

LIVE TIMEWISE MIDDLE SCHOOL



Session 8: Getting Into the Flow

Flow is a concept developed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. It refers to a psychological state where one is completely immersed in and highly focused on what one is doing. Flow can happen in any activity, from work to doing artwork to praying to sports. Anything can produce being in the flow, but certain conditions or elements have to be in place for one to get in the flow. Also, there are certain types of activities that tend to lend themselves to a flow experience. Research suggests that experiencing flow on a regular basis contributes to health and wellbeing. This session will address flow in leisure.

Student Goals

1. Understand the concept of flow, including elements that tend to contribute to, and detract from, being in flow.
2. Understand the relationship between skill level and degree of challenge, and anxiety and boredom, relative to flow.
3. To be motivated to engage in more activities that are likely to produce a flow experience.

Students will Think About

- What have I done that gets me into the flow experience?
- How do I know when I am in the flow?
- What activities could I do more of that might contribute to flow?
- When do I feel anxious, or bored, and how does that relate to what I'm doing and the level of my skill and the challenge.

Subtopics

1. Leisure Pyramid Review
2. What is Flow?
3. Relationship Between Skill and Challenge
4. To Get Into the Flow

Materials

- TW teacher manual pp. 92-97
- Master 15 (Leisure Pyramid), Flow Involves and Flow Diagram (Transparencies 11-12)

Subtopic 1: Leisure Pyramid Review

The Leisure Pyramid suggests we have better experiences when we do activities that are engaging and that we are “all in” and are fully present when we do the activity. This happens most often with activities on the bottom rungs of the pyramid, because these activities are more engaging and our minds don’t wander as much because we are more focused.

Ask and discuss:

- Would anyone like to share an activity they do in which you are sort of into it, but sort of not, or when you are a little bored, or maybe wishing you were doing something else?
- Would anyone like to share an activity they do in which you become completely engaged and involved in the activity?

Locate the activities on the Leisure Pyramid.

Discuss elements of the activities shared that fit on the top rungs of the pyramid [bored, restless, not paying a lot of attention, etc.]

Discuss elements of the activities shared that fit on the bottom rungs of the pyramid [focused, enjoyable, concentration, feeling competent/having the skill to do the activity, etc.].

Subtopic 2: Elements of Flow

Ask and discuss:

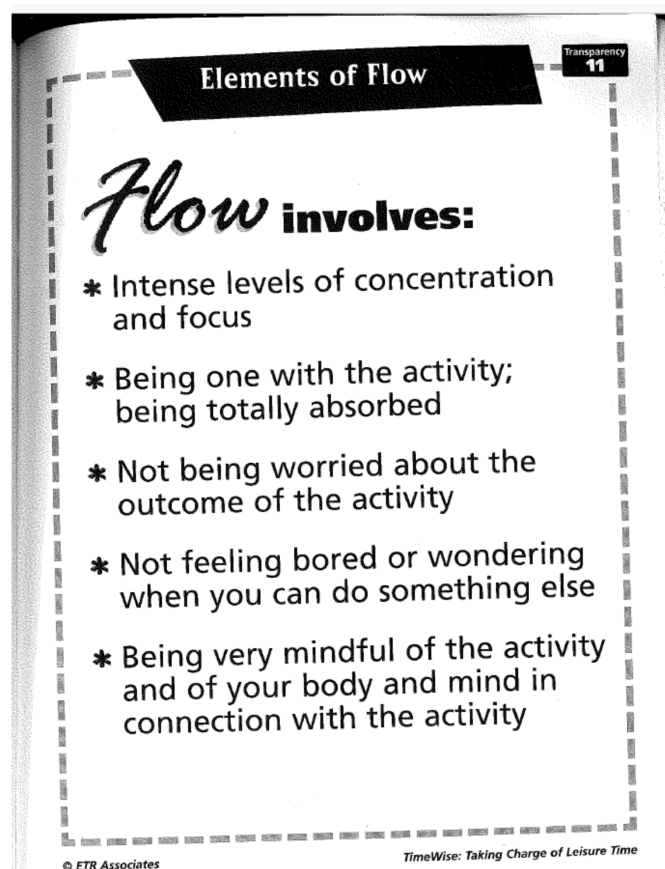
Think about how you felt during these activities.

- Were you aware of what was going on around you?
- Did you lose track of time?
- Did you have a high level of “want to” motivation?
- Did you feel as though you had a good skill level to do the activity?

How did these feelings differ between doing things on the top rungs vs. the bottom rungs?

Often when we do activities on the bottom rungs of the pyramid, we tend to “get in the zone” or experience “flow.” Flow is a concept to describe what we feel when we are very immersed in what we are doing and are having a very positive and enjoyable experience. Flow activities contribute to our overall health and wellbeing.

Discuss the elements of flow (transparency 11).



Subtopic 3: Relationship Between Skill and Challenge

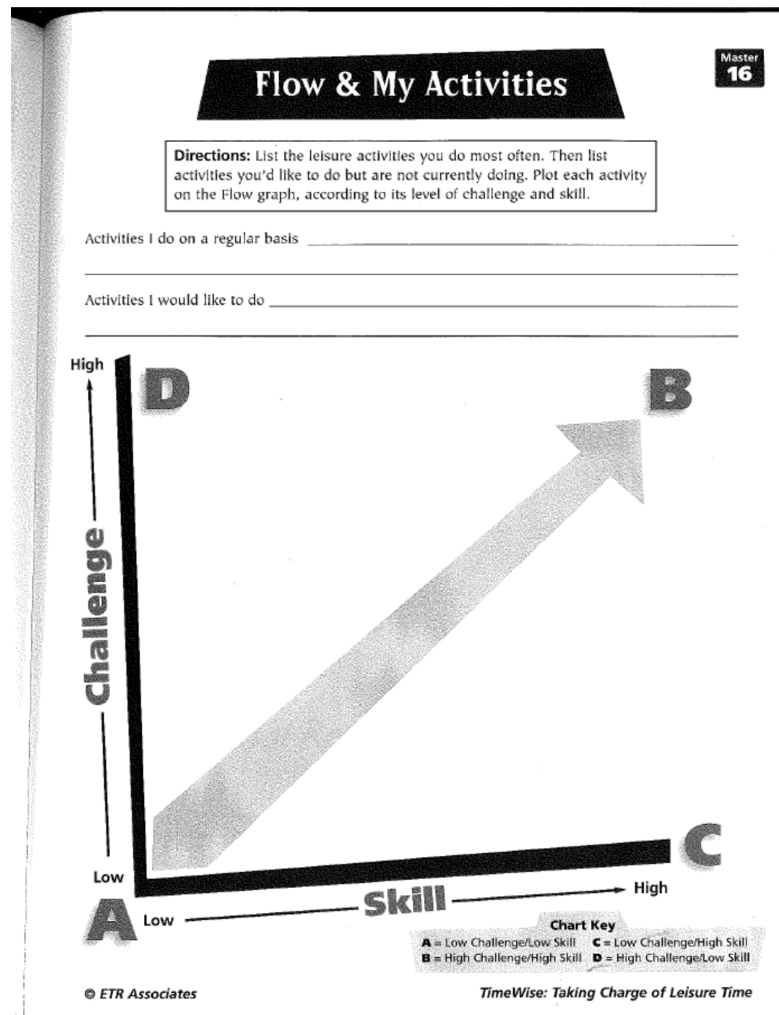
Ask and Discuss:

- What do you think causes people to be focused and absorbed in the activity, versus being unfocused and uninterested?

As important aspect of getting into the flow is that a person has a good match between their skill level and the degree of challenge of the activity.

You may want to use either Flow Model 1 or Flow Model, or both, to discuss the relationship between skill level and challenge and emotion. In Model 1, the arrow in the middle pointing from A to B is called the Flow Zone. It suggests that one can achieve flow at low skill levels if the challenge is not too difficult and the person feels they can handle that challenge. As long as there is a balance between skill level and challenge, flow may be achieved.

Flow Model 1:

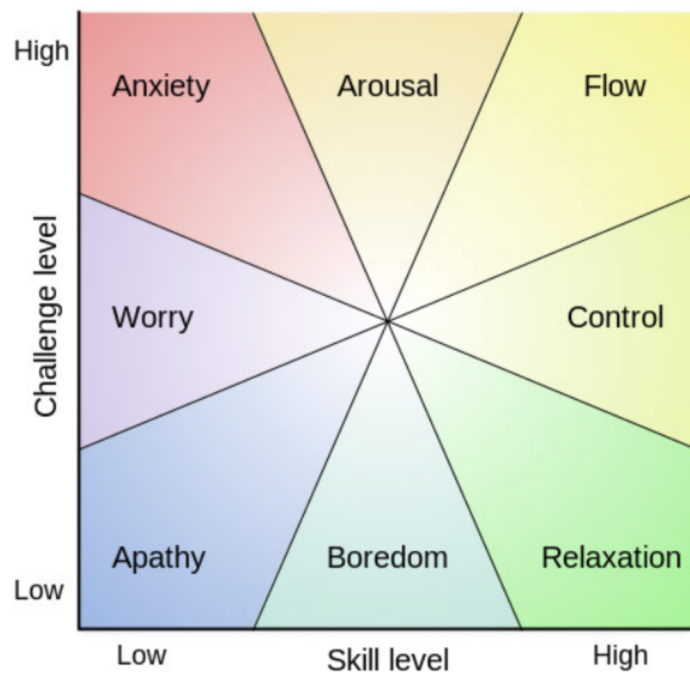


- What are some activities that you do that would fit into category A in Model 1? What about D, or in between A and D?
- How would you feel if you were in a situation where you had a high degree of skill but there was little challenge? For example, you had a good skill level at modern dance but you were rehearsing for a play where you were learning a dance that was very simple and that you had learned 2 years ago.

Low skill level and high challenge is likely to lead to anxiety, whereas high skill and low challenge is likely to lead to boredom. Flow Model 2 details these relationships in more detail.

Flow Model 2:

Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Model



Flow Model 2 shows a more detailed description of what can happen when skill level and challenge is unbalanced.

What this concept suggests is that if we know how to choose activities that match our skill level, we are more likely to have a positive experience.

Subtopic 4: To Get Into the Flow

Here are some ways to get into the flow in your daily activities.

1. **Find Activities You Enjoy:** Flow is more easily achieved when you're passionate about what you're doing.
2. **Set Clear Goals:** Knowing what you need to achieve and how to measure progress is crucial.
3. **Balance Challenge and Skill:** The activity should be challenging enough to engage you but not so difficult that it leads to frustration.
4. **Eliminate Distractions:** Create a workspace and mindset that minimizes interruptions and distractions.
5. **Practice Mindfulness:** Focusing on the present moment through techniques like meditation can help you enter flow.
6. **Seek Feedback:** Knowing how you're performing can help you adjust and stay on track.
7. **Embrace Challenges:** Stepping outside your comfort zone can help you engage more fully with the present moment.
8. **Connect with Your Environment:** Nature can be a great environment for reducing stress and enhancing focus.
9. **Be Patient and Persistent:** Flow is a skill that can be developed through practice.

Summarize

Low challenge and low skill (situation A in Model 1) may be easy or relaxing but it is not very engaging. Low challenge and high skill (situation C in Model 1) is likely to lead to boredom. When the challenge is much greater than your skill (situation D) you may feel anxious, stressed, or frustrated.

The flow feeling is like a natural high. Try to find activities that get you into the flow (the arrow in Model 1), and try to continually increase your skill level and challenge level to keep things interesting and not boring. It will also contribute to a healthier and happier you.