

Active LEARNING

Increasing Flow in the Classroom



Pat Hollingsworth & Gina Lewis



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This book was written by practicing teachers who are driven to provide the best, most meaningful learning experiences for each and every one of their students. This unifying purpose provides the intellectual vigor that creates a learning atmosphere where students are highly engaged and involved.

In this book, these experienced classroom teachers share their most useful and engrossing ways to create optimal learning experiences for all students, practical strategies that have been used with students of all ages, from pre-school through graduate school. These teachers know that getting and keeping students' attention is vital to the learning process.

In *Flow* (1990), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes attention as a type of mental and emotional energy. Flow is a state of consciousness in which a person becomes so totally immersed in an activity that time flies by unnoticed. He says that true "enjoyment happens only as a result of unusual investments of attention" (46). In other words, pleasure can be felt without effort (by electrical or chemical methods on pleasure points in the brain), but full enjoyment cannot.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) says that to experience flow you have to expend additional mental and emotional energy. A life filled with exciting flow experiences is more worth living than one spent consuming passive entertainment. Neurologist Richard Restak confirms the wisdom of active experiences: "The 'use it or lose it' formula applies to each of us no matter what our age. Moreover, the exercise of our brain's inherent powers is highly pleasurable" (2001, 14). This is a lesson for us as well as for students. In this book, teachers vividly describe ways to use and direct mental and emotional energy with the goal of creating lasting and more meaningful learning that leads to flow experiences. The long-term benefits for students who understand and experience flow include a greater chance of them discovering a passion that might guide them toward particular careers or deeply satisfying hobbies. There is also a greater likelihood that they will embrace lifelong learning and be more willing to take chances, persist through initial challenges, and overcome fear and apprehension in school, work, and their personal lives simply by harnessing the power of flow.

The opportunity for the flow experience to occur is greatly enhanced when individuals are having what Dan Rea (2003) calls "serious-fun." Educators encourage serious-fun by having high expectations for work quality and by orchestrating engaging classroom activities. Active learning that emphasizes "serious-fun" can help students focus their attention, increase their enjoyment of learning, and set the stage for flow experiences.

The lesson steps in this book are similar to those that create flow: Students understand and relate to goals, become immersed in the activity, pay attention to what is happening, and learn to enjoy the immediate experience. Lessons describe ways to combine goal setting, active learning, and self-reflection to help students reach optimal experiences.

Pat's Introduction to Active Learning

I was introduced to active learning early in my life. My grandmother delighted in the visual world and in storytelling. She taught me to love the birds, trees, and flowers of our rural North Carolina community. She told me wonderful stories that fired my imagination. Her teaching method was active. We walked in the yard looking at plants and flowers. We put out food for the birds, which she identified as they came to the feeder. I picked up acorns and fed them to the pigs. I helped plant, weed, and harvest in the garden. My grandmother encouraged me to be an active learner and to reflect on what I had learned by drawing pictures about it.

As a teacher, I have always been able to understand how students feel when they have to sit and listen for long periods without a break. In similar situations, my eyes glaze over and my mind wanders just as theirs do. Over the years I have learned what good teachers everywhere have learned: Meaningful and lasting learning must engage the learner. "The brain is biologically programmed to attend first to information that has strong emotional content" (Wolfe 2001, 88). We have to get and keep student attention. We have to tap into their emotions.

I recently read that every cell in our bodies has an emotional component (Shanor 1999). We have feelings about everything we do. When those feelings are positive, we are more likely to pay attention and be engaged. My positive experiences with learning, and probably yours also, brought me to and have kept me teaching.

"We know emotion is very important to the educative process because it drives attention, which drives learning and memory" (Sylwester 1995, 106). Most of us go into fields of study because of the positive experiences and emotions that we associate with the field. These are the kinds of experiences that we as teachers want to encourage in students.



CREATIVE INVENTOR

What Is Active Learning?

Students are actively learning when they are intensely engaged, mentally or physically. Active learning is vigorous, lively, energetic, intense, strong, and effective. Active learning is involved learning; it takes place when the learners are excited, mentally alert, and caught up in the experience. The lessons in this book include many strategies to keep learners alert and engaged. Here are a few examples of ways that active learning can increase flow in the classroom.

Relating to Goals

When teachers are explicit about the goals of learning, students understand and relate to what they are to gain from various lessons. This is an essential first step when introducing a lesson. Students need to feel a part of this process. To facilitate this, each lesson plan includes a section called Measurable Learning Objectives, which summarizes lesson aims to share with students, and a section near the end called Reflection, which includes advice on helping students reflect

on the experience to determine how well they reached their goals and whether they experienced elements of flow during the lesson.

Engaging Students

Teachers often instinctively know that to make learning more meaningful, students must exert more mental and emotional energy. In other words, we often want students to reach the state of flow—but just wanting this to happen does not make it happen. The thoughtfully planned, engaging activities in this book keep students mentally alert and absorbed.

Using Art, Movement, and the Senses

The lesson strategies are designed to employ as many of the five senses as possible to fully engage students. The arts are an ideal way to employ a variety of the senses, encourage students' sense of community, provide multiple tools

for discovering and expressing meaning, build confidence in and enthusiasm about learning, and reinforce the cornerstones of all learning: our cognitive, emotional, attentional, and motor systems (Sylwester 2004; Jensen 2001). Rules for Art and Life (pages 68 and 76), Exploring the World of Artists (page 83), and Active Learning to Develop Goals (page 9) encourage sensory learning, particularly through sight, touch, hearing, and smell.

Many of the lessons also use the strategy of physical movement to engage students. Movement Arts (page 25), History of Architecture (page 93), Thor and the Missing Hammer (page 31), and The Story of the Trojan Horse (page 41) use bodily movement extensively.

Varying the Pace and Activities

To keep minds alert and active, vary the pace and type of activities. Each of the lessons provides ideas for changing the pace, and each lesson is readily adaptable so that you can easily add your own ideas for variety. Active learning can be mental as well as physical. Changing from large group work to individual work to small group work is just one easy and effective way to vary the mental pace.



THE JOY OF THE ARTS!

Chapter 6

The Story of the Trojan Horse



Drama for Elementary Students

— Gina Lewis —

Grades: 1–6

Time Frame Options

- Day 1: 30 minutes
- Day 2: 1 hour
- Subsequent days: 1 hour daily

Measurable Learning Objectives

Share these aims with students:

- Day 1: Students will become familiar with a historical event by hearing and reading the story of the Trojan Horse.
- Day 2: Students will write and memorize lines to fit the story.
- Subsequent days: Students will invent acting and movement to fit the story.
- Students will create masks, costumes, and sets to fit the play.

The Story of the Trojan Horse

Drama is an excellent device for the active learning of history. Once students are actively involved in costume, setting, and dialogue, the stories of history become real and easier to retain in long-term memory. Feel free to improvise and modify this play to fit your classroom. The story “Ulysses and the Trojan Horse” from the SAILS curriculum *Ancient Greece* workbook (Hollingsworth 2000) served as a guide for this play. Read it to your students to give them an idea of the sequence and flow to follow. Students will be able to create the play almost independently following the guide of that book. The concept can apply to other historical periods as well: Students could improvise a Lewis and Clark skit, act out a play based on Paul Revere’s ride, or adapt a familiar fairy tale during a Middle Ages unit.

The greatest thing to remember in teaching drama is to be flexible and let the play evolve. The students are much more interested when they know that their ideas and contributions will be considered and developed into the play.

Materials

- costume materials (sheets, skirts, vests, fabric)
- cardboard or posterboard for sets
- pencils and paper for all students
- markers or paint
- miscellaneous craft supplies such as scissors, glue, tape, string, and so forth
- “Ulysses and the Trojan Horse” (page 45)
- Sequence of Events (page 44)
- student flow journals (see page 7)

Supplementary Materials

- tagboard for masks
- simple props, such as toy ships and arrows
- musical instruments for sound effects
- camera
- scrapbook

Preparation

1. Read the play starting on page 45 to become familiar with it.
2. Enlarge the Sequence of Events (page 44) onto 11" x 17" paper (or larger, if possible) and post it where the entire class can see it.
3. Gather the materials, with the idea in mind of keeping the set and costumes simple so that students focus primarily on the acting and the story.



Getting Students Excited about the Topic

1. Begin by describing the lesson and sharing the aims (see Measurable Learning Objectives). Tell students about the play you are about to read and ask them to think about the characters, props, sets, and costumes they would need to present it.

“Has anyone ever heard of Achilles? Or Odysseus? How about the Trojan War? I am going to read ‘Ulysses and the Trojan Horse,’ and I want you to visualize this as a play. I need each one of you to consider the different characters from the story and think about the props and sets that might be required.”

2. Read the play aloud.

Chapter 11

Exploring the World of Artists



Art in the Garden

— Donna Davilla —

Grades: 6–8

Time Frame Options

- Pretrip introduction: 30 minutes
- Time in garden: 1½ to 2 hours
- Subsequent days: three to five 30- to 45-minute sessions

Measurable Learning Objectives

Share these aims with students:

- Students' drawings in the garden will be superior in detail and variety to those sketched prior to the field trip.
- Students will be able to identify the principles of design through the context of a garden.
- Students will demonstrate the application of the principles of design in creating a work of art.
- Students will be able to identify the art of Monet and O'Keeffe and compare their characteristic styles.
- Students' knowledge of plant names will increase.

Exploring the World of Artists

As students return to the classroom in the late summer, their minds often linger on their experiences outdoors. A trip to a garden can be an enjoyable transition for students into a review of art vocabulary, an introduction to artists and design principles, practice in observation in both science and art, and a chance to express learning, connections, and inspiration in drawings and paintings. This type of learning asks students to recall their experiences and broaden their knowledge base for vocabulary, visual recognition, and application of their field trip experience. Active learning merges the visual, verbal, and kinesthetic in this lesson, offering opportunities also for science and art studies to merge.

Materials

- pencil and sketchbook for each student
- 3" x 5" index card for each student
- scissors
- set of nine colored flags or other cloths (a different colored set of nine for every two or three students)
- Principles of Design chart (page 90) for each student
- art prints or books of art featuring Claude Monet and Georgia O'Keeffe (see, for example, Castro 1985 and Nunhead 1994).
- Monet and O'Keeffe Venn Diagram (page 91) for each student
- Flower and Shrub Vocabulary chart (page 92) for each student
- student flow journals (see page 7)

Preparation

1. Arrange a field trip to a local garden. This can be a neighbor's garden near the school, a commercial garden, or a botanical garden. Try to arrange for the chief gardener to take you and your students on a walking tour. Be sure you get permission to have students leaving their colored flags or cloth in different places around the garden (temporarily).
2. Arrange the field trip with your school and parents, including permission slips, lunch, transportation, and so forth as you are required to do.
3. Photocopy all handouts: Principles of Design chart (page 90); Monet and O'Keeffe Venn Diagram (page 91); and Flower and Shrub Vocabulary chart (page 92).
4. Create a viewfinder for each student by cutting a small square (about 1 ½") in the center of each index card.
5. Gather Monet and O'Keeffe prints or books for the classroom and for taking with you on the field trip.



Getting Students Excited about the Topic

1. Engage students by reminding them of the summer and promising a taste of the outdoors:

“Do you remember a wonderful time that you had outdoors this summer? You might have been playing ball, hiking, or just walking about your neighborhood. Today we are going to be outdoors in a garden to sketch and to learn more about the principles of design.”
2. Share the aims of the lesson with students, as described in the Measurable Learning Objectives section, so that they understand and relate to what they will achieve. Summarize the four main tasks students will accomplish on the field trip:
 - In small groups, they will identify each principle of design on the chart (page 90) as they find it in the garden.
 - Students will think about the differences between the artistic styles of Claude Monet and Georgia O'Keeffe, as discussed in Guided Practice in the Classroom (page 86), before they leave for the field trip.
 - Students will make sketches while in the garden, looking carefully at the details of plants and especially the flowers as they draw. Later, they will create paintings based on the principles of design they identify in the garden.



OBSERVING NATURE

- Students will need to pay attention to the names of plants and try to expand their knowledge of them.



Guided Practice in the Classroom

1. As students arrive in the classroom on the day of the field trip, ask each of them to make quick sketches of flowers during the first five minutes.
2. After the sketches are completed, engage students in a discussion of gardens they have seen:

“What was special about that garden? Where is it located? Who introduced you to it?”
3. Next have students write as many names of flowers or other fauna as they can recall in the Flower and Shrub Vocabulary chart (page 92).
4. Lead a discussion about French artist Claude Monet. Explain how he created his own garden, which inspired his paintings. Show examples. Discuss art vocabulary of foreground, middle ground, and background. Have students practice pointing out each through art slides or prints.

About Active Learning: Increasing Flow in the Classroom

Would you like your students to experience flow in your classroom? Would you like them to be so immersed in an activity that they forget about recess? The complete lesson plans presented in this volume will motivate students through active involvement in the learning process. Ancient Greece comes alive when students dramatize key historical events. Architectural styles translated into movement, sound, and body shapes are easy to remember. Student-created board games make reviewing math facts fun. Measurable objectives, step-by-step procedures, optional teacher scripts, student handouts, evaluation tools, and enrichment activities provide structure for lessons to use in math, language arts, social studies, science, and the fine arts.

What is “Flow”?

Flow is a “state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost for the sheer sake of doing it.”

—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

“Few books in education have provided anything like this extraordinarily rich offering of creative ideas for igniting the hearts and minds of students. Teachers will be delighted by the book’s ease and accessibility, allowing them to quickly grasp and adapt any of the applications. Clearly written and displayed, Active Learning promises to transform even the most “turned off” students into engaged and impassioned learners.”

—Joan Franklin Smutny, Director of The Center for Gifted, National-Louis University, Evanston, Illinois

“Active Learning is a treasure for teachers to have in their classrooms. It presents the concept of flow and demonstrates in practical lessons how to involve students in their own learning. One of the particular strengths of the text is the format used for all lesson plans. It facilitates an integrated curriculum for thematic teaching in all areas of learning by careful planning, thoughtful teaching, and reflective assessment. Praise to the range of areas that the arts prove relevant! The book is a jewel!”

—Diane Montgomery, Ph.D., Professor, Educational Psychology, School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology, Oklahoma State University

About the Authors

Dr. Pat Hollingsworth has been the director of University School at The University of Tulsa since 1985. In addition to her duties as director, she teaches art, kindergarten, and university graduate classes. An active member of the National Association for Gifted Children, Pat has served on the board for over nine years. She has given presentations on her books and articles in Canada, Mexico, Europe, and all over the United States.



Gina Lewis teaches third grade at University School at the University of Tulsa. She is a member of the board of directors of the Oklahoma Association for Gifted and Creative Teachers. Twice nominated for Disney’s outstanding teacher award, Gina is currently completing her master’s degree in gifted education at the University of Tulsa.



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