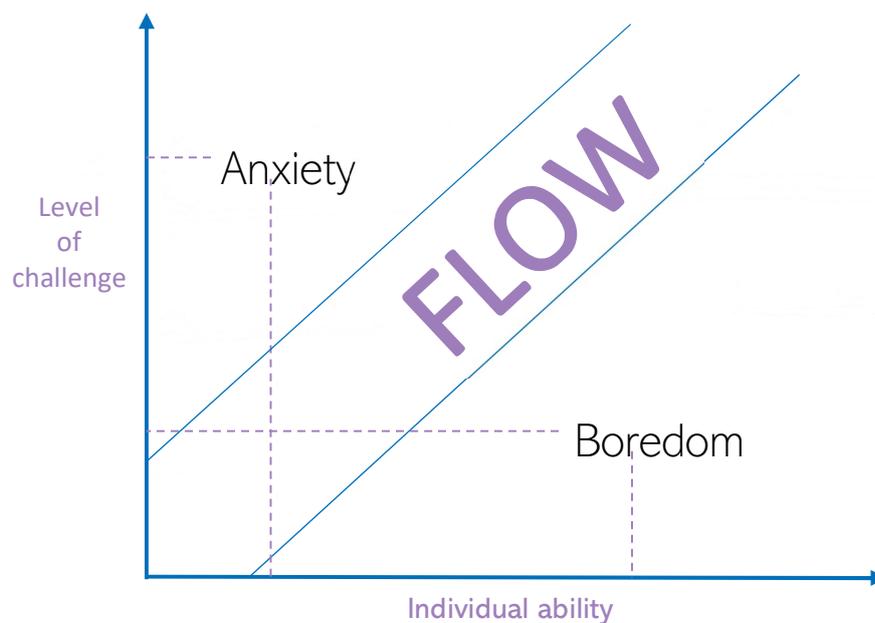




DIFFERENTIATION – MIXED COACHING

One of the most challenging parts of coaching children is having a group of different ages, abilities and learning styles, or a combination. Differentiation is the idea that coaching can cater for all these differences, to ensure each child is on the right surfing developmental path for them, whilst in a mixed level group.

Although this goal can be challenging to achieve in its ideal state, knowing ways in which to differentiate, even if seemingly minor, can make a big difference for children developing their knowledge and skills. Equipped with these strategies, a coach can feel more confident and able to aid this process if they are coaching a mixed group, and this leads to the desire to integrate these strategies in future programs and activities.



Different ability

High ability children that are not doing challenging enough activities will get bored and this can lead them to feel frustration towards the coach, program and surf school.

Low ability children can become anxious when presented with more challenging activities, which can reduce confidence and participation.

Both outcomes can lead to disengagement from a session, a program and potentially surfing altogether if the issues are not addressed soon enough. If a child has a bad experience, this negativity can be passed onto the parents and impact future retention, word of mouth referrals, the program and a surf schools' image in the local community. Hence the importance of trying to be proactive with differentiation in coaching.



DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES

Catering for higher ability children in a majority lower ability group

1. Identify high ability children
2. If there are 2 or more higher ability children in the group;
 - form a smaller group and surf/practice skills together to challenge each other
3. If there is only one individual in the group;
 - Acknowledge their higher ability and provide them a more challenging task at the beginning of the session to allow them to feel direction that is relevant to them;
 - Ensure you take the time in a lesson to offer them feedback if you are coaching primarily to the group level;
 - Help them to establish more challenging goals for the session/program; and
 - If they are confident, ask them to help demonstrate lower level skills to other participants and to be a 'coach helper' for a short period (don't overuse this though).



Providing a more challenging task (like a reverse take-off) for a higher-level ability child in a group is a simple yet effective way to ensure you're catering for their different needs



DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES

Catering for lower ability children in a majority higher ability group

1. Identify low ability children
2. If there are 2 or more low ability children in the group:
 - Create two ability groups, one in the water and one on the sand, and rotate them, ensuring the beach group has a role (e.g. observing, developing fitness or balance) and ensure each rotation isn't too long;
 - Initially give your in-water coaching to higher abilities to allow children of lower ability to observe and increase confidence through seeing it accomplished; and
 - Ensure you interact and share your coaching and presence around the whole group.
3. If there is only one low ability participant:
 - Explain each activity aimed at higher abilities, then provide an alternative to the lower ability participant;
 - Provide reassurance that they will improve in time; and
 - Team them up with a willing higher ability participant, to take turns while you focus on other children.



Allowing lower ability participants to observe and see other participants completing an activity can provide them with the assurance and confidence they need to participate.

Ensuring all children are feeling supported

1. Simply ask them what you could do better as a coach, and they will more than likely let you know. If they're shy, work on the relationship and as they open-up, ask again.
2. An alternative is to ask the parents, which may not only help get an answer, but provide parents with the assurance that you care and want to support their child's progress (this may aid in building relationships).