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Reconstructing Faculty Roles to Align with Self-Authorship Development: The Gentle Art of Stepping Back

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Reconstructing Faculty Roles to Align with Self-Authorship Development: The Gentle Art of Stepping Back

Abstract

Student development has connections to important academic purposes in higher education (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown & Lindsay, 2009). In particular, a growing body of work on self-authorship, a social-constructive theory of development, has demonstrated relevance to the purposes of higher education (Baxter Magolda, 2001; King & Baxter Magolda, 2004). The conditions which support self-authorship development in academic settings have been studied in detail, drawing attention to what King et al. (2009) frame as developmentally effective educational experiences. Explorations of self-authorship development in academic settings have focused on students' experiences and outcomes. The classroom experiences of faculty, particularly those working outside institutional initiatives, to support self-authorship have received less attention. This study used a theory-driven (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Pizzolato, 2005), practice-based research framework, to explore a faculty-student affairs collaboration through participant observation as the collaborators sought to align their teaching practices with the tenets of self-authorship development in the context of a senior undergraduate course in Service-Learning. Four themes emerged, which have relevance for those who wish to consider student personal and academic development concurrently. We argue that individual faculty members can collaborate with student affairs professionals and use self-authorship theory to expand their constructions of what it means to be a "good professor" by approaching teaching as a mirror image of the self-authorship journey travelled by students.

Les programmes de perfectionnement des étudiants sont liés aux objectifs académiques importants de l'enseignement supérieur (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown & Lindsay, 2009). En particulier, les travaux de plus en plus nombreux qui portent sur l'épistémologie personnelle (self-authorship), une théorie constructive sociale de développement, ont démontré leur pertinence par rapport à l'enseignement supérieur (Baxter Magolda, 2001; King & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Les conditions qui soutiennent le développement de l'épistémologie personnelle en milieu universitaire ont été étudiées en détail et attirent l'attention sur ce que King et al (2009) formulent comme des expériences éducatives efficaces de développement. Les explorations du développement de l'épistémologie personnelle en milieu universitaire se sont généralement concentrées sur les expériences et les résultats des étudiants. Les expériences des professeurs en salle de classe, en particulier celles des enseignants qui oeuvrent en dehors des initiatives institutionnelles dans le but de soutenir l'épistémologie personnelle, ont été beaucoup moins examinées. Cette étude a été menée dans un cadre de recherche guidé par la théorie et axé sur la pratique. Elle explore la collaboration entre professeurs et affaires étudiantes par le biais de l'observation des participants alors que les collaborateurs tentent de faire correspondre leurs pratiques d'enseignement avec les principes du développement de l'épistémologie personnelle, dans le contexte d'un cours de premier cycle de niveau avancé d'apprentissage du service communautaire. Quatre thèmes ont été mis en lumière. Ceux-ci sont pertinents pour ceux et celles qui souhaitent tenir compte à la fois du développement personnel et du développement académique des étudiants. Nous soutenons que les professeurs peuvent collaborer avec les professionnels des affaires étudiantes et faire usage de la théorie de l'épistémologie personnelle pour élargir leur compréhension de ce que cela signifie d'être « un bon professeur » en abordant l'enseignement comme le pendant du chemin d'épistémologie personnelle suivi par les étudiants.

Keywords

faculty-student affairs collaborations, self-authorship, student development in higher education, faculty roles, teaching methods

Cover Page Footnote

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There is wide acknowledgement in higher education of the need to support students as they embark on education in an increasingly complex world, beset with seemingly intransigent challenges. Higher education requires a more thought provoking and sophisticated curriculum which must include capacity to engage in solving complex interconnected problems (Barnett, 2000, 2005; Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kezar, 2004). Associations that support higher education take up these concerns, universities speak to them in mission statements, and student affairs personnel are likely aware of the pressing implications for student development. However, there continues to be a separation between academic and student affairs sectors in many institutions. It is not always clear what individual faculty members might do to support student development. New faculty, in particular, experience uncertainty about teaching roles and the scope of practice involved (Solem & Foote, 2004). Teaching concerns are often exacerbated by maintaining silos in student affairs and the academic sector and other barriers, including tenure and promotion practices, that do not fully recognise collaborative and service work (Day, 2008; Kezar, 2004, 2010; Sandeen, 2004). Researchers have advocated bringing together the expertise of student affairs personnel with faculty and incorporating opportunities for student development into educational programmes (Dale & Drake, 2005; Kezar, 2004, 2006; Kuh, 2008). In particular, self-authorship, a social-constructive theory of development originally conceived by Kegan (1994) and further explored by Baxter Magolda (1999, 2001, 2007), appears to have relevance as a growing body of work demonstrates the interconnected nature of self-authorship and advanced academic outcomes of the sort needed to meet the above challenges. The theory offers a platform for faculty-student affairs collaborations. After some years of entertaining the possibilities of supporting self-authorship development at an institutional level, we decided to explore what might be possible through a faculty-student affairs collaboration in our own classroom. This article offers our experiences in an exploratory study as faculty participant-observers in a senior undergraduate course, as we endeavored to teach in accordance with educational principles associated with self-authorship.

The Theoretical Framework: Self-Authorship

Self-authorship posits a developmental continuum through which young adults move from a largely external frame of reference, where they are guided by external claims of knowledge and authority, to a more internally referenced way of knowing which gives weight to their own meaning-making even while giving consideration to other perspectives. The importance of this aspect of personal development for academic development has been widely discussed (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2005; Pizzolato, 2004, 2007). Self-authorship acts as a regulator on cognitive scope. Students with emerging self-authorship are primarily relatively passive receivers of knowledge and are limited in the extent to which they can independently construct meaning or actively critique knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Accordingly, it has been argued that seeking academic or professional gains in the absence of opportunities for concurrent development of students' character and capacity are of limited value (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Deep learning and integration require synchronous development in the three interconnected dimensions that comprise self-authorship: epistemological development, intrapersonal development, and interpersonal development (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). Support for students to explore the questions "How do I know", "Who am I?" and "How do I construct

relationships” (Baxter Magolda, 2001) is needed for 21st century education (Baxter Magolda, 2007).

Along their varied paths to self-authorship, students engage in broad phases which Baxter Magolda (2001) has named “the crossroads”, “becoming the author of one’s own life” and “internal foundations”. Pizzolato (2004, 2005, 2007) has directed effort to understanding some of the micro features of self-authorship development, drawing attention to the cumulative power of dissonant experiences, which culminate in the *provocative moment*, a tipping point in the transition from the crossroads to becoming the author of one’s own life. Others (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes & Jones, 2007; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) have explored the distinct experiences of students’ self-authorship evolution in the context of identity development, resulting in more nuanced understandings of the theory. Several studies have explored the experiences of student minorities, finding that some of those who are presented with significant challenges to identity may be prompted to move through developmental milestones relatively early or in more complex ways by virtue of the dissonance of their experiences relative to the larger culture in which they live (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). This body of work underscores the idiosyncratic nature of self-authoring processes and adds an important dimension to consideration of learning experiences in classrooms. Clearly, development is complex and situated particular to individual students’ experiences and identities and cannot be orchestrated. Collectively, their work underscores the importance of avoiding strictly linear constructions of self-authorship that imply a uniform stepwise process of development for everyone. Such reductions of self-authorship research can obscure complex developmental work, particularly for individuals engaged in complex considerations of identity around ethnocultural or sexual identity. Jones (2009) cautions that “the self-authoring process may be more contingent and fluid than typically conceived” (p. 301). These important findings, along with the complexity of self-authorship as initially conceived, present significant challenges to educators who would wish to support student development in academic contexts.

Educational Approaches to Support Self-Authorship

Since Baxter Magolda published her seminal work, *Making Their Own Way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Support Student Self-Development* in 2001, a number of studies have confirmed student self-authorship as a regulator for optimal academic development (e.g., Hodge, Baxter Magolda & Haynes, 2009; Pizzolato, Hicklen, Brown, & Chaudhari, 2009; Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006). Research that reports the sorts of educational experiences which best support student development has been accumulating (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown and Lindsay, 2009; Pizzolato, 2005; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007; Reason, Terenzini & Domingo, 2007). Among the challenges experienced in planning educational programmes which concurrently foster development is the complex and idiosyncratic nature of students’ journeys toward self-authorship. Not surprisingly then, one finding that has emerged in this context is the critical importance of balancing challenge and support (Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006).

Given the nature of the three dimensions that comprise self-authorship, the importance of grounding learning in a social context and constructing learning partnerships is predicted by theory and well supported by research. Haynes (2004) describes a series of educational experiences grounded in a multi-year writing curriculum situated in an inter-disciplinary degree

which holds as core principles “validating learners’ capacity as knowledge constructors, situating learning in learners’ experiences, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning...” (p. 65).

Our exploration of teaching in attunement with principles of self-authorship was situated in a larger research project which had service learning at its core. Previous work had made connections between self-authorship and service learning (Boes, 2006; Jones & Abes, 2004) which has been shown to have a positive and enduring impact on the development of self-authorship by providing an opportunity for students to engage in a variety of community-based experiences which directly raise questions about equity and democracy. The combination of engagement in unfamiliar contexts with support for reflection assisted integration of dimensions of self-authorship as students moved toward a more internally-defined self, more complex constructions of the world, and a wider range of options in relationships.

Aside from the intrinsic merit for both students and the community, service learning provides a possibly unique experience for students to experience difference and in so doing to encounter the sorts of dissonant experiences which are at the core of Pizzolato’s developmentally significant “provocative moments” in the expansion of self-authorship. At the same time, a service-learning experience can be structured to allow students to take responsibility for the logistical considerations of their experience. This runs counter to some of the advice around successful implementation of service-learning experiences which argues for the development of a strong supporting relationship to be initiated by universities engaged with larger communities in this fashion (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Swaminathan, 2007). Since we planned to work with students in a facilitated small group format once they had commenced their service-learning placement, we also felt that differences in sites and experiences would contribute positively to the experience of students in the group and would support the goal of fostering individual cooperation and support, rather than competition, as well as helping to ensure that students were engaged in work that was personally meaningful to them. Therefore, since this was a theory-driven project, it departed from some of the conventions associated with service-learning, while still instituting supports for students as they sought and engaged with service-learning placements.

Research provides a good deal of broad guidance for those who would plan programmes to adopt teaching practices to support development, both in terms of principle and practices. The particular classroom experiences of faculty members have received less attention. What are the particular classroom experiences of those who aspire to teach in ways that support self-authorship development? How are student differences supported and challenged? What challenges do faculty experience and how do they meet them?

Methodology

This study explored our experiences of endeavouring to recast our approaches to teaching to harmonise them with social-constructivist theories of student development, particularly self-authorship, given its implications for academic development. Set within the larger project of how to teach to provide contexts which could support student personal development, this paper explores our experiences of the process of integrating these student development theories with practices which reflected them. Consistent with Patton’s (2002) description of Heuristic Inquiry, the part of the project taken up in this paper was focussed on our personal experiences and

insights, and the responses of our students which shaped these experiences, in an iterative fashion. Our planning of this course, our experience in it and our reflections during and after it were all marked by the intensity of the experience and our iterative search for meanings. Particularly evocative experiences with our students provide examples of the themes which emerged from the project.

Our weekly post-class debriefing sessions and the notes made in those sessions were central in identifying the themes discussed in this paper. Our goal in this phase of the project was to consider those aspects of the experience that related to our teaching. Informed largely by heuristic inquiry, a primary source of data in our deliberations concerning potential themes were the teaching moments that had the biggest impact on us and evoked a notable response from students. Noting Patton's (2002) emphasis on the place of intensity of experience, we gave particular attention the emotional moments we noted: the surprise, dismay, frustration and delight we experienced were signals for deeper reflection. At each debriefing session we discussed the more significant moments in the teaching for that day and debated those until we were agreed on the most significant experiences. These "moments" are perhaps best described as stories within the class meeting which evoked an emotional response from us; the events were often bounded moments which involved a student sharing a particular experience and a response to the experience. Having identified those moments as having impact on us and our students, we then considered those teaching moments in the context of self-authorship theory. This deepened our contemplation of their meaning and, significantly, informed our teaching directions in the coming week.

While data was collected from students (including samples of writing, an exit survey, course evaluations and a focus group) to support understanding of their perspectives and experiences, rather than to directly comment on our teaching in the context of theory we espoused, we studied these sources of data as they became available. These served as a check on our consideration of the experiences that we deemed most significant in each class, and then across the course. As one debriefing session followed another, we began to see connections across the sessions and began to tentatively identify overarching themes, which were then considered against the conversations in the focus group (conducted by an independent researcher) which followed completion of the course. The experience of working together to explicate moments of greatest significance, and then checking these against the various sources of data from students, assisted us to check our own perceptions and each other's and ensured that as co-researchers we together encountered "the combination of personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

Methods

While this paper is informed largely by our experiences as participant-observers, the research project also used interviews, focus groups, an exit survey and artefacts of students' work as data which, while not primary sources of information in this aspect of the project, added to our reflections on our teaching experiences. Our roles as participant-observers required us to move back and forth between the theories of interest to us and our practices with students as the complex social context of the course unfolded. Our primary meaning-making activity was the debriefing we would have together immediately following each class, as we placed a strong emphasis on constructing our understandings as teaching partners. This informed both

understandings of our experiences with students and our plans for our next class with them. In addition, we kept field notes and had other artefacts of our course work.

Consistent with Hubball and Clarke's (2010) emphasis on communities of practitioners in SoTL, we functioned as peer reviewers for each other as we reflected on our experiences with our students. Our collaboration was enriched by our distinct roles in the university since one of us is located in the academic sector and the other in student affairs. This positioned us to have a variety of conversations with colleagues as the project unfolded and to offer each other different perspectives on our experiences with our students. Our students were also commentators on our joint experiences and on our responses to them and they shared their perspectives in group sessions during the course, in conversations with us before and after class and in emails. Their engagement with us often sharpened the intensity of our experiences. While the experience of, and outcomes for, students in this course are certainly of interest, the focus of this paper is on the examination of our experiences with theory-driven practices in the classroom and student engagement with them.

Student Participants in the Service-Learning Course

The "Service-Learning Course", as students named it, was offered to undergraduate students in their third or fourth year as a senior (fourth year level) for-credit elective at a small university in Atlantic Canada. The course was offered through the School of Education, which had been willing to "loan" a course number when the application for the research funding which supported this pilot version of the course was submitted. We would note in passing, however, that many disciplines could conceivably have offered the course.

There were several barriers to recruitment. The autumn term had been disrupted by a labour dispute and the School of Education, which was offering the course, had no undergraduate students and the faculty members were therefore also not known to any students. As well, students at the end of a four-year degree program have little flexibility in their course selection. However, when students' union executive members, learning support staff and a couple of popular faculty members sent email messages to students, 45 students expressed interest in the course. To reduce the perception of risk involved in this pilot version of the course, it was offered as a pass/fail experience thus ensuring that the course would have no impact on a student's grade point average unless the student failed.

The communication to students indicated that there were criteria students had to meet in order to participate in the course, consistent with the research plan and ethics approval. One institutional concern that we managed was that the course should not put students at risk and so academically vulnerable students were not recruited though there is nothing in the literature to indicate that such a course would not benefit them. A number of students who were interested in the course did not meet the criteria which included a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.7 and third or fourth year at university. More than one third of the students held GPAs of 3.5 or greater.

In the end, the course included 22 students, (one of whom later dropped out because of a need to take on additional employment) including four with disabilities that affect learning, and four international students for whom English was an additional language; both groups were sizeable minorities on this campus relative to other similar institutions in Canada. Students from a variety of disciplines participated in the course, including Business, Chemistry, English,

Kinesiology, Music, Music Therapy, Psychology, and Recreation Management. As this article focuses on the experiences of faculty in this project, further details about students and their experience will be addressed in a forthcoming article.

Faculty Participants in the Service Learning Course

In order to better understand the faculty roles in this project, it is necessary to first situate the particular individuals who were involved. Deborah Day works in the academic sector of the university and is involved in research, teaching and administration. Terry Lane is Director of the Student Resource Centre in the student affairs sector and teaches graduate courses on a part time basis. We are white, hold PhDs and have extensive experience with university teaching but had rarely (and certainly not recently) taught undergraduate students before; most of our previous experience had been with graduate students. As well, we both hold post-baccalaureate Bachelors of Education and had school-based teaching experience in the past. We are professional counsellors which informs this work in important ways. In particular, we are both deeply interested in what we see as the reciprocal nature of student academic and personal development. In the conclusion to this article we take up ways in which university educators with different academic or professional backgrounds can take up ideas and practices from this research. As well, aspects of our background may have relevance to how we are perceived by students as we attempted to engage a pedagogy which, in part, shifts the balance of power in the classroom.

We jointly planned this course and met with the students for the initial classes and then the weekly meetings. Following each weekly session, we compared what we had seen and heard and noted specific instances that related in some way to the theories under consideration. While Deborah undertook most of the administrative work for the course, and the marking or responses to students as this course was part of her teaching assignment, both she and Terry were full participants as co-leaders of the groups in their meeting time with the students. We had team taught before on several previous occasions and so we felt comfortable in the classroom and were open to the other offering elaboration on a point, for example, or asking the other to respond to something when we judged the answer would be better. Both of us can be seen as participant-observers in several respects that are relevant to this research. First, we were concurrently offering a course and studying the experience of the course. As such, our debriefings after each group meeting served to assist with our planning for future sessions, consistent with the underlying theories, and also to reflect on the contributions students had made in the class. Also important was the balancing effect, in terms of hewing to the theory, of having both of us involved. Each of us was witness to, and commented on, the students' experiences' and each other's responses to them. While much of this happened outside the classroom, in the latter half of the course, this happened on occasion when we were with the students.

The Service-Learning Course Structure

Undergraduate courses at our university normally follow a typical Canadian semester which runs for twelve weeks; this course ran from January until early April 2008. In order to provide maximum access to the course for undergraduate students from a wide range of disciplines, the course was offered in a three hour block on Thursday evenings. For the first three

weeks, students met in one large group for a three hour class, which included mini-lectures, discussions, exercises and self-assessment experiences. Two self-report inventories, the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* and the *Campbell Interest and Skills Survey*, were administered to assist students in organising their thoughts about their strengths and areas of interest in preparation for seeking a service-learning experience. Students were introduced to the literature on service-learning. We organized the course so that students would seek and establish their own service learning placements, a departure from normal practice in service-learning. We were careful to provide experiences to learn about service-learning, to assess community needs and to support students to reflect on their skills and interests. In addition, we provided activities to prepare them for the logistics of seeking a placement. However, we stopped short of establishing placements for them ahead of time, as this conflicted with our goals of teaching in alignment with self-authorship, which suggested that mutual meaning making and allowing for students to choose/construct activities that were situated in their own experiences would be important.

We also took up some introductory literature and ideas related to self-authorship. While we were clear that self-authorship cannot be taught as such, students knew that this course was embedded in a research project and we felt it was important to be transparent about what was of interest to us and how we would be proceeding, in a general way.

After the first three weeks of class, students were divided into two groups which met for about an hour each week. We attempted to construct the groups so that each was balanced according to country of origin, presence of specific learning disability and gender. We also ensured that a variety of majors were included in each group. The rationale for dividing the class was to allow for greater participation for each student and to have a more intimate group within which to share experiences about the service-learning placement. As counsellors and educators, we both have specific education in, and are experienced with, group process. We also had regular email communication and occasional meetings with individual students between class meetings and just before and after class. Both of us were copied on all email correspondence with students.

While our goals as teachers were clear, and had been stated in the course outline, we followed a largely emergent approach to teaching, which, we felt, was a requirement of the approach we were exploring if we were to heed the cautions of Jones (2009) and others regarding the fluid and situated nature of the self-authoring process. It was important to us that there was room for students as partners in learning and it was our intention to scaffold the course content onto their interests and activities, rather than having that direct them.

The Gentle Art of Stepping Back: Pedagogy for Student Development

While there were many particular ways in which we sought to teach in alignment with the theory of self-authorship, our iterative debriefing sessions showed that most of them are captured within four interconnected themes: (a) relinquishing authority, (b) making space for student initiative, (c) permitting moderate struggle, and (d) trusting the group process.

Relinquishing Authority

One of the hallmarks of progress toward self-authorship is the journey from reliance on external authorities, to valuing and attending to one's internal voice as a source of knowing, a complex and demanding epistemological shift. Accordingly, we argue that a central task of

teaching in this context is to avoid needlessly taking up the role of authority, even when students might seek or welcome it. We held an awareness that authority is generally accorded to professors and that our professional-class and majority culture membership likely help to secure this.

One of the initial (and ongoing) requirements of the course was the completion of a reflective log related to the service learning experience. We had established this as a requirement to support processing of students' experiences in their service learning placements. The purposes of the logs included supporting reflection on the service activities and providing an opportunity for us to engage with students' reflections one-on-one. The logs were written using a word program and uploaded to the course (Moodle) website. We responded to the logs by writing (using "insert comment" function in Microsoft Word) directly on the logs, asking questions which we hoped would deepen reflection, noting implicit messages behind statements and noting when volume or expressiveness of writing indicated that the student was particularly attentive to an aspect of the experience. Our responses were aimed at supporting students to reflect on what they were learning about the service site and themselves and to help them notice what they were noticing.

Early discussions of logs were instigated by students in the context of exploring the course outline and grading scheme. The course outline indicated that the logs would be ungraded as they were designed to support learning processes only, without contributing to grades. We also indicated, in the outline and in discussions of the outline, that we expected that there would be a great deal of variability in what students would write about in the logs but that we were interested in what each of them thought and felt about their experience in service learning. Despite this, we had numerous circular conversations as students tried to find out what we wanted. Finally we offered the observation that the students seemed to think that the purpose of the logs was to keep track of student activities and that they were to serve a sort of accounting purpose in the course. One student responded by asking what other purpose there could be. All of this happened despite explicit instruction in the course outline indicating that the purposes were for student learning, for writing about what they thought and felt about their service experiences. It was evident when the first logs were turned in that a number of students persisted with the accounting model of logs as they listed activities they had engaged in and noted the times they spent at their service learning sites. Some students continued to be very anxious about the logs, wanting us to be specific about what we wanted and feeling that we were being unsupportive. We gently resisted requests to be prescriptive about what should be in the logs, placing our emphasis instead on regular writing in the logs, and processing what they thought and felt about their experiences. We felt strongly that the reflection would be an important element of hewing to the notion that it was important that we avoid adopting roles as interpreters of their experiences. However, it was not easy to resist their entreaties for more specificity. Being guided by the theory and having mutual support assisted us with this. Gradually, as we provided opportunities for group members to discuss how they were using the logs and as our feedback responded idiosyncratically to their particular experiences and sent them back to reflect further on their learning, the possibilities for the logs broadened and discussions which sought to set standard parameters for the logs disappeared. While shaping the logs in this fashion created a developmental challenge for students, we were mindful that self-authorship development rests on the balance of challenge and support. In the matter of the logs, we relocated our notions of support to encompass providing support for the process and for risk taking rather than providing

prescriptions and authoritative answers. We have considered whether providing further supports for the logs might have merit. Our experience with using concrete examples of student work is that students are inclined to seize on one as an exemplar and try to replicate it in some fashion. However, it would be worthwhile to try introducing a range of examples, with supporting literature about reflective logs, and see how that might change the experience.

Similarly, we had offered to provide formative feedback on any student writing without reference to marks. We presented this as a “free service”, a bonus as it were. We did not provide marks or make statements about the value of the writing but would offer our responses to it and pose questions, much as we would do for each other. This notion seemed very unusual to students, that there would be a response which did not tell them if they were “right” or “wrong”. A student who took up this opportunity was intrigued that we undertook to do this independently and that we sometimes responded to different aspects of the writing or in different ways. In this way he began to distinguish “feedback” with its developmental orientation from “evaluation” with its authoritarian stance and saw that there were differences in responses to learning, writing and ideas rather than a single consistent uniform response from us both.

On many occasions, in class and in the group meetings, we employed circular and recursive questions (Tomm, 1988; Tomm & Lannamann, 1988) to support students to think more deeply about the issue under discussion and to minimize the chance offering a response that would shut down the discussion or give weight or authority to our perspective. In short, we worked to ask good questions rather than provide good answers. This was one practical strategy that we had established as relevant prior to beginning the course. It was also one that students themselves noticed a great deal in the group discussions, commenting on the value of it in focus group sessions and an on-line survey to evaluate the project, while acknowledging how frustrating and unfamiliar it was at the outset. We felt their initial frustrations quite keenly but having both an educational principle and a strategy that maintained our engagement with students helped us to manage this.

Overall, we sought to establish a collaborative environment where students would share ideas, questions, answers and practical strategies to respond to issues in their field placements. This was managed from the outset by involving a diverse group of students in the course and providing the opportunity for a wide range of service-learning experiences. To further support an environment of collaboration, there were no marks given; although responses were made and feedback given an emphasis was placed on group problem solving and sharing. While there were no marks, we pressed students quite strongly to deepen their reflections or to consider more elements in their work.

In the second half of the term, it became apparent that many students were connecting their experiences in the community with their experiences in university by reflecting on their imminent graduation. Life after university became integrated into the group discussion of service-learning placements, something that we might have anticipated but did not. Consistent with the principles we had set out at the beginning, we did not attempt to pull the discussion back into more explicitly “curriculum related” topics. Instead, we respected the students’ desire and capacity to integrate their experiences in their service learning placements with their present lives and experiences in and out of university with their future lives, scaffolding the course goals on this meaningful content that they introduced.

Making Space for Student Initiative

The literature is clear on the importance of situating learning in the context of students' experiences to support self-authorship (Egart & Healy, 2004). This course was structured to create these sorts of opportunities but it was important that our approach to teaching and our responses to students did not undermine these opportunities.

There were no pre-established practicum placements associated with this course. Students were required to initiate a relationship and establish a placement without our intervention. This supported the challenge dimension of our work and mirrored the finding in the self-authorship literature that appropriate challenges facilitated development (Egart & Healy, 2004; Meszaros & Duncan Lane, 2010). We were mindful that challenge without support was destructive of self-authorship expansion and so to maintain support and challenge, while we did not establish placements for students, which introduced significant challenge, we led class discussions of potential sites, their needs and how best to approach them. We also established peer consultation to help to develop and co-edit a letter of introduction. Additional support was provided through readings and discussions about service learning, the nature of service, brainstorming about needs in the community and identification of organisations which tried to meet needs in the community. In this way, we worked to support students without intervening in the establishment of the service-learning relationship, leaving room for student initiative. Although this runs counter to the service-learning literature (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Swaminathan, 2007), which advocates the establishment and nurturing of placements by the university, we felt that this was within the capabilities of the students, particularly given the practical and emotional supports provided by the weekly group meetings and given the preparatory work specific to seeking placements. Furthermore, this sort of initiative was very closely related to the kinds of experiences which research has suggested support self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2009; Bekken & Marie, 2007; Egart & Healy, 2004; Taylor & Haynes, 2004) and we wanted to preserve this opportunity for development. However, it was challenging to maintain this position and we constantly needed to debrief our experiences with the students with reference to the self-authorship literature. In our debriefings we came to place an emphasis on our warm engagement with students as a complement to the various cognitive strategies we used to support them.

In a couple of instances, students asked us to intervene as they worked to engage a community agency which had looked promising but had not produced results. Students were understandably concerned about delays and we were stirred by their rising anxiety. It was tempting to support them with specific suggestions of what to do. Instead, we responded by helping them to explore what strategies they had tried and which others might be relevant, enabling students to experience that they could resolve these issues themselves. Gauging the need for support, and the nature of it, became a constant theme in our debriefing sessions.

Similarly, most students wanted very much to have our approval for placements. We responded to appeals for approval by asking questions about the fit of the placement they were pursuing with the nature of service learning as we had discussed in the course and in relation to their personal goals. Some students found this at least moderately frustrating and would initially answer our questions about fit and then respond with a, "Yes, but" sort of comment an attempt to determine what we thought of the placement. We generally then responded in a circular fashion, asking them about the potential of the placement as a service and learning site. In the initial weeks of the course students would try to compare their potential placements with those of

classmates to determine if they were adequate. Increasingly it became obvious that the placements that students were establishing for themselves were diverse and comparisons were not fruitful. But as they moved closer to making a commitment to a site, they tried again to get approval from us. Instead, we asked questions about the community needs being met and the learning goals of the students. Similarly, as students moved deeper into the placement experience some discussions came up that addressed the sorts of activities undertaken in the placement. We kept our contributions to these sorts of discussions focused on initiatives they were making. This theme worked hand-in-hand with the first theme, relinquishing authority. In the absence of any approval-related responses from us, their initiatives became the focus of the experience. As the students began to exercise initiative more comfortably, we noticed our own comfort levels rise. One of the challenges in responding to students in this phase was that of managing our own anxiety in response to their concerns. We had a lot of experience that would have eased their progress but worked to support them with our engagement and interest and by asking questions which supported them to find satisfying answers for themselves. We observed that it took a lot of energy and planning to stay out of the way and to support student initiative; at least as much thought as was needed when we approach our teaching from a more pre-ordinate stance.

Permitting Moderate Struggle

Pizzolato's (2005) explication of the "provocative moment" was, for us, one of the most interesting findings in the self-authorship literature. Because such moments are the culmination of a number of idiosyncratic dissonant experiences for students, we knew we could not create such an experience. But we determined to leave the door open for this and we were also mindful that if our roles were not to be constructed as involving removal of challenge, we would need to allow for some discomfort.

As we have already noted, it became clear early in the course that students expected us to perform a watchdog function as regards their progress and indeed we were accustomed from our previous teaching experiences to making sure that students were keeping to reasonable timelines and to taking steps to get them back on track if they were lagging behind or at the very least, drawing these matters to students' attention. Our historic constructions of "good professors" included that sort of logistical support. As well, students were apparently familiar with having professors provide active problem-solving or even intervening to solve problems which arose in the context of their studies. In the context of our university, which is relatively small and places value on the student-teacher relationship, a supportive teaching-learning relationship is highly valued. In this project however, theory suggested that conditions for student development required that we permit students to experience moderate discomfort in situations which we judged that they had the resources to manage or had the capacity to learn to manage. The theory pushed us over and over again to reexamine how we framed support and to take this up with students directly. Experiences that induced moderate discomfort included delays in commencing the service experience and lack of progress in establishing a placement.

Several students experienced delays in commencing their service experience. In some settings, police background checks or training were required. In other instances, complicated contexts contributed to the delays. A notable example was experienced by one pair of students who had planned an ambitious after-school program for pre-teen girls. They experienced extensive delays due to school cancellations because of bad weather, professional development

days for teachers, and a lack of school personnel willing to be on the site during the time of their program. The investment of this duo in program development was extensive and their anxiety grew as the term progressed and they still had not begun their program. Adding to their frustration was the failure of school personnel to respond to calls or follow up at times or in ways they had agreed to. It was difficult to watch as they struggled to get going and yet we were impressed with their persistence and resourcefulness. We constantly had to evaluate the level of reassurance we should offer. We felt there was great value in their persistent efforts to get this program going. At the same time, we stayed in very close touch with them, ensuring that they could bring their concerns to us, and reminding them that engagement in the process determined their outcomes in the course. As with other activities, we focused on asking good questions rather than providing good answers. Not only did they demonstrate a great deal of resourcefulness but over time they came to see setbacks as normal and to meet them with humour. It is difficult to describe our delight in these encounters with them, and how impressed we were their growing capacity.

Trusting the Group Process

Self-authorship is an explicitly social-constructivist theory, placing mutual meaning making and learning partnerships at the centre of teaching. Accordingly, we had structured the course to provide a weekly group meeting for joint sharing and problem-solving related to the service learning placements. While we felt this strategy supported our overall goals and knew we brought group process skills to these meetings, we could not have anticipated the intensity of the group experience or the extent to which we would be challenged to show confidence in the members of the group and group process itself.

We began each week in the group by going around the table and conducting a check-in during which students updated the group on their experiences and reflections regarding their establishment of placements and participation in them. This was followed by group problem solving discussion of the issues that arose. Perhaps one of the most unusual and concerning experiences for us involved a student who initially made no progress in seeking out and establishing a service-learning placement. Normally, we would have intervened in a more direct manner. In this instance however, we resolved to trust that the process of involvement in the discussion group would prompt this student to take active steps to get going, consistent with the social-constructivist tenets of self-authorship. Each week this student was exposed to a variety of experiences that students engaged in, creating a powerful norm. Our conviction about the wisdom of not intervening in a traditional fashion with this student was tested as he appeared at group three weeks in a row, reporting no progress in even considering where he might pursue a placement. We began to dread his turn in the check-in at the beginning of the group time. We did not offer any negative feedback or advice but engaged the student in the group meetings, restricting ourselves to asking if there were any particular challenges that this student might like to raise to get ideas from the group. Each week he declined, assured everyone that he was on the brink of progress, but without offering any specific details, and then returned to class the following week having had made no progress.

We were aware from the outset of the course that not establishing placements created some risks for students in terms of learning opportunities and success in the course. At the same time, we felt there was much to be learned by engaging in an active search and that many of the

same goals would be met by authentic engagement in this even in the unlikely scenario that a fruitful placement did not develop. Accordingly, we had determined (and shared with the students) that even if they did not establish a placement, the active searching for a placement and related problem-solving and tailoring of assignments to it would have value. With this one particular student we were faced with the most unwelcome scenario of someone who made no discernable efforts to establish a placement. Working with this student tested our capacity to hold to the stance we had adopted. We would have been far more comfortable in this instance to reclaim a position of authority and exert directive efforts. In the fourth week he returned to class and said that he had discovered something important that he wanted to share with the group. He said that he was lazy, and elaborated on this at length. He was direct and intense and it was a very moving moment to which the group responded warmly.

While we were immensely relieved, we tried to focus our response on deepening the student's reflection on this insight, rather than offering our approval. We were concerned that support given as approval would dilute his engagement in his own desire to change. We structured our support as interest and reminded him of the resources of the group to assist with ideas and problem-solving.

The student's insight and subsequent actions have much in common with Pizzolato's (2005) accounts of what she frames as the *provocative moment*, which she suggests is a culmination of the "jarring disequilibrium" which results from successive experiences of discontent with following formulas that students experience as they are preparing to transition from externally oriented ways of knowing to more internally referenced goals and self-constructions. The provocative moment is distinguished from recognition of discontent by commitment to actively move toward new ways of knowing. Had we not been well acquainted with this finding in the literature, our anxiety would likely have resulted in us becoming more directive with the student, stealing his achievement from him. On the other hand, Jones' (2009) work points to the very challenging work undertaken by students as they endeavor to manage the complex contingencies of intersecting social identities. It would be easy to assess this student's actions negatively, following his own construction of himself as "lazy" which likely belies challenging work that his English-first-language Canadian peers did not encounter.

The following week he returned having established a placement and the next week had a second placement in an organization that had never before had a volunteer. This student was proud that he had established this precedent, especially as an international student working in his second language. We were incredibly relieved that he was able to find a way to become engaged in the experience. This instance was a dramatic illustration for us of the importance of stepping back to allow students to reflect on their choices, and the role of the group in providing a mirror for students as opposed to the more traditional response which generally would have involved introducing some sort of sanction to save this student from himself. It was also a moment that spoke to the intensity of all involved in the course. Other students were genuinely delighted for this student. This encounter paved the way for some very straightforward exchanges about the place of international students in campus life and for reflection on our part regarding the unequal challenges for students and how we engage them.

Implications

While initially we had to be vigilant about adhering to the theoretical precepts of self-authorship underlying the course, this became easier as the course evolved. Without articulating it, students were beginning to ask for the experiences they wanted to have and to remove the experiences they did not want, consistent with a more internally-referenced way of knowing. They were active participants in shaping the nature of their learning experiences in the classroom, reflecting the circumstances they had had to construct in their placements. They had become agents who reconstructed faculty roles in the course. Students had begun to “own” the course and increasingly made suggestions about how to use the time, when to move on to another topic, and asked the same sorts of questions of us that we had been asking of them. At this point we found we had to exert much less energy to maintain a “hands off” approach to matters that students could readily manage themselves, particularly as they used each other as resources. Put another way, mutual construction of meaning had become a norm for the group. A discussion of the topic for the assigned culminating essay provides a more substantial example of how mutual construction of meaning worked.

The course outline had prescribed an essay as the final piece of work to be submitted in the course. It was also noted that the topic for the essay would be discussed by the group and a consensus decision on the topic would be reached. Two weeks before the end of class students raised this as a topic of discussion. The students had become very accustomed by this time to our strategy of giving them back the question. What, we asked, did they think was a question that was worth pursuing? This generated a lively discussion and we decided on the run to ensure that each person contributed a statement about what would matter to talk about. The students generated significant questions ranging from, “How does a social constructivist approach to learning differ from my past experiences?” to “What is the value and significance of learning through service?”. When near the end of our discussion time students were asked what we should do about the question, there was quite a lot of laughter and several students said that we would probably tell them to write about they had contributed in the discussion. This illustrated students’ appreciation of their roles in the course and the understanding that we did not require standardised experiences but in particular demonstrated their growing appreciation of themselves as “knowers” in their own right. Doubtless there are readers who are concerned with standards that will lose sleep over the lack of rigour in turning over an important assessment question to students. We would remind them that a primary purpose of the course was to support students to discern what was important in their learning and to come to be active agents in it. Furthermore, this discussion arose in a particular context involving ten weeks of field experience, small group discussions and reflective logs. The discussion itself was an important assessment and allowed us to engage the students to support deepening of the questions they suggested.

The growing reflexive nature of students’ capacity and their growing ease with pulling away from external validation (Schnarch, 1997) was evidenced the week after the essay discussion. A student who had been absent asked if anything had been decided about the topic for the culminating essay. When laughter broke out, she said, in good humour, “Why did I even bother?”. The instinct to position us as experts and authorities remained but this student did not pursue it with us beyond this initial query. Instead, the group of students took the lead and revisited the discussion and conclusions of the previous week. This student went on to write a spirited essay entitled, “Does Service Learning Have a Place in Higher Education?” For us the

evolution of students' capacity to initiate resolution of the student's question indicated the value of attuning our teaching to self-authorship to deepen engagement in meaning making and supporting emerging confidence in themselves as knowers. The working theories lent coherence to our work and provided a reference point for deciding what was important and guided ongoing decision making. But more than that, we felt a deep sense of satisfaction for what students had gained for themselves.

The students explained to us that to have time to talk in a small group about their personal responses to what they were learning, how they were learning, and to make connect all this to their lives outside of the course, was unique. We should recall that at this point in their undergraduate careers, a good number of students were but weeks away from finishing their degrees and were very preoccupied with the transition from university to employment or further study. This was the lens through which they viewed many of their experiences in the service-learning course. The group, therefore, offered a venue for working through these things and for connecting the service-learning experience to academic work and future life. We have seen in the example of student who deemed himself "lazy" that the group had power to support and change the student experience. Students reported in an on-line survey that the group process was significant for them. From our point of view, adopting a facilitating role, rather than a directive role, within the group was an important part of the reconstruction of faculty roles. Within this framework, we had no difficulty introducing content that we deemed significant in a responsive fashion. Having clarity about the implications of the working theories in the project assisted with this, as did having a collaborator.

Students also reported that having multiple opportunities, and the expectation, for reflection contributed to their learning. We gave this primacy over the feedback we would have traditionally offered in a course. We repositioned our feedback to support deeper reflections and to pose questions which were scaffolded on the students' initial reflections. One student, in a focus group, recounted that reflection was among the most significant learning tools and that engaging in it had taught her the power of her own capacity to direct her learning, a reflection of our own joint reflection experiences.

Finally, we are convinced that having a teacher partner or someone to consult with in undertaking a reconstructed role was critically important to this experience. As we were both versed in the theory and both engaged in the course, we could support each other to make sense of what was happened and to adhere to the stance we had established. It was also an important protection for students as we continually sought balance between challenge and support. It was through this mutual support that we could model for each other strategies of reflexive questioning. Having a collaborator was also helpful in considering ambiguous events, and in planning (and maintaining) responses to students who were experiencing challenges. Finally, having two of us involved provided a working model for students of people who were themselves curious, engaged and collaborative, while having views of their own. With the exception of this last element, a colleague acting in a consultant role could provide most of the advantages we experienced. We feel strongly that a teaching partnership, whether for the purpose of trying to explore and implement a theory as we did or more simply to consider a new practice has considerable advantages, as indicated above. In addition, it provides encouragement and supports persistence.

Our reflections on this experience identified one significant idea for adjustment to our approach if we were to undertake such a course again. While students did eventually come to an

appreciation of journals for reflection, it might allay unnecessary anxiety and promote deeper engagement with journals, sooner, if the nature and value of reflection were better explained at the outset.

While this course was structured specifically to allow for exploration of self-authorship in teaching, approaches arising from the themes we identified –either in part or all of them -- can be integrated into more traditional content-driven courses. There may be value, for example, in incorporating a group problem solving component into a variety of courses. Equally, reflection is an element which has been used to deepen knowledge in a variety of disciplines. It is also possible in many courses to turn students' questions back to them, rather than immediately providing an answer. All these approaches, consistent with a social-constructive stance, are used in higher education with academic benefits (Carnell, 2007; Haynes, 2004) and there are indications that collectively these approaches support the expansion of self-authorship. Most important for us was learning that we could undertake a theory-driven approach to reconstruct our teaching and our roles. The context around what we chose to do and when we chose to do it distinguishes this experience from being solely an exercise in teaching in tune with social-constructive principles. Our decisions were directed toward the purpose of supporting self-authorship development concurrent with academic development and required not only careful attention to the theory but sincere efforts to know each of our students. Our own learning and reflections supported our initial structuring of the course and the development of responsive learning and assessment experiences as the course unfolded. Just as self-authorship development is idiosyncratic and bound up with identity, the experiences and actions of those of us intending to teach in alignment with self-authorship will simultaneously be reflections of, and will reconstruct, our experiences and identity as educators. We argue that teaching in attunement with principles of self-authorship both requires, and supports, an expanded construction of what it is to be a “good professor”, a construction which alters thinking about what constitutes support and challenge, deepening engagement in teaching. Shaping our teaching around a theory gave us a reference point for classroom experiences as they unfolded. We view this as a resource which had benefits beyond simply trying to implement a new practice or technique, particularly as it provided a way for us to contemplate responses to teaching moments we could not anticipate. This was a strong support to our goals to be more responsive to students and to better integrate their views and experiences in our teaching.

While our initial interests in self-authorship grew from a desire to teach in a more sophisticated, integrated way for the benefit of students, we were entirely unprepared for the benefits we experienced. In particular, we were not fully aware of the extent to which our planned adjustment in our roles would recast the power relations in this course. We have each had, historically, good teaching ratings and a warm classroom climate, as indicated by student evaluations, and have found teaching exciting and engaging. However, as the course unfolded we were frequently surprised and moved by these students. In the last third of the course, the engagement, collaboration and authenticity of students, not to mention their humour, surpassed our expectations. They challenged us and taught us. We were struck by their eagerness to reveal themselves to us and each other and by their earnest efforts to integrate various aspects of their lives as most of them prepared to graduate. Student assignments, course evaluations, surveys and focus groups indicated that our overall challenging but non-directive stance, initially frustrating for students, coupled with our steadfast engagement with them, created a climate which supported them to reflect deeply on their learning and on how they learn. When we gave up our

roles as authorities, we became, ironically, more interesting and helpful to students. And they became, ironically, more interesting and wise to us.

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