American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2017)

Experiential Learning: Applying the Integral Model

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Teaching/Learning - Teaching strategies/methods (Other) 60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop

Abstract 2017-245

The classroom-as-organization (CAO) approach is one of a number of pedagogies (i.e., action learning, collaborative learning, and problem- and project-based learning) under the umbrella of experiential learning (EL). Essentially, CAO involves making organizational properties meaningful to students within the context of a classroom, giving them the responsibility for planning, organizing, and leading the class (Cohen, 1976; Miller, 1991; Putzel, 1992; Sheehan, McDonald, & Spence, 2009; Well, 1988). Based on our experiences teaching and conducting research on sport event management and leadership courses, we realize that the CAO approach helps students develop increased self-confidence, greater self- and social awareness, and a better understanding of how to perform effectively in ‘real world’ settings. Sheehan et al. (2009) for example, found that utilizing the CAO approach had a greater impact on students’ emotional competency development than utilizing traditional lecture and discussion approaches.

While encouraged by these research results, we believe educators and their students are better served when the CAO approach is conceptualized and facilitated within a holistic framework. As such, in this presentation, we will introduce the application of Wilber’s (2006) All Quadrants, All Levels (AQAL) model to the CAO approach. This application allows for a more systemic understanding and an integral framing of CAO and its impact on students’ development, via the interaction of the social, behavioral, cultural, and intentional aspects of managing an organization within the context of a classroom. When applying Wilber’s AQAL model to the CAO approach, the impact of the elements enacted within a CAO learning context on students’ development through AQAL’s four equal and irreducible perspectives are better understood (Jowdy, McDonald, & Spence, 2009). Both the individual and collective and the interior and exterior of experiences can be fully acknowledged through this application.

The Upper Left (UL) quadrant relates to students’ development of their own interior or subjective consciousness, motivation, and intentions. Through this development, students become more aware of their own thoughts and feelings, utilizing ‘I’ language (1st-person). The Lower Left (LL) quadrant relates to the development of a collective culture, characterized by individuals’ shared values, usually represented through their common language and customary group behaviors. A main focus of this quadrant is the “we”-language (2nd-person). In applying this quadrant to the CAO learning context, all individual students possess unique thoughts (UL), which are interpreted within a specific cultural background and formed among the collective of students (LL) and influenced by the specific use of the CAO approach. The Upper Right (UR) quadrant relates to the exterior form of any individual, thing, or event and in this context, is characterized by each individual’s overt and measureable physical actions or behavior and physiological changes. Physiological changes are commonly witnessed through outward observable actions (e.g., blushing, sweating or crying). The “it”-language (3rd-person) of the UR quadrant represents the “material accounts of objective phenomena” (Landrum & Gardner, 2005, p. 248). The Lower Right (LR) quadrant relates to the exterior and observable form of separate “parts” collect to form a large social system or organization. In the LR quadrant, such thinking is representative of how these separate parts fit together as a functional whole to form the larger process or social system. Within a large organization, this includes production forces, technological networks, and departmental systems or structures. The language of the LR quadrant is characterized by 3rd-person or “its”-language, as we seek to describe these large social systems (Landrum & Gardner, 2005).

Cook-Greuter’s (2004) distinction of lateral and vertical development forms is also helpful when framing the application of the AQAL model within the CAO learning context. Lateral development refers to acquisition of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that deepen individuals’ current perceptions of reality or meaning making (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Fisher, Rooke, & Torbert, 2003). For example, students’ lateral development might be impacted by traditional learning activities focused on enhancing verbal, written, and interpersonal skills and functional and

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transferrable business skills such as finance, sales, or marketing (Spence & McDonald, 2015). Vertical development, in contrast, is the means by which “we learn to see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality” (Cook-Greuter, 2004, p. 276). Indicative of vertical development is an expansion of students’ subjective reality to both envelop past assumptions and transcend to include new and alternative ones. Experiential learning is one powerful pedagogy that affords students the opportunity to envelope and transcend beliefs. For example, as students begin to understand their beliefs, they choose actions based on these beliefs. Upon reflection on such actions, they may test such beliefs and perhaps develop new ones (Johnson & Spicer, 2006; Spence & McDonald, 2015).

Our intention for using the CAO approach is our interest in stimulating students’ lateral and vertical development. Since students are managing and leading major projects in our classes, they have multiple opportunities to improve current skills such as verbal and written communication skills and working effectively as a team member. Our “holy grail” so to speak, however, is implementing and facilitating pedagogy that enhances students’ vertical development (Cook-Greuter, 2004), which ultimately translates to their increased leadership capacity and effectiveness in the “real world” upon graduation.

By the end of this workshop, participants should: (1) have a basic understanding of the Classroom-as-Organization (CAO) approach, including strengths and weaknesses of this management pedagogy; (2) understand how Wilber’s (2006) All Quadrants, All Levels (AQAL) model can be utilized to further frame the CAO approach and be applied within different contexts to help foster students’ lateral and vertical development; and, (3) generate ideas for future curricular design elements, learning activities, and research.