Reconsidering the Developmental View of Advising: Have We Come a Long Way?

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Since Burns Crookston argued that advising could be both a teaching and a developmental activity, advising as a field has been quick to assume those roles. But, frankly, Crookston never discussed how the relationship between developmental theory and advising was to be made. More importantly, he never outlined the teaching activity that he claimed was associated with a developmental view of advising. Although the field has been quick to adopt Crookston's vocabulary — most visibly his idea of the shared responsibility between advisors and students— with hindsight it is fiction to claim that in his article Crookston provided either a solid basis or a good direction to think about a developmental view of advising as teaching, let alone put it into practice.

Crookston's Developmental Advising Relationship

Crookston's argument that developmental advising is a teaching activity is based on three points: (a) "that teaching includes any experience in the learning community in which teacher and student interact that contributes to individual, group, or community growth and development;" (b) "that higher learning is to be viewed as an opportunity in which the developing person may plan to achieve a self-fulfilling life;" and (c) that "a developmental task is any experience that contributes to the development of the individual." Unfortunately, Crookston does not demonstrate how we move from these points to a developmental view of advising as a teaching activity. This is not his intention. Instead, Crookston's focus is on what he calls the most critical issue — the difference between prescriptive and developmental advising relationships.

Crookston's concern is contrasting the behavioral styles of prescriptive and developmental advising relationships. He claims that, unlike prescriptive advisors, developmental advisors (a) engage students in developmental tasks, (b) look for the potential within students. (c) believe that students are striving for self-achievement, and (d) realize that students are growing in responsibility and capable of self-direction. For Crookston, the developmental advising relationship centers on negotiating shared responsibilities. These negotiated responsibilities encourage students to exercise options instead of responding to what he characterizes as the "benevolent paternalism" in the prescriptive relationship in which students see advisors as those who give answers to problems. But it is one thing to contrast the components of prescriptive and developmental relationships and quite another to claim that this tells us something about teaching activities.

Critical reading reveals that Crookston presents neither a central theory nor the teaching strategies that would come from that theory. Contrasting behavioral styles is interesting, but it may be beside the point. How does his outline of the developmental relationship result from the fit of developmental theory with advising? Are his dimensions of the developmental advising relationship congruent with pedagogic strategies and skills advisors could adopt that would foster developmental growth? What do we teach and expect our students to learn, and how do we evaluate our efforts? Readers are left on their own to figure out where the connections may lie. But can they?

Close readers are struck by the circularity and anecdotalism in his definitions and discussions. Consider, for instance, the sense the reader is given of developmental tasks. Crookston defines a developmental task as *"any* experience that contributes to the development of the individual" [emphasis added]. What determines whether a task is developmental if any task can be developmental? We are never told what these tasks are or the activities, both teaching and learning, advisors and students engage in to succeed at these tasks. To be frank, the prescriptive behavioral styles Crookston criticizes could also readily be developmental. This, of course, confounds Crookston's scheme. There are any number of ways to illustrate this.

For example, we have all worked with students who simply did not have the academic background, skills, or dispositions to succeed in programs they hoped to enter. We made our in-

formed judgements based on academic records and test scores and predicted that these students simply could not succeed in their targeted course of studies. Taking an authoritative stance, we prescribed advice that these students should rethink their goals. In some instances we made use of administrative controls to force advising contacts and to force students to recognize that their assessments of their academic capabilities and educational goals were unrealistic. In doing this, we fit the description of Crookston's prescriptive advisor; however this situation is hardly prescriptive.

These academic problems present a developmental crisis, a point where developmental advisors can challenge students to confront their attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions about what they think about themselves within the college setting and the nature of their educational goals. The prescriptive style can be a catalyst to prod these developmental crises. It is at these crisis points, these academic problems, that advisors can begin to work with critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills, which can foster developmental growth (Laff, 1989). In other words the line Crookston tries to draw between prescriptive styles and developmental styles may be irrelevant, especially if our aim is to delineate advising as a developmental and teaching activity. More to the point, through analysis and experience we may well discover that prescriptive styles are an integral part of the teaching activities that developmental advising requires.

This illustration is not out of the ordinary. I could have outlined similar crises with problems of undecidedness or with students denied admission to programs with restricted admission. Each would demonstrate the same problems with Crookston's discussion, and each would point to a critical problem with Crookston's scheme.

Crookston does not present a developmental view of advising as teaching. He presents what he claims are the differences in the interpersonal relationships between what he labels prescriptive and developmental advising. But this has little to do with demonstrating the fit between developmental theory and advising and little to do with outlining pedagogical strategies and skills that would underlie developmental advising as teaching. In a sense Crookston gives us a story with no plot or structure. It would not be difficult to argue that we would stumble (and, indeed, have stumbled) if we tried to delineate from Crookston workable, concrete, tangible, and measurable competencies that could be incorporated to design and implement developmental advising programs.

The Prescriptive Bent of Developmental Advising

Habley (1993) has indirectly pointed to some of these inherent problematic issues in developmental advising. He notes that the upswing in enthusiasm and interest in advising that accounted for a small rise in some measured indicators during the 1970s has plateaued in the 1980s and early 1990s. Given the growing concern with falling persistence rates and graduation rates, the question arises as to whether during the initial upswing developmental advising strategies were incorporated into advising programs.

Habley (1993) points out that there has been no overall improvement in advising. The field has been consistent in the delivery of information about policies, procedures, and curricular requirements. But these are not developmental advising tasks and could be categorized as prescriptive. Consistently, the areas of little or no improvement have been in assisting students in (a) considering life goals, (b) understanding the purpose of higher education, (c) developing self-understanding and self-acceptance, and (d) mastering decision-making skills. These are the areas of developmental concern.

Interestingly Habley's findings correspond with Boyer's. Boyer (1987) notes that advising is the "weakest link in the undergraduate experience" and that students express little satisfaction with the advising they do receive. What this seems to suggest is that since Habley began collecting information in 1983, and perhaps in the 22 years since Crookston's article, except for changes in the vocabulary of developmental advising, the outcomes have not improved. It is not unfair to say that the field has yet to develop pedagogic strategies and skills that support the claim that advising is a developmental, teaching activity.

The Problematic Fit of Developmental Theory With Advising

Crookston may have set the stage that directed us to think about the relationship between developmental theory and advising, but making the fit of developmental theory with ad-

vising is not as easy as it would appear. There is hardly one kind of developmental theory. Theories have explored psychosocial development, cognitive development, identity formation, the development of moral reasoning, and more. Issues of ethnicity and age complicate the picture and, as Gilligan (1982) and Baxter (1993) have argued, gender-related issues raise other important questions. Each of these theories, however, is not intended to compete with the others. Rather each attempts to elucidate a facet of an overall developmental process. To get a complete description, as Peterson and McDonough (1985) have illustrated, requires a composite developmental picture drawn from each of these developmental theories. This, of course, is problematic.

As important, Gordon (1984) points out that students are dealing simultaneously with different kinds of developmental tasks. Students are apt to be at different overall developmental levels. But Gordon also points out that a student is likely to be simultaneously at different developmental levels and tasks within his or her own developmental growth. Somehow, developmental advising is to provide advisors with the skills to identify all of this and to provide advisors the teaching strategies to provide students the tools to cope with the varying and often competing developmental tugs.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the nature of the relationship between developmental theory and advising is itself tenuous. Developmental theories are descriptive. They chart the stages or positions along the course of normal development. These stages or positions that developmental theorists define are cross sections taken at certain intervals in the developmental process (Perry, 1970). The actual definitions of these cross sections are synchronic and static, detailing the salient features characteristic of each position. What is not delineated is transition, the ongoing developmental movement from one stage to another. Understandably this is not the fault of any developmental theory—it results simply from the nature of the constraints on any study. We are only given hints to infer how those transitions might take place (e.g., Perry, 1970, p. 110). This raises what might well be considered a paradoxical relationship in the claims that there is something called developmental advising.

Many times we find that those who try to outline how developmental theories apply to advising suggest that our role is to identify a student's developmental stage and plan strategies appropriate to that stage (e.g., Selke & Wong, 1993; Thomas & Chickering, 1984). Because these strategies focus on limited cross sections, they may actually work against our best intentions to foster growth. Development is an ongoing process; it is rooted in the transition between stages. If we base our advising models and strategies on the description of developmental stages instead of on transitional process, we do not provide advisors and students the skills they need to orient themselves to ongoing personal and academic growth.

It is not difficult to appreciate this point. Consider for a moment that developmental growth is driven by crisis. Whether we call it a "crisis of incongruity" (Perry, 1970) or "conflict-induced dis-equilibration" (Kohlberg, 1971), development is driven when our interactions bring up experiences that do not fit our expectations. We make mistakes or misinterpret because our ways of thinking about things do not account for new, different, or unexpected experiences. The buildup of these incongruities jolts our picture of the world and calls into question the assumptions that govern the ways we think about our interactions. How we learn to reorganize our thinking and how we build new analogs of reference have much to do with how developmental growth progresses.

If developmental advising purports to be a teaching activity, then somehow its strategies must involve teaching students the skills to deal with these dynamic relationships. This is supposedly what we mean when we argue that advising must provide challenge and support to students. Advising is to help students feel secure enough to take risks and introduce appropriate challenges to prod growth (Carberry, Baker, & Prescott, 1986; Stanford, 1969). Rut what does this mean? Is it enough to say that advising promotes intellectual and personal growth because it challenges students to explore majors and career options and to develop decision-making skills? These may not be sufficient self-reflective activities with which to promote developmental growth. If advising's teaching activities are deliberate, they should be geared to provoke some sort of crisis that challenges students to question their own thinking and master self-reflexive skills that help them examine the ways they think about their own thoughts, examine their assumptions, and examine their thinking in relation to the thinking of others (Perry, 1970). Advising activities could then become congruent

with the crisis/reorganization relationship that motivates development.

The Need To Rethink Our Direction

Developmental advising then may be self-contradictory. Developmental theory as a static description of stable positions does not fit with advising as process. To make the fit, we have to devise ways of picturing the transitional process underlying what developmental theory is trying to chart. Without doing this, the roles developmental advising claims in teaching and in fostering developmental progress can only be frustrated because the field is without the transitional strategies that would make its claims credible.

Perry (1970) warned us of problems such as these. He stressed that concepts such as motivation, structure, assimilation, and stages of development "are tools of analytic description only. So too is our developmental scheme itself' (p. 56). He realized that the task of developmental theory, while attempting to chart the logic of development, is at odds with what students (and we) actually do. Perry pointed out that for a student development is "a creative activity. . . . the student's task is primarily synthetic, its standards aesthetic" (p. 56). While developmental schemes might chart the course, they do not chronicle the creative transitional activities that drive movement, growth, and apprehension. If we claim that development advising fosters intellectual and personal growth, then developmental advising must ground itself in the same tasks and standards as the students.

This is a different direction and a far cry from Crookston but necessary if the field is to attempt to achieve its claims. To do this we need a closer reading of what developmental theory is trying to chart and what it implies. We need to outline the relationship between developmental theory and theory in general and to cull from that relationship transitional strategies that give substance to our claims that advising is a teaching activity (see Laff, 1994). Finally, we need to factor in that common to good teaching is challenging students in deliberate ways to question what we normally take for granted so that they can learn to examine their assumptions and develop the skills to create personal meanings. It can be no different for advising.

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