

Complex Partnerships: Self-authorship and Provocative Academic-Advising Practices

Jane E. Pizzolato, University of Pittsburgh

Self-authorship is an additional orientation to traditional college student, epistemological, development theories. Facilitation of self-authorship, via academic advising, may help students meet the desired outcomes outlined by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education and integrate these abilities into their knowing and decision-making processes. Through investigation of 132 student narratives about advising and selection of academic majors, I examined advising practices that are consistent with Baxter Magolda's (2001) learning partnerships model for self-authorship development. Findings suggest that student decision-making and self-authoring abilities were enhanced by advising sessions that focused explicitly on goal reflection and associated volitional planning. Students benefited from advising in which nonacademic factors were addressed. Implications for practice are discussed.

KEY WORDS: advising philosophies, advising theories, alternatives advising, decision making, major selection, undecided students

Relative emphasis:* theory, research, practice

In the last decade, many have called for higher education reform so that it more effectively promotes student learning and development (American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 1996; Astin, 1996; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2003a; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Kuh, 1996). In these calls for reform, critical thinking, an ability to see oneself as autonomous and in control of the knowledge construction process, and effective functioning in a democratic, multicultural society are typically desired outcomes of student participation in higher education (e.g., ACPA, 1996; Baxter Magolda, 2001). Because they focus on helping students develop personally and academically, academic advisors may be particularly well positioned to enact reforms in education. In fact, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (2003) revised standards for academic advising to reflect this commitment. The student learning and development outcome domains highlight skills involved in critical thinking (e.g.,

intellectual growth) and effective functioning in a democratic, multicultural society (e.g., appreciating diversity, taking social responsibility, exhibiting clarified values) (CAS, 2003). Beyond setting goals for students, the CAS standards also articulate the importance of advising practices and state that academic advisors should help students identify and achieve learning and personal goals while also helping students develop skills that will allow them to interact better within diverse communities.

Self-authorship and the CAS Standards

A more recent push for reform (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2003b; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) focused on improving college student outcomes that emerged from Baxter Magolda's (2001) introduction of empirical evidence for self-authorship, a way of knowing originally described by Kegan (1994). Self-authorship is defined as a relatively enduring way of understanding and orienting oneself toward provocative and uncomfortably disequilibrating situations in which the person recognizes a) the contextual nature of knowledge and b) balances this understanding with the development of his or her own internally defined goals and sense of self. The introduction of *self-authorship* as an epistemological orientation may help clarify the skills academic advisors should attempt to cultivate in students so that they can meet learning and development outcomes.

Academic advisors may observe differences in the ways students approach their decisions on academic majors, which may depend on the degree to which they have developed self-authorship. A self-authored student will not blindly follow parental expectations or expect advisors to tell her or him the major that would be best, nor will a self-authored student single-mindedly follow a gut feeling or passion. Instead, a self-authored student will be open to and actively consider the advice and input of family members, advisors, and other important authority figures (e.g., professors, coaches, older siblings), but the student will not exclusively consider externally imposed expectations. Rather, the self-authored student will consider both external expectations and internally defined goals and values. Self-authored students know that the best

* See note on page 4.

choice is made after consideration of multiple perspectives, in light of their own short- and long-term goals and values, and the constraints of the situations (e.g., university requirements, individual abilities, personal finances). Self-authored students will be reflective about how their decision impacts their own future and interpersonal relationships, and they will be able to see their individual decisions within a context of goals and situations that is larger than the one in which they find themselves at the moment.

The Impact of Self-authorship on CAS Standards

Prior to Baxter Magolda's (2001) discovery of evidence for self-authorship, college-student development theory suggested that epistemological development culminates in a contextual (Baxter Magolda, 1992), constructed (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), or relativistic (Perry, 1999) way of knowing. Students using such ways of knowing recognize that knowledge is socially constructed and that definitions of right or wrong (or good or bad) depend on context. They appreciate that decisions require consideration of culture, community expectations, and logic. If this type of knowing were facilitated in them, then college students would continue to manifest contextual, constructed, and relativistic learning and be simultaneously pushed to become critical thinkers, act autonomously, and function effectively in diverse communities.

Without an ability to integrate their own internally defined goals, values, and sense of self into their decision-making processes, contextual knowers often make decisions based on logic without considering their own feelings or goals, thus leaving them feeling dissatisfied despite their critical thinking and ability to act autonomously (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Because self-authorship combines both contextual knowing and a student's own internally defined goals, values, and sense of self, it may help students make decisions that are logically sound, most comfortable, and most likely to put them on a satisfying achievement trajectory. In addition, self-authorship, as opposed to contextual knowing, allows students to consider their immediate decisions in the context of a large frame of situations, relationships, and goals. Consequently, self-authorship may also help students make decisions that allow them to balance multiple goals more effectively than if they had made their decisions from a purely contextual orientation.

Because exclusive contextual knowing can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and often a desire to make major occupational or relational changes

(Baxter Magolda, 2001), advisors who merely help students meet CAS standard outcomes may not help students develop a satisfying achievement trajectory. By facilitating self-authorship in college students, advisors may help students not only individually attain the diverse skills outlined in the CAS domains, such as effective communication, clarified values, realistic self-appraisal, appropriate career choices, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility, but they may also see students integrate these abilities into their knowing and decision-making processes.

Promoting Self-authorship: The Existing How-To Model

From her examination of how participants developed self-authorship through work, school, and relationship experiences, Baxter Magolda (2001) claimed self-authorship could be facilitated in college students through implementation of her learning partnerships model (LPM), a conceptual framework for promoting self-authorship in higher education. The LPM is grounded in three actions: a) validate students as knowers; b) situate learning in students' experiences; c) define learning as mutually constructed meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2001). See Table 1. In practice, these principles should compel academic and student affairs professionals to present a variety of perspectives for understanding and interpreting situations, problems, and texts, and then to support students' use of varied perspectives to develop and defend their own understandings. By pushing students to develop their own beliefs, academic and student affairs professionals can help students see themselves as capable of making sense of complexity, their experience, and themselves as important to knowledge construction and knowledge as socially constructed (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Through advisor facilitation of self-authorship within the undergraduate experience, students may be able to achieve the outcomes outlined in the CAS standards and develop an internally defined identity, thus equipping them with the cognitive tools needed to cope with moments of dissonance. Because self-authorship is a relatively new concept, however, the literature on promoting self-authorship in college students is scarce (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Hornak, 2003; Hornak & Ortiz, 2004). In addition, preliminary qualitative evidence suggests that the LPM may promote changes in students' thinking. All this evidence, as well as existing work on similar constructivist techniques (Assor, Kaplan,

Table 1 The main principles of the learning partnerships model

| Learning Partnerships Model Principle | Principal Advising Goal |
|---|---|
| 1. Validate students as knowers | Increase confidence and autonomy such that students can construct their own ideas. |
| 2. Situate learning in students' experiences | Help students feel respected as knowers by providing a foundation for learning. |
| 3. Define learning as mutually constructing meaning | Help students clarify their own perspectives and learn to work with others to enhance mutual understanding. |

Note. The learning partnerships model was introduced by Baxter Magolda (2001).

& Roth, 2002; Cobb & Yackel, 1996; Hay & Barab, 2001), comes from classroom interventions, and whether the change in student thinking demonstrates a shift toward self-authorship remains unclear. Without literature to specify the types of practices consistent with the LPM in nonclassroom settings, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of practices designed to promote self-authorship is challenging.

In this study, I examine how implementation of LPM practices can help academic advisors facilitate student achievement of outcomes outlined in the CAS standards. More specifically, I investigate how academic advisors provoke self-authorship with regard to decisions about the academic major and how such advising practices are related to LPM principles.

Design of the Study

I undertook an exploratory study to investigate self-authorship provocation and support through academic advising relationships. Data were obtained from a larger study of self-authorship and decision making in college (Pizzolato, 2005). All data were collected via questionnaire. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and *The Experience Survey*.

The Experience Survey

Students completed two versions of *The Experience Survey* (Pizzolato, 2005), one at the beginning and one at the end of the fall 2003 semester. In the first version of this questionnaire, students were asked to describe the most important decision they had made (other than the decision to apply to college). In the second version, students were asked to describe the most important decision they had made during the fall 2003 semester. For both versions, students responded to the following open-ended prompts: a) "What was the [most important] decision?" b) "When did you make this decision?" c) "Why did you have to make this decision?" Students were also prompted to describe

their decision-making process by reporting: a) their options, b) their decision, c) how they made their decision, and d) whether and why they were (not) pleased with their decision. These prompts were modifications of those recommended by M. Baxter Magolda (personal communication, fall 2002) for assessment of self-authoring abilities.

By asking students to describe situations they identified as important in this survey, I aimed to capture students' ways of knowing when faced with a decision-making situation, and I asked them to identify a most important decision because it was most likely to call upon their most complex ways of knowing. Decision making requires students to assess a situation, the expectations dictated by the situation, and their own desires. People will either actively engage these perspectives or avoid multiple perspectives. Therefore, *The Experience Survey*, through which multiple perspectives are explored, seemed an appropriate way to investigate self-authorship.

By asking students to describe a personally important decision (instead of either typical problem-solving processes or responses to a problem I had specified), I aimed to capture students' optimal, not functional, ways of knowing. Students who self-author consider multiple perspectives, reflect on their goals, and work from these internally defined goals and perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). A pilot test suggested that *The Experience Survey* could elicit rich narratives of students' ways of knowing.

Procedures

In the pilot phase of the study, 10 students were invited to complete a draft of *The Experience Survey*. I had been acquainted with the undergraduate participants because they had previously participated in an interview study on self-authorship. Following completion of the questionnaire, each student was briefly interviewed to assess their reactions to and understandings of the survey and its readability. These interviews and the completed surveys

helped me revise questions to enhance comprehensibility and to preview the types of responses students might give to the questions. Because self-authorship had been previously assessed only through semistructured interviews, I needed to determine if the responses provided in interviews were different from those elicited from written questions and probes. Therefore, as a measure of reliability of the items between formats, I compared responses on the *The Experience Survey* draft to the students' responses to similar questions that I had asked during interviews. In interviews, students had described decision-making patterns that involved consideration of relational, personal, and external implications of each option. They also expressed a goal to strike a balance between goal achievement and maintenance of important relations with others (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004). In the draft survey, students wrote about concerns similar to those they had expressed in the interviews: "I had to really consider if it was what I really thought was right and if it was worth the risk and how I'd explain it to my family so they could understand."

The final, revised version of the *The Experience Survey* was piloted with 110 undergraduates with whom I was unacquainted. I studied the questionnaire responses for patterns in self-authorship. I also reviewed the range of responses students gave to these questions and the degree to which epistemological orientation could be assessed from their responses.

Participants

The initial sample who received the revised, final version of *The Experience Survey* consisted of 613 undergraduates at a large, public, midwestern university. Participants were recruited from

undergraduate courses in disciplines of all colleges at the university. All recruitment and assessment took place during 20-minute sessions of class time in the fall 2003 semester.

All participant responses to *The Experience Survey* were transcribed verbatim, and because I focused this study exclusively on student decisions regarding academic major, responses were coded for the decision-making subject. Students' narratives in which they described their choice of major or change of major were coded as academic-major decision making.

Following coding of student responses, the sample was limited to only those participants who had described making a decision on an academic major. As a consequence, the sample was reduced to 132 students. Most of these participants were female (63.3%). See Table 2. The sample was also primarily White (71.7%). Participants ranged from first-through fifth-year students, and they had declared diverse academic majors. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 26 years, with 98.4% of participants reporting being between the ages of 18 and 22 years ($M = 19.9$; $SD = 1.36$). Throughout the article, pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants.

Data Analysis

Because I wanted to theorize about plausible relationships, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998b), between advising practices and student development of self-authorship, I used grounded theory to make sense of the participant-produced narratives. Grounded theory can be used to elaborate effectively on existing theory because elaborations are derived from "systematically gathered and analyzed" data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a, p. 12). In this study, I aimed to elaborate on the LPM of Baxter Magolda (2001) in the context of academic

Table 2 Demographics of *The Experience Survey* participants ($N = 132$)

| Gender | % | Race or Ethnicity | % | Class | % | Academic Major | % |
|--------|------|--------------------|------|------------|------|-------------------|------|
| Female | 63.3 | African American/ | | First year | 15.2 | Arts | 1.6 |
| | | Black | 6.7 | Sophomore | 22.4 | Business | 12.9 |
| Male | 36.7 | Asian | 10.0 | Junior | 32.0 | Education | 9.7 |
| | | Hispanic/Latino(a) | 1.7 | Senior | 25.6 | Engineering | 15.3 |
| | | Multiple | 4.1 | Fifth year | 4.8 | Humanities | 2.4 |
| | | Other | 6.7 | | | Interdisciplinary | |
| | | White | 71.7 | | | Studies | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | Math or Science | 16.9 |
| | | | | | | Preprofessional | 11.3 |
| | | | | | | Social Science | 25.8 |

Note. Other was used to categorize those whose responses did not fit in any of the federally recognized race or ethnicity categories as described by the U.S. Office of Budget & Management (1995).

advising through analysis of participant narratives. In line with grounded theory methodology and because preexisting codes for college student's expressions of self-authorship did not exist at the time of the study, I used constant comparative analysis to determine patterns, themes, and (ultimately) codes constructed from students' responses to *The Experience Survey* (Boyatzis, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998a, 1998b). Based on reasoning and explanations of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998a, 1998b), grounded theory via constant comparative analysis seemed an appropriate method for code building and data analysis of self-authorship in college students.

Two coders reliably differentiated between narratives showing signs of self-authorship and narratives not showing such signs ($\kappa = .76$). Self-authorship was nominally scored and considered present if all of the following were true with regard to the student's decision making: a) The student considered multiple perspectives; b) he or she considered his or her own goals; c) the student attempted to balance her or his goals with the advice of others and her or his own understanding of the situation. Although the majority of students (81.1%) did not show signs of self-authorship in their selection of an academic major, 18.9% of students displayed self-authorship in their recounting of this decision.

To identify specific advising practices supportive of self-authorship, I studied all narratives showing evidence of self-authorship by using constant comparative analysis as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998a, 1998b).

Through open coding, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998a, 1998b), of the pilot responses, I predicted codes related to student anxieties, obstacles, and balancing styles in decision making. Additional line-by-line open coding of a narrative subset ($n = 30$) of the primary study ($N = 132$) led to inclusion of a few additional codes specific to advising practices. These analyses yielded a set of codes used in the narrative analysis. Then I employed axial coding, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998a, 1998b), in pattern and theme building.

To check the trustworthiness of my interpretations and to examine my biases throughout the coding and pattern construction process, two colleagues also coded narrative sets of 15. Whenever disagreements arose, we revised the coding scheme until we could reach agreement. As a consequence of the constant comparative analysis, we were able

to identify themes present in the responses by identifying relationship patterns between themes.

Findings: Provocation in Academic Advising

In this analysis, my focus was identification of patterns in advising practices that provoked or supported student's sense making from a self-authored orientation. Themes in advising practices supportive of self-authorship emerged, suggesting that in the context of academic advising, self-authorship is typically facilitated in a two-part process: goal reflection and volitional planning.

Goal Reflection

In the first phase of academic advising in which either the choice or change of an academic major was addressed, advisors encouraged goal reflection from multiple perspectives: academic, career, and personal. For example, Colin wrote:

My options were either mechanical engineering or engineering arts. I chose engineering arts. I got as much information about both majors and career fields as possible first. Both options were suitable (I could do either one), so then I talked to many people, students, and advisors. In the end my decision was the one that suited me best. My advisor helped me choose my major by having me make lists and think about what I want to be occupationally and personally. I hadn't thought about it like that before. Before I was just trying to choose based on what sounded best to me, and what I thought I could do. I thought I could do both. I still think I could have done either one, but I'm optimistic about the path I'm taking. I think I made my decision based on what will be best for me based on my strengths and my future goals for myself in my life and my career.

In making his decision, Colin had two viable options that he identified by himself. He took the initiative to learn more about each major, and when he was still unsure of which major to choose, he sought outside help. His advisor guided him through the decision-making process by first clarifying Colin's occupational and personal goals rather than by providing an analysis of the options Colin had initially chosen. Based on Colin's statement, this shift away from comparing options to identifying goals helped him make a decision that included his own personal and professional goals.

Colin's experience with his advisor was not unique to him. Other students who displayed self-authorship in their selection of an academic major

($n = 19$) had similar interactions with their advisors. Before encouraging her to declare her major formally, Talya's advisor pushed her to think about the kind of life as well as the kind of job she wanted after college. Only after Talya addressed her larger goals was she encouraged to think about the academic major that would best help her achieve those goals. In the process, Talya's advisor helped her find shadowing opportunities so she could experience job tasks and environments firsthand.

Hilary wrote that her advisor helped her after she had realized "I had many choices to pick from because I was interested in a lot." Her advisor had her list her academic and social talents and weaknesses. After reviewing this list and discussing activities she likes to do and those endeavors that make her feel good about herself, Hilary felt more equipped to make the best choice.

Volitional Planning

Although students found the search for a major to be intrinsically interesting, as well as important and helpful in reaching their personal and professional goals, many who displayed self-authorship described advising interactions in which more than selecting a major was addressed. Self-authored students reported that their advisors were future focused: The advisors concentrated not just on the student's feelings and immediate wants, but they also evaluated how the student would fare in a particular field. These students, with their advisor's help, learned to anticipate possible obstacles or challenges and could make plans to avoid or overcome potential stumbling blocks.

A focus on volitional planning in advising seemed particularly important to students who were trying to determine a major while in the midst of tense relations with their parents. For example, Sudi wrote about the importance of her work with her advisor in coping with her family's expectations of her:

I've been going to be a microbiologist for my whole life. That's what my parents really wanted. Who really knows why?! The idea of getting a degree and working in a lab for the rest of my life didn't seem like a good life. I wanted to work in inner city schools, but my parents said they'd stop paying my bills if I wasn't going to be a bio major. My advisor and I talked A LOT. She told me about programs like Teach for America, where I could work at an inner city school and get certified after college. We also talked about me working in a lab somewhere and taking ed classes at the same

time. She was really great helping me think about not messing things up with my parents and I right now.

Sudi's experience illustrates one of the important roles advisors can play in helping students with volitional planning. Sudi had the goal of working at an inner city school, but she had an awareness of the major obstacle, her parents' expectations, blocking her from achieving this particular goal. Through conversation about her parents' expectations, her own goals, and the provision of alternative routes toward her goal, Sudi's advisor helped her make carefully considered plans to achieve her dual goals: preservation of her relationship with and financial support from her parents and her own occupational goals.

The resolution of dilemmas, like that Sudi faced, echoed through the stories of other students who displayed self-authorship in their selection of an academic major. Being denied admission to the college of nursing placed a large obstacle between Zhara and a nursing career. Through help with volitional planning from her advisor, however, Zhara was able to cope effectively with her situation while not sacrificing her career goals. Her advisor pushed her past wallowing in her disappointment and helped her clarify the obstacles keeping her from her goal. "My advisor made me stop talking about how my future was over and had me list off all the things that might [have] kept me out of nursing." By helping Zhara focus on the causes of her application denial, her advisor helped her see ways she could make changes and increase her chances for being admitted upon reapplication. "Just by making that list it started to be clearer that I could make a much stronger case for myself by making changes in how I studied and what I got involved with." By helping students identify and understand obstacles, advisors helped students with volitional planning that ultimately made them not only better candidates for their academic majors of choice but also more reflective decision makers. By talking with advisors through an array of diverse options that helped them think about the implications of choosing each one, students were able to make purposeful decisions that matched their goals. They also identified and learned how to overcome obstacles to those goals.

Academic advisors who provoked or supported self-authored knowing helped their advisees see multiple perspectives, clarify their goals on multiple dimensions (personal, interpersonal, academic, and career), and plan for success. The students in this study sought out advisors at different phases of decision making: Some students needed help choosing between possibilities, while others needed help

seeing the possibilities. By listening to the students' individual situations, pushing them beyond emotional responses, engaging them in reflective conversations about their situations and goals, and teaching them ways to address difficulties, academic advisors were able to help students choose their majors and know in self-authored ways. This self-authored orientation allowed students to clarify their values and goals and to use them in guiding a purposeful achievement-oriented decision-making process in which they considered situational factors and maintenance of important relationships.

The Learning Partnerships Model in Academic Advising Contexts

According to Baxter Magolda (2001), self-authored knowing in college students is often lacking because students are rarely required to solve problems without formulas. The higher education environment is very supportive, and therefore, students are seldom required to make decisions in which they must consider and act upon their goals and values. According to Baxter Magolda (2001) and confirmed my own previous research, if higher education is to promote self-authorship development, then students need to experience discomfort or provocation (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004); provocation is a state of disequilibrium that compels students to revisit their own goals and conceptions of self as well as consider multiple perspectives. Baxter Magolda (2001) constructed the three-principle LPM to help educators and professionals facilitate self-authorship in college students.

Principle One: Validate Students as Knowers

By being validated as knowers, students develop the confidence and autonomy necessary to create their own ideas (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004). Academic advisors may help students set specific academic and career goals as well as guide them in achievement-oriented plans. Participants who took *The Experience Survey* described three broad ways in which their advisors helped them develop necessary confidence and autonomy.

Part of being confident and able to act autonomously in choosing or changing an academic major is being able to identify and evaluate options. For students denied admission to a major of their choice or for students in academic difficulty, developing enough self-confidence to feel capable of making autonomous decisions about their academic life direction may be particularly important. However, all students could likely benefit from some validation as decision makers, especially if,

as Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004) suggested, they have little experience independently making decisions of consequence.

According to the data from *The Experience Survey*, students unfamiliar with processes for recognizing possibilities found that advisors who helped them pinpoint strengths and weaknesses helped them identify realistic possibilities. For example, Scott related that his advisor asked him to focus on enjoyable activities: "Thinking about what I enjoyed and then what I was good at opened up a lot of possibilities for me." Although Scott initially felt unsure about a major (he had said, "[I] just wasn't happy. . . [and] didn't feel like I was good at school"), identifying his strengths had helped him. "I started to think about what I could do, and then I got happier because I enjoyed my classes and felt like I had direction."

In a situation similar to Scott's experience, Becca realized that she did not want to major in theatre. Her advisor asked her to articulate those activities in which she had experienced success. According to Becca, "I decided to change my major because my advisor helped me think about what would be best for me in the long run based on what my real strengths are and what I thought I could do long-term." Becca pointed out the importance of determining how students' strengths match up with their preferences. Although students need to evaluate their talents, identifying those on which they want to build is an equally important task for self-authorship.

Students in this study, once aware of multiple viable possibilities, seemed to benefit from real life experiences as they narrowed down their options. They participated in shadowing or interviewing professionals, in service learning, and in research projects in a field of choice. Even though Caroline had considered important factors such as "future job availability, level of income, and types of classes required," she remained unsure about a choice between a pre-med or pre-nursing major. Her advisor encouraged her to shadow a doctor and a nurse, and she said, "The job shadows really helped me figure out which job would fit best with what I want out of life." Jack said that his decision to switch majors was the result of his visit to an elite university medical center. Prior to this visit he "didn't know if [he] should continue down this road [med school]." By encouraging students to experience their careers of interest, advisors not only allow students to explore career choice, they expose students to another source of data to use in selection of an academic major. The hands-on opportunities validated students because they could work

(often temporarily) in a field where they could evaluate whether the fit between their strengths and the career was comfortable.

For some students, such as Sudi, selecting a major is additionally complicated by external forces that compel the student toward a particular decision. Dana's family situation compelled her to finish college as quickly as possible so she could begin to earn money. In cases such as those of Sudi and Dana, advisors must help students clarify their own goals and carefully evaluate the positive and negative implications of each possible choice. In Dana's case, these reflections led to subjugation of personal academic goals to meet equally or more pressing interpersonal or financial goals:

I decided to keep my major so I can graduate early (next winter). I weighed out options—graduate early and enter workforce = \$, graduate later = no money...being a single mother it's VERY important to me to be in the workforce ASAP.

In a situation such as that presented by Dana, both the advisor and student must understand the range and interaction of the student's goals so that the student can feel confident in following his or her decision.

To meet the first principle in the LPM, validate students as knowers, academic advisors need to help students figure out their preferences and strengths. Then they can help them identify the range of their goals.

Principle Two: Situate Learning in the Student's Experience

The goal of the second LPM principle, situate learning in the student's experience, translates into providing students with a foundation for learning that engages them and helps them feel respected as knowers. The second LPM principle builds on the first principle by adding a knowledge foundation rooted in the students' experiences. Enacting this principle in the context of academic advising should not be difficult because academic advisors are directly involved in helping students make sense of their learning experiences so that they can make appropriate decisions with regard to majors and course selection; they also help students consider future job opportunities. The advisor who only serves as a signature (signing forms students bring to her or him) and does not engage the student in conversation about her or his decisions or academic situations cannot meet the second LPM goal. However, if the advisor is helping students identify their interests, talents, and

abilities, they are probably already situating learning in students' experiences.

More specifically, in this study, students who acted as self-authors in choice of or change in academic major described advisors who went beyond directing them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and who encouraged them to consider more than the implications of their possible options. Students who showed signs of self-authorship had advisors who challenged them to talk through their decision-making process. When students had real-life experiences, their advisors spent time processing these experiences with them: They asked about the student's reactions to the experiences and then delved into the aspects of the experiences that the student felt were good and bad; they then questioned the student about the characteristics of the environment that contributed to the student's judgment of it. Students reported that they found helpful those advising conversations in which external requirements and constraints on the students' decisions were recognized and explicitly discussed. For example, some advisors talked with students about the course requirements for a major and the typical forms of evaluation in these courses; such discussions helped both parties determine if the major and courses were compatible with a student's learning style.

If students came to an advising session because they were in academic difficulty, self-authored advisees reported that conversations regarding the standards that mark good academic standing were important. For example, Nick stated that, through conversations with an advisor facilitating self-authorship, he had been better able to "understand what I needed to do if I was even going to try to get a degree, my ultimate goal."

Regardless of the reason why students sought advising, the most frequently reported practice of advisors of self-authored students was regular conversations about the variety of options available in each individual situation and discussion of the potential impact of the students' decisions on their other goals and on the important people in their lives. By helping them understand all the facets of their unique situations, advisors empowered students. Through a careful consideration of each student's situation, advisors helped students uncover their strengths, showed them that they possessed agency, and encouraged them to control their situation. For example, students who had been denied admission into their majors of choice described feeling dejected and believing that successful outcomes were out of their control. However, they

also said that advisors helped them self-author a new major in a way that helped them feel capable and confident. The facilitators of self-authorship engaged students through conversations about a) the student's situation, b) identification of options, c) ways to change their behaviors (often by identifying reasons for past successes), and d) characterizations of the environmental factors that seemed to encourage success. For example, when Amy was denied admission to the college of education, she described how her advisor helped her better understand the situation and make plans to move forward with new plans:

I did not get into the college of education and so I had to change my major. I didn't want to change it or know what to change it to. I always thought I was going to be a teacher. I was really mad I wasn't accepted, and I didn't know what to think about what I would be after that. I ended up changing my major to the college of human ecology—family and child ecology, but not overnight. I met with my advisor A LOT, and I talked to friends. My advisor explained just what my options were. I could try to get admitted again or I could choose a new major, and she reminded me that I did not have to pick something totally different (which I was afraid of). She showed me some alternatives that were still associated with education and working with kids, and that made me feel better. We also talked about what I wanted to do, what I liked about working with kids, and stuff like that so I could figure out which new major to be. In the end I was happy with my decision because I had done the research and thought about it, and I love where I'm headed now. I feel I am well-suited here.

Amy's description of coping with being denied admission shows how her advisor worked with her so she could understand her situation. Amy did not need to be reminded of the gravity of her situation, rather she needed help seeing that she had options, which included alternative routes to working with children. This realization coupled with conversations with her advisor pushed Amy to reconsider and further specify her goals; as a result, she developed an understanding of her situation and her future that allowed her to make choices based on the best fit for her circumstances and goals.

Results from the *The Experience Survey* seem to suggest that students who displayed self-authorship in their decision-making process had typically interacted with their advisors, and these

interactions involved reflection on the students' situations and goals. Learning was situated in students' experiences of both their current situations and in their broad learning experiences: Their experiences as learners had helped them clarify appropriate future goals.

Principle Three: Define Learning as Co-constructing Meaning

According to Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004), LPM principle three is designed to help students continue to clarify their own perspectives and cooperate with others to enhance mutual understanding. Based on the participants' stories, advisors who most effectively helped advisees defined learning as co-construction of meaning. However, narratives suggest that advisors may need to enact this principle in two parts: Initially, the advisor must actively engage students in advising sessions, and then, they need to help students see and balance multiple competing perspectives.

In the first phase, active engagement, students who expressed self-authored behaviors emphasized the importance of having an advisor who helped them learn to think through their academic-major decision. Without such provocation or engagement, many students may have haphazardly picked a major (i.e., not through self-authorship). This participant exemplifies haphazardly choosing a major by saying: "The advisor sits you down and asks what major you want, and I just said, Psychology! That was that." In a similar story, another student explained that he "went from a CJ [Criminal Justice] major to an advertising major" and that "there wasn't really a process, it just happened."

Although a myriad of reasons explain why students may not choose majors in self-authored ways, lack of student understanding of how to engage effectively in the process also may be important. Therefore, the second phase of the process is engaging students in considering and evaluating multiple competing expectations. Evaluation, rather than consideration, often appeared challenging for participants in this study. Even when students were testing options, they often relied on their parents' and friends' opinions or their own feelings in making a final decision. Natalie's description of her major selection illustrates how her advisor was able to help her through the confusing decision-making process:

My options were to keep merchandising management as a major/career, or change to interior design. I decided to change to interior

design. I took career placement tests, looked at career options for both majors, looked into the interior design program at [name of university], and spoke to other students/grads of both programs. Both of the options were possibilities. Then my advisor helped me by asking me about each option—what were the pros and cons, and how they would affect my goal of graduating in five years and my career goals. She really listened to me and she asked good questions that helped me make my final decision. I was really happy with my decision at the time, because the career options were more appropriate for me in this field. I would also make the same decision again today because I enjoy the interior design program better than merchandising.

When she began researching her options, Natalie sought not only facts about her options but the opinions of people in both programs; she attempted to make a decision by co-constructing meaning by considering information provided by others and using it to clarify her thoughts about her options. However, after she had identified the options and collected a variety of opinions about them, she was unsure how to choose between them. Her advisor helped Natalie evaluate the information, based on her goals and experiences, so she could determine how her choice could affect her other goals (e.g., career goals). By actively listening to Natalie's description of the options and questioning her about the potential impact of the choices on her multiple goals, Natalie's advisor engaged her in co-construction of meaning and led her into a process with a satisfying outcome.

In a similar process to that experienced by Natalie, Janelle was able to redirect her plans after being denied admission to nursing school. Janelle could see a variety of options that included reapplying to nursing school and choosing a different major, but she was paralyzed by her situation and could not make a decision. Her advisor was able to help her make sense of the options:

She asked me all about what I really wanted out of my life, how I would feel if I chose a different major, and how I would feel if I chose to reapply—and if I could financially handle extra years of school. We talked about all my options, and that helped me see that I really needed to reapply for myself....I knew my heart was truly interested in Nursing. I was not happy at the time, because I didn't want to

have to go to school for 6 years, but I wanted to be a nurse, and I knew that meant I had to do anything and everything it took to get me to that point.

Janelle's advisor helped her see the consequences of her choices in terms of her future career, current emotional state, and financial situation. She pushed Janelle past the emotion of the situation so that she could consider her options and their implications before making an informed choice.

By engaging in conversation about options, advisors can provide students with new ways of understanding their situations and push them to consider the implications of their potential choices on their broad range of goals. In so doing, advisors may be able to demystify the decision-making process in a way that not only invites students into the decision-making or knowledge construction process but shows them how to interact with others to make satisfying decisions. The three principles of the LPM should be taken together as goals for advisors who work with students in need of developing the skills and habits of effectively balancing competing expectations, setting goals, and working toward them.

Discussion

In this study, I examined ways in which academic advisors may be able to facilitate self-authorship with regard to choice of academic major for college students. The results showed that approximately one fifth of students in the sample (18.9%) displayed self-authorship in their decision-making, and that LPM principles were commonly practiced by advisors of students who displayed self-authorship in their selection of an academic major.

In narratives in which students displayed self-authorship, descriptions of advisor practices suggest that situating learning in students' experiences is an important but not a separate phase of the advising process. According to the survey responses, as advisors employed LPM principles one and three, they simultaneously employed LPM principle two; that is, when students displayed self-authorship in their decision-making process, they described typical advising interactions that involved two advising phases: goal reflection and volitional planning.

According to those surveyed students who exhibited self-authorship in deciding a major, LPM principle one was emphasized in advising phase one (goal setting): Advisors encouraged students to reflect on their interests, strengths, and weaknesses, and they encouraged students to consider academic, occupational, and personal perspectives when select-

ing a major. As a result, students were validated as knowers. Their advisors showed them that they could make an informed and satisfying decision.

In advising phase two (volitional planning), advisors of students with self-authored skills helped advisees identify and cope with obstacles. By encouraging students to articulate challenges, advisors showed students that learning consists of co-constructed meaning; this exercise contributed to the achievement of the goal stated as LPM principle three. In both initial phases, advisors situated learning in students' experiences by focusing on students' experiences as they would relate to different potential fields. They encouraged students to consider the effect of their decision across goal contexts, and when circumstances warranted, they helped disappointed students recognize choice limitations and required actions following denial of admission to a choice major or after placement on academic probation.

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest that specific advising practices seem to help students make decisions reflective of self-authoring capabilities. These practices are summarized in Table 3. Such practices seem desirable because they appear to help students make decisions in which personal and career implications are considered and that help them negotiate between multiple competing expectations or desires. Furthermore, these practices appear to build on existing frameworks for advising that call for student centeredness and a focus on problem solving (e.g., Bertram, 1996; Gordon, 1992; Schein & Laff, 1997). By specifying practices to help students solve problems in reflective ways, the practices outlined in Table 3 connect the process of selection of a major with consideration of and planning for potential future obstacles.

Statement of Limitations

Multiple limitations of the study should be noted. All participants came from the same university. Inclusion of students from a variety of institutional types may expose important advising methods not represented in the narratives presented. Also, the sample was comprised predominantly by White females; therefore, a similar study with a more diverse sample population would be helpful in assessing the generalizability of findings from this study.

Sampling groups were purposefully, rather than randomly, selected. While the random-sampling method ensures some diversity in the sample, I relied on instructors allotting class time for participant recruitment and assessment, and I counted on

students being present during the sessions in which the *The Experience Survey* was given.

Also, all data were collected from students through a written survey. This procedure creates two important limitations: No data are available from the advisors who worked with the students surveyed, and the data represent a snapshot recollection of the students' decisions.

Future researchers of advising interactions should conduct pre- and postassessments of student development. By collecting data before, during, and after the advising interaction(s), researchers would have information about student decision-making processes across time. Furthermore, while inclusion of pre- and postassessments would allow for gathering of important qualitative data, it would also allow for the administration of scales related to epistemological development or coping styles. With the quantitative scaling scores, investigators could study the degree to which particular advising strategies can enhance epistemological development.

For two reasons, future researchers also would benefit by collecting data from both advisors and advisees. First, data collection from both advisors and advisees would aid in triangulation of meaning. Second, the advisor data would shed light on the motives behind different advising tactics, thus enhancing understanding of the advising interaction.

On *The Experience Survey*, students were not required to write about their academic major decision, so all narratives describing this decision came from students who felt that selecting a major was one of the more important decisions they had made. Therefore, this sample did not include participants for whom the decision of academic major was not deemed particularly important. Without this group, the frequencies of specific findings could be biased.

Data from students who have had experiences across a large spectrum would be important for examination of the generalizability of claims presented in this study. Also, comparative studies of students who change their majors and students who have never changed their majors would be the foundation of an investigation into possible differences in decision-making strategies and personal epistemologies between the two subsets of students.

Implications for Practice

Despite the limitations of the study, several important implications for practice arise from this study. First, the findings suggest that while many students may be able to identify options, they lack the necessary tools for making a sound decision. If advisors can help students identify a) their options,

Table 3 Learning partnership model practices that help academic advisors facilitate self-authorship in students

| LPM 1: Validate Students as Knowers | LPM 2: Situate Learning in the Student's Experience | LPM 3: Define learning as Co-constructing Meaning |
|--|---|---|
| Encourage students to determine preferences and future activities of interest by researching and testing fields, taking classes, and talking to people working and studying in fields of interest. | Talk about students' experiences in different fields or courses. Focus both on student perceptions of their environments and their behaviors within them. | Discuss implications of particular choices and how choosing one major may impact other goals. Focus on the student's feeling and processing of the gains and losses associated with the possibilities. |
| Ask students to identify positives and negatives of various choices; ask them to focus on how different choices would affect progression toward their goals. | Remember to explicitly discuss contexts other than those at school. For example, ask the student about others who will be affected by the decision. | Present different options to students and guide them through the research process. Help each take initiative and receive feedback from him or her. |
| Encourage students to construct lists of their own strengths and weaknesses, and ask them to explain why they think they possess these particular strengths or weaknesses. | If a student wants to change majors either because of denial of admission or a change in interests, ask for an explanation and push the student to think about the gains, losses, and effects of the decision on other (academic, personal, career, financial, relational) goals. | Review goals and through brainstorming focus on alternative processes for achieving student objectives; this strategy is especially useful after a student is denied admission to a major. |
| | Recognize and explicitly discuss external requirements and constraints on the students' decisions; this conversation is especially important if poor academic performance is setting up road blocks in the pathway to goals. | Provide opportunity for the student to practice making a case for a particular decision. Include guidance regarding negotiations between competing expectations and desires. For example, if student choices are not aligned with parental expectations, help the student plan for effective communication with her or his parents. |
| | Address the processing of career assessment results. | |

Note. Practices are organized by principle in Baxter Magolda's (2001) learning partnerships model (LPM).

b) a broad range of academic, career, relational, and personal goals, and c) the implications of the potential choices on their goals, then students are more likely to feel capable of making a decision that best suits their situation.

Advisors should ask open-ended probing questions so that students have the opportunity to clarify their goals and communicate how these objectives relate to each other. Then through conversation about each of the student-identified options, or with additional options suggested by the advisor, the student should be able to evaluate options and make an autonomous decision. In addition, this advising method may be especially help-

ful to students who are likely to decide on a major based solely on their own instincts, because it forces them to clarify the reasons for their decision.

Second, this research suggests that advisors may need to explain not only the elements of success but also provide tips on avoiding failure. Students in this study reported that they benefited from identifying potential obstacles to their goals in addition to a plan for success. Advisors can help students learn the communication, interpersonal, and study skills necessary for success, but they must also help students identify potential challenges to their successes. Hindrances to success may include long work hours, nonacademic demands on the stu-

dents' time, or family obligations, among many other hardships. By helping students map the potential pitfalls and making plans for coping with these obstacles, students may be more prepared to handle the challenges they encounter throughout life (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Crookston, 1972; Earl, 1988; O'Banion, 1972).

Based on the stories participants shared with me, I suggest that advisors be open to the students' experiences, feelings, and ideas; however, a common theme in participants' narratives involved descriptions of limited openness in advising sessions. Many students noted the importance of their advisors pushing them past their emotions or helping them see their situation or options in a new light. This was particularly true for students who had been denied admission to the major of their choice. In situations where students enter advising upset about a situation, advisors may need to entertain briefly the advisee's emotions, but they then should help the student reframe the situation. They can encourage the student to identify personal as well as environmental attributions for their situation as well as help them see the existing options. Sometimes advisors need to point out the options, and other times advisors can help students discover alternative routes to their goals. In all cases, however, advisors need to know when to direct the session and when to allow the student to direct the session.

The type of advising promoted as a result of the study is designed not only to help the student make the immediate decision of a major, but it will help them develop the skills necessary for solving problems and making purposeful decisions in the future. Thus advisors must communicate the importance of the decision-making skills to students and help them consider ways in which they could transfer their developing skills to other contexts.

References

- American College Personnel Association. (1996). The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs. Retrieved January 28, 2006, from www.acpa.nche.edu/sli/sli.htm
- Assor, A., Kaplan, H., & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviours predicting students' engagement in school work. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72(2), 261–78.
- Astin, A. W. (1996). What matters in college. *Liberal Education*, 79(4), 4–15.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender related patterns in students' intellectual development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2003a). Identity and learning: Student affairs' role in transforming higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 231–47.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2003b, November). The learning partnership model. In M. Baxter Magolda (Chair), *Learning partnerships: Promoting learning and self-authorship*. Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Portland, OR.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to education for self-authorship*. Herndon, VA: Stylus.
- Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bertram, R. M. (1996). The irrational nature of choice: A new model for advising undecided students? *NACADA Journal*, 16(2), 19–24.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3–7.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cobb, P., & Yackel, E. (1996). Constructivist, emergent, and sociocultural perspectives in the context of developmental research. *Educational Psychologist*, 31(3–4), 175–90.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2003). *Academic advising: CAS standards and guidelines*. Retrieved January 2004 from www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Research_Related/CAS.htm
- Crookston, B. B. (1972). A developmental view of academic advising as teaching. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 13(1), 12–17.
- Earl, W. R. (1988). Intrusive advising of freshmen in academic difficulty. *NACADA Journal*, 8(2), 27–33.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

- Glennen, R. E., Farren, P. J., & Vowell, F. N. (1996). How advising and retention of students improves fiscal stability. *NACADA Journal*, 16(1), 38–41.
- Gordon, V. N. (1992). *Handbook of academic advising*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Hay, K., & Barab, S. H. (2001). Constructivism in practice: A comparison and contrast of apprenticeship and constructionist learning environments. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 10(3), 281–322.
- Hornak, A. (2003). *Implementing a curricular framework in the exploration of White racial identity*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.
- Hornak, A., & Ortiz, A. M. (2004). Creating a context to promote diversity education and self-authorship in community college student. In M. Baxter Magolda & P. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 303–32). Herndon, VA: Stylus.
- Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kuh, G. D. (1996). Guiding principles for creating seamless learning environments for undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 27(2), 135–48.
- O'Banion, T. (1972). An academic advising model. *Junior College Journal*, 42, 62–69.
- Perry, W. G. (1999). *Forms of ethical and intellectual development in the college years: A scheme*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2003). Developing self-authorship: Exploring the experiences of high-risk college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(6), 797–812.
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2004). Coping with conflict: Self-authorship, coping, and adaptation to college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(4), 425–42.
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2005). Creating crossroads for self-authorship: Investigating the provocative moment. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(5), 624–41.
- Schein, H. K., & Laff, N. S. (1997). Working with undecided students: A hands-on strategy. *NACADA Journal*, 17(1), 42–48.
- Strange, C. (1994). Student development: The evolution and status of an essential ideal. *Journal of College Student Development*, 34(6), 399–412.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998a). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd Ed.). New York: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998b). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 158–83). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- U.S. Office of Management & Budget. (1995). *Standards for the classification of federal data on race and ethnicity* (Directive No. 15). Retrieved January 24, 2006, from www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/race-ethnicity.html

Author's Note

Jane Pizzolato is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology in Education at the University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). In 2004, she was the recipient of a NACADA Student Research Award—Doctoral Degree Level, which was used to help support this study. Readers may contact Dr. Pizzolato at pizzolat@pitt.edu.