

FLOW IN LIFE

Discovering Flow in Everyday Life

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Abstract

This paper is a reflection about three different subjects that are addressed in the book Finding Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The first subject addressed is losing track of time by focusing your attention on a task. The second deals with creating psychic energy in our lives. Finally, the third subject discussed is how to go about creating flow in education. In each one of these sections the author sites a personal experience and her opinion about the subject.

Discovering Flow in Everyday Life

Our physical processes and environment decide much of our life, but our thoughts and emotions can determine our quality of life. Life is the experiences we have during the time we are here on Earth. Experience takes place in time, so time is the ultimate scarce resource (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). We must take care when choosing how to spend our valuable time to create a life of quality.

Losing a Sense of Time

Since time is of the essence, should we ever lose track of it? Most definitely! When we lose track of time we are in deep concentration focusing on the task at hand. To pursue mental operations to any depth, a person has to learn to concentrate attention. Without focus, consciousness is in a state of chaos (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). This is one problem that children encounter today. They jump around from one activity to another not being allowed to focus for a long period of time. I love to hear these words from my children, "I'm bored". That means that they are not being constantly stimulated and have some free time to create their own flow. It is not an easy thing to do, but one that is missing from our busy, over-scheduled chaotic lives. One of the first steps in creating a quality of life is learning to focus our attention.

Focusing attention to create flow can be an exhilarating experience. I do not allow myself this indulgence as much as I did before I had children. I find that being a mother puts me at the mercy of my family and their needs. If I space out and lose track of time someone may be left waiting, lost or hungry. However, there are times when I have lost track of time with my children. Usually it is doing things that don't amount to much, like sitting on the swing outside and making up stories about the stars or the clouds. When moments like that occur I want time

to stand still. This is my true enjoyment and a bit of that quality of life that Csikszentmihalyi talks about in his book. "The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

One moment in my life when I stretched my mind was when I was working as an animator on a new computer system. I was still learning the ins and outs of the software, but had a deadline to meet. I stayed late, took a dinner break and thought to myself I will just go back and figure out this one problem. Next thing I knew, people were coming into the office. I had totally lost track of time and worked all night long. My boss came in, took one look at me and sent me home. Of course, I was young, single and just out of college, where "all-nighters" were a common event. Focusing my attention like that today that would kill me and my family and they would probably disown me. Thankfully, I still have "flow experience", just not as long.

Creating Free Psychic Energy

Curiosity is the key to stimulating psychic energy and improving the quality of life. "If one has failed to develop curiosity and interest in the early years, it is a good idea to acquire them now, before it is too late to improve the quality of life" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). We are so focused on our daily lives of quiet desperation, with our nose to the grindstone, running from here to there that we don't take the time be curious about life. Our life is uninteresting and we become disinterested in life. This is very apparent when you compare the lives of adults to those of children.

I definitely see the difference in my life and attitude as an adult with my many responsibilities to that of my children who have less to cope with on a daily basis. They are

This program is designed to help the students focus their attention by using a series of balance, auditory and visual exercises. I have been volunteering in this program and have seen marked improvement in my son's attention span. Teaching these methods to our children will show them how to focus their attention and can help them to eventually achieve flow in the classroom. If they can focus on the task at hand and ignore all of the other distractions in a classroom then they can be successful.

Another way to achieve success in the classroom is for the teacher to establish harmony. The teacher needs to pay attention to their students needs and to create an enjoyable learning environment. Csikszentmihalyi states, "Only when there is harmony between the goals of the participants, when everyone is investing psychic energy into a joint goal, does being together become enjoyable"(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). If all classrooms could work toward this objective, then maybe both the teachers and the students would take pleasure from the educational environment.

Conclusion

This book has been my favorite selection for the semester. There are so many gems of wisdom in this book. My favorite is the Buddhist advice, "Act always as if the future of the Universe depended on what you did, while laughing at yourself for thinking that whatever you do makes any difference" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). I am going to try and use this bit of philosophy in my daily life.

This is a read that can actually make an impact on your life just by changing your outlook and attitude. I am going to read his other books, Flow and Creativity this summer.

Reference

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding Flow: the psychology of engagement with everyday life*.

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Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow*. New York City: Harper & Row Publishers.