And Now What? Effects of Initial Interaction with Diverse Peers

Patricia M. King, U of Michigan
Marcia Baxter Magolda, Miami U (OH)
Johanna Masse, U of Michigan

OVERVIEW

- Background info: Describe our study of interactions with diverse peers;
- Data excerpts: Read and discuss at your table;
- Findings: Themes by race;
- Discussion & Implications for Practice (3 models for organizing and scaffolding learning)
Fostering Diverse Interactions

Positive Signs
- Cultural diversity requirements
- Intergroup Relations programs
- More inclusive pedagogies
- More attention to effects of structural diversity on student learning
Fostering Diverse Interactions

Negative Signs

- Campus hate crimes motivated by:
  - Race: 13% \((n=4000)\)
  - Religion: 14% \((n=1462)\)
  - Sexual orientation (10% \((n=1195)\))
    (FBI, 2007)

- Professors report being under-prepared to address diversity issues in the classroom
Dissonance & Discomfort

- Diverse interactions are often challenging because they make people feel uncomfortable.

- Although this is a state we may try to avoid, it seems to play an important role in developing intercultural effectiveness.
Conceptual Framing-Context

Theories that emphasize context of intergroup interactions

- Allport: contact theory
- Pettigrew: factors affecting attitude change
- Stephan & Stephan: intergroup anxiety
- Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen: structural diversity
Conceptual Framing-Development

Theories that emphasize Development

- Festinger: Cognitive dissonance
- Piaget: Disequilibrium
- Kegan, Baxter Magolda: Self-authorship
- King & Baxter Magolda: Intercultural maturity
Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education

- National 4-year longitudinal study (2006-10) of 1st-year students attending 19 institutions;
- Concurrent mixed methods design:
  - QUAN: outcomes assessment instruments, surveys of pre-college and collegiate experiences; n=4500
  - QUAL: 60-90 min. interviews of background & collegiate experiences; n=315, 6 colleges
Interview Campuses

- 4 small private liberal arts colleges (representing all geographic regions of US), 1 medium sized private research institution (Midwest), 1 large public institution (West)

- 2 are Hispanic-serving; 1 all male; 1 all female that enrolls about 1/2 African-American, 1/2 White students
Methods- WNLSAE Interview

- Semi-structured individual interview conducted each year
- Guided, informal conversation (Patton, 1990) to elicit experiences and related meaning-making (Kegan, 1994) frameworks.

Coding, Phase 1 Summary

1) Relevant background characteristics
2) Important experiences
3) Effect of each experience
4) Relationship of the effect to liberal arts outcomes;
5) Institutional role in the experience (if any); and
6) Illustrative student quotes in support of these observations

(Baxter Magolda & King, 2008)
Institutional Themes

- Identified those experiences that enabled or inhibited the achievement of the outcome
  - Practice Examples: programs, courses, common pedagogies, student activities
  - Condition Examples: perceptions of the intellectual environment, aspects of the peer culture, leadership opportunities
- Identified themes separately for each campus, Years 1 and 2
Cross-Institutional Themes

Identification of themes that appeared on more than 1 campus

“Cross-institutional themes”

- Diversity Experiences
- Academic Challenge
- Transition to College
Diversity Experiences

- Experiences in which students encountered peers who differed from them; and
- Reacted with discomfort
Rationale for Focus on Uncomfortable Diverse Interactions

These interactions could yield rich information about:

- How students respond to having their beliefs or self-image be disturbed.
- Role of disequilibrium in learning about social interactions across difference.
Analytic Sample

- 55 experiences (Year 1=14 examples; Year 2= 41) shared by 49 students
- Half \( (n=25) \) the students who experienced discomforting interactions were students of color\* (1/3 of interview sample)
- 2/3 female [reflected all race/ethnicity groups except Asian/Pacific Islanders]
Findings: Topics Addressed

Topics addressed in the uncomfortable interactions (number reported)

- Race and ethnicity 25
- Sexual orientation 14
- Religion 10
- Politics 4
- Class 1
Themes: White Students

- Discomfort was based on an aspect of the Other’s social identity.
- Seemed immobilized by the discomfort and defaulted to a “flight” response, either figuratively or literally.
- Little evidence of preparation or inclination to more deeply examine these dynamics.
Themes: Students of Color

- Racial identity was at the forefront of the interactions
  - Own identity (salient or not)
  - How social organizations are affected by racial dynamics
  - Deepening awareness of role of race in US society
Discussion-Key Characteristics

- Structural diversity enabled more contact and learning about others
- Some aspect(s) of difference recognized
- Discomfort with the difference
- Dissonance & intergroup anxiety present
- Feeling “stuck” in how to react & how to understand the discomfort
Discussion: Developmental Capacities

- Unable to use multiple frames of reference, challenges to own beliefs, engage in interdependent relationships with diverse others.
- These require self-authorship, but most of this sample relied on external frameworks, reflecting an early level of intercultural maturity.
Disequilibrium is necessary but not sufficient for intercultural development.

Acknowledge the role of emotions in developmental processes.

Educational goal: modify the interpretive lens students use to understand such encounters.
LEAP Principles

1) Aim High—and Make Excellence Inclusive
2) Give Students a Compass
3) Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation
4) Engage the Big Questions
5) Connect Knowledge w/ Choices & Action
6) Foster Civic, Intercultural, & Ethical Learning
7) Assess Students’ Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems

from *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007)
Give Students a Compass

- Reflective Conversations (Baxter Magolda and King, 2008b, in *Peer Review*) help students access, express, explore feelings
- Help students develop a plan for processing dissonance and analyzing difference
Teach the Arts of Inquiry & Innovation

- Help students learn to:
  - Analyze difference
  - Discover how others see the world
  - Explore problem-solving and communication to work across difference
Engage the Big Questions

- Guide students in exploring
  - Difference
  - One’s own biases & perspectives
  - What it means for people to bring different values to the interaction
Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action

- Engage students in guided learning on real-world problems such as:
  - White privilege
  - Learning to understand and respecting difference
  - Intragroup and intergroup relations
Implications for Practice

- Establish environments conducive to growth:
  - Provide safe places to explore cultural differences and the tensions they can trigger
  - Encourage reflection about one’s own cultural background and social identities
  - Encourage taking interpersonal risks
  - Scaffold reflection, exploration, expression, problem-solving
Thank you to the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College for funding and support of this project.