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civics courses. Both theoretical and actual implementations of
Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory are reviewed. (Contains 16 references.)
(Author/BT)

MAXIMIZING FLOW IN THE

SECONDARY SOCIAL SCIENCE CLASSROOM

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Education

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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ABSTRACT

MAXIMIZING FLOW IN THE

SECONDARY SOCIAL SCIENCE CLASSROOM

Nicole C. Enriquez

First introduced in the early 1990's, the flow theory of Mihaly Csikszentmihályi, giving much attention to motivation and how it relates to learning, has presented a new view for educators to apply in their classroom. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that the most effective learning in a classroom will happen when students have entered flow. This optimal experience does not happen on its own. A person makes it happen. In this literature review, Csikszentmihalyi's theory is examined, followed by a look at the many factors that will either promote or inhibit flow in the secondary social science classroom, specifically the U.S. history and government or civics classroom. Both theoretical and actual implementations of Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory are reviewed.

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Maximizing Flow in the

Secondary Social Science Classroom

Introduction

Everyone has at one point been involved in an activity during which, at the point of engagement, they have lost track of time. The task may have been simple, complex, enjoyable and/or challenging. The task was one in which a person forgets himself because the involvement with the activity is so consuming. This intensive engage where time stands still can be described as flow. There are many factors that determine flow and how easily a person may enter into it, including the following examples.

As people engage themselves in everyday life, the way things are perceived is led by consciousness. Consciousness can be defined as a mirror that reflects what the senses tell the brain about what happens both outside the body and within the nervous system. It reflects those changes selectively, actively shaping events, and imposing on them a reality of its own (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Most of the time, consciousness is thought of as being biological programming, in which things are reacted to instinctively, but this idea will be challenged as the idea of self-direction is explored. If it is indeed possible for a person to override the way they react to things with a personal course of action, then it is important to study the way consciousness works. There is little that can be done to control the external things that happen to people, but a change in consciousness can determine whether a person reacts to events in a pleasant or miserable manner. Making the connection between external matters and how they are reacted to is important to educators, because educators control what happens in the classroom. How students

perceive what is happening to them is dependent upon self perception but the teacher has the liberty to form lessons in which the student will ideally choose to consciously desire to learn, not just learning by constraint, but truly enjoy learning.

As the educator works on forming lessons, the first challenge is to gain the attention of the students. There are millions of bits of information all competing for the attention of everyone everyday. The choice to discriminate and choose certain bits of information as being more important than others is attention. Where a person chooses to direct their attention determines what does or does not enter consciousness. Csikszentmihalyi calls attention a psychic energy in which people create who they are by how this energy is invested (1990). For the purposes of this literature review this mental energy will be referred to as just *attention*. The main idea is that the student controls how external factors will be perceived and therefore can choose to react in a number of ways. The choice becomes a key player in the quality of life of the student. In a secondary student's life there are many factors competing for their attention. The goal of the educator is to capture the students' attention. This is a difficult task. If educators hope to ever have students experience flow in learning, they must be able to motivate students to willingly give attention to particular learning tasks.

Another factor that influences flow is the self. Anything and everything that has passed through consciousness is going to affect the self. Year after year the self builds up from its experiences an ideal of goals. Based upon the goals that the self generates, a person chooses what to give attention to. The attention, in turn, determines the self. Depending on which things are given attention or priority to, those ideas mold the

concept of self. If students have formed goals in their consciousness that indicates they want to be an A student, then the job of teaching becomes a bit simpler than if it is the opposite. If a student walks into a class knowing they hate history and their goal is to pass with a D-, then the teacher's job is going to be much more difficult because the educator must now encourage the self of the student to choose the priority or value of success in the classroom. The teacher is then challenged to provide new experiences in which the students' self will generate a desire to give attention to this new information.

In summary, the influencing factors in flow are first of all that a person's experiences depend on what they chose to focus their attention on. These experiences form what goals are made for the self. These goals then in turn develop and affect the self.

<div align="center">Inner Disorder</div>

Flow is pleasurable; however, lack of flow can lead to disorder. Flow can be disrupted by information that conflicts with goals that appear in the consciousness of self. The level of disruption will determine how much attention is left to deal with other issues. (Further along in this paper, there will be an in-depth look at some things that actually contribute to this disruption in a student's life.) Whenever information disrupts consciousness by threatening its goals there is a condition of inner disorder, or *psychic entropy*, a disorganization of the self that impairs the self's effectiveness in accomplishing goals (1990). For this literature review the term *inner disorder* will be used in place of *psychic entropy*. If inner disorder happens to often or for too long, this can lead someone to no longer give attention to things that were previously important,

neglecting previous goals. An example of this might be if a student is trying his best in class but continually gets D's or F's on tests. The student's self may be threatened in some way. The student might feel worthless, or dumb, and therefore, may stop trying to do well in class. Or perhaps, inner disorder is caused by a troubling situation at home or a basic need being left unmet. These inner conflicts compete with the individual's ability to experience flow in schoolwork.

<div align="center">Optimal Experience</div>

The opposite of this inner disorder is what Csikszentmihalyi calls an *optimal experience*. When a person's goals are not being threatened, but rather encouraged, attention flow will happen quite easily. The same student who is trying his best, if given an A or B on tests will see the results of their hard work and be encouraged to continue studying and giving the teacher their attention in class. This student is no longer going to question his intellectual ability or self worth. This reinforcement is most meaningful because the student has found value in the hard work that was put in and will continue to strive for these results. Promoting an environment in the classroom where students feel minimal threat and are encouraged is key, because we want our students to experience flow in the classroom and to feel encouraged to learn. Depending on how long inner disorder has discouraged a student will affect how easily an optimal experience will be achieved. Success experiences must be built incrementally and need the solid foundation of basic needs being met. While an educator cannot control the experiences students have outside the classroom, but he can provide a safe environment in which students can learn and succeed.

The Eight Steps to Flow

There are eight steps that Csikszentmihalyi identifies as key factors in a person's ability to enter flow. These steps are essential in order to motivate students to learn and enter into a flow experience. There is partial responsibility left in the hands of the educator in promoting flow in the classroom. If an educator is aware of the steps and how to foster them in the classroom then a student is set up for success and even pleasure in learning.

Tasks within Reach

The first step emphasizes the need for the tasks that are being confronted to be achievable or within reach. If a student is constantly behind and never seems able to complete the work because it is not at his ability level, then perhaps the workload for that student needs to be modified. A teacher needs to be aware of the student's ability, and not to allow students to drown in their work. A student who simply does not want to do work does not fall under this category and should not be excused from doing what all the other students are doing. The student who is trying but cannot seem to get ahead can use some modifications. If a teacher can give smaller chunks of work for the student to complete, then the student will see finished work and receive the positive reinforcement needed for their self to be encouraged rather than threatened. The student not only needs the positive reinforcement from their teacher but from themselves also. Small successes will later lead to larger success stories.

Students must first have the appropriate skills to succeed in the classroom. If they are not given the opportunity to develop these, then the work assigned to them is not

challenging, but rather meaningless. If planned class work is achievable and matches the students' skill level, then perhaps they will find relevance in the topic. Students will be able to enjoy the work they are required to do when the challenges are balanced with their ability to act.

Concentration

The second step is being able to concentrate on the task at hand. If there are too many interruptions, this will cut off flow or impede a student from ever entering flow. Impeding flow can range anywhere from the interruption of a classmate asking to borrow a pencil, to an incessant school bell. However, life's worries can also demand a student's attention. When someone enters flow he forgets other aspects of life giving complete focus to the task at hand. The demands of the actual activity will consume the attention of the student, not leaving room for any other thoughts. The engaging lesson may capture all of the students' attention, and they may even be disappointed when something interrupts the class or it is time for them to leave the classroom. An example of such engagement may be seen in a novel computer program, or historical reenactment that has kept the students in the flow of their work.

Clear Goals and Immediate Feedback

The third and fourth steps to achieve flow are having clear goals and immediate feedback. As educators write lesson plans and teach to objectives, they facilitate awareness of the goals for a particular section or chapter. There is a sense of purpose in the class when students know what they are learning and why. Having clear goals and objectives in lessons makes it worth the students' time to learn and certainly worth the

educators' time to teach. Students are very aware of how important a lesson is based upon how it is presented. When an educator is excited about presenting a lesson and shows students why this particular information is important, students are more likely to listen. If a teacher reluctantly presents a lesson, students will notice the reluctance. Students may even accuse the teacher of handing out busywork if they feel like there is no clear goal or objective in what they are being asked to learn. It is important also to note that the goals presented to students must be relevant and students must buy into the goals or objectives in order to enter flow. Relevance is critical to the goals of learning. Students want to know "why" and appreciate real life application.

Feedback must be as immediate as possible and logically related to the goal in which students have invested their energy. How many times has a student taken a test in a class and the professor took so long to give the test back, that they did not even remember taking the test. The feedback, of course, should also be specific. It is important to provide positive feedback as well as constructive criticism.

<center>Automaticity</center>

The fifth step is similar to and ties in with the second step. The work in which a student is engaged will become almost effortless. People become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing (1990). For this reason this experience is called *flow*. The activity just seems to flow along as the student is working. The purpose of flow then is to stay in a continuous state of flow without reaching a peak or depression. This does not mean that the work is so easy that it is

almost effortless, but rather the assignment meets the needs of students at a point where they are not overly challenged or conversely, bored.

The happy medium is when students are between the boundaries of boredom and anxiety. If challenges are too high a student will get frustrated because he knows that he needs to do the work but just lack the skills needed to be able to. The student will then become worried because he needs a good grade in class but will not be able to earn one since the work is too difficult. Eventually, the student may even become anxious about the fact that the grade he receives in the class will determine whether or not he is eligible to play team sports at school.

On the other hand, if the challenges and skills are perceived to be too low, the student will become bored because he already knows the material that must be completed. Later the student may become apathetic about all the class work he must complete for this class because it is all below his skill level (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). When work is too easy students become bored and may not care to complete it. Work that is too difficult leads to anxiety and will also likely not be completed. Flow in the classroom truly depends on the ability of educators to assign appropriate class work, insightfully differentiating the needs of their learners.

<div align="center">Sense of Control</div>

While in the flow experience, a person will have a sense of control over the activity in which they are engaged. This sense of control is the sixth step to flow. This control is not necessarily true in actuality, but is a possibility in the mind of the person in flow. No one can control everything in life that could possibly happen. A teacher might

throw a pop quiz out to the class and the students not be prepared, but while in flow the students would feel as though they are in control of what they are doing in class as they successfully navigate the quiz.

There are two things that can threaten the sense of control over a task: objective and subjective aspects. The objective aspect deals with physical events that can happen which a student has no control over, that could disrupt flow. This might be a right-handed person breaking their right arm, an earthquake destroying their project, or a dog eating their homework. Even though a student may prepare themselves against these threats, not all things can be foreseen.

The subjective aspect deals with the student's own feelings. The student might feel as though he lacks the skill needed to complete an assignment, that other students will make fun of him during his presentation, or that they will not fairly receive the credit due to his work. In the classroom, the goal then is to avoid as many objective obstacles as possible and to eliminate subjective feelings through encouraging self-discipline and personal preparation. Eliminating the objective and subjective threats are good but not if a student becomes so enthralled with the ability to control the situation that he is no longer able to pay attention to anything else including the task he is attempting to complete. For example, if a student is fulfilling a project requirement by presenting to the class a power point presentation, but is unfamiliar with the program and has also seen in the past that the teacher has struggled with the program, this may heighten the anxiety that the student feels. The objective threat here would be the power point program that occasionally fails to function properly. The subjective threat is the feeling of

unfamiliarity with the power point program that the student feels. If a student becomes too concerned with these threats, the presentation may suffer. The student will not be able to perform the task at hand with a feeling of control because he will be too busy trying to control the whole situation. The student must remain flexible and realize that not all things can be controlled or foreseen.

<div align="center">Forgetting Self</div>

The seventh step deals with a person's ability to forget himself while in flow. In a person's normal everyday life he is very aware of himself. A person can be concerned with the way he looks, how well he is performing, and what others think of him. This self-awareness intrudes on a person's attention, which in turn affects his consciousness. When truly engaged in flow the mind is concentrated only on one thing and the ego is not mixed up in the flow of the individual activity.

Educators do not want students to feel threatened by the lessons being presented. If students perceive that their person is in danger (of ridicule or failure), then they will not be able to enter into flow and often feel self-defeat before even giving the lesson a chance. The way that an educator can best accommodate this is by having clear goals, stable classroom rules, and lessons whose challenges are matched to the students' skill level and abilities. This leaves little opportunity for a student to feel uncomfortable or threatened academically in the class.

The idea of losing the self in flow does not by any means involve a loss of the person or of his consciousness but rather a loss of consciousness of the self. When a person is not focused on his self, he has an opportunity to expand who he is. When a

student is interacting with an activity in which he forgets about himself and is only

working toward the goal of doing the task, at the end of the flow experience there is an

intensity added to his own self awareness. The student is able to realize that he has

learned new skills and has acquired new knowledge. This then is no longer the same self,

but a newly expanded self that is reflective of what the individual now knows. This leads

to the building of a strong self-concept. Educators can assist the expansion of the self by

writing lessons that challenge students to do their best and that provide an opportunity to

constantly improve skills.

<div style="text-align:center">Sense of Time</div>

Finally, there is what seems like a transformation of time as an individual is

engaged in flow. A sense of time is lost as the individual engages in the activity. This

time transformation takes two separate forms. In a 1990 study of flow theory, conducted

by Csikszentmihalyi's researchers, research participants indicated that hours passed like

minutes, flowing much faster than usual. Others said that something that normally did

not take very long to do seemed to have taken a very long time. This may be a difficult

procedure that must be very precise. For example, in a science classroom an experiment

may not take very long to do, but the thought process that the student must go through to

get everything accurately placed may seem to have taken much longer than it did in

actuality. All this to say that the perception of the amount of time that has passed is

irrelevant to the actual clock time passed. Even during lectures, students may sometimes

say that class ended quickly. The class may have been interacting exceptionally well and

this caused time to seem to have gone by rather quickly.

Environment

There are many factors affecting how easily an individual student can enter into flow. Because each student is an individual who perceives things differently from others, as a teacher, it can be frustrating when most students understand a lesson, but not all. The following factors have been identified as being environmentally influential. The factors have been grouped into categories, each including a brief discussion of how each factor promotes or inhibits flow in the classroom. Educators cannot control the outside environment of each student's life, but they can control classroom environment. The more teachers are able to encourage students to enter into a state of flow, the easier and more enjoyable learning will become.

One of the key factors in a classroom environment is motivation. How are students motivated to learn? If students are only motivated by the idea of getting better grades, graduation, and pleasing their parents, it will be difficult for them to enjoy learning and enter into flow. The ideal learning environment is a place where students are intrinsically motivated. If a teacher focuses students on intrinsic rewards as opposed to extrinsic rewards, students will enter into the flow activity for the sake of the activity, not for the extrinsic reward. In other words, the activity should be so intrinsically motivating that the participant will want to continue with the activity because the experience itself is so rewarding.

Many of the steps that promote intrinsic motivation parallel closely with flow theory. First, threat must be eliminated from the classroom. If students are afraid of what others might think about their work or ideas, they will not be able to work with the

freedom that is necessary for them to learn in a comfortable environment. This will be looked at further in the relationship portion of this paper.

The second step is goal setting. When students know what goal they are working towards they are able to see when they have achieved that goal and, as a result, they can feel personal satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation can be further promoted when students are given some choice about what goals they are working towards. Some examples of student choice will be presented in the curriculum section of this paper.

Third, encouraging students with affirmations, recognition, acknowledgment and any other methods that show the student that the teacher is excited about the students and their learning is going to help the student find their own successes more easily.

Although educators might prefer only motivated students in their classrooms, reality is that some students are not motivated. There are times that students seem totally unmotivated to learn in a classroom. However, the mere fact that they are present, shows at least a minimal amount of motivation.

There are a couple of reasons why students might be unmotivated. First of all, a student may *associate* the class he currently has with a negative experience. This could mean that a student failed U.S. History in 8th grade and is now in 11th grade and feels like he will not be able to pass the class. Or, perhaps the new teacher has mannerisms that remind the student of a teacher he previously had whom he disliked.

A second reason may be that the student has some *environmental factors* that are working against him. Students can feel unmotivated in the face of unsuitable learning styles, a lack of resources, language barriers, a lack of choice, cultural taboos, fear of

embarrassment, a lack of feedback, poor nutrition, prejudice, poor lighting, bad seating, the wrong temperature, fear of failure, a lack of respect, irrelevant content, and a host of other possibilities (Jensen, 1998).

A final factor to be mentioned in this discussion, concerning student demotivation is the student's goals and beliefs. If the student does not feel as though he has the ability to learn or does not feel like he has the resources to succeed in class, it will be difficult for him to achieve a motivated state of mind. Students are willing to invest in a lesson when they expect to succeed at a lesson, value the task, and emotionally react to the task in a positive fashion (Rea, 2000).

Scheduling

There are many ways in which scheduling affects classroom environment. Most teachers who have taught a fourth period class might comment on the unruliness of the class as they get restless before lunch. However, teachers who teach a first period might say that they sometimes wonder if the class is awake.

In secondary education, the maximum amount of time an educator gets with each class averages somewhere between 52 and 56 minutes. After the class has settled, the teacher must take roll, sign readmit slips, and answer any questions that students have as they walk into class. By this time precious minutes have been ticking away. The teacher begins the lesson and gives some guidance and directions for the work that must be completed, thus using a few more minutes. The teacher finally gets the students to begin doing their work and the bell rings. As soon as students had entered flow and seem to be enjoying their work, it is time for them to leave and start the whole cycle over again.

This, of course, is assuming that there are no other interruptions from the administration. Scheduling, interruptions, and time restraints greatly inhibit flow.

Block scheduling promotes flow because it allows for lessons that are longer and in more depth. It does not cut off or interrupt the flow experience. When students know they only have 20 minutes to finish an in class assignment that could well take 40 minutes to do, they are going to rush through the work and either turn it in incomplete, give quick answers that are not thought out, or, if the teacher is fortunate, the student will take it home and finish it for homework. These time constraints do not encourage learning but rather quick memorization to be regurgitated on the next exam. Of course, that exam will also have a time limit on it.

There are many lessons that can be implemented that would be fun and provide for real understanding but time constraints inhibit these. For some good ideas of how block scheduling would specifically work for the social science classroom and its benefits, see the reference page for reference information on the article written by Bryant and the other written by Algozzine. The amount of planning and preparation needed for these types of lessons discourage teachers who know that they will not be able to complete it all in the allowable time. Block scheduling improves planning time and also facilitates flow in other classes. This is facilitated by a connecting among disciplines (Khazzaka, 1997). If teachers have more time to teach, they will have more opportunities to connect what is being learned in history with what is being learned in art class as well as in English literature and other classes as well.

Another factor in scheduling that inhibits flow is the actual time that classes are scheduled to begin. Teachers will often blame part-time jobs and going to bed late as the reason why so many students fall asleep in class. However research has shown findings quite to the contrary. Dale Boger, a molecular biologist at Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California says "Sleep is regulated by many chemicals . . . a delayed accumulation of oleamide means a teen's natural sleep clock generates a natural bedtime closer to midnight with a waking time closer to 8 a.m." (Jensen, 1998). If students are falling asleep in class, it will be very difficult for them to enter into flow. If school started at 9 a.m. this would work more naturally with most student's bodies and would allow them to learn and remember things more easily because they would be awake.

Teaching Methods

Each educator has a style of teaching that is most likely tied in closely with his or her own learning methods. Some teachers lecture, others assign textbook work or cooperative learning groups, and others use a combination of some or all of these. In general, concerning teaching methods, variety is encouraged. Variety in the classroom helps not only to obtain and maintain the attention of students, but also makes the overall teaching experience more enjoyable.

Flow can be inhibited by the monotony of teaching methods. If a student is continually asked to perform based in response to a teaching method that does not work for him or her, there will be poor participation. Students learn in different ways and some effort should be made to help every student succeed in the classroom.

Cooperative learning generally describes instructional techniques or grouping structures in which students are divided into heterogeneous groups to complete instructional activities. Cooperative learning has four essential components: (a) positive interdependence, in which all group members participate to achieve the group goal; (b) individual accountability, in which each member of the group is held responsible for his or her own learning, which in turn contributes to the group goal; (c) cooperation, in which students discuss, problem-solve, and collaborate together; and (d) evaluation, in which members of the group review and evaluate their ability to work together effectively and to make changes as needed (Marr, 1997).

Cooperative learning groups are beneficial to students for many reasons. When students are in a group with their peers, the ideas that they might have can be refined and solidified. This allows for a comfortable place to receive feedback. To receive suggestions from a teacher can be intimidating to a student but if they have the opportunity to get it from their peers, threat is lessened. Cooperative groups can also help a student that is struggling with coming up with ideas for a project by allowing them to springboard with others. When two or more students are placed together in a group they are able to expand thoughts to a new level and see things in a new way. This helps ideas to develop and also helps them see that their ideas have value and that value is being recognized by their peers. Peer approval is critical in the secondary classroom. Creativity is also nurtured in a cooperative group setting.

Howard Gardner in Frames of Mind, (1983) introduces his theory of multiple intelligences (MI). The idea that there are at least eight ways to be intelligent should be

recognized in the classroom. These intelligences include the linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, personal (intrapersonal and interpersonal), naturalist and existential. Every student is intelligent, but their strengths may be in different areas. Implementing lessons that teach to many different intelligences offers teachers an opportunity to develop innovative teaching strategies. The MI Theory suggests that no one set of teaching strategies will work best for all students at all times. When teachers are implementing lessons to different strengths, they should be conscious of this and continually use a broad range of teaching strategies with their students. The emphasis from intelligence to intelligence should shift from presentation to presentation. This ensures that all students are actively involved with lessons at least from time to time as they endure the other types of lessons that may not appeal to them quite as easily.

Teachers should also give time during class when students can reflect on the importance of what they are learning. Generally, the brain does poorly at continuous, high levels of attention. In fact, genuine "external" attention can be sustained at a high and constant level for only a short time, generally 10 minutes or less (Jensen, 1998). If a student is struggling with keeping their attention on lessons, then they need a break. To try to keep a student's attention for too long can become counterproductive.

With attention overload the most obvious thing that may happen is that students tune out of a lesson. There are many reasons why students should be given a break or time to reflect. The first being that too much information does not allow the learner to process the information consciously because it is all happening too fast. A student needs

time to process what is learned and how it ties in to previous lessons and the following lessons. Second, if lessons are going to have meaning to the student, then the student must have a chance to internalize what they are learning. The student must make that connection himself, since a teacher can not just force students to find meaning. Students should be given time to find relevance in the lesson. Lastly, after new material has been presented, there is a certain amount of time the student needs in order for it to be permanently placed into their brain.

Classroom Management

How an educator chooses to manage the classroom greatly influences how easily a student enters into flow. There are two things that Csikszentmihalyi warns will make flow difficult to experience, which he calls *anomie* and *alienation*. The first *anomie*, means a lack of rules. This term comes from a French sociologist named Emile Durkheim. *Anomie* is when what is permitted or not permitted is unknown. In a classroom this can cause students who need structure and rules for their own consciousness to become anxious and unsure about what is expected of them in your classroom. When anomie is in a classroom, flow is made difficult because the class is not sure what is worth investing their time and attention in. To have no rules is not frustrating for both the teacher and the students as well.

Alienation is the opposite of *anomie*. With *alienation*, students are constrained by the classroom rules to act in ways that go against their own goals. Excessive rigidness in class makes learning difficult because they will get bored and their attention is not

invested in what they really want. Rules in the class should be flexible and conducive to learning.

Classroom management includes many factors including gaining the class' attention, transitions, communicating class rules, forming groups, discipline and rewards. Gaining the attention of a class can be accomplished in a variety of ways. When students first walk into class, they usually are talking. Having signals for the class will facilitate how easily they will give their attention to the teacher. There may be a spot in the class where the teacher stands that will let students know she is ready to begin class. There may also be a physical sign that the teacher hangs in the front of the class that she can point at when she desires class attention. These examples show respect to the students and do not threaten them. These techniques allow for a comfortable situation for the students as well as the teacher. If a teacher begins yelling "SHUT UP," it may get the students' attention but does not make it easy to transition. Students will want to know why the teacher is mad and possibly feel uncomfortable learning in the classroom.

For transitions, it is important to recognize that when students are in flow it will be disappointing to them when they must end what they are doing. One way to help students finish their thoughts, or at least get them ready for a transition, is to let them know how much time they have left for what they are working on. It also may help to ask them who needs more time. This allows the student to give the teacher some feedback about how ready he is for the transition. The class should be a comfortable and safe place where the student feels as though he can learn and communicate with the teacher if he needs more time or help.

Communicating classroom rules is very important in order for students to know what is expected of them and what the consequences are for not following the rules. As previously mentioned, a student must feel a sense of security and control before being able to enter a flow state. One way to help students feel this way is by having them take responsibility for establishing the classroom rules at the beginning of the school year (this is a great way to introduce a democracy lesson as well). The rules could later be posted somewhere in the classroom so that the students do not forget the group-selected rules. Rules are the guidelines, structures, and expectations for both teachers and learners. They do not need to be arbitrarily or authoritatively defined but instead developed with the cooperation and acceptance of all (Hansen, 1998).

When cooperative learning is a part of classroom routine, there should be a simple way of having the class move into these groups. As routine is established, the class will be able to move into the groups quickly. Some educators may prefer to have prearranged groups that they put together. For certain activities this may be the fastest and easiest way to get the lesson started. There are many other types of groupings that can be used, such as allowing students to pick their own groups (most students will prefer this method), counting off students and assigning specific numbers to them in which they get into groups with those who were assigned the same number, or even randomly selecting names out of a hat and putting those students into groups.

Having proper discipline policies in place will promote a learning environment in which the students have minimal disruption due to discipline. If an educator can discipline a student without anyone else noticing, this will keep the goal of getting

attention from being accomplished. This also keeps the distractions in the class to a minimum.

There are a few things that can be done to prevent discipline problems. These are just a few of the many suggestions that come from Brain-Based Learning by Eric Jensen 1996.

1. Limit the amount of focused learning time before switching to some kind of diffusion activity. This allows students an outlet for their energy.

2. Create more "What's in it for me?" The more relevant the lesson is, the more likely they will be actively engaged and not have time to think of misbehaving.

3. Anticipate, read and respond swiftly to learner states. If we are able to meet students' needs, hopefully they will be able to focus more on learning and less on other things.

4. Let students know you care by attending some kind of outside class activity that they may be involved in: a play, city events, sports, etc. This shows students that you genuinely care about them. This involvement helps transfer that thought into the classroom so that students realize that the rules are there because the teacher cares about them.

Pay attention to the reward system in the classroom. Rewards can be both extrinsic (tangible and external) or intrinsic (altruistic and internal). Students are motivated and interested when rewards appeal to them. A few examples of rewards are positive feedback, high fives, allowing for peer recognition, etc. These reward systems do not have students expecting food items or gifts for good work, but rather recognition (Jensen, 1996). Occasionally, having a celebration where a teacher may bring in pizza is

fun, but making the pizza the reward for learning certain material sets precedence for the future. Students will begin to expect these types of rewards for learning. Eventually the pizza will lose its appeal and the students will no longer see the motivation to learn. It is much better to reward students with exciting and innovative lessons that will make them want to learn than to throw chocolate at them.

An example of how overemphasizing external rewards might hinder a student would be a case in which a student is in a reading program with a grand prize for whoever read the most books. Students who do not like to read would not suddenly have a love for reading. They may not bother to read at all because they know they will not win or worse yet they may lie about books they read. On the other hand, the students who do like to read will read but now are not able to enjoy reading like they normally do, because they are trying to get through books as quickly as they can. The reward has become a distracter and not necessarily a motivator of reading.

Perhaps the best thing that we could do as teachers would be to make learning intrinsically rewarding. Students, of course, will often focus on the extrinsic rewards of doing class work before they ever look at the intrinsic rewards. We have no choice but to give grades as a reward for being able to recall information. This, of course, is not true learning, but it is how we measure what students know. To be able to get students to find learning, as being intrinsically rewarding is what will motivate them to learn -- not only learn what we assign but also learn more for their own personal enjoyment. When students enjoy learning, then they will begin to do things not because of the expectations they have of getting some kind of reward, but rather because learning itself is a reward.

The first thing an educator must do, regardless of the subject he teaches, is to get the attention of the students. If students are going from class to class with no break they are going to be wound up and not likely to be physically able to pay attention in class. A teacher may be able to provide some quiet time before beginning a lesson to allow students to unwind. This may be in the form of allowing them to put their heads down and close their eyes, reading, reflection, writing, or drawing. This gives students a chance to relax a little and not feel anxiety in the classroom. At this point they will be more receptive to lessons and more likely to give attention to the teacher.

The fact that students will be more receptive does not mean that lessons should go on for the remaining 50 minutes of class, expecting 100% undivided attention. The lessons being presented should be engaging. There should be innovative manners of presenting and contrast between transitions in class. The contrast could be as small as just changing the location from which the teacher is teaching. Music or props used to teach a lesson are also fun ways for a class to be engaged in a lesson. Field trips and guest speakers can also bring a welcomed change to the monotony of every day classroom life.

U.S. History in Flow

The traditional curriculum used in teaching history is called the Memoriter System. This system relies on the use of a textbook in which students memorize what is said in the textbook for learning assessment. The teacher and/or textbook provides guidance questions and outlines that highlight the essential information that should be memorized (McNeil, 1999). This form of teaching does have students memorize a lot of

information that is important, but does not create meaning and relevance to the student, and most certainly does not promote flow.

There are many ways to bring an U.S. History class into flow. One way that you can promote this is by allowing students to learn things that interest them. Granted teachers cannot allow students to control the classroom and its curriculum, but there are times that some flexibility could be allowed. Projects in which students get to pick something of interest to them will motivate them to research and learn. For example, in a lesson on the Civil war a teacher may allow students to pick a specific part of the war on which to focus. Students may want to know about the battles of Gettysburg or be as specific as wanting to know just battles in which artillery played a major role. These are not the only things they might want to learn about. They may be interested in studying literature or poetry of the time or even the composure of music for this time period. This not only enhances learning for the student studying different aspects of history, but adds a lot of fun and variety to the class. Giving choice in the classroom allows students to recognize their own multiple intelligences strengths and gives an opportunity for them to learn in a way that is interesting to them. This helps students enter flow.

U.S. History easily lends itself to multifaceted lessons. In a unit focusing on World War One, a teacher may want to set up the inside of the classroom with posters of propaganda promoting the war and come in costume as an American soldier. This soldier could then tell his personal account of the war to teach the living conditions of soldiers. Examples of soldier poetry could be read and then students could be given a chance to write their own, putting themselves in the place of the frightened soldier, proud parent, or

worried sweetheart back at home. As students simulate living during WWI, the interest

level increases. It also promotes interest to ask students who had family members in

WWI to bring in regalia or personal accounts of what happened to their family members.

This gives relevance and interest to the lesson and promotes flow in a new way as

intrinsic motivation propels the learner towards further learning.

<center>Government or Civics in Flow</center>

In a government class, it is much easier to show students the relevance of what

they are learning. Generally high school seniors taking government are close to eighteen

years of age. This marks a significant time in their lives because these students will soon

vote. For the first time in their lives, these students are being called upon as adults and

are being given the responsibilities of adults. There are several ways to make lessons in

government fun and informative. If a teacher is going to explain how a presidential

campaign works it would be simple to teach this through an ongoing simulation lesson.

The way this might work would be to have the class divide itself among Republicans and

Democrats and have each of the groups pick candidates for the primary elections. They

would then have an election with the main candidate they want for president. Once this

person has been elected, they would put together a campaign. Different people from each

political party would play the role of each part of a campaign (e.g. campaign manager,

treasurer, media consultant, etc.). Students could be asked to create a campaign ad. A

great resource for this section of the lesson would be the web site:

http://www.pbs.org/30secondcandidate. At this web site students would find information on the

history of political commercials, a step by step process of how ads go from idea to airing

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in a campaign spot, a section for building your own ad either for or against a candidate and instructions on how to conduct your own interview.

In order to elect the final candidate the class would arrange the 3-day national convention (this could be minimized to one day for classroom purposes). During this convention they would have the music that would set the mood and motivate the political parties and bring pictures of elephants and donkeys to class. A good way of introducing this part of the lesson might be to show a movie such as the 1972 film, *The Candidate*, and even portions of the Republican and Democratic National Conventions from past years. This lesson would take several weeks to complete but would cover quite a bit concerning the election process and would make it very simple to recall the different parts of an election.

Another practical idea that promotes flow is writing letters for the opinion section of the local newspaper. This could be an assignment that has to be completed by the end of the semester. That would make the student have to keep up with current events in order to find something they would like to write to the newspaper about. Once the student writes their letter, they should be encouraged to actually send it to the paper through the mail or email. If possible, a journalist or editor could come out and explain to the students how important it is for people to share their opinions in the newspaper. If someone from the local paper cannot speak to the class then perhaps a journalism teacher could speak to them. If a student does have their comments printed in the newspaper, then the article should be displayed on a classroom wall and in the school office. When

students realize that their thoughts and opinions matter, they are more likely to be motivated to learn.

Opinion polls are another way that students can learn about government. They could first take a look at some polls and sample questions from polls. They then can be given the choice to pick any government topic from which to ask questions. Students will then be asked to poll a certain number of peers and then adults. After conducting the poll, they present their results and write about what factors would affect the reliability of the poll.

Additional Ideas

There are many other ideas that can be used for any social science class that will motivate students to learn and promote flow. At the beginning of the school year, a teacher can present students with a goal setting session. At this time a teacher would ask students to write down what they are curious about in the subject matter, what they would like to know by the end of the semester, what grade they are setting themselves up for and what type of occupation they see themselves taking up after they get out of high school. This not only gives the teacher an idea of where the students are at, but helps them to set goals to work towards. These lists should be given back to students and kept by them. Through out the semester students could be given an opportunity to have one minute reflection periods in which they can keep track of how well they are achieving their goals or what they can do to achieve their goals.

A Reader's Theatre is another way for students to become actively involved with the material they need to learn. Reader's Theatre has students rewrite important

documents into an easier more comprehensible form. For example the English Bill of Rights could be turned into a song, skit or rap. Students may also choose to act out how these ideas came about.

Test reviews can also be a flow experience. A teacher can be very creative in the way she prepares a class for review. Students can create a review board game to play in small groups. The questions could be quick and open-ended or activity oriented tasks.

Relationships

The biggest inhibitor of entering flow for students in today's classroom may possibly be relationships. Students deal with relationships with their peers, parents, siblings, employer, teachers, significant others and any other variety of people that enter their lives each day. As they walk into the classroom, these relationships can distract the attention of students, inhibiting flow in class.

If students enter a classroom and feel stress or threat, this also greatly affects their ability to learn. Threats can take many forms, including that of a parent taking away privileges, a boyfriend or girlfriend threatening to break up, or a teacher who threatens a student with detention. Thinking and memory are affected under stress and the brain's short-term memory and ability to form long term memories are inhibited (Jensen, 1998). A student will not be able to learn effectively if their mind is on something else while the teacher is trying to teach.

A student may feel stress from many things that happen in the classroom, but there are some easy and practical ways that a teacher can reduce the threats and bring stress levels to a minimum. The first thing a teacher can do is to provide some

predictability in the class and daily routines. If students feel as though they know what to expect, then their stress level will be low as they enter the classroom.

Educators can teach students stress management techniques such as taking deep breaths, time management, and getting help by sharing with a confidant. A teacher also has the power to reduce threats from other students by displaying proper behavior and letting the class know what behaviors are appropriate and expected in the classroom. This includes following through and enforcing classroom rules. It is also appropriate for an educator to take into consideration what type of time constraints are put on class work that might feel threatening if they are unable to complete the work.

A teacher threatening discipline can be stressful to students also. If a student is told, "Next time you talk out of turn you are being sent outside of the class," the student's attention has now shifted from the teacher's lesson to a consciousness of his mouth. For the rest of the class period he will be focusing on this threat and possibly the repercussions of it. The student may fear that his sibling might see he got in trouble and tell his parents which will ground him and then his girlfriend will be mad at him because they cannot go out on Friday night. The teacher's lesson has lost importance and the threat has taken over. This may be a gross exaggeration, but very possible.

Too much continuous threat and/or stress can lead to learned helplessness. This is something that happens when a student feels out of control because of a previous experience in which something important may have resulted in a negative outcome. A student that has learned helplessness will often say a phrase such as, "I'm stupid so why should I even try to do the work?" It is very difficult for students to move away from this

negative thought process, but an educator can encourage a student by allowing him opportunities to succeed. These students need to see the connection between their actions and positive outcomes. A teacher could also provide a student with a peer that can study with him or her, study techniques, test taking strategies, time management and research strategies for the library and on the Internet. Empowering a student with skills and the knowledge of where to find information will greatly increase his chances to succeed and realize that he can do the work and do it well.

Home Factors

There are five characteristics that Csikszentmihalyi notes as influences that parents have on a teenager's ability to enter flow. The first is clarity. Teenagers need to know what their parents expect from them. Goals and feedback from parents must be clear.

The second is centering. Students must have the perception that their parents are interested in what they are doing currently and not only about what college they are getting into. If parents show too much concern for the future and not enough for the present, students, will not feel like what they are currently doing is being valued.

The third factor is the issue of choice. Students must feel like they have a couple of options of things that they could do including disobeying their parents. This of course means that they would be willing to face the consequences of these choices.

The fourth characteristic is commitment. This is the trust that allows students to feel comfortable enough to set aside their own inhibitions and become involved in what they are interested in. This safety is a key part of Maslow's (1968) hierarchy. Maslow

suggests that if the lower level needs of safety, security and stability are not met that a student will not be able to reach the higher levels of needs. The other lower needs that are mentioned are physiological needs such as the need for air and food, belongingness and love needs from family, friends, etc.

The fifth characteristic that has influence on flow is challenge or the parents' dedication to provide increasingly complex opportunities for action. All five conditions should begin to develop from the moment children are born. Erikson's (1968) developmental stages show how different parts of a person develop at different stages of their lives. Children learn to feel safe and trust at a very early age (birth to one year). They are ready to have parents encourage them to do more complex things as early as age four to five. These stages of development determine a student's outlook on the tasks set before them. Parents are able to help their student succeed and feel encouraged from the moment that they are born.

Parents should also be careful not to value performance measures, such as grades, over the child's learning experience. When parents overemphasize grades, they can turn an otherwise pleasurable experience for the student into a stressful, performance-oriented experience and, in extreme cases, cause a complete breakdown. Negative feedback and parental pressure can actually decrease a student's desire to participate in class (Mandigo & Thompson, 1998). Educators and parents alike should give positive and constructive feedback that will help students achieve the goals and objectives for the class. The classroom should not be a source of undue stress, but rather a place where the student can

succeed. Negative comments from peers, teachers, and parents should be discouraged and avoided as much as possible.

There are other factors that can promote flow. For example, consider reading skills. Students spend a good amount of time at home watching television and playing video games. Parents can promote reading skills by modeling a love for reading and encouraging their children to read by buying them books, taking them to the library or reading together as a family. The more skillful reader a student is, the better he or she is able to enter a state of flow in his or her studies.

Parents can set a time aside each day that is considered a quiet or study time. At this time, everyone in the family is asked to participate in activities that are quiet. This keeps students accountable for doing their schoolwork and gives them a time when they could illicit help from their parents.

Meals that are served to children should be well rounded with minimal saturated fat and sugar foods. The best foods for the brain are leafy green vegetables, salmon, nuts, lean meats, and fresh fruits (Jensen, 1998). Along with good nutrition, be wary of dehydration. When a student is thirsty, there is a loss of attentiveness in class. Parents need to encourage their children to drink more water instead of soft drinks.

Conclusion

Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory has brought about many new ideas and concrete examples of how a student could better experience the joy of learning. Many factors influence whether or not a student enters flow and how easily they are able to. This literature review examined many of these factors and laid out for the educator a simple

reference to look at to find whether or not their classroom was conducive to flow learning.

Every student is different and the strategies that will promote flow for each student may be different as well. It is important for educators to define for students the benefits, advantages, and values achieved by learning. Csikszentmihalyi introduced eight steps that will promote flow. Educators who implement these steps into their classroom environment and lesson planning will be able to encourage students to enjoy learning. This flow experience would then not only be for the students, but also for the teachers, helping their lessons to flow with more ease. As students are able to find more relevance in the lessons being taught, the more likely they will be to give more attention to the teacher and invest more time in studying for the class.

Recommendations for Further Study

Research should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of classroom strategies and how they affect flow state experiences. There could also be some research done on the differences of how youth describe flow as opposed to adults. Most research concerning flow theory has focused primarily on adult flow.

Minimal research was available for the social science secondary classroom concerning flow. Further study could develop curriculum for all the social sciences that further promotes flow. Surveying parents, interviewing staff and observing students would greatly increase knowledge on this subject. Both students and teachers could be consulted to find what teaching methods and strategies promote flow and which inhibit flow.

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