Self-authorship in undergraduate students in a blended-learning multicultural course

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Self-authorship in undergraduate students in a blended-learning multicultural course

by

Vicki Ziegler Abel

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education (Curriculum and Instructional Technology)

Program of Study Committee:
Patricia Leigh, Co-Major Professor
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2011

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father and mother, Donald and Glennys
(Tyser) Ziegler, who started me on this journey.
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I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who supported me in working on this research and thesis. Without my husband, Bryce, and his steady encouragement, this work would not have been completed. Our children and their families, my siblings and extended family, and our many friends have provided invaluable support. Special thanks must go to Dr. Patricia Leigh and Dr. James McShay for their questions, guidance and direction throughout the process of developing this thesis. Many other professors have provided insights and guidance.
ABSTRACT

Self-authorships provided the theoretical lens for this exploration of a blended learning multicultural course. Universities must help students develop a complex array of capacities to function effectively in today’s interconnected world. Self-authorship provides a framework to analyze student development across three domains: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Self-authorship development can be fostered through the use of the Learning Partnerships Model.

This qualitative study used the theory of self-authorship to analyze interactions in the online discussion portion of one section of twenty-one students in a multicultural course at a rural Midwestern university. The course used dialogic principles in a blended learning environment, combining face-to-face interactions with an online platform which supported online journaling, a variety of resources including articles and videos, and an online discussion forum. Six students were interviewed to determine self-authorship development. Their interactions with classmates in the online discussion were analyzed.

Some evidence of students’ self-authorship development was found. Lack of facilitation in the online discussion appeared to have the potential to engender some resistance. A number of suggestions for course improvement could be made based on literature on dialogic principles, optimal online discussion formations and the Learning Partnerships Model.
PREFACE

“Let your vision be world embracing” are the words of Bahá’u’lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í Faith. My parents started their family on a world embracing journey when my mother, a Nebraska farm girl, celebrated the second birthday of their first born child on board the Queen Elizabeth ocean liner en route to Germany to join her husband, a small town Nebraska boy, where he was on a Fulbright scholarship to study the debates of the Reformation in dusty Munich libraries. Half a century later, my parents’ children and their significant others have traveled the world, are serving society through job paths including blue and white collar jobs, academics, education, sales, and stay-at-home parents, and include straight and gay, conservative and liberal, religious and non-religious, tattooed bikers and Toyota Echo drivers, and much in between.

Growing up in such a family introduced me to diversity early. I can clearly remember my first personal encounter with class differences as a third grader, seeing through new eyes the lives of my best friend, her brother, and their mother, a single mom struggling to make ends meet. Later as a highschooler just moved to a new town, I was taken aback when I literally walked “across the tracks” to the other, less well-to-do “side” of town.

My understanding of social identities has further developed as I have helped parent our adopted Black son from one month of age and am now the grandparent of his children. Helping him in his social identity development in a predominantly White town, as son of White parents, has been a key area of learning for me. Two of my children have learning difficulties; being an advocate for their well-being in a school system whose members still struggle to see children with educational needs as fully equal has brought further understanding of the difficulties of being “different.” As members of the Bahá’í Faith, a
“minority religion” in this area, my children have faced challenges in school, on the playground and in relations with friends. Helping each develop a sense of identity separate from the majority has made me very conscious of other sometimes unappreciated social identities.

When my father was first in Germany, with his wife and child back in Nebraska, the only means of communication open to a poor student was letter writing. The letters took at least a week to get across the ocean. Phone calls were too expensive. Today, technology has changed our communications drastically. My Kenyan daughter-in-law emails her family back home and my nephew and his wife in Japan Skype my brother and family in Nebraska to show baby Ema’s first steps. Our son and his family Skype from Poland to share news of our grandsons’ exploits and to allow us to see “first hand” how big they are getting. This brings it home to me.

But what of the potential of technology for use in education? While harboring reservations about unexamined use of technology in the name of progress, I am intrigued by continuing the process of looking at ways to explore and enhance appropriate use. The capacity for connecting people across time and space offered by the internet and its associated tools holds great potential for building community.

I first learned about the course, Dialogues on Diversity, U St 150, through a graduate student seminar, and was excited about the concept. When the professor overseeing the program invited me to serve as a co-facilitator for one of the sections, I was honored. Working toward greater understanding across differences has been a key life motivation. When the possibility of developing a research project using this blended multicultural course arose, it seemed a natural fit.
My interests in this area of research are three-fold. First, I am very interested in seeing how technology can be used effectively to enhance communication and learning. Second, building connections and understandings across social identity groups has been of interest to me since my early years. The third area only became apparent as I researched the literature looking for a theoretical lens through which to explore this blended multicultural course. In the process of educating my children, developmental theorists caught my attention very early. Discovering the theory of “self-authorship” brought clarity to my understanding of both online education and multicultural education.

Self-authorship, which results in intercultural maturity, involves the process of learning to appreciate multiple perspectives, to work with and appreciate differences, and to be able to engage in discussions in which each person has deeply held but very different perspectives, while maintaining a sense of self based not on others’ judgments but on personally developed understanding. Developing these capacities is a deeply held personal goal toward which I continually strive. I enjoy working with students to encourage their development in this process. To explore ways in which this maturity is expressed in technology enhanced environments and face-to-face interaction has been an exciting, if daunting and overwhelming, project.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Students graduating from colleges and universities today face an increasingly connected, global, diverse world (Hurtado, 2001a; Schoem, Hurtado, Sevig, Chesler, & Sumida, 2001). Where they live and where they work will potentially provide them constant opportunities to encounter people whose backgrounds are different from their own. As individuals with easier access to formal schooling than most others their age throughout the planet, these students have the potential to be future leaders in all venues of life. Colleges and universities have the responsibility to prepare students for these environments (Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, 2007).

To assist students in developing the intercultural maturity necessary for this interconnected world, students need the capacity for self-authorship, an integrated maturity across cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal domains (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2003, 2005). Multicultural education courses are an important way of developing this capacity (Hurtado, 2007; Saenz, Ngai & Hurtado, 2007). “Blended learning” courses, utilizing a combination of face-to-face and online interactions, are increasingly common across all fields of study and provide students important opportunities to learn to communicate through online venues” (Christensen, 2003; Wade, Niederhauser, Cannon & Long, 2001; Yoon & Lim, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to explore ways in which self-authorship is expressed by undergraduate students at a land grant Midwestern university in the online discussions of a blended learning multicultural course. Self-authorship is explored across the three domains: cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal. This chapter presents the significance of the study, the research question and an outline of the contents of this thesis.
Significance of the Study

To work effectively in a diverse environment, multicultural understanding and competence are essential. The college years are an important time to work on these understandings (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Colleges and universities providing a diverse faculty and student body, courses that help students understand the history and context of different peoples, and opportunities to interact with those of different backgrounds help this student development (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Gurin, 1999). Among the most effective ways for universities to help develop capacity to work with diversity are intergroup dialogue and diversity courses (Hurtado, 2007).

Through these efforts, colleges and universities are able to help students develop intercultural maturity. Intercultural maturity is a very complex set of skills and attitudes. Researchers suggest that maturity across cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains comes about only in stages, starting with an initial stage in which everything is perceived in relation to and dependent on those around us, moving through stages of dissonance as understandings and perspectives broaden and diversify, toward a stage of self-authorship. Self-authorship is characterized by the capacity to shift perspectives, use multiple cultural frames, appreciate and embrace differences, and work for social justice locally and globally. Self-authorship is grounded in an internal self that openly challenges and explores new understandings and perspectives (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

While much of current educational practice still encourages students to continue to rely on authority’s knowledge claims and follow formulas to succeed, a model using the theoretical lens of self-authorship has been developed to frame efforts to foster student development across cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. This model, the
Learning Partnerships Model, is based on three key assumptions. These are that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, the self is central to constructing knowledge, and authority and expertise are to be shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers. Three key principles are utilized to translate these assumptions into action: learners are validated as capable of knowing, learning is situated in learners’ experience, and learning is defined as mutually constructing meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2003, 2004a). Viewing educational practice through the lens of self-authorship and the Learning Partnerships Model provides a connection between developmental theory and learning theory.

To better prepare students to understand diversity and diversity-related issues, one Midwestern university has instituted a three credit “diversity requirement” which can be filled by taking any of a number of courses designed to help students become more aware of diversity and thus more capable of acting in mature ways (University Catalogue, 2007). University Studies 150, Dialogues on Diversity (referred to after this as U St 150) is one of these courses. Though not a true “intergroup dialogue” (Zuniga et al., 2007), many of the theoretical underpinnings of intergroup dialogue apply to U St 150. Opportunities are presented for students to explore social identities and concepts of privilege and power in a dialogic environment. While intergroup dialogues by definition are face-to-face experiences (Schoem et al. 2001), U St 150 is a blended course, using technology to support learning. Technology provides some course content, asynchronous opportunities for interaction through threaded discussions, and a venue in which to reflect on personal learning through journaling.

“Sustained communication, critical social awareness and bridge building” are key pedagogical components of dialogue experiences (Zuniga, 2003, p. 10). By using technologies in keeping with current and developing student use of technology, U St 150
attempts to support each of these components. While there is some research exploring the use of technology in multicultural courses, this research extends that understanding by looking at the ways various elements of a blended course (face-to-face, threaded discussions, and journaling) support the goal of intercultural maturity and the educational foundation for that goal: self-authorship.

The purpose of this research is to examine the online portion of a blended learning multicultural course (U St 150) for evidence of self-authorship. For this research, I interviewed six students to better understand their development of self-authorship. I analyzed transcripts of their interviews, looking for evidence of self-authorship. I then analyzed the online journals and discussions in light of self-authorship’s Learning Partnerships Model assumptions and principles. These were compared and contrasted with multicultural and online learning best practices.

**Research Question**

The central research question for this project is:

In what ways are the three domains of self-authorship—cognitive, interpersonal and intra personal—expressed by undergraduate students in online discussions in a blended learning multicultural education course?

**Chapter Outline**

This research is presented in five chapters. The first introduces the research project and explores its importance.

The second chapter presents the literature review. The theory of self-authorship as a theoretical lens is discussed. This includes the three domains across which maturity must be fostered for self-authorship to develop. These are cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal.
Concepts relating to multicultural education and best practices on college campuses to promote intercultural maturity in college students are explored. Theory and best practices of online and blended learning environments are presented. Special attention is given to online discussions, and the kinds of practices which foster community building and interconnection between participants. Multicultural education and online education are examined together in light of the concept of self-authorship.

The third chapter presents the methodology. It provides an explanation and justification of data gathering techniques, research procedure and research design.

The fourth chapter shows the analysis of evidence of students’ self-authorship as it emerges from interview data and as it is expressed in online journals and online discussion threads.

The final chapter explores the challenges presented by this study. Bringing together literature and data exploring three such vast fields, self-authorship, multicultural education and online education was difficult. It provides a closer look at the course, U St 150 in light of the self-authorship analysis of the students interviewed, as well as an examination across the entire course of elements that foster self-authorship. It closes with some suggestions for future use of online discussion in a multicultural class to better support self-authorship development.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural maturity is an essential requisite for students graduating from today’s colleges and university. Students can be encouraged to begin to develop intercultural maturity through exposure to campus diversity experiences (both structural and informal interactional) and through curricular activities, especially activities that allow them to engage in deep and meaningful exploration of differences and that lead to more complex understanding of the world around them. One challenge of moving into a stage of “intercultural maturity” is the range of domains across which maturity must be present. According to King and Baxter Magolda (2005), these capacities are inherent in the concept of “self-authorship.” They point out that maturity must be developed in cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal spheres. They explain that,

The changes in students’ intercultural skills being called for today require not just knowing more facts or having more awareness, but a genuine maturity, an individual transformation that enables students to apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts. (p. 586)

Bringing multicultural education together with technology has caused concern among those who see technology as intimately connected with dominant power structures and multicultural education as focused not only on bringing voice to subordinate groups but also on examining the power structures beneath to effect change (Marshall, 2001; Munoz, 2002).

Because the theory of “self-authorship” is relatively new, and therefore unfamiliar, this chapter starts with a description of the theory of “self-authorship,” its origins and a model proposed for its implementation. I then discuss the need for diversity education and some current diversity initiatives. I explore aspects of online learning focusing on elements
utilized by U St 150. I conclude this chapter with perspectives on bringing together the two seemingly divergent practices of multicultural education and technology drawing on the theoretical lens of self-authorship.

**Self-Authorship**

To encourage students to develop maturity in intrapersonal as well as interpersonal and cognitive spheres requires that colleges and universities focus attention on the development of self as key to more mature understanding of both content areas and how to work in collaborative groups. Attention to this important element can help students develop the concept of “self-authorship.” What does this concept of self-authorship look like? How was it developed? How can students’ self-authorship be fostered?

Wildman (2007) draws attention to the disconnect in current educational practice between learning theory and developmental theory. He states that “theories of learning and intellectual development . . . should bootstrap each other in the service of schooling practices that view student development and learning as part of the same overall growth trajectory” (p. 20). Using the theoretical lens of self-authorship allows for a holistic understanding of these two historically disconnected approaches to students. Wildman explains the need for a “more coherent story line showing the interconnections among learning, development, and instruction” (p. 20). Self-authorship provides that “more coherent storyline.” It provides understanding of both the learner as developing over time through stages of development and of methods and approaches that can foster learner development.

**Self-Authorship Defined**

The concept of self-authorship was first proposed by Kegan (1994). He explained self-authorship as an internal identity “that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent
values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer authored by them, it authors them and thereby achieves a personal authority” (Kegan, 1994, p. 185, italics in original). Kegan’s work is deeply theoretical. Baxter Magolda is one practitioner who has extended Kegan’s work into the practical. She explains how Kegan advanced “the constructive-developmental traditions to integrate Piagetian cognitive psychology with psychoanalytic psychology” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 271) drawing on the understandings of each to develop a holistic outlook on human development.

Baxter Magolda extends Kegan’s explorations of self-authorship by continuing to draw together research and theories from a wide range of perspectives to build further understanding. Helping provide the basis for her ongoing exploration is her longitudinal study, begun in 1986, of a group of young adults and their development over the last two decades (Baxter Magolda, 2000, 2001, 2004a, 2008). Through this study, she has examined the complex process of becoming a mature adult. The result has been to broaden and deepen understanding of how to facilitate this process using the theoretical lens of self-authorship. Numerous other researchers and educators have worked with Baxter Magolda and independently to further understanding of self-authorship.

Self-authorship develops across three domains: cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Cognitive maturity is characterized by capacity to move from following formulas and accepting authority’s knowledge claims, to taking personal responsibility for one’s beliefs. Important in cognitive maturity is the capacity to consciously operate from multiple cultural frames. Decision making and problem solving capacities have matured. Intrapersonal maturity is characterized by an integrated identity, consciously crafted through
self-exploration as growing understanding of social and historical process and interactions with diverse others intersect to form a sense of self which is both cohesive and open to continued growth and change. Interpersonal maturity is the capacity to engage in meaningful, interdependent relationships with diverse others that are grounded in an understanding and appreciation for human differences and in which self is not overshadowed by need for others’ approval with mutually negotiating needs and genuinely taking others’ perspectives into account without being consumed. (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 8)

Important components of interpersonal maturity are understanding of social systems and their impact on interpersonal and intergroup relations, and the willingness to work for the rights of others.

Three very general “stages” have been identified through which individuals progress as they develop self-authorship Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004a, 2005; Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Pizzolato, 2003, 2005; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). In the first, the individual depends on following formulas and looks to authority and peers for construction of identity and a belief system and perceives knowledge as certain. An intermediate stage occurs as the individual begins to experience dissonance. This dissonance can occur as the individual becomes increasingly aware of ways that cognitive understandings and various life roles are at odds with each other. This second stage continues as increased understanding of the rest of the world’s collective experience impinges on personal assumptions. Knowledge is increasingly understood to be uncertain. This dissonance leads the individual to “The Crossroads” experience, or experiences, from which the individual embarks on the process of self-authorship, the development of a
coherent personal belief system in which knowledge is seen as contextual. This third stage allows the individual to interact with diverse others with respect and appreciation. Autonomy and connection become integrated into a cohesive whole (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004a).

These stages are mirrored by research into developmental models of racial maturity. Tatum (1997) compares two models of development of racial maturity, one for African Americans developed by William Cross, the other for Whites, developed by Janet Helms. Both involve some kind of encounter or contact which leads eventually to dissonance. The challenge for each is to accept their Blackness or Whiteness, often through some kind of immersion or emersion, and move toward a more balanced acceptance of personal identity and connection with the rest of the world. This acceptance can be seen as corresponding to the concept of self-authorship. Alcoff (2006) goes beyond concepts of Blackness or Whiteness and explores race through the lens of “contextualism,” in which race is seen as “socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and reproduced through learned perceptual practices” (p. 182). This contextualized approach requires understanding of the complexity of systems and experiences, and is descriptive of self-authorship.

Characteristic of these developmental approaches to maturity is the quality of dissonance. Complexity in life provided the dissonance to Baxter Magolda’s study participants, leading them to begin to question the formulas they used previously (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009, King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Baxter Magolda and King (2007) explain that “adversity, if accompanied by support, can promote the journey toward self-authorship (p. 493).” College diversity experiences often provide this experience of dissonance. Inoue’s (2005) findings support those of Baxter Magolda and King’s, as she
points out that the results of her study indicate that through positive experiences with diversity, students develop a greater sense of the value of their own ethnic and cultural values, which allows them to more fully appreciate the perspectives of others. They also develop the capacity to reflect critically on their own and others’ experiences and perspectives.

Some students, because of their social identities, have developed more understanding of the complexity of knowledge and a sense of self that is distinct from what they have encountered in their interactions with their environments and arrive at the university with some capacity to self-author. The experience of coming to the university can cause them to question how they fit into the system, to become less sure of themselves, and to appear to become less self-authored. By the time a school year has passed, if given appropriate support, many have regained their previously developed understandings and positions (Pizzolato, 2004).

College experiences which support students’ development of self-authorship through positive interactions with diversity are limited. In reporting on her longitudinal study of young adults, Baxter Magolda (2003) found that for her subjects full identity development, characterized by “central role of self in knowledge construction,” did not typically develop during the college years, but rather closer to the age of 30. She attributes this lack of development in college to the “lack of attention” due to the “traditional bifurcation” in the educational process separating the mind and identity. She places the responsibility for this separation of mind and identity on traditional approaches to higher education: “Delay in developing an internal sense of self is a result of social and educational environments that reward reliance on authority rather than a sign that it cannot happen in one’s 20s” (p. 236).
She also found evidence that college students were capable of more complex levels of self-authorship development if the educational environment supported this functioning (p. 236). Baxter Magolda and King (2007) suggest that the “potential for promoting self-authorship in college far exceeds the degree to which it has been prevalent among college students” (p. 493).

College experiences, like U St 150 being studied, can help provide the catalyst experiences that help students develop self-authorship. There are important steps colleges and universities can take to encourage student development of self-authorship and the resultant intercultural maturity necessary for effective functioning in today’s world.

**Learning Partnerships Model**

Through her growing understanding of self-authorship Baxter Magolda (2003, 2004b) developed the Learning Partnerships Model. It represents an effort to bring learning and developmental theory together in a cohesive whole.

Three key assumptions are articulated which help students develop the concept of self-authorship:

- knowledge is viewed as complex and socially constructed,
- the self is viewed as central to constructing knowledge, and
- authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers (2003, p. 237).

Three key principles are utilized to translate these assumptions into action:

- learners are validated as capable of knowing,
- learning is situated in learners’ experience, and
- learning is defined as mutually constructing meaning (2003, p. 237).
Many elements of U St 150 fit the Learning Partnerships Model. Students start the course by exploring their own identities. They branch out to examine identities which may different from their own through exploration of various media experiences and interactions with classmates as they engage in the process of making meaning of their new awareness.

Since the Learning Partnerships Model was introduced, increasing numbers of programs on campuses across the United States have been exploring ways to utilize this model. There is research being done on more effective ways of assessment (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; Pizzolato, 2007), on curricular efforts (Bekken & Marie, 2007; Haynes, 2004), on advising practices (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Pizzolato, 2006, 2008; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007), and on racial identity (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Quaye & Baxter Magolda, 2007). Off campus efforts like internships are being studied (Egart & Healy, 2004; Yonkers-Talz, 2004). Educators are also looking at ways to restructure higher education to foster student development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Hodge, Baxter Magolda & Haynes, 2009; Meszaros, 2007; Wildman, 2007).

Understanding self-authorship is an ongoing process, as Wawrzynski and Pizzolato (2006) imply when they refer to the “still developing understanding of what self-authorship is and what contributes to its development” (p. 279). One important way to explore self-authorship is through current diversity education initiatives. (See, for example, Baxter Magolda, 2003; Hornak & Ortiz, 2004; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005.)

**Diversity Education**

In the face of an increasingly global and interconnected world, intergroup relations skills are essential for functioning in today’s world in all arenas of life (Hurtado, 2001a; Schoem et al., 2001). Gurin (1999) lays a very clear foundation for the value of diverse
educational settings in helping students learn to live and work in diverse settings when they graduate. Those students who have the opportunity to study and discuss issues relating to race and ethnicity with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are most positively affected if the group has common goals, there is equal status among individuals, there is support by authorities for equal status, and there are opportunities for group members to get to know each other better. The learning outcomes Gurin sees students developing in diverse educational settings could be termed “intercultural maturity” or “effective citizenship” (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Kegan, 1994). The developmental foundation for these learning outcomes is self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2003; Kegan, 1994; Meszaros, 2007).

Other researchers have followed Gurin’s lead in finding links between diverse college environments and increased development of intercultural maturity. Zuniga, Williams and Berger (2005) showed that interaction with diverse peers, curricular activities that allow students to challenge personal prejudices and take social action, and the combination of co-curricular, curricular, and residential activities in support of greater diversity understanding together combine to encourage students to be motivated to take action in promoting social justice.

Hurtado (2001b) notes that “new intergroup relations skills are necessary for workers, students, and leaders in communities that are rapidly becoming demographically diverse in order to develop fair and culturally sensitive policies, or simply to better serve clients from diverse communities” (p. 23). She asserts that “campus diversity initiatives are central” to the civic and educational mission of colleges and universities. As students learn about diversity, they become responsible citizens, capable of working with differences and making
decisions to help promote the common good. So important is this role that Hurtado warns that institutions that marginalize diversity initiatives face possible attack for failing to fulfill a key responsibility. If these “intergroup relations skills” are a key responsibility of colleges and institutions, there must be an understanding of the ways students develop this level of intercultural maturity.

**Diversity Initiatives**

There are three dimensions through which colleges and universities can impact student multicultural understanding and development (Gurin, 1999). The first of these is structural diversity, which refers to the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body. The second is classroom or curricular diversity, which refers to the introduction of content across the curriculum that incorporates knowledge about diverse groups, allowing students to become more familiar with the history and backgrounds of those with whom they are coming into contact. The third is informal interactional diversity, which is the opportunity students have, sometimes for the first time, to interact informally with others of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. All three dimensions, Gurin explains, must be utilized for students to benefit from the learning opportunities provided. While reciprocal and interactive, each dimension impacts student development differently.

Saenz et al. (2007) studied factors that encourage positive interactions across race for several groups of students on college campuses. They found that structural diversity (presence on campus of students of various backgrounds) had the greatest impact on White students by increasing opportunities for positive interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds. Conversely, they found that participation in the predominantly White Greek organizations hindered development of White students. Their findings highlight the value of
structural diversity, especially for White students. For many White students, the college campus provides the first interaction with diversity. If White students remain immersed in White-only environments, opportunities for interaction with others of varied backgrounds diminish.

Hurtado’s (2007) study of change in undergraduate students’ attitudes in their first two years of college and the campus practices that impacted those changes supports the value of informal interactional diversity. She found that:

students who reported positive, informal interactions with diverse peers had higher scores on measures of more complex thinking about people and their behavior, cultural and social awareness, and perspective taking skills (i.e., the ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective). (p. 191)

In addition, these students had increased “democratic sensibilities” as evidenced by “their pluralistic orientation, interest in poverty issues, and concern for the public good.” Conversely, Hurtado found that students who had negative interactions with diverse peers were least skilled in intergroup relations and had lower scores in the “democratic outcomes” being measured. These findings led Hurtado to state that it is crucial that educators assist students in understanding and developing constructive ways to work with conflict between groups and individuals.

While structural and informal interactional diversity are important in helping students develop, additional assistance is needed in learning to interact positively with people of different backgrounds. Classroom or curricular diversity is also needed. What kind of curricular approach is most effective?
After exploring the literature, Sleeter and Grant (2003) identified five approaches to multicultural education. These are (1) “teaching the exceptional and culturally different,” which involves adapting instruction to student difference for the purpose of “mainstreaming” these different students into the regular classroom, (2) the “human relations” approach, which encourages love and respect and effective communication in order to bring different people together, (3) “single group studies,” which aim at consciousness raising of single groups to effect change, (4) “multicultural education,” which involves whole school celebration of all differences, and (5) “education which is multicultural and social reconstructionist,” which moves the appreciation of differences of multicultural education into social action (Sleeter & Grant, pp. 32-33). This fifth approach is most effective as it not only celebrates diversity, as characterized by the fourth approach, but also encourages examination of the social structures undergirding differences of wealth and poverty for the purpose of encouraging transformation within the individual and within the community. As such, this fifth approach is most effective in promoting the development of self-authorship, as it enhances cognitive capacity to see knowledge as dependent on the situation, intrapersonal capacity to develop an identity within an historical and global context, and interpersonal capacity to collaborate with diverse others in mutually supportive ways.

Saenz et al. (2007) found that intensive dialogue opportunities in classes had the effect of significantly benefiting all students, across all four racial groups they studied. Dialogic courses allowed students the opportunity to explore deeply the structures that support differences prevalent in society. These courses fit Sleeter and Grant’s multicultural and reconstructionist approach. Hurtado (2007) found that diversity courses, service learning courses, and intergroup dialogue all impact what Hurtado calls “democratic outcomes,” with
diversity courses and intergroup dialogue having the greatest effect. The democratic outcomes Hurtado found include concern for the public good, a pluralistic outlook, interest in poverty issues, tolerance, recognition of and respect for cultural differences, and capacity for deliberation and discourse.

With respect to Gurin’s curricular diversity, both diversity courses and intergroup dialogue are most effective in encouraging student development. Not all courses involving “intensive dialogue opportunities” can be categorized as “intergroup dialogue.” Zuniga, Nagda, Chesler, and Cytron-Walker (2001, p. vii) define intergroup dialogue as:

- a face-to-face, interactive, and facilitated learning experience that brings together twelve to eighteen students from two or more social identity groups over a sustained period to explore commonalities and differences, examine the nature and consequences of systems of power and privilege, and find ways to work together to promote social justice.

Clearly, to be most effective, these authors feel that intergroup dialogue needs to be sustained, face-to-face, interactive, and well facilitated. While this may be ideal, the principles underlying intergroup dialogue can provide an important basis for other multicultural dialogue courses. The current course being studied, U St 150, is one of these kinds of courses. These principles and practices include an environment in which each participant is respected, dialogue skills are modeled and practiced, and there is a good balance between the process of dialogue and the content which helps students understand more fully the historical underpinnings of social identity groups. This takes place in an environment where students feel they can be heard and can learn to hear others (Schoem et al., 2001; Zuniga, 2003; Zuniga, & Nagda, 2001). Coursework following “intergroup
dialogue” principles combined with structural and informal interactional diversity will help produce “citizens who can negotiate difference, act, and make ethical decisions in an increasingly complex and diverse world” (Hurtado, 2007, p. 192). U St 150 attempts to utilize these principles.

**Theory and Practice of Intergroup Dialogue**

Using principles and practices associated with intergroup dialogue is one of the most effective ways to encourage the development of democratic outcomes, and thus, self-authorship. Researchers and practitioners have looked carefully at what works best in intergroup dialogue, how it relates to other dialogue efforts, and ways it can be enhanced.

**Defining intergroup dialogue.** Zuniga and Nagda (2001) have studied various dialogue efforts and describe four different models into which these fall. The first of these is the collective inquiry model. This model concentrates on the process of learning to dialogue through suspension of judgment and finding shared meaning. The second model is the critical-dialogical education model which involves exploration of social identities, dialogues about issues of conflict and social justice and attempts to lead to alliances and action. This model draws on Freire’s (1972) concept of education for the purpose of liberation. The third is the community building and social action model which aims at drawing together a broad base of community for the purpose of building relations and working for change in community policy and individual actions. The fourth is the conflict resolution and peace building model which brings together conflicting parties and works at both mediating between the parties and building connections that encourage personal responsiveness to the needs of the other group. Intergroup dialogue fits most closely with the second of these models, the critical dialogical educational model.
Two interrelated definitions of intergroup dialogue from key researchers in the field may prove useful. Schoem et al. (2001) define intergroup dialogue as “a form of democratic practice, engagement, problem solving, and education involving face-to-face, focused, facilitated, and confidential discussions occurring over time between two or more groups of people defined by their different social identities.” Zuniga (2003) describes intergroup dialogue as “face-to-face facilitated conversation between members of two or more social identity groups that strives to create new levels of understanding, relating, and action” (p. 9).

The **process of intergroup dialogue.** There are a number of key elements of intergroup dialogue process, or “deliberative, participatory democracy,” as described by Schoem et al. (2001). They are as follows:

1. Dialogue is a process, not an event.
2. Dialogue is about relationship building and thoughtful engagement about difficult issues.
3. Dialogue requires an extended commitment.
4. Dialogue takes place face-to-face.
5. Dialogue takes place best in an atmosphere of confidentiality, and issues of sponsorship and context are important to its success.
6. Dialogues often may focus on race, but they also address multiple issues of social identity that extend beyond race.
7. Dialogue focuses on both intergroup conflict and community building.
8. Dialogues are led by skilled facilitators.
9. Dialogue is about inquiry and understanding and the integration of content and process.
Dialogue involves talking, but taking action often leads to good talking, and dialogue often leads to action (Schoem et al., 2001, pp. 6-14).

Hurtado (2001a), drawing on the research of many researchers, describes three different types of processes associated with intergroup dialogue. The first is the educational process which needs to support students who experience intergroup contact on a profoundly personal level, sometimes for the first time. The second process has to do with group dynamics. The third process is that of individual change, probably the area most closely studied.

Hurtado’s first process related to intergroup dialogue is the educational. Intergroup dialogue is built on three interconnected pedagogical processes: sustained communication, critical social awareness and bridge building (Zuniga, 2003; Zuniga & Nagda, 2001). Sustained communication allows for the development of trust which, through careful modeling of ways of listening, hearing, and appreciating differences of perspectives, allows participants to probe difficult issues. Critical social awareness helps students get beyond easy solutions and understand concepts of privilege, power and status and their impact on relationships. Bridge building helps students move beyond differences to see connections and ways they can work together to effect change.

The second process Hurtado describes is that of group dynamics. There are two elements of this process. The first is the development of a cohesive group moving from polite distance to close interaction for the purpose of effecting change. This element is characteristic of all kinds of groups as they begin to function as a working unit. Stages in this element include: forming (beginning the process of developing relationships and becoming cohesive as a group), storming (recognizing and reacting to differences and
challenges), norming (working through these differences to better understanding), and performing (working toward some goal) (Zuniga & Nagda, 2001). Each of these stages in group development provides important learning for the students.

The second element of Hurtado’s group dynamics is an effective curriculum pattern. Zuniga (2003) suggests a four-stage educational design. These educational stages are as follows:

1. creating an environment for dialogue (building the foundation),
2. situating the dialogue: learning about differences and commonalities of experience (building a shared vocabulary and placing both similar and different experiences in a larger framework),
3. exploring conflicts and multiple perspectives: dialoguing about “hot topics,” and
4. moving from dialogue to action: action planning and alliance building (pp. 12-15).

Both the group development stages Hurtado describes and the curricular design stages suggested by Zuniga combine to provide a basis for moving more deeply into dialogue. They also have potential to reflect the three key assumptions of the Learning Partnerships Model, that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, that self is central to knowledge construction and authority and expertise can be shared by peers in this knowledge construction. In addition, they can be enhanced by the three key principles of the Learning Partnerships Model to better translate these assumptions into action: validating learners as capable of learning, situating learning in the learners’ experience and explicitly defining learning as “mutually constructing meaning” (Baxter Magolda, 2003, p. 237).

Finally, the third process described by Hurtado is that of individual change through intergroup dialogue. Individual change involves the students’ greater understanding of issues
of personal social identity. This includes understanding the challenging concept of privilege and its impact. Another individual change can be developing capacity to dialogue, which includes being able to listen to others, suspend judgment, attempt to see from the perspective of others, and even take on different perspectives and explore them. Individual change also includes developing appreciation for the experiences and cultures of others (Hurtado, 2007; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Inoue, 2005; Tatum, 1997).

Hurtado’s third process, individual change, is an important arena for self-authorship. In exploring social identities, intrapersonal capacity can develop. Seeing from another’s perspective enhances interpersonal maturity. The complexities involved in interacting with diverse others allows for increased awareness of the contextual quality of knowledge.

However, exploring these issues can also lead to resistance. As Goodman (2001) points out, “When people’s need for safety and stability are not met, they turn off, shut down and avoid new information” (p. 63). Resistance can be overt, “discrediting people, discounting information, challenging every fact, changing the focus, avoiding assignments, or disrupting the class or meeting,” or it can be subtle, “conforming to assumed expectation or not participating” (p. 62). To help students feel safe enough to engage in individual change it is important to structure learning situations carefully. How can intergroup dialogue be supported and enhanced so that students reap full benefit from the dialogue process?

Enhancing intergroup dialogue. Zuniga, Nagda, and Sevig (2002) identify three practice principles which enhance intergroup dialogue. The first principle is maintaining a social justice perspective which involves acknowledging social identities based on socially constructed concepts like race and ethnicity and helping students increase their understanding of the effects of social inequity and power differentials. The second principle is balancing
process and content. This involves attending carefully to the learning, dialogic, and intergroup processes that will provide greater understanding while providing adequate public and academic content to move students forward. The third principle is that of praxis—reflection and action—in dialogue. The reflection element of praxis allows students to understand more fully their own frames of reference. Action allows students to take their understanding further, to envision and move into action so as to continue the learning process.

Complimenting these “principle practices” are the “key principles” Baxter Magolda (1997) has observed which serve to deepen dialogues about race. The first of these is conveying to students their right to their perspective and their validity as knowers. Second is encouraging students to share their own experiences, as these provide their context for knowing. Third is the mutual construction of meaning. This construction of meaning can be best served by continuing to explore themes in greater depth, by thoroughly exploring student experience as it relates to the themes being discussed, and by offering frameworks for exploration that may be different from those previously encountered by the students. A collaborative environment is essential to this dialogue. These same three principles have become the basis for the construction of the learning model, Learning Partnerships Model that Baxter Magolda has developed to help educators foster student development of self-authorship. (Baxter Magolda 2004a; Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Pizzolato, 2005; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007)

In today’s world, a key tool used by educators to help students develop deeper understanding of complex issues and critical thinking skills is technology. Characteristic of many of today’s students is their comfort with the use of technology (Dabbach, 2007;
Richardson, 2006). Educational practice increasingly makes more effective use of technology. Technology continues to develop new capacities to support education (Holmes & Gardner, 2006). Educators are looking at ways the tools of technology can effectively support student learning and development. Self-authorship, too, may be supported through technology.

**E-learning: Technology in Education**

Technology use in schools has mirrored technology use in society. From radio to movie projectors to television, educators have searched for innovative ways of helping students learn (Cuban, 1986). As the first computers appeared on the scene, educators eagerly searched for ways to make use of them. Drill and practice programs were their initial use.

Today’s sophisticated computers provide many educational options. As far back as 1996, Jonassen explored their use as learning tools or “mind tools,” in which computer application programs, such as databases, spreadsheets, multimedia, hypermedia, and others “engage learners in constructive, higher order, critical thinking about the subjects they are studying” (Jonassen, p. iv). Using computer technology in these ways is intended to provide environments which will promote constructivist learning in which students are empowered to “actively construct their own knowledge” (p. 12).

In addition to using application programs for educational use, learning environments or platforms, like WebCT and Blackboard have been developed. These provide “online access to learning resources, anywhere, anytime” (Holmes & Gardner, 2006, p. 14). These learning environments provide a wide variety of resources including the following:

- Repositories for resource materials
Calendars, etc, for scheduling

Assignment submission receptacles (drop boxes)

Portfolio building (personal workspaces)

Mentor support

Communal learning venues (discussion forums, chat rooms, blogs, wikis, whiteboards)

News and new topics (announcements)

Administration and progress monitoring (accessible as appropriate to individual learners). (Holmes & Gardner, p. 153)

These resources, both the application programs and the learning platforms, provide those involved in the field of educational technology wide latitude for designing ways in which these tools provide opportunities for constructivist learning. They can support a “constructivist theory of learning that stresses the importance of experiences, experimentation, problem solving, and the construction of knowledge” (Picciano, 2001, p. 93). This wealth of potential resources can provide opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills, foster motivation and curiosity, develop capacity for self assessment and reflection, scaffold next steps, support different learning styles and incorporate learner activity in authentic learner environments including social environments (Holmes and Gardner, 2006, pp. 97-98).

Educators are particularly excited about implications these resources and environments have for individualizing education to support constructivist learning theory. In the online environments, the learner can learn “by interacting with the available resources—teacher, tutor, information, media, etc.—and drawing on his or her own experiences to
construct the knowledge to solve the problem” (Piccianno, 2001, p. 93). The challenge, however, is in assessing how best to make use of these resources to fulfill appropriate educational goals. Making these assessments is equally important in considering how best to make use of technological resources in a blended learning setting.

**Blended Learning**

Blended learning has developed as instructors have made use of electronic environments and tools to enhance traditionally face-to-face courses. These efforts have started simply, with online postings of syllabi and other documents or through sending email messages, and have become more complex as the richness of technology develops and is explored and incorporated into course designs.

There has been much discussion of what exactly constitutes a blended learning course. After exploring the literature for an adequate definition, Yoon and Lim (2007) describe blended learning as “strategic blending” for “the purposeful mix of delivery media (particularly face-to-face and various forms of technologies) to improve learning/performance solutions, which are derived from the goals and needs” of a particular course (page unknown). A main purpose behind the choice to use a blended learning approach is to “extend the boundaries of the class” (Wade et al., 2001, p. 501).

Determining the appropriate mix of “delivery media” to address the “goals and needs” of a given course is the challenge (Christensen, 2003; Mortera-Gutierrez, 2006). Instructors must often try out a combination, assess its efficacy and adjust accordingly. Christensen (2003) describes the process with a blended instructional design course. First she identified three key roles she wanted the technology to play. The first was to provide a rich and diverse set of resources to support student work on a variety of individualized
projects. The second was to help students determine appropriate resources for their projects. The third was to help the instructor manage and respond to the varied needs of the students. After two iterations of the course, she concluded that more fully utilizing the technology allowed her to center the course more adequately in a constructivist pedagogy. Students benefited from being able to focus learning on tasks with personal relevance. They also appreciated the wealth of resources available through the online medium. While student responses were overwhelmingly positive, Christensen notes the challenge of balancing better learning outcomes for students with the amount of time and energy required of instructors.

In her study of ten professors teaching blended courses, Mortera-Gutierrez (2006) found some practices and situations that were detrimental and some that were beneficial to blended learning. Detrimental were a confusing e-learning platform, technical difficulties, and too much information that overwhelmed students. Practices and situations enhancing blended learning included: direct social contact face-to-face at the beginning of the course, well-defined assignments, instructors comfortable with and positive about technology, instructors giving timely feedback, and an appropriate blend of online and face-to-face interaction. Not infrequently, especially in classes traditionally taught face-to-face, the online component can be underutilized (Mortera-Gutierrez, 2006; Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2006).

In their study of a blended learning course involving pre-service and in-service teachers in their last quarter of college, Wade et al. (2001) described using the combination of a face-to-face issues course complemented by an online discussion forum. They too found that the face-to-face interactions in class allowed students to assist each other with technical difficulties and complemented and strengthened community building in the online class.
Online discussions. Online discussion was for the purpose of extending discussion of unresolved issues in the face-to-face class. Having clear criteria about the nature and quality of the online discussion postings was important. However, much of the responsibility for development of the online discussions was given to the students. They were given time in class to reflect in their small “newsgroups” on the quality of the previous online discussion. Students also brainstormed ideas for the posted questions starting each week’s discussion at the end of each class, giving a greater sense of ownership of the whole process. Educators involved described the online discussion as “forum for community building, undominated dialogue, social learning, and critical reflection” (Wade et al., 2001).

**Online Discussions**

Online discussion is a tool used by both blended and full e-learning courses. These discussions often take place on a school supported technology platform. Tu and Corry (2003) state that the “goal of online discussion is to promote constructive thinking and maximize interaction between and among instructors, students, contents, and interface.” One important way to maximize this interaction is to provide a variety of modes and approaches to encourage students to work together in various kinds of online discussions. These include collaborative research, peer tutoring, group projects, role playing, case study, scenarios, search and critique, student publishing, interview, and scaffolding of difficult concepts (Maurino, 2007; McIsaac & Craft, 2003; Tu & Corry, 2003).

Online discussions can be confusing to students as they try to determine what exactly is being expected of them. Clearly stated criteria of course expectations should be available in a well-formed syllabus (Knowlton, 2000; McIsaac & Craft, 2003; Tu & Corry, 2003;
Wade et al., 2001). These criteria should cover the length, quality, frequency and level of formality of postings.

A number of researchers have identified the building of community as being an important element of online discussions. McIsaac and Craft (2003) make a number of suggestions. To enhance building a community of learners, the instructor needs to set the tone for the online component through a warm environment. The online component must be both social as well as intellectual. A good way to start this process is by having students post their own personal biographies, including pictures.

Other elements of online discussions also deserve attention. Discussion cycle length (the time between the beginning and ending of a particular discussion thread or conversation) can vary from one to two weeks, and from weekend to weekend or weekday to weekday, depending on student, curricular and facilitator needs (Tu & Corry, 2003). Discussion group size should be limited to facilitate conversation and connection. Tu and Corry (2003) suggest from 10-15 participants and Wade et al. (2001) suggest a group no larger than 4-6. Group membership can remain the same throughout the semester to build a cohesive sense of small community (Wade et al., 2001) or change from cycle to cycle to allow all students to get to know each other (Hill, Raven & Han, 2002; McIsaac & Craft, 2003).

Moderation of online discussions is a key element in the capacity of online discussions to generate positive results. Tu and Corry (2003) state that “without appropriate moderation, online discussions may not extend thinking to deeper levels” and that this lack can “prevent the development of critical thought.” The instructor’s engagement in moderating and/or encouraging deeper thinking through discussion helps develop critical thinking that may not otherwise surface (Maurino, 2007; McIsaac & Craft, 2003). This may
be especially true of less mature and less self-directed students. More mature, self-confident, self-reflective learners may well thrive with less instructor involvement. For example, Wade et al. (2001) and McIsaac and Craft (2003) found that with their slightly older and more self-directed students, it was important that discussions be student led, with open-ended questions determined by the class during face-to-face sessions, and with very little instructor involvement. Wade et al.’s students may also have benefited from the opportunities they were given to critique the quality of their online interactions in light of clearly defined standards in their small group’s face-to-face interactions.

Careful attention to tasks given and questions asked in online discussions can provide the milieu that supports the development of deeper thinking. Maurino (2007) explores Ngeow and Kong’s four different kinds of discussion tasks: guided, inquiry, reflective and exploratory. Tasks with special relevance to the development of self-authorship are reflective and exploratory. Reflective discussion tasks help the student develop ways to assess personal as well as group process and progress. Exploratory discussion tasks require the highest level of thinking and processing. In looking at the kinds of questions that can be used to stimulate online discussions, Tu and Corry (2003) reference Hyman in defining five categories: definitional, empirical, relational, evaluative, and justification. Categories stimulating critical thought are relational questions, which ask students to make connections between and among facts, and justification questions, which ask for an extension of simple evaluations. Each of these approaches to enhancing the quality of online discussion can help deepen the level of critical thinking in which students engage.

Finally, there is the concept of scaffolding described by Holmes and Gardner (2006). They use the framework of “cognitive apprenticeship” and the four processes involved to
explore scaffolding. Modeling is the first task, showing how to carry out a task while explaining what is being done, why and how, so that the apprentice can attempt to do the same thing with support from the craftsperson as needed. The next process is scaffolding, which involves gradually building to new levels just beyond the reach of the learner, moving the learner through Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development.” The process of fading comes into play as the apprentice becomes more skilled, and the craftsperson moves out of the way, becoming more of an observer. Coaching is the fourth process, supporting all the other processes as needed, offering encouragement, and challenging or providing guidance or structure as needed. This process too can help students gradually develop deeper ways of thinking and understanding the complexities of life experiences.

Careful attention to all the elements of online discussion will help make the experience meaningful to the learner. A wide range of approaches, methods, and venues are available. Making good use of them can result in “well reasoned, reflective arguments and counterarguments; reference to the readings and other sources of knowledge and experience; and responsiveness to the contributions and points of view of other group members” (Wade et al. 2001). This kind of reflective thinking and receptivity to the views of others can lead to students’ eventual development of self-authorship, and thus show the possibility of the support technology can give to a critical multicultural perspective.

**Technology and Multicultural Education**

Marshall (2001) asks whether multicultural education and technology are the “odd couple” or a “perfect pair.” Munoz (2002) expresses concern that “new interactive media forms of multicultural education threaten to pass for teachers,” thus dislodging historically developed understandings that see “human interaction as critical to learning.” Countering
this worry, Sleeter and Tettegah (2002) point out the long history educators have of using various technologies in multicultural education, including artwork, music, filmstrips, and films. They feel today’s technology has simply expanded the use of these tools. Merryfield (2003) appears to sum up the issue by focusing on communication as she poses this question: “Can online communication be orchestrated in such a way that it is effective in developing cross-cultural competence, appreciation of differences, and global perspectives” (p. 147)?

Educators report using video, personal web pages, discussion boards, chat rooms and blended videos with background maps and historical graphics (Merryfield, 2003; Gabbard, D. A, L’Esperance, M. Perez, T., & Atkinson, T., 2002; Sleeter & Tettegah, 2002; Ramirez, 2002). Educators Gabbard et al. (2002) and Merryfield (2003) describe in detail their use of personal webpages to help students establish and explore a personal “sense of self,” which Baxter Magolda (2003) identifies as essential to the development of self-authorship. Merryfield finds that students share more deeply and personally when developing personal webpages, reading other students’ webpages, and reading peer responses to their own entries. She finds the writing and reflecting combine to enhance deeper thinking.

Online discussions appear to have their place in multicultural classrooms. When Merryfield first tried online discussions in a course that she had traditionally taught face-to-face, she was surprised at how willing students were to take on issues of racism, homophobia and White Privilege, issues that in the face-to-face setting produced marked resistance on the part of students. However, as she surveyed students at the end of the year, she found that one reason for the openness was that they did not feel a need to worry about meeting the other students face-to-face (2001). While this may be helpful in allowing students to explore the ideas more deeply, it may not contribute to developing student capacity for interpersonal
interactions with diverse others. In her later analysis of threaded discussions in the same course, she found students thought more deeply, analyzed and synthesized, and incorporated more references (2003). So while Merryfield finds potential advantages of online discussions, there is also the concern that students are not really engaging with each other as fellow human beings.

Online discussions also appear to allow for better expression of voices previously unheard. Tettegah (2002) says that computer mediated discussion “allows for freedom of voice,” and hopes that it “can provide us with an option of releasing suppressed voices through true and critical dialogue for better communication and true education” (p. 31). Ramirez (2002) goes further and calls this expression of voice “the most important lesson learned,” saying further that “the voice we need to allow our students to use is the one that empowers them to think in a non-obtrusive, non-stereotypical environment that freely allows discourse” (p. 40).

How free are students to share that voice? Hughes argues that “identity matters online, too” (Hughes, 2007, p. 713). Hughes proposes a concept for online communication that she calls “identity congruence” that happens “when an individual’s social identities, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender and occupational status, are consistent with the topics and patterns of communication and associated discourses of identity that are made available by an online group or community” (p. 714). If a student does not develop “identity congruence,” the student may not be fully engaged in the online interaction. They may also be disregarded by fellow classmates.

Hughes explains that there are numerous challenges to developing identity congruence. These include:
different ways of interacting: asynchronous or synchronous, different patterns of participation in terms of frequency, regularity, or time of day/night), different writing styles: formal or informal, lengthy or succinct, academic or personal, and different learning approaches: collaborative or independent, supportive or challenging.

(Hughes, 2007, p. 715)

In addition, Hughes points out that all of these differences can be “implicated in the construction of identities in discourses of class, gender, etc.” (p. 715). Facilitating an online discussion with these challenges in mind becomes even more important and more complex.

While some of these educators’ experiences appear to indicate positive outcomes when technology is used in multicultural education, they also express reservations and point out challenges. Merryfield (2003) explains that while she feels that “online technologies are important tools,” she has “concerns about online cross-cultural interaction substituting for face-to-face interaction” (p. 147). Sleeter and Tettegah (2002), while pointing out that the internet “extends and supports multimedia and face-to-face conversation,” do not propose that electronic media replace print or that distance education replace face-to-face in multicultural education. Schoorman (2002), after exploring the benefits of an email based educational opportunity for pre-service teachers and middle school students, points out that it was only after meeting face-to-face that students in both groups actually took their relationships to a deeper level. Learning to interact face-to-face is key to development of interpersonal capacity.

Using technology in a diversity course necessarily invites challenges based on the historical presence of the digital divide. It is important to consider any impact the digital divide may have, both the tangible factors (such as access and familiarity) and less tangible
factors (variety of experience with computers and software limitations), on students from diverse backgrounds as they attempt to engage in a course with an online component (Morse, 2004). In addition, Hughes’ “identity congruence” idea is important to remember. In “imagining the future” Hughes describes online discussions in which every participant strives to be sure that all are listened to with respect, all are encouraged to participate fully, and differences of opinion are embraced as learning opportunities. Required for this level of participation are a strong sense of personal integrity, autonomy, and connection, a true self-authorship. Yet most of the students using these online discussions have yet to experience environments supportive of their development of self-authorship.

So while technology appears to have potential for use in multicultural classrooms, it is important to consider Munoz’s suggestion (2002) that technology be used only “after applying serious consideration to the full range of possible consequences” (p. 23).

**Summary**

Students graduating from today’s colleges and universities encounter a world that is increasingly connected that will bring them into contact with people who come from much different backgrounds than their own. Intercultural maturity based on the foundational capacities of self-authorship is required. These foundational capacities are cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal maturity. Through the process of developing self-authorship, individuals move from reliance on outside forces as the source of identity and values toward developing their own internal compass. This, in turn, allows them to understand and appreciate the richness of the diverse experiences of those with whom they come in contact, to balance these with personal values and perspectives, and to think and act in self-authored ways.
Multicultural education provides a key to the development of this self-authorship. Not only does diversity education enable students to become better able to function in diverse environments, but research into the impact of diversity initiatives on college campuses has found that these initiatives also develop the larger critical thinking and perspective taking skills needed in college courses. In addition, they develop increasing understanding and capacity for becoming engaged in social justice issues, thus promoting the democratic outcomes necessary for civic involvement and support. Diversity initiatives on campus, through structural, informal interactional, and curricular domains, help students in the process of developing self-authorship in the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. Curricular initiatives that engage students in dialogue on issues of difference and privilege are especially effective. Using principles and approaches developed to enhance intergroup dialogue can provide a foundation for development and study of multicultural courses which incorporate dialogic techniques.

In addition to the use of dialogue to promote intercultural maturity and self-authorship, the use of technology has proven useful in engaging students in content and discussion to promote critical thinking. Blended learning courses, incorporating face-to-face and online components, allow for the best use of the benefits each has to offer the learning process. Research into the use of online discussion provides understanding of ways to best incorporate this strategy into blended learning courses. While there are questions about the appropriateness of combining multicultural education with technology due especially to the historical development of each educational element, educators are trying various combinations and ways of using technology to support multicultural education and finding
them to be successful. Applying the principles of the Learning Partnership Model to support self-authorship development may further enhance these efforts.

The course I researched for this study, U St 150, is a blended multicultural course utilizing dialogue as a basis for helping students begin the process of developing intercultural maturity and its foundation, self-authorship. I examine the ways in which the three domains of self-authorship, cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal, are expressed in online discussion.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore how elements of self-authorship are expressed in online journals and online discussions of undergraduate students at a Midwestern land grant university in a blended learning multicultural course. The “lens of self-authorship” provides the theoretical basis of this research. Self-authorship is a constructivist developmental theory encompassing three domains of human growth: cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal.

This chapter covers the context for the research including the course, the participants and the participant researcher, and the research design which includes data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness and limitations.

Context for the Research

The Course: University Studies 150: Dialogues on Diversity

U St 150 is an undergraduate, one credit, pass-fail course qualifying as a “diversity credit” fulfilling one of the three credits required for university graduation at a Midwestern land grant university. The course accommodates 100 students, divided into five sections with 20 students per section. It is a blended learning course, offered the second half of each semester. Over seven weeks, each section meets face-to-face once a week for two hours. In addition, the class meets asynchronously online using WebCT, the course management system currently in use at the university. The entire course membership meets face-to-face for final presentations and concluding remarks.

A course packet with syllabus, schedule, course requirements and readings that explore concepts and theories guides both the face-to-face interactions and the online discussions. The online environment provides a variety of online resources, including
articles and video clips. Students are responsible for responding to a posted question by posting two entries of at least 50 words in threaded discussions. These questions are designed to prepare them for the upcoming week’s face-to-face class. In addition, they are required to write a weekly journal entry of at least 250 words reflecting on both the online discussion and the face-to-face discussions of the previous week. Attendance at all face-to-face sessions and completion of associated online required postings results in a passing grade.

Each section of the course is facilitated by two or more volunteers who are invited to participate because of their potential for sensitive and adept facilitation. They receive a day-long orientation focused on developing understanding of the concept of dialogue, the purpose of the course, the materials and activities, the development of Zuniga’s “group process” (forming, storming, norming, and performing) and facilitation skill-building. Discussion of the online component usually centers on use of the technology. One or two facilitator reflection gatherings are held during the course of the half-semester. In addition to facilitating the face-to-face interactions of the class, facilitators are responsible for taking roll and ensuring that all student online postings are counted.

U St 150 and the other courses which fulfill the university’s three credit “diversity requirement” are to enable students to achieve at least two of the following learning outcomes:

- articulate how their personal life experiences and choices fit within the context of the larger mosaic of U.S. society, indicating how they have confronted and critically analyzed their perceptions and assumptions about diversity-related issues.
• analyze and evaluate the contributions of various underrepresented social groups in shaping the history and culture of the U.S.

• analyze individual and institutional forms of discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, etc.

• analyze the perspectives of groups and individuals affected by discrimination

• analyze how cultural diversity and cooperation among social groups affect U.S. society. (University Catalogue, 2007)

Goals of U St 150 focus on exploring diversity “within the context of the . . . campus” and on creating “a welcoming climate that values and appreciates diversity.” These specific objectives have been established for the course:

• To develop a capacity for dialogue: active listening, suspending judgments, identifying assumptions, reflection and inquiry.

• To reflect upon and learn about self and others as members of social groups in the context of systems of privilege and oppression.

• To explore the similarities and differences in experiences across social group memberships.

• To identify individual and collective actions for interrupting injustices and building alliances to promote greater social justice.

• To gain knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of difference and dominance at the personal and political levels.

• To develop skills to work with differences, disagreements and conflicts as opportunities for deeper understanding and transformation. (U St 150 course packet, 2008, p. 2)
Given these goals and objectives, U St 150 has the potential to encourage students’ development of self-authorship by providing opportunities for students to interact with diverse others. Ideally this interaction takes place through class interactions. Instructional materials include a wide array of online articles and media supplementing in-class videos and interactive activities. These materials are designed to engage students in exploration of five social identities: class, religion, race, gender and sexual orientation. Through exposure to different experiences in these social identities and their intersections, students are encouraged to think more deeply about their own identities and how these relate to others’ identities. These experiences have the potential to engage students in provocative experiences which can further the development of self-authorship.

**Research Participants**

Using convenience sampling, one of the five sections of U St 150 was chosen. Access was granted through the professor in charge of the course. Each section has at least two co-facilitators who share responsibility for facilitating classroom interactions and moderating the online environment. As co-facilitator of one of the sections, with my co-facilitator’s agreement, I studied students in one section.

Students in U St 150 are reflective of but not identical to the undergraduate population of the university. Looking at racial identity, compared to an 88% White student population at the university, U St 150 students were 76% White in the years between 1999 and 2003. There were slightly higher percentages of each reported minority group than the general student population. Many of the White students come from small Midwestern towns and have their first exposure to racial diversity when they arrive on the university campus. Other social identities are not as easily tracked, however, it may be assumed that students at
this university have less exposure to diversity across a variety of social identities. U St 150 provides students with an important opportunity to connect with people different from themselves through study of diversity issues. As such, it represents an opportunity to help encourage and to study the process of self-authorship development.

Baxter Magolda and King (2007) and Pizzolato (2007) point out the difficulty in ascertaining the existence of self-authorship. Pizzolato finds that while individuals can act in ways that appear to be self-authored by exploring reasons behind actions it becomes clear that self-authorship has not developed. On the other hand, individuals can engage in actions that appear not to have evidence of self-authorship while exploration into their reasoning process reveals development of self-authorship. Pizzolato points out that it is only through exploring the reasoning behind decision-making can one more clearly understand the extent of the development of self-authorship.

The purpose of this research, identifying evidence of self-authorship in students’ online discussion and journal postings, necessitates deeper understanding of a given student’s development of self-authorship for more accurate identification. The researcher determined to focus the search for evidence of self-authorship on students who were available for a single interview to be conducted toward the end of the semester. These interviews were to explore students’ decision-making processes and other elements relevant to self-authorship. This allowed the researcher a deeper understanding of online and journal postings relative to those particular students’ development of self-authorship.

Toward the end of the semester all students in the section were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. Eleven expressed their willingness. The end of the semester resulted in two of the eleven students getting sick and being unavailable, one dropping out of
all class activities, and two others being too busy for interviews. The five students not interviewed included a Latina woman, an Iraqi man and three White students, two women and one man. The remaining six students were interviewed (described below; see Table 1).

Each of the six grew up in with families that were at least nominally Christian. Class differences were hard to determine, and not directly explored in class. Class online postings indicated that each appeared to identify themselves as heterosexual. More detailed information about each follows below:

Table 1.

A Summary of Some Information about the Six Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Racial identity</th>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Mid-sized rural city</td>
<td>Moving home with mom</td>
<td>Mexican Nationals influx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Large rural city</td>
<td>“Breaking the odds”</td>
<td>First to go to college in her family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Large rural city</td>
<td>“the only class where we got to talk”</td>
<td>International travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>African city</td>
<td>Recently committed Christian</td>
<td>International school in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Small rural town</td>
<td>From engineering to music ed.</td>
<td>Long-haired music “nerd” in small rural town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubrey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Small rural town</td>
<td>Slang-speaking, self-described “odd duck”</td>
<td>International travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kelsey is a White female freshman from a larger town in a rural Midwestern state. She grew up in a neighborhood bordered by a large population of Mexican Nationals, recent immigrants to the state. She has been intensely aware of both her family’s and her town’s reaction to and treatment of this population. Her recent decision to move home and transfer to a nearby college has met with criticism from friends accusing her of bowing to parental authority.

Veronica is an African American female freshman from a rural Midwestern city. She has multiple siblings and is the youngest child of a single mother. She is the first in her family to go to college. She has school and neighborhood friends her age who have dropped out of school and are already parents of more than one child. She has worked consciously to avoid being “that statistic,” as she calls it.

Andrew is a White male, a senior from a rural Midwestern city. He and his two brothers attended Catholic schools, but he does not identify himself as a traditional Catholic. The neighborhood he grew up in was very diverse, an experience which has given him insights into others who are different from him. He is graduating this semester with majors in environmental studies, history and sociology. Quietly confident, he is never overbearing. He is thoughtful and reasoned in his interactions. Although it is the end of his last semester and he is taking 22 credits, he feels this course is important enough that he takes time out of a very busy schedule for our interview.

John is a White male senior who grew up in an African country where his father was in agriculture. An only child, he attended a nearby “international school” where his mother also worked. He is quiet and thoughtful. Growing up in a country where his skin color made him the minority and going to a school with students from around the world, John does not
quite fit in with other typical college students at this university. As a senior in “Liberal Studies,” he has not yet figured out what direction he wishes to go in life, so is carefully considering his options. In his interview, John carefully considers his words and the ways he frames his thoughts. His answers are often short and quiet, at times requiring some prompting for elaboration.

Justin is a White male freshman from a rural background where a work ethic was assumed. He attended school in a small, rural, Midwestern town where he was a benchwarmer in sports but a leader in music and dance activities. He has one sibling, a sister five years older than he is. He wonders how his now shoulder length hair will be received back at home. He has had little experience with diversity but has been encouraged by family to think for himself. He comfortably describes himself as a non-drinker and non-smoker on a college campus where he perceives both as being norms. He was perhaps the last student to leave the final Dialogues class, seeming not to want to leave, not wanting the experience to end.

Aubrey is a White female freshman from a small, rural Midwestern town whose only diversity growing up comes from students and faculty at a small liberal arts college and a large church-based residential facility for children and teens. In a family with two girls four years apart, Aubrey is the younger daughter who has been more apt to question parental dictates and mores. She appears to be something of a square peg who has not fit into the round holes in her small-town society, causing her to spend time thinking about her identity and her relations with others. Aubrey’s interview transcript is very colloquial, freely making liberal use of the word “like,” using sounds like “ladadada” to insert commentary, and
“quoting” conversations as she explains interactions with others. She is a quiet observer, watching and considering the reactions of fellow students.

**The Participant Researcher**

A key issue in qualitative research has to do with the relationship between a participant researcher and the other participants (Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 1999). In this research, I functioned both as a participant and a researcher as I served as a co-facilitator in a U St 150 section. This was my fourth semester co-facilitating a section. Rapport and trust building with students in the course is a normal part of the development of the dialogic process in each section. In one way, I was challenged with “fitting in” as my age immediately puts a barrier between me and some of the students. However, for the most part, by the end of a course there is at least a certain amount of acceptance and connection.

Another challenge with qualitative research is researcher bias (Glesne, 1999; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Increasing understanding of racial inequities and entrenched social injustice has been a growing personal mission for many years, leading me to tend to view the world through a racial justice lens. I have been challenged to stay focused on the multiple social identities and their intersections which self-authorship incorporates.

**Research Design**

This research took place at a Midwestern university during the spring semester, 2008, in one section of U St 150.

**Data Collection**

I received permission from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research on students. Data were collected from a variety of sources (see Table 2). I collected student data from one section of U St 150 during the spring of 2008. I analyzed
Table 2

Sources from Which Data Were Gathered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Source of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online dialogue threads</td>
<td>Students in one course section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online individual weekly journals</td>
<td>Students in one course section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews at end of semester</td>
<td>Several students from section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal journal</td>
<td>Self as participant observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from classroom discussions</td>
<td>Self as participant observer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

students’ online discussion postings and their individual weekly assignments. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I interviewed all students willing to participate in an interview. As participant researcher, I kept a journal. I wrote notes during class when not disruptive to the dialogue process and wrote in a journal immediately following some of the class periods.

Pizzolato (2007) has found that using the “Experience Survey” (ES) in conjunction with her “Self-Authorship Survey” (SAS-R) provides deeper insight into the development of self-authorship. I received permission from her to make use of these two tools (J. E. Pizzolato, personal communication, February 18, 2008). The Interview Protocol (Appendix A) was followed for the interviews. Questions in the protocol were modeled after Pizzolatto’s “Experience Survey.” My personal observation is that college students have a tendency to answer complex questions fairly simply, so I was concerned that the questions listed in the protocol would not explore deeply enough students’ development of self-authorship. To extend these questions, I had on hand the statements from Pizzolato’s Self-Authorship Survey.” As students were interested, we explored these statements and they
shared any thoughts and reactions they had. Finally, I was curious about any impact students might report from their participation in U St 150, so for those interested, we explored briefly whether they felt the course had any impact on their ability to see from others’ perspectives, what they may have learned about social systems and their effects on group norms and relations, and if they saw any personal growth in understanding of their own identity relative to various social identities. The interviews ranged widely, as we followed the students’ interests and concerns within the very broad context of the above set of questions.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews from the six students were transcribed. Students were given pseudonyms. Transcribed interviews were analyzed by searching for coding units related to the three stages of self-authorship development described in Appendices B, C, and D (Baxter Magolda 2001, 2003, 2004a & 2007; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). I read and re-read the transcripts to better understand ways in which the students’ words reflected levels of self-authorship development. Appendices B, C, and D cover, respectively, the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. Each includes beginning, intermediate and mature levels of development.

Online journals of the students who were interviewed were subjected to the same reading in light of self-authorship concepts. These were compared to the online journals of other students in the same class who were not interviewed. In these comparisons, I looked at length of postings, type of responses (responding to others, generating new ideas, relating ideas to outside or other sources, etc), depth of understanding of concepts being explored, and timeliness.
Online discussion postings for all students in the class were read in order of posting times to explore interactions among students. These postings were compared to each other in terms of length, type of response, depth of understanding, and timing. I looked especially at students who were interviewed to see how their “level” of self-authorship was expressed in interaction with others online and in response to the posted questions for the week.

As McMillan and Schumacher describe, this qualitative research project required extensive continuous reading of the literature to refine my understanding (2001, p. 134). This has resulted in reformulations of the problem as my understanding of the data interacted with the content of the literature.

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness is a more appropriate goal for qualitative research than validity. They point out that the methodology employed in quantitative research is determined by the criteria for establishing validity: internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The concept of validity is based on a purpose of finding clearly defined, unambiguous statements of truth, the positivist goal of quantitative research. Qualitative research seeking, instead, to describe elements of human behavior, complex and variable as it is, requires a different standard. Lincoln and Guba suggest that trustworthiness provides a more helpful rubric for analysis of the credibility of qualitative research. Criteria for trustworthiness are as follows: “truth value” (p. 290) is determined by credibility, applicability is more appropriately found in looking at transferability, consistency can be viewed through the lens of dependability, and neutrality can be replaced by a concept of confirmability.
To establish trustworthiness, I followed Lincoln and Guba’s suggestions by using triangulation, peer review and debriefing, and thick descriptions (1985). The online journals and the interviews combined with in-class interactions provided a measure of triangulation for this study. Peer review and debriefing through interaction with my co-major professor who was also the professor in charge of U St 150 provided some external reflection and input. Additional peer debriefing with my life partner, a quantitative researcher with a PhD in crop sciences, and a sister, a PhD professor in sociology, provided additional external input. As McMillan and Schumacher (2001) suggest, all observations and reflections in my personal journal were written as thickly as possible to provide additional insights into evidence of self-authorship in the participants. My journal also provided some element of reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and “disciplined subjectivity” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) as I analyzed and reflected on the research and analysis as it unfolded. External auditing has been provided by Masters’ committee members. (Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 1999).
CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, I analyze the results of this study. I present two sections in exploring self-authorship in the online portion of this multicultural blended learning course. I look for evidence of self-authorship and ways the course impacts its development.

To determine self-authorship, it is necessary to understand the reasoning behind words and actions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; Pizzolato, 2007). For this reason, I interviewed six students. Understanding these students’ level of self-authorship, allows for better understanding of how their self-authorship is expressed in the online discussion environment. The interview protocol I followed can be found in Appendix A. Appendices B, C, and D are the rubrics I used to analyze students’ interviews, online journals and discussion postings.

The first section of this chapter analyzes evidence of self-authorship in these six students, both through their interviews and journals, and through their online discussion postings. The second section will look at the course itself and ways self-authorship is expressed, supported or hindered in course interactions. Self-authorship will be explored in several different areas. The first two are the impact on self-authorship development of the lack of facilitation and the presence of resistance in the online environment. A third element is an exploration of possible reasons for the extreme lateness of several students’ online discussion postings as seen through the lens of self-authorship. The fourth looks at the interrelationship between the online and the face-to-face interactions.

Chapter five will close with a summary of findings and implications for the use of technology in blended multicultural courses for the development of self-authorship.
Evidence of Self-Authorship

The six students who were interviewed tended to be those who were most invested in the concepts the class is exploring and most willing to share their perspectives. So valuable was the course to them that each made time in busy schedules at the end of a spring semester to be interviewed.

Each of the six has come to the university with some key experience of not fitting into their home settings. As such, learning to navigate the challenges they have encountered appears to have encouraged each to have begun the process of developing self-authorship (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004).

Below, I explore the concept of self-authorship as it is expressed by these six students. To analyze these students’ development, I initially wrote profiles of each looking at the three domains of self-authorship, cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal, as expressed in the interviews, journals and online discussions. Two students are highlighted in each of the three domains. My purpose in doing this is to give the reader a brief description of both self-authorship and these students’ particular development and how it is expressed in the online discussions.

Cognitive

Cognitive growth occurs as one moves from assuming that all knowledge is certain and can be categorized as right or wrong through an evolving understanding of uncertainty and awareness of multiple perspectives into a capacity to see knowledge as dependent on the situation and to shift both perspectives and cultural frames of reference. Beliefs move from being externally defined by authorities who are not questioned to a recognition of the
importance of determining one’s own personal processes for choosing beliefs and finally to the development of an internal belief system that is stable, yet open to reinterpretation.

**Aubrey.** Aubrey is beginning the process of developing self-authorship. She is rather naïve in many ways. While she embraces the experience of learning about others’ experiences and perspectives, she is somewhat self-absorbed. However, Aubrey describes herself as spending “a significant amount of time thinking about things, (thinking) about the way I think.”

Her evolving awareness of multiple perspectives is evident as she expresses appreciation for U St 150 for giving her the “chance to gain other peoples’ perspective on things and, like, see how people would react to like what other people would say.” She explains further that during the class in which we discussed race after watching the video, “What’s Race Got to Do With It,” she described how,

One girl said one thing. Like, I was watching Veronica [the single African American student in the class] and she had this look on her face then went like “yeah, that’s bullshit.” Like to her . . . she was kind of like, “I don’t agree with you at all.” And then, didn’t respond. So . . . I find it interesting to see how people interpret what other people say. To be “oh, whatever,” or to take it to be completely offensive. (Interview 4/29/08)

Aubrey’s exploration of the concept of “right or wrong” reflects her budding awareness of multiple perspectives and the uncertainty of knowledge claims. She says:

Some things might be clearly right or wrong. I don’t know. That’s a difficult one. I don’t think it would be an ideal world if things were right or wrong because like you know that would be boring. Like some things are like, depends like on the
reasons behind something. Like, it may be [wrong] for somebody. But it’s like the reason behind it could totally change could totally change it into something that’s right. So, I mean, if everything is just right or wrong, then you’re kind of screwed. (Interview 4/29/08)

Aubrey’s online journals express thoughts consistent with those she shared in the interview. They are among the longest postings of the class, through which she shares her ideas and thoughts with animation and energy. Aubrey’s comment, “I love listening to people and hearing their responses to questions asked of them,” shows her enjoyment of trying to understand different peoples’ perspectives, an element of cognitive development. Her exploration of cognitive complexity can be seen in this journal posting as she considers the video, “What’s Race Got to Do With It” and the class discussion that followed:

I really have no idea what some people go through, and I feel bad. I know that because I’m white I will just be seen differently and I think that that’s unfair. I wish that the world was fair and I try to remind people that we are all equal. I agree that white people are in bad situations too, and it’s not just minorities. Yet, the majority (of people in “bad situations”) is people of color and different ethnicity. . . . We are at a University, wearing decent clothes, eating; we haven’t had to scavenge for food or shelter or be uneducated due to lack of money. I think that (white) people need to understand that first in order to talk about it like they’ve experienced it. (April 16, 2008 10:10 PM)

In her postings in the online discussions, Aubrey shares her perspectives more openly than she does in the face-to-face setting, resulting in the expression of voice which Tettegah
(2002) and Ramirez (2002) indicate can happen in online multicultural courses. Cognitively, she explores complexity through comments like this:

This is a very difficult situation, and it’s very hard to decide who is right and who is wrong. On the one hand the professor should try to work something out for Rashid because it’s not his fault that the class is only offered at that time and it happens to conflict with his religion. At the same time though it’s not the teachers fault either and why should he make exceptions? (April 21, 2008 5:06 PM)

In addition, she explores her growing appreciation for the value of sharing and exploring multiple perspectives. This is illustrated by the following comment about Greg, a gay man whose article about his struggle with his identity was the focus of the online discussion:

I hope people in the same situations as Greg would be able to write openly about it the way he did. I think that by having people read their stories, people will better understand the difficulties that are faced. Hopefully it will make people more understanding and then when people go to raise children, they will teach them to respect everyone and not treat people differently. (April 6, 2008 10:31 PM)

The online discussion provides Aubrey an opportunity to share her thoughts and explore ideas which reflect her growing cognitive complexity. While she does not appear to read other students’ postings and does not acknowledge them in what she writes, her more open perspective may provide opportunities to help other students explore their own ideas more deeply.

**John.** Cognitively John vacillates between desiring a clear sense of right and wrong. He grapples with accepting uncertainty. On the other hand, he is one of the students
interviewed who most clearly can shift into alternative cultural world views, as long as they are in accord with his own perspectives.

Of all the White students interviewed, John appears to have the most intimate appreciation for the legitimacy of other cultures. He is able to engage in meaningful interactions based on mutual respect with students from a variety of diverse backgrounds. Among all the White students, he is the only one who talks actively about how important it is to him to seek out friends from a wide variety of cultures. It is the less aware students whose lack of appreciation for different perspectives who are the hardest for him to engage in conversation.

One of the most important things John identifies as having learned from U St 150 is an appreciation of small town Midwestern natives and the lack of contact with diversity they often have. He appears somewhat surprised at the prevalence of this small town rural experience and says, “People come from small towns, and they’re just not used to certain things. I think I understand them a little bit better.”

John appears to attempt to use his own processes for choosing his belief system, rather than relying on authority figures’ claims. This is apparent in the process he describes as he talks about a major decision he has recently made to become a committed Christian. Differences between two of his groups of friends created a dissonance within John. His response to that dissonance was to “search,” taking responsibility for his own decision-making and for crafting his own personal belief system.

To do this, he talked to two close friends. He describes these people as “people I trust a lot, I guess, respect.” His parents were not people he would look to “for advice like that.” Nor was there a pastor he was interested in talking to, explaining, “I don’t see pastors as,
like, the supreme authority. That’s not my view of them. I see them more as people. And
I’d rather talk to someone that I have a closer relationship to. That’s more important to me.”
One friend, while not a traditional authority source, was the “Hall Director,” his “boss,” and
the other was a peer, a fellow “Community Advisor.” While John turned to these friends for
help in making his decision, he also appears to take some responsibility for developing his
own identity. In answer to the question, “How did you make the decision?” he answers, “A
lot of prayer, I guess.” Prayer was combined with “a lot of reading the Bible.”

But having decided to be a Christian does not mean that John currently accepts any
particular “religious community.” He says, “I don’t even like the ‘religious community’ idea
that much. It’s important to me, but I think of it more as, uh, my own walk that I’m going
through that I have to figure out on my own.”

In this decision making process, John does not appear to blindly accept authority’s
knowledge claims. He takes responsibility for choosing his own beliefs. He seeks input
from friends, does his own reading of the Bible for personal understanding, and, it would
appear, through “prayer,” which would also include thinking and reflection, has taken
responsibility for choosing his own personal beliefs.

Of all the students interviewed, John has the most difficulty deciding whether “In an
ideal world everything would be clearly right or wrong, with no exceptions.” At first he
says, “I think in my opinion, most things are.” Since he left the sentence dangling, I asked,
“Right or wrong?” And he replied,

Yeah, but I don’t think everything should be. If I want to wear a red shirt and not a
blue shirt, I think there are certain things that don’t really matter very much. I like to
think of most things as either right or wrong. (Interview 4/29/08)
When questioned further, relating to his earlier stated appreciation of different perspectives, he explained, “I’m pretty good at that because, um, the Bible talks about loving people and not judging people. . . . So, I really like people, even if I don’t agree with certain things about them.” Going back to the concept of “right and wrong,” he finally decides that, “I guess, technically I’m supposed to follow what authority figures tell me to do, respect the laws, but sometimes I think they’re silly and I think I want to walk across the grass and so I do.” And he finally decides that “it’s more the big things” that he feels fall into the “right or wrong” category.

Exploration of John’s journal entries confirms what he talks about during his interview. His comfort with diversity is clear in his first posting. He explains:

I have a diverse group of friends because I seek them out, because it is what I’m used to. I grew up in a country where I was the minority, went to an international school, and had friends from just about everywhere. I am not one of those people that claim to be colour blind, who don’t see people as black or white or yellow or red. I see people as diverse and love them for it. I want to know people from everywhere, from all different walks of life. (April 29, 2008 3:23 AM)

In his online discussion postings, John takes almost a mentoring attitude toward fellow classmates, many of whom are freshmen. He brings in other information to supplement the conversations. He makes strong statements encouraging awareness of ways personal actions perpetuate social norms and a willingness attempt to effect change. For example, he says,

I have some friends who find it very amusing to make gay jokes. I don’t really find them funny but I don’t normally say anything about it. While this does not directly
hurt anyone present at the time, it does make people think its ok to make fun of people. This just perpetuates discrimination and oppression in society. I really should say something, but it is difficult to tell your friends what to do. (April 29, 2008 2:40 AM)

Unfortunately, eight of his 14 postings, primarily ones at the beginning of the course, are late. They are also shorter than the required 75 words and posted within minutes of each other instead of 24 hours apart. It almost appears they are painful for him to post. His comments during the interview support this idea as he says,

I would definitely rather talk than post online. Sometimes I feel like with a lot of online courses, it’s easy for people just to go in and type something and not really think about it, or you think about it and say what everyone wants to hear. (Interview 4/29/08)

The lateness of these postings means that fellow students may not even read what he has written, as they’ve already posted theirs and moved on to the next week. This diminishes the potential value his somewhat more self-authored perspectives may have for fellow students.

Intrapersonal

Intrapersonal maturity develops as one moves from lacking awareness of one’s social identities and their intersections to a beginning awareness and finally to integrating those social identities into a cohesive sense of self which is open to new perspectives and is conscious of the impact of social identities at all levels of society. This identity moves from being externally defined to internally developed. Initially, differences are seen as a threat,
then are gradually accepted as legitimate and finally embraced. As one develops, a sense of personal responsibility for choosing one’s beliefs becomes more important.

**Veronica.** Veronica appears to see clearly the environment in which she has grown up and, while not taking the position that this environment is “wrong,” has clearly made the decision that she does not wish to be “that statistic” or to be “part of that.” In the intrapersonal domain, she acknowledges her need to take responsibility for crafting her own identity. When asked about a major decision she had made, Veronica chose to talk about deciding to go to the University. She explained that:

> our high school encouraged us to apply for college, and I heard (the university) was a good school, and a couple of my friends were applying here, and so I was like, “why don’t I try?” So it was kind of just a like a friend thing and just seeing something new. (Interview 4/30/08)

This description could indicate that Veronica has not developed a sense of identity separate from others’. Yet, by exploring more deeply, her reasoning appears more complex. While her mother was encouraging, Veronica explains, “Basically I did it on my own.” She is very happy about her decision because “it’s an accomplishment! I’m the first to go to college out of all my family.” She goes on to say,

> I was happy that I did it by myself. Like, I did it myself without any help. It was just me growing older and makin’ my own decisions. And I just realized I was growin’ older and makin’ my own decisions. And I realized I was growin’ up and you have to do stuff for yourself. (Interview 4/30/08)

When I ask about her understanding of the concept of “social systems,” she turns immediately to talking about her peers with whom she grew up in her neighborhood. It
becomes apparent that she has had to be even more proactive in creating her own identity than this comment might imply. She explains:

where I live, there’s not really a good neighborhood. Basically there’s not a lot of kids that go to school. . . . they drop out and they’re not bein’ proactive in doin’ what they wanta do. . . . I know a lot of girls my age that are parents with three or four kids already. I can’t imagine that with like three or four different babies’ fathers . . . it’s so crazy . . . they’re still not doin’ nothin’ with their life. So I kinda didn’t wanta be that statistic. So I kinda want to get out of that. I think with them it’s just, like, “well this is where I am; this is what happened,” and they just stayed there. (Interview 4/30/08)

Not only is Veronica aware of the class identity challenges she is facing, but she lives in a state that has little more than a two percent African American population. She is faced with being a “minority” in almost every situation. In addition, she is a woman and is aware of the added challenges of that social identity. She is excited about seeing the changes that she feels are taking place and explains,

bein’ a woman, faced with the challenges that guys “were superior” to women, it kinda made me want to stand up as a woman and be me and go for it and . . . don’t let nothin’ hold me back, because at times, women didn’t have those choices. So it’s kinda like, I’m makin’ something out of myself as a woman, which wouldn’t be possible . . . 50 years ago or so. And like bein’ African American, it’s crazy to me . . . Barack Obama, how he’s runnin’ for president! It’s like we came so far from bein’ slaves, from actually bein’ owned, to actually bein’ on the podium! (Interview 4/30/08)
In her online discussion postings, Veronica posts late until Week 4 when she responds to the “Doll Test” video, described later in this paper. However, no one seems to be able to respond to Veronica’s sharing of her personal experiences. She does not allow this lack of response to dampen her willingness to share openly her perspectives relative to the course content, which she continues to do in increasingly timely and direct postings. Her online postings are among the longest in the class.

The following week, she shows awareness of her Christian privilege and comes down firmly on the side of respecting and protecting a minority student’s religious rights, one of only a few students who take this stand. Veronica’s final postings share her sense of pride in her identity “of becoming a smart, African American Woman!!! With that said, I will continue to be myself and teaching those around me with the knowledge I learned in class.” To be this open about her sense of identity as an evolving process and not inhibited by a class with minimal diversity, shows evidence of development of intrapersonal maturity.

Veronica’s development of self-authorship fits the findings of Pizzolato (2004) in that her social identities have already required that she navigate complex situations as she develops her own personal identity. Thus, she has entered the university with a somewhat more advanced development of self-authorship than many of her freshman peers.

**Justin.** In the intrapersonal domain, while inexperienced with situations which would place him in a global context, Justin has developed a fairly coherent sense of who he is. He appears comfortable with people who are different from him. He is becoming aware of social identities, at least in terms of gender.

His long hair, he knows, will be a cause of teasing and perhaps harassment when he goes home for the summer, and he explains, “I’ll just take it for face value, I guess, and kind
of give them my two cents worth, and that’ll be over with.” He likes it long and has an internal sense that it is right for him. At work, at a grocery store meat department, he is “waiting for, expectantly, and dreading the day when, or if, I get told to cut my hair,” because “I know I’m going to challenge it.” A co-worker has a pony tail down to the middle of her back, he tells me, and he keeps his hair neat and pulled back, so:

Like I kind of want to challenge it but again I don’t want to challenge it because I don’t want to lose my job and get a bad recommendation for being an upstart, or whatever, and causing problems. But on the other hand, that’s kind of my place to do that. Because they can’t really say that. (Interview 4/28/08)

His sense of personal autonomy is surprisingly unshaken by the opinions of others. During his senior high school year, he confronted the position taken by one of his two band directors. This band director refused to direct the band for the high school Commencement, even though it was his responsibility, suggesting that a CD would work just as well. Within the span of one school day, Justin and his fellow musicians revolted, and Justin offered to direct the band. This led to an impromptu meeting between the school principal, the two band directors, the school superintendent and Justin.

So going against it was . . . a big deal, and it’s hard to go against the grain. . . . It’s hard to push when you know there’s going to be a lot of resistance. . . . That was the one thing where it was, like, I know that I have to do this. (Interview 4/28/08)

Much pressure was put on him to back out, but Justin held firm in his resolve, and finally the second band director, a person who has served as his mentor, angrily agreed to direct the band. At first Justin was shaken by his decision, not knowing whether his mentor was angry with him or with his co-director, yet feeling he had acted with integrity and not
allowed concern about others’ approval to impact his behavior. But he was very happy with the resulting Commencement music and his ongoing positive relationship with his mentor. Looking back over the experience, however, he still comments, “that kind of, took a lot out of me, doing that,”

Justin explores the relationship between gender and money. He understands that “there are systems kind of against women” and that by “going into a teaching career, that’s a more women dominated field,” a decision he has recently made, he faces lower pay. He explains “part of me thinks that’s just because it’s a women dominated field. Just because women are the majority, they don’t pay them as well.” Were he to stay in engineering, he knows he would have the better salary, explaining that that’s what a lot of people do engineering for, is just because of the money. And that just wasn’t a fit for me. I mean, everyone wants the money. Not everyone wants to solve the problems and to do this and to do this and it was just kind of like, that’s not what I really wanted to do. I want to do something that I like. (Interview 4/28/08)

When it comes to following the crowd, or worrying about being seen as “the loser,” Justin appears quite comfortable with not drinking and smoking. He says, “I’ve made the decision” and that not sticking to that decision would leave him feeling “not as happy with myself . . . because I’d feel like I let myself down.”

In his online journal, Justin freely explores perspectives which are new and challenging to his world view. After the class on sexual orientation, he says, “This week was hard for me, I had some predispositions that had come from fallacies and I was forced to face them. I am not proud of the fact, but I am glad that my perceptions changed.” His entry on race starts out, “White privilege. Even talking about it whites have a certain privilege.” Not
a common perspective from a White, male freshman. The rest of the entry is an insightful exploration of privilege and power. He ties the concept of privilege back to the week’s discussion postings about religious privilege.

Justin’s discussion postings are among the longest in the class. Many of his postings are late, though there are more on time toward the end of the semester. It appears as though he is increasingly engaged toward the end of the semester. He is one of those students who references fellow classmates by name most frequently. Twice it appears he may be specifically mentioning classmates’ names to affirm their particular contributions, as both are minorities whose postings have not been mentioned by other classmates.

Justin also makes strong statements of his perspectives. For example, in exploring sexual orientation, he is very empathetic to the challenges faced by gays. While many students jumped on the “it’s easier to come out today” bandwagon. Justin agreed, but said, “I still believe there are situations that make it hard . . . I think that high schools are probably one of the hardest places in the world. Not only to come out but to be yourself.” In the same posting, he goes on to explore families’ “fear” and parental feelings that “they did something wrong when their child is gay. But it is nothing they could control.” In exploring religious tolerance, he is quite open in his criticism by saying,

One problem that I can see with my religion was that we were taught a biased history. . . . I am a Lutheran, and was taught that we were the first of the protestant Christians and that. . . . we were above the horrible things that the Catholic church was doing. I don’t think that religions should be divided like that. (April 21, 2008 2:31 PM)
Justin’s postings are connected with what his classmates are saying through his references to them by name. They extend the conversations in interesting ways. In their strength of position, they could have the effect of helping fellow students see a different perspective. And because he is a white male, his perspectives may be more palatable to others. He appears willing to share his ideas freely, knowing that others may not accept them, giving evidence to his growing intrapersonal capacity. However, like John, eight of Justin’s postings are late, with the result that the impact they could have on peers’ perspective is lessened as they are less likely to be read.

**Interpersonal**

In the interpersonal domain, initially, dependent relations with others provides both a source of identity and sense of belonging. Relationships depend on gaining others’ approval. Through growth comes awareness of multiple perspectives and the desire to extract oneself from dependent relationships. Personal autonomy develops allowing for interdependent relationships with others which are characterized by valuing differences. Initially, social problems are viewed egocentrically. This gives way to growing understanding of the social systems that impact group norms and relations, which can lead to commitment to work for the rights of others, to ability to collaborate effectively, and to intercultural maturity.

**Kelsey.** In her relationships with others, the interpersonal domain, Kelsey is increasingly able to interact with diverse others in ways that show respect and yet do not undermine her own sense of who she is. She is beginning to understand the existence of social systems which impact peoples’ ways of relating to each other as individuals and as groups. She is concerned with working for the rights of others to help effect change.
Kelsey’s small Midwestern city has experienced a large influx of Mexican Nationals. They live in a neighborhood close to her mother’s home. She describes her mother saying “ahh, they’re invading our city” and her own response, “no they’re not!” When she camped in a friend’s back yard in this same neighborhood, friends worried about her getting shot in “the ghetto,” a concept she laughs at, feeling it is not an appropriate way of describing the area.

She encouraged her mother to run for mayor against the “rich, fat, White guy” who “doesn’t care about any of the neighborhoods” but instead focused on “families that are all about (city name) high school and, like, go to football games and eat ice cream on Friday night.” In campaigning, her mother went to the Mexican Nationals’ neighborhood to pass out “campaign stuff” and while she did not win, Kelsey says, “she made me proud!” She thinks that “the whole election made her (mother) see their perspective a little better.” Kelsey’s description of her mother’s campaign reflects a growing awareness of social systems and the way they impact interactions between groups.

In her exploration of ideas about the challenges the Mexican Nationals face, she references a book she had read about Puerto Ricans in Harlem, and the difficulties whole groups of people can have when they do not have access to adequate school systems or to a family setting that teaches them how “to dress and act” in conformity with the “dominant culture.” She concludes by saying, “it’s just more complicated than I always thought it was.” Kelsey is definitely in the process of exploring ways social systems impact personal lives and interactions.

As she examines this impact, she is aware the ways her own actions are perceived is impacted by various intergroup relations. She explains,
I have loved talking with diverse people about their experiences, but there have been times when I feel I have to watch what I say because I am the “white American,” the group who can be known to be racist against minority groups. However, while beginning to be aware of social systems and their impact on social identities, she often still tends to personalize experiences instead of seeing them in their broader context.

Kelsey’s online discussion postings are always on time. In this way she is more similar to many of the students, not interviewed, who appear to be at more initial stages of development and who look carefully at the exact requirements of the class and fulfill them to the letter without ever going very deeply into the subject. However, in addition to exploring each subject more deeply, the nature of Kelsey’s contributions appears somewhat different.

Many students in the class express amazement, repugnance, shock, outrage, and so on in the online discussions in response to some of the different perspectives and struggles to which they are exposed in the various videos and articles in the online platform. Kelsey is similar. However, she often takes her responses to another level. She expresses a deep empathy for the experiences of others in ways like this:

It seems like I’ve never heard a story from someone who was completely comfortable with discovering they are gay and announcing it to the ones they care about. Especially within Greg’s church sector, his church’s beliefs and upbringing made him believe he was “less than fully human.” I can’t wrap my mind around how hard it must be lose all hope because you have not yet found what you can believe in, not what someone else or an organization has fed to you.

(April 5, 2008)
She makes statements of her own perspectives, even if these may not necessarily be accepted by others. Several of these are as follows: “I definitely support the effort colleges make to provide extra scholarships for minority applicants.” “This just proves that race is a culturally constructed category because there is no biological difference, and our culture is somehow telling these children that is a difference.” “A place without diversity would be uninteresting and completely boring.”

She shares openly her own experiences and feelings, relating them to issues being discussed and showing her own growth in understanding.

I can’t say I know what it is like to feel pressured to be like a “real” man, but I know what it feels like to think I’m not beautiful because of the media portrayal of beauty. As I’ve gotten older, it is easier to ignore them. I always thought it was easy to be a man, but now I realize they suffer from the same pressure in a different way. (March 30, 2008 7:49 PM)

Finally, in addition to making direct statements, her postings are often peppered with questions: “How can we become a diverse campus when we continue to keep over half the population ‘white?’” “What is so wrong in our world that children today are thinking that the “bad” baby is the “black” baby!? Are they hearing this from their schoolmates, or from the media?” “so many of them all believe in one higher power—so what is the difference?” “Would it be like this if there wasn’t racism and inequality in our country’s past?” These questions are sometimes rhetorical, but often informative and could serve to challenge the thinking of classmates who may not yet have considered the issues she raises.

In these online discussion postings, Kelsey shows a willingness to interact with others without allowing her own perspectives to be overshadowed. She appears to be attempting to
explore ways that she can encourage her classmates towards deeper understanding, and even
to encourage them to be willing to work for the rights of others.

**Andrew.** Andrew’s developing interpersonal maturity is evident as he explores what
U St 150 has meant to him. After first explaining that “there was a lot that I had thought
about,” he continues by saying:

But I think it also kind of put, I guess, a bigger picture on, to see all the people in our
class and see where other people are in their own views. Because sometimes . . . you
kind of catch yourself thinking “well everybody thinks this way.” But not everybody
thinks the same way that you do. And that’s ok. It’s part of the society. But you just
kind of have to learn to, I guess, work with other people, and look at whatever they
might bring to the table and how they might view the world, and then take the time to
see how they see things too, and then . . . if we can do that, or if I can do that, I can
take that and apply it somehow in my own life, and hopefully I’ll learn from other
people. (Interview 5/1/02)

This ability to see others as thinking differently and having valid contributions to “bring to
the table” is important to having mature relationships.

Andrew’s attitude towards the park rangers he encountered halfway up the Grand
Canyon, dehydrated and seriously ill, reflects his willingness to refrain from judging their
behavior. Though according to him, they “refused” to allow him access to the climate-
controlled ranger station and refused him water, causing him to take a “power nap” on a
nearby picnic bench and to rely on his brother to fill up their water jugs, he simply says, “I
feel that I probably would have given me some water,” and “they were just not helpful at all
. . . I don’t really hold it against them . . . I don’t really know what was on their minds.” He
appears to be unwilling to make judgments about their actions, seeming to understand that their frames of reference may be different from his.

Andrew’s journal entries are among the longest in the class as he explores the ideas from class in depth. From his first journal posting, he discusses elements of social and economic systems. Based on journal entries, he is the only student who drew connections between the social class implications of an in-class activity in which Skittles are used as a substitute for wealth and arbitrarily distributed among class members, an interpersonal capacity.

He is very appreciative of having a class in which there is “great practice for actually listening, interpreting, and then responding. I think that this is something we do not do enough in our day to day lives.” In many different settings, he acknowledges different people’s and groups of people’s perspectives saying “this class really does a great job of making [us] look at situations from someone else’s shoes” and he concludes with, “I think that is very valuable in life.” He expresses his eagerness to take the “unfinished conversations” from the class “out into my life and into others lives once I graduate” as they are “absolutely necessary conversations we must have in order to better understand each other and our social environments.”

Andrew’s discussion postings are almost all on time, often some of the first postings of the class. At 115 words, they are almost the longest in the class. He openly empathizes with experiences different from his own as presented in the various videos and articles used to stimulate the online discussions. Sometimes he draws on experiences and relationships of his own, as he does in this way:
Greg’s story is a very sad one, but what is even worse is that I think it is a story that far too many people have to live through. One of my best friends since childhood dealt with a lot of the same issues when she came out to her family, and she went through some very tough times, but she is much happier now and fortunately her family was willing to understand who she was. (April 7, 2008 1:04 AM)

In the week focused on gender, Andrew talks about how “there is a constant pressure to be masculine and to be men from the start, and anything less no matter the age is a sign of weakness.” However, he blames this on the “way in which the media has infiltrated and distorted the way our society and our own personal ways of viewing and understanding the world.” He does not really look more deeply at how the social systems are involved, but sees the impact of those systems.

He is one of few students who openly acknowledges Christian privilege in a fairly in-depth way. He says,

In my own personal experiences I don’t think I have ever experienced a problem similar to Rashid’s. I am Catholic and growing up I went to Catholic schools so obviously religion was accommodated for. Here at Iowa State I have never had any problems . . . but I think some of that has to do with the fact that many of our institutions and structures here in the United States were established with more western religions in mind, like Christian religions. I think that it is unfortunate that our society is not as accommodating to all religions like Islam or Hinduism. I understand that it might be very difficult and not all people of a particular faith are devout enough to be concerned but for those who are I think it would only be fair to work with their beliefs. (April 21, 2008 9:26 PM)
In this explanation, Andrew shows at least some understanding that there are structures in place which reinforce Christian privilege.

Andrew’s interpersonal maturity is evident as he relates to others in respectful yet independent ways. He is concerned about speaking up for the rights of others. He is particularly interested in continuing to learn how to work with and even learn from people of diverse backgrounds. This maturity is in evidence through most of his discussion postings.

**U St 150**

Having explored evidence of self-authorship as expressed by the six students interviewed, I will look more broadly at the set up of the course as it impacts expression and development of self-authorship.

Baxter Magolda (2003, 2004a) has proposed the Learning Partnership Model as an approach that facilitates self-authorship development. The three key assumptions on which the Learning Partnerships Model is based are that knowledge is viewed as complex and socially constructed, self is central to construction of knowledge, and authority and expertise are shared in mutual construction of knowledge among peers. The educational principles supporting these three assumptions are to validate the learners’ capacity to know, to situate learning in the learners’ experience and to foster mutual construction of meaning.

U St 150 starts with activities focused on helping students identify and understand their social identities and how these intersect with those of others. Facilitators are encouraged to validate students’ capacity to understand. The use of dialogue principles encourages students to interact together to construct meaning in response to the various activities and media which make up the class. As such, U St 150 appears to be well poised to foster self-authorship development.
In this next section, several elements of U St 150 are explored. I look for evidence of self-authorship and ways in which self-authorship development is or is not supported. The first two elements are the impact of the lack of facilitation of the online portion and the evidence of some resistance in the online discussion. The third is an exploration of possible meaning behind some of the late online discussion postings as seen through the lens of self-authorship. The fourth explores the interaction between the face-to-face and online portions and implications for self-authorship development.

**Facilitation**

Watching the “Girl like Me” documentary, I really could understand what the girls were saying being a African American women myself. A lot of the issues that girls were talking about were true, and in fact growing up I also dealt with issues concerning my hair and skin color. Especially going to an elementary school with a majority of white children. It was very hard for me, because I was so different than the white kids. So they were always coming up to me asking me questions about African American issues. As a result to this movie I did like the doll test, because it just showcased what the society is teaching are children, and it just proved that lighter skin is more accepted then having darker skin. (Veronica, April 10, 2008 4:15 PM)

This Week 4 posting, Veronica’s first on-time posting, and only the third posting by any student for the week, elicits no response from fellow students. The subject is a video in which high school student Kiri Davis re-conducted the “doll test” initially conducted by Dr. Kenneth Clark, whose work was key in the Brown vs. the Board of Education desegregation lawsuit.
This lack of response is against the backdrop of online community building in which students are beginning to reference each other’s postings by name. However, no one seems to be able to respond to Veronica’s sharing of her personal experiences.

Instead of responding to Veronica, students share their varied reactions, like the following: “I was just speechless” (Ana), “I was very shocked” (Aubrey) and “this makes me mad” (Kelsey). They relate the issue of race to their experiences by making comments such as these: “if you are white you have to be tan, if you are black you have to be light skinned” (Madeleine). They recognize their unawareness of issues of race in ways like these: “It’s really hard for me to understand what the girls in this video feel like” (Lindsey) and “things I don’t even think of on a regular basis are issues for them” (Katie). They sometimes acknowledge their privilege through comments like this: “I, like a lot of my peers in the class, had never really had to think about how to look at skin color when I was a kid” (Lisa). In addition, they place blame like this, “It’s all because of the way our media influences our culture” (Madeleine). And occasionally, they blame the victim, an issue of resistance addressed later in this paper.

Only two (White) students explore historical perspectives. Kelsey asks, “Would it be like this if there wasn’t racism and inequality in our countries past?” And in a very late posting, Justin points out that “those people were ripped out of their countries and taken away from their culture. They know they are from a continent, not a country, not a heritage.” No one responds to either of these attempts to look deeper at social systems.

One of the reasons students may have been less willing to take on a difficult issue may be their uncertainty of how others would respond. This relates to Merryfields’ (2001, 2003) point that when an online discussion is the only interaction between students, there can
be more willingness to discuss difficult issues, when students do not need to “worry” about meeting each other face-to-face. Knowing they would see their classmates within a week may have impacted their willingness to share more openly.

Responding to Veronica could have provided important opportunities for students to have explored more deeply the perspectives and experiences of someone with a different background and experience. Looking at the points made by Kelsey and Justin could have allowed for exploration of social systems (beyond “media”) which underlie racism in this country.

In looking at the responses from a self-authorship perspective, these students, as with most college students, do not necessarily possess the capacities to be able to see different perspectives (cognitive) without feeling threatened by the differences (intrapersonal), and are not able to reach out to others and interact in mutually supportive ways (interpersonal). In the section of US150 studied, only a few students possess this level of self-authorship, and hence, the capacity to help facilitate the online discussion.

In the online discussion, it was clear that more facilitator interaction is needed to provide skillful online moderation. Students do not have this skill in general, except for a very few who are more self-authored. More adept facilitation in the online discussion needs to take place to make use of this medium more effectively.

Literature about multicultural dialogue points to the imperative of good facilitation both for promoting learning and to prevent negative results (Schoem et al., 2001; Hurtado, 2001b; Zuniga et al., 2002; Zuniga, 2003). Literature about online discussions also points out the importance of adept facilitation for optimal use of these learning tools (Maurino, 2007; McIsaac & Craft, 2003; Tu & Corry, 2003). While more mature students may be able
to facilitate their online discussions (McIsaac & Craft, 2003; Wade et al., 2001), most undergraduate students do not possess these skills and capacities.

Finally, in looking at online multicultural courses, Tettegah (2002) and Ramirez (2002) are excited about the potential for the expression of the voices of minorities which may not be heard in the face-to-face classroom. For this to be productive, however, for both minority and majority students, it is essential that these voices be recognized and incorporated into the discussion. They must become a part of the “community of practice” (Hughes, 2007) which encourages inclusion of diverse members through fostering identity congruence between all members and the group identity. In my study, some students were definitely not engaged online in the development of any kind of identity congruence. In addition, the uninvolved students, as explored in the section on “late postings” later in this paper, tended to be those who could have added elements of diversity to the group’s learning and identity congruence.

Effective facilitation could have helped develop identity congruence for all students and encouraged deeper exploration of important concepts which were only superficially explored. It could help affirm the perspectives of Veronica and assist other students to develop a deeper appreciation and awareness of multiple perspectives. Fostering more thorough understanding of the complexity of knowledge, and encouraging all students to more fully engage in the construction of knowledge could have helped these students’ development of self-authorship.
Resistance

“Is it the media, friends, school, or their family?” (Karen April 16, 2008 1:37 AM)

This is Karen’s question after viewing the “Doll Test” video, the reconstruction of Dr. Kenneth Clark’s “doll test” by high school student, Kiri Davis. To blame the victim, as Karen may be doing by suggesting that these Black children’s families are responsible for their perceptions of the Black doll as “bad,” can be a sign of resistance. Goodman (2001), in her exploration of resistance, explains that “When people’s need for safety and stability are not met, they turn off, shut down and avoid new information” (p. 63). In a class like this where there is so little opportunity for careful creation of a safe environment in which careful facilitation allows for effective exploration of difficult concepts and conflicts, opportunities for resistance are multiple. In addition to this posting and the possible indications of resistance on the part of those students who ignored Veronica’s posting, cited earlier, there is other evidence of potential resistance in this class.

In the discussion which is directed toward exploring the struggle Rashid, a Muslim student, has with conflict between required obligatory Friday prayers and a course required for graduation which only meets on Fridays, Cassie may be attempting to change focus, another form of resistance. In her first discussion posting, she says that “since it is a religious reason that special accommodations should be made for him.” However, instead of seeing any alternatives, she dismisses the issue by going on to say, “I think he has to make a decision and decide which is more important to him, attending the class or practicing his religious beliefs?” (Cassie April 22, 2008 11:10 AM). Her follow-up posting is a very long exposition (255 words, far above the required 75 words) about scholarships being denied students wanting to attend Bible colleges and how this is an example of peoples’ educational
opportunities being limited by laws in a country founded on religious freedom. She completely bypasses concepts of Christian privilege and the need for speaking up for the value of educational systems taking into account differing religious observances, focusing instead only on Christian rights.

Subtly conforming to assumed expectations in class may be a form of resistance practiced by as many as seven of the students in the class as they superficially respond to questions. While not actually going to the level of discrediting or discounting, they do not seem to make much headway in seeing from the perspective of others from different backgrounds. At times, they almost appear to use avoidance as they ignore the questions posted to stimulate discussion and deeper thinking about issues.

Baxter Magolda and King (2007) point to the importance of support when dissonance is experienced in order to support development of self-authorship. Saenz et al.’s findings (2006) about intensive dialogue and student development across all four racial groups they studied point to the value of well-structured dialogue opportunities. Research of online discussions indicates the importance of careful facilitation to build community (McIsaac & Craft, 2003). A sense of safety is needed to help alleviate resistance (Goodman, 2001). Skillful facilitation of the online discussion environment in a class likes U St 150 appears essential to helping provide for a safe and effective online learning environment for all students.

The findings of these researchers and educators combined with the possible evidence of resistance in the online portion of this class support the importance of good facilitation in the online environment. A course like U St 150 needs to be carefully structured to minimize resistance and to create optimal learning conditions for all students.
Late Postings—An Explanation

Twenty-two of the 40 late discussion postings belonged to three of the six students I interviewed, Justin, John and Veronica. Another nine belonged to the international student, Ali, who intended to be interviewed, but was sick the last weeks of the semester. This brings to 31 of 40 late postings belonging to students who were willing to be interviewed, out of a total of 294 postings by 21 students during the 7 week course.

This behavior could be seen as avoidance and dismissed as resistance. However, exploring these students’ words and actions through the lens of self-authorship provides a different understanding.

All four of these students appear to be at an intermediate level in their development of self-authorship. Analysis of data from the interviews and online journals of the three late posting students support this premise. While I did not interview Ali, I spent more than average time interacting with him as I encouraged him to be more engaged in the class, cajoled him to complete the required postings, and talked to him more generally about his experiences and perspectives. His online discussion and journal postings, like his three fellow late-posters, reflect more self-authored reasoning and perspectives. Several examples of all four of these students’ postings follow, organized in ways that express self-authored growth, understanding and perspective. Most, however, are late postings.

These students tend to more strongly express empathy with the perspectives and experiences of others. Justin says,

It saddens me to hear how one man can be driven to depression because others won’t accept his decisions and, I believe, biological impulses. He is gay, so be it, that should not make us look at him any less. I hate that people say, “Well I don’t
care as long as ‘they’ don’t hit on me or make out in front of me.” If a homosexual
was to hit on me I would decline, but I would actually take it as a compliment.

(Justin April 21, 2008 6:57 PM)

They make statements of their own perspectives which may be different from those of
their fellow classmates, as Ali does when he says, “The inequality base race and gender are
very major problem. . . . Media plays big role in [shaping] our thinking. The media industry
makes us believe what they want us to believe” (Ali April 27, 2008 8:43 PM). No other
student makes so strong a statement about the issues of race and gender inequalities.

They bring in historical perspectives and information, as John does. He is responding
to a fellow student’s wondering about the dolls she had played with, and in particular, about
whether there was a “Black” Barbie. He says,

I looked this up online out of curiosity. It seems that the first African- American
Barbie was in 1967. She was called “Colored Francie” and looked exactly like the
original Barbie, but had darker skin. Barbie was first invented in 1959. I would say
the 1967 release makes sense as the Civil Rights Movement had just peaked a
couple of years before. (John April 15, 2008 11:39 PM)

One of the only students to share the evolution of her perspective in a discussion
thread is Veronica, as she shares that, “After reading a few other messages that have been
posted I do believe that the professor was too harsh!!!” (Veronica April 28, 2008 7:43 PM).

Unfortunately, these postings are after the deadline or, in one case, very late in the
conversation. The only students who are likely to read them are other students who are also
posting late.
As students who appear to be at an intermediate level of self-authorship, these four are beginning to be aware of other social identities and have some understanding of historical processes which define and constrain. They increasingly see knowledge as dependent on situation, but are unsure of how others will react if they express these ideas. They are aware that their perspectives are different from their peers, but they have yet to develop their own coherent identities. They are still concerned about how others will perceive them and whether they will be accepted. They are also unsure of how to relate to others whose identities and histories they are only beginning to be able to take into account.

By posting late, these four students know their perspectives are much less likely to be read than if they post on time, as a part of their fellows’ discussion. This may provide them a measure of safety, especially if they are uncertain of responses they may get.

After explaining that he “would definitely rather talk than post online,” John explains his struggles with posting and even interacting with students whose views he disagrees with in this way,

I think like in David’s case [David is a student in the “What’s Race Got to Do With It” video that was watched during class], we have a lot of people in our class who really agree with him, who really put themselves in his shoes. And we had other people who probably just thought he was a complainer. I can see people not wanting to be him in public, in front of everybody, being that guy that brings up everything that other people don’t want to hear about. For example, . . . during the race discussion after that video, we started talking about scholarships, and things like that, I get really mad because I disagree with the I guess the majority. Can you use that word instead of minority? People who are not minorities? I normally disagree
with the view that they’re sharing. They should have scholarships. I normally find
siding with minorities on that view, because I guess the way I was raised. . . . And
sometimes I really think that people are wrong but I don’t feel like I want to tell them
that in class, because I feel like, sometimes I feel like these people are just racist.
And that’s pretty much what I’m thinking. I don’t want to say that! So with certain
things like that I wouldn’t to post online and get into an argument about . . . [trails
off] (Interview 4/29/08)

While long, this description captures the intermediate character of John’s
development of self-authorship and ways this developmental level impacts relationships with
diverse others. He is clearly aware of multiple perspectives and that others come from
different cultures and experiences. He has a beginning awareness that there are social
systems and that these affect interactions. He is somewhat naïve, as he is unsure of how to
frame his understandings. He wants to work for the rights of others. But he is at a loss when
contemplating ways of sharing his perspectives, which he feels are at odds with his
classmates.

There may be other explanations of these four students accounting for so many of the
late postings in the class. They may need more time to process ideas. They may want to
observe interactions before becoming involved. But the intermediate character of these
students’ development of self-authorship may be an important element of their late posting.

As some of the students who may be at a more self-authored stage of development
than their peers, the perspectives of all of these students may be particularly helpful to their
peers’ development. In addition, their own growth and understanding need to be encouraged
and supported for their own optimal development Finding ways to encourage these students
to be involved in a more timely fashion appears to be important to the development of the groups’ construction of knowledge.

**Value of Combining Face-To-Face with Online**

In a multicultural course, combining online with face-to-face interactions may have particular value. The online component, while challenging to facilitate well, can provide some students the opportunity to express themselves in ways they may not be comfortable with in the face-to-face interaction (Merryfield, 2001, 2003; Ramirez, 2002; Tettegah, 2002). Students anonymous evaluations compiled at the end of the semester reinforce this idea. One said, “I think it gave us a chance to discuss without having to be face to face. Plus it gave us more time to think about our answers.” Another said, “I felt like I was able to express myself more.” For students at an intermediate level of self-authorship development, being able to think carefully about responses to difficult issues before having to interact in a face-to-face venue may be particularly important as it allows them to explore different perspectives and ways of interacting in a more thoughtful way prior to having actual face-to-face interactions.

The face-to-face component interactions are equally important. Over the course of the seven weeks, some students were able to develop a deeper appreciation of classmates’ experiences and perspectives. An example of this follows below:

After going through the topics suggested for the video, we somehow focused on Ali [an Iraqi refugee] and some of his experiences as a Muslim, and now a student in the US. Other students listened attentively, even though Ali’s accent makes it a bit hard for many to understand.

This listening was repeated at the end of the last class. Ali really opened up. He shared this experience, telling of a conversation with someone lasting close to an
hour, after which the person asked, “So, when are you going to blow yourself up?”

People in class were aghast that anyone could actually be so rude as to ask something like that. Ali’s response was, “When I am, I’ll be sure you’re the first to know,” and to laugh it off as a joke. (Researcher notes 5/1/08)

The implication at the time was clearly that Ali did not think the person was joking.

This face-to-face interaction had a deep impression on classmates. Jeffrey, in particular, a White freshman male, wrote a lengthy journal posting about the impact Ali’s sharing had on him. He says this:

I felt really bad for Ali when he talked about people giving him crap about blowing himself up I can’t believe people can even ask a question like that and feel good about themselves in the end. Some of my friends wouldn’t even be that cruel to do that to someone. I’m happy for Ali, because he doesn’t let it bother him, he just makes a joke about it.

I wish I could do that when some one makes fun of me. It will make me feel a lot better about the situation. Nobody likes to be made fun of for what they look like or for the different diversity that the[y] are. This class has made me open my eyes to see what truly is going on around me. It makes me feel better knowing now I can do something about it. Its going to be really hard working with my friends and trying to point them in the right direction. I just hope I can find a way to help one person at a time. (Journal May 3, 2008 1:33 PM)

Jeffrey feels strongly enough that he also shares this perspective in an online discussion posting early in the week’s postings. He explains both his new appreciation and
understanding of Ali and his experiences, and his own intentions to speak out for the rights of others, both key self-authorship capacities. He says,

I think I am a changing agent now that I know and understand what people go through everyday. When Ali was telling us about how when he talks to people and they ask him when its his turn to blow up. I was like WOW I know people out there who are like that. I respect Ali for just finding a way to just laugh it off it takes a lot to be able to do that. (Jeffrey May 1, 2008 11:38 PM)

While admittedly naïve in his assumption that now he can “know and understand what people go through everyday,” Jeffrey’s willingness to post this so early in the discussion thread, thus sharing his growing self-authorship, points to a strength of his determination.

Combining online exploration of subjects which encourage self-exploration and development with face-to-face dialogic experiences has potential for multicultural courses. It can encourage students to explore perspectives online in a more private way, allowing for reflection and thoughtful formulation of understanding and responses. It can allow for the expression of voice. And, as Schoorman points out (2002), the face-to-face interactions can help account for the closeness students express at the end of this class.

Summary

Using self-authorship to explore online discussion interactions provides a different lens for understanding. The six students I interviewed appear to be at intermediate stages of self-authorship development. Their online interactions reflect this in cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal ways.
This course supports development of self-authorship through careful face-to-face interaction that is intended to validate learners’ capacity to know, through exploration of individual social identities and through questions both of which situate learning within the learners’ experience, and as students are mutually engaged in constructing meaning through the dialogue process. The online environment appears to be less supportive of this development. Better facilitation could encourage self-authorship expression and development through helping all students’ voices to be heard, more thorough exploration of complexity, and minimizing resistance. This kind of environment might encourage students who are at more intermediate levels of self-authorship development to engage more fully and in a timelier manner, as they may feel that, for them too, it is a safe environment.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This chapter concludes the thesis with an introduction, a section that looks at the evidence of self-authorship in U St 150 in general and the online portion in particular, insights and recommendations, suggestions for further study, limitations and delimitations, and a summary.

Introduction

Today’s world conditions require that students graduating from colleges and universities possess the capacity to work closely with people from widely different backgrounds and cultures (Hurtado, 2001a; Schoem et al., 2001). A way to frame this capacity comes from the theoretical lens of self-authorship, a constructivist-developmental approach to human development encompassing three domains, cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal.

Utilizing the Learning Partnership Model provides a framework to design, implement and assess educational efforts to enhance student development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2003, 2004a). The Learning Partnerships Model is based on three assumptions which are modeled by educators: knowledge is viewed as complex and socially constructed, self is seen as central to construction of knowledge, and authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers. Three educational principles provide the support students need to make use of the assumptions: learners are validated as capable of learning, learning is situated in the learner’s experience, learning is defined as mutually constructing meaning.

The goals of U St 150 (U St 150 course packet, 2007) support the development of self-authorship through the use of the principles of intergroup dialogue. The course builds on
student experiences and encourages students to share their experiences and growing understanding with each other through dialogue. Facilitators are to help guide student interaction to help develop greater understanding. The online portion provides an opportunity for students to explore ideas and experiences outside their own through the use of videos and other resources and through an online discussion group. This online exploration and discussion on a given topic takes place during the week prior to the in-class discussion of the same topic.

The online discussion is the venue which has been the primary focus of this study, as I have looked for evidence of self-authorship in student postings.

**Support of Self-Authorship Development in U St 150**

Not only do the goals of U St 150 support the development of self-authorship, but students themselves report through their journal postings at the end of the course that they have greater understanding and appreciation of experiences different from their own which point to growth in self-authorship.

**Self-Reporting of Self-Authorship Growth**

In online journal postings at the end of the course, cognitive capacity to recognize and value multiple perspectives is recognized by these students:

This class has definitely changed the way that I think about diversity. It has showed me the kinds of things that people deal with every day whether they deserve to or not. (Aubrey May 4, 2008 5:44 PM)

I will be honest, when I signed up for the course it was to both fill a humanities credit and to replace another class. I wasn’t sure what to expect but I figured that I would try it to see what it was like. I am glad that I had the chance to
take the class. It changed the ways that I viewed diversity and differences in others.

(Justin May 5, 2008 6:07 PM)

Growth in intrapersonal capacity is seen in Ana’s change in understanding of the White students in class:

Today was sadly the last day of this class. However, it was the most memorable! . . .

At the beginning to class I was well aware that racism exists today. I was and have been part of many racial acts against my race. I felt that this class gave me the chance to talk about it, and let people know about my life as a Latina. I really felt that this class embraced diversity. I really enjoyed it. Even today when we were filming, I just thought it was beautiful seeing all different colors come and become one whole. From seeing one of the students talk about how her experience at U St 150 changed her put a smile in my face. I was shocked to see that “white” people actually want to be educated about other cultures. My whole life I thought that “white” people didn’t care about anything else other than themselves, however I was proven wrong thanks to this class. I overall really enjoyed being part of U St 150. (Ana April 30, 2008 10:14 PM)

In addition, growth in interpersonal capacity is shown as students express willingness to stand up for the rights of others as they attempt to speak out against views that are limited and prejudicial, as shown by this posting:

This was the best class that I have taken at [the university]. I have learned so much different things about diversity in this class. It made me think about the past and it’s easier for me to pick out the bad things that people say to others. Now I realize what’s going on and that it is bad. Now I have a better understanding and now I can stick up
for people who are being made fun of or picked on. . . This class has made me open my eyes to see what truly is going on around me. It makes me feel better knowing now I can do something about it. It’s going to be really hard working with my friends and trying to point them in the right direction. I just hope I can find a way to help one person at a time. (Jeffrey May 3, 2008 1:33 PM)

These are some examples of the responses students posted in their online journals about what this class has meant to them. For some, it has opened their eyes to perspectives of which they had no previous understanding. The value of collaboration, of having time set aside to mutually construct new meaning and understanding through the process of dialogue is affirmed. While naïve and clearly intermediate in their nature, these postings attest to growth along the continuum of self-authorship development.

Finally, there is Andrew, a graduating senior with majors in environmental studies, history and sociology. The coursework for these majors, one might hope, could have given him understanding of the topics covered in U St 150. However, he says:

This half semester course has been without a doubt one of the best and I think most important classes I have taken in my college career. I honestly think that it is the type of class that should be required for all students before they graduate, because it really teaches people how to be decent human beings and how to treat other people with respect. I came into this class not really knowing what to expect and I think that I now walk away with a sense of accomplishment. I have had some previous experience with the topics covered in the class, but I think that the discussions in class and listening to other students talk really helped me hone my understandings of social relationships. I think that what my other sociology
classes lacked in hands on activities and actual discussion was made up for in this class. I think that this actual interaction is the most important tool for learning. I only wish the class was a full semester because I feel there is still so much to talk about. However, my goal is to take those unfinished conversations out into my life and into others lives once I graduate. I think that they are absolutely necessary conversations we must have in order to better understand each other and our social environments. (Andrew May 5, 2008 11:46 PM)

Even with three majors that could provide opportunities for growth similar to those in U St 150, it is apparent that Andrew does not feel he has experienced any. His comments about “actual discussion” that took place in this class point to the extent to which the principles of Baxter Magolda’s Learning Partnership Model are utilized in the set-up of U St 150: learners’ capacity to know is validated, learning is situated in the learners’ experience and mutual construction of meaning is fostered (Baxter Magolda, 2003, 2004a).

There is some evidence, then, that the class as a whole has impacted these students’ development of self-authorship. The role of the online portion in this development is less clear.

**Support of Online Portion for Self-Authorship Growth**

The question of this thesis is whether there is evidence of self-authorship in the online portion. As the analysis in chapter four illustrated, there is evidence in the online discussion postings of the intermediate nature of the self-authorship development of each of the six students I interviewed. A further consideration is whether the online discussion has a positive or negative impact on students’ self-authorship development.
McShay (2007) has stated that the purpose of the online portion is to enhance the classroom experience by introducing the upcoming week’s concepts (J. McShay, personal communication, October 23, 2007). This gives students an opportunity to begin thinking about concepts which may prove challenging, and beginning the process of discussing them before actually attending class and trying to explore the same ideas face-to-face. It is also intended to give the facilitators some perspective on student reactions to enhance facilitating the classroom dialogue. Anonymous student evaluations at the end of the class for this section support the efficacy of the course in doing this. Students made these comments: “I liked reading and viewing the clips because there were a lot of aspects of diversity I had left to learn.” “They helped a lot with having something to talk about each week.” Finally one student said, “it gave us a chance to discuss without having to be face to face.” Clearly, at least these three students felt exploring the ideas prior to class had value for them personally.

Questions intended to stimulate the online discussion start with student experience and understanding and gradually lead outward to understanding other experiences which may be very different. In this way, the online portion situates learning in the students’ experience and begins the process of validating them as capable of knowing. Some students appreciate the opportunity to share their experiences and do so willingly. They relate struggles various groups have to their own and those of their families. Relevant anonymous student evaluation responses were these: “I felt like I was able to express myself more.” “It was a great way to share personal thoughts.” For some students, then, the online portion has a positive impact.

However two particular elements of the way the online portion is organized may have a negative impact on student development. These two are the lack of effective facilitation and the lack of an effective structure to encourage timely and well-spaced postings. The lack
of facilitation, as discussed earlier, allows potential resistance to go unchallenged and unexplored. This allows students whose views may be limited by their life experiences to refrain from exploring more deeply concepts that might help them in their understanding. It also creates a potentially unsafe environment for students from different social identities or who may be at a more intermediate stage of development whose views are radically different from the resistant view being expressed. Students who read the resistant posting who may not have considered alternative viewpoints may miss the opportunity to expand their vision and understanding. Left unaddressed, these resistant responses can limit the ability for the class as a whole to engage in constructing meaning that explores the diversity of perspectives which exist in the class.

The course structure, while “requiring” that students post to the online discussion at least twice, spaced 24 hours apart, is somewhat flexible. Students often wait until the last moment before posting. This minimizes the potentially beneficial impact of allowing students to really begin processing the week’s concepts. Students recognize this tendency with comments like these in their evaluations: “It was hard to remember.” “Unfortunately, I did not take the online work seriously enough.” Thus, the course structure itself limits effectiveness.

In addition, there is the situation with the extreme late posters, discussed in chapter four. Because facilitator training explores elements of diversity education, facilitators are somewhat aware of the concept of resistance. It could be easy to dismiss those students who do not post in a timely fashion as being resistant. As discussed earlier, exploring the perspectives of these late-posting students through the theoretical lens of self-authorship has led me to believe that, instead of being resistant, these students may be those who are at a
more intermediate level of self-authorship development than their classmates. They may be posting late because of their lack of a sense of safety in the online environment, knowing that their viewpoints may be different from those of their peers. If this is true, it is these students who have a greater understanding of the complexity of knowledge and who have much to offer to the entire class as it engages in mutually constructing meaning.

Unfortunately, the lack of online facilitation combined with a course structure that does not encourage these students’ more full interaction hinders the potential to validate students’ capacity to learn and work together to construct meaning. The lack of response to students who express ideas and share experiences which are very different from the class norm both limits the potential for learning for all students and potentially stifles the willingness to share of those students with different viewpoints and experiences.

A course structure needs to be created that supports a more effective online environment, one that encourages the participation of all students in a more timely manner, the interaction of students with each other, and the more full involvement in the online discussion of those students who may be at a more intermediate level of self-authorship development. Studies of effective use of online discussion have much to offer. A warm, sharing environment with the instructor helping to set the tone and opportunities for students to share social information about themselves can help build a sense of community (McIsaac & Craft, 2003). Some use of techniques that require students to work together, such as through some kind of collaborative activity, group projects, student publishing can also help make the online portion more integral to the students’ perception of the class (Maurino, 2007; McIsaac & Craft, 2003; Tu & Corry, 2003). Use of discussion groups consisting of
smaller portions of the entire class size can lead to a sense of connection and commitment (Tu & Corry, 2003; Wade et al., 2001).

Finally, careful facilitation of the online discussion is important, especially with students who may be less mature and thus less self-authored (Maurino, 2007; McIsaac & Craft, 2003). Research in intergroup dialogue points to the necessity of modeling ways of listening and showing appreciation for diverse perspectives in order to support students’ efforts to begin to understand concepts of privilege and power (Zuniga, 2003; Zuniga & Nagda, 2001).

The three principles of the Learning Partnerships Model point to the necessity of support of the learning process, both structurally and through careful interaction. The first principle, “validating learners’ capacity to know,” is based on validating students’ understanding and welcoming them into the process of constructing knowledge. The second, “situating learning in learners’ experience,” requires construction of a setting that utilizes students’ knowledge and experience as a basis for continued knowledge construction. The third, “mutually constructing meaning,” involves students as participants in that process. All three principles must be modeled, and support provided to the learners to enable them to appreciate the complexity of knowledge, to learn to negotiate meaning with others, and to develop their own coherent sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2004a, 41-43).

Applying what has been learned in enhancing online discussion groups and intergroup dialogue combined with careful application of the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model would help produce an online discussion portion of U St 150 which would help contribute to self-authorship development.
Insights and Recommendations

Three key insights come to mind in reviewing this research experience. The first two are interrelated. These are the imperative of requiring courses like U St 150 and the need for these courses to be well structured. The first of these insights is the necessity for having courses like this to help students develop the maturity required for them to interact with people of widely diverse backgrounds in respectful and effective ways (Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, 2001a; Schoem et al., 2001). The second is that these courses must be adequately funded and structured, with sufficient time allotted so as to build the relationships (Schoem et al., 2001; Zuniga, 2003) needed to more fully allow for the mutual construction of meaning. Online components must be equally supported and well-structured so as to minimize resistance and maximize the value diverse students and perspectives can bring to students’ understanding of the complexity of knowledge, appreciation of and respect for different perspectives, and opportunities to construct knowledge in collaboration with others.

The third is the value of using the theory and tools of self-authorship for structuring student experience through both the curricular and the informal interactional dimensions (Gurin, 1999). Historically, learning theory and developmental theory have been disconnected (Wildman, 2007). This disconnect is not unlike the fable of the five blind men who come upon an elephant, each one asserting that the animal is, respectively, a tree branch, a huge fan, a pillar, a wall, and a rope, depending on which part of the body each encountered, the trunk, ear, leg, side, or tail. Using a theory that connects learning theory and developmental theory allows for a more “coherent” approach. Self-authorship connects these. Such an interdisciplinary approach allows for a coherent approach to multicultural education and online and blended educational environments. The practical framework of the
Learning Partnership Model has the potential to overcome the serious misgivings multicultural educators have had as they consider implementing courses with an online component.

In addition to these insights, the following recommendations for US 150 seem appropriate, in light of the above research and literature. These are as follows:

- Expand to a three credit course lasting the entire semester to allow for sustained interaction and commitment.

- Graded instead of pass-fail. This would allow for more development of the online portion of the course and more commitment on the part of the students.

- Rubrics for participation in the online (and face-to-face) environments to be developed to allow for increasing the depth of discussion, students’ references to the questions and materials being studied, and to each others’ postings, and their use of dialogic principles.

- Encourage students to develop their own “blogs” in the online environment to encourage the sense of community important to effective online interactions. This could replace the “identity collage” currently assigned, and encourage students to develop their blog sites with reference to their multiple social identities.

- More attention could be given to the questions posed to stimulate the online discussions so that these questions more fully build on each other to scaffold students’ developing understanding.

The above recommendations would help more adequately meet the needs of the students. If it is a goal of the university to support student development so that these individuals function effectively in an increasingly diverse world community, consideration
should be given to the above recommendations. As stated before, volunteers currently facilitate the five sections of this course. In addition to the above recommendations, hiring trained facilitators would enhance the university’s ability to meet its obligations to its students.

**Further Study**

One of several key areas identified by Baxter Magolda (2007) as needing further study is exploring those educational practices that promote self-authorship (p. 79). In an era of increased use of technology in education, there will continue to be increased use of online and blended courses. This research is at the beginning of that process of examining how online environments might be utilized to encourage self-authorship.

Future research on this course could be done after applying some of the ideas discussed above to enhance the online portion of U St 150. I could then extend this study by exploring student online interactions for evidence of self-authorship.

Study is needed to see whether it is possible to support self-authorship in an entirely online multicultural course, or whether some combination of face-to-face interaction is better. If a combination is needed, is there a balance between the two that is most effective?

A careful exploration of the principles and practices of the Learning Partnerships Model as these relate to online best practices would provide understanding of how each can inform the other. Studying various ways the two can be structured could provide better understanding of both the theory and the practice.

Important tools in the online discussion are the questions which provide the jumping off point. Looking carefully at the formulation of these questions and how they can be scaffolded to “situate learning in learners’ experience,” “validate learners’ capacity to know”
and encourage mutual construction of meaning, the three key principles of the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda, 2004a, 43-44), is an area that should be researched.

**Delimitations/Limitations**

This study is limited in its scope. Because of the use of convenience sampling at a rural Midwestern university, the sample has very little diversity. Having students with a wider range of backgrounds could provide for a more richly diverse sample. In the effort to keep the study to a manageable size, only one section of 21 students is studied. The length of the course is only half of a semester, resulting in very little opportunity to see the development of dialogue skills which could lead to greater use of the online portion to help with group construction of meaning. Finally, having only one researcher involved limits the breadth of understanding that two or more could bring to a project. Two researchers working together as a team would be able to provide feedback to each other throughout the process of developing and carrying out a research project, analyzing and comparing analyses, and presenting the results of the project.

The study also has limitations in regards to trustworthiness, explored earlier in the methodology chapter. Some peer review and debriefing through interaction with my co-major professor provided a degree of external reflection and input. No member checking took place as most of the students interviewed left the university, either graduating, dropping out, or moving on to other institutions.

During face-to-face class interactions, I attempted to write all observations of student interactions and personal reflections as thickly as possible, as suggested by McMillan (2001). My co-facilitator was inexperienced, and tended to rely on my co-facilitation skills, making it difficult for me to truly observe in class interactions beyond the most obvious ones. Thus,
my notes written during and after the class settings provide less than optimal insight into interactions that occurred during the classes.

Through ongoing reading of literature, I have found approaches that would increase the effectiveness of my interviewing process and techniques. In future research, if interviewing to determine self-authorship development, I would explore two important decisions individuals had made, instead of the one that I explored (See Appendix A). Pizzolato found that this provides a richer understanding of a subject’s decision-making process and development (Pizzolato, 2003). In addition, I would draw on Baxter Magolda and King’s careful structuring of an interview experience (the WNSLAE Interview) (2007). Their interviewers are carefully trained in how to provide probing questions to better understand students’ strategies for making meaning across the three domains of self-authorship. They provide feedback to the student throughout the interview. They spend the last portion of the interview summarizing the student’s comments and inviting the student to respond.

**Summary**

Kegan and Baxter Magolda have extended understanding of how human development theory and learning theory may be used together to increase our understanding of how to educate (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1994; Wildman, 2007). Combining best educational practices from the fields of multicultural education and online education in conjunction with the Learning Partnership Model can further the understanding and development of students across all three domains, cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal.

This combination could help lead to Hughes’ (2007) description of an online community. In looking the closeness needed to form an online community, she speaks of
individuals who welcome diversity and help ensure inclusivity, welcoming even discomfort and conflict for the sake of exploring learning in new ways, who can engage in group processes that are self-reflexive and self-critical. These are the skills of a self-authored individual, one for whom knowledge is viewed as contextual, who has a coherent sense of personal identity and who views others with respect.

While U St 150 provided support for students to make progress in their self-authorship development, both online and in the face-to-face environment, more could be done to further enhance this progress.
APPENDIX A. APPROVED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Vicki Abel
714 Lynn, Ames IA
515-292-6156

Interview Protocol—Semi-structured Interview
Self-Authorship in Undergraduate Students in a Blended Multicultural Course

Preliminary Information (to be shared at the beginning of the interview)

Thank you for agreeing this interview. The project in which you are participating is study of student understanding in a multicultural course that uses both face-to-face and online learning. The research seeks to understand how you, as an undergrad college student, approach learning about and relating to people and perspectives different from your own. The research will provide the basis for a Master’s degree thesis. It will also contribute to understanding of student learning.

Before we begin, I would like to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. Your name will not be used in the reporting of the data. We also will not share what you and I discuss with other people in your class (section of US 150, Dialogues on Diversity). Do you have any questions at this point?

This interview is voluntary and you are free not to answer any question. The interview will take from 45 minutes to an hour. Does that timeframe work with your schedule?

I’d like to ask your permission to record our conversation so I don’t have to focus entirely on taking notes. No one else will listen to the recording. If at any point you would like me to turn the recorder off, please let me know.

Interview
One element which helps us learn to relate to different people is that of decision making. The purpose of this interview is to explore with you ideas relating to decision making.

1. Can you share with me one of the most important decisions you’ve ever made? What was that decision?
2. How did you make your decision? What kind of process did you go through to make it?
3. Did you talk to other people as you made the decision? Who, and why?
4. Were you happy with the decision? Why or why not?
5. Would you make the same decision again today? Why or why not?
### APPENDIX B. RUBRIC FOR ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE MATURITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assumes knowledge is certain</td>
<td>Evolving awareness and acceptance of uncertainty</td>
<td>Sees knowledge as dependent on situation (contextual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorizes knowledge claims as right or wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is naïve about different cultural practices and values</td>
<td>Evolving awareness of multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Ability to consciously shift perspectives and behaviors into an alternative cultural worldview and to use multiple cultural frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views differing cultural perspectives as wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance on authority as source of knowledge</td>
<td>Ability to shift from accepting authority’s knowledge claims to personal processes for adopting knowledge claims</td>
<td>Internal belief system via evaluation, interpretation in light of available frames of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally defined beliefs</td>
<td>Recognize need to take responsibility for choosing beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resists challenges to one’s own beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Is open to reconstruction given relevant evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mature decision making using problem solving and reflective judgment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDIX C. RUBRIC FOR ANALYSIS OF INTRAPERSONAL MATURITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of one’s own values as intersection of social</td>
<td>Evolving identity as intersection of social identities</td>
<td>Capacity to create an internal self that openly engages challenges to one’s views and beliefs and that considers social identities (race, class, gender, etc.) in a global and national context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(racial, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation) identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally defined identity yields externally defined beliefs that</td>
<td>Evolving sense of identity as distinct from external others’ perceptions</td>
<td>Coherent identity gaining stability over time but open to growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regulate interpretation of experiences and guide choices</td>
<td>Tension between external and internal definitions prompts self-</td>
<td>Integrates aspects of self into one’s identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>exploration of values, racial identity, beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of other cultures</td>
<td>Immersion in own culture; Recognizes legitimacy of other cultures</td>
<td>Autonomy grounded in integrity, respect for self, confidence and one’s own particular history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference is viewed as a threat to identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognize need to take responsibility for crafting own identity</td>
<td>Chooses own values and identity in crafting an internally generated sense of self that regulates interpretation of experiences and choices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX D. RUBRIC FOR ANALYSIS OF INTERPERSONAL MATURITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent relations with similar others is a primary source of identity and social affirmation</td>
<td>Relies on independent relations in which multiple perspectives exist (but are not coordinated)</td>
<td>Capacity to engage in meaningful, interdependent relationships with diverse others that are grounded in an understanding and appreciation for human differences and in which self is not overshadowed by need for others’ approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving awareness of limitations of dependent relationships</td>
<td>Self is often over-shadowed by need for others’ approval</td>
<td>Mutually negotiating needs and genuinely taking others’ perspectives into account without being consumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggle to reconstruct or extract self from dependent relationships</td>
<td>Mutually negotiating needs and genuinely taking others’ perspectives into account without being consumed</td>
<td>Mature relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frames participation in relationships as doing what will gain others’ approval</td>
<td>Willingness to interact with diverse others and refrain from judgment</td>
<td>Understanding of ways individual and community practices affect social systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives of different others are viewed as wrong</td>
<td>Self-approval is criteria to judge others’ perspectives</td>
<td>Willing to work for the rights of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of how social systems affect group norms and intergroup differences is lacking</td>
<td>Begins to explore how social systems affect group norms and intergroup relations</td>
<td>Productive collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views social problems egocentrically</td>
<td>Willing to work for the rights of others</td>
<td>Intercultural maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No recognition of society as an organized entity</td>
<td>Understanding of ways individual and community practices affect social systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES


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U St 150: Dialogues on Diversity course packet (Spring, 2008). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.


