

# Learning Effectiveness

## Key Practice: Other

### Practice: Knowing Behavior Patterns Helps Teaching and Learning

**Institution:** University of Central Florida

#### **How this practice improves learning effectiveness:**

At the University of Central Florida (UCF), we are investigating the learning-style patterns of students taking web-based courses. We base our measurement protocol on the theory of William A. Long of the University of Mississippi Medical School. Long theorizes that students most accurately exhibit their preferences for knowledge acquisition and concept formation when they encounter ambivalence -- the pull from dependence to independence that reflects counterpoised feelings toward a set of stimuli (e.g., interacting with parents and teachers, leaving home for college, forming expectations of academic and social life on campus, or taking an online course for the first time).

According to Long, individuals have an affinity for one behavior type. The intersection of energy level and of the need for approval yields four basic Long types, defined by two dimensions (aggressive-versus-passive and independent-versus-dependent). These types may be augmented by four ancillary traits. Aggressiveness denotes the energy level that students bring to the learning environment. Aggressive types are high-energy students; passive types are low in energy. Dependency identifies the level of approval that students need from others, with dependent types thriving on approval and independent types having little need for it. Long argues that the teacher's major role is to remove (or at least be aware of) obstacles that impair students' normal progression.

The following gives a brief overview of the Long types:

**Aggressive Independent (AI).** These students possess high energy levels, are action-oriented, and have little need for peer or teacher approval. They lack judgment, express their thoughts and feelings impulsively, tend to be disorganized and nonlinear, and prefer to work independently. They resolve conflicts through confrontations. They are challenging students, preventing teacher complacency. Often in leadership positions, AI students can develop into fresh and direct individuals who deal with situations as they are encountered. Teaching strategies for working with AIs include offering them choices, having clearly defined behavioral expectations, using independent activities, and assigning them leadership roles.

**Aggressive Dependent (AD).** Like AI students, AD students possess high energy levels and are action-oriented, but they need peer and/or teacher approval. They are nonconfrontational and eager to please, rarely expressing negative feelings like anger or disapproval. They participate in class, often seek out the instructor outside of class, and maintain harmony within group situations. They perform at or above their ability. AD students are high achievers found in honors courses, student government, service organizations, and athletic programs. Teaching strategies for

working with ADs include providing ample opportunities for instructor approval, supplying guidelines so that they do not take on more than they can handle, and creating opportunities to mentor other students.

**Passive Independent (PI).** Passive Independent students can be stubborn, nonparticipatory, or withdrawn, presenting formidable challenges to both parents and teachers. They resist pressure from authority and are not concerned with approval. They are at great risk in academic settings because they resist the "system" continuously (e.g., they don't meet deadlines). PIs prefer to work alone. They are particularly baffling when manifesting superior ability yet behaving in ways contrary to their own best interests. They may present a poor academic self-concept from long-term underachievement patterns. Teaching strategies for working with PIs include establishing short-term goals and offering as much flexibility as possible

**Passive Dependent (PD).** These students are gentle, sensitive, nonconfrontational, and very compliant. The PD's need for approval dominates parental, peer, and teacher relationships. They are highly sensitive to the feelings of others, and they perceive disagreement and criticism as personal rejection. They are always at risk (e.g., if you tell them to tie the right shoe, they will tie only the right shoe and not the left because you didn't tell them to do so). As PDs mature, their excessive need for approval becomes the mark of a gentle, caring human being. Teaching strategies for working with PDs include establishing clear and complete directions for accomplishing tasks and providing a great deal of encouragement.

**Evidence (or plan to obtain evidence):**

Type	N	%
Aggressive Dependent	228	60
Aggressive Independent	87	23
Passive Independent	47	12
Passive Dependent	9	5

Furthermore, we discovered differences among Long types regarding attitudes toward fully online courses. Fifty eight percent of ADs and 65 percent of PDs indicated that they missed face-to-face interaction in a traditional classroom. AIs and PIs indicated less need for face-to-face interaction: only 16 percent of AIs and 10 percent of PIs indicated lack of face-to-face interaction as a negative.

How learning styles pertain to issues such as achievement, retention, and withdrawal should be further examined. Clearly, the online environment provides the flexibility for developing individualized strategies to address differences in learning styles. We are examining the possibility of providing advance organizers for our students that

advise them about expectations, role changes, and instructional challenges in online learning as compared with their on-campus, face-to-face courses.

**Estimated costs associated with this practice:**

**Relation to other pillars:**

Faculty and student satisfaction:

Behavior patterns affect both faculty satisfaction and student satisfaction. Clearly, the online environment provides the flexibility for developing individualized strategies to address differences in learning styles. We are examining the possibility of providing advance organizers for our students that advise them about expectations, role changes, and instructional challenges in online learning as compared with their on-campus, face-to-face courses.

**References, supporting documents:**

None

**Useful links:**

<b>URL/Web Address</b>	<b>Link Description</b>
<a href="http://www.ucf.edu">http://www.ucf.edu</a>	University of Central Florida
<a href="http://www.center.rpi.edu/PewSym/mono4.html">http://www.center.rpi.edu/PewSym/mono4.html</a>	Excerpted from
<a href="http://polaris.umuc.edu/~rouellet/learning/about.htm">http://polaris.umuc.edu/~rouellet/learning/about.htm</a>	Long/Dziuban Learning Style Inventory
<a href="http://www.center.rpi.edu/">http://www.center.rpi.edu/</a>	The Center for Academic Transformation

**Summary:**

The University of Central Florida investigated learning styles of online learners based on the theories of William Long, which explain that individuals exhibit four basic patterns of response to ambivalence. Knowing these patterns helps teachers remove obstacles to learning.

**Other Comments:**

None

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