Support, Identity and Ethical Development

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship of social support and related concepts, student development, and ethical development. Ethical development has typically been examined in terms of the influence of institution type, size, college major, religious orientation, experiential learning, demographics, and life experiences. Research has produced inconsistent results based on these factors. This paper examines the role of support in promoting student development and subsequently promoting student ethical judgment as a path for a distinct student population. Social support is examined along with social capital, mattering, and marginality. Ethical development is examined through Checkering's identity development theory. The paper highlights one path to increasing student ethical development, by using support to promote student development.

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship of social support and related concepts, student development, and ethical development. Ethical development has typically been examined in terms of the influence of institution type, size, college major, religious orientation, experiential learning, demographics, and life experiences. Research has produced inconsistent results based on these factors. This paper examines the role of support in promoting student development and subsequently promoting student ethical judgment as a path for a distinct student population. Social support is examined along with social capital, mattering, and marginality. Ethical development is examined through Checkering's identity development theory.

The goal of developing highly ethical students has been a common concern for the educational community. However, studies have produced inconsistent results when analyzing various influences. This paper looks at the concept of support and related concepts. It also reviews the influence of support in recent study that examines the influence of social support on a particular group of participants. This paper examines why student development theory can help us appreciate why support can influence certain populations.

Another concern details what educational professionals can do to foster development in students. In the university, we have many resources and assets to use to help students. However, there may be no average student. Student populations differ from one another. Strategies that work on one group may not be influential with other groups. Many paths to development may exist.

Ethical development is an important outcome of a college education. "American postsecondary education has a role in the development of citizens who both think and act morally" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 345). In reviewing research of the last thirty years, these scholars concluded that the college years represent a broad time of student change. Documented changes include statistically significant gains in factual knowledge, cognitive, and intellectual skills, values, attitudes, psychosocial skills, and moral dimensions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). They concluded that a major change in student moral development occurs in college. Recently it has become clear that moral issues are integrated into the context of various disciplines and a renewed emphasis on moral development is needed (McNeel, 1994a).

Currently, there is a broad public and institutional understanding of the need to encourage moral development in college. The National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (2006) reviewed the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education poll which indicates that the public expects graduates to have a sense of maturity, the ability to self-manage, the ability to get along with people,

problem solving and thinking abilities, technology skills, career expertise, writing and speaking abilities, and good citizenship practices.

Rest and Narvaez (1991) remind us that there are tens of thousands of ethical interventions annually reported in higher education. Kohlberg (1973) and Rest (1986) have reviewed over 150,000 student responses to interviews and questionnaires. Although we pay a lot of attention to helping students to develop morally, we are not sure how to accomplish this goal. We know that some things work, but we are unsure why they work. Not everyone is affected by certain experiences. There is little agreement by colleges and universities on what programs are the most beneficial. And, even if students show growth in moral development, there is no guarantee that they will act ethically. Derryberry and Thoma (2000) remind us that we have no specific advice from the literature on designing programs to foster moral development. Rest (1986) declares that although a number of factors are known to influence moral development, we are unable to determine why.

Literature Review

Student Ethical Development is the Goal

Moral reasoning is a process where a person arrives at a judgment of what is the moral thing to do in a dilemma (Boss, 1994). Moral reasoning studies are abundant in scholastic literature. The two most recent prolific scholars regarding moral reasoning are Lawrence Kohlberg and James Rest. They produced the most accepted theories of moral reasoning in higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

James Rest (1979, 1986, 1994) furthered the work of Kohlberg in moral development. He advanced Kohlberg's theory by advocating that individuals operate in more than one stage at a time. He found correlations between moral judgment and those who love to learn, seek new challenges, take risks, take responsibility for themselves and their environments, and operate in social milieus that support them. Much of moral development occurs as people develop socially (Rest, 1986). Rest developed the Four Component Model to explain moral behavior. He recognized that judgment is just a part of moral action. The model explains the psychological processes needed to perform morally in a dilemma. It includes moral sensitivity or the ability to identify a moral issue in a dilemma, the use of a moral judgment framework, the moral motivation to put moral values ahead of other values, and the moral character to take the morally correct action (Rest, 1986).

Rest developed an objective systematic test called the Defining Issues Test based on the scenarios of Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview. This test measures one's preference for more complex differentiating and discriminating moral considerations. Respondents encounter moral dilemmas and choose alternative courses of action, noting reasons behind their choices. This test calls on respondents to reflect their current moral judgment framework. The test measures the percentage of post conventional moral reasoning (thinking like a philosophy major) used in responding (the *p*-score). This *p*-score reflects the percentage of reasons that respondents tell us refer to rights, values, and universal principles. Over 58,000 DIT tests have produced consistent results (Rest, 1986, 1993). There are limitations to the DIT, see Thomas and Dunphy (2014) for a discussion.

Student Development Theory

College provides a vast opportunity for student growth in a number of dimensions including ethical development. Documented changes include statistically significant gains in factual knowledge, cognitive, and intellectual skills, values, attitudes, psychosocial skills, and moral dimensions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Catalysts may cause a particular student to be more receptive to growth. Kohlberg believed that development is the transfer of reasoning to more complex cognitive structures that result from interaction with one's environment (Kohlberg, 1981). Rest (1086) believed moral development occurs as people develop

socially. Erikson (1959) suggests that anything that grows has a plan to grow. Growth occurs when a crisis creates a need for a decision based on psychological changes interacting with cultural demands. This results in progression, regression or stasis.

On such theory of student development was defined by Chickering (1966). Chickering (1966) states that development occurs through of differentiation of culture and experience and integration. He argued that the impact of experiences depend on the characteristics of the people who encounter them. This implies that that there are many paths to development. Certain paths may be more influential to certain students.

Phycologists view student development as a series of developmental tasks, including qualifications in thinking, feeling, valuing behavior and relating to others (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). They suggest that personal development is the primary impetus to develop moral reasoning. Relationships with other persons exert the most powerful influences on individual development (Chickering, 1974). Individuals may develop personally along the lines of Chickering's theory. Students may advance along the certain vectors of personal development at different rates. Advances in some vectors would affect advances in others. As people develop, their social skills would improve, enabling them to enjoy more meaningful friendships and record greater social support. As their development progresses and their social support increases, they develop the confidence to enhance their ethical judgment. For example, Chickering included vectors in managing emotions, moving toward interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. It appears that these vectors may be associated with social support and the confidence it brings to individuals. .

Chickering and Reisser (1993) state that identity development involves students becoming aware of who they are, developing a comfort with themselves, and not requiring them to rely on others for their own satisfaction. Support may be a path for students to develop identity. Getting to their identity may require the support of others for certain populations.

Chickering's Vectors

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors provide a good guideline for student development. Many of their vectors reference support from others. They highlight differentiation and integration. Learning and development occurs as students encounter new conditions and experiences that are important to them and for which they must develop new competencies or attitudes. Students move through autonomy to interdependence. Development depends on feedback from others (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

Achieving competence is their first vector. This includes competence intellectual areas, physical skills and interpersonal skills. Chickering's competence vector includes interpersonal relationships. Competence involves sensitivity to others. It involves a sense of one's worthiness. Interpersonal competence includes not the skills of listening, cooperating, and communicating effectively, but also the more complex abilities to tune in to another person and respond appropriately. It also includes aligning personal agendas with the goals of a group and to choose from a variety of strategies to help a relationship grow or group to function. Students rely on others for support and to affirm their behavior. Chickering's interdependence vector includes student growth by arriving at a point where they no longer need constant support, affirmation, and approval (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

The second vector is managing emotions. Students arrive at college with a variety of emotions. Students learn to manage these emotions by learning appropriate channels for releasing irritations, dealing with fears, and healing emotional wounds. Students learn to balance self-assertiveness with participation. They need to rein in open emotional expression or find their own expression. They need to go beyond the boundaries of self and identify with others and become a part of a larger whole (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

The third vector is moving through autonomy to interdependence. These relationships result in a new openness to differences in ideas, people, backgrounds and values. While this vector involves a lessening need

for outside support, it acknowledges a broadening of the interdependence with greater communities and societies (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

The fourth vector includes developing mature interpersonal relationships. Student interactions with peers provide powerful learning experiences. Relationships reflect an increase in intimacy and commitment toward a mutual interdependence. Friends provide support and feedback. This includes a complex combination of autonomy, interdependence and intimacy (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

Chickering lists an identity vector where students learn to be comfortable with who they are. Identity involves comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in a social, historical and cultural context, clarification of self through roles and life-style, sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration. It involves gaining a sense of how one is seen and evaluated by others. It involves an assurance of recognition from people who count. It involves those we respect and their feelings toward us. It welcomes warm support from others. It welcome feeling usefull to others. Support is important. Identity is a result of the support of others (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

Purpose is the sixth vector. This involves expanding competencies, developing interpersonal relationships, and clarifying identity. This means students need to know who they are and who they are going to be. Students value external validation. People develop plans for action and priorities that integrate vocational aspirations, personal interests, and interpersonal commitments (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

Developing integrity is the final vector. Rules are evaluated based on the purposes they are intended to serve. We need the acceptance of people significant to us. We look for the approval of our social group. We need the support of our close friends. This involves humanizing values away from uncompromised beliefs while balancing our own and others interests, personalizing values while respecting other's points of view, and matching personal values with socially responsible behavior (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993).

Most of these vectors mention or rely on the concept of support or relationships to achieve progression in the various vectors. Chickering highlights support often.

Social Capital

Support is a component of what Social Psychologists call Social Capital. The core idea is that people are social animals and their social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver or a college education can increase productivity, so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (Brooks, 2011). Social psychologists believe that behavior results from the interplay between the unconscious and conscious minds. Most behavioral modification programs and interventions focus on our will power and our conscious minds. These programs tend to fail. Programs that strengthen our perception of situations with our subconscious mind promise greater success (Brooks, 2011).

Social capital refers to connections within and between social groups (Portes, 1998). Social capital is a concept formed centuries ago in response to the industrial revolution and the age of rationalism. The concept of people working together to support each other is reported in the writings of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Edmund Burke (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). The French sociologist Bourdieu (1986) mentioned social capital as one of the four forms of capital that formed a structure of society and explained its actions. He felt that social capital referred to the social connections people create in developing usable social networks. Capital also referred to the resources linked to those networks. As a follower of Marx, he felt that social capital could be used to better societies. His work explains how social classes preserve their social privilege over generations. He explains how people are guided by their predispositions and fundamental unconscious beliefs in their decisions.

Social Support

Social support enhances social development, personal development, and is one aspect of interpersonal relationships. Social support in psychology consists of two separate elements, the perception that the student can turn to a sufficient number of available people in times of need and the degree of satisfaction the student finds with the available support. Although research on social support centered on medical and stress issues, social support has since been related to social development, personal development, and ethical development. Acceptance, affection, and affirmation are important in social support. Individual psychological makeup may determine the number of supporters an individual feels are necessary. People high in social support report more positive events in their lives and these events exert a greater influence on their lives. In addition, these people believe they have more control over life events. People high in support believe they have more rewarding personal relationships. People high in social support seem to experience more positive events, have higher self-esteem, and have a more optimistic view. Social support contributes to positive adjustment and personal development (Sarason et al, (1987).

Cobb (1976) defined social support as the individual belief that one is cared for, loved, esteemed, valued, and belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligations. Perceived support is just as important as actual support. Social support is often attributed to positive adjustment and personal development. There is an assumption of belonging to a support network (Larose et al, 1999). Some believe that developing support is a cognitive function built with personal constructs from positive early relationships with caregivers. How people process the support available to them is an important cognitive factor (Sarason et al., 1985).

Mattering and Marginality

Schlossberg (1989) developed a related concept called Marginality and Mattering which ties into her transition theory. She states that when people take on new roles, especially when they are uncertain of what it includes, a sense of not fitting in can cause self-consciousness, irritability, and depression. They feel marginalized. On the other hand, if they feel they matter, they are more likely to grow into the new role. Mattering has five aspects. People matter if they feel they are object of another's attention because they are being noticed. They feel important if they believe they are cared about. When someone is proud of them they get an ego boost. If they are needed they feel depended upon. They feel appreciated when someone cares about their efforts. Mattering helps people grow (Schlossberg, 1989). Chickering (1989) also addressed Mattering. He stated that if students believed they mattered to someone else, that they were the object of someone else's attentions, and that others cared about them and appreciates them, they are far more likely to persist and succeed. If they do not feel anyone cares about them or their success, if they feel ignored and not accepted; they will feel marginal and are much less likely to succeed.

Schossberg (1981) developed her transition theory for analyzing personal growth. Transitions are any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. She believes that change is affected by three sets of variables: the individual's perception of transition, characteristics of the pre change and post change environments, and the individual's characteristics. Those characteristics include the individual's strengths and weaknesses based on their experiences. They include the actual or perceived support. And, they include the individual's strategy for coping.

Recent Study

A recent regression study took place at a regional, public university (Thomas & Dunphy, 2014). It is a commuter campus with older students that currently enrolls approximately 5,500 students. The student body comes from 29 different cities, a variety of different social classes, and rural and urban areas. Freshmen typically

score in the bottom third of the country in SAT scores. Incoming freshmen average in the low 900's on the SAT. There is substantial variation in the quality of students' high school preparation. The range of passing scores on the ISTEP was from 30% to 70%. There is a high proportion of first generation college students, nontraditional students, part-time students, and students who are the primary supporter of their families. The student body is two-thirds female; two-thirds work an average of 28 hours a week, and over a third are minority. The area traditionally has a manufacturing base with jobs available in the steel mills and other factories located nearby. The average student age was 26. School enrollment varies inversely with the local economy (Thomas & Dunphy, 2014).

In this study, significant variable included satisfaction with social support, college major and lower religious orthodoxy scores. Satisfaction with social support accounted for significant variances in student moral development. It was the most significant factor to influence ethical development in this regression study for this particular population (Thomas & Dunphy, 2014).

Discussion

The research review suggests that support may in fact be a possible significant influence in student development and therefor ethical development for a particular student population. A number of other studies have suggested that social support was a critical issue in student development. And, student development was critical in moral development. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) summarized the research by saying that students who were more engaged socially, politically, academically, and culturally reported greater increases in moral development. Students need to be accepted and valued by important others. Student contact plays a critical role in identity development. McNeel (1994b) suggested that there was a relationship between moral judgment and whole person development. Students who advanced in ego and identity status showed growth in principled reasoning. Spickelmier (1983) suggested that there was a relationship between moral judgment and whole person development. Students who advanced in ego and identity status showed growth in principled reasoning. Burwell, Butman, and VanWicklin (1992) found that growth in principled reasoning was correlated with developing one's own sense of identity. Rest (1986) determined that much of moral development occurs as people developed socially. Erickson (1968) says that in order to find our own identity, we need to have an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition by those who count.

These studies have confirmed a relationship between social development, student development and moral judgment development. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) summarized current research by saying that students who were more engaged socially, politically, academically, and culturally reported greater increases in moral development. These studies also support the unfluence of social support in ethical development. Haan (1985) and Walker (1996) believed that it is not cognitive dissonance but social dissonance that increased moral development. Josselson (1987) discussed the influence of anchoring or how students relied on family husbands, career and friends. These studies agree that social growth is important to moral development. Kuh (1981) states that peer support and support networks positively affect students. Chickering (1993) believes that students need to have others affirm the validity of their feelings to form identity. Students disengage emotionally from their parents and find reliance on peers and role models. Friendships provide invaluable support and comfort with positive feedback. Gilligan (1982) believed female students defined themselves in terms of their relationships with others.

One path to developing ethical judgment may include social support to encourage student development which in turn encourages ethical judgment development. A significant number of studies found that support is important at least for certain individuals. Social support may be the catalyst that enables certain students to benefit from the informal curriculum and advance in moral development. In the regression study, those students who believed that they had a greater number of supporters and that they received a greater amount of satisfaction from their support evidenced higher levels of moral judgment. While regression and correlation cannot indicate

causation, the findings do suggest a strong relationship between these variables. There appears to be a connection between social support, social development, student development and moral development at least for those students in the study (Thomas & Dunphy, 2014).

Recommendations

What can we do?

There are a number of strategies that colleges can undertake to influence student development and hopefully ethical development. These strategies involve the faculty, other students, student affairs and the administration.

The faculty can influence student development and provide support. Faculty can provide opportunities for interaction with students. This interaction can increase students' interpersonal skills. Faculty can listen to students and respond to their problems. Faculty can provide accessibility through office hours and other interactions. Faculty can provide cooperation, opportunities for active learning and community engagement, and feedback while holding high expectations and providing support. Faculty encourage contact with authority, paths toward knowledge, communication, using the formal curriculum, covert or implied tactics, mastering news, and learning professional assumptions, values and expectations. Faculty are role models. Faculty can relate curriculum to student experiences. They can recognize individual differences. They can create encounters with diverse perspectives that challenge assumptions. They can provide activities that challenge assumptions (Schollberg, Lynch, Chickering, 1989).

Besides faculty, another major impact of college comes from peers. Other students' influences include learning communities where students can explore separate learning and connected learning. Students can experience identity of cohesive purpose. Students can provide support through service clusters and support groups. Students need opportunities to share stories with supportive groups. Students can affirm the validity of feelings and help form identity. Mentors help students manage emotions. Students looks for role models in other students. Student groups help students to achieve goals. The impact of a college education is dependent on the students present (Chickering, 1993).

Student affairs are in a unique position to provide support and influence outcomes. They are in a unique position to create and maintain a powerful environment. They are in a position to provide an environment conducive to student development through sponsored activities and support services. Schlossberg, Lynch, Chickering (1989) recommend designing programs for entry services, support services, and culminating services. Their support services include academic support, personal counseling, department programs, recreation, athletics, cultural activities, health programs, support groups and mentoring. Chickering (1966) suggests selecting significant dimensions of students' diversity, select indexes, establish criteria, measure development measures, create programs to enhance results and communicate those programs to everyone.

The final partner in student support comes from the college administration. Commuters are less likely to promote attitudes and values to lever self-awareness and hasten development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). So administrative strategies need to compensate. Chickering (1993) recommends that institutions agree on clear and consistent institutional objectives that are well publicized. Colleges need powerful curriculum, active learning strategies, and opportunities to promote friendships and communities, strong student development programs, and a powerful educational environment. Colleges should be aware that size impacts students. Institutions support reliable resources and a student centered environment. They can find ways to encourage expressions, sharing feelings, and collaborative behaviors. Administrators can act as co-learners. Colleges can design curriculum to make the content relevant to student experience. They can work to reconcile individual differences. They can create encounters with diverse perspectives that challenge assumptions and provide activities that integrate diverse perspectives.

This study has examined the results of a recent regression study and the literature surrounding the concept of social support in terms of student development. It seems consistent that for certain populations support can influence student development and possibly social development. Further research is needed to investigate the importance of support for other populations.

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