

# Blank Canvas: Explorative Behavior and Personal Agency in Arts Entrepreneurship Education

Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation Lab

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## Abstract

Development of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge is important for artists and musicians because professional success in these fields often necessitates the ability to create opportunities and network; therefore, higher education institutions have been implementing arts entrepreneurship education programs with an experiential focus. Literature on the efficacy of these programs has thus far not adequately addressed questions regarding how educators can effectively enable students to exercise personal agency and behave exploratively – two forms of action which entrepreneurial learning theory suggests are critical for entrepreneurial knowledge generation. This empirical study finds that students in arts entrepreneurial education within higher music education environments seek to balance personal factors against social ones while taking actions to minimize uncertainty in entrepreneurial ventures.

Teachers should be aware of these existing dynamics and variants in students’ personal factors while emphasizing student-centered, experiential, and “idiosyncratic” approaches.

## Introduction

The need for entrepreneurial skills in a competitive industry has led to the growth of arts entrepreneurship courses across the world, but research gaps still exist in direct examination of the student experience in those courses. There is space for an empirical approach to both what and how arts entrepreneurship students are learning. Since the primary goal of these programs is experiential development of entrepreneurial knowledge, educators should utilize learning environments where students can exercise personal agency and behave exploratively to foster those skills. To learn how students in arts entrepreneurship courses function in these educational environments, this

paper present empirical data, a structure of the qualitative data, and a conceptual model of how arts entrepreneurship students explore and exercise personal agency.

## Research Method

This study utilized the inductive “Gioia” methodology that features thematic coding of interviews, student diaries, research journals and course deliverables from a 5-week

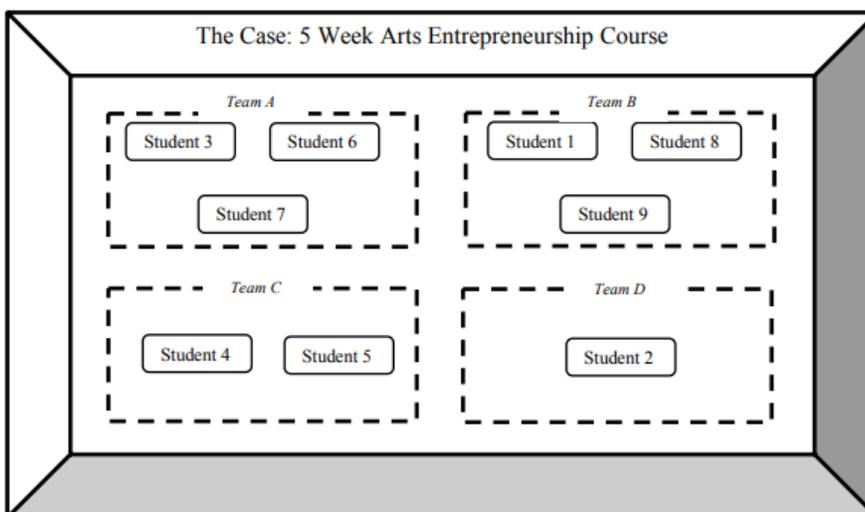


Figure 1 – Single Case Embedded Research Design

# BLANK CANVAS

masters-level course on arts entrepreneurship in Norway. It employed a “teacher-research”

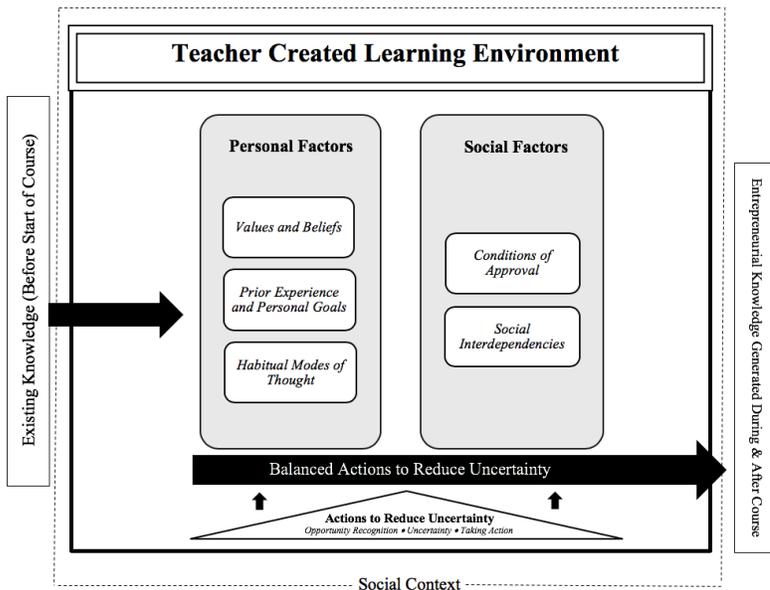


Figure 3 - A Model of How Students Explore and Exercise Personal Agency in Arts Entrepreneurship

approach where the paper’s author also oversaw the classroom. The course covered theories and applications of entrepreneurship while seeking to develop communication skills and active mindsets through a team project, diaries, and lectures. Student teams were given a “blank canvas” to identify a problem and test entrepreneurial solutions that created some form of economic, social and/or environmental value. 9 students were sampled after the conclusion of the course with an eye toward their variety of backgrounds in education, work, and entrepreneurship experience.

## Results

The model displayed in Figure 3 demonstrates the five key components of the study’s results:

- (1) A teacher-created learning environment combining theoretical content and team-based experiential learning of entrepreneurial skills, in which
- (2) Students’ personal factors, such as their values and beliefs, goals, experiences, biases, and habits, influence their actions as they are balanced with
- (3) Social factors comprised of conditions of approval and social interdependencies.
- (4) Actions to reduce uncertainty such as opportunity recognition and proactive action taking are performed
- (5) Resulting in balanced actions to reduce uncertainty.

## Conclusion

The answer to the larger research question of how students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education is through balanced actions to reduce uncertainty. This response may seem intuitive and simplified, but attention to the creation of educational environments and how they impact the social and personal factors described in the model is essential for educators and practitioners to understand. Effective course design should move beyond the practice of addressing theoretical problems and give students room to enrich their sense of personal agency by addressing real problems within their social context. While students will have varying degrees of tolerance for experiencing uncertainty and taking entrepreneurial action, placing the center of both empathetic feeling and analytical thinking back on the student may address the core of any liberal education initiative.

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