**Defining Developmental Education: A Commentary**

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Among the meanings of "develop" are "to evolve the possibilities of...to promote the growth of" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1981, p. 308.) "Development" is defined as "the act, process, or result of developing" (p. 308). "Remedy," meanwhile, refers to "a medicine, application, or treatment that relieves or cures a disease ... something that corrects or counteracts an evil" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p.970). To remedy is "to provide or serve as a remedy for" (p. 970). Synonyms are cure and correct. The definition of remedial has been expanded to not only include "intended as a remedy," by more specifically, "concerned with the correction of faulty study habits and the raising of a pupil's general competence [reading courses]" (p. 970).

How do we want to define ourselves? Is our mission to promote the growth of students to their highest potential, or the correct a previous wrong? As Payne and Lyman point out, the answer to this question has significant political and budgetary ramifications as well as considerations for how we perceive ourselves as educators.

Previous published articles present the theoretical foundation for student development and its application to developmental education (Dwinell & Higbee, 1990a; Higbee, 1988, 1993; Higbee, Dwinell, & GoldbergBelle, 1990). Among the most widely cited and researched of the founding theorists is Arthur Chickering (1969; Dwinell & Higbee, 1990b, 1991, 1992; Higbee & Dwinell, 1992). Chickering, together with Linda Reisser, (1993; Reisser, 1995), has recently revisited his original theoretical proposals in an effort to respond to what Darby so appropriately describes as the disequilibrium inherent in working with students during a period in their lives that is charged with opportunity for growth. This disequilibrium is intensified by interactions with a world that is in a state of rapid change socially and politically as well as technologically.

**Seven Vectors of College Student Development**

Chickering's (1969) seven vectors of college student development have withstood the test of time. Perhaps the most significant addition to the second edition (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) is the recognition that a theory originally written to address the developmental needs of the traditionally age college students of the 1960s can be equally pertinent to students of all ages in the 1990s. Although some of the terminology has changed, the vectors remain remarkably the same.

**Developing Competence**

This vector includes intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal (previously termed social) competence. Reisser (1995) describes three areas of intellectual competence:

1. the acquisition of subject matter knowledge, and of skills tied directly to academic programs.

2. The growth of intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic sophistication, expanding interests in humanities, performing arts, philosophy, and history, and increasing involvement in lifelong learning.

3. Changes in ways of knowing and reasoning; the development of skills like critical thinking and reflective judgement; and increasing ability to locate and use new information, to analyze objectively and draw conclusions from data, to solve problems, to generate questions and answers, to communicate proposals and opinions, and to develop new frames of reference.

Developmental educators can make significant contributions to student growth in intellectual competence. By engaging students more actively in the learning process, whether through cooperative learning ventures lithe that described by Myers, modeling behaviors and scaffolding as delineated by Caverly and Peterson, providing additional learning opportunities like Stratton's co-requisite course, or other creative means of teaching, developmental educators can promote the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills while also teaching specific skills in content areas. Collaborative learning also enhances interpersonal competence. As expressed so eloquently by some of the students quoted by Chumchal, participation in developmental education programs can lead to substantial gains in sense of competence, or confidence in one’s abilities, and provide the motivation and courage to take the next step.

**Managing Emotions**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) expand on Chickering’s(1969) earlier work to include the trials and tribulations of returning adult students. Reisser (1995) states, "In the new edition we contended that age does not necessarily correlate with emotional maturity, and we addressed a wider variety of emotional baggage that younger students and returning adults bring to college" (p. 507). Chumchal's findings certainly support this viewpoint.

**Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence**

One of the primary changes in the second edition of Education and Identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) is a greater emphasis on interdependence, the recognition that we can achieve emotional and instrumental autonomy and still rely on one another for support. Another significant change in the new edition is the acknowledgment of potential gender differences in approaches to autonomy and interdependence (Gilligan, 1982).

**Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships**

Reisser (1995) acknowledges "that relationships provide powerful learning experiences about feelings, communication, sexuality, self-esteem, values, and other aspects of identity, for both men and women" (p. 508). A critical function of the college experience is to promote acceptance of individual differences and an appreciation for cultural diversity, which in turn can lead to a greater capacity for intimacy. To sustain mature interpersonal relationships students must be capable of trust, open and honest communication, and unconditional positive regard.

What and how we teach can have a significant impact on students' attitudes toward other. We have the opportunity to address topics such as racism and sexism in a manner that is non-threatening, especially given the smaller size of the typical developmental education class and the opportunities for collaborative learning. This is yet another way in which we can promote student growth beyond the content areas of English, mathematics, and reading.

**Establishing Identity**

Reisser (1995) proposes, "Any experience that helps students define 'who I am', 'who I am not' can help solidify a sense of self....Personal stability and integration are the result" (p. 509). When a student has achieved a stable and realistic self-image, new challenges will be less threatening, and the student should be a better prepared to respond to new ideas and concepts or conflicting values and beliefs.

**Developing Purpose**

Although this vector involves educational and vocational planning and making lifestyle choices, it also focuses on establishing priorities. What is really important in life? What would you really like to accomplish? I always tell my students that I have only two goad that really matter to me, to be a good mother and to touch my students' lives in "little ways". I hope I have a positive influence on the development of my students as will as on my own children. This my purpose in life. I want my students to think beyond what kind of job or income they want, or what kind of house or car they desire. What gives life meaning? Life is precious and unpredictable. If you died tomorrow, what would you want people to say about you?

**Developing Integrity**

This final vector is reflected in student values: (a) humanizing values, which are relative rather than dualistic (Perry, 1970), and (b) personalizing values, which refer to the process of "affirming one’s own values and beliefs, while respecting others' view points" (Reisser, 1995, p. 510). Perhaps most important, however, is achieving the congruence between values and behavior that truly signifies integrity.

**Conclusion**

Why do we call ourselves developmental educators? Hopefully, because we envision our mission as the development of the whole student, not just the development of intellectual competence. I would like to think that our profession exemplifies not only excellence in teaching our content areas, but in education well-rounded individuals who will emerge from our colleges and universities prepared for the years to come. Pardon me if I bristle every time I hear someone refer to what I do as remedial. My students are not sick, and they do not need to be cured. They are evolving, and the possibilities are limitless.

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