SESSION TITLE:

**Inside Out: How Learning in Community is Reflected in How We Teach**

***Doctoral Institute Presentation 2015***

SESSION ORGANIZERS:

Bradley Baker, Temple University

Patricia Berg, Walsh University

Christian Calderon, University of Memphis

Mateo Cruz, Columbia University

Liliane Furtado, FGV/EBAPE

Kim Gower, University of Richmond

Michelle Hong, Virginia Tech

Konrad Jamro, University of California

Stephen Kuselias, University of Massachusetts –Amherst

Jennifer Leigh, Nazareth College

Leigh Lester-Holmes, Maharishi University of Management

Delia Mannen, ESADE Business School

Juliana Mansur Kopp, EBAPE / FGV

Magid Mazen, Suffolk University

Avis McGriff Rasmussen, Regent University

Sid Saleh, University of Colorado Boulder

Caitlin Sockbeson, Tulane University

Tobi Popoola, University of Mississippi

Barbara Ritter, Coastal Carolina University

Erika Small, Coastal Carolina University

Pooya Tabesh, University of Houston

Emily Tarr, Ohio State University

Alex Tawse, University of Houston

Jody Tolan, USC Marshall School of Business

Ny Mia Tran, Muhlenberg College

Chantal van Esch, Case Western Reserve University

Phillip Witt, Washington State University

SESSION OVERVIEW:

Each year the Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference (OBTC) hosts a Doctoral Institute (DI), a one day, pre-conference workshop uniquely designed for doctoral students dedicated to the advancement (and enhancement) of management education. As an extension of the mission of The Teaching Society for Management Educators (OBTS), the DI provides personal and professional development for these emerging teaching-scholars via workshops, mentorship, networking events, and the opportunity to collectively plan and deliver a presentation to the OBTC community.

At the 2015 conference,, 21DI participants worked in collaboration to create a one-hour conference presentation for the OBTC community reflecting the week’s theme: “Learning in Community” (OBTC, 2015). Upholding the tradition of OBTC, the DI presenters created an interactive and engaging session divided into four exercises, each focused on an aspect of what it means to *learn in community*. Below is a description of these four specific, yet interrelated experiential activities that culminated in shared learning and reflection for attendees.

Exercise #1:

**LIVE FROM OBTC- IT’S SATURDAY MORNING!**

The brief introduction utilized *applied improv*, a very dynamic teaching tool designed to improve soft skills and leadership development. The *applied improv* involved three presenters acting out a *Saturday Night Live* type skit to show the difference between a typical management conference and the unique characteristics of the OBTC conference. This method was used as an attention getter and also added humor to the presentation. Improvisation is a very useful tool in the classroom as well and can be integrated in a variety of circumstances to help build many soft skills for business students.

Improvisational techniques derived from the experiences in improvisational theatre can be adapted for the college classroom to leverage the characteristics of the Net Generation, their multiple intelligences and learning styles, and the variety of collaborative learning activities already in place in a learner-centered environment. (Berk & Trieber, 2009, p. 29)

Improvisation as a teaching tool can help “build trust, foster teamwork and better brainstorming,

improve communication and presentation skills, promote creative problem solving, respond quickly and decisively to unanticipated challenges, think on their feet and recognize opportunities as they arise, increase their comfort level with change and willingness to take risks, and manage change and promote a supportive, improvisational corporate culture” (Berk & Trieber, 2009, p. 29). These soft skills are important to a holistic approach to education.

Exercise #2:

**THE SOCIAL DREAMING MATRIX**

The metaphorical concept of social dreaming originated with the work of Freud, and by extension Bion who expanded Freud’s theories of the collective unconscious in shared group experiences (Lawerence, 2003). Freud once stated that dreams exist “to disguise the wishes and conceal the needs of the dreamer” (p. 609), thus allowing access to a rich material for the dreamer in his or her waking life. As a common human experience, dreaming presents the opportunity, if regarded as such, for a community to do collective work using dreaming material to illuminate the collective unconscious underlying the shared experience. These ideas have led to the emergent theory and activity of the social dreaming matrix, where a collection of people meet in a safe environment to share their dreams, associations, and metaphorical representations in effort to make meaning of the group’s life (Lawerence, 2003).

In effort to examine the collective experience of the OBTC in La Verne, the DI presenters utilized the theory of social dreaming to create a safe environment and allow the group to participate in an integrated, experiential activity. This unique pedagogy was derived from Lawrence (2003) who stated:

The purpose of the social dreaming matrix is to freely associate to the dreams that are made available, so as to make links and find connections in thinking. Dreaming thinking and thought are the currency of the matrix, and not the face-to-face relationships of its participants. By concentrating on dreaming and thinking the matrix becomes the creative pool of new knowledge for each participant as they associate to the dreams to make links and find connections. (Lawerence, 2003, p. 610)

This free association is the driving force in the social dreaming matrix activity. Each dream a participant verbalizes inevitably sparks unique associations for other participants with changing meanings and interpretations (Lawerence, 2003). Following are the steps to create a social dreaming matrix in a large group setting.

**How to Run a Social Dreaming Matrix Exercise**

**Time required:** 30-60 minutes

**Equipment required:** one chair per participant, arranged in a chaotic format in the room (no two chairs should be directly facing each other, yet no chair should be isolated from the group)

**Process:** Dim the lights. You may even play soft music. Have participants each take a seat. Explain the basic premise of the social dreaming matrix as stated above, that the environment is a safe place, and that no participant is to comment directly on another participant’s dream statement. Like brainstorming, this is a freethinking exercise void of critique. It is also a collective process examined at the group-as-a-whole level (Wells, 1990), so participants are not to engage in dyadic dialogue, rather expression with the membership as a whole. Set a timer for 30-60 minutes and say “begin.” The social dreaming matrix will begin when someone states a dream they had during the group’s time together. Others will chime in as they feel inclined. Allow for times of silence and do not interject to move the process along. When the timer sounds, the matrix is over. Turn the lights on and ask participants to gather in groups of 5-6 to debrief what was just experienced. What themes were surfaced in the matrix? What associations came to light? What patterns emerged and what meaning did the matrix bring to the collective experience of the group? Allow 10-15 minutes of small group reflection, then ask groups to share out.

Exercise #3:

**YES! AND….**

Negativity can bread negativity. Like the common cold, the contagion of negative thought can spread throughout a family, an organization, and a classroom. On the other hand, according to the Mayo Clinic, positive thinking can reduce stress and improve health

(Mayo Clinic, 2015). One simple method of transforming negative thought into positive thought is an experiential learning activity called Yes! And…The DI presenters incorporated a Yes! And… activity to demonstrate the power of positive thinking.

**How To Run a Yes And… Exercise**

**Time required:** 10-20 minutes

**Equipment required:** Enough room to form a standing circle and toss a beach ball

**Process:** Have participants stand in a circle of 5-15 people. The moderator explains the rules as such: I will start the process by making a statement about a topic we have learned in class. I will then pass the beach ball to another participant in the circle and he/she will state “Yes! And…” as he/she adds a positive comment to what I stated. Then the process continues as the beach ball is randomly passed to others in the circle. When the “story” naturally ends, a new one can begin if desired by simply stating “the end” followed by a new statement. Following the activity, debrief the participants as to what they observed, what was challenging, what was easy, what worked well, what didn’t work at all? The moderator can use the following questions during the debriefing:

* What are the obstacles to agreement?
* How does it feel to be consistently agreed with and to consistently agree?
* What was it like to unconditionally listen so intently to someone? To be listened to?
* Was it easy or difficult to build upon what each other was saying?
* How can this technique be helpful to you in working with others?

(Covey, 1989; Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2008)

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