CHRIS has been charged with revamping the diversity training in her organization. She attended a conference specifically to gain new ideas about how to shift her department’s basic diversity training to a process that would foster high-quality, transformative learning for her colleagues and students. She attended a session that promised to share a new way of thinking about diversity and social justice education and provide resources for participants to take back to their own campus. The exercises challenged Chris to see the world through different lenses. She thought the session was terrific, and it was further accentuated by personal stories from many of the attendees. She was amazed at how quickly participants were willing to share their early experiences with oppression—both as targets and as perpetrators—with other participants whom they apparently had known for just a short time. By the end of the session, she was convinced that this was just the kind of training that would lead to the learning outcomes she was hoping to foster. After the workshop, Chris spoke with the presenters briefly about the experience. They assured Chris that they had provided her with all the materials she needed. As Chris left the training, she thought to herself, “Is this really all I will need to provide transformative learning for my staff and students?”

THINKING MORE COMPLEXLY ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

AFTER ATTENDING a session at a conference and experiencing transformative learning ourselves, we often attempt to use those same activities to replicate that learning for others in our own educational environment. We tend to remember and rely on “that great activity” and lose sight of the complexities of why or how that learning occurred. The reality is that the magic is almost never in the exercise or the handout but, instead, is in the facilitation. Educators who aspire to teach social justice have an obligation to be aware of how well-intentioned work may actually do harm if good intentions are assumed to be all it takes to be...
effective. We must carefully consider and fully develop the professional competencies necessary to do effective social justice facilitation. This article offers a framework for consideration of these competencies from the perspective of the field of social justice education. What we offer is based on our collective years of experience in social justice education and facilitating learning experiences that have had a wide range of outcomes—transformative and not so transformative!

The framework we suggest encompasses four competencies for social justice educators: knowing ourselves, knowing learners, designing outcomes-based activities, and co-creating facilitation. When combined, these competencies allow educators to create transformative learning experiences through an integrative process that incorporates cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains. Transformation occurs when learners engage in making meaning of major life events and changes through a combination of critical reflection and cognitive processes. This process reinforces what many student affairs educators know from experience—that learning and development are not separate. In their Journal of College Student Development article on intercultural maturity, Patricia King and Marcia Baxter Magolda contend that “the changes in students’ intercultural skills being called for today require not just knowing more facts or having more awareness but genuine maturity, an individual transformation that enables students to apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts” (p. 586). In his book In Over Our Heads, developmental psychologist Robert Kegan suggests that transformative learning requires educators to foster development along cognitive, intrapersonal (identity), and interpersonal dimensions in order for learners to be able to apply their skills in more complex situations without feeling “in over their head.” For example, social justice education efforts ask participants to be able to live with ambiguity and yet be able to take a stand on issues of human suffering, domination, and oppression. Living with ambiguity and taking a stand require recognition of multiple perspectives (cognitive maturity), understanding of one’s own convictions (intrapersonal maturity), and the ability to act even when others disagree (interpersonal maturity). If aspiring social justice educators like Chris are able to master the various social justice educator competencies, they will be more likely to effectively guide participants through the complex components of transformative learning and maximize each individual’s opportunity for growth and a group’s ability to take action against systems of oppression.

A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION COMPETENCIES

Because she has the best intentions, Chris needs to consider whether she has the competencies needed to lead the activities she found powerful as a participant. A road map for developing social justice education competencies would require identifying specific learning (competency) outcomes, creating tools that allow individuals to assess their level of competence, and providing learning opportunities that facilitate acquisition of the competencies. Our goal is to prompt educators committed to teaching social justice to engage in conversations about necessary competencies and to offer a framework to stimulate these conversations.

Knowing Ourselves. Because we do not live in a just and equitable society, we must be aware that our own social, historical, and political experiences in an unjust and inequitable society shape our conscious and unconscious perspectives. Our social group memberships—whether they are based on our race or ethnicity, gender, age, or other types of social identity—affect how we think and act. For those doing social justice education, it can be tempting to think that we, with our degrees and certified training, “get it” and don’t have any work to do ourselves. This complacency often indicates when we have the most work to do. Outside of our roles as facilitators, we must do the personal

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Improving the quality of undergraduate education requires cultivating an ethic of positive restlessness that takes the form of an institutional commitment to continual innovation and improvement focused on student success.
In order to truly partner with learners, facilitators need to adjust the program, conversation, or approach along the way.

Questions to ask ourselves could include these:

Who are the participants? What are their social group identities? What experiences or education have they had in regard to social justice issues? What developmental capacities do these participants have? What have I heard them say? What have I seen them do? What questions have they asked? What kinds of behaviors and interactions have I observed? How have I seen learning happen for them? How do these behaviors, attitudes, or interactions change when the social identities of the people with whom they interact vary? What campus, community, or national issues or history serve as a context for their understandings? What are the group dynamics? Is this training required or voluntary? Is this training proactive, or is it a response to a specific issue or event? What triggers might the participants have?

This information can help us determine whether students are in a place in which they believe that there are right and wrong answers to most questions, whether they are comfortable with negotiating differences with peers or are looking for approval, whether they view authorities as experts who impart knowledge, or whether other developmental markers are present.

An assessment landscape can be created by reflecting on what we see every day in our offices and classrooms; these observations can constitute important components of assessment. They can help foreshadow how parts of the program design might provide challenge and where a facilitator may need to provide support. A brief questionnaire that asks participants to assess their knowledge and skills as they relate to the topic area is another potential tool. Other useful information that participants might be asked to provide includes which members of social identity groups they are most or least comfortable with; relevant background information that might affect learning (time conflicts, commitments, learning issues); past experiences with multicultural education; and expectations, hopes, and fears. Many scholars and educators have advanced theories of social identity and student development that can also help us assess students’ needs, including those in the domains of cognitive theory, learning theory, intercultural maturity, and identity development. Pat King and Marcia Baxter Magolda’s *Learning Partnerships* edited text as well as their article on a developmental model of intercultural maturity discuss the applications of many of these theories to practice in consideration of students’ developmental needs.

We encourage social justice educators to seek multiple sources of information. It is helpful to keep in mind that this type of informal assessment doesn’t have to be exact or comprehensive. In most cases, we can’t anticipate all the developmental levels of students who will come to our offices, take our classes, or participate in our training sessions. However, the information gathered in this way can give us a good starting place for planning social justice education.

As important as assessment is, it is also important not to get bogged down in information gathering that may not be effective in terms of cost or time spent or usable data produced. In order to truly partner with learners, facilitators need to adjust the program, conversation, or approach along the way. This ability to track group dynamics and adjust the curriculum based on current information is an important skill to acquire.

Conducting informal assessment plays an important role in helping us understand how participants might perceive us based on our social identities. In their article on social identity and authority in the classroom, sociologists Mark Chesler and Al Young point out that participants may make assumptions about a facilitator’s expertise based on the facilitator’s social identity characteristics. When a facilitator from a dominant social identity group (for example, a white person) is given a great deal of authority by participants from similar dominant social groups, it may lessen the possibility of creating an equitable learning environment. Recognizing this type of authority is important. For example, additional time might be spent on building trust and openness within the group so that participants can learn to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences, bringing up concerns, and disagreeing with the facilitator. Members of non-dominant social groups (for example, people of color) may feel distrustful or may question the legitimacy of the knowledge and authority of facilitators from dominant social groups (for example, white people). Under these circumstances, facilitators can model alliance building and represent the possibility that privileged groups can challenge injustice from authentic, intrinsically motivated perspectives. Similarly, facilitators who are members of
nondominant identity groups may experience anxiety as “outsiders” and may be seen by participants as visible examples of difference. Participants from privileged backgrounds may suspect that such facilitators lack authority, and this attitude may interfere with creating a democratic classroom or workshop environment. On the other hand, participants who interact with facilitators of like nondominant backgrounds may feel a connection that facilitates empathy, understanding, and validation not necessarily found in other settings.

Facilitators should be aware that complex authority dynamics may be in play in the learning environment. Knowing the learners and understanding these dynamics can prepare facilitators for potential challenges and allow them to develop strategies to support participants. Assessment might include reflecting on what we know about a particular group of learners (through formal and informal mechanisms); talking to others who have worked with them; learning about the particular context for the training and the learners; and asking the learners questions prior to and during the training. The information thus obtained can assist facilitators in better understanding their learners and how the facilitators or the training might be perceived—an important step toward appropriate training design.

Designing Outcomes-Based Activities. In discussing their model of intercultural maturity, King and Baxter Magolda assert that diversity education programs could be enhanced if educators would create learning goals aligned with a holistic conceptual framework that includes developmental steps to achieving transformative learning. But what does it mean to design a holistic, developmental curriculum for learning about social justice? To begin, facilitators can reflect on the following questions: What do I want people to learn? What kind of development does that require? What types of developmental issues or challenges are my students dealing with? What capacities do I want to encourage? How can I create a conducive climate for people's struggles with social justice issues? An important step in creating a developmentally appropriate curriculum is to identify the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal goals of the training.

The emerging body of literature can help guide social justice educators in making decisions about appropriate design to foster learning. In their chapter on creating a context to promote diversity education and self-authorship in Learning Partnerships, Anna Ortiz and Anne Hornak support the idea that in order to achieve a multicultural perspective, maturity is required within three domains: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. They note that a multicultural perspective requires the ability to reflect about previously held beliefs (cognitive), the strength to avoid a sense of loss of one's self while understanding the position of others (intrapersonal), and the ability to do this in a way that is open, respectful, and compassionate without being patronizing (interpersonal).

As a curricular approach, Ortiz and Hornak use a developmental framework for deconstructing whiteness that was first discussed in a Journal of College Student Development article by Anna Ortiz and Robert Rhoads. This theoretical framework is structured around what the authors identify as five increasingly complex learning goals: understanding culture, learning about other cultures, recognizing and deconstructing white culture, recognizing the legitimacy of other cultures, and developing a multicultural outlook. This framework can assist facilitators in identifying learning goals that are developmentally appropriate for their audience. Facilitators can then identify the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions within these goals. For example, if understanding white privilege is the developmentally appropriate overarching learning goal, the outcomes might be further delineated as (1) understanding how white culture has been universalized in society and privileged as the norm (cognitive), (2) identifying participants’ own experiences with culture and how it is affected by white privilege (intrapersonal), (3) engaging in cross-cultural conversations about their experiences with culture and the effects that white privilege has had on them (interpersonal).

In their Journal of College Student Development article, Lisa Landreman, Christopher Rasmussen, Patricia King, and Cindy Jiang discuss the process through which some social justice educators developed their critical consciousness and identify four themes that characterized the participants’ initial phase of awareness raising: (1) exposure to people with cultural backgrounds
different from one’s own cultural experience, (2) experiencing a critical incident related to these differences, (3) self-reflection on cultural differences, and (4) an “aha moment” or new realization that resulted from reflection. The acquisition of critical consciousness was fostered by sustained involvement with these experiences combined with the development of authentic intergroup relationships and involvement in social justice action. This research provides further evidence of the interdependent and cumulative nature of development. Landreman, Rasmussen, King, and Jiang found that exposure to diversity changed the way that participants viewed themselves, leading them to reinterpret what they had previously viewed as normal. Participants described moving from a relatively simplistic to a much more complex way of seeing the world (cognitive development) and their role in it (intrapersonal development), often stimulated through critical incidents that involved relationships with others, giving them cause to reflect on how they treated—and were treated by—people in their lives (interpersonal development). Responding to challenges to their sense of competence while keeping their own sense of identity intact required a mature sense of intrapersonal development. Landreman, Rasmussen, King, and Jiang concluded that “navigating the social demands of relating to others who do—or don’t—experience privilege requires a combination of cognitive, identity, and social maturity skills” (p. 294). What the works mentioned in this section share is a description of a process of development that is grounded in the learner’s experience and sequenced through increasing complexity. It is critical for social justice educators to realize that this development occurs gradually over time and requires considerable practice.

Logistical issues also need attention in the design of a social justice curriculum; for example, *How much time do we have? What is the size of the group, room, or other parameters? When is the training scheduled (for example, time of day, time of year)? Is this training a reactive or proactive response to a particular situation? What activities will be most appropriate? How should the training be organized or sequenced?*

Attending to time constraints, tone, physical comfort, access, and creating a positive climate are important components of both design and facilitation. Multiple forms of pedagogy should be incorporated to increase the possibility that the learning will reach more people in more transformative ways. There is no one exercise that works best for everyone, nor is it the purpose of this article to recommend specific exercises. In their *Educational Leadership* article on how students learn, Kurt Fischer and L. Todd Rose remind us, “Students do not all learn in the same cookie-cutter fashion, and a dynamic analysis of learning and development provides powerful . . . tools for understanding their variations. The multiple webs of development capture the natural variability among students, and developmental range demonstrates how the variability occurs within each student” (p. 12).

In general, we have found through our own practice that students develop an enthusiasm for cultural and personal explorations when they are given the space to explore and share their own experiences. Intergroup dialogue educators Biren Nagda and Patricia Gurin note: “The scholarship of teaching and learning shows that involving students in intellectual and affective interaction with fellow classmates—voicing their convictions and trepidations, listening to each other’s desires for connection and fears of betrayal, inquiring into how each of their experiences is influenced by the larger social realities, and knowing deeply that one’s own sense of humanity is interconnected to how we are with each other—can contribute to democratic living just not politically but personally as well” (p. 43).

When developmental issues are left unaddressed, it is not uncommon for initial learning goals to be a bit unrealistic (for example, “By the end of this three-hour training all 100 participants will be social justice allies”). Many of us have rationalized that when learning goals aren’t met it is the result of student resistance, a common response of dominant group members to social justice education. However, not meeting learning goals can also be the result of poorly
planned training, inappropriate exercises, or a climate that offered more challenge than support.

**Co-Creating Facilitation.** It is important to make the decision on whether to co-facilitate a training session or facilitate alone early in the planning process. Co-facilitating can be a source of support when challenges arise and provide greater opportunities for multiple social identities to be brought into the training and for connections to be made with a wider range of participants. If co-facilitation is chosen, it is important that co-facilitators collaborate in developing the session and spend time establishing a relationship with one another. Co-facilitators can develop their relationship by sharing their cultural experiences, background, and stories; discussing their facilitation style, strengths, and challenges; identifying teaching goals and philosophy; sharing feedback; and establishing how they will interact with participants, manage speaking time, and assess the process during the session. Regardless of whether a workshop is facilitated with another trainer, faculty member, or staff member, we believe that the most effective sessions are those in which facilitation is co-created with participants.

One of the many significant contributions of Brazilian educator, author, and activist Paulo Freire was the notion that effective social justice education incorporates some basic tenets of informed action or praxis— that is, a focus on critical self-reflection, dialogue, and action. This refutes the idea that students are empty vessels waiting for the teacher to deposit expert information. Instead, reflection, dialogue, and action on the part of both the facilitator (or facilitators) and the participants are encouraged. The facilitator and the participants become co-learners in the process. According to Kegan, the goal for us as educators is to build a bridge from students’ current experience to a new one (challenge) with support—to be good guides for students’ learning journeys. In a recent *About Campus* article, Jane Fried reminds us that the more learning connects to what matters to students and helps them make integrated meaning, the greater is the likelihood that transformative learning will take place. Connecting with learners is one of the tenets of Marcia Baxter Magolda’s Learning Partnerships Model. Learning partnerships portray learning as socially constructed and emphasize that learners must bring their whole selves to the learning experience and share expertise among the learners and facilitator within an interdependent relationship. These tenets are consistent with critical multicultural praxis. In effective social justice education, educators ask students to critically examine social practices that they are a part of, to reflect on what they learn, and to put that learning into action. Good facilitation requires a balance of challenge and support that includes reflecting with students, posing questions, and really listening to students’ experiences as everyone figures out together how to co-construct the learning. Some important questions to help us consider the complexity of facilitation include these:

- *How can I best be fully present in this moment? Do I have the skills and the knowledge to change my plan based on the participants’ experience? How will I share facilitation? What group dynamics am I prepared for, and what dynamics am I unprepared for? What resistance might I anticipate, and how will I manage this resistance? What emotional responses might arise, and how can I respond effectively? Will I be able to be flexible and adjust as the process evolves? Am I able to guide an organic learning experience led by the participants as much as by myself?*

Knowing the developmental capacities of the learners—and of yourself—is key to answering these questions. Leading discussions is one of the most important and most difficult responsibilities of a social justice facilitator. We want to reemphasize that the magic is not in the exercise but in the learning that takes place through a well-intentioned, organic, reflective, participant-facilitator dynamic through which divergent perspectives are expressed. How we co-create an environment that allows students to reflect and make meaning of their experience will make all the difference.

Social justice educators can be ineffective if they are not prepared to navigate and respond to what participants bring to the learning experience. Failing to see differences in participation styles, learning styles, development, or educational experiences can have a similar effect. Depending on where they are situated on a continuum from resistant to willing or from

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**How we co-create an environment that allows students to reflect and make meaning of their experience will make all the difference.**
incompetent to competent, participants will need a facilitator to fulfill entirely different roles to foster their learning. In reality, this becomes even more complex because groups of participants can include a variety of participants who need entirely different things from the same educator. Creating shared agreements for how learners (including the facilitator) will communicate with one another stands in contrast to traditional classroom pedagogy and begins the process of validating students as knowers. The role of the facilitator is to guide the process, carefully balancing the need to empower students to engage with their peers toward mutual understanding and the need to provide a civil and open environment for dialogue. One strategy is to remove the teacher or facilitator from the center and make the learners and the learning central.

It is important for facilitators to recognize that social justice work is emotional work. For learning to occur, it is critical to identify the situations that may evoke powerful feelings, such as pain, guilt, or fear, all of which can inhibit or foster learning, depending on the facilitation. Establishing an environment in which participants are able to have their identities affirmed, in which taboo or “silly” questions can be asked, challenges made, and feelings (anger, sadness, pain) expressed is an important role for facilitators. While there are many ways of establishing this type of supportive environment, at its core it involves providing opportunities for the learners to know and be known— for authentic relationships to be developed. Creating this kind of environment will allow the cognitive dissonance (and sometimes conflict) that comes from sharing different perspectives. Educators must be equipped with the skills to manage the conflict in a way that allows a balance of safety, authenticity, and commitment to the learning process. Scholarship in fields such as critical pedagogy, group dynamics, and counseling as well as reflective practice can all be tools for developing facilitation skills for social justice education. Walter and Cookie Stephan’s book on Improving Intergroup Relations as well Maurianne Adams, Lee Bell, and Pat Griffin’s edited text on Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice are two works that have assisted the authors of this article in social justice facilitation.

**CONCLUSION**

In these times of heightened criticism of the role of multicultural and diversity education in student learning, we need to develop an effective way to live and work in support of social justice. Becoming a competent social justice educator requires more than an application of techniques; it is a way of being in the world in our day-to-day lives. Helping students make the connections between their local world and the larger world can be significantly easier when they see those connections reflected in our own professional and personal practice.

As Chris realized, it is important for those of use seeking to effectively foster transformative learning and to build a more just and equitable society to think carefully about whether we are prepared to effectively foster that learning. If we do not take time to think carefully about ourselves, our participants, our outcomes, and our facilitation before we try the newest activity we have acquired, we risk doing harm and perpetuating oppression despite our best intentions. Rather than feeling that we need to be perfect before we can do this work, it is essential for us to become more aware of the areas in which we need to focus our attention and increase our level of competence. As a field of study, social justice education needs to begin to identify competencies, to develop means of assessing the competence of individual social justice educators, and to provide ways for social justice educators to continually develop their competencies. Before we rush into the next diversity training session, it makes sense for us, like Chris, to stop, take a step back, and think more complexly about the work we do.

**NOTES**

