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Representing Wholeness: Learning via Theatrical Productions

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REPRESENTING WHOLENESS: LEARNING VIA THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS

To facilitate learning in a complete way means engaging in a holistic experience of learning that includes both artistic and discursive forms of representation. This requires the learner to be wholly present in the moment and capable of understanding and linking both the rational and emotional dimensions of learning and knowing.

Consistent with previous work in organizational and reflective learning, we suggest that the use of theatre is a powerful tool to create this wholeness, and present phenomenological evidence to support this supposition. We then discuss further research to pursue in this regard.

Keywords: Theatre; Aesthetics; Presentational Form; Organizational Learning; Wholeness
REPRESENTING WHOLENESS:
LEARNING VIA THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS

This article is an attempt to show that theatrical productions can have substantial power in creating a holistic experience of organizational learning. Our premise is that learning requires engagement of the whole individual so that both cognitive and affective dimensions can be engaged, and theatre is a largely untapped source for such learning in organizations. This is particularly true in academia where we typically discuss learning in a purely intellectual and rational manner. We make intellectual arguments about the importance of feeling as we sit alone in front of a computer typing on about the importance of relationships. It is an ecological fallacy. But it is hardly surprising that we do it.

Intellectual, propositional, explicit knowledge is the coin of the realm in academia. Intellectual knowing is the stuff of reasoned arguments, scientific analysis, and analytic rigor. However, we also understand that true knowing involves both the intellectual and the emotional dimensions; what we refer to as wholeness. An array of work in management and organization theory supports this. For example, Yang’s (2003) theory of holistic learning suggests a theoretical structure to examine integration of different types of knowledge and learning processes. The model presents three knowledge types: explicit (codified knowledge representing factual information), implicit (personal habits, intuition, and tacit understanding), and emancipatory (emotional values, feelings, spirituality, and vision); and three learning
processes: knowledge acquisition, knowledge creation, and knowledge transformation. This theory is based on Habermas’ (1971) theory of learning, and defines knowledge as “human beings understanding about the reality through mental correspondence, personal experience, and emotional affection with outside objects and situations” (Yang, 2003, pg. 108 italics added). This perspective is also consistent with the work of Strati (1996), as well as others in organizational aesthetics (see Taylor & Hansen, 2005 for a review of the field) regarding knowledge and ways of knowing.

Related scholarship in the area of workplace spirituality also suggests that learning involves different types of knowing or knowledge as well as a communal dimension in the experience. Gallagher, Rocco and Landorf (2007) conducted a phenomenological study of the role of spirituality in learning using Yang’s model. They found that the learning processes of professionals at work were significantly informed by the role of spirituality (as an emancipatory or emotional form of knowledge) as well as the critical role of the community. Additional work has also suggested that it is important for organizations to be communal centers in which individuals can explore the meaning of work as a source of spiritual growth and as a means of connection to a larger purpose (Bell & Taylor, 2001). The argument is that this experience promotes wholeness of the individual members. Similarly, work regarding the creation of “caring organizations” such as Dobson & White’s (1995) suggest that trust will flourish in such organizations because the community supports wholeness required to create an experience where full and true learning can occur.
There is also a long tradition stemming from Polanyi’s (1958 (reprinted in 1978)) early work on tacit knowledge to later work on experiential learning (e.g. Bowen, Lewicki, Hall, & Hall, 1997) to more recent work in organizational aesthetics (e.g. Strati, 1999; Nissley, 2002; Baruch, 2006; Beirne & Knight, 2007) that recognizes that explicit knowledge is not the only form of knowledge. To talk about wholeness intellectually is to leave out the tacit, embodied portion of the knowing, it is to talk about wholeness and learning in a partial way.

To talk about learning in a complete way means representing both the tacit, or implicit knowledge, as well as the explicit knowledge. Langer (1942) suggested that different forms of knowledge require fundamentally different forms of representation. Tacit knowledge is represented through artistic forms such as theatre and explicit knowledge is represented through discursive forms such as logical arguments. Thus, we suggest that to promote learning in a complete way means creating wholeness through both artistic and discursive forms of representation.

This is the intellectual argument behind presenting the use of theatrical presentations to promote wholeness in learning. Theatre allows engagement of both the intellectual and emotional levels of knowing (head knowing and gut knowing) for the participants to be wholly present in the process. The use of theatre starts with emotional or gut knowing suggested by Langer (1942) by creating a presentational form of knowledge. That is, a play touches the audience and performers on a gut knowing level, and creates an aesthetic experience. Following the performance by a conversation invokes a discursive form of knowing, or head knowing (Langer, 1942).
The wholeness created by this experience for both performers and audience allows for learning in both dimensions.

This is not new, since academics have been using experiential exercises and role-plays in the classroom since the earliest beginnings of education (see Beirne & Knight, 2007 for an overview). However, the power of performing a play to create the link between head and gut knowing has only recently been explored within the academy. In 1989, Peter Vaill wrote about the use of drama and the performing arts in management education in his book *Managing as a performing art: New ideas for a world of chaotic change*. This pioneering work in management education led to a multitude of arts based learning approaches. Nissley (2002) describes examples of theatre in management education ranging from the use of dramatizing discussions to improvisational and staged reading theatrical presentations. For example, Baruch (2006) studied role-play teaching in the classroom as a means of wholly engaging students. The development of “organizational theatre” where plays are specifically created for addressing particular organizational issues, is becoming more widely used (Nissley, Taylor & Houden, 2004; Schreyogg, 2001; vonKrogh, Ichijo & Nonaka, 2000).

Yanow (2001) examined the implications for improvisational theatre for organizational learning. Her essay discusses several fundamental principles of improvisation that emphasize both the individual and community elements of wholeness in learning. She states:

“These are some of the principles of improvisation: it rests on sustained practice over time; the engagement is a collective undertaking; and it is focused
on its subject. Improv terminology for this focus is ‘being in the moment.’ The actor has to be fully present, fully engaged in the enterprise at hand…This ties in with a fourth principle, which holds for theatre in general, not just improv: activity is purposive, and each character has, or works to establish, an objective in his or her scene.” (Yanow, 2001 pg. 59).

Beirne & Knight (2007) used radical theatre workshops to engage MBA students in critical and reflective learning. Their study suggests the immersion of the students as actors was key in nurturing reflective debates on management issues. Both Yanow and Beirne & Knight discussed wholeness of the experience with the cast or actors in theatre, while Taylor (2003) discusses this unique engagement and wholeness with the cast and audience in his reflection on producing and performing plays at several academic conferences:

"Working from this simple epistemology and the related assumptions, writing plays for me is about communicating in a gut-to-gut way. Presenting plays in a non-traditional theatre forum (such as at the Academy of Management) and discussing them afterward is about encouraging the audience’s knowing in the gut to be translated into knowing in the head. The problem is that theatre is particularly susceptible to creating knowing in the gut that does not get translated into knowing in the head and fades away.” (Taylor, 2003 pg. 274).

Brecht (1964) was concerned with the issue of translating emotional or gut level knowing to intellectual or head level knowing, and worked to create an
experience that linked the two by moving the audience not only to feel, but also to think about the performance. We suggest that this link between the head and gut for the audience can be enhanced by creating wholeness in the experience for complete learning which may also provide a powerful means of introducing organizational learning and change.

WAYS OF KNOWING

The primacy of intellectual knowledge can be traced back to the eighteenth century and Descartes’ separation of mind and body and focus on intellectual knowledge and the mind (Wilber, 1998). In response, Baumgarten suggested a theory of knowledge consisting of “on the one hand, logic, which investigates intellectual knowledge; on the other hand, aesthetics . . . which investigates sense knowledge (Strati, 1996)”. And although by the early twentieth century there was wide agreement in philosophic discussion that aesthetic experience is the foundation of all other types of knowledge (Welsch, 1997), academia had followed the physical sciences down the road of privileging intellectual knowledge and its tools of analytic rigor and reasoned argument, by and large leaving aesthetic knowledge to the fine arts or the margins of the academy.

There have been many voices arguing the importance of different ways of knowing, as we noted earlier (Habermas, 1971; Taylor, 2003; Yang, 2003). Heron (Heron, 1992; Heron & Reason, 2001) describes an “extended epistemology” and
suggests that good inquiry should cross epistemologies using different forms of knowledge. He suggests four types of knowledge:

“Experiential knowing is through direct face-to-face encounter with person, place or thing; it is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance. Presentational knowing emerges from experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on. Propositional knowing “about” something, is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements. Practical knowing is knowing ‘how to’ do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence.”

(Heron & Reason, 2001, pg 184).

We note that so far, we have been operating in the realm of reasoned argument and citation of academic works – in short, the realm of intellectual knowledge. We do so for the same reason you pay for things in pounds sterling in England rather than in dollars – it is the coin of the realm. Although there are examples of academic work that bring-together intellectual and presentational forms (e.g. Jermier, 1985; Taylor, 2000; Yanow, 2001; Bierne & Knight, 2007), they are not the norm. We suggest that it would be wrong to talk about wholeness without trying to be holistic in our own forms of representation. In order to do this, we will
discuss two phenomenological experiences using theatre to create complete learning, and suggest strategies for continued learning in organizations.

THEATRICAL PRESENTATIONS

We have been aware of the value of a combination of experiential and presentational learning through our efforts as teachers. As mentioned previously, the impact of experiential exercises or role plays in the classroom is well known. For example, “The Power Game” (Bowen, Lewicki, Hall & Hall, 1997) gives the students an opportunity to wholly experience the dynamics of power in an experiential fashion. Others of us have used plays in the classroom to convey the criticality of values in organizations. One colleague has his students rehearse and perform the plays Antigone and A Man For All Seasons during a seminar on values and ethics in the workplace. Garaventa (1998) used drama to engage rational intellect and emotions in learning about business ethics. Yanow (2001) used her improvisational experience to enhance classroom learning by being more fully engaged in the moment and experiencing the collective interaction instead of using prepared lecture notes or plans. Baruch (2006) examined the impact of acting in the classroom as students engaged in role-plays. Bierne & Knight (2007) used radical community theatre with Scottish MBA students to increase reflective learning. Nissley (2002) describes numerous uses of aesthetics (arts based) learning in management education, including theatrical productions.

Taylor (2000) discusses the use of aesthetic experience in presenting a play as a means to create aesthetic theorizing. He suggests the experience creates gut level
learning that grounds or anchors the participants (both cast and audience). He argues that this level of learning connects the participants in a way that creates meaningful wholeness, even though there is no common conclusion. We believe this is a key element in creating holistic learning by linking such gut level learning with head learning, which could, perhaps, provide not only individual, but organizational learning and culture change.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The idea of doing the performances at the academic conferences began with Taylor’s (2000) presentation of a play at the Academy of Management. Following his initial work, the authors initiated two phenomenological experiments. A phenomenological study, according to Creswell (2007) is one that describes the meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a particular concept or phenomenon. Thus, phenomenology is a process in which the researcher attempts to understand previous experiences through reflection and retrospection (Creswell, 2007).

In this study, we performed two plays at academic conferences. Both performances were followed by discussion between the performers and the audience regarding a variety of issues about the play itself, and the academic organization involved. The purpose of this design was to create situations where theatrical productions could enhance complete learning for both the performers and the audience members. Instead of delivering a talk about issues in the various
organizations, this was our attempt to *represent* an experience that could raise issues we considered fundamental to the values and culture of the organization. We wanted to bring forth the issues in not just an intellectual way, but in a holistic experience that fully captured the audience and created a communal experience or collective interaction (Yanow, 2001). Further, we wanted to demonstrate the power of aesthetic experiences linked with conversations to raise organizational issues and potentially begin to introduce change (Yanow, 2001; Nissley, Taylor & Houden, 2004; Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, 2002).

*The Plays*

The two plays were conducted at annual conferences of a large academic organization in two different years. Both performances were conducted as staged readings, with the cast members meeting for rehearsals in the days leading up to the actual performance. Although the cast members differed in the two productions, both plays were written and directed by the same playwright. After each play, the audience was engaged in a discussion regarding the performance. Following this, the audiences were surveyed with questions regarding their reactions to the experience. In addition, the cast members also shared their reflections on the experiences. Thus, we obtained information from both the performers and the audience members in both instances.

Each play was chosen to express a perspective on the academic organization involved. The first play, for example, began with opening remarks by the protagonist. The audience had no idea they were about to watch a staged reading of a
play, but in fact, had come to hear an intellectual presentation of a paper. The comments by the protagonist attempted to set the stage for the presentational approach for the presentation. The actor described the objectives of the play as one means to begin to articulate the unique character of the organization, a division of a larger academic organization, to facilitate learning in the process of shaping the division for the future. The audience was invited to participate in a unique experience that involved eight members of the organization as cast members in a play titled *Soft Targets*.

The play is about a young woman who is employed as an engineer and doesn’t appear to fit with that occupational choice. She loses her job and begins a journey to discover who she really is. She is “helped” along the way by three sprites (or fairies) who sing polkas as she goes through the job search/interview process. At the conclusion of the play, the young woman realizes she should be a teacher – characterized by the sprites as “A polka kind of gal”. This realization is captured in a bedtime story she tells her daughter at the conclusion of the play.

The second performance was also conducted at an academic conference for the same organization. It differed from the presentation of *Soft Targets* in that the audience came expecting to see a staged reading (play), and there were no introductory remarks to set any objectives or framework for the presentation.

The play, titled *Ties that Bind*, is about a young academic who progresses through the phases of a doctoral program (complete with a famous professor as a mentor for her dissertation research) and learns along the way that she must fit in with an academic lifestyle and occupation. The actors wear neck-ties as symbols of
their respective fields, institutions, or affiliations; and as the young woman interviews for jobs as an assistant professor, she is introduced to the restrictions of different types of ties associated with her socialization to the academy. At the conclusion of the play, the young woman takes a traditional assistant professor job (with the appropriate tie) and has made choices about what level of conformity she will embrace in her desire to be a member of the academy.

The responses to the two plays by both the audience and the performers were obtained by a) informal discussion following the performance, b) a questionnaire administered after the performance. The questionnaire included the following questions:

1. What did you take away from the performance? What was the experience like for you?
2. What effects (if any) did the play have on you?
3. Do you think the experience will have any effect on your intellectual efforts or behaviour within academia?
4. What effects (if any) do you think the play might have on [this organization]?

The informal discussion comments as well as the questionnaire responses were collected and examined for potential learning implications. We used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to determine possible themes and content in the questionnaire responses. The responses were reviewed for recurring statements or
ideas and coded into different major thematic categories. These categories, or themes represented patterns in the audience and cast responses to the performances.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Audience Reactions to the Plays*

In the informal discussion following the two plays, we had responses that represented confusion regarding the purpose of the performance (for academics and the particular organization), and confusion about any real contribution of the play to knowing or knowledge. This could be due to their familiarity with intellectual forms rather than aesthetic forms of knowledge as academics. However, both audiences had responses that were dichotomous in terms of their perceived relevance of the performance to the organization and/or aesthetic knowledge. That is to say, many members of the audience experienced the plays as personally relevant, but not relevant to their intellectual work within the academy. This seems to echo an idealized academic and business world that sharply divides the rational and intellectual world of work from the personal world of emotion and meaning – in short what we would suggest is the antithesis of wholeness.

We were surprised by the dichotomous response to the plays at the time. First, many of the members of the audience commented on the courage to perform the plays. This was related to the both the professional risk in not presenting an intellectual “academic” paper, and the risk in raising here-to-fore un-discussable issues openly in the organization. This group had members who reacted on a gut level to the
behaviour of the actors. That is, audience members saw the actions of the cast, quite outside the meaning of the play itself, as a means of providing acceptance for more, perhaps, atypical behaviours within the organization. It is possible these people were/are more attuned to, or accepting of, the embodied or tacit portion of knowing we mentioned at the outset of this article. Nissley, Taylor, & Houden (2004) note this in their discussion of Pondy & Mitroff’s (1979) suggestion that scholars view organizations as monologues or dialogues, where monologues are stories told from the perspective of the dominant (or traditional) group versus dialogues that deliberately introduce a second perspective. Perhaps these audience members were already intertwining ways of knowing and accepted the play as a dialogue.

Interestingly, we received informal comments even months after the plays which may indicate the potential for long-term learning.

Second, as we noted earlier, many members didn’t understand the relevance of the play to the organization. This was particularly true for *Soft Targets*, since the link to academia was less obvious. This group took away the surface meaning of the play relating on an emotional level to the pain and hardship experienced by the main character, but had no recognition of the significance of her search to be whole in the workplace and find meaning in her life. We have already noted that the strength of presentational form is its encouragement of individual sense-making, and this demonstrates one of the ways the audience interpreted the play. This was also interesting since it is in contrast to the cast members who (almost all) at one time or another during the process noted how powerful the experience was for them (similar to the reflections of Beirne & Knight’s (2007) students).
Another element of the responses consistent with Taylor’s (2000) argument about aesthetic theorizing, was the marked differences in interpretations and conclusions about the play. For example, one audience member insisted that the portrayal of academic life in *Ties that Bind* was entirely fictional. He stated that this type of “fitting in” did not occur in an occupation based on academic freedom. On the other hand, several other members reiterated experiences that supported some elements of the portrayal. These members wanted to discuss potential avenues for change given their identification with the protagonist. This was consistent with the wholeness we also saw in one of the responses to *Soft Targets*, that is, the link between emotional experiences and reaction to the play combined with intellectual curiosity to find a way to improve or change the organization.

Finally, there was an unusual response to the second play which we think is enlightening. This response was characterized by a member of the audience moving around the room during the discussion following the performance. She literally crawled over railings and on the floor during the conversation. She offered no words to the group even after she ceased movement lying on the floor by the stage.

This response was unexpected, and very different from any responses from the first performance. This woman had responded to the artistic form of the play with her own artistic form, clearly at the gut level of knowing. The most interesting aspect, for us, was the reaction of the remainder of the group. Their responses to her movements was also dichotomous: some of the group was distracted, uncomfortable, and annoyed by her behaviour, while others were quite content to let her react in the way she wanted. The first group appeared to want to actively engage in linking the
head and gut level learning that Brecht (1964) was trying to promote, while the second group was either content to leave her response as hers alone, or interested in keeping the emotional level separate from the intellectual dimension of the process.

This response appears to demonstrate, for us, both the power and the obstacles associated with using theatre to create wholeness in learning. Since the linking of the emotional and intellectual levels is individual, it creates an environment where each person can be whole in a unique way. It also means there is no one right answer or conclusion, beyond some gut level understanding.

Questionnaire Responses

We obtained 32 responses to the questionnaires sent out after the performances (10 for Soft Targets and 22 for Ties that Bind). The smaller number of responses for Soft Targets may be due to the focus of that performance on a single division of the academic organization rather than open to the entire organization as Ties that Bind was. The responses from the audience members were perhaps more reflective of the experience since they had some time to respond rather than immediately after the performance.

The responses echoed some of those during the informal discussion following the plays, and we identified five major themes: memorable, relevance, courageous, emotional and intellectual linkage, and reflective. The memorable theme represented the recall or staying power of the performances in participants memories. The relevance theme represented the linkages between the subject of the performance and the organization and it’s issues. The courageous theme referred to the recognition of
the cast members to engage in an unusual form of academic presentation. The *emotional and intellectual linkage* theme represented recognition of the value and power of participating in experience both emotionally and intellectually. The *reflective* theme represented recognition of the stimulation of reflection and self as well as organizational-examination by participating in the experience. Some of the responses appear to be representative of holistic learning, while others were not. We present several of the responses in more detail below.

Response #1

“It affected me on a very emotional level--and we too often avoid emotions as 'professionals.' The meetings are particularly void of an affective component, and it seemed to me that the Washington, DC meeting was particularly buttoned up this year, . . . . I've been thinking about the intellectual-emotional dichotomy of the academic world--particularly business education--for quite awhile. Every time that I see or hear something new or different, it gives me hope/encouragement/reinforcement that I am not alone in my discomfort with that dichotomy.”

Response #2

“The session tapped not just the intellectual, but also the emotional, the humorous, the ironic. It allowed us poke fun at ourselves and get more perspective on what we’re doing and the system we’re in.”
Response #3

“These themes [in the play] really helped me to think about them in a more holistic way – able to see my struggle more clearly by seeing it in a different way.”

We noted two things in these responses. The first is recognition that the play had an emotional impact and the second is that that emotional impact was then translated into thinking. This suggests a wholeness of response that includes both an emotional and a cognitive response. These responses also suggest that this sort of wholeness is generally missing in academic discourse, such as conference meetings. We think this wholeness of response is due to the wholeness of communication, that is there is an emotional response from the aesthetic form, which forms the base for an intellectual response which has been set up by the intellectual framing of the issues. This creates the inter-relationship between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge.

Responses that cross ways of knowing are not inherent in theatre. Brecht (1964) criticized traditional dramatic theatre for creating catharsis and offering emotional resolution that did not push the audience into the intellectual realm. He suggested that modern theatre (his epic theatre) was designed to force the audience to engage intellectually and take decisions and be moved to action themselves. Brecht’s epic theatre was intended to move the audience through the different ways of knowing, in contrast to traditional theatre. Beirne & Knight (2007) also criticize the passive approach of traditional theatre which does not promote the wholeness of experience for the audience. Not having Brecht’s talent as a playwright, we rely on
explicit intellectual framing (which includes the context of presenting a play within a hyper-intellectual academic conference) of the aesthetic form to engage the whole person.

Response #4

“Take away from the play? 1] YOUR commitment to us as people not only as academics! 2] YOUR ability to have others act foolish for a good reason -- what a leader. 3] The realities of life -- the difficulties in making it in this world and the importance of finding our niche despite what others tell us is important since it may not be for us. Effect on me? First I have not been able to get that D--- "everyone has a mania" lyric out of my head, thank you very much! Second, the play has been remembered far longer than anything you might have said in a formal address. Third, I have re-told portions of the play to my colleagues and students, especially when they were waning from their dreams. Fourth, I am pleased I know you and that you will support me if I ever end up on the streets -- literally or professionally! Effect on intellectual efforts? This presumes I have intellectual efforts! But, not much comes to mind here. This was a personal message, in my mind, not an intellectual one, which I appreciate! Far better to have it affect me personally than intellectually.”

This response demonstrates several of the themes encountered in the questionnaire responses. First is the staying power that is discussed. The play has
stayed in his memory, (even when he wishes that the lyrics from the Pennsylvania Polka would not stay in his memory) longer than a primarily academic intellectual presentation would have stayed in his memory. He tells people about the play, another indication that it has stayed in his memory. We think that this is a result of the form as much as the subject. Something that engages our whole self stays with us longer than something that engages part of our self (whether that part is intellectual or emotional). This is part of the wholeness theatre can introduce into the learning process. This, of course, is entirely consistent with our knowledge of the power of experiential learning techniques in the classroom, as previously mentioned. The significant impact on long-term learning of experiencing (even hypothetically) the content versus receiving it through another teaching medium is well known. This is also supported by many other responses that indicated a lasting impression and longevity of the experience.

The second issue that this response raises is the particular way in which the content comes across involving reflection of each individual. Intellectual work strives for validity in terms of convergent generalizability. Aesthetic forms seek validity in terms of divergent generalizability. This means that intellectual forms try to create a single agreed upon meaning. Aesthetic forms create individualized meaning that is different for each person. There are of course, similarities and general themes, but the particular meaning of the play is connected to each individual’s experience.

For example, the themes that the respondent mentions such as “the difficulties in making it in this world and the importance of finding our niche despite what others
tell us is important since it may not be for us,” may not be explicit themes the playwright had in mind when he wrote the play. He recognizes them as a legitimate and particular understanding of the play, but not as how he would articulate his experience of the play. And that is a strength of presentational/artistic form – it allows/encourages/forces everyone to make sense of it for themselves. This is consistent with Taylor’s (2000) argument on aesthetic theorizing. Another element to this duality is the demonstration of this response of the obstacles in attempting to merge different types of knowledge in academia. Since the academy is deeply rooted in explicit knowledge, the validity of tacit knowledge through artistic forms is marginalized or minimized as the respondent isn’t sure about an intellectual contribution of the performance. Another response also illustrates this phenomenon:

Response #5

“For me, the play was a magic mirror (Turner’s) showing a reflection of me, to me, exaggerating this and that to allow me to see myself in there. I did.”

There are also themes here that are consistent with the spirituality at work literature. Many authors in that field have suggested that meaningful work is a dimension of spirituality (Ashmos & Dushon, 2000; Bell & Taylor, 2001), and point out that the meaning is defined by the individual’s own experiences. Gallagher, et.al.’s (2007) study on spirituality as a dimension of holistic learning theory also supports this perspective as well. This suggests there is considerable value of the
aesthetic form to create meaning for individual members of a group and facilitate the learning process.

The third theme of this fourth response relates to the relevance of the performance for his intellectual efforts or the organization itself. He sees the play as a personal message that is related to his unique interpretation of the meaning of the play. This represents the dichotomy we noted earlier regarding the relevance of the plays to the intellectual efforts and the organizational issues raised in the informal discussions of the performances. It is as if the individual has internalized this split between his personal life and his intellectual work, seeing them as disconnected.

Another response echoes this perhaps even more clearly:

Response #6

“I’m not sure why this means to present was chosen, although I liked it and I saw division members in a new light, I’m not sure what intellectual impact this will have on me.”

The final theme of the fourth response is the courage necessary to perform such plays at an academic conference where aesthetic presentations are not the norm. This was also reflected in the discussions following the plays, particularly for Soft Targets, where the audience did not expect a play, but rather a paper presentation.

Response #7
“It showed awareness and reflexivity about the whole process. It gave me hope that there is a community of folks within the academy who are critical, open, reflexive, creative, and willing to express themselves.”

Response #8

“We should do more ‘art’ regarding the scholarly work we do because art causes us to reflect.”

These two final responses demonstrate reactions that suggest that reflection is a critical element in creating the experience of holistic learning. The reflection begins with an aesthetic experience that allows the process to move beyond the moment and creates an experience of memory that continues to be re-visited after time. This is also likely to be a part of the reason we saw the staying power of the performances over time. Interestingly, these also seem to suggest a hopefulness about organizational change associated with this experience.

Cast Reactions to the Play

We can think of any performance in terms of an aesthetic transaction (Berleant, 1970; Fine, 1984) between the performer and audience. We can only speak from the perspective of the performer.

The cast members’ reactions to the experiences of the performances involved two main themes: the experience of being in the play, and the value of the representational form and aesthetic knowledge to the organization.
The informal discussion with the cast, audience and playwright generated responses from the cast that first focused on the experience of being in a staged reading “at work”, and second on what relevance the plays had for academia and the organizations involved. The first types of responses suggested that there was some tension between the cast members that could have been erased if this were not a “professional” venue such that the experience would have been much more connected for the members of the cast as they developed their roles and parts. Some cast members recognized that the short time frame (rehearsing just a few times before the actual performance) may have also contributed to this lack of freedom. Interestingly, other cast members felt that they had the freedom to design their character and role as they wanted (within the confines of the script) and did not feel constrained by the “professional” requirements of the organization. The cast members did not necessarily see themselves as courageous for engaging in these performances, although the audience members clearly thought so. One cast member did describe the experience as “incredibly liberating” since performing caused her to make significant progress overcoming public speaking anxiety. She indicated that the experience would dramatically alter her involvement in organizations as well as her teaching style in the classroom.

The second type of responses discussed the relevancy and the reality of the plays to the academic organization. As with the audience responses, there was considerable difference of opinion regarding this, as some members felt the plays had direct relevancy and were very realistic about the academy, while others felt the portrayal was completely unrealistic or had a difficult time seeing any relevance.
Again, similarly to the audience, this may be related to the lack of "comfort" or acceptance of aesthetic forms of knowledge and the presentational form in particular at an academic conference, as well as the individual interpretation of the experience.

**Questionnaire Responses**

The questionnaire responses from the cast members were consistent with the informal discussions, and emphasized the power of the transformational experience as well:

Response #1

“We created an energy and flow between the cast and then with the audience. We created a play that changed as we grew, learned, and increased our comfort and trust with each other. It was notable that the plays were never the same twice! Every time we performed it, it was different and all of them were valuable in the transformation.”

This response shows that the collective interaction between the cast members as they rehearsed and performed the plays created an experience of personal growth and learning. The interaction was with both the cast as the reading took shape and form through the rehearsals, as well as with the audience in discussing the plays afterward. This is consistent with the role of community in creating holistic learning we noted earlier, as well as with the conclusions reached by Taylor (2003), Yanow (2001) and Beirne & Knight (2007) regarding the wholeness achieved by the cast or actors involved in theatrical productions.
Response #2

“I suspect that these experiences arose from the opportunity to bring all (or at least many) or our senses and emotions- not just our minds-to our work. Our sense of being outside of the normal academy looking in perhaps freed us up to be more inside ourselves, more alive, and more aware of other possibilities for doing legitimate academic work.”

This cast member noted the excitement of the experience in bringing rational and emotional knowledge together consistent with others’ acknowledgement of this element of the experience. He also recognizes the unusual (perhaps courageous) dimension of being outside typical academic conference format as a means of creating wholeness in the experience.

CONCLUSION

We began this paper with a discussion about the power of theatre as a means of engaging both the emotional and intellectual dimensions of learning and stimulating wholeness needed for complete learning. We have described some theoretical foundations for this premise, as well as shared our experiences in presenting two different plays at academic conferences. Our experiment in this began with a specific goal for the presentation of Soft Targets, where the opening remarks and the surprise of seeing a play instead of an academic talk was an attempt to allow the division members to encounter and intertwine different types of
knowing, and to represent the unique character of the organization; in short, a demonstration the wholeness underlying the organizational culture and character. Similarly with *Ties that Bind*, we were attempting to demonstrate something similar to work in organizational theatre described by Nissley, Taylor, & Houden (2004). They discuss use of Schreyogg’s (1999) idea of a tailor-made play written and staged for a specific organization to dramatize critical issues in that workplace. The performance is used to allow organizational members to raise and discuss topics that might otherwise remain unspoken. Here both performances were attempts to provide a novel means to examine underlying issues in the organizations (the elephant in the room, so to speak) and provide the members with an opportunity to experience and learn about that in a different and more complete way of knowing.

As we mentioned earlier, this was also a powerful learning experience for the cast of the plays. During each of the eight hours of rehearsal for the plays, the group progressed from “reading the words” to “becoming the characters” and learned to relate to each other in the moment of the interaction. This transformational process was created by the wholeness of the experience both as actors and by interacting with the audience that significantly affected their performance on stage and ongoing relationships. In short, the development of the play was a microcosm of our efforts to facilitate complete learning and organizational change through engaging the emotional and intellectual dimensions of the group, but it was risky – it required us to go beyond the typical norms of academia and engage in multiple ways of knowing.
Our final comments are to suggest that theatre as an aesthetic, artistic experience combined with a discursive experience, can be a very powerful tool for introducing wholeness in the learning process. We believe this engagement of the rational and emotional can help raise organizational issues that remain un-discussed in many organizations and promote change. While we saw a dichotomy of responses in terms of engaging in wholeness and thus, holistic learning; we have only limited experience with our experimental performances in this regard, and we suggest that others look at this means of inducing learning and change as we attempt to create organizations that are more fully human. The academy has been rooted in intellectual knowing, but there have been opportunities like these that allow us to begin these types of explanations.

What can we do to more fully develop such opportunities? We suggest that the continued expansion of different types of knowing, and combining the artistic with discursive forms to link head and gut knowing can be an excellent starting point. We also suggest that the examination of the audience and cast reactions to theatrical presentations be more systematically assessed. We did not have the consistency to demonstrate reliable conclusions about these experiences; we would like to see the power of this form demonstrated with some more reliability. Thematic analysis as a means to discover content areas for learning and further reflection could prove very useful in this regard. Further, we would also suggest that we continue to be open to alternative presentational forms as educators and scholars. This is the means by which we can truly know ourselves and engage in complete learning and expand organizational change.
REFERENCES


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