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Interview Strategies for Assessing Self-Authorship: Constructing Conversations to Assess Meaning Making

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This article presents two interview strategies used to assess college students' developmental growth toward self-authorship. We illustrate that self-authorship is a foundation for achieving many college learning outcomes and argue that designing practice to promote self-authorship requires understanding how to assess it. We offer a brief overview of the concept of self-authorship, explore the basic tenets of assessing self-authorship, and describe in detail two self-authorship interview strategies. The conversational nature of the interviews creates a learning partnership between interviewer and interviewee that serves the dual role of assessment and developmental intervention. Challenges and benefits of using these interview strategies to assess and promote self-authorship will help readers judge their utility in future research and practice.

Interest in designing higher education learning environments to promote self-authorship is on the rise in light of national reports' descriptions of learning outcomes for the 21st century. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' (2006) statement on *Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility* espouses that college should enable students to be "far more aware of the complexity of the issues at stake and far better able to ground their commitments in analysis, evidence, and careful consideration of alternatives" (p. 11). *Greater Expectations, A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (Association of American

Colleges & Universities, 2002) calls for intentional learners who "are integrative thinkers who can see connections in seemingly disparate information and draw on a wide range of knowledge to make decisions" (p. 21). *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2004) advocates cognitive complexity, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, civic engagement, and humanitarianism among desirable learning outcomes. How can educators effectively respond to the calls made in these reports in ways that help students achieve these outcomes? We argue that the first step is to understand the developmental foundation that makes achievement of these outcomes possible. The construct of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994) provides a rich conceptual lens for understanding the development of complex epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capacities associated with student development and maturity in effectively navigating adult roles and responsibilities.

In this article, we offer a constructive-developmental perspective on assessing self-authorship, highlight the basic tenets of this approach, and explore in depth two interview strategies being successfully used to assess self-authorship in young adults. We also address how these interview strategies can function as developmental interventions. First, we offer a short summary of theory and research on self-authorship, noting how this model lays a

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foundation for educational practice designed to promote self-authorship.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Robert Kegan (1994) articulated the concept of self-authorship as the foundation of many of the demands modern life places on adults. He described self-authorship as:

> an ideology, an internal identity, a *self-authorship* that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer *authored by* them, it *authors them* and thereby achieves a personal authority. (p. 185, italics in original)

Research confirms that this ability to author one's thinking, feeling, and social relating is inherent in successful functioning in adult life (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). For example, intercultural maturity requires the capacity to use multiple cultural frames, the ability to construct an internal sense of identity that is not threatened by difference, and the capacity to engage in interdependent relationships (Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Synthesizing various national reports on components of 21st century higher education, Baxter Magolda (2004c) concluded that self-authorship was also the foundation for achieving many contemporary college learning outcomes.

Self-authorship encompasses and integrates three dimensions of development: epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal (Kegan, 1994). The epistemological dimension of development refers to how people use assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge to decide what to believe (Kitchener, 1983; Perry, 1970). Self-authored persons assume knowledge is un-

certain and judged in light of evidence relevant to the context; they actively construct, evaluate, and interpret judgments to develop their internal belief systems (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). Thus the cognitive maturity called for in integrating disparate information to make decisions requires a self-authored belief system (Baxter Magolda, 2004c). How people use assumptions about knowledge to craft beliefs is closely related to how they construct their identities, or the intrapersonal developmental dimension (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; King & Baxter Magolda, 1996). Just as complex knowledge construction requires integrating disparate information, complex identity construction requires integrating various characteristics to form a coherent identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Self-authored persons have the ability to explore, reflect on, and internally choose enduring values to form their identities rather than doing so by simply assimilating expectations of external others (Kegan, 1994). They then use this internal identity to interpret and guide their experiences and actions. This internal identity that is not overly dependent on others is a crucial aspect of standing up for one's own beliefs (an aspect of cognitive maturity). Similarly, it is a crucial aspect of mature relationships (the interpersonal dimension) that require respect for both self and other. Self-authored persons have the developmental capacity for interdependence, or the ability to respect one's own and others' needs, negotiate multiple perspectives, and engage in genuinely mutual relationships (Kegan, 1994). Thus, self-authorship on all three dimensions reflects the integrated developmental capacities that are inherent in the cognitive, identity, and relational maturity required for college graduates to be effective workers, parents, family members, and citizens (Baxter Magolda, 2004c).

The Journey Toward Self-Authorship

Multiple theories of college student develop- ment suggest that many students have been socialized to depend on external others such as authorities and peers for their beliefs, identity, and relationship constructions. They often see knowledge as certain and accept authority's knowledge claims uncritically, which leaves them no internal basis for making judgments (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1970). Their reliance on peers and others for approval yields an identity that is susceptible to external pressure rather than one based on internally chosen values (Abes & Jones, 2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Josselson, 1987). In relation- ships with significant others, these individuals often sacrifice their own needs to meet perceived expectations (Gilligan, 1982; Kegan, 1994) or rely on social conventions as the basis for decision making (Kohlberg, 1984). Using this combination of assumptions and choices, students tend to follow external formulas for gaining knowledge, establishing identity, and engaging in relationships with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001). College experiences usually challenge this authority dependence by invit- ing learners to develop their own purposes and meaning. The resulting tension between internal and external influence marks a crossroads (Baxter Magolda, 2001) where learners struggle to sort through multiple perspectives to choose their own beliefs. They recognize the need to establish their identity internally and to extract themselves from overly dependent relationships, but both tasks are more easily recognized than accomplished. Participants in Baxter Magolda's (2001) 20- year longitudinal study spent most of their 20s working their way through the crossroads to achieve self-authorship. Kegan (1994) noted that one half to two thirds of the persons in his

research had yet to achieve self-authorship.

Self-authorship is possible, albeit not prevalent, in college. Pizzolato (2003, 2004, 2005) found that dissonance and provocative experiences prompted college students who were at high risk for withdrawal from college to begin to internally define their goals and identities. Torres's (2003, Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004) longitudinal study of Latino/a college students revealed that early experience with diversity and racism prompted them to be more open to multiple perspectives. Similarly, Abes's (2003; Abes & Jones, 2004) longitudinal study illustrated that lesbian college students' experience of discrimination offered an opportunity for them to self-author their identities and beliefs. These studies suggest that dissonance and experiences of discrimination help students recognize a mismatch between external influences and their internal voices and stimulate reflection on how to grapple with and reconcile this mismatch. Thus adversity, if accompanied by support, can promote the journey toward self-authorship.

However, the potential for promoting self-authorship in college far exceeds the degree to which it has been prevalent among college students, perhaps due to the need for more intentional support for what Kegan (1994) calls the challenging curriculum of adult life. We turn next to current efforts to promote self-authorship during college; this sets the stage for using interview strategies to assess and promote self-authorship.

Current Efforts to Promote Self- Authorship in College

Promoting development involves respecting students' current meaning making and using it as a starting point to identify appropriate challenges that prompt students to consider more complex perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 2004b; Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda,

1996). Thus, designing educational practice to promote self-authorship necessitates assessing students' current epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. In turn, judging the effectiveness of educational practice in promoting self-authorship requires some means of assessing students' developmental progress.

Efforts to provide intentional support for college students to develop self-authorship show promise. The Learning Partnerships Model (LPM), which emerged from Baxter Magolda's participants' stories about conditions that enabled them to develop self-authorship, has been successfully used in diverse settings to promote self-authorship during college (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). The model proposes creating such conditions through supporting learners' current development by validating their ability to know, situating learning in their experience, and defining learning as a mutual process. It simultaneously challenges learners toward transformation by portraying knowledge as complex and socially constructed, emphasizing self as central to knowledge construction, and sharing authority and expertise in mutual construction of knowledge. The LPM has served as the framework for a semester-length cultural immersion program (Yonkers-Talz, 2004), a higher education graduate program (Rogers, Magolda, Baxter Magolda, & Knight Abowitz, 2004), an honors college (Haynes, 2006), a 4-year writing curriculum (Haynes, 2004), a 2-year core curriculum course sequence (Bekken & Marie, 2007), an urban leadership internship program (Egart & Healy, 2004), and an academic advising program for students in academic difficulty (Pizzolato, 2006; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). In each case, students made progress toward self-authorship, although the degree of progress varied depending on their initial meaning making, the intensity of the challenges involved, and the duration of the experience. The LPM has been used in conjunction with other models to guide a diversity course (Hornak & Ortiz, 2004) and community standards in residential life (Piper & Buckley, 2004); in both cases progress toward self-authorship occurred. The model has been used in larger scale efforts in faculty and curriculum development (Wildman, 2004) and the reorganization of a student affairs division toward a learning organization (Mills & Strong, 2004). Collectively these efforts underscore the potential for promoting self-authorship during college.

Educational practices that are intentionally designed to foster self-authorship hold great promise for higher education's success in helping students achieve contemporary learning outcomes. To realize this potential, assessing progress on self-authorship is crucial. We now turn to basic premises regarding how to assess the complex phenomenon of self-authorship and a detailed discussion of two interview strategies that have been used successfully to do so in higher education settings.

BASIC TENETS OF ASSESSING SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Robert Kegan (1994) portrays development as "the evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (p. 9). The complexity of this evolution requires a complex approach to assessment. Numerous constructive-developmental theorists have worked extensively to access the underlying meaning-making structures behind intellectual (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1970), ego (e.g., Loevinger & Wessler, 1970), and moral (e.g., Gibbs & Widaman, 1982; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999) develop-

ment. Most of these efforts emphasize Piaget's flexible and inquisitive method clinique (Gibbs & Widaman) or explore ill-structured problems (King & Kitchener). As King (1990) noted, assessment is complicated because individuals often use more than one meaning-making structure at a time, and prefer (recognize as better) statements using reasoning structures that are more complex than what they are able to produce independently. These complications are also inherent in assessing self-authorship as it incorporates similar dimensions of development.

Self-Authorship as a Constructive-Developmental Phenomenon

Theories of self-authorship reflect a constructive-developmental tradition (Kegan, 1982, 1994). This tradition holds that humans actively construct their perspectives by interpreting their experiences (i.e., constructivism) and that these constructions form meaning-making structures that evolve over time (i.e., developmentalism). Piaget's (1950) work on cognitive structures stands at the core of this tradition and many theories of college student cognitive development incorporate his notion that development occurs when dissonance with one's current meaning-making structure prompts consideration of new, more complex structures (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1970). Kegan (1982) extended this notion to an integrated view of development in which epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of development are interwoven. Recent research reveals that dissonance in any of these dimensions can initiate development (Abes, 2003; Pizzolato, 2005; Torres, 2003).

Work in this tradition is predicated on the premise that people approach and interpret their experiences using particular meaning-making structures (e.g., external formulas, crossroads, self-authorship) to make sense of, or interpret, their experiences. Kegan (1982) emphasized that individuals make meaning in the space between their experiences and their reactions to the experiences—"the place where the event is privately composed, made sense of, the place where it actually *becomes* an event for that person" (p. 2, italics in original). To understand and assess these meaning-making structures, researchers must learn *how* people made sense of an experience and what constructions of the world, self, and others undergird that interpretation. To further complicate assessment, in each meaning-making structure there are elements individuals are aware of and have control over (what Kegan calls object) and elements that have control over them (what Kegan calls subject). Object is "distinct enough from us that we can do something with it" (Kegan, 1994, p. 32); subject "refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in. We *have* object; we *are* subject" (Kegan, 1994, p. 32, italics in original). For example, relationships are often subject for college students because they so closely identify with what their peers expect of them. Although they can articulate their personal needs (of which they are aware and have control), they can be unaware of the degree to which how they construe peer relationships dictates their identity, decisions, and actions. Thus assessing the meaning-making structures in the journey toward self-authorship requires unearthing both object and subject aspects of meaning making.

Implications for Assessing Self-Authorship

Kegan (1994) uses the Subject-Object Interview (SOI; Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 1988) to assess self-authorship. The SOI is based on two discoveries from his earlier research: the types of content areas that reveal

subject-object information and the necessity that the interviewee have ready access to reflections about these areas. Productive content areas include anger, anxiety, success, or change. If asked good probing questions to explore how they experienced these phenomena, interviewees could explain how they constructed their sense of self. Interviewees who were actively experiencing problems had ready access to this self-referential material, whereas people who were not actively experiencing problems did not. Thus, the SOI begins with asking interviewees to record notes on 10 cards with the words "anger, anxious/nervous, success, strong stand/conviction, sad, torn, moved/touched, lost something, change, important to me" (Lahey et al., p. 291) to "fill" the respondent with self-referential material for the interview. Once the interview begins, the interviewee chooses which cards to explore, and only a few cards are actually discussed because the key to conducting a quality interview is accessing the meaning-making structure underlying any experience the interviewee regards as important.

Another key characteristic of the SOI is the complex role of the interviewer (Lahey et al., 1988). Because each respondent produces unique material, the interviewer constructs questions in the context of what the respondent introduces. The interviewer's primary task is to explore how the interviewees construct themselves to yield the interpretations the interviewees share. To achieve this task, the interviewer must listen actively to identify questions that will locate the boundaries of the interviewee's assumptions about knowledge, self, and relationships. Asking about areas in which a person is struggling is more likely to yield information about that person's "leading edge" of development (the boundaries) rather than those areas in which the individual is settled (the central tendency or typical way of resolving issues). An underlying premise of this

strategy is that there is variability in an individual's repertoire of responses and that the interviewer should explore this range. Prodding interviewees to dig into their assumptions requires sympathetic and supportive listening to let them know that the interviewer heard and understood what they already shared. This sort of listening is crucial to building the rapport that assists interviewees in substantive self-reflection.

Many of the core assumptions inherent in the SOI are consistent with constructivist perspectives on qualitative interviewing and developmental assessment. The constructivist paradigm, which describes realities as multiple, socially constructed, context-bound, and mutually shaped by the interaction of the researcher and participant (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), is consistent with basic tenets of an integrated view of development toward self-authorship. An individual's particular meaning making is of paramount importance (Kegan, 1982; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) from this perspective. Constructive-developmental theorists often emphasize tapping into real-life situations and allowing interviewees to choose the context and content of the interview to elicit their unique meaning making. Similarly, a focus on meaning making content is typical in constructivist-developmental research to access meaning constructed in particular contexts. Acknowledging that the interview is a context for meaning construction in and of itself, constructivist researchers regard the interview as a partnership in which the interviewer and interviewee engage in a conversation to construct meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2004a; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin). Constructive-developmental researchers have used various forms of unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2000) or informal conversational (Patton, 2001) interviews to engage interviewees in exploring assumptions about knowledge, self, and relations with others (e.g.,

Baxter Magolda, 2001; Belenky et al., 1986; Perry, 1970). These interviews reflect responsive interviewing in which "the researcher is responding to and then asking further questions about what he or she hears from the interviewees rather than relying on predetermined questions" (Rubin & Rubin p. vii). Holstein and Gubrium's (2003) active interview also reflects this interpretive practice as interviewer and interviewee produce meaning through their interaction.

This cursory overview of self-authorship theory and constructivist interviewing reveals the complexity of assessing human development in general and self-authorship in particular. This complexity has hampered efforts to assess self-authorship through questionnaires. Pizzolato's (2007) 24-item Self-Authorship Survey (SAS), constructed by translating the three dimensions of self-authorship into skill sets, reveals the degree to which respondents agree with how closely the statements reflect their typical ways of thinking and acting. Coupled with an experience questionnaire that allows respondents to write narratives about important experiences, the SAS assesses both self-authored reasoning and action. Pizzolato (2007) reported dilemmas in this assessment process including respondents writing about decisions in which their actions were constrained by others and using language that made it difficult to ascertain self-authored reasoning. Creamer and Laughlin (2005) and Laughlin and Creamer (2007) used an open-ended interview and a questionnaire to assess self-authorship in the arena of career decision making among college women. They found that the interview revealed how students constructed their consultation with others about career decisions, whereas the questionnaire provided information about those the students consulted. Thus acquiring sufficient detail to identify underlying meaning-making structures may require interview approaches.

The basic tenets of self-authorship theory and constructive interviewing have also guided two interview strategies developed to assess young adult development longitudinally. We discuss each of these next to offer readers examples of strategies to assess self-authorship in young adult populations.

STRATEGIES TO ASSESS SELF-AUTHORSHIP: TWO EXAMPLES

Example 1: Baxter Magolda's Longitudinal Self-Authorship Interview

The original interview Baxter Magolda (1992) used in her longitudinal study assessed epistemological development. This was appropriate to the initial portion of the study's focus on the role of gender in epistemological development. Baxter Magolda started the interview with a version of Perry's (1970) broad opening question, asking participants to describe their most significant learning experience of the year as a way to invite them to frame the conversation. Exploring why particular experiences were important yielded assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge. Additional topics used to prompt conversation included participants' expectations of instructors and peers in learning, how learners' learned best, what cocurricular experiences promoted learning, and how they had handled any conflicting information they had encountered. This learning focus was effective during the college phase of the study, but participants found it less useful after their graduation when they wanted to talk about a broader range of experiences.

Participants' request to talk about their post-college experience more broadly changed the focus of the study from the one-dimensional focus on epistemology to a multidimensional focus that included intrapersonal and interpersonal development and eventually yielded a picture of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda,

2001). Giving participants greater freedom of expression yielded an informal conversational interview (Patton, 2001) that began with participants offering a summary of the previous year, then proceeding to share experiences they felt were significant. Abandoning the earlier conversation topics in favor of probes that encouraged participants to make meaning of their experiences allowed their most important concerns to emerge freely. These concerns or reflections make up the bulk of the approximately 90-minute interview. Follow-up questions to deepen understanding of the development underlying these reflections elicit a description of the experience, why it is important to the participant, and how it affected her or him. Everyday conversational questions such as "tell me more about that" or "help me understand why you reacted in that way" help participants clarify and make explicit their meaning. The closing segment of the interview is a time for participants to add any other observations they wish to share, talk about how their current perspectives relate to those shared in the previous year, and ask questions about the project.

During their 20s, participants were struggling with three major questions: How do I know, who am I, and what relationships do I want with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Most encountered the crossroads at which others' expectations of them and their own emerging values conflicted during their early 20s. Free flowing conversation about the contexts in which these tensions occurred (e.g., advanced education, employment, personal and community life) and how participants handled these tensions enabled Baxter Magolda (2001) to identify possible pathways toward self-authorship, the nature of the three dimensions of self-authorship, and the environmental characteristics that promoted self-authorship. An example interview excerpt in which Andrew talks about the impact of his

mother's death reveals the richness of participants' reflections:

> I just found myself in so many ways changed, just the way I approached and reacted to things. I think I deeply changed because my Mom was probably my best friend. For me it was just a drastic change in my life, even just beyond losing a family member. It's kind of hard to pinpoint exactly what it made me do. But I think it oddly enough made me realize that I, in a way, had nobody else to lean on and I had to, I guess, pick myself up by my bootstraps. My father's still alive. He was never the one that I'd lean to for support. So I found myself going a lot more to internal support, congratulating myself for a good job, and doing things to please myself rather than to please somebody else. If I got a B on something, but I thought I had done a good job, I was much more comfortable and able to deal with it because I knew I had given it my best. I guess in a way I just felt, "Well, that's just one other person's opinion." Pushing myself internally made the A's come easier because I might have set my own personal standards higher. It's kind of hard to pinpoint exactly how it affected me. (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 130)

The loss of his mother pushed Andrew to turn inward. Although he could have shifted to his father for support, he was able to take up that responsibility himself. Even in this extremely short excerpt it is possible to see how Andrew interpreted this experience and what it meant for how he came to view himself and the world.

Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship Interview (2001) invites participants to identify the content for the interview and share reflections in areas of importance to them. This allows for multiple, context-bound realities to emerge as the interviewer listens to each individual's unique meaning making perspective. The interviewer works in partnership with inter-

viewees to explore the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal assumptions behind their reflections. Encouraging the interviewee to explore issues deeply means the interviewer must occasionally refine or reframe questions that have yielded superficial responses to assess whether the interviewee will produce more substantive responses with such encouragement. This kind of questioning is most successful when there is sufficient rapport to sustain the challenge of not being let "off the hook" by giving a superficial answer. Due to the 20-year duration of this study, rapport between the interviewer and participants is strong and superficial responses are rare. Additionally, participants feel a commitment to help others understand their experiences in ways that will assist future generations of college students.

Variations of Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship Interview (2001) are being used to longitudinally assess the effects on self-authorship of a cultural immersion experience (Yonkers-Talz, 2004) and an urban leadership program (Egart & Healy, 2004). In these instances, interviewers have substantive relationships with participants that increase the effectiveness of the interview strategy because participants are willing to reflect deeply and share their perspectives openly. This interview strategy also serves as the foundation from which the interview strategy for the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education was constructed, representing an opportunity to explore the effectiveness of this approach when interviewers and interviewees have no prior relationship.

Example 2: The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education Interview

The interview portion of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE; funded by the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College) is intended to trace how students develop on seven liberal arts outcomes as well as the underlying journey toward self-authorship. The overall WNSLAE study focuses on the development of seven outcomes associated with undergraduate liberal arts education and the educational conditions and experiences that foster these outcomes (Blaich & King, 2005). "The overarching goal of a liberal arts education is to provide students with the necessary skills to construct lives of substance and achievement, helping them to become wise citizens" (Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, 2007b). Outcomes identified as central to wise citizenship include: effective reasoning and problem solving, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, integration of learning, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, moral reasoning and character, and well-being (see Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, 2007a, for definitions of these outcomes and King, Kendall Brown, Lindsay & VanHecke, in press, for how these outcomes were chosen). These outcomes are interrelated and growth on one is likely to affect growth on another. The three dimensions of development—epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—are inherent in students' growth on these outcomes. Wise citizenship, the culmination of complexity on these outcomes, requires self-authorship.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE WNSLAE INTERVIEW

Students come to the college experience with unique characteristics including their personal histories and meaning-making structures. These characteristics mediate the educational experiences they choose (e.g., curricular, cocurricular, personal life) and how they engage in those experiences, including those that are required rather than chosen. How students engage in experiences mediates how

they make sense of them to inform their understanding of knowledge, self, and social relations. For example, a student with low self-confidence and no internal voice will likely engage in a learning experience feeling inferior to authority figures, which in turn results in interpreting what the authority figure says and does as "true" or "right." Students' interpretations of experience determine their growth toward epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal maturity. Just as we argued earlier in this article that self-authorship is the foundation of contemporary learning outcomes, we conceptualized self-authorship as the foundation under girding the seven liberal arts outcomes. The WNSLAE interview strategy was crafted to elicit students' characteristics, the nature of the educational experiences they viewed as significant, and how they made sense of those experiences. Our approach to the interview takes into account the integrated nature of the three developmental dimensions as well as the integrated nature of the seven liberal arts outcomes. Collectively, these data revealed students' progress on the three developmental dimensions, the seven outcomes, and interconnections among dimensions and outcomes (Baxter Magolda et al., 2007).

Underlying Structure of the Interview Conversation

We organized the interview into three segments to give respondents maximum freedom to identify relevant content yet enable interviewers to elicit information about the conditions that foster growth on the seven outcomes, wise citizenship, and self-authorship. The interview is organized to "trigger" responses relevant to our overarching purpose but does not contain a structured set of questions for each outcome. Although an interview strategy is outlined here, the main segments of the interview are constructed "in situ"—as the conversation unfolds. The opening segment (following standard informed consent preliminaries) was guided by our interest in how students' entering characteristics (i.e., ways of constructing knowledge, self, relationships; personal history) affect achievement of or development toward self-authorship and wise citizenship. The interviewer invites respondents to share their background as a way to become better acquainted. If necessary, interviewees are asked to share expectations they brought to the current college year and eventually the conversation turns to the extent to which those expectations matched what they experienced thus far. Throughout this segment, which is intended to take 20 to 30 minutes, interviewers ask for clarification and elicit meaning making with conversational prompts such as "How so?" or "Help me understand more about how that experience didn-'t match with what you expected."

The second, and primary, portion of the interview addresses our interest in the educational experiences students regard as key to their development toward self-authorship and wise citizenship and why these particular experiences are relevant. Interviewers seek to understand how students make meaning of these educational experiences (the interaction of their personal meaning making and the educational experience) to achieve or develop toward self-authorship and wise citizenship. Interviewers do not introduce self-authorship, wise citizenship, or the seven outcomes but instead invite students to identify meaningful experiences that contribute to their growth in college. They then engage students in conversation, asking students to describe their experiences; explain how they made sense of the experiences; and discuss how the experience affected the way they decide what to believe, how to view themselves, and how to construct relations with others. Possible ways to assist interviewees in reflecting on their experiences include asking about their most significant

experience, their best or worst experiences, challenges or dilemmas they encountered, situations in which they were unsure of what was right, their support systems, conflicts or pressures they encountered, and interactions with people who differ from them. These probes help keep the focus on how the student has come to understand these experiences as a way of accessing his or her meaning-making structures.

When the previous segment comes to a natural close or time is short, the interviewer shifts to the closing segment of the interview for the remaining 15 to 20 minutes of the 90-minute interview. This segment elicits the respondents' synthesis of their experiences and meaning making. The interviewer summarizes some of the content of the interview, then invites respondents to consider how they are "putting it all together" or what they are taking away from the year that has just been discussed. Possible ways to assist respondents in this task include exploring how their collective experiences have shaped what they believe, who they are, and how they relate to others; what insights they are taking away from their collective experiences; what they gained from the past year; the implications or consequences of their insights from the past year; issues these experiences raise; and how this year's experience has helped them consider their hopes for the coming year. The conversation closes with one last invitation to share any other observations and the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

Use of the WNSLAE Interview

We have used this interview strategy in both the cross sectional pilot study and subsequent longitudinal study for the WNSLAE. The pilot study was conducted in 2005 with 174 students; this sample included 65.5% first- and second-year students, 34.5% seniors, 66% women, and 80% Caucasians attending four

institutions that differed by type (a community college, a liberal arts college, a regional comprehensive university, and a research intensive university) and by size (enrollments ranged from 1,300 to 39,000). Based on the success of this interview strategy in the pilot study, we then made some minor revisions and used it in the first year of the WNSLAE longitudinal study with 315 first-year students on six campuses across the nation. Trained members of the research team conducted the interviews on site at each of the participating campuses.

As designed, the interviews were constructed within context and thus varied by interviewer and interviewee. The three segments worked effectively to elicit data on student characteristics, meaningful experiences, and participants' interpretations of those experiences. Rich data also emerged about growth on the seven outcomes (although not every participant spoke to every outcome) and self-authorship. The short interview excerpt that follows, which reflects approximately one page of a 24-page interview transcript, illustrates the degree to which the interviewee self-authors what she believes, how she sees herself, and how she interacts with others. After exploring the interviewee's experience in a class on alternative medicine in which she struggled to be open-minded, the interviewee volunteered that she was concerned about being more open-minded at college and was finding that she was expressing herself more. That led to this exchange:

> Interviewer (I): You said coming here you were a little apprehensive and that maybe you were doing it [being more open-minded] more here than in high school. What do you think makes you willing to do it more?
>
> Student (S): Yeah I think it might even be growing up. Umm, I think in high school I can't say that I was afraid of, of going

against what people thought, but it definitely wasn't something that—I mean unless I felt truly very, very strongly about something which I didn't, I don't think I felt that strongly about really anything in high school. Umm, I just didn't have any reason to and for the most part, I mean, not always, but I tend to agree with the majority or I don't, you know. So I think it was kind of a challenge here to take the obscure viewpoints because I, I knew that somewhere on campus someone did believe that. Umm and I was really interested to figure out why or what, what supported that, so . . . yeah I think it was probably just growing up and feeling strongly about something and under-standing that other people really—I guess in high school I never saw anyone who felt that strongly about anything but here you see it all the time and it's, it's kind of hard to deal with but it's really refreshing too, so. . . .

I: So it sounds like in high school it was a little bit more because of the homogenous kind of group?

S: Yeah I think so. Yeah.

I: And so having people different than you here has allowed you to explore your own positions a little more.

S: Oh yeah, even, even people that were of, of different race or ethnicity at my high school basically have the same viewpoints. They're—how everybody's parents work for the chemical plant and it was a very, very religious, very Republican town. Umm and I feel like even if you disagreed with it, even you were like Democratic or didn't believe in God, you tended not to say anything just because there was such an overwhelming majority that it would really make you feel like an outsider. And I think I did probably feel that way a couple times but again I didn't feel strongly enough about what I believed in to really make an issue out of it and I just felt like it would pass. And I think once

I got here, I saw that people you know had the same views but weren't afraid, kind of like I was and I think it was really just a matter of growing up and [being] willing to stand up for what I thought, so. . . .

I: So how has this environment supported your ability to do that, to think, to speak up or to . . . ?

S: I think, honestly I think seeing everyone else do it has helped. Especially as a freshman umm I you know you see other people you know being willing to talk and you say, well I, I agree with you and I think it sparks up a lot of conversations. I think people are more open to hearing different views even if they don't agree with it. And not, not everyone, of course but I know I feel more open to listening to different views and I think a lot of people are like that so I feel like you won't just be disregarded because you have different views by any means. Umm, I think that's what makes this school what it is, is its differences and its various cultural aspects and things like that. So I think it's definitely a lot more welcomed than it would have been. (B02)

This student understands multiple per-spectives exist, and she desires to learn what supports various viewpoints. Exploring diverse viewpoints was new to her because these were not prevalent in her high school environment. Her description of not disagreeing with others in high school to avoid being made an outsider and feeling able to disagree in college because it was welcomed conveys her reliance on external others for her sense of herself. Cognitively, she is open to exploring knowl-edge claims and establishing her own views. Intrapersonally and interpersonally, she still relies on the external environment to enable her to express herself. This is why she finds people feeling strongly about something hard to deal with but also refreshing. As she explains

elsewhere in the interview, her interest in understanding diverse perspectives led her to assume leadership roles in support of campus diversity efforts. Her observations about her reactions to encountering different perspectives in high school and college, along with her new leadership roles in diversity contexts, suggest that she is moving toward intercultural maturity. Thus even in this very short excerpt, her meaning making on all three dimensions and the intercultural effectiveness outcome (one component of wise citizenship) is evident.

The grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006) conducted on these data support the utility of the interview in eliciting students' meaning making on the seven outcomes and self-authorship (King, in press). In the pilot study, four overarching themes emerged among the experiences that resulted in developmental growth. The effects of these experiences were characterized as promoting: (a) increased awareness, understanding, and openness to diversity; (b) exploration and establishment of the basis for one's beliefs, choices, and actions; (c) development of a sense of self/identity to guide one's choices; and (d) increased awareness and openness to taking responsibility for one's own learning (Baxter Magolda et al., 2007). In addition, passages throughout the transcripts conveyed student involvement with activities that resulted in growth on the liberal arts outcomes. For example, there were prevalent reports of confronting moral dilemmas around alcohol and drugs, challenges in relationships, and academic honesty; the way students thought about these issues was strongly related to their meaning making assumptions (Lindsay, King, DeGraw, Barnhardt, & Baxter Magolda, 2007). For example, some dealt with these dilemmas by maintaining values from their upbringing (relying on external formulas). Others applied morals selectively or in ways that served their own

needs, unable to balance other's needs or rights into the equation, but aware they were doing so (mixture of external and internal). Fewer addressed the moral dilemmas they faced by acknowledging considerations of treating others fairly, the difficulty of balancing competing needs, or basing their decisions on affirmed principles of conduct they had set for themselves. Similarly, the way students understood differences in political affiliation, religion, socioeconomic class and across cultures also reflected their underlying assumptions about knowledge, identity, and relationships (i.e., meaning making) (Barber, DeGraw, & King, 2007). Thus, although interviewers did not explicitly ask about any of the outcomes, an empirically derived portrait of the outcomes emerged. Similarly, although we did not inquire explicitly about self-authorship, the data revealed approaches to student meaning making that reflected the various phases of the journey toward self-authorship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

These two interview strategies are useful for several purposes: to assess self-authorship as a basis for designing practice, to assess the developmental effects of practice, to conduct research on self-authorship, and to engage students in developmental conversations. In this section, we offer several observations for the consideration of those interested in using self-authorship interviews for any of these purposes.

Assessment Challenges

A major challenge in these interviews is working mutually in a partnership with the interviewee to elicit the best possible descriptions of how interviewees understand their experiences. Thus, in order to produce relevant data, it is essential to give the respondent time, space, and encouragement to describe and

interpret their experiences. The interviewer must follow the respondent's lead, which makes the conversation unpredictable; this requires attentive flexibility on the part of the interviewer, who needs to understand the grounding for this strategy, trust the process, and be able to adapt to potential vagaries that might arise. The lack of structure that affords the respondent this reflective space can make the interviewer, and sometimes the respondent, uncomfortable. Interviewers are sometimes tempted to ask additional questions to fill silences in which the respondent is reflecting before speaking. Interviewers are also sometimes tempted to complete respondents' sentences when they appear to be struggling to articulate their thinking. In turn, respondents sometimes hesitate and ask for additional clarification because they are concerned that they may not give the interviewer relevant information. For example, when Kyle, a student in Baxter Magolda's (1992) longitudinal study, was asked to describe how he learned best, he said: "I, as a freshman, am still learning how to learn in college coursework, and therefore do not feel that I could be handing out advice to anyone on this subject matter" (p. 273). Kyle did not trust his ability to provide meaningful information. Building a partnership in the research interview to overcome these dilemmas is crucial to enable a dialogue that reveals meaning making.

Active listening is essential because the interviewer must attend to the responses to figure out how to guide the conversation toward meaning making. The interviewer must also have an in-depth understanding of meaning making in order to hear it emerging and coax it out into the dialogue naturally. Respondents often describe what took place in a particular situation instead of what sense they made of this series of events. Prompts such as, "What did you make of the situation?" or "Tell me a little more about why you found

that frustrating" invite respondents to move beyond a description of *what* took place to *why* they interpreted it the way they did. To do this effectively, the interviewer must be comfortable asking why or probing for reflection that the respondent may need to think about in order to respond. Interviewers need to be aware that articulating one's reflections can be intellectually strenuous, takes time to verbalize, and may not be stated clearly on the first attempt. Listening patiently and responding with encouragement are important skills interviewers must practice in this role. Active listening of this sort takes mental energy. At the same time, the interviewer is trying to balance focusing the interview on relevant topics and encouraging the respondents' meaning making to surface. In the WNSLAE pilot study, interviewers were sometimes preoccupied with whether the dialogue would produce meaningful data about the outcomes of liberal arts education because the questions did not explicitly ask about these outcomes. Although we learned that the interviews did produce meaningful data about the outcomes, the interviewers were sometimes focused on this potential concern during the interviews, to the detriment of eliciting deeper interpretations of experiences from the students. Training interviewers to conduct self-authorship interviews involves addressing all of these dilemmas.

Another major challenge in interview assessment occurs in the interpretation and synthesis of interview data. Because each interview is created in situ to give respondents maximum freedom to express themselves, no two are alike. Coding self-authorship interviews requires identifying meaningful units of conversation, labeling those units to convey their essence in terms of meaning making, and sorting the labeled units into categories that portray the key themes of the interviews (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Patton, 2001). These

key themes form the basis for creating a theory (e.g., about young adult development in Baxter Magolda's (2001) longitudinal study or about how liberal arts educational experiences mediate self-authorship and outcome achievement in the WNSLAE). This process of interpretation, often referred to as grounded formal theory (Charmaz, 2006), is labor intensive and highly subjective despite the systematic process through which multiple researchers unitize, code, and categorize data (see Baxter Magolda, 2004a for a researcher's struggle with this process). Extensive training in this approach is necessary to produce high-quality interpretation and data synthesis. Although the time required for training and interpreting data may initially make these strategies unattractive for assessing self-authorship in routine practice, our experience training graduate students and other professionals to conduct interviews and interpret data in the WNSLAE suggests that it is not only possible, but that doing so is a good investment relative to the quality of data about the nature and educational impact of students' experiences.

Self-Authorship Interviews: Conversations with a Developmental Effect

Despite these challenges, self-authorship interviews clearly hold benefits for students participating in these conversations. The nature of these interviews offers respondents an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in ways that are atypical in everyday life. Processing their experience and consciously reflecting on it can bring insights to light that students might not otherwise have discovered, as evident in this email to one of the WNSLAE interviewers:

> I had a really good time at the interview as well. I almost wanted to ask if there was any chance I would be called in again for the study for any further questions. It was

just that exciting! It also helped me see some things that I forgot about myself, like that I believed in always helping others and making them smile as a kid. I do that now anyway almost subconsciously, but back then it was a much bigger deal cause I was such a big shy guy. Who would've guessed that now though, cause I felt like I ran my mouth a mile per minute at that interview!

Students in the pilot of the WNSLAE responded so favorably to the reflective opportunities in the interviews that the authors constructed a Conversation Guide to assist educators at their institutions to continue these productive conversations (Baxter Magolda & King, in press). Educators can use this guide to engage students in meaningful reflections about their education and lives. Either of these interview strategies can be used as a developmental conversation. Academic advisors, faculty, and student affairs educators in every realm of student life can invite students to share experiences that are important to them, particularly those Lahey et al. (1988) defined as "ripe" content—experiences that involved change, success, anxiety or challenges. In many cases, students meet with an educator to discuss a challenge (e.g., disciplinary violation), a change (e.g., major or career change), or a source of anxiety (e.g., identity crises or relationship issues). Constructing these conversations using the interview strategies described here can make these routine conversations opportunities for promoting self-authorship.

The interview strategies highlighted here are interventions themselves. Although this may be disconcerting to researchers who do not wish the phenomena under study to be contaminated by the research process, this is accepted as part of the process in constructive-developmental interviewing: The process itself affects development because respondents are actively reflecting on their experiences and

reflection contributes to development. For some participants, talking about their experiences offers a first opportunity to verbalize how they see the world, how they define themselves, and how they relate to others; for other participants, the interview is the stimulus for constructing meaning they haven't constructed before. In these ways (and as noted by several participants), the interview itself may be a significant learning experience. For example, Ned shared:

> I don't often get the opportunity for someone to ask these tough questions to figure out my framework. It is very parallel to discussions with my close friend—at the beginning I had no idea what I'd say; then I recognize things that I need to think more about. (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 344)

This comment reveals that self-authorship interviews model the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda, 2004b) by creating the conditions noted above that are conducive to promoting self-authorship: Interviewers validate students as knowers by offering respect for their interpretations, they situate learning in the students' experience by asking respondents to set the context for what is important, and interviewers portray knowledge as complex by asking the respondent to explain the nuances of how they came to their particular interpretation or perspective. Questions about how the respondent came to experience something a particular way suggest that self is central to knowledge construction. Finally, mutual construction takes place throughout the interview as the interviewer reflects back the respondents' ideas to come to a more thorough understanding. Thus these interviews model the dynamics of practice that promote self-authorship. At the same time, they enable both learners and educators to gain insights into learners' meaning making that may be used to enhance the quality of educational experiences. These conversations help learners process their experience and give educators access to the kind of educational experiences that can be offered to promote self-authorship—and those that don't. Thus these interview conversations can be used both to assess and promote student development and increase the likelihood of college students achieving desirable learning outcomes.

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