

Symposium: Gender, race and school success

The papers

1) Intersectional and contingent school success: Gender, racialisation and social class.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the ways in which children and teachers are multiply (and sometimes contradictorily) positioned within social categories such as gender, social class and ethnicity. The first part of the paper presents brief illustrations of educational inequalities that have been identified by researchers in various countries. It discusses the theoretical concept of intersectionality and its utility for the analysis of inequalities. It also draws on Judith Butler's notion of 'liveable lives' as central to how children and young people, parents and teachers negotiate educational processes and practices.

The paper draws on empirical research to consider the experiences, and positioning, of children's and parents' experiences of unequal treatment in educational institutions. In doing so, it illuminates some of the ways in which educational inequalities are reproduced in recurrent patterns that exclude some children and parents from canonical narratives of normative and ideal pupils, and so from 'liveable lives'. The paper argues that an intersectional perspective is central to understandings that do not fix, essentialise and individualise differences that are fluid because they are multiple and that are always simultaneously social and personal.

2) Narratives of African Caribbean high-attaining boys: Perceived peer and family influences in education'

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Abstract

The underachievement of African Caribbean boys has been the subject of considerable debate and research in education but few studies focus on this group's achievements (Byfield, 2008; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). Difficulties associated with racial identity and masculinity are amongst explanations offered for African Caribbean boys' educational underachievement and research has also implicated the peer group's contributions to undermining academic performance (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Sewell, 1997, 2001, 2009; Grantham & Ford, 2003).

This research explored the subjective experiences of high-attaining African Caribbean boys regarding their perceptions of peer influences in school. Seven pupils were given two narrative interviews (2 months apart) about their relationships with peers and experiences related to 'peer influence' and the impact they considered that this had on their education and attainment. Interviews also addressed the impact of family narratives on the boys at school. The interviews were analysed using Gee's (1991) structural linguistic narrative approach, which as well as helping to identify narratives also allowed analysis of how the boys performed their identities in co-constructing their narratives with the interviewer.

The findings suggest that the boys perceived peers to have some influence on their educational experiences and subsequent attainment. Narratives espoused the positive aspects of peer relationships as being emotionally and practically supportive and helping boys' motivation to study through competing for high grades. They also highlighted that peer distractions could lead to underachievement. Pupils used multiple and complex strategies to manage their relationships so that they continued to attain well. These included strategic self-presentation, deploying resources (e.g. social capital) and utilising support from teachers and family members. Family racialised narratives were found to play an important role in developing racial identity and academic orientation.

3) **The educational strategies of the black middle classes**

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Abstract

A growing body of research in England has focused upon the strategies and capitals deployed by White middle class families in their pursuit of educational success. However, scant attention has been paid to how or indeed whether these processes operate in the same way and to the same advantage for their Black middle class counterparts. This paper draws on qualitative data from a two-year project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which examines the educational experiences of the Black middle classes in England. Specifically, it explores the perspectives, strategies and experiences of Black Caribbean heritage families as they seek to navigate their children successfully through the education system. This paper concentrates on the moments of careful negotiation and concerted effort on the part of parents as they engage with and attempt to circumnavigate the low expectations teachers hold about their child's capabilities. These findings are situated within a wider context in which parents express concern about how to best raise healthy, balanced Black daughters and sons in a society which continues to position them as problematic and undesirable. It is argued that while class status serves as a potentially useful tool in helping to mediate against discrimination, the consequences are not guaranteed. The pervasive dynamics of racial stereotypes are such that ultimately being Black and middle class does guarantee protection against racism.

4) **Culturally Responsive Practices and Young Immigrants' Academic success in Iceland**

Dr Susan Rafik Hama

Abstract

Developing an educational system that ensures all demographic groups of students achieve equitable and excellent learning results has become a compelling goal for many underserved students around the world. Here in Iceland, schools have made impressive strides in incorporating students' prior knowledge, language, heritage and learning styles in their education.

The main purpose of this study is to highlight factors that show how culturally responsive practices contributed to the accomplishment of young immigrants' academic success in upper-secondary schools in Iceland. The theoretical framework is based on critical theory and culturally responsive pedagogy, which includes teacher-student dialogue, valuing students' academic, social, and cultural backgrounds, high expectation of students and inclusive pedagogical practice (Gay 2010 Banks 2004). The study is qualitative and based on data gleaned from interviews with 29 students, of both genders, in upper secondary schools in Iceland.

The findings suggest that immigrant students' academic success is attributed to their school and especially teachers' caring, communication, content, and pedagogy. The results indicate that, in order to improve learning outcomes for diverse populations of students, schools (leaders, teachers, and facilitators) need to be aware of and better understand elements that cultivate immigrant students' cultural integrity, abilities, and academic success. These elements are important in generating, validating, facilitating, liberating, and empowering ethnically diverse students.