

What is Accelerated Learning?

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California is known for embracing new ideas, and the latest, Accelerated Learning (AL), is just what the financially-stressed education system has been hoping for—a learning technique capable of transforming basic skills students into transfer students in just a few semesters. It is a colossal promise. Can this initiative deliver? Can it save the education system in California the billions needed? If adopted, will it prepare students to replace the workforce as the baby boomers retire?

Who knows?

For that matter, who knows exactly what Accelerated Learning is? It is extremely difficult to pin down. It depends upon whom you are talking to. Though maybe what it isn't important. Maybe we just need to take the best of the AL ideas, for it is a compilation of tried and true theories, and adapt them. There are many aspects to admire about Accelerated Learning. It promotes **redesigning curriculum and innovation**. The key AL principles—positive learning environment, total learner involvement, collaboration, variety of learning styles, and contextual learning—are an impressive array. Yet, its promise to lead **all** basic skills students to transfer level is a bit lofty.

What about preparing them for the workforce? For life?

At the 2011 National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) Conference, Suzanne Walsh from the Bill Gates Foundation said, “Rewarding institutions for getting students through is misguided. Instead, rewards should be for innovation and getting students an education and employable.”

Across the nation, research shows that the success rates of basic skills programs are dismal, and most basic skills students rarely attain an AA degree, a certificate, or transfer. Therefore, **innovation** in basic skills programs needs to be encouraged. Here's a radical thought, maybe the lack of success with these students is not entirely the fault of the programs or the faculty. Or the students! Maybe our goals are out of whack. Is transferring to a university a realistic or meaningful goal for the student who has struggled academically through elementary and high school? Should the only measure of success be the completion of an AA degree, freshman composition, or even a vocational certificate?

Basic skills students and programs can be successful because of **innovation**. And as faculty at Delta College we hope that our innovation is welcomed, not discarded or discounted. We have many ideas on how to make our programs better and help students reach their goals.

A way to help basic skills students be successful needs to include features of successful training programs for low-skilled, hard-to-employ individuals. In the article, “Career

Ladders and Pathways for the Hard-to-Employ,” Alison Gash and Melissa Mack offer the following six features of successful training programs.

1. **Integrate basic skills remediation with career specific content** to maintain participant engagement and expedite program completion.
2. **Create incremental pathways** that include employment opportunities with short-term and long-term training requirements for job placement and career advancement.
3. **Make training accessible and flexible** by varying training sites and schedules, by accommodating language and/or learning barriers, and by developing drop-out prevention services.
4. **Promote partnerships between training providers, Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), and organizations that work with the hard-to-employ** to help streamline recruitment and promote completion.
5. **Partner with industries/employees** in program design to assure that training is relevant and to increase employer investment in the programs and its students.
6. **Conduct frequent and relevant evaluations** to improve career ladder programs and maintain partnerships.

We need to prepare and guide our basic skills students into career areas as well as success in life. Would Delta College support this effort?