Whereas the legalistic framework is defined by institutional rules and standards, policies and procedures focusing on students as learners and as agents of their own development should be considered as a new framework for student affairs practitioners.

The Developmental Conversation: Facilitating Moral and Intellectual Growth in Our Students

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> Character education ... assumes that there are values to be transmitted, virtues to be encouraged, a character to be established.
>
> --Noddings (1 994, p. III)

We student affairs practitioners are being pulled, more than ever, in opposite directions in our interactions with students. On the one hand, we are required to be the watchdog and enforcer of policies that ensure equity on campus. On the other hand, we are compelled to create learning opportunities outside the classroom, along many dimensions. While we are concerned about reducing risk, this mandate moves away from providing an environment that honors the concept of challenge and support. The purpose of this chapter is to explore these contradictions and suggest a model for facilitating development of individuals, groups, and the community.

A discussion of this nature is predicated on the following assumptions, all of which are discussed in the context of the chapter:

- The student is ready and able to benefit from the educational experiences the institution provides.
- We are professionals who know how students learn and grow.
- We should serve as institutional agents in creating and providing educational experiences for students.

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- Every student has potential beyond his or her apparent skills and talents.
- We have the capacity to sustain conversations and relationships in which we can learn from one another.

The relationship between the institution and the student begins with the student's admission. The institution decides, after evaluation of the student's credentials, that the student has the academic background to benefit from the educational experience it offers. The institution commits to its contractual relationship with students by providing a catalogue describing its academic programs, the academic guidelines and requirements, and the faculty from whom students will learn. The relationship continues to broaden and deepen as the student receives information and makes decisions about his or her enrollment-banking and credit arrangements, scholarships and loans, housing, conduct codes. The exchange of information and decisions are undergirded by our initial assumption that the student is ready and able to benefit from the educational experiences the institution provides. The student's academic credentials support this conclusion, but it is also predicated on the assumptions that (1) the student is in a state of mental and physical readiness, (2) the student has aspirations congruent with the institution's mission, (3) the student accepts the institution's values, (4) the student has the requisite study skills and work ethic, and (5) the student has the interpersonal skills to interact successfully with other students and faculty in one-to-one and group relationships.

These big assumptions are not always met. Not all students come to the institution capable of this level of engagement. We will discuss these challenges later in the chapter. Other assumptions we make are that we must fundamentally believe that our role is to help students recognize the hidden potential they have and bring that potential to fruition.

The entire process is constructed on a pair of frameworks: the legalistic and the developmental.

The Legalistic Framework in Student Affairs

The institution must fulfill its contractual obligation to students. To meet this obligation, faculty and staff are hired as agents of the institution to create and promote educational experiences for students. As institutional agents, student affairs professionals support the teaching-learning process and deliver services in addition to creating and providing educational experiences. As institutional agents, student affairs professionals may serve students in many ways.

Student affairs professionals are delegated responsibility for the operation of the institution. We provide a context or framework for our relationships with students. A legalistic framework is defined by institutional rules and standards, policies and procedures. Student affairs professionals ensure that students find their education accessible; we further accept that we will

Teach students about the expectations of the institution, to allow them to take responsibility for upholding threshold values and to conform behaviorally to the institution

- Guide students in making meaning and reflective learning, teaching them the importance of the process, creating and reinforcing an environment where the reflection process is embedded so that they can begin to teach one another
- Terminate the relationship when learning cannot or does not happen
- Work with legal and ethical guidelines to foresee the impact of their behavior on other students

In other words, it is our responsibility to work to remove barriers, whether they originate in the organization or the student. Student affairs professionals provide services to students. We are expected to know the institution's rules and standards, policies and procedures. The expectation is that each student will have a positive exchange while receiving services in convenient ways. The institution hires as its' agents or representatives faculty and staff who have the expertise to help students learn. Faculty and student affairs practitioners provide intentional, systematic educational experiences that help students learn. Thus the obligations of the contractual relationship between the student and the institution are met by faculty and staff.

The Developmental Framework in Student Affairs

The developmental framework acknowledges that we are professionals with a body of knowledge about how students learn and grow. In our work, we are called to use this knowledge for the benefit of the students we serve. Each of us teaches in different settings-residence halls, student activities, judicial conferences--but each of us brings to our relationships with students the knowledge and skills to guide their growth and development and to provide educational experiences that will assist in that growth and development. It is our contention that fundamental to these experiences is the simple act of developmental conversation, a concept we will explore in more detail shortly

A responsibility necessary for developmental growth is to communicate and inspire hope in a student, to maintain belief and pride in the person. Professionals fulfill this responsibility by serving as confidant, coach, supervisor, or adviser. As student affairs practitioners, we assume a variety of roles in order to provide an education that is appropriate to each student's needs and developmental stage.

Despite these compelling interests, the most complex and influential role that student affairs professionals can play is that of educator-the guide for a student's learning. When one takes on the role of educator, one accepts responsibility to use both the developmental and legalistic frameworks. Using the developmental framework, student affairs practitioners pursue conversations

and relationships as a means of educating students. Using the legalistic framework requires knowledge of rules and standards, policies and procedures. It is essential that we use both frameworks, finding a balance that allows us to converse, permitting all parties in the conversation to learn.

Nel Noddings (1994) suggested that moral learning occurs through conversations in the context of caring relationships, a concept adapted for a useful discussion of what we have termed the "developmental conversation."

Nature of the Developmental Conversation

If the legalistic framework requires us to write and enforce policies and procedures for the equity of all individuals, the developmental framework would require us to develop conversations to facilitate the relational self. Such a conversation implies a commitment to Rogerian thinking and assumptions about the helping relationship: that one should hold the other in unconditional positive regard; that empathy is valued; that the relationship is built on sincerity, authenticity, and therefore risk taking. Such conversations, like all educational interventions, may be remedial or developmental; however, the conversation assumes a willingness to learn from one another, to be engaged in the moment with students, to maximize their readiness to learn.

Noddings refers to "what may be the very heart of moral education-the quality of ordinary conversation" (I 994, p. 1 14) in which our partners in the dialogue are regarded more highly than the topic. To devote time to facilitating knowledge of each other in conversation (whether the two are students in conflict with one another or a hall manager and resident) is to create shared values of respect, trust, and dignity. From this place we can engage our differences. "Insistence on respect and loving regard leaves us open to influence; we are pledged to learning and exploring together, not to a total transmission of moral values" (p. 116). This mutual exploration is at the heart of the develop- mental conversation as well, and it is our contention that such a conversation can become an intervention that creates a dynamic experiential opportunity for moral, cognitive, and emotional growth. Noddings (1994, p. 117) notes that "moral educators can also profit from a consideration of conversation in our own interactions. As our attention shifts from judgment to action, from justification to motivation, we should find some intelligent use for the core insights that have been developed in several competing models of moral education. That means engaging in constructive ... ordinary conversations our- selves.' A model for such a developmental conversation is explored in Table 4. 1.

Applying the Model

Dialogue is an essential component of moral education, "not just talk or conversation. Dialogue is open-ended; that is, in a genuine dialogue, neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be. As parents and teachers, we cannot enter into dialogue with children when we know that our

Table 4. 1. A Model for the Developmental Conversation

Stage of the Conversation	*Questions to Ask*
Acknowledgment and construction	Tell me what happened. Do you know why you are here (what you did, and so on)? Can you think of ways in which your behavior affected your future?
Perspective taking	Can you think of ways in which your behavior affected others in your class? in this community? in your group? Is there another way to look at this?
Evaluation	What have you learned from this?
Meaning making	What does that lesson mean to you? How do you know that?
Resolution, repartition, absolution	What would make things right? What would that mean to you? What would that mean to the person or organization that was harmed?

decision is already made.... Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be ... goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning" (Noddings, 1992, p. 23).

All of this sounds great, but how can we instruct others to do it? The developmental conversation requires a great deal of human attention and energy because the relational self is at the core of it. It requires that we not apologize for this goal. "The main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (Noddings, 1992, p. 174). Such a goal can hardly be an intellectual exercise exclusively Strategies for developing a conducive environment have been identified by scholars such as Boyer (1978), Kitchener (1994), and Noddings (1992).

State the outcomes and goals you have for students clearly Do not apologize for having them (Noddings, 1992).

- Keep students together long enough to facilitate the development of their community (Noddings, 1992).
- Encourage students' ownership of the campus, the efforts, and the buildings.
- When establishing rituals or procedures, incorporate ways for students to make meaning from the activities in which they are engaged (Noddings, 1992).
- Encourage evaluation of the self as being more relevant than the evaluation of others.
- Communicate acceptance of students. Respect where they are. Help them answer the questions they have for their own lives rather than the questions you may have for their lives (Kitchener, 1994; Noddings, 1992).

- Help students think in complex ways. Create ill-structured problems. Ask students to take different points of view. Ask students to make judgments and to explain what they believe (Kitchener, 1994).
- Relinquish control. Give students the responsibility of exercising judgment. Ask them to evaluate themselves (Noddings, 1992).
- Acknowledge the need for emotional acceptance and the need to be in caring relationships. Make caring part of the way in which you work with students (Kitchener, 1994; Noddings, 1992).
- Create a community and a culture where values are important and can be explored. Expect the members of the community to make intentional decisions to act on their values (Boyer, 1978).

Interventions with Student Groups. just as the developmental conversation can be applied to individual students, so it can be an effective toot for the groups to which they belong. However, an important dynamic that operates uniquely with groups is the effect of within-group differences. The practitioner, like many classroom teachers, faces the dilemma of reaching both ends of the normal curve in terms of the group (or the classroom) without marginalizing any group member. It is easy to assume a level of homogeneity within the group. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the variance and diversity in the group and to help students value the tensions and conflicts that may be the inevitable by-product of that diversity. Valuing these conflict's requires trust, openness, and vulnerability of the part of every group member and the professional with whom the group is partnered.

When we deal with students in groups, we quickly see the impact of identity cultures (ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation), friends, development, and experiences (urban, rural, travel abroad). Meaning making takes on complexity when we try to challenge and support each individual while creating shared meaning among all members of the group. Further, in groups where individuals seek equity and fairness, responding to the needs of the individual may be seen as a violation of the group norms. Successfully managing the diversity of student groups is dynamic.

Creating Communities. If we are to engage in the developmental conversation with students individually and in groups, the institution must create a learning community that helps students attain their educational goals. The academic community, through its governance systems, fulfills the institution's obligation to establish curriculum, academic policies, and standards of behavior, thus permitting the institution to meet its contractual obligations to each student. In this manner, we ensure that the academic community is just.

Building just communities is important, but not at the expense of building communities of care. As Parker Palmer (1987) suggests, teaching and learning require that the learners and teachers be in a relationship with each other. "Knowing and learning are communal acts.... They require a continuous cycle of discussion, disagreement and consensus over what has been seen and

what it means" (p. 25). Thus the structure and purpose of the community must derive from both the legalistic and the developmental frameworks. This will permit the community to model and to further the learning and teaching that occurs in the relationships among its members.

Helping Supervisees Develop. We frequently assign the responsibility of conversation (and the likelihood of impact on a student) to the least experienced staff. When an entry-level student affairs practitioner works with a student or group of students, the practitioner needs to draw on the same two frameworks of knowledge and skills referred to earlier: the legalistic and the developmental. As supervisors, how do we ensure that the basic legalistic concerns are met while challenging a staff member to take risks to develop the capacity to be instrumental with students in their meaning making?

Professionals in student affairs have always worked within an ethic of caring-they have easily and effectively developed relationships with students; however, some current administrative models of graduate training disregard the relationship in favor of systems thinking. Counseling, listening, and advising have always been at the heart of effective student services work (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1987), but as the profession has become more functionally specialized, graduate programs have become more administratively focused. In fact, fewer than half of the graduate programs listed in the American College Personnel Association's Directory *of Grad*uate Preparation Programs in *College* Student Personnel (1994) require both a counseling skills class and group facilitation class as part of their core curriculum.

Self-Learning and Peer Learning: A Mandate for Professional and Personal Development. Typical to our professional development may be our habit of sticking to a legalistic framework with regard to our own learning. When we plan our professional development, it is far easier to focus on the content of our professional roles and what else we need to know rather than identifying the ways in which we can develop the relationship skills that can enhance our ability to do good practice. We study new federal guidelines, attend conference presentations on enforcing policies, and participate in discussions of standards and good practices in the profession. These activities are important to the institution, but they do not require us to be in conversation. In other words, we engage in professional growth activities that, while important to our effectiveness, do not require us to be engaged in any way but intellectually.

Freire (1970) made the same case to educators almost thirty years ago, admonishing them to be midwives in the education of their students, rather than bankers and depositors of information. The same argument can be made with student affairs professionals. Do you see yourself as part of the banker analogy, or are you a true midwife of a student's education, especially outside the classroom? To be a midwife requires active engagement.

If we believe that a student's development hinges on a personal commitment to conversation, we should be willing to apply the same standard to our-

selves. Reflective practitioner-educators ask of themselves the same questions that we pose to students: How has this choice, decision, or action affected you? others? your community? is there another way to look at this? What have you learned from this? The tools and skills that are necessary for this paradigm to work include the ability to question, the ability to suspend judgment and actively listen, the ability to deal with new information, and the ability to accommodate the dissonance it may create. The reflective practitioner who engages in the developmental conversation is also capable of asking the question "What is this student here to teach me?"

Dilemmas in Implementing the Model

What happens when a student is not able or willing to be in a relationship with the institutional agent? Do we have the right to give up on someone, or is education inherently an act of hope?

Our hierarchical institutions and legal systems have admitted students with baggage far heavier than we have the skills, patience, or desire to handle. For those students, this resistance and the lack of institutional resources create barriers to real developmental movement and may serve to keep professionals in a minimalist, legalistic mind-set because our goal becomes controlling student behavior (prescribing sanctions) rather than facilitating student teaming.

As practitioners, we must ask whether the lack of a developmental relationship is sufficient reason to terminate the student's relationship with the institution. Once this question arises, we quickly resort to the contractual conditions that serve as the legalistic framework for the relationship. At times, we may need to abdicate our responsibility for development and permit the student to continue enrollment based on the preexisting contractual relationship. At other times, when the student's lack of engagement is disruptive to the institution or harmful to self or others, we may be able to act. However, the decision to sever the relationship is the decision to abandon hope and the possibility of growth and development. To abandon hope is a serious decision. Termination of a student's relationship with the institution is not a decision to be made quickly. One must be certain that all means of teaching and teaming have been exhausted.

A second dilemma we face is differentiating the disturbed student from the disturbing student, a concept explored in great depth in Delworth (1989). The disturbed student may be one who has a mental illness but whose participation in the institution is legally guaranteed until such time as he or she becomes a disturbing student, engaging in behaviors that disturb the educational activities of the community. These are situations that student affairs practitioners find most discomforting, for they require diagnostic expertise and the ability to evaluate the many shades of gray that color the situation. One of the most important decisions you can make is the decision to refer because you believe another level of expertise is needed to resolve the dilemma.

A Question of Balance

When dealing with students, you may be tempted to take refuge in contractual activities: ensuring that policies and procedures are followed and rules are not broken. In this litigious age, we cannot afford to avoid the legal mandates that shape part of our work. But when we fail to challenge and support students to facilitate their development, we have failed in our mission to educate.

As practitioner-educators, we have different assignments and job duties, but all of them require that we approach our work from both the legalistic and developmental frameworks. We are required to use our professional judgment to find the balance between these frameworks, but the balance point is dynamic-it changes daily and situationally. So it is essential that supervisors engage their staff, their peers, and themselves in the same process of meaning making in order to model the relationships we expect to be in with students. Furthermore, these relationships should support the growth and development of all parties involved.

Applying the Model to Developmental Theories

The most effective intervention in this model needs to be couched in developmental theory, and people develop in a great many ways, as documented by the vast body of literature in the field. Whether the planned intervention is vocational, psychosocial, cognitive, or moral, it is necessary for the practitioner to be fluent in the application of various theories of development. Most such theories share common tenets of linearity: that development is fairly orderly and predictable, that development moves people from simplicity to complexity and from the concrete to the more abstract. At higher developmental stages, people are capable of holding increasingly divergent viewpoints simultaneously and are more capable of understanding alternative perspectives at their stage and lower. However, an optimal developmental intervention is what Kohlberg (1975) described as "plus-one" intervention-an intervention designed one stage higher than the students currently assessed level. To expect more is over- whelming to the student; to expect less misses the opportunity altogether.

Conclusion

When our institutions admit a student, we enter into a contractual relation- ship with that individual to provide an education. From a legalistic viewpoint, we have fulfilled that obligation if the student obtains the knowledge and skills required to pursue his or her intellectual and career goals. Colleges and universities have been less forthcoming in describing the outcomes students may expect from the educational experiences offered for the developmental, relational self. Rose (1992) provides us with a description of the moral person that reflects the outcomes for students with whom we have been successful in the - developmental conversation: the moral person "possesses perceptual acuity,

emotional stability, and a sense of meaningfulness. In other, words, this person sees a situation accurately, is free from emotional distraction in relation to the situation, acts appropriately, and sees the entire episode as part of a meaningful life gestalt" (p. 39). The key to this rich multidimensional education is to focus on students as learners and as agents of their own development.

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Student affairs practitioners today must often face difficulties related to the promotion of multiculturalism while maintaining individual rights and freedoms with a college population.

Meeting the Needs of All Students and Staff Members: The Challenge of Diversity

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Colleges and universities have struggled to find a method that makes the writing and enforcement of institutional policies, procedures, and practices inclusive of everyone's rights and feelings. This is an arduous task, given the fact that so many different constituencies make up our campuses. Each of these groups desires the protection of its own issues as well as a clear understanding of how these issues should be addressed.

issues related to role and function are often at the forefront for student affairs practitioners when dealing with campus diversity. Student affairs practitioners are generally responsible for the development and implementation of university policies that may have a direct or indirect impact on students from various backgrounds. Although policies provide an operational framework, with guidelines for students, faculty, and administrators, they also inadvertently maintain the status quo through policies that do not adequately address the needs of all students. This can in turn lead student affairs practitioners to ethical concerns, conflicts with student development theories and their own professional values, and questions of person-environment fit.

It is generally accepted in our field that every practitioner is responsible for promoting diversity. T includes an understanding of current diversity issues and the historical context of these issues. Often we direct diversity- related issues to a designated individual or department and do not assume the personal responsibility required to foster an environment conducive to all students.