

Departments

The vertical structure of the AL Model

Everybody moves at their own pace and with different priorities. Our brains work in diverse ways, and our capabilities are not always suited to a standard approach. Many students just do not progress the way we expect, yet we force the issue and pretend that we are serving them by pushing them through the system. We have a set chronology for learning with predetermined outcomes, neither of which is applicable to a vast number of students. Why not get the most out of who they actually are, instead of insisting on constricted parameters for achievement? The general structure of education today is the failure, because it does not have the fluidity and flexibility needed for personal development.

Try to envision a situation that supports important learning objectives, while also positioning students to do what they themselves perceive as meaningful work. The pupils would be optimally placed, according to their knowledge and skill levels to ensure they truly learn the material. Their idiosyncratic styles would be accommodated, because they would be able to approach learning from a variety of angles. Some students could examine it in a traditional way (i.e., bookwork), some could do it with a hands-on approach, some collaboratively, some alone, some verbally, some in written form, some visually through diagrams or videos, some using software, and some with other tools. Support mechanisms would be readily available. They would not be thrust forward to the next level until they are ready. And, they would have layer upon layer of purpose to support their learning. Such a scenario would necessitate a lithe structure that could easily adapt to evolving circumstances.

In Actualized Learning's model, grade levels would be replaced by departments within the aforementioned sectors. Furthermore, there would be specialized subdivisions within the various departments. It would be somewhat analogous to large companies that are divided into various areas of responsibility and tiers of production. The distinction between departments would be much more subtle than to what we are accustomed. There is a common understanding of how third grade is different from sixth grade, for example, and never the twain shall meet. In our current system it is extremely hard to reconcile when a fifth grader has second grade math skills, but eighth grade reading skills. Add thirty

permutations (in a single classroom) to that mix and it is unrealistic to think our schools can properly address every student's needs. We are basically plugging a bunch of very different kids into the same mold, and expecting them to all be on the same page.

Placing students appropriately is crucial to their development. If they are placed too low or too high, there will be unwanted consequences. AL's response to that dilemma is to provide teachers with the tools and educational environment so students are appropriately challenged. It will be a versatile system, so student placement can be adjusted to the circumstances and his/her profile.

Students would progress through departmental tasks instead of grade levels. Departments would still be geared to certain levels of maturity, skills and content knowledge, but they would mostly be characterized by the duties performed within them. In addition, departments will represent depth of knowledge (DOK) levels. There will, therefore, be two main determinants for what occurs in a department and gives direction for the activities: DOK skills and content objectives. Each sector will provide a context for applied learning, and its various sections will carry out the goals within those contexts. In the process of carrying out those goals, each department will employ and ingrain different skills in support of the deliverance and assimilation of specific content learning. The subdivisions would take the customization of learning a step further by tailoring the attainment of precise learning objectives to diverse learning preferences.