The Personal Development Methodology is a framework for people who are committed to their own growth. It allows them to address their limitations in practical ways, and it increases their ability to handle the challenges of reintegration as they move to higher levels of personal development. The methodology presents a logical pattern of actions related to metacognitive skills that guides the individual through the self-growth process in ways that can result in significant change, especially if an effective mentor provides guidance over an extended period of time. Individuals who learn to use this methodology can expect to gain a greater sense of self-confidence, increased self-esteem, and enhanced appreciation of themselves as persons with unique identities and talents. This module provides information about the processes and tools involved in the steps of the methodology. An example illustrates how the methodology might work for an individual with a particular area of focus.

### Table 1  Personal Development Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Recognize the need for change and growth</td>
<td>Current limitations or constraints require some action or decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explore contextual issues</td>
<td>Assess the current situation, resources, priorities, and barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Prioritize based on values</td>
<td>Decide what is important for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. State clear outcomes</td>
<td>Set goals with outcome criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Develop a plan</td>
<td>Create an operational plan that includes defined activities and time allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Perform to the plan as set</td>
<td>Execute the planned steps or actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assess performance</td>
<td>Monitor progress towards the objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Adjust the plan</td>
<td>Assess, during activities, on the basis of criteria, measuring progress, and making adjustments accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Appreciate gains</td>
<td>Acknowledge growth and progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Reward achievement</td>
<td>Motivate yourself for future successes; celebrate your successes with family and friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Description of the Personal Development Methodology

The Personal Development Methodology is a systems framework or guide that is focused on the whole person, emphasizes integrating skills with values, and focuses on achieving life goals. Sometimes these goals may be blocked by some barrier, whether internal or external (4.2.2 Becoming a Self-Grower). Performance skills in the affective domain, especially commitment to self, are central if one is to succeed in one’s personal development goals. In other methodologies, such as reading, teamwork, etc., which have a focus on more discrete performance skills, affective skills are secondary. In all methodologies, however, repeated looping among the steps and intense personal commitment to performance improvement are essential for successful results. The personal development process is complex, and can be derailed in many ways; so it is imperative that one be aware of the significant processes in each step.

### Selecting a Mentor

Individuals without experience with the first four steps in the methodology usually need to select a mentor before they begin using the methodology. The selection of a mentor (Johnson, 2002) is a highly significant personal decision that must be approached with discernment, focusing especially on the ability of the prospective mentor to establish rapport and trust quickly. Kitchener (1992) explores the ethical dimensions of the mentoring role in the context of higher education, especially the issue of differences in power and status. Individuals who offer to be mentors must have strong affective skills in the area of valuing others, and they must be able to facilitate self-management and emotional management skills in those whom they mentor. Having clear ethical and policy guidelines is a wise preventive strategy for mentoring programs, and individual mentors should carefully discuss the nature and expectations of the relationship with those mentored.

### Analysis of Steps in the Methodology

Each of the ten steps in the methodology involves a specific action. These action steps will be reviewed to identify the main intent, processes, tools, and outcomes for each.
Step 1—Recognize the need for change and growth.

It is difficult to accurately assess one’s own growth issues and to clearly state priorities for change. Often a mentor’s most important contribution is helping a person become aware of a need for change and for a commitment to growth (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Initially, individuals may seek assistance about a crisis or problem that is creating negative emotions and cognitive distortions (Piattelli-Palmarini, 1994) that disrupt their ability to cope. The initial steps in the Personal Development Methodology may take some time because it usually takes repeated efforts before the direction of change in personal priorities becomes clear. Individuals often seek an immediate fix instead of engaging in a truly life-changing process that incorporates a longer-term, developmental approach. Cauce et al. (2002) found that many individuals, especially those from ethnic minority groups, need help from counselors, family members, or mentors if they are to become aware of ways to pursue a positive mental health and personal development path despite negative influences from their life contexts.

Step 2—Explore contextual issues.

Complementary to recognizing the need for change and growth (Step 1) is the exploration of the current situation, resources, and barriers. Step 2 puts emphasis on the environments, social situations, and contextual aspects of the person’s life that are likely to create variations in his or her successful self-growth. It is challenging, but essential, to accurately assess contextual issues such as family support, peer behaviors, experiences with authorities, and sufficiency of resources in order to support goals or overcome barriers. A strong way for a person to address Steps 1 and 2 is to complete a life vision portfolio with guidance and assessment from a trusted mentor.

Step 3—Prioritize based on values.

It is often difficult to be fully conscious of one’s own values. However, when an individual is in a transition phase which forces him or her to make life changes or to engage life in a more challenging way, it is necessary that he or she make them conscious. By articulating value statements, individuals, organizations, or societies express the essence of life’s most meaningful aspects. Academic disciplines are based upon values, organizations are anchored to a set of values, societies coalesce around collective values, and the quality of a person’s life is based upon living consistently with positive values. The better one analyzes and clarifies his or her own values at any level or in any context, the more likely it is that one’s behavior will be consistent with one’s values. As noted, the life vision portfolio is a significant tool for analyzing and clarifying individual values.

Step 4—State clear outcomes.

Outcomes must be carefully distinguished from the behaviors and processes used to meet or achieve them. The performance criteria for the outcomes in a personal development plan must be clear, measurable, realistic, and relevant to the person’s intent and priorities. In most cases a personal development plan will involve learning skills contained in the social and affective domains. The contexts in which a person plans to carry out the plan must be carefully considered to assure that the wording of expected outcomes is specific and concrete.

Step 5—Develop a plan.

Achieving outcomes requires attention to deadlines, availability of resources, and opportunities. The Planner’s Report form in the Learning Assessment Journal (Apple, 2000) is designed with teamwork in mind, but it can be adapted for describing the practical steps and logistics needed in personal development tasks. Chapter 10 of Foundations of Learning (Krumseig & Baehr, 2000) provides general resources for personal development. A complete personal development plan should include behaviorally defined steps, record keeping requirements, definite timelines, identification of resources, specification of contexts for tasks, and assessment criteria for each outcome.

Step 6—Perform to the plan as set.

Individuals vary in how well they monitor their achievement of the steps that lead toward outcomes in their personal development plans. Mentors must support growth and refuse to accommodate lack of responsibility or task avoidance on the part of the mentee. Procrastination is a common problem that can be addressed by shortening timelines and breaking processes into smaller steps. If an individual views a goal as essentially one large step, he or she will avoid approaching any aspect of the goal and, therefore, make no progress. Cook (2000) found that it is less important to identify why procrastination occurs than to directly address it as a behavior needing improvement. The most important safeguard is a carefully written, detailed, and mutually agreed upon personal development plan that includes clear methods of assessment.

Step 7—Assess performance.

To determine how well the outcomes are being achieved, personal growth objectives must be assessed (4.1.1 Overview of Assessment) at intervals established in the plan. Mutually agreed upon assessment methods during the planning stage will facilitate resolution of difficulties that occur because of ambiguities or missing elements in the
plan. The SII technique (4.1.9 SII Method for Assessment Reporting) is the recommended assessment method because it is readily adjustable to the qualitative changes involved in the Personal Development Methodology.

**Step 8—Adjust the plan.**

Assessing performances related to the outcomes in the plan is likely to result in new insights related to changes in challenges and opportunities impacting the person’s life, growth in values, and increased self-regulation (e.g., Patrick & Middleton, 2002) indicated by independent use of the Personal Development Methodology. If it appears necessary to set new or different standards of performance, a mentor can apply the Accelerator Model (4.3.4 The Accelerator Model) to help a mentee continue to move past his or her comfort zone.

**Step 9—Appreciate gains.**

Mentors can help mentees recognize improvements in their attitudes about learning, risk, and life vision that result from taking on increasing challenges. Even small life changes are highly significant because they predict an increased ability to actualize potential in the future. Reflection on growth experiences, e.g., by using the Learning Assessment Journal, involves ongoing exploration with the goal of capturing creative insights that will directly influence decisions. The module Performance Levels for Learners and Self-Growers (1.4.5) provides a set of behavioral standards to guide assessment of progress toward personal development outcomes.

**Step 10—Reward achievements.**

Important accomplishments need to be recognized and celebrated with family and friends. Making personal development goals public in this way helps individuals feel positive while also adding powerful social motivation for continuing to set challenging personal development goals. How achievements will be rewarded should be built into the personal development plan to help individuals stay motivated to achieve outcomes.

**Application of the Personal Development Methodology**

Kardash (2000) reported on an Undergraduate Research Experience (URE) that involved mentoring science students with the goal of improving their ability to “do science.” The instructional theory included the assumption that this level of learning requires a cognitive apprenticeship in situated cognition (i.e., a specific type of learning environment in which learning occurs) so the students will learn to think of the tasks in the same ways that expert mentors do. Despite careful guidance by URE faculty regarding the central learning goals or priorities, such as students’ ability to ask new scientific questions, the data suggested that these goals were less well achieved than were secondary ones, such as the ability to give effective oral presentations.

A strong focus on the first three steps of the Personal Development Methodology (recognizing the need for change and growth, exploring contextual issues, and prioritizing based on values) is essential for helping students focus on central growth issues, such as the improved ability of the URE students to ask questions that resemble those asked by professional scientists. Students need to be consciously aware not only of personal learning and growth potential but also of their ability to overcome barriers within themselves. Without this awareness, learners will not be able to reach the new levels of growth that result from deepening reflection on attitudes, values, and skills related to a life goal.

In this simulated example, Amy, an imaginary high-achieving science student in a URE, uses the Personal Development Methodology with support from her faculty mentor in order to enhance the value of the experience.

Amy already knows that she intensely enjoys the laboratory procedures and detail involved in biology and chemistry courses, but she has spent little time consciously reflecting on how her personality and learning style will fit with her career aspirations. Initial discussions about her conceptualization of a science career lead her mentor to suggest that she focus on the bigger picture and learn more about the responsibilities and challenges that go with such a career by joining him in the upcoming URE.

Amy knows that she deeply admires the persistence and creativity of many scientists, especially those who have made historically significant contributions, but she begins to wonder how well her values will fit with those common in many science jobs outside the university. She reflects on questions like “Will it bother me if seeking truth turns out to be a smaller part of my career than grantsmanship? Can I generate enough original ideas?”

Amy can easily state clear outcomes for her science project but she struggles with how to state outcomes for her goals of clarifying the fit between her personal life priorities and a career in scientific research. She accepts her mentor’s challenge that she demonstrate her increasing awareness of the practical nature of doing science by stating ten substantive insights about the fit between herself and a science career by the end of the URE. Standards for insight statements include the following characteristics:
they must be related to processes needed in science work, they must be at “Level 3” quality (2.2.2 Elevating Knowledge from Level 1 to Level 3), and they must be elaborated in ten, one-page write-ups that differentiate the insights and include supporting observations and reasoning.

From her learning journal, Amy notices that she is starting to think of herself as an active and independent scientist and that it is becoming easier to write her insights at the generalized level modeled by her mentor during their discussions. Amy’s mentor arranges for special URE awards for her and several of her peers who also have taken on the personal development challenge.

Concluding Thoughts

Learning how to stay on an accelerating path of personal growth is a high priority for anyone who wants to create a more meaningful life by overcoming barriers and increasing positive changes. This module provides an overview of the Personal Development Methodology, including supporting tools, resources, and research for its ten steps. The purpose of the methodology is to guide those individuals who seek to learn the skills for achieving self-regulated personal growth, the basis for a well-lived life. Those who learn to flexibly use the methodology to guide their planning, actions, and assessment will gain greater personal confidence, increase their ability to respond to mentoring, become more aware of the role of values, and seek continuous self-growth in all life contexts.

References


