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Foreword: High 'C's — charting course for an accelerated learning school

The *Accelerated Learning Series* attempts to pull together new and innovative thinking about learning. The titles in the series offer contemporary solutions to old problems. The series is held together by the accelerated learning model that, in turn, is underwritten by an informed theoretical understanding.

The term 'accelerated learning' can be misleading. The method is not for a specific group of learners, nor for a given age range, nor for a category of perceived ability. The method is not about doing the same things faster, nor about fast-tracking, nor about hot-housing. It is a considered, generic approach to learning based on research drawn from disparate disciplines and tested with different age groups and different ability levels in very different circumstances. As such, it can be adapted and applied to very different challenges.

The books in the *Accelerated Learning Series* build from the accelerated learning cycle. The cycle starts by attending to the physical, environmental and social factors in learning. It proposes the worth of a positive and supportive learning environment. It then deliberately attempts to connect to, and build upon, prior knowledge and understanding whilst presenting an overview of the learning challenge to come. Participants set positive outcomes and define targets towards reaching those outcomes. Information is then presented in visual, auditory and kinesthetic modes and is reinforced through different forms of intelligent response. Frequent, structured opportunities to demonstrate understanding and to rehearse for recall are the concluding feature of the cycle.

In 1995, the Chief of Naval Operations released the following transcript of a radio conversation between a US naval ship and the Canadian coastguard. The incident took place off the coast of Newfoundland.

- Coastguard: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the South, to avoid a collision.
- US navy ship: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the North, to avoid a collision.
- Coastguard: Negative, you will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the South, to avoid a collision.
- US navy ship: This is the captain of a US navy ship. I say again, divert your course.
- Coastguard: Negative, I say again you will have to divert your course.
- US navy ship: THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER US LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE UNITED STATES ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 15 DEGREES NORTH, I SAY AGAIN THAT'S 15 DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTERMEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP.
- Coastguard: We're a lighthouse, your call.

Sometimes tinkering with the edges and attending to peripheral detail becomes overwhelmed by the need for a paradigm shift. When this occurs, it is 'all hands on deck'. This happens most often by default and only occasionally by design. What you will read about in this book is how a paradigm shift was made not in response to a threat to survival, an edict from afar, or a passing fad, but in a genuine desire to change course towards an ideal.

This book consists of two separate but related sections. The first part is from the whole school perspective of a senior manager. The second part from the perspective of the head of a large department. Both describe in detail how accelerated learning methods were used to make a permanent change in course for the school. Accelerated learning was, I would argue, one of the mechanisms that allowed the change to occur. It was not, itself, the change. Accelerated learning is not the new paradigm, it is a mechanism that allows the new paradigm to be progressed.

It is all very well knowing that you want to, or need to, turn your ship. Ships are unwieldy and can be difficult to turn quickly. So are schools and so are some departments within schools. In addition to the will to change course, the tools to allow you to plot and to implement the changed course are needed. So are the mechanisms to steer the new course and remain on that course when buffeted by winds and heavy seas. The successful captain needs to know the way around both the high 'C's and the low 'C's. To navigate both high and low 'C's the captain takes the following tools, all of which are the 'C' tools:

- ◆ chart
- ◆ compass
- ◆ clock
- ◆ calendar
- ◆ crew.

As a leader of learning in a school or in a large department, the **chart** reminds you of your ultimate destination and gives an indication of good ways of getting there. For a school this is always about getting to the best possible learning experience for all. Reading the Cramlington story convinces us that captain and crew know the destination, fixate on it and work hard at getting there expediently. The chart is the school destination in written form, openly discussed and declared. Information about the journey is charted and shared: school development plans, OFSTED action plan, schemes of work. Implementing accelerated or any other generic model of learning does not work without a sustainable plan.

The **compass** reminds you of your broad direction and nudges you when you make a deviation. Without a compass you second guess where you are and where you have been. The compass for a school and its departments is to be found in the process of constant review. Regular reference to our journey's end at every meeting. How are we doing, how can we improve? The school planning process helps but only if it is shared with the crew. Collective planning of 'learning direction plans' – schemes of work – puts the destination into every learning moment. We want to get there – we must do this. Schemes of work based on a model of learning are at the core of the Cramlington experience and at the core of implementing accelerated learning, but so is the **clock**.

Without a clock the early navigators were lost. Thousands of lives were imperilled daily because they did not know how long they had been at sea or how long they had to go. Ships foundered on rocks within miles of home and safety, because they could not fix their point without fixing time. In a school the sense of an ultimate destination is also fixed by time. The points on the journey towards the best learning environment for all are fixed by time and reviewed as those times are gradually reached. This is about landmarks and landmark setting. The landmarks operate as targets for the school. By 'x' we will... Without this, you have a gentle but aimless drift in the general direction. Targets specified in time commit you to the journey. For this the captain and crew also need the calendar. The calendar gives advance notice of the expected arrival of the landmarks along the way. Successful implementation of accelerated learning necessitates regular, formative review of progress. Chart, compass, clock and calendar work together to keep the ship on course but none of this works without the **crew**.

It is your crew who keep the ship moving, who keep it afloat, who patch it up, clean it, scrub it down from time to time and keep it seaworthy. Some crews are mariners in love with the journey and the sea, others are sea dogs – grizzled, hearty, reliable and committed – some are press ganged, scurvy-ridden and potentially mutinous. You inherit your crew and they inherit you. You do not have to share the same philosophy of journeying but you have to agree on the destination. Once agreement of the destination is canvassed and secured, as long as it is regularly revisited through chart, compass, clock and calendar, we can suffer minor disagreements as to the best way to trim the sails. A captain who enthuses the crew by the promise of the destination is a good captain.

The Cramlington message is to focus on the destination and not on the journey. The destination remains in place. The means of getting there may alter. Successful implementation of accelerated learning requires everyone to know where they are going and why. Talk it up, communicate it, share it. Then support the crew on the journey, observe them, review with them, listen with them as they suggest improvements. Give them tools to do the job: time, continuity, resources, technology, improvement in physical space. But be aware of the rocks.

Journeying on the high 'C's is a lofty experience shaped by high aspirations and shared ideals. Journeying on the low 'C's is different. Sometimes pirates threaten. In these circumstances an alternative set of management tools may need to be used when you feel that despite your navigational prowess, your management skills and the willingness of your crew you become becalmed or dangerously adrift in hostile waters. When you find yourself amidst these 'C's, then the emergency toolkit is brought to the wheelhouse.

- ◆ canvas
- ◆ cash-till
- ◆ calculator
- ◆ crystal ball
- ◆ catheter
- ◆ catapult
- ◆ cannon

- ◆ cooler
- ◆ catechism
- ◆ crucifix
- ◆ candle.

If your ship is in the doldrums, catching any breath of wind may help. For this you need more canvas. More **canvas** allows you to exploit the opportunities that come your way. This is the equivalent for a school of diverting resources in support of the desired outcome. For Cramlington this took the form of staff development, residential time to re-write schemes of work, improved information and communications technology, and enhanced display facilities in classrooms. To pay for more canvas you will need to raid the **cash-till**. Successfully implementing accelerated learning does not create big sums because most of the costs are bound up in the development of people, but there are cost implications nevertheless. To raid the cash till you will need a **calculator** for your costs. You may need to calculate the costs of an enhanced post for a learning co-ordinator, or perhaps the costs to the timetable of running a learning to learn programme in Year 7, or the costs of a whole staff two-day residential to re-write schemes of work, or the costs of equipping a staff development library. All journeys cost. This is no exception.

Is the journey worthwhile? This is where you need a **crystal ball**. The crystal ball has never featured in the inventory of management tools recommended by the world's institutes but in many cases it ought to. I have provided a rationale for utilising accelerated learning in a section on trends in learning, which can be found on my website www.alite.co.uk Crystal ball gazers should go there now.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, your crew do not wish to leave port. This is where you need any combination of **catheter, catapult, cannon or cooler**. A catheter is useful occasionally to inject some new life into a tired old body. Many schools I visit see accelerated learning as offering just that. A reinvigoration of what has been traditional practice for years. In some cases, literally, new blood. A change in staffing with some fresh approaches and fresh attitudes coming along can be fortuitous in launching for a new destination. At Cramlington it would seem that many experienced staff were able to look again at their practice through the medium of the accelerated learning approach. A catapult would be useful in a slightly different crewing situation.

The catapult approach is two stages removed from the last resort. The catapult is used to keep your crew on their toes. This could be peer observation, or standing agenda items at departmental meetings, or learning theme of the week communicated at staff briefings, or removing bells and replacing with clocks. The idea is that constant, small reminders of the focus is on learning to keep your crew performing at their best. The nautical equivalent is the captain who sits on the bridge and occasionally fires a peanut at the crewman's feet with his catapult. Nothing malicious, just a reminder to focus on the journey. Sometimes that fails. A big gesture is required.

A cannon makes a very big noise and can be quite dramatic. They are most often used in adversity, occasionally in triumph, sometimes to celebrate, sometimes to forewarn. In a school this is the bigger gesture. The purpose of the bigger gesture is to declare intent. The declaration that we will replace activities week with motivation week, or thinking skills will be taught across Year 8, or we will have a paper-free lesson week, or all our assemblies will focus on learning skills. One of the things that they did at Cramlington was to put auxilliary whiteboards alongside the main whiteboard in every classroom. The purpose being to ensure that learning outcomes for the lesson were visibly recorded. By doing this the strategy is given significance. The cannon or big gesture can focus minds wonderfully, but what do you do when all else fails?

The catheter, catapult or cannon has not worked. Some of your crew sit in your galley lamenting their lot, spreading rumour and dissent to anyone who will listen. Then you need to leave them behind. This is the equivalent of the cooler. As a manager of learning you have tried everything to involve this section of the crew but they, over their years at sea, have invested so much of themselves in being dissenters that they feel they cannot come aboard without losing face. Sadly you have to leave them behind. They can cool their heels on the quayside. You have a journey to progress. In every school in the land some of the crew have been left on the quayside. As a captain you have to make this difficult decision. There is a critical mass or tipping point of popular support that you need for your journey. Work with that.

You may need to tell others about your journey. To do this you need **catechism**, **crucifix** and **candle**. The catechism includes the principles on which your adaptation of the accelerated learning methods are based. The authors of this book talk about the methodology to others and, when they do so, they provide a set of underlying written principles to explain why they choose to do what they do. This is a catechism they can check against. In some schools the principles are listed in the staff handbook. In others they form the basis of a checklist for classroom observation or for an induction programme for new staff. In at least one school I know of, delivery of the accelerated learning cycle is built into the job descriptions of teaching staff.

In sharing your journey with others, either by choice through staff development and conferencing or by edict through external inspection, you will need a crucifix. In some faiths the crucifix is believed to be capable of warding off evil spirits. Some will be so antagonistic to your beliefs that they will test them for you thoroughly. 'Is there any evidence that this works?' 'Why should we do this when we have got so much else on?' 'We tried that once, it was just after prohibition ...' 'We already do that anyway.' Some will come bearing clipboards. 'Can I see your policy on ...?' In those situations, stay with it. Encourage the crew to do the same. If you abandon a ship mid-voyage, you do not climb back on board again once the raiders have left. Derek Wise describes how Cramlington successfully weathered inspections and how the accelerated learning methods fit comfortably within national requirements.

Finally, from time to time in proselytising about the success of your methods you need a candle. Good teachers light candles in dark places. For some, all that is needed to advance their learning journey is one little glimmer of insight. Someone else provides and explanation of the significance of 'bell work' to the learning cycle and to the connecting phase of learning and suddenly it is understood. Cramlington share their experiences with their cluster of schools and the intent is to infuse the practice throughout the cluster. This is akin to letting others light their candle from yours.

Whether your journey has begun, is about to begin, or has not yet been considered, I commend the experiences described in this book to you.

Bon voyage!

Alistair Smith

Accelerated Learning Series General Editor
April 2001