Engagement with Diversity Experiences: A Self-Regulated Learning Perspective

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Abstract

In this chapter, we use a self-regulated learning perspective to examine how students respond to the cognitive and emotional challenges of diversity experiences. Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the cognitive, motivational, affective, and behavioral strategies students use to help themselves learn (Zimmerman & Labuhn, 2012). We present a new process model of learning and resistance that describes how students' previous beliefs and experiences interact with the classroom environment and how, when students perceive a threat to their goals, values, or well-being, they choose one of three pathways to bring the environment back in alignment: learning strategies, learning-focused coping, or learning-resistant coping. We describe the process model in depth and give examples of how students' strategies and coping affect the learning environment. We conclude with implications for instructors.

Keywords: *diversity, social justice education, self-regulated learning, classroom environment, resistance, learning strategies*

Key Terms and Definitions

Power: The way in which social structures grant access to advancement, social mobility and privilege. Power is relational and parasitic while the dominant group has the ability to thrive the non-dominant group(s) are at a loss.

Advantaged or privileged identities: When students identify with social groups that traditionally have more power in the U.S context (e.g., white American, two-parent home, middle to high SES background**,** able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gender, Christian religion).

Minoritized or marginalized students: When students identify with social groups that have less power and opportunities for social mobility and advancement historically in the U.S context (e.g., African American, differently abled, LGBTQ identifying, African and Middle-Eastern religions, first gen students, low income backgrounds).

Diversity: an incorporation of social identities other than one's own into a space, office, class, committee, etc.,

Diversity experiences: Diversity experiences are opportunities for interaction with and learning from individuals who share different social identities. In this chapter we focus specifically on curricular/co-curricular diversity experiences, which are structured and programmatic efforts to help students increase their knowledge and skills around issues with diversity (Denson, 2009). These experiences range from brief activities in a course, workshops hosted by cultural centers, and full-semester courses focused on diversity, ethnic studies, or women's studies (Bowman, 2011; Denson, 2009, Engberg, 2004). Social justice education is a form of diversity experience.

Self-regulated learning: Cognitive, motivational, affective, and behavioral strategies students use to help themselves learn independently.

Engagement with Diversity Experiences: A Self-Regulated Learning Perspective

Instructors and facilitators of workshops and courses focused on issues of diversity and social justice are concerned with how best to structure their activities in order to promote students' learning. On top of designing activities that can best reveal the underlying mechanisms of privilege and oppression, instructors must also consider how to address the inevitable resistance that will come when students' pre-existing beliefs and values are challenged. In this chapter, we use a self-regulated learning perspective to examine how students respond to the cognitive and emotional challenges of diversity experiences. To do this, we integrate multiple existing frameworks into a comprehensive process model that applies to students of all backgrounds, with attention to how students' identities and previous experiences influence their learning.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the cognitive, motivational, affective, and behavioral strategies students use to help themselves learn (Zimmerman & Labuhn, 2012). It occurs in cycles of forethought, performance, and reflection (Pintrich, 2000). Although traditionally applied to academic learning in primary content areas (e.g., math, science, English/language arts), SRL is also relevant to the learning that occurs in diversity experiences—even those outside of the classroom. SRL can explain how students apply their cognition, motivation, affect, and behavior to achieve the learning goals of an experience. SRL can also explain why students resist and disengage from these experiences. Learning from a diversity experience is not simply a matter of having the right attitudes or participating in the right activity. Instead, learning occurs as a result of goal-directed, dynamic choices students make in response to their assessment of the learning environment.

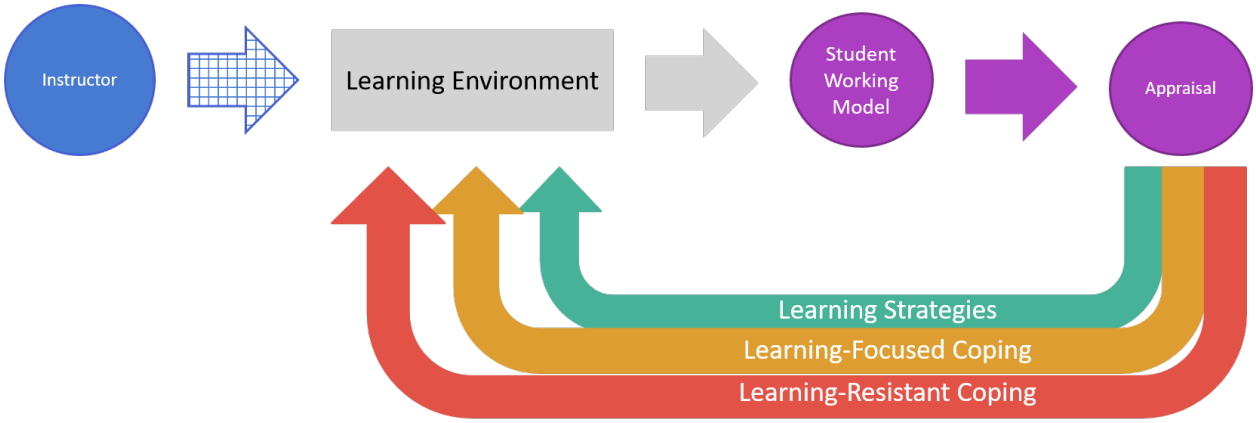

Figure 1. Process Model of Learning and Resistance in Diversity Experiences

Our process model (Figure 1) seeks to show how students' behavior in diversity experiences is a result of goal-directed (although not necessarily conscious) internal processes. What follows are specific examples of student learning and resistance through the lens of the model. To illustrate the model, we will use examples from research articles that explore participants' responses to social justice education. From left to right in Figure 1, the first element is the instructor, who brings their passion, awareness, skills, and knowledge into the learning environment (Jackson, n.d.; Maxwell, Fisher, Thompson, & Behling, 2011). Often, instruction is filtered through contextual restrictions such that all of the educator's relevant abilities are not brought to the fore. For example, a pre-tenure professor of Color may limit the extent to which she shows her passion for social justice in the classroom in order to avoid being seen as too "radical" (Matias, 2013). The learning environment is composed of classroom norms (i.e., guidelines or working agreements), learning goals, methods, and content of the day in addition to the characteristics and moods that all students bring to the classroom.

Student Working Model

In diversity experiences, students are faced with many challenging ideas about power structures and systems of oppression. But how students react to those ideas varies from student to

student. In the interaction of person and environment, the person is represented by the working model in Figure 1, in which the student takes their perceptions of the learning environment and assesses it through the lens of their beliefs, motivation, and previous experiences. Students do not enter the classroom as "blank slates" but come with previous experiences and cognition, motivation, and behavioral tendencies based on those experiences. *Cognitions* are beliefs and attitudes. Existing research suggests that some of the beliefs and attitudes that predict engagement in diversity experiences are openness to diversity, awareness of inequality, left-leaning political views, and identification with a marginalized group (Bowman, 2011; Denson & Bowman, 2017). Even students who grew up in homogeneous communities with little exposure to people who are different from them still have stereotypes, biases, and beliefs regarding their own identity and social position (Matias, 2013). Some of these beliefs may be more implicit while others are more explicit.

Closely related to students' attitudes and beliefs is their *motivation,* specifically their values and goals related to diversity and the learning environment. Values are beliefs about the importance, usefulness, or interestingness of a subject (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Goals are specific outcomes that one anticipates receiving as a result of engaging in an action (Pintrich, 2000). Motivation can be entirely extrinsic (i.e., driven by external rewards), intrinsic (i.e., driven by personal interest), or a combination of the two (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Marginalized students are often motivated to participate in the activities of cultural centers and student organizations to feel a sense of connectedness and support to those sharing their identities (e.g., Lozano, 2010; Patton, 2010). Other activities are valuable because students consider them more practically important and/or useful, such as for getting a job post-graduation, or fulfilling a requirement for their major. A student can think about value for diversity at a general level or

more specific to the particular content of an activity. For example, a Latinx student might value diversity in general but also specifically value their Latinx identity (or another identity, for instance gender or sexual orientation) and content related to that identity. Value for a particular outcome, such as achieving course credit, or avoiding a negative consequence, such as academic probation, also matters. This is especially true when a diversity-focused activity or course is part of an educational requirement. Moreover, students can approach a diversity experience with a variety of goals in mind, including actually learning the material (mastery goals), appearing to have the right beliefs and attitudes (performance-approach goals), avoiding being embarrassed or being perceived as prejudiced (performance-avoidance goals), or meeting like-minded peers and making friends (social goals) (Pintrich, 2000). Students will have multiple relevant values and goals that can be more or less salient depending on the learning environment.

Finally, students have existing behavioral patterns that they bring to a classroom. Some students have many friends who are of a different race, sexuality, and/or socioeconomic group; other students have homogeneous friend groups. Some students are frequent attendees at diversity events whereas others may be engaging with a group or activity for the first time. Some students see themselves as agitators (e.g., “devil’s advocate”) and enjoy heated debate while others avoid conflict at all costs. Students also have different self-regulatory skills when it comes to learning more generally, and learning about diversity in particular. For example, an A-student who has mastered study skills in other academic areas could apply those same skills to be successful in a required diversity course. However, the student may struggle because the unfamiliar cognitive and emotional content of the course disrupts their usual behavior.

Appraisal

Our description of the appraisal process is based on the cognitive theory of psychological stress and coping (Folkman et al., 1986), which focuses on how individuals perceive and react to their environments. Specific applications to the learning environment are informed by Boekaert's dual-processing model of self-regulation (Boekaerts, 2007; Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016). As the student compares their working model to their perception of the learning model, they make an assessment (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986): "Is there a threat to my well-being, values, or goals?" In this primary appraisal, the student determines whether they are safe, i.e., whether is a challenge to their ability to meet their goals for the day, whether that be to learn, to interact socially, or to just enjoy class. They determine whether or not there is a threat to their mental, emotional, or physical well-being. They consider whether there is potential for harm to their values or self-esteem. In social justice terminology, some call emotional responses "triggers" (Griffin, 1997). Students are constantly attending to cues in the learning environment for information on how well they are meeting their goals, whether learning or social. Processing of threat is often unconscious and occurs alongside rapid emotional responses (Boekaerts, 2007). For example, consider a South Asian student enrolled in a general survey course on Asian American history that focuses primarily on the history of East Asians in the United States. South Asians' experiences are often erased in discourse on Asian Americans within white-dominated spaces. As such, the reproduction of these dynamics even within Asian spaces may engender feelings of psychological threat (i.e., may trigger the student). Also, if a student has the goal of getting through the class with a minimum amount of effort, any calls for engagement could become a threat. Moreover, threats can be external to the learning environment: a student may just be too tired, hungry, or stressed to engage.

Confusion is a prime example of a cue that indicates a learning goal is not being met. However, emotional reactions are also the precursors to feelings of threat. These reactions might occur when presented with surprising statistics, when engaging in a thought-provoking activity, or when a peer provides a harsh response to a statement. Common negative emotions during social justice learning include shame, guilt, powerlessness, anger, and sadness (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000; Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004). Within the context of social justice education, negative emotions are especially common for students with privileged identities when the experience focuses on that identity (Shapses Wertheim, 2014). Negative emotions can be detrimental to the learning process for diversity experiences (e.g., Mayhew & King, 2008) but do not have to be (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Shapses Wertheim, 2014). In thic chapter, we aim to show how proper self-regulation can be a tool to help manage classroom threats.

Importantly, students only feel threatened when the information is relevant to the self (Boekaerts, 2007). Many social justice activities are designed to engage students to cognitively and emotionally reflect on their own experiences and worldviews (e.g., Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). Developmental psychologists have proposed that experiences that are novel and/or contradict one's current understanding create disequilibrium that students must then attempt to resolve, and empirical research demonstrates that diversity activities that encourage this disequilibrium are more effective at changing attitudes (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012). However, cognitive dissonance can trigger negative emotions (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Mayhew & King, 2008). Given that the attitudes in focus are often implicit or otherwise deeply held, challenges to those attitudes can create a sense of threat to the self. Furthermore, the determination of threat is entirely dependent upon the perception of the

individual based on their existing working model. What one individual considers a threat may be different from what another person considers a threat.

The following is a quote illustrating a white teacher candidate feeling threatened by course content:

> *I know I may not have had any relationships with people of color but that is not my fault…. I don't see race so this is not about race. You telling me to see race is racist. Race is just not important. I believe in goodness of all human beings and how we can love each regardless to race, religion, and gender…. I do want to learn about race but I feel like I am being blamed for all this stuff even when I work hard to help African American and Latino students. I don't understand why I have to feel guilty. … You see, I care for everyone, so I'm confused… Isn't that what teachers are supposed to do?* (Matias, 2014, p. 141)

The student is experiencing disequilibrium between their belief that "race is just not important" and their instructor telling them to "see race." That this conflict is threatening is revealed by their statements of "I feel like I am being blamed" and "why [do] I have to feel guilty." Specifically, the student perhaps feels guilty about their lack of interaction with people of color despite their desire to help African American and Latino students. The student's self-image is at risk because they believe that their motivation to become a teacher and help students of Color is a good thing, and not, in fact, potentially racist. Feelings of threat lead to coping, whereas students who do not feel threatened use learning strategies. Both of these outcomes are outlined below.

Learning Strategies

When students' primary assessment indicates that there is no threat to their well-being, values, and/or goals, they are free to apply learning strategies to master the activity content.

Sometimes learning is uncomfortable but within a student's capacity to manage the discomfort because they have effective learning strategies (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016). Many students enter social justice courses with previously learned strategies for reading and participating in class. Furthermore, for some students, the effectiveness of their strategies will be increased by their comfort and/or familiarity with the topic at hand. At the same time, however, the uniquely personal content of diversity experiences might also disrupt students' ability to use their normal strategies. For example, a Christian student may find it difficult to carefully take notes on a reading that challenges their views on homosexuality.

Many social justice educators emphasize particular skills, such as active learning, and can help students learn and apply these skills. In the next example, a white man in a race-ethnicity dialogue course describes how he applied his active listening skills to difficult topics:

> *Well I just tried to listen to what other people had to say and not necessarily change their views or change my views, just to digest what they were saying and put it on a bigger scale of what it meant. And then just take it from every side and see like where I fell on that and if I felt I wanted to switch over.* (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 220)

In this example, the student finds that he disagrees with his peers, but instead of reacting negatively, he "trie(s) to listen" and "digest." The student feels comfortable enough to focus his attention on the learning strategy.

Coping

If students' primary appraisal indicates that a threat to goals, values, and/or well-being exists, then the student must decide how to cope. Coping consists of efforts to restore well-being by trying to change the external environment or by adjusting one's internal emotional state to be consistent with the environment's demands (Folkman et al., 1986). When coping, students are

seeking to determine what obstacles they have to overcome to prevent harm and/or maximize the benefits of the situation. To determine how to cope, students evaluate the demands of the situation and their available coping resources, which can include the course guidelines and the instructor or other students in addition to the student's personal resources. Coping strategies include both strategies to manage emotional arousal (e.g., taking a deep breath, seeking social support, crying), as well as volitional strategies to refocus on the task at hand (e.g., focusing thoughts; Cascallar, Boekaerts, & Costigan, 2006). These efforts are done with either the goal of returning to wellness enough to learn (learning-focused coping) or withdrawing from the learning opportunity (learning-resistant coping).

Learning-focused coping. In learning-focused coping, the situation is threatening but the student adopts the goal of continuing to learn and subsequently direct their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions toward that goal. For some students, learning-focused coping will involve moderating one's internal cognitive and emotional response. In the following example, a student responds to a peer's comment:

> *It was just like, it was kind of a shock because I wouldn't expect someone from the same group as me to make that error because it's very offensive to people who have been liberated from Spain after all those years of colonization. And it was just like, I don't know how to explain it, it was kind of like this fiery feeling, like an impulse, that I had to say something, like it was something that I couldn't just let slip by. And so I didn't yell at her or anything, but I told her, "Ok it's not Spanish, it's either Latino. . . ." I told her what I just said to you. . . . So I wanted definitely to bring that issue up because I don't want other students to accept her comment and then learn something wrong.* (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 230)

In this example, the student felt a "fiery feeling" and knew they had to respond to their classmate's comment. However, instead of yelling, the student directs her energy toward an explanation. This strategy supports the student's (and her classmates') engagement in the learning environment. Other internal strategies include taking a deep breath or using self-talk.

Other students will seek to change the external environment to restore their well-being. For example, a student might ask a peer for clarification or for the facilitator to remind classmates about the course guidelines. Instructors can set up and help students practice classroom norms that encourage productive participation even in the face of threat.

Although all students are capable of learning-focused coping, students are best able to manage this coping when experiencing threats related to their marginalized identities. In the following example, a white woman in a gender dialogue feels anger but responds in a way to promote learning:

> *[He] went into this spiel about how in a rape scenario, the rapist is the real victim because the rapist is not able to recover from the rape. And I was pissed, you know, I'm not one to hold my tongue, I was right there, "please don't sit in a room surrounded by women and tell me that a rapist is the real victim in a rape. I don't think so."* (Gurin, Nagda, & Zuniga, 2013, p. 228).

As a woman, the student may have been more familiar with dominant narratives about rape that seek to place less blame on the rapist. If her identity as a woman is important to her, it would be important to challenge such narratives, especially "in a room surrounded by women." In this way, the student improves the learning environment not only for herself, but for her peers who may similarly feel harmed by the man's victim-blaming statement but feel unsafe to speak up.

Students use learning-focused coping because they value the content, the learning environment, and their contributions to the classroom. As in the first example, the student notes "I wanted definitely to bring that issue up because I don't want other students to accept her comment and then learn something wrong." This student feels responsible for her classmate's learning and feels efficacious in her ability to help them learn. Students with strong personal motivations to be in the space are more likely to choose learning-focused coping when faced with a threat. When faced with their own contribution to systems of oppression, a student with a goal to learn as much as possible is more likely to push through feelings of guilt (learning-focused coping), whereas another student might engage in rationalizations for how they are not complicit (learning-resistant coping).

Learning-resistant coping. In learning-resistant coping, students adopt any goal other than learning in response to threat. The student may instead seek to restore a sense of cognitive equilibrium, may seek to express their anger or sadness, or may withdraw completely from the learning environment. Social justice educators have noted the many forms that resistance can take; some students reason that the instructor is biased, some downplay the significance of oppression, some verbally attack the instructor or peers, yet still others cry (Matias, 2014; Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004; Shapses Wertheim, 2014). These reactions are usually disruptive to the learning process and may require rapid responses from the instructor in order to minimize the disruption. Furthermore, these reactions can be emotionally violent and create feelings of threat in other students and the instructor, especially those with marginalized identities (Matias, 2013; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

For individuals holding privileged identities, learning-resistant coping often occurs when they are confronted with information contrary to their beliefs about these identities. As an

example, DiAngelo (2010) describes a mandatory workplace training entitled “Race and Social Justice.” A component of the training is when DiAngelo, a white woman, and her co-facilitator, a person of Color, present common barriers for whites seeing racism, including the desire to see people as individuals and not as members of broader racial groups. During a subsequent break, two white participants (“Bill” and “Sue”) approach DiAngelo and declare, “Bill and I think we should all just see each other as individuals.” DiAngelo mentions trying to explain without avail. By the afternoon break, she notes that Sue had left the training.

In this example, Bill’s and Sue’s working models appear to include the beliefs that race has not impacted their lives and that the problem of racism can simply be solved by treating everyone as individuals. When DiAngelo and her co-facilitator presented information on the need to see and respond to racism, Bill and Sue were met with a threat to their beliefs. Without knowing more about them, we cannot know whether this threat created a sense of emotional threat or simply cognitive dissonance, but we do know that Bill and Sue responded with learning-resistance coping: they confronted the facilitator. When her attempt to alter the learning environment was not successful, Sue withdrew completely.

Motivations for using learning-resistant coping may differ when the student belongs to a marginalized or minoritized group. In some cases, students of Color may hold dominant ideologies about racism and eschew a colorblind ideology. In other words, they may believe that we “shouldn’t see race” and instead the problem of racism can be solved by treating everyone as an individual - a belief similar to those often held by white Americans. When the student’s colorblind beliefs come under threat, they may utilize similar methods of learning-resistant coping to Bill and Sue. Yet, a student of Color (or any marginalized student for that matter) may also use learning-resistant coping when encountering threat more relevant to their marginalized

identity. If a student does not feel safe to challenge their classmates' problematic beliefs or speak up to redirect classroom discussion, as the white woman and Latinx student in the examples above did (Gurin et al., 2013), they may withdraw. Then, it is imperative for instructors -- and educational institutions more broadly -- to cultivate spaces in which students feel safe to employ learning-focused, rather than learning-resistant, coping strategies.

It is important to note that students engaging in learning-resistant coping are not always conscious of the disruptiveness of their actions, and even if they are, may not know how to make their coping more learning-focused. In some circumstances, they may not even possess the tools to respond appropriately. These students are reacting according to past behaviors that have been supported in other contexts. Therefore, compassion is necessary even as an instructor works to curb the student's negative impact. We believe that giving students the opportunity to reflect and teaching them self-regulation strategies can be effective, but one instructor may not be able to adjust a lifetime of learned behavior.

Back to the Learning Environment

Whether the student chooses to adopt learning strategies, learning-focused coping, or learning-resistant coping, their behavior will affect the instructor and other students, which then changes the learning environment. When the learning environment changes, all students again update their working model and make appraisals. If the appraisal changes so that the threatened student feels safe, then the student may change from coping toward learning strategies. If the student continues to feel threatened, however, they may continue with the same coping strategies or attempt new ones (Cascallar, Boekaerts, & Costigan, 2006). This cycle continues throughout the experience.

Student Identity as a Key Consideration

Thus far, we have discussed the ways in which a student's learning is dependent upon their own actions and beliefs. In other words, we have outlined the possible courses of action a student may employ when they encounter threat in the learning environment. For many students, some degree of threat, or risk, is critical to facilitate their learning. However, it is equally important for students to feel safe amongst their peers and instructor(s). To be clear, we understand that what constitutes an optimal level of threat, versus an optimal level of safety, can look very different for students holding marginalized identities (e.g., students of Color, gender and sexual minorities, disabled students, low-income students), relative to those with more privileged identities (e.g., white students, cisgender and heterosexual students, men, able-bodied and -minded students). Below, we unpack this idea in greater detail.

Threat and Safety for the Privileged Student

For privileged students, learning from diversity experiences often requires a level of risk-taking, in that they must place their uncertainties, fears, and need for safety to the side to express their viewpoints or to ask the questions that will contribute to the learning of not just themselves but everyone in the classroom. Risk means there are potentially negative consequences: others may not react favorably or admitting an implicit bias to themselves could be damaging to a student's sense of identity. Students with advantaged identities relative to the context or the topic come into the classroom comfortable, ready to learn, and with many of the social and contextual conditions that are favorable to them. Taking risks is not easy but often well-supported in diversity experiences. Many programs exist simply to create spaces that are safe for privileged students to feel free to express the values and beliefs that are otherwise not "politically correct" and can be damaging to marginalized students' sense of psychological safety. For instance, at

some institutions there exist courses that cultivate spaces for white students to come together and learn about race and racism, white supremacy, and the ways in which they contribute to the further marginalization of people of Color. Thus, the safety of students with advantaged identities is privileged, perhaps even above the safety of their marginalized peers at the institution as a whole. The privileged student need only be willing to make themselves vulnerable in this space, knowing that their safety and advantage will be preserved.

Threat and Safety for the Marginalized Student

For the marginalized student, risk-taking in the classroom looks entirely different. As mentioned above, threat in the classroom on many occasions may arise out of experiences that students find psychologically triggering. This may particularly be the case for marginalized and minoritized students when they share the room with peers holding privileged identities. A student of Color may experience threat when a white student challenges the existence of racism in front of the whole class. An immigrant-origin or international student may experience threat when a US-born peer begins to characterize immigrants as poor, uneducated criminals. In these situations, whether or not the marginalized student is able to use learning-focused coping, in lieu of learning-resistant coping, depends upon the degree to which that student feels safe in the classroom.

Unfortunately, safety for students from marginalized backgrounds is often unattainable due to the pervasive societal ideologies often maintained by institutions of higher education that perpetuate the oppression of students from marginalized groups (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Safety means that the student can fully participate and engage in their learning (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016). They have the resources to direct toward learning in the particular environment and context they find themselves in. They are not hungry, they are not upset, they are among people

with whom they feel comfortable sharing their viewpoints, and they have the self-efficacy to express their viewpoints and process the information they need to further their knowledge. By this definition, then, there are quite a few contexts in which marginalized students are never safe (Arao & Clemens, 2013). These students have to come into a classroom environment in which there are people and topics that do not offer comfort or safety. The risk is not simply to get negative feedback or self-understanding but to have negative consequences that extend outside of that one learning moment into their lives outside the classroom. When an transgender student challenges a cisgender peer's transphobic beliefs (e.g., that trans women are not real women, or that there are only two genders), the consequences are far more vast. To challenge a problematic belief, a trans student may have to out themselves as trans, which then identifies them as holding an extremely vulnerable identity amongst a classroom and campus full of cisgender peers. Moreover, should the cisgender student being challenged react unfavorably, the trans student may become triggered and experience damage to their psychological and emotional well-being (Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011). The difference for the marginalized student, then, is that spaces dedicated solely to their psychological safety are few and far between. Unlike learning experiences cultivated for the safety of the privileged student, very few formal, institutionalized safe spaces exist for marginalized students. While a student may seek out mental health care to deal with the consequences of threat in the classroom, this requires that 1) the mental health care practitioner be sensitive to the student's identities and needs and 2) the student has the financial means to obtain such care.

The difficulty is that, since learning cannot occur without safety or risk, how do marginalized students ever benefit from diversity experiences in higher education classrooms and co-curricular experiences? One answer, as some have noted (Arao & Clemens, 2013) is to

ask students to be "brave." But in doing so, we are not just asking our students to be brave; we are asking them to disregard their own safety and sacrifice themselves on the altar of learning for the benefit of more privileged peers. Thus, it is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that marginalized students feel safe to contribute and to learn. Because even when students have marginalized identities, they may still have a great deal to learn about the history of their identity groups, effective methods for social action, and information about identities that they do not hold. Moreover, diversity experiences can be a valuable opportunity for marginalized students to meet like-minded peers sharing some of their social identities. Then, these experiences serve as a critical source of community-building.

As educators, we must honor the sacrifice that marginalized students make by differentially asking students to take risks in the classroom, with consideration of their identities. We must ask more of our students with advantaged identities and be careful to respect the decision of students with marginalized identities to not engage in the learning process. At the same time, we must give marginalized students hope that their sacrifice is not in vain and will advance the goals of learning and social justice.

Implications for Instructors

In this chapter, we have argued that participation in and learning from diversity experiences is a product of dynamic appraisals and choices situated within the contexts of a students' previous experiences and learning environment. The process model in Figure 1 is a cycle: students make appraisals, apply strategies, and appraise again. Because each cycle begins and ends with an appraisal of the environment, the way instructors structure the learning environment and respond to student behavior is key in helping students use learning strategies and learning-focused coping. Specifically, instructors can promote students' learning by 1)

giving students opportunities to reflect on their appraisals, 2) creating an optimal learning environment, and 3) teaching students how to self-regulate. Each of these can be accomplished by focusing on students' metacognitive abilities. Self-regulated learning theories emphasize the importance of metacognition, which is the ability to think about one's thinking (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman & Labuhn, 2012). Students who are higher in metacognition are better able to activate their prior knowledge and experiences when entering a learning environment. During a learning experience, they are better at monitoring their understanding and adjusting their strategies accordingly (Pintrich, 2000). Diversity experiences are unique from traditional academic contexts because the material is often connected with issues of identity that students may not have reflected on in academic settings. Therefore, students who are generally high in metacognitive ability may fail to apply those skills because the content is so unfamiliar or difficult. In addition, diversity experiences often have norms that differ from traditional classrooms, even when they occur in a classroom setting. For example, students may be encouraged to share their emotions and intimate personal experiences. Thus, instructors will need to be intentional about aiding students in self-reflection and metacognition in order to mitigate defensiveness (Bowman, 2010; Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Sherman & Cohen, 2002). In the next section we describe metacognitive self-regulation strategies that instructors can help students develop. These strategies are: 1) give students the opportunity to reflect, 2) create an optimal learning environment, and 3) teach self-regulation strategies.

Give Students the Opportunity to Reflect

Instructors can both reduce and normalize feelings of threat by helping students understand the goals of the experience and set norms to support those goals. Many instructors already do this with setting of classroom guidelines or working agreements that emphasize

respect, challenging the idea and not the person, and confidentiality. Many instructors also introduce the concept of learning edges and comfort zones to support the understanding that learning may be uncomfortable (e.g., Kaplowitz & Griffin, 2019). We recommend that instructors go further by having students reflect on their individual goals, values, and well-being at the start of a term and identify potential threats that may occur. For example, Matias gives preservice teachers a survey at the beginning of her multicultural education course with questions such as "What do you hope to learn? How do you hope to get there in your learning?" and "Have you talked about race and racism before? Who do you feel most comfortable in talking about this topic? Please describe" (Matias, 2013). Students who are aware of their goals are more likely to and better able to self-regulate toward them (Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, instructors should accept that students will have multiple goals and not all are focused on optimal learning.

Creaing an Optimal Learning Environment

After having students identify their goals and values, instructors can use the information to construct an optimal learning environment. For example, if many students have social goals, the instructor can focus on providing opportunities for peer interaction. Instructors might also create small groups of students with similar backgrounds, beliefs, or values and assign them particular readings or activities tailored to their potential points of resistance. For example, a group of students from homogeneous communities might need more content discussing the widespread nature of inequality compared to students from diverse communities.

Most importantly, instructors need to make students aware of their motivation for learning and encourage personal investment in the learning process for themselves and others. Motivation for learning is the main predictor of whether students under threat will engage in

learning-focused or learning-resistant coping. However, not all students enter the classroom with the intention to learn or valuing social justice. Instructors can help students be aware of their motivations and can encourage interest in learning, for example by imagining an "ideal world" at the beginning of the course and referring students back to this vision as needed.

Instructors must highlight that discomfort and negative emotions are signs of threat to students' goals, values, and well-being. Throughout the class, instructors can have students pause to reflect, especially after a particularly challenging or emotional moment. Since students are each part of the environment for each other, one student's learning-resistant coping can create threats for others. Pausing for reflection can interrupt the cycle and allow everyone the chance to self-regulate in adaptive ways. Mindfulness may be a useful way to frame such reflective moments (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000).

Teach Self-Regulation Strategies

It is important for students to be aware that they might experience threats, but it is even more important for students to know that they are empowered to choose their response to threats. Experiencing threats and having to cope are very common in diversity experiences. The goal, then, should be to choose learning-focused coping as often as possible. Thus, instructors should give students examples of learning-focused strategies that they can use. Students may experience new thoughts and feelings during a diversity experience, so explaining to students what they may feel and how to deal with those feelings normalizes the feelings and equips students to respond appropriately. Students can also help each other use the strategies when there is a shared set of strategies. To facilitate understanding of coping strategies, instructors can share their own experiences of feeling threat and how they successfully coped.

However, instructors must have a superordinate set of strategies to regulate students when self-regulation fails. This means instructors should have specific cues that they look for to determine when students are threatened and have specific strategies they use to respond to learning-resistant coping. For example, instructors can assign a “minute paper” if it seems that multiple students are struggling. They can also call for a five-minute break. For cases where a student is going through intense emotional struggle, referral out to a counselor or other support professional may be appropriate. The instructor must keep the learning of the overall group in mind over the needs of one person. Above all, instructors should emphasize the cyclical nature of learning. No one moment is the end of learning. Feelings of threat can be successfully resolved with little harm to others through the use of learning-focused coping. Diversity experiences often emphasize continued growth and development, and instructors can incorporate practicing that development in every class session.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented a new process model that explains how students respond to learning opportunities in diversity experiences. We have argued that students’ responses to learning opportunities are goal-directed and based on their factors such as their identities, past experiences, and motivation. Based on students' previous experiences, beliefs, and motivations, they will appraise the learning environment in different ways. When students appraise the environment as safe (i.e., lacking a threat to their well-being, values, and goals), they use learning strategies to engage with the content. When students perceive a threat, they will either engage in learning-focused coping, in which they regulate their emotions, cognitions, and behavior to attempt to learn the content, or they engage in learning-resistant coping, in which they seek to change their internal state or the learning environment to restore their sense of

equilibrium. Students' reactions feed back into the learning environment to create a cycle throughout the experience.

In order to apply the process model to their teaching, instructors can educate themselves on common sources of resistance for their topic. Additionally, they can obtain as much information from their students on their previous knowledge and experiences to prepare for possible threats. As we have noted, instructors can teach students self-regulation strategies, which the following lesson plan is focused on. Finally, instructors must continually invest in their own process of learning and development to create learning environments that provide the most effective opportunities for students to learn about diversity and social justice.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Lesson Plan

Materials needed: Sheet of paper and writing utensil for each student, copy of Figure 1, and area for recording class guidelines and regulation strategies

Part 1: Goals and Threats

In this section, students identify the goals and values they bring to the experience.

Instructor: "Everyone has different goals when they come to an activity like this. Of course, our hope is that you want to learn as much as possible, but as learners we usually have more than one goal. Make a list of three to four goals that you have for today, and then rank them in order of what's most important to you."

After giving students 2-3 minutes to list and rank their goals, the instructor should explain the learning objectives for the day and the content that will be covered. Then give students a few minutes to identify beliefs and values that are relevant to the day's learning objectives.

Instructor: "Since my main goal is to have you meet our learning objectives, this activity is going to be structured toward those goals and this content. Sometimes what happens in the class will conflict with one of your goals or values. When you experience a conflict, you might feel confused, or uncomfortable, or angry, or sad. We call this experiencing a sense of threat or being triggered. On your page, write down some ways that you might feel threatened today."

Part 2: Process Model

In this section, students learn about the process model. The instructor may want to supplement this section with the idea of comfort zones and learning edges. Introduce the model in Figure 1 and explain the multiple pathways.

Instructor: "When people experience threat, they try to cope with the threat to make themselves feel better. People respond to threat in different ways. Some people lash out. Some people become silent. Other people try to reason with themselves. We call these responses coping. Some coping is directed at trying to get back to a place where you can learn, and other coping is about just trying to feel better. How you choose to cope will influence me and everyone else in the class. Then we start the cycle again. Can someone give me an example of each type of coping?"

Part 3: Group Norms and Regulation Strategies

In this section students think about how to help themselves and each other self-regulate. Try to create strategies that students can use on their own as well as ways for students to hold each other accountable. Note that some students may feel uncomfortable with other students "calling them out", so be sure to discuss individual preferences and come to a consensus or majority view on the collective strategies.

Instructor: "As I said, going through these cycles is a part of the learning process. Our goal is to help each other spend as much time using learning strategies rather than having to cope. However, sometimes we will feel threatened and need to cope. Fortunately, we can use each other as resources. Let's make a list of guidelines for behavior to minimize threats to each other.

Let's then identify learning-focused coping strategies to use if we find ourselves or another person on feeling threatened."

After identifying group strategies, have students identify specific strategies that they want to use throughout the activity and write those down. Encourage students to keep their lists visible to them.

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