**Title** Using classroom experiences and post-course feedback to continuously improve our teaching practice

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**Abstract**

Classroom as Organisation’ (CAO) simulations position instructors as ‘guides on the side’ while students take responsibility for organizing the teaching and learning of relevant management concepts. This creates continuously evolving experiences as typical management situations emerge and demand attention. Instructors require special skills, students are rarely ambivalent about the process, and feedback polarizes between those thriving on responsibility and those wanting to listen to a ‘sage on the stage’.

Using class materials this workshop invites participants to explore aspects of a CAO experience and gain insights into learning outcomes, requisite teaching skills and continuous improvement strategies to achieve all these.

**Introduction**

The teaching context for the work explored in this activity is an undergraduate course called Introduction to Management conducted in block mode and taught in Finland using English as the language of instruction. At the beginning of the three-week course a World Café experience introduces core educational concepts including self-directed learning and peer-to-peer assessment as features of the three weeks of study ahead. Anticipated subject content is explored through the lens of participants’ prior experiences and emerging expectations. On the third day the class begins moving into a form of Classroom as Organisation (CAO) which deliberatively shifts power and responsibility from educator to students. Since CAO is known to unsettle expectations about more familiar habits of learning, a frequent response from students is uncertainty and/or confusion which begins to change as the process becomes manageable through action. Understanding and managing the features of this transition process is the central focus of this activity.

The students anticipate becoming managers and leaders in international business contexts. To provide them with an ‘as if real’ environment where they can acquire future-oriented knowledge and practice relevant skills, the CAO process is predicated on the learning value of temporarily replicating conditions akin to real world conditions. To achieve this, students work in teams on assigned tasks, individual assessment tasks apply a form of continuous improvement, and classroom conditions vary from focused attention on student presentations to apparent chaos. At any moment the educator may be shifting between participant observer, coach, process manager, and occasionally even validity and verification checker.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**.

CAO first entered the Organisational Behaviour literature in 1976 (Cohen et al 1976) and a range of applications have since been described [sample refs?]. The provenance of our approach is linked to Roger Putzel’s work (Bright 2012, Puzel 2013) and draws on a wide array of educational and management literature and practices. At its core is the precept of ‘doing as we say, **and** as we do.’ That is, we use collaborative methods to generate learning process that align – as much as practicable – with the concepts which form the content of the subject. For example, we choose to model ‘Theory Y’ assumptions and consequent behaviours when interacting with students and will enact ‘Theory X’ behaviours only when/if specific contextual conditions require it.

Many of the relevant educational concepts underpinning a CAO are associated with writers in the field of adult learning. They range from the work of Vygotsky (1980) to Dewey (1963) Illich and Freire (see for example Horton and Freire 1990) Mezirow (1991) and Kolb (2017], who all champion learner-centred approaches to education. Many management and leadership theories which can be described as person-centred (see Williams 2015) align with these educational precepts. Thus, it is possible to align the two sets of theories to create workplace-like learning spaces, where management theories can be put into action and educational theories provide validation of the learning strategies.

However effective application of relevant theoretical underpinnings does not seem enough to help all students make the transition to self-managed learning. Despite sharing the same experiences with others who were already managing many aspects of the learning space, this writer: *‘why am I getting graded while I'm still in the process of learning and practicing?’* remained unable to escape from his own assumptions about how learning should occur and be assessed. These students are likely to be those who most vocally oppose expectations of engaging with theories through practice, missing the otherwise obvious fact that work will be unlike study.

While it may be self-evident that work contexts have few characteristics in common with conventional classrooms, it is also clear that some students enter tertiary learning spaces imbued with a form of ‘cognitive entrenchment’ (Epstein 2019) inhibiting their capacity to apply curiosity to the task of adapt to the reality of the CAO experience. For example, a familiar entrenched view of ‘learning’ holds that it occurs as a form of passive reception of data to be memorised and assessed via various retellings (tests, essays) of what has been heard. Where this view is strongly held it can lead individuals to resist efforts to engage them in practice-oriented experiences. Addressing this resistance in students is a continuing task for educators using CAO principles in their teaching practice.

**Learning Objectives**.

Learning emerging from this session is anticipated to parallel CAO experiences in that – to some extent – individuals will take away personal insights and understandings relevant to their particular circumstances. In general, the activity will address these objectives

Participants will

A experience a CAO style action learning sequence and draw conclusions and insights from either/both direct participation or structured observation

B examine student feedback items from the point of view of both student-writer and teacher-reader to develop ways of taking a ‘third person’ perspective on both points of view

C review educational and management theories proposed as underpinning rationales for use of a CAO approach, and develop their own propositions for application to a range of teaching/learning strategies

Topics relevant to the session range broadly across theories of management and tertiary education. Concepts to be considered include work-integrated learning (WIL), reflective practice and self-managed learning. Each of these, in its own way, aims to assist students extend their capacity to understand ways of combining academic and work-related activities and to appreciate the value of doing so as an everyday learning activity

**Exercise Overview and Session Description**.

The activity will involve use of paper and pens and some whiteboards or chart paper. We will provide relevant handouts and any other specific items. The activity works best in a room with a flat floor and moveable furniture. To achieve the full impact of the process the workshop will occupy 90 minutes, however a 60 minute version is also possible. No particular group size is required as discussion and activity will adjust to the number attending. Questioning of the presenter/s will be encouraged to enable participants to explore their specific interests in CAO and / or underlying theirs and principles. of practice.

This activity-based session begins with a review of some of the anonymous feedback received over the years. Participants will briefly engage with the data to explore for improvement strategies that can be shown to realistically address such comments without abandoning CAO principles of learning. Some current means of addressing anticipated resistances, as indicated by the feedback, are introduced to demonstrate ways of enhancing future students’ engagement with the shift in power relationships. A continuum of CAO structuring processes (e.g. from World Café, through group discussions to specific class management actions) will be introduced and discussed /enacted with the goal of providing participants with a student’s perspective on the nature of a CAO experience. The concluding discussion will focus on exploring underlying educational and philosophical principles and consideration of how such approaches and principles relate to various teaching / learning contexts.

**References**

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