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Intersectional Research as a Methodology for Shaping Transition Research in Support of Equitable Postschool Outcomes

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Abstract

Disparities in postschool outcomes between student groups associated with intersecting historical marginalizations such as ableism, racism, classism, and linguicism remain stark. Critical research methods have contributed to the development of equity-focused research. In this conceptual paper, we examine intersectional research, one critical methodology focused on equity. In a recent study of postsecondary transitions of multilingual students with disabilities in the northeastern United States, we found this methodology to be productive in examining marginalization and equitable transition outcomes. First, we define intersectionality and provide a rationale for its use. We then share foundational claims of intersectional research, and we provide illustrative examples from our study. The discussion identifies implementation strategies. Last, we share implications such as tensions, benefits, and insights from our application and the extant literature.

Keywords

intersectionality, race, equity, transition, research, reflexivity

Special education scholars, the majority of whom are members of U.S. dominant groups based on ability, race, socioeconomic status, language, and citizenship, have a long history of examining and advocating for equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. Historical accounts of progress toward disability-focused fights for equity such as Wehmeyer's (2013) account of intellectual disability are important reminders of hard-won improvements in educational conditions by and for people with disabilities and special education scholars. A nagging lack of progress, according to special education scholars of color such as Annamma et al. (2017), is also notable with regard to multiply marginalized people whose disability intersects with other historically marginalized identities (e.g., race, sexual orientation and gender, home language, and/or immigrant status). Sustained inequitable education in the ecology of the U.S. society has a multitude of causes and associated factors exposed by numerous theoretical lenses. This special series on special education transition research seeks to disseminate "anti-racist and abolitionist tenants" of our collective work (Sinclair & Kucharczyk, n.d., p. 1), aiming to ameliorate inequity through knowledge sharing. Aligned with the special series, our work pointedly focuses on the role research plays in intentional efforts to move toward equity in special education transition.

More specifically, this article is focused on intersectional research, which is one methodology for conducting research in service of equity. First, we define intersectionality, a theoretical construct in which racism is one point in a constellation of affronts to equity. This theoretical construct serves as a basis for the development and application of intersectional research. We then present a rationale for the application of intersectional research specific to special education transition. Following the definition and rationale, we outline the theoretical assumptions that inform methods decisions for researchers aiming to conduct intersectional research. Next, we introduce a recent study in which we attempted to conduct intersectional research and we illustrate key elements of our approach with examples from our application. Finally, we reflect on our application of intersectional research and how it contributed to our attempt to focus on equity in the context of postsecondary education transitions of multilingual students with disabilities. We conclude by identifying implications for the field.

Before we proceed accordingly, we enact intersectional research by first addressing our positionality. Positionality, typically detailed in the form of a statement, refers to researchers' acknowledgment of aspects of their identities, experiences, and perspectives they–with or without intention–brought to bear on their research (Holmes, 2020). Hence, positionality statements make

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explicit some of the less visible assumptions and biases that have informed researchers' decisions and actions. Both of us have attempted to explain how our identities and experiences have contributed to this conceptual paper and the research upon which it is based. Readers can locate our positionality statements in the Supplemental Appendix. For those unfamiliar with positionality statements, they are dynamic and partial, shifting in tandem with personal and professional identity and experiential development (Stronach et al., 2007). Positionality, a key feature of intersectional research, requires reflexivity, a process that is inherently steeped in the examination of oneself. Therefore, we use the first person point of view throughout this article.

Intersectionality: Definition and Rationale

Several decades ago, Crenshaw (1991), a law scholar who studied the legal implications of sexual violence contextualized by sexism and racism, argued that multiple factors influence people's self-perceptions and others' perceptions of them. Crenshaw's (1991) conceptualization of intersectionality included how these dimensions of identity and multiple other sources of marginalization exert influence on identity development (Crenshaw, 1991). In this influential and generative work, Crenshaw pointed out that while liberation movements such as feminism and antiracism provided strength and empowerment for some women and people of color, respectively, marginalization associated with both sexism and racism prevented Black women from fully benefiting from either liberation movement. Simply put, *intersectionality* refers to the ways in which multiple systems of oppression shape people whose identities drive both the ways they navigate the world and the ways in which they are treated by others.

Intersectionality gained traction among researchers, particularly those who used critical theories and others who articulated an equity-driven purpose to their scholarship (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Intersectionality has also emerged in special education and disability studies as a tool for understanding inequity in education based on the ways in which disability, race/ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic background, home language, immigration status, and other factors map to both identity and oppression (Annamma et al., 2013). For example, in Annamma's (2014) study of Black girls with disabilities who were in juvenile detention, she found that racist, ableist, and sexist beliefs and practices contributed to isolation and other damaging behavioral control methods to the detriment of the young women's learning.

Intersectionality affords insight into the compounded and/or tangled marginalizations through an emphasis on context and perspective. This emphasis makes intersectionality particularly useful when examining inequities faced by students with disabilities. The framework is useful because, along with their families and educators, students with disabilities must navigate multiple, sometimes conflicting, systems and structures marked by exclusion and marginalization (Kozleski & King Thorius, 2014). For example, multilingual students receiving both special education and English learner (EL) services routinely interact with at least three intersecting systems of service delivery (i.e., general, special, and EL education) that can exacerbate confusion and inconsistency in instruction and accommodations. Obstacles and challenges have multiple sources such as individual manifestations of disability, access to evidence-based practices related to both special education and EL services, and/or sources of oppression such as xenophobia and anti-immigrant ideologies, and these require different solutions (García & Ortiz, 2013). A recent study of high school students who were receiving both special education and EL services illustrates this issue. Teachers in the study identified intersecting problems such as professional siloing, limited collaboration with students and families, and academic failures as barriers to transition planning (Romano et al., 2023). In a related study, intersectional data analysis highlighted ways that students and parents proceeded with transition planning outside of school and in their homes and communities, exhibiting persistence in working toward their goals in ways that were not always acknowledged or embraced in school (Trainor et al., 2022).

The potential of intersectionality as a framework for transition research is threefold. First, intersectionality focuses analyses on systemic and structural barriers associated with biases and unequal distributions of power (e.g., ableism; Annamma et al., 2013). As García and Ortiz (2013) explain, these barriers and their impact on equitable opportunities and outcomes are less well-understood than factors associated with the individualized manifestations of disability. Second, intersectionality augments analyses of and intra-group variation in people's responses to oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991). This is important because research on evidence-based transition practices has struggled to address variation in subgroups' preferences, strengths, and needs and the applicability of evidence across groups (Trainor et al., 2019). Third, intersectionality increases analyses of the relationship between the researchers' theories and assumptions and their results. Exposing and examining these links is a way to destabilize the unequal power distributions emblematic of traditional methods of inquiry in which the perceived expert (i.e., the researcher) is exerting control at the expense of historically marginalized groups' access to knowledge, research benefits, leadership opportunities, and quality of life (Bartling & Friesike, 2014). Next, we focus on our process of designing and enacting intersectional research, particularly when using qualitative methods, during a recent multiyear mixed-methods study.

Table 1. Foundational Principles of Implementing Intersectional Research and Applied Examples.

Principle	Applied example
1. Participants' experiences of marginalization and inequality generates knowledge about human and systemic interactions that is on a par with theories and knowledge resulting from formal academic research.	Participants were given an identity prompt and selected what aspect of identity they wanted to share. Researchers did not require additional self-categorization or correction of identity categories.
2. Researchers' access to privilege and power shapes research decisions and how oppression is examined.	Researchers held weekly meetings that included open forums for discussing oppression in the larger society and questioning its implications for the study.
3. Understanding how people live within and across multiple communities and contexts while navigating multiple marginalizations is foundational to the experiences.	Home and school contexts were considered as sites for college planning with informal aspirations and social supports paralleled in value to academic preparation and teacher expectations; youth participants selected adult participants.
4. In addition to participant-researcher reciprocity of resources such as time and materials, participants are positioned as collaborative partners with expertise and leadership capacity.	Youth participant invited to complete consultancy position, reviewing research materials for understandability, usability, and enjoyment.
5. The purpose of research as a collaborative endeavor is to work toward greater equity and improved quality of life.	Research products were designed with goals of improved accessibility and equitable transition planning.

Intersectionality: Principles and Praxis

Intersectional research spans disciplines, paradigms, and methodologies; hence, no single set of steps or procedures define its implementation. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) articulate five claims that undergird intersectional research, helping researchers to enact key approaches to knowledge production through an intersectional lens. We have paraphrased these claims, referring to them as "principles," in Table 1. Intersectionality is a frequently referenced concept across multiple disciplines and decades of social science research (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022), yet we found few examples of its application in transition research.

We use examples of how the implementation of these principles are evidenced throughout our decisions and actions in a recent study of the transition experiences of secondary students who received both special education and EL services to illustrate intersectional research. Notably, we refer to the focal participants in our study as "dually identified" students. Our rationale for using this term, rather than the more common term, "English learners with disabilities," is linked to our implementation of intersectional research, because, as we discuss in depth later in this paper, participants did not describe themselves as disabled or EL. Our term emphasizes the services participants were entitled to receive. Following the first principle, we accepted that people who are marginalized have working theories and self-concepts related to their identities that should be honored and accepted by researchers, even if it conflicts with how dominant groups traditionally define aspects of participants' identities. After describing the larger study, we share more implementation examples, illustrating the mentor text's principles in action and their resulting impact on our work.

Description of Example Study

The qualitative research in this conceptual paper was a part of a larger multiyear mixed-methods examination of transition experiences of dually identified students, with a focus on the transition to postsecondary education. From 2017 to 2022, we sequenced and integrated quantitative and qualitative studies for the purpose of exploring and contextualizing findings from a U.S. national dataset in local, naturally occurring transition settings (Patton, 2015). While we attempted to carry out intersectional research across the quantitative and qualitative strands of our study, we selected qualitative research examples for the purpose of this article.

The qualitative research included a series of interviews with 26 dually identified secondary students, their family members, and their teachers from six public schools in a large northeastern U.S. city. In addition, a group of eight college students who were dually identified in high school participated in a series of three interviews over the course of a calendar year. We purposefully sampled high schools serving dually identified students and then recruited students from these schools (Patton, 2015). Considered the focal participants of the study, students were invited to interview twice. At the initial interview students were asked to nominate a teacher and family member to participate in the study. Teachers and family members who participated were interviewed once. In total, 13 parents and eight teachers were interviewed, in addition to the secondary and postsecondary students. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted our ability to recruit and implement parent and teacher interviews, limiting these groups' sample sizes.

We conducted interviews with participants in the language of their choice and, as needed, transcripts were translated into English by bilingual members of the research team. The interview guides followed a semi-structured

approach. We used open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their ideas, introduce unanticipated topics, and co-construct meaning in conversation with researchers. We posed questions about students' future plans and experiences in transition, parents' and teachers' postsecondary expectations of students, and school, home, and community support and resources for planning, striving toward, and attaining goals.

Analysis included multiple readings of interviews and creating a codebook of operationalized definitions based on both inductive and deductive coding strategies. We also documented our analyses in memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Coding was multilevel (Saldaña, 2015); first-level coding entailed identifying key interview concepts such as students' future goals. Second-level coding involved identifying the themes that illustrated the relationships between codes. Throughout analysis, we engaged in reflexivity both individually and at weekly team meetings. The majority of the team were members of dominant U.S. groups represented in academia. Reflexivity included explicitly discussing positionality and using mentor texts from scholars from historically underrepresented groups to inform data collection and analysis. For example, to interpret and write about participants' rejection of disability labels, we (two former special education teachers) found it necessary to bracket our views of labels as helpful indicators of needed services. Mueller's (2019) research on adolescents' views of labels and stigmatization, written from the positionality of a researcher with disabilities, expanded our understanding of students' rejection of labels during interviews and the implications of label-averse decisions when leaving high school.

Enacting Intersectional Research

Detailing the ways in which we applied the principles of intersectionality represents a retrospective examination of what we did, why we did it, and how our decisions and actions impacted the research. Using Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022), succinct articulation of foundational claims allowed us to organize current reflections of past events. Therefore, we posed the following research question to investigate the intersectional characteristics of our work: *As scholars who identify as equity-focused, how did we implement intersectionality in our study of dually identified students' transitions?*

Intersectionality as Method

In this section, we expound on our application examples (see Table 1) of the intersectional research principles that guided our work. These principles represent our understanding of the defining claims of intersectional research from Esposito and Evans-Winters (2002). We call these "principles," highlighting that our interpretations of the scholars' claims may introduce variation or distance between our work and the mentor text. As White scholars applying the work of these scholars of color, we aim for transparency, acknowledging the role of our positionality in application. This means that the extent to which our work aligns with Esposito and Evans-Winters' (2022) work is representative of dominant-nondominant tensions in positionality, and thus in equity-focused work. Important to note, enacting transparency is tricky because research is a cultural practice (Cole, 2010). Cultural practices are routinized behaviors and related dispositions, often done without awareness of either their underlying assumptions and/or the implications of those assumptions (Bourdieu, 1990). Despite these and other challenges, the demand for transparency is also important because it is considered a quality indicator of qualitative research (Brantinger et al., 2008). Transparency has also emerged as an expectation of the open science research movement which connects transparency to credibility in both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Steltenpohl et al., 2022).

Principle 1

The first principle asserts that intersectional research acknowledges and values participants' lived experiences, especially those associated with struggle and resilience in the face of marginalization. This is done by holding participants' working theories of those experiences alongside academic theories resulting from traditional research. In our study, we attempted to honor and integrate this claim into our process in several ways. For example, when we initially entered the field, teachers shared with us that many students rejected the EL and disability labels used on official school documents. In acknowledgment of teachers' daily interactions with students, we decided not to use our original questionnaire about participants' backgrounds with questions about disability, race, socioeconomic status, and other identity indicators. Instead, we decided to facilitate participants' self-disclosure of dimensions of their identities. Subsequent student interviews confirmed teachers' claims of students' rejection of disability and EL labels.

To accomplish this procedurally and with consistency, we used an identity wheel graphic organizer, which showed identity categories such as ability, race, ethnicity, age, language, gender, and sexual orientation as spokes on a wheel. Participants were asked to elaborate about themselves on any three dimensions of their choosing. They were provided with multiple opportunities to add to their graphic organizer, but we did not require them to complete the wheel or reveal any single dimension for our research purposes.

In addition, during interviews, we refrained from using school-designated terms and labels to describe participants, instead mapping to their disclosures and preferred terms. For example, when a student self-identified as bilingual and good at English, despite falling short of EL declassification

criteria, we did not interpret their self-identities as inaccurate or untruthful. Instead, we probed, listened, and analyzed their views of their English proficiency and we triangulated their responses with parents and teachers when possible.

Principle 2

The second principle acknowledges researcher positionality that is conveyed through the privilege and power associated with personal identities and affiliations (e.g., race/ethnicity, disability, language, religion) and life experiences (e.g., immigration, terminal degree attainment, professional roles, socioeconomic status). Positionality influences researchers' decisions and actions. Enacting this principle meant intentionally integrating opportunities for reflexivity, both as a team and individually. We addressed this throughout the study, from design to dissemination. *Reflexivity* is self-examination coupled with responsive actions toward one's goals. For example, a researcher noticing that ableist ideas are influencing their fieldwork prompts themself to take action to address their biases. Strategies for addressing biases may include writing about one's assumptions, discussing sterotypical thinking with colleagues, and seeking alternative theoretical frameworks that destabilize prejudicial thinking and acting. Reflexivity is a well-researched tool associated with qualitative methods of memoing about field experiences and data interpretations (Stronach et al., 2007). It is important to mention that reflexivity has also been critiqued because it frequently occurs voluntarily and privately. In our example, we coupled individual memoing with weekly team meetings, regularly discussing how systemic oppressions played a role in what we were seeing and finding in the field.

We also discussed how identity influenced our own lenses and decisions as researchers. The racial, linguistic, disability, and immigration identities represented by team members varied; however, we understood that our group was shaped by our majority identities and statuses (e.g., White, highly educated, financially secure). Thus, our positionalities differed in many ways from our participants. To maintain awareness of our positionalities and to interrogate how these influenced our research processes, we authored individual positionality statements, reviewing and revising them throughout our research study. We also intentionally discussed how our own positionalities were influencing how we were collecting, interpreting, and presenting data. For example, we recognized our positionality as U.S. citizens and residents set us apart from some of our participants, and we understood that this distance might interfere with our understanding of undocumented participants' decisions and actions related to transition, particularly to employment and postsecondary education. In our view, the most ethical way to approach this issue was to consult local experts about resources and supports for college-going students with undocumented individual and/or mixed family statuses and to share this information with participating students, families, and teachers. This allowed us to respect and care for participants, and also to inform ourselves about the ways citizenship intersected with disability and other marginalizations when/if participants elected to self-disclose and discuss.

Principle 3

The third principle describes the importance in acknowledging and attending to how participants live within and across communities and how multiple marginalizations influence their experiences. In our study, we made a point to incorporate both the home and school experiences of students in our interview protocol and subsequent conversations. We asked questions about the ways in which transition planning was occurring across both the students' home and school communities. We also asked students to nominate both a family member and a teacher to speak with us about these experiences outside and inside of school. In our analysis, we examined the ways in which evidence of transition planning in home and community contexts compared with that which occurred in classrooms, parent–teacher collaborations, and other school contexts. Through fieldwork and data triangulation we made a concerted effort to contextualize our analyses, including when we found conflicting perspectives or examples that seemed to contradict emerging themes. For example, some students and parents did not associate school with transition planning despite that teachers articulated ways in which they were addressing students' transitions. We conducted repeated readings of interviews, a strategy typically used in qualitative analyses, to locate and contextualize sources of disconnect. Using critical theories, we considered how multiple marginalizations impacted transition planning opportunities afforded to students within and outside of school.

Principal 4

The fourth principle posits that participants should be viewed and treated as research collaborators with valuable expertise to share. From the beginning of the project, we had few participant-led activities (e.g., participatory action research) built into our design. Therefore, our collaboration with participants occurred during late-stage research activities such as reviewing research products. We did not include participants in the team analysis meetings or invite their participation in presentations and papers. Enacting this principle was also negatively impacted when our efforts to conduct member checking, a qualitative strategy for participants' review of data and analysis, were thwarted by the COVID-19 pandemic when all research was halted (see Trainor et al., in press). After the close of data collection,

we did invite students to work on our project in a paid consultancy role and we invited colleagues in related fields (e.g., college planners focused on underrepresented student populations) to provide feedback on usability and other factors important to accessing our work. For example, one student participant consulted on our project, working through transition planning materials we created based on participants' preferences and needs shared in interviews. These activities were undertaken to gain information about participants' opinions about the understandability, usability, and enjoyment of the materials as well as notes for improving them. Feedback from this individual will be used in our future efforts to improve research products such as planning tools and website content.

Principle 5

The fifth principle states research is conducted in service to equity, fostering all communities to benefit from the results of inquiry. Equitable societies, as the fifth principle hints, are collaborative in the development of stuctures and systems that support all individuals and groups. In our research process, we attempted to reimagine transition both through the perspectives of our participants and through our own critique of the current oppressive structures and systems that minimize access to effective transition planning. In this study, our focus on greater equity was to understand the complexity of multiple marginalizations associated with a large number of factors that varied across participants. Ableism and linguicism were prioritized in our analyses, but racism, sexism, classism, and other biases and inequities required our attention. In addition to examining barriers for the purpose of replacing them with equitable, supportive resources, we strove to understand the participants' successes, joys, and resilience. To this end, we aimed to create greater accessibility in transition through our research, expanding traditional definitions of transition planning, or what counted as such, in ways that matched what participants celebrated outside of the exclusionary structures and systems associated with school contexts.

We examined findings not only in terms of precedence from the field available in extant research but also findings that aligned with a goal of sustaining the identities of all students, particularly those who experience multiple marginalizations. For example, we highlighted the power of postsecondary education dreams and aspirations supported by students, parents, and communities as resiliance in the face of repeated difficulties, passing state required exit exams and coursework. We saw creativity and tenacity in students' endeavors outside of school, and we used these analyses when developing implications for transition planning in school contexts. Reimagining transition from the perspectives of students presented new opportunities than what was being made possible in school. Exploring how schools can better support and sustain the goals of students as they are imagined by students and families in the transition process is a major implication of our research.

Our implementation of the five principles representing our understanding of the foundational claims of intersectional research (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022) illustrates how we implemented this approach. In the next section, we reflect on how to move intersectional research forward strategically.

Moving Forward With Intersectional Research

In this conceptual paper, we have presented a definition, rationale, and example of intersectional research. We now turn our attention to strategies for doing intersectional research based on lessons we learned. We also share the tensions and benefits we experienced.

Doing intersectional research required us to make changes in our usual strategies for project completion. We found that the intersectional-focused steps we took were interdependent in relation to the tenets delineated by Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022). Based on this experience, we organized our reflections and suggested research strategies in four key responsibility areas: (1) implementation, (2) reflection, (3) communication, and (4) collaboration. Table 2 illustrates the alignment between responsibilities, strategies, and principles. As illustrated in Table 2, opportunities for doing intersectional research occur across a project. Before discussing the strategies in detail, we provide the following extended example illustrating how the lessons learned, the tensions, and the benefits were interconnected and experienced across research stages.

Reflecting on how our research team members' statuses as either U.S. citizens or residents illustrated our power and privilege (Principle 2), we read and discussed incursions and trauma being inflicted on students and their families by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Here, we were engaging primarily in reflection. Based on what we learned, we decided that we needed to collaborate with community members with firsthand knowledge of immigration. We located a community-based collaborator who helped us offer informational resources to undocumented participants (Principle 4) and allowed us to share our work with a wider audience of multilingual students, families, and educators who were focused on postsecondary education access (Principle 5). To collaborate effectively, we prepared project materials at the intersection of disability and postsecondary education transitions for sharing with a community-based audience outside of academia. Our partners offered reciprocity by allowing us to make participant recruitment materials available to our shared audiences. Collectively, these strategies introduced tensions that included making time and space for discussions among the team, whose members'

Table 2. Strategies for Moving Intersectional Research Forward.

Area of researchers' responsibility	Intersectional research strategies	Intersectionality research principle				
		1	2	3	4	5
Implementation	1.1 Create timelines with space for reflexive discussions with team and community members		x	x	x	
	1.2 Use accessible and familiar spaces in close proximity to the community					
	1.3 Educate project officers and other colleagues about time, space, and resource changes necessary for intersectional research					
Reflection	2.1 Employ deductive and inductive application of theory and analytic processes, remaining open to participant experiences that contradict or expand current theories	x			x	x
	2.2 Use individual journaling and group debriefing to immerse the team in the community's sociopolitical, cultural, and historical realities					
	2.3 Engage community in sessions to discuss for each stage of research, inviting members to review and generate research materials (e.g., interview protocol)					
Communication	3.1 Develop community-friendly tools for working with community, reducing jargon and wordiness, paying attention to authentic uses of vernacular and language variation	x	x		x	
	3.2 Articulate a listening protocol using active listening with team and community					
	3.3 Educate IRB staff on intersectional processes and how they align with research ethics					
Collaboration	4.1 Build relationships with experienced community leaders, foster fostering leadership development	x	x			x
	4.2 Develop researcher opportunities for co-leadership between research team and community members					
	4.3 Use liberatory and inclusive teacher education scholarship (e.g., Freire's (2018) funds of knowledge, culturally sustaining pedagogy) to align research goals and actions and share decision-making power					

Note. IRB = institutional review board.

experiences and beliefs about the U.S. immigration policy varied. In addition, increasing our knowledge of national and local forcible ICE separations of children from their families raised our awareness of the political context of our work. This heightened awareness surfaced negative emotions such as anxiety and sadness that, at times, overshadowed our daily research tasks, but it also increased our sense of purpose and hope about the work we were doing to increase community members' paths to postsecondary education. These tensions required us to devote more time and resources to our community partnerships. Benefits to the team included expanding our understanding of immigration and its impact on undocumented students with and without disabilities and strengthening our research-to-practice connections. For example, we developed materials for undocumented students seeking financial aid, focusing on accessibility at the intersections of disability and immigration status. These strategies increased our understanding of participants' intersectional identities and aided both our data collection and data analysis. Strengthening research to practice connections also assuaged our feelings of helplessness with regard to community-level trauma resulting from ICE interventions. This extended example illustrated elements of implementation, reflection, communication, and collaboration across the principles of intersectional research upon which we now elaborate.

Implementation

For the purposes of this discussion, we defined *implementation* as logistical activities with a primary focus on the tangible and intangible resources necessary for doing intersectional research. Across the tenets identified by Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022), researchers aiming to do intersectional work must build in time for both reflection (individual and teamwork) and collaborative relationships with participant communities. They note that fully understanding participants' theories of struggle, resilience, and their daily manifestations, as required in the first and third principles, relies on the strengths of a trusting relationship. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) suggest both additional time for observations and transparent sharing sessions where researchers reveal their intentions and goals for study to the larger community. In Table 2, our first strategy, adding reflection to the research timeline, has the potential to aid in planning and accountability and in doing so addresses a tension we experienced. We fell behind our scheduled timeline because reflexively sharing at weekly meetings absorbed time set aside for analysis. Ultimately, reflection strengthened analysis. Using a timeline with scheduled opportunities for reflection could aid researchers' efforts to create more space for steering and documenting intentional reflection and reflexive actions.

The third strategy in the implementation section (See Table 2) is based on our experience with institutional review boards (IRBs) at our university and school districts who wanted certainty around participants' time, research activity locations, and other details. Because our aim was to build trust and share power with research participants, these details were not predetermined and we sought participant input introducing variation to IRB reviewers who preferred consistency (Brooks et al., 2014). Researchers doing intersectional research will likely need to work collectively to educate these governing structures while maintaining ethical standards. Hemmings (2006) suggests that aiding the IRB in understanding how these strategies benefit participants, already in the purview of review boards, is one way to enact ethical research while helping to change power structures in meaningful ways.

Reflection

Qualitative work, at its core, acknowledges and embraces subjective ways of knowing (Patton, 2015). This means that the results of a study are, by design, delivered, discussed, and disseminated through the researchers' lenses. Intersectional research emphasizes reflection because, as Esposito and Evans-Winters' (2022) tenets make clear, examining social interactions and contexts requires a full understanding of the relational self and other. Reflection implies scrutiny and consideration. Our first strategy, inductive and deductive use of theory, underscores the need for researchers to value and employ participants' ways of making sense of the world. Qualitative researchers traditionally lean into deductive methods associated with grounded theory to do this work. Grounded theory requires an openness in data collection and analysis whereby the researcher simply observes and asks insiders about the phenomenon of interest (Charmaz, 2006). For our team, we also brought theories of capital (e.g., cultural information, networking, and financial resources) to interviews with participants about postsecondary transition. Noting our connections to theory and our use of both deductive and inductive reasoning were central to our efforts to articulate our method with transparency. In Table 2, our second strategy aligns with both qualitative criteria for rigor identified by Brantlinger et al. (2005) and multiple principles of intersectional research linked to the claims articulated by Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022). For example, we discuss school engagement theory as developed and measured by fellow researchers, and how their theories shaped our interview protocol, and we also explain how our field work with multilingual learners with disabilities augmented and reshaped our theorizing of engagement (Trainor et al., 2022).

Our second reflection strategy resulted from another tension we experienced. Doing intersectional research challenged some of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that we held, and these beliefs were in conflict with what students and families valued and knew to be true. For example, our beliefs about both EL and disability identification as mechanisms for service delivery were in tension with the first intersectional research principle that calls on researchers, especially those who are not experiencing marginalization in ways similar to participants' experiences, to accept and value participants' working theories about their lives. We knew from prior work that labels provide limited information. Still, we found it uncomfortable to not have access to pertinent information about student participants' EL levels and special education disability categories. Despite that teachers verified that all students recruited for the study were receiving both EL and special education services, we were pulled toward measurements and delineations that we consciously try to critique because of their ties to deficit thinking, biases, and inconsistent application (Artiles et al., 2011). Part of this unnerving push and pull originated with concern about how label-less work would be received by colleagues. Dealing with this inner conflict forced us to see that our concerns were about self-promotion and adherence to academic standards and not about honoring participants' truths and experiences, which is the aim of qualitative methodologies (Pugach, 2001). A benefit of this reflection was that it revealed a solution. In this case, we elevated participants' rejection of labels, instead focusing on the discreet challenges to learning that they shared with us in interviews. This heightened our awareness of the structural barriers they faced. Enacting the principles of intersectional research was not a quick or easy path leading us to equity-focused work. Rather, incremental progress motivated us to learn and to reach out to other experts, often those with multiply marginalized backgrounds, to interpret data.

Communication

The category of communication is straightforward, referring to strategies to share information within the project and across researcher team-community group activities. Maintaining consistent and clear communication and expectations across the team and within the community where research is conducted is essential to establishing trust (Patton, 2015). Therefore, it is important to be cognizant of the degree to which the research process is transparent. Reflexivity plays a role in maintaining transparency, as research team members must have a clear understanding of the ways in which their identities, backgrounds, and experiences inform key decisions in the research (Pugach, 2001). Our first communication strategy, developing community-friendly tools that limit jargon and wordiness and that take into account vernacular and language used by the community, is important in authentically engaging with community members. Understanding communication

preferences and picking up on the communication styles of a particular community requires building familiarity and knowledge as well as working closely with insiders who can inform and provide feedback on the utility of various tools created for the purpose of the project. Developing research tools, such as interview protocols and recruitment materials, that are relevant to both the research team and to the community is critical. Responding to the communication preferences of community members who are invited to participate in research also has the potential to address their reluctance to participate in research based on personal or historical knowledge of harmful research experiences (Quraishi & Philburn, 2015).

Our second communication strategy is to engage in active listening and to develop a listening protocol to use when engaging with community stakeholders and when collecting data. This approach is essential in intersectional research as it ensures that space is provided for participants to introduce new topics perhaps unanticipated by the research team. Openness is required to intentionally listen to what community members and participants have to say about their lived experiences. In our project, we entered the research with clear expectations and goals but found that it was important to adjust and adapt these to align with students, families, and educators, which created opportunities for discovery. For example, we learned from our interviews with participants that transition planning was occurring outside of school within students' homes and communities. Engaging in active listening allowed us to pay attention to participants' descriptions of their experiences that contrasted with our perspectives that were informed by both our positionality and the extant literature. The third strategy, educating IRB representatives on intersectional processes and how these strategies align with federally protected participants' rights and research ethics, is important in both ensuring that intersectional research becomes better integrated into and accepted within traditional academic systems like the IRB but also to help the IRB understand the relationship between their goals in upholding ethics in research and an intersectional approach to research, which honors the lived experiences of participants in research and allows for them to co-construct research processes and approaches.

Collaboration

We defined *collaboration* as working together, within teams and across researchers and participants. Collaboration is essential to intersectional research as it ensures that research is two-sided, mutually beneficial, and co-constructed between research teams and community members (Wyatt et al., 2018). It also ensures a certain authenticity in the research output, aligned to the participant communities' preferences, needs, and informed by the voices of the community anticipated benefits, aligning with Esposito and Evans-Winters' (2022) intersectional research claims. It also ensures authenticity in the research output, aligned to participant communities' preferences, needs, and anticipated benefits, aligning with Esposito and Evans-Winters' (2022) tenets of intersectional research. Consistent attention and negotiation of power is required for collaborative research, as research teams must create space for co-leadership and ownership of research processes within and amongst communities. To this end, our first strategy entails building relationships with experienced community leaders and fostering the development of less experienced community members, inviting them to engage in and inform the research process and output. This approach required us to let go of our preconceived ideas of what successful schooling and transition look like and instead listen to community members' definitions of and approaches to desired postschool outcomes.

The second strategy involves developing opportunities for co-leadership between research team and community members. Through this process, research teams that support and accept community members' leadership and decisions during the research process may encounter creative and emergent models of working together (Wyatt et al., 2018). In this way, identifying, connecting, and providing support for collaborative leadership becomes bi-directional with researchers both supporting and receiving support through community collaboration. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) underscore the importance of this give and take across all five of their claims of intersectional research. To develop community leadership, researchers are responsible for reflecting on structures that have historically excluded community collaboration and for sharing educational, financial, and social networking resources.

The third collaborative strategy is to use liberatory and inclusive teacher education scholarship to align research goals and actions and to share decision-making power. Many scholars of color have described processes for using scholarship to advance liberation and these theories can inform and guide research decisions and processes (e.g., Friere, 2018; Paris & Winn, 2014). Shared readings and discussions of frameworks throughout the research process can ensure that research activities align with the overall goal and purpose of the respective research. Dialoging about researchers' theories and those within the community also fosters collaboration. In summary, Table 2 contains an initial list of strategies for implementing intersectional research.

Limitations

We found through our attempt to enact intersectional research that it was difficult to know whether we were effectively balancing our attention to all five principles. We found intersectionality principles provided a framework for

making decisions in research design, data collection, and dissemination; however, enacting these principles while analyzing data presented challenges. For example, the complexity of intersectionality in analysis required prolonged attention and discussion. We wondered if it distracted us from our focus on other theoretical frameworks central to investigating transition, such as self-determination and capital theories.

We came to understand our work as a product of *bricolage*, a metaphor and a method for bringing multiple theoretical frameworks to bear on research. The method is particularly useful for interrogating biases and inequities and for situating participants' experiences in cultural, historical, and sociopolitical contexts (Wyatt & Zaidi, 2022). Limited time and our inexperience with implementing and documenting intersectional research principles meant that our planned time for analysis and other research responsibilities fell short of what we needed. In addition, we found few mentor texts while doing this work. This paper provides a retrospective examination of how we approached intersectional research by examining our documentation of criticality in artifacts such as research memos. Prior to this study, our use of the term intersectionality applied mostly to peoples' identities and interactions with interlocking systems of oppression. Expanding our understanding of intersectionality to a robust research approach requires intentional planning so that all priciples can be implemented confidently, consistently, and aptly. Understanding what we were doing and how this was shaping our work remains a work in progress. We found it challenging to create a map or set of sequential steps of clearly delineated actions. Fully operationalizing intersectional transition research for future studies–both ours and others–may benefit from articulated quality indicators that help gauge progress and accountability.

Implications

The intersectional research claims developed by Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) provide clear guidance for expanding the inclusivity of participant and researcher groups, reframing the roles of people who have been exploited or excluded from research. Their work intentionally reframes new roles for all people to be critical stakeholders whose perspectives and positions are centrally important to knowledge production. Thus, by articulating these claims and what it means for researchers implementing them, the abstract notion of equity-focused research is made more accessible through the concretization of methodological decision-making. We are hopeful that our example provides insights to those seeking to understand postsecondary education transitions.

Based on a traditional approach to our initial literature reviews and early empirical work (Trainor et al., 2016), we were confident our study would address a knowledge gap with regard to the growing population of multilingual secondary students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education. By focusing on that knowledge gap, we prioritized the fifth principle with an intention to release research and related products that would improve the transition experiences of dually identified students. The application of intersectional research claims helped us to see that our products were mostly shaped for an academic audience and that this was linked to accountability measures in academia. Our desire to go beyond peer reviewed journal publications that would be impactful for students, families, and educators aligned well with multiple claims from Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022), who emphasized the importance of relevance and use of the outputs of research based on inputs from all communities, including those who have face systemic oppressions. The elevated questioning of the benefits and fit of research solutions to highly contextualized questions and problems of practice also aligned with aspects of another movement, one that is anchored in special education research—the open science research movement (Cook et al., 2021). While beyond the scope of this paper, open science research is also concerned with making scientific results more relevant and accessible to communities outside of academia (Bartling & Friesike, 2014), underscoring the relevance of intersectional research.

Importantly, enacting the third principle, attending to inter- and intra-group differences across contexts, meant that both data collection and analysis were complicated and slow. We needed to carefully consider, for example, not only the intersection of multilingualism and disability, but also the nuanced differences associated with the intersections of those multiple languages, race, immigration focusing on social interactions rather than individual demographics. Variations in inter- and intra-group historical, cultural, and sociopolitical experiences of participants' distinct identity groups are important but dominant group researchers may not generally have awareness and understanding of the entire palette of concerns and related resilience responses. We needed to simultaneously embrace the second and fourth principles, paying particular attention to working with insiders from historically marginalized groups. All five intersectional research principles required us to be deliberate in research decisions and actions.

Intersectional and open science research methods both traverse quantitative and qualitative paradigms. See, for example, Lombardi et al. (2023), for a discussion of the application of transparency, a key concept across both intersectional research and open science methods and strategies. Although our focus in this paper was on our application of intersectional research in qualitative work, our larger project was a mixed-methods research design and intersectionality principles were challenging to apply in the quantitative work. For example, disability terms describing participants in our secondary analyses of national data were school-based, categorically accepted and applied without contextualizing linguistic identities of youth and families (see Trainor et al., 2019). Esposito

and Evans-Winters (2022) acknowledged that researchers who employ transparency in service of credibility and trustworthiness are employing qualitative concepts, but that the underlying values of these claims are applicable in quantitative studies. We agree with Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) and we attempted to apply the claims of intersectional research throughout our work, with varying degrees of success. For example, we are continuing to examine why quantitative and qualitative results regarding transition and secondary school engagement varied widely for the similar populations of participants (see Trainor et al., 2022). In light of this paper, we are questioning the role that intersectional research claims might have played in the seemingly contradictory findings and their implications.

Additional implications of this work more directly engage with qualitative discussions of positionality and the specific concern about addressing biases and power imbalances in qualitative research. As researchers who identify as members of the dominant group, we acknowledge the limitations of our expertise, and we seek to enact reflexivity throughout the research process. One implication is that this work is neither tidy nor formulaic. We see the example we have presented here as a set of snapshots taken on a journey still in progress. It is nonlinear and most humbling when we stumble off track; however, engaging in intersectional research is also generative of discovery. We are trying to etch out a new road map leading to a destination that has fewer obstacles to equity and more pathways to young adults with disabilities, their families, and their educators' increased quality of life. Space for this articulation in the special series afforded this and is indicative of motivation from within academia to conduct equity-focused research.

Given our positionalities, we also recognize the importance of making this journey with others. Collaboration within and outside of academia, representing students' and families' identities and affiliations, is key. Reshaping our expectations and adapting to other ways of knowing means that we need to cultivate relationships across communities outside of academia. Using a mentor text is one route, establishing a range of equally valued team members with diverse professional and personal identities is another. Deconstructing inequity within academia is also essential to change, and this may require updating the criteria for rigorous research to include measures of researchers' efforts to address intersectionality.

Conclusion

Our experiences in taking an intersectional approach to research illuminate a path forward in the field of transition for scholars seeking to eradicate historical marginalizations such as ableism, racism, and linguicism. The principles outlined by Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) provide a jumping off point for scholars. We encountered various tensions and challenges in our work, but our intersectional approach ultimately led to many benefits and insights. Going forward, we aim to continue to build from and extend our key learnings from this project to continue to explore and extend how intersectional research can be a tool for greater equity in transition and postschool outcomes, particularly for students experiencing multiple marginalizations.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available on the *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* website with the online version of this article.

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