WISDOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

In higher education, much attention is being directed at the quality of the student experience. It is up to educators to begin to answer the sophisticated questions about the quality of undergraduate education, conceptualized in its broadest form by the institutions' primary stakeholders. In this current context, the time is nigh for career services to maximize its contribution to the creation of powerful learning environments and take a greater role in shaping this discussion. This guiding model will benefit students, employers, and institutions alike.

Wisdom is a construct of six interacting dimensions: 1) self-knowledge, 2) understanding of others, 3) judgment, 4) life knowledge, 5) life skills, 6) willingness to learn. Wisdom develops when students go through the core "learning-from-life" process articulated into reflection, integration, and application.

The conditions that facilitate the development of wisdom by directly or indirectly stimulating the learning-from-life process are: students' orientation to learning, experiences, interactions with others, and the institutional environment. Depending on how deeply and often students are stimulated to go through the learning-from-life process, they will experience growth in one or more of the six dimensions of wisdom.

Keywords: higher education, Wisdom, learning-from-life, orientation to learning.

1 INTRODUCION

The model presented here provides a context for doing so. It is intended to provide educators with a framework for considering how to more purposefully influence the integrative nature of the educational experience to enhance the development of wisdom.

However, given that campuses are still characterized by fragmentation and divisions, the only seamless part of the campus may be the students themselves. Because there are few formal mechanisms to help students continually integrate and make meaning of their aggregate experiences, higher education planning for a more seamless environment would benefit from an understanding of how students transform the multiple inputs from college into meaningful thought and action.

Colleges and universities are already doing many things that facilitate learning, but what generally is missing is a way to make the seemingly disparate connections more visible and intentional for students. The wisdom development model presented here can be a useful tool for guiding educators when framing their work, formulating their policies and programs, and enriching their individual interactions with students to intentionally stimulate the learning-from-life process. The following recommendations illustrate how the wisdom model, and the salient professional literature that reinforces its design, can help educators seeking to improve the quality of the collegiate environment for students.

In an increased effort to understand the complex, integrated nature of the collegiate learning experience, education researchers have sought to understand which learning outcomes can be attributed to various elements of the college environment or experience. Yet, there is little understanding of how students put it all together. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore: (a) the development of wisdom, a construct that encompasses and connects a number of learning outcomes, and represents the sum total of the integrative experiences individuals have as they mature; (b) how wisdom develops; and, (c) how college contributes to this process.

This article provides a theoretical framework and model that explores: wisdom, a multidimensional construct that connects a number of desired learning outcomes; how wisdom develops; and, how college contributes to this process.

Although there is much discussion about "what" students learn, and to a lesser extent "where," educators still don't know how students integrate all the lessons they have learned in and out of class and on and off campus and make meaning from those experiences. What is known is that students

learn from many places, from the classroom to the sports field, through part-time jobs and late night conversations. But how do all of these seemingly disparate experiences come together? Is there a way to address learning as the holistic phenomenon that it is, without dividing it into discrete variables? Educators need to conceptualize a college education as a sum that is greater than its individual parts, to understand how this process occurs, and to determine what they can do about it.

Wisdom seemed to be greater than the sum of the parts, growing out of an amalgamation of personal qualities, knowledge, skills, and insights put to use for a larger purpose. Additionally the professional and research literature primarily addresses the "what" and "where" of learning, but the "how" is largely ignored. No heuristic model was found to bring these areas together and explain the relationship and interplay between them, and detail how students reflect and integrate the lessons they learn, in and out of class, on and off campus, and apply them to their lives. Thus, this study was focused on ways that various aspects of the campus environment facilitates the process of integration leading to the development of wisdom.

The institutional environment provides a setting where orientation to learning, experiences, and interactions with others influence the learning-from-life process, and the development of wisdom. As learning-from-life is influenced, there is subsequent impact on one or more of the six dimensions of wisdom (self-knowledge, understanding of others, judgment, life knowledge, life skills, and a willingness to learn), which in turn changes a student's orientation to learning for a future experience or interaction with others.

The arrows indicate that individuals can have interactions with others and/or participate in experiences that do not have an impact upon the learning-from-life process. Thus, a student's orientation to learning will not have been altered in any way, and he or she will remain in the exact same spot when another situation or inter- action is encountered. The frequency or ease with which the learning-from-life process is influenced varies for each person, which accounts for why some individuals seem to get more out of particular experiences or situations than others.

The dotted lines around the orientation to learning, experiences, interactions with others, learning-from-life and wisdom portions of the model indicate the permeable nature of each element of the college experience.

The college environment itself provides one context where wisdom may be facilitated, but the model accommodates the impact of the non-college-related environment and that these experiences along with college-related experiences interact with each other to further enrich the learning experience.

The model represents one slice of an ongoing process that is incremental and cumulative, and the individual dimensions of wisdom can develop at different levels at varying speeds. The learning-from-life process is like walking up a spiral staircase, both repetitive and progressive, allowing one to look down and see where one has been while continuing movement in light of what has gone before.

2 MODEL OF WISDOM DEVELOPMENT

This study is based on Brown's [1] Model of Wisdom Development, a framework that describes wisdom, how wisdom develops, and the conditions that facilitate the development of wisdom. While originally conceptualized within the realm of education, the model can be extrapolated to individuals both inside and outside of traditional educational systems. In Brown's model [2], wisdom is comprised of six interrelated factors or dimensions: self-knowledge, understanding of others, judgment, life knowledge, life skills, and willingness to learn:

1. *Self-Knowledge*. Self-Knowledge describes how well a person knows his or her own interests, strengths, weaknesses, and values. Self-Knowledge is characterized by personal authenticity and genuineness kept constant in a variety of contexts, and an internal locus of success/fulfillment/satisfaction in regards to their relationships and goals. Self-knowledge is comprised of three main components: a conscious understanding of one's own values, talents, multiple identities, interests, sense of purpose, morals and ethics; the development and reliance on an internal locus of success and the ability to maintain a personal authenticity in a variety of contexts; and personal confidence and self- efficacy. Self-knowledge can pertain to specific professional, physical, political, or spiritual matters, or multiple areas. Self- knowledge embodies the adage, "to thine own self be true."

2. *Understanding of Others.* Understanding of Others describes a person's deep understanding of a wide variety of people in varying contexts, a genuine interest in learning about others (attentiveness, empathy), the capability of engaging them (various approaches), a willingness to help them, and

possession of advanced communication skills that enable one to articulate thoughts in a way meaningful to another person. Understanding of others refers to a genuine interest in learning about others in varying contexts at individual, social, cultural, and systemic levels; a capacity to engage with them; and a willingness to use one's spheres of influence for the common good. Advanced verbal and nonverbal communication skills enable establishing and managing competing priorities, and overcoming barriers.

3. *Judgment* refers to the knowledge that there are different ways of looking at an issue when making key decisions, and that one must take into account a variety of viewpoints, the past, and the present context, as well as one's own background influences. Judgment is characterized by acuteness of perception and discernment.

4. *Life Knowledge* includes recognition of the interconnectedness between people and the natural world, knowledge and ideas, and the ability to look at the deeper meanings and questions in life. Life Knowledge is characterized by a capacity to grasp the central issue, find one's way in a time of darkness, and understand the realities and uncertainties of life, over the life span.

5. *Life Skills* includes the ability to manage one's daily multiple roles and responsibilities effectively. Life Skills is practical competence, an ability to understand systems and anticipate problems, with tools and strategies for dealing with multiple contexts in life. Willingness to Learn describes a basic humility in what one knows and continual interest in learning about the world.

6. *Willingness to Learn*. Willingness to learn is characterized by a confidence in what knowledge a person has, the humility to believe that he or she simply cannot ever know everything, an openness to and interest in learning more, and a willingness to stumble in the pursuit of more knowledge.

3 HOW WISDOM DEVELOPS: LEARNING FROM LIFE

For individuals to develop wisdom, they must go through the process of learning- from-life. Wisdom develops when people go through the key "learning from-life" process, where they reflect, integrate, and apply the lessons that they have learned, in and out of class, on and off campus, to their lives. The three conditions that directly facilitate the development of wisdom are a person's orientation to learning, experiences, and interactions with others. These conditions all take place in a particular environment, with a context that influences a person's orientation to learning and development. This context furnishes experiences, as do the people within that setting.

Learning-from-life is comprised of reflection and integration and application—transforming one's experiences into one or more of the six dimensions of wisdom discussed above, through taking in, processing, and using information.

Reflection and Integration. Reflection and integration are comprised of taking in and processing information. In a loose series of conscious or unconscious actions (e.g., writing, talking, or thinking), students process information gained from experiences and interactions and transform them into something more meaningful: analyzing (separating the information into parts, then considering the information in new ways); connecting (between new information and existing areas in one's life); contextualizing (associating the similarities and dissimilarities between the new information and previous knowledge); and synthesizing (bringing the new information into the existing knowledge, creating a new whole).

Application. Once students have engaged the reflection and integration phase of obtaining and processing information, application can occur. Application in this context refers to any changes in a student's attitudes, values, awareness, and/or behaviors. Increased wisdom results as this process evolves—if an individual does not engage in application there is no subsequent growth or change. Application might entail changing an opinion, considering options, making a judgment, formulating a plan, and/ or implementing a decision. At certain junctures, students may experience a cross- roads, representing a time when current ways of doing things do not work. The wisdom to apply lessons learned inspires some students to press on and change their way of thinking, while others may retreat.

4 CONDITIONS THAT FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF WISDOM

Four conditions directly or indirectly impact the core learning-from-life process to the development of wisdom: orientation to learning, experiences, interactions with others, and the environment.

a) *Orientation to Learning.* The first condition, orientation to learning, refers to the attitudes,

expectations, personal biographies, and motivations individuals bring to their interactions with people and situations. Orientation to Learning refers to level of engagement and potential for gaining knowledge when one interfaces with activities and people. This can include a general orientation to life, or vary by specific areas or situations, in addition to the person's past as it comes to bear on any new interactions. A person's previous experiences affect not only the person's approach to a situation, but also what he or she expects to get out of it, and how predisposed an individual is to maximize the whole experience. At the broadest level, there is a general orientation to life that includes the amount of thought an individual gives to his or her personal future, degree of optimism, amount of perseverance, and ability to capitalize on the rich array of experiences life affords them.

b) *Experiences.* The second condition, experiences, refers to any activity or situation encountered, including the formal and structured (e.g., classes, internships, work), informal (e.g., recreation, organizations, travel), and even the unplanned (e.g., social interactions, living situations). Students participate in a variety of experiences, activities or involvements, during different points in their college career, with varying frequencies and durations. However, the depth of involvement varies. Experiences may include a critical incident, book, or decision regarding one's relationships or career. Courses can be powerful facilitators of the development of wisdom, depending on how the course connects with various aspects of the student's life in meaningful ways. Experiences also vary in terms of the degree in which they provided a doorway to other types of experiences or opportunities to learn from life. The resulting degree of impact can be influenced by the degree of congruency between a student's core values and the activity and the perceived relevance to the student's life.

Students bring with them a variety of feelings and attitudes regarding college including previous experiences, varying levels of confidence and commitment to college, and how much energy they are willing to invest in their college education. For example, in a single lecture hall one student can be sitting in the front row, having read all of the assigned readings, while another student is in the back passing notes or glancing at a newspaper. Two students in the same time and place, but the orientation of each student will affect how much he or she will get out of the same situation. Experiences include any activity, structured and unstructured. Interactions with Others includes all general experiences with others, experiences with people different from oneself, and in particular relationships such as friendships, family, and experiences with influential people. Environment refers to general settings, and provides the context where one's orientation to learning, variety of experiences, and interactions with people interact in various combinations to produce wisdom.

c) *Interactions With Others.* The third condition, interactions with others, refers to how students encounter individuals similar and different from themselves in a variety of contexts, including their courses, co- curricular activities, and living situations. Interactions can vary in terms of quantity and quality. Students may move in one primary social circle or many, and interactions with others give them exposure to a variety of opinions, situations, perspectives, priorities, interests, and behaviors. Particular individuals can have a specific, significant impact on a student's development of wisdom.

d) *Environment.* The fourth condition, institutional environment, incorporates the overall setting and provides the context where students' orientation to learning, variety of experiences, and interactions with people come together in various combinations to produce wisdom. The unique ethos of the college environment purposefully influences each of these other conditions because its core function is to advance learning, as opposed to other settings where learning can occur but is not the primary objective. In the collegiate environment, the people, policies, and resources that shape that institutional setting are directly and indirectly focused on the achievement of the student. The college environment provides numerous opportunities for formal, informal, and unplanned experiences and also provides exposure and interaction with a large number and variety of people as well as sub communities; all of which are, depending upon one's specific orientation to learning, important to facilitating the learning-from-life process associated with the development of wisdom.

5 THE MEASUREMENT OF WISDOM

Brown and Greene [3] have produced a measure of wisdom based on Brown's Model of Wisdom Development. An initial study Brown & Greene demonstrated the reliability and construct validity of scores from the Wisdom Development Scale (WDS) with a collegiate sample, but cross validation of those findings with other samples, as well as an examination of other types of validity, such as predictive and criterion-based studies, are needed. A rigorously tested, effective measure of wisdom could be used to understand the development of the construct over time as well as how it can be influenced through various types of interventions and experiences. This understanding be used to help

justify allocating resources toward the facilitation of wisdom development and allow stakeholders to assess the influence of those interventions and experiences upon cognitive, affective, social, and moral growth.

If wisdom were equivalent to expert knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life that is transmitted from one generation to the next through written texts and proverbs as a property of the collective [4, 5], it would make sense to give people hypothetical life planning, life review, or life management problems to find out how much of this expert knowl- edge they have learned and can reproduce. However, if wisdom is considered to be a property of the individual, it can only be measured by assessing how wise a per- son is, as I do in my empirical wisdom research [6,7,8], and not by determining how much a person knows. Moreover, the maximum-performance approach of hypothetical scenarios is not appropriate in the case of wisdom be- cause, unlike abstract intelligence, the concrete expression of wisdom is context- dependent, as Sternberg [9] has emphasized. This means that wise advice al- ways depends on the concrete situation and on the specific people involved in the problem. Sternberg suggests in his commentary that 'hypothetical scenarios can be useful, because sometimes one is called upon to judge wisely in giving advice to others on problems they face.' Yet, wise advice to others usually is not given on the basis of general hypothetical scenarios. On the contrary, the more the advice-giver knows about the situation and the people involved, the more specific and effective the advice can be. In fact, as I mention in the article, respondents might be asked about their own or a family member's/friend's life problem that they recently en- countered and what they did to solve the problem to assess their level of wisdom. Giving wise advice to a family member or friend could count as one of the indicators of wisdom.

In sum, rather than measuring wisdom as an expert knowledge system that exists independently of people and can be more or less successfully accessed by individuals, I measure wisdom by how close people come to the theoretically con- structed ideal type of a wise person.

Taranto [10] wrote fifteen years earlier that '... wisdom as a concept remains wonderful and wondrous but not very clear.' This statement is still true for the overall field of wisdom research, and I am convinced that the discussions about the nature and measurement of wisdom will continue into the future. As Sternberg states, wisdom is an important area of study, and I hope that the present dialogue might intrigue other researchers to enter this exciting field.

Some researchers like Berlin Wisdom Paradigm [11] believe that adopting another ways of measuring (such as performance based measures of wisdom or interviews) would cause to different conclusions. Moreover the face and content validity of such scale items may pose a problem for valid measurement. Self-report measures are always influenced both by intentional positive self-presentation and by inaccuracy of people's self-judgments.

6 THREE-DIMENSIONAL WISDOM SCALE (3D-WS)

Wisdom was operationalized and measured as a latent variable with cognitive, reflective, and affective effect indicators. Finally the 3D-WS consisted of 14 items for the cognitive, 12 for the reflective, and 13 for the affective component of wisdom was as a reliable and valid instrument presented [8].

The 3D-WS measure has 3 dimensions: consisting of the cognitive, reflective, and affective. The 14 items of the cognitive dimension were all worded negatively, measuring an inability or unwillingness to understand a situation or phenomenon thoroughly, a tendency to see the world as either black or white, an unawareness of ambiguity and uncertainty in life, and an inability to make important decisions despite life's unpredictability and uncertainties. The 12 items of the reflective wisdom dimension assessed the ability and willingness to look at phenomena and events from different perspectives and the absence of subjectivity and projections. The 13 items of the affective wisdom dimension gauged the presence of positive, caring, and nurturing emotions and behavior including the motivation to foster the well-being of others, and the absence of indifference or negative emotions and behavior toward others. All items were scored on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

The cognitive component is assessed by items that measure an understanding of life or the desire to know the truth. This includes knowledge of the paradoxical (i.e., positive and negative) aspects of human nature, tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, and the ability to make important decisions despite life's unpredictability and uncertainties.

The reflective component measures the ability to look at phenomena and events from different

perspectives and to avoid subjectivity and projections. The affective element captures the presence of positive emotions and behavior toward other beings, such as feelings and acts of sympathy and compassion, and the absence of indifferent or negative emotions and behaviors toward others.

The cognitive dimension of wisdom measures individuals' ability to comprehend the deeper meaning of life events [8]. The items measure perspective-taking skills. The late adolescents have already developed cognitive abilities such as logical reasoning as well as factual and practical knowledge about how things work in life.

According to Ardelt, the reflective dimension of wisdom is the essential element among three dimensions, because it supports the other two dimensions. In other words she believes that the reflective dimension is a prerequisite for the development of the cognitive dimension of wisdom. A deeper understanding of life and its relationship with human nature comes with the eternal endeavor for self-awareness, self-insight, and metacognition. Consequently the items for the reflective component should measure the degree to which people try to overcome subjectivity and projections by looking at phenomena and events from different perspectives and how much they avoid blaming other people or circumstances for their present situation. We thought that the low scores of both the youngest and oldest groups of our study could be interpreted by the items. As it was noted by Ardelt most of the questions refer to the ability to avoid blaming people or circumstances for present situation. Adolescents in this age think of themselves as the wisest who knows what to do and what is the best. Actually they try to rebuild the world according to their own ideas, then in a case of any problem with them they do not suppose themselves as responsible, but the world goes against them. This could also mean that may be adolescents in our study did not have the metacognitive ability to reflect on their experiences.

All items were assessed using one of two 5- point scales, ranging either from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) or from 1 (definitely true of myself) to 5 (not true of myself).

7 PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study comprised 456 students from high schools and universities in Palermo (Italy). There were 179 male (39%) and 277 female (61%). Their age ranged from 15 to 24 years, with a mean age of 23.1. Among this sample, 120 participants are high school students (26.3%) and 336 participants are university students (73.7%). Results indicated that item parameters of half items of the 3D-WS were not estimated very well in young participants. In the end, some superior items were selected through the weighted item information along with item parameter estimations to create two shorter scale forms of the 3D-WS, in order to benefit further research to the young population.

8 THREE SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Participants (20 recent graduates) were also asked to reflect on the salient aspects of their undergraduate college experiences in three semi structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed 3 times using an in depth interview format that employed a flexible outline of topics and questions. The focus of the first interview was to set a broad context for the study and revolved around the following questions:

1. What were some experiences (e.g., courses, people, programs, policies) which left the strongest impression on you? (Positive? Negative?)

2. In what ways are you different/same now from when you entered college?

3. What was your motivation for attending college? Taking specific courses?

The second round of interviews stimulated thinking around the concrete details associated with particular experiences and the integration and application of knowledge. Participants were also asked to describe how a difficult life problem provided them an opportunity to draw on what they had learned from college to solve it. The third interview focused on exploring wisdom:

1. Describe someone you believe is wise.

2. Given that definition, in what ways are you wiser because of college?

3. How did college facilitate this wisdom development?

In this third interview, redundancy in terms of themes and categories were reached.

9 DISCUSSION

We examined the developmental trajectory of self-reported wisdom using 3D-WS in Five different age groups. The findings of this study suggested that the reflective and affective dimensions of wisdom showed significant age differences, but the cognitive dimension of wisdom in these age groups did not show an age effect. Therefore the results of this study suggested that there is a need to distinguish specific dimensions of wisdom when explaining age effects, rather than making definite statements that wisdom develops with age or not.

In terms of affective dimension of self-reported wisdom all age groups differed significantly with the oldest group individuals who scored the least. Insignificant age differences of the cognitive dimension of wisdom in the age groups, could mean that these age groups scored similarly on the cognitive dimension of wisdom. The interesting point was the highest score of group 1 (15-17 year-olds) in cognitive dimension. But surprisingly, this study showed that older individuals' cognitive dimension of wisdom was not different from that of younger individuals' cognitive abilities. This study found that there is no age contribution to the cognitive dimension of wisdom but a significant age contribution to the reflective and affective ones.

This study provides support for using the WDS as a measure of integrative, holistic learning. The WDS can help researchers do a number of things. First, it can help identify whether individuals are developing wisdom, and identify what sorts of intrapersonal factors and experiences affect it. Potential influences include such things as age, gender, and socioeconomic background. The WDS may assist in identifying what sorts of experiences seem to be more likely to promote the development of wisdom, in all aspects of human activity. These experiences can include work, school, relationships, community engagement, and religious and spiritual involvements. Ideally, this might inform societal and educational leaders, as well as others interested in human development, in developing more integrative and holistic learning experiences through their policies and programs, and provide greater capacity to assess them more pointedly. Such data may help substantiate decisions to allocate resources in our current empirically based decision-making environment.

Results indicate that the 3D-WS can be considered a reliable and valid instrument and a promising measure of the latent variable wisdom in large, standardized surveys of older populations.

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