

• I N T R O D U C T I O N •

Let Me Learn and Speaking the Language of Learning

Colin Calleja

One of the editors of this volume was sharing the vision of Compass Academy Charter School (our LML lab school) with a colleague one morning and ruminating about how the vision for the school gets to the heart of what sets Let Me Learn apart from other learning theories. Here is the school's vision: "At Compass Academy Charter School we speak the language of learning."

Think about that "we speak the language of learning" — not the language of judgment or disdain or hyperbole. No "slow learner," no "dim bulb," no "dull," or "really bright" or "so smart" or "gifted." We speak the language of learning — delving far beyond issues of schooling and the business of testing.

We speak the language of learning — a language that allows individuals to explain their thoughts, actions and feelings as they work to make sense of the world around them and respond appropriately; a language that conveys in real time what is going on in the mind of the learner; a language that allows others the opportunity to see, hear and capture the growth and change the LML approach makes in learning outcomes; and the change the use of the Process makes within a learner overtime.

And in doing so, we grow in our respect for others whose differences we recognise and value. We grow in our understanding of subject matter, and we grow in our ability to demonstrate appropriate responses to the world around us. We grow as learners within our family, our school, our preparation for entering the world of work, and we grow in our ability to be contributing citizens within our community, nation and the world.

This book presents a compendium of research papers that report the effect of the Let Me Learn Process when applied within different learning contexts. The different contributors to this compendium address the same basic questions: *How do I learn? How do others learn? How can such knowledge of how learners learn inform my practice?* Over the past 20 years, the data generated by gathering responses to these basic questions has helped us refine our understanding of the learning process and has helped learners make learning work for them.

Every successful learning initiative requires key people to allocate hours of dedicated time to make it a success. Let Me Learn® has for the past twenty years been blessed with individuals who have dedicated their time to research and apply the LML Process within different areas of practice. Through such experiences, the Process has developed into a powerful transformative process for educators and learners alike. This compendium is evidence of some of the many contributions from individuals who have made Let Me Learn what it is today.

The compendium starts with the powerful experience of Joseph Coleman, a person who has dedicated his life to work with kids in his home city of Akron, Ohio, formerly considered the manufacturing capital of rubber car and truck tires. Joseph has been doggedly and faithfully pursuing LML work in this context for 15 years. In his essay, he explains how he has used the LML Process to bring teachers and students to an understanding of themselves as learners. Most importantly, he tells forthrightly how he has struggled to cope with his own learning issues. Joseph's struggle is most probably the struggle of each one of us, a struggle of passage from *knowing about LML* to *doing and living LML*.

This volume is divided into four parts. The first chapters present the theoretical framework on which the Process is built. Chapter one starts by presenting the Process as a model for intentional learning. Prof Christine Johnston, the originator and lead researcher of the Process, presents the Brain-Mind Connection/Interactive Learning Model as the foundation of the Advanced Learning System which underpins all the research presented in this volume. The succeeding two contributions within this part of the book present the research that has made this Advanced Learning System a cut above other proposals that try to define learning and the learner. The second chapter by one of the editors of this volume traces critical reviews of published learning styles models and juxtapose them with research conducted on the LML process to test the robustness of the theory that supports it. Dr Patricia Maher invites practitioners in higher education to cultivate a culture of autonomous learning and intentionality. She presents the Process as a tool that offers tutors and learners a framework to use their metacognition more effectively to address each task with intention.

Part II to IV delve into the application of the Process in the different fields of practice. Part II features eight chapters dealing with Professional Development,

reflective practice and leadership. Christine Johnston and John Johnston present a seminal paper in which they report the measurable outcomes of an implementation of 16-week intensive staff development training for teachers. Through a recursive laboratory experience, teachers applied their newly gained insights concerning the Let Me Learn Process to developing and implementing a plan of action involving effective teaching and learning strategies appropriate to the students they had chosen to focus on. The study illuminates the potentially powerful system-wide impact of professionals engaged in understanding themselves as learners while developing insights into their students as learners.

The next Chapter by Colin Calleja reinforces the previous chapter findings showing how participants experienced personal and professional transformation through their participation in the LML professional learning process. Through a case-study approach, the researcher examines how different educators relate to the context of their practice while undergoing the LML professional learning experience. Through this approach the author examines how educators from a confessional school in Malta have undergone a transformative learning experience, both as individuals and as a school community.

Michelle Attard Tonna and Colin Calleja present the Let Me Learn Professional Learning Process in light of the generation of social capital, as viewed in terms of social capacity building. This paper shows how the Let Me Learn Process has marked a proactive stance in teacher professional development and transformation through its emphasis on teacher networks, partnerships and externalisation of teachers' knowledge base. It also demonstrates how through this process social capital was fostered through teacher collaboration and learning-together experience.

In chapter 7 Michelle Attard Tonna continues to explore the scene of teachers' continuing professional development and studies whether, considering the variety of training opportunities and the changes taking place in this important area of INSET courses in Malta, is sufficiently supporting and addressing the change agenda they are experiencing within their schools and classrooms. In this chapter, the author investigates how the professional development offered by LML is helping in the development of professional communities, a key ingredient in addressing these needs.

Robert Kottkamp presents the LML process as a tool for reflective practice both for the teacher and the students. LML provides a language for communicating internalised and externalised learning actions among learners. This chapter presents the idea of children becoming reflective practitioners of their own learning – a vision of the child as an intrinsically motivated, truly empowered, joyful, and effective learner. The LML process also offers teachers the opportunity to derive deep satisfaction from teaching as it helps them realise the goal that initially drew them to the profession, the desire to support children to discover for themselves the keys to unlock their capacity and will to learn.

Ruth Silverberg describes the application and outcomes of using a shared framework and vocabulary for understanding learning. Through the participation of a group of students in an urban leadership preparation programme, they could create a relational space for making constructivist learning possible. The study presents the experience of this group of students who, through their shared experience of learning about themselves as learners, they could understand how to make new, constructivist meaning of learning, schooling, and leadership.

Patricia Marcellino authors the final two chapters in this portion of the compendium. In chapter 10, *Revisiting and Redesigning a Faculty – Developed Team Instructional Model*, she writes about the importance of injecting the field of educational leadership with research that explores the complexities of human agency. This chapter focuses on team-building and how educational leadership students interact in diverse learning teams. Marcellino constructed her teams utilising the scores from the Learning Connections Inventory and Johnston’s theoretical learning model. Teams were, thus, composed of students with different degrees of use of patterns, representing each of the four Learning Patterns. This helped both the instructor/researcher and the students engage in reflective practice and develop a learning contract where students could take roles respecting their combination of Patterns.

In her second contribution (chapter 11), Marcellino once again uses the Patterns’ combination to construct teams that sought to answer two key research questions, namely, “How do educational leadership students apply metaphors to describe the evolving team experience?” and “Can the use of metaphors become a diagnostic tool to access team viability in regard to team strengths and weaknesses?” This paper continues to strengthen the researcher’s resolve that, when teams are constructed well, they can give learners the possibility to learn from each other. This study also gave the instructor/researcher a better understanding of metaphors and their use as a diagnostic tool. This allowed the instructor to perform different interventions to facilitate the process within the team. This helped broaden team understanding and could as well contribute to the development of the area of team study. Marcellino suggests that the use of metaphors may be applied as an instructional technique and a diagnostic tool for team tension or problems which could allow leadership instructors gain access to teams and apply supportive coaching to improved professional relationship-building and learning.

The third part of the volume deals with the application of the Let Me Learn Process within the area of Higher Education and academic advising. In this section we find six presentations. In the first chapter of this section (chapter 12), Christine Johnston and Betsy McCalla-Wriggins present some practical suggestions of how advisors can incorporate the LML Process with first-year college students. This chapter presents a step-by-step process of how an academic advisor can understand

and respond to each first-year student while negotiating their personalised learning pathway. Such advising helps the students understand the demands and act with intention to formulate reasonable and appropriate responses. Through understanding their Learning Processes, students can be helped to find a career path that complement their Learning Processes.

Patricia Marcellino revisits the team-building model proposed in an earlier contribution in this compendium. Through this model which advises the setting up of teams according to Learning Pattern constructs, first year University students felt that such team organisation helped them expedite a team focus; take time to interact as a team to develop team skills and learning about the team's strengths and weaknesses; helped them learn about team-building to produce a collective product; helped the instructor and the team members resolve problematic situations and form team contracts that helped students formulate team rules, goals and focus on performance outcomes.

James Newell et al. explore the role of Let Me Learn as a metacognitive process with teams of students from engineering. The focus of this research was on how first year engineering students are supported in their transition through helping them engage more effectively in understanding the learning process. By so doing, learners understand and become more capable in managing their studies. This study shows how engineering students with a predominant technical reasoning pattern leading their learning tend to proscribe their use of writing. Through awareness of this, the study shows that they are more likely to consciously decide to use writing more than they naturally would.

Kathleen Pearle reports on a pilot programme at a large community college which effectively used the Let Me Learn Process as a tool for metacognition, reflective practice, and intentional learning. This experience yielded dramatic increase in the rate of student retention and transformational learning for both tutors and students alike. Jacqueline Vanhear presents a combination of learning tools which together yielded increased student achievement and more productive transformative learning. This study integrated the use of Vee Heuristics, Concept Mapping together with Let Me Learn to help students go through a metacognitive learning process which eventually lead to meaningful learning. Using the productions of the students, this study traced the effect of a learner's mental operations on the learner's use of Vee Heuristics and Concept Mapping as the learner embeds and retrieves new and scaffolded knowledge.

Antoinette Camilleri Grima takes the Process to the area of learner's autonomy in modern language learning. The chapter narrates the experiences of a group of B.Ed. (Hon.) students who were guided on how to use their identified Learning Processes as they completed a particular Unit of Study. Through helping students identify their own needs and finding their own learning paths, students felt that their self-

esteem was boosted; they came to a better understanding of themselves and others within their group; and as a result felt better able to offer help, and better prepared to face a classroom of different individuals and finally felt better able to take necessary decisions relating to their career.

Part IV of this volume deals with studies on pedagogy of difference and student achievement. This final section starts with a quantitative research study by Jaime Thone comparing Learning Patterns across two groups of students, namely, students in general education and students in special education. It also specifically focuses on two categories of students in special education – students classified under the disability category of Other Health Impairment (OHI) and students classified for special education under disability category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD). This study showed that, while there was no significant difference between the general education and special education population for all Patterns measured, some common Patterns among Special education students were identified which could assist in creating a purposeful learning environment for those students as well as their general education counterparts.

In the next chapter, Ruth Falzon and Colin Calleja reports on another study which analyses the activities used in a structured multisensory reading programme in light of the mix of Patterns utilised. The programme was found to be inclusive and embracing the whole class. Lois Addy from York University in England reports on a small scale study that sought to look at the impetus to learn from the child with Developmental Coordination Disorder perspective. The use of the Learning Connections Inventory has provoked an interesting debate amongst educationalists and health care professionals regarding the dilemmas faced by children with Developmental Coordination Disorder when compared with those of their peers.

Robert Kottkamp and Ruth Silverberg study teachers' assumptions and reconceptualisation of students considered problematic. After arguing that the student a teacher labels as problematic is at risk, the authors explore what might be done to shift teacher assumptions and reduce placing students at risk.

Colin Calleja presents the pedagogy used to inform intercultural communication competencies and skills programme. In this chapter, the author presents an Intercultural Communication training methodology informed by the Let Me Learn Process.

Robert Grandin and Cathy Burke present a study of primary students which demonstrated how the metacognitive understanding of their learning grew, leading to more positive approach to schooling and a wider range of achievements. The authors suggest that the change in pedagogy influenced by the Let Me Learn Process was the treatment that made the difference. Jacqueline Vanhear replicates the study, presented

in an earlier chapter in this volume, this time with Primary children. Once again, this researcher captures the powerful effect which this combination of learning tools and Learning Processes yielded on student achievement. This study shows teachers can capture the mind operations of primary school children, mentor and coach the growth and development of the learner, rather than shape the learner through one-size fits all learning environments.

The final chapter reviews the Let Me Learn Process and shows how, when teachers and students work together to identify Learning Patterns and access them appropriately, students learn to assume responsibility for increased learning and performance. Furthermore, because students know how to access Patterns and create strategies for different kinds of assessment situations, they perform better on various measures of achievement.

This volume is just a peek into a plethora of publications, dissertations, articles, and referred presentations produced over the past 20 years. While we are hopeful that through this compendium we captured some of the most relevant applied research in the field, we are sure that we have left out some very valuable contributions which we hope to have the opportunity to celebrate in future publications.

June 2015