

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES AS SURROGATES FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Games, business simulations, behavioral exercises in the classroom seek to bridge the gap between abstract lectures and experiential learning. But those involved with teaching behavior in the business colleges have so far ignored a valuable resource, literature, to supplement the teaching of behavior. Literature can evoke empathy and allow readers to vicariously experience what it is portraying of human behavior. Classroom teaching of behavior can use literature as a surrogate for experiential learning. This paper uses a particular genre of poetry, the dramatic monologue to illustrate its argument.

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning in behavioral fields seeks to impart knowledge by getting the student involved hands-on in the subject matter. As noted by Walter and Marks [13, p. 1], experiential learning is no longer limited to being an experimental form of teaching; it has become an accepted form of teaching behavioral sciences. Kolb [9] has described an experiential learning model that demonstrates the translation of experience into learning. Knowles [7, 1975] has shown that principles and techniques of experiential learning are backed by modern pedagogic theories. The students find it far easier to remember an experience than a lecture. Coleman [6, p. 58] notes that this occurs because of the associations that embed experiences in memory, and such associations "are with concrete actions and events to which affect was attached, and are not merely associations with abstract symbols or general principles expressed in abstract symbols." The very existence of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning is proof of the efficacy of learning by doing.

Literature and Behavior

Games, business simulations, behavioral exercises in the classroom, and even case studies seek to bridge the gap between abstract lectures and experiential learning. These approaches are in direct contrast to classroom situations where "behavior is talked about rather than observed, felt, or experienced" [1, p. 138]. There exists, however, a very valuable resource that those involved with teaching behavior in business colleges have failed to utilize.

The resource is literature. Literature for thousands of years has dramatized human behavior. The power literary works possess can be attributed to their ability to evoke empathy in their readers. While reading a novel, reciting a poem or watching a play, readers and audiences are able to experience vicariously the action being evoked. To paraphrase Shakespeare, literature may be seen as a mirror up to nature, human nature, that is. The power of literary works to evoke empathy and allow readers to vicariously experience what the literary work is evoking can be used by teachers of behavior in classrooms. Indeed, they can serve as sources for vicariously experiencing life and through it

behavior. In other words, one ought to be able to use literature as a surrogate for vicarious experiential learning.

Recognizing the Relationship

It was in recognition of this that AACSB [2] sponsored a competition that sought to promote greater incorporation of the humanities into business curriculums. The judges praised institutions such as Bentley College, Clarkson University, Eastern Kentucky University, University of Kansas, and New Jersey Institute of Technology for submitting proposals for courses through which humanities could be incorporated into business curriculums. In addition to praising these colleges, AACSB awarded the Exxon award to Julia A. Harding from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for her proposal to develop a course that will rely on review and discussion of classical and modern literature. By reviewing literary works, students will be able to observe "the experience of fictional and historic characters," and as a result, "the business students will be exposed to diverse human environments and experiences. It is hoped that this broadening experience will provide future managers with a new depth of perspective useful when applied to the specific conditions of real business situations."

In making these awards AACSB has recognized the contribution literature can make in developing the behavioral sensibilities of business students. The incorporation of literature into business curriculums could indeed mitigate the complaints voiced concerning the tunnel vision of the business students. This point was argued in an article published in *Business Week* [4]. More recently Tarr [1986] as well as Behrman and Levin [51] have pointed out the lack of human skills of the business graduate.

Incorporating literature to supplement behavioral courses is quite practical. Indeed, instead of simply talking about motivation, one could let the students experience the human motivation through reading about Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness*, Jim in *Lord Jim*, Ahab in *Moby Dick* and of course Hamlet, Macbeth--the list is virtually limitless. One could go further and use the character of Willy Loman to illustrate Maslows hierarchy of needs [11], use Forsters *A Passage to India* to illustrate cultural differences among nations, and use Upton Sinclairs *The Jungle* to illustrate factors that bring about regulatory pressures because of unethical behavior. In this paper I would like to show how the poetic genre of the dramatic monologue may be used to dramatize aspects of human communications and behavior. The term dramatic monologue is used to describe a special kind of poem in which the reader eavesdrops or listens into what a speaker is saying aloud either to himself or to another character in the poem. Through that monologue the speaker in the poem reveals himself. In order to elicit meaning and to see the speaker revealed, the reader is forced to piece together and read between the lines. He is forced to work with incomplete data. In real life one is also confronted with something similar. In communicating with peers and fellow workers in a

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business environment, one confronts what may be described as an iceberg effect. Our knowledge of those with whom we communicate is limited. We know only what is apparent; consequently, our communications involve a considerable amount of conjecture. When we communicate with fellow workers, we know only the apparent facts. There is lot about their inner being that we don't know and have not been told. Yet in dealing with them, one must assume and conjecture. A manager must spend a good deal of his time in such conjecturing and yet the behavioral courses do little to teach business students about this aspect of communication. We hope our students will pick up the ability to communicate on their own, and that they will become knowledgeable about dealing with their workers even though they have limited knowledge of the workers personalities.

Dramatic Monologues and Communications

Dramatic monologues can expose students to a very significant aspect of interpersonal communication. Since in understanding the poems, one must conjecture and piece together the given data, one could argue that such readings of poems can give students some appreciation of what is involved in communications with people of whom we have only limited knowledge. The reading and analysis of dramatic monologues can get the students to vicariously experience the complexities involved in interpersonal communication. In addition, reading the monologues could enhance students perception of human behavior. It is significant that Robert Langbaum. The definitive study of the dramatic monologue is entitled The Poetry of Experience [10]. In it Langbaum discusses the dramatic monologue as a form of poetry "which makes its statement not as an idea but as an experience from which one or more ideas can be abstracted as problematical rationalizations" [10, pp. 35-36]. Experiential teaching of behavior in business colleges seeks the same: it seeks to impart knowledge not through lecturing about abstract ideas but getting the students to experience first and through that experience abstract learning.

The dramatic monologue is a form of poetry which began in the 19th century. Tennyson to some extent and Browning to a much greater extent were involved in making the genre into an art form. More recently, T. S. Eliot and Robert Lowell among others have used the form for their poetic expression. There exists a fairly large group of dramatic monologues that could be used to study the genre.

Illustrating the Genre

Here I would like to explicate Brownings "My Last Duchess" in order to illustrate what the genre is and what it seeks to do. As the poem opens, we hear the speaker describing a painting. From the opening remark--"That my last Duchess painted on the wall/Looking As if she were alive"--one surmises that the speaker is a duke and that he is talking about the painting of his wife, who is no longer alive. The next several lines do two things: first they inform the reader that the speaker in the poem is a rather possessive art collector; secondly, they tell the readers about the duchess. The duke continues:

I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra pandolfs hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Willt please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there;

The parenthetical remark--"none puts by/the curtain have drawn for you"--indicates to the reader and the listener in the poem itself about the possessiveness of the speaker. The painting clearly is a prized possession of the speaker and he is not willing to share it with others. The remaining lines point out the "depth and passion" being reflected in the painting of the duchess. The intensity and the earnest qualities have invariably moved observers to wonder "How such a glance came there?"

In describing the origins of the duchess passionate glance, the duke lets his own possessive jealousy be known:

Sir, twas not
Her husbands presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my ladys wrist too," or Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy.

Instead of saving the passion and earnestness of her joyous glance for her husbands presence, the duchess would respond pleasantly to courtesy on the part of other people. As the remaining dialogue unfolds, the duke is attempting to paint the duchess as an infidel, but upon closer examination it is clear that the duchess was not at all guilty of infidelity. Rather her crime was one of finding joy in what life has to offer--fresh fruit, sunset, courtesy on the part of others and riding a mule. Note the following lines:

She had
A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whater
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, twas all one! My favor at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace--all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least.

In objecting to the duchess behavior, the duke is consumed by jealousy. He is incensed that his wife can respond joyously to life around her. Her behavior led to the dukes saying:

She thanked men--good! but thanked
Somehow--I know not how--as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift.

The duke does not want the duchess to find joy in her pursuits, innocent pursuits; he wanted her to limit her joy for her husband and his nine-hundred-year-old history. The Duke thought of her actions as trifling and rather than telling her of his anger at her behavior, he decided not to "stoop":

Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
in speech--which I have not--to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say "Just this

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Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"--and if she let herself
Be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
Een then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop.

The arrogance of the duke causes him to do away with the duchess rather than tell her what it was that displeased him:

Oh, sir, she smiled no doubt,
Whenever I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive.

Before the reader can recover from learning the fate of the duchess, he experiences yet another shock. The reader responds with shocked amazement when informed of the identity of the dukes listener in the poem and the occasion for the conversation itself:

Willt please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughters self as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, well go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

The last three lines, that follow the dukes condescending waving of his rank privilege--"we'll go/together down, sir."- bring the poem and the character of the duke into final focus. Those lines, to quote Langbaum, "bring all the parts of the poem into final combination, with just the relative values that constitute the poems meaning. The nobleman does not hurry on his way to business, the connoisseur cannot resist showing off yet another precious object, the possessive egotist counts up his possessions even as he moves toward the acquirement of a new possession, a well-dowered bride; and most important, the last duchess is seen in the final perspective. She takes her place as one of a line of objects in an art collection" [10, p. 84]. Her fate serves as a warning to be conveyed to his bride-to-be in case she, too, does not tow the line as prescribed by the duke.

CONCLUSION

The poem can be read at two levels. The first involves a careful reading and paying attention to the verbal clues. This lets the readers extract the plot and learn the story. The second, deeper level lets the reader experience the occasion. We observe in shocked amazement the performance of the duke and his wickedness. As Langbaum has noted: "What interests us more than the dukes wickedness is his immense attractiveness. His conviction of matchless superiority, his intelligence and bland amorality, his poise, his taste for art, his manners--highhanded aristocratic manners that break the ordinary rules and assert the dukes superiority when he is being most solicitous of the envoy, waiving their difference of rank" [p. 83]. Through observation and empathy, the reader has become a part of the poems denouement and this lets him experience the dramatic behavior. To experience the dramatic significance of the poem implies observing the character of the duke and to do so we cannot simply read the poem and piece together the clues, but we must empathize

and experience the poem. Through such empathy our perception of human behavior is enriched. For thousands of years literature has served to enrich readers' perceptions of human behavior. Reading poems like "My Last Duchess" serves the same role, and they ought to supplement the teaching of behavior in classrooms. Students sensibilities can be enriched through their readings of literature; it is a very proper surrogate for experiential learning. Through it behavior can be defined and vicariously experienced thus making teaching and learning much more rewarding.

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