



# And Now What? Effects of Initial Interaction with Diverse Peers

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# OVERVIEW

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



# Fostering Diverse Interactions

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



# Fostering Diverse Interactions

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## Negative Signs

- Campus hate crimes motivated by:
  - Race: 13% ( $n=4000$ )
  - Religion: 14% ( $n=1462$ )
  - Sexual orientation (10% ( $n=1195$ ))  
(FBI, 2007)
- Professors report being under-prepared to address diversity issues in the classroom



# Dissonance & Discomfort

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- Diverse interactions are often challenging because they make people feel uncomfortable.
- Although this is a state we may try to avoid, it seems to play an important role in developing intercultural effectiveness.



# Conceptual Framing-Context

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Theories that emphasize **context** of intergroup interactions

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



# Conceptual Framing-Development

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## Theories that emphasize **Development**

- Festinger: Cognitive dissonance
- Piaget: Disequilibrium
- Kegan, Baxter Magolda: Self-authorship
- King & Baxter Magolda: Intercultural maturity



# Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education

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





# Interview Campuses

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- 4 small private liberal arts colleges (representing all geographic regions of US), 1 medium sized private research institution (Midwest), 1 large public institution (West)
- 2 are Hispanic-serving; 1 all male; 1 all female that enrolls about 1/2 African-American, 1/2 White students



## Methods- WNLSAE Interview

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

Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (2007). Constructing conversations to assess meaning-making: Self Authorship interviews. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 491-508.



# Coding, Phase 1 Summary

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

(Baxter Magolda & King, 2008)



# Institutional Themes

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



# Cross-Institutional Themes

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Identification of themes that appeared on more than 1 campus

## **“Cross-institutional themes”**

- Diversity Experiences
- Academic Challenge
- Transition to College



# Diversity Experiences

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- Experiences in which students encountered peers who differed from them; and
- Reacted with discomfort



## Rationale for Focus on Uncomfortable Diverse Interactions

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These interactions could yield rich information about:

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



## Analytic Sample

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





# Findings: Topics Addressed

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Topics addressed in the uncomfortable interactions (number reported)

- Race and ethnicity 25
- Sexual orientation 14
- Religion 10
- Politics 4
- Class 1



# Themes: White Students

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



# Themes: Students of Color

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



# Discussion-Key Characteristics

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



## Discussion: Developmental Capacities

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- Unable to use multiple frames of reference, challenges to own beliefs, engage in interdependent relationships with diverse others.
- These require self-authorship, but most of this sample relied on external frameworks, reflecting an early level of intercultural maturity.



# Implications for Practice

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- Disequilibrium is necessary but not sufficient for intercultural development.
- Acknowledge the role of emotions in developmental processes
- Educational goal: modify the interpretive lens students use to understand such encounters



# LEAP Principles

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- 1) Aim High—and Make Excellence Inclusive
  - 2) Give Students a Compass
  - 3) Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation
  - 4) Engage the Big Questions
  - 5) Connect Knowledge w/ Choices & Action
  - 6) Foster Civic, Intercultural, & Ethical Learning
  - 7) Assess Students' Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems
- from *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007)



# Give Students a Compass

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





# Teach the Arts of Inquiry & Innovation

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



# Engage the Big Questions

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- Guide students in exploring
  - Difference
  - One's own biases & perspectives
  - What it means for people to bring different values to the interaction



# Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action

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



# Implications for Practice

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- Establish environments conducive to growth:
  - Provide safe places to explore cultural differences and the tensions they can trigger
  - Encourage reflection about one's own cultural background and social identities
  - Encourage taking interpersonal risks
  - Scaffold reflection, exploration, expression, problem-solving



# Resources

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- [www.liberalarts.wabash.edu](http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu)
- [www.soe.umich.edu/liberalartstudy](http://www.soe.umich.edu/liberalartstudy)
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WABASH NATIONAL STUDY OF  
**Liberal Arts** Education

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