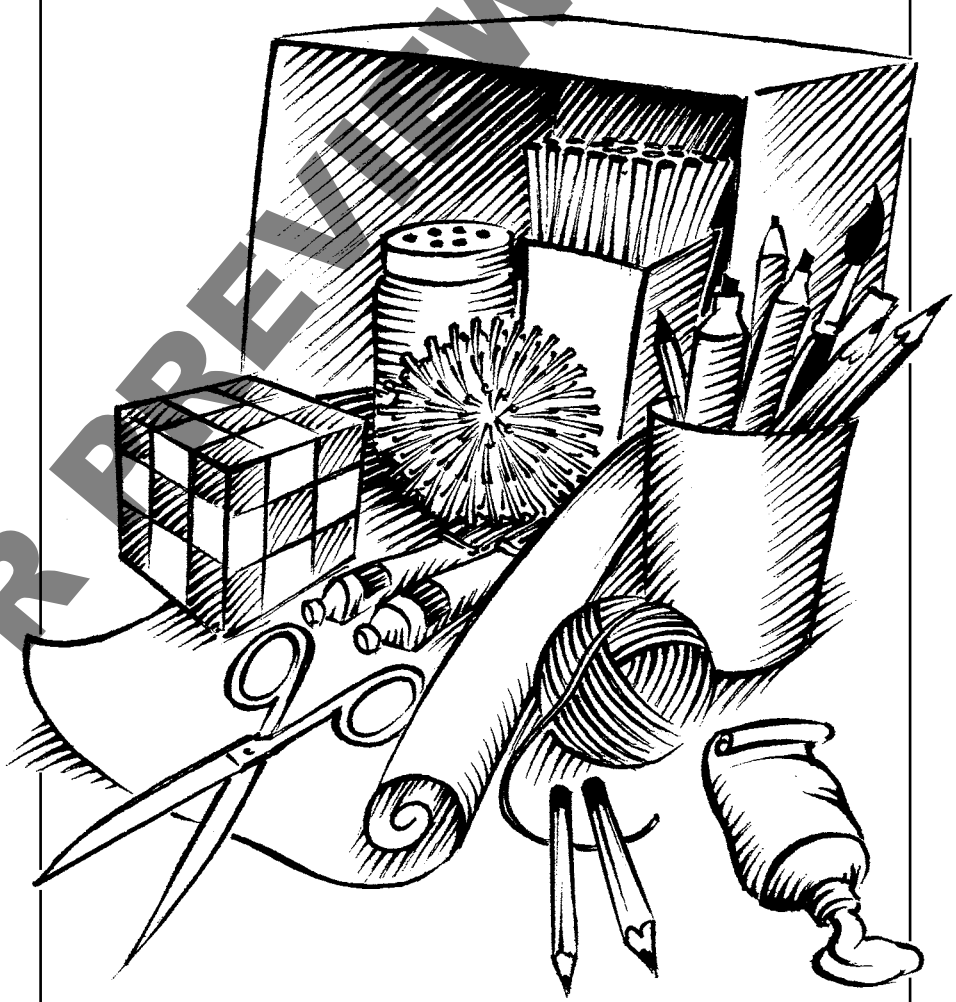
Unit 4
The training environment and the toy box

Purpose

To help you make the most of the facilities at your disposal by providing a wide range of 'props' to enhance your training and encourage participants to learn in a relaxed and comfortable environment.



FOR PREVIEW ONLY

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Unit 4
The training environment and the toy box

Introduction

Many modern training rooms are built to be functional rather than interesting and can be colourless and bland. They usually have provision for traditional training, with flipchart stands, white-boards and a set of pens, as well as an overhead projector and possibly the means of giving a PowerPoint® presentation.

Whilst this is all very useful and of obvious benefit to a presenter, the introduction of a variety of 'props' in the form of a toy box helps stimulate the learner into thinking with different parts of their brain and helps them relax and become a comfortable contributor quickly.

Purpose

To help you make the most of the facilities at your disposal by providing a wide range of 'props' to enhance your training and encourage participants to learn in a relaxed and comfortable environment.

Application

You can use the unit in any event that you are running, whether it is training, facilitating or running a meeting.

What happens

You use the contents of the toy box to help you create the atmosphere you require, whether it is to enhance the environment or to arouse the interest of the participants.

Resources

Most trainers already have a 'toy box' of their own to enliven the training sessions and to encourage participation. Think about what you currently use to help you run your training sessions, then use **Tool 4.1 What do I do?**, to see how many of these items you currently use in your training.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

You will also be able to consider your training environment by using **Tool 4.2 My training environment**, to check out your current practice.

Tool 4.3 My resource bank, has been included to enable you to make a note of the places you have found useful as a source of training aids.

TLL 4.4 Learning Log building blocks, will assist you to keep track of what you have used successfully, and what you might use again, or improve, or change.

Accelerated Learning trainers develop this further. Most of them have some form of 'toy box' which they use to stimulate the participants' thinking, as well as to provide materials for them to use to build models, create pictures, design items, and so on.

WHAT'S IN THE TOY BOX?

The toy box can contain whatever you like and, as you become more familiar with using it, you will find yourself picking up bits and pieces as you do your day-to-day shopping. The concepts behind the toy box are:

- There should be plenty of colour for stimulation.
- There should be a number of tactile toys with a variety of textures, materials and shapes, which are interesting and comforting to touch and feel.
- There should be lots of visually interesting toys which get people talking and thinking.
- The contents of the box should encourage the participants to use their hands, eyes and their brains.

Whilst the contents of the box are individual to each trainer, there are some items that you will find invaluable, and it is recommended that you have a selection of them. These are as follows:

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

Item	Use
• Rolls of old wallpaper (bought from DIY shops for approximately 50p per roll)	• For participants to draw on • Also used to cover tables, so that participants can make notes
• Old magazines/glue/ glitter/scissors	• For creating collages
• Post-it® Notes	• For getting the participants to move around
• Coloured pens and pencils/perfumed pens/paints and paintbrushes/glitter pens	• For drawing pictograms, and so on
• Eye-catching notebooks	• To enable the participants to take notes if they wish to do so
• Play-Doh® (or home-made play-dough – recipes on the Web).	• For participants to build models with.

More suggestions for your toy box are:

- Brainteaser puzzles
- Plasticine
- Stress busters, for example, Koosh® balls
- Bubbles
- Threading beads
- Pik-A-Stix®
- Snowstorms
- Bendy drinking straws
- Coloured paper and card
- Stickers
- Juggling balls, rings or batons
- Playing cards
- Glitter

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

- Foil confetti
- Paper-chains
- Glue
- Old magazines for making collages
- Scissors
- A large Lego® set
- Building bricks
- Paints
- Lots of coloured pens
- Scented pens
- Skittles
- Bouncy balls

In addition, it is relaxing for the participants to have food and drink available; this can be, either the healthy option of fresh fruit and fresh juice, or a combination of chocolates, biscuits and coffee.

In preparation

Give yourself plenty of time before the session starts to set up the room and distribute the contents of the toy box.

If you want to use the wallpaper to enable people to make notes, roll it out over the table space and fix it with drawing-pins or something heavy. (Plain white paper tablecloths can also be used.) At the end of the session, participants will be able to cut or tear off the piece with their notes on and keep it. It is more memorable than a notebook.

Distribute the toys around the table, making sure that there is a selection close to each place setting and include pens and paints and notebooks for each person. Distribute the food and drink so that individuals can reach whatever they might need. Try to achieve a balance between overcrowding and being too sparse.

If you want to write a 'welcome message', you can use some of the wallpaper pinned up round the room. Take a piece about 2 metres long and use coloured pens to write and draw your message of welcome.

When participants enter the room, welcome them and encourage them to pick up and use whatever

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

is on the tables, but at this stage don't offer any explanation about why they are there.

TRAINER'S TIP

If you observe the participants as they enter the room, you will be able to see a variety of expressions on their faces. Some may be apprehensive, some will be smiling, some will be excited and others surprised. No one will be indifferent to the atmosphere you have created by using the toys.

By not offering any explanation as to why they are there, you are creating 'anticipation' a useful technique for achieving Accelerated Learning, and explained more fully in *Unit 2 Developing total learner involvement*, and *Activity 20 Creating anticipation*.

When all the participants have arrived and you are ready to start the session, introduce yourself and explain that you will soon be outlining the objectives for the day, and facilitating their introductions; but first you want to explain the room layout. Tell participants that people learn in different ways using a variety of their senses and they learn best when all of these senses are stimulated. Also explain that people learn much better when they are having fun and enjoying themselves, and that to help everyone achieve the outcomes that you have set for the day, you have introduced a number of aids to stimulate thinking and achieve the results you have identified as goals.

Explain that they will probably be using some of the items during the day when they may draw pictograms or create collages and build models. In the meantime, they may pick them up and play with them during the session. Assure them that you will not be worried if they are using the toys whilst people are talking, because you know that they will be listening, but using a different part of their brain.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

TRAINER'S SUPPORT

It can be very difficult to allow participants to doodle and play with toys whilst you are trying to deliver a training course. There are two aspects to this: firstly, the learner who is 'fiddling' is probably listening more thoroughly than the participant who appears to be fully participating. Secondly, as you become more familiar with Accelerated Learning, you will be less involved in 'delivery' and more involved in creating learning experiences for participants to learn for themselves.

The more you use training aids, the more comfortable you will become, and you will be able to buy items which help you demonstrate the learning points you are trying to make, as well as to relax participants. Very soon, your toy box will become individual to you and you will find yourself as you go shopping sizing up every item as a potential for your box!

Because you will find favourite 'pet' shops or websites for training aids to use, *Tool 4.3 My resource bank*, will act as an *aide-mémoire* to help you remember where you found the different items you use.

THE ENVIRONMENT

It is equally important to consider the environment to make sure that it is conducive to learning. You need to create an atmosphere that is inviting to walk into, and that creates a good first impression. This can be achieved in a variety of ways.

First, as far as possible use natural light. Do not close curtains and blinds, but open them. If you have to use a room without windows, then create as much light as possible by putting table-lamps on each table, and using 'daylight' bulbs where possible.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

Fresh air is important too, so try to ensure that the room is not too hot and stuffy. Wherever possible, and weather permitting, open windows to let fresh air in, because this helps people to think more clearly and to concentrate.

Find colourful posters or pictures that demonstrate the learning points and hang them round the room to give a focus for people's attention. This will help to reinforce your message.

Make sure the chairs are as comfortable as possible. Ideally use armchairs; however, practically speaking, this is not usually a possibility in most training rooms, so consider how you can ensure that people can sit comfortably. Tables can be used if people have writing to do, or if they need to make or draw things. Consider placing these around the room for people to use in 'break-out' groups; or perhaps they should be available for them all the time. It makes the use of toys much easier if there are tables from the start; the toys themselves prevent the tables from becoming a barrier.

Consider whether you want to have music playing when people walk into the room. Ask yourself how it will enhance the learning experience. Some suggestions for using music are given in *Further reading, music and useful addresses* on page xxiii.

Whatever you do with regard to the environment, remember that the room will be the main focus of the participants' learning, so the more stimulating and interesting you can make it, the better.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

- When the participants walk into the room, toys create an immediate impact and interest. Watch their faces and you will see curiosity and smiles.

- They create a talking point that gets participants talking, even if they don't know each other.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

- People relax, as they concentrate on fiddling with something, rather than just sitting, waiting for the session to begin.

- When they play with the toys, participants are using different parts of their brain, and therefore becoming more receptive to your lesson.

- Many people concentrate much better when they are playing with something and will be listening much harder to what is going on around them.

- Toys enable people to connect with their inner child. This in turn helps them to relax and be more receptive to the learning that they will receive. Children are very open-minded when it comes to learning; toys help adults to be the same.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

What do I do?

Which of the following do you already use as part of your training sessions?

Item	Yes	No
• Selection of coloured pens and pencils	☐	☐
• Fun notebooks	☐	☐
• Old magazines for collage making	☐	☐
• Glue	☐	☐
• Post-it® Notes	☐	☐
• Koosh® balls	☐	☐
• Posters	☐	☐
• Postcards	☐	☐
• Balloons	☐	☐
• Streamers	☐	☐
• Glitter	☐	☐
• Stars	☐	☐
• Double-sided sticky tape	☐	☐
• Old wallpaper	☐	☐
• Blu-Tack®	☐	☐
• Old greetings cards	☐	☐
• Paints	☐	☐
• Coloured card	☐	☐
• Stress busters	☐	☐
– Plasticine	☐	☐
– Bubbles	☐	☐
– Threading beads	☐	☐
– Pik-A-Stix©	☐	☐
– Snowstorms	☐	☐
– Bendy drinking straws	☐	☐
– Stickers	☐	☐
– Juggling balls	☐	☐
– Juggling rings	☐	☐
– Juggling batons	☐	☐
– Playing cards	☐	☐
– Foil confetti	☐	☐
– Skittles	☐	☐
– Paper-chains	☐	☐

What items do you use that are not listed above?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

Tool 4.2

My training environment

Think about the things that you do to make the training environment comfortable and conducive to learning and add anything that's not on the list:

My training environment	Yes	No
Comfortable chairs where possible	☐	☐
Plenty of natural daylight	☐	☐
Lights/bulbs to help daylight	☐	☐
Posters on the walls	☐	☐
Wall pictures	☐	☐
Introduction of colour	☐	☐
Use of a 'toy box'	☐	☐
Good catering with water/juice/coffee/fruit/biscuits/ chocolate freely available	☐	☐
Music to create the right atmosphere	☐	☐
Provision of colourful notebooks and pens	☐	☐
Decorating the room to create a theme	☐	☐
Opening the windows	☐	☐
Ensuring the atmosphere is neither too hot nor too cold	☐	☐
'Welcome' notice	☐	☐
White paper tablecloths for tables (to write on)	☐	☐

What else do you do that is not listed above?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

My resource bank

Toy box items I have found	Where? Telephone No./ Web address	What I have used it for

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Continued …

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

Tool 4.3

My resource bank

… continued

Music I have discovered	Where? Telephone No./ Web address	What I have used it for

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

continued …

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

My resource bank

… continued

What I used to create the environment	How?	What courses I used this for

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

continued …

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

Tool 4.3

My resource bank

… continued

What additional information I have found on Accelerated Learning	Telephone No./ Web address/ author	How will I use this?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003

Learning Log building blocks

This Trainer's Learning Log is to help you see how much you have personally learnt from putting Accelerated Learning into practice, and to help you remember what was successful and what you might change in future learning experiences.

What outcome was I trying to achieve?	Miscellaneous comments
What props did I use?	Which Accelerated Learning principles did I use?
How did I envisage my course working?	What was successful in my course?
What would I change in any future events?	
What was the reaction of the learners?	What was my reaction to the event?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

OK TO COPY

Using Accelerated Learning Techniques © Fenman Limited 2003