Cycles of Development in Learning about Identities, Diversity, and Equity

Christy M. Byrd

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank for Annahita Ball, Sarah Dawson, Laura Kraft, Arine Lowery, Paula McAvoy, Jessica Riddell, Brooke Thomas, Nada Wafa, Jiayi Wang, and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback.

Abstract

Objectives: Many scholars and educators have written about how to approach teaching about social identities, diversity, and societal inequity in classrooms and beyond. The current paper adds to this literature by considering the developmental trajectories of individuals as they engage in learning opportunities about identities, diversity, and equity. **Results:** This paper details the specific aspects of knowledge that are essential to developing cultural competence and critical consciousness as well as a sequence in which they should be acquired. **Conclusions:** Previous models emphasize progressive movement toward more advanced levels but this paper explains how motivation can explain movement and stalling in development. Furthermore, it analyzes the cognitive and motivational antecedents of resistance to diversity learning opportunities. The paper concludes with implications for teaching and future directions for research.

Public significance statement: When teaching about social identities, diversity, and inequality, it is important for instructors and facilitators to understand what awareness, knowledge, and skills students need to master. This paper explains the process of how students learn about diversity, the way motivation drives the process, and what resistance might be encountered along the way.

Cycles of Development in Learning about Identities, Diversity, and Equity

How can instructors, community organizers, and workshop leaders promote cultural competence and critical consciousness in their students? Many have written about how to approach teaching about social identities, diversity, and equity in classrooms and beyond. The current paper adds to this literature by proposing a new model of development for individuals as they engage in learning opportunities designed to promote their cultural competence and critical consciousness. Here, cultural competence is defined as one's understanding of social identity groups and critical consciousness is defined as the ability to analyze structural inequality, the desire to develop skills and to take action to address inequality, and one's involvement in efforts to create social change (Watts et al., 2011). The model presented is informed by work in social justice education (e.g., DiAngelo, 2018; Gurin et al., 2013), multicultural education (Sleeter & Grant, 2011), teacher education (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1996; Rains, 1998; Rodriguez, 1998), educational psychology (e.g., Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Pintrich, 2000), clinician and counselor education (e.g., Chao, 2013; Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010), and the author's training and facilitation experience. After discussing the model, I will describe forms of resistance in response to learning about diversity and conclude with implications for teaching.

Throughout, the term "student" is used to refer to any individual engaged in a learning opportunity with the goal of developing their cultural competence and/or critical consciousness. These experiences can range from one-off workshops to college courses. Similarly, "instructor" refers to the leader, organizer, or facilitator who sets the main learning goals and guides the experience. These models are oriented toward adult students but is based on research that also includes adolescents (e.g., Heberle et al., 2020).

Developmental Cycles

Figure 1 shows what competencies students improve in as they move toward motivated and effective action for social change. There are two stages. First, models of critical consciousness begin with reflection or critical social analysis aspect that refers to an understanding of the nature of social inequality (e.g., Watts et al., 2011). Models of cultural competence also describe awareness as recognition of how one's social identities influence one's worldview and experiences and recognition of privilege and oppression (e.g., Carroll, 2009; Sue & Torino, 2005). Therefore, the first stage of the model focuses on competencies about social identities and inequality.

Second, awareness prompts knowledge (Carroll, 2009), and models of cultural competence describe several forms of knowledge that essential for skill development (Singh et al., 2020; Sue & Torino, 2005). However, descriptions of knowledge can be quite general, so the developmental cycles divide knowledge into specific competencies. Stage 2 consists of an outer knowledge cycle and shows how knowledge informs an inner cycle of agency, action, and reflection, again drawing on critical consciousness models (Watts et al., 2011).

Some models of cultural competence also include values and dispositions that orient one toward positive interactions with diverse others (e.g., Bennett, 2017). Rather than focus on values as a specific competency, a later section will describe how motivation overall functions as a dynamic force that moves students through the developmental cycles.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE]

Stage 1

There are three competencies in Stage 1. Some individuals, particularly those from marginalized groups, will develop these competencies early in life as a result of experiences with

discrimination (Pillen et al., 2020) and parent socialization (e.g., Heberle et al., 2020). Students may first learn about these competencies within a particular identity (e.g., gender), but these understandings easily transfer to other identities. I propose that learning Stage 1 competencies in an identity-general way will aid students in grasping intersectionality and the complexity of identities when they focus on specific identities. Others also suggest that emergent social justice allies are more effective when they understand the need to recognize and confront oppression across identities (Bishop, 2002; Godfrey & Burson, 2018). Such understanding is likely strengthened when early learning experiences are identity-general.

Awareness of social identities. To master this competency, students understand that 1) all people have a personal identity and multiple overlapping social identities; 2) personal and social identities interact with and influence each other; and 3) above and beyond personal identity, social identities influence how one interacts with others and how others interact with them (Bell, 2016; Pillen et al., 2020). Furthermore, one's membership in social groups influences their personal identity through socialization (Harro, 2000).

Awareness of structural inequality. The second competency is understanding that certain social groups have more power and greater access to resources than other groups (Pillen et al., 2020). Prejudice, discrimination, and inequality in general are more than individual problems; they are embedded in institutions and systems relating to membership in social groups. Some refer to this understanding as critical reflection (Watts et al., 2011). The most difficult aspect of this competency is separating individual from systemic causes (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Individuals are the actors in society, but their actions are guided and determined by their group memberships (Johnson, 2017). Understanding the historical nature of inequality and the

policies and practices that produce it can begin with this competency but may not be mastered until later.

Within this competency, students also begin to acknowledge and reckon with their own privilege (Sue & Torino, 2005). Some anti-racist educators are skeptical of teaching methods where privileged students focus on their own privileges and individual experiences (Lensmire et al., 2013; Margolin, 2015), particularly because students of color may already understand and feel frustrated with the slower pace required to educate White students (Smalling, 2020). However, according to motivational research, learning is enhanced when students make connections to their own lives (Anderman & Anderman, 2010). Indeed, students of color acquire their awareness through reflection on and discussion about their personal experiences within an oppressive society, often in adolescence (Heberle et al., 2020). White students, and students with privileged identities in general, also need time and space to make these connections. Awareness of one's social identity and structural inequality are only early, but critical, steps of development.

Knowledge of identity-general characteristics of inequality. This competency focuses on the nature of oppression. Specifically, oppression is pervasive, restrictive, hierarchical, intersectional, and internalized (Bell, 2016). Furthermore, privileged groups create and maintain oppression through five mechanisms: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 2013). Understanding the broad characteristics of inequality before focusing on specific groups helps students apply their understanding to multiple contexts and later acknowledge the complexity of oppression (Jackson, 1999). Knowledge of these characteristics of inequality is sometimes described in critical consciousness models as another aspect of awareness (critical reflection) (e.g., Watts et al., 2011), suggesting that it is foundational to development. For this reason, this competency is in Stage 1.

Moving to Stage 2. I propose that instructors in the most optimal learning environments ensure that students have mastered Stage 1 competencies, either in an identity-general or identity-specific form, before focusing on Stage 2 competencies. Otherwise, students may experience confusion and resistance that could drive them out of the learning process. First, understanding the nature of social identity is a prerequisite for understanding distinctions based on social identity. For example, discrimination based on physical and mental ability is incomprehensible without recognizing that individuals with disabilities have common kinds of social interactions. Second, in my facilitation experience a common objection for students in diversity experiences is “Why are we talking about this? We should all treat everyone as individuals” (see also DiAngelo, 2010). Such statements reflect a lack of knowledge of social identities, that is, students have not grasped the concept that *not* everyone gets to be treated as an individual. The solution in those cases it to “go back” and explain that group membership is relevant to everyday experience and that inequality exists based on group membership. Students would be less likely to voice such objections if these assumptions were previously introduced. Third, the assumptions underlying the competencies are included early on in intergroup dialogue and social justice education programs (Bell & Adams, 2016; Gurin et al., 2013; Kaplowitz & Griffin, 2019) and in books aimed at developing critical consciousness (e.g., Johnson, 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Singh, 2019), likely because of how fundamental they are. Mastery of Stage 1 competencies seems essential for deeper learning.

Stage 2

Stage 2 has two cycles: The outer cycle in Stage 2 focuses on understanding of information about a social identity (group characteristics, history, and mechanisms of oppression). The inner cycle is the agency/action/reflection cycle and draws primarily on models

of critical consciousness (Freire, 2013; Watts et al., 2011). Unlike in Stage 1, the competencies in Stage 2 are not in a particular order. Stage 2 is identity-specific, such that learning will often focus on one social identity at a time.

Knowledge of group characteristics. In this competency, students first understand how groups within a social identity are defined. Although many groups seem self-evident, the categories are actually quite complex. For example, in the U.S. Latinx can be considered a racial (or racialized) group whereas others define it as an ethnicity only. Large pan-ethnic groups can be divided into many subgroups, and the criteria for who belongs to which group varies by context. For instance, some Afro-Caribbeans consider themselves both Black and Latinx. Additionally, students must come to terms with preferred labels for each group from a personal, local, and scholarly perspective. For example, “Caucasian” is a common colloquial term that scholars find outdated and racist (Teo, 2009). Thus, a level of comfort with ambiguity and complexity in definitions is also necessary within this competency.

Students must then grapple with the characteristics of each group in terms of population, socioeconomic status, geographic distribution, common values, traditions, and concerns. When teaching this competency, it is important that instructors acknowledge within-group variability and take care not to stereotype group members. Instructors should highlight the concept of intersectionality to help students negotiate the distinctions between individual, subgroup, and group experiences (Bell, 2016). Learning demographic characteristics also reveals the relative status of groups and subgroups within a social identity. However, relative status is dependent on the group or subgroup in focus and the particular context.

It is important to note that the goal of teaching about group characteristics is to provide a context for students to understand identity-specific mechanisms of inequality and how to take

effective critical action. The goal is not to merely appreciate diversity in the absence of a vision for society that is free from structural inequality (Sleeter & Grant, 2011). Since group differences are the result of societal structures, learning about group differences must be in the service of changing those structures.

Knowledge of history. This competency focuses on learning the history of changes in group characteristics, the relations between groups, and past social movements, which many view as essential to critical consciousness (Godfrey & Burson, 2018; Watts et al., 2011). This competency may be the most complicated as understanding of historical events can change with new analyses or in light of current events.

Knowledge of identity-specific mechanisms. This competency applies the identity-general characteristics of structural inequality to specific social identities. For example, colorism and benevolent sexism are specific manifestations of oppression for race and gender, respectively. Understanding in this competency will often require some knowledge of group characteristics and historical developments in order to understand how the mechanisms developed and work currently. For example, a discussion of slavery would provide context for understanding colorism in the African American community.

Agency/Action/Reflection cycle. Agency refers to feelings of self-efficacy to take effective critical action. Developmental theories emphasize the importance of self-efficacy in behavior; individuals are unlikely to act when they do not feel prepared to do so (Bandura, 1997). Although individuals can experience agency at any point in the developmental cycle, the ability to take effective critical action is conditioned on the competencies in Stage 1. In the absence of those competencies, it is likely that individuals' action will be "flat" instead of critical. That is, the action may do nothing to challenge structural inequality and may in fact

contribute to oppression. For example, those with beliefs justifying inequitable systems are more likely to take action to alleviate a disadvantaged person's negative feelings rather than their circumstances (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). What is considered effective action will vary based on the social identities involved, the individuals, and the context. Nevertheless, the Stage 2 competencies strengthen the effectiveness of action, such that those who have spent more time learning about group characteristics, history, and mechanisms will better know what to do and how to do it (Heberle et al., 2020; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

Reflection in this cycle refers specifically to reflection on one's critical action (rather than critical social analysis), with questions relating to the effectiveness of the action, its sustainability, and its negative and positive effects on the student and their community. Reflection can spur increased or decreased agency. It can also lead to a desire to learn more in order to become more agentic or effective. Thus, the bidirectional arrows between the outer and inner cycles reflect the fact that learning leads to action and action leads to learning (Pillen et al., 2020). As such, Stage 2 never ends. One is either moving through the cycles or remaining still.

In Stage 2, individuals may have more knowledge about certain identities compared to others (for example, a student may know more about the history of racism than the history of heterosexism; Diemer et al., 2015). However, students and instructors should resist the temptation to think of some people as more advanced than others and instead focus on the need for everyone to engage in continuous learning. Furthermore, none of the competencies in this stage are ever mastered, in the sense that one can ever be fully culturally competent (Sue & Torino, 2005). The content of these competencies is complex and change over time with historical and social conditions.

Moving Through the Cycles

Previous scholars have focused on students' marginalized or non-marginalized identities as predictors of their engagement in diversity experiences (e.g., Bowman, 2011; Jackson, 1999), but self-regulated learning theories (Zimmerman & Labuhn, 2012) offer the potential for more nuanced explanations. That is, students' beliefs, values, previous experiences, and behavior patterns can explain why students enter diversity experiences and how likely they are to stay engaged throughout their learning. For example, individuals who are more open to diversity and more identified with their ethnic-racial group are more likely to engage in diversity experiences and benefit more from them (Chao, 2013; Denson & Bowman, 2017). Participation in diversity experiences can also be explained by factors such as growing up in diverse neighborhoods and having different-race roommates (Denson & Bowman, 2017).

Furthermore, scholars emphasize the role of dispositions and values in cultural competence development (e.g., Bennett, 2017). For example, Weatherford and Spokane (2013) showed how characteristics like openness to diversity predicted multicultural competence in counseling. Such characteristics, along with the background factors discussed in the previous paragraph, can predict students' motivation, which I propose is ultimately what drives students' movement through (or stagnation in) the developmental cycles. When motivation is above a certain threshold, students will remain engaged in the learning experience and seek out further learning. When motivation falls below that threshold, students will disengage (Zimmerman & Labuhn, 2012). Students with little value or interest in diversity will not engage at all. For example, a White supremacist is unlikely to choose to participate in a diversity experience and may be withdrawn or disruptive when required to. Values and goals seem especially important. Values are beliefs about the importance, usefulness, or interestingness of a subject (Wigfield &

Eccles, 2000), the most relevant likely being valuing diversity and equality. Goals are specific outcomes that one anticipates receiving as a result of engaging in an action (Pintrich, 2000). It is likely that students also enter diversity experiences to have the opportunity to discuss controversial topics, to experience more interactive classroom settings, or as a way to make friends with like-minded peers. For example, research with college cultural centers has shown how students seek out identity-affirming experiences (Patton, 2010). Students will always have multiple values and goals relevant to a experience and some may be more or less salient at different times.

In addition to values and goals, another essential feature of motivation is students' emotional experiences while learning. Diversity experiences can create disequilibrium for students as their pre-existing beliefs about their identities and society are challenged (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Pillen et al., 2020). Learning triggers motivating emotions like empathy, hope, and righteous anger (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Gurin et al., 2013; Hardiman et al., 2007) as well as negative emotions like confusion, guilt, and shame (DiAngelo, 2010; Hardiman et al., 2007; Matias, 2014). If not appropriately managed, negative emotions can lower motivation to the point where students disengage from learning (Boekaerts, 2007). Thus, while values and goals may be essential for predicting whether students engage in a diversity experience, emotions may be most predictive of what they learn each class session (Byrd et al., 2020).

Resistance to Learning about Identities, Diversity, and Equity

Decreased motivation can be manifested in a number of ways. This section explains the forms of resistance that can occur and the beliefs and values that support resistance. Resistance consists of coping strategies to manage threats to values, goals, or well-being, threats that arise when the learning environment conflicts with individuals' knowledge and beliefs or with their

values and motivation (Byrd et al., 2020). Much of what follows is based on conceptualizations of White identity and colorblind ideology, but the intention is to describe resistance more generally across social identities.

Predictors of Resistance

Experience with privilege predisposes students to resistance. First, individuals tend to be less aware of a group identity in which they hold privilege (Syed & Juang, 2014; Todd & Abrams, 2011). Thus, they may have less appreciation for the effects of their group membership on their day-to-day lives. Individuals are also motivated to maintain their privilege. Furthermore, socialization and inherent beliefs in equality can lead to the construction of a privileged identity that is about helping less advantaged people. For example, White preservice teachers' identities as good-hearted people who care about minority children can lead to a great deal of energy focused on denying their racism (Schick, 2000). Additionally, privileged individuals are socialized to believe in the rightness and superiority of their own personal experiences and viewpoints (Flood et al., 2018; Goodman, 2011; Rodriguez, 2009) and their worldview is based on socialization that their group is morally and intellectually advanced (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Thus, beliefs about the unimportance of social identity and the superiority of one's views combine into the claim that discussing inequality is actually problematic, e.g., "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race" (Turner, 2015).

Despite privilege providing special preparation for resistance, students can also be resistant when it comes to identities where they are marginalized (Jackson, 1999; Seward & Guiffrida, 2012). Although members of marginalized groups may have more early personal experiences with inequality, there is no guarantee that they have raised their observations about individuals to systemic levels.

Forms of Resistance

The following are forms of resistance and how each manifests. The list is based on the work of previous scholars in diversity and social justice education. I have further attempted to identify the motivational underpinnings of each form of resistance. The beliefs are sequentially numbered with digits and the motivations with letters throughout this section and summarized in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

Denial: When students deny, they claim that information presented to them is wrong (Flood et al., 2018; Goodman, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Rodriguez, 2009). Denial comes from a lack of knowledge and the presumed universality of one's own experiences. It manifests in claims that everyone should be treated as an individual or that social identity does not matter for success in life. Often, students will appeal to universality or egalitarian ideals (Rains, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Some will claim that the instructor (or their sources) are biased and subjective (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Other students will use the encouragement to share personal experiences as evidence that all opinions are equally valid (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Thus, the beliefs underlying denial are: 1) belief in a just world (i.e., inequality does not exist), 2) certain individuals use their bias to lie about the facts, and/or 3) everyone's point of view is as good as anyone else's. The motivations behind denial is a A) valuing of equality and B) a desire to see the world as fair and just. Some might also fear that a focus on social group membership might discount their experiences as an individual, i.e., C) fear of loss of individuality.

Minimization: When minimizing, students argue that the information presented is true only in limited or exceptional cases (Goodman, 2011; Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; Johnson, 2017;

Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). For example, students might suggest that discrimination in a workplace is because a particular boss is problematic. Other students might point to exceptional cases as evidence against a claim, such as by highlighting the presidency of Barack Obama as evidence of lack of racism in the U.S. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Other forms of minimization includes attributing offense to hypersensitivity (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Minimization emerges from the same beliefs and motivation as denial.

Overwhelm: When overwhelmed, students actually experience and/or claim to experience negative emotions that block their ability to engage. The student might say they are "sick and tired" of hearing about inequality (Johnson, 2017) or say that the problem is too stressful to think about or too complicated to discuss (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). For example, a student may not want to learn new terminology such as "Latinx" because they are confused about the usage. Some individuals may genuinely care about inequality but feel frozen by guilt or a sense of inadequacy (Rodriguez, 1998). Crying when overwhelmed, more than other forms of resistance, can disrupt other students as they attempt to comfort the affected student or are blamed for causing the overwhelm (DiAngelo, 2018; Rains, 1998).

Sometimes overwhelm is a form of denial: it allows students to avoid inquiry when their beliefs are challenged. Sometimes, however, overwhelm can stem from genuine feelings of pain and hurt based on one's experiences in an oppressive society, such as students expressing their difficulty with rigid gender roles (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007).

Another form of overwhelm can exist in students who feel pressured to educate others. For example, some students of color report that they are expected to know even more than the instructor about racism and, as an additional challenge, must share their knowledge without expressing negative emotions (Jackson, 1999). Although some students find a teaching position

empowering, many students may seek to avoid being put into that role and encountering conflicts with other students (Pieterse et al., 2016).

Overwhelm can be a step beyond denial and minimization because the student has, to a certain extent, that inequality exists. However, the acceptance is accompanied by extremely negative emotions. Thus, the belief behind overwhelm is 4) “Inequality exists, but I can’t do anything about it right now.” Again, valuing equality and a just world motivates overwhelm but the motivation is undercut by D) low self-efficacy.

Misdirection: Another way that students can accept inequality but minimize its impact is by calling it something else (Johnson, 2017). This can take several forms. First, students might argue that inequality results from biology, human nature (Goodman, 2011; Todd & Abrams, 2011), individual choice, or meritocracy (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; Johnson, 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Since the mechanisms are acceptable or impossible to alter, the resulting disparities not objectionable. For example, a student might justify discrimination against pregnant women by noting that it is impossible for males to give birth (biological argument). Some may claim that women should have the choice to stay home to raise children, thus women’s lack of participation in work is not a result of oppression (individual choice). Others insist that meritocracy exists but that unfortunate circumstances prevent its effectiveness: for example, hunger impairs the judgment of poor people or students of color are limited by stereotype threat. Reverse racism and other “White victimhood” arguments also rely on belief in meritocracy, arguing that systematic efforts should not be required to correct individual failures (Ross, 1990) and would be unfair (Rains, 1998). Each argument places the blame anywhere except on systems of oppression and easily morphs into blaming the victim (Johnson, 2017; Kaplowitz & Griffin, 2019). Students who make these arguments have difficulty separating

individual discrimination from institutional discrimination (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Thus, the belief behind misdirection is 5) “inequality exists but it’s not my problem.” A motivation behind it is E) an interest in self-determination, i.e., the belief that individuals should have some autonomy over their circumstances.

Second, some students may misdirect by arguing, based on their personal experiences or stereotypes, that disadvantaged groups are advantaged relative to dominant groups (Goodman, 2011; Kaplowitz & Griffin, 2019; Todd & Abrams, 2011). For example, some may say that racial minorities are privileged because of natural athletic talent. Lastly, individuals might redirect one form of oppression into another form that they are more comfortable with, for example claiming that examples of racism are actually classism (Johnson, 2017). Both are an advanced form of denial, essentially saying that 6) “this form of inequality does not exist.” The motivation is the same as denial and minimization.

Focus on intent. When students focus on intent, they divorce oppressive actions from their consequences by highlighting the presumed values or goals behind an action. These students deny or minimize particular manifestations of inequality. The main belief behind focusing on intent is 7) that intent is just as or more important to consider than impact. Students argue that actions cannot be discriminatory or that the consequences for discrimination should be less severe if the individual or institution had an egalitarian goal. Similarly, individuals might argue that people within institutions are not at fault for the actions (currently but especially historically) of those institutions (Kaplowitz & Griffin, 2019). For example, White individuals may feel they have no responsibility for the effects of slavery because their families did not own slaves. This belief emerges from a misunderstanding of oppression as individual actions rather

than a collective system (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). B) Belief in a just world is the underlying motivation.

A related intent argument is that one's marginalized identities shield one from participation in oppression (Goodman, 2011; Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Rather than arguing about the intent of a particular action, one can argue that their marginalized identities inform all of their actions and thus have non-oppressive intent. One's identity as an ally can be used similarly. These arguments downplay intersectionality, particularly the role of one's privileges in their actions. Further, this belief can come from a failure to appreciate internalized oppression and collusion. For example, a Latina denigrating another Latina for her darker skin still contributes to oppression.

Disbelief in the methods. A special form of resistance among those who understand inequality is a disbelief in particular methods of social transformation. Notably, genuine disagreement about appropriate methods to address inequality is expected, but these disbelievers, motivated by D) low self-efficacy (either doubt in themselves or in the ability of others to act effectively), slow down or completely halt productive conversations by claiming that 8) these particular methods won't work. For example, those seeing the need to work "outside the system" will critique traditional political participation as ineffective whereas those who desire to work "within the system" will argue that actions such as protests damage the legitimacy of a movement. Some may believe that socially just methods are valuable but too difficult or time-consuming to implement (Rodriguez, 1998). Others may rely on human nature to claim that humans are inherently power-hungry and have no self-interest in social change.

Avoiding the conversation. This form of resistance can manifest in many ways. Some students will claim that politics or certain values should not be a topic of conversation in schools,

which should be “neutral” and “value-free” (Rodriguez, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Others will find it controversial to discuss differences at all (Goodman, 2011), even when they are aware of them and/or concerned about inequality. Others may claim a value for social justice but insist that it takes time away from more important topics (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). An ally might use their privilege to avoid the conversation is by claiming that they cannot speak for target group members (Rains, 1998) or that they need more information to understand the topic or speak authoritatively. Though these excuses have positive intent, they allow allies to refrain from educating themselves about the target group well enough to speak. The ultimate withdrawal is to become silent without any counter-argument at all (Goodman, 2011; Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1996). The underlying belief is 9) “Not now/here.” The primary motivation is F) to protect the self. At this point, however, avoiding the conversation does not have lack of knowledge as a shield.

Summary. A few motivations can explain much of resistance. Most individuals do not believe that oppression is good or just; rather, they would prefer a just world and have mistaken beliefs. System justification theory would suggest that these beliefs are efforts to maintain predictability and control in an uncertain world (Jost & Andrews, 2011). However, those very beliefs about the justness of the world can interfere with their learning about the true nature of inequality. We also see a progression of resistance from complete denial of inequality to setting up various conditions to avoid confronting inequality, including facts about the circumstances themselves and their own capabilities.

Resistance by competency. Resistance can occur throughout development, but different forms of resistance may be more likely at certain points. In the last column of Table 1, I propose the forms of resistance that may manifest in response to different competencies. Denial and

minimization may be more likely when learning the early competencies, with disbelief in the methods more likely in Stage 2 when students have some familiarity with potential actions. Avoiding the conversation and overwhelm likely occur at any point.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

With events in 2020 again bringing racial inequality into mainstream attention, more members of the general population are seeking resources to increase their own knowledge about diversity and equity and to be able to teach others. However, the model presented here should make it clear that there are multiple competencies necessary for effective critical action. A benefit of the developmental cycles model is that each competency can be directly translated into learning objectives for a class session.

Furthermore, the cycles make it clear that students will require different content based on their previous knowledge and experience. The most commonly recommended resources may be pitched towards those new to diversity education and may not address the needs of more experienced students. Tailoring content to students' needs will preserve motivation to continue learning and agency for action. For example, a budding activist may feel bored and frustrated in "Microaggressions 101" but thrilled to learn about the history of anti-racist protests. At the same time, that student may fail to effectively apply the information if they are unfamiliar with the mechanisms of marginalization that spur protests. Instructors need to tailor their content, and the developmental cycles present levels of content and a sequence for learning.

Additionally, students already engaged in critical action also need assistance to reflect on their action and to understand how to deepen their knowledge for further effective action (i.e., move between the inner and outer cycles in Stage 2). Without guidance, many of the millions of

people who participated in protests in summer 2020, for example, will feel frustrated about next steps and may lose their motivation to continue to push for anti-racist efforts.

Since students with marginalized identities tend to have higher mastery of competencies and to learn more from diversity learning opportunities (e.g., Chao, 2013; Denson & Bowman, 2017), they may need separate, more advanced, or faster-paced instruction at certain points. For instance, an analysis of intergroup dialogue courses showed that, instead of learning equally as much as White students, Black students tended be more often in teaching roles because they thought more about their race and group membership (Gallaway, 2017). Yet it would be inappropriate to automatically place all students of color into a more advanced learning opportunity. At the same time, students will benefit from interactions with others of different backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs, so instructors can offer carefully structured experiences across levels of understanding that do not place undue burdens on more knowledgeable students and that prevent more privileged students from causing harm as they work through their resistance (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Matias, 2013).

Good assessment will correctly sort students into experiences they are most prepared for. By specifying the beliefs in each competency and form of resistance, the developmental cycles can assist instructors in determining where students are and where they can be expected to go. With sorting assessments available, instructors should not be afraid to announce the levels of their offerings and help potential students select the offerings that will be most useful. As a result, sessions will be more tailored, efficient, and effective.

Finally, during sessions, instructors can anticipate resistance and use strategies to promote positive motivation, reduced resistance, and better learning. As certain forms are resistance may be more common with certain competencies, instructors can use the forms

presented to prepare responses to common objections (for examples of responses, see Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Instructors can also teach students self-regulation strategies that will empower students to better regulate their own motivation and emotions (Byrd et al., 2020).

Conclusions and Future Directions

This paper has built upon existing models to provide concrete definitions for the forms of knowledge that are essential in promoting students' cultural competence and critical consciousness. The model emphasizes developmental competencies as opposed to aspects of personality or identity in order to highlight all students' potential for growth given appropriate learning experiences. Additionally, I have proposed a sequence of development and articulated how motivation spurs development. Finally, this paper has offered an analysis of the beliefs and values behind resistance to learning about diversity.

The model presented here integrates decades of research and practice, but further research is needed to validate all of its propositions and to explore variations in individual differences, contextual factors, and learning content. The next generation of diversity and inclusion sciences calls for approaches to diversity education that move beyond generalities to specific, evidence-based practice. The developmental cycles offer an important framework for enhancing students' cultural competence and critical consciousness for a more just and equitable world.

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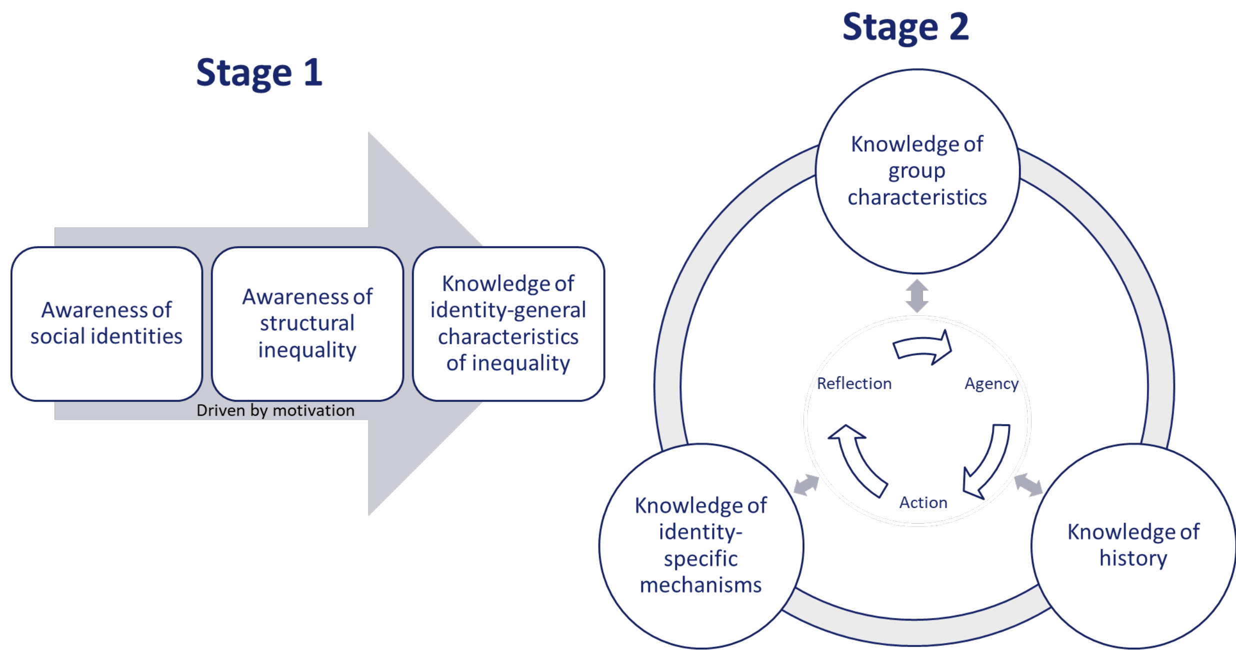

Figure 1. Developmental cycles in learning about identity, diversity, and equity

Table 1. Forms of Resistance

Form of resistance	Beliefs	Motivations	Competency most likely to appear in response to
Denial	1) Inequality does not exist 2) Certain individuals use their bias to lie about the facts 3) Everyone's point of view is as good as anyone else's	A) Valuing of equality B) Belief in a just world C) Fear of loss of individuality	Awareness of social identity Awareness of structural inequality Knowledge of identity-general characteristics of inequality Knowledge cycle
Minimization	1) Inequality does not exist 2) Certain individuals use their bias to lie about the facts 3) Everyone's point of view is as good as anyone else's	A) Valuing of equality B) Belief in a just world C) Fear of loss of individuality	Awareness of social identity Awareness of structural inequality Knowledge of identity-general characteristics of inequality
Overwhelm	4) Inequality exists, but I can't do anything about it right now	A) Valuing of equality B) Belief in a just world D) Low self-efficacy	Awareness of structural inequality Knowledge of identity-general characteristics of inequality Knowledge cycle Agency/action/reflection cycle
Misdirection	5) Inequality exists but it's not my problem 6) Inequality exists, but not this form	E) Self-determination	Awareness of structural inequality
Focus on intent	7) Intent is just as or more important to consider than impact	B) Belief in a just world	Knowledge of identity-general characteristics of inequality
Disbelief in the methods	8) These methods won't work	D) Low self-efficacy	Agency/action/reflection cycle
Avoiding the conversation	9) Not now/here	F) Self-protection	All