The Development of Moral Reasoning in an Adult Degree Completion Program

By
John W. Washatka, Ed.D
Assistant for Academic Administration
Mount Vernon Nazarene University

Problem

Lack of data regarding moral development of adult learners in nontraditional programs (Bebeau, personal communication; Stokes, 2006; Wlodkowski, 2003).

Universities with nontraditional programs may not know how the programs fulfill the schools' missional statements (The Mission, Formation and Diversity Project, 1999).

Conducting research on moral reasoning with adult nontraditional students would help determine effectiveness of nontraditional programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare an undergraduate nontraditional degree completion program with traditional degree programs, as well as national norms in order to determine the effectiveness of the nontraditional program to develop moral reasoning in its students.

Significance

Nontraditional degree completion programs continue to gain in popularity (The Higher Learning Commission, 2000; Stokes, 2006)

No research is being done to determine the effectiveness of nontraditional programs (Bebeau, personal communication; Stokes, 2006)

Postsecondary institutions demonstrate a continued interest in developing moral reasoning in their students, both traditional and nontraditional (Bok, 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Yanikoski, 2004).

Research Question

How do students enrolled in an adult nontraditional program compare with students enrolled in traditional programs in their level of moral reasoning?

Methodology

Administration of the Defining Issues Test 2 (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau , 1999)

Developers link moral reasoning ability with level of education (Rest, 1994; Rest & Thoma, 1985)

Measures for ability to make judgments in accordance with moral principle of social justice (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 2000; Walker, 2002).

Developers identified three different moral schemas, with schemas represented by DIT2 scores (Rest, N arvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau , 2000)

Methodology

Moral Schemas:

Personal Interest (PI)

Maintaining Norms (MN)

Postconventional (P)

N2

Methodology

The DIT2 Test (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999)

Standardized psychometric test used to measure level of moral reasoning (social justice)

Moral reasoning ability embedded in a larger theoretical model of moral functioning (Thoma, 2006) which includes three other components:

Moral Sensitivity
Moral Motivation
Moral Character

Methodology

The DIT2 Test (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau , 1999)

Multiple choice test where subjects rate/rank outcomes of moral dilemmas

Reliability of DIT2 based on high correlations between DIT and DIT2

Validity of DIT2 similar to validity of DIT

Methodology

Nontraditional subjects were seniors enrolled in a program capstone course. Program was an accelerated, degree-completion business program.

Traditional subjects were seniors enrolled in a university general education capstone course. Program was traditional in format, varied majors.

Cross-sectional study

Analysis

Independent *t*-tests were run to compare scores of nontraditional seniors with traditional seniors as well as a national group to determine statistically significant differences.

Multiple correlation was performed to determine expected relationships between traditional and nontraditional programs.

Analysis

DIT2 Scores, with T-Test Results and Effect Sizes, Comparing Traditional Seniors (n = 291) and Nontraditional Seniors (n = 103)

Schema Index	Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	*T* Test Results	Cohen's *d*
PI	Trad	23.60	11.68		
	Nontrad	24.19	12.99	.42	
MN	Trad	36.53	13.14		
	Nontrad	43.02	12.79	4.33***	.50
P	Trad	35.41	13.72		
	Nontrad	28.85	11.73	-4.33***	-.51
N2	Trad	36.15	14.24		
	Nontrad	27.95	14.36	-5.01***	-.58

***$p < .001$, two-tailed.

Analysis

DIT2 Scores, with T-Test Results and Effect Sizes, Comparing National Scores of Seniors (n = 2,441) with Nontraditional Seniors (n = 103)

Schema Index	Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	*T* Test Results	Cohen's *d*
PI	National	24.80	12.53		
	Nontrad	24.19	12.99	-.48	
MN	National	32.40	14.01		
	Nontrad	43.02	12.79	7.56***	.79
P	National	37.84	15.44		
	Nontrad	28.85	11.73	-5.84***	-.66
N2	National	36.85	15.53		
	Nontrad	27.95	14.36	-5.71***	-.60

***$p < .001$, two-tailed.

Analysis

DIT2 Scores, with T-Test Results and Effect Sizes, Comparing National Scores of Seniors (n = 2,441) with Traditional Seniors (n = 291)

Schema Index	Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	*T* Test Results	Cohen's *d*
PI	National	24.80	12.53		
	Traditional	23.60	11.68	-1.55	
MN	National	32.40	14.01		
	Traditional	36.53	13.14	4.78***	.30
P	National	37.84	15.44		
	Traditional	35.41	13.72	-2.57***	-.16
N2	National	36.85	15.53		
	Traditional	36.15	14.24	-.73	

***$p < .001$, two-tailed.

Analysis

Predictors of DIT2 Scores (n = 373)

Variable	*B*	*t*	*p*
PI			
Age	-.002	-.03	.58
Gender	-.04	-.84	.40
Program Type	-.002	-.03	.97
MN			
Age	.04	.52	.60
Gender	.05	.98	.33
Program Type	.17	2.18	.03
P			
Age	-.05	-.66	.51
Gender	.01	.18	.85
Program Type	-.18	-.22	.03
N2			
Age	-.09	-1.1	.26
Gender	.019	.35	.73
Program Type	-.19	-2.39	.02

Longitudinal Analysis

DIT2 Scores, with T-Test Results and Effect Sizes, Comparing Scores of Nontraditional students between their junior (n = 52) and senior (n = 41) years

Schema Index	Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	*T* Test Results	Cohen's *d*
PI	Junior	25.15	12.79	2.36*	.5
	Senior	19.32	10.47		
MN	Junior	41.40	12.10		
	Senior	44.25	13.64	1.07	.22
P	Junior	27.69	13.71		
	Senior	30.98	13.18	1.17	.24
N2	Junior	26.83	15.26		
	Senior	31.84	15.62	1.54	.32

*$p < .05$, two-tailed.

Discussion

Findings:

- Significant differences exist in index scores between nontraditional and traditional seniors at the same institution.
- Significant differences exist in index scores between nontraditional seniors and national scores of traditional seniors.
- No significant gains in nontraditional students between junior and senior year.
- Gender and age had no statistical or practical significance.

Conclusion

Nontraditional seniors have not developed the same moral reasoning ability as the two comparison groups.

Reasons for the differences have not been clearly identified.

Age and gender have not been significant variables in this study.

Discussion

Interpretation of findings or explaining the differences in scores:

Differences in level of education

Differences in curriculum

Differences in majors

Differences in learners

Discussion

Directions for Future Study:

- Longitudinal studies
- Comparative studies
- Correlational studies

Discussion

Directions for Future Study:

If you are interested in conducting research in moral reasoning, please see me after this session.

john.washatka@mvnu.edu

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