

Non-formal and Informal Learning through Flow

Ajda Erjavec, Jelica Pegan Stemberger, dr. Tatjana Dragovič and Karmen Šemrl
 Glotta Nova, Centre for New Knowledge

*"We have a mind. We have feelings. To separate the two is to deny all that we are.
 To integrate the two is to help us realise what we might be."*

George Isaac Brown

The consequence of a good and quality relation between emotions and the mind during learning is setting the »genius inside« free. Learning in the state of flow takes place without coercion and is congruent with our natural patterns of learning and this makes this state very valuable for all who want to organize non-formal education or impregnate their activities with opportunities for informal learning.

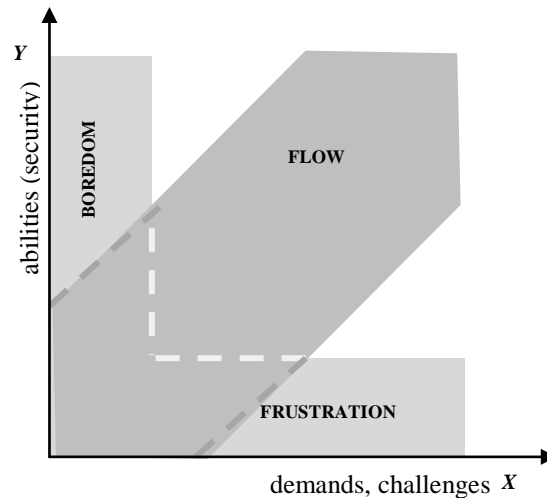
Learning in flow becomes a process of efficient practical use of all awakened inner potentials and resources. Therefore we can achieve incredible results in learning foreign languages or, for example, when developing computer, communication, motivation, organization skills or whatever it is we need to learn, in a rather short time-period or, better put, instantly. Compared to classical teaching there is another difference in the acquired knowledge. A foreign language that is taught on a conscious level remains a »stranger« in the mental learning model of each individual. A foreign language, that is transferred, with the help of innovative learning approaches that facilitate flow, directly to the unconscious level, becomes a part of the personality and the developmental process of individual's personal growth.

This change in understanding learning (focus is switched from the learning objectives to the learning process) represents a **global** leap from the conscious to the unconscious. This is a leap that sets learning on the level of art that simply **is** and takes place continuously, without interruptions. When learning, for instance, a foreign language or communication, computer or organization skills, becomes a unique part of the developmental process of our personality, a new »magic« world is created, where everything we want and even more can be learned. For what we call the unconscious is what is responsible for the way an individual builds his own personality, uses his potentials and also for what he accepts or declines (Benveniste, cited in Harland, 1987).

Internal emotional states are a synthesis of mental and physical elements that influence our performance and facilitate our unconscious processes – informal learning is one of them. For example, they say Mozart was in a special inner state of dreaming and satisfaction when he created and he could even see, feel and taste his music.

The ability to choose internal emotional state we want to be in is a powerful tool for achieving one's own goal, irrespective of whether this goal is to learn a foreign language, communication skills, time-management, or to finish an assignment or to get a creative idea. There are several ways, techniques and strategies for reaching a certain inner emotional state we would like to be in in a specific moment that can also be used by a learning facilitator when preparing learning events, for instance, choice of perceptual position, visualization, internal dialogue, anchoring, reframing limiting beliefs, change of sub modalities etc. When developing awareness of internal emotional states that are most appropriate for learning, so called coaching »questions« and processes of modelling and self-modelling can be of great help.

After long years of research of optimal experience in the fields of leadership, teamwork, cooperation, communication and learning, a psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1997) used exactly the process of modelling to define the internal state of »flow«. Efficient state of flow, a state in which remarkable results in many fields can be achieved, derives from a **balance** between **abilities** that bring an internal state of **security**, and **demands** or **challenges**.



Picture 1. Review of »flow« in relation to boredom and frustration regarding individual's abilities and task difficulty.

If we succeed in ensuring this balance between abilities and challenges, we avoid feeling boredom, which is often to »blame« for cessation of learning activities, or feeling stress, which is mentioned even more frequently as a cause to stop learning or even to delay the beginning of the learning process.

As a consequence of changes in perception of time (that runs very fast during flow, but at the same time, there is always enough of it left), openness towards people, novelties, feelings of satisfaction, happiness and fulfilment, flow brings us faster and more efficient learning.

If learning facilitators want to spread love towards learning and intertwine activities of their organizations with informing, raising awareness and educating any given target audience, recognizing and facilitating flow is the road to success. This road though is paved with the creativity of learning supporters and their own experience of flow during their activities and their love for work.

The more I want to get something done, the less I call it work.

Richard Bach

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997) *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, New York, Basic Books.

Harland, R. (1987) *More Structural Linguistics." Superstructuralism: the Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, London, Methuen