Learning that LASTS: Notes for Teachers
By Susan Williams

Responses – When someone is responding, **focus directly on them**. Do not allow yourself to be distracted by other things, but give them your full attention. It is also very helpful to affirm their comments/answers with more than “Good”. Summarizing what they have said can be affirming, or relating their comment to some other aspect of the lesson. Express appreciation for their viewpoint. Asking the group what they think in response to a difficult or controversial question can diffuse a possibly embarrassing or touchy situation. However you respond, be sincere and don’t just make up phony-sounding responses. As Vella says, “Avoid the ‘plop’. This is when a comment “falls” because there is no affirming response. **But it IS okay** to say things like, “I disagree (and give a reason)” or “My experiences haven’t born that out, but …” if you feel the comment deserves such. I think most people appreciate honesty and not just our accepting every response as a good one. This is especially true if someone verbally “attacks” what we feel is a basic principle of the course. They are entitled, as adults, to their opinion, but we need to restate where this course is coming from.

Echoing – Summarizing or repeating how you heard someone’s comments not only is affirming, but also allows them to confirm or deny what you thought you heard. It can also be a way of helping them to see an issue or discussion that is sidetracking the main topic and get them back on track.

Affirmation – Lavish affirmation and encouragement go a long way towards keeping the learner engaged. “Lavish affirmation means generous encouragement, clear and loud recognition of the effort an adult is making to learn new knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” – Vella, *Training Through Dialogue*, p. 153

Scribing – Allowing others to scribe (write on the board or poster paper) for you frees the teacher to give full attention to the class and their responses. Scribing for yourself distracts you, gives your back to the class, and takes up extra time. However, **you can help your scribe by restating or summarizing answers**, so they can keep up with the responses given. This demonstrates good teamwork.

It is also helpful to **write out instructions** for learning tasks on chart paper. If a task is adequately outlined in the manual, it may not be necessary. However, if there are many details in the manual task or the task is not in the manual, it can save time and confusion to post a brief outline of what you want the learners to do. It gives them something to refer back to while performing the task.

However, Vella recommends NOT using chart paper for something that will not be used again or displayed. This saves paper. **Use the chalkboard or whiteboard for recording feedback that will not be kept**. (I do like to look back at the Appreciate/Suggest, so it may be good to continue doing that on the chart paper.)

Let’s think about what we write on the board/chart. First of all, make sure you know how to spell what you will write. If you are listing names, make sure you have proper spelling. If your group is primarily ESL, do you need to write page numbers, module numbers, or the name of the topic/module on the board?

When something has been posted or scribed, be sure to USE it. Allow the learners to get a good look at it, group the responses, make observations about what they tell us. Let’s not post something just for the sake of posting it or just to create an activity.

Modeling – Work at modeling what you teach. I’ve found that participants frequently comment when we do this – whether it is modeling teamwork, being learner-centered, etc. For example, don’t tell them to use charts and visuals if we are not going to do it. Vella recommends telling learners at the
outset that you are not going to do it perfectly all the time (before they feel the need to say to you, “What’s going on? Why did you do that?”).

**Guard against defensive behavior** – Decide what you will do when challenged. Accept it as their opinion.

Go over the list given of reasons why we need to correct learners, but do it carefully and with respect.

**Guard against asking a question for which you expect a particular answer** – this destroys safety, as adults don’t want to respond for fear they won’t “get it right”. If you want to make a statement, make it. If you want feedback, ask an open question.

**Teamwork** – Teamwork among the facilitators is VITAL to the success of the course. As stated above, we must model what we teach. Teamwork involves all members of the teaching team meeting together and planning, preparing before the course begins. During the course, it involves being ready to scribe, help with posters and visuals, give helpful input during discussions, helping with audiovisual equipment, passing out papers, etc. There should always be two teachers seated near the front, in case one needs help during a module.

The team should discuss how the various members would like to be helped and also what is NOT comfortable to them (if a poster falls, do you want someone else to pick it up?). Do the team members welcome input from the other teachers or it is distracting and causes them to lose their own train of thought?

Teamwork also involves **being fully engaged** in what is being taught, even when you are not the teacher.

Talking with another teacher in the back of the room is distracting and does not model good teamwork. Also, leaving the room when you are not teaching has the same negative effect.

**“Don’t do for a learner what they can do for themselves.”** This is a Vella principle. I’ve found it works well in situations such as having a learner read a passage to the group or discover something for themselves. It does not work well if we just leave our learners “adrift” by not giving them the assistance they need.

**Safety** – Along with encouraging them to do things and participate, we need to provide them with a safe environment. One way we facilitate this, is by not asking participants to read aloud; we let them volunteer. You may arrange beforehand with someone that you have permission to call on them if no one volunteers, but don’t surprise them with it. This can be very hard on ESL learners and take away their sense of “safety”. Sometimes a group is reluctant to read aloud. In this situation, you may want to go to a few individuals and ask if you may call on them – or call on members of the teaching staff (not all the time).

**Assistance** – Adults tend to be reluctant to ask for help, especially if they are familiar with the teacher (I know you – how can you help me?). We have to find the balance with each group on giving help when needed or necessary and staying in the background when they need or want to be working on their own. During modules like Designing a Learning Module Together, the teachers really need to go to each group to guide them through the process and give input and explanations. Often, during discussions it can be helpful for the teachers to each join a group and help with input. However, BE CAREFUL. Some adults resent having the teacher at their table all the time and it makes them feel self-conscious if they think you are critiquing what they say. But when I polled LtL
participants about this, most said they appreciated the teacher’s presence if they participated in the discussion and did not merely sit and observe. Just make sure you don’t dominate the discussion.

Do assist participants in performing learning tasks by warning them when time is half over or almost up for a task. You may even want to mention that they should be on a particular portion of the task (as in the case of Designing a Learning Module Together).

In the instance of teachers assisting during Design Times, it is necessary for them to circulate and ask for topics, to see the person’s design guide, encourage them to do RNA, etc. We can feel rebuffed and put off by negative reactions from participants, but if they are to be truly helped, we have a right as teachers to ask for these things and make them accountable for each part. Quite a few participants will complain that their teaching time (40 min) is not adequate. The problem is often that they have tried to cover too broad a topic area or maybe they have included too many learning tasks. Always encourage them to “think brief” and then they can add more as they see that there is time. Also encourage them to come up with a primary learning task and then secondary learning tasks that could be left out, but may be included if there is time. Encourage them to write time frames down for each of the 4 C’s.

Audiovisual Equipment – Everyone on the teaching team needs to be involved in the set-up and breakdown of equipment. Many shy away from this because they don’t know how to do it. They need to work alongside someone who is knowledgeable and LEARN how. It is far too much responsibility for one person alone. Having several involved also helps provide a “checklist” – Have we got the computer, projector, speakers, OHP???

When using a computer projector or OHP, do not turn out all the lights in the room. We are tempted to do this to make the visual on the screen easier to see. However, it not only puts the teacher in the dark to his/her students, but anyone taking notes has a hard time seeing their paper. Turning off the first and maybe the second set of lights is sufficient. It will probably help to close the curtains closest to the screen, but the room can get very hot if all the curtains are closed.

Soliciting Questions – In order to model our emphasis on open questions, we try NOT to say, “Does anyone have any questions?” Instead, you might say, “What questions do you have?” or “How can I clarify what I’ve just asked you to do?” However, DO say something along these lines. Never assume that everyone understands, especially our ESL participants. Culturally, some of them may require that you approach them personally to ask if it is clear. They may not feel free to voice their questions in a group. Never make it sound like “their fault” that they didn’t understand. If you feel a participant’s question is taking too long or applies only to them, it is okay to direct them to the Parking Lot and Suggestion Box. The Suggestion Box is helpful for those who are uncomfortable with speaking up or drawing attention to themselves.

Parking Lot – This is a piece of paper in the back of the room where students can post questions that the teacher may need time to think about or may have to locate the information needed to respond.

Suggestion Box – This is a folded piece of paper in the back of the room (like an envelope) where students can put suggestions re the course. It may be something to be dealt with immediately (the room is too warm) or for future consideration (the layout of the manual made it difficult to follow). Encourage learners to use this all during the week instead of waiting till the end of the course and writing their comments on the evaluation sheets only, especially if it is something that can be changed. In one LtL, several people said things were moving too swiftly for them. We slowed it down as much as we were able and they appreciated our attention to their needs and requests.
Necessity of humility; of seeing yourself not as vital to the learning, but as a part of the learning –
“The educator for liberation has to die as the unilateral educator of the educatees, in order to be born again as the educator-educatee of the educatees-educators. An educator is a person who has to live in the deep significance of Easter.” – Paulo Freire In other words, a good teacher sacrifices himself or herself for the sake of the learners. It is not about us, but about them. It is not about getting through our material and letting them see what a great teacher we are. It is about their self-discovery and their taking hold of the material in the way that best meets their needs.

List of Learning Tasks

List of Learning Tasks
by Susan Williams
Remember that a learning task allows the student to work WITH the content in some way. It is not meant to be merely going off on a tangent or stimulating creativity. It is not “dead time” or wasted time. Sometimes learning tasks involve only thinking, sometimes they involve physical action.

Some of these tasks involve teacher participation; some are done solely by the students.

Teacher direction will of course happen more with lower grade levels.

The first few tasks are used more often as a Connection Task – to engage rather than to teach.

- Brief skit – written by you or by a student
- Show a film clip – discuss how it relates, what they saw, why it happened
- Listen to a song – discuss meaning of the words as they relate to topic
- What is the first word that comes to your mind when you hear ____?
- Give false information – can students distinguish from truth?
- Pose a question or situation – If ____ happened, what would be the result?. Think about a time when you ____.
- Read (to self or aloud)
- Read and highlight the areas of interest/parts that support the theory/parts you would use in a debate.
- Describe an experience you have had ______
- Discuss or debate – or come up with a question you would use in a debate on this subject
- Draw a picture, logo, symbol.
- In this category, name your favorite.
- Sort the items into order of importance, chronological sequence – give reasons.
- Make up a song, cheer, chant.
- Put yourself in the place of _____ (story character, historical figure, inventor, explorer).
- Construct a Venn diagram to show comparison or contrast.
- Make a chart.
- Create a diagram to show ______.
- Arrange _____ in a sequential order (even young children can do this).
· Group according to like qualities.
· Evaluate the following case study.
**List of Learning Tasks page 2**
· Develop multiple solutions to this problem – which one can you make the best case for?
· List the steps to do something – What would come next? Write out your own list of steps for ______.
· If you had to explain this to someone else, how would you do it? List some steps. What if you couldn’t speak their language?
· Write yourself a letter. How can you apply this information in the future?
· Tell a partner one new thing you’ve learned about this subject.
· List words that describe ______.
· Summarize what’s been said
· Rewrite the story if ______ had happened.
· Choose the (book character, subtopic, etc.) that you most identify with or find most interesting. In groups, discuss ______.
· Class project – For example, when I taught grade 3 the class put on a puppet show. Various groups of students wrote the script, made the puppets, painted the scenery, wrote the program, and acted it out. This gets everyone involved, even though their talents vary.
· Conduct a survey or a Resources and Needs Assessment (what do your peers know or want to know).
· If this were a movie, what title would you give it?
· What would your suggestions be for improvement?
· Think of a Bible verse or biblical character that relates to this topic.
· Describe situations where you might use this information.
· Identify an opportunity to teach what you have learned to someone else.
· Classify these objects into categories based on ______.
· Rank these items in order of importance to you.
· What went wrong? Develop a plan of action for finding out.
· In groups, critique each other’s work. Criticisms must be in the form of a suggestion – “This would be more understandable if you _____.”
· Write a new title for this book/story/song.
· Journal for this week on how you have applied the information.
· Construct (diorama, shadowbox, relief map, brochure)