NEEDY STUDENTS

Relevant Literature

Commencing a dissertation requires an undergraduate student to undergo multiple transitions simultaneously, including from directed to autonomous learning, from knowledge consumer to knowledge generator, from pupil to academic collaborator, and from being one-of-many taught to an individual relationship with a supervisor (Day & Bobeva, 2007). Many students have difficulty making the transition from course-taker to independent researcher (Lovitts, 2005). Goode (2007) argues that the privileged discourse of the ‘independent learner’ and ‘self-directed learning’ within higher education renders those not independent and self-directed learners as ‘deficit’. Students who may take longer to transition are seen as ‘problematic’ and ‘hard work’ to supervise (p. 592).

But how realistic is it to expect students to become self-directed autonomous researchers over the typically one year period of an undergraduate dissertation? It is expected that over the course of a PhD a student will progress from “relative dependency to competent autonomy” (Gurr, 2001), suggesting that perhaps the more likely outcome from an undergraduate or honours dissertation is relative dependency. Gurr (2001) produced the Supervisor Student Alignment Model that depicts hands on supervision as providing the appropriate level of support for dependent students. This model can be used by students and supervisors over time to assess the appropriate style of supervision according to the developing autonomy of the student.

References:

