

# Accelerated Learning

## What is Accelerated Learning?

Accelerated learning is a movement in the training and teaching world which has established itself, over the last 20 years or so, as an alternative to longer-existing, e.g. chalk and talk or pedagogical, models.

It is based on the practical application of a number of theories and empirical observations from the world of social science and psychology.

It does not have a single, unified theoretical basis.

## Origins of Accelerated Learning

Accelerated learning traces its roots to Bulgaria. In the 1960s, a Bulgarian educational psychiatrist, Dr. Georgi Lozanov, was experimenting with non-traditional methods of teaching English to Bulgarian students (McKeon, 1995). Specifically, Lozanov discovered that the use of Baroque music could bring his students into a state of relaxed attentiveness. Today, similar to the effects of commercial advertising, this technique is referred to as "suggestopedia" (Russell, 1999, p. 186). The use of these techniques can increase the speed at which students learn. The increase in learning efficiency, as compared with traditional teaching methods, is achieved through engaging the whole body in the learning process (Lozanov, 1978).

In the 1970s, Lozanov's work received the attention of Sheila Ostrander, Lynn Schroeder, and Nancy Ostrander (1979). Their book, *Superlearning*, discussed the use of Baroque music to relax and make positive suggestions to improve the progress of student learning. This book was the catalyst to start the use of these teaching methods at Iowa State University. In 1975, The Society for Accelerative Learning and Teaching was formed (Meier, 2000). In 1994, this group became known as the International Alliance for Learning (2003). The International Alliance for Learning (2003) identified the elements of accelerated learning which included:

- Knowledge about the human brain and emotional states
- The learning environment
- The role of music and the arts
- Personal motivation
- Multiple intelligences and learning styles
- Imagination/metaphors
- Suggestion
- Team learning and cooperation

## The theoretical roots of Accelerated Learning

Accelerated learning encompasses and links to other "theoretical" frameworks, including the following:

- Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) - e.g. visual, auditory and kinaesthetic processing; pacing; leading; chunking.
- Multiple intelligence theory
- Mind mapping
- Learning style theory and learning preferences
- Suggestopedia
- Learner-centred approaches
- Left-right brain theory and the triune brain
- Person-centred (or learner-centred) approaches
- Memory systems, mind gym
- Study skills

#### Accelerated Learning in Practice

Because the theoretical and research origins of accelerated learning are so varied and are continually added to, it is perhaps easier to illustrate accelerated learning in order to explain it.

- Colour

Handouts, flip chart pens, overhead projector slides or any other way that you present information is made more attractive, more stimulating and more memorable by the use of colour. You can also colour-code information, adding an extra dimension to the content. Remember that about 8% of men and 5% of women are red-green colour blind.

- Visual imagery

Whilst some people prefer information presented in words (written or spoken), others find visual images have more impact and are more memorable. So, illustrating your content, showing pictures, using videos and expressing ideas in diagrammatic form should be used in conjunction with words.

- Music

Music can change mood. So, music as a greeting at the start of training, to "wake people up" after lunch or at the end of a session and to signal transition from one topic or activity to another are useful. The tempo of the music you choose can also affect the speed at which people work, so you can hurry people up when they are doing a group task or slow them down if you want to encourage reflection. In addition, music played at the tempo of Baroque music is said to stimulate brain activity and enhance the ability of individuals to learn. Always check that the music you are using isn't distressing (the song that was played at someone's funeral, for instance) or annoying and doesn't interfere with hearing.

#### - Rhymes and mnemonics

Rhymes have been used for centuries to aid memory. People on training courses could be asked to create their own "poems" to help them remember key facts or you can create one for them to learn.

Other mnemonics use capital letters to form other, more memorable, words or sentences, e.g. "My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas"; the first letter of each word gives you the first letter of the planets, in order: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto.)

#### - Metaphors

A metaphor is a way of speaking in which one thing is described in terms of another, thus throwing new light on the character of what is being described. A more general term is analogy, this covers metaphor and similar concepts such as comparison, simile, allegory and parable.

An example would be "No man is an island" (John Donne), i.e. we know about islands so the metaphor tells us something new about man.

In NLP, this process is referred to as "pacing and leading"; making statements about the current "reality" for an individual or group before directing their attention somewhere else, to something new.

Pacing statements are "verifiably true", leading statements are "maybe true". What you do as you make the pacing statements is to set up a response pattern of "that's true" in the other person's mind. Human beings are creatures of habit - we like what's familiar. The human brain seeks pattern and, having established a pattern, likes it to continue. When the brain has said "that's true", say, three times, it's likely to say it the fourth time.

When pacing and leading is done elegantly, it is possible to move from saying mostly things which are "verifiably true" to saying mostly things which are "made up" without the listener(s) noticing the transition.

An example might be, "We're here to learn about X ("true"), we've had an early start to get here ("true") and we don't yet know each other very well ("true"). But I hope you'll feel free to join in and ask plenty of questions as we go on ("true?")."

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## - Food

Your brain is the greediest organ in your body, with some quite specific dietary requirements. The brain is best fuelled by a steady supply of glucose, starting with breakfast. Other foods with a link to brain "fitness" include:

- Beans on toast is a good combination; the carbohydrates in toast boosts scores on cognitive tests, but beans are also a good source of fibre, and research has shown a link between a high-fibre diet and improved cognition.
- Marmite, a yeast extract is packed with B vitamins, whose brain-boosting powers have been demonstrated in many studies.
- Eggs are rich in choline, which your body uses to produce the neurotransmitter acetylcholine.
- Salad - packed full of antioxidants, including beta-carotene and vitamins C and E, which have been shown to improve cognitive skills by helping to mop up damaging free radicals.
- Nuts - especially pecans, walnuts and almonds, are also a source of antioxidants.
- Yogurt contains the amino acid tyrosine, needed for the production of the neurotransmitters dopamine and noradrenalin, among others and that supplementing your intake can improve alertness and memory.
- Fish - brains are around 60 per cent fat, and trans-fats (found in abundance in cakes, pastries and biscuits) clog up the system, however, evidence is mounting in favour of omega-3 fatty acids. In other words, fish is the best brain food.
- Fruit - strawberries and blueberries seem to improve coordination, concentration and short-term memory.

- Games, fun, play and active participation

Making things enjoyable is motivating. Enjoyment does not mean trivialising but, obviously, if you're doing bereavement training, you'd have to be sensitive.

Competition, within a game format, is another way of engaging people. So, instead of a "boring" revision session, play a panel game with small prizes to see who remembers most.

Physical activity also addresses the needs of some learners to "feel" what it is they are learning - try learning to ride a bike by reading a book! Being active for short periods and raising heart beat also improves brain function and alertness.

- Resource-rich environment

The brain is used to multi-tasking (even men!) and if asked to concentrate on one thing for too long, will distract itself.

So, in a training room, have toys and food for people to "fiddle" with. Have "wallpaper" round the room for people to look at. By "wallpaper" I mean posters (A0 size) containing key words, graphics, models, etc., that are relevant to the training - I often use well-known cartoon figures.

Also allow people to manage their own time. Don't force people to sit still until you are ready to break, give them permission to get up and walk around, get a drink, go to the toilet, when they want to.

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Choice

Offer people different ways of learning. They will have differing preferences, strengths and weaknesses. So say something and write it up on the flip chart and do a team exercise about it and ask them to create something on their own. Repetition itself is an important principle in learning and so is working in these different modalities.

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Feedback

Make sure that people can contribute what they already know (better than spending the introductory session boring them to death with something they all know very well) and give you feedback on what they have learned. So, a revision exercise (an alternative to the panel game described above) might be to "create a poster advertising the X that we've just been learning about. This makes them re-cycle what they've learned (which aids internalisation) and tells you whether or not they've "got it".

Further information and resources

### Accelerated Learning

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Accelerated learning principles and exercises at <http://www.alcenter.com>

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David Meier &ndash; The Accelerated Learning Handbook 2000

- <http://www.accelerated-learning.net/multiple.htm>

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<http://www.eureka-tp.com> - accelerated learning company - archive of trainers tips or sign up for monthly tips by email

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<http://www.helpself.com/directory/learning.htm>

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<http://www.kn.sbc.com/wired/fil/pages/listaccelerapa.html> - a hotlist on accelerated learning

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<http://www.learnfast.co.uk> - accelerated learning trainers

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<http://www.mindtools.com> - accelerated learning trainers

### Learning and brain techniques

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Gordon Dryden and Jeannette Vos, *The Learning Revolution (Visions of Education)*, 2001

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<http://print.google.nl/print?q=how+the+brain+learns&oi=print>

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<http://www.brainconnection.com>

### Memory

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<http://www.supermemo.com>

### Brain gym and excercises

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<http://www.mind-tek.com/mindlab.html>

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<http://www.open2.net/mindgym> - mind gym

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<http://www.youramazingbrain.org>

### Multiple intelligence

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Howard Gardner *Frames of Mind*, 1983

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<http://www.businessballs.com/howardgardnermultipleintelligences.htm>

## Mind Mapping &trade;

- <http://www.mind-map.com/EN/index.html>
- <http://www.mindmapper.com>

## Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)

- <http://www.anlp.org> - Association of NLP
- <http://www.anglo-american.co.uk>

## Learning Styles

- Complete a questionnaire to identify your preferred learning style at: <http://www.accelerated-learning-uk.co.uk>
- Current learning theories and a summary of learning styles in the context of schools education are at: [http://www.funderstanding.com/learning\\_styles.cfm](http://www.funderstanding.com/learning_styles.cfm)
- David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 1984
- Gordon Lawrence, *People Types and Tiger Stripes: A Practical Guide to Learning Styles*, 1982
- Honey and Mumford's learning styles inventory at <http://www.peterhoney.com> - Pay £10 for a copy of their learning styles inventory.

## Suggestopedia

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgi\\_Lozanov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgi_Lozanov)
- <http://www.seal.org.uk> - Society for Effective Affective Learning