, at least, as not as good (Ball & Harry, 1993; Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012; Pugach & Seidl, 1998; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999).

Erasure. Once again, in acknowledging the intersections of multiple identities, another challenge to educational advocacy is the way in which certain identities erase others or, at least, cause them to become inconceivable. For example, it is not uncommon for students with disabilities to be infantilized by parent statements such as, “He has the mind of a four-year-old,” or “She’ll always be our little girl.” Such characterizations fail to acknowledge the full humanity, including the interests and concerns, of students with disabilities; in fact, these students’ interests and concerns may be much more akin to those of their chronological-age peers than the adults raising them imagine or understand them to be. For example, a 15-year old Latina with spina bifida who has limited control of her body and labored speech is, like other adolescents, likely to be coming into her sexuality and, thus, interested in dating, romance, and intimacy. The failure to acknowledge the sexuality of people with disabilities is a chronic problem and one that leads to a secondary problem: even when their sexuality is recognized, it is generally assumed to reflect proclivities that are dominant in society and/or that mirror the parents own attraction norms: heterosexual, intraracial, and/or intrareligious, among others (Gatzambide-Fernández, Harding, & Sordé-Martí, 2004; Haddad, 2013; Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012; Pugach & Seidl, 1998; Raible, 2012; Weber, 2007).

Facile Solutions. In advocating to reconcile the inequitable ways in which various intertwined identities are compromised, it is important to be wary of so-called solutions put forward that are, upon closed examination, revealed to be overly facile. For example, the overrepresentation of students of color, especially black males, in special education is well documented (Alexander, 2012; Clark 2004, 2012; Giroux, 2013). This reality is reflective of the ways in which these boys’ active bodies are culturally misunderstood, by their usually white female teachers, as deviant, often dangerous, and in need of remediation typically provided in highly racially seg-

regated educational spaces (Clark, 2004; Erevelles, Kanga, & Middleton, 2006; Ferri, 2010; Ferri & Connor, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Howard, 2006). It is equally well documented that students of color are vastly underrepresented in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Sapon-Shevin, 1994, 2007). Admission to such programs is often based on standardized test scores (even though these scores cannot be correlated to program performance outcomes), family income and/or educational background, and teacher recommendation, thus it is not considered surprising that these programs are over-populated by white, middle-upper class students from families with highly educated parents (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sapon-Shevin, 1994).

Efforts to reconcile these related inequalities have included in-service teacher trainings on classroom management skills that omit direct discussion of race, class, and gender issues, as well as the impact of unconscious and implicit biases on the development of those skills (Adams, Griffin, & Bell, 2007; Giroux, 1999; Lawrence, 2005; Howard, 2006). Reconciliation efforts have also focused on intentional efforts to recruit more students of color to GATE programs, often tethered to changed or expanded admission criteria which has done more to reify the perception that students of color, working class students, and first generation college students are inherently less qualified, than to dispel the false meritocracy embedded in these programs' structurally-biased admissions protocols and processes (Erevelles, Kanga, & Middleton, 2006; Ferri, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012; Pugach & Seidl, 1998; Sapon-Shevin, 1994).

These efforts also remove the imperative that general education, and general education classroom teachers, teach curricula and through pedagogies that are reflective of and responsive to all learners, including those who enter those classrooms with various advanced skill sets. As a result, so-called advanced students who may, in fact, have challenges in many areas, do not get those challenges remediated, and, likewise, the extraordinary talents of so-called general and special education students are often overlooked because deficit paradigmatic views pre-dominate in teacher preparation, and thus in teachers' views of them (Clark, 2013; Ferri & Connor, 2006; Giroux, 2013; Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Discussion

This last trend can be seen as, perhaps, the key challenge that faces advocates for quality education for all students. Not only must these advocates pay attention to the ways in which multiple identities both reinforce privilege and/or compound discrimination, they must carefully examine the overall educational structures and system within which education is taking place. In so doing, they must ask what policies and practices will lead to socially just, quality educations for all, carefully weighing and balancing specific students' rights to receive differential education based on their histories, current circumstances, skills, and interests,

and the right of all students to secure an equitable, thus equally high quality, education.

In facing this key challenge—in paying attention, examining, asking, weighing, and balancing—they must, underneath it all—*see*. The literature reviewed for this study is riddled with persistent and newly emergent educational concerns manifest largely because of overt and covert fidelity to the mythology of “color blindness” (Alexander, 2012; Broido & Reason, 2005; Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012; Pugach & Seidl, 1998;). Generally, this mythology seeks to promote the idea that it is possible, indeed laudable, to fail to acknowledge a student’s racial or ethnic background. It is not uncommon to hear teachers brag, “I don’t see color. I don’t care if a child is black or green or purple, I am going to teach him [or her] just the same.” The inclusion of colors such as green and purple in this oft-heard phrase is particularly troubling, not only because it negates the importance of racial identity, but because it has the added effect of mocking the idea that color matters and that specific colors—white and black—matter most (Alexander, 2012; Clark, 2004, 2012; Milem & Hakuta, 2000). It is hard to imagine teachers proclaiming themselves “nature blind,” or saying, for example, “When I go out in the woods, I can’t tell a tree from a bush, I have no idea what specific flowers are, I do not even notice when some are red, and I never notice if there are clouds in the sky.” Yet, in educational contexts in which very dire human realities are at stake, “not noticing” is falsely likened to a more evolved consciousness than noticing is. Lauding “blindness” is also problematic in the disability arena in which, for example, people who are actually blind (e.g. cannot see), are still quite capable of highly astute and nuanced perception, knowing, and understanding (Ball & Harry, 1993; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999).

Compounding this erroneous commitment to “not noticing” and, thus, not naming singular identities, much less multiple ones, is the way in which each of our own individual identities and related histories make it difficult to simply notice differences, as well as mistreatment, discrimination, and outright oppression along other’s identity dimensions. Numerous workshops on challenging oppressive behavior, particularly racism, homophobia and ableism, often make use of an activity in which participants are asked to share (with a partner) either a time when they attempted to challenge some form of oppression, or a time when they did not challenge such (Adams, Griffin, & Bell, 2007; Ball & Harry, 1993; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999). After participants share their stories, analysis of responses ask participants to share what they thought contributed to, or got in the way of, their ability to challenge.

Participant report-outs suggest that both their ability or inability to challenge was predicated on them holding or not holding positions of power, and having or not having a lot of information about the issue of oppression at focus. Impetus to challenge also came from feeling passionate about the mistreatment (especially if they took it personally), whereas disinclination to challenge was additionally tethered

to fear for their safety, or an unwillingness to deal with the discomfort disrupting the status quo might cause them, including the potential to damage their relationships with “offenders.” Perhaps most telling, however, is that most participants who opted not to intervene didn’t do so because they were not even aware that oppression had occurred; they lacked sufficient knowledge to be able to discern that a remark or policy was, indeed, oppressive. For example, if one is unaware that Muslims generally do not eat pork, one would be unable to challenge the suggestion to a religiously diverse cohort, “Let’s all go out for ribs,” as problematic.

Too often, able-bodied teachers fail to recognize the ableist language they use with students, like “*walk your talk*” (phraseology commonly used in social justice circles, including from that perspective in this article). Further, school officials from overwhelmingly middle-class, white, and heterosexual families are predisposed to overlook the additional challenges a Daddy-Daughter *dance* might present for students from various other racial, class, or family configurations. Clearly, meaningful educational advocacy and ally building require significant cognitive and non-cognitive development to fully embrace and enact students’ lived experiences of intersectionality. But even as this development is under way, simply developing an awareness of what one does not know and that there is always more to know, can enable one to begin to ask questions that will affirm, rather than disaffirm, all students, between, among, and across all discrete and multiple identity dimensions.

Conclusions and Significance

There are both significant parallels and distinctions in terms of how dis/ability, family configuration and race have been responded to within the hegemonic context prevalent in most school settings, past and present. It is vitally important for all educators to engage inclusive education with sophisticated understanding of how the misinterpretation of non-dominant cultural values and practices intensifies, even if inadvertently, non-dominant group oppression (Pugach & Seidl, 1998). Understanding intersectionality enables better allyship within, as well as across, categories of difference, thereby holding the greatest promise for meaningfully improving educational outcomes for all students, but especially for students whose identities, standpoints, and positionalities have led them to be multiply marginalized.

Troubling Intersectionality, Identity, Standpoint, Positionality, and Allyship

Increasingly over the last fifty years, notions of identity hybridity and fluidity ubiquitous to intersectionality have come under critique in Post-Colonial and Cultural Studies circles (Gatzambide-Fernández, Harding, & Sordé-Martí, 2004). Such notions have been characterized as manifestations of Westernization that contribute to the dissolution of indigenous culture. “Strategic essentialism” is offered

to cross-identity positional postures as a lens through which Western influence on intersectionality can be negotiated and problematized (Spivak, 1986, p. 45).

Accordingly, the scholarship herein can be understood to have employed race to examine identity in a strategically essentialist manner. All three studies employ race as an analytical tool, but each study assigns it a different degree of analytical weight. Clark & McGhie argue that while race, class, and gender are all factors in the disproportionately negative educational outcomes of especially black male students, race *continues* to matter more and most (Bell, 1992; Milem & Hakuta, 2000). Brimhall-Vargas describes the influence of race on religion to reveal, for example, the embedded whiteness of theological text and, thus, how the so-called separation of religion and state in schools actually operates in such a way as to ensure that Christian hegemony is proliferated, largely unfettered, in the curriculum in ways that concomitantly promote white supremacy and heteronormativity (Carter, 2008; Haddad, 2013). Sapon-Shevin surfaces the overrepresentation of children from historically underrepresented racial minority groups among those characterized in schools as having a disability, as well as among those who are most likely to be formally or informally adopted into unconventional families (Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012).

Intersectional scholarship can likewise inform students and teachers of their own situated statuses and how, in moving beyond a heroes-and-holidays-oriented multicultural education that leaves issues of power and oppression unexamined, they can push back against these limiting positions (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Accordingly, intersectional scholarship enables analyses of different identities, standpoints, and positionalities and related oppressions of various groups in manners expressly designed to facilitate the development of students and teachers as *strategically essential allies* in the struggle for social justice.

Critiques of allyship, especially as this concept has been codified in social justice work/education, raise concerns as to how people, especially those from dominant identity groups, thus conditioned by various forms of privilege, can join *with* “others” in manners that are not, in some way, still colonizing (i.e., inclined to take over despite operating under the auspice of working against hegemony) (Broido & Reason, 2005). The distance between word and deed is salient here—talking the talk of allyship, but not walking the walk of it (the embedded ableism in these expressions notwithstanding, as previously noted). But some critiques of allyship have even problematized its talk, arguing the notion of “voice”—finding voice, using one’s own voice, giving voice to—is located in Western ideals that valorize representative pronouncement over silence used to communicate what cannot be spoken in the context of oppression, as well as what is meant when silence is absent (Candel, 2014; Frantz, 2013). Encouraging members of a specific dominant group, relative to a specific non-dominant group liberation struggle, to work against the hegemony at focus as it derives from/is manifest in their own dominant group community has been one counter-colonizing approach to allyship. The scholarship

herein seeks to e-x-t-e-n-d counterhegemonic ally consciousness and the praxis it informs to enable teachers and students to work as race, class, and gender allies to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, to develop an allied understanding of how of school curricula has religious, racial, and sexual identity, and to establish school communities in which ability, family, and race are *seen*—individually and in sum—as foundational to ally-building.

Pedagogical Implications of Intersectional Scholarship

Like researchers, teachers can learn to understand the multiple identities, standpoints, and positionalities that both they and their students bring to the educational context of schooling. In so doing, they can expand the concept of intersectionality by disrupting limited and limiting understandings of teacher and student identity, standpoint, and positionality, and articulate ways in which understanding issues of intersectionality and multiple identities, standpoints, and positionalities can help teachers and students to become better allies towards those experiencing marginalization and exclusion.

This Freirian concept of teaching against oppression is manifest in Nieto's sociopolitically-located multicultural education (2012), in Sleeter's multicultural education as activism (1996), in Banks' (2004) ethnic studies-linked access and power orientation to multicultural education, and in the praxis of myriad social justice educators who focus on interrupting and challenging classism, racism, homophobia, ableism and other forms of oppression ("isms") in schools and the larger communities in which these schools are located (Adams, Griffin, & Bell, 2007). Teaching against oppression enables teaching about identity, multiple identities, and intersectionality, and requires critique of other teaching models that do not address these complexities.

For example, although two individuals may both identify as people of color and gay/lesbian, other identities (such as class, gender, size and religion) may substantially affect the ways in which these individuals are viewed and treated. Thus, it would be an oversimplification of a teaching against oppression pedagogy to characterize it as simply teaching about the "authentic" knowledge borne of oppressor and oppressed group identity. To the extent that this oversimplification manifests in this pedagogy at all, it is focused more on group experience than knowledge; and to the extent that it is about knowledge, it is about knowledge that derives from experience. A teaching against oppression pedagogy does not focus on the discrete experiences that people have in society as members of groups as if each such group experience operates in isolation of the other, but it *does* consider how all the experiences that people as members of societal groups have—the function of past, continuing, and new systemic stratification—has led to their on-going differential access to full participation in democracy.

A teaching against oppression pedagogy *might* suggest, but never rigidly insist,

that there are experiences that people in the same group are likely to share that people outside the group are not. So, for example, by virtue of being wealthy or poor, White or Black, male or female, Christian or Muslim, etc., there are experiences that one is likely to have and other experiences one is unlikely to have. By virtue of having/not having these experiences, knowledge is developed—experiential knowledge. But the development of this knowledge is not “perfect”—not everyone in a group will have the experiences commonly associated with their group, not everyone in a group who does have these experiences will process them the same way (i.e., develop the knowledge commonly derived from the experience) even if most will. Precisely because people are members of more than one group they must negotiate the interplay of multiple experiences and the often competing/conflicting knowledge deriving from each one. A teaching against oppression pedagogy *might* also recognize that some people outside a group may develop approximate knowledge or intellectual understanding of that group’s experience and related knowledge deriving therefrom, even if most will not.

But, a teaching against oppression pedagogy *always* seeks to elucidate an important reality: that one can never know someone else’s experience organically if it is not one’s own—one may know the history, cultural traditions, etc., of another group, one may even know about others’ experiences in copious detail, but one cannot not know, in the organic sense, what it feels like to be what one is not. This dynamic is made more complex when what one is, is complicated by one’s multiple group memberships.

A teaching against oppression pedagogy is situated in power and privilege and oppression and discrimination dynamics, but not solely concerned with the marginalization of “the other.” It is also concerned with (and independently so) revealing the privilege of “the non-other,” as well as about reframing the discourse from the other to the otherizing, from the marginalized to marginalizing, from the minority to the minoritizing, etc., among, between, and across multiple other and non-other groups. In this way, a teaching against oppression pedagogy *seeks* to ensure that “the other” has agency, rather than being defined by and limited to “victim status” (hooks, 1993). Perhaps Freire (2000) most astutely captured the layered complexity of what a teaching against oppression *seeks* to accomplish here in his codification of the concept of “false generosity” in describing the struggle of all people to become more fully human:

...the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity...become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power; cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. Any attempt to “soften” the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed

almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity... In order to have the continued opportunity to express their “generosity,” the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this “generosity” which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. That is why the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source.

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes that nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the “rejects of life” to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individuals or entire peoples—need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world (pp. 44-5).

So, while no person exists solely as a member of a dominant or non-dominant group, and while most people have some ability to move between dominant and non-dominant group experiences, supremacy and subordination persist, and their persistence has pernicious effects on the daily lives of those who are the most consistently and pervasively disadvantaged in society.

Against the backdrop of this complex reality, teachers and students (and parents) must, through a teaching against oppression pedagogy, ally to co-construct classrooms as oppositional spaces in which they ally further across multiple identities to fight against all “isms” (not against one another) and for equity and social justice (Giroux, 1999). Classroom-based allyship that calls attention to power differentials only reifies powerlessness if those differentials are not contested in the daily enactment of teaching and learning—if they are talked about, but not walked (enacted) in negotiating the reciprocity of teaching and learning in the everyday (Freire, 2000). Thus, a teaching against oppression pedagogy requires fidelity to an on-going process of critique and self-critique in the co-construction of co-stewardship of classrooms as democratic communities in which students, teachers, and parents work together to realize and live revolutionary citizenship in the everyday.

Coda

Increasingly, young people are moving away from singular identities (based only on race *or* class *or* gender *or* religion *or* sexuality *or* dis/ability *or* family configuration, among other dimensions of difference) that many of the adults who work with them—especially as teachers—still hold to with steadfast allegiance. As a result, a generational divide, rooted in outmoded understandings of multiculturalism, exists that can exacerbate the development of crucial student/teacher relationship building that is foundational to student success. Bridging this divide requires especially multicultural educators to intersectionally reframe debates about identity. By building conscious awareness, knowledge, and understanding of how intersectional identity manifests in the lives of children and youth, as well as adults, all educators can become more effective in their work to close the academic

achievement/performance gap, and in seeking to create more inclusive, democratic educational institutions.

A step in this direction might engage pre- and in-service teachers in self-reflexive dialogue in the teacher education and/or professional development classroom, guided by Freire-inspired (1970, 1990) problem-posing prompts, perhaps configured as follows:

- (a) What does it mean to me to be an ally to others when my “most salient” identity or identities is/are dominant?
- (b) What does it mean to me to have others be an ally to me when my when my “most salient” identity or identities is/are non-dominant?
- (c) What does it mean to me to have others be an ally to me when my when my “most salient” identity or identities is/are BOTH dominant AND non-dominant?
- (d) When I think of a time when I believe I was a successful ally to people with identities that are not salient for me, I come to evaluate this time as “successful” allyship because...
- (e) When I think of a time when I think I struggled or failed to be an ally to people with identities that are not salient for me—I come to evaluate this time as “failed” allyship because...
- (f) For me, the “the basics of allyship” for multiple identities are...because...? I can develop this allyship posture by...? I can support the development of this allyship posture in others by...?
- (g) The experiences I have had with allyship related to multiple identities—personal and collective—in organizations, institutions, etc., are...? The nature of these experiences was...(e.g., good, bad, etc.), because...?
- (h) True and/or false for me: To be my ally you have to know me and something about my oppression—that my oppression happened.
- (i) True and/or false for me: To be a “full” ally to me, you have to take into account all my identities.

In considering the sum of one’s identities, some being sources of affirmation and joy, others of marginalization and pain, it becomes clear that no single identity operates on its own. In putting any two identities together, the source assessment inevitably shifts, perhaps making one more powerful, more vulnerable, or a combination of both.

Race; color; ethnicity; Deafhood; geographic origin; immigration status; language; caste; socioeconomic class background; employment status; sex; gender; gender identity and expression; family configuration; sexual orientation; physical, developmental, or psychological ability; Veteran’s status; age or generation; religious, spiritual, faith-based, or secular belief; physical appearance; environmental concern; and political affiliation are just some of the multiple identities that not only

teachers, but students bring to the classroom. In teacher education and professional development arenas, the mere of these topics is often met with a sense that giving them further attention is “forbidden” (Lawrence, 2005, p. 1434). Teacher educators must talk and walk directly into the forbidden to expand their conceptions of multicultural education and diversity training through engagement with progressive scholarship developed in the interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary fields of African American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women’s Studies, as well as cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, area studies, labor studies, and social justice education, among others. This scholarship provides new and more robust understandings of difference, both in the United States and globally, which in turn inform cutting-edge advances in the pedagogy through which this scholarship can be imparted in the classroom. While scholars in a number of fields study dimensions of difference and use difference as a way of explaining various identity dynamics in their research, what distinguishes intersectional scholarship is that it is interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary and, in so being, it focuses upon the ways myriad dimensions of identity interconnect, creating new and distinct social identity formations, and, ostensibly, from which more robust solutions to identity-based inequities in schools can be immediately tackled and durably resolved.

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