This chapter presents the need for the journey of self-authorship and an overview of key concepts and terms explored in this volume.

The Journey of Self-Authorship: Why Is It Necessary?

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Education is what survives when what has been learnt has been forgotten.

B. F. Skinner

Nowhere today are the increasing public cries for accountability in higher education heard louder than in student learning outcomes. The expectations of higher education in the twenty-first century include overarching goals of effective citizenship and outcomes such as critical thinking, mature decision making, appreciation of multiple perspectives and difference, and interdependent relationships with others (Baxter Magolda, 2004a). These broad goals go considerably beyond mere knowledge of subject matter and require a new lens to view learning and teaching in higher education.

An understanding of developmental transformations and a theoretical framework are required if broader learning expectations are to be met. The theoretical framework of self-authorship, as identified by Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (1992, 1999), offers a context for examining these transformations and developing effective responses to students’ intellectual growth through the lens of self-authorship. The Learning Partnerships Model (LPM) (Baxter Magolda, 2004b) that grows from the tenets of self-authorship provides a practice model linking learning and development for implementing the transformations that students need to become self-authored. This
volume presents the urgent case for professional and institutional transformation and examples of using the lens of self-authorship as a framework for educators to consider as courses are structured, research designed, and outreach developed and implemented.

The necessity and urgency for a new look at how we prepare college students will be evident in this chapter’s synopsis of recent national reports and discussions about the preparation of college students. These efforts to measure and report student learning in higher education seem headed for narrow national testing of subject matter knowledge without consideration of the broader goals of a college education and a self-authored citizen. What is missing in all the calls for more accountability for students’ intellectual growth is an understanding of a theoretical context for developmental transformations and a model for implementing the teaching and learning process that fosters growth. The goal of this volume is to fill the void for this understanding. This chapter explains terms and concepts used throughout the volume and introduces the LPM, a holistic practice model that brings together within a common framework the theory of self-authorship, development, and instruction.

Other chapters in this volume provide examples of how to assess self-authorship, how to use the theory in research to understand how students make self-authored decisions, and how to develop innovative curricula using the lens of self-authorship and the LPM. A chapter on needed institutional changes if we are to take student learning seriously and a chapter summarizing the promise of self-authorship with further case examples of the LPM provide ideas for transforming educational practice. Finally, a chapter of next steps with suggestions for advancing the journey of self-authorship completes the volume.

The urgency and necessity for educators to embrace the journey of self-authorship and the LPM for improving college student learning outcomes become clearer as we view national efforts currently underway to shape the dialogue in narrower ways.

National Efforts to Improve Student Learning

Higher education institutions in the United States have kept pace with and have often led the rest of the world in providing students with powerful new technologies, new dynamics of communication, and new connections to faculty as knowledge has been created. However, serious learning issues are now surfacing, and the call to improve college student learning is being revisited by organizations such as the Business-Higher Education Forum (2003, 2004), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2003), the State Higher Education Executive Officers (2005), the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2004; Schneider and Miller, 2005), and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2005; Miller and Ewell, 2005). It is apparent from each of these major reports that student
learning outcomes are rapidly taking center stage as the principal gauge of
the effectiveness of higher education.

As further evidence of the growing concern of fostering the intellectual
development of college students, three major efforts are under way to shape
the national discussion of preparing higher education students to compete
in the new global economy. The first of these efforts involves accreditation
of academic programs and institutions. In September 2003 the Council for
Higher Education Accreditation produced its Statement of Mutual Responsi-
bilities for Student Learning Outcomes: Accreditation, Institutions, and Pro-
grams. This statement identified a common responsibility for institutions
and accrediting agencies in policing themselves and preparing for external
review. This common expectation focuses on student learning outcomes and
calls for institutions to regularly gather and report concrete evidence about
what students know and can do as a result of their respective courses of
study. This evidence must be framed in terms of established learning out-
comes and supplied at an appropriate level of aggregation. The document
amplifies this expectation of mutual responsibilities by providing an in-
depth background statement on accreditation and student learning. A clear
need is cited for accrediting organizations to augment the information
reported about student learning resources and processes with more easily
understood information about what students know and can do as a conse-
quence of their attending various institutions and programs. It was antici-
pated that this call for direct measures of student learning and ease of public
understanding would be echoed in the report of the federal Commission on

On September 19, 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings
announced the formation of the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the
Future of Higher Education (Babyak and Glickman, 2005). The new com-
misson was charged with developing a comprehensive national strategy for
postsecondary education that will meet the needs of America’s diverse popu-
lation while also addressing the economic and workforce needs of the coun-
try’s future. A nineteen–member commission appointed by Secretary Spellings
is composed of representatives from business, educational organizations, and
institutions, with Charles Miller, an outspoken critic of education from Texas,
as chair. Miller has been an architect of change in the Texas education system
for over two decades and helped create two major accountability systems in
the state: the accountability system for public schools that became the model
for the No Child Left Behind Act and a method of accountability testing for
the University of Texas System. Although all commission members will weigh
in on the final report, a heavy reliance on accountability testing in higher edu-
cation was a logical expectation given Miller’s urging to test college students
as a way of measuring what they have learned. In anticipation of the commis-
sion’s report, the national conversation was broadened through discussion
among college and university presidents and provosts in summer 2006.
The National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) prepared a discussion paper released in April 2006, “Improving Student Learning in Higher Education Through Better Accountability and Assessment,” coauthored by Peter McPherson, president of NASULGC, and David Shulenburger, vice president of academic affairs. This paper was discussed by university presidents and provosts representing nearly all four-year public colleges and universities in the United States at their 2006 summer meetings and recommendations were shared with the Spellings Commission staff. In laying out the many attempts over the past few decades to better understand the complexities and outcomes of higher education, the authors conclude that no single system accurately reflects and compares the critical facts easily understood by all interested parties, serves as an effective instrument for continuous quality improvement, and is flexible and dynamic. Emphasizing that the very diversity of our U.S. decentralized organization of higher education is its greatest strength, the paper urges consideration of a voluntary system by type or mission of colleges and universities and one that is based on outcomes. Restating a deep commitment to improving student learning, McPherson and Shulenburger call for a serious discussion within the higher education community on how best to improve current efforts and consider a voluntary system to improve student learning.

These three recent developments will keep alive the conversations about student learning with an emphasis on measuring direct outcomes of learning and reporting to the public in easily understood terms. The fact that all three efforts are currently underway and outcomes of their deliberations likely focus solely on knowledge attainment, with a national testing program of skills probably resulting, is troubling if we believe a more holistic picture of student learning is necessary. These developments make clear the need to consider seriously the journey of self-authorship as a viable model for improving the transformations necessary for college students to meet higher education’s overarching goals. This volume responds to the call from NASULGC for serious discussion within the higher education community on how best to improve our current efforts and consider a voluntary system to improve student learning. Before proceeding with chapters that explain and give examples of the theory framework and the LPM practice model, we need a common understanding of concepts and definitions that appear throughout this volume.

Definitions

Three key terms are threaded throughout this volume: student intellectual development, student learning outcomes, and self-authorship.

**Student Intellectual Development.** Student intellectual development at the postsecondary level has become a global concern as agencies, institutions, and governments struggle to identify what is essential for college students to learn to function fully in the twenty-first century and how to measure these learning outcomes. Indexes of student learning that are both
creditable and easily understood by the public are necessary and currently missing. Theories of student learning, particularly higher-order learning, are important in helping us understand the student intellectual development that underpins student learning. Discussions of a theory base are noticeably missing in the national conversations; nevertheless, they must underpin our holistic view of college student development.

Although there are different orientations to understanding student intellectual development through various theoretical lenses, the research begun by Perry (1968) and extended by Baxter Magolda (1992) undergirds the chapters in this volume and helps us understand the metaphor of a journey that students undertake as they move through their college years. Perry's work on the stages of intellectual development identified nine stages of this journey that college students move through with respect to intellectual development. The nine positions can be grouped into four categories: (1) dualism/received knowledge, where authorities have the knowledge and students must learn the answers; (2) multiplicity/subjective knowledge, where there are conflicting answers, and students must trust their inner voices, not the external authority; (3) relativism/procedural knowledge, where there are disciplinary reasoning methods; and (4) commitment/constructed knowledge, where students integrate the knowledge they learn from others with their own personal experience and reflection. This journey through the stages can be repeated, and a student may be at different stages at the same time with respect to different subjects.

Perry's interviews were conducted with a small sample of primarily male students at a medium-sized private university almost four decades ago. More recently, Marcia Baxter Magolda's work builds on Perry's research using the journey metaphor and changes in students' construction of meaning or ways of knowing from absolute knowing, through transitional and independent knowing, to contextual knowing. Her longitudinal research began with a study in 1986 with 101 first-year college students. Her goal was to better understand learning and intellectual development during college. Although these initial interviews were helpful in understanding different ways of knowing during college, Baxter Magolda (2001) recognized the need to continue her study to a postcollege phase and expand her investigation of intellectual development to include how participants viewed themselves and their interconnections with others. Perhaps the best way to understand the broader definition of student intellectual development used in this volume is through her own words:

College educators share a common goal—to guide college students through this transformation to develop mature ways of making informed judgments. Moving away from uncritical acceptance of knowledge to critically constructing one's own perspective, however, is more complex than learning a skill set. It is a transformation of how we think—a change in our assumptions about the certainty, source and limits of knowledge. The evolution of assumptions about knowledge from certain and possessed by authorities to context dependent...
judgment based on relevant evidence is what researchers call intellectual or epistemological development [Baxter Magolda, 2006, p. 50].

**Student Learning Outcomes.** Agreement on common learning goals and outcomes for college students, and therefore what is measured, sounds deceptively simple. In fact, achieving agreement is complex given the diversity of higher education institutions, their missions, and their visions, leading often to narrow, easy-to-measure outcomes. In a poll conducted by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the public indicated that the following broad goals were “absolutely essential” for higher education (Shavelson and Huang, 2003):

- Sense of maturity and ability to manage on one’s own—71 percent
- Ability to get along with people different from one’s self—68 percent
- Problem-solving and thinking ability—63 percent
- High-technology skills—61 percent
- Specific expertise and knowledge in a chosen career—60 percent
- Top-notch writing and speaking ability—57 percent
- Responsibilities of citizenship—44 percent

Many others weigh in on the definition of student learning outcomes. Most recently, Derek Bok (2006) in his book *Our Underachieving Colleges* cites several purposes he believes go beyond intellectual development and are essential for all college graduates: learning to communicate, learning to think, building character, preparing for citizenship, living with diversity, preparing for a global society, acquiring broader interests, and preparing for a career.

While it is up to each institution to define the learning goals and outcomes for its students, the definition I use is related to the journey of self-authorship and the ends we seek in the journey that college provides. Again, the words of Baxter Magolda provide the definition used in this volume:

Educators have multiple expectations for the journey that is called a college education. For example, we expect students to acquire knowledge, learn how to analyze it, and learn the process of judging what to believe themselves—what developmental theorists call complex ways of knowing. We expect students to develop an internal sense of identity—an understanding of how they view themselves and what they value. We expect them to learn how to construct healthy relationships with others, relationships based on mutuality rather than self-sacrifice, and relationships that affirm diversity. We expect them to integrate these ways of knowing, being and interacting with others into the capacity for self-authorship—the capacity to internally define their own beliefs, identity, and relationships. This self-authorship, this internal capacity, is the necessary foundation for mutual, collaborative participation with others in adult life [Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xvi].
Self-Authorship. The words of one of Baxter Magolda’s students, Mark, build on the definition of self-authorship in the preceding paragraph as he struggles to define his own beliefs, identity, and relationships: “Making yourself into something, not what other people say or not just kind of floating along in life, but you’re in some sense a piece of clay. You’ve been formed into different things, but that doesn’t mean you can’t go back on the potter’s wheel and instead of somebody else’s hands building and molding you, you use your own, and in a fundamental sense change your values and beliefs.”

Mark clearly articulated the move into self-authorship he and his peers made in their mid- to late twenties. During this time, the tide turned in the clash between internal voice and external influence. Participants’ internal voices grew strong enough to supersede external influence, and although external influence remained a part of their lives, it was now relegated to the background as the internal voice took the foreground. The internal voice, or self, became the coordinator and mediator of external influence. As Mark said, participants began to use their own hands to build and mold themselves and their beliefs.

Becoming the authors of their own lives involved reshaping what they believed (epistemology), their sense of self (intrapersonal), and their relationships with others (interpersonal). Participants shifted from “how you know” to “how I know” and in doing so began to choose their own beliefs. They acknowledged the inherent uncertainty of knowledge and took up the challenge of choosing what to believe in this context. They also attempted to live out their beliefs in their work and personal lives. At the same time, “how I know” required determining who the “I” was. Intense self-reflection and interaction with others helped participants gain perspective on themselves and begin to choose their own values and identity. This emerging sense of self required renegotiation of existing relationships that had been built on external approval at the expense of personal needs and the creation of new mutual relationships consistent with the internal voice (Baxter Magolda, 2001). This explanation of self-authorship prepares us to take a look at the practice model that grows from this understanding and provides a road map for the journey and the transitions along the way.

Learning Partnerships Model

The transitions required for the journey of self-authorship take time, energy, and guidance from a variety of dedicated educators. This complex journey ideally begins for students at the outset of college. For the journey to be successful, faculty and student development professionals must place self-authorship as the central goal of higher education and provide a new form of guidance for teaching and learning. This new form of guidance, the LPM, emphasizes challenge and support and brings together two traditionally
separate worlds in academe: cognition and affect. Students experience the classroom, or curricular, with its emphasis on knowledge, and they concurrently experience student life, or the cocurricular, with its emphasis on affect. Too often these two worlds do not meet or coordinate despite an avowed preference found in the college recruitment literature for education of the whole person. The LPM provides a bridge or pattern for collaboration between the two worlds.

The chapters that follow provide an in-depth look at understanding the LPM, the self-authorship theory behind it, and multiple examples of its application. It is important to have a good understanding of the model, and I offer a simple metaphor to help in visualizing it. To fully understand the LPM, think about a journey you may be planning. You will need some form of transportation, a road map with signs along the way to guide your journey, and a final destination. Now visualize your transportation as a tandem bicycle. There is a rider on the front, the student, who decides the direction and is in charge of making decisions. The rider on the back is you, the teacher or student affairs professional, who stokes the bike, providing challenge and support for the student on the front. You provide the elements of challenge and support in your teaching and mentoring (you might picture them as the saddlebags for the journey). Keeping challenge and support in balance as the student heads in the direction of self-authorship is part of your role and a key element of the model. The guideposts are found as students move from absolute knowing, the first marker; through transitional or independent knowing, the second marker; to contextual knowing, the final destination. This visual and simple depiction of the LPM is a metaphor for an in-depth understanding of the model that appears in the following chapters but helps us see the ideal of the partnership, as the student and the educator are good company for each other on the journey. For a deeper understanding of the model we turn again to the words of Baxter Magolda (2004c):

Learning partnerships support self-authorship via three principles: validating learners’ capacity as knowledge constructors, situating learning in learners’ experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning. Validating learners’ capacity to learn and construct knowledge is necessary for them to realize that they can go back to the potter’s wheel. Situating learning in their experience instead of the experience of authority gives them a context from which to bring their identity to learning. Defining learning as a mutual process of exchanging perspectives to arrive at knowledge claims supports their participation in the social construction of knowledge. The three principles model autonomy through encouraging learners to bring their experience and construct their own perspectives. The principles model connection through encouraging learners to connect to their own and others’ experience and ideas [pp. xix, xx].
A Necessary New Lens for the Journey

As national calls for a new emphasis on student learning outcomes take center stage and become the principal gauge of higher education’s effectiveness, faculty and administrators need a broader, more holistic framework for understanding and fostering student intellectual growth. The conceptual framework for this volume, which addresses the need for a new lens to understand student intellectual growth and responds to the call from NASULGC for serious discussion within the higher education community on how best to improve our efforts, provides an innovative perspective that is gained from the theory of self-authorship and the LPM. Practical examples of the use of this new lens fill the chapters that follow and conclude with a chapter to spark involvement in the next steps on this journey of student intellectual transformations.

References


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