

Research Proposal

This is a proposed piece of research and subject to ethical approval from Buckinghamshire New University

Please note that throughout this poster presentation:
Coaches = trainers of ski instructors
Coachees = ski instructors receiving training in the skill of focused attention.



Background – Focused Attention and Skill Development

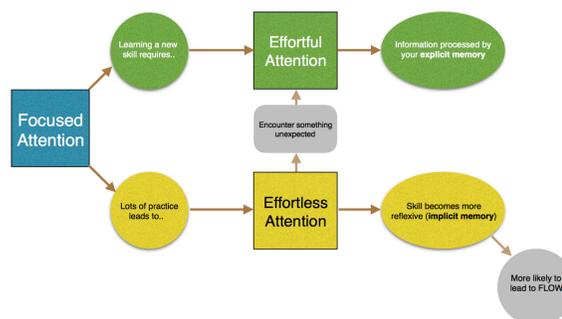
- Attention is described as psychic energy.
- Each person has a limited amount of attention available which must be used to focus on the task in hand.
- Focused attention brings order to consciousness.

Csikszentmihalyi, 2002

Transient Hypofrontality Theory (Dietrich & Stoll, 2010) suggests that as you narrow your attention to the task in hand, and providing you are well practiced at the task, your attention becomes effortless (see diagram below).

Research carried out by Wrisberg and Shea (as cited in Cox, 1998) demonstrated that, as motor learning becomes automatic, the demands on the limited amount of attention available decreases, leaving the learner with space to attend to other cues.

Focused Attention and Skill Development



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The model above is taken from Lesson 1, Focus Your Attention (Tate, 2017)

Background – Focused Attention and Flow Experiences

Csikszentmihalyi (1994) suggests that when goals are sufficiently clear they “can serve to focus attention long enough for one to achieve a flow experience” (p180). This points to the assumption that ‘focused attention’ is a crucial *process outcome* (Csikszentmihalyi, Latter & Duranso 2017) for achieving flow experiences and, that if one improves that skill, then one is more likely to experience flow.

- Flow has nine fundamentals or components (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, Latter & Duranso, 2017).
- The exact wording of these components has varied in different texts with ‘focused attention’ also being labelled ‘concentration on the task in hand’.
- Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2010) have further defined this “signature quality” (p182) more precisely saying that it is not only complete attention that is important but that effortless attention is more closely associated with being in a flow state that provides enjoyment.
- Flow experiences have long been associated with sports and high levels of sport performance (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, Latter & Duranso, 2017) with many performers including Alpine skiers sharing their flow experiences in interviews.
- Research has included looking at the link between the flow state and elite athletes (Jackson, 1995, 1996), but there is a lack of research to date that specifically looks at Alpine skiers and/or ski instructors and flow.

Background – Mindfulness, Flow and Sports Performance

Mindfulness originates from Eastern philosophies and has become a very useful evidence based tool for improving psychological health.

It has also been used as a tool to improve performance in sports including; Mindfulness Training on Athletes’ Flow (Aherne, Moran & Lonsdale, 2011) and Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE) (Kaufman, Glass & Arnkoff, 2009) looking at promoting flow in archers and golfers.

Little research appears to have been done on using these techniques with the coaching Alpine skiers.

Research Questions

This proposed research study will look to answer the following questions:

Do coaches who develop the skill of focused attention in Alpine skiers (coachees);

1. Enhance their learning of motor skills?
2. Lead them to use more effortless attention?
3. Increase the likelihood of them experiencing flow?

And by developing the skill of focused attention;

4. Does this foster more flow experiences or does having more flow experiences improve one’s ability to focus attention?

Research Design

The design of this research is a qualitative project involving semi-structured interviews to explore the link between coaching the skill of focused attention, and subsequent flow experiences by coachees.

Two experienced ski coaches and approximately eight ski instructors, engaged in training for their next level of certification in the Irish ski instructor qualification pathway, will be recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews.

The data will be analysed for themes using deductive analysis to map onto the construct of flow and it’s nine characteristics.

Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research and involves finding patterns or themes within or across the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe it as, “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within the data” (p79).

Interviews and Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews will involve devising questions for both the coaches and the coachees.

The questions to the coaches will be designed to elicit information about the type of coaching that has been given to aid the development of the skill of focused attention and in particular to what extent mindfulness techniques have been used.

The questions to the coachees should find out to what extent the coaching they have received has helped them to experience flow both in their training and subsequent practice sessions. Questions should also explore the frequency and depth of those flow experiences. Frequency refers to the number of flow episodes that each participant experiences while depth refers to the quality of those flow experiences and whether all nine characteristics are involved.

Data will be collected by recording each interview and then creating transcripts that can be used for the thematic analysis.

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Ski instructor training, Cervinia, Italy