

Pedagogy for Personal Transformation & Creativity

Arcie Mallari



Arcie is a champion for social change and a visionary for beyond classroom approaches to learning personal development and scholastic transformation. Exposed to the poor living conditions as a resident in one of the dumpsites in Payatas, he met children with dreams of growing up as a housemaid. Through such stories he was inspired to develop a vision of developing unique educational programs was born – a vision that

will help them realize their true ambitions and discover a world far bigger than what they know. With his team of volunteers he has turned his imagination into Silid Aralan Incorporated (SAI), a non-government organization for community-based projects that are focused on learner empowerment. SAI's mission is to "be co-learners of children by facilitating the discovery of their life's purpose and love for learning that will inspire and empower them in creating socially responsible innovations." Through SAI, Mallari and his team of volunteers were able to inspire change to thousands of underprivileged and academically-challenged students who are now academic achievers and leaders in the community - not through typical armchair tutorials - but by reinforcing the students' confidence in their own capabilities. SAI is expanding across the Philippines training around 5,000 students and mobilizing more than 1,000 parent-volunteers who share Mallari's vision of Silid Aralan as a platform for personal development, creativity and achievement.



Introduction

Silid Aralan Inc. (SAI) was founded on April 12, 2007 by Arcie G. Mallari, Russell Q. Angeles, and Marc Licaros to provide new opportunities for learning and strengthen the educational services for under privileged public school students in Rodriguez (Montalban), Rizal in the Philippines.

Silid Aralan is an afterschool tutoring and supplementary educational program that caters for underprivileged and academically-challenged school children and youth. SAI inspires and helps children and youth develop their passion for learning and then teaches them how to learn. The children are taught outside of class hours through creative methods that appropriate lessons to activities that students enjoy and can relate to.

In addition, SAI also provides training for parents, teachers and student volunteers. There is also



supplementary training for non-readers, low performing students, and students with low self-esteem. (<http://orgs.tigweb.org/silid-aralan-inc>).

A key part of our philosophy and practice is that we are all co-learners - teachers and students are engaged in a collaborative co-created enterprise for learning. This means that teachers reveal their own learning process for students to see.



Pedagogic Approach

We call our approach 'The Silid Aralan Learning Technology (SALTEd[©])'. We represent and explain what we do using the metaphor of a wheel (Figure1).



Figure 1 The Silid Aralan Learning Technology or SALTEd[©] can be pictured as a wheel of a cart.

It has three components: the outer rim, the hub and the spokes.

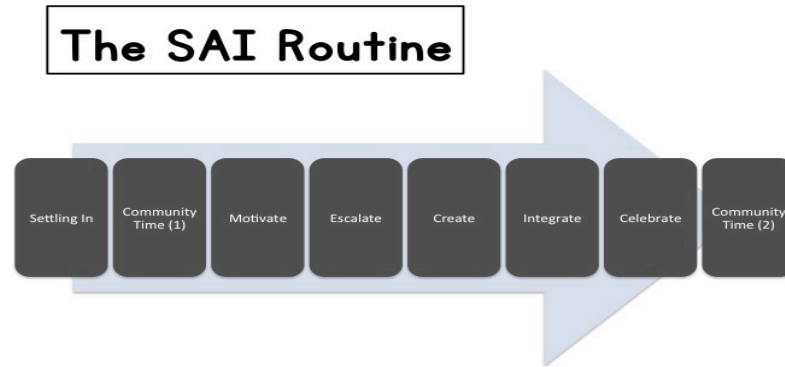
The outer rim. This is the part of the wheel that meets the road of life. It represents the process by which each learner discovers his or her potentials, strengthens their life's purposes and develops the love for learning.

The hub. This is the part of the wheel from which the power emanates to the rim. It holds the wheel together. The hub symbolizes the core

values that are at the heart of learning in Silid Aralan facilitated process.

The spokes. These transmit the strength and direction from the hub to the rim. The spokes are the means of developing life-long and life-wide learners. Each spoke has a purpose and there are five Spokes of Learning

Figure 2 SAI pedagogic process



Learners are escorted and supported through a process represented in figure 2 and described below.

1st Spoke -Motivate - find your passion



The first spoke seeks to prepare learners for optimum learning by arousing their *passion for learning*. This motivation takes root in our belief that we are all smart. The Multiple Intelligence Theory of Howard Gardner, simply stated, is that there are many ways to be smart. There are multiple intelligences. The implication of this simple idea is that when a learner recognizes that each of us is smart in many different ways and we have different things we want to be smart about - the things we care about and value, we can transform the way our learners think of themselves.

As each learner discovers the ways in which they are smart they are motivated to learn more. We have discovered that learners' ability and willingness to use the intelligences they have come to recognise and apply them to things they are interested in eventually extends to the rest of their learning enterprise and makes them eager and open to learning more and other things. However, before optimum learning can be achieved, there are often barriers that need to be overcome. We call these walls "Learning Blocks".

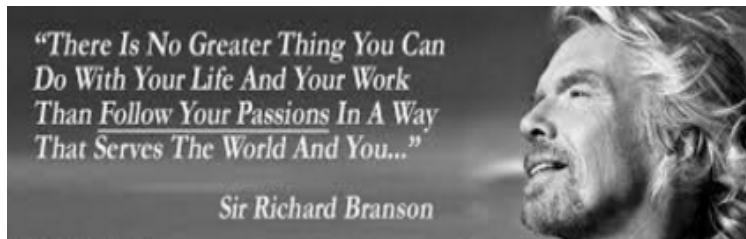
Learning Blocks

A "Learning Block" is the paradigm (set of beliefs) used by an individual which inhibits their ability to learn and excel. This perceived reality stems from a negative experience which the learner had gone through or witnessed.

For most of our learners, their learning blocks are the result of their poor standing in

school. They have been defined by their low grades as *dumb* and sadly, their parents often reinforce this belief.

At the beginning of their Silid Aralan learning experience, most of our learners can't even see themselves being educated beyond elementary school.



However, with the SALTEd approach, learners begin to see that they are really smart in more ways than one. Gradually they begin to change their perception of themselves and their beliefs about what they are capable of achieving. They will become free of the burden of being called *dumb*. With their learning blocks removed, their passion to learn becomes more evident.



As educators, Silid Aralan 'teachers' face their own learning blocks when they "teach", instead of "learn" with their learners. As teachers we must also be co-learners and this is sometimes hard to take on. A teachers attitude and approach should be that of a co-learner in the group. With this learning block removed, the CoLe will be ready to share of himself/herself, particularly of things that he/she is personally passionate about.

Having removed their learning blocks, learners will be free to pursue their passion. Their enthusiasm will be boundless. If their passion is in painting, they are free to paint! If their passion is song-writing, they are free to write a song! If their passion is education, they are free to educate themselves and others who are willing to do the same! With the elimination of their learning blocks an engaging environment is created. This brings about the natural desire for learning in all human beings. The learner can now be seen as a candle ready to be lit.

2nd Spoke: Escalate - passion + self-knowledge



The second spoke of learning seeks to increase the knowledge of the learner. Armed with the passion to acquire new knowledge, learners are now ready to listen, to learn and to unlearn.

Unlearning : Learning blocks encourage negative beliefs towards learning. For example, the "I am not smart" Learning Block results in an attitude of indifference or even avoidance to learning:

! “Why should I listen to my teacher? I’m not going to understand anything she says anyway.”

! “Why should I study for tomorrow’s quiz? I’m going to fail anyway.”

! “I don’t need to know this. I’m not going to need this in my future as a housemaid.”

This indifference will prevent learners from furthering what they know and will potentially become stagnant in this aspect of their lives. What the learners have to understand is that their definition of “not smart” is merely an interpretation of a past experience that they have gone through or witnessed personally. For learners to unlearn such negative beliefs and attitudes they must undergo the 3A’s of unlearning

Acknowledge you have a learning block. Acknowledging that you have a learning block is as easy as crashing through a 5-inch thick cement wall. Your learning block could actually already be a “comfort zone” for you and you may be sitting on top of it like a royalty of failure. How can you identify a learning block? One sure fire way of recognizing a learning block is when you are presented with an opportunity to learn and the first thing that comes out of your mouth is “I can’t”. Or even if you don’t verbalize your “I can’t” but negative feelings and attitudes become manifest, then there is a resistance to learn - a wall is definitely blocking your way.

3 A’s of Unlearning:
A1. Acknowledge you have a learning block.
A2. Accept your past.
A3. Act on it.

What you have to understand as a learner is that there is something that happened in your past which you allowed to define your “I can’t”. Look back and determine what this was.

Accept your past. Negative learning situations from the past should remain in the past. We should not allow our past to define our future.

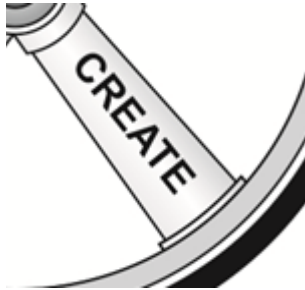
Act on it. Having acknowledged our learning block and accepted the situation that caused this block, the only way to go is to move forward in acquiring new knowledge. Moving forward and making progress helps the learner develop their confidence and self-belief.

With the 3 A’s of Un/Learning, our learners will become open to absorbing old things but with a new, more positive psychological orientation. With this attitude every experience becomes an exciting opportunity for learning. In other words the pedagogic process tries to change how learners perceive themselves and their world and the way they might and can act in the world. Such changes in perception expands learners’ affordances - their opportunities for action and their willingness to act on these affordances.

Having obtained the passion from the motivational spoke, and add this to the self-knowledge acquired in the escalate spoke, our learner is now ready to create new

possibilities for themselves.

3rd Spoke: Create - passion + knowledge = creating new possibilities



The third spoke of our pedagogic approach is inspired by personal breakthroughs. When learners have broken through their learning blocks and begin acquiring knowledge, they expand their affordances and the possibilities that they can create are endless.

Inevitably this leads to the “Aha! Moment”
An “Aha! Moment” is an opportunity that was once thought of as impossible. With this “Aha! Moment” everything becomes possible - learners realise that they can achieve things they never even dared to dream of.



As the universe of possibilities is opened up, as confidence and self-belief grows, the learner begins to apply their willingness to learn and achieve to other things, collectively this process empowers the whole community of learners.

4th Spoke: Integrate - passion + knowledge to create possibilities and create value in their community



The integrate spoke of learning gives learners a sense of value as they choose to contribute something good to their community. It is the giving back of what they have learned in a way that is relevant and useful to their community.

Empowerment is manifest when learners give something back because they care passionately, not because they are told to, but because they willingly choose to do so. Also, the choice of what to give back is theirs - their gift is their decision and it is their own judgment about what is useful and valuable based on their deep understandings of and relationship with their context.

So our pedagogic process leads the learner to the self-awareness that whatever circumstance they are in, it is their choice to live an empowered life. The source of their empowerment comes from within. Since they have become empowered, they are now ready to help empower others. As learners act their part in their community, big or small, there is a realization that they play a small but significant part in the whole picture of things. Put another way, they are a tangible and useful part of the ecosystem that their community comprises and their actions can have a positive impact on this ecosystem. Over time, as they continually give back to their community, they realize that they are realising or serving their life's purpose and chances the chances they have or create.

5th Spoke: celebrate



The fifth spoke of learning celebrates the greatness of each learner. The breakthroughs of each learner is honoured as they own the steps they have taken towards discovering and serving their purpose. In this spoke, our own mission to support learners' love for learning is achieved with the learner's self-acceptance of her uniqueness as a learner.

With this final spoke transmitting strength and direction from the hub to the rim, the wheel turns once more and the life-long and life-wide process of learning continues...with love.

Disseminate

Perhaps there is another spoke in our pedagogic model which is to try and influence young people beyond the people we actually teach. One of the ways we achieve this is through our celebrations which we film and brand as our TURD talks which emulate the well known TED Talks and in the same way as TED the stories told by the students - empowered learners, of Silid Aralan Inc are intended to inspire others.

TURD TALKS

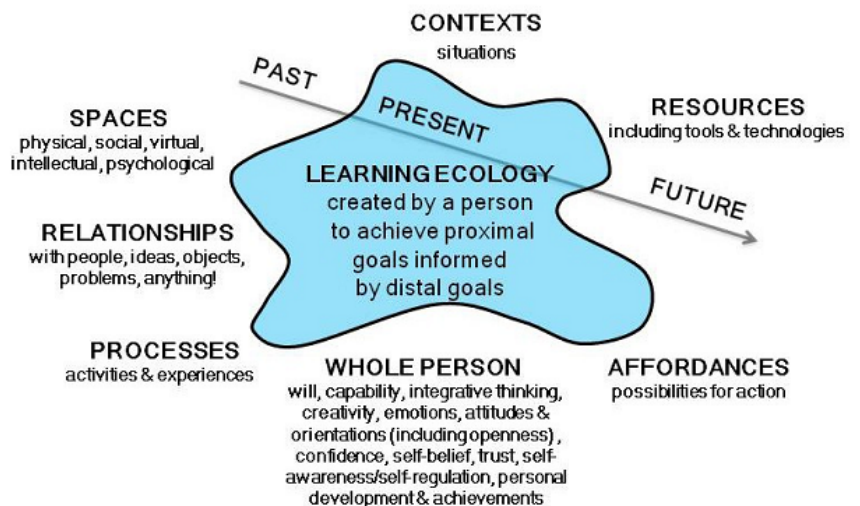
(Definition of "TURD": no good, piece of sh*t no one wants to touch.)

For just an initial outlay of \$500 the TURD talks helped raise \$187,000 to support the charity. You can listed to some of these transformed and creative speakers by following these links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7td7sn-ck8Q>

Editor: I think Silid Aralan Inc's pedagogy for personal transformation and creativity can be related to the ecological model we are exploring (Figure 1).

Figure 1 The model of a learning ecology we are exploring.



Exploring Learning Ecologies <https://www.lulu.com/>

It seems to me that what Arcie and his team are trying to do is enable and empower learners to create entirely new ecologies for learning and creativity in the everyday contexts and situations they inhabit. Teachers as co-learners in a co-created ecology for transformative learning, accept that learners bring with them a past history that leads them to think that they are failures and poor at learning and cannot make a useful contribution to the world. Through their actions and interactions teachers set about changing this set of negative beliefs so that learners begin to see themselves and their place in the world more positively and as the uniquely talented people they are who can act in their world to make a positive difference.

Their pedagogic strategy help learners express their passions for what they care about and value and use this to discover purposes that they want to serve. They teach students to inspire and motivate themselves and to make their decisions about what to act on. In the words of the ecological model they discover affordance or potential for action and they act on it. The ecologies they build are ecologies for creating and achieving what they care about and value - they will inevitably involve all the elements of the framework shown in Figure 3 (it would be great to test this through some example stories) and the successes they have build their confidence and self-esteem so that they are empowered to engage with learning in other contexts and circumstances. In this way their reconfigured learning ecology provides a model for them to replicate in future learning projects. In this way it has transformed their ability to learn throughout their life.

Norman Jackson
Commissioning Editor

You can make a donation to support the work of Silid Aralan via their website
<http://silidaralan.org/>