

LEARNING ECOSYSTEM IN OUR CLASSROOMS... A PRELIMINARY MODEL

*Vish Iyer, Monfort College of Business, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO
80639, 970-351-2348, vish.iyer@unco.edu*

*Moe Manshad, Monfort College of Business, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley,
CO 80639, 970-351-1209, muhanad.manshad@unco.edu*

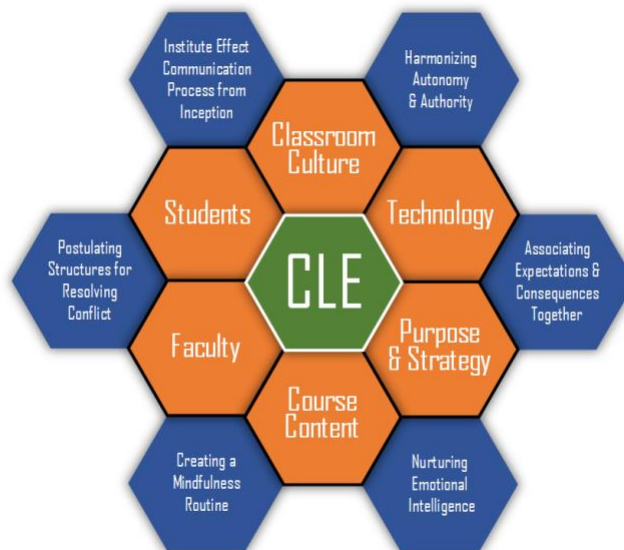
*Daniel Brannon, Monfort College of Business, University of Northern Colorado,
Greeley, CO 80639, 970-351-2053, Daniel.brannon@unco.edu*

INTRODUCTION

One of the ways Merriam-Webster defines “Teaching” (noun) as something taught- especially doctrine-teaching as it was written. This gives “Teaching” a “dogmatic” meaning characterized by or given to the expression of opinions very strongly or positively as if they were facts. Merriam-Webster [2] also mentions the following synonyms for the word “dogmatic” ... DICTATORIAL, MAGISTRAL, DOCTRINAIRE and ORACULAR. And this is how many of us in the profession think about teaching. We often consider ourselves kings or queens of the classrooms dispensing information within a set time-period two or three times a week and dictating what, when, how, where, and how-often we interact with our subjects, namely our students. This could truly be considered as a 19th century classroom set up. How many of us consider our classroom as a learning eco-system? As facilitators and leaders, when we orchestrate the activities in our classrooms, we must purposefully think about the learning and training that transpire in our classrooms as part of an eco-system. “Ecosystem” is defined in Oxford Languages, as a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. Every ecosystem is characterized by its vibrance, interactions, energy transferences and growth. According to Ryan Eudy, A Learning Ecosystem, in a corporate setting, is a system of people, content, technology, culture and strategy existing both within and outside of an organization, all of which has an impact on both the formal and informal learning that goes on in that organization. Given such a learning paradigm, this paper will propose a classroom ecosystem that will enhance the formal and informal learning that will go on inside and outside the classrooms. The components of this Classroom Learning Ecosystem (CLE) will consist of Students, Faculty, Course Content, Purpose/Strategy, Technology (that allows dissemination of necessary information), and Classroom Culture (which comprises of shelter, openness, transparency and commitment). A classroom is an ecosystem much like the natural ecosystems that define the world around us, and the survival of any ecosystem is predicated on the transfer of energy between the organisms that embrace the system. Our students are the foundation of our ecosystem that energizes and sustains our classroom ecosystem. However, more frequently than not, the unhealthy nature of the classroom surges out since our students become passive consumers of educational experiences rather than active accomplices in the ecosystem. Students in classrooms are often controlled by external authorities instead of building an internal sense of authority and learning to manage themselves. Teachers often play the role of “Elders” rather than “Enablers” for students to build their own internal sense of authority and learning to manage themselves through self-cognizance, self-regulation, and inherent motivation. Empowering students to become the primary “Suppliers of Energy” in our classroom ecosystem will allow our students to build self-awareness through self-regulation fueled by intrinsic motivation, which is the primary energy source of a student-driven classroom ecosystem.

What is the Classroom Ecosystem entail? Students: Students are our primary suppliers of energy in our CLE. They are the ones that are in the developmental stages. In this group learning takes place formally through Enablers and informally through all the participants in the process. **Faculty:** Faculty is the Enabling element in CLE. Faculty is the balancing element when it comes to autonomy and authority. This balancing act creates a learning environment that enables students to become the primary suppliers of energy in CLE. As John Dewey professed, students can conceptualize knowledge autonomously by accessing their agency and exercising autonomy, harvesting support from peers and educators when necessary. **Course Content:** The subject matter presented in classrooms can be both formal and informal that provide students various experiences in the classroom that contribute to learning. This may be through observation, participation, and critical thinking activities both inside and outside the classroom that foster learning. **Purpose/Strategy:** This element of CLE deals with the goals established for the course and how these goals are to be attained. That is, using Bloom’s Taxonomy of learning, the classroom purpose needs to be determined whether the classroom goals are knowledge dissemination, comprehension, application driven, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, or combinations of these.

Technology: There is no doubt technology dictates the goals established for the course and how the course contents are disseminated in our CLE. Learning process is more influenced by how learners use mobile technologies, modern LMS systems, and new social tools at their discretion offering learners unparalleled access to knowledge and skills, as well as opportunities to interact with peers in numerous learning contexts. **Classroom Culture:** Classroom Culture is one of the most critical elements in CLE that fosters the primary energy suppliers’ impetus for higher levels of energy formation. Classroom culture that is designed to shelter, openness, transparency, and commitment is destined to energize our primary energy suppliers to our CLE, namely our students. The necessary pillars that anchor the framework for our CLE to be the most effective are: Harmonizing Autonomy and Authority, Associating Expectations and Consequences Together, Creating a Mindfulness Routine, Nurturing Emotional Intelligence, Postulate Structures for Resolving Conflicts, and Instituting Effective Communication process from inception.



References will be available upon request from vish.iyer@unco.edu