

# Learning for a Complex World

A lifewide concept of learning,  
education and personal development

Edited by  
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# Chapter 5

## Authoring your life: a lifewide learning perspective

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### **Synopsis**

Navigating the complexities of twenty-first-century life requires self-authorship, or the development of an internal voice to guide one's beliefs, identity and relationships. Competing demands of adulthood introduce the limitations of uncritically following external authority and help adults realise that although they cannot control reality, they can choose how to respond to it. Establishing their internal criteria for what to believe, how to identify themselves and how to relate to others yields an internal voice to co-ordinate external influence. Developing self-authorship is an arduous task and is more likely when higher education contexts are intentionally designed to assist learners in transitioning from external to internal definition. The three-dimensional nature of self-authorship and the notion that this personal growth is a necessary component of complex and holistic learning, supports the central thesis of this book which advocates a lifewide concept of higher education. Learning partnerships in which educators respect learners' voices, discourage simplistic solutions to complex problems, encourage learners to develop their own personal authority and engage in mutual learning, support learners in self-authoring their lives. Examples of learning partnerships in multiple contexts illustrate how educators can intentionally capitalise on learners' experiences to reinforce learners taking responsibility for their own lifewide and lifelong journeys for learning.

### **Introduction**

Regardless of where you live in this world, young adults are faced with the challenging task of managing uncertainty, complexity and constant evolution in twenty-first-century society. Thus higher education's role in preparing them for success in adult life extends beyond information acquisition to transformational learning (Kegan 1994; Mezirow 1990). Jack Mezirow describes transformational learning as '... the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames

of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action' (Mezirow 2000:7–8).

Transformational learning involves what Kegan (1994) calls the growth of the mind, or the remaking of one's meaning making about knowledge, identity and social relations. Kegan's conception of the mind incorporates conceptions of self and relationships. The evolution of meaning making in three dimensions – epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal – undergirds the ability to manage and be comfortable with uncertainty, complexity and change. The concept of lifewideness advanced in this book resonates with this holistic view of human development and the transformational learning it supports. It is also consistent with calls for educational reform that focus on both intellectual and personal maturity.

Professional associations in the US have long focused on holistic student development, advocating a vision of education that includes intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions (American Council on Education 1949). Historically, US higher education included a student affairs component, or a co-curriculum, that addressed most of these dimensions while the intellectual dimension was the purview of teachers through the academic curriculum. However, collective research on the college experience (e.g. Kuh *et al.* 1990; Kuh *et al.* 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005) confirms that learning cannot be parsed in this way because it occurs in multiple dimensions in both these arenas. This research resonates with Barnett's concept of learning in multiple spaces (Chapter 2, this volume).

Contemporary reports from US educational reform associations call for blending learning in the curriculum and co-curriculum based on the understanding that all dimensions are essential for learning. For example, *Learning Reconsidered: a Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling 2004:5) advocates learning as 'a complex, holistic, multi-centric activity that occurs throughout and across the college experience'. This report outlines student outcomes that encompass cognitive complexity, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, and civic engagement. Similarly, *Putting the World into World-class Education* (DfES 2004) lists becoming informed, active, responsible global citizens as the first of eight key concepts. Effective citizenship and learning extend beyond skill acquisition to achieving complexity on the three dimensions of development (Baxter Magolda 2004c; King and Baxter Magolda 2011). Epistemological

maturity is required to analyse and judge the validity of multiple perspectives to make wise decisions. Personal maturity is necessary to enable acting autonomously yet collaboratively and acting with integrity. Relational maturity is required for effective collaboration that integrates multiple perspectives in an uncertain and complex world. Kegan (1994) portrayed these three dimensions of development as integrated throughout the lifespan and defined self-authorship as the point at which adults take internal responsibility for their belief systems, their identity and the nature of their social relations. Much of the student development research in the US suggests that college students need more opportunities and support to develop the capacities that would enable them to meet these demands (e.g. Baxter Magolda 2001, Baxter Magolda *et al.* in press; Kegan 1994; Torres 2010; Pizzolato 2004). Longitudinal research with US college students also indicates that movement towards self-authorship is central to young adults' abilities to succeed in complex work, educational and personal environments (Abes and Jones 2004; Baxter Magolda 2009; Torres 2010). In this chapter, I describe the concept of self-authorship, how it develops, learning partnerships to promote its development and linkages between self-authorship and lifewide education.

## **Self-authorship**

The concept of self-authorship emerged from the constructive-developmental research tradition based in the work of Jean Piaget, William Perry and Robert Kegan. Constructivism refers to humans' tendency to construct meaning by interpreting their experiences. Developmentalism suggests that these constructions evolve over time through periods of stability and transition to become more complex. Piaget (1950) described increasingly complex ways of making meaning on the part of children. Perry (1970) extended this notion in his research with college students to outline what he called a scheme of intellectual development. Perry's scheme, while focused on intellectual development, did include the dimension of self, as did the work of Belenky *et al.* (1986) on women's ways of knowing. Kegan (1982) made explicit the intersection of the epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions. In doing so, he described a series of meaning-making structures that evolved from relying on external others for meaning making to taking responsibility for one's own meaning making. He labelled one of the latter ways of making meaning in that journey 'self-authorship'. My twenty-five-year longitudinal study (Baxter Magolda 1992, 2001, 2009) of one group of US college students expands the possibilities of this journey and describes a similar trajectory from external definition to internal definition. Hamer and van Rossum's (2010) twenty-five-year research programme in Dutch universities paints a similar portrait, as do contemporary

US studies on various student groups (e.g. Abes and Jones 2004; Pizzolato 2003; Torres and Hernandez 2007).

One way to portray this evolution is through the metaphor of rules and exceptions. We typically have 'rules' we use to make sense of our experiences. These rules come from prior experiences, including information from authorities, and assumptions we make resulting from these experiences. When we encounter an experience that does not fit with our rule, we typically view it as an exception. This allows us to maintain our original rule. However, when too many exceptions have occurred, we revise our rule so that it more effectively captures our experiences. Piaget called this process equilibration, suggesting that humans want to be in balance and reconstruct their meaning making to account for dissonance. This process refers to the basic structure behind our meaning making, or *how* we make meaning, rather than to the content of what we think.

The significance of our lifewide experiences is that the more diverse our experiences are the more we are likely to encounter situations that do not conform to the rules we have formed. A good example is participating in travel where we are exposed to a culture very different from our own. Although this might be a transient experience it is likely to expose us to new ways of making meaning that are very different to what we are used to and, consequently, our own ways of thinking may be challenged. Similarly, daily interactions with others in our own community whose race, ethnicity, religious faith, social class or sexual orientation differs from ours provides exposure to multiple perspectives that potentially challenge our meaning making.

### **One portrait of self-authorship**

I began a longitudinal study of *young adult* learning and development in 1986 involving one hundred and one college students at a US university. I interviewed them annually throughout their college experience and have continued to interview them annually since their graduation. Most were eighteen when they began college and are now in their early forties. I share an overview of the journey toward self-authorship here based on their stories (for more detailed stories see Baxter Magolda 1992, 2001, 2009). It is important to emphasise that this journey is nuanced based on personal characteristics (e.g. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation), context (e.g. social class, culture) and the intersections between the two. It also varies depending on whether young adults encounter the appropriate demands for self-authorship and the requisite support for it, a topic addressed later in the chapter.

## Following external formulas

Although the journey toward self-authorship varies according to upbringing, personal experiences and schooling, over half of the one hundred and one students I interviewed upon their college entrance had acquired a way of knowing that privileged the voice of external authority. They believed that knowledge was certain, authorities had it and their role was to acquire it uncritically (Baxter Magolda 1992). Jim explicitly articulated this view:

The information is cut and dried. It is either right or wrong. If you know the information, you can do well. It is easy because you just read or listen to a lecture about the ideas, then present it back to the teacher.

(Baxter Magolda 1992:xi)

These students also relied on external authorities to help them make decisions. For example, when asked about choosing her major, Carmen shared, 'I did not really decide. My mother suggested majoring in zoology, so I did' (Baxter Magolda 1992:89). Participants looked for external formulas for learning, how to view themselves and how to relate to other people.

Over the course of their college experience, most encountered exceptions to this rule when professors insisted that knowledge was often uncertain and that learners should critically evaluate knowledge claims. Most altered their original rule to believe that knowledge was uncertain in some fields, but still relied on some form of external authority for some process for ascertaining the truth. Thus they followed external formulas for how to decide what to believe and how to view themselves and relations with others. Mark, who developed more complex ways of knowing during college, still turned to external formulas as he attended law school:

I came here and I tried to figure out what the legal culture figures is success. I knew a Supreme Court clerkship was [success], so one of my goals was to aim towards that. So I got here to law school and I figured out, 'Okay, well, to be a success here you have to get to know some professors who are influential with judges to get a good clerkship, to get in the pipeline, to get in the star system here. Also get on *Law Review*. Write a paper here that you can publish.' I thought, 'Okay, this is kind of the plan then, step by step.' The ultimate plan for success in the legal culture.

(Baxter Magolda 2001:41)

Although Mark was no longer relying on specific authority figures for what to believe, he focused on ascertaining what others regarded as success so he could follow that plan. After one year of law school, he reported:

I said, 'Is this map of success given to me by the legal culture really a map at all to success?' And it depends on your definition of success. A great resume or accolades, yeah, that's the chart to a sign of prestige, that's the way to go. But I realized that I couldn't be a person who sacrificed happiness to that goal of prestige ... I never dreamed that I would be unhappy working on the law journal. I didn't think it would be as tedious and boring as I found it. That never figured in. There was no way law school and its classes could be as big a turnoff as they were.

(Baxter Magolda 2001:46)

Like many of his peers, Mark began to look to himself for deciding what to believe. Most participants did so because they encountered problems with external formulas in their work or personal lives. Either following the formulas did not lead to the intended outcome, or they achieved the outcome and found it unsatisfactory. Resolving this dissonance led to a crossroads marked by tension between external influences and one's internal voice.

### **Crossroads**

Abandoning external formulas left my participants unsure of how to proceed due to tension between their emerging internal voices and external influence. They recognised the importance of listening to their internal voices and trying to bring them into conversation with external voices. Kurt, in his mid-twenties, captured this phase of the journey:

I'm the kind of person who is motivated by being wanted, I think. I've gone to a couple of workshops and, either fortunately or unfortunately, I'm the kind of person who gets my self-worth on whether or not other people accept me for what I do or other people appreciate what I'm doing. ... I'm coming from a position where I get my worth and my value from other people, which is, I think, wrong for me to do. But that's where I am right now. I feel like whether or not I choose to be happy is dependent upon me and only me. If I say, 'You made me mad,' or the converse, 'You made me happy,' then I'm giving all of the power that I have to you. The power of choice is mine; I have a choice of how I want to perceive each and every situation in my life. ... Obviously I'm not to that point yet because I choose to make myself happy and make myself sad on what other people are thinking. But I think I'd like to

someday get to a point where I can say, 'Okay, that's your perception. I am not dependent on you for my happiness or my sadness.' And I think that would be a very strong, very spiritual place to be.

(Baxter Magolda 2001:98–9)

Kurt was aware of his internal voice and knew he could and should be using it to guide his life. However, he had not developed his internal voice sufficiently to co-ordinate others' perceptions about him. He struggled at work because he acted in ways to gain his co-workers and supervisors' approval. He also struggled in personal relationships because he sacrificed his needs to those of others.

Lauren, also in her mid-twenties, was experiencing the crossroads but was working on cultivating her voice to sort out her feelings and priorities. Talking about a situation with her boyfriend she shared:

He came home with me to [my parents' house] and I was totally gung-ho. I'm like, 'This is it; I know it.' And then after they gave me their feedback, they liked him but they were just not sure. And after they said that, all of a sudden I didn't like him as much anymore. It was nothing that he did to me; it was not the way he acted. It was nothing. But it was because of what they said; all of a sudden I started changing my mind. Yes, that's exactly true. But then my sister, on the other hand, is the opposite and is like, 'Just go with how you feel.' And my friends, my close friends here are like, 'Just go with how you feel.' So now it's gotten better. I'm trying to really think of what I want and not what they want. So this relationship is continuing, which they're not upset about at all, but I will tell you they have told me, 'Come on, this really isn't going to work. It's too far.' And that does affect me. But I'm really trying to take the attitude where maybe I need to find out for myself. But I will admit always in the back of my mind what they think still lingers over my decisions.

(Baxter Magolda 2001:99)

A short time later Lauren moved to where her boyfriend lived so that she could work out for herself how she felt. Despite their awareness of the need to use their own voices to co-ordinate external influence, it took many of my participants until their mid to late twenties to navigate through the crossroads to place their voices in the foreground. In many cases, their intrapersonal or interpersonal capacities were not yet sufficiently developed to support their epistemological insight. Developing those capacities, and thus the internal voice to co-ordinate internal influence, yielded self-authorship for most of these learners by their late twenties.

## Key components of self-authorship

Following my longitudinal study participants through their thirties prompted me to identify three elements within self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation and securing internal commitments. The first element involves growing to trust the internal voice by using it successfully in multiple contexts over time. Dawn, diagnosed with MS at age thirty-three, described trusting her internal voice:

Finding the balance between [going with the flow] and me saying I have control over myself, not letting this condition get the best of me. Knowing how to make things happen and let things happen. When you find the balance between those things, life is spectacular. That is kind of a trust thing – trusting that you know yourself enough to dance that line. Know when to make something happen and when to let it happen. Trusting yourself that you know that space. I don't quite know myself enough to trust that yet. I'm working on it. I'm getting close. That deepest self-knowledge to know you can stay there at that middle point and have that balance. That is a constant process for me. To be able to say this is my life and it's on my terms; I love that.

(Baxter Magolda 2004b:xx–xxi)

Dawn conveys the key characteristic of trusting one's internal voice: realising that reality is beyond one's control but that you can use your internal voice to shape your reaction to reality. Most made this discovery through one of life's many challenges, including health problems, work struggles or relationship difficulties, emphasising again the value of lifewide experiences in promoting development.

Trusting the internal voice led to building a philosophy of life based on internally established beliefs and values. At some point in their thirties my study participants reported that these ideas moved from being in their heads to being in their hearts. They felt these internal commitments became second nature to them. Dawn described this latter element:

It's starting to feel – more like wisdom than knowledge. To me knowledge is an awareness of when you know things. You know them as facts; they are there in front of you. When you possess the wisdom, you've lived those facts, that information so fully that it takes on a whole different aspect than just knowing. It is like you absorbed that information into your entire being. Not just that you know things. It is something deeper. Knowledge is brain –

wisdom comes from a different place I feel like. Something deeper connecting with your brain so that you have something different to draw from. A point where knowing you are going to do something – the knowledge has a deeper level – internal, intuitive, centered in entire being, the essential part of you that just – makes the basic knowledge pale by comparison.

(Baxter Magolda 2007:71)

Securing internal commitments helped participants feel settled and enabled them to live out their convictions. It also helped them deal effectively with major health challenges, career changes, relationship complexities and their wide range of work and family responsibilities.

### **Factors that mediate developmental growth**

Complex interactions of individual and environmental factors influence development. Although the majority of developmental research suggests that few eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in the US reach self-authorship, Pizzolato (2003) reported that those who entered college despite lack of parental and community support exhibited early self-authorship because they had to figure out how to pursue college on their own. She reported that differences in their personal characteristics and coping strategies mediated their ability to maintain their self-authorship in the face of the marginalisation they experienced at college. Torres and Hernandez (2007) observed that some Latino/a students became self-authoring during college, in part due to having to address racism and the complexity of negotiating family relationships. Torres (2009) also described differences among Latino/a students' acceptance or rejection of negative stereotypes due to their perceptions of oppression or privilege, and noted that those with more complex developmental capacities were better able to reject negative stereotypes. Abes and Jones (2004) found similar evidence in studying lesbian students, who with increased developmental complexity were able to reject heterosexist assumptions prevalent in society. These examples imply that marginalisation due to social class, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation provides dissonance that may lead to abandoning external formulas. They also raise the possibility that dissonance in any area of one's life might affect growth in all three dimensions and thus affect learning in other arenas. Research suggests that learners foreground different dimensions (i.e. epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal) in ways that further nuance the developmental journey (e.g. Baxter Magolda 2010; King 2010; Pizzolato 2010). This reinforces the notion that lifewide experiences stimulate developmental growth and that lifewide education is crucial to promoting self-authorship because different learners meet these challenges in different places in their lives

and deal with them in different ways. The personalised support provided informally by an individual's own support network or the support offered by a formal learning partnership provides the support necessary to keep the challenges from being overwhelming.

Learners whose lifewide experiences provided dissonance prior to college may come to the college experience aware of their internal voices and committed to further developing them. These learners are likely to recognise and take advantage of the many curricular and co-curricular opportunities to promote their epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. Intentional partnerships to assist them in maximising these opportunities could help them refine their internal voices during college, yielding a stronger preparation for navigating life's challenges. Learners whose lifewide experiences have not yet challenged their meaning making may come to college unaware of the need for an internal voice and resistant to educators' efforts to get them to challenge external formulas. These learners require different kinds of partnerships and perhaps more immersive experiences to help them make significant progress toward self-authorship during college. Efforts to make them aware of the shortcomings of following external formulas and the value of their internal voices must precede support to help them cultivate and refine their internal voices. Efforts to spark this awareness include structured opportunities for learners to reflect on their experience, intentional conversations to help learners establish their own learning goals, pedagogy that fosters critical thinking and encourages learners to appreciate the emergent and collaborative nature of real world learning, and an environment that both challenges and encourages them to engage in the learning opportunities they have in all parts of their life. Perhaps explicitly conveying to learners that their lifewide experiences are an integral part of their learning and growth would emphasise the crucial role of personal maturity in adult life. Emphasis in the UK on the Personal Development Planning process (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2009) and in the US on engaged learning reflects the perspective that lifewide experiences should be linked to formal learning experiences to promote personal maturity. The concept of self-authorship is one way to capture the personal maturity required to succeed in contemporary life.

### **Promoting self-authorship through 'learning partnerships'**

Throughout the longitudinal interviews learners shared their best learning experiences and the characteristics of learning environments that helped them develop more complex ways of making meaning. These included classroom and co-curricular learning environments, as well as personal, work and relational

environments they encountered during and after college. I synthesised their ideas into the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM), a model of practice to intentionally promote self-authorship in higher education (Baxter Magolda 2004a, 2009). The LPM is a combination of three means of supporting learners and three means of challenging them. Educators support learners in moving toward self-authorship by validating them as knowers, situating learning in their experience and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning. Educators do so by:

- respecting their thoughts and feelings, thus affirming the value of their voices
- helping them view their experiences as opportunities for learning and growth
- collaborating with them to analyse their own problems, engaging in mutual learning with them

(Baxter Magolda 2009:251).

Educators challenge learners to develop self-authorship by portraying knowledge as complex and socially constructed, emphasising self as central to knowing, and sharing authority and expertise. Specifically, they do so by:

- drawing participants' attention to the complexity of their work and life decisions, and discouraging simplistic solutions
- encouraging participants to develop their personal authority by listening to their own voices in determining how to live their lives
- encouraging participants to share authority and expertise, and work interdependently with others to solve mutual problems

(Baxter Magolda 2009:251).

Learning partnerships provide good company to learners on their difficult journeys toward self-authorship. Using the metaphor of a tandem bike, I have argued that implementing the LPM means that educators take the back seat from which they can provide guidance while offering learners the opportunity to direct their own developmental and educational journeys from the front captain's seat. This arrangement maximises learners' personal choice and responsibility to manage their own journeys – factors crucial to developing self-authorship.

Learning partnerships are possible in multiple learning spaces in higher education as well as in lifewide experiences outside of education (e.g. parenting, employment). My longitudinal participants experienced learning partnerships with educators, work supervisors, parents, siblings, spouses and therapists (Baxter Magolda 2009). Many of these partnerships were not intentionally

designed to promote their development but instead arose from interacting with others who were interested in helping them succeed in various lifewide experiences.

Next I share some examples from the work of colleagues who have implemented intentionally designed learning partnerships in multiple settings. Their work suggests that young adults could reach self-authorship earlier than my longitudinal participants did if the conditions are in place to promote it. I include examples that illustrate learning partnerships in the curriculum, the co-curriculum and those that combine these two curricular environments.

### **Academic contexts for learning partnerships**

Use of learning partnerships in academic contexts suggests that they can promote academic and personal outcomes simultaneously. The two examples that follow highlight explicit efforts to promote academic success by attending to the underlying developmental capacities it requires.

#### *Earth Sustainability: a core curriculum to promote self-authorship*

Educators at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) organised a twenty-two-credit, four-course sequence on earth sustainability to help students meet core curriculum requirements and develop self-authorship. Virginia Tech is a Research I university with roots in agriculture and engineering that serves approximately twenty-one thousand undergraduates as well as graduate students in over a hundred graduate degree programmes. Designed using the LPM as the pedagogical foundation, the interdisciplinary course series used a spiral curriculum in which learners worked to achieve increasingly complex content learning goals and complex ways of making meaning simultaneously.

Bekken and Marie (2007) describe how learning and development goals were mapped on a four-semester plan to situate learning in learners' current experience and cumulatively challenge them to move toward self-authorship. For example, using assumptions and arguments translated to sorting opinions from arguments supported by evidence in the first semester. In the second semester the goal changed to identifying assumptions, discovering disciplinary biases and recognising complexity. In the third semester learners were asked to evaluate arguments and supporting assumptions and challenge disciplinary bias. In the fourth semester learners were asked to frame arguments from multiple perspectives, justify assumptions and assess evidence. This cumulative progression placed learning in learners' experiences yet simultaneously

challenged them to recognise the complexity of earth sustainability. Assignments also placed learning in learners' experiences by asking them to analyse their experience (e.g. analyse their families' food consumption) or engaging in a class experience together (e.g. a service-learning project in a local food-producing community). Multiple instructors presented multiple perspectives, emphasising how their own disciplinary training and beliefs influenced their perspectives. At the same time each class session involved learners sharing their perspectives, which instructors respected and valued. Instructors discouraged simplistic solutions for achieving sustainability, instead opting to explore conflicting perspectives and engage learners in weighing the benefits and drawbacks of various approaches. Assignments were aligned with the learning goals for the semester, always blending analysis of class discussion and readings with learners' own voices.

Of the nineteen students enrolled in the first offering of the series, fifteen were white, three Asian-American and one Hispanic. They were majoring in natural or applied sciences, social sciences and the humanities, and most held jobs. Through analysing written essays about sustainability at the outset of the first course, Bekken and Marie identified the vast majority of the learners as following external formulas. Revisiting their essays at the end of the first term, over half rejected their initial theses as too simplistic. Several noted the value of developing their own visions of sustainability. By the end of the third term learners reported making connections between course material and their personal lives and wrote with an authentic voice that was not evident in earlier terms. A mixed-method assessment of the Earth Sustainability series with these students as well as a matched comparison group included two measures of epistemological development and an interview. These measures, administered at the beginning of the series, the end of the second semester and the end of the fourth semester, revealed that Earth Sustainability students made greater epistemological advances than did the comparison group students. Olson *et al.* (in press) reported that by the fourth semester Earth Sustainability students were abandoning the idea that knowledge is absolute in favour of acknowledging uncertainty and the need for evidence to make knowledge claims. The authors noted that epistemological differences between the Earth Sustainability and comparison students were not significant at the end of the first year, suggesting that a sustained curriculum is key to developmental growth. Overall the success of the Earth Sustainability series supports the notion that content and developmental goals can be achieved simultaneously and that learners in their second year of college can abandon external formulas and begin to author their own perspectives.

### *Promoting self-authorship through academic advising*

Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) described a retention-focused academic advising programme (STEP: Support to Enhance Performance) modelled on the LPM for students in academic difficulty in one college of a large, public Midwestern research university in the US. The eighteen students who participated in STEP were between twenty and forty-one years old and represented all class years even though 50 per cent were seniors. The group was 79 per cent male, and racially diverse (31.6 per cent African-American or Black, 5.3 per cent Asian, 10.5 per cent Latino/a, 10/5 per cent Other and 42.1 per cent White). These students either had less than a 2.0 GPA for the semester or were on academic probation. The STEP programme involved regular one-on-one sessions with a professional advisor focused simultaneously on academic success skills and how students made sense of their experiences, decisions and themselves as well as how they balanced others' expectations of them.

The STEP advisor was careful not to offer formulas for success, opting instead to engage students in constructing their own success plans. By respecting their thoughts and feelings, she encouraged them to develop their internal voices. For example, she began by listening to their stories about how they came into academic difficulty before engaging them in active problem solving. Her advising sessions focused on who students wanted to be and who they were so that they could craft plans around this information. This focus emphasised their role in making career and other important decisions and situated learning in their experience. The advisor served as a coach, offering her expertise as students made plans and encountered obstacles but inviting students to transfer skills learned from overcoming obstacles and to explore their motivations behind particular behaviours. Sharing authority and expertise in this collaborative partnership helped students learn to value their own voices.

Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) reported that STEP participants were following external formulas at the outset of the programme. Their academic difficulty provided enough dissonance to set the stage for considering new plans. By the end of the semester, participants were shifting away from external formulas to seeing themselves as important players in deciding what to believe. Pizzolato and Ozaki speculate that this movement is faster than what is typically reported because the intentional use of the LPM helped them connect cognitive capacities to their real-life situations. Routine questioning about why they were evaluating their situations in particular ways may have helped them consider their voices more carefully. Participants ended the programme more convinced that they could have some control over their academic success, more in tune

with their own interests and better able to address the pressures stemming from others' expectations. It is likely that these new perspectives would also carry into non-academic decisions.

#### *Other examples of learning partnerships in academic contexts*

Educators have successfully used learning partnerships in individual courses as well. Hornak and Ortiz (2004) designed a community college business course using a blend of Ortiz and Rhoads' (2000) Multicultural Education Framework and the LPM. Learners made progress on revisioning their own pasts, learning about other cultures and beginning to understand how culture is created. Hornak and Ortiz concluded that creating learning partnerships in diversity educational contexts would help learners see themselves as intimately involved in the perpetuation and change of culture. Brudzinski and Sikorski (in press) redesigned a large introductory geology course using learning partnerships. They report that once they connected effectively to students' developmental capacities, student confidence on one hundred and twenty-eight learning objectives improved dramatically. They also share their own personal growth in integrating science content with affective dimensions of learning.

Haynes (2004) and her colleagues used the LPM to redesign a four-year writing curriculum in an interdisciplinary undergraduate program at Miami University (Ohio), a public, liberal arts institution enrolling approximately sixteen thousand undergraduates of traditional age. Frustrated that their students were not able to produce sophisticated senior theses, the teachers redesigned the writing curriculum to focus on reading and writing proficiency and critical analysis in the first year. The second year then moved on to learning and writing in the disciplines, followed by interdisciplinary writing. The third year emphasised interdisciplinary methodology and theory. The fourth year capstone then supported students in applying their prior knowledge in writing their senior theses. This gradual sequencing of writing matched students' developmental capacities, guiding them gradually to embrace multiple perspectives and develop their own voices in their writing.

Learning partnerships also guide a Bachelor of Integrative Studies degree offered on Miami's regional campuses, where enrolment includes a non-traditional student population (Hieber and Wahlrab in press). Integrative seminars begin with a focus on understanding the self, including crafting one's own plan of study based on one's own career and life goals. The focus then shifts to one's role in community through service-learning experiences. In the capstone seminar, learners integrate these understandings in creating and

developing a culminating project that they will carry forward into their future career and studies. Thus this academic programme attempts to intentionally integrate the various dimensions of students' lives. Student journals in classes assist them in bringing their voice to learning and tracing their own development. Training teachers to use learning partnerships in teaching and advising is also a central part of this programme.

### **Co-curricular contexts for learning partnerships<sup>1</sup>**

College students living on campus face numerous challenges in living away from home, living with peers whose values and experiences differ from theirs and adjusting to living in a community where individual and peer needs must be negotiated. Residential life educators are using learning partnerships to promote learning outcomes in all three dimensions of development. The next two examples highlight a process for community development and a residential curriculum.

#### *Using community standards to promote self-authorship*

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) is an urban research institution serving twenty-eight thousand students. Its mission includes a liberal education that prepares graduates for the work force or continued education. Substantial growth of on-campus housing in the early 1990s set the stage for an innovative approach to developing community called the Community Standards Model (CSM). Piper and Buckley (2004) defined community standards as shared agreements among members of a living unit about how they would treat one another. Residential living requires multiple levels of negotiation with others: with roommates on study space, sleep time, visitation and housekeeping; with neighbours on common space use and noise levels; with residents of multiple ethnic, racial and value backgrounds; and with peers whose values vary on alcohol use and sexual behaviour. Many students entering residential living early in their college experience have not yet acquired the developmental capacities to effectively engage in these complex negotiations. The CSM takes into account students entering developmental capacities in engaging them in learning how to participate effectively in relationships.

CSM is a structured process involving three phases:

- Phase I involves staff introducing residents to the concept of community standards and engaging residents in generating an initial set of standards. Encouraging residents of a living unit to establish their own standards (within university and legal parameters) emphasises personal responsibility for behaviour.

- Phase II involves community problem solving when residents feel someone has violated the standards. At students' request, staff convene meetings to discuss how these incidents affected community members. The focus at this stage is on clarifying the effects of behaviour on the community and refining of standards to avoid future violations.
- Phase III involves holding particular residents accountable for alleged violations. When complaints are initiated, staff work with the alleged violator to prepare him/her for the discussion with the community about his/her behaviour. All are encouraged to share their viewpoints, including the alleged violator, with the goal of obtaining an agreement to modify the offending behaviour.

Using both community and individual development theories, designers of the CSM incorporated the LPM into their work. Involving residents in establishing their own standards and holding themselves and others accountable to these standards respects their thoughts and feelings. Learning is situated in their living experience because problem solving takes place in the context of real-life issues of importance to them. Guiding the community to collaborate on solving problems offers practice in sharing authority. Drawing out multiple perspectives and values about daily living and community issues emphasises the complexity of relationships and the importance of bringing one's perspective to the dialogue. Rather than authority figures solving roommate or community problems, residents are actively engaged in learning how to solve problems and in doing so learn about themselves and how to interact more effectively with others.

Piper and Buckley (2004) report that quality-of-life surveys completed by residents at the end of the academic year offer evidence that community standards are effective. Over 70 per cent of the respondents reported that they were more comfortable making their own decisions, more understanding of others, more aware of how they affected others, more open to ideas different than theirs, more responsible, more appreciative of others' uniqueness and more willing to state their opinion. Over 60 per cent agreed that they were more able to stand up for what they wanted and to object to actions they thought were wrong. Because these living units included first- through fourth-year students, staff interviewed students to ascertain their views about community standards from various developmental phases. Those who initially viewed the standards as external formulas to follow began to see them as a process for negotiating needs. Similarly, these students gained confidence in expressing their own needs over time. In addition to helping students abandon external formulas, community standards helped those who were already at the crossroads to move

toward self-authorship. Those residents reported gaining increased self-awareness and ability to interact effectively with peers, dynamics that suggested that their internal voices were moving to the foreground. For those who were self-authoring, the experience of interacting regularly with peers around shared standards offered opportunities to refine their beliefs, identities and social relations. This example illustrates that co-curricular experiences can be powerful sites for learning and self-authorship development.

#### *Using a residential co-curriculum to promote self-authorship*

Miami University's (Ohio) Office of Residential Life created a developmentally sequenced curriculum for the approximate nine thousand undergraduate students living in the residence halls. This occurred in the context of an overall university initiative to become an Engaged Learning University (Hodge *et al.* 2009). The Engaged Learning University model 'features principles and practices that lead students steadily toward self-authorship in which epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal maturity are integrated' (*ibid.* 16, 18). Because this philosophy included blending the curriculum and co-curriculum in a vibrant campus community, residential life was an ideal site for engaged learning.

The residential curriculum is guided by an overarching goal of enabling residents to become citizen leaders and engaged scholars within their community. The curriculum contains three tiers that each outline developmentally appropriate learning outcomes in the areas of academic success, community engagement, cultural proficiency and identity development. The three tiers in their model relate to moving in (generally involving first-year students), moving through (sophomores and juniors) and moving out (seniors) of the college experience<sup>2</sup> Using the LPM, the staff crafted moving-in goals for students who are externally defined, moving-through goals for those at the crossroads and moving-out goals for those using self-authorship. Diversity in students' meaning making is acknowledged and accommodated by creating learning partnerships with individual students to match their developmental capacities. Residence life staff receive training in the LPM and self-authorship theory and generate multiple strategies to implement the curriculum accordingly. This example exemplifies constructing the residential environment as a learning space in which students can grow on all three dimensions of development.

#### **Blending academic and co-curricular contexts**

Perhaps the most powerful learning partnerships are those that engage all aspects of learners' lives, acknowledging their holistic development. These

partnerships resonate with lifewide learning because they enable and empower learners to integrate various aspects of their lives in the learning process.

*Casa de la Solidaridad: cultural immersion to promote self-authorship*

Casa de la Solidaridad is a Jesuit study abroad programme focused on justice and solidarity cosponsored by the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Santa Clara University and the University of Central America. A one-semester-length cultural exchange programme in El Salvador, it challenges students' perceptions about global justice and human liberation and encourages them to self-author their values. The Casa celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2009 and has over two hundred alumni.

Kevin Yonkers-Talz, co-creator and co-director of the programme, designed the Casa to reflect the components of the LPM (Yonkers-Talz 2004). Cultural immersion automatically situates learning in learners' experiences. Their living-learning community, which includes University of Central America students, and field placements bring them into direct contact with diverse others. The complexity of issues associated with poverty permeates the experience. Sustained and guided individual and community reflection in the living-learning community emphasise the importance of bringing one's views to deciding what to believe. The six courses students take while at the Casa integrate the subject matter with their field placements. A praxis course to integrate learning from students' field placements in the community emphasises knowledge as complex and socially constructed. The living-learning community and pedagogy of the Casa model sharing authority and expertise. Mutual relationships within the Casa community and with the Salvadorians define learning as a mutual process. Staff support, community living and the pedagogy of the Casa validate students' capacity to know.

Yonkers-Talz lives with the Casa students and also formally interviews them throughout their experience. He reports that encountering the poverty in El Salvador creates major dissonance for most students despite their preparation for the experience. Participants report that continual reflection on what they encountered in this experience helped them work through questions of what to believe (e.g. about how governments and societies work, define their own views about poverty and justice), refine their sense of their identity and form a vision for their role in the larger world. The interviews suggest that students entered the experience with some notion of expanding their worlds and leave the experience having moved out of the crossroads into self-authoring their beliefs, identities and social relations. The intensity of the experience no doubt accelerates

development, yet the learning partnerships provide the crucial support to address significant challenges.

### *Internships to promote self-authorship*

The Urban Leadership Internship Programme (ULIP) at Miami University challenges students to clarify their vocation and identity through a ten-week summer internship involving work, service and urban exploration. The ULIP involves approximately twenty-five sophomores and juniors each year in internships in three urban areas in the state. Once admitted, students work individually with the programme coordinator to design an internship uniquely suited to their goals. The overall design of the programme is intentionally structured to offer learning partnerships with programme staff, internship supervisors and peers.

Egart and Healy (2004) described how they implemented the six LPM components in the structure of the programme. The interns' role and responsibilities in their urban placement and community introduce the complexity of knowledge in these settings. The interns need to negotiate their new environment and identity, establishing their own voice in work and personal life. The interns work mutually with their peers to share authority and expertise. This occurs through a course in the semester prior to the internship, regular meetings in each urban centre of interns placed there during the internship and follow-up conversations with the entire group the semester following the internship. Collaboration among co-workers, roommates, supervisors and the programme coordinators supports students in defining learning as a mutual process. The programme coordinator emphasises that supervisors should give interns substantive responsibility and value their perspectives. Learning is automatically situated in the interns' experience in their jobs and community service in the urban setting. Group work and reflective writing offer validation of their thoughts and feelings as they navigate the internship experience.

Egart and Healy (2004) conducted a formal evaluation of the programme's effect on participants' development. Interns reported that their relationships with supervisors encouraged them to develop their own voices due to sharing authority. The experience of being independent and autonomous in their work roles and their everyday living in an urban environment challenged them to consider their own perspectives in everyday and work decisions. Encountering dissonance in their internships and daily lives in the urban environment called their attention to the complexity of urban issues. Structured opportunities for reflection on their experiences and their role in society led them to view

themselves as citizens who could affect change. Participants' shifted from being unsure what role they could play to developing internal beliefs and values that helped them envision active roles they would pursue in the future. This shift suggests a move out of the crossroads into self-authoring one's beliefs, identity and social relations. It also suggests that direct experience, paired with strong and facilitative support, can lead to significant growth in a short period of time.

### *Learning partnerships in an Honours programme*

After successfully developing a four-year writing curriculum using the LPM, Haynes (2004) translated these insights into a total reform of Miami University's Honours programme. Students from all university disciplines participate in the Honours programme throughout their college experience. Taylor and Haynes (2008) explicitly outline a three-tier approach to both the curriculum and co-curriculum that identifies the developmental goals, learning goals, educator expectations and learning experiences that best challenge and support learners at each phase of development. Like the Earth Sustainability course series described earlier, the three-tier approach intentionally structures learning outcomes and educational practice around learners' developmental capacities. The developmental goal of the first tier, where learners tend to follow external formulas, is to help learners see the shortcomings of doing so. The developmental goal of the second tier, where students are at the crossroads, is to help learners listen to their internal voices to decide what to believe and to mutually negotiate with others. In the third tier, where students are becoming self-authored, the developmental goal is to assist them in using their internal belief systems consistently and integrate aspects of their identity.

Taylor and Haynes have recently embarked on a total revision of the Honours programme based on this approach. Educators collaborate with students to identify experiences that will help them achieve learning goals, the students report how they achieved goals in each tier in an electronic portfolio and the staff assesses the portfolio based on rubrics crafted around the developmental and learning goals. First-year students submitted their reflective narratives this year to begin meeting the sequenced learning outcomes. Students' reflective narratives allowed teachers to complete a thematic analysis for key Honours courses to identify developmentally effective assignments and activities. For example, through the thematic analysis for CHM 144.H: College Chemistry Lab, teachers learned that the sol-gel experiment in particular had a large impact on students because the instructor trusted students to create, implement and analyse the results of a long-term experiment and expected students to share their new knowledge in a public forum. Teachers are using the results of such

thematic analyses to guide faculty development efforts (K. B. Taylor, personal communication, 3 March 2011).

### *Self-authorship through learning partnerships during orientation*

Although sustained partnerships over time enable educators to provide ongoing good company to learners, an example of building an orientation (induction) programme around the LPM reveals that the process can begin in a two-day orientation experience. Based on her participation in a community of educators working on designing engaged learning, the director of orientation (Stoll in press) initiated changes in Miami University's new student orientation programme. This programme orients students and their parents to the college experience prior to the start of their first college year. The programme focuses on four goals for incoming students: confidence, comfortable, connected and curious. Confidence entails self-efficacy and a sense of one's ability to succeed, comfortable relates to developing a campus support network, connected refers to a sense of belonging and curious relates to openness to new ideas. Recognising that these goals demanded certain developmental capacities, Stoll infused the orientation programme with the LPM.

Three key components of the programme – individual advising, written reflection and orientation leader training – were intentionally designed to support and slightly challenge students' entering tendency to follow external formulas. Student orientation leaders engaged small groups of students in crafting academic and co-curricular goals, which individual advisors then asked the students to share the next day. This approach conveyed respect for students' thoughts and linked their experience to organising their class schedules. Written reflection incorporated into large and small group sessions asked students and their parents to reflect on the information provided and its relationship to their own experiences. Reflections related to how ideas presented related to their prior expectations, their strengths and interests related to choosing a major and their academic and co-curricular goals. Some reflection questions focused on action steps that families could discuss after orientation. Staff and students facilitating these discussions were trained to craft learning partnerships with students and parents. Stoll (in press) collected student and parent feedback that revealed these outcomes: understanding the difference between memorisation and discovery-based learning, students gaining a sense of their role in the learning and advising process, and parents gaining insight into their role as partners to help their students become the directors of their educational journeys. These are remarkable outcomes for a two-day experience. They

suggest that the way we frame the college experience with incoming students may predispose them to approach it as a lifewide learning project.

### **Authoring your life: a lifelong and lifewide project**

My longitudinal participants' stories support the notion that learning is a lifelong and lifewide project. Their journeys toward self-authorship took place in classrooms, co-curricular settings, community involvement, employment and in their personal and professional relationships. Growth that occurred in these spaces influenced growth in other spaces. The journeys also illustrate that growth in the epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions is intertwined. This holistic view of learning and development in all of an individual's life spaces resonates with the lifewide concept.

The examples of learning partnerships support the concept that learning and development can occur in almost any context of an individual's lifewide experiences but that experiences that are intense and immersive appear to accelerate development. Having good company in both curricular and co-curricular settings and empathetic and skilled support also facilitates development. Because the LPM emphasises situating learning in learners' experience and respecting their voices, it naturally incorporates various dimensions of their lives into the learning relationship. The challenge of bringing one's own voice to the learning process further reinforces the centrality of the learners' whole lives in their learning and development.

Both learning partnerships and lifewide education aim to promote integration among various aspects of learners' lives. They also both aim to promote self-authorship, recognising it as the developmental foundation for the most valuable complex learning outcomes. Self-authorship enables taking advantage of learning opportunities as well as creating one's own learning infrastructure in various contexts. Research on success in adult life supports the role of self-authorship in managing complexity. Kegan and Lahey (2009) offer numerous examples of how organisational leaders in private corporations and public agencies function more adaptively when they have achieved self-authored meaning making. Kegan and Lahey advance the notion that moving beyond self-authorship to self-transformation – a way of making meaning that enables reflection on one's internal belief system – is actually necessary for the increased complexity these leaders face. Similarly, Drago-Severson (2010) suggests that educators in secondary school systems need self-authoring and self-transforming meaning making to adapt to the complex challenges they face. My longitudinal stories demonstrate how self-authorship helps the participants

navigate the challenges of adult work and personal life (Baxter Magolda 2009). Developing an internal voice to guide one's life enables one to recognise and engage in opportunities for growth as well as to identify and develop the kinds of partnerships that support it. Thus substantial evidence exists that higher education must broaden its view to emphasise and gain the benefits from lifewide education. Learning partnerships embrace learners' lifewide experience and promote their capacity to shape their journeys toward self-authorship. The learning partnerships described in later chapters (Chapters 11 to 13 this volume) provide examples of how one UK university has tried to achieve this goal.

### **Endnotes**

1 The term co-curricular is used here to describe campus-based contexts for learning that do not gain academic credit.

2 <http://www.units.muohio.edu/saf/reslife/reslife/whatwedo/rescurric.php>