An Annotated Bibliography of Accelerated Learning

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Accelerated Learning

Beale, D. D. (1997). Accelerative learning and the emerging science of wholeness. *Journal of Accelerated Learning and Teaching, 22*(1-2), 9-32. Retrieved November 7, 2007, from http://tec.camden.rutgers.edu/JALT/PDFs/JALTSpring97.pdf

Poetics, philosophy, and pensiveness serve as the organizing themes in the post-modern piece within in which Beale (1997) explains how she envisions accelerated learning as an example of what she describes as the emerging "science of wholeness." The author tells the abbreviated history of not only science as a field of inquiry, but of the most modern (read post-modern) incarnations of the field including neuroscience, chaos theory, and quantum physics which represent the most "whole" science—meaning interconnected, complex, flowing, and against previous notions of logic. Beale writes, "The substrata of information below the level of consciousness plays an infinitely greater role than previously realized" (p. 11). In addition to giving voice to a new science, the author also describes a group of free-thinking, progressive scientists (e.g., Lozanov, "suggestopedia;" Bohm, physicist; and Sheldrake, biology) and the challenges they face in attempting to extend or reconstruct old ideas and theory. She includes accelerated learning in the mix as an approach to teaching and learning that has lived on the margins of traditional educational practice. And one that has attempted to create holistic learning environments where creativity and interconnectedness between students and teacher and environment are *modus operandi.*

Boyd, D. (2004, January 1). Effective teaching in accelerated learning programs. *Adult Learning*, *15*(1-2), 40. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ768241). Retrieved October 7, 2007, from ERIC database.

A brief history of accelerated learning sets the stage for Boyd (2004) to describe what he, among others cited in the piece, consider the theoretical foundations of accelerated learning. The article also offers several suggestions for educators teaching in accelerated learning programs. The roots of accelerated learning are traced back to the 1960s when a Bulgarian psychiatrist, Georgi Lozanov, employed what he described as "non-traditional" teaching techniques referred to as "suggestopedia" to a group of adult students. According to the author in the 1970s accelerated learning was adopted by corporate trainers as a way of saving money and time on professional development. Fast forward to the 1990s when brain research *reminded* educators and educational psychologists that learning "involves the body and mind" and that employing the "whole brain" is the key to accelerated learning. The theory Boyd describes as "foundational" to accelerated learning represents the most commonly cited theory (and phenomena) generally associated with adult learning including multiple intelligences, the concept of preferred learning styles, experiential learning, adult identity development, collaborative learning, and constructivism. The author states, "The implication for teaching is that in an accelerated learning model, everyone is both a learner and a teacher" (p. 42). Replace "accelerated learning" with "adult learning" and note few if any differences between the two. The same critique can be levied against the author's suggestions for practice which include building a positive learning environment, using a holistic approach to learning, and drawing on the learners' experiences. Implicit in the author's work is that accelerated learning is for adults. Furthermore, to Boyd,

what makes learning "accelerated" is tied to educators' ability to efficiently deliver information and students' ability to become more effective learners. Unfortunately, the article does not elaborate on either of these supposedly unique attributes of accelerated learning.

Brookfield, S. D. (2003). A critical theory perspective on accelerated learning. In R. J. Wlodkowski & C. E. Easworm (Eds.), *Accelerated learning for adults: The promise and practice of intensive educational formats (No. 97)* (pp. 73-82). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Does increased contact time between teachers and students ensure better education? In his essay, Brookfield (2003) interrogates what has arguably been the strongest critique waged against accelerated learning; fewer contact hours equates to impoverished teaching and learning. Intellectual rigor, analytical depth, trust, teacher modeling, and peer learning are all areas which critics point to as suffering from less face to face interaction. By the way, for Brookfield, accelerated learning means students moving through an educational experience or program in a shorter amount of time than what has traditionally been programmed (i.e., the same amount of credit hours typically covered in a fifteen week semester completed in six weeks). As is the case with much of his most recent work, Brookfield cites heavily from Marcuse and Fromm, to illustrate the potential for critical theory to examine accelerated learning through different lenses—those of Marcuse's "rebellious subjectivity" and Fromm's "automaton conformity."

In relation to Marcuse, Brookfield sees moments of distance, isolation, and inwardness (all characteristics of Marcuse's rebellious subjectivity) as underutilized by facilitators of accelerated learning, especially those working in online learning environments. The end goal of rebellious subjectivity is to gain a "truly critical perspective" which enables a person to see through and move beyond "commonsense ways of being." Brookfield believes this practice to be naturally aligned with accelerated learning. He states, "As such, educational formats such as accelerated learning programs that involve substantial amounts of independent study, self-directed learning, or on-line education and that emphasize periods of learner isolation and separation from institutional services and peer interaction, could actually be considered to offer more, not fewer, opportunities for the development of critical awareness" (p. 75). According to Brookfield, the relationship between Fromm's "automaton conformity" and accelerated learning, especially cohort-style programs, resides in the pressures to conform inherent in group learning. In other words to stand against a group, hence the dominant opinion, is to be antisocial and in a cohort-style program this could ultimately lead to failure or alienation. The author states, "In accelerated cohort programs that involve a degree of participation, even of student governance, there is a danger that a few strong voices will define the agenda early on in the cohort's history and that this agenda will mimic the dominant culture's ideology" (p. 80).

Brookfield's vision of how the work of the critical theory of Marcuse and Fromm can inform the facilitation of accelerated learning is exemplified by his statement, "To me, critical reflection is a social learning process in which we depend on others to be critical mirrors reflecting back to us aspects of our assumptive clusters that we are unable to see" (p. 77). Implicit in this statement is the influence of both scholars' work as Brookfield acknowledges the sameness and connectedness of individuals in the learning environment by using the "hall of mirrors" metaphor while expressing the potential of individual, critical thought. Ultimately he believes it is only

situated, social settings that teaching and learning which can hold learners accountable for their own evolution into critically minded, freethinking individuals.

McKeon, K. (1995, January 1). What is this thing called accelerated learning?. *Training and Development*, *49*(6), p. 64. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ504487) Retrieved October 7, 2007, from ERIC database.

McKeon (1995) begins his article with a quote from the Greek biographer and essayist Plutarch who wrote, "The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be ignited". The author contends the words of Plutarch might just be the seeds of accelerated learning. In this brief article McKeon attempts to define accelerated learning by telling the reader what it is and what it is not, and then describing a four-phase accelerated learning process. What accelerated learning is not, according to McKeon, is an acceleration of the learning process aka speeding up learning. It is, "…a multi-sensory, brain-compatible teaching and learning methodology". The author goes on to add other descriptors to his definition of accelerated learning including student-centered, differentiated, "fun and non-threatening," and "collaborative." According to McKeon, the elements of the four-phase[†] accelerated learning process are: *preparation*, creating a soothing, caring learning environment; *acquisition*, multi-modal learning of course content; *integration*, referred to as "playtime"; *articulation*, a time to go over what was learning; and *application*, transfer of learned information to real situations. McKeon does not present research or theoretical evidence to substantiate his definition and description of accelerated learning. For example, his definition references "brain-compatible" teaching and learning yet the article does not describe what that means. Instead of telling us the what, where, and how of accelerated learning, McKeon enthuses the similarities between accelerated learning and elementary school, "Activities should be fun and enjoyable—as if they were designed for children." McKeon's piece certainly ignites some enthusiasm about the potential of accelerated learning as a methodology, but unfortunately leaves us with an unanswered question, "What is this thing called accelerated learning?"

Silcock, P. (2003). Accelerated learning: A revolution in teaching method? *Education 3-13 31*(1), 48-52.

"Accelerated learning results from qualitative leaps in understanding," according to Silcock (2003, p. 51). The author believes there are three specific pedagogical principles that will "guarantee" maximum student learning: comprehension, commitment, and control. Comprehension relates to a learner's ability to make sense of the learning expected of them. What Silcock describes as commitment is more cognitively defined as intrinsic motivation and task value. Similarly, the author's explanation of control, in terms of cognition, can be equated to self-regulation.

Truth be told, I selected this article because I am interested in revolutionary (read transformative, emancipatory, critical) pedagogy. Alas, like many articles written about accelerated learning (past and present) the author depends heavily upon principles and theory associated with learning and/or adult learning in general. In the worse case scenario, and I believe the Silcock piece to be an example, the author co-opts another domain i.e. cognition and renames some of its most

[†] The author states the model has four phases, but outlines five phases in the article. No explanation of the discrepancy is provided.

robust phenomena, changes the context/situation, and contributes to the literature, but not the advancement of the theory. Arguably, even the contribution to the literature is questionable in this case.

The conclusion of the article implicitly discusses accelerated learning as a "revolutionary teaching method." Silcock implies accelerated learning that attends to comprehension, commitment, and control means, "Pupils are emotionally or personally 'empowered' in situations where they can freely commit themselves to topics they see as having personal value for them" (p. 52). Does this make Dewey the Father of the Revolution?

Wlodkowski, R. J. (2003). Accelerated learning in colleges and universities. In R. J. Wlodkowski & C. E. Easworm (Eds.), *Accelerated learning for adults: The promise and practice of intensive educational formats (No. 97)* (pp. 5-15). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Raymond Wlodkowski along with his colleague Carol Easworm (2003) edited what is the most informative source in the literature of accelerated learning. In the first chapter of this volume, Wlodkowski provides an overview of the state of research about accelerated learning. According to the author, who serves as the director of the Center for the Study of Accelerated Learning at Regis University, at the time of publication there were approximately 250 accelerated learning programs at colleges and universities in the United States, the majority of them designed to meet the needs of adult learners, and more than 200 of them housed within traditional institutions. Furthermore compared to all adult learners, approximately 13% are studying for degrees through accelerated learning programs. Wlodkowski's definition of accelerated learning is simply learning completed in less time which. At times accelerated learning is referred to as "intensive" or relating to courses delivered in a condensed format which may include weekend, evening, and sometimes workplace classes. The author describes online learning as an example of how accelerated learning blurs many concepts typically associated with the status quo of conventional academics including contact hours, tenure, nonprofit status, full-time faculty, and semester systems.

Through Wlodkowski's overview of the research in accelerated learning, I gained a sense of the field's relatively recent attempt to describe accelerated learning as a unique phenomenon with its own theory and practice. At the same time, I noted a perspective undoubtedly typical among those who dedicate their careers to describing and championing a new and potentially loathed *beast.* The posture is a defensive one. In the case of accelerated learning, it seems as though scholars doing research in the domain are creating a body of research that begins from a weakened position, one which must defend itself against critique, and one which must assert its worth through permissible research endeavors in an attempt to even gain an invitation to participate in the scholarly discourse about the state and traits of adult learning. The perspective articulated above is evidenced through the author's reports of research findings, quantitative and qualitative, which demonstrate little to no differences between students' assessments and attitudes, and persistence and success in accelerated versus traditional programs of study. For example in relation to student attitudes Wlodkowski reports that according to findings of the "first comprehensive review of research assessing accelerated formats" conducted by Scott and Conrad in 1992, "When the perceptions of adult students in accelerated courses are compared

with the perceptions of younger students in conventional versions of the same types of courses with the same instructors, both groups generally have positive and similar attitudes toward their courses" (p. 9). The one major difference: students in accelerated learning programs complete their courses/degrees months and years before students in traditional programs—an arguably *huge* difference, especially for the typical adult student.

A major question not posed by Wlodkowski, yet one worthy of consideration is, "How much research will it take to prove to the critics that the outcomes of students' experience in accelerated learning are not significantly different to those of students in traditional programs?" To answer this question scholars interested in accelerated learning must develop research questions that originate from within the field, not in response to questions from critics.