

***Beyond the Mind:  
Exploring Business Ethics  
Utilizing the Principles of  
Kinesthetics through Devised Theatre***

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International Association for Business and Society, Ashville, North Carolina, USA, June 2012  
Conference Theme: *Personal Responsibility for Improving Society*

**Proposal for a Salon Session:** This session format provides an opportunity to share and discuss an idea that is not aimed at research but at application, either in the classroom, in one's personal life, or in society. Proposals should be approximately two to three pages (single spaced) in length and should specify the nature of the idea and the focal area of the application. It should also clarify how the idea is relevant to the IABS domain and the intended outcome of the session.

**Grounding:** This proposal emerged from a conference on *Ethics and Aesthetics* convened at the University of St. Thomas, and catalogues a chapter submission for a referred book related to this summit.

**Key Words:** Business Ethics, Pedagogy, Kinesthetics

Within the Academy as well as AACSB there has been persistent debate around whether business ethics should be taught as a stand-alone course or rather integrated across the business curriculum. Rare, however, are conversations heading in the direction of integration of business ethics beyond the traditional bounds of the business curriculum and into, for example, theatre arts. And yet just this type of collaboration was established when an inter-College alliance was formed to create the devised play Cheat, a mainstage theatre production for a major regional comprehensive University in the Northwest United States, in which theatre became the ground and moral theory from business ethics became the figure. This proposed IABS session provides a detailed deconstruction of the variety of ways in which business ethics concepts and models informed the creation of Cheat, an original play written, designed, produced and performed by undergraduate theatre arts students.

The initial discussion will have participants focus on outlining the several motivations for engaging in the collaboration. The first had to do with extending the reach of business ethics theory and practice. Principally the domain of business programs, there is great benefit to leveraging the investment of faculty in the teaching of business ethics to the academic advantage of non-business students. After all, students from virtually every scholastic discipline engage in discussion and debate – some thoughtful and some not – around matters of corporate malfeasance. Better to have such conversation informed by solid theory than by mere intuition. The second has to do with better understanding what constitutes effective pedagogy, and the personal responsibility faculty have to pursue this objective. While much attention has been given to the distinction between visual and auditory learning styles, “little attention has been given to kinesthetic learning” (Tranquillo, 2008: p. 1). Kinesthetic learning is one form of active learning and has generally been deployed in those circumstances in which the objective is to acquire a manual skill or refine muscle coordination (Tranquillo, 2008: p. 1). However, it has been suggested that at the post-secondary level kinesthetic learning can well serve the objective of “strengthening concepts as well as connecting ideas together,” and is thereby “intended to stimulate deep thinking” (Tranquillo, 2008: p. 1). What better way to test such an hypothesis than by challenging students who are already well-versed in the mechanical benefits of kinesthetic learning to extend the principles and practices of such learning to the acquisition and application of the most abstract concepts – those of business ethics?

Kinesthetic learning extends upon the construction of compelling metaphor. “[M]etaphorical meaning...denies the well-established distinction between sense and representation” – as does theatre (Ricoeur, 1979: p. 149). Within the context of Cheat, “the meaning [of business ethics] is not only schematized but lets itself be read *on* the [theatre] image in which it is inverted” (Ricoeur, 1979: p. 149). Theatre bears great potential to move the engaged student beyond a purely intellectual understanding of business ethics theory and application: “[t]o *feel*, in the emotional sense of the word, is to make *ours* what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase...[i]ts function is to abolish the distance between knower and known without canceling the cognitive structure of thought” (Ricoeur, 1979: p. 154). Good metaphor incorporates an affective component; kinesthetic learning does this and more by engaging the body as well as the mind. “Kinesthetic activities are a time when students can develop their own personal interpretation of a concept and make connections to other ideas and concepts”

(Tranquillo, 2008: p. 7). Participants will find in the detail that is presented a sketch of both metaphor as well as kinesthetic learning.

*Business ethics* was one of several through-lines that generated thirty-three moments interwoven to form the play Cheat. The business through-line consisted of ten moments with five characters – the Boss and four interchangeable and replaceable employees within an abstract, office-like setting. The theatrical style of expressionism was invoked for the business through-line, meaning the dramatic action, dialogue and design elements such as costumes, sound, and lighting were non-realistic. Expressionism seeks to dramatize the spiritual awakening and struggle of its protagonists against bourgeois values and established authority. For example, stylized choreography movement was employed to abstractly represent the business world and the characters' emotions within that world; actors wore only black and white base costumes with added costume elements of green or gold, suggesting the armor of gladiators as well as wealth, power, and status within the organizational hierarchy. Characters spoke in a stylized textual form that often named the intent and emotion of their character rather than employing realistic dialogue.<sup>1</sup> Each time a worker was fired, the boss directed another worker to sweep them off the stage with a golden broom, only to have the same actor return in the next business moment and be hired as a new employee within the organization.

This expressionistic world formed the narrative of a boss who is under increasing pressure from his Board of Directors (who are in turn under pressure from their investors) to increase profits through cost minimization to the point at which he finally submits to the Board's demands of "rank and yank."<sup>2</sup> This pressure is funneled directly onto the four employees who then fear for their jobs and begin cheating, scapegoating, and threatening one another to maintain their positions within the organization. The through-line follows Lopez, a female employee, as she rises in power by trampling other employees – to the play's climax as the CEO is figuratively killed and a hostile take-over by order of the new Board of Directors is consummated.

Several practical considerations that contributed to the success of this learning venture have been identified. The first was that the faculty involved both got along with and respected one another. They were additionally willing to devote the time to making the learning project a success, even absent full compensation. This was undergirded with a commitment to interdisciplinarity, supported by a university culture that values boundary spanning. This boundary spanning was not only evident in the eagerness of faculty to collaborate, but in the willingness to take risks – to surrender learning to the students. Pragmatically, it was enormously beneficial to have had a devising course already a part of the university curriculum. This again points to university culture, in this case one that places trust in faculty to successfully

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the first words spoken by the boss while on the phone to his investors:  
BOSS: Salutation Investors. Commencement of speech. Outline of current business models, extolment of current state of stock value. Pride in corporate policy. Expression of plan for future profits. Specific details of quarter's model interwoven with colloquial allegory-

<sup>2</sup> The use of *rank and yank* is the most direct connection to Callahan's book from within Cheat.

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articulate the goals and parameters of a course that seems by its very nature to defy structure, supports the expenditure of faculty political capital to navigate the course approval bureaucracy, and entrusts faculty to market an innovative course product to what might have proven a skeptical customer base.

It was surprising to find that at the conclusion of this endeavor it was difficult to determine the point at which business ethics theory left off and kinesthetic learning picked up. In drafting the script for Cheat, theatre students relied heavily on ethical theory as presented in class by a business ethics professional. However, in interpreting ethical theory through characters, dialogue, narrative, costumes, staging and lighting these students not only encapsulated but more importantly extended upon such theory. The process was neither fully deductive nor fully inductive. Kinesthetic learning occurred in the actual performance of the play. Through the very enactment of the devised piece learners came to a more complete understanding of business ethics.

*The ability to integrate kinesthetic learning into the business ethics curriculum is only limited by the imagination of the instructor.* Brainstorming, which in part involves suspending judgment of ideas, will be a key component within the proposed salon session. By way of provoking thought as to what might emerge, imagine a discussion regarding utilitarianism, as expressed through cost-benefit analysis, taking place in the classroom. Students must identify all the categories of costs and benefits appropriate to the issue at hand and then specify these in monetary terms. Risk appraisal is also calculated. In the front of the room is a large balance scale. When the analysis is complete, students place money – say bricks masquerading as gold ingots, each with a purported value of \$1M – on the appropriate pan of the weighting platform. The scale's beam will indicate whether costs outweigh benefits.

And brainstorm some more. The scale is now a huge teeter-totter, each side able to accommodate the entire class. Students have been debating the ethics of child labor, with some concluding it to be morally justified as a means to economic development and others concluding it to be morally reprehensible because it violates basic human rights. The time for commitment to a decision has arrived and students are instructed to make their stand on the matter of child labor by joining one or the other end of the teeter-totter. One by one students stream to the front of the room and position themselves on the teeter-totter. Since there is no reason to believe that individual student weight is systematically related to a position on this issue there is no need to standardize weight across students. The fulcrum does its job, and the will of the majority is revealed by the slope of the beam. Now imagine you are on the 'losing' end of the teeter-totter and you are lifted off the ground. You are convinced you are on the right side of this issue. And you are literally left high-and-dry as you hang suspended in mid-air. The sense of helplessness is palpable in ways not possible had not the principles of kinesthetic learning been harnessed to drive home the despair felt by those who find themselves ineffective in persuading others to what is honestly believed to be the right point of view. Now moral distress is understood viscerally, through the body, as well as intellectually.

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*This session is a call for an interdisciplinary kinesthetic approach to higher education, and particularly to the teaching of business ethics.* The space between and overlap within business ethics and theatre forms fertile ground for enhancing learning, particularly for student artists and student audience members within the walls of the university. The collaboration between theatre and business ethics outlined in this session document a door being opened for the student devisers. Most had never heard of the theories presented by the business ethics content expert during the initial play development, so the challenge to generate performance based on those concepts posed a formidable challenge. Yet as these theatre artists transformed business ethics theory into playable actions for the stage the depth of their theoretical understanding was clearly demonstrated. The student devisers who created the business through-line for Cheat not only digested complicated business ethics theory, they synthesized it and presented it effectively to an audience through characters, dialogue, narrative, costumes, staging and lighting. In numerous instances they spontaneously made critical connections on their own between business ethics theory and each element of the theatre production. The same can be done in any conversation around the topic of business ethics if faculty are both enlightened about and open to the possibility of kinesthetic learning. This session promises to elicit IABS attendee creativity by articulating a model that has proven effective for student learning – including clips from the play Cheat as technology permits – coupled with a challenging interactive engagement designed to elicit creative examples of learning-by-doing from the participants.

References Cited:

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