

# A Decent Way to Identify Students' Intellectual Position: Perry's Scheme



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## Abstract

This mini review aims to sum up Perry's Scheme and touch briefly on how it helps us to be better guide for medical students. Perry's Scheme enables us to detect in which stage the student is in intellectual development. Development occurs in four steps: In first step, which is duality, student believes that there is absolute "right and wrong" which is known by authorities. In second step, which is multiplicity, the student can comprehend that a problem can have more than one answer and the true one is determined by student's inner voice. In third step, which is relativism, there is no right or wrong answer; every opinion could be better in accordance with the circumstances. The last step is commitment within relativism in which student produces a perspective and makes his/her decision and estimates results of this decision with taking full responsibility.

**Keywords:** Perry's Scheme; Medical Education; Intellectual Development

## Introduction

Consider that you were giving the lecture and you explained perfectly how to approach a patient with kidney stone. While you were lecturing, you mentioned about there are different approaches in accordance with the place of the stone, its size, severity of the patient and so many situations like these. After the lecture one student came and asked that "Sir/Ma'am, which one of these approaches is right one?" what would you feel?

In this paper, we will be talking about "William Perry's Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development" which has been widely used in researches about student's intellectual development and which is really helpful in not only educational studies but also in the areas where measurement of intellectual development has a big role, like career planning. William G. Perry was born in 1913 in Paris and he studied on Educational Psychology. He made researches on the intellectual development of students for 15 years in Harvard Graduate School of Education. In 1970, he published "Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme" which includes his works. Even though Perry used mostly male students in his works during these 15 years, it is highly appreciated that his scheme can be applied to different cultures and genders even in 21st century [1].

We will first summarize Perry's study from Wilbert J. McKeachie, and then we will move on to details. In his book, McKeachie writes that Perry "described the development of Harvard students as

progressing from the dualistic belief that things are either true or false, good or evil, through a stage of relativism in which they feel that all beliefs are equally valid, to a stage of commitment to values and beliefs that recognized to be incomplete and imperfect but are open to correction and further development" [2]. While McKeachie expresses Perry's study in this way, we can put it forward as follows: Perry organizes that how students define "acquisition of knowledge" in their minds, from simple to complex with development steps. Perry's Scheme has nine branches under four main folds but in this paper we will sum up them in four branches in order to make it simple (Figure 1).

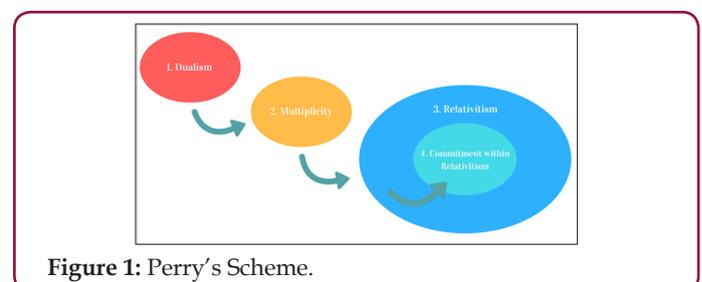


Figure 1: Perry's Scheme.

**Dualism:** Student thinks that there is only one true answer that should be learnt. For him/her there is an absolute "right and wrong" or "good and bad". The knowledge about these can only be obtained from an authority without reflecting on it. Since this authority knows truly what is right and what is wrong [1,3,4].

**Multiplicity:** Student thinks that a problem has more than one answer or does not have an answer or the answers can contradict with each other. When it comes to finding an answer he/she listens him/her inner voice instead of listening the authority. Student trusts this inner voice which has not a justification [1,3,4].

**Relativism:** In this stage every opinion or solution could be better in accordance with the circumstances. Student evaluates different perspectives with considering the conditions, source of the knowledge, and evidences. For this student, even the experts' arguments are the subjects of evaluation [1,3,4].

**Commitment within Relativism:** Student can produce his/her perspective by considering the source of knowledge, his/her personal experience and reasoning. He/She, in this point, makes his/her decision and estimates results of this decision with taking full responsibility. This decision making, however, is a continuously evolving process which does not happen in one time [1,3,4].

We should not miss a crucial point about this scheme which is that one student can be at the one of these four stages in one topic but he could also be in another stage in a different topic. Passing through one stage to another occurs via cognitive disequilibrium which is a result of student's readings, listening, the things he/she gained from his/her social and cultural environment. When we acquire information that cannot be fitted into existing information of us, we transform the new information into a picture, which is more compatible with our existing informations, or we could replace our old frame with a new one which is more suitable for this new information. This is the thing that will enable us to move

forward stage [5]. In this part, we will answer famous question which is "how we will use these things in real life?" with respect to Perry's Scheme. At the very beginning of this review, we asked that "what would you feel when a student asked the aforementioned question?" If you are teaching in a medical school, it is probable that your students can ask such dualistic questions especially if they are on their freshman years. Perry's Scheme helps us exactly in this point. Since, it helps you to detect in which stage the student is in intellectual development by not traditional ways but it enables you to identify his/her stage in a more systematic way. Hence, Perry's Scheme facilitates you to be a better guide for students to open next windows of the Perry's stages.

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