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ABSTRACT
        During recent decades, there has been an influx of
underprepared students in America's colleges and universities. At
many institutions, programs have been created to assist these high
risk students through special classes and/or support services.
Through application of student development theory these programs can
shed the negative connotations of remedial education and can provide
new models for individualized counseling and instruction. This paper
asserts that research in student development provides educators with
a sound theoretical foundation for meeting the needs of high risk
students and that student development theory provides a framework
which should serve as a beginning point for designing services for
high risk students. It presents theories of moral and ethical
development, learning and perceptual modalities, personality,
developmental tasks, and student involvement and explores how these
theories can provide critical insights into the needs of high risk
students. It is concluded that knowledge and application of
developmental theory will help educators of high risk students to
define and articulate their mission and philosophy, and will help
them justify and perfect programs which in the future may be viewed
as models for teaching and advising all students. (Author/NB)

Meeting the Needs of High Risk Students

Through Application of Theory and Research

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Running head: High Risk Students

ABSTRACT

During recent decades there has been an influx of
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created to assist these high risk students through special
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student development theory these programs can shed the
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Theories of moral and ethical development, learning,
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MEETING THE NEEDS OF HIGH RISK STUDENTS

THROUGH APPLICATION OF THEORY AND RESEARCH

Research in student development provides educators with
a sound thecretical foundation for meeting the needs of high
risk students. Too often this body of literature is
overlooked by those who take a more remedial rather than
developm, ·tal approach to overcoming academic deficiencies.
For purposes of this paper high risk will be defined as
students who lack requisite skills as determined by standard
measures such as admissions tests and/or high school
gradepoint average.

In the 1949 revision of the Student Personnel Point of
View Williamson et al. establish the concept of
individualized education, stating, "The optimum development
of the individual necessitates the recognition by teachers
and administrators, as well as by professional personnel
workers, of individual differences in background, abilities,
interests, and goals" (1949). For the high risk student,
education of the "whole person" should take into
consideration such factors as level of maturity, personality
type, preferred learning styles, career plans, and
educational and personal goals. Although the ultimate
responsibility for a student's growth rests · :th the

student, faculty members and student development
professionals can play a critical role in facilitating the
student's intellectual, moral, ethical, and social
development. Student development theory provides a
framework which should serve as a beginning point for
designing services for high risk students.

Moral and Ethical Development

According to Perry (1968), many traditional-aged
college students will be characterized by dualistic thinking
when they enter the institution. Even if these freshmen
have begun to be able to perceive the world in a
multiplistic manner, they are likely to retreat to dualism
when encountering a new situation. For high risk students
educational settings have often in the past evoked feelings
of frustration and anxiety. It is not surprising, then,
that these students would seek the relative safety of
dualism, clear cut decisions in black and white, with
faculty members as authority figures espousing the truth as
they know it.

Parker (1978) provides further insights into the
instructional needs of these students, for whom encounters
with uncertainty or diversity are stressful, thus making
interpretive tasks difficult. Learning occurs at the

direction of the faculty member, who is the authority with all the "right" answers. A careful balance must be established between challenge and support (Sanford, 1966). Challenges arise in the form of course content as well as interpersonal relationships in the classroom. While cognitive dissonance is desirable for the stimulation of intellectual growth, adequate support must also be provided. Widick, Knelfelkamp, and Parker, (1975; Knelfelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978) suggest establishing support through highly structured organization of the course. This will provide comfort for the dualistic student when attitudes and values are challenged by course content and the differing opinions of faculty and peers.

The needs of the relativistic student in the predominantly dualistic/multiplistic classroom must also be examined. It is not necessary to ignore the development of the minority in order to provide adequate support for the majority. In order to facilitate growth toward commitment, alternative assignments can be created for the student who has already mastered analytical tasks. The high level of structure will still be available as a source of support. In general, however, the relativistic student in the dualistic/multiplistic classroom will not suffer as debilitating consequences as the dualistic student who fails

to receive the support needed to confront educational obstacles (Widick, Knelfelkamp, & Parker, 1975).

The student's level of moral and ethical development should also be taken into consideration for purposes of orientation, registration, academic advising, and developmental counseling. Instructions must be specific. Many students will want to turn to their advisor or counselor for solutions rather than taking responsibility for themselves. Student development professionals must establish that delicate balance between challenge and support, providing necessary information but allowing students to make their own decisions. One of the most difficult choices an educator must make is allowing a student to fail. Intervention can only be carried so far. For some high risk students failure, or choosing to drop out or stop out, can in the long run lead the student to a path for happiness and success.

Developmental Tasks

Arthur Chickering's (1969) seven vectors of student development provide a framework for understanding the other pressures and concerns competing with academic pursuits in the lives of high risk students. One instrument available to educators interested in measuring student development is

the Student Developmental Task Inventory (Winston, Miller, & Prince, 1979).

In the area of developing competence many high risk students have put greater emphasis on physical and manual skills or social skills because they perceive themselves to be more capable in these areas. Seldom, perhaps, have they received praise for intellectual skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis. Nor do these students recognize their own creative ability. It is the role of the faculty member and/or counselor to stimulate growth and enhance self esteem in academic areas. Otherwise, these students will continue to give the impression of misplaced priorities because they reap greater rewards on the athletic field or at the sorority or fraternity house than in the classroom.

Developing autonomy is a task which challenges the high risk freshman both within and outside of class. Many freshmen lack motivation because they have not identified goals and objectives. They are just beginning to develop emotional autonomy and often experience a sense of disequilibrium in the establishment of a personal set of values. This carries over into the task of establishing a realistic and stable self identity.

Managing emotions, developing a sexual identity, and freeing interpersonal relationships can become all-encompassing tasks for the traditional aged freshman. At the dualistic or early multiplistic stage of moral and ethical development they may be just beginning to accept individual differences, but are often still judgmental of others. Since they are at present working on developing an awareness of their own feelings, it is difficult to experience empathy for others. Freshmen in particular may not be prepared to maintain mature and intimate relationships, yet one of their primary goals when entering college may be to do just that. Thus, it is not unusual for students to be distracted from studying by concerns related to developing relationships.

Developing purpose is a task which can be a source of bewilderment for the high risk freshman or sophomore who is being challenged to select a major. Programs for high risk students should include in depth career exploration for those who need it. While choosing a career or major may lead to a stronger sense of purpose, students should not be pressured to make this decision too early. It is helpful to experience courses in a number of different fields while also meeting core curriculum requirements.

Developing integrity is the seventh of Chickering's vectors, and requires considerable self knowledge. Educators must serve as role models, displaying behaviors which are consistent with their values, in order to earn the respect of their students.

Personality Type

Personality type is another factor which should receive consideration in meeting the needs of high risk students. Through administration of the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI, Myers & McCaulley, 1985), educators can determine how Jungian personality types may be related to students' classroom performance (Myers, 1980). In several studies high risk university students have been found to be more likely characterized as sensing than intuitive (Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Nisbet, Ruble, & Schurr, 1982).

Intuitive (N) types have an advantage in many academic situations because from an early age they have been able to translate symbols into meaning and vice versa more easily and quickly than the sensing (S) types within their peer group. Thus, Ns tend to score higher on standardized tests, excel in analytical tasks, and achieve in the traditional classroom in which written and spoken language skills are crucial. Due to these advantages, Ns are more likely than their S counterparts to have developed confidence in their

academic ability. Their academic efforts have been rewarded; thus, their achievement motivation is enhanced.

Meanwhile, an S student may have experienced numerous defeats in the classroom, learning at a slower pace, not seeming to reap the rewards commensurate with the time and effort devoted to the task, and may lack both the confidence and the desire needed to sustain the effort required to succeed in the traditional college or university classroom with its emphasis on reading and lectures. However, just as Ss rely heavily on memory when learning to read, while Ns sound out words, S types can continue to use their well developed memories to their advantage in academic settings. By teaching sensing students to create mnemonic devices, especially those which relate concepts to visual stimuli or utilize other physical senses, educators are assisting S students in adapting their personality type to learning at the college level. When assisting students in choosing among options in the curriculum, advisors should keep in mind which courses will be more analytical, and which courses will lend themselves more easily to learning through memory devices and the five senses. Instructors can assist sensing type students by speaking slowly and clearly, repeating key ideas, administering untimed tests, and

providing opportunities for additional help outside the classroom, e.g. lab sessions.

Although it is on the S-N scale of the MBTI that the most significant differences among high risk students have been evident, interpretation of the other scales can also provide useful information.

Research (Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Nisbet, Ruble, & Schurr, 1982) indicates that high risk students are more likely to be extroverted (E) than introverted (I). Extroverted students enjoy group activities including group advising sessions, counseling and learning skills workshops, and planned study group sessions. Introverted students are more likely to seek one-on-one contacts with advisors and/or counselors. Most Is would prefer to study alone, and may be more likely to benefit from developing a study schedule. Participation in campus activities, although perhaps at times conflicting with academic goals, may provide the E student with a sense of belonging, a source of motivation to persist at the institution. It may be necessary for the instructor, counselor, advisor, or residence hall staff member to draw out the highly introverted student, learn about the student's interests, and encourage involvement in individualized activities which are perceived as less threatening.

The Thinking (T) - Feeling (F) Scale may be less closely related to academic aptitude, yet it can have implications for career decision making. While Ts are more successful at logical analysis, e.g. math, Fs are better at tasks which require empathy. Ts prefer structured courses with clear goals. Fs are more likely to get emotionally involved, and may be better equipped tc tolerate ambiguity.

The Judging (J) - Perceiving (P) Scale can provide useful information regarding motivation. Js are organized and able to apply themselves to required tasks, regardless of their level of interest. Due to their open, spontaneous, and curious natures, Ps are more likely to procrastinate. Js benefit more from study skills courses (Robyak & Patton, 1977), but need them less. Ps excel in experiential learning. Js get higher grades, while Ps score higher on standardized aptitude tests.

Through application of Jungian theory counselors, advisors, and teachers of high risk students can make significant strides toward individualizing education, as well as gaining insights into the attitudes and behaviors of their students.

Perceptual Modalities

James and Galbraith (1985) have developed a typology of seven perceptual modalities which, in combination with

measures of personality type and/or cognitive style (e.g.,
Kolb, 1981) creates a profile of student learning styles.
The two perceptual modalities utilized most commonly in the
traditional university classroom are aural, i.e., lecture,
and the printed word in the form of the text. However, for
the sensing (S) student these are likely to be among the
least desirable means of learning.

Two of the perceptual modalities more likely to be
preferred by high risk students are visual, i.e., learning
through pictures, graphs, and/or video, and interactive,
learning through verbalization with faculty and other
students. These students will gain more from classes with
smaller enrollments, discussion sections, and the use of
visual aids. Even if this type of learning environment is
not available, visually oriented students can improve
performance by creating their own visual aids, mapping notes
from lectures and texts, and using mnemonic devices for
memorization. Interactive students benefit from the
formation of study groups and testing one another. The
Cornell format of note-taking (Pauk, 1974) can assist both
visual and interactive students in developing a systematic
approach to predicting exam questions. Both types can also
benefit from role playing when applicable.

The haptic and kinesthetic perceptual modalities are preferred by some high risk students. Haptic refers to individuals who learn through their sense of touch. Activities which may stimulate learning for haptic students include building models, dissection, or even simply enumerating while touching a finger tip for each point or item on a list. Similarly, kinesthetic students learn through movement. Athletes and dancers are obvious examples.

The last perceptual modality described by James and Galbraith is olfactory, i.e., learning through the senses of taste and smell. Chemistry and food and nutrition majors who are olfactory learners may be at an advantage.

Through assessment of perceptual modality preferences the instructor, advisor, or counselor can assist the student in adapting preferred styles to the traditional aural and print oriented university classroom. Information concerning modality preferences can also be helpful for purposes of career exploration and academic advising. When several options are available, courses should be selected on the basis of number of students in the class, nature of the text(s), speaking ability of the instructor, opportunities for discussion and oral presentations rather than papers, use of visual aids, hands-on learning activities, and

freedom from restriction of movement, depending upon the
needs of the student.

Theory of Involvement

Astin (1985) proposes that "Students learn by becoming
involved." (p. 133). Astin defines student involvement as
"... the amount of physical and psychological energy that
the student devotes to the academic experience." (p. 134).
Involvement can be perceived as a continuum, both quanti-
tatively and qualitatively. Astin asserts, "The amount of
student learning and personal development associated with
any educational program is directly proportional to the
quality and quantity of student involvement in that
program." (p. 136). The message is clear. High risk
students should be encouraged to become involved in the
institution at all levels, even if that involvement at times
serves as a distractor from academics. However, most
important may be those experiences which foster involvement
in the academic program. After reviewing the literature
regarding student involvement, Astin concludes, "Frequent
interaction with faculty members is more strongly related to
satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement
or, indeed, any other student or institutional
characteristics." (p. 149). It is imperative that teachers

of high risk students be accessible. Office hours should be held daily, consistently, and be clearly communicated. Faculty members should make themselves available to students immediately before and after class. Individual "getting acquainted" appointments at the beginning of each term are desirable. This practice provides the faculty member with an opportunity to obtain some of the background information critical to individualized instruction. What are the student's goals, hopes, and dreams? Why has the student chosen to attend this particular institution as a means to achieving his or her aspirations? Is the student's locus of control (Rotter, 1966) internal or external? Does the student still seem to engage primarily in dualistic thinking? Students are usually eager to share information about their families, friends, and past experiences. For the new freshman this interview can help ease the transition from home to college. Although very time consuming for the faculty member, these meetings set the stage for involvement, developing a sense of trust, and acknowledging the individual.

Student development professionals also play an important role in fostering involvement. Some institutions require a weekly group meeting with an advisor or counselor. During these sessions students discuss common problems,

learn about academic expectations and degree requirements,
and are made aware of campus and community resources. More
ambitious programs provide creait courses for high risk
students which include such topics as study strategies,
self-awareness, communication skills, relaxation exercises
and academic anxiety reduction. Meanwhile, high risk
students should be encouraged to live in residence halls
when possible, and participate in campus activities which
are compatible with their interests. Research (Astin, 1975,
1985) supports that involvement is a critical factor in
retaining students.

In Achieving Educational Excellence Astin (1985)
states, "...the underprepared student is regarded as a
liability by those who embrace the reputational, resources,
and outcomes views of excellence." (p.105). Instead, Astin
proposes the talent development model, in which the college
or university serves as an intervention strategy, and
excellence is determined by the extent to which the
institution facilitates the development of students to their
maximum potential. Thus, the high risk student should be
perceived as posing a positive challenge to faculty and
student development professionals. Through application of
student development theory and research the high risk

student will be encouraged to persist and become an asset to the institution and society as a whole.

Widespread acceptance of Astin's talent development model is likely to take some time. Although disadvantaged students continue to be viewed as a liability by many colleges and universitites, there is growing acceptance of the idea that all students benefit from teaching and advising that take into account the development of the whole students and individual talents. As this trend intensifies, faculty and administrators will come to see that the needs of all students lie along a continuum.

In the meantime, educators of high risk or disadvantaged students will find knowledge of developmental theory helpful in defining and articulating the mission and philosophy of their programs. Moreover, knowledge and application of theory will help professionals justify and perfect programs which in the future may be viewed as a model for teaching and advising for all students.

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