

Call for participation in research related to the development of cognitive moral reasoning among adult learners

By John W. Washatka
Director of Academic Services for Adult and Graduate Studies
Mount Vernon Nazarene University

Project Description

Using a standardized psychometric instrument, the project would assess the ability of nontraditional, undergraduate, adult degree completion programs to develop moral reasoning (or cognitive moral development) in their students.

The project could measure for a variety of outcomes:

1. Growth in individual students within an institution as measured from year to year in a longitudinal study.
2. Levels of development between groups of students within an institution (cross-sectional).
3. Levels of development in groups of students between institutions (cross-sectional).

Rationale

Faith-based post-secondary institutions, as well as other types of institutions, may have as one of their missional statements the spiritual development of their students, including nontraditional, adult learners (see for example the CCCU's research agenda at <http://www.indwes.edu/cral/current-research.htm>). Other types of institutions may see it as part of their mission to develop the character of their students. While not the equivalent of spiritual or character development, cognitive moral reasoning (the ability to deliberate about a moral decision) is seen as a component of both. Assessing the level of moral reasoning may serve as an aid to evaluate the effectiveness of an institution in fulfilling its missional statements.

No research has been done to date measuring for moral reasoning development among adult students.

Process

Subjects would take The Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT2), a standardized psychometric instrument designed to measure levels of moral reasoning. Test scores reflect the ability of subjects to rate and rank answer choices against a rubric measuring for outcomes related to moral principles associated with justice. Research on the DIT has proven it to be a reliable and valid tool for measuring cognitive moral development, particularly as such development aids in the identification and resolution of justice issues.

Participating institutions would pay for the scoring of their students (roughly \$181 per 100 students) and share test data with other participating institutions in order to develop a database.

References

- Bebeau, M.J. & Thoma, S. J. (2003). *Guide for DIT-2*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for the Study of Ethical Development.
- Bergman, R. (2002). Why Be moral? A Conceptual Model from Developmental Psychology [Electronic version]. *Human Development*, 45, 104–124.
- Kohlberg, L. (1980). Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education. In B. Munsey (Ed.), *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg* (pp. 15–100). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- McNeel, S. P. (1994). College Teaching and Student Moral Development. In J. R. Rest & D. Narváez (eds.), *Moral Development in the Professions: Psychology and Applied Ethics* (pp. 27–50). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rest, J. & Narváez, D. (1998). *Defining Issues Test*. University of Minnesota: Center for the Study of Ethical Development.
- Rest, J. R., Narváez, D., Thoma, S. J., & Bebeau, M. J. (1999). DIT2: Devising and Testing a Revised Instrument of Moral Judgment [Electronic version]. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(4), 644–659.
- Thoma, S. J. (2006). Research on the Defining Issues Test. In M. Killen & J. G. Smetana (eds.), *Handbook of Moral Development* (pp. 67–92). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Walker, L. J. (2002). The Model and the Measure: An Appraisal of the Minnesota Approach to Moral Development [Electronic version]. *Journal of Moral Education*, 31(3), 353–367.