

## Learning that LASTS...

A Christian approach to Adult Learning by Dr. Roland Walker, based on the work of Dr. Jane Vella as presented in *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*. (1994) San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

The acronym L - A - S - T - S is derived from five basic principles of effective adult learning that are introduced below. Read and highlight which new ideas stand out to you.

### Learner-centered

Learner-centered education values the growth and success of the learner above success of the teacher and the course. It is instruction tailored to the specific learners we are teaching. This is in contrast to teacher-centered or content-centered education. We don't focus on teaching material; we focus on teaching people. In order to approach education in a learner-centered way, we must know our learners well. Resources and needs assessment must be an ongoing process we engage in to discover learners' motivational themes, to select content that is relevant, and to build on what learners already know. Learner-centered education is characterized by mutual respect and love between teacher and learner.

### Action with Reflection

Action with Reflection is a principle that also has two contrasts: First, learning that LASTS is active, rather than passive. People learn by doing and by reflecting on what they have done, not just by being exposed to information. Effective teachers design tasks for learners (e.g. solving problems in a small group using the new information) and opportunities for learners to reflect on these experiences (e.g. discussing their experiences and writing down their insights). Since it is important to engage the whole person in learning, learner-centered teachers also design learning tasks that engage ideas, feelings, and actions (i.e. cognitive, affective, and psychomotor functions). Tools such as the 7 Design Questions and the 5Cs Model are useful in designing effective learning modules.

### Solving problems

Solving problems is the way we have all learned informally from infancy to the present. This is the kind of learning we instinctively do best. It is in contrast to what Paulo Freire calls the "banking" approach, the notion that teachers can make deposits of information into the brains of their students. Effective teachers provide resources for learners via lectures, stories, pictures, drama, readings, videos, etc., but they also pose problems (e.g. powerful questions) to stimulate learners to interact with these resources. Applying new content to real-life or life-like problems produces powerful learning.

### Teamwork

Teamwork, rather than competition or learner independence, is an excellent way to solve problems because it draws on the resources of others in the group in a synergistic way. "All of us are smarter than any of us" and "everyone has a gift to bring" (Holsclaw and Williams, 1994) are two beliefs that motivate us to provide opportunities for group work throughout a course. Understanding the dynamics of group work helps to achieve effective teamwork. Jane Vella's "Bicycle Model" reminds us that both "wheels" (group maintenance and task maintenance) are important to effective teamwork. In both business and education, the value of synergy that comes from good teamwork, is gaining recognition. Kurt Lewin was a pioneer

of the study of *group dynamics*, which demonstrates the value of social learning as compared to individual learning.

## **Self-discovery and Self-direction**

Self-discovery and Self-direction stand in contrast to teachers treating learners as children, either by “spoon feeding” them or dominating them. An important goal of education is that students learn to ask themselves powerful questions and learn to find ways to answer them. This process is one in which teachers and learners collaborate as partners. Effective teachers invite learners to direct their own learning and share the power for shaping their own process of learning. They act as resource persons, consultants, facilitators, evaluators, givers and receivers of feedback, and designers of learning tasks that lead to self-discovery. The goal of developing self-direction in adult learners was promoted strongly by Malcolm Knowles, who coined the term *androgogy*, for adult learning, as opposed to *pedagogy*, the traditional term for the practice and study of teaching children.