Creating Great Experiences Summary

From PSIA-NW Tech Series Fall Training at Wenatchee, WA
November 12-13, 2017

Play Sooner
Know Your Student
Maintain Flow

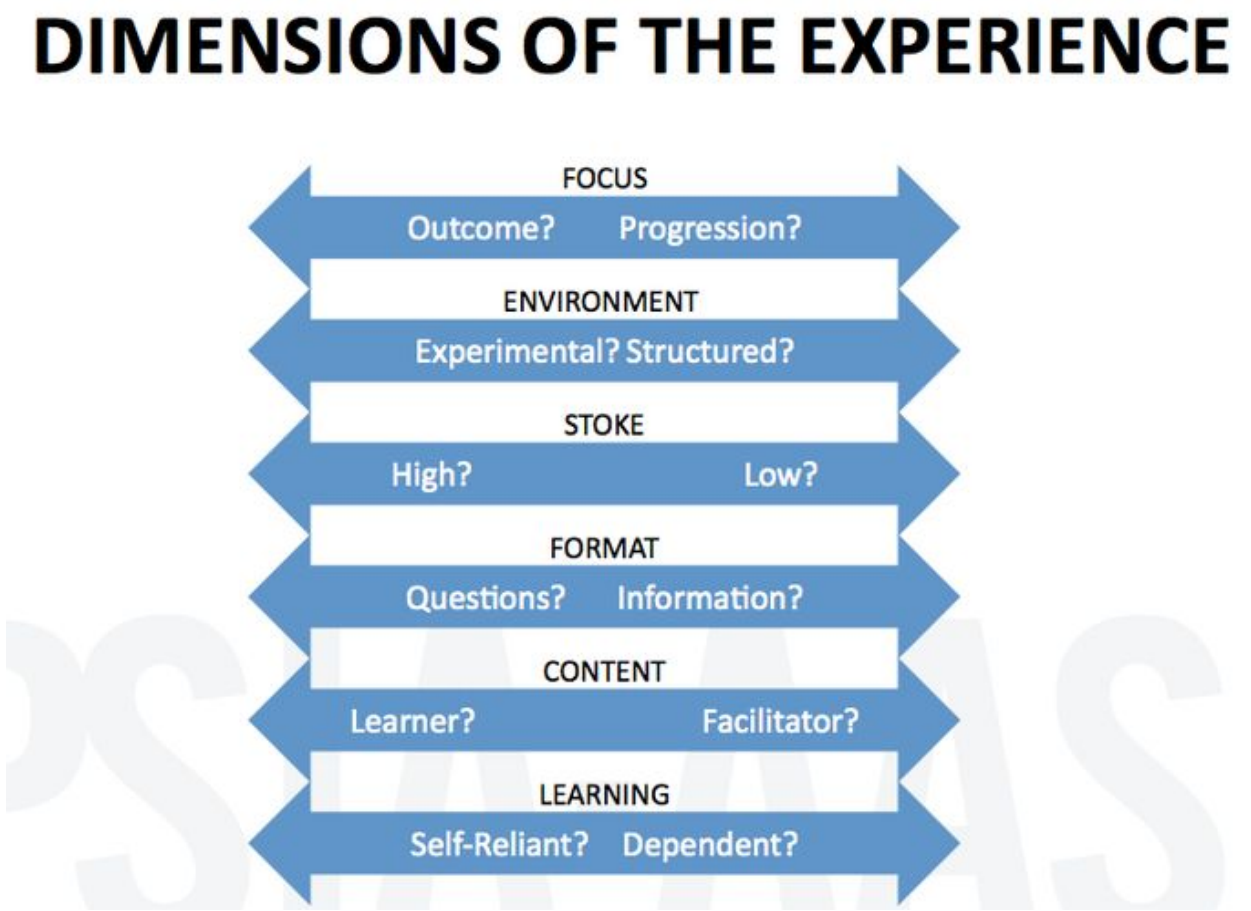
Here is the video of the Creating Great Experiences Session: https://youtu.be/VWJ9kydcKDw

Our goal was to provide a real learning experience during the session by offering 3 different experiences: slackline, fly casting, bongo board / balancing activities. The purpose was to offer activities of varying challenge and technical applications.

Play Sooner
Participants were able to choose an activity of their preference. No one was forced to do anything and some people preferred to watch vs do – which honored their comfort level of participation.

There was no "pre-planned progression" used and an emphasis on "trying" the activity. This got people "playing sooner" with very little "information" by design.

The purpose was to create a "real" learning experience and very purposely chose to coach on the far left of the "Dimensions of The Experience" (teacher moves) - which were developed from Ben Fok's article that appeared in the Fall 2017 NW Snowsports Instructor. Having Ben be one of the presenters was also very intentional.



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Starting with “play” allows 3 key things to start happening:

1. It creates a non-judgemental environment where ***there is no right or wrong***. Students can begin with their current level of understanding or ability and not be intimidated by the challenge that comes with processing information. The importance of this comes in when discussing Flow (below)
2. The instructor can observe and begin to ***profile the student*** to gather information
3. The experience begins with the ***student taking some ownership*** over the content

Know Your Student

This means much more than just their name and where they are from, and while some personal information is an important element of developing trust and part of great people skills, what we are seeking is to really "know" your student by observing them doing.

Can you give meaningful prescription before observation?

Once people started trying, the facilitators asked questions based on their observations of the participants. These questions informed the facilitator what to add to the experience next for the participant. Rather than being linear, it was situational and more of a stepping stones approach.

For example, on slack lining, I noticed that most people came off the slack line when both feet where on the slack line when trying to remain balanced. I asked the group, "Did you notice if both feet or one foot was on the slack line when the person looses balance?" They tried a little more, then came to the consensus was often both feet.

I asked a followup question, "What happens when you feel like you are loosing balance if you take one foot off the slack line vs. try to balance with both feet on?" Let's try that and see.

Then people were able to explore the benefits of one foot on vs. two feet on and come to an understanding themselves without me telling them. Ask, don't tell.

Often, when we try a new activity we are overwhelmed by unfamiliar sensations and naturally begin to process a lot of information. By purposefully asking questions the instructor can get the student to focus on the cause and effect of specific movements or have them identify specific details. This helps to create awareness and as they begin to cognitively understand what they are doing their application (performance) improves.

Yes, there were clues in the questions I was asking but not the specific answer. The question can truly be for the learner AND for the coach, so I understand how the learner is interpreting and approaching the task at hand, rather than just basing my prescription on my assessment of their physical performance. This approach helps to make the lesson student centered and as a result is more powerful in helping them learn than simply telling them what to do differently.

Small Group Reflection - Large Group Share Out
Within your activity group, if you had to pick one:
–Was the experience Focused on an **Outcome** or a **Progression**?
–Was the Environment **Experimental** or **Structured**?
–Was Stoke **High** or **Low**?
–Was the Format delivered through **Questions** or **Information?**
–Did Content originate from the **Learner** or **Facilitator**?
–Was learning **Self-Reliant** or **Dependent**?

After the activities, we regrouped and discussed their observations of their own experiences and what the facilitator did. They came to a consensus that the experience was purposefully leaning to the left on the Dimensions of The Experience slider. Most also enjoyed their experiences - whether the "stoke" came from the energy of the group or a personal sense of satisfaction getting better at the activity they were doing.

We then watched the golf coaching video where the participants counted the number of instructions each coach gave the students prior to letting them play (hit a golf ball).

I highly recommend you do the same - watch the video - and consider how many instructions YOU give prior to letting someone try something.

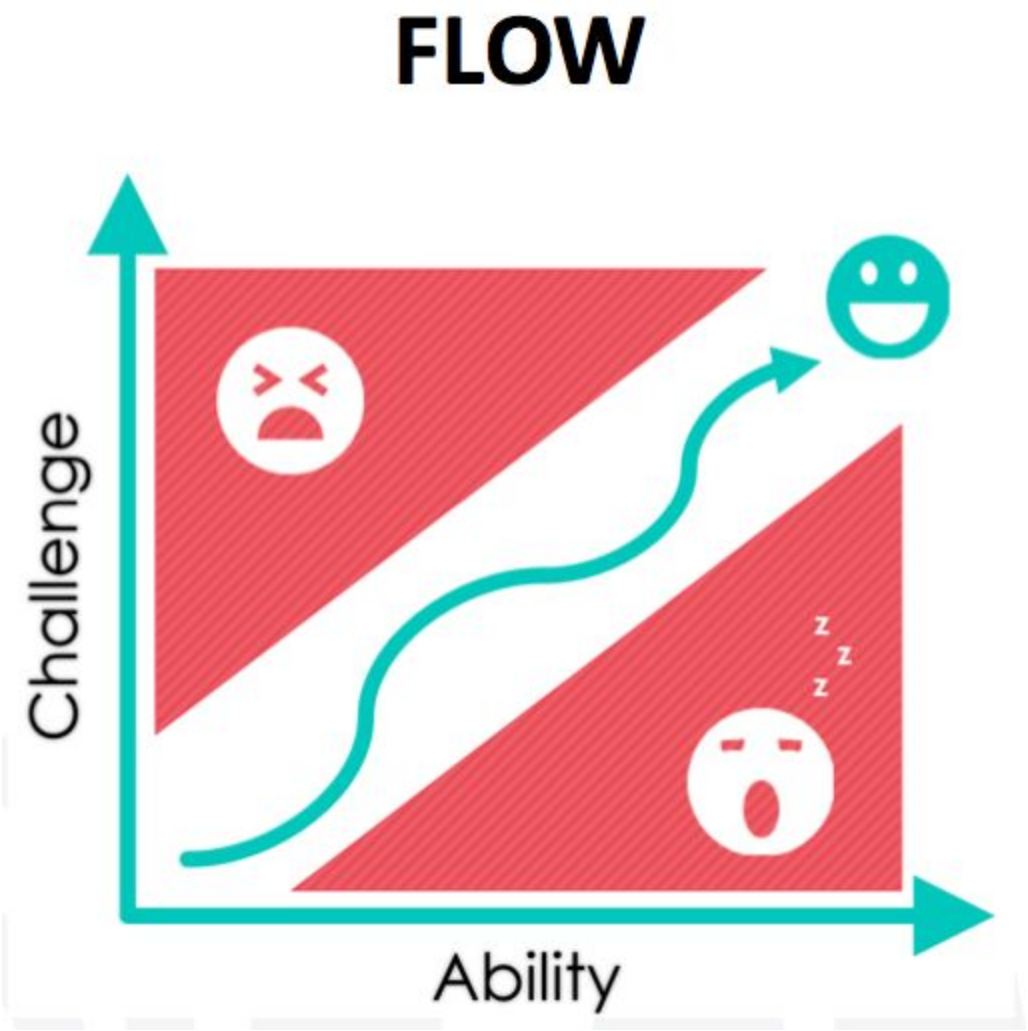
Here is the golf video: https://vimeo.com/41343451

Maintain Flow - Flow Theory
Ben shared with the group about Flow Theory by Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_(psychology)
Here's a TED Talk too: https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi asks, "What makes a life worth living?" Noting that money cannot make us happy, he looks to those who find pleasure and lasting satisfaction in activities that bring about a state of "flow."

Basics of Flow Theory: Essentially when the challenge was too little compared to the participant's ability, this led to boredom (engagement goes down). When the challenge is too high compared to the participant's ability, this led to fear or anxiety (engagement goes down).

Being aware of the balance of ability and skill helps the facilitator keep everyone engaged (we know this already - nothing new), but how can we increase the challenge for one person while keeping the challenge less for another in a class (this is a common scenario - the lesson split). Being aware of what we are doing as trainers can help us when training our newest instructors.



flow.png 91.7 KB View full-size Download

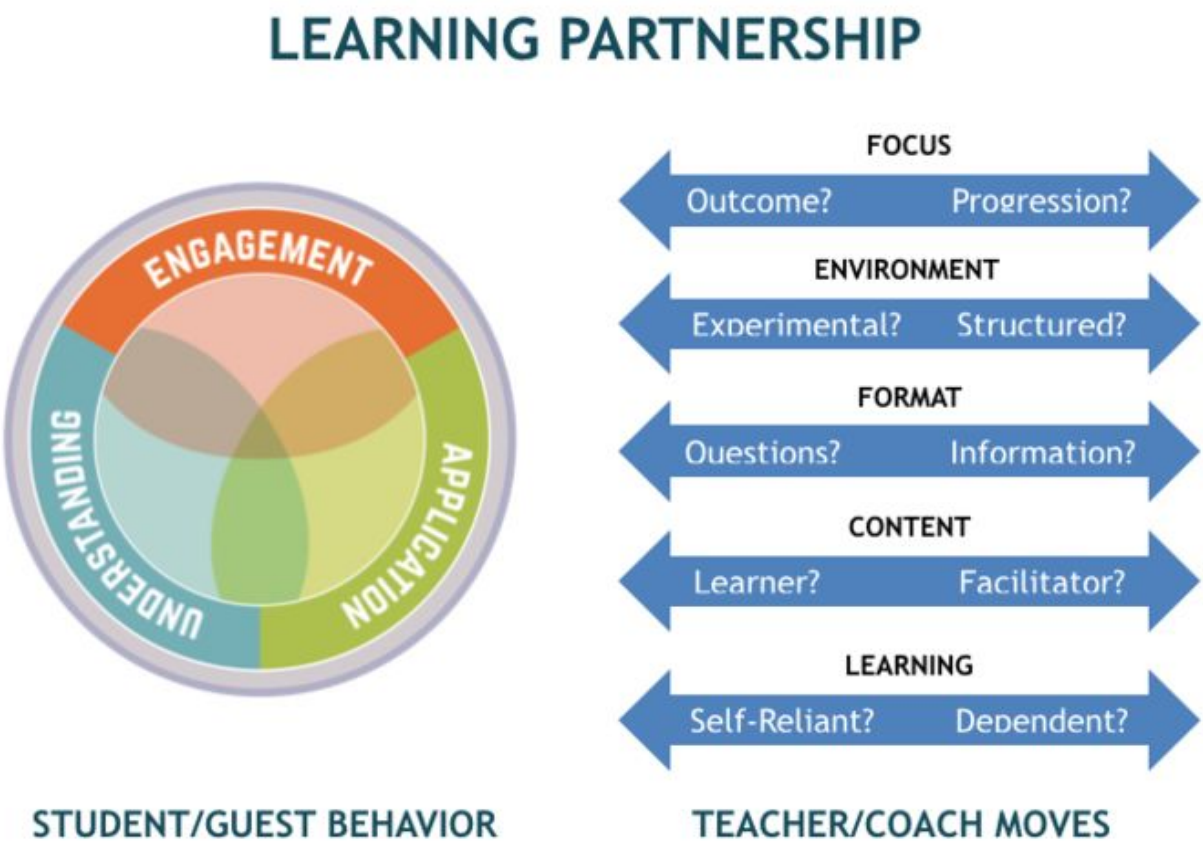
This led to the understanding of how student behavior – our observations of student performance using the learning lenses of Engagement, Application and Understanding – allows us to then and only then adjust our approach, being cognizant of what we are doing using the Dimensions of Experience sliders (which are the Teacher Moves).

Starting with “play” does just this. It creates that opportunity to observe the student behavior and ensures that we don’t immediately create challenge through a bunch of instructions or information, before we have had a chance to assess ability, motivations etc.

Based on our observations, questions can then be used to either increase challenge “Can you…” or to increase ability “What do you notice when…” It is however important to clarify that this doesn’t mean that we no longer state information and only ask questions. Yes, learning is more powerful when the answers are “discovered” by the student, but the instructor still has a responsibility to meet the student’s expectation of providing expert guidance. If the student is

becoming frustrated, presenting some concise and clear information might be the best way to bump their ability and get them back into Flow. The key is that this interjection of information is based on observing the state and needs of the student, rather than just because “step 5 always follows step 4”.

The idea is that through using the lens of Engagement, Understanding and Application, we are able to adjust our approach to keep the students in Flow, to create the best experience.



student-behavior-teacher-moves.png 127 KB View full-size Download

How do I use this as a Trainer? Is it relevant?
Extremely relevant. I have now led our staff at Mt Hood Meadows through this module - we split our returning staff orientation into a module format with about 30 people attending each module. I have led it now 6 times.

I revised the session a little to include Ben's statistics about Try vs. Learn; "try" has a significantly less commitment level vs. "learn" which implies extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. As well, I added the perception of a First Day Experience as compared to other activities our guests could do other than snow sports.



first-day-fun.png 410 KB View full-size Download



try-vs-learn.png 37.5 KB View full-size Download

What is interesting is that the most seasoned instructors tend to have the most difficulty with the idea that they can/may observe their students doing before providing coaching. They tend to believe they must provide all the information and a very structured way.

As we prepare our staff trainers to lead our New Instructor Training Course in the coming weeks (starting Dec 2) I am being very cognizant of how much a new instructor can absorb - there is so much to know that it is overwhelming.

BUT ... if they are part of the learning (specifically learning how to teach), they will absorb much more. So rather than specifically telling new instructors everything they MUST do, we are redesigning how we teach instructors to teach people as well as our beginner progression to be goal based, not task based.

Yes, we are providing suggested activities to achieve the goals (in a beginner lesson experience), but can a new instructor think creatively if they know the goal? Yes, I believe they can.

Rather than memorizing a specific progression that they MUST deliver every time or risk failure, they may think about the first time experience and delivery a product that will enrich people's lives rather than discourage them because they did not make it to the lift.

Recall the story: The lead snowboard trainer and a first year instructor each took a first time group lesson. At the end of the lesson the participants were surveyed with one question, "Based on your experience, would you come back for another lesson?" And to no surprise 6 out 10 people who went with the lead trainer would come back. But 9 out of 10 who were in the first year instructor's class would come back! Why? Because they had a great experience.

Was the information from the first year instructor as technically accurate as the lead trainer's? What matters more for the guest experience?

Real World Application - Teaching a Beginner
On Sunday, 11/19/2017, I had the opportunity to teach a green level skier. He was returning to the sport after a season off. I was "suspicious" of his ability based on clues from his words during our initial meeting, so we took a warmup run on the Ballroom Carpet.

"Let's try making some turns down here and see how it goes," were my instructions.

I led, he followed after I made a few turns. As he came to me and stopped I asked, "On a sliding scale would you say those turns were easier or harder than you'd hoped?"

He said, "Harder."

I asked, "How are you making your turns?"

He replied, "I'm leaning back and really trying to dig the back edge of my ski into the snow to make it turn."

I processed his answer, and then asked; “What happens if…”

And from here I was able to tailor my coaching based on his understanding of how to make a ski turn. What I did, and what you might do, will vary, but the point is, that I was able to understand how he was approaching his technique in order to help him improve it, and relate my coaching specifically to his present understanding. I phrased my instruction as a question, which opened the door for him to experiment and then give me feedback (an answer). Based on that answer I knew where to go next, and so on. The best part? I kept him in Flow, and he gained ownership over his own learning rather than feeling he was solely dependent on me to tell him what to do.

How can we get our newest instructors here sooner?

Perhaps with a goal based approach;
Perhaps by asking meaningful questions of students that informs your next move;
Perhaps by adjusting flow (challenge vs. ability) so that stoke is high, rather than forcing specific tasks or activities upon them