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## **Leveraging the Creative Arts in Business Ethics Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to describe a way of teaching business ethics using the creative arts, especially literature and theater. By drawing on these disciplines for both method and texts, we can more easily make the connection to business as a fully human activity, concerned with how meaning is created. Students are encouraged to understand story-telling and narrative, and how these tools lend insight into the daily life of businesspeople. The paper describes two main courses, *Business Ethics Through Literature and Leadership*, *Ethics and Theater*, and the rationale for each. We begin by suggesting three main leverage points that the courses engender. We then rely on the words of students who have taken the courses for insights into what they learned. We then critically assess some of the principles that have informed course design over time. We conclude by suggesting that paying attention to the creative arts gives rise to a rather different approach to business ethics, one grounded in the pragmatist tradition in philosophy.

**Key Words**

Teaching Business Ethics

Business Ethics and Humanities

Creative Arts and Business Ethics

Collaboration and Trust

Leveraging Creative Arts

Literature and Theater

## **I. Introduction**

For the last twenty years or so we have been teaching business ethics using the creative arts. We believe that the creative arts offer a number of important leverage points to make a difference in the lives of our students. However, we also believe that such teaching embraces a rather different idea of business ethics and its possibilities. The purpose of this paper is to explain this different kind of teaching and to suggest that making some small changes to traditional business ethics courses via the creative arts can yield great benefits. In section II we explain how two main courses that use the creative arts are structured. In section III we articulate three main leverage points as we see them. In section IV we share some of our students' insights. In section V we extract some principles from these courses and address their implications. Finally in section VI we argue that such teaching requires a different view of the field of business ethics, in line with the pragmatist tradition. As such we need a new research agenda that comes from this way of teaching.

## **II. Literature and Theater Courses<sup>1</sup>**

Medicine, law, and business are all deeply human professions. Yet, increasingly in today's society, each depends on a substantial body of technical knowledge that requires mastery. Professional schools have to be on the cutting edge of this technical knowledge, and in large research universities faculty must be committed to producing the next generation of such knowledge. However, it

becomes crucial for both faculty and students not to lose the idea of 'deeply human profession' in the face of this technical knowledge.

This has led to a real paradox for business schools. In recent years we have a number of critiques of business schools, especially after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) have suggested that management researchers and business schools misunderstand the nature of research, and that most of the so-called "technical knowledge" is not based on evidence. Mintzberg (2004) has argued that management is an art best understood at a later age through a process of apprenticeship and experiential learning. Freeman and Newkirk (2011) have suggested that these critiques miss the mark, since they misunderstand business. According to them, business is a deeply human activity through which we create value and trade with one another. It is fundamentally a cooperative and collaborative activity that relies on understanding the particularity of human interests, needs and emotions. It is much more than 'the physics of money'. There are whole human beings involved in the delivery and reception of services, the building of organizations and institutions and the responsibilities for business education. Whole human beings have values, emotions, families, and otherwise complex lives. And, whole human beings engage in authority and power relationships. There is substantial conflict and opportunities for self-dealing as well as cooperative behavior.

We need to draw on the full palette of the humanities to understand the richness that is inherent in business, especially the creative arts such as literature, theater, music, and the like. For the last 20 years we have been drawing on these

disciplines to teach MBA students at the University of Virginia's Darden School. Two main courses have generated a sustained interest from the students: (1) Business Ethics Through Literature (BEL); and, (2) Leadership, Ethics and Theater (LET).

In BEL the students read novels and short stories. They meet in small dinner groups to discuss the week's readings, and then come to class prepared to discuss the book or story. All of the teaching is done via Socratic questioning rather than lecture. And, the aim is to create a conversation about the book on its own terms, followed by an examination of how the book's themes can yield insight into the lives of the students who are soon to be executives. It is crucial to get the students to examine the book in its own right to develop their skills in analysis and judgment, rather than trying to glean answers to "how does this book apply to business". It is only by digging deeply into the texts that students can understand the humanity of the characters. If there is only a straightforward application of the book to business, the students run the risk of recapitulating the standard story of business, rather than questioning and critiquing it. In addition there are a number of creative writing assignments. The final assignment is to write a short story, and the course concludes with a "fiction reading" of the students' stories.

Typical texts are Fitzgeralds' *The Great Gatsby*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues". All of these texts are filled with ethical questions. For instance in *Gatsby*, a discussion of who if anyone in the book is heroic, leads to an examination of what the students intend to do after business school is over, and how their goals can become so single minded that they forget that their "green lights" must be set within a societal and ethical context. They can see the particularity of

the Gatsby-Daisy-Nick relationships, the importance as well as the barriers, to love. They ask whether Nick should help Gatsby with Daisy, and what is the role of monogamy in life. They begin to talk about and understand the role of purpose, the importance of real friendship, and the need to constantly question one's authenticity.

These same themes are present in Achebe even though the context is quite different. Okonkwo's juxtaposition with the Christian missionaries illustrates one of the key ethical challenges of globalization. Moral relativism is a critical theme here, but Achebe brings it to life again through the particularity of the relationships in the village and between the villages. The arrival of the multinational outsiders, the Christian missionaries, changes the culture so much so that Okonkwo commits suicide, a taboo for the Ibo as well as the Christians. *Things Fall Apart* is simply the best text we have found to understand the moral complexities across culture, and the theoretical issues of moral relativism.

In the Baldwin story we find the conflicting forces of conformity and individuality in the characters of Sonny, the jazz musician, and his brother, the schoolteacher. Baldwin intimates how a sense of self needs a harmony between these forces, and the end of story introduces us to Creole, whose very name suggests such a harmony. The real world of race, drugs, religion is a constant pressure on the characters in all of Baldwin's work, and Sonny's embracing of a musician's life. The conversation where his brother says that people can't always do what they want, and Sonny's response that we should all do exactly what we want, engenders a real conversation among the students about their lives post MBA. They embrace the idea



that their lives will be filled with moral issues, some of which may not be easy to solve, or solvable at all.

We ask the students to imagine themselves as Gatsby, as Nick, as Daisy, as Okonkwo, as Sonny and his brother, and to see the world from their eyes. In doing so, we hope to get the students practice their ability for perspective-taking and empathy and broaden their worldview and be sensitive to how very different people can live. Many business ethics courses rely on ethical dilemmas. While there are dilemmas presented in fiction, they are much more contextualized and rich, and therefore more realistic and more difficult to solve. They are not separated from the rest of the characters' lives, as they so often are in business school dilemma cases. This focus on particularity makes the ethics conversations more about the students' lives and less about moral theory. The students are encouraged to be on the "inside of the situation" rather than approach it as a spectator. In essence these ethics conversations become what Dewey called "dramatic rehearsal."

The writing assignments give the students the idea that crafting a narrative is a creative process but one that draws on the student's experience. Sharing their narratives with others in class is an experience in becoming vulnerable. It leads easily to the idea that the students will be crafting their own narrative when they graduate, and that such a narrative is likely to be influenced by context, relationships, and offers the chance to design one's life.

The second course that draws on the creative arts, (LET) focuses on forming a theater troupe of the 25 students in the course. This class takes the students a step beyond the process of *learning from* theater, through reading, discussing, or

reflecting on a play and its characters, to actually *creating* theater. The course not only invites them to richly imagine themselves as the key protagonists, but to actually *become* them, to find the authentic connection between themselves and character and to bring those characters – in all their complexity and contradictory messiness – to life. To add to the challenge, students must undertake this journey embedded in a context of other actors/students seeking to do the same, and all with the meta-goal of stitching these individual human stories into a cohesive whole, an overarching narrative that imbues each character’s story with meaning and purpose.

The course is usually taught as a one week intensive where it is the only course that the students are taking.<sup>2</sup> The students are told on Day One, that the last day of the course will be a public performance of an original play that the students will write, direct, produce and perform. The course begins with some acting exercises about becoming a character, believability, subtext, and creating stories. Guided through the exercises by a professional director, who is brought in as a full-time co- instructor, the students are encouraged to begin opening up, drawing upon and sharing real experiences and emotions in the exercises and subsequent improvisations. Of equal importance, they are encouraged to listen and respond honestly to their colleagues as they build scenes together. Once again, the idea of creating a narrative looms large in the course.

Day Two consists of a monologue exercise, a directing workshop, and the beginnings of rehearsal for a set of one act plays. Students begin the task of analyzing and interpreting their scene or play. While discussion plays an important

role, much of the work is done with actors and directors on their feet, script in hand, considering and trying multiple interpretations of a scene. Students probe deeply to understand character, motivations, relationships revealed through the scene. As new insights emerge, the students try the scene again, informed by these new understandings. Students are encouraged to stretch their thinking and consider multiple, often contradictory interpretations. Students learn the role of directorial and actor choices regarding the material – choices in terms of how to interpret the characters, actions and themes of the play and then how to bring those understandings to life in honest performance. As they explore these options, students come to understand the importance of looking within to find their common experience with the many characters they play, in order to access real empathy and to spark genuine feeling and truthful portrayals. They also learn the importance of close listening to their partners onstage, to letting go of their preconceived notions in order to respond honestly to what is happening in any given moment on stage.

The students perform these one act plays on Day Three. Each of the first three days have writing exercises, both “free writes” and an exercise where the students write a short play in 20 minutes. On Day four the students choose a theme to write scenes around and writing commences. Now students are challenged to go beyond creating characters and believable interactions within the constraint of an existing narrative to actually crafting the narrative itself. At the end of the day we have a reading of all the scenes and then pick some to perform the next day, and then set about trying to put the scenes into a context that makes a coherent whole. Day five is rehearsal, dress rehearsal, technical rehearsal and a performance where

the community is invited to attend. The performance, a culmination of the week's work, takes students from the safety that has developed within the enclosure of the troupe, to putting all at risk before a group of their peers who haven't shared the week's experience. Now the troupe must fall back on the work, the trust, the collaborative ethic that has developed over the week in order to overcome the vulnerability of sharing their most personal offerings – the ideas embedded in their narratives and the real emotions, motivations, quirks they must reveal through their characters. The final assignment is a reflections paper where the students reflect on what they have learned about themselves and about leadership, ethics and business.

The ethics component of the learning may seem weak to some. While much of the dramatic and comedic material centers on questions of ethics, the learning is subtler. Bringing a character to authentic life is, at its core, a highly ethical enterprise requiring the actor to confer upon that character – no matter how small the role or how distant from the self conception of the actor – the dignity of understanding. With compassion, with empathy, the actor must find the worth, and more importantly, the personal connection to the individual they hope to bring to convincing life on the stage. Once again the students confront the issues from the inside, rather than as a spectator, focusing again on Dewey's "dramatic rehearsal". The process of becoming a 25 person theater troupe is based on the ability of the students to collaborate, to trust, and to connect with each other on a very human level. In short they are practicing ethics through the creative process. They must get over a sense of embarrassment that they have to expose their vulnerabilities during the week. They must learn to give and receive feedback in the directing process and

to manage conflict and different opinions constructively. The bond of performing together creates a willingness to be open to experimentation and authenticity. We tend to think of theater as the land of the divas and big overstated emotions.

However, truly great theater requires actors and directors to not only put aside their own egos but to also genuinely act with generosity toward each other.

There are many lessons around leadership and ethics for the students. None can rely on “expertise” or “position”, so leadership is “leadership by choice” (Burns, 1978). In addition there is a moral component of leadership here. The pressure of a performance in front of their community members and friends is quite real.

Without relying on expertise or position, the students must rely on judgment and trust. They must, as leaders, create a conversation amongst themselves that has meaning and that gives each person motive force. The shortened timeframe adds intensity to this pressure, and there are often interpersonal difficulties to be overcome. In short the students experience each other as fully human, collaborating together to create a performance literally from nothing.

The moments after the performance you can sense the feeling that they have done something extraordinary, that none of them could have imagined five days before. And, it worked because there was mutual commitment, trust, authenticity, and much hard work. These ideas are the very basic stuff of ethics, and the students realize that they have formed a special bond with each other based on moral ideals.

### **III. Leverage Points**

Leverage points are the idea that relatively small changes can produce big results. And, there are multiple levels on which they work. Adding courses like the

ones we have described to a business school curriculum is a fairly small change that can produce significant results. But, it isn't necessary to add the whole courses. One can imagine a more traditional business ethics course around lectures and cases, that uses a few short stories, or a novel, or a play. For instance adding Melville's story, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, or *Boll's Action Must Be Taken*, or any number of stories by Baldwin or Updike or Oates can yield the same results. Having the students read classic theater like *Hamlet* or *No Exit*, or more business oriented plays like *Glengarry Glennross* and then perform some of the scenes can have similar effects. We see these texts as leverage points as three main ideas.

**(1) Connection to self.** At our most experiential, we typically ask students of business ethics to put themselves in the shoes of a case protagonist in order to assess a situation and determine a course of action around a business problem. But even at its best, case study requires we step only lightly into those shoes, just enough to grasp case data specific to the problem so that we might better wield our technical tools and skills. While we as instructors might seek to spark deeper reflection on the ethical and moral issues of the case, our understanding of the protagonist is often thin, archetypical, intellectual, centered on them as a business person operating within a narrow managerial context. And so our personal connection to the protagonist is often limited and the learning more centered on technical execution. But fully apprehending the ethical implications of a problem, and more importantly, fully committing to an ethical response, requires a deeper engagement of the self.

Literature and theater provide this opportunity. Exploring literature and creating theater requires we plunge much more deeply into questions of character, motivation, values, beliefs. We must understand the characters if we are to make sense of the larger narrative. But to understand those characters at the deepest level, we must be willing to plunge more deeply into an examination of ourselves. For, ultimately, carrying out rich literary analysis or creating a truthful portrayal on stage requires that we find the commonality between ourselves and the protagonist - - that with empathy, compassion and brutal self awareness we examine those elements of our own character, motivation, values and belief that connect us to characters who, often, couldn't seem more different from us.

Thus, through the power of narrative and the exercise of the kind of creative muscles involved in literary analysis and theater, we create a stronger connection between self and many other characters and situations. Such a personal connection is a critical leverage point for more fully engaging our students in the rich, nuanced, human problems facing the business practitioner and inspiring a more powerful moral response.

**(2) Connection to complexity.** Similarly, it is through this process of literary analysis and character development that we confront students with the messy complexity of the contexts in which we as humans operate. One must delve far beyond the surface "case facts" to fully explore a piece of literature and create compelling, believable performance. Yet, it is the magic of great narrative that it makes this task less daunting, that it sparks curiosity, that it invites us – compels us even -- to grapple with complexity. We must examine and reconcile multiple layers

of narrative and subtext -- digging deeply into motivations, relationships, actions, reactions, histories, themes – in order to make sense of a piece of literature and bring it to honest life on the stage. The willingness to immerse themselves in the mess, to appreciate the nuance, to search for the deeper meanings provides a critical leverage point for enriching the way our students come to analyze and respond to the complex problems they will address.

**(3) Connection to each other.** At the end of the day, this kind of pedagogical approach can only work if the students are willing to approach the materials with openness and a willingness to be vulnerable to each other. Whether it is sharing their own connection to a piece of literature, or listening to another's short story, or building a scene together that requires honest emotion and response, students must learn to trust each other and participate together in generous collaboration. Each of these activities entail risk, yet by the end of the semester, we have regularly seen students joyfully take these risks together and come out the other side invigorated and affirmed by the process. They see their role in the collective differently and have new appreciation for the kinds of creativity and productivity they can engender through trust and collaboration.

#### **IV. What the Students Tell Us<sup>3</sup>**

The transformations and learning's that occur are best understood in the words of the students. The following is typical of student comments about the courses:



*“As one might expect, it is extremely hard to get twenty two type-A MBA students to do something together, but we did it. It was not because we had a great leader leading us. It was because we all were leaders leading each other.”*

*“Theater helps you to see how and why we as human beings work well together and how to create a situation that will lead to the most creativity and productivity.”*

*“Leadership...is about being part of a team; it's not about giving orders, but about working together...to achieve a common objective.”*

*“It was great to get out of the business school mindset of cases and non-fiction business books and read some fiction again. It made us talk about deeper issues than business issues and think about what we want out of our lives of careers and what responsibilities we have to our society.”*

In these comments the students suggest that authenticity and a more democratic idea of leadership organized around a purpose is in fact more effective than the traditional idea based on authority. A number of other students comment on the importance of trust and empathy and getting more in touch with their emotions:

*“I quickly learned that when we remove our MBA hard-hats, we are able to develop a trust and understanding for each other that can significantly improve the dynamics of teamwork.”*

*“The experience of becoming someone else taught me the importance of really putting yourself in someone else’s shoes in order to understand their motivations.”*

*“Loved the opportunity to do some critical literary thinking. Crawling into another person’s mind gives each of us the chance to understand the actions, justifications, and motivations of other people, which in turn allows for an empathy we may not naturally have (I know I don’t).”*

*“I loved the focus on our development as complete people who can talk and learn with their classmates in more than just a business and networking way.”*

*“I think it’s important to recognize that we are not always business people and that there are more qualitative methods of evaluating problems and that people and feelings are a bigger part of the world than business school would lead us to believe.”*

In addition the ideas of working together relatively free of ego, and pushing each other so that everyone challenges themselves and gives and expects authentic feedback from others add layers of complexity to the learning of the students. For instance:

*“The most importance thing I will take away from the class...is an understanding of the power of work free of ego....I can count the times on one hand that I have been a part*

*of a group whose purpose was clear and meaningful enough for the whole of the group to shove ego aside and be about the craft.”*

*“I liked that it brought me out of my comfort zone. it's important to have a different class experience like this while at Darden. I liked learning about literature and hearing classmates share their thoughts on things we read. I wasn't enamored with all the materials we read but I thought all our discussions were interesting. I liked that our final assignment was writing a fiction short story, again it's good because it got me out of my comfort zone.”*

*“The participants of the class created an environment where feedback was not only accepted, it was expected.”*

It is very difficult to get students in a traditional classroom to viscerally feel the importance of shared leadership, collaboration based on trust, the power of ego, and the learning that is possible through authentic conversation and feedback. Yet the theater provides a venue where these traits are a necessity for success. (Dunham and Freeman, 2000)

## **V. Leveraging Key Design Principles**

From our experience with these methods and ideas a number of key design principles have emerged that now find a central place in our teaching. We believe

that these principles can themselves serve as leverage points to transform the way that we approach the teaching of business ethics.

### ***The Power of Narrative***

At the heart of humanity, in life and in literature, is the weaving together of the complex, messy lives of imperfect humans into a narrative that, at its best, reveals new insights – sometimes humorous, sometimes heartbreaking – about how we should live. We humans are story tellers at heart. Nowhere is this clearer than in business. Understanding narrative through literary analysis, and building narrative as a writer, actor or director, requires that we develop sensibilities and capabilities that are, in some ways, the reverse of those we seek to develop in other parts of the business school. As managers we often seek to reduce complex phenomena to a few bullet points or a two-by-two matrix; as artists we must attempt the opposite, uncovering the many levels of complex phenomenon embedded in seemingly simple action. It is not enough to know that a character is angry; the reader, actor or director must uncover the envy, fear, insecurity, and/or other emotions, beliefs, motivations that drive and color that anger. And it is not enough to understand one character's immense complexities; the artist must understand how each character contributes to overall, coherent meaning in the larger story.

Carrying out this complicated task requires that we help the student as artist to connect the characters and their journeys to their own narrative, to see the commonalities of experience, hope, dreams, despair, humor that link us personally to characters who couldn't seem more different from us. We have to confront our own truths in a deeper, richer way. We need to be willing to be vulnerable to

ourselves and the other members of the class who are undertaking the same arduous task. And so, the very act of making these connections can make our own narrative a bit clearer, and our linkages to others more compelling. This process involves intimate reflection and public sharing of how each of our journeys is simultaneously *unique* and yet *common*.

These linkages become key as the student/artists try to pull the larger story together. Understanding my own character requires that I understand what it is I need and want from the other characters, how they have shaped me and my action, how their own narratives shape their response to me. I must elicit their narratives in order to understand my own, and I must respond in an honest and coherent way to what they throw my way.

One small leverage point here to facilitate this awareness is through our readings of short fiction and writing exercises. For example, we might use Isaac Asimov's *Robot Dreams* to illustrate how power is leveraged in the workplace. Asimov's story has three characters: A boss, her subordinate and a robot (some argue that there are only two characters). The story is driven by dialogue that illustrates how power and deference are shown in language. Following the reading of this story, we ask that students write a short story using dialogue as the vehicle to illustrate relations – "to show, not tell" through what characters say and when they choose not to respond at all. Our students come to realize the extent of their reach into others' lives -- that their decisions have real and lasting influence on others.

In theater rehearsal, as director and cast seek to make sense of the emerging narratives of characters and their interactions, the larger story becomes an act of

collaborative sensemaking, a negotiated sense of meaning behind character, plot, emerging themes. Unlike other class projects, where students can divide and conquer – “you do this part, I’ll do that part, and we will meet before the day its due to put it all together” – this work can only happen live, as the troupe explores different interpretations and each actor responds to new actions and meanings.

Another leverage point is one of our writing exercises that involves creating a description of a place everyone is familiar with – a student common area at our institution. We ask our students to share their descriptions with other members of the class. Appreciating the differences in shared experiences aids our students in understanding that meaning is simultaneously shared and personal. This is one of the key steps in managing in a diverse world.

Many of our narratives feature broken, depressing, imperfect people in difficult situations (something like real life). Our characters are often written from the perspective of marginalized persons. The protagonists are difficult at first, because there is a tendency for much of the MBA curriculum to be present lionized, world-striding master’s of the universe. Because this is notion of success is so strongly modeled within the business school world, some of our students have adapted a dominant mindset without critique. We hope that by choosing narratives about those at the margins, our students can truly see the center. Often, early in the classes, students will comment on how “depressing”, “powerless” and “unhappy” some of the narratives make them feel. We ask them to consider that there are many who don’t expect that those feelings would be ones that they could escape.

### ***Exercising the Creative Muscles***

Yet another leverage point is to approach teaching ethics by driving learning to the confluence of thinking/feeling/doing. While case studies activate rich thinking, literature and theater classes require the same intellectual interrogation, while also engaging the student in deeper feeling and emotion. The theater takes that even further by requiring the doing, asking students to physically embody the learnings of their intellectual and emotional explorations. Students must respond to the situation at hand using their repertoire of skills, emotions, and body language – they get immediate feedback from their classmates’ reactions and thus can learn about how they might have done things differently. They also learn by listening and watching each other, and bring new tools into their repertoire. It is this embodiment of the character and the narrative that is a source for insight.

### ***The Role of Attention***

Creating an authentic and believable moment on stage means responding in an honest way to what is actually happening. While the production is shaped through the process undergone in rehearsal, the ongoing performance requires a freshness that brings the play to vivid life for each audience. This requires that the actors involved, focused and ‘mindful’ at each moment. Rather than falling into habit, delivering lines and taking movement automatically, good actors seek to ‘stay in the moment’ and respond authentically to any subtle change that occurs on stage. We encourage students to ‘be in the moment’, staying present to what others are saying. In literature, this builds listening and conversational skills that can improve the understanding of the text and the self-understanding of the student. In theater,

the artist must constantly be aware of everything happening on stage. All an actor has is the line that others give. So it is imperative to stay in the moment and “tell the story” regardless of dropped lines. Of course there are multiple ways to deploy attention in writing and on stage. Students experiment with different ways to attending to the environment and each other, and learn the strengths and weaknesses of specific ways of paying attention.

### ***Collaboration and Trust***

Theater and the performing arts often suffer from an image of a field dominated by egos and ‘divas.’ In fact, great theater only happens when a troupe of actors come together in a spirit of generosity toward each other, willing to put their own egos on hold, in order find the larger truths of the play and bring something real and compelling to life. Honest performances require actors to take risks sharing something personal of themselves; compelling scenes require that each actor shares the story and responds mindfully to each other. A troupe of actors can only do this successfully if they have built a level of trust and collaboration that allows them to take these risks in rehearsal and later in front of an audience. There is a similar necessity in sharing your writing with a small set of peers as you work through your story in progress, and in sharing the final product in a group read through with all of your classmates. By sharing the work of writing, acting, and directing students develop the ability to jointly-author their work, and learn how to contribute in ways that benefit the group as well as themselves.



## **VI. Conclusion**

We have learned some substantial lessons from our work in leveraging the creative arts to teach business ethics. First of all it is important to create a safe environment for students in order for them to work with the kind of openness and willingness to be vulnerable that is critical to making the class successful. The dinner parties are one vehicle we use in the literature class to build this sense of safety and trust. Small groups meeting over a meal can form the kinds of bonds that allow that trust to develop. In the theater class, we begin with by sharing theater experiences and with a conversation about why the students are taking the course. By acknowledging that some have stage fright or perceive themselves as not good a public speaking, we create a safer space for them. We then use acting exercises that slowly increase in the kinds of demands they make of students. And, we acknowledge that good theater is honest and that we are not a professional theater group. And, as teachers we are constant cheerleaders and providers of feedback. The result is that the students can focus both on the craft of acting and writing as well as on the lessons learned.

Students should address a mix of literature, some of which they can more easily relate to but much of which challenges them to empathize with people and situations that are difficult for them to access. The former helps build their confidence while the latter do the important work of stretching them creatively and emotionally. In the theater course we don't let the students write about their experience in business school. We want them to reflect more broadly on their experiences in life.

Third, we don't hesitate to get help from the professionals. We have often invited professional writers to class to discuss literature and their writing. In the theater class we have greatly benefited from having a professional director co-teach the course, and to use former actors as resources. These kinds of exercises and assignments can be very foreign to a business school instructor, but over time with help they can become almost second nature.

Fourth, we try and practice what we are trying to teach the students. We try to be in the moment at all times, and to be conscious of the underlying narratives that are being woven into the fabric of the course by teacher and students. We have come to see teaching itself as a performance art, and we believe that our teaching in non creative arts settings has improved enormously because of our work in literature and theater.

Finally, our experience with this teaching leads us to a kind of skepticism about much of the current thinking in business ethics, at least as the discipline is understood in the Anglo-Saxon and management theory world. Business ethics is based almost entirely on an analytical approach to ethics. The trifecta of theory, deontology, consequentialism, and virtue, have become an oligopolistic trio that seems to us to be in need of substantial revision. Often we focus on issues or dilemmas, and then try to apply one or more of these theories or their surrogates to resolve the issue or dilemma. While there is nothing wrong with using cases and theory, in fact we use them as well, they simply don't go far enough.

We want to suggest that human experience, especially in business, is much more nuanced and more holistic. We bring a substantial and complex emotional,

cognitive, and developmental palette to our lives as business persons. We see particularity and particular others (Benhabib, 1992) not generalized undifferentiated others. Thick descriptions abound. While there is room for Kant and thin descriptions and obligations to strangers in moral discourse, so too must we make room for the trust and compassion that exists (or not) in families and friendships. We must leave room for Sartre's authenticity and Kierkegaard's existential pain and Nietzsche's critique of the meaningless life.

We create meaning with each other in business. The very language that we use constructs what problems we are able to solve. The analytical language of most business discourse ensures that we will not be able to solve nuanced human problems. In addition to the dilemmas that require right-wrong judgments we believe that ethics is best conceptualized as a conversation about how we describe and re-describe self, other and communities to live together and collaborate in making a better world. Using the creative arts to teach business ethics has given us a set of questions that engages us as researchers and scholars as well as teachers, for instance: (1) What are some alternative views of the connections between self and other and community and how is meaning constructed in these alternative views? (2) What would the discipline of business ethics be like, if we took as background disciplines, the creative arts and humanities, rather than just philosophy and the social sciences? (3) How do complex emotions affect the construction of meaning and the solving of problems, and in particular, how are trust, collaboration, leadership, love, fear, and related concepts connected?

The humanities and especially the creative arts offer a way to leverage the idea that business is a fully human institution in all of its complexity. We need to continuously connect business with our culture and our humanity, in order to connect with each other. We look forward to the evolution of the teaching and research in business ethics.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In addition we have taught a course using music where the students, of widely varying musical ability and training, must learn to play music together and to create an original performance. We also use many additional experiential exercises that are oriented around getting the students to understand how meaning is created collaboratively in organizations. We believe that there are many more possibilities using the creative arts to teach business ethics, especially if we adopt a more pragmatist version of the discipline. We are also grateful to Jenny Mead and Randy Strawderman for their many contributions to these courses.

<sup>2</sup> There is also a 6 week version of the course. The following website is a resource about the course, and there is a documentary that focuses on what the student experience is. See:

<http://it.darden.virginia.edu/leadershipandtheater/>

<sup>3</sup> The student comments are a selection from the last 10 years and range over both BEL and LET. Surprisingly there are very few negative comments.

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