What does it feel like to be a problem?

Toward Unpacking Mathematics-Learning Experiences in Developmental Mathematics Courses

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March 19, 2015
Acknowledgements

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Bob Megginson, Duane Cooper, Mark Hoover Thames and other organizers of and contributors to this workshop
What does it feel like to be a problem?

- DuBois’ classic question regarding the nature of identity, “the color line,” and Black life in the US
- What does it mean to be a Black learner in non-credit-bearing remedial/developmental mathematics courses?
- Who are our students becoming as mathematics learners in these courses?
- What psychosocial phenomena are emerging amid their learning experiences?
My research program

- Multi-pronged: (1) Mathematics identity and socialization, (2) Math-learning experience in non-credit-bearing mathematics courses, (3) Urban mathematics education

- Drawing from multiple studies and institutional contexts toward unpacking math-learning experiences in NCBR mathematics courses at four-year universities
Overview of the research studies

- Drawing from three studies (2008, 2011, present), involving approx. 150 undergraduates
- Largely qualitative studies of learners’ experiences in the classroom and in the broader institutional environment
- Methods: Ethnographic observations and video analysis of classroom episodes; series of semi-structured interviews; interviews and artifact collection from key institutional stakeholders
Two central themes

- Identity (Stereotype) Threat: Are students’ racial, gendered, and mathematics-specific identities being primed in ways that may cause them to question themselves and their trajectories? (Larnell, accepted; Larnell, Boston, & Bragelman, 2014)

- Cooling-out Phenomenon: Are students in non-credit-bearing mathematics courses subjected to socialization messages that may inadvertently lead them to dis-identify with the domain? (Larnell, in preparation)
Next Steps

- As per Vilma Mesa’s (et al, 2014) call to the mathematics education research community to consider the community college context
- Chicago: Mayor’s initiative to provide full scholarships to Chicago’s City Colleges for Chicago Public School graduates who meet eligibility requirements
- How do psychosocial learning issues differ across these contexts (two- and four-year institutions)?
Thank you


- Larnell, G.V. (in preparation). We real cool: Reconsidering the “cooling-out” phenomenon among Black learners in remedial mathematics courses.