

## Learning Resource D

### The Self-Concept of a Self-Directing Person

It is suggested in Learning Resource B that one of the competencies possessed by self-directing learners is a concept of themselves as nondependent and self-directing persons. How does one develop such a self-concept? Certainly a starting point is having a clear picture of what it means—being able to visualize how you would feel, how you would think, what you would do if you were completely self-directing. Presented below are some descriptions of self-directed learners (or self-directed learning) that may help you construct a model for yourself and, by comparing where you are now in your thinking about yourself with that model, discover aspects of your self-concept that might need strengthening.

The adult able to break the habits of slovenly mentality and willing to devote himself seriously to study when study no longer holds forth the lure of pecuniary gain is, one must admit, a personality in whom many negative aims and desires have already been eliminated. Under examination, and viewed from the standpoint of adult education, such personalities

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seem to want among other things, intelligence, power, self-expression, freedom, creativity, appreciation, enjoyment, fellowship. Or, stated in terms of the Greek ideal, they are searchers after the good life. They want to count for something; they want their experiences to be vivid and meaningful; they want their talents to be utilized; they want to know beauty and joy; and they want all of these realizations of their total personalities to be shared in communities of fellowship. Briefly they want to improve themselves; this is their realistic and primary aim. But they want also to change the social order so that vital personalities will be creating a new environment in which their aspirations may be properly expressed.

—Eduard C. Lindeman, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (New Republic, Inc., New York, 1926), pp. 13–14.

... if genuine dialogue is to arise, everyone who takes part in it must bring himself into it. And that also means that he must be willing on each occasion to say what is really in his mind about the subject of the conversation. And that means further that on each occasion he makes the contribution of his spirit without reduction and without shifting his ground. Even men of great integrity are under the illusion that they are not bound to say everything "they have to say." But in the great faithfulness which is the climate of genuine dialogue, what I have to say at any one time already has in me the character of something that wishes to be uttered, and I must not keep it back, keep it in myself.

—Martin Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," translated by Ronald G. Smith, in *The Knowledge of Man*, edited by Maurice Friedman (Harper and Row, Inc., New York, 1965.)

These populations [high learners] are marked by learning, by efforts to achieve their inherent potential, and by curiosity and *joie de vivre*. Yet, at the same time, these people like their present job, understand and accept their own characteristics, are not strongly dissatisfied with their present self. They

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have the confidence and courage to reveal their real self. They have clearly directed interests: they choose their own career and activities and are not pushed by external forces. They strive to achieve certain major goals, are spurred on rather than blocked by obstacles, and are productive and successful. Their relationship with at least a few people tends to be compassionate, loving, frank, and effective.

—Allen Tough, *The Adult's Learning Projects*  
(Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1971), p. 28.

The school of the future must make the object of education the subject of his own education. The man submitting to education must become the man educating himself; education of others must become the education of oneself. This fundamental change in the individual's relationship to himself is the most difficult problem facing education for the future decades of scientific and technical revolution. (p. 161)

Learning to learn is not just another slogan. It denotes a specific pedagogic approach that teachers must themselves master if they want to be able to pass it on to others. It also involves the acquisition of work habits and the awakening of motivations which must be shaped in childhood and adolescence by the programmes and methods in schools and universities. Each individual's aspirations to self-learning must be realized by providing him—not only in school and university but elsewhere too, under conditions and circumstances of all kinds—with the means, tools, and incentives for making his personal studies a fruitful activity. (p. 209)

—Edgar Faure, and others, *Learning to Be*  
(UNESCO, Paris, 1972).

The basic tenet of democracy has been stated in these terms: "When men are free, they can find their own best ways." But what is a free man? A man with a full belly? A man without problems? A man with no pressures? Free to do as he pleases? When such things are achieved, a man is still

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only part way there. People need more; they need the freedom to become. Scientists who have written about the nature of self-actualization are generally agreed that one characteristic of such fortunate persons is the possession of a high degree of self-esteem. They see themselves in essentially positive ways.

It would be hard, indeed, to overestimate the importance of a positive view of self for effective behavior. The self is the center of a person's existence, his frame of reference for dealing with life. Persons who approach their problems with an air of "can do" are already far ahead of those who begin with a "can't do" attitude, expecting defeat. With a positive view of self one can dare, be open to experience, and confront the world with open arms and quiet certainty.

—Arthur W. Combs, Donald L. Avila, and William W. Purkey, *Helping Relationships: Basic Concepts for the Helping Professions*  
(Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1971), p. 144.

A mature person is not one who has come to a certain level of achievement and stopped there. He is rather a *maturing* person—one whose *linkages with life* are constantly becoming stronger and richer because his attitudes are such as to encourage their growth rather than their stoppage. A mature person, for example, is not one who knows a large number of facts. Rather, he is one whose mental habits are such that he grows in knowledge and in the wise use of it. A mature person is not one who has built up a certain quota of human relationships—family, friends, acquaintances, fellow workers—and is ready to call a halt, dismissing the rest of the human race as unimportant. Rather, he is a person who has learned how to operate well in a human environment so that he continues both to add new people to those whom he cares about and to discover new bases of fellowship with those already familiar.

—Harry A. Overstreet, *The Mature Mind*  
(W. W. Norton & Company, 1949), p. 43.

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(Cyril O. Houle, \* in his pioneering study of continuing learners, found that they profited by seven key principles:)

1. Act as though you are certain to learn. Nothing so disturbs the beginning adult student as the nagging fear that he will not be able to learn what he would like to learn. Nothing is more reassuring than the discovery through experience that he can succeed. . . . Adults can learn most things better than children, though it may take them longer to do so.

2. Set realistic goals—and measure their accomplishment. One frequent obstacle to adult learning is that men and women, realizing that they have the full power of their strength and vigor, think that they ought to be able to learn without any effort or strain whatever. . . . In any learning program, therefore, you must first of all be realistic about what you can achieve.

3. Remember the strength of your own point of view. Your learning is strongly influenced by the point of view you bring to it. . . . Most important of all, do not let your established values harden into such fixed beliefs that you cannot tolerate new ideas. When this happens, the process of education ceases.

4. Actively fit new ideas and new facts into context. Your greatest asset as an adult learner is the fact that your experience enables you to see relationships. When a new idea or fact is presented, you can understand it because you have background and perspective. And you can remember it because you can associate it with what you already know and therefore give it meaning.

5. Seek help and support when you need it. Sometimes an adult will choose to learn by himself, and sometimes he will choose to learn with others. A balanced learning program combines many elements, though not all at the same time. But while adults often teach themselves what they want to know, they may run into real dangers if they rely on this

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method too consistently. . . . One time when it is well to seek out a teacher is when you are beginning the study of a new subject. . . . A second time when you need help is when you bog down in your studies. . . . A third time when it is wise to seek help is when you feel the need of the social stimulation of a class or a group.

6. Learn beyond the point necessary for immediate recall. We all learn many things we do not really wish to remember—and which we promptly forget. . . . If you want to remember something permanently, however, you must do what the psychologist calls *over-learning*. Even after you can recall the fact or perform the skill perfectly, you should keep on reviewing it.

7. Use psychological as well as logical practices. You have already had an illustration of this rule. In Chapter 1 you were urged first to skim this book, then to read it, and then to examine it closely. Now it seems illogical to many people not to go through a book thoroughly, digesting a paragraph at a time. Yet research has shown that the way here recommended is better.

—Cyril O. Houle, *Continuing Your Education*  
(McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964), pp. 18-35.

Exploration of the full range of his own potentialities is not something that the self-renewing man leaves to the chances of life. It is something he pursues systematically, or at least avidly, to the end of his days. He looks forward to an endless and unpredictable dialogue between his potentialities and the claims of life—not only the claims he encounters but the claims he invents. And by potentialities I mean not just skills, but the full range of his capacities for sensing, wondering, learning, understanding, loving, and aspiring.

The ultimate goal of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education. This will not be a widely shared pursuit until we get over our odd conviction that education is what goes on in school buildings and nowhere else. Not only does education continue when

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schooling ends, but it is not confined to what may be studied in adult education courses. The world is an incomparable classroom, and life is a memorable teacher for those who aren't afraid of her.

—John W. Gardner, *Self-Renewal*  
(Harper & Row, New York, 1963), pp. 11-12.

It appears that the person who emerges from a theoretically optimal experience of personal growth, whether through client-centered therapy or some other experience of learning and development, is then a fully functioning person. He is able to live fully in and with each and all of his feelings and reactions. He is making use of all his organic equipment to sense, as accurately as possible, the existential situation within and without. He is using all of the data his nervous system can thus supply, using it in awareness, but recognizing that his total organism may be, and often is, wiser than his awareness. He is able to permit his total organism to function in all its complexity in selecting, from the multitude of possibilities, that behavior which in this moment of time will be most generally and genuinely satisfying. He is able to trust his organism in this functioning, not because it is infallible, but because he can be fully open to the consequences of each of his actions and correct them if they prove to be less than satisfying.

He is able to experience all of his feelings, and is afraid of none of his feelings; he is his own sifter of evidence, but is open to evidence from all sources; he is completely engaged in the process of being and becoming himself, and thus discovers that he is soundly and realistically social; he lives completely in this moment, but learns that this is the soundest living for all time. He is a fully functioning organism, and because of the awareness of himself which flows freely in and through his experiences, he is a fully functioning person.

—Carl R. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn*  
(Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company,  
Columbus, Ohio, 1969), p. 288.

## Learning Resource E

### Relationship-Building Exercises

#### *Rationale*

Students typically enter into any activity labeled "educational" with the notion that the appropriate relationship for them to establish with fellow students is that of competitor, and that they should relate to a teacher as an authority figure. This has been their conditioning, for the most part, through previous schooling. In Martin Buber's terms, they see one another as "its" rather than as "I's and thou's," as objects rather than as fellow human beings. Furthermore, they tend to think of resources for learning as residing outside themselves—in teachers, experts, books, and the media. They usually don't even know what resources their fellow learners have to contribute, and wouldn't think of using these resources even if they knew what the resources were.

Self-directed learning can flourish only when learners and teachers see one another as mutually helpful human beings with resources to share.

#### *Objectives*

The objectives of these exercises are to help learners: (1) begin to experience other learners as collaborators rather than as competitors, as human beings rather than as