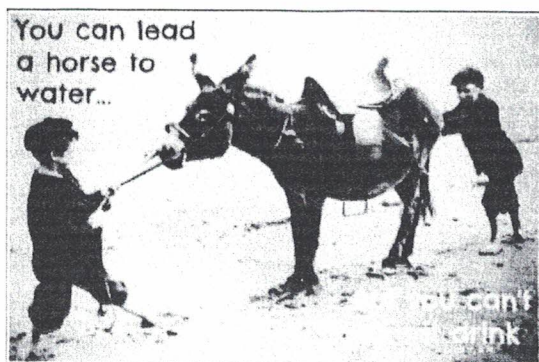


The concept of “Flow”



I would like to explain more about my understanding of the teaching and learning processes. In New Zealand, the Maori use the term “ako”, which means both to teach and to learn. It seems presumptuous to imagine that the teaching and learning processes can be separated. Both teachers and students create shared learning experiences by bringing their knowledge, learning experiences and understandings to the table. If I as the educator do not learn from my students, then neither you nor I have fulfilled our potential. It is through teaching that we learn and therefore I explicitly invite you to teach me. Educational research shows that when teachers facilitate reciprocal teaching and learning roles within their classrooms, then students’ achievement improves.

In my previous research I referred to this mutual learning process as “flow pedagogy”. It was popularised by Csíkszentmihályi (2000, 2014). Csíkszentmihályi developed his theory of flow during four decades of research in psychology and human sciences. He defined flow as a state of intense concentration or complete absorption in a situation. It is a state in which people are so involved in an activity that everything else fades into the background.

Csíkszentmihályi researched “autotelic” activities (1997: 117), or activities which people engage in solely for the pleasure they experience during participation, such as sports or artistic and/or creative pursuits. He remembered “many years spent in terror and in boredom sitting on the coldly abstract benches of so many classrooms”, and questioned whether the education he had received during those years was worth the consequential “suspended animation” (ibid). He was motivated to seek a deeper understanding of the causes of what he called “flow”, with the aim of helping to design teaching environments that could “inspire children to learn because they have learned to enjoy learning” (ibid).

His research also examined optimal experiences reported by people involved in non-verbal and at times solitary pursuits, such as sports or artistic endeavours like music and dancing. His understanding of self-psychology as well as an interest in human potential and intrinsic motivation culminated in the flow model, which delineates the characteristics of these enjoyable experiences: namely, a relationship between the level of skill and the level of personal challenge. In order to create or experience a feeling of flow, the level of skill needs to match the level of the challenge. If the skill-level is perceived as low and the challenge-level perceived as high, the learning experience is more likely to induce anxiety. This can hinder learners at higher levels from reaching their full potential.

Ideally, flow learning experiences move from a motivation to meet new challenges, to the satisfaction of having mastered them and increasing skills, to a renewed motivation to meet further challenges. In this way, flow experiences lead learners along an upward spiral that is characterized by a feeling of well-being. Flow

learning therefore ties in with a large body of work on intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 1985; Amabile 1985; Gottfried 1985). For flow to occur,

(1) people are moved by curiosity and novelty; (2) people need to feel in charge of their own actions; and (3) autonomy and self-determination will lead people to act in ways that often override the instructions built into their nervous systems by genes and by learning. (Csíkszentmihályi and Nakamura 1989: 48)

An effective flow classroom incorporates the practices involved in mastering any new skill, such as learning to dance. Although the initial steps might feel awkward and clumsy, once they have been practised and the level of skill rises to be more in line with the perceived difficulty of the challenge, an enjoyable flow experience results, encouraging students to seek out new challenges to continue the enjoyment. Teachers must be aware of the appropriate times to intervene without disrupting the dance, and may thus be considered “flow teachers”:

Flow teachers do all they can to centre students’ attention on the challenges and inherent satisfactions of learning something new. Flow teachers often have high expectations of their students, but they translate these expectations into modes of practice that model critical reflection and account for personal accomplishment. (Benstein 2017: 291)

Therefore, whilst teachers cannot make their students learn, they can help students become motivated, handle information and experience, develop knowledge, attitude and skills, and transfer learning from their classroom to the real-world (ASHE-ERIC High. Edu. Rept., 1986).

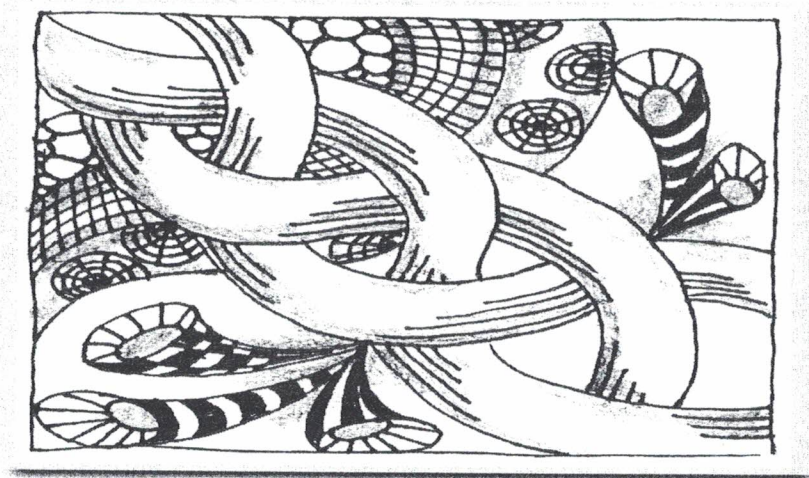
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Zentangle

During this course, I would like to engage you in meaningful activities and therefore encourage you to refrain from checking your smart phone, counting your Facebook likes and browsing the latest Instagram pins. Instead, I would like to introduce the concept of Zentangle to you, which is intuitive, fun and relaxing. It has unexpected results, tunes into deeper layers of consciousness and increases a sense of well-being. So, if you have withdrawal symptoms when you cannot check your social media updates, I would like to suggest you try it. So, what is Zentangle?

Zentangle is a process of creating an abstract image using a patterned yet unplanned sense of consciousness. It is easy enough that anyone should be able to participate in the process, leaving the artist with "an increased sense of wellbeing". A zentangle should always be created with black ink on a 3.5 inch squared white paper tile. There should be no up or down so that the image has no orientation. It should not be representative of recognisable objects and maintain an abstract stance. Zentangles are meant to be portable, so that they can be created at any time, when the mood strikes the artist.



Zentangles are not doodles because: the Zentangle method requires utmost focus and it is a ceremony of what beauty can be achieved. *Said benefits of using the Zentangle Method are:*

- * relaxation
- * simple and quick access to mindfulness
- * non-verbal journalling
- * decreased insomnia (improved sleep by creating Zentangle art before bedtime)
- * self-esteem
- * inspiration
- * decreased panic attacks (e.g. for fear of flying, do a Zentangle art before take-off)
- * nurturing and development of creative abilities
- * relieve stress
- * improve hand/eye coordination
- * increased attention span and ability to concentrate
- * problem solving
- * design inspiration

The Zentangle Method:

1. Draw a border by hand, sketching it lightly (in pencil) as it is not supposed to be visible in the finished piece.
2. Lightly sketch a string inside your border. A string is a simple curved line/squiggle that will lend structure to your design as your pattern will emerge accordingly from the contours of the string. The string elegantly divides the border into sections.
3. Start creating a tangle. A tangle is a pattern drawn in pen along the contours of the string. Your Zentangle may only have one tangle, or it could have a combination of different tangles. This pattern should be whatever naturally comes to you, remember that there is no right or wrong move when creating a Zentangle. Tangles should be composed of very simple shapes, lines, dots, squiggles. You can add pencil shading to the tangles which can create more depth and visual interest.
4. No erasing mistakes – there are no mistakes with a Zentangle (especially as you are using a pen). Every tangle is built stroke by stroke, so pay good attention to each stroke and build the pattern in a deliberate way. Remember to focus as this will free your mind, like meditating, of any worries or problems.
5. Keep going until you are finished. You will know when this is. Keep your Zentangle safe or frame it/display it for enjoyment.

Why do it?

A CZT (Certified Zentangle Teacher), John Nordell, blogs of research carried out by Nainis et al (2006) which noted the positive effect of art therapy on cancer patients – reducing both physical discomfort and anxiety. Nainis et al's study seems to have motivated him to implement his own research surrounding Zentangle. His findings: despite potential issues with the implementation of the study, suggested that Zentangle decreased 16 out of 21 patient's anxiety (although 3 increased), and therefore he concluded it was likely to increase a patient's well-being.

Meredith Yuhas' (Ph.D., of Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, CT) preliminary results were encouraging and have been blogged on the internet. They were indicative that the Zentangle Method is a highly effective tool for supporting and nourishing a state of mindfulness. Here is her summary:

Zentangle: Evaluation of a Mindfulness Activity

A recent pilot study concluded that Zentangle is a mindfulness activity. Also, when comparing a group of post test scores after 1 hour of Zentangle instruction, including 10 minutes of independent practice, the participants experienced mindfulness process post test scores equivalent to a group who participated in a 1 hour a week 16-week mindfulness focused treatment. Thus, the Zentangle process appears to be an efficient way to create a state of mindfulness. Consistent with the increasing amount of recent mindfulness research, the practice of Zentangle as a mindfulness activity could benefit the individual both mentally and physically. Such benefits include but are not limited to psychological wellbeing, decreased mental health symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and stress. In addition to being useful in the treatment of chronic pain, fibromyalgia, improving brain function and immune response, blood pressure and insomnia. (<http://tanglepatterns.com/2012/05/tangle-refresher-25-zentangle-milestone.html>)