



Flow Pedagogy

Inviting deep involvement and joyful connection through a slow, intentional approach to early childhood education.

THE CALL TO SLOW DOWN

There's a growing whisper among educators that's quickly becoming a rally cry: slow down. As more people search for and embrace "slow pedagogy," it's clear that educators are seeking something deeper than just strategies – they're yearning for presence, purpose, and play. At Phoenix Support for Educators, we've been listening closely – and reflecting together. We've long championed a shift away from managing behaviour toward creating environments where children flourish. We've seen the profound value of offering children long stretches of uninterrupted time, where open-ended materials and responsive environments invite sustained play and deep

involvement. We call this Flow Pedagogy – an approach rooted in positive psychology that invites educators to move slowly and intentionally, creating the conditions for deep involvement, and genuine connection.

WHAT IS SLOW PEDAGOGY – AND WHY ARE EDUCATORS CRAVING IT?

Slow Pedagogy is more than just taking your time – it's a philosophy that honours children's rhythms, prioritises presence over productivity, and sees relationships as central to learning. It invites educators to pause, observe, and trust in the power of unhurried moments. This approach has been gaining momentum as educators push back against urgency culture – the pressure to rush, to do



more, to tick boxes. Perhaps this trend is more than a passing phase – it might just be a deep remembering. A remembering of what truly matters in our pedagogy: connection, curiosity, and the joy of childhood. Flow Pedagogy aligns beautifully with this movement. It offers a framework for slowing down with purpose – helping educators shift from fast-paced programming to something far richer: creating space for deep involvement and meaningful, need-meeting experiences.

One of the most significant academic contributions to the concept of slow pedagogy comes from Alison Clark, who explores the importance of unhurried time in early childhood education. Her work highlights the need for slow knowledge and reflective practice, grounded in children's lived experiences and natural rhythms (Clark, 2022). Drawing inspiration from Froebelian principles, Clark advocates for play-based learning that honours childhood as a valuable stage of life. Educators such as Carrie Rose have also brought visibility to slow pedagogy in Australian contexts. Her ROSE Way Planning Framework emphasises reflective, intentional practice and advocates for unhurried, child-led experiences that honour children's natural learning rhythms (Rose, 2019).



FLOW PEDAGOGY: WHERE PLAY, JOY, AND NEUROSCIENCE INTERSECT

Flow, a term coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008), describes a state of optimal experience. It's that feeling of being fully immersed in something challenging yet satisfying, where time seems to melt away, and you're entirely present (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). In early childhood education, flow reveals itself in those profound moments when children become deeply absorbed – whether alone in the quiet observation of insects in the grass, or together in long, uninterrupted stretches of imaginative play where time slips away, physical needs are forgotten, and their whole being is invested in the richness of the moment. This immersive engagement closely resembles what the *Reflect, Respect, Relate*

resource describes as a child's "level of involvement" – a state marked by deep concentration, creativity, emotional expression, and purposeful movement (Department for Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008).

These are not just moments of play – but moments of profound learning, emotional nourishment, and authentic fulfilment. Flow Pedagogy emerges from a growing movement within early childhood education that recognises the need to slow down, observe deeply, and trust in children's capacity for sustained, self-directed engagement.

This approach aligns closely with the Leuven Scales of Wellbeing and Involvement, developed by Professor Ferre Laevers. These scales help educators observe when



children are experiencing emotional safety (wellbeing) and deep, sustained engagement / involvement (*Laevers, 2005; DECS, 2008*) – two conditions that reflect optimal Cup-filling states.

Through the lens of the Phoenix Cups®, we can understand flow as a moment when multiple Cups (needs) are filling at once:

- Fun Cup® – through joyful, playful exploration
- Freedom Cup® – in the autonomy to follow curiosity
- Mastery Cup® – when challenge meets growing skill
- Connection Cup® – supported by attuned relationships
- Safety Cup® – held by consistent, nurturing environments

- Offer environments that are open-ended, psychologically safe, and rich with possibility
- Reflect on how our own actions either *interrupt* or *invite* flow

This shift is subtle – but profound. It calls us to slow down, tune in, and see planning as an act of trust in children’s intrinsic drive to learn.

A PEDAGOGY FOR OUR TIME

As educators navigate a world that often feels rushed and overstructured, Flow Pedagogy offers a welcome return to what matters most – nurturing wellbeing, honouring relationships, and trusting the process of learning. It speaks not only to the needs of children, but also to the deep yearning of educators to work in ways that feel human, sustainable, and delightful.

This approach is not brand new – but it is beginning to find a name. Flow Pedagogy is emerging from the quiet corners of practice, from years of observation, reflection, and deep commitment to children’s right to thrive. You may begin to hear the term more often. And when you do, know that it’s not just a concept – it’s a movement. One rooted in relational, need-meeting practice.

In true Phoenix-style evolution, we’re calling for a paradigm shift – away from responding to behaviour and planning activity after activity for the sake of “learning” – toward designing environments that prioritise wellbeing, deep involvement, and the gentle unfolding of Flow Pedagogy.



FROM PROGRAMMING ACTIVITIES TO DESIGNING FOR FLOW

In many early childhood settings, the pressure to plan, document, and “fill the day” can unintentionally push educators into fast-paced routines. Activities are slotted into time blocks, transitions are tight, and the focus often shifts from what children need to what needs to be done. Flow Pedagogy gently challenges this pattern. It invites us to rethink our role – not as entertainers or schedulers, but as designers of conditions where flow can flourish.

This means planning with children, not just for them. It means creating spaciousness in the rhythm of the day – pausing long enough to notice the beginnings of deep engagement, and holding back from interrupting it. When we design for flow, we:

- Prioritise deep involvement over ticking off activities
- Honour child-led rhythms rather than enforcing transitions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandi Phoenix is the founding director of Phoenix Support for Educators and founder of the Phoenix Cups® framework. With a background in psychology and early childhood education, Sandi is passionate about supporting educators to move beyond behaviourist approaches and into reflective, relationship-based, and needs-focused practice. Her work is informed by positive psychology, contemporary neuroscience, and a deep respect for the rights and rhythms of childhood.



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