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**ABSTRACT**

A need exists for focusing on the development of social interaction skills across the college curriculum. Eight basic assumptions should be followed when attempting to develop students' skills: social interaction (1) is a major vehicle for learning; (2) assists students in developing a flexible range of effective behavior; (3) requires abilities that can be learned; (4) can be taught in and out of the classroom; (5) requires abilities that develop interdependently with abilities in communication, analysis, problem-solving, and valuing; (6) is enhanced by a shared framework of interaction concepts; (7) requires skills that are learned developmentally; and (8) requires skills that are learned and developed in context. These assumptions guided the development of a model of social interaction behavior in college students, by an interdisciplinary faculty team, with input from the entire faculty, at a small liberal arts college. Intended to help faculty understand the responses of students at different levels and to support student growth, particularly at transition points, the model is based on two primary individual skills--receiving information and responding to it--and six group skills, including defining roles, developing solutions, and managing conflict. This model has helped college students develop social interaction skills. (Tables illustrating the model are included. (DF)

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INTERACTION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:

A MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

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## ABSTRACT

After exploring the importance of the need for focus on the development of social interaction skills across the curriculum, this paper sets forth eight assumptions about social interaction in the college curriculum. A developmental model of social interaction behavior in college students, created by an interdisciplinary faculty team with input from the faculty as a whole in a competence-focused liberal arts college (Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin), is set forth and discussed in relationship to theories of intellectual and moral development.

INTERACTION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:  
A MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

Within communication education, movements directed to writing and speaking across the curriculum have been strengthened in recent years. The notion that these basic communication skills are important across disciplines hardly needs to be belabored, except to note that a rich source of materials for assessing and developing these abilities has been produced at all levels.

This paper reports a parallel effort to examine another communication skill--interaction--and to develop a framework for its infusion across the curriculum in a liberal arts college. Because interaction across the curriculum may be a novel idea, the need for such efforts requires explanation. The initial part of the paper, then, will discuss the importance of interaction across disciplines, and the conceptual view taken regarding the role of interaction in education, outlined in the set of assumptions developed by a group of faculty. The last part will outline the experience of one faculty in identifying and integrating interaction skill development across the curriculum.

Interaction across the curriculum: The need

Just a little reflection on teaching/learning settings reveals the pervasiveness of interaction settings in education. Not only do college students spend countless hours in large and small group discussions and one-on-one exchanges while in school, but all of them can expect even more interaction when they move to the world of work (where lectures are a rare phenomenon indeed!). Work gets done in groups, decisions are made in groups, and attitudes are changed in groups.

Students have learned a great deal about group and dyadic interaction by the time they get to college. They know, for example, how to make the subtle changes

that signal the complex interrelationships of variables in different situations: roles, goals, environmental factors, historical factors (i.e., of the interactants over time), etc. They have, in effect, mastered the "rules" of their speech community and become communicatively competent (Hymes, 1972). But they are competent to varying degrees. All who work with college students of various ages can attest to the variations of effective interaction within the patterns of the "generic student."

College students, for all their mastery of the "rules," have also discovered that not all interactions go smoothly. They recognize the frustration of not being able to get the work done, to get the decision made, or to deal with diverging attitudes. And, while speech communication texts have given some advice on what to do with and in groups, the research has not been well translated for systematic development of social interaction skill. For example, Hirokawa (1983) examined the effectiveness of groups in producing quality decisions, seeing the connection to the processes used in the groups to that quality. Focusing on the clarity of activity in the phases of group interaction, he concluded that groups who clearly set forth their goal and process in the beginning reach solutions of higher quality than those who begin more intuitively or without organization. On question facing the teacher of interaction (in whatever discipline the content of the discussion falls), is how you can get students to produce the more effective clear beginning phase.

Thus, while we recognize that students come to us knowing a good deal about interaction, they may well need some assistance in continuing to develop their skill. Although people learn interaction initially the same way they learn their grammar (i.e., through observation and classification of what they experience), such learning remains largely implicit unless it is brought to the foreground. As

we do with grammar in teaching writing, we need to examine the rules which operate in interaction, to better understand why some moves work and others don't. And, as we do with writing (a step above grammar in complexity), we need to evaluate the "rhetoric" of interaction, to lead to the higher level performance that will assist in the achievement of the goals for which teachers of various disciplines ask their students to engage in interaction.

One way to start, and the way chosen by the faculty at Alverno College in Milwaukee is to view interaction as a developable skill, like writing and speaking. Over twelve years of work in targeting goals for students' development of social interaction skill, the faculty gradually evolved and expressed eight assumptions which guide their work:

1. Social interaction is a major vehicle for learning.

We believe that social interaction in the classroom ensures the mutual exchange of ideas and information, increasing the opportunity to learn from others, enhancing the ability to demonstrate one's knowledge, and promoting the likelihood of personal change.

2. Social interaction assists students to develop a flexible range of effective behavior.

We believe that in teaching social interaction skills we are helping students to develop alternative ways to approach and resolve problems in working with people--while not attempting to standardize communication. Students need to build on their unique qualities of expression as well as on feedback from faculty. The varied experiences in different roles and situations help to develop a continually expanding repertoire of effective interaction behavior.

3. Social interaction abilities can be learned.

Students have spent significant time interacting socially, but may not have studied their abilities systematically. We believe that social interaction skill is developed through structured analysis, goal-setting, practice, and feedback.

4. Social interaction can be taught in and out of the classroom.

We believe that the role of the teacher in assisting the development of students varies, both because the situations vary and because there are differences in interaction style among the faculty. For example, teachers may work in a variety of formats (one-on-one, small group, large group). The teacher may adopt a variety of roles--lecturer, leader, critic, facilitator, mediator, observer, guide, advocate, etc. Often, we find that conflict experiences may be useful situations for teaching students more effective social interaction approaches.

5. Social interaction ability develops interdependently with abilities in communication, analysis, problem-solving, and valuing.

We believe that social interaction skills are influenced by the students' abilities to deal with multiple aspects of the situation and with varying stages of their own cognitive and affective development.

6. Social interaction development is enhanced by a shared framework of interaction concepts.

We believe that a common vocabulary helps students develop by providing a common language to discuss their behavior. Initially, students learn two models of the many available to analyze interaction. These two models, a synthesis developed by an interdisciplinary faculty group, focus on task-

oriented groups and dyadic interaction. The models differentiate between task and socioemotional components for easier learning, but integration of these components is both taught and expected in practice. Later, students extend their use of analytical frameworks further by employing models developed by their academic disciplines (e.g., business and management, education, nursing, psychology, etc.).

7. Social interaction skills are learned developmentally.

We believe that analysis of an interaction requires a different skill from being able to interact effectively. As adults, students need to work back and forth between action and reflection in order to come to an understanding of their interaction behavior. Continued practice across varied settings, combined with self-reflection and feedback from others leads students to become more conscious of their choices in interaction and more effective in achieving their interaction goals.

8. Social interaction skills are learned and developed in context.

We believe that complex interactions among elements of the situation may affect the quality of social interaction performance. Thus, students need to assess the impact of various elements in making decisions about appropriate interaction, and faculty need to adapt their feedback in recognition of, for example,

--Member characteristics (group interaction skill, preparation, energy level)

--Group factors (size, composition, role relations, length of working relationships, norms governing behavior)

--Task characteristics (nature of task, clarity of purpose, relation to content)

--Physical environment and other constraints (time, resources, etc.)

These assumptions guided the work of the faculty in working with students, given the decision that social interaction was an outcome of a liberal arts education. At Alverno, social interaction is one of eight developmental abilities that students must demonstrate as requirements for graduation.

#### Interaction: A diagnostic model of student development

Given ten years of experience in working with social interaction as an outcome important in a liberal arts education, the Alverno faculty addressed the issue of organizing and refining that experience. An interdisciplinary group of nine faculty began by trying to identify the component skills that appeared to play a role in student effectiveness. Initially, they targeted four "individual skills" (i.e., related to the ability of an individual to enter into interaction): analytic listening, analytic responding, affective listening, and affective responding. They also identified four "group/context skills" (i.e., related to the work of the group rather than the processes of individuals in the group): situation defining, adapting, group problem-solving, and owning group identity.

The group took brief descriptions of these skills to the larger group of about 100 faculty members and asked them to consider their experience across disciplines and inside/outside classroom contexts. Their questions were:

Where do you see beginning students with relationship to these skills? What concrete behaviors mark their performance? Where do you see graduating students in the same skill areas? What concrete behaviors mark their performance? How do students with 2-3 years of coursework perform in the same areas? What behaviors mark the middle of the continuum?

After two faculty groups of six to seven members each worked on the reflecting task, the interdisciplinary group took the input and worked for nearly a year in sifting through the reported experiences, matching them against several developmental frameworks, some more general frameworks like Piaget's (1950) and Kohlberg's (1969), and some specific to the development in the college years like Perry's (1970).

The revised picture of student abilities in interaction follows. Recognizing the interplay of the cognitive and affective elements, the group combined the four individual skills into two: Taking information in (individual cognitive/affective processing skills) and Responding (individual cognitive/affective communication skills). Six group/context skills were identified: Designing the environment, Defining roles, Interpreting the task, Developing solutions, Integrating the affect, and Managing conflict. A discussion of each demonstrates the sense we have of interaction skills as developmental and the model of their development as diagnostic.

It should be noted here that the three labels "beginning," "developing," and "advanced" are general descriptions of development, not exact and unvarying measures. Students, in fact, may "begin" their program with pre-"beginning" level behavior, e.g., in the case of extremely apprehensive students, the behaviors ordinarily expected of a beginning student would be the first goal they need to work for (with additional assistance from a special social interaction lab).

From our experience, we know that students may begin their work in many places along the range we have identified. We recognize that these abilities are not tied to age, even though we suspect that they are related to the amount of experience in varied situations, which sometimes is helped by more years of experience. But we believe that the descriptions are useful for teachers concerned

with student development of interaction ability for the help they can provide in diagnosis, prescription, and support of student growth.

Individual skills

TAKING INFORMATION IN (Table 1)

TABLE 1

TAKING INFORMATION IN:

INDIVIDUAL COGNITIVE/AFFECTIVE PROCESSING SKILLS

| BEGINNING  | DEVELOPING  | ADVANCED  |
|--|---|---|
| <u>IN LISTENER'S ATTITUDE</u>  |   |   |
| <u>Natural:</u>  | <u>Skill:</u>   | <u>Refined Skill:</u>   |
| Approaches listening as automatic, passive, easy   | Approaches listening recognizing the demands of different contexts/disciplines                          | Approaches listening analytically; recognizes as hard work  |
| Gives outward attention to each speaker  | Listens with interest; holds own contribution until speaker is understood                               | Listens analytically and affectively trying to understand speaker's frame of reference              |
| <u>IN LISTENER'S BODY LANGUAGE</u>   |   |   |
| <u>Understanding:</u> Focuses on mechanics or recording information (notes, media)                           | <u>Comprehension:</u> Focuses on recording; only important details so as to stay part of the discussion | <u>Synthesis:</u> Focuses on notetaking so as to prepare for active response to the speaker         |
| <u>Minimal:</u> Maintains minimum eye contact apparently unaware of impact of others                         | <u>Purposeful:</u> Uses purposeful eye contact somewhat aware of impact on others                       | <u>Active:</u> Uses eye contact to actively relate to others in anticipation of outcome(s)          |
| <u>Conforming:</u> Has limited awareness of body cues as index of expectations for social listening behavior | <u>Responsive:</u> Is conscious of body language in listening   | <u>Proactive:</u> Uses repertoire of body cues to communicate with and to impact group's outcome(s) |
| <u>IN INTERPRETING OTHER'S BODY LANGUAGE</u>   |   |   |
| <u>Literal</u>   | <u>Active/Perspective Taking</u>  | <u>Integrative/Proactive</u>  |
| More conscious of words than concepts; listens literally   | Conscious of related ideas; organizes into concepts   | Conscious of conceptual ideas; organizes into concepts  |
| Hears only what reinforces or supports what one already knows  | Listens for new ideas; tolerates some ideas discrepant from own   | Listens with openness to challenge of own ideas   |
| Hears without necessarily connecting ideas to own experiences  | Links ideas to personal experience through reflection   | Combines new ideas and personal experience  |

TABLE 1 contd.....

IN INTERPRETING OTHER'S BODY LANGUAGE

| <u>Literal</u>  | <u>Active/Perspective<br/>Taking</u>                                      | <u>Integrative/Proactive</u>                           |
|---|---|--|
| Tendency to accept information uncritically from identified experts | Begins to question quality of information apart from authoritative source | Evaluates quality of information in relation to source |
| Tendency to listen in dichotomous, absolute terms (black vs. white) | Capable of hearing more than two alternatives (shades of gray)            | Listens with expectation that complexity is a "given"  |
| Tendency to listen judgementally (right vs. wrong)                  | Recognizes how own values are related to judgement                        | Separates own values in evaluating what is heard       |

The description of the interactant's ability to take information in has several parallels to Perry's (1970) schema of cognitive development in the college years. Perry describes the typical college student as entering with a sense that there are black and white answers to questions and that the teacher as the authority figure has those answers. He describes the task of the college years as assisting students to come to an understanding of multiple perspectives.

In terms of expected patterns of development of the interactant's ability to process cognitive/affective information, the model explores the listener's attitude, moving from an unquestioning stance of taking information in out of one's own reference set, to a sophisticated ability to listen analytically to the frame of reference of another. In listener's body language the focus moves from implicit to conscious use of body cues. Similarly, the ability to interpret body language of others moves from a literal to more subtle awareness, again marked by perspective taking. Finally filtering input illustrates the patterns described by Perry-- moving from relatively dogmatic to cognitively complex listening skill.

Evidence for these behaviors may often be indirectly gathered, although some are stated in behavioral ways available to teacher assessment. Students often reveal their inner processing in accounting for their observations about interaction, in reflective writing (faculty may ask students to keep logs or journals) or in other ways.

RESPONDING (Table 2)

TABLE 2

## RESPONDING: INDIVIDUAL COGNITIVE/AFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

| BEGINNING   | DEVELOPING   | ADVANCED   |
|---|--|--|
| <u>CONTEXT</u>  |  |  |
| Focuses on short-term objectives of group task  | Begins to understand contributions in larger perspective   | Integrates group participation and task completion with personal development                 |
| Responds only out of immediate context  | Responds and recognizes responses out of at least one other context                                    | Responds out of expanded contexts (variable frameworks)                                      |
| Accepts the purpose of the group task as identified by others   | Makes relationships between accepted purpose and the ideas expressed among participants                | Integrates the ideas presented as a means of redefining/accomplishing purpose                |
| Gives information; however, may not make relationships  | Seeks information, summarizes  | Synthesizes  |
| Agrees with presented ideas   | Begins to question ideas; Asks for support for discrepant ideas  | Advocates own ideas; Evaluates contributions   |
| States own ideas but not necessarily in relation to others  | States agreement/disagreement without rationale  | Provides rationale for opinion   |
| Responds appropriately when asked   | Volunteers analytic response to comments of authorities  | Volunteers analytic response to participants regardless of authority                         |
| Responds out of feelings without necessarily being able to directly express them                            | Begins to express feelings directly using "I statements"   | Integrates appropriate expression of feeling in relation to movement of group                |
| Quotes others' perspectives; Gives literal answers or offers advice   | Paraphrases others' perspectives; Identifies major concepts/issues and begins to generate alternatives | Integrates own perspective while offering alternatives directed to the perspective of others |
| <u>ACTIVITY LEVEL</u>   |  |  |
| Passive: Demonstrates more passive behaviors  | Active: Demonstrates more contributing behaviors   | Pro-Active: Demonstrates appropriate leading behaviors; integrated with critical thinking    |
| Exhibits limited awareness of use of body language  | Exhibits congruent verbal and body language  | Exhibits intentionally congruent or purposefully discrepant verbal and body language         |
| Uses own pattern of body language without attention to how clearly the signals can be interpreted by others | Uses body language that others can understand and interpret  | Monitors body language in relation to group members and task                                 |

The description of the interactant's ability to respond draws on faculty experience of student behavior as well as on a range of general development patterns. For example, both content and context sections describe the experience of the beginning student as limited by the explicit directions given or setting assumed. This is typical of the Piagetian "concrete" mode of thinking and also links to the literal thinking described in the early Perry stages.

The activity level section illustrates another Perry aspect--the notion of how much control an interactant feels in a situation. Perhaps due to the socialization of schooling, we have found beginning students more docile and passive than those who have had the opportunity to redefine the classroom situation as one in which they have some power to take action or to influence the outcome.

Recognizing that in the world of work these students will have to deal with more ambiguity, faculty have created learning experiences to give them the opportunity to need to go to other frameworks to make sense out of an assignment for the group. Or, alternatively, some faculty consciously "overstructure" the type of worksheets students are asked to do in preparation for an interaction, especially a group discussion, in order to force them to make connections beyond what they would ordinarily assume from the context.

#### Group/context skills

The individual skills, we believe, relate to the cognitive/affective development of students, exhibited similarly in group interaction, writing, speaking, etc. The group/context skills, in contrast, call for the integration of certain aspects characteristic of working with one or more others. They require the ability to join in common activity and adapt within the shifting grounds of the group's work.

TABLE 3

## DESIGNING THE ENVIRONMENT

| BEGINNING  | DEVELOPING  | ADVANCED  |
|--|---|---|
| Accepts existing environmental factors influencing group:            | Shows awareness and understanding of how environmental factors contribute to group social interaction and takes action to correct or improve existing group environment | Anticipates and evaluates needs of group to plan, create, and maintain desired environment to effectively accomplish group task |
| <u>Physiological factors</u>   |   |   |
| -Biological rhythms  |   |   |
| -Nutrition   |   |   |
| -Temperature   |   |   |
| -Air Quality   |   |   |
| -Light   |   |   |
| <u>Sensory factors</u>   |   |   |
| -Space   |   |   |
| -Design and layout   |   |   |
| -Location  |   |   |
| -Interruption  |   |   |
| -Etiquette   |   |   |
| -Customs   |   |   |
| -Attire  |   |   |
| -Identity  |   |   |
| -Recognition   |   |   |
| -Affiliation   |   |   |
| -Authority   |   |   |
| -Position and order  |   |   |
| -Safety  |   |   |
| -Belonging   |   |   |
| -Pacing  |   |   |
| -Sex, culture, religion, age, income, occupation, other demographics |   |   |
| <u>Task factors</u>  |   |   |
| -Time  |   |   |
| -Materials   |   |   |
| -Preparation   |   |   |
| -Knowledge and skills of participants                                |   |   |
| -Agenda  |   |   |
| -Support persons and services  |   |   |
| -Recording and communicating activities                              |   |   |

Recognized in many small group texts, the ability to account for and influence environmental factors is an important interaction skill. Both in planning for interaction (i.e., choosing an appropriate environment to support the goal of the interaction), and in adjusting for needs when an interaction is underway (e.g., moving furniture so that everyone can see and hear), there is no question that this is an area where students display a range of effectiveness. Again, given Perry's schema, it is not surprising that students initially accept even a frustrating environmental arrangement, because it is a "given" or arranged by the authority figure. As the model illustrates, students move to greater awareness and finally to effective action in relation to these factors.

One strategy used by a number of faculty is to make explicit what they themselves do with the environment when working with beginning students. Several faculty call attention to the purpose for which they arrange the classroom for different activities. In developing assignments, faculty may require explicit attention to the environment as part of the analysis of an interaction or in the planning of a strategy.

DEFINING ROLES (Table 4)

TABLE 4

## DEFINING ROLES

| BEGINNING   | DEVELOPING   | ADVANCED   |
|---|--|--|
| <u>IN BALANCING SELF AND GROUP</u>  |  |  |
| Brings own preparation to group work  | Analyzes work for its relevance and relationship to each individual's work   | Coalesces individual work with that of others so that there emerges a synthesized product  |
| Is aware of own goals and focuses on importance of own goals                                | Is aware of the ways in which goals of self and others may support each other or conflict                                  | Seeing multiple levels of group goals and individual goals, can draw upon goals in common to facilitate group cohesion and to make conflict functional                                 |
| Focuses on personal input (may not be sure how to integrate with input of others)           | Understands the need to recognize and give feedback to other group members. Input and role                                 | Sees group as instrument of discovery, through combined effort in providing input and through interaction with others  |
| Concerned about own success within the group  | Recognized the need to cooperate with others as part of own success  | Values group outcome, so that own success is fully integrated  |
| <u>IN PERCEIVING SOURCES OF GROUP STRUCTURE</u>   |  |  |
| Has limited awareness of own role with that of others in determining direction of the group | Has awareness of own role and role of others in group in shaping the task and deciding about the process                   | Able to integrate content and process, becomes explicit about working out group goals in context   |
| Sees group identity in terms of most immediate common elements                              | Develops tolerance for differences within the group, including different perspectives                                      | Recognized that quality of task depends on effective use of differences in group interaction   |
| Expects others to respond in much the same way as self                                      | Recognizes that others will have different responses from own  | Owens group decision, while also able to articulate, defend, and support both the group decision and personal perspectives on that decision  |
| <u>IN MAKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT GROUP IDENTITY IN DECISION MAKING</u>                        |  |  |
| Sees others primarily in their roles or categories  | Begins to see multiple aspects of each individual  | Sees relationships among members of the group as grounds for being group   |
| In nonverbal behavior, defers to the perceived status and power in members of the group     | Recognizes that members of group have varied skill and worth; begins to redefine worth in relationship to context of group | Works out role structure of group with other members in fluid way, recognizing the need for support group's overall goals, seeing behaviors as open (e.g., leading rather than leader) |

The relationship of individual members to the group is the concern of this set of behavioral descriptions. One task that shows developmental differences is that of balancing self and group. As the model illustrates, the flow we experience is from separate to integrated. (We recognize that there is a value bias in our model--see the discussion on p. 19.)

Part of the ability to develop group relationships is related to the sources of group structure--seen as from without or created by the group. This is related to the notion of internal vs. external control implicit in Perry's schema as well as to the ability to take the perspective of others. The latter is further specified in the assumptions made about group identity in decision-making.

In working with students, faculty may simulate role differences or use "real" role discrepancies (e.g., roles within student organizations or roles related to students' outside activities). For many disciplines, an important consideration is the types of role relationships typical of the profession, e.g., for education majors, the role of teacher vs. parent, school board member, administrator, etc.

INTERPRETING THE TASK (Table 5)

TABLE 5

## INTERPRETING THE TASK

| BEGINNING   | DEVELOPING  | ADVANCED  |
|---|---|---|
| <u>PURPOSE</u>  |   |   |
| Restates the purpose of the task accurately                       | Questions others in order to more clearly focus the task      | Assists the group to carefully define the task  |
| Identifies the major issues                                       | Seeks out information from others to examine the issues       | Examines and evaluates the validity of opinions and assumptions of group members                    |
| Hears and accepts the directions as given                         | Links directions to personal experience and interpretation    | Combines directions with personal experience and completes the task                                 |
| <u>ASSUMPTIONS</u>  |   |   |
| Identifies the assumptions of others without much examination     | Questions the assumptions of others at least implicitly       | Probes to get sufficient data base from a speaker or the group to verify all assumptions            |
| <u>CONSTRAINTS</u>  |   |   |
| Accepts constraints as first perceived by the group               | Questions to find the range of flexibility within constraints | Helps the group to deal with the problem within the wider (or narrower) range of actual constraints |
| Views constraints as negative or defines them in a limited manner | Acknowledges constraints as productive                        | Copes with constraints creatively   |
| Views timeline as inconvenient                                    | Views timeline as part of the task and learning process       | Meets timeline requirements or proposes mutually acceptable alternatives                            |
| Looks to constraints for safety/security                          | Recognizes and adapts to constraints                          | Assists the group to deal with the constraints  |

Our reading of Hirokawa (1983) reinforced our sense that groups differentially demonstrate the ability to interpret the task. Again, at times it is the literal approach that marks the beginning student. Such students, for example, may assume that everyone has the same sense of what a task requires, especially when that task is assigned by a teacher. They may need more assistance to see that they need to make explicit what they think is in each other's head, or to question the directions to make the group more effective.

Later on, working with developing and advanced students, faculty are likely to ask students to review their group process to evaluate their ability to set a clear direction and follow it. Others faculty may provide larger, less explicitly structured tasks to promote the development of this skill.

DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS (Table 6)

TABLE 6

## DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

| BEGINNING   | DEVELOPING  | ADVANCED  |
|---|---|---|
| <u>PROCESS</u>  |   |   |
| Attempts to offer the group early solutions to problems before assumptions are verified or alternate solutions are fully considered | Assists group to question a quick solution and to retrace some of the stages in problem solving as needed | Assists the group to use an explicit process or identifiable stages before deciding upon a solution                       |
| Uses questions as a means of obtaining information  | Uses questions to clarify the issue in one's own mind or in the minds of others                           | Asks questions to raise the level of complexity or to move the group forward toward goals                                 |
| Sees only one solution to a problem   | Helps the group identify alternatives   | Evaluates alternatives with the group in order to arrive at a quality solution  |
| Views conflict as detrimental to solving problems   | Identifies conflict and tries to mediate  | Uses conflict resolution strategies (theories and/or frameworks) in order to arrive at a solution acceptable to the group |
| <u>EVALUATION</u>   |   |   |
| Undervalues others' opinions, or allows others' values to constrain own participation   | Is aware of how values affect group process and decision making   | Seeks value orientation in both the process and the product   |
| Evaluates consequences of the group decision as related to self   | Sees consequences for self and for the group  | Responds sensitively to the group and consequences of group decisions   |

In most task groups, the developing of solutions is clearly linked to clarifying the task and to managing conflict. However, we wanted to isolate the aspect of generating solutions to identify the ways in which group members grow in their ability to identify alternatives. The two categories are process (the ways in which the solutions are generated) and evaluation (the means used to probe the values and consequences related to solutions).

Faculty are particularly concerned that students follow methods appropriate to their disciplines in developing solutions, so at developing and advanced levels, students are given assistance to modify general strategies through the application of methods characteristics of science, humanistic discussion, etc.

INTEGRATING THE AFFECT (Table 7)

TABLE 7

## INTEGRATING THE AFFECT

| BEGINNING   | DEVELOPING   | ADVANCED   |
|---|--|--|
| Has a limited awareness of emotional factors in discussion (unaware of overreactive)  | Asks open ended questions to differentiate emotional content when appropriate  | Integrates cognitive and emotional factors   |
| Tries to influence the group using primarily one mode of cognitive or emotional expression  | Begins to be aware of and use techniques congruent to both cognitive and emotional expression  | Combines cognitive and affective considerations to arrive at an acceptable group solution                                      |
| Responds to emotion laden-language  | Recognizes power of emotion laden-language   | Separates emotion laden-language from the content of the message and uses this language intentionally to persuade the listener |
| Response is dependent on personal need (includes withdrawn response in shyness or unconsidered response in aggression)            | Recognizes personal need may not be predominant but provide a stimulus to more discussion  | Evaluates whether personal needs are consonant with group  |
| Assumes little responsibility for personal emotional response and will likely blame others or seek external causes of frustration | Recognizes mutual responsibility in dealing with emotions and choice of emotional response   | Builds cohesiveness of group through choice of responses and appropriate sharing of emotion                                    |
| Assumes proper timing and appropriate situation is irrelevant   | Recognized the importance of appropriate timing and situation to express self  | Uses nuances of proper timing to promote acceptance of ideas and controls emotional response appropriate to the situation      |
| Expresses anger or frustration directly or indirectly, but spontaneously (i.e., without much reflection)                          | Begins to explore and reflect on varied aspects of emotional responses in group settings and expresses emotions directly, with understanding of consequences | Expresses emotions out of belief for integration of emotion with other aspects of response in group                            |
| Personalizes objections, questions, criticism and conflict and likely to respond defensively or aggressively                      | Understands the value of acknowledging and giving feedback   | Views feedback as a means of strengthening relationships and/or accomplishing the task   |
| Unable to give feedback to others   | Attempts to give feedback  | Gives feedback in an appropriate manner  |
| Recognizes withdrawn members  | Regards withdrawn members as having something to contribute if included  | Develops strategies to include withdrawn members   |
| Assumes understanding of others' position   | Communicates an understanding of others' position  | Builds on stated understanding and offers alternatives to resolve problems   |

As noted above, our work with students is designed to clarify the task and socioemotional elements in groups, but directed toward an integration of those elements as a goal. This piece of the model illustrates the developmental pattern we observe, again reinforced by our reading of developmental theorists. Kohlberg's stages, for example, may be seen as compatible with our descriptor of the movement away from personal need as sole determinant to personal need balanced with the needs of the group.

Faculty again may use logs or journals to tap evidence of growth in such integration. But it is also assessed and strengthened in procedures designed for group evaluation of their own processes.

MANAGING CONFLICT (Table 8)

TABLE 8

## MANAGING CONFLICT

| BEGINNING   | DEVELOPING  | ADVANCED   |
|---|---|--|
| Listens with interest more focused on those who are friendly or with whom one agrees  | Listens with tolerance to those who have varied points of view  | Listens with openness to those who create conflict by challenging one's own point of view  |
| Sees conflict as group disruptive (necessarily blocking) and so avoids it at all costs  | Begins to make distinctions among types of conflict, e.g.,<br>--related to the topic<br>--relational (inter-personal)<br>--related to the task or context | Shows complex understanding of the interrelatedness of topic, personal values, relationships among group members, nature of the task and context of group decision           |
| Gives in quickly to objections or questions of others OR takes offense at objections or questions of others   | Deals with criticism of own position more objectively   | Makes conflict productive for the group, seeing its potential for increasing the quality of a decision   |
| Unlikely to advocate or challenge unless issue is of great personal importance or impact  | Can challenge others' points or positions in order to get more information out  | Appreciates conflict's role in broadening the base for the group's decisions   |
| Looks outside the group to settle conflicts   | Attempts to mediate conflict quickly, but may sacrifice depth in probing to quick solution  | Asks group to take ownership of issues related to conflict   |
| May use maladaptive coping mechanism to deal with conflict, e.g., blaming others, avoiding conflict   | Becomes less defensive, recognizing conflict as present and also recognizing one's own contributions to it and responsibility for it                      | Consciously uses appropriate coping mechanisms to deal with own responses to conflict/sees potential benefits of probing conflict issues in leading to decisions             |
| Follows a pattern of interaction without much adaptation, e.g., always raising hand to be recognized or always breaking in to speak when one wants to | Waits (patiently or impatiently) for a break in the conversation to speak/begins to adapt to the rhythm of varied situations                              | Generally exerts control in order to hear another person out, as long as the process is being moved forward/adapts appropriately to other types of "flow" in the interaction |

Views of conflict again are related to other factors, e.g., the roles of group members, the purpose of the task, etc. However, in focusing on conflict itself, we describe the orientation we have seen in students' initial ability to deal with the conflicts that emerge in most groups. Here, note that we find two initial patterns in some aspects. Some students are passive in the face of conflict (e.g., "Whatever you say..." is their escape from dealing with it). Others are aggressively determined NEVER to give in on the smallest issue. Both positions are moderated by the development of more complex and more open approaches described in the model.

There is in these materials a clear bias toward the development of collaborative interaction skill. We do take a clear position that conflict needs to be seen, as often as possible, not as threatening, but as a source of added information. Yet we also recognize that such a view of conflict is not absolute; students need to be able to make situated decisions about what is possible in interacting with others. We hope to provide them with sufficient reflection on their experience and sufficient guided practice in conflict situations to promote idealism without encouraging naivete.

#### Discussion of the developmental model of interaction

The model is intended as a diagnostic tool--a means of assessing where students are in their development of abilities that integrate their social interaction skill with cognitive and affective development in their discipline areas. It provides for faculty working with students a series of the normal progression of these abilities, so that faculty can first understand the responses of students and then develop strategies to assist them to further develop their abilities toward integration across the curriculum. Because the model is a

generalized picture of what we have experienced with students and because we intend it as diagnostic, it may not fit individual cases perfectly. Moreover, not all the growth in student skill happens because faculty intervene. Much of it occurs because the students are experiencing varied situations and growing in the normal way by doing so.

We also expect some variability in student behavior even when the student has achieved more advanced performance. First, we know that elements of the situation may impact on a student's ability to interact effectively; we are all constantly building our repertoire of interaction skill as we meet new experiences. Second, we recognize that regression under stress or in new and different situations is a normal pattern in social interaction, much as it is in writing. But we also see that students can more quickly "come up to speed" in a new situation when they have already been performing at a high level.

As faculty, we have found this model helpful in working together to develop student skill in interaction. It has assisted us

--to understand the responses of students at different levels, e.g.

to explain why freshmen respond literally to directions, accept constraints without question, and see their performance as unrelated to the rest of the group, while seniors take hold of directions as more general guides, negotiate to change the constraints, and can produce work that meets their own as well as the group's needs.

--to provide support for growth, particularly at transition points.

Perry (1970), for example, notes that students let go of a certain security as they leave the literal and dogmatic approaches to learning, so that they may need explicit help in dealing with the insecurity of newer approaches.

- to seek opportunities to expand the experiences available to students in and out of the classroom
- to examine classroom practices, assessing the degree to which they assist students to develop their repertoire of interaction skill as they develop increasingly sophisticated analytical thinking in their disciplines.

The developmental model of interaction across the curriculum is a working draft of one faculty who have spent a number of years working with the explicit goal of the development of their students' social interaction skills, and two years in attempting to pull together a model to reflect that experience. We at Alverno College are interested in the responses of others who may have made similar efforts.

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