



EDITED BY

Kate Winter · Andrea Bramberger

RE-CONCEPTUALIZING SAFE SPACES

*Supporting Inclusive
Education*

Re-conceptualizing Safe Spaces

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Re-conceptualizing Safe Spaces: Supporting Inclusive Education

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About the Editors

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About the Contributors

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Abstract

This collection showcases work supporting access to education of persistently marginalized populations, as well as efforts that help privileged groups understand their role in perpetuating the marginalization of others in educational spaces, by bringing into the popular discourse examples of the diverse and valuable work taking place. The edited volume features both scholarship and practice related to creating the kinds of spaces needed in education to support learning as it is entwined with gender, gendered biases, and power dynamics and structures. As such, this book combines foundational concepts with practical cases of creating safe spaces in venues of education for diverse identities as they intersect with gender. We intend for this work to support the efforts of a broad audience of educators across the United States, Europe, and beyond. “Safe space” is both a precondition, and one of the effects, of efforts of inclusiveness and egalitarian access to education. It supports and is supported by equitable learning opportunities through mutual appreciation, respect, and a coming to voice in schools and universities. By creating safe spaces for learning and unlearning, researchers and practitioners have been working to strengthen the purpose of schools and universities, where education and learning are intended for everyone, with the goal of increasing critical thinking and valuing difference. There is an ongoing tradition of discussing safe space in feminist studies. Drawing on this foundation in gender, we broaden and specify our focus to include gendered identities intersecting with class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability within multiple aspects of education.

Keywords: Safe spaces; in/just learning spaces; egalitarian access to education; safe, brave spaces; inclusive education; gender and education; power structures in education; co-creation of learning spaces; performances of safe spaces; intersectionality

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Section I
Aspects Addressing the Conceptualization
of Safe Spaces in Education

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Chapter 1

Learning in and through Safe Spaces

Andrea Bramberger and Kate Winter

Abstract

This chapter introduces the purpose and structure of this edited volume, including why safe spaces are needed in educational settings, how to think about what makes a space safe for different individuals or groups, and aspects to consider in creating and maintaining safe spaces. It describes the two broad sections, the first of which comprises chapters that introduce the problem, context, need for safe spaces (Chapter 2), the broad conceptual frames supporting them (Chapter 3), and detail and deconstruct examples of various safe spaces created in diverse educational settings (Chapter 4). Chapters in Section II include aspects of the conceptual foundations and details about the purpose, development, and implementation processes, and outcomes of various efforts to create and/or maintain a safe space for education.

Keywords: Safe spaces; in/just learning spaces; egalitarian access to education; safe, brave spaces; inclusive education; gender and education

Inequities persist in access to education in schools and universities, necessitating continued efforts for inclusiveness (Ahmed, 2012; hooks, 1994, 2003, 2010). Discrimination against individuals and groups, whether by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability, or combinations of identities, prevents equitable access to quality learning opportunities and full engagement with knowledge generation and transmission. Inclusive education, in contrast, enhances practices through, and spaces in which, all students can learn equally and in egalitarian ways. This edited volume discusses modes and initiatives to strengthen schools and universities serving as public spaces, where education and learning are established for everyone (Giroux, 2014, 2015; Kincheloe, 2004), with the goal of increasing critical thinking and valuing difference through both the processing of deliberative models (Benhabib, 2002), and safe spaces for learning and unlearning.

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Through this volume we strive to raise awareness of key aspects to consider through self-reflection as researchers, educators, and creators of spaces intended for learning, starting with how our positions and privilege as researchers, educators, and/or creators of learning spaces influence our interactions with those we serve. What do we know of the lived experiences and needs of the learners we hope to serve? Is our definition of the purpose of the space aligned with their needs? What are our preferred concepts of education and learning and how do they influence our perception of learning spaces? How do we support modes of egalitarian shaping of learning situations? To what extent and in which ways do (safe) learning spaces reflect, strengthen, or modify the structures that determine individuals' allocation to positions inside and outside the classroom? With this volume, we offer various ways of thinking about the needs for safe spaces in education that are broad and inclusive – using “both/and” thinking instead of “either/or” processes to reject the “tyranny of the or” (Collins & Porras, 2002).

The concept of “safe space” originated in the fields of feminism and gender studies. It addressed spaces “where groups of presumably like-minded women could come together, sharing ideas and experiences without fear of silencing or rigorous challenges” (hooks, 2008, p. 76). These spaces impacted women’s learning and supported restructuring education towards equality and its cocreation through the efforts of all learners. Safe space has now become a buzzword for multiple attitudes towards difference, homogeneity, and diversity. Gender is still a crucial category, but the conversation has expanded to include intersections with class, race/ethnicity, disability status, sexual orientation, religion, and other categories that create and maintain not only differences but also injustices. In our context of education, we consider these categories and their connections with gender as they interact with the need for safe spaces.

Safe space refers to how we increase our attention to those aspects that enable the persistence of injustices through education and embedded in education, to how we limit or extend access to experiences and credentials, and to how we decrease unjust conceptions of education and move towards equal learning for all students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2011). In and through safe spaces, limiting learning situations and conditions are fully addressed, alternatives are discussed, and different modes of performing alternative learning are practiced.

Our concept of “safe space” encompasses both the effort and bravery of critically discussing and performing the uncomfortable, and places where engagements can occur with individuals who are eager or hesitant to share their vulnerability with others. No space is guaranteed to be safe for all learners, but understanding the needs of learners, staying true to the purpose of a safe space, and establishing clear expectations and parameters for engagement can create space for a safe retreat or withdrawal from engagement, if needed. In education, there is a need to challenge opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or biases, and we believe through spaces intentionally established to support productive discourse that these opportunities do not need to feel threatening. For example, “safe, brave spaces” are intended to prepare and support participants to productively work

through uncomfortable material in the spirit of inclusive learning (Arao & Clemens, 2013), not by demonstrating and reproducing power dynamics, but by naming and transcending the underlying structures that determine these dynamics' direction. As we hope is apparent throughout this volume, there are numerous approaches to creating and maintaining safe spaces – and safe, brave spaces, in education, each responding to its own unique need and context, and with this collection, we offer various viewpoints of creating and maintaining safe spaces. Still, those approaches are not arbitrary. They all are bound to the premise of inclusiveness in education and to efforts of creating, maintaining, and guaranteeing equitable opportunities for all learners.

In addition to focusing on the meaningful inclusion of historically marginalized populations, this book also addresses approaches to working with historically privileged individuals and groups. As new voices are brought into discussions, previously privileged voices may feel silenced or devalued, creating a new need for safe, brave spaces (Ali, 2017; Arao & Clemens, 2013), and environments for inclusive dialog and learning. Through safe, brave spaces in education, formerly marginalized and formerly privileged voices – across varying and intersecting levels and domains of privilege and marginalization, can be heard and hear from each other in productive learning. Through this collection, we are proposing applications of inclusion that embrace multiple forms and structures of education, include critical reflection of ways to think about difference and sameness, strengthen situatedness and an alert mind that witnesses and reacts to injustices, and try to transgress binaries and expand approaches. We hope to foster dialog about how we are alike and different at the same time. Collectively, the following chapters offer new possibilities for what inclusive education can look like, specifically as it relates to gender and diverse gendered identities.

Reconceptualization stresses the process, flexibility, and the persistent efforts towards safe space that remain ongoing. There is no all-encompassing conception of safe space to be discovered, but rather there are conceptualizations to be discussed, optimized, transformed, and rejected within various contexts. Inclusiveness stresses the valuation of and the openness for diversity and difference, while simultaneously embracing and appreciating what we have in common. The book is an approach towards the reconceptualization of safe space, and gender is its focal point: How do scholars and practitioners describe and use safe space in education as it relates to gender? What can educators, researchers, and/or creators of learning spaces learn from these examples to support their efforts to create spaces conducive to inclusive and transformative learning? Education and educational spaces are defined broadly, and learners represent the spectrum of young students through participants in adult education and professional development opportunities. Teachers may be engaged in primary and secondary education, universities, or other areas providing formal and informal education and training.

This volume is organized in two sections with chapters that introduce the problem, context, need for safe spaces in education (Chapter 2) and the broad conceptual frames supporting various approaches to developing safe spaces

(Chapter 3), and then detail and deconstruct examples of safe spaces created in diverse educational settings (Chapter 4). Chapters in Section II include aspects of the conceptual foundations and details about the purpose, development, and implementation processes, and outcomes of various efforts to create and/or maintain a safe space for education, as told by their creators. The authors critically reflect on education and the power structures that determine learning spaces – of which they are part of, and they engage in various initiatives to establish safer spaces. They intertwine criticism of structures that shape education, self-reflexivity, and concrete (inter)action. They develop approaches to safe space with both the needs of the learning group and the specificity of the space in mind. Taken together, the authors' reconceptualizations of safe space for inclusive education might inspire readers to transform the learning spaces in which they find themselves.

Abbreviated versions of each chapter's abstract are provided below.

Section I: Aspects Addressing the Conceptualization of Safe Spaces in Education

Chapter 1 – *Learning in and Through Safe Spaces*; Andrea Bramberger, University of Education Salzburg, Austria; Kate Winter, Kate Winter Evaluation, LLC, United States. This chapter opens Section I, which introduces the purpose and structure of this edited volume, including why safe spaces are needed in educational settings, how to think about what makes a space safe for different individuals or groups, and aspects to consider in creating and maintaining safe spaces. It also offers previews of the chapters that follow and our logic for the order in which they are shared.

Chapter 2 – *Why Safe Spaces Are Needed*; Andrea Bramberger, University of Education Salzburg, Austria; Kate Winter, Kate Winter Evaluation, LLC, United States. This chapter describes why safe spaces are needed in education settings for full inclusion of gendered identities as they intersect with categories such as race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and ability. This discussion briefly addresses varying and intersecting levels and domains of privilege or marginalization such as identity, inter-/intraaction, organization, society, and knowledge, and how safe spaces in education can support learning as it is entwined with gender, gendered biases, and power dynamics and structures.

Chapter 3 – *Ways of Framing Safe Spaces*; Andrea Bramberger, University of Education Salzburg, Austria; Kate Winter, Kate Winter Evaluation, LLC, United States. This chapter provides foundations of differentiating the sophisticated and various theoretical approaches towards safe spaces demonstrated in this book. For the purpose of framing the examples provided in this collection, we offer three broad ways of thinking about safe spaces: safe learning spaces as separate, counterhegemonic, or third spaces; safe learning spaces of difference, sameness, and intersecting identities; and deliberative and democratic learning spaces. It needs to be noted, however, that these are not mutually exclusive but different aspects to consider and that they each operate within and across, and

are, therefore, influenced by, the five levels of inequity discussed in Chapter 2. That said, not all levels of inequity are necessarily addressed by any given space, regardless of the frame used to interpret it. This discussion respects the multiple paradoxes in education, especially the one of difference and sameness, offering approaches to modes and learning settings of inclusion and exclusion and how they create different, yet “safe,” spaces.

Chapter 4 – *Considering Various Performances of Safe Spaces*; Andrea Bramberger, University of Education Salzburg, Austria; Kate Winter, Kate Winter Evaluation, LLC, United States. This chapter discusses and interprets examples of safe spaces through the lenses provided in Chapters 2 and 3. Specifically, we discuss a few diverse examples of safe spaces for learning and development taken from children’s literature, an art exhibit, a feature-length movie, and a professional development experience, detailing how each can be seen in terms of to what extent it offers a separate safe space, works with aspects of sameness/difference and intersectionality, and/or creates a space for democratic iterations that address one or more of the levels of inequity.

Section II: Interventions Addressing the Performance of Safe Spaces in Education

Chapter 5 – *“Train Your Imagination”: On the Program “Globalization and Education” at The University Of Fribourg (Switzerland)*; Edgar Forster, University of Fribourg, Switzerland. This chapter opens section “[Section II: Interventions Addressing the Performance of Safe Spaces in Education](#),” discussing engagement in the way of thinking about education that might establish safe spaces. It suggests a critical approach towards education that offers and demands positioning, extends limitations without restraining boundaries of other individuals, and enhances safety in education as the space or quality of situatedness and flexibility. The study is a meditation of the master’s program “Globalization and Education” at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. It contributes an evaluation of the function of bravery in academic discourse. Safety and bravery refer to the complexity of educational space in higher education: to interactions in the classroom, the institutional context, and social imaginaries of Western modernity. While civility and respect are essential, and potential causes of pain should be acknowledged, the control of conduct can never fully guarantee safety. The chapter proposes replacing the classroom with a research community. It would no longer excessively focus on the relationship between a teacher and students, but the subject matter. The commitment becomes more symmetrical, and, therefore, a research community creates a brave space.

Chapter 6 – *Expand the Space, Expand the Bravery: A Practicum for Building Safe Brave Spaces Within STEM Faculty Professional Development Programs*; Kelly Mack, Association of American Colleges and Universities, United States. This chapter offers a view into the perspectives of conveners of safe brave professional development spaces. Safe brave spaces represent an ideal mechanism for

supporting not only personal reflection but also the grappling with and letting go of the destructive values and beliefs that negatively impact undergraduate STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) student success. The authors share the narrative of a safe brave space occupier, demonstrating how the power of reflection can influence the value of safe brave spaces. As a result, the reader is left with a different lens through which STEM faculty professional development programs can and should be considered – whether it is who is in them, who is missing from them, or what is required to facilitate more productive interactions within them. Admittedly, there is more work yet to be done. Understanding that this work requires safety and bravery is a necessary next step.

Chapter 7 – *Safer Brave Spaces That Empower Queer and Trans Students*; Erica Jayne Friedman, Florida International University, United States. This chapter focuses on gender in education and its intersection with sexual orientation. It outlines a multifaceted approach to creating safer brave spaces for queer and trans students within a predominantly Hispanic-serving, public research university with a mainly commuter student population in South Florida. The creation of safer brave spaces is acknowledged as a practice since safety is an ideal to be worked toward especially for those with less power and privilege, such as queer and trans people as opposed to straight and cisgender people. Administrators are called upon to mindfully create spaces that empower queer and trans students. Quick tips throughout the chapter highlight that queer and trans students should be given opportunities to determine their own risks, choose their own mentors, create their own spaces, have their own voices centered, realize their own solutions, fail and learn from setbacks, and deconstruct systems of power.

Chapter 8 – *Sexualized Violence: Safe or Brave Spaces in Educational Measures*; Marita Kampshoff, University of Education Schwäbisch-Gmünd, Germany. This chapter discusses how – often veiled – aspects in learning situations create unsafety and argues for transcendence. The chapter examines the continued presence of sexualized violence against girls and gender nonconforming/lesbian, gay, trans*, or inter* students in education. It discusses endeavors to establish “true” safe spaces as preconditions for and effects of efforts to prevent or minimize sexualized violence. It shows thereby that debates on safe or even brave spaces provide further stimuli for the topic of sexualized violence and reveals the significance of the interaction of sexism, heteronormativity, and hatred of people who are perceived as “different.” Counseling centers, survivor support associations, schools, and child and youth welfare organizations are now developing concepts to protect all target groups. However, there is still a lack of sufficient and well-conceived support services, especially for lesbians, gays, and trans*. Strengthening the agency of those affected could be a promising starting point.

Chapter 9 – *Gendered Patterns in Lifelong Learning in Spain in the European Context: The Opening of New Cultural Spaces for Women*; Montserrat Cabré i Pairet, Marta García-Lastra, Tomás A. Mantecón Movellán, University of Cantabria, Spain. This chapter discusses gender as it intersects with age and explores modes to transform practices of creation and transfer of knowledge.