



The Co-created Classroom: From Teacher/Student to Mentor/Apprentice

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Abstract

The classroom can be an exciting place full of the potential for transformational learning. However, this possibility often remains at the level of wishful thinking. This paper describes transformational teaching and learning in practice and

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the migration of relationships from teacher/student to mentor/apprentice. Moreover, we reimagine the classroom as one that is co-created by instructor and students, transforming the learning space and leading to meaningful relationships, growth, and development.

Keywords

Active learning · Assessment · Coaching · Collaboration · Communities of practice · Course design · Culture change · Empowerment · Engagement · Experiential learning · Feedback · Intrinsic motivation · Leadership · Learning community · Mentorship · Peer evaluation · Tacit knowledge · Teaching · Transformation · The will

Introduction

The nature of business suggests a mind-set that is both practical and value driven. It carries the notion of a “bottom line”, that one should set goals and create the most appropriate and effective structure to realize them. It is mission driven in that the best businesses have some important reasons for being that really matters to people. And business also requires us to recognize the importance of listening deeply to the stakeholders that surround it and to get in sync with the concerns and motivations of the people that are its lifeblood. When businesses live these realities, they become relevant and are usually able to grow and to prosper over time.

In some ways, the business classroom is separated from these qualities of the business world, and it can quickly get out of sync with the heartfelt concerns of its stakeholders, including students, parents, companies, etc. Parents care deeply about employment and career concerns and academia often downplays all this. This can make some question the relevance of higher education to their interests and concerns. In addition, pressures to publish can make faculty question the importance of teaching. Intense graduation requirements can put so much focus on checking off boxes and earning grades that the actual learning becomes the ground and not the figure. As educators we know the value of helping our students to learn the essential facts and concepts that are the vocabulary of our academic disciplines. But beyond this, our larger challenge is to make the classroom come alive and to create the potential for “transformational learning,” which we define as an enthusiastic experience that causes students’ lives to be different or better in some way that feels important. However, at times we may feel that the norms of undergraduate education are not conducive to this. Faculty and students can start to settle or lower their expectations.

Many of us become educators, because we know that the classroom can be an exciting place full of the potential for transformational learning. We most likely have experienced this in our own schooling and also had glimpses of it as we now lead our own classrooms. Teachers are passionate people, and we have a natural yearning to have our work go beyond the transactional practices of covering material, grading, and motivating students to meet deadlines and do their work. In our heart of hearts, we hope to develop our students and to see them develop new capacities, to expand

their thinking, and to go beyond constraints and barriers to relating and be effective with all kinds of people. We want our class to be one that students look forward to coming to and one that really touches their lives in a significant and meaningful way.

However, as we face the constraints of the traditional classroom, we also know that some of the potential for transformation often remains at the level of wishful thinking. This paper describes my own journey of discovering a more meaningful way to engage students in teaching organizational behavior and leadership classes. My class size is approximately 16 students, which is smaller than at many colleges, so larger class sizes may require further innovation to make conducive to the co-created classroom. While examples are detailed from my own classes, I believe that there are opportunities for transformational teaching and learning in all disciplines and that it is a worthy challenge to look for the possibilities. My hope is that it might inspire you to innovate in your own way and to rekindle your desire to transform the classroom and try some new approaches in working with your students.

This paper represents years of collaborative work done with my writing partner, Bill Van Buskirk. Bill serves the work as thinking partner, writer, and scholar in developing the method and thinking, while I serve as teaching practitioner, innovator, and data collector. Our many invaluable discussions move this thinking forward and challenge the ingrained assumptions that hold the work back.

Engagement and the Transformational Classroom

No transformation happens without students being deeply engaged. Kurt Lewin (1947) talked about the change process as requiring an “unfreezing” and then a “refreezing.” The engagement in the classroom then has to be strong enough that an “unfreezing” of thinking, practice, habit, relationship, perception, or attitude might actually occur. So, as an instructor, I view it my job to help my students to engage with the course material with urgency and to find their own meaningful connections to it. When this happens, the classroom environment invariably comes alive. This aliveness is palpable and becomes a fertile ground to all kinds of individual, interpersonal, and group transformation. Students find themselves with new curiosities. Students start relating to peers they had felt distant from. Intellectual concepts start to seem relevant and relatable. Skill areas that seemed like weaknesses become possibilities or even strengths. When these things start happening, you know that the classroom environment has become transformational.

Transformational teaching then means always looking to connect to the intrinsic motivations of the students and the energy in the group that is potentially there. This is similar to making music. To sing and play a song and not feel it does nothing for either the singer or the audience. The master musician, like the great teacher, brings the music to life and draws people to it, uplifting everyone in the process. As educators, we must also connect ourselves to the course material and give it a context in which to live and breathe. But as we bring our whole selves to this endeavor, we must also manage our own vulnerabilities, and this can be a challenge.

Managing One's Own Engagement in the Classroom

A key challenge in facilitating the co-created classroom is in deciding when and how to engage with students. The instructor needs to be vulnerable enough to connect with students on a human-to-human level but removed enough to maintain a formal role that protects the integrity of the learning environment. It is still a classroom and looking out for students as they share more of themselves with each other and with you is of paramount importance. Setting boundaries can be challenging because while opening things up is clearly a necessity for maximizing engagement, safety is a must. So when students move into dialogue that borders on therapy, the instructor should refocus discussions on the work, building skills, careers, and course material.

In my own development, I've increasingly become more transparent in the classroom but, in doing so, have discovered that a key challenge is to keep myself grounded so I maintain the ability to hold the space. Some topics in my courses are emotionally charged and can trigger my own thoughts, feelings, and issues. For example, if we are discussing sexism or racism and I myself am triggered by the discussion, then my own ability to provide a safe environment for the students to explore and learn may be impaired. Therefore, deciding when and how to engage is important. Recently, during a student led presentation on "gender in leadership," I was asked to role play an interaction to reconsider my position and to change my behavior. In the role play, she immediately threatened to escalate the situation. We debriefed the role play and I suggested that she might try to analyze what might be underlying her boss's behavior so that she might hopefully change it without escalating the situation. At this point, I could feel her getting frustrated as she snapped, "I don't really care what his feelings are." In thinking back on this interaction, I realize that I had put myself into a situation where I was playing too many roles at once: teacher, role play partner, and feedback giver. And in trying to understand her reaction, I realized that my response might have come off as invalidating her legitimate concerns. It made me rethink putting myself in a situation in which I'm role playing such a charged issue, especially given my own power position in the classroom. In this case, the class needs me to be more removed from the action so I can hold the space for them to freely engage and learn from their experience.

Partnering with the Elephant in the Room

When teaching, at times it may seem like there is no intrinsic interest at all and that all the students care about is their grades. One must reject this cynicism and continue to open to the potential energies in the classroom space. We will refer to that hidden, latent energy, the "elephant in the room." When we are teaching, there is always an elephant in the room. The "elephant" represents everything that is "unspoken" that carries energy for the students. Some elephants are external to the classroom but effect it, while others emerge during the learning. In a group of undergraduate seniors, the elephant might be that they are all about to graduate and are feeling

scared and alone in taking their next step. No one talks about this in class, but it is a hovering backdrop that is striking in its silence. Or sometimes the elephant is an event taking place in the world, as in a controversial election. After a racially charged event in the news, it might be fear and vulnerability about the diversity in the class and how different students might feel. Or it might have to do with the course work itself. If students are supposed to be working on a group project but some are procrastinating, there might be some uneasiness about disappointing the professor – about being “found out.” Or perhaps “rush” is going on in the sororities and fraternities. Here, the students might seem distracted from the course work, but they are actually alive and present to the compelling challenges that they are experiencing in their extra-curricular activities. Other times the elephant takes the more diffuse form of tacit knowledge students have acquired, dense, rich stores of knowledge in the back of their heads that might parallel the major themes of the course material we are studying. Experiences in internships, relationships, and family life all have potential connections to organizational behavior/management/leadership concepts but may go unexplored. If we welcome this tacit knowledge and lived experience, students are happy to share it, and they delight in learning from their peers when it is grounded in real, felt, passionate experience. If we treat these “elephants” as interference, distraction, or threat to our own position of “knowledge sharer,” then they quickly retreat to the safe ground. In the traditional classroom, these elephants are often viewed as a distraction from the material being discussed in class. Instead of viewing them this way, we can transform the classroom by bringing these rich sources of energy into the dialogue and connect them to the material we are teaching. And we can take it a step further by teaching the students the skill of surfacing hidden sources of meaning and having them do this for each other. When this becomes a shared goal for the class, things start to get really exciting.

Students are in one of the most amazing times of their young lives. They are exploring their identities, falling in and out of love, playing with possible futures, saying goodbye to childhood, establishing independence, dealing with how the world sees them, learning about their strengths and weaknesses, and finding out what really matters to them. Accessing these energies can fill the classroom with connection and vibrancy. Instead, we often try to manufacture an interest in our courses in ways that may seem artificial to our students, despite our best efforts to be relevant. We ask them to come to our interests instead of reaching out to theirs. Meanwhile, the elephants call for their attention and we lose a ready source of energy, motivation, and passion. Since many of these concerns are often viewed as “nonacademic,” it actually takes energy to not talk about them and to “check them at the door,” so we can do what we are here to do.

But what if these stories, curiosities, and life challenges were not a distraction to the classroom but a part of the lesson plan? What if our job was not to distract students from them but to collaborate with our students to find creative ways to connect and to allow the elephants to graze in the course material? We can name the elephant and use it, and there is energy and passion there. There is relevance and connection and a personal stake. Many of them can be turned into real-life case studies with analysis, theory application, and role plays. So as instructors, we need to

look for the “elephants” we can bring in to our particular course material. In most fields, there are fertile bridges to bring in the student’s life stories and concerns. And we can share that responsibility by making it a class objective to create a culture conducive to sharing.

In the field of “organizational behavior,” we have already come a long way down this path. Kolb’s notion of experiential learning (2005) permeates our teaching methods, and most instructors use experiential learning exercises, case studies, and various discussion methods to energize the students and make learning enjoyable. Still, the instructor usually owns the power in the room and students are largely passive unless called upon to take part. And with these power dynamics at play, if the students are not being graded on an activity, there will be insufficient extrinsic motivation, and they are often not intrinsically motivated to do the work.

Transforming the “Teacher/Student” Relationship

Transformational teaching requires us to rethink our role as instructors. Students will share almost anything with a mentor, but in most teacher–student relationships, interdependence and trust are simply not there.

The challenges of faculty to student mentorship were highlighted for me when I was with a group of friends having an informal discussion about significant mentors we had experienced in our lives. When someone asked who our most significant mentors in undergraduate school had been, few reported having any at all. It wasn’t that there weren’t excellent teachers at the schools we attended, but that the faculty that might have potentially become mentors never actually got to know us as people, our goals, strengths, and challenges. There was never an occasion for these faculty to take a sincere interest in our individual development and to guide us in a way that could make a significant difference in our lives. My friends further went on to say that there had been extracurricular mentors that had helped to shape them in an important way, but not faculty. This struck me and let me to question whether the classroom really was a fertile ground for mentorship. And if it isn’t, then what are we really doing?

This challenging conversation reinforced the struggle I felt earlier in my teaching career. When I first thought about manifesting more meaningful relationships in the classroom, I thought that I would simply offer my coaching services to students and that they would gladly take advantage of them. After all, I had a consulting practice coaching executives outside the college and was offering to show my students the same care and concern as my clients. I was surprised and disheartened when only a few responded to this invitation. I might have concluded that they were disinterested but later realized that creating a mentor relationship is like a building that gets built one brick at a time and does not come from a wide sweeping and impersonal invitation. True mentorship relationships need time and care to develop and are not created by a generalized invite. And further, they need to have real and present involvement in shared and co-authored work to take root.

The traditional power relationship between teacher and student can be very confining. At times, the teacher is viewed as the all-knowing expert and the student, the hungry mouth to feed. This dynamic is hardly conducive to empowerment and building new competence and confidence in the student. Teaching in a more traditional way, I never really got to experience the work of the student by working alongside them, so the whole relationship was one of reporting on life, rather than living it together. When the master plumber works with the novice apprentice, the whole idea is for the novice to eventually be able to offer the same quality as the master. As wisdom and competence are built, the relationship is affirmed and the advantages to both are clear; the master gets inexpensive help and the apprentice eventually becomes a master. Their stake in each other is clear. Many students never have an apprentice relationship like this during college, and so there is no expectation for this role and also a limited ability to know how to manifest and function in it. And because it breaks the norms of the usual professor/student relationship, there is bound to be some resistance, even if in the abstract, it might sound advantageous and refreshing. Anything new carries its own discomfort and new norms and expectations need to be nurtured.

So I asked the questions, how do we create the occasion for mentorship, where can I meaningfully engage with my students and collaborate despite our differing levels of expertise, age difference, and disparate roles? What would create the conditions for us to work together toward something worth struggling with, toward something that demanded our utmost commitment and creativity and give us a relatively equal stake in the outcome? And what could we collaborate on that would seem real and compelling?

A natural interdependence comes with focusing on the course itself as a shared goal. The reality is that we spend more hours together in a term than most of us have with some of our friends and extended families. We also expend great effort on assignments and class-related activities, and making this all enjoyable, engaging, relevant, and meaningful is a natural, shared concern. We have a common stake in co-creating the classroom, sharing responsibility for the course material, and building a classroom community to support learning. Adding to our interdependence is a collective interest on building skills, reaching our potential, and attaining success. The skills associated with classroom design and management have clear and practical application to many careers, i.e., commanding a room, presenting yourself with confidence, building a group, presenting material, forming relationships, building trust, public speaking, conducting oneself at meetings, getting work done on time, collaborating with a partner, sharing power, earning respect, appropriate disclosure and storytelling, listening, etc.

Since adopting a pedagogy of co-creating the classroom, the difference is dramatic. Where just several years earlier I was inviting students to be coached and having no one show up, I am now constantly meeting with students and serving as a mentor to many. We now have meaningful work to do together, and there is a real and organic context for our mentor/apprentice relationship to begin, grow, and prove to be of value. When the students did not respond initially to my invitations for mentorship, I might have falsely concluded that they were disinterested in their own

development. In truth, everyone wants a mentor if they can reasonably believe that it will be a positive and constructive relationship. And I personally find that stepping into mentorship is a great privilege and a meaningful life of service. However, creating the occasion for this relationship to flourish is where things get challenging. For those teaching courses related to management and organizational behavior, we are well positioned to use the wisdom of our field of study to optimize our teaching life and to make our teaching work as meaningful as possible. Just as the field of organizational development emphasizes meaningful participation in the process of managing change and the sharing of power, co-creating the classroom requires us to do the same.

The Mentor/Apprentice Model

We'll begin this description of how the mentor/apprentice relationship takes shape with a story from a recent organizational behavior course. The context is a class of 16 students taking a required course for their major at Muhlenberg College, a liberal arts college in Allentown, Pennsylvania. We'll break it down step by step so you can think about how this reframing of the teacher/student relationship might be applied in other teaching, consulting, and training contexts.

The topic of the day was "culture." It is useful to note that the design for the class was the one proposed by two of my students who were serving as teaching apprentices or "TAs" for the day. In the class structure, each student has a turn at this, and it involves reading, strategizing, and having several meetings with me to hash out ideas and to explore what might engage and ignite the class in relation to the topic. This is not a "delegation" of teaching responsibility, but instead I teach the class with the students, with them taking the lead. I make myself a partner in co-leading the session so I can add richness to the discussion and support the TAs' efforts. The knowledge that "I have their back" serves as a comfort in taking on the design and facilitation of a 75-min session which can be daunting to an undergraduate student.

In our preparation meetings for this session, several "games" and "exercises" were proposed by the "TAs," as well as clips from TV shows (*The Office*), etc. While these initial ideas might have produced an enjoyable session, I saw little possibility for transformational learning in the design. I also sensed that the TAs had not yet immersed themselves in the material and challenge, so there was a superficiality in the air. So in my role as "coach," I opened a dialogue with the two students about how they viewed the culture of our own class. Once the discussion got going, they remarked that while there was a norm of acting cordially toward one another, the students did not yet feel safe enough to really disagree with each other or to act candidly and that our class held a dynamic that was really a microcosm of the entire college's larger community of subcultures. They noted that these subcultures were represented in the form of athletes, Greek students (fraternity and sorority), theater people, etc. They noted that the walls between these subcultures were palpable and greatly affected seating arrangements, who interacted with whom and the overall

classroom dynamic. The TAs had some curiosity and energy around this and ultimately decided to explore it in the session as both a way of learning about how subcultures operate within a dominant culture and as a service to the classroom community in moving them past some barriers that they thought were effecting the potential of the class to work effectively together. They viewed this as an “elephant” in the room, as these dynamics were noticed and felt by most of the students but not discussed publicly.

When the day of the class arrived, the TAs and I began by presenting some content about culture from the textbook and some additional reading they had done. They then elicited a discussion about the overall campus culture. It was interesting that during the discussion, no one brought up the subcultures at the college or their presence in the class dynamics. This confirmed our suspicion that it was indeed an “elephant in the room.” The TAs then rearranged the seating of the room to group people they thought were in particular subcultures and asked each to meet and describe the artifacts, values, and basic assumptions of their particular campus subculture. I noted that at this point, the energy of the room seemed to explode when the subcultures were acknowledged, and students immediately began opening up and acting more candidly. Soon, the students’ out of class personalities began to clearly infiltrate the classroom culture. The rest of the class period was spent looking at how subcultures exist within dominant cultures and how this was playing out in our own class, on campus, in organizational life, and in society. They also drew the link to performance in the workplace and had a discussion about how this all might affect our ability to function as a class and learn with and from each other. Then the TAs reformed groups to have one representative from each culture and charged them with comparing the different subcultures around various cultural dimensions and characteristics.

It was striking when in the debrief one of the student athletes in the class described in detail the ways in which he had been enculturated into the football team culture, from being recruited, then initiated, how they ate meals together, worked out together, went out together, etc. He remarked that if he had not had this class, he never would have really gotten to know any of the other students in the class, despite seeing them on campus, being in courses together, etc. He acknowledged that he enjoyed his own subculture but was also aware of opportunities lost. There were also questions posed about how this way of being might affect the challenges of working with people in the future in their careers and building trust with coworkers, clients, and customers. This was a poignant moment for the group, and several acknowledged that walls were coming down and that they really appreciated the opportunity to hear about each other’s lives and the subcultures they lived in.

At the end of class, I handed out a feedback form for each student to write about the session and to give direct feedback to the two TAs. I later met with the TAs for a debrief of the session and we read the comments together and reflected on what had taken place. The TAs were happy about the session but also came up with several ways they might improve the design and their facilitation in the future. We ended with my own comments about each TAs performance and in asking them to give

each other some feedback. Each was then charged with writing a reflective paper about the experience, analyzing what occurred. This paper will then be posted on their ePortfolio as evidence of their work.

I share this story to illustrate the quality of engagement I've found to be readily available with undergraduate students and also how we might use the energy and vitality of the students' own relationships with each other to transform the classroom. The excellent design for the class on culture was largely created by the students for the students out of something they felt and observed in relation to the assigned topic. It was also the product of their own creativity, their interactions and chemistry with each other, and research and reading they did in preparation. This was further enhanced by some coaching and interaction with me that challenged them to think and to get in touch with what might make for a meaningful session. And in the process, the evaluation component which in the traditional classroom is centralized to the instructor became broadened to include their classmates which added to the meaningfulness, vitality, and excitement of the whole experience. While I ultimately assign the grade to their session and reflection paper, they are also deeply concerned with what their peers think. This becomes a source of building poise and confidence, identifying workable challenges for growth and enhancing identity. By reading actual written feedback, they see in the data what others notice and appreciate and also behaviors that might get in the way of them meeting their career goals.

In the co-created classroom, the instructor holds the space for student interaction, encouraging them to operate with their full maturity and invest in both the class and each other. He/she supplements the student's tacit knowledge with academic depth and serves as a role model for how to engage people in discussion, exploration, and meaningful storytelling. And he/she serves as coach and mentor in allowing students to shine and to facilitate a great experience for their classmates.

The Classroom as a Community of Practice

The foundations for rethinking our course design come from the literature on communities of practice (CoP). Course design is commonly understood as the arrangements of learning goals, course material, assignments, due dates, and experiential exercises summarized on a syllabus. We imagined that the traditional classroom design could be significantly augmented by the use of tacit, often underutilized resources embedded in the culture of the classroom (Wenger 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991). By culture, we refer to how students make sense of course material against the backdrop of their personal histories, relationships with one another, interests and skills, work experience, ambitions for the future, athletic involvements, etc. These resources are, to a large extent, tacit and underutilized in most classrooms (Wenger 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1999; Brown and Duguid 2000). Yet they are charged with lived emotion, passion, and vitality that metaphorically parallel the content of the course.

Communities of practice are learning groups oriented to discovery of new knowledge. They rely on apprentice-like relationships between members and on

inventing new practices through which they achieve their ends. COPs have become valued in knowledge-intensive industries where proprietary knowledge is key to competitiveness and where knowledge contained within established organizational routines often proves inadequate (Barney 1991; Barney and Hesterly 2006; Wenger and Snyder 2000; Dawson et al. 2006; Shaw and Stacey 2006; Stacey 2004). In response, communities and organizations build the capacity to generate homegrown knowledge relevant to strategic, cultural, and organizational issues. These efforts require culture changes in which work groups embody enhanced creativity and commitment (Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991).

The extraordinary vigor and liveliness found in COPs has inspired us to incorporate selected elements of the CoP into our classrooms. Over the course of 6 years, incremental attempts to introduce these elements have grown into our design of the co-created classroom. Similar to CoPs, in the co-created classroom, students discover and invent knowledge that is new to them (and to some extent to the professor). This task is initially experienced as beyond their competence. As they learn course material, they collaborate with the professor to design and conduct most of the class sessions in a manner that is exciting as well as informative. We have found that this approach generates high enthusiasm, improved course ratings, high attendance, a more intense willingness to get involved, and a sense of relevance. In reflection papers at the end of the term, students report an increased sense of confidence as they get over their stage fright and learn how to “command the room.” They also delight in being an integral part of a true learning community, closer to the ideals of what college might be.

Transitioning to a co-created classroom involves culture change with elements that are at once subtle, complex, and outside the range of student awareness. We draw inspiration from ten dimensions commonly found in CoPs: domain difficulty, emergence, learning-by-doing, dispersed expertise and authority, tacit knowledge, high engagement based on openness to new members, intrinsic motivation, informal communication, learning at the level of identity, and the invention of new practices (Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991; Clark and Stewart 2012; Retna and Ng 2011; Hara and Schwen 2006).

In the co-created classroom, tacit knowledge is embraced and efforts are made to focus material on the real-life opportunities, challenges, and dilemmas of students. Marrying course contents to the tacit knowledge of students puts it into context and is then viewed as useful and vital. Task-relevant knowledge is often encoded in personal meanings: hunches, skills, rules of thumb, intuitions, images, and interpretations of events (Von Krogh et al. 2000). Tacit knowledge encompasses ways of organizing, operating, and thinking that individuals may have not articulated to themselves or to each other (Polanyi 1967). It is often accessed through personal experiences: stories, jokes, metaphors, skits, gesture, drawings, songs, rituals, and the imaginative layout of work spaces. (Von Krogh et al. 2000, p. 176). It is shared by direct observation of how a task is done, by storytelling of successful solutions of difficult problems in the past, by imitation of more accomplished members, by hints, and by outright experimentation (Von Krogh et al. 2000, p. 83; Retna and Ng

2011; Orr 1990; Lave and Wenger 1991). The classroom becomes transformed when these resources to make tacit knowledge become available and central to the work of the class.

With the community of practice metaphor in mind, the classroom then can be experienced as a community with true interdependence because neither expertise nor authority can be centralized in a single individual. While the instructor has a special role in the group, there is the expectation that all members must learn from one another. Due to the open-ended nature of the group's tasks, members both give and take direction from one another. Leadership is more facilitative than directive and members act as apprentices to the leader. The teacher acting as the leader of the community of practice provides both opportunities to participate in the work and resources to support learning, but much direction comes from members (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Brown and Duguid 2000). To decentralize power, the design and running of sessions are, as much as possible, carried out by students themselves in partnership with the professor.

The Student as "TA"

In this model of co-creating the classroom, each student serves as a teaching apprentice or "TA" for the course, which provides a framework for collaboration between the professor and students. This can be done with individual students or in pairs. While it may seem simpler and more efficient to delegate the classroom presentation and facilitation to the student, this would run counter to the goals of the cocreated classroom as this would greatly reduce occasions for shared work, apprenticeship, and mentorship. Delegation can also rob the class of the benefit of the instructor's experience and remove a rich source of data for the professor: to have the experience of working directly with student partners on a complex task. In the role of TA, students invariably showcase both their issues and their strengths, and the professor then has the opportunity to model a way of working assertively and collaboratively with the students. And in classroom sessions, students invariably pick up on the "moves" of the professor, and these become part of the body of knowledge for all students to draw from. The collaboration between the professor and TAs requires give and take and for the professor to both assert him/herself while giving the students room to lead. Keeping the overall experience of the class in the forefront, the professor makes choices based upon what will serve the class best, and TAs are encouraged to do the same. The students in fact may be better equipped than the professor to find stories that are relatable and interesting for the class that relate to the concepts. They also might think of exercises that are in line with the interest levels and context of the students. In addition, when they take risks, it has a different symbolic meaning than when the professor shares personal data. Students are also challenged to make interventions that will allow for the development of the class as a learning community. The professor brings a wealth of experience gained from a graduate studies, research, and practice. Together they make a potent team.

Engaging the Will of the Class

In many classroom environments, there is a battle of “wills.” The professor tries to get the students to work, and the students either succumb to the power of the professor or resist. In the co-created classroom, there is a sincere attempt to engage the will of students. In TAs’ sessions, students are asked to not only deliver material but to energize, engage, and mobilize the class. This requires engaging the “will” of their classmates. This includes both the more disciplined side of the “will,” often called “will power,” and the more expressive side often called “the wish.” (London 1991) The disciplined will is at play in class preparation and in keeping people focused during the session. If the students need to have done some prework for the session, then the TAs need to find a way to encourage them to do it. During the session, their efforts are more directed toward engaging “the wish” and making the classroom come to life.

The immediate nature, high desirability, and excitement of “the wish” exhibit a sort of clarity and desire that transcends logic and rationality. Rollo May (1969) asserted that every act of will starts when a wish is conscious and addresses a presently felt need. This viewpoint is akin to Freud’s notion that nothing but a wish can set the mental apparatus in motion. And the more the students come from “the wish,” the more energy there will be. So the role of the TAs becomes to look for ways to engage “the wish” of their peers.

For example, in my organizational behavior class, I had two student “TAs,” Steven and Erika, who designed class with me about power and influence. The two students came up with an exercise in which their peers had to build a tower out of some materials that they provided. They announced a prize for the winner and separated the class into groups to do their work. They also introduced several original touches into the exercise in which each group was given monopoly money, and groups could purchase additional items at a “store” they created. They could buy various items and also use coupons that allowed them to affect the tower building of other groups. The class evolved into a near pandemonium as groups increasingly tried to win, forgetting the usual norms of being in a college classroom. In the end, one of the groups found themselves in an ethical conundrum. Would they use their earned coupons to topple another group’s tower in order to win? They did. As you can imagine, this offered great food for class discussion about many subjects pertinent to the course. And it was brought up in future class sessions as part of the shared lore of the group. A wide range of phenomena happened in the space of 75 min, as groups formed alliances against other teams, and the class allowed themselves to be ordered around by two student TAs who minutes before had just been their peers. Each student in the exercise also got individualized feedback about their performance in the building groups. Overall, the session was a powerful design, further enhanced by the fact that it was generated, created, and implemented by students in collaboration with the professor. Beyond the value of the exercise, this feeling of student empowerment reinforced the dynamic of co-creation and transformed the classroom. It was as much how it got created than what was created that carried the power to get full involvement from the students and the possibility of

more and better class sessions to come. In debriefing with Steven and Erika, they reported being amazed by what had transpired but also self-critical. They mentioned that they could have managed their time better and highlighted more of the behaviors that resulted, pairing them more succinctly to theories. I interpreted their self-criticism in the face of a session that had been very successful, an artifact of the maturity they had been elevated to. Their standards for themselves had grown to the point that were working on subtle nuances. At the end of the debrief, I asked them to give feedback to each other, asking each, "If someone asked you what it's like to work with the other TA, what would you say? What strengths did he/she show in working with you and what would you want even more of? In the discussion, each praised the other. But an issue emerged where Erika had been holding back her own ideas and felt the need to defer to Steven's opinion. He told her that he would rather she be more assertive in sharing her own ideas and that they spurred his own thinking. So this became another learning point as they think about working relationships and the subtle dynamics that occur.

Overall, the design and facilitation of this session visibly tapped into the "wish" of the students. They began to act in an unguarded manner and to show their instincts. Later this became material for thoughtful analysis of what had occurred and lived human behavior to use as a text for analysis.

The learning for Steven and Erika as TAs was both content and process rich. They took on what felt like a big challenge in designing a class with their professor, learning to collaborate with each other and finding their poise and confidence to deliver a product to a group they felt a stake in. Afterward they were asked to apply theory in writing a reflective/analytical paper. They also had the experience of making an intervention into a group's development and had a chance to distinguish themselves among their peers. All this creates an upward spiral where the next pair of TAs will want to keep the bar growing ever higher. Students in their early twenties are potentially very mature but can also be immature. The structure brings out their potential maturity and then inspires others to follow suit.

The experience described above was early in the term and also then created the possibility of classroom experience being different than the norm. What else might happen in the rest of the term? It also deepened the relationship between students as they began to respond to each other's leadership; to deal with each other's values about winning, losing, and competition; and to show each other in real time how they exercise power. And since the exercise was largely designed by the students in collaboration with me, their teacher, it was uniquely theirs. They now clearly saw themselves as cocreators of the classroom and a place where almost anything is possible.

Students report that the variety and novelty of having different student TAs in each class creates a freshness that keeps them engaged throughout the semester. One student remarked, "I think what I liked most about your classes was the fact that no class was ever the same. By having students serve as TAs, it made coming to class more interesting because you never know what class will be like. As someone who has ADD, I find interactive learning to be much more beneficial to me than a standard lecture."

The co-created classroom can be realized through a series of interventions. There are certainly other interventions possible that might be even more appropriate for different courses or to make use of the instructor's unique personality and skills. These have been developed over 5 years and refined. They are designed to empower students and build a strong classroom culture migrating a shift from teacher/student to mentor/apprentice.

The Interventions

Intervention #1: The Poetry Gallery

In our experience, most students carry with them a complex, powerful, and unconscious default image of what constitutes a college class. Therefore, it is important to introduce a "frame-breaking" experience to open up possibilities and to begin to see new potentials in what the experience might be. We have found that the Poetry Gallery exercise is a great way to set a tone for this transition. In addition, students find a deeper engagement with classmates, intrinsic motivation, and learning at the level of identity. Finally, students participate actively in inventing practices through which the class takes shape.

The Gallery is comprised of two equally important elements: a setting and a set of activities. The setting is designed to capture student attention immediately upon entering the room. We post approximately 75 poems on the classroom walls. Poems are displayed in oversized fonts on brightly colored sheets of paper. We provide live or recorded instrumental music to provide a calming, unobtrusive background that supports quiet browsing of the poetry. First, participants silently *browse the gallery*. Next, they *select a poem that speaks to them*. They *share their poem* with one other student and tell why they selected it. Time permitting, participants *read their poems to the whole group* and talk about what the poems evoked in them. Next, participants engage in a *freewrite exercise*. For 8–10 min, participants write on a theme without self-critique or hesitation. Finally, those members who choose to do so can *perform their freewrites for the group*.

Research on the Poetry Gallery (Van Buskirk and London 2008, 2012) has found three major effects: personal transformations, group empathy and trust, and enhanced connection to the course material. Students report that the Gallery intensifies and clarifies personal and interpersonal experience. For example, a shy student chose a poem that expressed his faith and feelings of strength he gets from his religious life. This is not something he would typically talk about with peers, especially in a business class. During the Poetry Gallery, he surprised himself by taking the risk to pick this poem and then to talk openly about it with another student of a different race and gender. She was surprised by his sensitivity and they opened up to each other. This then gave him confidence to read his poem to the whole class. He reported in a reflection paper that it took courage for him to break his usual self-censorship. The class was surprised and delighted by the sensitivity and strength of his description. His peers then felt challenged to rise to his example as the

group suddenly became a safe place to talk about difficult things. Later in the term, they found themselves able to address many undiscussables in terms of the course material (i.e., how social class of students affects peer relationships, spending habits and perceptions of social loafing in student working groups). This arc of personal discovery, social bonding, and enhanced relevance of the course material is a common occurrence.

How the Gallery Facilitates the Migration to the Cocreated Classroom

While the Gallery by itself is not enough to generate the culture change we seek (it is a one-time experience in a 14-week semester), it orients students to the kinds of changes they will experience in the rest of the class, and it is a vital stage-setter for the other three interventions. Below, we briefly sketch how the Gallery supports change along each of the ten dimensions. These insights have been obtained through student reflection papers after the Gallery and at the end of the course.

The Gallery is also a gateway experience toward dispersed expertise and authority. In the Gallery, the directive role of the professor is greatly reduced. He or she provides little initial explanation or guidance beyond telling arriving students to wander the room reading the poems on the walls “as if they were at an art gallery.” As a result, students create their Gallery experience.

This experience also introduces students to ideas of tacit knowledge and learning. As they browse, select, and share poems, students encounter a great deal of personal material that they have not shared in other classes (or may have been completely unaware of). These include values, relationships, future ambitions, crises, work experience, athletic or artistic skills, conflicts, and changes. As they share these responses with others, and as they write their own proto-poems in the freewrite, students begin to encounter and appreciate what they have been missing in previous classes.

One of the most common student responses in reflecting on the Gallery is the increase in engagement with others. As students hear others talk about “issues close to their own heart,” they respond with great appreciation. As they feel heard by others, the sense of trust in the class increases exponentially. Stereotypes fall away as students get to know one another on a more personal and nuanced basis. They discover and appreciate one another’s depth of feeling, integrity, and in many cases, poetic sensitivities.

Although participation in the Gallery is initially required by the professor, as students participate in the Gallery, they quickly own it. In the climate of engagement that occurs, students report making choices to take risks related to sharing, freewriting, and performing. In student reaction papers, students rarely mention grades as a significant factor. Intrinsic motivation, first experienced in the Gallery, is later built into other interventions.

The Poetry Gallery also is an intervention into identity. Learning occurs at levels deeper than mere content. Students commonly report experiencing themselves differently. The surfacing of tacit material, unanticipated depth in others, the climate of high trust, and decisions about risk-taking in participation often prompt students

to view themselves in a different light. They begin to wonder if they should share more of themselves in other groups, if they should seek out community more intensely, or if poetry might have some value in other settings (Van Buskirk and London 2012).

Intervention #2: Coaching for High-Impact Class Sessions

In the typical classroom, personalized attention through coaching is unlikely to occur. Firstly, the instructor has no direct experience working with the student, so the coaching would be based upon self-report or worse, the instructors own guess about what the student needs. By partnering with students on the TA session, a great opportunity presented itself where the coaching had a reason, a context, and a real-life working outcome to live in. The second reason for coaching is that many of our students are ill equipped to handle the responsibility and maturity required to TA for a class session. We found that they needed the coaching to uplift them and to bring out their potential. As they stepped up and succeeded, the relationship could take on a more mature character. So the coaching provides quality control and developmental potential and brings the student-professor relationship to a place of real mentoring.

Immediately after the Gallery (in the third or fourth week of the semester), coaching sessions are organized. Initially, students are given the challenge of working with a peer and the instructor to design and facilitate one 75-min class session. They read the material assigned to the class. They also read an additional article on the topic and set goals for the session. These goals are multidimensional including the content of the topic, skill practice, and engagement of peers, furthering the development of the class as a learning community and personalizing the material. They then work with the professor to craft a design, execute, it and get feedback from both peers and the professor. While most students have had to give presentations in the past, few have been challenged with creating a session of this magnitude and with this much responsibility. Coaching students to lead effective sessions involves addressing three issues: (1) diagnosing the class and what it needs, (2) using of self (usually in the form of personal narratives), and (3) negotiating the role of the professor.

Diagnosing the Class

In the first coaching session, students learn to tailor content and pedagogy to what the class needs. At this point, the professor asks a series of questions to elicit tacit perceptions of the class so far. For example, a group might choose an activity at random such as showing a film clip from *Office Space*. Here, the instructor might say, “That would certainly be fun, but what will you do with it that will have some impact?” At this point, the professor tries to put the audience into the picture. He asks questions such as, “What have you noticed about the class?” or “What does this class need?” or “What has been your favorite presentation so far.” Or “In this topic what

are your classmates most knowledgeable about, and what can you give them that will really add value?" Another approach is to focus on the student's relationship to the content area. With students who have read the article, the professor asks the question: "What is the most interesting part of the article?" "What is the message of this article that students need to hear?" The professor then challenges the pair to think about how they might respond to the class's needs. These questions are designed to encourage student TAs to be audience centered and to take responsibility for the potential impact of their session. This inquiry usually results in them reframing their challenges from "How do I present information?" to "What is the impact I want to have on individuals and the group."

Use of Self

The second goal of the coaching session is for students to "use themselves." This step builds on the Gallery workshop and reflection paper where students have had significant experiences of tacit knowledge becoming explicit. The professor encourages them to put themselves into the topic and to share their own stake in the material. Usually, this involves finding personal or work-related stories that connect in some way to the topic and have the potential to spark classroom discussion and inquiry.

Particular emphasis is placed on stories that contain a modicum of personal vulnerability. We have found that shared vulnerability often triggers strong identification, curiosity, and interest from the class. As part of the coaching session, the professor encourages students to share their own stories early in the presentation, prior to asking their classmates to take risks. Finally, students and the professor rehearse the story in full and explore possible exercises that might engage the class even more. In rehearsing presentations with the professor, students reduce risk and transform vulnerability into confidence. Once students have connected their stories to the material and to the current state of the class, they are in a position to choose an exercise from the text, to modify an exercise from a previous session, or to invent something completely new:

In a session on influence, one student, a prominent member of the football team, repeatedly talked about his coach. It was clear that this man had been an important figure in his life and that he had learned a great deal about leadership from him. However, the student was confused because, while he had viewed his coach to be a role model, his language, judgmental attitude, and aggressive manner were inconsistent with how influence was described in course readings. The student also found a disconnect between how he acted on the football field and the gentler way that he and his classmates influenced each other. Yet he was fascinated by the way his coach acted and wondered if there was some way to incorporate aspects of this style in his presentation. I suggested that he talk to his partner as his coach spoke to him. The result was both amusing and exciting as he transformed into his coach. We decided to use this as the basis of an exercise. The class was initially shocked by his manner, but this role play led to a great discussion where students

challenged their assumptions about political correctness, boldness, the risks involved in being assertive and how they interacted with each other in group projects.

Negotiating the Role of the Professor

The diffusion of expertise and authority in the co-created classroom does not mean that the professor is passive. In fact, he/she participates actively as a partner in the presentation as well as a guide. The relationship to the student resembles a master/apprentice arrangement where the teacher participates actively in the work at the same time he teaches (Lave and Wenger 1991). The precise nature of this collaboration, however, varies from case to case as the professor's role is tailored to the needs of the dyad. In some cases, the professor provides music, in others class management expertise. In all cases, he/she "has the student's back" in case anything goes wrong. The professor as partner tends to assure a level of trust with the presenters that infuses them with confidence and, according to student reflection papers, contributes to quality presentations.

How Coaching Sessions Facilitate the Migration to the Co-created Classroom Coaching challenges student notions about what it means to prepare for a presentation. In the coaching, the professor encourages the TAs to diagnose the state of the class as a learning community and to view their session as an opportunity for intervention. They are also encouraged to be innovative in creating their own designs that emerge from the students' own experiences and perceptions. Dispersed expertise and authority are thus enacted by negotiating the professor's role. An ethos of learning by doing emerges as students take increased responsibility for the task. They report learning about the course material as they discover together how to engage a large group in learning important lessons about itself. In addition, tacit knowledge is evoked and used as students diagnose the class and learn how to use themselves in their designs.

The solo TA or dyad, along with the professor, often generates a high level of engagement in the coaching session itself as students gain confidence in the relevance of their experience, in the skills they discover in rehearsing presentations, and in the assurance that the professor is there to support in case anything goes wrong. Motivation shifts significantly from extrinsic to intrinsic as students experience real growth, engagement with the professor and, in some cases, the beginning of a professional trajectory (i.e., how these skills might apply in the future (Wenger 1998). Student identities are enhanced through the discovery of unanticipated relevance of heretofore tacit skills to professional tasks. In response to these experiences, students begin to ask themselves who they are, who they might become, and what they might accomplish in the future (Clegg et al. 2005). They learn to bring their "whole selves" to the work, discovering that memories of work experiences, athletic triumphs and disappointments, or forgotten artistic skills can make their presentations come alive.

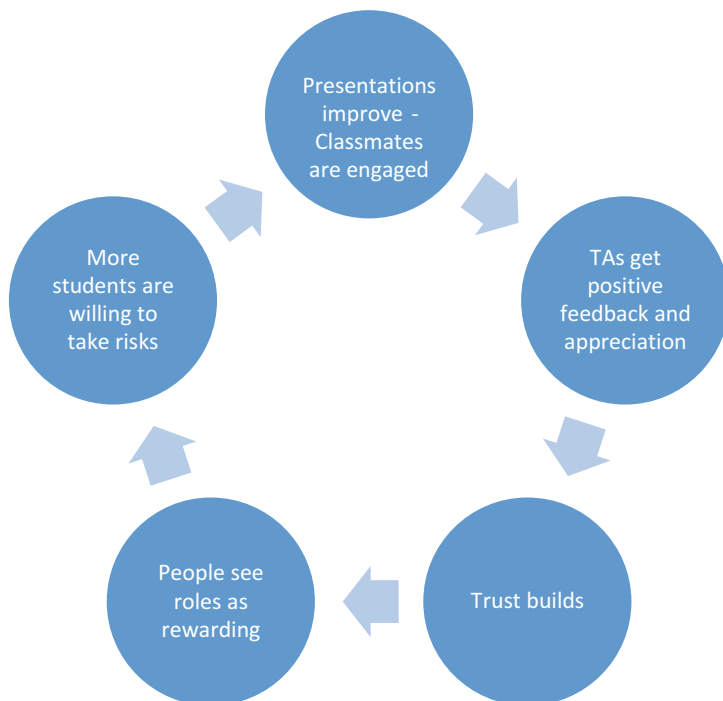


Fig. 1 Cycle of support

Intervention #3: Student-Facilitated Sessions and Their Effect on the Development of the Class

As they find alignment between concepts, personal stories, and experiential exercises in coaching sessions, most students discover new strengths and gain confidence. However, it is in the sessions themselves that the class as a whole begins to shift into a co-created classroom.

Effective class sessions drive the development of a more highly engaged culture. To describe the progression of the classroom culture, we developed two models of interlocking virtuous cycles: a cycle of support and a cycle of aspiration (Figs. 1 and 2). The *cycle of support* (see Fig. 1) usually unfolds in a sequence of five steps. The first step is an early sequence of exciting session designs. For this reason, students judged to be the most active or skillful participants in early classes are the first to present. Next (step 2), effective early sessions elicit appreciation from peers that supports trust, spontaneity, risk-taking, and engagement. As early presenters are rewarded by positive feedback, others see that presenting can be a safe and exciting experience (step 3). As the semester continues, trust builds in the class (step 4), and more students build vulnerability into their presentations. As students model their efforts on earlier work, presentations are characterized by increasing self-disclosure and creativity which further galvanize student attention in a virtuous cycle of support:

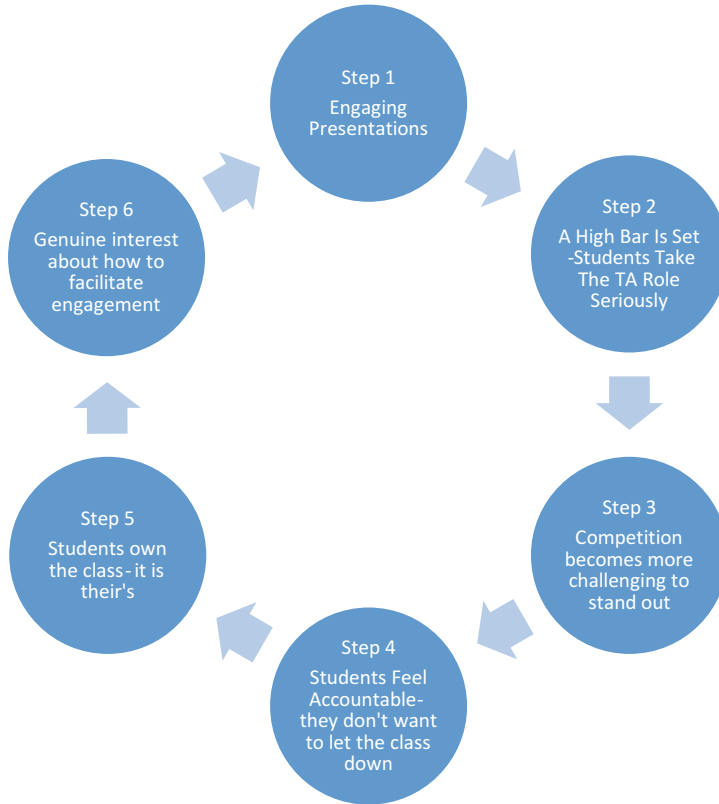


Fig. 2 Cycle of aspiration

One student was a football player. He told the story of having been the backup quarterback, with the expectation of waiting his turn to be the starter and star of the team. However, he was passed over for a younger player. In his presentation on the topic of motivation, he talked about what it was like to continue being a backup and how it was difficult to prepare for games, help the starter and do the other activities expected of the back-up. He also raised the question of how the relationship with his coach evolved and what he might have done differently to earn more respect and credibility. The class was mesmerized by this account. There were many athletes in the class who could easily empathize with his feelings. The high level of self-disclosure in this story and the supportive response of the class tended to create a heightened trust that encouraged others.

Early high-quality class sessions generate a second virtuous cycle, *the cycle of aspiration* (see Fig. 2). As the semester unfolds, the culture of the classroom encourages students to equal or exceed efforts of their peers. Like the cycle of support, the cycle of aspiration begins with *engaging early presentations*. However, in addition to triggering positive feedback, these presentations set a “high bar” that

motivates others to take the class more seriously (step 2). Third, class sessions tend to improve as students learn from one another. Fourth, presentations create expectations to which students feel accountable and which they want to exceed. A mix of accountability and competition shows up often in coaching sessions later in the semester. Students don't want to be the weak link in a strong chain. They bring to coaching sessions an urgency to find a way to succeed, and they more easily see the professor as a guide and partner who "has their back" during the class sessions. Fifth, students own the class more and more for its own sake. Traditional concerns of grades and social approval become less salient as each dyad commits to adding value to the class. It is not enough to be a "talking head" or an entertainer. Most of the later presenters have enjoyed their class experience and become curious to learn how to make similar presentations. Sixth, this virtuous cycle of gratitude for the efforts of peers, increasing standards of excellence, and increasing accountability creates an increasing curiosity about how to create engagement in those who have yet to present.

As these two cycles mature, they tend to reinforce each other. As the group gets more supportive, presentations improve. Compelling stories are easier to come by as students see that risk-taking is increasingly supported by the class. A growing climate of trust supports the vulnerability and risk-taking that makes presentations both exciting and effective. The result is a culture where students work together in an atmosphere of high trust to produce an ever-improving product. The cycle of support and the cycle of aspiration work together to create the emergence of a collaborative classroom culture.

Student TAs work collaboratively with the professor as mentor in facilitating classroom facilitated, confronting a domain that is at once highly difficult and emergent. Together, the cycles support students in responding to these challenges: the cycle of support generates an atmosphere of trust and risk-taking which, when embraced, supports the presentation of highly engaging presentations, a central factor in both cycles. Likewise, the cycle of aspiration generates a sense of accountability and competitiveness that motivates students to take on the task of making highly engaging sessions and to support others in their efforts.

Dispersed Expertise and Learning by Doing As the professor steps back from a command and control role, and as students take on more responsibility and leadership, they find the knack of conducting and participating in a series of engaging classroom sessions. As the cycles of aspiration and support mature, students get more involved and learn more and more by "doing." They begin discover their own expertise. They learn course material in the context of mastering the art of skillful facilitation. They borrow (and adapt) techniques from one another such as role plays, skits, stories, and the skillful use of classroom exercises. In this sense, the culture of the class resembles the culture of a community of practice where members freely consult each other based on perceived expertise and interest instead of organizational role.

Tacit Knowledge In addition to borrowing pedagogical devices, students also engage in deeper modes of role modeling. They borrow aspects of personal style that include humor, vulnerability, risk, musical talents, and personal revelations. This expanded repertoire of tacit knowledge constitutes an expanding resource available to the class.

As the cycles of aspiration and support emerge, they energize the classroom community. As students respond to each other on both academic (aspiration) and personal levels (support), individuals become highly engaged with one another. As they learn about the course material and the mechanics of course design, they also learn about one another's values, challenges, skills, relationships, struggles, etc. As a result, students get engaged by one another's sessions on many different levels, and a rich network of intrinsic motivation becomes part of the experience. Students are motivated by social bonding, responsibility to the group, professional growth, and increased confidence in their presentation and facilitation abilities. Many report in student evaluations that the experience of high-quality, self-revealing class sessions make them think more seriously about their own academic and personal identities.

Finally, the cycles of support and aspiration support the invention of many new practices of session design and facilitation. Students have invented dramatic skits, written songs, confronted the class with workplace dilemmas, apologized for "bad behavior" in a previous class, devised a model of "speed dating," and many other surprising approaches. The plethora of invented practices is similar to what is found in highly functioning communities of practice. It also reinforces the value of the cocreated classroom and a sense of ownership, pride, belonging, and identity emerge.

Intervention #4: Continuous Evaluation, Self, Others, and the Class

Evaluation of student sessions is not an afterthought but an integral part of every class session. It is not a discrete judgment made by the professor but occurs as a stream of assessments made by every student on the presentations of every other student. As such, it is an important driver of the culture change. Members evaluate themselves, other class members, their presentation partners, the professor, the feedback they receive, and the course itself. In this dense network of evaluation, students begin to enact a classroom that is different from anything they have experienced before.

The Evaluation Process Explicit evaluation begins after each class session when each student writes feedback to the presenters at the end of each class. In these comments, they answer three general questions: What did you like about the presentation? What did you get out of it? What could the presenters have done better? These notes are written immediately after the performance while the students' reactions are fresh. Since we are trying to gauge not only the academic quality of the performance but its effect on engagement, we want feedback to be

immediate. For this reason, the rubric is kept simple and focuses on direct experience.

Next, the TA or TA's for the session meet with the professor immediately after the class (if possible). They are initially asked the questions, "What went even better than you thought it might?" "What would you do differently?" Then they take turns reading the notes aloud. This allows them to "feel" the feedback as well as understand it. This can be a difficult moment, and the professor acknowledges both positive and negative comments (or disagrees with them). He/she is quick to praise what went well. Students are encouraged to explore their reactions. Partners are asked what they make of it. Next, partners give each other feedback. This is important because one's partner has firsthand knowledge of the collaboration. Sharing this is not part of the usual social norms of student collaboration, but the professor's prompts legitimize it and create a space for meaningful sharing and feedback. A good prompt to get things going is "If someone asked you what it is like to work with Jim, what would you say?" Follow-ups can mine the data for more specifics. "You mentioned that Jim was a creative thinker. How would you describe the way he uses his creativity in your meetings together?" This step is also a chance to clear up misconceptions between partners. The dynamics of debriefs vary but are always powerful moments of reflection and learning. Even when the partnership is less than optimal, the potential for transformational learning is there:

Ella was very structured, accountable, and controlled, while Marie was unreliable and charismatic. Throughout the project I noticed Ella being very upset with her partner. When the presentation was over, she was horrified, though the presentation on the whole was pretty good. Marie had gone off the design and used valuable time going off on what felt like a long tangent. Marie began the feedback. She talked about how Ella was the best partner that she had ever had, and that she had learned so much in working with her. She acknowledged her for carrying the project and gave a heartfelt thank you. I was watching Ella's face during this, and it was as if it had melted. Gone was the stony hurt and anger, replaced by compassion and a sense that she was somebody's hero.

It is only after this sequence of activities, peer notes, reading notes aloud to the professor, professor feedback, student responses, and feedback between partners, that the professor gives a grade for the presentation. He usually does this on the spot, although occasionally he waits to read the student's reflective paper on the experience. After students get their grade, they have a chance to respond according to whether they think it is fair. It is important that they have a chance to present their own point of view since the feedback comes from so many different angles, and their take on their performance can be different from the professor's.

Immediacy and comprehensiveness of feedback are implicated in both the cycle of support and the cycle of aspiration through which the culture of the class is enacted. In student notes, negative comments are couched in terms of how the presentation could be improved or in how this student might reach his/her potential. This language lowers defensiveness and most students are avid to learn how their presentation could have gone better. When the notes are overwhelmingly positive, many presenters are disappointed at the lack of constructive criticism.

Writing evaluative notes after every presentation affects the audience members as well as the presenters. It focuses everyone's attention on the act of evaluation in every class. Students who have not yet facilitated a session as TA prepare their own sessions with the knowledge that peer evaluation will be part of the picture. This motivates students to pay careful attention as they seek to learn something they can use in their own presentations.

For students who have already served as TAs, ongoing evaluation of others is an opportunity to reflect on what they have already done. After leading, students return to the participant role. Here they often reflect on their session in light of subsequent class sessions. For some, this extended evaluation is an important way to continue to work on issues raised in the feedback session.

The continual ongoing evaluation in the class strongly contributes to the way the students perceive and think about the sense of the course as a co-creation. These changes cut across most of the dimensions we have sketched so far. It problematizes the domain by involving students in the act of assessment to a much greater degree than they had previously experienced. This intensification of evaluation is yet another difficulty students must negotiate during the course of the class. Students learn to give and receive feedback more intensively and more personally than ever before.

Moreover, continual evaluation under these conditions tends to make assessment an emergent process. The sheer number of the judgments made by peers provides emergent models against which students evaluate the action. This is very different from traditional classrooms where students are usually given a rubric for peer evaluations. In this case, the rubric itself evolves as the class progresses.

Dispersed expertise and authority are also bolstered by the evaluation process, as the voice of the professor is one of many to which students must pay attention. Moreover, the placement of professor feedback at the end of the evaluation process provides maximal opportunity for students to judge themselves and one another before the professor weighs in with his/her opinion. The chance to question and influence the professor's judgment further empowers students.

Evaluation in the collaborative classroom tends to support the emergence and utilization of tacit knowledge. On the spot evaluations, the profusion of notes, feedback from one's TA partner, the professor, and the ongoing "feedback" one gives oneself during the rest of the semester tend to surface a variety of tacit judgments, reactions, disagreements, and reevaluations of one's performance. As the class goes forward, these tacit elements inform the design of later classroom sessions, feeding the upward cycle. Similar to a community of practice, the skill and knowledge of each individual in the class are elevated along with a collective capacity to learn and effectively participate. Challenges that were a struggle at the beginning of the term become much easier later in the term. Students who are uncomfortable participating report finding a new ease and flow in being active. Students who fear public speaking find themselves actually enjoying leading a session. Students who previously would read off PowerPoint in a stilted fashion begin speaking extemporaneously. And the ability to go back and forth between the personal, the practical, and the academic becomes a collective competency.

Evaluation also supports high engagement within the class as a whole. In a class of 16 students, the presenters will receive 16 notes of feedback. This lends a weight to peer opinions that most students find unique. As the semester wears on, they care more and more about what peers think of their TA sessions. The fact that students continue to make sense of what they have heard in light of later presentations and that they experience a certain level of angst relative to their upcoming sessions point to evaluation's effect on engagement.

One of the most unexpected results in our work has been the change in student orientation to grades vs. feedback. Students are disappointed when feedback is "too easy," they parse positive feedback for critical suggestions, and they continue to work with feedback they've received in future classes. Finally, working with the professor to make sense of the feedback provides another intrinsically motivating element.

The experience of being so continuously involved in evaluation creates an expansion of the student's professional identity (Clegg et al. 2005). In reflection papers, students talk about how the dual role of being judges and judged changes how they think about their role as students. Many find this role empowering as they make judgments that are at once more consequential, more critical, and more empowering than ever before. Many students envision taking this heightened criticality into the workplace where they imagine giving feedback that balances caring and fairness.

While students do not invent the evaluation scheme, it immerses them in a wide range of practices that changes how they view classroom evaluation. Writing notes, receiving notes, and working through reactions with the professor force them to deal with the actual impact of their presentations on their peers. They must deal with the possibility that their class session might be boring, disturbing, or confusing. They must deal with these reactions in direct interaction with the professor, who acts as a facilitator and a judge at the same time. However, they are not passive recipients, even when they themselves are being evaluated. Reacting to notes from the class, giving and receiving feedback from their partner, and checking self-evaluations against this wealth of feedback amount to a more richly nuanced evaluation than any they have ever experienced (this is a common response in evaluation papers and focus groups).

For the instructor, evaluation becomes a vibrant process of thinking critically about choices made in preparation, design, and implementation and how they resulted in what actually occurred in the TA session. While most sessions are highly successful, the few that are disappointing can be challenging for both the professor and student. I recently had a student who seemed unaware that a disconnect had happened during her session. At one point, she became long winded and students began avoiding eye contact with her and disengaging. In our debrief, I let the written feedback speak for itself, and as we read each note, together, we validated or invalidated the comments. This built a shared understanding and a co-inquiry that I thought helped her to take in the feedback and to not feel overwhelmed by it. Then we discussed how the disconnect occurred and how her long-windedness is an ongoing issue and some ways she might work on being more concise and powerful in her communication. As we discussed, I tried to make sure she felt supported as we looked at what is a very significant issue for her that might affect her career aspirations. In the end, her grade on the assignment became secondary and getting

control of the issue became of greater importance. I found myself feeling vulnerable in the interaction, since I did not know how much directness she could handle and worried about crossing her sensitivity line in looking at something as central as the way she comes off to her peers and their judgments about her behavior. I also added some criticism of how she had acted in our preparation sessions and this felt risky to do, given the disconfirmation she was already experiencing. However, I also needed to make sure I told her the truth and did not shrink from the difficulty of helping her to face issues that could derail her career.

Continual evaluation primes students to reflect deeply on the process of the class. At the end of the course, they write reflection papers on the course as a whole. These consist of open-ended questions designed to provide a window on how the class worked from their point of view. Students routinely integrate course material, personal experience, and the dimensions and interventions described in this paper. We provide three quotes that exemplify many of the processes that occur in the course. After each quote, we highlight the dimensions and the interventions contained within it:

Douglas McGregor's ideas of Theory X and Theory Y were present in our class in a big way. As a student, I felt empowered in this class to create my own experience. I felt more loyalty to the teacher and to the class when I was given respect as a person and was able to input my own ideas. Whenever I went into the professor's office, I knew that he would listen to my ideas and take them into serious consideration. He let us implement our own ideas even if they weren't ideas he would have chosen. Because he let me have the power to control my own work, I felt a greater desire to perform well so as to keep the balance of respect between us. (CoP dimensions: diffusion of authority, invention of practice, intrinsic motivation. Classroom interventions: coaching).

I came prepared to the coaching sessions every time because I wanted to rid myself of a stereotype that I believe I helped facilitate. I felt that people at Muhlenberg underestimate my intelligence because I am a football player. The other football players and I always sit together in class usually wearing sweats or some type of athletic attire with Muhlenberg football somewhere on it. I also do not help my case by coming late to class and not speaking up more. ... One thing I will never forget is when one student brought up the Poetry Gallery we had done earlier in the semester. He said to me that he thought I was just a jock who played football, but when he heard what I had to say about my father and how he was always there for me, it changed his opinion.

The evaluation process kept me involved. I was engaged in all of the sessions because I knew I had to provide feedback at the end of class. Since I would be receiving feedback from these same people down the road, I wanted to give the most genuine and helpful commentary I could provide. This reminded me of the 360-degree feedback we read about in class. It increased the focus of not only the students but of the presenters as well because they had to present material in ways that appealed to class members as well as to the professor.

Conclusion

In exploring the possibility of co-creating the classroom with students, we must deal with our own basic assumptions based upon our own experiences, anxieties, and fears. For example, some would argue that collaboration sounds good but that

students care primarily about their grades and therefore are not to be trusted to share power. A deeper look tells us that this obsession with grades is more of a symptom of a greater problem than an inevitable reality. Grade obsession is a symptom of a learning environment that has grown rote and/or cynical. It is also a sign that students are bored with how we are engaging them. Some faculty are great lecturers, but students report anecdotally that they just get too much of it. And when there is nothing there to engage students at a larger level of concern, they focus on how they are being judged and on dealing with authority. These are not their only concerns, just the ones they focus on when there is nothing else going on that is particularly urgent or compelling. Another roadblock to collaboration with students is the fact that tenure considerations often de-emphasize the relative importance of teaching and leading some faculty to feel that putting greater energy into their teaching might not yield personal or professional rewards. Given these dynamics, the desire to innovate in the classroom must come from our own intrinsic desire to have meaningful work. In many cases, students pay huge sums of money and take on debt to go to colleges and universities and can reasonably expect that their development be a priority of the faculty. If the reward systems don't line up with this, we are not a slave to them but can set our own priorities for what is important.

The co-created classroom offers some exciting possibilities for transformational learning and for a classroom experience that students love. On a personal level, teaching in this way has not only made my classes better but also given me a renewed sense of purpose about my work. Since adopting this approach, I can now say that I am truly developing my students and that what they take from our classroom experience has enriched their lives. It has also been a place for me to connect with students and enjoy those relationships in a clear and productive way. They know what my work with them is and why I do it, and they understand their role and embrace it. This allows students to get value from both me and their peers in a way that respects boundaries but that also carries accountability. Earlier in my career, I was less clear about what my relationship was to them and now realize that they were confused as well. Finding this clarity in intent and approach has made all the difference in making the work come alive. The details of this work were developed in a particular context, but the frame of co-creation has potential for transformation in other types of college settings as well as in consulting, training, and organizational life. My hope is that you feel inspired to find your own story in this pursuit and to find a way to co-create your own learning environment.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Clarifying the Relationship Between Transformative Teaching and Transformative Learning](#)
- ▶ [Creating a Flow Organization to Lead into the Future](#)
- ▶ [Identity and Meaning in Transformation](#)
- ▶ [Leader Self-Development, Maturation, and Meditation: Elements of a Transformative Journey](#)

- ▶ [Self-Awareness in Personal Transformation](#)
- ▶ [Self-Knowledge: Master Key to Personal Transformation and Fulfillment](#)
- ▶ [The Untapped Power of Imagination in the Workplace](#)
- ▶ [Transformative Leadership](#)

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