

Stetson Law Conference

Trends in Substance Abuse Intervention: The Principles of Self-Authorship

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Colleges and Universities are faced with increasing challenges as society demands high expectations of graduates who are well prepared to engage in a complex, diverse, and multi-faceted world (Keeling, 2004). Skills in problem solving, critical thinking, knowledge acquisition under changing conditions are not only needed in the market place, they are in high demand for effective and engaged citizenship (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Keeling).

One office on campus which frequently encounters students struggling to meet these demands is the conduct office. Hearing officers across the country encounter student after student whose decision-making abilities have been under-developed resulting in poor decisions, negative consequences, and violations of the student code of conduct. College students who abuse substances are all too frequently encountered by hearing officers as ill prepared for the skills society demands. In fact, college students who have a history of substance abuse experience a myriad of negative consequences during the same years all students are expected to be building the necessary skills to be successful in the world (Baer, 2002; Baer, Kivlahan, Blume, McKnight, & Marlatt 2001; Brook, Richter, & Rubenstone 2000; Caron, Moskey, & Hovey, 2004; Dawson, Grant, Stinson, & Chou, 2005; Fenzel, 2005; Ham, & Hope, 2003; Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Kopstein, Wechsler, 2002; Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2006; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse 2003; Vik, Tate, Carrello, & Field, 2000).

Most schools have a code of conduct that would include the violation of underage drinking in addition to many other alcohol and or drug related activities (Lake, 2001). Potential consequences for violating school policies related to substance use have been increasing on many campuses around the country. "These potential consequences included being fined, attending a required educational program, performing community service, being referred to a treatment program, and receiving other disciplinary action" (Wechsler et. al, 2002, p. 212).

In addition, to these policies, a recent trend which many schools have adopted is either zero-tolerance or three strikes policies. Many of these policies have been put in place due to the frustrations and concern over high-risk drinking and the ramifications on the entire campus community. One could argue that there is a very strong correlation between the number of judicial dismissals and the alcohol and/or substance abuse experienced by those students.

This paper attempts to highlight this group of substance abusing students through the lens of skill development in three particular areas. This paper will first highlight recent trends in college substance abuse that have generated the need for disciplinary interventions and programs. Next, the concept of self-authorship will be utilized to address three areas of developmental needs that current disciplinary processes must

address. The paper will conclude with a description of an innovative program which utilizes specific skill building.

Trends in College Substance Abuse

The ramifications of high-risk drinking and other drug use have risen to the point of the highest priority health risk for college personnel (Lee, Gledhill-Hoyt, Maenner, Dowdall, & Wechsler, 2002; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2003; NIAAA, 2002; O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Turrisi, Wiersma, & Hughes, 2000). Despite the recent evidence that suggests a growing number of substance abstaining students are on campus, frequently excessive and severe use plagues college campuses in record numbers (Wechsler et al., 2002). Student deaths, near deaths, transportation to detoxification centers or hospitals, encounters with police officers, altercations with staff members and roommates, are problems every college administrator knows all too well. Administrators and researchers alike have sought new and creative ways for inroads to sustainable change in problematic student behaviors that have been fueled by substance abuse.

In conversations among judicial affairs colleagues many are quick to agree that current practices are not working for students experiencing the severe impact of substance abuse (personal communication, D. Gehring, 2005; personal communication, W. DeJong, 2005). The precedent for campus treatment has already been set in terms of other medical and psychological health concerns among students.

It is clear that a new response in addition to suspension or dismissal is required for higher education administrators. College campuses across the country tragically marked numbers of lost student lives due to alcohol poisoning deaths during the fall semester 2004. Two of these deaths occurred at Colorado State University. In addition to students putting their own lives at risk, the destructive behaviors are also severe when measured by the impact on the broader community. In fact, while suspension of these students may alleviate the immediate concerns in the campus environment, the problems surface elsewhere in the broader community or at another university. In truth, it is not appropriate or realistic to believe that suspension can be the primary tool with which to respond to as much as 37% of the student population who are engaged in substance abuse (Wechsler et al., 2002).

New strategies must be developed to make systemic change in high risk behavior. For years, student affairs professionals have struggled to reduce the number of incidents surrounding high risk behavior. Although it is not entirely new, some recent strategies have begun to re-integrate developmental theory into the disciplinary process. Impacting epistemological development may improve student's self-understanding which in turn may improve behavior. By empowering students to create their identity rather than one created for them, and by helping students identify personal values, critical decision-making skills may be honed and further developed. Whether a student is using substances to combat peer pressure or deal with social anxiety, these critical skills are powerful tools to engage in healthy decision-making (Gilles, Turk & Fresco, 2005).

Self-Authorship: A developmental framework

Student development researcher Robert Kegan (1994) reflected that it is not simply problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge acquisition skills society is demanding. In a growing and complex world, society demands the organization of our experience. Kegan referred to this organizing our experience as self-authorship. "Self-

authorship is simultaneously a cognitive (how one makes meaning of knowledge), interpersonal (how one views oneself in relationship to others), and intrapersonal (how one perceives one's sense of identity) matter" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 10). Kegan argued that development in each of these areas is required to utilize the skills that modern society demands.

Meaning Making: Cognitive Development

Cognitive structural theories provide a guide to understanding "how people think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences" (Evans, Forney & Guitto-DiBrito, 1998, p. 124). The structures or lens through which people view knowledge and make meaning of their experience changes over time. Cognitive-Structural theorists propose that through life experience, the structures through which meaning is viewed become more complex (Piaget, 1952; Perry, 1968; Baxter Magold, 1992; King & Kitchener, 1994; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy & Belenky, 1996).

Parks (2000) alleges that between 17 and 30 years of age, several distinctive constructs emerge as people make meaning of their experience. Parks states that this process "includes: (a) becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, (b) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (c) cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just" (p. 6). Student affairs professionals must understand that student thinking changes. As thinking changes, so too will identity, the ability to empathize, the complexity of relationships, and behavior (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Cognitive epistemological development reflects the concept that the ways of knowing central to each student are manifested from their own mental constructions (Baxter Magolda, 1999). The individualized mental constructions are rooted from unique experiences and contexts. Substance abusing college student's epistemological development may provide further insight to finding appropriate and effective substance use interventions.

Researcher and teacher Marcia Baxter Magolda (1992) has spent her life's work creating an epistemological frame with which to understand college student's cognitive development. Baxter Magolda's epistemological reflection model describes four ways in which traditional age college students perceive knowledge: concrete knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing. If applied to substance abusing college students, would these same epistemological constructs emerge?

The Epistemological Reflection Model (Baxter Magolda, 1992), includes four very distinct ways of knowing: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing.

Viewing ways of knowing as complex, socially constructed entities leads to the assumption that these processes can best be understood through the principles of naturalistic inquiry. Because students' ways of knowing and their experiences jointly shape each other, ways of knowing are context-bound. The fluidity of reasoning patterns indicates multiple realities rather than one single truth about students' perspectives. (p. 21)

Absolute knowers view the world through the lens of facts and certainty. Correct answers exist for all questions regarding all areas of knowledge. The gatekeepers of this certainty are authorities. Although Baxter Magolda (1992) discovered some gender

related themes toward acquiring this knowledge, similarities toward the elevation of authority and the disregard for peers emerged. Memorizing the knowledge given by the authority creates a certain and factually attainable world.

Transition knowers emerge as distinctly different in that they begin to experience some parts of knowledge as uncertain. "Learning is more complex in the uncertain areas, a situation that prompts students to believe that understanding takes precedence over acquiring and remembering information (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 47). Transitional knowers expect to gain some understanding in the different contexts of their life.

Independent knowers shift their assumptions of the world to being primarily uncertain. They recognize that differences shared by authorities is not solely due to education, rather there are often a range of views possible. Independent knowers begin to see their peers along with themselves as capable of sharing knowledge. Authorities now take on the role of creating opportunities to explore knowledge rather than the supplying the truth. Although independent thinking emerges, there is not a system or structure for prioritizing one perspective over another (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Baxter Magolda (1992) finds that it is rare for contextual knowers to develop while in college. She found that many critical experiences occurred in significant new roles and relationships upon completion of the degree (Baxter Magolda, 2005; 2003). The previous reasoning perspective is replaced with the belief that some knowledge claims are better than others in a particular context" (1992, p. 69).

These different lenses impact all aspects of a student's life. For example, peer pressure to use substances take on a very different role for absolute knowers versus independent knowers. The use of substances may delay the growth necessary to achieve epistemological development. High risk may create a barrier between a student's identity and values.

Constructive-developmental pedagogy, as it is described in this book, is more than letting students talk and generate their own ideas. It is a matter of creating the developmental conditions that allow them to generate their own ideas effectively, in essence to develop their minds, their voices, and themselves. (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 7-8)

By understanding the epistemological lens of substance abusing college students, more effective interventions may result. The development and implementation of these services are critical in engaging high-risk substance users to systemically change behavior. Currently, practitioners do not know whether substance use interferes with epistemological development. However, epistemological development alone will not transform all aspects of a student's life.

Interpersonal: Building Relationships with Others

Self-authorship is a dynamic process that includes building healthy, reciprocal relationships with others (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Living in community with an understanding of diversity and growing skills in intercultural competence are critical skills for the complex world in which we live. Baxter Magolda affirms that:

Educators want students to understand their own cultural heritage, learn about other cultures, move away from ethnocentric perspectives, and work interdependently with people different from themselves. Educators want this capacity to enhance the quality of life and interactions on campus as well as improve the larger social community beyond the campus. (p. 233)

Building the capacity for reciprocal, mutual, interdependent relationships is central to the process of self-authorship. This requires openness to various perspectives and experience, a commitment to engage with others and an understanding of personal identity that is not intimidated by difference. Healthy relationships that reflect mutual respect depend on communication skills and a developed intrapersonal identity.

Identity: Building Intrapersonal Development

Making choices consistent with personal values is an important developmental task. Responsible and healthy choices are built upon a clear sense of self, values, and priorities that are not easily influenced by context or peers. Students engaging in substance abuse often struggle with consistency of values and clarity of personal identity.

Self-authorship practices engage students by ‘emphasizing the self as central to knowledge construction’ (Baxter Magolda, 2003, p. 235). Self-exploration and reflection opportunities that enable students to develop their identity are central to systemic behavior change. In Baxter Magolda’s (2001) qualitative research, she found that ‘bringing their internal sense of self to the foreground and moving external influence to the background was essential for them to become authors of their own lives’ (2003, p. 235).

By building skills in self-authoring, students are able to transition from being defined by others to defining their identity, experience, and relationships. To self-author and integrate one’s relationships, one’s thinking, and one’s identity is to be prepared for the complexity of the modern world.

Can substance abusing college students who have experienced negative consequences to their choices benefit from engaging in self-authorship? One program developed at Colorado State University has been designed with these goals in mind. The results are promising as the model is now utilized on many other campuses. A second program currently under development at Colorado State University is also utilizing the concepts of self-authorship to guide its advancement.

Back on TRAC (Treatment, Responsibility, and Accountability on Campus)

It has, in fact, been difficult for some to embrace the idea that colleges do have a need to provide intervention and limited treatment programs. Colorado State University (CSU) has been instrumental in offering an additional alternative to traditional methods of intervention by way of a new model that offers both accountability and treatment. CSU has adapted the model and principles of a community drug court to students who have violated the student conduct code due to issues with substance abuse. This collaborative system of accountability through weekly staffing, case management, treatment plans, case reviews, drug testing, rewards, and sanctions, effectively deals with the students’ alcohol and other drug issues while allowing students to remain in school to accomplish their academic goals. Cognitive development, intrapersonal development, and interpersonal development skills are primary objects of the program.

The Back on TRAC program is leveraged development and treatment for students facing potential separation from the university due to drug or alcohol issues. The program emphasizes accountability and personal responsibility while providing on-campus treatment resources, case management, peer support, and individually tailored contracts. The program is based upon the community drug court model combined with the best practices of Student Affairs and Higher Education. A staffing team meets weekly to review each student’s progress in both treatment and developmental arenas.

The program is also unique in that it is a voluntary program in which students that may otherwise be separated from the university because of a conduct issue related to alcohol or drugs have an opportunity to remain in the campus community if they participate in the Back on TRAC program. Back on TRAC gives tools and insights by increasing holistic competencies for a lifetime of healthy living.

Students may qualify as a Back on TRAC candidate when alcohol or other drug fueled behavior has resulted in either potential suspension from the university or conditional admission due to previous school or community infractions. A hearing officer presents the student's case to the staffing team. This begins the formal application process. Included in the application phase is required assessment that most often includes:

- 1) An assessment of current mental health status
- 2) A thorough alcohol and other drug evaluation
- 3) Baseline urine analysis (UA) and random breathalyzer (BA) testing

Upon completion of an individually tailored contract, the Back on TRAC program is organized in three phases. The student can expect the contract requirements to take approximately three to eight hours per week to accomplish. The requirements include but are not limited to:

- A proscribed frequency of drug testing.
- Each student is assigned a Case Manager with whom the student meets weekly. The Case Manager will monitor the progress of goals, UA/BA's, academic progress, contract requirements and provide support.
- Each student is assigned a Clinician who will address therapy issues related to drugs/alcohol. Students are expected to meet with the Clinician weekly.
- All students report to a court-like campus room each Friday afternoon for a progress or status review. All staffing information is reviewed at this time. Students will give an update of progress on goals and concerns. Upon considering the weekly performance of a participant, appropriate incentives and/or sanctions are determined at this time.
- A curriculum of psycho-educational groups offer one-time workshops on a broad range of topics related to addiction and recovery, academic success, and developmental skill building. Students must attend all four workshops.
- All students sign a consent to treat and confidentiality waivers appropriate to their situation. In most cases, parents act as a partner with the staffing team to support the student in attaining the goal of being successful.
- All students with either a cumulative GPA or most recent semester GPA of 2.5 or below are required to have monitored study sessions at the DAY office.

Whereas the first phase of the program focuses heavily on initial comprehensive intake assessment and transitioning to abstinence, the second phase is designed to empower students to explore and maximize their potential. In order to complete Phase II, students are required to partake in an additional assessment that focuses on assets. In addition, students choose 4 among 12 different psycho-educational groups to further develop skills. Students continue to take random UA and BA's in addition to meeting every other week with both the clinician and the case manager. Self-exploration activities are fused into the treatment over breaks, as educational sanctions, and even rewards.

Phase three enables students to transition from the structure of the program to empower personal decision-making and realistic goals around legal substance use. In phase three students continue to decrease the frequency of random drug and alcohol screening in addition to participating in Wellness Activities that target significant areas of personal growth such as physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual life and work. Students also make plans for post treatment services. Relapse prevention and/or harm reduction contracts are encouraged for each student tailored to their individual situation.

The program is designed to maximize the number of tools each student can attain in order to be successful in the university environment and beyond. Some students quickly realize in order to be successful they must live a substance free life beyond the Back on TRAC program. Others seek a social life in which they consume responsibly, safely, and in a lifestyle that will remain within healthy boundaries.

Completion of the program is a significant accomplishment and a time of celebration. The Back on TRAC tradition is to share this accomplishment with other participants and special invited guests. Each Back on TRAC participant who is completing the program is encouraged to invite his or her family members, advisor, lawyer, or other significant friends. The Back on TRAC team often invites an honored guest from the campus or local Judicial District to share in the celebration. The student is invited to share his or her story during the special graduation ceremony. This is a powerful opportunity for those students just entering the program to see the work involved in completing the program and also experience firsthand the personal rewards of goals attained.

The program challenges students cognitively by moving from concrete thinking and significant structure to less structure and an increase in choices. The program focuses skill building and development by making treatment relevant to each student's experience. Peers are encouraged to support one another by creative problem solving, group sharing, social networking, and even 12-step encouragement. The program also intentionally includes a variety of self-exploratory identity development strategies.

The benefits of the Back on TRAC program have been staggering. Over the past five years, approximately 70% of students entering the program go on to complete and earn their university degree. The recidivism rate is less than 4%. Currently students pay \$200 to participate in the Back on TRAC program which generates some financial support. However, the cost savings is in what the university would have lost had these students been suspended. As of February 2007, Colorado State University had retained \$3 million dollars in tuition and fees that otherwise would have been lost.

Currently six additional institutions have pursued a Back on TRAC model at their corresponding institutions. Although each program has its unique program designs, the foundational principles are held in common. Steeped in the strategies of self-authorship, Back on TRAC serves as a promising model for a very difficult population of students.

Conclusion

In order to prepare students for the complexity of a demanding world, building skills through self-authorship is a promising approach in developing the whole student. Students whose behavior may signal skill deficits or developmental delays need not be removed from higher education. By incorporating self-authorship into conduct intervention programs, student affairs professionals can effectively and efficiently retain vulnerable students and enhance the broader community.

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