

## Developmental Stages of Teachers

Stroot, S., Keil, V., Stedman, P., Lohr, L., Faust, R., Schincariol-Randall, L., Sullivan, A., Czerniak, G., Kuchcinski, J., Orel, N., & Richter, M. (1998). Peer assistance and review guidebook. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Education. Retrieved February 15, 2008 from <http://www.utoledo.edu/colleges/education/par/Stages.html>.

The purpose of this piece is to introduce the developmental stages of teachers and to apply these developmental concepts to the styles and strategies of mentoring by consulting teachers. There are multiple theories in the literature that describe the process of learning to teach and the changes that a teacher experiences during these processes. One theory that has been used to describe a teachers' movement through his or her career has incorporated developmental stages of teachers. Like any theory relating to developmental stages, the teachers' developmental stage theory assumes that stages are distinct phases that teachers experience, and are hierarchical in nature.

Developmental stages address various domains, including the cognitive (Piaget, 1961), conceptual (Hunt, 1971), ego (Loevinger, 1966), interpersonal development (Selman, 1980), and values or morals (Kohlberg, 1969). Although all of these developmental theories address different domains, they are all interrelated. Each of the developmental theories move from the concrete to the abstract, and each of them follow the same characteristics of stages described by Kohlberg (1973). These characteristics include: distinct or qualitative differences in structures that perform the same function at various points in development, different structures that form an invariant sequence in individual development, different and sequential modes of thought that form a structural whole, and hierarchically integrated stages. Kohlberg (1973) proposed that stages incorporate changes in quality, competence, and form as a person moves from one stage to another.

Stages of development can be directly applied to the experiences and concerns of all teachers as they learn to teach. Consulting teachers in a Peer Assistance and Review program work with entry-year teachers and experienced teachers who may have been in the district for many years. Entry-year teachers may be first-year teachers who enter in one of the early stages of development, or they may have come into the district with multiple years of teaching and quickly move to one of the advanced stages of development. Experienced teachers in trouble are probably in one of the early stages of development, but with assistance, may move quickly to later stages. **It is important to understand the stages of development in order to provide adequate assistance for teachers as they strive to be more effective in their classroom setting.**

Stages describing the development of teachers have been created at the pre-service and in-service levels. One of the most well-known models for pre-service teacher development is that of Fuller and Bown (1975). Fuller and Bown's model identified sequences of concern which begin with the pre-teaching stage, in which pre-service teachers continued to identify with the pupils in the observed class rather than themselves

as a teacher. The second stage addressed an early concern about survival, where they lost their idealistic fantasy of the teaching role and became concerned about their own survival as teachers. The third stage included limitations of the teaching context, where pre-service teachers were concerned about their own teaching performance, but not yet about whether the pupils were learning. **In the final stage, the teachers became concerned about pupil learning, and began to see pupils as individuals with individual needs.** Other researchers have identified models focusing on pre-service teacher's development stages, including Caruso, (1977); Sacks and Harrington (1982); and Yarger and Mertens (1980). These models are similar to Fuller and Bown's, also moving from the concrete to the abstract, using specific stages to describe teachers as they move through this continuum.

Following Fuller and Bown's pre-service stages of development, and using the Teacher Concerns questionnaire developed by George, (1978), Marso and Pigge (1994) surveyed approximately 300 pre-service and in-service teachers in various stages of their career. Four career periods were identified: pre-service teachers, teachers with 5-19 years of experience, teachers with 20-29 years of experience, and teachers with 30+ years of teaching. Lower levels of concerns about the task of teaching were reported by pre-service teachers compared to the in-service teachers, though in-service teacher groups were not significantly different from one another. Late-career teachers did, however, report lower concerns about self-survival than did mid-career teachers. Pre-service teachers also reported significantly lower levels of concern for impact on pupils than in-service teachers, and again the in-service teacher groups were not significantly different from one another. Perhaps one limitation of this research is reflected in the career periods identified by the researchers. Large ranges in the career periods limit the knowledge of development, as much of a teacher's development occurs within the first 5 years and within the 5-19 year period.

Similar models that have focused on in-service teachers' developmental stages include Burden (1980), Gregorc (1973), Katz (1972), McDonald (1982), Peterson (1979), Unruh and Turner (1970), and Yarger and Mertens (1980). Like the pre-service models, stages of in-service teachers all flow through the same hierarchical concepts that move from concrete to abstract, and in the teachers' world, move from stages referring to teachers' survival to that of master teacher. Katz's (1972) model was chosen to explore these stages in more detail, though the same examples could be infused into other pre-service and in-service models. Katz also describes developmental stages that teachers could experience within the first five years of their teaching career.

Katz (1972) identified four in-service teachers' developmental stages: Survival, Consolidation, Renewal, and Maturity. In **the first stage of Survival**, the major concern of the teachers was coping on a daily basis, as teachers began to question their personal and professional competence and their desire to teach. During Katz's Survival stage, the teachers are asking questions of themselves like, "Can I make it until the end of the week?", "Can I really do this work day after day?", or "Can I get through the day in one piece?" Survivors are focused on themselves and their own needs, and have little understanding of their students and their needs. **In order to offer assistance to teachers**

**in the Survival stage, it is important to provide on-site guidance for specific teaching skills and suggestions to meet group and individual needs of students.** The Survivor needs to understand the direct relationship between what the teacher does (or does not do), and what the students do (or do not do).

Often in the survival stage, teachers do not take responsibility for what occurs in their classroom. They may try to rationalize their inability to teach effectively by not acknowledging that they have a problem or by blaming the school context or the students themselves when they do recognize that there is a problem. Comments such as, "I think things are going pretty well", even when they are not, or "I know what I am supposed to do, but it just doesn't work with these kids", or "I can't follow the curriculum because I don't have enough materials to do it the way it needs to be done", or "The principal will not support me when I need help with discipline", or "You might be able to do that in another classroom, but you don't know the baggage my kids bring to my class. It won't work here!" These teachers tends to blame the students, the principal, the lack of materials, or anything but themselves when they are not able to accomplish the task of teaching. Often, in the Survival stage, teachers do not believe they have any control of their teaching context.

When observing teachers in the Survival stage, they may not have clear rules and routines in the classroom nor consistent procedures for managing student behavior. They tend to react to situations that occur rather than anticipate and prevent potential problems by using preventive management strategies. Teachers in the Survival stage are also very self-centered and when they are able to teach, they focus on the act of teaching without considering whether or not the students are learning. Although Survival teachers may have a lesson that they have planned, it is common to observe them go through the lesson as though it was a script that could not be changed. There is no recognition of students' reactions to the lesson, no checks to see to what extent the students understand the material that is presented, and no modifications of the materials to address the differing needs of individual students in the classroom.

The teaching style of the teacher in the Survival stage is often a teacher-directed style, with little interaction or contribution from the students. The teacher is unsure of his or her ability to maintain control in the classroom, and prefers to have students in passive roles rather than active participants in the learning process. These teachers are likely to agree with a student-centered style of teaching in theory, but are likely to say that "it won't work with these kids", and revert back to the teacher-directed style. If they do try something new, teachers in the Survival stage will make quick decisions about whether or not the new strategies work. If they do not experience immediate success, they are likely to revert back to the teacher-directed position where the teacher maintains the power of control, even if it was not previously working.

**Teachers in the Survival stage have very specific needs within their classroom, and need very specific suggestions from their consulting teacher to address those needs.** Survival teachers have difficulty incorporating ideas that they learned in their teacher education program or that someone has shared with them into their own classroom

setting. They need suggestions for the specific situation that they are experiencing at that time. It is also important that Survival teachers realize that there is no one answer, but only ideas and suggestions that may or may not work with all students.

Survival teachers also need resources to help them develop and present their lessons. However, it is not enough to provide information without interaction. When sharing resources with Survival teachers, it is important to help them make that connection between the information that the consulting teacher is providing and how it can be used to meet the specific needs in the classroom. Specific suggestions regarding how the materials can be used to meet objectives, or how management strategies can be used to create a positive learning climate for the class are necessary for the Survival teacher to effectively integrate the ideas or materials into their daily classroom.

When sharing these ideas, it is also helpful to take the discussion to multiple levels. For example, when having a discussion about setting rules for the class, take the discussion to the next level by exploring multiple options, just in case the first suggestion does not work. The consulting teacher might say, "Try this, and if this doesn't work, here is another suggestion. If neither of these work, your options are . . ." **Give the Survival teachers multiple options so that they do not find themselves in exactly the same situation if their first attempt does not work.** They need the continued, ongoing support and suggestions as they learn to be a teacher.

By the second year, many teachers have entered **the Consolidation stage**, and have begun to focus on instruction and the needs of individual children. Teachers in the Consolidation stage ask questions like, "How can I help a child who does not seem to be learning?" or "How can I deal with a child with a specific discipline problem?", or "How can I change my lessons to meet needs of low ability/high achieving students?" Often teachers in the Consolidation stage have been able to implement rules and routines for the groups, and have lessons that meet the needs of the students in the class. The teachers are beginning to focus on individual children with unique problems and specialized needs.

While observing a teacher in the Consolidation stage, it is common to see the majority of students well-managed and the instructional activities meeting the needs of the average student in that class. Students who have special behavior problems may still be disruptive, and though the individual needs of students are beginning to be recognized, the teacher is still struggling to find ways to meet special needs.

**Consulting teachers should be ready to exchange ideas with teachers in the Consolidation stage, and begin to help them network with their colleagues in similar areas of expertise to facilitate further exchange of ideas.** These teachers also need opportunities to share their feelings and ideas with teachers in similar stages of development. The teachers in the Consolidation stage will require their consultants to provide a wide range of resources in order to have materials and ideas ready to meet specific needs of the children in their classes. Consulting teachers will should also share documentation regarding staff development workshops or graduate course work, as these

teachers are interested in opportunities within the district or community to gather additional information.

**In the third stage of Renewal**, teachers are often in their third or fourth year of teaching, and have become competent in the practice of teaching children. Activities and patterns previously established have become routine and boring, and teachers are looking for new ideas that provide variety in the teaching setting. Teachers have mastered the management strategies, and have explored and conquered various instructional strategies. An observer entering the classroom is likely to see a well-managed classroom where students are actively engaged in tasks that are appropriate to their individual needs. **Teachers in the Renewal stage are always striving to improve their classes and are interested in continually trying new methods or adding new "twists" to their teaching patterns.**

Teachers in the Renewal stage are always asking questions like, "What are some new materials, techniques, approaches, ideas, etc., that I can try in my classroom?" or "What is the teacher in my specialization doing in the next building?" or "Are there new ideas that have emerged since the last time I was in class?" Renewal teachers are often interested in professional development opportunities that are available through local, state, or national organizations. They may want to attend conferences or become members of their professional associations. These teachers may also be interested in enrolling in graduate course work or examining their own classroom teaching through videotaping or action research projects. They are also interested in visiting other classes and having visitors to their classroom so they can share ideas in the applicable context and get new ideas from their peers.

Most often, these teachers are very self-motivated, and consulting teachers merely need to provide opportunities for the Renewal teachers to pursue their own agenda. If the consultants have materials and resources to share with the Renewal teachers, they are always appreciated. The consulting teacher can also share their ideas, and listen as the Renewal teacher shares some of the ideas that he or she may be using in the classroom, and brainstorm modifications or similar strategies with the teacher.

**The final stage of Maturity** occurs when teachers begin to ask questions of themselves and their teaching that focus on insights, perspectives, and beliefs of teaching and children. **Teachers in the maturity stage are still interested in new ideas and resources, however, they begin to ask deeper and more abstract questions about their philosophy of teaching and the impact they may be making in and out of the school setting.** Questions include, "What are my philosophical perspectives?" or "How will schools change society?" or "What is my role to assist in change?" An observer entering the Mature teacher 's classroom will observe similar scenes as those of the Renewal teacher. It is through discussion with the teachers that the subtle differences emerge.

In offering assistance to teachers in the Maturity stage, consulting teachers can encourage the teachers to participate in conferences and seminars and to accept leadership positions

in their school, community, or professional organization. These teachers tend to make excellent mentors because they have experienced all of the developmental stages of teachers and understand the needs of teachers moving through these stages.

So what does all of this mean, and why should we care about developmental stages of teachers? **A consultant's knowledge of these stages and each teacher's place within the model will help determine the type of interaction that will best facilitate mentoring.** The stage of development will help explain the teacher's actions in the classroom and guide his or her reflection about what has occurred within the lessons. If we know that the stages occur in a hierarchical pattern, it is logical that teachers in the earlier stages of development will have basic survival needs, while teachers in later stages of development will have needs relating to individualizing student learning and pursuing their own professional development. The stage of development can also help to determine the type of interaction that is most beneficial to that teacher. Therefore, it is important that consulting teachers create strategies to identify a teacher's stage of development to better provide appropriate assistance for the specific needs of the teachers.

A consulting teacher in a peer assistance and review program will most likely be working with teachers from across the continuum of teachers' developmental stages. Entry-year teachers will include those just graduating from their teacher preparation program, and teachers with multiple years of experience moving into the district for the first time. In addition, experienced teachers previously hired within the district may be experiencing difficulty could be "stuck" in an early stage of teacher development.

One cannot assume that a teacher's years of experience are directly related to the teacher's developmental stage, as individual teachers move through these stages at different rates. It is also extremely important to recognize that teachers do not pass through these stages independent of the other conditions of one's life. Depending upon changing personal and professional factors, it is likely that the teachers will fluctuate among the stages. For example, if a teacher goes through a major life crisis, such as the death of a parent, it is likely that he or she will drop to a lower developmental stage while coping with this traumatic event. Also, if an experienced teacher moves to a new school district, he or she are likely to begin the first year at a survival stage of development. This stage may pass quickly as the teacher draws on past knowledge to begin to function within the new context. However, it is important to recognize that this is likely to occur. A change from a suburban to an urban setting may also result in an experienced teacher moving to a lower stage of development, and as such, they may need assistance with strategies that will help them become successful in this new context.

So if that is true, how is a consulting teacher supposed to know a teacher's stage of development? First of all, it is important to recognize the relationship between Adult and Teacher Development. Loevinger (1966) has developed stages of ego or self development that also move from concrete to abstract, and can be associated with teacher styles in a classroom. For example, a teacher in the more concrete stages (who would be self-protective) would be likely to have an authoritarian classroom with a very rigid system of rules. The classroom may be run like a military class, and it is clear that students are at

the bottom of the power structure. A teacher in the middle stage of Conformist, has the most common kind of classroom we see, where social acceptance is important, and students and teachers are expected to conform to the rules established in the classroom. It is important in this classroom that each person respect his or her responsibility for following the rules, and students' status is defined by their ability to follow these rules. If a teacher is in the Conscience stage, they run an efficient, effective classroom where there is concern for interpersonal communication. The teacher and students are concerned with achievement, rational thinking, mutual concern for communication, and planning and coordinating the various tasks in the classroom. The classroom of a teacher in the Autonomous stage is usually like a learning or growth center where there is a great deal of flexibility, creativity, and change. The classroom is collaborative where control, authority, and respect for individual contributions are respected and valued. Students have a great deal of choice and are able to make decisions about how their learning will occur and how they best add their talents to the classroom structure.

After recognizing the interrelated nature of adult stages and teachers' developmental stages, it is possible to use both formal and informal methods to examine teacher characteristics that will indicate the stage of development. Burden ( 1990) provided a list of instruments that can be used for formal assessments, ranging from the Embedded Figures Test to a Teacher Concerns Questionnaire (Fuller, 1969), which indicates whether teachers' concerns fall into categories of Self (low developmental stage), Task (intermediate developmental stage), or Impact (high developmental stage). Informal methods can be designed through observation, documenting behaviors and interactions that may fall into one or more of the stages described previously. It is not important to label teachers with a developmental stage stamped on their forehead but to use the information to understand the teacher and offer the best assistance possible.