Student Development of Moral Reasoning, Intercultural Effectiveness, and Leadership:

Three research perspectives

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Debra Gentry – Chair
Cherry Danielson
   Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College
Marcia Baxter Magolda
   Miami University of Ohio
Nathan Lindsay
   University of Michigan
Tricia Seifert
   University of Iowa

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Research Question

What is the role of research in helping institutions understand how they are preparing students as citizens?

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• Theme: Education Research in the Public Interest
• Nussbaum (1997) *Cultivating Humanity*
• Our campuses are shaping citizens
• Do institutions know what type of citizens they shape?
• An example of how research can play a role
Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education

- Pilot phase
- Student outcomes of interest
  - Effective reasoning and problem solving
  - Inclination to inquire
  - Integration of learning
  - Well-being
  - Leadership
  - Moral character/reasoning
  - Intercultural effectiveness

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Study Overview

- Cross-sectional design
- Participating institutions
  - Four institutions
  - Differed by Carnegie classification & selectivity
- Student participants
  - Stratified random sample
  - 601 total from Fr, So, Jr, & Sr classes
  - 82% Caucasian – (over sampled minority students)
  - 66% female

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Mixed Method Data Collection

- Spring 2005
- Three research teams
- Three methods of data collection
  - Institutional context – interview/focus group data
  - Qualitative interview data
  - Quantitative survey data

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Method 1
Institutional Context

Research Question

How do institutions talk about and express value for intercultural effectiveness, leadership, and moral character as student outcomes?

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Institutional Context Methods

• Campus site visits
• Interviews & focus groups
• 160 total – faculty, staff, & students
• Collected data regarding
  – perceptions of the value of each outcome to the institution
  – perceptions of intentionality
  – descriptions of campus initiatives
  – language used to refer to the outcome

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Intercultural Effectiveness
Results

• Multiple ways value is expressed
  – Is valued across campus in similar ways
  – Mixed messages
  – Lack of follow through

• Language used/definition
  – Campus diversity
  – Openness

• Intercultural effectiveness valued as
  – a student outcome (ends)
  – an institution’s environment (means/ends)

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Leadership Results

• Multiple definitions of leadership
  – Silo-related definitions
  – Leadership as involvement
  – Grassroots occurrences

• Descriptions
  – Hierarchical model
  – Social Change Model

• Leadership is valued as
  – a student outcome (ends)
  – an environment that promotes leadership (means)
  – a strategy to increase student retention (ends)

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Moral Character Results

- Institutions judged it inappropriate to hold moral character as a valued outcome
- Instead of moral character institutions value
  - moral reasoning (ends)
  - thoughtful citizenship (ends)
- How they see it enacted
  - embedded in the environment (means)
  - occurring naturally

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This Method Offers …

Contribution

– Institutional context method elicits descriptions of campus environment, the language used to define outcomes, and statements of value.

Raises these questions

– Does the language that campuses use to define or talk about these outcomes make a difference in the way students express or exhibit these outcomes?
– Do the different ways that campuses express value for these outcomes make a difference in the way students make gains in these outcomes?

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Method 2
In-Depth Interviews

Research Question

How do students’ personal meaning-making, key educational experiences, and their interpretation of these experiences influence intercultural effectiveness, moral character, and leadership?

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In-Depth Interview Method

- Stratified (by race within class rank) random sampling of those who completed quantitative portion

- Sample:
  - 174 total participants
    - 65.5% first- and second-year students
    - 34.5% seniors
    - 64% female
    - 80% Caucasian

- Informal conversational interview

- Grounded theory approach to analysis

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• Interactions with diverse peers led to increased social/cultural awareness (e.g., understanding differences, exposure to multiple beliefs & practices, challenges stereotypes and privilege)
  – Students with minimal prior exposure to diversity were challenged but opened up to new perspectives
  – For students with substantial prior exposure to diversity, these interactions deepened their understanding of and appreciation for multiple perspectives; they critiqued lack of interaction/negative attitudes on part of campus constituents

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“Just like with the religion class and the English class and being around different kinds of people, I mean, that’s helped give me more of a worldview. I mean, you can’t just be living in your own community and just going by day to day, I think it’s just, it’s good to know things that are going on around you [laughs] and the different kinds of people there are and different perspectives. You know, you grow up and you’re thinking, ‘This is the way’ and ‘This is how I’ve always done it,’ you realize that other people have not done it that way and their way may be better, their philosophy of living might be better … I think it’s really important to be around people that are different than you because of the experiences that you learn from them and it kind of opens you up, I guess.” (senior)
“I took a ‘gender and the law’ class … we had a bunch of people of different ethnicities. Like, Black girls, and you know you talk about controversial issues, and it’s hard hearing what they have to say. And actually questioning, ‘Am I racist?’ Because ignorance is racist, like subconsciously. I mean, I don’t think so at all, but maybe by my action, I don’t know, you know?” (first-year student)
“I guess just talking a lot, like a kid down the hall is from Taiwan … we just talk about it. There’s a girl from Montana who grew up raising cattle and this is just so big for her, too. Or like in dance troupe we have a lot of Black students. I did a workshop with them. Usually you’d be at a place, like ‘Oh there’s the white girl trying to do hip hop’ but it was comfortable, you know, like ‘I’m dancing too.’ And they were really receptive and really nice about it. I think it’s been healthy, definitely, because what can you do? Just keep ignoring it? Or just feel awkward for a little bit and then get over it?” (first-year student)
Moral Character

• Pressure to succeed socially and academically challenged moral character
• Students responded by
  – Avoiding pressure by maintaining morals from upbringing
  – Applying morals selectively or choosing morals to meet one’s own needs
  – Struggling between doing what one wants and what is right
  – Acting on own belief system; not judging others for different belief systems

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“[Our teacher’s] tests are really easy because she knows that we really don’t need to know everything. And we should get an A because she feels like we actually learn something, whatever. Another lady taught the nutrition part of the class – she wrote the test. Well, this lady actually tried to find out what we learn, which is not that much. And so everybody sitting there is like “oh my gosh, this test is so hard” and there’s two girls behind me and I know them, they live in my dorm. They’re whispering ‘What’s the answer to that?’ ‘d’ ‘okay.’ So this is like the hardest test we’ve taken so far and they’re cheating. And I’m like, okay, if everybody is going to do bad, I don’t want you to do well so that she’ll throw out a whole lot of questions and we can do good. Instead of you doing really well and then them [instructors] thinking, ‘Why didn’t everybody else do as well as they did?’ … I don’t want to turn them in but I have to, I really felt bad about it because there’s no way. So I told [the instructor]. While I understand that [they] want to do well, if everybody is going to do bad, [they’re] going to be fine. Cuz they are not going to fail the whole class. So that was really hard for me, very very hard.” (first-year student)
Leadership experiences affected how students viewed themselves, their relationship with others, and leadership perspectives

- Learned that leadership is not titles and control
- Learned that leadership can be implicit (team player, role model)
- Learned to trust myself
- Learned to work with others; responsibility to a greater cause

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“Having to lead a committee, and funding, I’m the president of [organization] also, and just Dance Marathon, I think, instilled in me that sense of responsibility to a greater cause. Dance Marathon is all about appreciating everyone around you – if you do something good, people tell you and it’s amazing to hear it. So I think it’s instilled a lot of great qualities, just the fact that I can run an entire position in addition to my school work, working two jobs, and being president of another organization. It’s really taught me a lot about my limits, how much I can do, and how much I can’t do, and just about time management. And create responsibility, and it’s taught me how to work with people from all different kinds of backgrounds and work habits. And I think it is going to be great for me in the workplace, because people work very differently and it’s hard to address in a team to get to one goal, and not have conflicts, and to be able to handle those conflicts is very important to work in a team setting. And it’s taught me a lot about that.” (senior)
Qualitative Method Offers …

Contribution
– how students’ constructions of knowledge, identity, and social relations mediate how they make meaning of their college experiences

Raises this question
– How can institutional values and good practices facilitate more complex meaning-making relative to the liberal arts outcomes?

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Research Question

What college experiences affect moral reasoning, leadership orientation towards social change, leadership commitment to sustaining collective effort, openness to diversity, and intercultural effectiveness?

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Quantitative Method

Data Collection
- Paper or web registration
- Paper or web College Experiences Questionnaire
- Sit-down assessment instrument completion

Variables
- Good Practices in Education
- College Experiences
- Dependent Variables: Moral reasoning, Leadership orientation towards social change, Leadership commitment to sustaining collective effort, Openness to diversity, and Intercultural effectiveness
- Controls: Student background characteristics

Analyses
- Two models: OLS regression of (1) good practices on outcomes and (2) college experiences on outcomes

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Quantitative Results

• Leadership Orientation toward Change
  – Faculty contact
  – Cooperative learning

• Leadership Commitment to Collective Action
  – Faculty contact
  – Academic effort

• Moral Reasoning
  – Good practices in education and college experiences did not predict moral reasoning

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Quantitative Results

• Openness to Diversity
  – Diversity courses
  – Diversity experiences and interactions
  – Integration of academic material
  – Attended political/social debate

• Intercultural Effectiveness
  – Greek affiliation (negative effect)
  – Attended political/social debate (negative effect)
  – Courses with community service component

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The quantitative method offers . . .

Contribution

- Identifies which, and to what magnitude, good practices and college experiences impact liberal arts outcomes

Raises these questions

- How do students make meaning of their college experiences relative to these outcomes?
- Does institutional intentionality relative to liberal arts outcomes affect the degree to which good practices and college experiences have an impact on these outcomes?

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Three Methods

Implications

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What can campuses do to impact these liberal arts outcomes?

• Institutions can encourage
  – student-faculty & student-student affairs contact
  – active & cooperative learning
  – integration of academic material
  – diversity experiences, interactions, and courses
  – academic challenge
  – leadership opportunities

• Institutions can marshal resources to support
  – political and social issue debates
  – career exploration activities
  – students’ struggling with academic and social pressures

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Emerging Questions

• What is the relationship between the extent to which an institution values an outcome and the extent to which it is actualized in students?

• In the absence of consistent institutional value, can individual programs accomplish this same end?

• Is there a relationship between institutional integrity regarding these outcomes and their authentic development in students?

• Do students’ perceptions of institutional value of outcomes matter?

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What have we learned?

• Mixed methods offer these benefits:
  – Rich data, many dimensions from multiple views
    • Student perspectives
    • Outcome measurements
    • Environment descriptions
  – Students make sense of their experience
  – Better understanding of campus context
  – More nuanced, holistic understanding of student experience

• Mixed methods offer these challenges:
  – Qualitative methods are labor intensive and it takes time to unfold meaning
  – Interpretations of mixed-methods findings is a complex process about which educators have varying perspectives
The role of education research

• Provide methodologies and methods that elicit the whole picture
• Unearth connections between campus environment and student achievement of outcomes
• Help campuses understand how those connections work
• Help campuses gain clarity about how they see themselves

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Next Steps for Wabash National Study of LAE

• Pilot phase of study has led to design changes
• Longitudinal Study
• 18 institutions
• Follow the entering class of 2006
• ~ 5,500 student participants
• First-stage data collection – Fall 2006

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