

Others or Same:

Intersectionality, Interdisciplinarity, and the Question of Synonymity

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The Question

Can we presuppose a methodological allegiance between
interdisciplinarity and intersectionality?

In “Literary Matters: Research Methods in Reading Ethnic Literature,” Katrak (2008) brings our attention to this important question when she considers the methodological relationship between interdisciplinarity and intersectionality. She argues that intersectionality informs interdisciplinarity. Intersectional categories somehow announce the critical approach that helps to determine the requisite disciplinary frameworks and methodologies for analysis. Katrak presupposes a synonymy that may be more problematic than we think because interdisciplinarity can be approached in one of two ways. Does Katrak advocate an allegiance between intersectionality and a critical or instrumental interdisciplinary approach? This presentation examines the theoretical and pedagogical implications of this question.

The Problem

Critical IDS

An interdisciplinary approach that is more theoretical, nonlinear, and oriented toward challenging knowledge structures and learning

(Klein, 2017; Lattuca, 2001)

Instrumental IDS

An interdisciplinary approach that is more practical, linear, and oriented towards problem-solving, exigency, and research

(Klein, 2017; Lattuca, 2001)

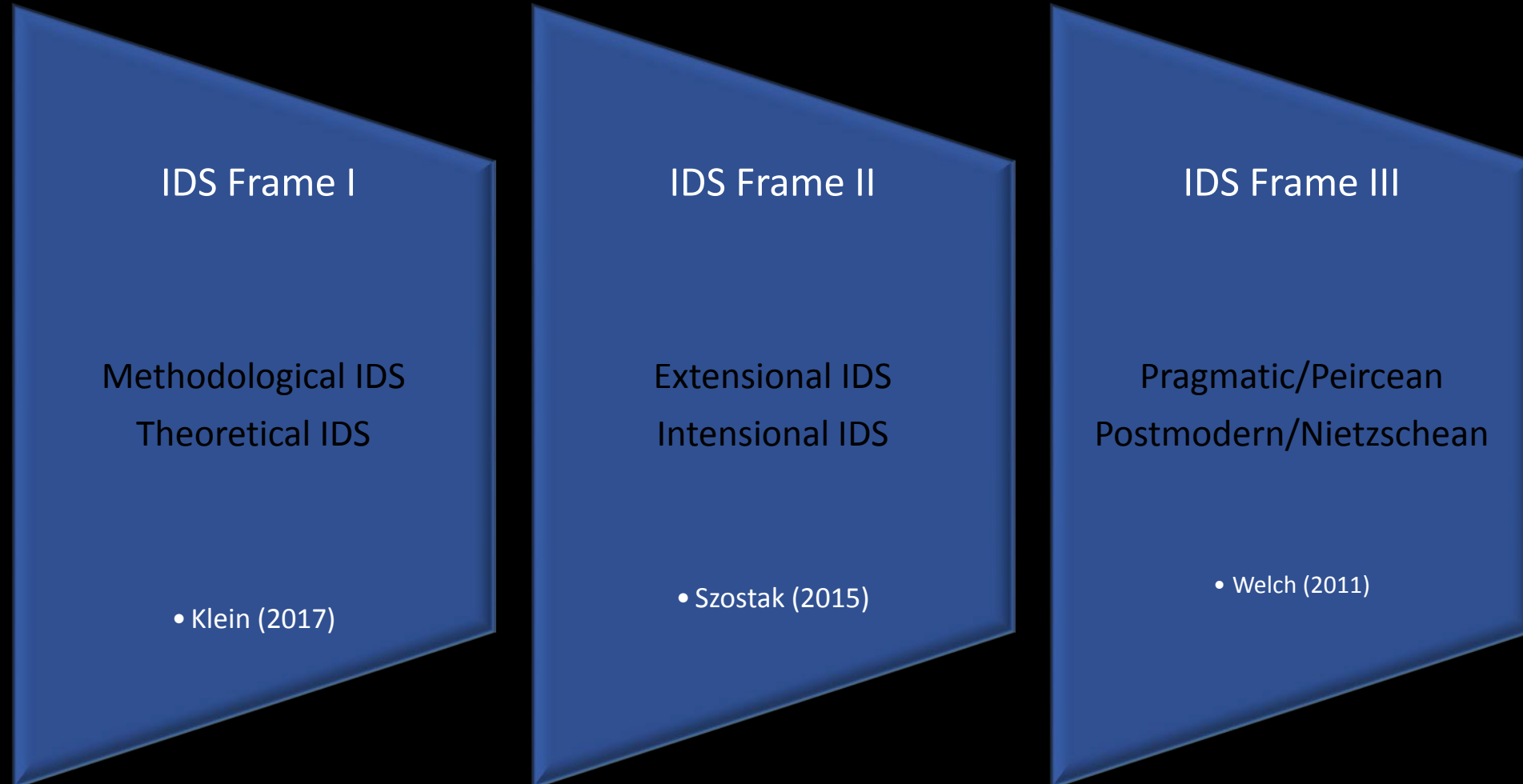
Intersectionality

A framework for locating the interconnected complexities of difference for an explanation, critique, and/or transformation of an individual experience or group reality

(Butler, 2017; Crenshaw, 1995)

What is intersectionality and how does it relate to critical and instrumental interdisciplinary (IDS) approaches? There are important distinctions to consider. The wrong methodological alliance may support rather than disrupt the reductionist thinking that intersectionalists and interdisciplinarians claim to challenge. Under what philosophical conditions will intersectionality and interdisciplinarity become synonymous?

The Problem (Re)Framed



These three descriptions of interdisciplinary approaches help us to identify **the genealogy** that explains the philosophical conditions in which interdisciplinarity and intersectionality become figurative equivalents as models of mediation and integration. It is in dialogism that this will occur. Peirce (1955) anticipates dialogism. As a pragmatist and semiotician, Peirce claims that all thinking is dialogic (Chandler, 2002, p. 34). He helps us to see a continuum between our dual views of interdisciplinarity .

The Solution

Peirce

Translation of
Signs

“We think only in signs. These
mental signs are of mixed
nature...”

• (1955, p. 115)

Bakhtin

Dialogic
Philosophy

“Each word (each sign) of the
text exceeds its boundaries”

• (1986, p. 161)

Kristeva

Intertextuality
(Transposition)

“Each word (text) is an
intersection of word (text)...”

• (1986, p. 37)

Holquist (1990) views Bakhtin as the philosophical heir to Peirce. He claims, “...in many ways, dialogism is very close to the thought of C. S. Peirce, especially to the notion that meaning may be defined as the translation of a sign into another system of signs” (1990, p. 50). Using Bakhtin’s dialogism, Kristeva coins the controversial term *intertextuality*. She writes, “The word as minimal textual unit turns out to occupy the status of mediator...” (1986, p. 37). Like words, intertextuality is coextensive and interrelational for Kristeva (p. 44). As umbrella terms for mediation and integration, intersectionality and interdisciplinarity become tropes for intertextuality and dialogism .

The Dialogic Principles

Principle 1

Language and dialogue create unity and simultaneity out of “separatedness” and difference in the dialogic process.

(Bakhtin 1986; 1990)

Principle 2

All words, texts, and selves are connected and interrelated by this same dialogic process. To write is to author a text and thyself.

(Bakhtin, 1990; Holquist, 1990; Kristeva, 1986)

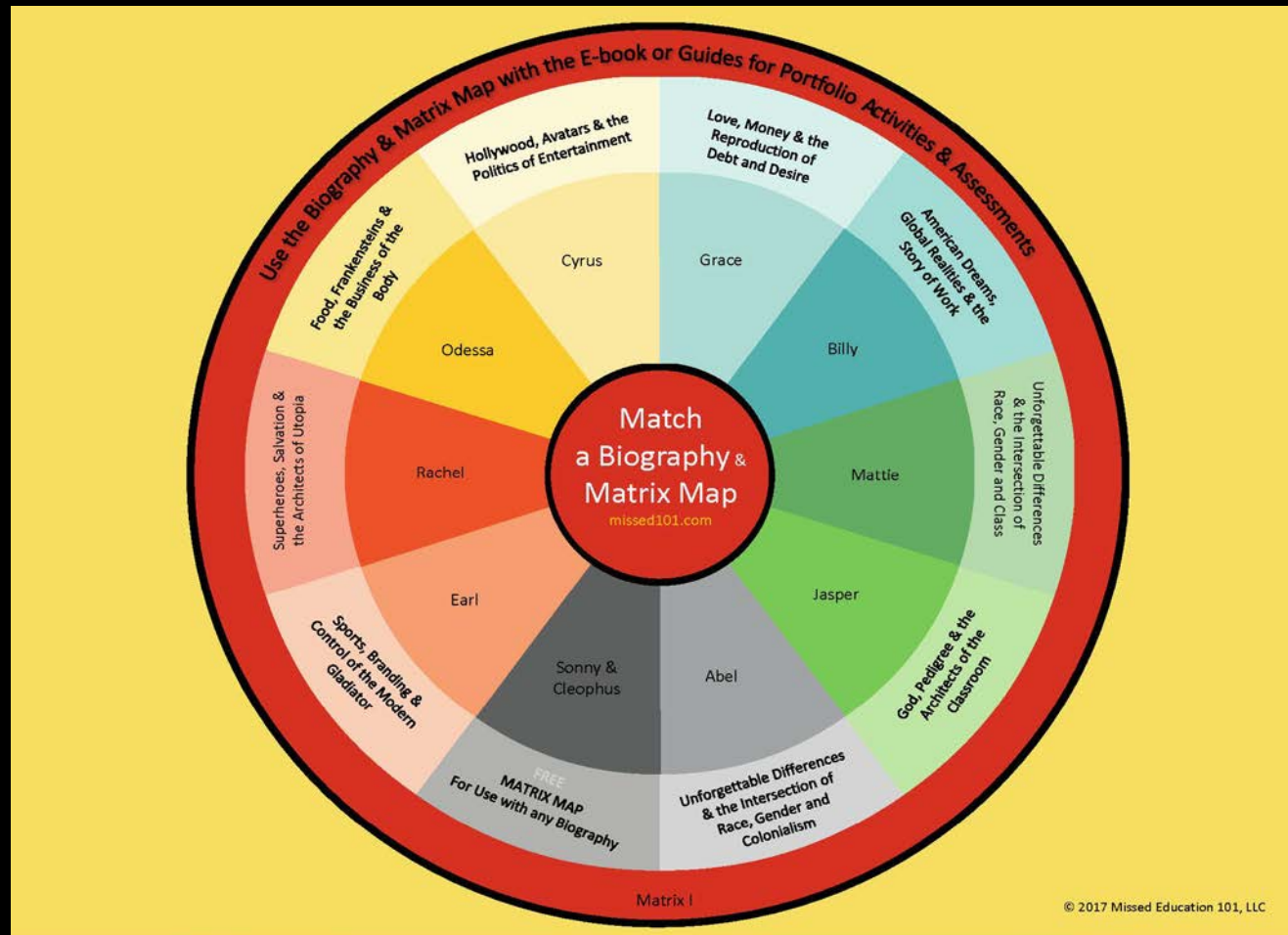
Principle 3

Intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, and intersectionality are figurative equivalents in dialogism.

(Kristeva, 1986; Butler, 2017; Orr, 2003)

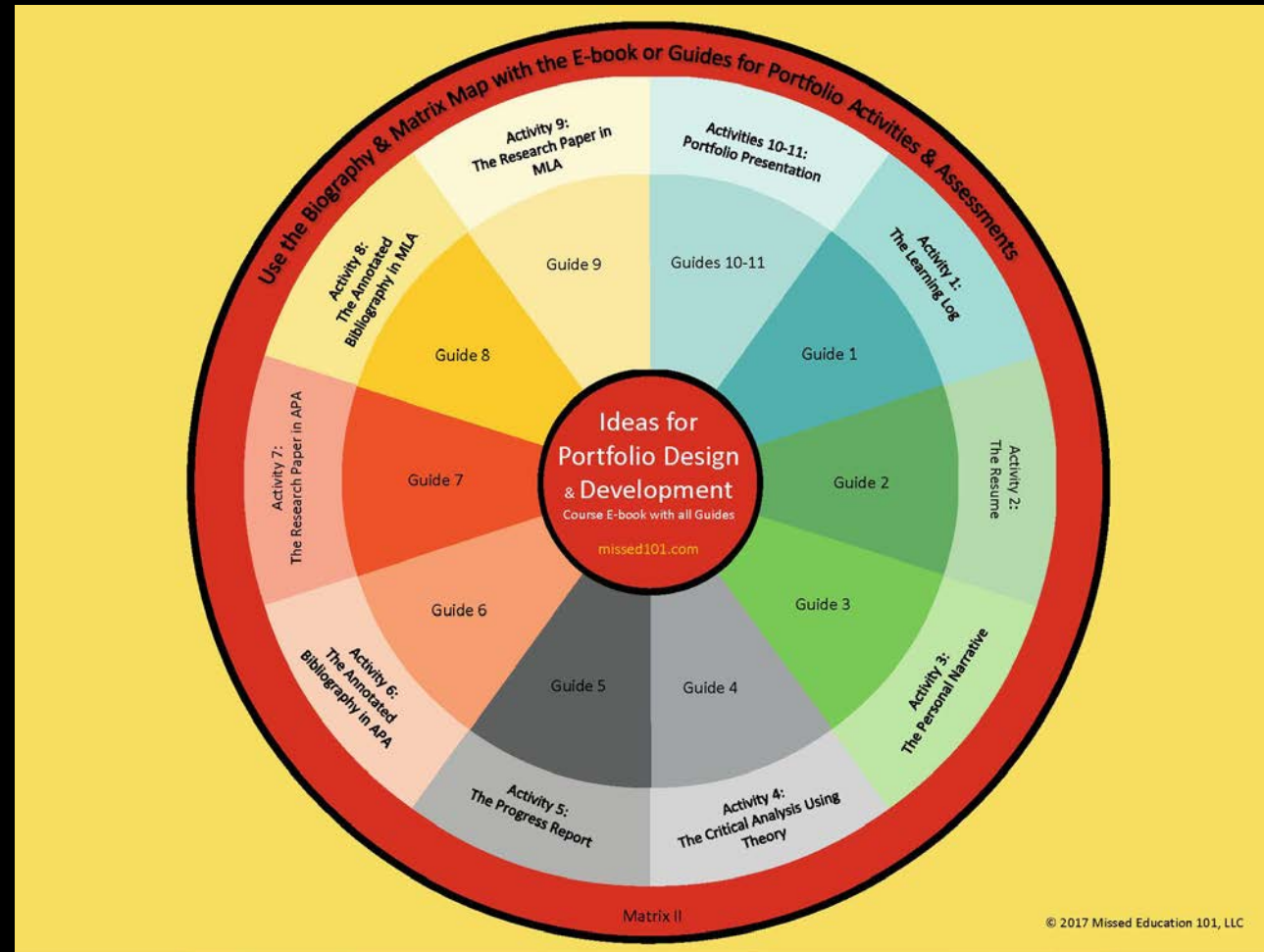
As the common theory underpinning intertextuality, intersectionality, and interdisciplinarity, *dialogism* offers us key principles that inform our classroom practices and assessments. Holquist (1990) writes, “dialogism is a form of architectonics, a general science of ordering parts into a whole. In other words, architectonics is the science of relations Relations, it will be helpful to remember, is also a telling, a narrative and Bakhtin draws attention to dialogism as authoring ...” (p. 29).

A Model of Dialogic Pedagogy



This is a model of dialogic pedagogy expressed as a planning wheel (Palmer, 1991). Dialogic pedagogy allows us to imagine what interdisciplinarity and intertextuality look like when practiced simultaneously in a virtual space that recognizes texts and serves as always integrated and learning as a continuous narrative. Students access the digital course materials online by clicking the spaces in the wheel (Bruner, 1987; Moran, 2010; Rule, 2006).

A Model of Performance-Based Assessment



An integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum begins with effective curriculum design. According to Jacobs (2002), “An integrated curriculum is a coherent match among the key elements of content, skills, and assessment meeting the needs of a specific group of learners” (24). The writing portfolio is an effective way to assess interdisciplinary learning in undergraduate education. Students access the digital assessment materials online by clicking the spaces in the planning wheel.

Resources

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