

AL adventures : Part 1& 2 March 2002

The Principles at Work in our Learning

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"Thanks a lot for yesterday, we all really enjoyed it. It was only when I got home and was telling my husband what we had done during the day that I realized how much we had actually learnt and that you had sneaked much of it in so it seemed like fun. Very clever. We look forward to the next part."

Feedback from an expatriate manager, participant in "Building Bridges with NLP", a People Potential flagship programme for building rapport.

Affirming Accelerated Learning Design

This feedback provides us both an affirmation of the effectiveness of our work and of the importance we place on program design according to Accelerative Learning principles. The feedback reminds us that during the training, the participants had had a day full of fun and only during reflection did they recognize consciously that the component parts of that experience had been built into the design of the program. Our goal at People Potential is indeed to design a holistic and memorable experience, which engages our participants in a process that above all meets the explicit outcomes agreed upon.

In this, the first of what I will call "AL adventures", I will present some key principles of Accelerated Learning as a means of analyzing what has made our significant learning experiences so powerful. I will do this by first describing one of my most powerful learning experiences and then analyzing it according to AL principles. This is the starting point for understanding what is involved in designing a holistic AL experience, both for ourselves and then for others. Holding integrity as the watchword for our work as **Human Potential Developers** the AL adventure must, as Stephen Covey says, begin within our circle of control.

To understand the power of the Accelerative Learning concept at work we need look no further than our most powerful learning experiences. As trainers and educators, we have at our disposal, beyond the books and the theories, the most amazing resources, our own learning and training adventures.

Accessing our major memorable experiences - as a learning resource

For me, a major formative learning experience was camping on an island off Scotland when I was 14 - with an eccentric geography teacher and 25

classmates. We were introduced to the discipline of an army regime, up early, walking 10 kilometres a day, studying rocks, plants and animal species in their natural context - with magnifying glass and reference texts in hand. We were engaged fully in all the activities, from cooking our own breakfast, (burnt porridge!) to singing campfire songs on the beach in the evening. The results? By the end of the week on the island we had had a lot of fun AND learnt the equivalent of the geography and biology syllabus for much of that semester as well as field research skills that would be useful right into our tertiary education. AND, importantly, the learning stayed, anchored into a memory of connected experiences that stretched us mentally and physically beyond what many of us might have thought possible, certainly in a conventional classroom.

Significantly, the learning could be viewed as holistic, extending far beyond the confines of the academic syllabus. The fun, the laughter, the emotional bonding that accompanied the intense field work was to last. Not surprisingly, my passion for such adventures has stayed, and as my family, friends and colleagues will testify, I'll find any opportunity to coax them up a mountain or jump in a stream with for example, Chinese New Year being spent in Endau Rompin Jungle reserve. Thank you Geografi Cikgu!

AL Principles underlying memorable learning

The question is how can this type of experience help those of us who work in "conventional training rooms? This is where a framework for analysis is useful.

What I will do here is analyse the island experience in the light of AL principles. For the core principles we have to thank Professor Georgi Lozanov, often thought of as the father of Accelerated Learning. His research in the 1950s led him to develop a language learning methodology which significantly increased the effectiveness and scope of learning.

These AL principles have been applied and developed in multiple ways since then and indicate ways in which we can access the human potential that often remains hidden. After reading this you'll be able to decode your powerful learning experiences, and analyse the learning that took place, consciously and unconsciously, noticing how this happened!

1. **We are designed for learning** . This is evident in our ability to adapt, in this case adapt to a remote island context, without the comforts of "civilisation" and what's more, enjoy it!
2. **We do not know the limits of our potential.** This is endorsed by the fact that in this new context we were able to learn so much more so much more quickly than we would in the conventional setting. This is great. The question then is what would be an optimum context for using even more of our capacities?

3. Everything suggests something! £890 As the advertising industry knows so well, everything suggests something! Travelling by train and by boat to a distant island with a large group of friends, to spend a week camping away from parents and school - suggests many things - to me it suggests holiday, relaxation, fun, excitement expectation, adventure into the unknown - thus the whole project and the physical setting suggested a "adventure" mental context for the learning.

4. We learn best when we are relaxed Professor Georgi Lozanov's extensive work on accelerated language learning with carefully selected music, concluded that we learn best when we are relaxed. The island environment of rolling hills and a beautiful beach as well as our mental "frames" were likely to invoke a state of relaxation as if on holiday! The benefit was that we were thus in an ideal learning state.

5. We learn with both our conscious and unconscious minds. The learning experience on the island had an impact on both our conscious and unconscious minds. There was the explicit, conscious learning in completing the field work projects. Then there were the multiple ways in which each individual unconsciously interacted with and absorbed information from the environment, when handling the specimens in their natural environment, the values implicit in the teamwork experience, the emotions invoked by the natural scenery, the singing and all that was in the "background" of our daily expeditions.

6. We learn through all of our senses - and in such a situation our senses were all being stimulated. Visually, by the multiple patterns and shades of colour in nature, the stunning sunrises and sunsets, the deep velvet of the night sky, the bare grey hills, and auditorily, the call of seabirds, the crashing of the waves on the beach and the silence of the night; kinesthetically, touching stone, sand and water, the wind on your face; physically moving, walking & climbing; feelings being stirred - a sense of community; sense of smell (olfactory sensing) burnt porridge, the fragrance of heather and the salty tang of the sea air.; Taste (gustatory) the barbecued (slightly burnt) sausages, the burnt porridge tastes will remain with me forever, fondly associate with the total experience.

In summary then, when we decode the island experience within a framework of Accelerated Learning principles we discover that all the principles applied and thus provided us with the ingredients for a holistic powerful learning experience.

AL Principles in the training room

We return then to the question of the relevance of this to the training room. In this first article I decided to approach this topic in this way so that you could:

1. access your own memorable learning experiences.
3. analyse the experience according to AL principles

4. stimulate your thinking on the implications for classroom training.

The Scottish island learning involved us in experiencing and developing independence, interdependence, curiosity, excitement, discovery, wonder, emotional bonding, intellectual stimulation, hands on learning involving all of our senses. This contrasts sharply with an all too frequent classroom experience in which teaching almost exclusively centres on the visual and auditory senses.

Much work has been done on applying these principles in the training context and we will explore these further in later articles. I invite you now to begin and for many of you continue, with your own experiments in applying these principles, for that is how we in turn become developers.

Conclusion:

Our experiments both with using accelerated learning principles as a basis for design over the years and teaching these design principles to others has been an exciting and inspiring journey both for ourselves and our participants. Be guided by the AL principles when you create the key elements of this type of powerful learning experience in yourself and in your training and you too will be able to generate similarly powerful results.