



The Learning Revolution revisited

by Patricia Cernadas

Back in 1998 chance (or rather opportunity) put into my hands an invitation to an international conference in Buenos Aires. I'd never heard of SEAL or of the learning revolution before. I had been teaching for many years and felt reasonably confident of my skills and teaching techniques. Yet, something inside me prompted me to sign up. I was in for a surprise. Those hot February conference sessions proved to be a turning point in my teaching and personal life.

At *The Sunshine of Learning* I got a glimpse into how our amazing brain works; I discovered my own learning and teaching style and how that insight could help each and every one of us to learn and teach better. I learned that all my 32 students were smart, in their own special way (even dear English-proof Emilio could shine if asked to write a song instead of an essay!). I learned of the power of emotions and how healing a good story can be! (I'll never forget Clarita's tears as I put down *I love you forever* and her thank-you note as I left the classroom that afternoon.)

Two years later I attended a second SEAL conference, this time with 4 friends and colleagues- who I guess preferred to experience first hand what I had promised would be a new mind and heart opener. The leit motif was *Seeds of Confidence*, a most suitable theme since that was what I felt I needed most. Those two years had turned my teaching upside down- and that of my poor language team! I had literally swatted all NLP, Hemispherology and MI material I could lay my hands on. I started discussion groups and Teachers as Readers groups in my school, which got us all excited and belligerent: we were in the middle of a learning revolution and we didn't want to "miss the bus" (or brain ship rather!). And yet, we felt so "green", so hesitant, when it came to actual implementation in a traditional school environment like ours. All the research by Howard Gardner and Gordon Dryden, Daniel Goleman and Tony Buzan and all those amazing brains who had little by little become household names for many of us had planted new ideas in our heads and staffroom but still felt quite foreign when it came to implementation in our crowded classrooms.

And the 2000 conference- with its emphasis on Self esteem and effective/affective learning practices- gave us inspiring tools but most importantly, confidence. Confidence in how empowering our role as teachers could be; in how the right conditions facilitate learning, in how little students care how much we know until they know how much we care!

Eleven years have passed. I still see red when my students say "*If I would have known*" or "*the news are*" and yet I feel I'm not the same Pat who shyly slipped into that conference hall 11 years ago.. I feel I have grown as a teacher (and as a mother, I guess) because I've learnt to value diversity and to try to cater for different needs. I may have become more flexible (I even leave room in my planning for "right-brain day activities") and instead of "suffering" my kinesthetic students, I involve them in my teaching by giving them little tasks that will enable them to stretch their legs (as well as their brains) in ways other than sabotaging my class. As Howard Gardner might say I suppose I've become a little more "people smart", which as a teacher is as important as being "word smart" and welcome the chance to plan collaboratively with colleagues who can provide their own unique talent and thus enrich everyone's experience.

I'm not sure I have achieved a learning revolution in my school or even my classroom. What I do know is that SEAL opened a window of opportunities for me. The most important of which was the window of self-discovery and the joy of learning.

1 SEAL; Society for Effective Affective Learning
2 Neuro Linguistic Programming
3 Multiple Intelligences