

Stage 1: Learners of Low Self-Direction Dependent learners need an authority-figure to give them explicit directions on what to do, how to do it, and when. For these students, learning is teacher-centered. They either treat teachers as experts who know what the student needs to do, or they passively slide through the educational system, responding mainly to teachers who "make" them learn.

Some learners are dependent in all subjects they are "taught;" others are dependent only in some subjects.

Some dependent learners become excellent students within a specialized area; they can be systematic, thorough, and disciplined, mastering a settled subject or transmitting a fixed tradition.

Some learners are enduringly dependent; others are temporarily teacher-dependent because, in Pratt's terms, "they lack either relevant knowledge, skills, and experience or the motivation and self-confidence to pursue educational goals" (1988, p. 168).

Being a dependent learner is not a defect; it can, however, be a serious limitation. All learners--of whatever stage--may become temporarily dependent in the face of new topics. Learners of other stages may freely choose to learn in a dependent mode--e.g., for efficiency or to gain access to a certain teacher.

Stage 2: Learners of Moderate Self-Direction Stage 2 learners are "available." They are interested or interestable. They respond to motivational techniques. They are willing to do assignments they can see the purpose of. They are confident but may be largely ignorant of the subject of instruction. These are what most school teachers know as "good students."

Stage 3: Learners of Intermediate Self-Direction In this stage, learners have skill and knowledge, and they see themselves as participants in their own education. They are ready to explore a subject with a good guide. They will even explore some of it on their own. But they may need to develop a deeper self-concept, more confidence, more sense of direction, and a greater ability to work with (and learn from) others. Stage 3 learners will benefit from learning more about how they learn, such as making conscious use of learning strategies (Derry, 1988/9).

As part of the process of weaning from other-direction, students in Stage 3 may examine themselves, their culture, and their milieu in order to understand how to separate what they feel from what they should feel, what they value from what they should value, what they want from what they should want. They may learn to identify and value their own experiences in life. They may learn to value the personal experiences of others.

Successful Stage 3 learners develop critical thinking, individual initiative, and a sense of themselves as co-creators of the culture that shapes them. This may involve a therapy-like shift of personal paradigm--a "perspective transformation" (Mezirow, 1981) or "life-world transformation" (Wildemeersch & Leirman, 1988)--or it may come as a gradual enhancement of developing power.

Stage 3 college students see themselves as future equals of the teacher, as professionals or worthwhile adults in the making, but they may not be experienced or motivated enough to continue on their own. They may want to be involved with teachers and other learners and to be respected for who they are and what they can do.

Stage 3 learners work well with the teacher and with each other in the design and implementation of learning projects. Students can learn collaboratively at any stage, but students who are ready for Stage 3 learning can

accomplish far more together than students in earlier stages.

Stage 3 can be an exciting phase; students are happy working in the warm interaction of a friendly group--and many don't want to leave it. However, a vital part of Stage 3 is for students to become empowered, so that they learn to create lifelong learning situations for themselves.

Stage 4: Learners of High Self-Direction Self-directed learners set their own goals and standards--with or without help from experts. They use experts, institutions, and other resources to pursue these goals. Being independent does not mean being a loner; many independent learners are highly social and belong to clubs or other informal learning groups.

Learners at this stage are both able and willing to take responsibility for their learning, direction, and productivity. They exercise skills in time management, project management, goal-setting, self-evaluation, peer critique, information gathering, and use of educational resources.

The most mature Stage 4 learners can learn from any kind of teacher, but most Stage 4 learners thrive in an atmosphere of autonomy. Some learners become situationally self-directed; some become self-directed in a more general sense.

Interestingly, Stage 4 learning does not completely do away with teachers. As Candy puts it, "There are certain skills and other bodies of knowledge which are best and most easily mastered under the tutelage of an expert" (1987, p. 229).

From Grow, Gerald O.(1991/1996) "Teaching Learners to be Self-Directed." *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3), 125-149.