

## APPENDIX K: THINKING THAT LEADS TO AN ENERGY FLOW

We have all been in a situation in which we felt “in the flow.” In teaching, it is often the experience of everything clicking. In this state, we lose track of time, and we become immersed in our task as our energy flows out. We feel it and lead students effortlessly; the creative energy in the room is palpable. At the end of the experience, we feel energized and alive. On the other hand, we have experienced episodes in which there was no such flow of energy. In this state, time drags and we have to really work to get positive results of any kind. At the end of these days, we feel fatigued or that our energies are stuck, perhaps frustrated and unsatisfied.

What is the difference? Why do some days boost our energy and others drain it? Most of the difference is caused by our mental state. Granted, there are external factors such as weather, the energy level of our students, or curriculum and testing requirements. However, in events in which there was a flow of energy, there are common ingredients and most of them are controllable by our approach. Here is a list of some of elements that contribute to our energy flow:

1. **Saying “Yes” to the Moment.** Recall how you felt in those situations in which you were in a “groove,” and that things were “going somewhere.” Time became irrelevant and you became completely immersed in the present. Contrast that to times you felt that the day was dragging. You were likely aware of how slowly the clock was moving, not nearly fast enough. When we say “yes” to the moment, we tap into a source that is not bound by time -- the place where creativity and insight are born.
2. **A Focus on Giving.** When we find ourselves in the flow within collective settings, we are likely putting great attention on the needs of others. Our awareness then goes out to the group and we forget ourselves. When this happens in the classroom we do not feel as though we are the origin of our teaching as much as a conduit of knowledge from a larger creative source. These moments of flow contrast sharply to times when we feel that we are pulling teeth to get students to learn. It will be useful to check in on our thinking periodically and ask ourselves, “Am I teaching for them, or for me (i.e., ego)?”
3. **A Clear Intention and Acting with Purpose.** Confidence is not bravado but the absence of fear. As soon as we allow fearful thoughts, our focus shifts from the moment and the emergent sense of intention within us and creates a defense response against the object of our fear. We spend a lot of time thinking about all the things that might go wrong (in the form of fear of failure, negative expectancy, the general fear that we are not quite sure how things are going to turn out with our lesson, or even paranoia that the students are thinking ill of us), and fearing arising problems. This fear kills our confidence and our flow. When we tap into the moment and act with a clear intention, fear tends to dissolve.

**Chapter Reflection 16-q:** This constant voice of fear may not seem obvious, but take any two-minute stretch of time and listen to the messages that run through your head. How many are related to fear or anxiety, especially fear of a potential problem? If we want less fear, denying or fighting it will be ineffective. We need to simply allow the thoughts of fear to arrive, acknowledge that they are there, and maintain focus on what you are doing and staying with your clear sense of intention.

**4. Allowing One's Humanity to be Expressed Fully.** Reflect on those times in and out of the classroom in which you felt a flow of energy. It is likely that you felt a sense of integrity and as if your entire being was involved in what you were doing. Can you recall a feeling of flow in cases in which you allowed only parts of yourself to come out, while suppressing your personality, emotion and passion? We have all heard the old teacher's adage -- "Don't smile until Christmas." The assumption is that in allowing our humanity to come out, students will see who we really are and find a way to attack us. However, if we spend the whole day defending against being human, the cost to our sense of well-being is great (not to mention that it is ineffective, as discussed in Chapter 7). If we give ourselves permission to be human and express ourselves authentically, we will feel more flow in the moment. At the end of the day we will feel that our energy has moved through us. We do not need to already have teaching experience to act authentically. We can be authentic from day one. It will be much easier to trust this is possible if we become expert at the technical aspects of teaching, especially in technical classroom management (Chapter 12).

**5. Cultivating a Reciprocal Energy Flow.** Time flies when we are having fun. Fun is a basic human need along with power, freedom, love, self-efficacy (see Chapter 7 for discussion of these). When our own basic needs and those of our students are met, we feel a sense of reciprocal energy flow. It is difficult to feel a sense of flow when we look out at a group of young people who are frustrated and/or tuned out. The energy has to go both ways in the classroom. We can feel a sense of flow alone when engaged in a favorite pastime or creative endeavor. Finding a sense of flow when we are doing the independent tasks in our jobs can make a substantive difference to how we feel each day. For example, if our planning feels creative it will feel less burdensome. If we take the moment to enjoy what students write rather than view the task as entirely menial, we can savor the process of grading. When in the classroom, flow will require everyone's contribution. We will be more successful if what we do involves a shared sense of growth. When the activity is promoting a "psychology of success" (Chapter 8) and the group is engaged in the moment, time flies and we feel psychological movement.

We can tell we are in a flow when we feel that we lose track of time, feel energized and alive, and feel a sense of love or happiness emanating from within. When we spend more of our day in that state, our bodies will feel a difference, and we will find that many of the trials and problems we deal with on a regular basis decrease.

**Chapter Reflection 16-r:** It may be useful to reflect on times in your life that you have felt in flow. What was going on? Describe the experience.

**Chapter Reflection 16-s:** Reflect on why any of us feels the need to repress our students. What do we accomplish by doing so? What are the mental messages telling us this is a good idea? Is it that "I will lose control," or "If I show my humanity they will see I am weak?" Most of these mental messages are subtle. Can you detect them in your thinking?