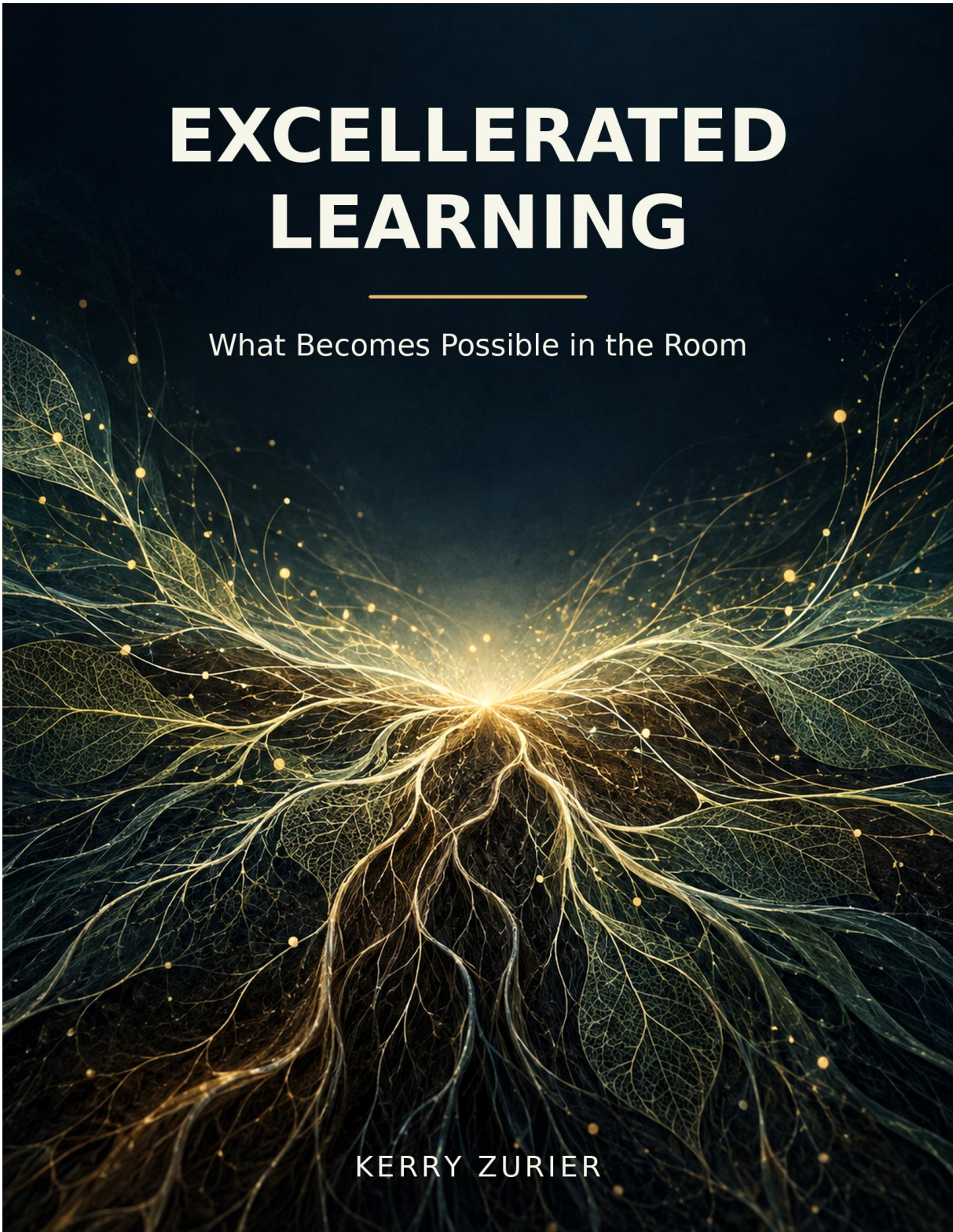


EXCELLERATED LEARNING

The background of the cover is a dark, deep blue. It features a complex, glowing network of golden-yellow lines that resemble roots or neural pathways. These lines radiate from a central point, branching outwards. Interspersed among these lines are numerous small, bright yellow dots, some of which are larger and more prominent than others. The overall effect is one of organic growth and interconnectedness, suggesting a theme of learning, development, or a complex system.

What Becomes Possible in the Room

KERRY ZURIER

A Note Before We Begin

This is not a book about how to get more information into people faster.

It is about something far more interesting. It is about how to create the conditions in which people become more available to themselves, to one another, and to possibilities they could not see before.

I have spent decades inside learning environments, first as a student captivated by what was happening to me, and later as someone designing experiences for others. Again and again, I have watched people arrive believing they needed more answers and discover that what they actually needed was a different relationship to their own capacity.

That distinction matters. If I think my job is to give you the answer, I will design one kind of room. If I believe you carry intelligence, experience, intuition, and unrealized possibility that can become available under the right conditions, I will design an entirely different one.

I will design a room based in the principles of Excelled Learning which is the body of distinctions combining a multitude of principles that I have learned over my lifetime.

The lineage of the distinctions and principles matters. The masters who have preceded me matter. Georgi Lozanov matters. Arnold Schultz, Marshall Thurber, Bobbi DePorter, Buckminster Fuller, and Money & You® matter. But this is not meant to be a history of their work. It is an invitation to look differently at learning itself and at the role we play when we gather people in the name of education, leadership, coaching, or transformation.

My hope is not that you finish this ebook agreeing with me. My hope is that you never again walk into a learning environment without noticing what it is asking people to believe about themselves.



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Notes and Image Credits

About the Author



1 It Was Never About the Content

My first experience of Accelerated Learning came before I knew there was a name for it.

I was a third quarter junior when I transferred to the University of California, Berkeley and met my new college advisor. Professor Emeritus Arnold Schultz was an ecologist, a systems thinker, and one of the founding figures in the College of Natural Resources. And, he was everything I never knew I needed in a mentor. But the labels do not begin to describe what happened in his classroom.¹

How do I explain Arnold?

I can give you his titles. I can tell you what he taught, what he helped create, and the disciplines his work crossed. I can also tell you how he, in a moment of self-crisis, got me admitted to Berkeley with one phone call.

But none of that would explain what it was like to enter a room he had created.

Arnold was rigorous without making rigor narrow. Poetry, science, parable, humor, cooking, field experience, and difficult questions could all belong in the same inquiry. These were not techniques pasted onto a conventional class. They were evidence of how he saw reality. For Arnold, reality was interconnected, alive, and far too interesting to be reduced to a single discipline.

I did not leave Arnold merely thinking I had encountered a methodology. I left with my way of seeing altered. That is why he is almost impossible to explain. His influence was not confined to what he said. It lived in what became possible around him.



CNR 101—Ecosystemology field trip, 1980. Professor Arnold Schultz with the learning community, cutting creosote and speaking in the Pygmy Forest. Photographs from the author's collection.

Arnold saw systems. He blended hard science, social science, business, philosophy, culture, humor, art, and the lived world. At a time when most education separated subjects into neat compartments, he invited us to notice the relationships among them.

He created a course called Ecosystemology.

Even the name suggested that we were entering a field larger than any one discipline. We encountered ecology and systems thinking through essays, parables, games, art, humor, conversation, and direct experience.

We took examinations outdoors in a rose garden. One final, he asked us to bring two blue books. In one, we had to design a question worthy of the examination. Then we switched books with another student and had to answer their question. The question part of the exam was weighted at 75% of our grade. This was my introduction to questions as intelligence. We made a pilgrimage to the pygmy forest in Mendocino County and to a mushroom farm.

Arnold's Ecosystemology reader introduced me to R. Buckminster Fuller, always known as Bucky, the designer, inventor, and systems thinker whose principles would become one of the central intellectual threads of my life.

Ecosystemology was the most impactful course I took at Berkeley. What stayed with me was not simply what Arnold taught. It was the context he created for learning it.

It was his methods that made the difference.

That sentence contains the beginning of this entire inquiry.

Arnold did not ask me to choose between rigor and imagination. He did not ask me to set aside my curiosity so I could receive the approved answer. He created a world in which interconnectedness, lateral thinking, cooperation, and exploration were not extras. They were the way we learned.

Exactly a decade later, I attended Money & You®. Once again, I found myself captivated by both the principles and the way those principles were being revealed. This was not a room built around passive reception. It emphasized cooperation, experience, independent thinking, authenticity, and application. Accelerated Learning had been taken to a whole new level.

There are moments when we encounter something new and moments when we recognize something we have been waiting for. Money & You® was a recognition. I had felt the power of this kind of education in Arnold's classroom. Now I could see that it could be deliberately designed.

The room is always teaching

Most of us think of content as the most important thing being taught. Yet every learning environment communicates two messages at once.

The first is explicit. What is the subject, skill, principle, or idea to be conveyed.

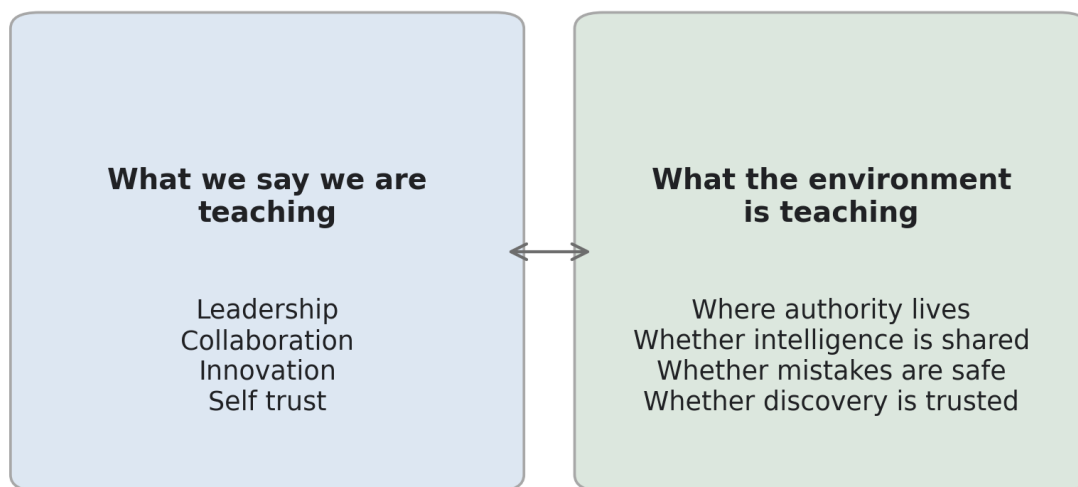
The second is contextual. This takes into account what the environment implies about authority, intelligence, risk, relationship, power dynamics and the learner's own capacity.

A room in which one expert speaks and everyone else listens may be teaching leadership, but its context can still say, “the important intelligence is at the front of the room.”

A workshop may speak about innovation while punishing mistakes. A program may praise collaboration while ranking people against one another. A facilitator may say, “trust yourself,” while leaving no space for participants to discover anything on their own.

People learn both messages. And, participants feel confusion.

The room is always teaching



Every learning environment teaches through both its context and its content.

That is why excellent content can produce such ordinary results. The content may be generous while the context quietly diminishes the learner.

You cannot say you believe in the genius of the learner and then design an environment in which people spend eight hours watching you demonstrate yours.

I am not arguing that expertise does not matter. Of course it matters. Preparation matters. Accuracy matters. Sequence matters. But expertise is not the purpose of the room. It is one of the resources available to the room.

My job is not to be the smartest person in the room. My job is to create a room in which everybody's intelligence becomes available.

From transmission to emergence

Traditional education is largely organized around transmission. Something exists in the mind of the teacher, and the goal is to transfer it as accurately as possible into the mind of the student.

Transmission has a place. Sometimes people need clear information, a demonstration, a map, a standard, or a set of instructions. The trouble begins when transmission becomes our entire theory of learning.

Human beings are not empty receptacles. They arrive with history, pattern recognition, questions, resistance, intuition, emotion, knowledge, and capacities that may not yet have had the conditions to appear. If our design accounts only for what we want to put into people, we miss what could come through them.

Excellerated Learning begins with a different question.

Not, How do I cover the material?

But, What could become possible here, and what conditions would allow it to emerge?

That question changes everything - the use of time, the role of the facilitator, the relationship among participants, the meaning of mistakes, and even what counts as success.

Pause and notice: In the learning environments you create or attend, what is the context teaching that no one has said aloud?

My job is not to be the smartest person in the room.

My job is to create a room in which everybody's intelligence becomes available.

2 We Were Born Knowing How to Learn

Observe a toddler learning.

They do not sit through a lecture on balance before attempting to walk. They touch. They watch. They imitate. They move. They fall. They try again. They repeat what fascinates them and abandon what does not. They recruit every sense available to make meaning of the world.

There is no separation between learning and living.

Our earliest learning is sensory, emotional, physical, social, and experimental. It happens through play, relationship, repetition, surprise, and consequence. Curiosity provides the energy. The environment provides feedback. Other people provide modeling, encouragement, language, and belonging.

Then, somewhere along the way, we begin treating learning as though it were primarily the ability to remain still while someone explains something.

We replace exploration with correct answers. We separate subjects that are interconnected in life. We make mistakes expensive. We reward individual performance in situations that rarely resemble how meaningful work actually gets done. And then we wonder why so many intelligent people decide they are not good learners.

The problem may not be the learner

When someone disengages, struggles, or resists, our first impulse is often to locate the problem inside that person. They lack motivation. They are not paying attention. They are not ready. They are difficult.

Sometimes those explanations may contain grains of truth. But they are not the only explanations available.

What if the environment is asking the learner to access information through a channel that does not work well for them? What if they cannot see the relevance? What if they are using so much energy protecting themselves from embarrassment that little remains for curiosity? What if the pace is wrong? What if the room rewards compliance when this learner needs discovery?

I am less interested in labeling people by a fixed learning style than I am in refusing to design learning through only one doorway. Human beings can see, hear, move, feel, discuss, imagine, practice, reflect, and create. Why would we voluntarily use only one or two of those capacities?

Multiple pathways are not about making every moment entertaining. They are about giving the whole person a chance to arrive.

Relaxed does not mean passive

Georgi Lozanov, the Bulgarian psychiatrist and educator who developed Suggestopedia, challenged assumptions about how much human beings can learn and what interferes with that capacity. His approach paid careful attention to suggestion, expectation, emotional state, art, music, and the learning environment. The radical proposition underneath the methods was that many of our limitations are not limitations of capacity. They are limitations we have learned to expect.³

If a person enters a room believing, “I am bad at this,” that belief is not merely a thought sitting politely in the corner. It affects attention, risk, interpretation, and effort. If the authority in the room conveys that the subject is terribly difficult, that suggestion becomes part of the lesson. If mistakes produce humiliation, the nervous system learns that participation is dangerous.

A more effective state is often described as relaxed alertness, calm enough to receive, awake enough to engage. Relaxation here does not mean low standards, passivity, or the absence of challenge. It means we are not wasting the learner's resources on unnecessary threat.

Music, visual beauty, story, humor, warmth, rhythm, movement, and positive expectation can all contribute. None is magic by itself. They matter because they influence state, and state influences what becomes available.

Curiosity is an organizing force

Fear narrows. Curiosity opens.

When people are afraid of being wrong, they search for safety. When people are curious, they search for relationship, pattern, explanation, and possibility. Curiosity does not eliminate discipline. It gives discipline a reason to exist.

This is why context must precede content. Before people care about the information, they need to understand why it matters, where it lives, what question it helps them explore, or what possibility it opens.

The learner is always asking, even if silently, “Why should I care? How does this connect to my life? What can I do or see because of it?”

Those are not interruptions to the curriculum. They are the doorway into it.

*People do not retain information simply because it was presented.
They are far more likely to retain what became meaningful.*

Natural learning is not sloppy or accidental. It is alive. It moves between encounter and reflection, action and feedback, individual insight and shared meaning. Excelled Learning does not invent those processes. It remembers them and designs with them on purpose.



Pause and notice: Where in your own education did you feel most alive? What were you allowed to do there that you were not allowed to do elsewhere?

3 Stop Treating People Like Receptacles

Here is the thing, people do not need another experience of someone standing at the front of the room knowing more than they do. They have had plenty of that.

They may need knowledge. They may need a model, vocabulary, distinction, demonstration, or challenge. But receiving those things is not the same as becoming capable.

If I tell you what I know, you may remember it. If I create an experience in which you discover it for yourself, now it belongs to you.

Safety is not comfort

Safety has become a widely used word, and sometimes we confuse it with comfort. A transformational learning environment cannot promise that no one will feel discomfort. Growth often includes uncertainty, vulnerability, frustration, disagreement, and the temporary loss of an old way of making sense.

Safety means something more demanding. It means that you will be treated with dignity while you are learning. You may question. You may make a mistake. You may offer a different perspective. You may even flatly disagree. You will not be diminished for speaking up or being contrary. You will never be diminished for being unfinished.

This kind of safety does not lower the standard. It makes genuine challenge possible.

Without sufficient safety, people protect themselves. They perform, withdraw, please, attack, hide, or wait for the right answer. With sufficient safety, they can risk finding out what is true.

Participation changes ownership

Learning is not a spectator sport.

We learn leadership by leading, communication by communicating, coaching by coaching, collaboration by collaborating. Explanation can orient us, but capability grows through use.

Active participation has at least four movements:

We do something. We practice enough to move beyond the novelty of the first attempt. We experiment by changing an approach and observing the result. Then we reflect so the experience can become conscious learning.

Experience without reflection can simply reinforce habit. Reflection without experience can remain beautifully worded theory. The power lies in the movement between them.

A strong debrief does not tell participants what the experience was supposed to mean. It helps them examine what happened, what they did, what they noticed, what assumptions were operating, what patterns became visible, and where else those patterns live.

The meaning cannot be completely preloaded. If the facilitator already owns the only valid conclusion, the activity is not an experience. It is a disguised lecture.

Collaboration makes more intelligence available

Human beings are social learners. We learn through observation, imitation, storytelling, disagreement, teaching, feedback, and shared endeavor. In community, we gain access to perspectives and pattern recognition that are not available to us alone.

This does not mean every group automatically becomes wise. Groups can amplify fear, conformity, and poor assumptions as easily as they amplify insight. Collaboration has to be designed.

A well-designed collaborative environment does several things at once. It distributes participation. It gives people meaningful responsibility. It makes listening as important as speaking. It allows difference without turning difference into rank. And it gives the group a task large enough that no one person can complete it alone.

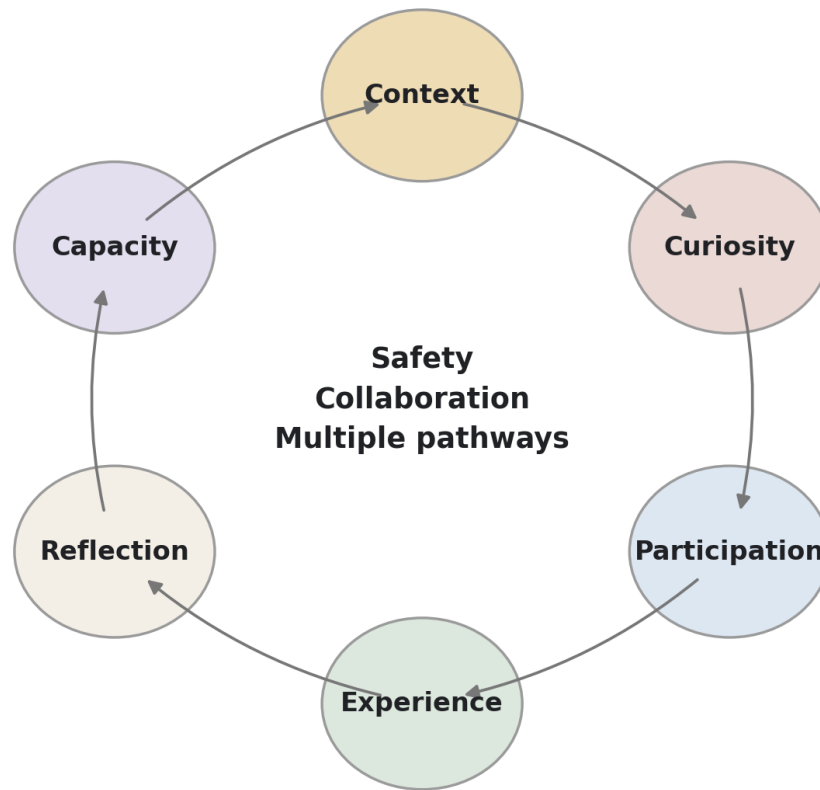
This is where cooperation becomes more than being nice. Cooperation is a practical recognition that the whole can have capacities not contained in any individual part.

Five conditions in motion

If I were writing a technical manual on Excelerated Learning, I would list five foundational elements that would be required in any Excelerated environment: a positive learning environment, active participation, collaboration, multiple pathways, and context before content. And, while these distinctions are useful, in life they are not five boxes to check. They are one living system.

Context creates relevance. Relevance awakens curiosity. Curiosity increases participation. Participation provides experience. Experience becomes learning through reflection. Collaboration multiplies perspectives. Multiple pathways make more of the room available. Safety allows people to risk the entire process.

A living learning system



The conditions reinforce one another as a living learning system.

Change one condition and you affect the others.

This is why facilitation is not merely the delivery of activities. The facilitator is constantly reading a system: energy, trust, confusion, dominance, silence, pace, meaning, readiness, and relationship. What does the room need now? More structure or more space? Another example or a direct experience? A pause or a provocation? A partner conversation or time alone?

There is no script that can answer those questions for every group. There are only principles, practice, and presence.

The design creates the possibility. The people create what happens.

Pause and notice: Where are you doing for learners what they could be discovering, practicing, or creating for themselves?

4 A Truth Experienced Is Truth

Marshall Thurber, an entrepreneur and educator shaped by Bucky's systems thinking, was one of the people who carried Accelerated Learning beyond language education and into business, leadership, systems thinking, and human potential. Along with educator Bobbi DePorter, he helped develop the lineage that became Excellerated Learning.

Marshall often said, "A truth believed is only a belief. A truth experienced is truth."

There is a reason that sentence has endured. We all know the distance between understanding a principle and living it.

I can explain cooperation to you. You can agree with every word. You can take excellent notes and repeat the definition. Then I can put you into a situation with scarce time, incomplete information, conflicting incentives, and other people, and we will discover what is actually available to you.

That discovery is not a failure of the lecture. It is the limit of the lecture.

The experience must be real enough

An experience becomes educational when something real is at stake. Not necessarily something enormous, and never something irresponsibly dangerous. But the learner must make choices, encounter consequences, and receive information that could not have been obtained by listening alone.

A simulation, game, role play, team challenge, coached practice, or real-world assignment can compress life. Patterns that take months to notice in ordinary circumstances may become visible in minutes because the environment makes them observable.

Under pressure, we reveal strategies. We dominate, defer, rescue, compete, withdraw, organize, improvise, listen, control, or create. The point is not to judge the strategy. The point is to see it clearly enough that choice becomes possible.

That is the gift of a well-designed experience. It turns an invisible pattern into something we can work with.

The debrief is where meaning is made

The activity is not the learning. The learning is what participants make of the activity.

A facilitator who falls in love with the game can miss the human beings inside it. Was the experience connected to a meaningful context? Did participants have enough agency? Was there adequate time to reflect? Were different interpretations welcome? Could insight be connected to real life and practiced again?

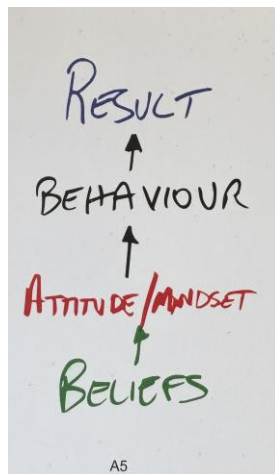
The debrief should travel from description to interpretation to application:

- What happened?
- What did you notice in yourself and others?
- What assumptions or strategies shaped the result?
- Where does this pattern appear outside the exercise?
- What becomes possible if you have another choice?

Notice that none of these questions asks, “What was the answer I wanted you to find?”

The facilitator may offer distinctions, challenge a conclusion, or reveal another layer. But the purpose is not to colonize the experience with the facilitator's meaning. It is to help participants develop the capacity to generate meaning, test it, and choose how to use it.

The purpose is to not just debrief behavior, but to get underneath the behavior to what is driving it: mindset, attitude, and ultimately, beliefs.



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Feedback is information, not identity

Experience becomes especially powerful when paired with useful feedback. Yet feedback can quickly recreate the old hierarchy of the evaluator knows and is testing or measuring the learner.

In an Excelled Learning environment, feedback serves awareness and choice. It names observable behavior and impact. It does not reduce the person to a label. It leaves room for context, intention, interpretation, and self-assessment.

The distinction is subtle and enormous.

“You are not a leader” closes identity around a verdict. “When the plan changed, you took over without asking the group what they saw and people stopped contributing” provides information the learner can examine and act upon.

The goal is not dependence on the facilitator's judgment. The goal is increased capacity for accurate self-observation.

Integration is the overlooked step

A breakthrough in the room is not the same as a new capacity in life.

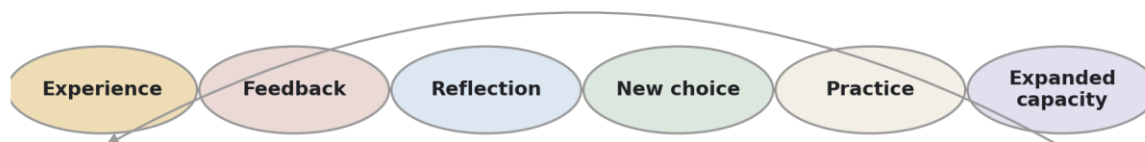
People need an opportunity to practice again, make a different choice, receive new feedback, and connect insight to the environments they are returning to. Otherwise, a powerful experience can become a moving memory rather than an embodied resource.

This is one reason Excelled Learning is cumulative. Each experience can prepare the ground for the next. Language is introduced, tested, refined, and lived. The group develops shared references. Participants gain confidence in their capacity to inquire, recover, collaborate, and create. Lessons are repeated in different ways.

Repetition leads to discovery.

The learning is not a collection of moments. It becomes a system of increasing capacity.

From experience to embodiment



Integration is cumulative, not a single breakthrough.

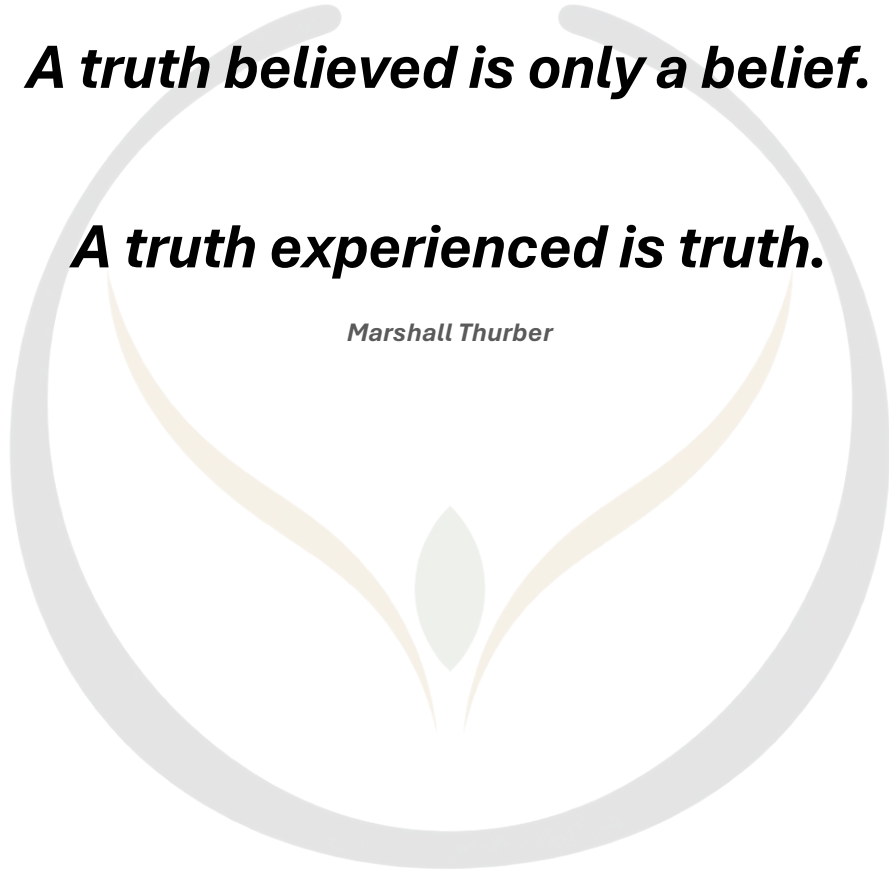
Insight becomes capacity through a continuing cycle of experience, reflection, choice, practice, and feedback.

Pause and notice: Think of a truth you understood intellectually long before you experienced it. What changed when it became yours?

A truth believed is only a belief.

A truth experienced is truth.

Marshall Thurber



5 Learning Is Not Transformation

Accelerated Learning asks how human beings can learn more naturally, deeply, and effectively.

Excellerated Learning asks an additional question: How do we create the possibility of transformation?

Information changes what people know. Transformation changes what becomes available to them.

That is not merely a more dramatic version of learning. It is a different order of change.

We change constantly. We gain a skill, modify a behavior, adopt a routine, or improve a result. Transformation reaches beneath the behavior to the organization that produced it: the assumptions, identity, relationships, and way of seeing from which our choices arise.

After transformation, a person may still return to an old behavior. Human beings are not software upgrades. But they cannot completely unknow the new possibility. The old response is no longer the only reality available.

Once the door opens, it cannot be entirely unopened.

Breakdown is not the enemy

We tend to interpret confusion as evidence that learning has failed. Sometimes it is evidence that the existing way of organizing reality can no longer contain what is happening.

Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel Prize-winning chemist whose work explored dissipative structures, offered a powerful image. Under particular conditions, systems far from equilibrium can reorganize into new forms of order. In human development, we can recognize a related pattern. Stability is disrupted. The familiar strategy stops working. There is a period of uncertainty. Then a new organization may emerge.⁴

I say may because transformation cannot be manufactured on command. We can create conditions, introduce meaningful challenge, provide support, and invite a system to reorganize. We cannot ethically force a particular human outcome and still call it transformation.

This is where the facilitator's relationship to control becomes crucial.

Pressure without domination

No pressure, no movement. Too much pressure, and the system protects itself or breaks. Meaningful pressure creates enough disturbance that an old pattern becomes visible and another choice becomes necessary.

The art lies in calibration.

What is a stretch for one person may be overwhelming for another. What challenges a new group may bore an experienced one. Pressure can come from time, complexity, responsibility, feedback, ambiguity, relationship, or the consequence of real choice. It does not require humiliation, manipulation, or emotional ambush.

The test is not whether participants became emotional. Emotion is neither proof of transformation nor evidence of harm by itself. The more useful questions are:

Did the person retain agency?

Was the challenge connected to a meaningful purpose?

Was there sufficient support?

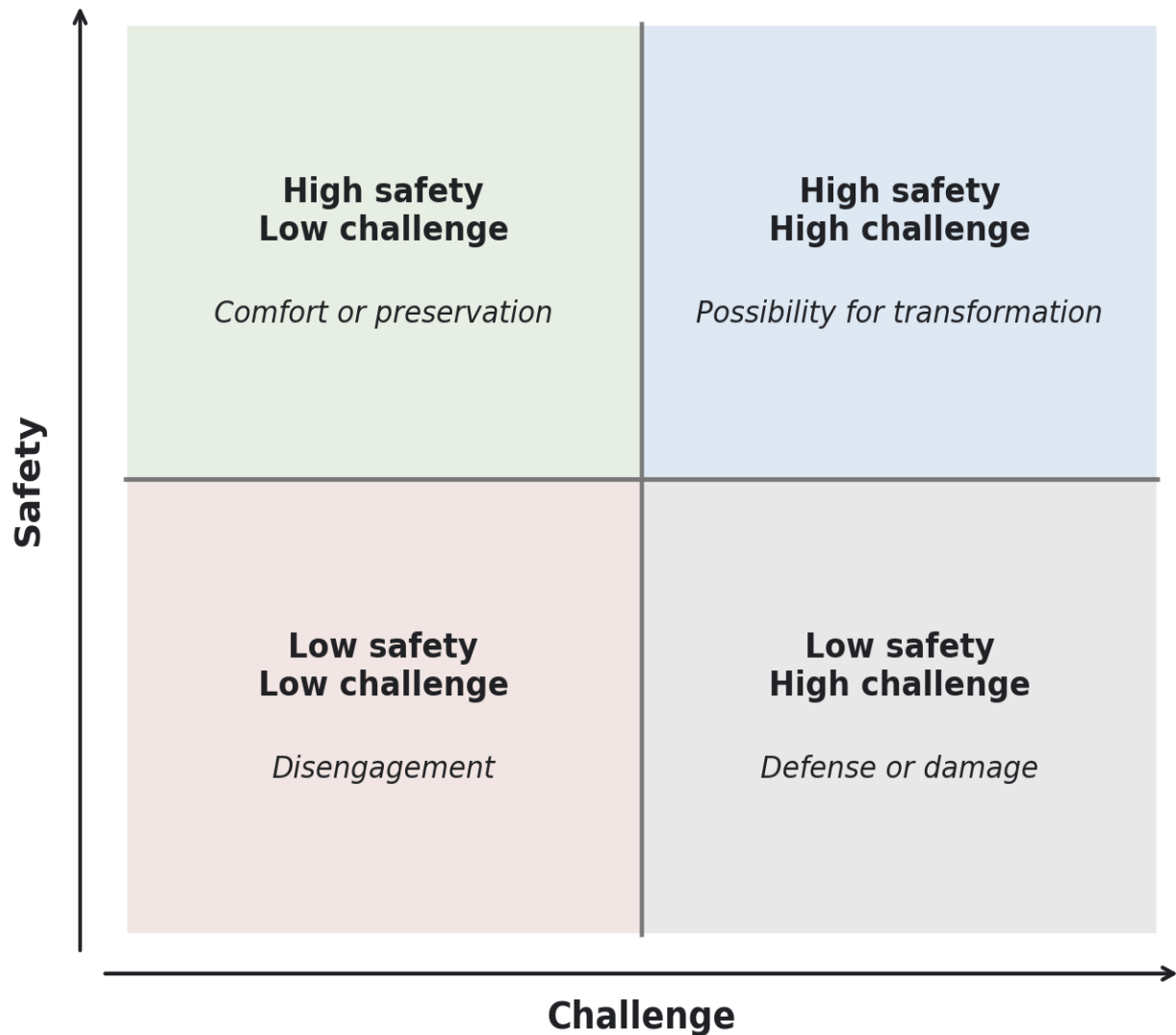
Could the experience be processed and integrated?

Was the facilitator serving the learner's emergence, or attached to producing a dramatic result?

That last question is uncomfortable, which is precisely why it matters.



The transformational field



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Transformation becomes possible where meaningful challenge, sufficient safety, agency, and integration meet.

The facilitator cannot be the hero

Transformation is seductive. When something extraordinary happens in a room, the person leading it may be credited, or may quietly credit themselves, with causing the breakthrough.

But if I need to be the cause of your transformation, I have placed myself at the center of something that belongs to you.

I can design, invite, challenge, witness, reflect, and protect. I can bring distinctions and experience. I can sometimes see a capacity in you before you can see it yourself. But I cannot own your emergence.

The facilitator's role is not to create greatness in people. It is to create conditions in which what is already trying to emerge has a chance to become visible.

This requires humility and enormous skill. It means reading the room without assuming you know the whole story. It means knowing when to intervene and when to get out of the way. It means being willing for the learning to be different from what you planned, while remaining responsible for the integrity of the environment.

Transformation expands capacity

One useful way to recognize transformation is by what becomes newly possible.

Can the person now see a pattern they could not see? Remain present where they previously disappeared? Ask for help without collapsing into inadequacy? Hold tension without needing to eliminate difference? Act from a purpose larger than self-protection? Create with others where they once competed or controlled?

The result is not perfection. It is range.

Transformation gives us access to more than one way of being. It expands the freedom to respond rather than merely repeat.

Pause and notice: What is available to you now that once was not? What experience made that capacity visible?

6 Creating the Cocoon

The transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly is almost too beautiful a metaphor. It risks becoming sentimental. The actual process is anything but sentimental.

Inside the chrysalis, much of the caterpillar's familiar structure breaks down. In insects with complete metamorphosis, clusters of precursor tissue called imaginal discs have been present since the larval stages. During metamorphosis, those structures develop into adult features such as wings, legs, eyes, and antennae.⁵



Metamorphosis observed as a living system. Maria Sibylla Merian, 1705. Public domain.

The butterfly is not a better caterpillar. It is a different organization with capacities the caterpillar did not have.

That is what makes the metaphor useful.

The cocoon does not create the butterfly

The cocoon provides conditions. It protects a process it cannot perform on the butterfly's behalf.

A transformational learning environment serves a similar function. It does not insert potential into people. It creates sufficient safety, challenge, time, relationship, and nourishment for capacities already present in possibility to organize and emerge.

This shifts our stance from deficiency to potential.

If I begin with deficiency, I look for what is wrong and how to correct it. If I begin with potential, I still notice gaps, behavior, and consequences, but I relate to them differently. I ask what capacity is trying to emerge, what interferes with it, and what environment would allow it to strengthen.

The art of perturbation

“A system fluctuates in an orderly manner until the occurrence of a disruptive event, at which time the system moves and seemingly random, disorderly ways until it chooses a new direction at a higher level of organization.” (Prigogine, 1976)

Perturbation is the act of applying pressure onto a system in a consistent way to cause a transformation or breakthrough.

Protection and perturbation belong together

A cocoon is not a padded room. Transformation needs both protection and disturbance.

Protection without challenge preserves the current form. Challenge without protection can produce damage or defense. The craft is to hold both.

In practice, that may mean establishing agreements before inviting risk. It may mean building relationship before delivering difficult feedback. It may mean giving participants real responsibility while making recovery possible. It may mean naming that confusion is expected, without romanticizing suffering. It may mean slowing down when the group wants to rush toward certainty.

The sequence matters.

Trust is not a warm-up activity we complete so we can get to the real curriculum. Trust is part of the curriculum. So is choice. So is the way conflict is handled, the way mistakes are interpreted, and the way power is used.

Design the whole field

People often ask for the techniques of Accelerated or Excelled Learning. What music should I use? How should the room be arranged? Which activity works? What questions should I ask?

Those are legitimate questions. Music can shift state. Beauty can invite care. Movement can reenergize attention. Metaphor can hold complexity. Games can reveal patterns. Reflection can integrate experience. Room arrangement can either reinforce hierarchy or support relationship.

But no technique carries the philosophy by itself.

Music used mechanically becomes decoration. An activity without context becomes entertainment. A circle of chairs does not guarantee equality. Positive language that denies difficulty becomes manipulation. A debrief with a predetermined answer returns us to the very model we intended to leave.

Design the whole field: physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, temporal, and ethical.

What do people see when they enter? What does the sequence suggest? Who speaks first and most often? Where is choice real? How is energy renewed? What happens after failure? How does the group know what it is becoming capable of? What does the facilitator do with their authority?

The answers to those questions are the curriculum too.

A living framework

If you need a starting place, hold these six movements. They are not steps to complete once. They are conditions to revisit throughout the life of the learning environment.

- Create sufficient safety for honest participation.
- Establish meaning before adding information.
- Engage the whole person through multiple pathways.
- Move between experience, feedback, reflection, and practice.
- Apply enough challenge to make old patterns visible without taking away dignity or agency.
- Look for expanded capacity, not dramatic performance.

The framework is simple. Living it is not.

It asks the facilitator to be fully present, prepared without being rigid, confident without needing to dominate, able to read what is happening without turning every signal into a conclusion.

It asks us to trust design and remain responsive to life.

Pause and notice: Which condition do you naturally create well? Which one disappears first when you feel pressure as a facilitator or leader?

The design creates the possibility.

The people create what happens.



7 What Becomes Possible

For many years, education has asked some version of the same questions.

Did they understand the material? Can they repeat the concept? Can they demonstrate the skill? Did they achieve the objective?

Those questions are necessary. They are not sufficient.

Excellerated Learning adds another set:

Who are they able to be now that they could not be before?

What can they see that they could not see?

What capacity exists in the room now that was unavailable when we began?

These questions change what we notice.

We begin to value the person who asks a new question, not only the person who gives a fast answer. We notice when a group starts using difference as a resource. We recognize recovery after failure as a form of learning. We pay attention when someone claims their voice, releases the need to be right, or discovers they can remain present in uncertainty.

These outcomes are harder to quantify than recall. They are also the capacities demanded by a world of complexity, interdependence, and rapid change.

Education as an act of trust

At its deepest level, this work is based on trust in human capacity.

Not naive trust. Not the belief that everyone already has every skill or that development requires no discipline. I mean the trust that people are more than their current performance, that intelligence exists in many forms, and that under the right conditions human beings can discover, reorganize, cooperate, and create.

Our design reveals whether we truly believe that.

When we over-explain, over-control, rescue too quickly, prescribe every meaning, or make ourselves indispensable, we may be acting from care. But we may also be communicating that we do not trust the learner to find their way.

Sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is provide the structure, ask the question, and stay present long enough for someone else's knowing to arrive.

What I have come to believe

I have spent my life educating principles intended to enhance cooperation and fulfillment for humanity. Accelerated Learning has been the vehicle, but the deeper commitment has always been the same.

I believe learning can call people toward more of themselves.

I believe the environment matters as much as the information.

I believe experience can reveal what explanation cannot.

I believe cooperation makes capacities available that competition alone cannot produce.

I believe challenge and safety are not opposites; held responsibly, they make transformation possible.

And I believe the person leading the room is not there to be its source of intelligence. We are there to convene, to design, to listen, to challenge, to protect, and to get out of the way when something wiser begins to emerge.

That is both less glamorous and more profound than being the expert.

Begin with one room

You do not need to redesign an entire institution to begin.

Begin with the next room you enter.

Before deciding what you will say, ask what you want people to experience. Before creating the slides, ask what the context must communicate. Before adding another explanation, ask what participants could discover. Before correcting an answer, ask what question might deepen the thinking. Before pushing harder, ask whether the system needs more pressure or more safety.

Then notice what happens.

Learning environments are living systems. Small changes can have precessional effects. A different question alters a conversation. A different arrangement alters participation. A moment of genuine listening alters trust. An invitation to create alters ownership.

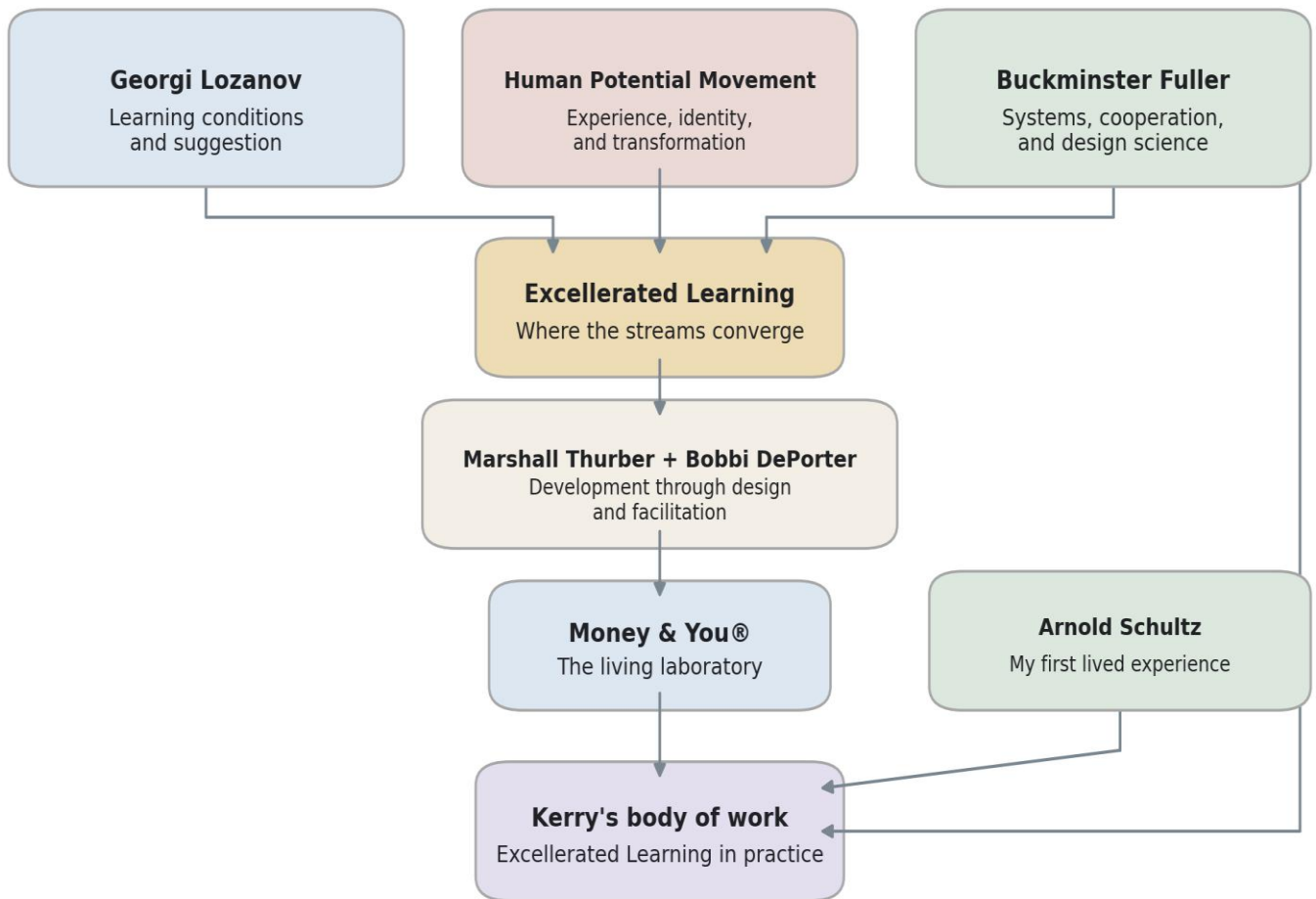
You may not be able to predict what emerges. That is not a flaw in the design. It is evidence that real people are present.

The final measure of the room is not how much of the facilitator it contains. It is how much more of everyone becomes available.

What becomes possible when we educate from there?

The People and Lineage Behind the Work

This is not a tidy family tree. It is not even a complete family tree. It is a map of influences that converged through people, places, ideas, and years of practice. Each stream has its own history. What follows is the lineage as I experienced it. The people whose work changed what I could see, and the rooms in which those ideas became real.



A map of influence, not a literal or complete genealogy.

Arnold Schultz - the impossible-to-explain mentor

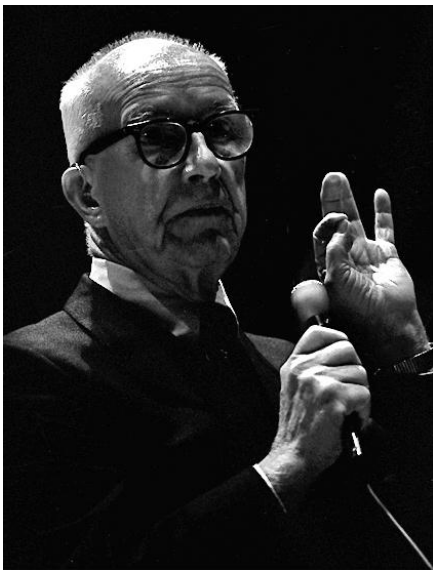
Arnold was a Berkeley ecologist, systems thinker, teacher, and co-founder of Conservation and Resource Studies. Those identifiers locate him historically. They do not contain him. For me, Arnold's deepest contribution was demonstrating that an educational environment could be rigorous, playful, interdisciplinary, and alive at the same time. He did not merely teach interconnectedness. He built a world in which we experienced it.

R. Buckminster Fuller - Bucky

Bucky was a designer, inventor, author, and systems thinker who asked what humanity could accomplish through comprehensive, anticipatory design and cooperation. I first encountered him through Arnold's Ecosystemology reader. His principles became the central intellectual thread in the work that followed.

Georgi Lozanov

Lozanov was a Bulgarian psychiatrist and educator best known for Suggestopedia, an approach that examined how expectation, suggestion, art, music, emotional state, and environment affect learning. His work challenged the belief that conventional educational performance reflects the limits of human capacity.



R. Buckminster Fuller. Wikimedia Commons.



Georgi Lozanov at Viktorsberg, Austria, 2008. Photograph by Kaz Hagiwara, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Marshall Thurber

Marshall was an entrepreneur and educator who brought systems thinking, business, experiential learning, and human development together. He helped create environments in which principles were not simply explained; they were placed under enough pressure to become visible in experience.

Bobbi DePorter

Bobbi is an educator and co-founder of SuperCamp who helped carry Accelerated Learning into business, youth education, and personal development. Her work helped make whole-person, participatory learning available to new audiences and settings.

Money & You® - where the streams converged

Money & You® was not simply another influence. It was where many of these streams became an experience: Bucky's principles, systems thinking, cooperation, business, games, reflection, responsibility, and transformational learning. Ten years after Arnold's classroom, I recognized that the kind of environment that had changed me could be designed intentionally. That recognition became my life's work.



Money & You® as a living laboratory—participants, facilitators and the relationships through which Excellerated Learning has been practiced, refined and carried into the world. Kerry Zurier is pictured facilitating and with Doria Cordova and Bobbi DePorter. Photographs from the author's collection.



The Doorway to What Comes Next

This book is intentionally not comprehensive.

It is an invitation. An appetizer. A glimpse into what becomes possible when we stop treating learning as the transfer of information and begin designing environments in which people can encounter capacities they did not know they possessed.

But a glimpse should not be confused with mastery.

Creating a transformational learning environment requires far more than a collection of activities, games, music, debrief questions or facilitation techniques. It requires comprehensive knowledge, lived experience, principled practice and the ability to perceive the room as a living system.

It requires understanding context as deeply as content. It requires knowing how safety, challenge, timing, relationship, perturbation, experience and reflection interact. It requires the discipline to debrief an experience without imposing your meaning upon someone else's discovery.

Most of all, it requires an extraordinary willingness to be uncomfortable.

You must be willing to relinquish the familiar authority of being the person with the answers. To remain present when the room becomes uncertain. To resist rescuing people from the very ambiguity through which new capacity may emerge. To recognize the difference between meaningful challenge and domination. And, to accept responsibility for the conditions you create without claiming ownership of what another person discovers.

You cannot invite people into territory you are unwilling to enter yourself.

Excellerated Learning has been the lineage, the laboratory and the living practice from which my work grew. After decades of designing and inhabiting these environments, another distinction has begun to emerge.

What if the deepest purpose of learning is not acceleration, transmission or even transformation?

What if it is evocation?

What if our work is to create the conditions in which the intelligence, agency and unrealized capacity already present in people can become available. To them, to one another and to possibilities none of us could have predicted?

I believe this is more than the next methodology.

It is the beginning of a movement: away from education organized around the authority of the person at the front of the room, and toward environments designed to make the intelligence of the whole room available.

I call this **Evocative Learning™**.

The larger book will explore the knowledge, practice, responsibility and personal transformation required to live it.

For now, this is the doorway.

An Invitation for Your Next Learning Environment

Before your next class, program, meeting, retreat, or coaching conversation, sit with these questions:

- What is the possibility I am convening people around?
- What will the environment communicate before I say a word?
- Where will participants have genuine agency?
- How will they encounter the idea through experience, not explanation alone?
- What forms of intelligence and participation does the design make available?
- What amount of challenge is meaningful, and what support makes that challenge usable?
- How will reflection turn experience into learning?
- How will people practice the new capacity before they leave?
- What am I willing to release so the intelligence of the room can emerge?

Do not use these as a checklist you can finish. Use them as an inquiry that keeps the room alive.

And then ask the question beneath all the others:

What becomes possible now?



Notes and Image Credits

These notes identify factual sources. Personal recollections and interpretations are the author's own.

Notes

1. UC Berkeley Rausser College of Natural Resources, “Choosing Their Path, Making an Impact,” October 2023. The article identifies Arnold Schultz as instrumental in founding Conservation and Resource Studies and describes his interdisciplinary Ecosystemology teaching.
2. Arnold Schultz, Ecosystemology (<https://archive.org/download/arnold-schultz-ecosystemology-2009/Arnold%20Schultz%20-%20Ecosystemology%20-%202009.pdf>)
3. Georgi Lozanov, *Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1978).
4. The Nobel Prize in Chemistry 1977 was awarded to Ilya Prigogine for contributions to non-equilibrium thermodynamics, particularly the theory of dissipative structures. NobelPrize.org.
5. Nicolas A. Beira and Renato Paro, “The Legacy of Drosophila Imaginal Discs,” *Chromosoma* 125 (2016): 573–592.

Image credits

Photographs from the author's collection: CNR 101—Ecosystemology field trip, 1980 (Professor Arnold Schultz with the learning community, cutting creosote, and speaking in the Pygmy Forest); Money & You® participants and facilitators, including Kerry Zurier, Doria Cordova, and Bobbi DePorter; and the ‘Beliefs → Attitude/Mindset → Behaviour → Result’ learning artifact. Historical photographs were restored and collages arranged for this edition.

Georgi Lozanov at Viktorsberg, Austria, May 8, 2008. Photograph by Kaz Hagiwara, via Wikimedia Commons; cropped for this edition. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

R. Buckminster Fuller during his 1972–73 tour at UC Santa Barbara. Photograph by Dan Lindsay, via Wikimedia Commons; cropped for this edition. Licensed under CC BY 3.0.

Metamorphosis of a Butterfly, Maria Sibylla Merian, 1705. Via Wikimedia Commons; public domain.

Conceptual diagrams, cover artwork, and the open-field symbol created for this edition.

About the Author

Kerry Zurier has spent decades creating and leading experiential learning environments grounded in cooperation, systems thinking, human potential, and transformational education. Her work draws from the lineages of Accelerated Learning, Excellerated Learning, Money & You®, and the principles of R. Buckminster Fuller. She is committed to learning experiences in which people do not simply receive information, but gain access to greater capacity, agency, relationship, and possibility.

