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ABSTRACT

This study reports the development of 25 post-baccalaureate students who participated in a longitudinal study of college students' epistemological development. experiences into the process of knowing. The study interviewed students to evaluate how they arrived at contextual knowing through experiential learning experiences. The experiences described offer specific examples of how to connect knowing to students' experience that could be used in undergraduate and graduate settings to promote contextual knowing. Findings indicated five major themes: (1) students value opportunities to think and explore for themselves, to struggle with ideas, and to formulate and support their own opinions; (2) students are interested in connecting their beliefs with their own lives and identities; (3) learning environments in which students' knowledge and experiences are central facilitate the making of such connections by students; (4) such learning environments are characterized by teachers and students taking on roles as equal partners who mutually respect each other; and (5) peers are also viewed as equal partners whose sharing and exchange of perspectives enhances exploration of what to believe. Student narratives illustrate these themes as well as the interrelationships among them. (Contains 14 references.) (GLR)

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The Development of Contextual Knowing in Graduate and Professional Education Settings

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The Development of Contextual Knowing in Graduate and Professional Education Settings

> The information is cut and dried. It is either right or wrong. If you know the information, you can do well. It is easy because you just read or listen to a lecture about the ideas, then present it back to the teacher. *--Jim*

> I don't care if people feel this way or that way about it. But if they can support their stance and have some background and backing for that, to my thinking that is valid. *--Gwen*

Most educators reading the quotes above will recognize Jim's comment as typical of many undergraduate students and view Gwen's notion as the desired outcome of higher education. Despite the debate on what form(s) education should take, most agree that the ability to critically analyze information to construct an informed perspective is valuable for productive participation in society. There is considerable evidence, however, that graduating students have yet to adopt Gwen's perspective.

One lens through which to view this issue is students' assumptions about the nature, limits and certainty of knowledge -- what Kitchener (1983) calls epistemic assumptions. The epistemic assumption behind Jim's comment above is that knowledge is certain and the property of authorities. His role is to acquire it and demonstrate his acquisition. Epistemological development research (Baxter Magolda 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule 1986; Kitchener and King 1990; Perry 1970) suggests that Jim will encounter experiences that challenge this set of epistemic assumptions during college, prompting him to adjust his assumptions. Prior to arriving at Gwen's perspective Jim will entertain the notion that knowledge is partially certain as he discovers areas of uncertainty, and as knowledge appears uncertain in more areas he may decide it is basically uncertain. Gwen has decided that varying opinions exist but that some are better than others. She judges what to believe based on her analysis of the validity of the ideas she encounters. I labeled Gwen's perspective contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda 1992). *Contextual knowers* believe that knowledge is uncertain and one decides what to believe by evaluating the evidence in the context in question. Learning for contextual knowers means thinking through problems, integrating knowledge, and applying knowledge in a context. Contextual knowers prefer instructors who focus on application in a context, evaluative discussion of perspectives, and allow student and instructor to critique each other's ideas. They also want this mutual exchange in evaluation, which they define as working together toward a goal and measuring their progress.

My longitudinal study of college students' epistemological development revealed that of the 80 students participating all four years, only two percent were contextual knowers as they neared graduation (Baxter Magolda 1992). This finding is similar to King, Wood and Mines (1990) report that seniors they studied still used their own and others' biases to decide what to believe, a process that would occur prior to contextual knowing. Kitchener and King's (1990) longitudinal research offers similar findings. My longitudinal study participants who were working toward contextual knowing as they neared graduation reported a few experiences in their college lives that encouraged this movement. On the basis of their experiences, I advanced three principles for promoting contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda 1992). The first, *validating students as knowers*, means communicating to students that they are capable of knowing and that their opinions have value -- a prerequisite for viewing themselves as capable of constructing knowledge. This validation is necessary for students to let go of the view that authorities are omnipotent. A related principle, *situating learning in students' own experience*, helps students connect learning to their own lives to arrive at the view that their experience and beliefs play a central role in knowledge construction. Finally, *defining learning as mutually constructing meaning* redefines knowing as knowledge construction rather than acquisition. The educator and student both bring their experiences and knowledge to be joined in the process of creating meaning.

These principles are consistent with educational approaches advanced by prominent educators and human development theorists. Belenky et al.'s study of women's epistemological development prompted them to argue for "connected teaching," a connected teacher being one who shared in the process of knowing and served as mid-wife to "assist the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it" (1986, p. 217). Feminist writers refer to this as hearing students into speech (Frye 1990). Palmer (1990) argues that this is essential to good teaching, the goal of which is "to draw students in to the process, the community, of knowing" (p. 12) Palmer argues that the objectivist approach of holding knowledge at arms' length "ignores the way reality is shaped by an interplay of knower and known, and it leads to teaching with no higher aim than making sure that students get the propositions straight" (p. 12). Introducing the interplay between the knower and known is an essential step in helping students move from Jim's assumptions to Gwen's. Introducing this interplay opens the door for subjectivity in the form of students' lived experience to become a part of the knowing process.

Perhaps the most eloquent proponent of centering education around students' lived experience is Paulo Freire. His description of problem-posing education (1988) clearly sketches the relationship between teacher and student differently from traditional education. Both participate in the knowing process, bringing their subjectivities to it, and by engaging in dialogue both are mutually affected by the other. Shor and Freire (1987) described liberation pedagogy with this comment: "The object to be known in one place links the two cognitive subjects, leading them to reflect together on the object. Dialogue is the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study" (p. 100). Shor (1992), calling this empowering education, clarifies the values inherent in this view of pedagogy. He argues that learning starts from what students bring (their lived experience), a condition that enhances their participation and their affect toward academic work, and proceeds forward as the teacher and students dialogue or "reflect together on the meaning of their experience and knowledge" (p. 86). This democratic process involves shared authority in developing class plans and discussions, selecting themes to address, and summarizing progress. Shor emphasizes, however, that "mutual dialogue is not a know-nothing learning process" (p. 247). The teacher brings her knowledge to the dialogue but rather than imposing it unilaterally, she introduces it in the context of the students' perspectives and themes. Shor argues that mutual inquiry involving the teacher's academic talk and the students' everyday talk transforms both.

Collectively these approaches suggest that connecting knowing to students' lived experience would help them conceptualize themselves as knowledge constructors, thus encouraging contextual knowing. Most of these approaches sketch out assumptions and values that underlie pedagogical practice rather than specific ways in which to implement these values. Following my longitudinal study participants after college revealed that they endorsed contextual epistemic assumptions. Those that pursued post-baccalaureate education found learning environments which incorporated their experience in the process of knowing. The purpose of this paper is to describe their experiences in these settings to illuminate how they arrived at contextual knowing. These experiences offer specific examples of how to connect knowing to students' experience that could be used in undergraduate and graduate settings to promote contextual knowing.

Method

The findings reported here are based on graduate and professional school experiences of the longitudinal study participants referred to earlier. A brief description of their undergraduate experience illustrates the context from which they approached advanced education. Their undergraduate institution is a midwestern, public, four-year liberal arts school. The original 101 participants' majors represented all six divisions of the university. Admission is competitive, the institution is largely residential, and the campus culture encouraged high involvement in campus activities, with one-third of the student body involved in Greek organizations. Of these 101 students, 80 participated all four years of the college phase of the study. Seventy participants continued in the study after the fourth year; fifty-nine graduated within four years and the remaining eleven in five years. Of that group only two were members of non dominant populations. (For a complete discussion of this phase of the project see Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Twenty-five of the 70 post-college participants enrolled in post-baccalaureate education. These settings included graduate programs, professional education, some undergraduate courses to prepare for advanced education, and miscellaneous courses related to participants' work roles. Fourteen students attended graduate programs including psychology (4), economics (3), masters in teaching (4), masters in business administration (2) and international relations (1). Four students returned to undergraduate courses: two to prepare for medical school, one to acquire certification in adult education, and one to prepare for a graduate art history program. The latter student took both undergraduate and graduate art history courses. Three students attended law school and two attended seminary. Two students enrolled in banking and real estate courses related to their work. Of these 25 participants, 9 entered full-time schooling immediately upon college graduation. Three more entered full-time schooling after one year in the workforce. One of these students worked simultaneously with full-time education. The remaining 13 students worked full-time and engaged in their educational efforts part-time. Of the 25, 12 are women and 13 are men; one is from a non dominant population.

The college phase of the study relied on qualitative interviews to allow learners' stories to be the primary focus. Because post-baccalaureate experiences varied widely, it was particularly important for the post-college method to allow insights to emerge from the learners' experiences. Thus an informal conversational interview (Patton 1990) was used. The annual interview began with a summary of the focus of the post-college phase of the project described as continuing to explore how individuals come to know and resolve knowledge claims. The participant was then asked to think about important learning experiences that took place since the previous interview that were relevant to this focus. The participant volunteered those experiences, described them, and described their impact on her or his thinking. The interviewer asked questions to pursue why these experiences were important, factors which influenced the experiences, and how the learner was affected. The interview addressed learning experiences in work life, everyday life, and academic life for the 25 students described above. Those in school full-time perceived that as most important whereas participants who worked full-time reported their work life as most important. The academic life findings are the subject of this paper. Interviews were conducted by telephone and ranged from sixty to ninety minutes. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview responses were analyzed using Patton's (1990) method for generating themes from naturalistic data. The transcriptions of the taped interviews were reviewed and divided into units, or sections of the response that represented one idea. The units were then sorted into categories to allow themes to emerge from the data. This process involves identifying which units converge or fit together and developing a classification system based on those categories (Patton 1990). The quality of the classification system is determined by judging whether the units in a category fit together in a meaningful way and whether the distinctions between categories are clear (Patton 1990). Categories were adjusted until they accounted for the units accurately. This process was conducted twice on the interview data; once for epistemic assumptions and once for experiences that were reported to affect assumptions about knowing. Ninety-two percent of the post-baccalaureate participants were contextual knowers; the other eight percent were independent knowers. The themes reported here are based on the experiences that affected epistemic assumptions. These themes encompass all but a few miscellaneous units. The analysis meets Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation that an accurate classification system should contain no more than five percent miscellaneous items. Themes for full-time students did not differ from those of part-time students. Credibility of the data is addressed through prolonged engagement (seven years) to build trust and understanding and member checking to assure accuracy of interpretations. Participants routinely receive summaries of interpretations and are asked their perspectives on these summaries.

Findings

Five major interrelated themes emerged from the students' experiences in post-baccalaureate experiences. First, students valued opportunities to think and explore for themselves, to struggle with ideas, and to formulate and support their own opinions. A closely related theme was their interest in connecting their beliefs with their own lives and identities. Exploring one's own beliefs and connecting them to one's life were possible in teaching and learning environments in which students' knowledge and experience were central to learning (theme three). These environments were characterized by teacher/student roles described as equal partners who mutually respected each other, the fourth theme. Finally, peers were also viewed as equal partners whose sharing and exchange of perspectives enhanced exploration of what to believe. The students' narratives illustrate these themes as well as the interrelationships among them.

Thinking, Exploring, and Supporting One's Own Ideas.

Although some students were inexperienced in exploring their own ideas in classes, many who continued their education post college found the process both difficult and appealing. Amy's instructor in an art history course encouraged students to share their thoughts in class and in their papers. Amy was not accustomed to this, as is evident in her reaction:

> We would have -- give our own opinions on artists - were they pop artists or pre-pop, and I would just be like ugh. . ..What in the world could I have to say? It had probably already been hashed out. Different people have different opinions and it's so hard for me to say "this is *my* opinion." It was easier for me to say these are the pros and cons of different people.

Amy acknowledged that she was "scared of showing my own ideas, being completely off." After talking with her instructor, she worked hard to try to give her opinion and trust her own ideas more.

Reginald concurred that struggling with ideas was easier when the nature of the process was acknowledged by professors. He found his seminary professors supportive in this regard:

> There's another professor that allows, in the sense of creating your own ideas, when the final papers or projects have to be done, he offers creative choices. You can do a regular paper or you can do something like a poem or a short story or a painting, something other than a normative. And then also their doors are open to come in,. . .or to hand something in and say, "I've struggled with this," or I might have had to hand in something a week later because I had started off in one direction and realized I was just spitting back someone else's words. But I've struggled with this and now I've done something that I need to write it for myself. And they present the grace of saying, "Yes, do that. That's what I expect. That's what I'd like you to do."

Sandra found struggling with dilemmas inherent in mental health work easier when she learned that her psychology professors also struggled with what to believe. Her worries about being overly sensitive were assuaged when she heard her professors say:

> "Well, gosh, that really bothers me too." So that's probably the biggest help, especially when the professor says so, too, "Well, yeah. I've been in this field for however long, and that still really bothers me too." Or, "It's still a really difficult decision to know what to do." . . . It's encouraging to know that they're still in the field and they've come across those more than once and they're not burnt out. So I can probably do it too.

Although clearly a struggle for all three students, Amy, Reginald and Alice were able to engage in the struggle more effectively because their instructors acknowledged and supported it.

Alice was also able to explore her own perspective, and increase her awareness of it, through a less than positive experience. She described a course in which a professor in her counseling psychology program intentionally discriminated against a few class members to illustrate how it felt to be treated this way. Although she was angry that she had been deceived, she reported this outcome:

> I guess it's made me real conscious of my own assumptions and my own frame of reference, realizing that it is my own frame of reference and that I have it, but it doesn't mean I have to be locked inside of it. I can't get away from my own feelings and my own biases and my own -- you know, that's there, I can't change it. But I can be aware of it and work with it and work around it. And I think that has helped a lot, it really has.

Despite their struggles with exploring their own perspectives, these students found exploring their own ideas appealing and recognized the central role their own thinking played in coming to know in their fields.

For some students, exploring and supporting their own ideas came easier. Andrew found this opportunity enjoyable in his economics program. He noted:

> We had to pick a topic and kind of take a position - we had to use economic tools, supply and demand charts, and explain why we thought is was correct or incorrect. Which was something I had *never* done in economics. Someone had to explain why supply side economics would reduce the federal deficit or would not. You had to argue it. And we weren't told what topic to choose - it was our own decision. . . . Defending your point and getting your point across is important. You are presented with a lot - you have to defend your position and why you chose something . . . people asking questions why? You have to reason why you did something. Every time I do something I think through it a little more. Asking that why question a lot more.

Similarly, Lowell encountered working on his own views in his international economics graduate program. He described his classes:

> They are called seminars and that's what they really are. We read a whole heck of a lot. . . So you take what you can glean out of these tests as you're going through them and bring them into the class discussion. It helps you hone your views and hone your arguments, which I think is beneficial. . . When you have to present something, it has to be, as you know, very well put together, very well organized so that not only does it make sense but that you can convince someone that your project is worthwhile or what have you.

Lowell also reported that grading in this program hinged on "what sort of thought processes and how well you can back up your argument." As a result he described his goal in classes:

> So for me personally I like to get as much of a cohesive view at the end, not that it's the final one, but just a better informed opinion or conclusion than I had at the beginning of the class.

Alice, who earlier in her academic program struggled with deciding what to believe, appreciated the flexibility that her internship supervisor and academic adviser offered her to explore what worked best for her.

> They can give me some insights or different strategies that they feel might be effective. And a lot of times what they're doing is just kind of letting me flounder through it and go through the process myself. And while that's hard, it's just like with anything else. I remember it and use it better if it's something that I came up with than if they just told me, "Use this technique, this works best for this."

Andrew, Lowell and Alice all found exploring their own perspectives enjoyable and believed the outcome was more valuable as a result.

Despite its inherent difficulty, most students valued exploring and supporting their own ideas. The effect is most clearly summarized by Alice and Reginald. Alice reported that she was more of a self-thinker in graduate school:

> I'm questioning things more, and I'm not taking -- just because I take notes and then that's the way it is and that's all that's been written and that's law. I'm finding that I'm really questioning things and issues. Like with the dual diagnosis. I'm really sorting stuff out for myself instead of just taking notes about everybody else's opinion.

Reginald tied self-thinking to the ability to learn. He saw establishing his own perspective as necessary for self-identity, which he in turn saw as necessary for learning. He described it like this:

> I can get into a classroom setting and if I want to look at having my own ideas, if I don't have any sense of what I believe -- I guess I had them but I never wanted to identify them. That was the thing that sets -- the boundaries were what were there where the instructor and I or the students and I -- we met at this meeting place and it would come to a point where I said, "Well, what about this idea?" They would say this and I would say, "Well, I'm not sure about that, here's something I -- how I look at it." And if the boundary wasn't there, the instructor or the person's idea would just overwhelm mine and say "Okay," and write it down and that was not my idea.. . . If I don't have boundaries, I lose the sense of who I am and I can't learn.

Thus the opportunity and encouragement to explore one's own perspective became viewed as a necessary foundation for exploring knowledge claims.

Connecting Beliefs with One's Own Life and Identity.

Not only did students encounter the notion of exploring their own perspectives in graduate and professional education, but they discovered that knowing was not divorced from their everyday lives and their personal identities. Having perceived it as outside of their experience as undergraduates, they now came to understand the active role of self in constructing knowledge. Some were just beginning to see this connection whereas others had developed it further. Deirdre was encountering this link for the first time:

> My consciousness is also being kind of -- you know, it's going through the roof so that I'm beginning to look at things ranging from my intimate relationships, I mean, with my parents and with other people, in different terms. I'm beginning to see more where this theory kind of really fits into everyday life.. . . Talking about the possibilities of what women today can do for their future, having a knowledge of that kind of past. I'm really beginning to see where that is so important because it really kind of awakens you to what goes on so that you can begin to fight because you know who you are and you know what you're about. You know what you can do, what you deserve and that kind of thing.

Finding out how knowledge related to her life opened up new possibilities for Deirdre. She concluded: "It's kind of realizing that everybody's experience isn't this kind of dominant idea, that your sense of what's important and what really is knowledge really is dependent on where you're coming from or what you value."

Alice also found that connecting knowing to herself was more powerful in her graduate psychology program. She explained:

> I have a counseling in groups class. Our group is going through the actual group process. You know, the phases of the group and getting to know each other and building trust and the struggles. It's real interesting to see it happen. We take kind

> of personal issues, nothing real in-depth but maybe interpersonal communication or something kind of light and we discuss it as a group. Again, it's the hands-on -- you know, you're seeing it happen to yourself.

"Seeing it happen to yourself" took on more meaning for Alice than learning group process in the abstract. Some students, however, viewed their academic experiences as disconnected from themselves or even contrary to who they were. For example, Laura described her fears of being shaped by her economics program:

> When you're taking all economics, a lot of mathematics, they're shaping the way you think about things. I really am fearful of that. And I sometimes fear that I'm losing creativity over this logical process of thinking in economics. I consider -- a large part of myself is very creative. I play the piano; I can draw and all this stuff. And the more I go in this logical direction, the more I seem to lose my creative side.

Thus while Laura was also recognizing the connection between knowing and self, the way of knowing required in her program was inconsistent with her creative bent. She was not sure she could effectively know in economics without losing herself.

Other students were committed to including who they were in the process of deciding what to believe. Sandra illustrated this notion as she described class discussions of dilemmas over whether a parent or child is a counselor's client in court or what counselors should report to protect children. She commented:

> There will be different viewpoints. . . Some of the class will say, "This is confidential and unless it fits under those specific legal guidelines of 'they're going to hurt themselves or they're going to hurt somebody else,' then you don't report that." And then we'll make different cases for, "Yes, you should," or "no, you shouldn't." And I guess if somebody could come up with some pretty good reasons as to why you should or shouldn't, then if it's consistent with how I feel I will take that. But if I don't feel that way on a gut level, then they're going to have to come up with a lot more to be able to convince me that you shouldn't report it. . .

What is clear in Sandra's comments is that she already has a belief system about these issues. Sandra explained that her belief system had developed from experience working in this area and values she constructed as a result. Although she is open to hearing arguments contrary to her beliefs, they need to be more elaborate if they are to override beliefs she has already internalized. Similarly, Andrew argued for acknowledging one's own biases as they form the reasons one holds a particular perspective. He said:

> The big thing is to see both views on a thing, and there may be more than just two. There may be several approaches to something. It's just a process of where you're coming from. And there's a lot of other views outside of your major that come into play, especially when it comes to economics. What you think is right as far as politically sometimes comes into the economic view that you support, of whether you think the government should be bailing somebody out, whether the model that you use includes lots of government spending, it's going to be so different than somebody else that thinks the government shouldn't be involved. But I think the biggest thing is just seeing all different sides and then making a decision. I'm not comfortable with just saying, "Hey, this is great. I'm going to take this or this, and that's what I'm going to go with." Too often I find if you do that, then somebody else that challenges you, you don't really know why you take this view.

Andrew advocates analyzing various views and approaches but simultaneously recognizing that "where you are coming from" is essential to knowing why you take a certain view. He believes that students should make conscious decisions about what to believe based on analyzing information and their own perspectives.

Ross supported Andrew's call for a balance between personal bias and evidence, emphasizing the need to look beyond his own experience. He described struggling with basic questions of truth (such as who wrote something, what did they believe) in his seminary classes:

> Most of the time I try to, I would hope I'm being objective. That's what our professors harp on, being objective when you come. But I've found it near impossible to do, in coming with so many experiences and knowing to a certain degree what God has done in my life and the different things I've seen changed, and the different people I've seen changed. And to forget all that and let's be totally neutral and see what these different people say -- it's been real difficult, to take that neutral stand.. . . One of the most important things is recognizing what you come to questions with -- this bias, or this experience --recognize it and try to not look from just that experience, but from this other person's point of view.. . . It's too easy to come to questions and say this is the answer based on what we've heard or experienced rather than looking at all sides.

Ross concluded that one has to make personal experience and evidence come together to decide.

A few students extended the notion of connection to self, identity, and one's life a little further. In the cases cited here, both students had encountered the link of self and knowing as undergraduates and were exploring it further in professional education settings. Reginald described the importance of living one's beliefs in a discussion about a paper for a feminist praxis course that was to be written for possible publication:

> I think that little fear may be dangling over my head, wanting to say just the right things and not trusting what (I) -- my experiencing and my learning. And then I think that's another reason for wanting to be able to live my theory. "How can I present it to 90 people if I can't live it myself?" But one thing I found here. . . is I'm given the grace to struggle with what I'm learning and to work on creating a sense of understanding and experience that I have created -- that I have come up with myself.. . . The sense of sitting back and saying, "Okay, what does this mean? What do I believe? What is this that I'm doing?"

Living his theory appears to extend his earlier comment that self-identity and boundaries were required to learn. Now he apparently feels the need to live those beliefs. Mark, in law school, also adopted this notion despite the fact that keeping his beliefs and knowing separate had served him well in previous academic settings. He described his earlier success like this:

> As far as feelings in a classroom, you're exposed to a host of new ideas. And to keep an open mind you have to check your gut reaction. And by checking those I've been able to really learn a host of things other people haven't because they've immediately closed their ears to new information, information that was different to them. So in a classroom to broaden my mind in the way I approach things, I just chuck the feelings and go with the ideas. It's really good in there.

Mark had found this approach increasingly wanting, particularly in knowing in other realms of his life, many of which overlapped with issues central to studying law. His transformation from knowing in the abstract to knowing through self prompted a major change for him. He discussed it in the context of dealing with racism, an issue he thought about on both a global and a personal scale due to an intimate interracial relationship:

> I'm still evolving as a person and all that. And my primary goal in life is to be happy.. . .I've kind of taken a big step back from politics and political action. When it deals with people that are close to you, then is the time for action. Because it interferes with your happiness, I guess you could say. Versus in a broader scheme. . . any effort, any cost I put into fighting racism on a grand scale isn't worth the effort, isn't worth any benefits I get back.. . . My first swipe at something. . . would be, "Does this make me happy?" And if it doesn't, it's dismissed. Just like the Law Journal work. You've got to listen to the internal cue there or you can end up in a psycho ward.. . .And maybe that's the first swipe you take at something like that. "What's this lead to?" Some kind of positive community, some kind of love, some kind of -- you know, what's this do?

Both Reginald and Mark illustrate mediating both the process of knowing and acting on knowledge with their own identities, their own life circumstances. Both demonstrate acting on what they belief, or as Reginald said, "living your theory."

Using Students' Knowledge and Experience in Teaching/Learning.

The importance of supporting one's perspective and connecting knowing to self was clearly evident in the learning environments students found valuable in graduate and professional education. Eileen reported that students spoke more in her graduate classes than instructors did; the instructors served as moderators to clarify students' ideas. This was true in Lowell's classes too:

> He starts off the class with some anecdote about his experiences. . . that initiates discussion. And he sort of acts as referee, and we kind of throw arguments back and forth at each other. He'll summarize things like you've done and say, "Okay, here's this, this and this," or he'll tell us a fact that he's seen because he's worked so closely with it. And then we discuss it and say, "Ah, well, you know, that's wrong," or "they shouldn't have done that."

Lowell appreciated his instructor's input and expertise, but the value of the class was student's ability to use their own experience to process the topic at hand. Andrew expressed a similar opinion noting that "A professor that comes across as, "This is what we're going to do," or whatever, students might be afraid to say, "Hey! Today in the Wall Street Journal, this is in here. Can we talk about this. . . ?" All three students appreciated the instructor allowing students' experience to take center stage.

Students reported specific opportunities through class formats or assignments to learn using their own knowledge and experiences. Hugh particularly liked an organizational class in his MBA program, calling it "the most incredible class":

> We did some role plays, I had the most fun. We did something called Dollar Power. It was fantastic. Everyone had to bring one dollar bill into class. She divided people in the class into the upper, middle, and lower group. The upper group was given a certain amount of money, the middle group was given some money and the lower group had no money. The upper group was in a nice room, the middle group in an average room, and the lower group were placed in the hallway. They took the shoes from the lower group and gave them to the high group. This is all they told us. The rules of the game were that the lower group couldn't talk or go to the offices of the other groups without permission from the next group. . . . We could do anything we wanted.. . . Lower group got hostile and there were communication problems. . . . I understood how communication works and how different groups get wrong ideas - what I learned was how you can't take things for granted, people can assume things when they are totally inaccurate. . . . No substitute for experiencing something.

Hugh further offered that most of his MBA classes were based on dealing with cases and situations from the real life experience classmates brought to the class. He found this to be more effective and, in his words, a "more mature" environment. Amy found her art history courses more stimulating for similar reasons. She emphasized liking exploring what she saw in art work:

> Being able to kind of see something and then have all this background and then also see this, being able to see this kind of stuff sort of in the painting itself or seeing what other people might have thought or coming to a painting yourself and discussing what you see in it, I thing that's really interesting to me.

Looking at paintings from her own perspective was still new, however, and Amy reported a bit of a struggle, particularly in one assignment where she was trying to work from others' perspectives as well as her own:

> I'm supposed to pretend that I'm a nineteenth-century art critic and look at some paintings in the (university) art museum. She's grouped them into two different groups. One is classical romanticism paintings and the other partings are impressionist and realist. And we have to choose a side and talk about why (some) are good and why the other ones aren't good. . . . It's kind of hard because I'm supposed to be using their ideas but yet I'm supposed to be writing from my perspective. None of these ideas are mine.

She was more comfortable in her modern art class in which the instructor told her she could go any way she wanted to on her paper. Amy liked this freedom to explore and to express her own perspective.

Ross also found papers and discussions in which students had freedom of choice useful:

> We did one five page paper and people really enjoyed what they got into. We specialized in one area, got to read some of the people who had opinions on that subject and looked at the historical progression of those different opinions. Then we summarized and gave our own conclusions. It was really fascinating and was enjoyable. I wish I could have had the same experience with different aspects of the course . . . Most experiences are more participative - breaking into smaller groups, doing some collaborative work, that's been enjoyable and rewarding. Having students do presentations on different areas. . . . It's so rewarding to interact with the material -- you bring all your experience and things you're dealing with at the moment -- that's when I found that I can bridge that gap between school and church. And say "ah, this is exactly what we're going through."

For Ross, using his own experience helped him connect what he was learning in seminary with the church he was trying to start. Jim had hoped for this same connection when he enrolled in banking school. However, his request to do a major paper on credit unions rather than banks was denied by his instructors. Jim decided to write the paper on credit unions despite his instructors reactions in hopes of enhancing his knowledge base.

Some students found environments that wholeheartedly supported their experience as the foundation for learning. Kelly was delighted with her graduate experience:

> The professors use more of our knowledge. In (undergraduate) they had the knowledge they wanted to give to us so we could be successful as professionals. In my graduate education classes, the feeling that I get is that they accept me as a professional. They *expect* me to come to the class with all this knowledge and they are going to take that and expand on a part of it, to make me see a different avenue on that knowledge. They'll use all the different areas in the class -- they take different types of knowledge - he pulls it out of each of differently and ties it together to help us see a point. I felt like the level of respect was there; I consider myself a professional. It's nice to be treated like I have knowledge. . . . The way they present the material -- it's not as much a knowledge transferred - it's more of an open discussion. They're comfortable enough with their knowledge and what they want us to learn that we can throw in ideas/angles and they'll explore them. They *want* us to bring in our experiences to the class. It's good to bring in things from my professional life and take them to another level. Even body language - the way they respond to us as professionals with knowledge. It makes me feel more confident. The respect I feel from professor makes me more comfortable to go out on a limb and say something I am not sure of.

Kelly's willingness to explore beyond her current experience was heightened because her professors started with her knowledge base and validated her as a professional. Her experience matches Reginald's earlier description of instructors encouraging him to decide what to believe on his own. By the outset of his third year in seminary he offered:

> What's going to start to happen. . . "What does this theory mean to me? What does it mean to live it? What does it mean to live what you believe?" And very soon, I think it will continue throughout the year. . . the sense of systematic theology. What is it you believe? Here's what other people believe. What is it that you believe? What is it that we believe as a community or al least profess that we believe? And what is the moral context and ethical nature of things. Yes, I think this will be a year of reflection.

Reginald's educational environment stressed his knowledge from the very beginning; and after becoming increasingly comfortable with claiming his own experience, he is ready to reflect on what he and his community believe.

Mutual Respect between Students and Teachers

The notion of mutual respect is inherent in the preceding themes; however, in a few cases students commented on it directly. They applauded teacher's efforts to construct equal teacher-student relationships and complained about situations in which teachers treated them like children. Deirdre, contrasting a graduate and undergraduate class, said:

> We're not treated like kids; we don't act like kids. Some people don't work in the class and the teacher accepts that but doesn't take it like a personal thing.. . . We're all adults in there; I think I'm the youngest one in there. And there's that kind of respect and listening to each other and it's less master-slave, like I feel this other one is.

Sandra drew a similar contrast between her graduate psychology professors, stating the difference in more concrete terms. One professor's response to questions was consistently "it's in your notes" whereas the other two professors interacted with students differently. Speaking of the latter professors, she explained:

> They'll stop class and if you have a question they're going to explain it and they're not going to go, "Well, it's in your notes." They're really good about explaining, an if you have an example that you just don't understand where it would fit, they'll tell you. Or they'll help you figure it out. And that's kind of how I think it should be. . . .(the professor) was really good about- - if she didn't know she said, "I don't know. Let me look that up or check that with the agency that you work at to see who's going to be liable". . . and told us where to find Ohio law if we'd like to look it up. It was just much different than, "Well, it's in your notes."

Deirdre and Sandra both felt learning in the mutual respect context was more satisfying. Unfortunately, many students reported teacher-student relationships that were not characterized by mutual respect or equality. In some cases these were an exception in programs that otherwise treated them as adults; in a few cases there were typical of the program. Tracy described it best in describing a professor she and her peers were frustrated with: "He just seems as if he's from the old school genre of 'Well, I'm going to talk and you're going to listen. And you're not going to question what I have to say,' which I don't think is very good."

Environments in which mutual respect was more forthcoming prompted students to delve into learning more readily. Reginald shared his satisfaction with this environment:

> My course started off from the very beginning team taught, in the circle, in the round, and one of the first things they said was, "While you're here there's going to be some people that make you feel like a child. . . that are going to talk at you. But we say to you, 'no, this is your education. Go for it.'" . . . I didn't raise my hand; I was, of course, cordial and polite, and it was part of a dialogue. There people were part of the course as much as we were, and they were saying that too. "We're learning from you."

Andrew had more specific experiences in many of his economic courses that stemmed from mutual respect. He explained:

> I find in econ, we talk about what's going on in the Wall Street Journal or articles all the time. The same thing in finance; we pull a lot more in and it's a lot more open discussion. The teacher asks, "When's the best day for the test for you? Let's look at our schedules. Do you want to take it at night so we can have a longer time frame? Do more of an essay test?" There's a lot more of that going on. A lot less, "This is the way it is.". . . When we have (exams) we sat down and discussed, depending on when would be a good break as far as what we're going to be studying and whether we did cases in classes. Do we want to do more than one team project? How do you feel? Do you really want to work on teamwork in this class? So a lot of that was a lot more flexible and it wasn't set for you right away.. . . A lot more of your thinking is put into class.

In Andrew's case, teachers not only treated students like adults in the course of conversation, but invited them to participate in mutual decision making regarding the class direction and activities. Students were freer to explore their thinking, connect knowledge to self, and use their experience in settings characterized by mutual teacher-student respect.

Collaboration among Peers in Exchanging Perspectives

Almost all the students in graduate and professional education programs valued collaboration with their peers. For some, this stemmed from the diversity of their classmates and the experiences they brought to the program. For example, Lowell's international economics courses were enhanced by the experience of class members:

> There are a number of people like myself who work in the federal government and for business who have a lot of experience. So they can bring a lot of their own experiences. . . into the classroom situation. Many people have interns at the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund or State Department or what have you. . . So the professor starts off, and everybody can put their input in. And it's pretty relevant since most people are really tightly involved in what's going on.

Marge's premed courses also contained a diverse group of people. She described it like this:

> I'm in a nontraditional environment; there are people in my classes that are in their 50s and there are some (university) students that are taking classes there also that are younger than I am. It's interesting; there are working Moms. There's just a

> whole different class of . . . I thing those people bring some perspective. My friends in my class, one is an electrician, one is a flight engineer, one works for the Senate here in Ohio, another one is going back to school full-time who used to be in human resources. They're interesting to be around. They're not just like me. They all have something that we can learn from and something we all appreciate about each other.

Learning from people with different backgrounds was also important to Hugh:

> In our classes we don't have books, we just have these Harvard Business Review cases and we read them, it's very discussion and hands-on oriented. It's fun sometimes. Some are fascinating because I'm one of the youngest students there. There are people with experience in their 30's and 40's with kids - you're working on group projects with them and they've been managers for years. You get a different perspective just talking to them. . . . I've learned a lot about the bigger picture. People have different backgrounds, some with finance backgrounds who look at it that way, others from a human standpoint, they look at things differently. Being with financial minds at the bank you don't learn to look at things from different perspectives. You need to be able to see macro picture.

Hugh felt he could acquire a bigger picture by hearing from people whose minds were other than financial. Tracy found different experience bases helpful in her psychology program as well:

> Most of the people who attend are either people who are already working who never got their undergraduate degree for some reason; they had to go right to work and who are now coming back to school; a lot of people in my classes are business executives who are getting their graduate degrees and their businesses are paying for them. So I think the average age is around 26. . . You find out -- I like it because some the people bring their actual experiences into the discussions. Another thing is there's a heck of a lot more diversity. . .

Collectively, students appreciated the diverse backgrounds and experiences their peers brought to class and felt that sharing these perspectives enriched the learning experience.

Some students focused on the value of processing their thinking with peers. Ross illustrated this view:

> I learn easier with interactions between students instead of just a straightforward lecture. A few (classes) are like that at seminary. The majority of them are lecture. I can pull more out of those by seeing opinions of other students and as well as processing some ideas by someone asking how I think about it. The idea that's on the table, pulling that into my own experience - seems to help me remember it more and put it in my framework of looking at life. It's difficult (in lectures) - normally it ends up happening outside of the class in talking with students or explaining to my wife what I learned.

Processing was so important to Ross that he pursued it on his own when it was not built into class. Mark took a similar approach in law school, explaining the importance of "engaging the other students." He commented: "(Here) you're able to do it. . . because everyone here has a story and everyone is very intelligent and articulate. And I feel honored to be (here) because you can knock on your neighbor's door and discuss anything."

Andrew found that talking through ideas with peers helped him figure out why he held a particular view.

> Something that added a lot was dealing with people from different countries. Grad school was very heterogeneous. People from different backgrounds had different opinions and tastes. . . . A little bit of antagonism is good for learning- it forces you to think about why you believe what you believe. . . . A lot of things we're taught in business are from an American approach and they are not necessarily the best way. . . international students challenged a lot of what we took as standard. They even argued with the financial theories which supposedly aren't one of the things you debate. It was really good, they just - we had people from communist countries who had very different perspectives. A lot of what they said made sense for the type of situations they were dealing with.

For Alice, processing her thinking and her actual counseling performance was not a matter of choice. Despite that, she found it helpful, as is clear below:

> I'm taking a counseling techniques class. It's hands-on, they throw you in the video booth and just do it.. . . There's a group of four of us and then there's two supervisors. We view them as a group of six. We each point out what we think are the strengths and weaknesses of that session, what we think needs improvement, what was good. You get a lot of feedback from different sources. So I think that's been real helpful. . . . You learn to trust those people real quick. So, it's real comfortable now.

Talking with their peers helped these students explore what to believe, why they believed something, and how to act on their beliefs. Alice also noted the trust involved in this type of sharing.

The trust Alice mentioned was a central theme for some students. Deirdre noted that closeness played a central role in her class being able to appreciate each other's diversity:

> It's a really dynamic kind of environment. The class is so close now. I mean, I know everybody in there; I could talk to them about anything. We're all -- it's very close and we work well with the teacher. And I think we all see each other as very different in terms of what we'll choose to read for each other. And that's a whole good thing. You can look at them and really appreciate what they have to offer. And the class seems really rich because there are some really different people in there.

Reginald also indicated that trust played a role in the quality of dialogue:

> Dialogue in the seminary became more open as time went on. I've been more comfortable (with dialogue) as time progresses, but I have my boundaries, the people who I trust I'll be more willing to talk more openly with. Be more free with. . . . With people I really do trust, sometimes I divulge too much. I let everything out without thinking about it - that's my way of processing what I'm learning. . . . I'm willing to do this with people I trust. . . . This year is the first time I did a study group, I used to do things individually. I had a good study group of people I trusted, and some interesting things came out of that group in terms of what people were believing - it was a biblical class on the prophets. A critical analysis of it, learning different people's views of how they went about biblical interpretation. Where they drew the line in terms of critical analysis and scripture, holy piety kind of thing. We were very close - we knew how to laugh together - but had differences in beliefs.

These comments imply that as students became more trusting of each other they were able to take greater risks in exploring their beliefs and take advantage of diverse perspectives in knowledge construction. In some cases the fear of disagreeing was lessened by closeness among peers.

Contextual Knowing Revisited

The five themes that emerged from participants' graduate and professional education settings extend the conceptualization of contextual knowing that I sketched on the basis of a few of their undergraduate experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Although the core of contextual knowing remains the same -- students' own perspectives taking a central role in constructing knowledge -- the post-baccalaureate stories illustrate more clearly how students respond when their knowledge construction is viewed as central by professors. When the notion of exploring and supporting one's own opinion was first introduced to students, they were often uncomfortable with it and hesitant to trust their own ideas. However, encouragement from professors to try to explore their own beliefs, to practice supporting various stances, to experience something directly in order to decide what one thinks, and professor's acknowledgment of their own struggle with knowing helped students delve into and appreciate this process. Connections to life and identity helped students recognize the role biases play in knowledge construction and that knowing is not solely a rationale process devoid of subjectivity. These realizations not only validated students as knowers but made the knowledge construction process accessible to them. Once discovered, they appreciated using their knowledge construction capacity in learning and valued settings in which this was the norm. From this epistemological vantage point knowledge became automatically situated in their own experience because their experience played a central role in deciding what to believe. However, their instructors also emphasized evaluating evidence and merging it with one's own experience. The expectation of mutual respect and equal relationships among professors and students stemmed from students' attempts to balance their experience and knowledge with knowledge constructed by others and introduced through professors. Recognizing the value of one's own perspective translated to recognizing the value of peers' thoughts and a subsequent appreciation of the diverse ideas of others and the process of exploring various perspectives together. Professors and peers were seen as collaborators in the mutual construction of knowledge.

Implications for Promoting Contextual Knowing

Collectively the students post-baccalaureate experiences offer insight regarding how to draw students into the learning process, the community of knowing, and offer opportunities for contextual knowing. First, their stories illustrate the kind of experiences that validate students as knowers. This took place primarily through using students' knowledge is learning and creative assignments. When Kelly's graduate professors expected her to bring knowledge from her teaching life to class, she felt that they accepted her as a professional and as a person with something valid to say. Amy's modern art teacher validated her knowledge when she encouraged Amy to look at paintings to see what Amy might see in them. Hugh's organizational development teacher used the Dollar Power activity to create an experience from which students could make sense of inequality in group interactions. Hugh's ability to establish his own perspective about it made it an exhilarating process for him. Amy's assignment to give her opinions on artists and Ross' seminary paper in which he came to his own conclusions communicated to both students that thinking for themselves was appropriate.

Opportunities to explore one's own ideas were not sufficient for some students whose ability to explore required support in the process. Support was reported in three forms:

creative options for assignments, acknowledging that deciding what to believe is often a struggle, and professors acknowledging that they too struggle with deciding what to believe. Reginald's professor offered creative choices for the format of a final paper or project, facilitating Reginald's creation and expression of his own ideas. When Amy approached her instructor with her concerns about her opinions on the artists (another creative assignment), the instructor acknowledged that it was difficult and encouraged Amy to trust her own opinions. Reginald's instructors also acknowledged the difficulty in creating one's own ideas by giving him extra time to complete assignments to truly express himself. Sandra was encouraged when she learned that her instructors struggled too and that this was an ongoing part of knowing in her field.

It is important to note that the instructors described here did not just support students thinking whatever they pleased. Another form of supporting students' developing their own beliefs was giving them practice in merging evidence and one's own experience. Andrew reported that arguing for and against topics in economics helped him figure out why he held particular beliefs. Similarly, Lowell honed his views by discussing knowledge from his texts in class, a class in which grading was based on students' ability to back up their arguments. Sandra's class making cases for a particular action pro and con was something she considered in light of how she felt about it in the first place. Ross also tried to look at issues in the seminary from perspectives other than his own experience at the suggestion of his professors. The expectations of these instructors that students consider evidence outside of their own experience reflects Shor's (1992) argument that empowering education is not a "know-nothing" process.

In the course of encouraging students to simultaneously develop their own beliefs and consider other knowledge in the process, the instructors described here acknowledged the role of students' subjectivity in knowledge construction. Alice knew that her thoughts and feelings counted both in the course in which the students went through the group process in order to learn about it and in her internship where she was given the flexibility (or chance to flounder as she called it) to decide what strategies worked best for her. Reginald also received direct support through conversation and assignments to reflect on his own biases in deciding what to believe. However, other students like Mark, Sandra, Andrew and Ross, expressed awareness of their biases or feelings but did not describe this awareness as stemming from their educational settings. In these students cases recognition of their own biases came from work and personal life experience. Although some connection to life and identity is evident in the stories told here, more evidence for this connection occurred for participants who worked full-time after college. Prior to contextual knowing, most students exhibited either an impersonal (objective) or a relational (subjective) pattern of knowing. Many of their work and personal life experiences, as well as some of the personal life experiences of participants in graduate and professional education settings, prompted the merger of these patterns, both of which are necessary in contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1993). Because this connection became more clear to participants through actual experience, incorporating more experience into education such as Hugh and Alice described is important.

In some ways incorporating more experience into learning settings was accomplished by teachers who served as moderators or referees. They encouraged students to bring and express their own experiences, leading to the appreciation of diverse views of peers expressed by nearly all of the post-baccalaureate participants. Their role as moderators kept the exchange of views productive and helped students learn how to analyze and process various perspectives. The respect inherent in this approach to teaching also validated students' experience and set the stage for connecting knowing to their lives. The stories about mutual respect between teachers and students convey much of what Shor calls empowering education and Belenky et al.'s connected teaching.

Promoting contextual knowing, then, involves capitalizing on students' experience, creating particular experiences that students have not encountered, framing class discussion that encourages analysis of existing knowledge and personal biases, asking students to support their beliefs in discussions and papers, assignments that involve processing one's own beliefs in light of relevant knowledge, and serving as a moderator for students to engage in these activities. Perhaps more importantly, directly communicating to students the importance of exploring their own thinking and the difficulty of such a task might help them begin to engage in it. Presenting knowing as an ongoing process of critique and analysis, of combining one's own and others' knowledge and of combining objective and subjective is the first step in students letting go of the acquisition mode so many have been trained to adopt. Because many of the students whose stories are told here enrolled in advanced education immediately after graduation, it is unlikely that they were vastly different in terms of readiness to hear this view of knowledge than they were as seniors. It seems, rather, that their views of knowing changed when their instructors presented the process differently. Although some needed more support to move toward knowledge construction than others, their instructors presenting and modeling knowledge construction seemed to be the turning point. The experiences they described seem reasonable for both undergraduate and graduate education. Promoting contextual knowing in both will necessitate educators modeling knowledge construction rather than knowledge acquisition.

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