

Optimal Educational Experiences and Their Relationship to Self-concept and Flow in  
Adolescent High-Ability and Gifted Learners  
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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between field-based, experiential (nonclassroom) education of precollegiate learners; classroom-based education of precollegiate learners; their self-concept; and optimal experience, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow. For purpose of this analysis, the study participants were divided into three groups of ability (high-ability, gifted, and highly gifted) based on their combined SAT scores. Three self-report research instruments were used for data collection: an investigator-developed Experience Survey, an investigator-developed Multidimensional Flow Scale, and the Multidimensional Self Concept Scale (Bracken, 1992). It was anticipated that the intensity of participation and frequency of flow in nonclassroom educational contexts would have a significantly higher perceived benefit to learners and perceived occurrence, respectively, as compared to those in classroom educational contexts. It was also expected that positive relationships would exist between experience, self-concept, and flow. It was concluded that experiences in the nonclassroom educational context resulted in a significantly higher perceived benefit and frequency of global flow in learners as compared to those in classroom educational contexts. Many meaningful positive relationships were found between the intensity of participation in educational experiences, self-concept, and flow, with the strongest relationships existing between aspects of self-concept and flow. Further research is needed to better understand the benefits of particular educational activities, their potential influence on the development of self-concept and on experiences of flow, and the interplay between and among these variables.