

Session 1 Transcript: Josie Lewis

Hi, I'm Josie Lewis, author, speaker and artist. And I'm here today, to talk to you about flow. Flow is an incredible, neurological state of deep concentration. Everyone at every age can get into flow. Flow radically increases brain capacity, skill acquisition and creativity. It's also fun. Learners who report getting into flow more often, have increased attendance, better grades and frankly, better attitudes. Today, I wanna talk to you about the ways you can increase flow for the students in your classroom. First, I'm gonna share a little bit about my story and why I became a flow evangelist. Next, I'm gonna breakdown what flow actually is. And talk a little bit about the neuroscience involved. Don't be scared, it'll be fun. Then, I'm gonna give you a few tips on how to make your classroom into rich environments for flow. So here's my story, I've been an artist my whole life, but a few years ago I went through a personal tragedy that changed everything for ever. My full-term baby died at birth. And then I went on to have four miscarriages. I went about a two year period of loss and grief, and fear and trauma, physical illness and hormones. Meanwhile, I had been a full-time artist for my entire life. Having been awarded a BFA and an MFA, teaching, exhibiting and selling my work. But around my season of losses, I gave up being an artist. I didn't feel like I was really connecting with my audience in a meaningful way. But, I didn't give up creating. I found that when I was making art. Specifically, painting simple pattern shapes with watercolors, I would drop into an altered state that almost felt pharmacological. I would forget everything that was going on and kind of sink into the colors and the process. It was incredibly therapeutic. And I remember feeling like it was the only time where I felt like myself. Being curious, I did a lot of research. It turns out I was getting into flow. I'll say more about what flow actually is in a moment. But to finish my story, as a lark, I filmed the process of one of my watercolor paintings. I took a 40 minute painting and shrunk it down into like a 30 second timelapse. And posted it on Instagram to my 300 followers. Fully expecting that it would get 47 views. It got 20,000 views. So I posted another video and the same thing happened. So then I started posting a video every day for the last few years. And over that time I've grown a social media audience of more than two million. And have had more than a billion views of my videos. It seems that the flow I find when I paint is transferable to my audience who

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has like mini flow when they watch my videos. As a result, I got to write a book and even had an opportunity to give a TED Talk naturally on flow. Getting back to what flow actually is, like I said, flow is a state of deep concentration. The brain only has bandwidth for a certain amount of input. And when the conditions are right, all of the available focus will be funneled towards that one thing that we are working on. That means the awareness of other things drop away, like physical discomfort such as hunger or tiredness. Meanwhile the passing of time takes on other dimensions. Often feeling like it's going much faster than it actually is. You can get into flow doing literally anything. It can be gardening, it can be jogging, it can be singing, it can be painting, it can be small engine repair. There are so many different varieties of flow that just are depended on the persons wiring and personal preference. So next I wanna talk a little bit about what actually happens during flow. They've discovered some really significant things about what's happening in our brain. First of all, basic brain anatomy. We have a prefrontal cortex up front, super important, it's all about high level human stuff. Like reasoning and planning and judgment and self-awareness. We really, really need it. It's really important just to function like a human. And I like to think of this part of the brain as the strict librarian. She is there to keep things on track, to make sure nothing falls off the rails, to keep us on our schedule, to keep us on our list. And a pretty non-stop stream of self-criticism. The librarian is there to tell us where we're doing it wrong. We need the pre-frontal cortex it's so important. And part of what educators are doing is helping students to develop pre-frontal cortex functioning. Super, super important. However, in flow, the prefrontal cortex temporarily goes dark. The activity in the prefrontal cortex, when somebody is in that deep concentration goes off line. So the prefrontal cortex goes slow during flow. Okay, now I wanna talk about ways you can deliver flow in your classroom. I've got four tips for you. Number one, is being aware of the challenge to skill ratio. In the flow literature, one of the very important topics that comes up a lot is the fact that to get into flow, you have to have the right amount of challenge. If you're at zero percent challenge, it's far too easy and you're bored. If you're at 100% challenge, you're frustrated because it's just too hard. When I ask people what they think this challenge is? People say well, 50% challenge, 70% challenge, 30% challenge those low-ballers. But it turns out the challenge that you want to achieve, to get into flow is four percent my friends. That is the target. So if you

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find yourself frustrated or your students are frustrated and they're not getting into flow it's probably because the challenges are too hard and you need to dial it back down. The only difference between wrestling and dancing is cooperation. And if you find yourself wrestling or you see your students wrestling, that means the difficulty is probably a little too high and you need to dial it back down so they can reach that four percent target. Tip number two, one of the things that's really important to get into flow is having clear feedback and clear goals. One of the ways to achieve that in a learning environment is to gamify the classroom. My ninth grade English teacher, Mr. Duffy, made a literature quiz game. And the students themselves who are responsible for generating the questions and a tally was kept of the point scores. The game became a major part of the classroom experience. It was very fun and I still remember details from Dickens. Number three, every teacher knows that lecture will only get you so far. Besides not being compatible with a lot of learning styles, flow doesn't really happen when people are passively sitting and absorbing information. However, since at least some lecture is usually required in most classrooms, I have a solution. Allow doodling during the lecture. There's an incredible Harvard study, that shows that doodling while listening to a talk, helps the doodlers retain 30% more information over the passive listeners. I know as a lecturer it can feel disorienting to not have all the eyes on you. But that study, is real. I personally love to listen to audio material when I'm working in the studio and I absorb a tremendous amount of information that way. To help your students you could maybe provide a note taking print out that has note taking blanks at the top of the page. And a space for doodling at the bottom. That's an idea. Number four tip, the fourth tip for providing a classroom of flow is to allow for hands on exploration. And time to get into the flow. Well people can't get into flow in 10 minutes. It's also important to remember that everyone reaches flow differently and what works for some students may not work for all. Experimentation is necessary in the classroom as well as life. In conclusion, I consider myself a flow evangelist. Flow is a dynamic power that transcends gender, age, economic status, cultural background, language, intellectual ability and even unique personality preferences. I love to see people connect with the reality of flow. Everyone experiences it in many different ways. As educators, you're in an amazing position of bringing flow into your arsenal of learning techniques. And also, teaching students how to recognize and use flow in

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other aspects of their life. I'm gonna include some additional resources on flow in the notes so please check those out. And thanks for spending this time with me.