Knowing Our Students

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This chapter originated in audiotaped conversations among the three authors as we reflected upon our combined years of teaching experience, and set ourselves the following questions: Why do we want to know our students? What do we need to know about them? How do we get to know our students? What theory and knowledge bases help us to understand them? What do we want students to know about themselves, about each other, and about us?

These questions are addressed in this chapter by interweaving narrative descriptions, examples, and excerpts from our conversational reflections on what "knowing our students" has meant for our practice. Sometimes, we use a common voice in which "we" refers generally to the three authors; at other times, each of us is expressed in her voice, identified as Beverly, JoAnne, or Maurianne. We offer examples of how to gather and then make use of information about our students, and we describe experiences that illustrate successful strategies or, in some cases, the mistakes we have made when we didn't practice what we preach.

Why Do We Want to Know Our Students?

Some background knowledge about student learning styles (discussed this volume, Chapter 4) and prior familiarity with course content are generally helpful in any teaching situation. However, when the content involves issues of social justice, to which students bring strongly held opinions and beliefs, this knowledge becomes essential. Regardless of age or experience, participants do not enter the social justice classroom

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* We ask that those who cite this work always acknowledge by name all of the authors listed rather than either only citing the first author or using "et al." to indicate coauthors. All collaborated on the conceptualization, development, and writing of this chapter.

as blank slates. They bring information and opinions about gender roles, racial stereotypes, "normal" ability, or "appropriate" sexual behavior as part of their socialization. What they have learned, and from whom, affects their attitude about everything presented in our social justice education courses.

In our conversation, we identified six specific reasons why we want to know the participants in our classes. First, we want to be able to match our curricular goals, and the instructional activities that support them, to what we anticipate or learn about our students. Early assessments provide information about students' past experiences and beliefs about social differences. JoAnne recounts an example of beginning a course on issues of oppression with a group of human service professionals. During an opening discussion designed to elicit information about prior experiences with the topic, one participant said emphatically, "I want to tell you this: I don't want any lectures. I'm tired of being lectured to! I want to be able to talk to people here and learn from each other." If JoAnne had started with something didactic, this participant would probably have tuned out. By carefully assessing expectations and remaining flexible, JoAnne was able to alter her design and return to important conceptual material at a time when participants were more able to listen responsively.

Second, we want to know enough about our participants in our social justice education classes to be able to anticipate questions or areas of confusion. We need to think about who our students are as we decide how to introduce key terms and concepts. Some participants may hesitate to ask us what the words we use mean; they may speak English as a second language, or feel embarrassed by their lack of understanding and sensitive to public humiliation. Beverly recounts a training for college staff that focused on racism but inadvertently excluded people through the use of undefined key terms.

Beverly: Among the staff in attendance was a group of five women from housekeeping who sat together during the workshop. On the last day of the training, they came up to us, and one of them said she was totally lost. She didn't have a college degree, she said, and the material we had given them to read was difficult. She then said that when someone in the group referred to "nepotism," she didn't even know what the word meant and had been too embarrassed to say this in the group. She had tears in her eyes when she was talking to us. She was embarrassed to admit that so much had gone over her head, but she also didn't want to lose more.

A third reason we want to know our students is to be able to teach to their current levels of awareness, assumptions, expectations, and information. For example, we sometimes forget how quickly student generational culture changes, and assume that issues such as sexism are readily apparent to most of our female participants. Some younger women insist that the women's movement has already solved all issues of gender inequity in the workplace and that sexual harassment is "no big deal."

Knowing or learning about our students does not occur all at once, or just at the beginning of a course. The nature of social justice courses is such that along the way, participants may discover beliefs, assumptions, and feelings they did not know they held. Participants also change as they engage with social justice content, putting old beliefs behind them and embracing new ways of thinking. We want our teaching strategies to also change as we, along with our students, make new discoveries about their beliefs and values.

Beverly: I change things all the time! I think flexibility is a major resource. I'm constantly assessing my educational goals and asking myself whether what we are doing is moving in a useful direction.

Maurianne: I tend to have backup strategies—depending on where I think the group may go with a particular topic and what the dynamics may be. Although I always give out a written "agenda" for a class, students know I am likely to change activities, such as break them into small groups or ask them to write a page on their thoughts or provide a short impromptu lecture on missing information or conceptual links for clarification. The fact that I revise the agenda during the class tells participants that I'm trying to be responsive to who they are and what they seem to need in the moment.

A fourth reason we want to know our students is to be able to judge whether we are using appropriate and realistic learning goals. Even the fairly basic instructional goals of awareness, knowledge, and action (noted in Chapter 4, this volume) may be unrealistic, if we find that generating awareness and providing missing information on a topic consume most of our class time, and we are left with insufficient time or participant readiness to think about intervention skills or action strategies until somewhat later in a semester.

Maurianne: Often, there's a sharp difference between how I may prioritize my teaching objectives and what I discover is actually possible for my students, given the limitations of time, the number of other courses they are taking, and their actual "learning edge" for a specific social justice issue. In planning our general education "diversity" course, we sometimes overestimate the awareness level and readiness of many of our students. We find we can't introduce personal interventions or action until students actually care about these issues and feel personally implicated in them.

Group size also affects one's teaching goals and is important to plan for in advance. Teaching about racism or heterosexism in a class with more than 100 students might call for more of a lecture format rather than raising awareness through experiential learning.

JoAnne: I might give some experiential taste to provide a frame for the information in a large class of 100 students located in a lecture hall, but it certainly wouldn't be the "get to know yourself" kind of experience used in a smaller class of 20 or 30. I think we must be very clear to not raise questions when there is not sufficient time to answer them. If there's only a limited time with a large group of people, I wouldn't want to open people up to self-disclosure.

Still, an introductory activity such as "I am" (described below) can be done with a large group in row seating if students fill out the worksheet individually, turn and pair with the person next to them, or form groups of four with people sitting in front and in back. The benefits of self-reflection and learning about each other in this case can be augmented by the instructor who reads the "I am" worksheets after class and reports back on the overall group demographics in a later class.

Beverly: The "I am" exercise I use asks participants to fill in as many or as few descriptors as they choose. When students have finished writing, I ask for volunteers to read their lists and then ask people to talk about any patterns they notice.

Usually, somebody will notice that the white people have not mentioned being white but that the people of color have mentioned their ethnicity; the men have not mentioned being male, but the women have mentioned something about being female. I often use this exercise as an introduction to a lecture presentation on the topic of racial identity development.

A fifth reason we want to know our students is to be able to anticipate participant reactions to our own specific social group identities as instructors, an issue presented at greater length in the preceding chapter, but relevant to our discussion here as well. We have experienced contradictory reactions among participants to our various target identities as female, lesbian, Jewish, or black. Sometimes, participants grant us an expertise on "our" issues that enables them to avoid exposing their own views or struggles with their own experiences. Other times, they discount what we present as overly subjective or self-interested, and write us off as lacking expertise or authority. Either side of this paradox diminishes our effectiveness as facilitators in ways that may not hold true for facilitators perceived as belonging to dominant groups.

Sixth, we try to know our participants well enough to plan for their likely reactions to and interactions with each other in a culturally diverse class setting. We have observed white participants who become silenced by their own participation in the larger system of racism. We have seen participants of color become frustrated by the slow pace of discussion or by the level of white denial.

Beverly: One of the things I might be thinking about is "Well, do we need to break up into small groups? Or, can this continue as a large-group discussion?" If there seems to be a lot of animation in the classroom, everybody wants to talk, and yet we don't have enough time to let everybody talk, does that mean I should put people in pairs, so that everybody can say something to someone, even if they're not participating as a large group? Does it mean that we need to make a change in the order of the content? Those are some of the things I'm prepared to think about on the spot in terms of what's happening in the class: *process* as well as *content*.

What Do We Need to Know about Our Students?

With which social identities are students most or least comfortable? What issues are of greatest concern to them, and what is their motivation for being in this class? What is their prior experience with the range of social justice issues, and what are their expectations? We have learned that within any group, there will be a range of experiences, familiarity with the material, and emotional comfort. We also anticipate that everyone, including the facilitator, will bring a certain amount of misinformation and ignorance to any discussion about social justice issues. These are assumptions that we make explicit for participants at the start of the educational experience.

Social Identity Mixture in the Class and Multiple Social Identities of Individual Participants

Prior to the start of a class or during the first class or introductory module, we ask for specific information about social identities to help us assess the racial and ethnic diversity, gender mix, and age ranges of the group. Revealing personal information about one's social identities may be emotionally difficult for many people, so creating

a climate of safety and comfort is important. Beverly tells the story of a man visibly identifiable as black, who had grown up in a mostly white community and identified culturally with the white community when she divided the class into caucus groups. The people of color caucus group was assigned to a room in one building and the white caucus group in another building, and she found this man in the breezeway between the two buildings.

Beverly: He stood there, unsure of which way to go. We stood in the breezeway and talked about it. I didn't say you need to be in this group or that group, but I asked him what it would mean for him to go one way or the other. He said, "I know I'm black, but I still identify with being white." I told him that I knew a lot of folks in his situation, who had grown up in white communities, that I had grown up in a similar situation, and I guessed that there were other people of color in that room with a similar experience. I suggested it might be helpful for him to be in the room with the people of color and talk about his dilemma and what it meant for him. In the end, that's what he chose to do.

Sometimes, merely posing a provocative question creates a crisis of meaning for participants that in turn leads to new levels of understanding. The following example illustrates an unexpected response to the introductory "I am" activity (described earlier) and illustrates the strong feelings that can attach to one's social identities, especially when those identities may be in transition, turmoil, or disguise.

Beverly: At the end of my presentation, a woman came up to me in tears. She had left the room for a period of time during my lecture, because she had been overcome by emotion. At the end, she apologized for leaving and said, "It was because when you asked us to do the 'I am' exercise, I didn't know what to put." She had been raised in a Cuban family, but she was not visibly identifiable as Hispanic and had been taught to pass as white. She felt she could not put down white, but was terrified at the idea of writing down that she was Cuban. I had not asked them to write down anything in particular. I had asked them to simply complete the sentence, "I am ..." But this was what she was experiencing. By the end of my presentation, she realized that she had internalized a lot of racism herself. She said she realized the biggest racist was the one inside of her, and that she really wanted to explore and reclaim her identity as Cuban. She said, "I know it doesn't matter, nobody cares, nobody in this room cares if I'm Cuban or not, but I feel like I'm going to be found out." I had never anticipated that this brief exercise would be so powerful for a particular individual in the room.

One reason it is important to know our participants is that we are able to then be sensitive and responsive to the ways in which social identity can be so internal and ambivalent that what seems obvious to a viewer is far from obvious or simple to the self.

Prior Experience with and Reactions to Social Justice Education

We try to find out whether participants have had prior experiences with social justice courses, and if so, to hear about their reactions to these experiences.

Beverly: Some students relaxed visibly when I said, "I know you know this material, and so I would appreciate it if there's a different way you understand it or

a different language you use. Please speak up. I also know there are some people here for whom this is all new." Some know a lot, some know very little, and both will feel anxious unless you acknowledge some way they can move forward together.

In addition to finding out what participants already know, we try to learn about their attitudes and beliefs, their expectations for the experience, and their motivation for participating. Gathering some of this information can be a fairly straightforward process. A written assessment of participant expectations and concerns about the course can be conducted prior to the start of a class or during the first session. Informally asking participants why they are taking the class and what they hope to learn can accomplish this goal as well.

The level of resistance is likely to be quite high if participants are attending a required course or workshop they believe they have been unfairly mandated to attend. Knowing this information in advance allows the facilitator to acknowledge the ways people might be feeling and plan activities to help a resistant group move forward in their understanding of the content and their acknowledgment of its importance.

How Do We Find Out the Information We Need to Know Our Students?

Prior Assessments

There are countless formal and informal ways to collect assessment information before the start of a class or during its initial stages. One productive strategy, already noted, is to distribute a questionnaire or needs assessment prior to the start of the learning experience. Participants might be asked to describe themselves in terms of the issues to be covered in the course. For example, if the course is on racism, questions regarding racial identity are appropriate. Questions about expectations, particular learning needs, and previous experiences with similar courses or workshops are useful. Often, asking questions about areas of worry or concern will provide insight into the perspectives and issues participants bring.

Sometimes, it is possible to have information in advance about the participants in one's course (if they are staff members at one's institution or if an academic course has a prerequisite with which one is familiar). One can make some assessments on the basis of known demographics of an established group of participants (entering students in a geographic area, transfer students from certain schools, faculty members at a neighboring institution), although mere demographics cannot convey the personal meanings participants may attach to their age cohort, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, ability or disability.

Introductory Activities

We have learned always to confirm prior demographic or attitudinal assessments with information generated face-to-face during the opening segments of classes or workshops. Also, because it is often not possible to obtain critical information in advance, participants can be asked to fill out a questionnaire as an opening exercise or the facilitator can pose some questions for open discussion. Alternatively, the facilitator can engage participants in experiential exercises that bring out information about group membership. For example, during the initial module of a racism course, Beverly has used an exercise called "Common Ground" during the beginning phase of a class or workshop.

Beverly: In this exercise, I ask participants to line up on one side of the room and to remain silent throughout the exercise. Before beginning, I assure them that they always have the right not to participate at any point in the exercise and can simply remain where they are or stand aside. Then, I read a series of statements and ask them to step to the other side of the room if the statement is true for them. For example, I might say, "Please step to the other side of the room if you are a woman." Those women who choose to participate cross over to the other side of the room and stand facing the remaining participants. I ask everyone to look and see who is in your group and who is not. Notice what thoughts and feelings you have as you look across the room. After people have had some time to observe who has crossed the room and who has not, those who crossed the room return to the original group. Then I read another statement, for example, "Please cross the room if you are Asian, Asian Indian, or Pacific Islander."

I may read as many as 15 or 20 social group identifications, some of which may be visibly identifiable, some of which may not be. I ask questions such as "Cross the room if you have a visible or hidden disability, or if neither parent attended college, or if you have ever been homeless, or if you have an alcoholic parent, or if you are an immigrant to this country." When no one crosses the room in response to one of the requests, the group can pause to notice. These moments are often very powerful reminders of whose voices are not represented in the class. We did this activity recently at a Catholic college, and there was no one Jewish in the room. That was a powerful statement about who's not here, so we said, please take note, and then went on to the next question. Or a person of Native American descent may cross the room by herself and it is powerful to see her standing there by herself and then move back again. When you ask for people who grew up poor, white people cross the room with people of color, but often there are still people of color who did not grow up poor standing on the other side.

Afterwards, when we process this exercise, people often talk about their surprise to see that sometimes those who crossed and those who did not fit with their expectations. It brings out one's assumptions. For example, when it comes to disabilities, sometimes people cross whose disabilities are not visible. It is a powerful, nonverbal experience. It shows, I'm not just what I look like on the outside. An opening exercise like this one, though not without risks, can quickly and powerfully bring issues for discussion to the surface, allow the group to feel a sense of intimacy, and provide valuable background information to the teacher as well as to the members of the class.

There are many other activities like this that can provide valuable information about participants. Some of these activities are public, such as the activity described above; others are more private, such as asking participants to write to the instructor.

Maurianne: At the end of the first class, I give students time to write to me, telling me whatever they want me to know about themselves, such as their background or preparation for the class, their goals for themselves in this class, any worries they may have about the class, or any physical or other disabilities they want me to know about so I can adjust assignments or activities. These are confidential. Then, during the semester, I ask them to write again, telling me how they're doing, what they're struggling with, what questions or problems

they have, what aspects of my teaching they find helpful, what they wish I would change. This lets me know what I need to spend more time on and what I should think about changing. I find out about the students on day 1 and keep learning more throughout the semester.

Another strategy might be to have students call out the identities that are important to them personally and begin conversations in homogeneous caucus groups.

Beverly: Midway through the course, I ask people to choose an aspect of their iden-tity they would like to talk about, and it is interesting to see that some of the women of color chose the fact of growing up poor, in which they meet with white women who have also grown up poor. Asking class members to name the identities that are important to them allows the group to decide how they are going to caucus without my imposing the important identity on them.

These activities affirm the multiple and interactive nature of social identities; they cue the instructor into the important issues for particular students; they enable patici-pants to probe their own experiences and personal meanings more deeply, and they enable participants to get beyond each others' surface appearance or skin.

A variant JoAnne uses as a frame for her graduate courses invites students to meet together in generationally defined groups (those born between 1960 and 1970, between 1970 and 1980, and so on) to identify their heroes, favorite music, and memorable public events.

JoAnne: It was interesting how the historic moment becomes clear and how social forces shape people's understanding of a range of things. We then walk around the room and read newsprinted presentations of what each others' generational groups have talked about and use these as metaphors and iden-tifiers for the rest of the semester. It doesn't take much of an age range to have a powerful impact. Between 20 and 35, you have three generations; between 20 and 45, there are many worlds.

Feedback Mechanisms throughout the Course

The small- and large-group discussions, the various ways of processing activities, and our responses to writing assignments can simultaneously serve as teaching, self-reflec-tion, and information-generating tools. Processing can mean something as simple as asking, "How are you doing? Does this make sense to you? What was the hardest part of this activity for you? What was the easiest?"

Beverly: I try to structure in some processing time at the beginning and end of classes. If it's an ongoing class, frequently other people will begin to help with that responsibility. Sometimes I'll check with people privately, and sometimes it can be helpful to do that kind of checking publicly: "I noticed that this was really upsetting for you and I wondered how you're doing with it now?"

Similarly, walking around and listening during small-group discussions is another useful way for facilitators to stay attuned to participants' thoughts, concerns, and level of understanding. We may notice feelings or questions that members of the class can then share. This information can be used as a point of departure for the next segment.

JoAnne: When people are in small groups and you're moving around the room from group to group, you can listen to what's being said about what's just taken place. Sometimes I'll ask the members of group, "Do you mind if I say something about this question that came up?" Sometimes I share it in an anonymous way and say, "As I was circulating, I heard several of you talking about such and such, and this looks like an issue we need to respond to."

We can also notice how the group is coalescing and what issues are central, peripheral, or unmet. What is the learning climate of the group? Who is speaking? Who is silent? What issues are being avoided? Where is the tension? What are the strengths of the group?

We use journals or reflective writing activities as feedback and response mechanisms and to guide future sessions.

Beverly: I have, in a classroom setting, required writing assignments, reflection papers, or journal writing that will be coming back to me the next time so that I have an ongoing source of information. I have used index cards on which I asked people to write down a burning question or something that has come up for them. And, have them do it anonymously. Often, people will put down a question they would be embarrassed to ask otherwise. Then, I collect the index cards, leaf through them, and read off samples. This allows me to see right away what issues or points of clarification need to be discussed and share some with the group.

A version of this activity occurred one time when it seemed as if my co-facilitator and I had been talking too much and the group was sort of dead. We were trying to think what to do. So, we distributed these index cards, and students wrote down their questions, and we read the questions to the group for the group to answer. We said, "Who thinks they can answer this question?" It got very lively! It was a very useful thing to do both in getting questions from them and, also, increasing their own participation.

Maurianne also asks participants to bring to class whatever "burning" open-ended questions (questions for which there is are simple or correct answers) they have after completing homework reading assignments. These can be used to start the next class or as questions for small-group discussions. Or, as a variation, each person's question can be passed along for one or more written responses, before reading aloud a sampling of questions and responses. This lets everyone know what the key questions are and how various participants are thinking about the same issues.

JoAnne invites visual or dramatic symbolic representations of students' experience to draw on different learning styles:

JoAnne: So far, most of the feedback devices we've been talking about are paper-and-pencil or talk. I think those are excellent, and they work for some people. But, then, I think there are other media as well that can get at different ways that people express themselves, such as symbolically representing things that are happening for them. I like to use colors and papers. It also gets people physically into different configurations. They may huddle on the floor. All kinds of changes in structure will bring out different interactions, such as music or silence.

Feedback Strategies at Various Endpoints

We also want to know what participants have learned at the end of a given class session or the end of the course. What knowledge and awareness have been gained? What questions or tensions remain? What type of support system is available to participants as they apply what they have learned?

Written statements, action plans, and presentations synthesizing a participant's learning represent various methods for assessing the impact of the course. We also ask direct questions such as "What have you learned? What has changed in your understanding of these issues? What next steps would you like to take to continue to learn about and address these issues?"

Particularly with social justice content, application to real-world contexts is an important goal for our teaching. Depending on the duration of a course, participants may choose to implement these strategies and report the results back to the class. When time is more limited, a written or verbal description of a proposed action plan helps transfer the learning from classroom to daily life (see Module 4 in Chapters 6–15, for examples).

It is important to acknowledge the obstacles inherent in confronting issues of oppression without a community of like-minded people. For some participants, there may be limited safety outside the classroom for engaging with social justice issues. A gay student may not yet be able to speak with dorm mates or family. A woman in an abusive family relationship may not be able to act upon gender politics at home. Action plans must be tempered by the real-life conditions for participants. Issues of safety, risk, comfort, and the legitimization of feelings are important to consider as the learning experience ends. Participants need to understand that as their consciousness shifts, they may experience new tensions with friends, family, or colleagues. Discussions about ways to develop an ongoing support network or to maintain whatever supportive relations have been developed within the class are often useful as the semester reaches its close.

What Theory and Knowledge Sources Help Us Understand Our Students?

We and our colleagues have written elsewhere about the ways in which theories about learning styles, social identity, and cognitive development inform our overall curriculum, our in-the-moment facilitative judgments, and the ways we devise and respond to various writing assignments (Adams & Love, 2005; Adams & Marchesani, 1992; Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994; Anderson & Adams, 1992; Hardiman, 1994; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, 1997; Marchesani & Adams, 1992; Romney, Tatum, & Jones, 1992; Tatum, 1992, 1994). The major guiding social identity, cognitive development, and learning style theories we use to anticipate and understand participant reactions to social justice subject matter are presented in this volume, Chapters 2-5. Here, we will say something of how we draw upon and use specific theories to help us better understand the participants in our social justice education classes.

Learning Style Models

Kolb's learning style model (Kolb, 1984) helps us understand students' differing modalities for taking in new information (concrete experience or abstract conceptualization) and for processing or applying new information (reflective observation or active experimentation) (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Smith & Kolb, 1986; Svinicki & Dixon, 1987; see also Chapter 4, this volume). Maurianne informally introduces Kolb's learning style

and experiential learning theory early in the semester and explains its relevance to the experiential dimensions of the course.

Maurianne: I ask students to brainstorm (while I chalkboard) their various learning and study behaviors. Some prefer to study alone, take notes, and draw diagrams; others work in study groups, make telephone calls, stop by each others' dorm rooms. Some look for the big picture; others take detailed notes of the facts. I then ask about their most and least preferred teaching styles, and again their responses are wide-ranging and sometimes situationally quite specific. In these discussions, examples of all four learning styles keep coming up, so I then have students' personal examples to draw upon to illustrate the range of learning styles in the classroom, using Kolb's model.

   I then talk about my two major learning style objectives for this class. First, I want to make sure that everyone's preferred learning style is matched at least some of the time (so I use Kolb's model as a checklist for my weekly instructional design), and, second, I want everyone's learning style repertoire to be stretched by trying out and developing new skills in relation to their less preferred learning styles. This gives me the transition I need to show how Kolb's experiential learning theory rests on the importance of all four learning modalities for a complete process of learning. As a result, the relatively "odd" interactive and experiential things we sometimes do in class—unusual when compared to what goes on in other classes at our large research university—make sense and are supported by an established theory of how people learn.

Other learning style models, such as Witkin's bipolar model of field sensitivity and field independence (Witkin & Moore, 1975), have been adapted to describe culturally and linguistically based learning style differences (Anderson, 1988; Cushner, McClellan, & Safford, 2006; Gay, 2000; Hale-Benson, 1986; Nieto, 2004; Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974; Shade, 1989) and to differentiate connected and separate learning styles in relation to socialized gender differences (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Lyons, 1983). Learning style models help facilitators to acknowledge and understand that intergroup learning style differences are not deficits for one group and indices of superiority for another. We learn to respect cultural and linguistic as well as individual learning style differences, and to recognize their existence within groups as well as among groups (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Shade, 1989). At the same time, we try to avoid any tendency to restereotype our students through the uncritical, careless, or simplistic application of learning style templates (Tharp, 1989).

As facilitators, we also use the various learning style models as self-correcting devices to call attention to learning style limits in our own instructional designs, and to remind us to plan curricular and facilitative strategies that both match and stretch the variety of learners in our classes.

Social Identity Development Models

Social identity development models (Cross, 1991; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, 1997; Helms, 1990; Jackson, 2001; Tatum, 1992) provide road maps for participants as they grapple with who they and others are in relation to racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression (discussed in Chapter 2, this volume). The social identity models prove especially helpful for understanding the various ways in which the anger, denial, or pain evoked by social justice subject matter may be expressed by

participants and felt by ourselves as facilitators (see Cross, 1995; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, 1997; Tatum, 1992).

Beverly: If you're talking about race, some white students will feel guilty and will wonder whether they are bad people, and what does living in a racist society mean for who they are? Some students of color will feel angry or agitated because of an increased awareness of victimization. They express impatience with slow progress on obvious problems. The clash of their anger and the white students' guilt is predictable. Both groups of students reach a saturation point where they don't want to hear about racism any more. It feels too overwhelming. They pull back, avoid coming to class perhaps, or don't complete the reading assignments.

For me, I need to know, *Is it happening yet?* I have strategies in place to address these issues. I forewarn people that these things are likely to happen. My experience has been that telling people ahead of time is a helpful thing to do. Sometimes, students will tell me, "Oh, that thing you said would happen, is happening now."

It helps to remember that participants in our classes are likely to have different understandings of racism, sexism, and other social identities, depending in part on their levels of identity development with relation to specific social justice topics and on their identity status, that is, whether their identities are advantaged or targeted. The Jackson-Hardiman social identity development model (reprinted this volume Appendix 2A; 1992, 1997) provides a valuable tool for anticipating and understanding these different between-group and within-group social identity perspectives. For example, we note different perspectives among men or women of color on topics in racism and among men and women of color on sexism, which derive in part from their different life experiences and in part from the lens or filters on their experiences created by their social identity development locations. These perspectives expand and become more multifaceted as they learn more, for example, in the context of these courses. This expansion is itself a developmental process. The social identity development models help us anticipate and plan for the potential collision in the classroom of contradictory but strongly held worldviews among participants across social identity groups and also within social identity groups. As with the learning style models, these social identity development models also serve to remind us as facilitators that we, too, have our own social identity perspectives that both characterize and limit our worldviews and from which we tend to generalize what we believe that participants in our courses ought to do, feel, and think.

Cognitive Development Models

Social cognitive theory (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Perry, 1981) helps facilitators anticipate the tendency of many participants who are new to social justice course content to dichotomize complex questions, reduce multiple perspectives to simple either/or choices, or not see relations between concrete examples of personal experience and broader theoretical principles. Another cognitive development indicator is whether participants are willing to listen to one another as sources of knowledge rather than insisting that the facilitator be the classroom authority. With these concerns in mind, we as facilitators attempt to moderate the sources of complexity and contradiction by emphasizing one issue, one perspective, or one theoretical construct at a time. We start with the concrete, personal, and experiential before moving to the

abstract and conceptual, and process the sources of contradiction and conceptual confusion. For example, rather than starting out with the notion of multiple identities, we gradually and incrementally build multiple perspectives as a semester-long enterprise (Adams & Marchesani, 1992; Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994).

For dualistic thinkers, our authority as facilitators can be used to support new and more complex modes of thinking.

Maurianne: I use my authority to model respect and appreciation for peer perspectives as a valid source of knowledge about social diversity. Gradually, over a semester, authority and leadership are taken over by students in the class. Initially, however, I have found that if I don't use my authority, there is a power vacuum that leads to many lost learning opportunities. The more complex thinkers seem readier to pick up different perspectives from a range of sources, including other students.

What Do We Want Students to Know about Themselves and about Each Other?

Multiple Identities

One limitation of social identity models is the tendency to describe social identities as if they existed in equally weighted either/or categories: male/female, Jewish/Gentile, people of color/white. These binary categories obscure the complex identities experienced by biracial, bisexual, and multiethnic people, and oversimplify the interactions in all people among their own multiple social identities, and in many cases, their different advantaged or targeted social identity statuses. Further, a participant is often more conscious of his or her target identities than advantaged identities.

Beverly: One of the most important things I want students to know about themselves is that they are both advantaged and targeted. Almost everybody can think of themselves in both these ways, although they tend not to. So, in a course on racism, students of color tend to think of themselves as victimized by racism and white students as unwitting agents of oppression. For students in the advantaged group, whatever that area of advantage is, one of the things I want them to become aware of is the power they have to reconceptualize their area of advantage as victimizer into being one of ally, someone who has the power to interrupt racist or sexist or antisemitic acts, for example. Similarly, students who think of themselves primarily as victims need to reconceptualize their target area into one of empowerment, taking pride in that aspect of their identity.

But this leads to multiple identities as well. For instance, there are areas of privilege unacknowledged by students who feel victimized by race. The black male student needs to be aware of his sexism, the Latina woman of her dominance as a Christian perhaps, the heterosexual black woman of the privilege she has because of her sexual orientation.

We have met participants for whom membership in targeted groups seems preferable, almost a badge of honor. For them, it seems more desirable and socially acceptable to be a "victim" than to be an agent of oppression in order to avoid the guilt, pain, and responsibility of advantaged-group status. Participants who do acknowledge their

membership in a advantaged group often struggle not to be reduced to a stereotype in other people's eyes. Facilitators need to be understanding and help participants recognize and name these feelings as part of their learning process.

Participants who experience themselves exclusively through their targeted identities may be newly grappling with personal experiences of discrimination and oppression for the first time, and unable to explore other aspects of their identity. They may never before have questioned accepted ways of thinking and find it conceptually difficult to balance the many layers of a complex issue, especially when those layers have deeply personal and sometimes contradictory meanings.

Maurianne: One of my students, a Jamaican American man, was vehemently and openly sexist and homophobic, as well as believing the derogatory stereotypes about Jews to be factually based and true. As a black man, he didn't see how race and gender could possibly be disentangled. But gradually, by associating gender issues with his mother and grandmother, both of whom he admired, he was able to wonder whether sexism had affected them as women. He also learned a lot from interviews he conducted with black women about their experiences of sexism.

His homophobia came from his church minister, a man whom he credited with saving him from the streets. As part of his classroom learning, he agreed to try to separate his beliefs (about homosexuality) from his behavior (toward gay, lesbian, or bisexual students), and to change his "unfair" behavior toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, especially since he hoped to be hired as a residence assistant in student residence halls. As a residence assistant, he knew that he would have to treat *all* people fairly.

His breakthrough on antisemitism came after a long segment on Jewish history, highlighted by the films *Genocide* and *Courage to Care*. He told the class that he now understood that not all white folks had the same history or life chances. This breakup of a single concept, "all white folks," was powerful for him. By my not pushing too hard, this young man begin to disentangle for himself a set of beliefs that had been based on personal experiences of racism, revered authorities, and efforts to survive.

The Challenge of Inclusivity

The challenge of inclusivity refers to finding ways that enable each participant to feel safe while on a learning edge as part of a classroom community, without diminishing the reality of the rage, fear, and shame.

Beverly: After we had done the "Common Ground" activity and were processing it, a white mother of biracial children explained that she didn't cross when I asked for people of racially mixed heritage, because the question was about parentage, although she wanted to cross because she had African American children. The next time we used the exercise, we added, "If you are a member of a multiracial family, please cross the room." This would have included her experience.

Making it possible for participants to speak up about our unintentional omissions provides opportunities to fill in missing information.

A common example of inclusivity occurs when white participants say, "I have no culture," and attempt to find something in their background that will afford them "victim status." Maurianne offers the example of a white, heterosexual man who recently discovered a fraction of Native American ancestry and wanted to focus on exploring this racial heritage rather than his white privilege. Although it may be important that he explore a distant Native American ancestry, it is more important in the social justice curricular context that he explore his advantaged identities and recognize his corresponding privileges. Only in this way might he be able to understand the hostility felt by other participants who struggle with their target identities on a daily basis.

What Do Students Need to Know About Us and Our Own Struggles With Social Justice Issues?

In conversations that led to this chapter, we could not separate our discussion about knowing the participants in our classes and workshops from the need to understand ourselves as facilitators. This raised the related question, "What do participants need to know about us?" The amount, context, and nature of personal information that we disclose are matters of judgment in planning or in the moment. We believe that particularly in the early moments of a course, important modeling takes place. Self-disclosure may seem unusual to many participants, especially in an academic climate. We try to make the relation of our own self-disclosure to the topic under discussion clear. We offer our own experience with both advantaged and targeted identities as a way to join with participants, expand the boundaries for discussing these subjects, and model how such discussions can happen. For example, Beverly usually describes herself sometime during the first session as an able-bodied, African American, heterosexual, Christian female, raised in a middle-class family. She talks about the fact that she is targeted by racism and sexism because she is a black female, but she also acknowledges her struggle to become aware of the daily privileges she receives as a heterosexual, as a Christian, as an able-bodied person, and with the education she received as the result of her middle-class status. In this way, she establishes connections with participants whose primary identification may be with a targeted or advantaged group, and encourages her students to consider the range of positions of privilege and marginality they occupy in relation to others.

Beverly: In a recent workshop, I noticed a number of highly verbal black men who talked a lot about racism but interrupted the women all the time. I said we need to look at our ally behavior not only in relation to racism but also to sexism, and I referred to my previous impatience with white people around not understanding white privilege. How can you not notice that? I got less impatient when I became aware of how ignorant or unobservant I was about my heterosexual privilege. Recognizing my own learning process regarding heterosexual privilege helped me be more generous in terms of my understanding of the way white people can struggle around understanding white privilege, or black men can struggle around their sexism.

Maurianne recounts how she talks with her students about her efforts to disentangle her Jewish identity and her white privilege in ways that feel honest and authentic. She does this to help all her students think about their ethnic family histories in relation to race and to help Jewish students balance their conscious experience as targets of antisemitism with their largely unconscious assumptions about white privilege.

Maurianne: One of my challenges in class is to talk about how I grew up thinking of Jews as a race, partly because of my ancestry in Europe where Jews were stigmatized racially. But I also talk about how I had "passed" as a non-Jew, by ignoring that aspect of my identity and assuming that Jews, like other white ethnic groups, could assimilate if we worked hard and ignored our differences.

This is obviously not a strategy that works for people of color. Acknowledging my personal struggle with these issues, and talking about the similarities and differences among differently racialized ethnic groups in different historical contexts, shows how my own analysis was reshaped over many years to fit my emerging understanding of my experience as a Jew and as a white woman. It's often easier for participants to acknowledge their racial privilege, as Whites in this society, if we've already acknowledged where they and their families may have been targeted due to social class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

This chapter is about the importance of knowing the participants in our social justice education classes. We identify such needs as knowing how students are processing and making sense of social justice information, and how they are relating to each other and the instructor. We close this chapter with the acknowledgment that social diversity and social justice education involves journeying into life experiences that are often fraught with fear, suspicion, lies, and shame. Questions that may seem innocuous, such as "List your strengths" or "Describe your social identities," can pose a crisis to a participant. To know the participants in our classes means to maintain an attitude of respectful awe at the range, diversity, and elasticity of human experience.