Developmental Versus Prescriptive Advising: Must It Be One or the Other?

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How well I remember the first time 1 came across Crookston's article. I was amazed by the way he approached a complicated and multifaceted dyad and reduced it to simple, straightforward constructs that could be studied, evaluated, and measured. As a result Crookston's model that contrasts prescriptive and developmental advising has inspired many, including me, to attempt to unravel the intricacies of the advisor-advisee relationship (Fielstein, 1987, 1989; Fielstein & Lammers, 1992; Fielstein, Scoles, & Webb, 1992; Frost, 1993; Miller & McCaffrey, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Winston & Sandor, 1984).

Unquestionably Crookston's seminal work has inspired speculation and thought, culminating in many noteworthy theoretical and empirical studies (e.g., Crockett, 1978; Dassance & Batdorf, 1980; Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982; Habley, 1982; Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975).

Reading Crookston's article for the first time was truly an aha! experience for me. It gave me direction and purpose; it set my academic career in motion. In 1984 I was searching for a theoretical base for my dissertation. 1 was clear as to what my subject would be—students' perceptions of the relationship between advisor and advisee. What was unclear to me, however, was how to conceptualize the advising relationship in such a way that it could be systematically studied.

Discovering Crookston's model was critical; it offered the foundation I needed. It allowed me to test whether the developmental approach, which was endorsed in the literature. was the relationship students actually wanted from an academic advisor?

In my literature review I found a second article that greatly influenced me and subsequently became a springboard for my study; Winston and Sandor (1984) had found that students (men and women, freshmen through seniors) preferred developmental advising to prescriptive advising.

This sounded intuitively appealing and accurate. After all, what college student would want to defer to an authority figure? For some students the freedom to make choices was the primary advantage of college. I was not surprised, therefore, to learn that Winston and Sandor (1984) found that students rejected the authoritarian "advisor knows best" model.

When developing the questionnaire for my study, I examined closely the one used by Winston and Sandor (1984). On theirs, students were asked to rate 22 items on a prescriptive-developmental continuum. Apparently one limitation to this type of rating scale is that each content area requires selecting one direction of the continuum over the other. Consequently, respondents were forced to choose between prescriptive and developmental models.

My concern was that, by definition, forced choice precludes an independent judgement. What if students wanted to rate certain items as important in both the developmental and prescriptive directions! For example, when students read item #20 (Winston & Sandor, 1984), "the advisor provides information mainly about courses and class schedules" (p. 10), they probably thought that it was important. However, when they read the alternative choice (which leans toward developmental) that "the advisor provides information about workshops and seminars in areas such as career planning and study skills *and* courses and class schedules," they most likely opted for this one. Sounds like you get more for your money. I would have selected this one over the others because more is usually better.

Despite this limitation, 1 was impressed by and indebted to the scholarly efforts of Winston and Sandor. Their work helped me develop my questionnaire. The fundamental difference was that my questionnaire allowed for an independent rating of each advising activity. But to confess, even with the new format, I predicted developmental activities would receive higher ratings.

Fortunately, I am not a betting person; I would have lost. When students were asked to rate items independently, prescriptive items received significantly higher priority ratings than developmental items did (Fielstein, 1989). I was surprised that prescriptive items were valued over developmental items, especially because the

literature for 20 years had strongly supported the developmental approach (Ender et al., 1982; Grites, 1979, 1981; Miller & McCaffrey, 1982; Winston & Sandor, 1984).

The literature was also replete with evidence calling for an individualized approach to advising (Andrews, Andrews, Long, & Henton, 1987; Fielstein et al., 1992; Trombley, 1984). Findings reveal that providing information and offering personal support are important roles for an advisor to assume (Trombley, 1984). "Not only are the roles necessary, but they are also two very distinct aspects of advising" (Andrews et al., 1987, p. 63). However, "student perceptions of the relative importance of these two roles may vary depending on individual student characteristics" (Andrews et al., 1987, p. **63).**

I would like to propose that more studies need to be conducted to examine which academic and/or personality profiles correlate with which kinds of advising. For example, Andrews et al. (1987) found that students with low grade point averages wanted more personal support from advisors than other students. And Crockett and Crawford (1989) revealed that more "intuitive" students had a stronger interest in the "wide scope of activities in the advising process; they were more interested in future potentialities and less interested in mundane details of educational program requirements" (p. 159). These intuitive students appeared to endorse the developmental approach to advising. On the other hand, the more "thinking" students did not value a collaborative relationship and seemed more content with the criteria associated with prescriptive advising. Crockett and Crawford concluded that the variables were, nevertheless, "responsible for a small proportion of the variance" (p. 159), suggesting that students varied within, as well as between, the groups. This supports the argument that advisors need to look at each student (regardless of type, subgroup, or category) as an individual.

What does this mean exactly? How does this change things, or does it? After careful thought it became apparent that in my zeal to believe that students wanted advisors to take a developmental approach, I failed to remember how essential some of the prescriptive activities are. To explain, I found that 50% or more of the students rated four of the nine prescriptive advising activities as "high priority": explaining graduation requirements (87%), discussing course selection (79%), planning a course of study (67%), and explaining registration procedures (51%). Notice that although these activities are informational and some are even didactic, they were considered highly important by students.

Remember, many items that could be considered traditional, prescriptive advising activities are also prerequisites to advising. For example, "explaining requirements for graduation" was rated as a priority activity by all students (87% high priority, 13% priority). This activity is informational; advice is passed on to the student by an all-knowing advisor. And yet this kind of advice is considered helpful, necessary, timely, and therefore, appropriate. It does not contradict the growth model. And, besides, a student can choose to ignore the advice and suffer the consequences.

Perhaps in our enthusiasm for developmental advising, we overlooked the obvious, the value of certain traditional, prescriptive activities as prerequisites to developmental advising. It could be that some of the so-called prescriptive activities have been given a bum rap and are actually critical building blocks that enable developmental advising to evolve. I surmise that without accurate and timely information about course requirements and changes, a student might lose faith in an advisor's ability to advise.

In sum, we must use caution when we sweepingly infer from the literature that students prefer developmental relationships. On the contrary, my study found that not all students want a personal relationship with an advisor (Fielstein, 1987, 1989). Even though most students in my study thought it important for the advisor to be personally acquainted with the student, a sizable minority (17%) thought it was not a priority. Therefore an assumption that all students desire personal contact with an advisor is incorrect; it would not adequately address the needs of the 17% of the students who did not want this.

Inevitably this led me to rethink my position on prescriptive advising. It may he that we can no longer rest on our assumption that a personal relationship involving developmental advising/counseling is the overriding desire of all students. Perchance we have overidentified (as 1 did) with the growth model and biased our judgments about student preferences.

In the mid-60s, when we turned from the traditional approach to the more "enlightened" developmental approach, did we overreact? Did we conveniently forget what it was like to be away from home for the first time? Did we want to forget how scary it was, especially for first

generation students, to be confronted by a different life-style and new demands? It has made me stop and think: Have I been projecting too readily my adult attitudes and beliefs on to my advisees? Have I been too quick to adopt what sounded intuitively appealing? I just kept thinking, "What student wouldn't want to be a partner in the learning process on an equal footing with his or her advisor?"

Maybe looking back and remembering how lost we were when we arrived as freshmen is too painful for some of us. I probably did repress feelings of susceptibility, insecurity, doubt, and fear. I remember wanting freedom to make my own choices, but in reality 1 was immature, irresponsible, and lazy . . . unsavory words straight from Crookston's model.

As I revisit the classics, I am reminded of the importance of research and how it links theory with practice. Future theory builders may want to integrate developmental with prescriptive advising in a more meaningful and satisfying way. This rearrangement may highlight many traditional, prescriptive activities that lay the foundation for successful advising relationships. Of course students have the right to want and expect precise information regarding curriculum choices, major requirements, and graduation requirements; we cannot afford to overlook or minimize this.

When we provide such nuts and bolts, we are laying the foundation from which a developmental relationship can unfold. 1 suspect advisees would not trust their advisors with private concerns until those advisors had proven themselves to be knowledgeable.

An analogy might be made to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one of the most comprehensive theories of human motivation (Maslow, 1962, 1970). We now know that growth needs (self-actualization) cannot be met until lower-level needs for food, clothing, shelter, safety, and survival have been met. Efforts to work with students on higher-level needs will be in vain unless basic needs have been met.

I encourage other investigators to explore the theoretical base supplied by Crookston. Perhaps a comprehensive model (hierarchical and progressive) that adroitly combines the best advising practices would be an effective alternative. Many authors have already proposed a comprehensive approach to advising that underscores informational and counseling roles (Andrews et al., 1987; Frost, 1993; Trombley, 1984).

Truly our profession's remarkable and insightful beginning has given us a rich and diverse history. I propose that NACADA members continue the legacy inherited from Crookston and others by continuing to improve our advising practices and delivery services.

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