Practicing Developmental Advising: Theoretical Contexts and Functional Applications

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Academic advisors know that substantial literature exists about their profession and that much of it is theoretically rooted. They know. too, that the translation of theory into practice is more complicated in everyday routines than it appears in conceptual form. The translation is complicated by multiple sources of guidance or authority about what advising is and why it is vital to the education of students and by conflicting demands on advisors and their students that affect how advisors carry out their duties.

This paper is concerned with the translation of developmental theory into advising practice. Even more specifically, it is concerned with elevating the most routine advising practices, such as answering students' everyday questions, to an opportunity for student learning and personal development. We hope to accomplish this goal by (a) offering a synthesis of operational themes in developmental advising literature, (b) summarizing the primary foci of three clusters of developmental theory, (c) proposing some generalizations from developmental theory that are applicable to academic advising practice, and (d) demonstrating the use of a conceptual, developmentally grounded model for academic advisor decision-making in everyday practice.

Themes in the Developmental Advising Literature

There is no shortage of literature on developmental advising. Since Crookston discussed academic advising as teaching, a view that is key to understanding the attractiveness of a developmental orientation to advising, there has been a steady flow of polemics and a trickle of experimental research in the field. A synthesis of this literature can be made in the forrn of major themes, citing representative authorities on the subject:

1. A caring attitude by advisors is important to advising success (Ford & Ford, 1989).
2. Goal setting and achievement is vital to student success (Trombley & Holmes, 1981).
3. Advising is seen as a process and is conducted by collaborative teams (O'Banion, 1972).
4. Advisors must help students choose appropriate majors (Gordon & Kline, 1989).
5. A supportive, or developmental, orientation is clearly favored by advisors over an information-sharing. or prescriptive, orientation to advising (Winston & Sandor, 1984).
6. Student preferences for advising orientation are mixed, with some favoring a prescriptive orientation (Fielstein, 1989; Winston & Sandor, 1984).
7. A helpful strategy in advising is to view students as partners in the process (Kramer, 1988; Winston & Sandor, 1984).
8. A clear, positive relationship exists between good advising and student persistence (Lopez, Yanez, Clayton, & Thompson, 1988).
9. Academic advising can be tied directly to positive educational outcomes of students (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982).
10. Academic advising can be connected to institutional effectiveness (Habley, 1988).
11. Good academic advising, especially developmental advising, is grounded in philosophical and theoretical perspectives (Carberry, Baker, & Prescott, 1986; Kramer, 1988; Miller & McCaffrey, 1982).
12. The best forms of academic advising demonstrate total integration of advising with other educational activities, including full use of institutional resources and clear connection to institutional purpose (Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, & Associates, 1984).

Of equal interest to prevailing themes in the developmental advising literature are conspicuous omissions. Not nearly enough discussion is available in the literature about the idea of advising as teaching, for example. Additionally, little experimental or quasi-experimental research exists on the effects of advising on students and, when reported, reflects an overdependence on student satisfaction as the dependent variable in the research design. Creative and reliable methods of assessing developmental outcomes are still in their infancy. Little is known about variable benefits of multiple advising approaches and how these may affect selected student subpopulations. Whether advising approaches have

differential results depending upon a student's gender, cultural background, or age, for example, simply cannot be determined from existing literature.

Primary Foci of Developmental Theory

The primary purpose of theory is to explain phenomena. Most student development theories focus on quite specific phenomena related to learning and development. As a rule, developmental theories do not paint these phenomena with a broad brush; rather, they focus on coloring some detail within a larger portrait, leaving other parts of the portrait undefined.

Theories that describe student development can be classified into three categories: (a) cognitive developmental theories, (b) psychosocial theories, and (c) person-environment interaction theories (Rodgers, 1990). A brief sketch of each cluster of theory is provided to highlight the main focus of the theorists. An excellent summary of developmental theories and their use in academic advising is available in Thomas and Chickering (1984).

Cognitive Developmental Theories

Cognitive developmental theories (Gilligan, 1982; Loevinger, 1976; Kitchener & King, 1981; Kitchener, 1986; Kohlberg, 1984; Perry, 1970) describe development as sequential progression through irreversible, hierarchial stages of cognitive structure that organizes how experiences are perceived and how reasoning functions. Cognitive structures serve as filters of reality. Because they vary by individual, the same event may be seen quite differently by many people. Cognitive complexity, a goal of developmental educators, permits more adequate interpretations of experiences and events. Use of these theories by academic advisors may permit more precise descriptions of and incisive insights into students' comments and queries expressing widely differing views of seemingly similar situations. These theories also help us to understand students' expressions of confusion over complex events or dilemmas. Simplistic views of the world may lead students to simplistic solutions, such as career choices that do not fit known personal attributes.

Psychosocial Theories

Psychosocial theories (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1968; Heath, 1968; Levinson, 1978) describe how development is shaped by the resolution of developmental tasks that occur in chronological sequence throughout the life cycle. These theories feature explanations of coping with prevalent life themes, such as searching for identity and purpose, and may help advisors to focus their interventions with students on what should be taught during each encounter with students rather than merely on what students present as questions. Such insight permits the use of a tactic that allows advisors to deal with "teaching" issues in addition to "presenting" issues. Advisors who understand and wisely use these insights into common life struggles frequently zero in on targets of real concern to students (often concerns that students have never articulated themselves) and can elevate a routine discussion to a teaching-learning event.

Person-Environment Interaction Theories

Person-environment interaction theories (Huebner & Lawson, 1990; Walsh, 1973) attempt to explain how environmental conditions and individual attributes influence one another. They are almost uniformly grounded in Lewin's (1936) postulation that *Behavior* is a function of *Persons* interacting with *Environments* ($B = f[P \times E]$). This concept forms the basis of campus ecology models (Banning, 1989; Banning & Kaiser, 1974) and other campus environment models (Strange, 1991). Advisors may find person-environment interaction theories and related models useful in explaining to students more precisely how environments in and out of class influence behavior. Often, students' feelings about their college, department, and even specific professors can be traced partly to the degree of fit existing between students and the multiple environments in which they live and work. Advisors can sometimes address a lack of fit between students and their environments by making appropriate referrals to subgroups with similar values or needs.

Generalizations from Theory to Academic Advising Practice Using Laws of Human Development

What generalizations can we make from these theories about how students learn and develop, and how we can facilitate the process? Chickering argued in his now-famous *Education and Identity* (1969) that we can synthesize what we

know into two laws of human development: (a) development occurs through cycles of differentiation and integration, and (b) the impact of an experience depends upon the characteristics of the person who encounters it.

The first law, pertaining to cycles of differentiation and integration, may be understood to refer to change in cognitive and other life structures that move from the simple to the complex while undergoing constant reintegration into new structures for dealing with life's experiences. We may assert from this law that development occurs when individuals encounter experiences that require that they rethink former knowledge, reexamine previously held conceptions, reformulate responses to events and circumstances, and integrate new knowledge into the self-structure. Such conditions and their consequences often are the concern of the developmental advisor.

The major lesson of the first law of human development is that educators must create or use situations that cause conflict in students—situations that demonstrate potential for motivating students to reconstruct their experiences—as opportunities to teach and to establish or strengthen relationships with students. Teaching with a developmental intent does not simply supply information upon demand; rather, it uses expressed dissonance or conflict as motivation for learning and as an opportunity to teach. This can be viewed as an element of intrusive advising (Lopez, Yanez, Clayton & Thompson, 1988), when the advisor takes the initiative to bring out developmental issues. Such an opportunity for developmental advising may occur, for instance, when discussing career choice with a student whose parents have strongly encouraged choosing computer science but who shows distinct artistic interests and talents. This student could be challenged to carefully weigh the life-shaping consequences of choice of major or questioned about how he or she views parents' roles in such decisions.

Chickering's second law pertaining to the effect of personal attributes on experience, while seemingly self-evident, is underused as an educational strategy. As development occurs, individuals, who already possess distinguishing characteristics as compared to others, become still more distinctive, and these qualities in large measure determine the extent of influence of a given educational activity. Teachers, including advisors, need to know a great deal about specific individual characteristics to shape the outcomes of interactions between teacher and student.

The major lesson of the second law of human development is that educators must know enough about individual students that the educaters can help students fashion educational experiences for optimal effect. This law suggests strongly the importance of assessment of academic and developmental status upon entry into higher education and the importance of setting clear, achievable goals. Academic advisors can construct many approaches to meeting student needs — ranging from highly personal to remotely bureaucratic — if advisors know enough in advance about their students. It is important, for example, to use information about crucial student life roles (Abel, 1988) and to differentiate approaches according to students' ages (Shane, 1981).

Conceptual Model for Developmental Advising

These laws of development and the theories that undergird them can be used to create a conceptual framework to guide developmental advising. We developed this framework to demonstrate the role of theory in guiding practice and present it sequentially as (a) defining the task, (b) identifying outcomes, and (c) promoting development.

Defining the Task

First, the conceptual model must address definition of developmental academic advising. Developmental academic advising is the use of interactive teaching, counseling, and administrative strategies to assist students to achieve specific learning, developmental, career, and life goals. These goals are set by students in partnership with advisors and are used to guide all interactions between advisor and student. Teaching strategies are employed mostly, though not exclusively, in out-of-classroom settings and concentrate principally on student-as-subject-matter. Counseling strategies are used to gain insight into, and sometimes to modify, personal conditions that affect learning. Administrative strategies are exercised to create and sustain programmatic initiatives for student/advisor interaction. Administrative strategies are used to design the overall programmatic character of advising activities and may prescribe the specific targets of intervention (e.g., the individual, groups, or entire departments or other

units of the college or university). All strategic alternatives to achieve advising goals employ effective interactive methods.

Developmental academic advising is distinguished further by certain behavioral attributes of the advisor. Specifically, the advisor demonstrates a caring attitude and uses sympathetic dialogue to establish and sustain humane relationships with all advisees. The advisor assesses developmental status in each advisee and works to foster developmental growth in each interaction. Finally, the advisor judges the effectiveness of advising by its developmental consequences on students.

Identifying Outcomes

Second, the conceptual model must describe the intended outcomes of the advising process. Developmental academic advising is characterized by its specific goals for student growth. Its authority comes from educational philosophy and theories that focus activities on the achievement of developmental goals. Such goals are most likely to be achieved when advisor and student espouse common expectations; thus, a conceptual paradigm for development should reflect conventional expectations for higher learning that neither advisor nor student normally would sidestep. We propose the following goal categories for student growth, drawn broadly from literature about educational philosophy and student development (Chickering. 1969, 1981; Erikson, 1968; Heath, 1968; Kohlberg 1984; Perry, 1970), to serve as a conceptual frame of reference for developmental academic advisors:

　　setting career and life goals,
　　building self-insight and esteem,
　　broadening interests,
　　establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships,
　　clarifying personal values and styles of life, and
　　enhancing critical thinking and reasoning.

A use of these goals is illustrated in Table 1. We generated the table to illustrate the underlying developmental themes associated with typical questions presented by students to their advisors.

Advising interactions often stem from questions posed by students. Sometimes the questions are straightforward and ask merely for information or opinion. Some examples of this type of inquiry are:

What GPA do I need this term to avoid academic suspension?
What are the requirements to complete a major in biology?
I-low do I submit a complaint about a professor's conduct?
How do I change majors?
How do I register?
Can I drop a class I'm performing poorly in?
What is an easy class I can rake to raise my GPA?

Reactions to these questions, shown in Table 1 as requests for information or opinion, may take the form of simply answering the questions or offering the requested opinions. When this reaction is used, professionals in the advising field tend to label the advisor behavior "prescriptive." Indeed, most experienced advisors have answered these questions time and again and can prescribe actions for students without applying a theoretical frame of reference as suggested above.

Advisor responses need not be limited to a prescriptive response, however. As demonstrated in the table, even with simple questions the underlying motivation for the question may reflect a condition that is ripe for learning and growth. Questions about avoiding academic suspension likely are driven by uncertain self-concept; questions about requirements likely reflect issues concerning goal-setting and interests; questions about protesting behavior of others may reveal underlying concerns for interpersonal relationships; questions about routine policies and procedures of the institution may show immature acts toward individual responsibility; and questions about looking for an easy way out of difficulty may demonstrate uncertain value positions and ethical actions. The prescriptive advisor may ignore these connections and fail to take advantage of a propitious educational moment.

Other questions faced by advisors, shown in Table 1 as requests for consultation, appear more mature, reflect clearer assumptions of responsibility, and ask more directly for developmental reactions from the advisor. Examples of this form of question or presenting statement are:

How can I improve my performance in calculus?
I want to declare a major, but I'm clueless about what I really want to do.
I don't have the grades to get into the major I really want. What alternatives do I have?

What majors are consistent with my interests?
What are the benefits of going straight to graduate school versus spending some time working first?
Even with this form of question or presenting statement, the option is open for the advisor to react by supplying information or opinion without meaningful interaction with the student.

The developmental advisor pursues the underlying issues associated with a question and deals with the hidden concerns as a central feature of the reaction. Table I shows how these questions are especially ripe for teaching in context of developmental concerns by revealing the likelihood that many underlying themes of concern are present in every question asked.

TABLE 1
Relationships of Developmental Growth Categories and Common Questions Asked of Academic Advisors

Student Question	Growth Category*					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Requests for Information/Opinion						
What GPA do I need during this term to avoid academic suspension?		x			x	x
What are the requirements to complete a major in [a designated field]?	x		x		x	
How do I submit a complaint about a professor's conduct?				x		
How do I change majors? How do I register? Can I drop a class in which I am performing poorly?	x	x			x	x
What is an easy class that I might take to raise my GPA?		x	x		x	
Requests for Consultation						
How can I improve my performance in [a designated] class?		x			x	x
I want to declare a major but am clueless about what I really want to do.	x	x	x	x	x	x
I do not have the grades to get into the major I really want. What alternatives do I have?	x	x	x	x	x	x
What majors at this institution are consistent with my interests?	x	x	x	x	x	x
What are the benefits of going to graduate school versus spending time working first?	x	x	x	x	x	x

*Key to Growth Categories:
    1 = Setting career and life goals
    2 = Strengthening self-insight and self-esteem
    3 = Broadening of interests
    4 = Improving interpersonal relations
    5 = Clarifying personal values and styles of life
    6 = Enhancing thinking and reasoning

Promoting Development

Third, recognizing the underlying developmental issue is the first step in applying what is known about student development to academic advising. The next steps, likely to be even more complicated than the first, deal with taking action beyond simply answering questions to promote development. These steps require the application of the laws of development described earlier.

Table 2 was created to illustrate succinctly— not to describe exhaustively — the types of activities developmental advisors, whether professional or faculty, might initiate or sponsor for advisees in addition to one-on-one advising sessions. The centralized academic advising center, for example, might be the best administrative arrangement to sponsor such activities (Spencer, 1989). Other small group activities clearly are indicated. Likewise, the use of collaborative strategies with others in the college or university concerned with many of the same issues as are academic advisors may be beneficial (Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, & Associates, 1984).

Regardless of the structure used to deliver activities that apply the laws of development and regardless of the precise description of a particular event, these activities serve to illustrate the final step in developmental advising. Action must be taken in a variety of ways to stimulate change in students in intended developmental directions. The developmental academic advisor must initiate specific educational activities that target each goal category in the conceptual model. Such activities likely will be most effective during times not dominated by course selection and registration events. They may form the outline of the advisor's ongoing interactions with advisees.

The illustrated initiatives and programs also highlight the need for early and continuous intervention with students. While some of the illustrated activities would be appropriate throughout the undergraduate years, such as "world political and social events dialogues" and "formal discussions about campus climate issues," most will be more effective during the freshman and sophomore years. Thus, the advisor must make strategic decisions about when is the most opportune time to conduct group developmental activities.

The timing decision for offering developmental activities is not always easy. Sometimes inferences from theory conflict with institutional realities. For example, theory informs us that career decisions may be best made following the satisfactory resolution of other developmental

TABLE 2
Illustrations of the Application of Laws of Development in Academic Advising

Student Growth Category	Advisor Initiatives/Programs Law #1 (a)* Law #2 (b)**	
Setting career and life goals	(a)	Goal-setting seminars
	(b)	Individual and group assessment
Strengthening self-insight and self-esteem	(a)	Personal dilemma resolution exercises
	(b)	Journal/essay writing projects
Broadening of interests	(a)	Interviews of successful people
	(b)	Guided participation in campus events
Improving interpersonal relations	(a)	Multicultural encounter-like groups
	(b)	Formal discussions about campus climate issues
Clarifying personal values and styles of life	(a)	Values clarification seminars
	(b)	Career exploration activities
Enhancing thinking and reasoning	(a)	Group sessions on academic achievement
	(b)	World political and social events dialogues

*Development occurs through cycles of differentiation and integration.
**The impact of an experience depends upon the characteristics of the person who encounters it.

tasks, such as with identity issues. The optimal time for such decisions might occur during the junior year (or even later for some students); yet, the realities of college curriculum designs dictate that a major be chosen earlier in the college experience.

Most importantly, active engagement of the advisor in group, ongoing activities such as those suggested in Table 2, keeps the advisor in touch with the unfolding developmental needs of students. Students' needs are not always delivered to the advisor at predictable times and in precisely defined terms; thus, constant engagement in potently interactive, developmentally oriented activities with students will poise the advisor for strategic teaching.

Summary

Developmental advising occurs when the advisor (a) is fully informed about developmental goals of higher education, (b) knows how to apply such knowledge in practice, and (c) acts on the knowledge. This paper was used to argue that sound authority is embedded in the literature of the field for the exercise of a developmental perspective in academic advising. The perspective becomes viable when the connection is made between knowing about student learning and development and acting on the knowledge using workable practices arising from the knowledge.

Some theoretical perspectives on education were discussed as laws of student development and their application to academic advising were discussed briefly. A conceptual model for developmental advising was presented and illustrations of its use were given to deal with typical. everyday questions of students.

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