



Kim A. Case, Ph.D.

University of Houston-Clear Lake

caseki@uhcl.edu

www.drkimcase.com

www.facebook.com/drcasepedagogy

twitter @drkimcase

Intersections of Identity Education Project

Learning Objectives-

- to promote student understanding of multiple social identities, intersectionality theory and the complexity of group membership and identities, and the matrix of oppression;
- to provide experiential student learning opportunities for direct and applied social action with regard to intersecting identities;
- to develop students' prosocial behavior and strengthen their public education skills for building community awareness of social inequalities.

Background: Connecting Intersectional Theory to Social Identity Curriculum

In 1989, Crenshaw introduced the term "intersectionality" to explain that complex identities (based on race, gender, sexuality, class, age, etc.) contrast with categorical generalizations about social groups. Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) "matrix of domination" also provides a conceptual structure to aid current understanding of the various social locations that result from complex identities in both privileged and oppressed groups. The intersectional approach provides instructors and students with a sophisticated critical framework for examining the complexity of identity. How can psychology instructors develop a deeper understand of intersecting identities among our students?

The "Intersections of Identity Education Project" required students to utilize their newfound knowledge of intersections of identity and intersectional theory for public education. Public education could be achieved by creating brochures, websites, videos, blogs, and workshops. The assignment provided avenues for students to learn through application of intersectionality to personal social identities and lived experiences while sharing knowledge with peers and the wider community.

Description: The Intersections of Identity Education Project

Step 1: Identify a Topic- In order for the students to effectively educate others, they first needed to understand intersectional theory and its application to real world social identities. Once they

understood the intricacies of the theory, they chose an intersection of identities topic as the focus of the project.

Step 2: Select an Appropriate Target Audience- With a topic chosen, students investigated options with regard to appropriate target audiences. They explored community organizations for possible collaborations and reflected essential considerations such as access issues. Students narrowed down the audience options and chose a final target population.

Step 3: Determine Access Needs- Students made contact with the target audience. For many students, this led to discussions with the target group to make sure the project met the needs of the community. For others, they developed a plan for recruiting discussion participants to make sure their public education took place.

Step 4: Develop and Implement Education Plan- Students completely designed their projects, creating videos, documentaries, games, workshops, handouts, etc. for public education. Students then conducted public education making their workshops, videos, games, and handouts available to the target community audiences.

Step 5: Student Reflection- Each student wrote a project reflection paper (5-7 pages) connecting the project to course readings, theory, and concepts. The reflection included sections addressing: choosing their topic and the target audience, gaining access and recruiting participants, implementing the public education, feedback from the community, and what they learned.

Student Projects and Reflections

As described above, the final project for this course required students to create an avenue for public education with regard to intersectional theory or some particular aspect of intersectional identities. This assignment allowed them to develop their own unique vision for the project, improve their planning and organizing skills, and create their own map for arriving at the final project destination. Student evaluations of the project indicated their learning would last well beyond the course. One student shared that the project helped her realize “we can change things one person at a time.” Another recognized the value of the real world application of theory & proclaimed “applied knowledge is key!”

Student Voices: Two Students Discuss Their Projects

“As an aspiring college professor, I (Angela) wanted to create something for my own future classroom. The handout included several board game-themed (e.g., Monopoly, Risk) pictures and interactive games such as a crossword puzzle to emphasize the multidimensionality of the matrix of domination. I offered my handout to sociology, women’s studies, and education faculty to share with their students. I provided copies and asked them to post the handout online for their classes. Several instructors on our campus took the offer and used the handout in their courses. It was really intimidating to put my project out there...It was extremely exciting and motivating! I will never forget the lesson I learned not to be afraid to exhibit my work, and I will always remember feeling that I can help make a difference in education. What a lesson in self-efficacy this class brought to my life!”

“I (Shaprie) chose to create a video on the intersection of race, class, and the educational system. I distributed the video via email to many of the education faculty on campus with a brief note describing my class project and its potential relevance for their students. To reach a broader audience, I also

posted the video to Facebook and wrote a blog to discuss the topic, inviting others to post personal stories involving race, class, and education. I found it to be quite rewarding compared to traditional final projects that require students to simply stand in the front of the class and present on something the class has talked about all semester.”

Additional Student Projects:

One male student connected with a community group to provide workshops on masculinity, homophobia, and human trafficking to boys in juvenile detention. Another contacted a non-profit immigrant advocacy group and developed brochures for distribution to migrant domestic workers to inform them of their legal rights. His resulting brochures had already reached over 1,000 workers by the end of the semester. Projects also included a documentary emphasizing how Asian women and men are portrayed in popular films, a board game designed to teach players about oppression, privilege, and intersectionality, and website about income, race, neighborhood geography, and access to nutritional food. A student also created a video about forms of privilege and made it available via social networking and facilitated discussion. One student created an art project to explain how social identity affects opportunities and barriers. On display with a poster explaining the concept and art paper requesting comments, the piece inspired a conversation about oppression, privilege, and social change.

Students expressed their enthusiasm as the community audiences responded with interest and curiosity to their specific projects. Overall, the assignment helped students accomplish the goals of understanding intersectionality theoretically and in applied practice. Students committed to creating change and become fully engaged in designing projects with maximum impact through public education. The assignment’s connection to raising awareness beyond the classroom walls brought intersectionality to life for a meaningful opportunity for learning. For those that chose to provide workshops and create brochures for outside organizations, this project also incorporated service learning. Some students expressed that they planned to continue their public education and outreach that developed from their projects long after the course end. The intersectional framework calls for applying theory to practice for social action, and student projects that educated the public achieved that goal. While taking the role of educator for these projects, students gained deeper understanding of the complexities of social categories and identities and challenged assumptions that overgeneralize and stereotype entire groups.

References

Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139-167.

Student assignment instructions:

(to be adjusted as needed to fit your course learning goals)

- This project has two main goals:
 - Focus on intersectionality (concept or some specific intersection)
 - Public education to raise awareness about intersectionality
- The project itself may take a multitude of forms. Creativity and organized planning are essential to an effective and successful project. The two main decisions are
 - 1) what intersectional topic will I focus on for the project?**
 - 2) how will I educate the public about this intersectional topic?**
- Possible projects in final form: website, youtube channel with videos, mini-documentary, art show, informational brochures for social service agencies, training for educators or counselors, facebook page. The possibilities are endless!!
- **Community Partners-** You will think very carefully about who you will need to partner with in the community to gain access to the “public” or your particular target audience for educating about intersectionality.
 - For example, if you create a website or facebook page, how will you get people to the sites? This must be done as part of your project. By the due date, you will need to show that the public has been educated in some way or that you have made these connections so that the target audience is being reached. In other words, a summary of how you would hypothetically go about reaching the audience means your project is incomplete.
 - Another example- if you create brochures on a particular intersection issue, you will need to partner with agencies, schools, or whatever appropriate institutions to gain access to your target audience. You will need to convince your partnering agencies that the information you plan to provide is something they need and will commit to sharing with the audience you are seeking out.
- **Individual or Group?** The project may be an individual project or include a maximum of 2 people in a group. Keep in mind a 2-person project will require twice the work as an individual project with twice the outcome in terms of the final product. It is up to the team to ensure that the final product is worthy of a 2-person group.
- **Reflection Paper-** You will also turn in an APA style reflection paper about your intersectionality project. This paper will be 4-5 pages and will explain why you chose your topic, how it relates to intersectionality theory and other theories covered in the course, your rationale for effective public education, and how you are getting the information to the public.
- **Research Support-** You may cite readings from the course, but should have a minimum of 4 journal articles (peer-reviewed) as part of your reflection piece. If you do not already own the APA manual, I strongly urge you to make that purchase now. Although you will submit this paper on WebCT, you must also bring the printed version and any journal articles referenced in your paper to me on paper by the due date.