Framework Essay

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Adult Development

There is a spectrum of areas in which adults develop throughout the course of their lives: physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, etc. Development is fluid and is the result of complex interactions a person has in their everyday life. I believe a person's development in those areas is greatly impacted by their sense of self. A person's "self" "…refers to all the knowledge, feelings, and attitudes we have about ourselves as unique, functioning individuals" (Lemme, 2006, p. 79). How a person develops physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially can be first viewed through their lens of self. Within the realm of self, we can see the impact a person's self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy have on their responses to everyday experiences. Self-efficacy specifically, has an impact on how individuals view their decisions, life experiences, life crisis, and goals (Turner, Goodin, & Lokey, 2012). As Lemme (2006) states, "…the self influences behavior, intentions, aspirations in all the important aspects of a person's life" (p. 81). Within that quote, I think it would be appropriate to assume it also influences their development. Viewing a person's development through their lens of self is a great way to see how, where, and why they are developing in certain areas.

Within the realm of cognitive development, there is a *decrementalist view* and a *continued potential view* of cognitive development in adulthood. The continued potential view is the one I favor. This view promotes the idea that adults can continue to develop new cognitive abilities throughout their lifespan. As an educator, I think promoting this type of perspective, perpetuates the good results of this perspective in older adults. Within the realm of social development, Kahn and Antonucci's convoy model helps one see the developmental patterns of adults and how those relationships impact health, life satisfaction, and well-being (Antonucci, Ajrouch & Birditt, 2014). The work done by Kahn and Antonucci reiterates the need for quality relationships over

quantity of relationships. Quality relationships have more impact on mortality and physical and mental health than does a quantity of relationships. Positive developmental correlations can be seen in those with these types of quality relationships (Antonucci, Ajrouch & Birditt, 2014).

Mechanistic models of development are certainly the most compelling and useful to me as an educator. Lemme (2006) states, "Rather each of us is unique, because our life experiences are unique" (p.39). Every student I work with, comes into my office with very different life experiences; unique perspectives on life, education, and success; and goals. When I am able to understand the context in which they live, have lived, and potentially will live, I am able to better help the students I meet with. Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory portrays each individual as a "highly complex system in which biological, cognitive, emotional, and social elements are powerfully entertwined" (Lemme, 2006, p. 39). This theory allows me to rightly view the environmental factors that affect both the traditional and non-traditional students I meet with. Each traditional and non-traditional students' microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem are unique to them. The systems contain people, activities, roles, relationships, careers, work environments, stressful situations, beliefs, values, etc. I find myself critically analyzing students' lives in congruence to the items in their systems. What is contained in each of those systems has an effect on their goals and views on education. So, when I am working with students I try to figure out how those relationships, environmental factors, beliefs, etc., play a part in them furthering their education and being successful in the *now* and in the *future*.

Adult Learning

Learning can take place in a variety of environments- formal settings, nonformal settings, and informal or self-directed contexts (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). I see learning and development going hand in hand as I can see learning take place in student's lives

and see the results of their learning. Within my own education practice, I attempt to encourage and foster in every student a desire to be a lifespan or lifelong learner. Thornton (2003) states, "Life-span learning is about "learning how" to develop, sustain, and even change embedded potentials and to acquire behaviors that enhance development and optimize aging" (p. 66). I firmly believe that in order for a person to be a successful lifelong learner they have to possess some of the qualities of a self-directed learner. Garrison's Model helps me understand how learning best takes place among self-directed learners. Within this perspective, Garrison incorporates "self-management (contextual control), self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility) and motivational (entering and task) dimensions to reflect a meaningful and worthwhile approach to self-directed learning" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 114). Within these dimensions we can see how motivations, self-management, self-monitoring, and self-directed learning become inseparable parts of the learning and development process. The self-management dimension helps us see how students manage their learning goals, the self-monitoring dimension helps us identify how a student learns (meaning/making), and the motivation dimension explores a student's motivation to participate (Garrison, 1997).

Jarvis's Learning Process is a model of learning I find quite useful, because he views a person' learning from a more social context. His learning process model is based upon a person's experiences and their reactions to those experiences. Every student has a unique perspective because of their experiences; using Jarvis's theoretical model as a way to examine the ways in which a student learns is a great way to understand their perspective. The model is founded on Jarvis theorizing that "all learning begins with the five human sensations of sound, sight, smell, taste, and touch" (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 100). Once those sensations meet new experiences, learning can occur because the sensations transform "into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values

emotions, and so on" (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 100). Within my own educational role, I get to observe students encountering new experiences and watch them *learn* as they respond to those new experiences. As I am talking with students about college, giving them new information, and asking them questions they might never have thought about, I see some of them start to experience a little bit of uneasiness. As these students are receiving new information from me (uncharted territories), I see them start to process and learn from our encounter. Talking with students about their plans for the future, educational goals, personal goals, etc., I know I have made them start to think and ultimately learn. Different types of learning can occur according to Jarvis's learning process model- critical thinking, problem-solving learning, reflective learning, action learning, etc. (Merriam, et al., 2007). After a person is done working through those different types of learning, according to Jarvis's model they have changed in three ways- "internally, with regard to their beliefs about themselves or their identity; the meaning they apply to external situations or events may change; or third, the learner's level of experience may be changed by the learning experience" (Wang & King, 2009, p.46).

Being able to be an effective educator and promoter of life-long learning requires me to understand how students develop and learn best. Actively trying to apply theory, concepts, and models to my encounters with students will help me be able to better understand how they develop and learn best. In turn, not only will I be helping the students become life-long learners, but also myself in the process.

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