

### Why Self-Authorship is Important to Teaching and Learning

Kegan (1994) asserted that self-authorship is necessary to function in today's complex and confusing world. Baxter Magolda has suggested that self-authorship is important to learning and that faculty routinely expect students to evidence self-authorship, even though this ability is generally not evident until well into their 20s (Brown, 2009). This gap for traditional aged college students between what they can do and what is expected of them can be bridged with the Learning Partnerships Model.

### The Study

Baxter Magolda's work concerning self-authorship arose from her 20+ year longitudinal, qualitative study of 101 Miami University (Ohio) college students. Originally an exploration of intellectual development, self-authorship is considered an integrated theory of college student development with implications for the classroom, course development, academic advising, residence life, and almost any area of the college experience. Numerous publications and related studies have expanded her continuing work.

### Self-Authorship Defined

- Self-authorship is "the capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world" (Baxter Magolda in Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, p. xxii).
- The ability to know yourself, know what you know, reflect upon it, and base judgments on it
- Begins to evolve as students near graduation; more evident in their late 20s/early 30s

### Skills Associated with Self-Authorship (Brown, 2009)

- critical analysis and evaluation
- formation of integrated identity
- independent learning
- development of mature relationships
- embracement and valuing of diversity
- consideration of multiple perspectives
- cognitive maturity
- collaboration
- deciphering of ambiguity

### Self-Authorship Deconstructed

Baxter Magolda found that her participants, while in their 20s, were concerned with resolving three questions:

- Intellectual/Epistemological - *How do I know?* — the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge
- Intrapersonal - *Who am I?* – an individual's sense of who they are and what they believe
- Interpersonal - *How do I want to construct relationships with others?* – perceptions and construction of relationships

Baxter Magolda identified three elements of self-authorship:

- (1) **Trusting The Internal Voice**-Gaining control over thoughts and responses, leads to greater confidence in internal voice
- (2) **Building An Internal Foundation**-Developing a personal philosophy to guide actions
- (3) **Securing Internal Commitments**-Living life authentically; internal voice and foundation are integrated with external world

These components become more evident as students develop a greater focus on their own ability to know, understand themselves, and develop authentic relationships with others.

### Individuals move through four phases of self-authorship:

1. **Following Formulas** - allow others to define them, doing what authorities suggest, following guidance from others to be successful
2. **Crossroads** – dissatisfaction with others' definitions, see that following doesn't always work, but not yet able to act on desire to be more autonomous
3. **Becoming the Author of One's Life** – ability to choose one's beliefs and live them out (not without challenges), some renegotiation of relationships, weighing their needs against others'
4. **Internal Foundations** – individuals become grounded in the sense of who they are, develop a mutuality of relationships, recognize that ambiguity and external influences exists, and base life decisions on a strong inner core of beliefs and self-concept

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## The Learning Partnerships Model

The Learning Partnerships Model suggests approaches to helping students develop a sense of “internal authorship” where “the internal voice moves to the foreground,” taking precedence over external sources of authority and information (Baxter Magolda, 2011). The LPM includes three assumptions that challenge students' dependence on authority and three principles that foster the development of self-authorship.

### Three Core Assumptions of the LPM

1. Knowledge is complex and socially constructed
2. Self is central to knowledge construction
3. Authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers

**Three Core Principles** (for educational practice that supports the development of self-authorship)

#### 1. Validating learners as knowers

- Insure students know their voices are important
- Help students to view you as human, approachable, and concerned—students more likely to see knowledge construction as reachable
- Mute the voice of faculty as “the” authority
- Encourage active sharing of ideas and viewpoints

#### 2. Situating learning in learner's own experience

- Recognize and acknowledge that students bring their personal experiences into the classroom
- Avoid marginalizing students (“he” in examples, speaking about topics with which they are unfamiliar)
- Use analogies, drawing from student experiences, sharing stories
- Explain the relevance of material to students' daily lives
- Provide opportunities for self-reflection to help students become clearer about what they know, why they hold their beliefs, and how they want to act on them
- Develop assignments that draw from and relate to student experiences
- Offer guidelines to students, rather than requirements

## Defining learning as mutually constructing meaning

- Frame learning as something you do together
- Present teaching and learning as relational where instructor and students are changed
- Allow students to see your thinking, reasoning, learning, and writing processes

### Questions to Consider

- What is your reaction to the idea that faculty should be concerned with helping college students to strengthen their internal voice and lessen dependence on external voices?
- Which of the three principles of the LPM is easiest for you to implement? What makes the other principles more difficult to implement and how might you overcome this? List at least two ideas for implementation of each principle in your teaching.
- How might you apply the three principles to your teaching generally or to a specific course or learning objective?

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