What Is Accelerated Learning?

Accelerated Learning (AL) is a comprehensive, proven methodology that greatly increases our capacity to learn, problem-solve and create. Using a framework based on the brain’s natural learning cycle, it draws on music, storytelling, metaphor and movement to create an interactive, learner-centered environment in which knowledge is easily acquired and retained.

AL facilitates deep learning and increases the rate of transfer of learning from the classroom to real life. The knowledge we acquire in an AL classroom “sticks,” so there is no need to repeat the same material again and again. AL enables us to expand our perspective and move beyond limiting beliefs about ourselves and our ability to learn. As a result, we experience a quantum shift in our development, skills and competence.

We also develop a greater overall capacity to learn, adapt and change.

Most AL training has focused on developing outstanding teachers and trainers. However, I believe that self-learners can apply many of its principles and techniques to their own learning tasks with great success. In other words, I believe that learners can benefit from AL's wisdom whether the teacher is trained in the methodology or not.

Accelerated Learning Principles

Accelerated Learning Principles derive from detailed studies of the human mind and how it acquires knowledge. The goal is to create powerful learning that engages the analytical brain and the emotional brain, as well as the conscious and unconscious mind. As a result, AL principles revolve around the application and expansion of the following:

- **Playful Discovery & Experimentation**

  The first Accelerated Learning Principle recognizes the importance of play, experimentation and a sense of discovery in learning. Play makes learning easy because it concentrates our attention on what we are doing and involves all of our senses. Play creates a safe arena in which to try out new behaviors and learning. It is a way to acquire new abilities and ways of thinking, as well as to develop empowering beliefs about ourselves and the world in which we live.
What this means to you as a self-learner

When you engage in the task of learning, try to approach it in a playful, childlike way. Instead of succumbing to the stress and pressure of your subject, see if you can create a fun game out of it. If you can play your game with colleagues who also wish to learn the subject, that is even better!

Emotional States

A second Accelerated Learning Principle is that human beings require emotion to learn. When our emotions are positive, they promote easy, stress-free, learning. When they are negative, they hinder it. This is why AL practitioners pay careful attention to the emotional and physical state of every student and seek to develop and maintain the optimal state for learning.

What this means to you as a self-learner

Your emotions matter! If you feel depressed, bored, resentful, or overwhelmed by your learning task, it will be very difficult for you to do well. On the other hand, if you can find a way to connect to the material, to ignite your interest in it, to welcome the learning challenge knowing you can succeed at it, your ability to learn will skyrocket.

The Learning Environment

A third Accelerated Learning Principle recognizes how much the environment affects our ability to learn at both the conscious and unconscious level. By environment, I mean everything from room lighting, temperature, acoustics, seat arrangements, and wall color to the degree to which learners feel safe, empowered and welcomed.
What is Accelerated Learning?

What this means to you as a self-learner

Become aware of the environment. If you are in a barren, windowless classroom with florescent lights blaring down on you, it may negatively affect your ability to learn. If your instructor lectures at you and uses threat of failure and intimidation as teaching methods, it will affect you. In contrast, a clean, cheerful room with windows that let in natural light, and walls that are decorated with colorful posters, may poitively affect your ability to learn, as will an enthusiastic instructor who encourages your ideas and participation. Although you may have no control over the room or instructor, it is important to be aware of the effects they may have on you so you can prepare yourself mentally. When you are studying outside of a formal classroom, be sure to consciously choose the environment that is best for you.

The Arts

A fourth Accelerated Learning Principle recognizes the important role that the arts play in facilitating self-understanding, emotional involvement, and the application of knowledge to real life situations. From painting and sculpture to music, dance, storytelling and drama, the arts enhance learning at both the conscious and subconscious level.

What this means to you as a self-learner

The more you draw on the arts to express what you are learning, the better you will learn it. For example, draw a picture of what you are learning; take an old song and invent new lyrics that express what you are learning; or create a short play of the material you need to learn and act it out.

Personal Motivation

A fifth Accelerated Learning Principle is that the ability to learn ultimately depends on intrinsic motivators within each individual, such as desire, self-confidence, and personal expectations—not on extrinsic motivators like grades, rewards and prizes. AL methodologies work beautifully
in this regard because they help learners tap into their innermost desires, goals and visions, and they naturally engage participants in learning.

What this means to you as a self-learner

If your instructor does not light a spark or make a heart-felt connection for you with the material, you will need to do so yourself. Remind yourself why you are studying this subject and what it means to you in the overall scheme of things. Do some brainstorming, write in a journal, talk to someone who is passionate about your subject, or check out a movie that connects you emotionally and visually to your subject. The critical thing is to find something that sparks your interest, connects you to the material, and inspires you to learn.

▸ Multiple Intelligences & Learning Styles

A sixth Accelerated Learning Principle is that human beings learn in different ways. This is why AL practitioners in the United States are strong supporters of Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences and the theory of Learning Styles. In particular, they agree with Gardner's statement that:

Students learn in ways that are identifiably distinctive. The broad spectrum of students—and perhaps the society as a whole—would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a number of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means.

What this means to you as a self-learner

Knowing the multiple intelligences and learning styles that come most naturally to you will empower you to learn in the best, most effective way—regardless of how your instructor teaches. For example, if you are a visual learner, you can mind-map a lecture using different colored pencils to create pictures and diagrams instead of writing down words. If your interpersonal intelligence is particularly strong, you can invite fellow students to create a study group in which you debate the pros and cons of what you are learning.
Imagination, Visualization & Metaphor

A seventh Accelerated Learning Principle recognizes the role that imagination, visualization and metaphor play in learning. Imaginative games and activities enrich verbal and written information with physical movement, color, depth and positive emotion. The ability to visualize not only enhances our creativity, but also our ability to spell, remember and learn. Metaphors help us explore, enhance and emotionally connect to the subject.

What this means to you as a self-learner

The more you can enhance your ability to visualize—to create vivid pictures in your mind using all of your senses—the more creative you will become and the better you will learn. Allow yourself to daydream, try expressing out loud what you see in your mind's eye to a study partner, or practice creating metaphors that connect you emotionally to what you are learning.

Suggestion & De-suggestion

An eighth Accelerated Learning Principle stresses the power that suggestion—both from others and from ourselves—has on our ability to learn. Human beings have many preconceptions about themselves, the world around them, and the subject matter they are learning. Personal suggestions, often called beliefs or mental models, either enhance the ability to learn or limit it.

What this means to you as a self-learner

For better or worse, your conception of yourself, including your talents and abilities, was formed long ago in childhood. As a result, it may very well be inaccurate—especially if it limits you in some way or makes you feel as though you are incapable of learning or achieving something. This is why it is critical that you consciously look at your assumptions about yourself and your abilities. If they are limiting you, start creating new pictures of yourself doing and accomplishing what you thought you could never do—easily, joyfully and successfully.
Team Learning & Collaboration

A ninth Accelerated Learning Principle recognizes the importance of collaboration in facilitating the learning process. Cooperative learning activities allow participants of all abilities to benefit as mentors and learners. They also help participants develop interpersonal and time-management skills. Cooperation and shared learning turn participants into a supportive community that helps individuals become the best they can be.

What this means to you as a self-learner

The truism that one of the best ways to learn something is to teach it to someone else is definitely true! In addition, when you work with others, you get the benefit of their experience and insight. Together you can create a final product or body of knowledge that is much greater and more effective than you could create alone.