

Chapter 7

The Found Poem as a Pedagogical Strategy for Promoting Self-Authorship for Practice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the question does the use of the found poem—a poem constructed by assembling a series of phrases from a series of readings—promote self-authorship in a professionally oriented graduate program. The chapter begins by arguing that self-authorship is a necessary condition to being an effective practitioner, followed by outlining self-authorship, its relationship to practice and higher education. This is then followed by laying out the practice context for the use of the found poem, a graduate course in the Capacity Development and Extension program at the University of Guelph. We then discuss the use of the found poem and how its use changed over time. In the following section two former participants in the class, who are now practitioners, share their reflections on the found poem followed by the instructor's reflections. We then discuss the implications for its use and attempt to answer the question does the found poem facilitate the development of self-authorship?

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INTRODUCTION

Lauzon (1998; 2017^a) argues we live in challenging times as we face increasing environmental degradation, increasing inequity across the globe, jobless economic growth, a shrinking world where we are constantly encountering difference and diversity, and ongoing challenges associated with global warming. Lauzon (2017^b) further argues that these challenges and problems, characterized as wicked problems, will be most effectively met through the actions of individuals or at local levels among groups of people who share a sense of common purpose and agreed upon action. People, however, will be operating out of their own unique perspectives, what Jack Mezirow has called meaning perspectives. While meaning perspectives may be populated by different content, there is form and structure that can be transformed that relates not so much to the content of the meaning perspective, but more to how one makes sense of the world and actually comes to know the world. This chapter concerns itself with self-authorship, and the meaning perspective that supports self-authorship requires what Kegan (1994) describes as 4th order consciousness. This order of consciousness is the foundation of self-authorship, the foundation we argue of an effective practitioner. In fact, our capacity to enter into truly collaborative relationships, or relationship of interdependence, requires that we be independent or self-authoring (Lauzon, 1995). Furthermore, we would argue that self-authoring is essential in negotiating the realities of contemporary society.

This raises the question of what are the implications of these challenges for higher education, and in particular what are the implications for professional education, education that is developing practitioners who will carry out their practice in organizations and communities? Baxter Magdola (2007, p. 69) partially answers this question when she writes that: “Twenty-first-century learning outcomes require self-authorship, the internal capacity to define one’s belief system, identity, and relationships.” As she further notes, “college learning focused on knowledge and intellect is insufficient for mature functioning” as complexity (the essence of wicked problems) is the mainstay of adult lives (p. 70).”

This chapter attempts to explore the question does the found poem—a poem created out of a series of phrases drawn from a collection or series of readings— promote movement toward self-authorship? Drawing on our experiences using the found poem, two participants and the instructor will reflect on their experience and explore whether the found poem as a pedagogical strategy promotes self-authorship. It should be noted that this is not reporting on a rigorous research project, but merely our collective reflections on our experience with, and our assessment of the efficacy of the found poem as a pedagogical strategy for promoting self-authorship. However, first we examine the relationship between self-authorship and higher education, arguing that practice requires self-authorship and higher education should facilitate its development. There is then some discussion on how this is accomplished. This is followed by an outlining of the practice context in which the found poem is used, capacity development. Next is a section on the development and description of the use of the found poem followed by two learners and the class instructor’s reflections on its use. This is followed by discussion and conclusions.

Higher Education, Self-Authorship and Practice

Higher education is intended to prepare us for the “real world”. Yet often we hear complaints from those in the “real world” that our graduates are not prepared adequately for the workforce. Often what I hear from those who employ graduates is they have the technical skills but lack the soft skills. This

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