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AUTHOR	Downey, John A.
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ABSTRACT

Various student development theorists have postulated that the collegiate experience is a strong contributor toward cognitive development in college students. This essay examines Kitchener and King's (1981, 1985) reflective judgment model of cognitive development as both a metacognitive exercise and as a particular skill. The development of reflective judgment, both as a method of examining assumptions about thinking and as a specific skill for justifying one's beliefs, is promoted as a desirable outcome of an enhanced program of general education in a community college curriculum. The author promotes a program of contextual support designed to optimize the development of reflective judgment in selected community college students by employing the skills development ideas of a number of student development theorists (Kitchener, Fischer, Lynch, and Wood). Specifically, the author uses President Woodrow Wilson's ideas about what it means to be an educated person to create the foundation of the proposed Wilson Scholars Program of enhanced general education within a community college transfer degree program. This document offers details regarding the Wilson Scholars Program at Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC), Virginia. As President of Princeton University, Wilson articulated a vision of education that emphasized access and a personalized approach to liberal learning. Suggests the BRCC program could be used as a national model. Contains 31 references. (AUTH/NB)

Developing Reflective Judgment in Community College Students:

Employing the Writings of Wilson in a Program of Contextual Support

A Student Development Research Proposal

John A. Downey

Blue Ridge Community College

Abstract

Various student development theorists have postulated that the collegiate experience is a strong contributor toward cognitive development in college students (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBritio, 1998). The current essay examines Kitchener and King's (1981, 1985) reflective judgment model of cognitive development as both a metacognitive exercise and as a particular skill. Furthermore, the development of reflective judgment, both as a method of examining assumptions about thinking and as a specific skill of justifying one's beliefs, is promoted as a desirable outcome of an enhanced program of general education in a community college curriculum. Employing the skills development ideas of Fischer (1980), Kitchener & Fischer (1990), and Kitchener, Lynch, Fischer & Wood (1993) a program of contextual support designed to optimize the development of reflective judgment in selected community college students is promoted. Specifically, President Woodrow Wilson's philosophical promulgations of what it means to be an educated person, along with the study of ill-structured problems he faced during his lifetime, are used to create the foundation of the proposed *Wilson Scholar's Program* of enhanced general education within a community college transfer degree program. A research study designed to explore the cognitive growth of students engaged in such a program is proposed.

Developing Reflective Judgment in Community College Students: Employing the Writings of Wilson in a Program of Contextual Support

The cognitive development of students, especially in regards to the improvement of complex reasoning skills, has long been an expressed goal of higher education (King, 1994; King, Wood, & Mines, 1990; King & Kitchener, 1994; ACPA, 1994; Wood, 2001). Beyond college and university mission statements that express the cognitive development of students as a primary focus of education, many college liberal studies programs of general education emphasize critical thinking as a desirable outcome for graduates (Kitchener, 1983a; Kitchener & King, 1985). The implication of these assertions is, of course, that it is the educational experience and collegiate environment that fosters the development of cognitive skills in students.

Kitchener (1983a), Wood (2001), and other researchers (King, et al, 1990; Davison, King & Kitchener, 1990) have asserted however, that despite the widespread desire in higher education to develop the complexity of thought in students, educators are not even clear regarding the nature of the cognitive construct they seek to develop. Alternatively referred to as "critical thinking", "problem solving", "cognitive development" and "reflective inquiry", educators largely are unsure as to the exact nature of the process and definition of the concept they desire as an outcome of the educational experience (Kitchener, 1983a; King, et al, 1990).

Kitchener and King (1981, 1985) have countered this problem of definition by promoting a seven-stage model of cognitive development, the highest level of which is purported to be the attainment of "reflective judgment". Their research has described and measured the Reflective Judgment Model of cognitive development, a stage theory that distinguishes itself from other hypotheses of cognitive development by focusing on two distinct aspects of the cognitive

process. First, the reflective judgment model examines the specific epistemological assumptions of the person engaged in the thought process (Kitchener, 1983a; Kitchener & King, 1985). Secondly, the model is based on the assertion first postulated by John Dewey that reflective thought can only occur in relation to cognition about issues whose resolutions that are not provable, a concept termed "ill-structured problems" (Evans, et al, 1998; Kitchener, 1983a; Davison, et al, 1990). Therefore, unlike the constructs of "critical thinking" or "problem solving" the Reflective Judgment Model describes a process by which individuals come to develop different perspectives to justify their thinking about problems whose resolutions are not provable. This distinction between the model of reflective judgment and other forms of cognition will be more fully developed later in this article. The assumptions that an individual makes about knowledge, and their justifications for the beliefs they express about unclear problems interact and develop in relationship to one another (King and Kitchener, 1994). Kitchener and King assert that the development of reflective judgment is a function of the interaction of age and education variables (Kitchener, King, Wood & Davison, 1989).

The Stages of the Reflective Judgment Model

Kitchener and King proposed seven distinct stages of cognitive development that can be categorized broadly within three general categories (Evans, et al, 1998; Wood, 2001). The first three stages are viewed within the classification of pre-reflective reasoning, characterized by the thinker's perspective that all knowledge is certain. Students in this category view the process of education as a journey to discover the known by listening to or observing those in authority. In stage one, knowledge is seen as absolute and observed. Stage two thinkers view knowledge as certain, albeit not always immediately accessible. Finally, thinkers who view knowledge as temporarily uncertain until such time as the authority provides or discovers the right answer

characterize stage three. Longitudinal studies of the reflective judgment model with traditional age students have revealed that pre-reflective thinkers are generally found in the high school to early college age groups, supporting the more general finding that age and education interact to increase the cognitive complexity of students across the stages of the reflective judgment model (Kitchener & King, 1981; Kitchener & King, 1985; Kitchener, et al, 1989; Wood, 2001).

The second category of the reflective judgment model, called quasi-reflective, summarizes stages four and five. In stage four, quasi-reflective thinkers wrestle in the face of ambiguity with the cognitive assumption that knowledge is uncertain. Stage five thinkers progress to the belief that knowledge is subjective and contextual. Davison, et al, (1990) report that stages three and four best characterize the thinking of college students, indicating that college begins the process toward an individual's development of more complex reasoning. Similarly, the same research suggests that graduate student's thinking tend to be reflected in categories four and five.

The final category of the Model is called reflective and it encompasses the last two stages, six and seven. Stage six is associated with the cognitive assumption that knowledge is "constructed into individual conclusions about ill-structured problems" (Evans, et al, 1998, p. 163). Here, thinkers accumulate for themselves just enough evidence to assert a level of comfort with defending their viewpoint regarding the unclear problem. Stage six marks an individual's first foray into reflective thinking. Stage seven describes the attainment of true reflective judgment, illustrated by the cognitive assumption that knowledge is a process of reasonable inquiry, subject to re-evaluation in the face of additional evidence. Thinkers in stage seven look to the standard of reasonableness to defend one set of beliefs over another (Kitchener, 1983a). In other words, thinkers now realize that some evidence is more defensible than other evidence in

the face of unclear problems. Additionally, thinkers realize that some evidence may need to be reevaluated or disregarded in the light of new evidence. Finally, stage seven thinkers employ the tool of argument to judge the merit of one epistemological position over another (Evans, et al, 1998; King & Kitchener, 1994).

The research by Davison, et al. (1990) mentioned above concludes that few students tend to reach the developmental levels of stage six or seven. However, the authors of that research assert that the majority of these studies were conducted on students enrolled in curricula not particularly supportive of reflective thinking. Therefore, King and Kitchener argue that research on their model provides some evidence of cognitive development beyond relativism (Evans, et al, 1998; King & Kitchener, 1994).

Reflective Judgment as an Outcome of an Enhanced General Education Program

Face validity suggests us that collegiate educational environments interact with an individual's age in the development of complex cognitive skills in college students. Kitchener (1983a) argues against the proposition that age alone contributes to the maturation of reflective thinking. Instead, Kitchener's research suggests, "development continues into the young adult years as long as individuals continue their formal education, but development plateaus after leaving educational institutions" (p.89).

General education programs are built on the assumption that all students, regardless of vocational desire, benefit from the development of a range of characteristics that prepare the individual for life beyond college. Cognitive development is but one of these characteristics. However, the actions necessary for any particular college to define general education outcomes, describe them in operational terms, create a measure for them, and implement programs designed to develop them in students are close to impossible to initiate.

Bender (2001) argues that the difficulty that Academe has in agreeing on a uniform philosophy of general education is the result of a historical tension between the English view of the purpose of higher education, (as espoused by John Henry Newman), and the German influence on American higher education, (as promoted by Harvard University's President Eliot in 1869). The former philosophy, Bender argues, was characterized by a vision of education that championed the pursuit of knowledge for it's own sake, whereas the latter view describes the purpose of education as preparing individuals for specific work. This tension, which Bender concludes is a strength of American higher education, requires us now to balance both tasks. However, since the two visions imply two "differently trained faculties" (p. 9), the task of balance is challenging indeed. One might also note here the present author's viewpoint, that the challenge could be considered more difficult on American community college campuses, where the difference of perspectives between the "intellectual" general education faculty and the "practical" occupational faculty is more pronounced. Still, Bender asserts that, while he may:

> relish the power of my discipline to advance knowledge, I nonetheless feel strongly that I must be able to move back and forth between a civic and disciplinary context, to move questions and findings back and forth. I find it right and proper that I continuously press my graduate students to advance the discipline, while I try to synthesize and prompt moral and civic reflection in my undergraduate classes. To my mind, this dualism is at the heart of the work of the modern university." (p. 13)

Despite the tension between these two competing philosophies regarding the very purpose of higher education, a tension that contributes to difficulties in establishing comprehensive general educational programs, colleges are under significant and increasing pressure to create educationally purposeful experiences for students and document the specific

outcomes of those experiences (Gaff, 2001; Ratcliff, Johnson, LaNasa, & Gaff, 2001). The fact that this century old debate in higher education has now taken on political overtones in a very public forum now reaching beyond Academe (Gaff, 2001) does not make this challenge any easier. Gaff points out that although the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of skills are often presented as mutually exclusive paradigms in higher education, an educated person actually needs an appreciation of both. Fong (2001) is even more direct:

> Given present circumstances, those who value liberal education cannot afford to set it at odds with professional preparation. We must break down this artificial distinction so as to preserve the value of the liberal arts while also strengthening the liberal character of the professions (p. 15).

To heed Gaff's (2001) call for a "both-and" strategy (p. 207) in encouraging cognitive development as an outcome of general education programs, the construct of reflective judgment must be viewed as both an intellectual exercise of metacognition as well as a specific and necessary skill for today's college graduate. Ironically, the reflective judgment model theory appears supportive of both types of outcomes. In other words, the concept of reflective judgment appears descriptive of both an individual's intellectual processing and a particular cognitive skill set.

Recall that in describing the reflective judgment model above, the distinction between it and other forms of cognitive development was illustrated. King and Kitchener (1994) distinguished reflective judgment from other contemporary models of cognitive development that are based upon Piagetian theories. Specifically, Kitchener and King argue that Pieget's concept of formal operations, defined as the ability to reason deductively and inductively on propositions, involves a different cognitive construct than reflective judgment. The theorists

assert that, since this and similar cognitive constructs fail to pay attention to epistemological assumptions, they are best characterized as models of logical reasoning. Such reasoning alone does not account for differences found in measures of reflective judgment (King & Kitchener, 1994; Kitchener, 1983a).

What distinguishes reflective judgment from logical reasoning in this regard is the effect *metacognition* has on the thinking process when an individual is faced with a problem without a clear solution. At the higher stages of the reflective judgment model, the individual *reflects on* the awareness that not all problems are readily solvable or "puzzle-like" (Kitchener, 1986). Therefore, assisting students in understanding the epistemological assumptions that are involved in their review of ill-structured problems might be considered an intellectually oriented exercise in a program of general education.

Conversely, the attainment of reflective judgment also requires an individual to *justify their beliefs* about the ill-structured problem, a process that might be considered to involve the demonstration of a particular skill, or set of skills, in a general education program. The skills needed to justify one's beliefs about an unclear problem are the same skills faced day to day in "real-world" situations such as when an individual ponders a career decision, who to vote for, or how to raise a family (Davison, et al, 1990; Kitchener, 1983b). King and Kitchener (1994) note that, concerning both an individual's metacognition regarding assumptions about knowledge and their justification of beliefs regarding ill-structured problems, development occurs in relationship to one another.

The development of a comprehensive general education program that seeks to encourage reflective thinking as both an intellectual activity and a specific skill is worthy of deeper examination. Indeed, a wide range of research has already examined reflective judgment in

higher education as the goal of individual courses, honors programs, and extra-curricular activities (c.f. Wood, 2001, for a comprehensive bibliography regarding research conducted on the reflective judgment model). However, little research has focused on employing reflective judgment as a desired outcome in comprehensive programs designed to restructure or enhance general education in the collegiate setting. Further, although community college transfer programs are essentially designed to be equivalent in content to general education programs that occur in a university or four-year college setting, even less research has examined the development of reflective thinking in the general education programs of such institutions.

The paucity of research on this topic is surprising in light of recent studies on the numbers of students who "swirl" through their baccalaureate educational experiences, transferring from institution to institution until they graduate (Palmer, 2001). Palmer's summary of transfer patterns data reveals "... the sizeable contribution of community colleges to baccalaureate education" (p.21). Therefore, the current article suggests a preliminary design for the study of reflective judgment as an outcome of an enhanced program of general education in a community college setting. However, prior to the discussing the main focus of this article, implications regarding the concept of stage development must be acknowledged and considered.

Implications of Stage Theory in the Study of Development

Development, in the context of the model of reflective judgment espoused by King and Kitchener, implies that student's thinking grows in complexity along the continuum of the seven stages described earlier. As mentioned above, reflective judgment research suggests that most college students are characterized by stage three and four thinking (King, et al, 1990; Davison, et al, 1990). Kitchener (1983a) argues that the goal of education at this level might be to provide students:

> ...more help in actively applying the tools of evaluation and the rules of inquiry to the critical examination of each perspective, and they need an introduction to alternative views of knowledge and reality (i.e. that there are alternatives other than dogmatism and skepticism) (p. 91-92).

If providing students with the help suggested by Kitchener results in movement across the stages to a more complex level of thinking, then common criticisms of such stage theories must be overcome. Specifically, King and Kitchener (1994) address four distinct conditions of stage theory, the last of which is most relevant to our discussion.

King and Kitchener (1994) cite several researchers who suggest that stage models of cognitive development, especially those that describe development into adulthood, are controversial. King and Kitchener counter these criticisms by discussing Flavell's criteria of stage theories, and by citing research that supports reflective judgment as consistent with each of the criteria. First, the researchers argue that the reflective judgment model is consistent with Flavell's least controversial criterion: organization of the structure of the constructs. King and Kitchener (1994) demonstrate that their research has found "remarkably consistent interrelationships between individuals' assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how they justify beliefs in the face of uncertainty (p. 24). Furthermore, the construct of reflective judgment appears consistent across various types of ill-structured problems and across various types of academic disciplines.

The second stage criterion of Flavell cited by King and Kitchener involves the requirement for qualitative differences between stages. King and Kitchener's 1994 book on reflective judgment devotes two chapters to describing the qualitative differences between the stages and concludes with their comment that:

> One observation will suffice: there is a qualitative difference in the assumptions of a person who believes that authorities are the source of all knowledge and that knowledge thus gained needs no further analysis and one who believes that knowledge must be constructed by integrating evidence as well as expert opinion into a reasonable conjecture (p. 26).

The third criterion of stage theories requires the stages to be in an invariant sequence. King and Kitchener point out the research difficulties inherent in examining such a criterion. Never can one be sure whether any aspect of a particular stage trait one measures on any given day truly reflects an individual's positioning across the continuum of the construct. No researcher can track the development of any construct accurately and precisely at all stages of the construct (King & Kitchener, 1994). Nonetheless, the theorists argue (rather reflectively perhaps) that there is enough reasonable evidence that supports the invariant stage criterion across the construct of reflective judgment. Specifically, King and Kitchener cite a myriad of longitudinal studies that support the stage construct across time, as well as one particular study which demonstrated that individuals failed to understand the meaning of the higher stages when the couldn't understand the lower ones (Kitchener, et al, 1993).

In summary of Flavell's three criterion of stage theory, relative to reflective judgment, King and Kitchener conclude:

> For the seven stages of the model, we have (1) explicated the logical relationships between the components of each stage that reflect an underlying (organized) structure, (2) shown the qualitative differences between these sets of assumptions, and (3) documented sequential changes in the emergence of these assumptions. It is our conclusion that a

stage model, as defined here, provides a useful framework for describing the development of reflective judgment (p. 27).

One last condition of stage models is relevant to our discussion. Early in the development of the reflective judgment model, King and Kitchener were confronted by evidence that argued against the invariant sequencing of the reflective judgment model. Research on the reflective judgment model suggested that individuals don't always function at their theorized stage across different situations (Davison, et al, 1980), and that growth across the continuum of the model is gradual (Kitchener & King, 1994). Some critics have argued that stage theories imply that people may function in one, and only one, stage at a given time. In response to this criticism, Kitchener and King postulated that patterning across a person's stage scores does not imply that all scores of that individual will follow the simple pattern evident in one particular stage. In other words, the researchers argued for the possibility that stage scores might cluster *around* a given stage rather than within a given stage. The researchers also stress a possible explanation for this clustering pattern of reflective judgment measures (Kitchener & King, 1994).

Functional and Optimal Levels of Reflective Judgment

Disturbed by Flavell's stage theory argument suggesting that movement between stages ought to reflect radical discontinuity, Kitchener and King (1994) sought to discount the notion that individuals must operate in one and only one stage at a time, marked by dramatic and sudden shifts from stage to stage. They found comfort in research conducted independently by Fischer in 1980, which suggested a possible explanation for more gradual development across stages than Flavell would theorize should occur.

King and Kitchener (1994) detail Fischer's belief that two developmental characteristics should be examined when exploring an individual's change across stages. He postulated that

people have an optimal level of development as well as a functional level of skill development. The former category refers to a person's highest level of capability evident over long periods of time. Kitchener and King (1994) report that growth in optimal reasoning "increases with a person's age and is marked by periods of relatively abrupt or fast growth followed by periods of relative stability" (p. 29).

In contrast, Kitchener and King describe Fischer's concept of functional level as the manner in which an individual learns specific skills between periods of abrupt growth. This concept of skill acquisition is characterized by slow and gradual development. Fischer further theorized that unless a person was provided with enough challenge to stimulate the acquisition of new skills, relative stability in functional level would be prevalent (Kitchener & King, 1994).

The differences in optimal and functional levels of development are described more specifically relative to cognitive growth in an article by Kitchener, Lynch, Fischer & Wood (1993):

> ...the shapes of developmental functions for specific behaviors and domains vary systematically under different assessment conditions. In particular, optimal and functional levels show different growth functions: Optimal level shows stagelike discontinuities in development at predictable ages, whereas functional level tends to show gradual, continuous change or less predictable growth (p895).

Additionally, Kitchener and King (1994) point out "under ordinary circumstances, most environments do not provide cues or support for high-level performance, especially about issues of knowing" (p. 35). Therefore, Kitchener, et al (1993) examined the effect of "contextual support", defined as the prompting of a skill, on the development of optimal levels of reflective judgment. Theorizing that no skill exists independent of the environment, the researchers argue

that optimal level functioning would be most evident in areas where individuals were supported with opportunities for repeated instruction and practice. In contrast, functional level would remain relatively stable over time because without contextual support, skill acquisition would occur gradually.

Kitchener et al's (1993) research supported their hypothesis. The study revealed that contextual support prompted subjects to move toward the optimal level of development, and that the assessment context affected the level of reflective judgment exhibited. In other words, they found that "the same person exhibits different levels of performance under different assessment conditions and these differences are predictable ones" (p. 902). More importantly, Kitchener and Fischer (1990) argue that evidence regarding the interaction of age and contextual support on reflective judgment contains important implications for educational environments.

If Fischer's theory is accurate, then Kitchener and Fischer (1990) are also correct to point out that "skills are hard to learn and difficult to sustain" (p. 59). They further argue that movement toward optimal performance can't be reached without "sustained work at mastering and internalizing the skills" (p. 59). Both Kitchener and King (1994) and Kitchener and Fischer (1990) promote the advancement of an educational system that confronts students with both well-structured and ill-structured problems. Lamenting the fact that most educational environments support instruction only in the former, Kitchener and Fischer (1990) challenge educators to concentrate on the latter:

> Without major changes in the classroom emphasis from well-structured problems to ill-structured ones, as well as direct emphasis on the nature of the knowing process itself, it is unlikely that even college freshmen...will be able to use or understand critical thinking as a process of inquiry applied to solving ill-structured problems (p. 60).

The challenge to enhance the educational environment to stimulate reflective thinking in students requires a deep institutional commitment to the cause. Although some educators have written about particular courses (Kroll, 1992) or narrowly focused programs (Haas, 1992) designed to develop reflective judgment in higher education settings, few studies have examined a more comprehensive program of contextual support. Kitchener and King (1994) emphasize the difficulty of this educational task:

> Rising to this challenge so that students ask more complex questions and make more effective judgments is no small undertaking. As educators, we have the responsibility to teach students the "habits of mind" associated with making interpretative analyses and thoughtful, reasoned arguments. Attempting to teach students to think more reflectively is a complicated and often difficult task (p. 222).

Designing a Program of Contextual Support for the Development of Reflective Thinking

At Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, Virginia, a small group of educators are engaged in the beginning stages of creating an enhanced educational experience for selected students enrolled in our Associate of Arts and Sciences (AA&S) Degree Program. Prompted by a discussion regarding the developmental aspects of our own educational experiences, a colleague and I began to talk about the educational philosophies espoused by President Woodrow Wilson, whose birthplace is located within the service area of our College. As president of Princeton University, Wilson articulated a vision of education that emphasized access and a personalized approach to liberal learning, characteristics that ironically resemble the educational mission of community colleges.

Further research on Wilson led us to view him as both visionary, and a product of his times. Although we found his articulation of the purpose of education inspiring, his views on

gender and race issues were limited by the historical context of his childhood, and by the societal norms of the times he lived in. These realities will need to be acknowledged in any historical review of the contributions Wilson made to the country and the world. Our particular aim has been to enhance a collegiate program utilizing Wilson's educational philosophies to stimulate reflective thought in community college transfer students. Classroom discussions of race and gender within the historical context in which he lived will also stimulate complex thinking, as long as an appropriate balance of challenge and support is included in the development of an intellectual community. That community must strive to balance the values of open discussion with respect for each and every member of that community.

To create such an intellectual community, we conceived of a program we called "Wilson Scholars," scheduled to begin with one cohort group this coming fall. In the summer of 2000, several Blue Ridge Community College administrators and faculty members attended the Asheville Institute on General Education, a weeklong annual workshop sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. At the Institute, we examined closely the structure of the general education program proscribed for all colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), as well as the specific degree structure that supports it at Blue Ridge Community College.

While in Asheville, we were intrigued by the large number of schools struggling to come up with just the right combination of content and courses that would sustain their institution's view of a liberal education. Partially in response to this observation, and partially due to the fact that community colleges in Virginia inherit a fairly rigid structure of general education from the VCCS, we gained what we thought was a unique insight: Perhaps the content and structure of

general education programs don't matter as much as the manner that students are taught to reflect on both the purpose of that program and on the inter-relationships across academic disciplines.

While reflecting on this insight we also discovered at the Asheville Institute the concept of learning communities that have been established at various colleges throughout the country. Learning communities are characterized by the intentional assembly of a small group of students, bound by a common core of courses, a dedication to learning, and by a commitment to be engaged with others in the learning process. We then began to think about the Wilson Scholars Program in terms of establishing a learning community based on the educational ideals of President Wilson.

Next, we selected from the college's Associate in Arts & Sciences degree program, a common core of courses that participants would take together. We added a seminar course each semester of the two-year program, designed a service-learning component in cooperation with the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace, and established a capstone experience, which will include a field study experience in France, where Wilson signed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Currently, we are in the preliminary stages of selecting participants for the program.

If the Wilson Scholar's program is to be established in part to develop the reflective thinking skills of student participants, then the concept of contextual support, or the prompting of the skill of reflective judgment, must be present in the design of activities associated with the program. Kitchener and King (1994) present several suggestions to help educators promote reflective judgment in higher education (Evans, et al, 1998). Although eleven suggestions are presented, six will be discussed here in relationship to the Wilson Scholars Program. In particular, a discussion of how Blue Ridge Community College educators might encourage

reflective thinking in Wilson Scholars by using Wilsonian insights into the educational process, and by discussing ill-structured problems faced by President Wilson, is presented.

Employing the Philosophies and Experiences of Wilson to Create Contextual Support

King (1992) reminds us that many factors influence the development of reflective judgment in college students. She asserts that colleges have a particular obligation to teach students the "habits of the mind" associated with reflective thinking. That responsibility occurs, according to King, against a backdrop of an intellectual community on campus that pervades a wide range of interactions and environments.

The establishment of an intellectual community does not happen randomly. It involves a shared vision for the purpose of education and a commitment to a value structure that affirms every individual's unique contribution to that purpose. Some of the suggestions advanced by Kitchener and King (1994) for the development of such an intellectual community on campus are listed below. Following each proposition, examples of how Wilson's writings and experiences might be employed in the Wilson Scholars Program to advance each suggestion, is expressed.

1. Familiarize students with ill-structured problems within your own discipline or areas of expertise *(p.233).* During the first year of the Wilson Scholars program, we propose that all participants will enroll in the same sections of College Composition I and II and United States History I and II. Additionally, students will enroll in a student development leadership seminar their first semester, and a humanities seminar during their second semester or enrollment. In the history and English curriculum, instructors might employ historical decisions faced by Wilson and challenge students to reflect in writing on the various perspectives that contributed to the final outcome of his decision. Such an effort might be structured similar to Kroll's (1992) assignment concerning the Vietnam War. One such historical incident that would be fruitful for

reflective inquiry might be Wilson's refusal to compromise his own opinion on the establishment of the League of Nations (Auchincloss, 2000; Heckscher, 1991). These or similar exercises in the academic classes might be augmented by a discussion in the student development leadership class that asks students to justify their opinion regarding whether or not Wilson's stance demonstrated leadership qualities.

2. Create multiple opportunities for students to examine different points of view on a topic reflectively *(p. 237).* In light of this suggestion, Kitchener and King (1994) caution educators to be ever mindful of the individual's developmental readiness for growth in regards to cognitive self-awareness. In this regard, they advocate the appropriate mix of challenge and support, and an active teaching pedagogy that promotes student and faculty engagement in the educational process. One creative method of engaging students in taking multiple points of view might be to have them examine a few of the controversies Wilson faced as President of Princeton University. For example, during his tenure at Princeton he was engaged in a very public battle with the graduate dean Andrew West, who wanted to build a graduate campus removed from the grounds of the undergraduate quad. Wilson argued that the graduate school ought to be brought symbolically and really into the life of the campus. Having established the country's first preceptor mentoring system for undergraduates, Wilson clearly viewed learning as a process of interaction between those with experience with education and those without such experience (Auchincloss, 2000; Heckscher, 1991).

Instructors might also encourage reflective thinking by engaging groups of students in a mock debate, having one team take the viewpoint of West and the other group side with Wilson. Encouraging students to research original writings of both men, they could be asked to defend their team's perspective with any opinion they could defend with factual evidence from the

research. (For example, why did alumni support one side or the other? What were faculty arguments for or against the plan? Did monetary issues play a role in the conflict?)

3. Create opportunities and provide encouragement for students to make judgments and to explain what they believe. (p. 238). One of our greatest hopes for the Wilson Scholars program is that the service learning projects will engage students in a meaningful exchange with the community in our service region. Our goal is to employ the weekly student development seminar class to promote discussions that link leadership, civic awareness, personal responsibility and the curriculum. Many of the traditional age students who attend Blue Ridge Community College have limited experiences outside of working and attending school. We are working with the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace to design an educational experience within the context of service learning. Then, we can use Wilson's ideas of service and leadership to have students reflect on and justify issues they become exposed to while working on their service projects. Whether their project involves working for children in a city Boys & Girls club, answering phones at a county government building, or helping tourists at the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace, students will engage in experiences that will change their perspective. The key to developing reflective judgment based on these experiences is providing the opportunity for students to discuss, write about, or quietly consider the relationship between these experiences and what they are learning in the classroom. To optimize those opportunities, Wilson Scholars Program administrators will need to work very closely together to build the supportive context of an intellectual community. Interestingly enough, Kitchener and King (1994) cite a quote from Woodrow Wilson that underscores our objective in this regard:

> the real intellectual life of a body of undergraduates, if there be any, manifests itself not in the classroom, but in what they do and talk of and set before themselves as their

favorite objects between classes and lectures (cited on page 239 and attributed to Bowen, 1977, p 33).

4. Informally assess students' assumptions about knowledge and how beliefs should be justified (p. 240). Kitchener and King (1994, page 240) cite a creative exercise for employing this technique in a classroom setting. They suggest drawing a continuum on the board with "fact" on one end and "theory" on the other. The instructor then provides students with a list of statements and asks them to place those statements along the continuum. The researchers then advocate following this exercise with reflective questions such as "How do you know which is fact and which is theory?" One method for implementing this exercise might be to employ quotations from the writings of Wilson about the educational process as the exercise statements rated along the line. Examples of such statements you might ask students to place along the continuum include:

- "The American college must become saturated in the same sympathies as the common people (Fried, 1965, p. 97).
- "A league of free nations had become a practical necessity" (Fried, 1965, p.393).
- "The American college has played a unique part in American life" (Baker & Dodd, 1925, p 102).
- "What we should seek to impart in our colleges, therefore, is not so much learning as the spirit of learning" (Baker & Dodd, 1925, p110).

Kitchener and King (1994) also cite Kroll's (1992) work as a more focused approach to this exercise. They also provide examples of the types of questions a career counselor might ask to elicit the level of reflective judgment that the student is operating from. All of these examples

would be useful in providing the contextual support for participants in the Wilson Scholars Program.

5. Be cognizant of which skills are required for selected activities or assignments (p. 248). Although not directly related to Wilson's perspectives about education or the ill-structured problems he faced as President, this suggestion is included to point out important program structural concerns. We realize that the Wilson Scholar's Program will need to intentionally build in structural support that will allow us to individualize our responsiveness to participants. In particular, the resource exhibits developed for educators and presented in tables 9.1 through 9.5 of the Kitchener and King (1994) book will be very useful in assisting program administrators in developing program activities. Finally, suggestions in the book regarding small class sizes, articulating and emphasizing educational goals, and staying attuned to each student's engagement in the learning process will assist us as we design the details of the program.

Assessment of Reflective Judgment in an Enhanced Program of General Education

Research on the reflective judgment model has been conducted with thousands of individuals using a structured interview process called the Reflective Judgment Interview (Kitchener & King, 1994; Kitchener, et al, 1993; Kitchener, et al, 1989). However, since the interview requires a great deal of time as well as trained and certified administrators, it's utility as a measure of reflective judgment is limited. A decade ago, Kitchener (1994) worked to develop a paper and pencil appraisal for reflective judgment called the Reflective Thinking Appraisal. Unfortunately, the researchers have abandoned that measure because of "several difficulties that we had with the reliability of the Reflective Thinking Appraisal" (Karen Kitchener, personal communication, April 28, 2001). In place of the RTA, the researchers are currently working on an instrument called the RCI, Reasoning about Controversial Issues Test.

The researchers report that initial reliability and validity data about the RCI is in press. (Karen Kitchener, personal communication, April 28, 2001; Pat King, personal communication, April 28, 2001).

Originally, I had hoped that we could assess reflective thinking for each participant in the Wilson Scholars Program. If the initial work on the RCI proved to be a reliable and valid measure of reflective thinking in individual, then administering the instrument to the twenty or so students in the Wilson Scholars Program at the start of their first year, at the start of their second year, and at the end of their second year would be desirable. Ideally, we would also be able to randomly select an equal number of transfer students who are not participants in the Wilson Scholars Program and measure their progress across the stages of the reflective judgment model. Obviously, we would hypothesize that the contextual support of the Wilson Scholars Program would lead to comparatively higher scores on the RCI for participants versus non-participants.

Unfortunately, the RCI does not appear to be a valid measure of reflective thinking for individuals. In a personal communication by e-mail with Dr. Phil Wood, one of the principle co-developers of the RCI, he explains:

> As you've probably already seen, the instrument's internal consistency is not great for some of the scoring procedures. I've also cautioned many people that a small sample size is unlikely to yield useful data – generally speaking I think that samples under 100 and/or which examine only on educational level are probably not well advised (Personal communication, May 3, 2001).

As a result of the difficulty with the RTA and the RCI, the only reliable and valid measure of reflective judgment in individuals at this time appears to be appears to be the

reflective judgment interview. Therefore, assessment of the growth in reflective judgment in Wilson Scholars will prove formidable as a practical matter. However, administration of the reflective judgment interview with trained administers at the time periods indicated above would be the most desirable assessment measure if practicality were not a concern. No other measure appears to adequately assess the construct of reflective judgment, as Kitchener & King (1994) point out that most related measures of critical thinking do not correlate well with the RCI and appear to measure a different construct than reflective thinking. Most of these measures appear to assess necessary, but not sufficient, elements of critical thinking in relation to reflective thinking. In other words, reflective thinking appears to be a more complex construct than logical reasoning, verbal reasoning, intelligence, or formal operations alone. Furthermore, the reasoning skills required to solve well-structured problems may be a pre-requisite to the more complex skills needed to wrestle with ill-structured ones (Kitchener & King, 1994, p. 202).

In addition to the RJI, I would be interested in administering the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to determine whether the thinking-feeling scale would have any correlation with the development of reflective judgment. In examining the relationship between the two scales I might hypothesize the students higher in the thinking scale of the MBTI (focus on objectivity while making decisions) would tend to stay in the lower levels of reflective judgment longer. Conversely people with the feeling orientation (focus on subjectivity while making decisions) may be more adept at taking the perspective of another and therefore exposed to more practice in the middle stages of reflective judgment. Using the same design suggested above, it would be interesting to examine what impact the Wilson Scholars Program might have on the interaction of reflective thinking and the thinking-feeling scale of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

Conclusion

The reflective judgment model provides an excellent framework for educators who desire to develop complex cognitive reasoning as an outcome of general education. The model allows both student development personnel and faculty to work collaboratively on the design of a program to enhance the educational experiences of students. One example of such a program, the Wilson Scholars Program at Blue Ridge Community College, could serve as a national model for community college general education improvement. Although a great deal more planning must be considered prior to the program's implementation, the reflective judgment model can serve as an excellent resource while considering the design and participant characteristics. Through planned collaboration with the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace in Staunton Virginia, the College could provide selected students with a learning community experience designed to improve their ability to examine the cognitive assumptions they make when faced with ill-structured problems. Assessment of such a program would contribute greatly to the paucity of the present literature about general education outcomes at community colleges.

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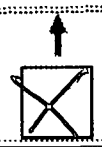	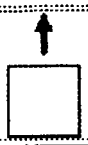	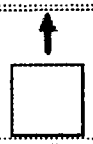
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Signature: John A Downey	Printed Name/Position/Title: John A. Downey, Dean of Health and Human Services	
Organization/Address: Blue Ridge Community College Post Office Box 80 Weyers Cave, VA 24486	Telephone: (540) 453-2224	Fax: (540) 234-9598
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