ACCELERATED LEARNING IS AN EDUCATIONAL POWERHOUSE THAT absorbs students into their studies and reenergizes the instructional process. It creates a highly engaged environment centered on learner needs, and seeks to maximize the results achieved using practical, flexible methods that fit the subject, occupation and individual. In fact, according to Dave Meier, “Do what works, and keep searching for what works better” is the credo of accelerated learning, with the focus being on the outcome, rather than the process.

Many educational institutions capitalize on students' existing knowledge base to accelerate program completion. Some allow credit for prior learning or test-out options, while others work in tandem with secondary and postsecondary partners to facilitate credentialing via articulation, dual enrollment or transcribed credit. Of particular interest for purposes of this article are youth apprenticeships, work-based practicums and career internship programs that connect learners with their occupation of choice in an authentic learning setting. Real work placements lead to faster, more effective development because when students experience firsthand the framework and atmosphere of a particular profession, they engage in genuine practices and experiences associated with that profession, and they relate successes and mistakes to high-stakes consequences that vest them in the results of their performance.

Immersion Experience
Learning at work functions as an immersion experience that engages the senses and focuses students' attention on the tasks at hand, speeding up the creation of brain-based connections. The benefits of learning at work also build on research findings that show that learning is a whole body-and-mind effort that produces a comprehensive context for growth, rather than emphasizing content delivery alone. Similar to learning a foreign language through a study-abroad program, secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) instructors can benefit from immersing their students in their future occupation instead of fragmenting teaching into detached theory and practice incidents. For example, nursing and business students learn faster and achieve more comprehensive understanding when placed in an office to perform the regular duties of the job. Tradesmen, too, make deeper and more complex mental associations related to their profession when working in a shop or yard alongside experienced specialists, as compared to being confined to out-of-context instruction.

However, learning at work should not be a sink-or-swim experience. Rather, the plan needs to be thoughtfully developed to guide learners to success by releasing higher-order tasks and responsibilities gradually as students master simpler concepts first. Acceleration is rooted in creating an environment conducive to such learning, with every step being intentionally designed to connect learner performance with direct outcomes, which support ongoing development.

Furthermore, the design must be
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Flexible Acceleration

In reality, returning learners are already using this flipped approach, coming to school for specific degrees at a time when their careers require additional skills and credentials. Working adults prefer the intensive learning characteristics of accelerated programs, seeking to compress the time required to earn a qualification. In addition to the general competencies and practical experiences that assist these students in achieving their educational goals, credit for prior learning and test-outs are often viable options for acknowledging skill mastery acquired through previous work and life experiences.

Consequently, expanding accelerated instruction through occupational connections is a value-added proposition. Secondary and postsecondary institutions profit from increased CTE course enrollment, persistence and graduation rates, while students enjoy lucrative credentials that embody employability and vocational-specific competencies alike. Completing school projects using workplace resources

Flexible Approach

Work-based immersion can be incorporated into program planning, potentially changing the way we think about the process of design, development and implementation of CTE credentials. Traditionally, we offer coursework first, scheduling internships and on-the-job experiences for the last semester of the program plan. However, when students are immersed early on in the occupation they are interested in, student engagement and motivation increase. Therefore, scheduling some type of work-based learning experience at the start of a program may be an effective answer to the retention and achievement issues faced by our industry.

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and facilities transfers a portion of the overhead to the employer, making these programs cost-effective solutions for both the enrollees and the school.

Conclusion

Accelerated learning is an effective way of supporting lifelong learners. CTE schedules that lead to faster credential attainment, embrace relevant work experiences and provide enhanced flexibility attract and retain students. Naturally so, since in a perpetually evolving society fast-tracked instruction is a valid solution for those wishing to continue their education without placing other career and personal goals on hold. Acknowledging existing skills and competencies, immersing learners in work-based placements early on and building instruction on the foundations set by these authentic first experiences is a program design approach worthy of consideration.

Workplace immersion for accelerated learning is a feasible solution for career and technical education; one that should be explored in depth by results-minded leaders looking to recharge and augment the outcomes of their programs. 

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REFERENCES