**Classroom as Organization – Taking the Plunge**

“No matter what style of teaching is used, the classroom is an organization” (Cohen, 1976, p. 13). For those instructors who desire to explicitly make the classroom an organization the pedagogical approach entitled Classroom-As-Organization (CAO) has been used. This highly experiential approach requires instructors and students to step outside their comfort zone and take risks. This can be a daunting process to prepare and execute. This roundtable is intended to discuss the benefits and challenges of CAO. Those who have taught using CAO will also have an opportunity to share tips.

**Introduction**

Classroom as Organization is a pedagogical approach that takes experiential learning to the limits. In this session those who have used the approach, those interested in implementing it and those who would like to be introduced to the approach are welcome to attend. The intent of the discussion is to identify the strengths and weakness of the approach as well as discuss ways to make the approach successful.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching implications**

Classroom-as-Organization (CAO) is a pedagogical approach that is highly experiential (Chappell and Thomas 2019). It is based on the premise that students learning management must actually manage in order to effectively learn how to be managers. In the same way that you can study golfing, cooking or other skill in the classroom, you will not become proficient till you start to play or get into a kitchen to try. CAO is not intended to remove theory and content learning from the classroom rather the classroom becomes an organization in which the students can observe and apply theory and content directly (O’Brien & Buono, ND).

The CAO approach is not a simulation rather it is a process of creating a real organization with the goal of the organization being learning (Cohen, 1976) although sometimes there is a specific project output as well (Doherty, 1998). The structure of CAO is significantly different from a traditional classroom. The instructor becomes the Senior Manager of the learning organization responsible for facilitating the learning (Bright, Turesky, Putzel & Stang, 2012). Students become members of the organization who take on roles and are responsible for tasks that will help the organization be successful. In this highly experiential approach student make organizational decisions and experience the consequences of those decisions (Doherty, 1998). While instructors are ultimately responsible for evaluation (grades) the member of the organization (students) take an active role in evaluating, providing feedback and revising assessment criteria (Cohen, 1976) and when necessary the structure.

Instructors may seek to use this approach as they see the alignment between the organization and the classroom (Cohen 1976), to create a learning laboratory (Doherty, 1998) or as a means of better preparing students for the workforce (O’Brien, & Buono, ND). Regardless of the impetus the highly experiential nature of CAO creates significant barriers to entry for instructors. Instructors are asked to give up “control” and no longer be the sage on the stage lecturer (Chappell and Thomas 2019). They need to have competency as a facilitator and manager not just effective as lectures (Cohen, 1976). Their skills need to develop over time to better know when to intervene to help a struggling group and when to allow the challenges to be a mechanism for learning in the organization (Cohen, 1976). Instructors preparation is significant. They must identify, and if needed modify, a structure for the organization and have a plan for implementing it with students who likely have never experience learning in this way.

The CAO approach is so different for traditional learning that students often complain, wanting to be told what to do (Doherty, 1998). It requires high levels of student participation (Doherty, 1998) where students must be risk takers using trial and error to identify how to be most effective even if that means proposing a new structure or process for the organization (Doherty, 1998). Students often experience stress and discomfort with this different approach (Doherty, 1998). For a further discussion of the shadow side of CAO for instructors and students see: Chappell and Thomas 2019

These barriers, while significant, are not insurmountable. Existing structural materials and instructor support for those using CAO provide a means to overcome the challenges. This roundtable discussion is intended to help those who have used CAO and those who are interested to learn from those in the discussion who have taken on the challenge.

**Session Description**

This roundtable will start with brief introductions of each participate. During introductions each participate will identify their level of involvement and knowledge of Classroom as Organization. A brief outline of Classroom as Organization will be presented by the facilitator. The depth of this description will be based information provided during the participants’ introductions. The group will then seek to answer the following questions:

1. How does Classroom as Organization benefit the student learning experience?
2. What are some of the challenges of the Classroom as Organization approach?
3. What tips/tricks might be offered for those new to the approach?

If introductions and the overview take 15-20 minutes, it will leave about 13-15 minutes to discuss each of the questions.

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