The language-identity dilemma: How language, race, and culture limit STEM students’ learning

This talk explores how language and cognition combine to create a powerful learning hurdle for students. As students learn science they are challenged to learn new language and new concepts simultaneously. The unintentional result is that students are often placed in contexts where they fail to understand the concepts and fail to understand the words used to describe those concepts. Conversely, teachers are often left unaware of how language represents what students know.

Through a series of qualitative and small-scale quantitative experiments, this talk explains how language, race, and learning are intricately connected in STEM learning. The talk identifies how small alterations in instructional practice can support learning despite these challenges.