

The Making of Heroes: A Grounded Theory on Student Development

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The study explores the nature and extent of educational intervention in public universities in the form of the non-academic inputs of student affairs or services. A multi-site case study of seven Philippine state universities was conducted using grounded theory as a vehicle for theory-building. Each site represented different sizes in student population, academic focus, geographic locations and types of location (rural and urban). A total of 107 interviewees including university officials, alumni, students, faculty and student affairs practitioners served as resource persons, with their responses validated against university documents and site observations. The study puts forward a substantive theory on student development. It takes into account the embedded nature of the process of student transformation—itsself a product of experience and choice. Student experience is defined by internal and external environmental factors, whereas choice is generated through a decision-making sequence composed of motivation and personal goal formulation. The study finds theoretical grounding in the various fields of psychology, social science, and educational management.

KEYWORDS: student development, agency, transformational process, determinants of behavior

Society bestows upon educational institutions the distinction of being the transformational hub for the molding of productive citizens and agents for societal reforms. Educational institutions propose to achieve this primarily through a plethora of educational programs in the form of academic and non-academic programs. The underlying presumption is that there is a direct-causal link between institutional resources and intentions poured into the learning experience, and the desirable outcome of student development. Although interventions and expected outcomes are often clear on paper, what goes on in between the

process is more often ambiguous, as compared with business processes where a more predictable, linear and calculated investment will produce a corresponding calculable output (Astin, 1999; Brimley, Garfield, 2005; Bush, 2000).

Although the study analyzes the student learning process, it focuses on affairs that bridge the gap between the academe and the wider society. The substantive area of student affairs is chosen as it presents various programmatic opportunities for academic interventions to become more socially relevant and embedded. It is assumed that non-academic, extra- or co-curricular affairs offer

substantive elements for a more broadened and socialized idea of student development.

COMPASS AND SURPRISES

The research journey relied on traditional data generation methods of interviews, document analysis, and site observations to explore the depth and breadth of each case. However, the nature of the cases was not merely revealed by the predetermined methods mentioned. A substantial amount of the data that yielded significant insights into the investigation arose from unplanned events and chance encounters.

The study leads the researcher to seven state universities across the Philippines: three state universities in the National Capital Region, two in Mindanao, one in the Visayas, and one in Luzon. Theoretical saturation is achieved in the fifth site. However, two more sites are made available through which validation of the emergent model is made. In grounded theory, this is unnecessary but nonetheless it may be useful to further strengthen external validity.

The first participant, SITE ONE, is a university in the southern part of Mindanao with a population of 6,000 students. It is famous for its excellent agricultural education programs. Founded by a Muslim princess primarily for the education of the Muslim indigenous people, the university is marked for its critical location in the midst of the armed conflict in Mindanao. The second participant, SITE TWO, is acknowledged as the standard bearer of all state universities in the Philippines. It is situated in a highly urbanized locality in the National Capital Region with a student population of at least 26,000, coming from all over the country as well as overseas. It offers the most extensive programs and it has achieved an international level of educational sophistication. SITE THREE, is fondly called the citadel of student activism. Like the

second site, it has a large population of nearly 26,000 and is composed of multiple campuses around the island of Luzon. It is known for its mission of providing education for the masses. Like the previous site, it is predominantly composed of commuter students. SITE FOUR, like the first site, is a university famous for its agricultural programs. It has 7,000 students and is located in the heart of rural Luzon. It started out as a farming school established by the Americans. SITE FIVE, is another system school with a total of 7,000 students in all of its campuses. It used to be a normal school which became a university in the 1980s. It is located in the same urban setting as the schools in the National Capital Region, only that it is still in an environment that is relatively rural compared to Metro Manila. SITE SIX is a former technical and vocational college which evolved later on into a university. Its main campus with an estimated total of 6,000 students is located in the biggest urban city in Mindanao. The main campus is known for its engineering courses. Like SITES 2, 3 and 4, it has satellite campuses in five other areas in Mindanao. The last site is SITE SEVEN, a prominent teacher education university in the Philippines. Like SITES 2, 3, 4 and 6, it has satellite campuses all over the Philippines. Its main campus in Metro Manila has an estimated total of 7,000 students.

Semi-structured interviews are employed to derive insights from people affected by the offices and programs of student affairs, personnel, beneficiaries (students), and stakeholders (administration and other sectors, such as alumni and parents). Interviews last from 20 minutes to more than an hour, depending on how much a respondent can or is willing to share. Guide questions are based on the a priori constructs. Most interviews are taped and eventually transcribed. A total of one hundred seven (107) individual and group interviews have been conducted.

Table 1: Number of interviewees per site

| Participants | SITE1 | SITE2 | SITE3 | SITE4 | SITE5 | SITE6 | SITE7 | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Heads of Student Affairs | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Immediate Superiors | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Program heads | 2 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 29 |
| Faculty advisers | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 11 |
| Presidents of Student Councils | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Student Leaders | 4 | 0 | *2 | 3 | *3 | *4 | 4 | 20 |
| Alumni | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | *1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Parents | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Other administrators | 2 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| Other students | 0 | 1 | *2 | *1 | 2 | *1 | *2 | 9 |
| Other respondents | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| TOTAL INTERVIEWEES | 19 | 12 | 16 | 15 | 18 | 15 | 12 | 107 |

*Conducted in groups

University and student affairs documents provide official information on practices (not necessarily actual) that reflected the values and priorities of the university and the student affairs organizations. All sites are able to share copies of their student handbooks and student publications. Other documents which have been gathered across sites are: calendars of activities, accomplishment reports, strategic plans, brochures, budgets, and various student affairs' forms. Finally, the inclusion of facilities management in the technical review of literature prompts an investigation of the buildings of the sites in terms of their conditions and provisions available for the use of student affairs and student activities. The various activities of students provide insights on student life and the culture of the university.

FROM CONTROL TO CREATIVITY

The ultimate significance of the results is the challenge for educators to forego a mechanistic view of the educational process as one that can be controlled, presupposing that its noble intentions justify and make it possible. The discussion of the results reveal basic elements that make up the

educational process, albeit with distinctions between academic and non-academic learning. Transformation here is broadly defined as the evolution that takes place in the lives of the students as they go through academic, non-academic, formal and informal interventions of the school. The findings reveal that such a transformation can be affected, touched, given a name, but never manipulated. The challenge therefore is not to find the means to control students but to creatively explore and journey *with* them in their search for their own life-meanings.

Western literature on student development alludes to the theoretical foundations of student affairs work, often explained through psycho-social theories on human development (Miller, Winston & Associates, 1991). Participants of the study, however, define student development not so much as a theoretical construct but as an organically defining concept of the learning experience. Student development is posited as an amalgamation of three different aspects—input, process and outcome. The components of *input, process, and outcome* evidently point to a transformational view (Astin, 1993 as cited in Hu & Kuh, 2003; Keefe & Howard, 1997 as cited in Lunenberg and Ornstein, 2000).

The transformational view presumes that there is an original state (input) that ends at a “transformed” or altered condition (outcome). The component in-between is where evolution or

change takes place; it is composed of a dynamic institutional element, the effect of the wider social context, the students’ motivation, and the sustained processual link among these elements.

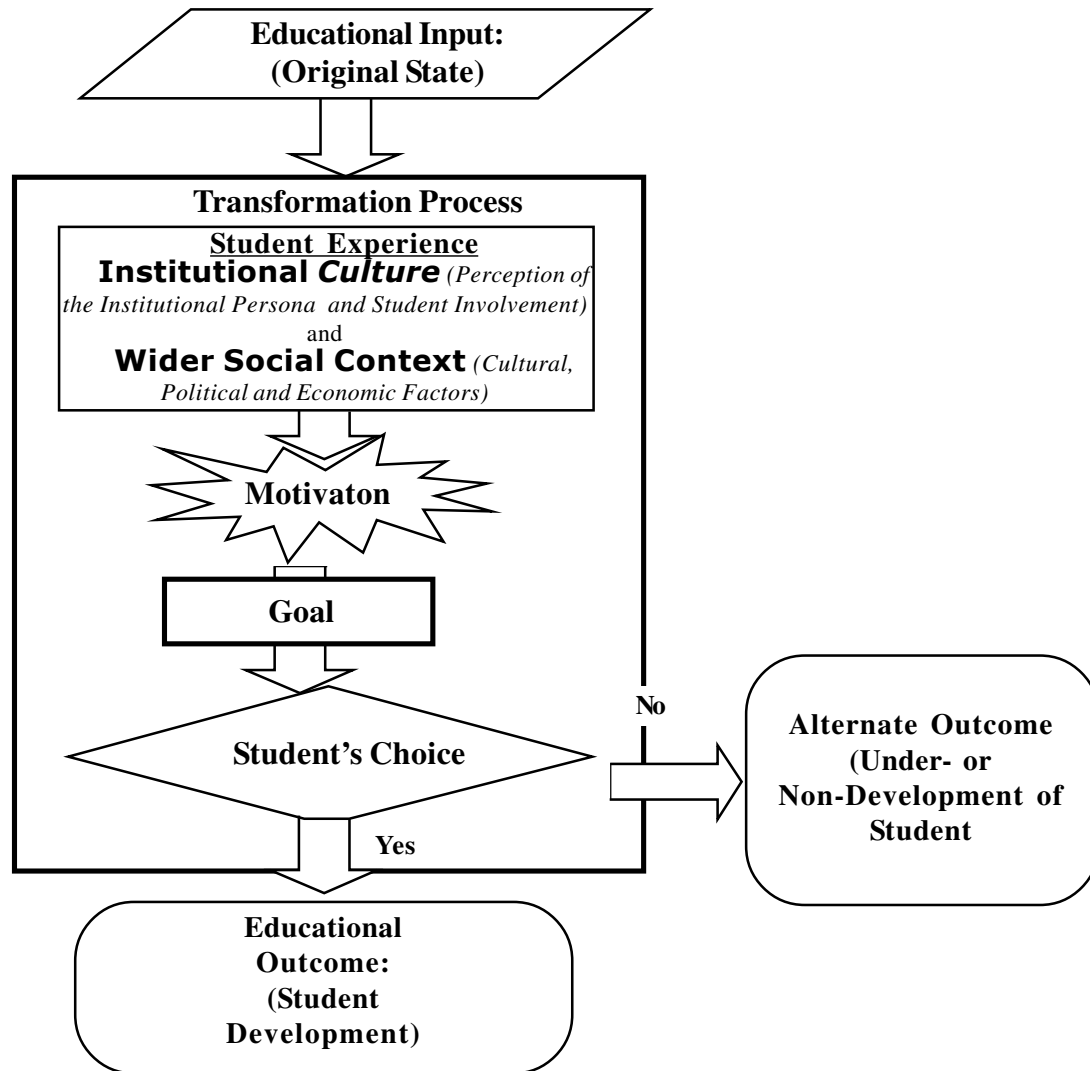


Fig. 2: Student Development Model

Student Experience

Keefe and Howard (1997 as cited in Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2000) refer to student experience as a mediating variable to student outcome. The process component, as the results reveal, is primarily composed of experience and choice. Astin (1984 as cited in Hamrick et. al., 2002) stresses that

student learning and personal development is a function of the amount of time a student immerses himself in an educational program (academic, extra or co-curricular), thus, reiterating the experiential (immersion) and choice (decision to immerse) dimensions of the transformational process.

The study reveals that student experience is predominantly framed by the environmental factors internal and external to the organization. Internal factors pertain primarily to institutional culture, defined by the dimensions of perception of the institutional persona and the various engagements of the students within the learning environment. The larger social context is framed by cultural, political and economic factors.

Institutional Culture

Institutional culture is composed of patterns of behaviors and belief systems of the different subgroups that make up the organization, such as the students, faculty and administration. These cultural subgroups are constantly shaped by various culture bearers brought into the institution (Winston et al., 2001; Strange and Banning 2001 as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002). The study cites the following elements in organizational culture in the context of student experience: perception of the educational persona, and involvement in various educational programs.

The perception of the institutional persona is the impression of an individual or group of individuals regarding the personality of the school. The school's culture in other words, embodies a particular persona with its unique values, idiosyncrasies, language, etc. This persona comes to life primarily through adult interaction. Adults in this study pertain to any practitioner in the school setting, regardless of the type of work (e.g. faculty, student affairs workers, and non-teaching staff). They are most likely the employees in the university encountered by students on a daily basis.

As one law student leader says when he compares the present school with the previous school where he earned his bachelor's degree:

...As compared to the previous school I have been, student affairs there are involved with student organizations. We are guided. Here it is the opposite, we don't feel their presence, unless their help is asked. I wish they were more involved to ensure continuity of student services, and not allow services to be

variable to the ruling political student party (Student Leader 1, SITE 2, Tape 4).

Adult interactions are manifested beyond the operational role of the employee or adult as teacher or staff. In fact, adult interaction can have more positive effects if the formal-operational roles as employee turn into friendly relationships. According to one student:

...the people are nice. Our dean knows all of us. The faculty is okay, they can be your friends, and you can even see that even in the other colleges. They are approachable, especially the younger ones" (Student 1, SITE 4, Tape 2)

Adult interaction can also be seen in the way policies are implemented. The kind of treatment students receive from adults determines their relationship with their school; one group of students views the implementation of the ID policy of the school as one that is "closed to the outside world" (Students Group 1, SITE 3, Tape 1). On the other hand, in the same university, another official does not fully implement the policy on student offenders to give them a chance to reform themselves without the stigma of their "crimes." He cites that some of these student offenders return to him and thank him because they were able to start their lives anew (Student Services Head, SITE 3, and Tape 2). Incidents mentioned above elucidate the creation of a particular school's personality which becomes the embodiment or the "persona" of the institution to which the students relate, as they would to a real person. This phenomenon is specifically identified as organizational climate and defined as the collective personality (or syntality) of a school, characterized by the social and professional interaction of the people (Webb & Scott, 1999).

The resources of the school as manifested through its physical facilities and the services received by the students likewise shape the institutional persona. Physical facilities have a

subtle effect on attitudes and learning outcomes (Gratto et al., 2002; Hallenback, 1991; Strange, 1991). State universities in the Philippines are burdened with perennial budgetary constraints, as seen in dilapidated facilities and lack of services. In an experience of the proponent in SITE 3, which is located adjacent to a slum area, the researcher notes a prominent sign at the university entrance "*Beware of pickpockets and snatching*. A student was then asked if the university is indeed "*unsafe*", the student replied "*if you are stupid*" (Tape 1). Thus, the idea of safety does not refer to the security of the school itself, but the ability of the student to cope with and outwit his environment. On the other hand, richer schools which can afford to pay to ensure the security of its premises may not be able to produce street-smart students. A student narrates that being a student in a state university means being ready for surprises, such as computers crashing, leaking roofs, absentee teachers, and political rallies on school grounds. It means having to deal with less food, fewer books, and limited classroom space (Student Leader 4, SITE 3, and Tape 4). However, the perceived good reputation of the school makes up for the lack of resources. For most students in SITES 2, 4 and 5, despite the lack of funds to afford better facilities, their schools are performing well as evidenced by the national and even international recognition it receives for its quality education. The quality of performance can be measured in terms of regular attendance in classes (some sites reported faculty members who don't appear in class), competence in teaching the subjects (as opposed to some professors who are teaching subjects not related to their expertise), and attentiveness to the needs of the students.

Student Involvement

Emerging as a distinct cultural factor yet strongly attached to the variable of adult interaction is student involvement. Student involvement as a construct is described as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999). According to the study, student involvement refers

to the various engagements (curricular and co-curricular) of the student inside the university. Across all sites, students are involved in the work of student affairs in multi-pronged ways as participants, beneficiaries, partners, stakeholders, resources and external public. Each role is taken differently depending on the kind of students. Students active in co-curricular activities are more likely to take on the six roles together. For example, student leaders are also beneficiaries, of services (e.g. scholarships); participants in activities (e.g. trainings and shows); partners in student affairs work either on a compensated or voluntary basis. In short, they act as external public, beneficiary, critic, and customer. The president of the student body, as a member of the governing board of the university, can also act as a stakeholder, sometimes with even greater influence and power than most university administrators. The various engagements of the students in the university depend on the resources of the institution (Astin, 1999; Hamrick et al., 2002). This multi-pronged involvement of students is especially seen in cash-strapped state universities. Student involvement is the vehicle through which positive interaction with institutional adults is facilitated. In fact, the study asserts the centrality of this involvement as a crucial force in shaping experience and motivating students towards their development. The literature on this subject concurs by suggesting among many others, the following proposition to improve school climate: provision of opportunities for active student learning; provision of dynamic programs that reflect the intellectual, social, physical development of the students; and a reward system that promotes positive reinforcement rather than punishment (Webb & Scott, 1999). Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1999) encourages educators to focus more on motivating students to invest time and energy in the learning process, thus, positing student involvement as integral to a theory of human development. Similar protagonists, such as Hu and Kuh (2003) emphasize the merits of promoting greater student engagement in order to increase learning productivity.

It should be noted that internal factors such as size, curricular emphasis, and institutional prestige do not have direct effects on student development, but act as “encouraging factors” to the decision of students to develop themselves (Braxton, Smart & Thieke, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991 as cited by Kuh, 2000). Kuh (2000) further cites institutional mission, philosophy, faculty and student cultures, and school climate as just contextual conditions, or what he termed as “substantive frames” to student learning, but these are not the “causes” of student learning. He posits that contextual conditions in the institutions are integral in encouraging students to actively engage in the learning milieu through his academics or his involvement in various educational programs. Thus, this presupposes that student development is a product of what the student does or chooses to do with the opportunities, rewards and support given by the university.

Wider Social Context

External events likewise play a crucial role in shaping the learning experience. The effect of the external conditions of the immediate environment is most apparent in the first site, a university situated in the south of the Philippines, right in the heart of an armed conflict between the government (military) and the Muslim insurgents. The students themselves are children of both warring factions. A narration of the student governing body succinctly illustrates this:

...our students have a lot of problems. They cannot speak or present themselves in public and are not too confident of themselves. It starts with their elementary preparation. We are not like you (referring to the researcher), you can choose your students because you are a private school. Most of your students have no problems, they can go to school and can finish it because they are well supported by their parents. For us here, our elementary schools are also bombed, teachers don't regularly report, facilities are lacking, students are not too exposed. So what will

happen when they go to college? How can you change in 4 years education the effect of 16 to 18 years of war experience? But even if they lack in other skills, they are mature, they are battle-tested. Thus, they value peace, because of their experience of war (Faculty Adviser 1, SITE 1, Tape 1).

Context can either be in the form of cultural, political or economic situations of a particular locality. It can be noted that geographical location of a school (i.e. rural or urban) can predetermine the dynamics of these factors. Again, using SITE 1, there are reports of threats of buildings being bombed if certain “requests” are not heeded by administration. A good number of students are children of the military or the insurgents who have access to weapons of war. Similarly, the wider community culture can even supersede established institutional policies as in the case of a dean of student affairs (Tape 6, SITE 1) who has to mediate a conflict between Christian and Muslim students. Disciplinary policies of the school may mandate a set of sanctions or procedures on how the issue can be settled. However, the practice in that particular area dictates that any conflict must be settled through monetary remuneration which could sometimes be negotiated while looking down a barrel of a gun and with an entire clan behind the students involved. A different scenario is presented by another site situated in the country's highly urban capital, where the external environment is more complex. Its significance on the learning process is more indirect. During elections in the National Capital Region, although it is true that everyone is aware of and can be emotionally affected by the electoral process, its effect can be felt only in activities such as student rallies or faculty discussions. The educational process itself proceeds uninterrupted. Unlike in a university like SITE 1, where elections are concomitant to violent encounters between political oligarchs, the maintenance of peace and order becomes a precarious balancing act, with the external environment dominating the learning

experience. In informal conversations with other students, it seems that some, if not quite a number have been exposed to violence. The response given by the student leader on a question on how students cope was a curt “...we just take it as a given, a part of life” (Student Council President, SITE 1, Tape 3). Students respond to these situations with seemingly emotional detachment, perhaps to suppress the crippling fear of the imminent dangers to their very lives. A student living in a situation of armed conflict is not sure to finish schooling, because every now and then, he has to go home and help his family evacuate their besieged farmlands or assist them in rehabilitating the property after battles. The lack of financial resources and the challenges of surviving the war not only hinders his ability to produce his academic outputs (e.g. reports, assignments, and involvement in activities) but also threatens his very survival. The common struggle of a student can be as basic as having at least three square meals a day, given this scenario.

Student Choice

Authors concur that the formal *and* informal interventions of schools are important ingredients in creating positive student experiences, in the hope of achieving student development (Beeny, 2003; Dong-hyun, 2003; Flowers, 2004; Gellin, 2003; Hamilton, 2005; Harper, 2003; King & Anderson, 2004; Littleton, 2002; Wilson, 2004; Yueng, 2003; Zuniga, William & Berger, 2005). However, choice is also a pivotal variable that could define outcomes (Astin, 1984 as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002; Kuh, 2000).

Choice elevates experience from a passive process to one that is active and evolving, thus transformative. The study does not say that choice is consciously made. Choice here is revealed not as a product of deciding categorically between good and bad options. It has a causal relationship with experience but its effects are not entirely products of calculation. A positive experience, (i.e. having all the resources and support to achieve full development as a student), does not necessarily result in a positive choice towards full student

development. Nor does a negative experience necessarily lead to a negative choice. An alumnus from SITE 4 (Tape3) narrates how he came up with various ways to make ends meet. Although he stayed in the university dormitory that charged a minimal rate, his parents were poor farmers who could not afford to send him enough money for his food. He was left to fend for himself either by planting vegetables in empty lots beside the dormitory building or undertaking various money-making activities. Such experience, he claims made him a survivor and motivated him to finish his agricultural studies. He describes his student experience as an episode in his life of “zero visibility”, from which he emerged to conquer obstacles and eventually become what he is today, a known agriculture expert in the country.

It can be noted that some students in state universities are the first in their families to graduate from college. These students come out of “intergenerational poverty”, and a college degree is seen as a means towards economic mobility (Ludwig & Mayer, 2006). Thus, choice could have been shaped by the strong desire to extricate one’s self as well as the family from the clutches of poverty. Further rumination leads to the question: what operates within the process of choice that brings about a committed decision towards positive development? From the standpoint of developmental psychology, student beliefs about themselves (i.e. psychological health) and their attitudes toward school (i.e. motivation and engagement) are also important contributors to academic achievement (Nyzell & Ryzin, 2007). This recognizes the inner resources of the student to filter information coming from the experience and decide to make a positive choice. The same alumnus, earlier cited, provides an insight to this phenomenon:

Q: In what way did being a SITE 5 student help you in your professional life?

A : *Actually nobody taught us to be that way. In SITE 4 there is no subject that teaches you to be hardworking. The environment helps, it guides you on how to live. A lot did not push through, for example some of them opted to work. There*

are lessons you learn from the school, but you bring along something of your own when you entered school (Tape 4)

Motivation is the driving force behind choice that leads to the formulation of a personal goal. The Motivational Systems Theory of Ford (1992) defines motivation as “a psychological, anticipatory and evaluative phenomenon, that is defined as the organized patterning of an individual’s personal goals, emotional arousal processes, and personal agency beliefs” (p. 248). Ford further defines personal goals as: thoughts about desired or undesired conditions that one would like to either attain or avoid; emotions as organized patterns consisting of affective (neural-psychological), physiological and transactional components; and personal agency beliefs which are evaluative thoughts involving a comparison between the desired consequence (the goal) and the anticipated consequence (the cost of pursuing the goal) (p. 248). The same paradigm finds resonance in educational studies such as the one by Moran (2006), which recognizes emotional, rational, and material considerations, as one chooses to help or not. The elements of helping and non-helping behaviors are also posited as those affected by organizational context through the philosophical ideals and values in the organization. The latter cognitive and affective factors nurture helping: (1) the knowledge of the nature or risk of helping; (2) the relationship of one who needs help; and (3) the relationship with a social group that nurture helping. Ford likewise cites four major prerequisites for effective functioning that establishes the antecedent-chain leading to choice: 1) the person must have the motivation needed to initiate and maintain activity until the goal-directing episode is attained; 2) the person must have the skill needed to construct and execute a pattern of activity that will produce the desired consequence; 3) the person’s biological structure and functioning must be able to support the operation of the motivation and skill component; and 4) the person must have the cooperation of a responsive environment that will facilitate, or at least not

excessively impede progress towards the goal. (p. 247)

A student’s desired goal can be the same or different from the outcome expected by the school. The school’s desired outcome for the student can be the completion of his/her academic course, but for the student it may be alleviating him/herself and family from poverty. Therefore, it’s possible for other vehicles aside from a college degree to be used to achieve that desired outcome. This is evident from interviews with students who opted to drop out of school and work instead. In other words, choice hinges on the environmentally embedded personal goal of the student.

In short, choice is a consequence of a decision-making process emanating from motivation which is either nurtured or curtailed by environmentally-embedded experiential factors. It is defined by the student’s personal goal.

Student Outcome

The study unveils student development as two-directional: one, as an intentional goal and the other, as a consequence or an alternate destination. The desired holistic development encompasses the intellectual, emotional, social, physical, cultural and spiritual aspects of the student. The literature’s reference to the goal of student affairs in terms of holistic student development is no different from educational results of attaining effectiveness in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities, while maintaining efficiency in the use of educational resources (Keefe & Howard, 2000, as cited in Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2000). On the other hand, the alternate outcome of under- or non-development is not the result of a deliberate choice to fail but as a consequence of a choice made, or of other aggregate social experiences. An example is when students decide to involve themselves more intently in co-curricular programs in sports or the arts at the expense of their academics. In this case under-development occurs since the student develops one developmental dimension (arts or sports) but sacrifices another (academics). The study did not discover cases of non-development, but reflected it in the student development paradigm as an imminent contrast to holistic development.

ENDING THE BEGINNING AND BEGINNING FROM THE ENDING

The myth of destination is the notion that the journey has finally reached its conclusion. The truth is that the final step is no more than the first step of another trip. Essentially, the duality of destination as departure and arrival speaks of a sojourn that hopefully would lead to greater depths and renewed insights regarding the phenomenon under study; unveiling the nature of the subject matter.

The entire educational milieu contributes to student development. Ironically, it can also be true that the former impinges on the latter. All facets of the educational practice, experience and context are asynchronous sources of learning or development. Development, under-development or absence of development happens, notwithstanding the quality and quantity of resources infused in the learning process. The educational experience nurtures the formulation of the students' own paradigms for living. Moreover, the results reveal that the dynamics of the entire transformational process puts it in fact beyond the control of anyone but the students themselves. Although specific variables are identified by the study, the substantive theory of student development does not prescribe a guaranteed formula to generate the desired outcome; but instead recommends a framework on how to understand it. The autonomy of the transformational process is the main consideration in deriving insights for educational practice.

Furthermore, in terms of instructional and curricular implications, the study proposes the use of a kind of "*life-relevance*" pedagogy that establishes and emphasizes real-life applications of every subject and program in the achievement of the students' personal goals. This presupposes the educator's personal knowledge of the student and the recognition that subject-matter or program interest is not assumed but one that must be carefully determined and cultivated. This could be supported by using instructional materials and language indigenous to the students' environment and cognizant of their realities.

The effect of the environment as one of the defining variables of experience brings the study to the realm of sociology. There are three social structures under play, namely: the institutional structure such as the school; the relational structure as manifested by the interaction of students with adults in school; and the embodied structure which represents the habits and skills inscribed in the students' minds and bodies that allow them to produce, reproduce and transform the institutional and relational structures (Lopez & Scott, 2000, pp. 3-4).

The study resonates with what sociologists posit as the effect of the physical and the cultural environment in the behavior and thinking of the individual, with desires, dispositions and tendencies argued as human conditions that are influenced socially through opportunities (Lopez & Scott, 2000). Likewise, the rational theory of the social sciences touches on the element of choice as made conditional to expected outcome, but one which hinges on the presence and absence of opportunities or constraints (Elster, 1990). These brings to fore the fact that although development is primarily a personal responsibility, it is concomitantly a responsibility of social agents such as schools, governments, civil society, church, business and other organizations to provide a conducive learning environment for the young.

Future studies could perhaps further explore the dynamics of student choice using phenomenological inquiry. Participants can be expanded to include those belonging to a higher economic status, or students from private universities, as this might uncover other variables that can shape the student development process. Another potentially significant element that can define student experience is family, which the present study has not included.

Nonetheless, the core of the study evidently gravitates towards the potency of the choice determinant of development. The complexity of that potency is not fully answered by the results of the study. Nonetheless, the results do posit, that the depth and strength of that choice primarily depends on the student himself. The choice-

determinant emerged as the fulcrum that makes student development happen.

The schools' attempts to mold young minds into productive citizens and catalysts for changes in society, or as the title alludes, "heroes", bespeak a noble intention and a socially desirable goal. The reality is that student development depends on the student him/herself; thus, making heroism essentially the creation of the hero himself.

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