Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development Explained

A Paper Presented by
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<u>Introduction</u>

College students possess characteristics that change as they progress in their years at a university. Discovering emotions, feelings, independence, and achievement are part of a college student's transition and exploration in establishing identity and developing characteristics. Examining student developmental theories help us to understand why students sometimes display certain characteristics by illustrating stages of development.

There are two types of student developmental theories: psychosocial and cognitive. Psychosocial theories involve development as a succession of stages, such as thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and relations with other and to oneself. Examples, of psychosocial theories are Arthur W. Chickering's seven vectors of development (1969) and Erikson's eight developmental crises (1959) (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Cognitive theories involve the reconstruction in feelings and thought that form beliefs, values, and assumptions. An example of a cognitive theory is Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1969) (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

One particular theory of student development is explained by Chickering in the seven vectors of student development model (1969). The purpose of the seven vectors was to illustrate how a student's development in the college setting can affect him or her emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually in a college environment, particularly in the formation of identity. He also emphasizes that universities encourage the development of human potential as a primary aspect of his theory (Garfield and David, 1986). Chickering's theory has increased importance to theoretical and practical understandings of student development and student success (Ortiz, 1999). The theory is an addition to Erikson's identity and intimacy aspect, with great emphasis on the formation of identity throughout a student's years in college (Evans, 1995). Changes that

occur for a particular student do not necessarily occur for all students (Chickering, 1969). Thus, every student possesses his or her own distinct rate within each vector and vectors can correlate with one another (Evans, 1995). The seven vectors of student development theory is cited often in research and is a well-known psychosocial theory of student development (Schuh, 1989).

Chickering's Seven Vectors

Chickering's seven vectors developmental theory was first published in 1969, when the growth of student development theories was at a rise (Chickering, 1969). In 1993, he revised and updated the theory along with Linda Reisser, who was then a dean of student services at Rockland Community College. The 1993 edition includes the following vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

"Developing competence" includes intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal qualities. An intellectual level of competence involves using one's mind to build skill using analytical and comprehensive thought and the development of forming points of view in dealing with experiences in life. The physical and manual aspect involves athletic and artistic achievement, respectively, as well as an increase in self-discipline, strength and fitness, competition, and creation. Interpersonal characteristics encompass skills of listening, understanding, and communicating and functioning in different relationships (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

The second vector of Chickering's theory is "managing emotions." Managing emotions is important so that feelings such as anxiety, anger, depression, desire, guilt, shame, and

embarrassment do not become extreme to the point where they interfere with educational proceedings. Knowing and becoming aware of these emotions at their minimum and maximum levels and finding out ways to cope with them are key to moving through this vector (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

The third vector of the developmental theory is titled "moving through autonomy toward interdependence." Autonomy is dependence on others, while interdependence is dependence on one's self. The transition from autonomy toward interdependence requires emotional and instrumental independence. Emotional independence occurs when there is a separation from a support group, such as parents, peers, and teachers. One must accept voluntarily to lose the support group to strive for one's goals in life and express their own opinions. A student achieves instrumental independence once he or she is able to organize activities and learn how to solve problems on their own. Thus, thinking up ideas and then putting those ideas into action is instrumental independence (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). "Developing mature interpersonal relationships" is the fourth vector. Two aspects of this vector are "(1) tolerance and appreciation of differences [and] (2) capacity for intimacy" (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 48). Tolerance is both intercultural and interpersonal. Openness for the understanding of a person for what qualities they possess, instead of stereotyping, is an increase in tolerance. The capacity for intimacy factor entails moving from a significant amount of dependence on others toward an interdependence between people in one's environment (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

The fifth vector is "establishing identity." This vector is important because it encompasses development that occurs in the first four vectors (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). The development of identity includes the following: "(1) comfort with body and appearance, (2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, (3) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural

context, (4) clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, (5) sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (7) personal stability and integration" (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 49). Knowing one's self and the attitudes towards one's self is important in establishing identity.

"Developing purpose" is the sixth vector. Developing a purpose for why one attends college varies and depends on careers goals, personal aspirations, and commitments to family and other aspects of one's own life. Decisions must be made to learn to balance these career goals, personal aspirations, and commitments to family and self (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

The seventh vector of Chickering's theory is "developing integrity." Integrity for one's beliefs, values, and purposes must be established. Also, thinking about others beliefs and points of view and the willingness to preserve self-respect while monitoring behavior is important in college students' development (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Revisions to Chickering's Seven Vectors

There were seven revisions to Chickering's seven vectors of student development theory that were updated in 1993. The first change was in the title of the fifth vector. It was originally titled "freeing interpersonal relationships," but then was retitled "developing mature interpersonal relationships" and was moved to the vector before "establishing identity." The reason for this change was "to recognize the importance of students' experiences with relationships in the formation of their core sense of self" (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 39). The "managing emotions" vector was broadened to include anxiety, depression, anger, shame, guilt, and other emotions in addition to the earlier focus on aggression and sexual desire (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). The "developing identity" vector includes issues on identity

development with the consideration of mentioning gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation. This is due to the research on differences done by others (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

More emphasis in particular aspects in the vectors were included in the updated version of Chickering's theory. The third vector was changed from "developing autonomy" to "moving through autonomy toward interdependence." Thus, more emphasis was placed on interdependence. More emphasis was placed on intercultural aspects of tolerance in "developing mature interpersonal relationship," the fourth vector (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Chickering included current research findings, as well as statements form a diverse population of students in the updated version of the student developmental theory (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Application of Chickering's Theory

Research findings can be applied to Chickering's student development theory. For example, living away from home increases leadership and interpersonal skills and cultural awareness (Ortiz, 1999). Therefore, a student moves towards interdependence. Another research finding states that students living at home are "less fully involved" in social, academic, or extracurricular activities in school with others as compared to those students who live in the dorms (Chickering and Kytle, 1999). This finding is supported by all institutions, no matter what data or method of analysis is obtained (Chickering and Kytle, 1999). All colleges encourage students to move along the "developing competence" vector, especially in the development of intellectual competence. All students develop a substantial amount of interpersonal competence, unless a student remains totally isolated from all social events. Developing interpersonal

competence is due to the amount of people a student meets throughout his or her college life, whether in class or outside of class (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Researchers have found the development in female college students differs from the development in male college students. One example of the difference is that women tend to rate interpersonal relationships to be more important than men do. Thus, autonomy is important to women in interpersonal relationships. Female college students have the tendency to have an elevated rating on scales of intimacy than male college students. Studies administered to African American universities showed that female African Americans had higher scores on developing mature interpersonal relationships, autonomy, and purpose in life than male African American student. There is an inquiry as to whether Chickering's theory can be applicable to students who are not Anglo and middle-class. Some speculation has been acknowledged as to whether psychosocial development may be postponed for African American students due to their development of race identity (Evans, 1995).

Summary

Administrators that are educated in student developmental theories apply what they have learned from Chickering's theory to their involvement with students that attend their universities. In student affairs, it is of professional and ethical importance in the understanding of college students (McEwen, 1995). The seven vectors of student development theory are well-known and often cited in research because they apply to emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development of college students.

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