**Experiencing Classroom as Organisation (CAO)**

Walking for a while in learners’ shoes to experience the journey of being a student taking responsibility for their own learning.

CAO requires learners to take up the burden of ‘being responsible for’ their own learning. Conversely it requires that educators accept responsibility for guidance not direction, and for advising not telling. At one end of the spectrum of responses to CAO, is the perception that it enables sharing the journey of learning as a lifelong process. At the other end of that spectrum, it is a challenge to unquestioned assumptions that equate ‘learning’ with ‘being told’ - positioning the educator as possessor of knowledge and the learner as receptive vessel to be ‘filled’ with said knowledge. This experiential workshop will explore that spectrum in sufficient detail for participants to decide whether CAO is a teaching/learning process that suits their needs and personal approach to the tasks of education.

**Introduction**.

Classroom as Organisation has been a frequent topic at MOBTS conferences in the USA. This workshop is designed to introduce the concept to audiences who may not yet be familiar with the concept or the process. Drawing on work presented at previous MOBTS conferences the intention is to provide a first-hand experience of ‘moments’ within the longer learning experience to provide a basis for discussion and exploration of how this approach can be applied in participants own educational contexts. Thus, the workshop is intended for educators themselves to consider whether the approach suits all/any/none of their current educational contexts.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

CAO was first employed by Cohen et al (1976) to describe their approach to bring the experience of work into formal teaching settings. Since then, various authors and educators (e.g. Putzel, 2014; Herbert and Leigh, 2018; Thomas, Chappell and Bright, 2021) have expanded on that work by providing both theoretical guidelines and practical examples of how to employ CAO as an action learning cycle-based approach to engaging learners in the detail of managing their own education in various specific content areas. The workshop contributes to expanding awareness of the use of experiential learning strategies and principles in a range of academic settings.

**Learning Objectives**

Participants in the session will bring their own perceptions about experience-based learning to the session and engage with CAO as a specific approach that may expand and support - or challenge and cloud - their present understanding. The workshop does not intend to tell participants what to learn, nor what ‘will be learnt’. Instead, it aims to offer a ‘proving ground’ for current awareness and future possibilities as well as celebrating some of the learning that has been achieved in other contexts.

**Exercise Overview**.

A CAO classroom - in Putzel’s (2014) terms – begins with a highly formalised structure that allows a highly decentralized organization, having high vertical differentiation, high horizontal differentiation, and moderate geographical differentiation, to operate effectively.

In effect it is a tightly controlled structure whose operation by participants generates opportunities for learning how groups and organisation behave and - more importantly - how their own contributions affect the efficiency and stability of the overall environment. For educators it shifts the focus from being the possessor of knowledge to being an acute observer and ‘local’ guide to theories, concepts and practices.

The workshop process will provide a miniature demonstration of how all this is managed including direct experience of being the learning in the context, and address process management issues as they emerge from the participants own experiences.

For reviewing purposes, you are invited to imagine a miniaturised version of the first few days of a ‘start-up’ organisation where the company goals are announced, employee roles and tasks are all assigned at once and the staff must begin to operate ‘as if’ a functioning organisation. While the company guidelines are clear and well-structured the process itself seldom runs smoothly – and learning opportunities abound.

**Session Description.**

The session will begin with a short introduction to the history and some experiences of international CAO classrooms. It will then move to a direct – abbreviated - experience of a CAO in action as participants adopt roles and take on completion of specific organisationally relevant tasks. There will be an extended debriefing to ensure that experiences, concepts and questions are all addressed.

References

Cohen, A. (1976). Beyond Simulation: treating the classroom as an organisation. *Journal of Management Education, 1976*(1).

Herbert, A., & Leigh, E. (2018). Classroom as Organisation: An Educational Strategy for Emergent Learning. In A. Eskola (Ed.), *Navigating through Changing Times: Knowledge Work in Complex Environments*. New York: Routledge

Putzel, R. ( 2014). *XB Manual for a Learning Organisation*. Colchester, VT. St Michaels College

Thomas, D. R., Chappell, S. F., & Bright, w. D. S. (2020). *Classroom as Organization*. USA: Edward Elgar.