

THE AL MODEL IN BRIEF

Why have schools been organized around academic content areas? They are not the centerpieces of our lives, so why are they stationed as such? The design of Actualized Learning, therefore, centers around the segmentation of schools into sectors that parallel significant arenas in our lives: Health (well-being), Communities (local environs, social interactions, and relationships), Citizenship (the national community), The Marketplace (economic/financial/workplace dynamics, and life-paths), Culture (self-expression and perspective), Research and Development (investigation/exploration and clarification), and Production (applied learning). These sectors are more than contexts for academic content. They are the reasons for studying subject matter. In other words, learning would become a process of acquiring tools for the attainment of important objectives. Dividing our schools into sectors that resemble key areas in our lives would naturally enhance relevancy and expedite the connection to schema. It would provide recognizable conditions for the usage of subject matter. It would allow for mixing up the application of content in a variety of appropriate ways. And on top of all those benefits, it would facilitate a customized approach to learning, so students with different interests and learning styles could find what works for them.

In lieu of grade levels, AL will have multiple departments within the sectors that are focused on certain skill and knowledge levels, which will facilitate the appropriate placement and advancement of students. Departments are where the students engage in meaningful tasks that incorporate specific learning objectives. Students will be focused on accomplishments, and in so doing will acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. Engagement is a natural by-product of meaningful tasks within contexts that are aligned to people's lives. AL's departments manifest that purpose in direct tasks that are concrete, appropriate, and within the two over-riding contexts provided by the sectors and scenarios.

Scenarios will provide over-arching purpose and direction to all learning tasks. They will predominantly answer the question why students are expected to do something. They also serve horizontal integration and collaborative efforts, because the entire school will be mobilized for dealing with pressing issues. This has the added benefits of raising awareness, developing problem-solving skills, and heightening relevancy. Collectively striving to achieve mutual goals can be very empowering, as it capitalizes on the exhilaration that arises from being part of something that transcends oneself. It taps into our social and spiritual identity and can be truly uplifting.

All learning activities will be designed so they progress through the actual process of learning. It is important for our schools to promote actual learning, and not just the exposure to content. The first step in learning is tying into **schema**. Schemata are representations or models that help us define reality and function within it. It is a product of past experiences that furthers comprehension and utility of new experiences. Since establishing a frame of reference is essential to progressing to new knowledge, it is imperative to create a range of opportunities within which one could find the most conducive path for learning. The educational environment

has to therefore readily provide familiar practices that easily allow for progression into expansive ways for achieving objectives. After the links have been made to one's architecture of reality, the next step is to provide **perspective**. Although learning initially requires a frame of reference, that is merely the point of embarkation. The circular nature of schema, in that past experiences define future experiences, necessitates redirection or expansion in order to learn something new. Connecting to schema is essentially looking backward, but building perspective is more about projecting forward. Where have we been, now where can we go? What do I know, and what don't I know? Let students do it their way initially then portray alternatives through modeling, examples, and comparative results. The third dimension of learning is **purpose**. Purpose is the greatest source of desire, and absolutely the most important force behind learning. Goals arise from purpose and clarify all undertakings. It is to that end Actualized Learning has designed a learning environment with layer upon layer infused with meaning. After a base for understanding has been established and one has some perspective of what to do and a reason to do it, it is time to do it. **Application** is, therefore, the next critical step in the learning process. It is the manifestation of learning, and it anchors one's understanding and purpose. "Doing" is a process of confirmation for the student and an authentic test of comprehension. This is when experience and learning will take root and supply provisions for personal growth. The value of new content is derived from its usefulness. Students do not learn by sitting at a desk, they have to take the material and do something with it. They have to connect with it. Doing something once or twice might help solidify one's understanding of the targeted content, but how long will it be retained? For knowledge to progress to higher levels and become firmly implanted, **repetition** is mandatory. Repetition should be done so extensively that the knowledge becomes deeply ingrained and skills become second nature. Overlearning can lead to the internalization of knowledge and the mastery of skills. It becomes part of the learner with the added benefit that less effort is expended when utilizing that knowledge. The primary purpose of Actualized Learning is to construct a learning environment and experiential opportunities to facilitate these stages.

Determining the potential of our students and paving the way for its realization requires a very different approach to evaluations. Generally, what occurs on a test is nothing more than a display of short-term memory of certain facts, temporary ability to make some calculations, or immediate retention of task-specific procedures. In contrast, Actualized Learning intends to treat evaluations as maps for guiding our youth toward the realization of their potential, which in turn will lead to more significant contributions from which we all gain. We should focus on assessments that serve our children by revealing their talents and aptitudes. We should still have standards and expectations that ensure everybody is aware of what is indispensable to learn, but that does not mean we should only value accomplishments along those lines. Many students have a tremendous amount to offer, even if they are not good in certain academic subjects. Determining the direction best suited for someone requires comprehensive and ongoing scrutiny. The entire gamut of assessments must be utilized and conducted regularly: observations in varied situations, noting personality traits, constant feedback (formative), diagnosing problem areas, comparative analyses (norm-referenced), ascertaining one's grasp of the material (criterion-referenced), measuring retention levels (summative), and weighing progress (benchmarks). Assessments can be integrated into the learning process instead of being tacked on as the culmination of study. It is, therefore, advantageous for teachers to evaluate while they are facilitating, observe while they are getting involved, and record findings while doing analysis. A

dynamic educational environment, where pupils are engaged in well-defined tasks and directly interacting with facilitators, affords constant opportunities for feedback and evaluation. Assessments should provide information in both directions, where both the students and teachers are receiving timely input. Grades should serve the goals of adjusting instruction, guiding feedback/interventions, and helping our youth discover viable channels for their lives.

Actualized Learning perceives education as taking place in a holistic environment that goes beyond campus. Schools should extend to include the various stakeholders, as well as make explicit the means for getting involved within the school. Parents, businesses, community service organizations, local politicians, educational institutions, clubs/societies, professional associations, and students themselves all play important roles in the governance, operations, and culture of an AL school. Alliances with local institutions for college credit, online courses, advanced courses, mentorships, and tutorials will be aggressively pursued. Businesses will serve as advisors, board members, contributors/benefactors, mentors, tutors, guest facilitators on campus, as well as offering opportunities for volunteer work, internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, informational interviews, employment, and simulations. Parental participation in particular is critical. AL will develop outreach programs and conduits for parental involvement, including defined roles for their involvement in the various sectors.

Actualized Learning's model is suitable for any kind of student population. AL will serve our nation's youth better regardless of socioeconomic background, academic inclination, or cultural preferences, since it is a lithe, flexible learning environment that is oriented to individual fulfillment.