

Facilitating Flow in Band: Learning with Joy in the 21st Century

Leonard Tan, Wang Chee Keng John, Chian Lit Khoon, Leong Wei Shin, Rachel Ee and Winnie Chew

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Psychological skills for peak performance in sports can be adapted for use by school bands.
- These skills can be effective in facilitating flow while students engage in band.
- Through the process of learning these skills, 21st Century Competencies (21CCs) may also be developed.

BACKGROUND

During the 2017 Committee of Supply Debate Speech, then Minister for Education Ng Chee Meng stressed the importance of nurturing the joy of learning and developing 21CCs. Accordingly, this project aimed to develop a set of pedagogical approaches to facilitate flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in band with the goal of helping students learn with joy in the 21st century. An interdisciplinary endeavour, this set of pedagogical approaches uses the co-PI's *Mental Skills for Peak Performance: An Athlete's Guide* (Wang et al., 2004) as a primary point of departure.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) To develop a set of pedagogical approaches to facilitate flow experiences in band; and (2) To test the effectiveness of these approaches through intervention. The topics covered in our eight-week intervention workshop were: (1) Knowing Yourself; (2) Strengths and Weaknesses; (3) Setting Goals; (4) Relaxation Skills; (5) Attentional Skills; (6) Self-Talk and Confidence; (7) Imagery Skills; (8) Overcoming Performance Anxiety; (9) Routines: Pre-Performance; (10) Routines: During Performance; (11) Routines: Post-Performance; and (12) Review. To enhance the students' learning experience, a Guidebook was created for students in the experimental bands.

KEY FINDINGS

Data suggests that our pedagogical approaches can be effective in facilitating flow while students engage in band—they can help students stay calm and focused while making music, which facilitate fluency and enjoyment. Furthermore, they can help students engage with the mental processes of learning, concretize their learning,

gain confidence, be more committed, and mitigate challenges caused by COVID-19. Finally, while designed for band, the skills learned and 21CCs developed can potentially be transferred to other contexts of learning, including academic studies and beyond school.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for practice

We recommend that psychological skills for peak performance be intentionally weaved into band programmes, thereby helping students learn with joy in the 21st century. One unexpected finding was that psychological skills such as imagery, mental practice, and positive thinking can be valuable when bands are confronted with the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Several practical implications follow. For example, if access to instruments were a challenge, or if bands could not meet in person for live rehearsals, band directors/teachers and students can engage in imagery and/or mental practice online. Positive thinking can also be used to encourage fellow band members during these trying times.

Learning gains (for studies involving intervention)

This project supports MOE policy initiatives to nurture the joy of learning and develop 21CCs. In particular, it offers concrete strategies for band derived from sports. The pedagogical approaches we created may be further developed into materials/resources for school bands. Beyond band, they may also be adapted

for other music CCAs (e.g., Choir, Guitar). Future research involving other CCAs may be useful in this regard.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 388 band students and 31 band directors/teachers-in-charge from 11 secondary school bands (two for the pilot study, nine for the actual study) in Singapore.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We began by creating the pedagogical approaches and Guidebook for an eight-week intervention workshop. Following a pilot study with two bands (one experimental, one control), the actual study was conducted with nine bands (six experimental, three control). While students in the experimental bands underwent the intervention workshop, their control counterparts did not. The primary sources of data were self-report questionnaires and interviews/focus group discussions; additional sources included an open-ended survey regarding the workshop, field notes of observations of band rehearsals/performances, and photographs of participants' Guidebooks. Due to COVID-19, parts of the study had to be moved online.

REFERENCE

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Wang, C.K. J., Singh, B., Ng, M. G. H., Lee, B. P. H., & Chow, J. Y. (2004). *Mental skills for peak performance: An athlete's guide*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

About the authors

Leonard TAN, WANG Chee Keng John and CHIAN Lit Khoo are with the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

LEONG Wei Shin, Rachel EE and Winnie CHEW are with the Ministry of Education, Singapore.

Contact Leonard Tan at leonard.tan@nie.edu.sg for more information about the project.

This brief was based on OER 32/17 TYC: Facilitating Flow in Band: Learning with Joy in the 21st Century

How to cite this publication

Tan, L., Wang, C. K. J., Chian, L. K., Leong, W. S., Ee, R., & Chew, W. (2022). *Facilitating Flow in Band: Learning with Joy in the 21st Century* (NIE Research Brief Series No. 22-008). Singapore: National Institute of Education.

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