

Strategies for Enhancing Flow State among School Educators

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Abstract:- In every society, teachers are instrumental in shaping the ideology of the students. They influence the learning and conceptual understanding of their students in a significant manner. It is therefore important for them to immerse themselves in the process of teaching and to maintain a balance in the face of challenges experienced during teaching. Like any other activity, teaching has its own challenges. Here, the Flow state plays an essential role in fostering teachers' motivation, concentration, and engagement in confounding activities. Effective teaching involves the application of a student-centered approach in order to understand the requirements of each student that would help facilitate their learning. For the fulfillment of this purpose, it becomes imperative for every educator to acquire the skill to get fully absorbed in the process of teaching, which can be practically applied by being in a flow state.

This paper theoretically highlights some strategies which can be used by the school administration to enhance the Flow state of the educators.

Keywords: Flow state, Effective Education, Meditational Practices, Student-centered teaching, Strength-based approach.

1. Introduction

In recent times psychologists have increasingly recognized the importance of flow in providing a better approach to improve the respective activities of the teachers. According to research, the flow state is considered highly functional which correlates with enhancement of performance in learning, creative actions, and sports activities. Scholars have suggested that a flow state can be induced. It is therefore important that while involving in any activity, if the other disruptions distract the experience then the individual cannot be in the state of flow (Nakamura et al., 2009). In the school setting flow state among educators enriches their work in a significant manner and also improves their quality of teaching where students get engaged in proper understanding and learning of concepts. It also enables the teachers to strengthen their skills and is a benefit for students in the course of their endeavor in academics, sports and co-curricular activities. Therefore to facilitate the teaching learning process in a school environment it becomes imperative to comprehend the concept of flow and take steps to enhance this positive state among the educators.

2. Conceptualizing Flow

Flow is a widely known concept of positive psychology. The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi gave this concept of flow in the year 1975. It is a psychological state of mind in which a person is fully absorbed in a task with a sense of control and the reflective self-consciousness is lost. Flow state of mind can be mentioned as an optimal experience according to Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre which means that in this psychological state, the individual simultaneously feels motivated, cognitively efficient, and happy. This zone of mind is experienced when an individual is intrinsically motivated and enjoys engaging in the activity. It is considered to be a rewarding experience that generally leads to positive consequences. When individuals act with full engagement in their tasks/activities they feel a holistic sensation which can be called the flow state of mind according to

Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.36). Jeanne Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi in the year 2002 mentioned the following components of flow:

1. A focused concentration that is intense on the current activity of the individual.
2. There is a merging of awareness of the person and his actions.
3. The self-consciousness reflective nature is lost.
4. Over one's actions there is a feeling of control.
5. The temporal experience is distorted.
6. The engagement in the activity gives an intrinsically rewarding experience which Csikszentmihalyi calls autotelic nature.

This flow state of mind occurs during sports, creative, and work-related activities where the individual's attention is fully centered on the stimulus field.

3. Strategies for enhancing Flow among teachers

The Flow state of the school teachers can be uplifted using the strategies mentioned, which are useful in increasing the flow state in their respective school environment. It explains the ways of intervention and training programs through which flow state can be boosted among teachers in a school setting. These strategies are:

3.1 Strength-based approach at the workplace

In the area of positive psychology, several kinds of research indicate the significance of using strengths in the workplace. In the workplace when there is a match between an individual's strengths, abilities, skills, job requirements, and personality, it is then one feels involved and engaged (War, 1999). According to Peterson & Seligman (2004), the 'new' psychology of traits distinguishes individual differences that are general and stable, and are shaped by the individual's environment and therefore capable of change.

The usage of assessment tools including Clifton Strengths Finder 2.0 and the Values in Action Inventory of Character Strengths among teachers can facilitate the process of identifying the strengths. After identifying their strengths, teachers can be assisted in making a specific plan for using those strengths of their personality which, they have not used in the act of teaching. This provides a way to re-craft teaching in which teachers can capitalize on more of their talents and strengths. The role of these two strengths assessment in uplifting flow state among teachers is hereafter explained.

- A. In a school environment helping teachers experience flow or more engagement requires identifying and developing their unique strengths and talents. The Clifton strengths assessment is meant to identify the unique sequence of individual's 34 themes of talent. Studies suggest that individuals who are aware and also exercise their Clifton strengths are found to be six times engaged in their tasks. With regard to engagement in the work, this assessment can be conducted on teachers to make them aware about their strengths. They can be encouraged to exercise these strengths during teaching related activities and interaction with their students. It uplifts the engagement and absorption in work and results into enhancement of flow state during teaching.
- B. Another assessment for identifying strengths is the Value in Action Classification of Character Strengths. In context of teaching, one of the benefits of knowing character strengths and acting upon them is more engagement which can help in maximizing flow state of teachers. Dr. Seligman theorized that by bringing one's highest strengths into effect results in the 5 areas of well-being (PERMA) i.e. more positive emotion, more engagement, better relationships, more meaning, more accomplishments.

3.2 Meditational Practices

Meditation is a self-regulation practice that is exercised by means of mindfulness or by focusing attention on a particular thought or object or activity. It gives the experience of calmness, concentration, clarity, and emotional stability. According to Daniel Goleman (2012), the practices of meditation currently are taken out of the context

of religion and are available for the advantage of anyone, irrespective of religious beliefs. Studies associate the practice of meditation with the experience of flow.

When the practitioners enter the meditative state, the feeling of effortless attention is reported to them. At the time of flow state of mind, effortless attention is also felt. Both flow experience and practice of meditation are characterized by deep concentration on an assured focus. Some other attributes that are common between meditation and flow are loss of senses of space, time, and self-awareness.

In this perspective, efforts can be taken by the schools to initiate meditational practices for the teachers and encourage them to participate in them. Researches on flow suggest that meditation improves a person's capacity to experience flow state.

Therefore to enhance teachers' flow state, a guided meditation commentary for five to ten minutes, in the staff room or in a classroom setting can be organized at least twice a day. This regular few minutes' meditational practice within the school environment can improve their concentration, engagement and flow state in the act of teaching.

3.3 Deriving a sense of purpose in teaching

When an individual finds purpose in his work, it naturally deepens his or her engagement and absorption in that work. Individuals start deriving meaning when they perceive that, through their job activities they can make some contribution to their society. In the area of education, the flow state becomes a part of teachers' teaching process when they derive purpose from their act of teaching. Concerning purpose in the work, American psychologist Amy Wrzesniewski and her colleagues have explained it as a calling(work).

In a school environment, the feeling of deriving a purpose is significant because it gives a fulfilling experience during one's job hours. It can be fostered among educators using intervention programs. These intervention programs are designed to instill teacher motivation, which professionally empowers them. It reignites a sense of purpose and awakens their love for teaching. It has been observed that in the area of education, the dedicated involvement, and absorption are remarkably higher among those educators who find meaning and purpose in it. These educators experience flow while delivering a lecture or engaging in any other teaching-related activity. In a classroom, this flow experience helps educators to engage in executing the most suitable teaching practices. This positively influences student learning and quality education is maintained. Delivering quality of education is the concern of engaged teachers (McLaughlin, Pfeifer, & Stanford University Policy Institute, 1986) and in the classroom practices this concern is observable (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986).

3.4 Execution of intrinsically motivating teaching activities

The flow state explains intrinsically motivated behavior and is claimed to be an intrinsically rewarding experience. The psychologist Kruglanski (1978) indicates that intrinsically rewarding experiences are accompanied by positive effects, it is because these actions signify the contentment of one's wants that the individual needs.

As every educator has their own unique way of teaching, therefore it becomes imperative that in a school the age old traditional way of completing the curriculum be substituted with new way of teaching. It can be practically executed when teachers are encouraged to recognize their individual distinct teaching activities and methods, which motivate them to teach and give them internally rewarding experience. Further steps can be taken by schools to check whether it is being implemented. This application helps in boosting the flow state of teachers. It not only improves teacher's efficiency but also uplifts the conceptual understanding of the students. It has been proposed that, more intensely held predispositions for one's work is reflected by the engaged teaching (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986). This type of teaching is simply manifested when the educators teaching is intrinsically motivated and gives the experience of flow.

3.5 Student-centered teaching

The approach which is student-centered focuses on giving learning experiences to students that are authentic and designed for the aim to: (a) facilitate content based deep understanding and conjunction with development of skills

that are of higher-order thinking like synthesis and/or analysis, (b) make certain active engagement, (c) give choice and voice to student, and (d) support innovation and inquiry (Cattaneo, 2017).

It has been suggested that the experience of flow in relation to individual's interest structure and goal is a force of expansion, also for skills growth in existing interest (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 1999). In this direction efforts can be taken by the school authorities to create awareness among school educators' to develop interest in student centered approach of teaching which creates an expansion in teachers' experience of flow state. It can be implemented by understanding and satisfying students' academic and emotional perspectives and making this a professional and individual goal for every teacher.

3.6 Mindful and non-judgmental approach of teaching

The mindful approach involves self-awareness while teaching, where the educators are instinctively cognizant about themselves as well as their students. The mindful approach advances teachers' awareness and focus, as well as enriches their responsiveness to pupils' needs. Studies assert that it helps to increase concentration. Therefore in a classroom setting, teachers' flow state can be boosted by creating self-awareness among educators that uplifts their concentration and absorption while teaching.

This Mindful approach of teaching sustains their flow experience, as being non-judgmental enables them to be less entangled in the distractions of the day-to-day happenings of school and also retains their absorption level in educating. This teaching has a positive effect on students. It allows them to be more expressive and improves their participation in school activities which holistically gives them better learning experiences.

For the practical application of a non-judgmental approach, teachers can daily take out few minutes in silence to devotedly contemplate positive affirmations in a fully aware and mindful manner. It acts as a positive food for thought that shifts teachers' perspective toward the brighter side of life, where teaching is one such important area of their lives. These affirmations can be different each day to create novelty and enhance a non-judgmental outlook towards self, others, and the environment.

3.7 Skill development training programs in teaching

In the diverse area of science, commerce and arts teachers are always considered to be constant learners. It is therefore imperative for them to update themselves with the changing times of modern education, and broaden their mindset with new courses and training programs, with regard to skill development in teaching. Incorporating educational technology in the classroom setting can increase flow experience among teachers when handled properly.

Skill development in teaching is in context with updating school teachers with the current educational technology and making use of it while teaching in a classroom. It was asserted by Schuler and Brunner (2009) that with regard to higher training motivation flow was associated.

Concepts of each subject that at times are not easy to explain can be clarified with complete absorption, by means of audio-video presentations in a classroom. The use of multimedia gives varied techniques of teaching to the teachers, for better and improved learning experiences of the students. When teachers learn to effectively use Educational Technology (ET) as an aid in their classroom teaching, their engagement and involvement in teaching process increases, which further enhances their flow state and grasps the attention of the students.

The significance of the experience of engagement in activities was acknowledged by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). For teachers, the practice of multimedia in the act of teaching is interesting emotionally, and filled with curiosity, as the audio-visuals of the theoretical and practical subjects reduce the monotony from the customary mode of teaching. This increases the flow experience among the teachers as the work of Silvia (2008) suggests close links between flow and curious emotion of interest. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) also emphasizes making effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools.

School administration should organize training programs for the teachers that can positively influence their classroom teaching practice and create an influence on the learning of their pupils. With the advent of simplified and improved technology in the areas of education, teachers should be assisted and supported from time to time

by the professionals in gaining expertise in acquiring skills to use technology as part of day to day classroom teaching, where smart class is an example.

3.8 Positive School Environment

An overall productive, fulfilling teaching experience and healthy interactions with students, co-workers and authorities, build up a positive school environment for the educators. The flow state of the teachers influences their teaching experience and their interactions with students and others in a constructive manner.

Application of constructivist teaching method can also be exercised to maintain a healthy school environment. In this teaching method, teachers' allow the students to get actively involved in knowledge construction, classroom discussions, interactions and other teaching-learning activities. It gives students the experience of being accepted and valued. Efforts should be taken by the school authorities to endorse the importance of flow among educators and by giving recognition to their hard put efforts from time to time as well as promoting positive interactions between student-teacher and teacher-co-workers.

4. Conclusion

The aforesaid discussion explains strategies through which teachers' flow state can be enhanced in a school setting. Ways like meditational practices, strength-based approach, deriving purpose, student-centered teaching, mindful and non-judgmental approach, training programs, intrinsic motivating teaching activities, and positive school environment, all these approaches independently and jointly can elevate teachers' flow state. The educators' flow experience is an important aspect of effective teaching. It nurtures their efficiency by merging the action of teaching and awareness of being fully present. This excludes irrelevant feelings and thoughts from their consciousness, due to focused concentration and attention towards the way of teaching. The satisfying experience of the flow state of mind allows the educators to be happy, motivated, productive, and enjoy the process of teaching. It is therefore beneficial for the schools to implement all these possible strategies to enhance their teachers' flow experience.

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