The Independent Learner

Dorothy Coombs
April 2010
“A degree course is very different from A-level, or other level 3 qualification, in that you will be expected to take responsibility for yourself and your learning”

(Jennifer and Richard Latto)
• What is an independent learner like?

• Why should learners be independent?

• How can we encourage independence?
What is he/she like?

Students say:

Finds things out
Does extra work
Is well organised
Doesn’t have to be pushed
Teachers say:

Confident
Flexible
Well motivated
Self disciplined
Inquisitive
After an absence the dependent learner says:

> I was “bad” (ill)
> I was going to come to a workshop
> I looked for you
> I couldn’t find you
> Didn’t you get my e-mail?
> Did I miss anything important?
> (On being asked for the homework):
> “I wasn’t there was I?”
The Independent Learner says:

} Please could you e-mail me the work I missed/will miss

} I am sorry that I was absent, I will come to a workshop to catch up

} I have contacted my friend and I have done the work I missed
Why does it matter?

“The ultimate goal of the teacher is to shift to the individual the burden of learning”

John W Gardner
What are we aiming to achieve?

> To equip students for life-long learning?

> To improve exam results?
What is the role of the teacher in encouraging independence?

- To raise self esteem (but not unconditionally)
- To shift locus of control from external to internal
- To promote meta-cognition
How do we do this?

- Make learning enjoyable
- Give clear instructions
- Value students’ opinions
- Teach less and allow learning more
- Be a learner yourself
- Allow students to make mistakes
- Work in partnership
- Sometimes say “It might be” not “It is”
- Be a role model
- Try saying “Imagine you are....”
The Drawbacks

- Time consuming?
- Less control?
- Scary?
References

} Claxton G. “Building Learning Power” TLO

} Jarvis M. “Teaching Post 16 Psychology” Nelson Thornes.

} Latto J. and Latto R. “Study Skills for Psychology Students” O.U.P. 2009