

**SPECIAL ISSUE: ARTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION**

## *Blank Canvas*

### *Explorative Behavior and Personal Agency in Arts Entrepreneurship Education*

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**ABSTRACT:** The majority of learning in arts entrepreneurship education is experiential (Essig & Guevara, 2016). Experiential and entrepreneurial learning theories indicate that to facilitate entrepreneurial knowledge generation which “enables [entrepreneurs] to recognize and act on entrepreneurial opportunities and to organize and manage new ventures” (Politis, 2005, p. 400), individuals need to exercise personal agency and engage in explorative behavior (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Politis, 2005). If arts entrepreneurship education is to help students generate such entrepreneurial knowledge, arts entrepreneurship educators should create learning environments in which their students can exercise personal agency and behave exploratively. Despite this, how students exercise personal agency and explore within arts entrepreneurship education has not been empirically studied. This empirical paper attempts to answer the following question: How do students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education? Using rigor to systematically analyze qualitative data (Gioia et al., 2013) from a five-week course in entrepreneurship in higher music education to produce a data structure and model, I find that within a teacher-created learning environment, students balance personal factors (their values and beliefs, habitual modes of thought, prior experience and personal goals) against social factors (social interdependencies and conditions of approval) while taking actions to reduce uncertainty. The findings imply that teacher-created learning environments and engagement in social contexts influences how students exercise personal agency and explore. **KEYWORDS:** arts entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial learning, personal agency, explorative behavior, Gioia methodology. DOI: 10.34053/artivate.9.2.115

## Introduction

Research argues that entrepreneurial skills and knowledge are critical for musicians. They must recognize and act upon opportunities, build and utilize networks, manage multiple concurrent roles, and self-manage a series of simultaneous employment engagements to build careers as “enforced entrepreneurs” (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015, p. 263; Bennett, 2016; Breivik et al., 2015; Cawsey, 1995; Coulson, 2012; Teague & Smith, 2015). In response, higher education has called upon arts entrepreneurship education to teach arts entrepreneurship, defined as “a management process through which cultural workers seek to support their creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value” (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015, p. 25). Arts entrepreneurship education’s growth is considerable, with courses now available in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK (Brandenburg et al., 2016; Pollard & Wilson, 2013; Thom, 2017; Toscher & Bjørnø, 2019; Watne & Nymo, 2017). In the US, as of 2016 there were 372 arts entrepreneurship courses offered by 168 institutions, compared with just 36 institutions offering such courses in 2007 (Beckman, 2007; Essig & Guevara, 2016). This growth in arts entrepreneurship parallels the broader field of entrepreneurship education for which “universities are creating courses and programs to deliver entrepreneurial knowledge and competencies to students in a variety of majors beyond business . . . such as the arts” (Duval-Couteil, 2013, p. 395–397). Research lags behind this growth in teaching, as “action and intervention have raced far ahead of theory, pedagogy, and research to explain it” (Rideout, 2012, p.86). While curricular efforts are documented (Beckman, 2005, 2007; Damásio & Bicacro, 2017) and theories and definitions offered (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Gangi, 2017), there is an important gap in the arts entrepreneurship literature that empirically examines how arts students are learning in the arts entrepreneurship classroom.

The majority of learning in the arts entrepreneurship classroom is experiential (Essig & Guevara, 2016), focused on transforming experience into knowledge; so, naturally, experiential (Kolb & Kolb, 2009) and entrepreneurial learning (Politis, 2005) theories may be a starting point for examining student learning. These theories claim in order facilitate the generation of entrepreneurial knowledge which “enables [entrepreneurs] to recognize and act on entrepreneurial opportunities and to organize and manage new ventures” (Politis, 2005, p. 400), individuals need to exercise personal agency and engage in explorative behavior (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Politis, 2005). If arts entrepreneurship education aims to help students generate such entrepreneurial knowledge, then arguably educators should create learning environments in which their students can exercise personal agency—operationally defined as “the ability to accomplish action” (Campbell, 2009, p. 411)—and behave exploratively to transform experience into knowledge. Here, explorative behavior is operationally defined as “choosing new actions that are distinct from what they have already taken” (Politis, 2005, p. 408). This contrasts with exploitative behavior, which refers to exploiting “what is already known, implying individuals learn from experience by exploiting old certainties . . . it is thus about creating reliability in experience . . . the returns are hence generally more certain, closer in time, and closer in space than returns to

exploration” (March, 1991; Politis, 2005, p. 408). Seen in the light of Politis’ theory of entrepreneurial learning, both concepts of personal agency and explorative behavior involve action—and action is argued to be the core of entrepreneurship (McMullen & Shephard, 2006). This may explain the growth and popularity of action-based entrepreneurship education (Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006; Haneberg et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial action may be the means through which students can develop the types of entrepreneurial competencies (Morris et al., 2013) which are often the basis and rationale for creation of entrepreneurship education in the first place. But before students can take entrepreneurial action in the classroom, educators should be interested in how their teaching practice may influence students’ abilities to exercise personal agency and explore.

The influence educators may have on their students has been addressed by experiential learning theorists to show how students interact with their learning environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Using the concept of “learning space,” Kolb & Kolb compare and examine a graduate management MBA program and an undergraduate arts program in order to empirically demonstrate how the differences in the learning styles between the two may be a reflection of the institutional learning environments in which they study. They found that art students tended to be more in the feeling-oriented regions of the learning space (a region relating to concrete experience), whereas management students tended to be more in the thinking-oriented region (related to abstract conceptualization). This should be of significant interest to arts entrepreneurship educators: entrepreneurship education for arts students may not be the same as it is for management students. An anecdote from their study is illustrative—when the researchers asked what texts they should provide art students for a workshop on learning, the provost of the arts school replied “learning is not text driven” for arts students (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 202). This contrasts to management education, which is largely centered around texts. Further, the findings of these influential experiential learning theorists have direct relevance for arts entrepreneurship education, in which the majority of learning is assumed to be experiential (Essig & Guevara, 2016). It demonstrates how educators help determine the coordinates for experiential learning along both the acting/reflecting or feeling/thinking axes in their learning spaces. We can see how this might influence how students take action, but what about whether those actions are explorative or exploitative, or why explorative behavior is particularly interesting?

Politis’ (2005) model accounts for both exploitative and explorative types of behavior in entrepreneurial knowledge generation and offers several interesting propositions and arguments about how each type of behavior relates to entrepreneurs at different career stages. These propositions make the study of explorative behavior especially interesting the context of music and arts education. First, Politis proposes that those entrepreneurs who rely upon exploration as a model of transforming experience into entrepreneurial knowledge will be more effective in recognizing opportunities—and this exploration is associated with “substantial success as well as failure, implying a larger performance variation” (Politis 2005, p. 409). Considering the wide variation in economic performance and outcomes of artists in the creative economy, which has been noted for its “winner-take-all” dynamics (Stern & Seifert, 2008), it could be argued that working artists in their careers are used to explorative action and that students could benefit

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from being exposed to this type of behavior. Indeed, if we hypothetically compared artists with established careers to those music and arts students in the college classroom, we might find those in higher education are still at a “suboptimal stable equilibrium” in their careers (Politis, 2005, p. 409). Second, Politis notes that individual entrepreneurs with a “spiral” and “transitory” career orientation (Larsson et al., 2001) will to a larger extent focus on an explorative mode of behaving and transforming experience into knowledge. These spiral and transitory careers, which can be characterized by a “prefer[ence] to explore new activities related to previous ones in which creativity and personal development become the key motives . . . project oriented and episodic, implying that the competence developed, which consists of skill diversity, networking, speediness, and adaptation” (Politis, 2005, p. 414-15) are career characteristics typical of those working as musicians and artists (Coulson, 2012; Teague & Smith, 2015). Third, Politis proposes that the more an entrepreneur relies on exploitation, the more effective they are at coping with the liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965). Early career artists, like music students, are susceptible to such liabilities of newness and I would argue that such early career artists would first need to focus on exploration in order to achieve a breakthrough in their careers. In our modern world, for example, the large majority of the twentieth century’s recorded music is available at our fingertips through smartphones and streaming services, and new artists must compete with not only contemporary artists but artists and music from the past century in their competition for listeners. This type of “substantial success” or breakthrough is necessary before they can begin thinking about behaving in an exploitative manner in order to manage their liabilities of newness. For example, the type of actions taken by a world-famous rock band like U2 are likely very different than the type of actions taken by a two-month-old garage band comprised of nineteen-year-olds from Sandusky, Ohio. The latter must explore more to establish themselves and their career, whereas U2 can exploit their already established name, reputation, and fanbase.

Only recently have theories of experiential and entrepreneurial learning been explored in greater depths within the context of art, the arts entrepreneurship literature, and *Artivate* (Toscher, 2019). While experiential and entrepreneurial learning theories have received more attention in the broader entrepreneurship education literature, some evidence observes differences in experiential learning styles of arts students compared to management students (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), perhaps limiting the transferability of some findings from the broader field of entrepreneurship education to the subfield of arts entrepreneurship education. Further, while we would hope that the substantial amount of empirical research within the broader field of entrepreneurship education (Nabi et al., 2016) and entrepreneurial learning (Wang & Chugh, 2014) would assist the arts entrepreneurship field, the subjects in these studies are largely a different population (business students) who have self-selected into entrepreneurship education. In addition to differences in experiential styles found by Kolb and Kolb (2005), these two student groups may also have differing career goals and motivations for studying entrepreneurship (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015; Toscher, Dahle, & Steinert, 2020). Thus, practitioners and educators would benefit from a rich, empirically grounded understanding of the entrepreneurial learning processes of students in the arts entrepreneurship classroom.

This empirical paper attempts to answer the question, *How do students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education?*

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I introduce and discuss the research method, the research design, the empirical setting of the arts entrepreneurship course, the empirical data, and the participants of this study. Then, I present and discuss the results from my analysis of the data, which includes a structure of the qualitative data and a conceptual model of how arts entrepreneurship students explore and exercise personal agency in the classroom. Finally, I conclude with implications for education and practice.

## Research Method—The Gioia Methodology

### Research Method

To answer the aforementioned research question, I use a qualitative approach aimed at building theory. This approach is inspired by grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), guided by analytic rigor (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2013), and is often referred to as the largely inductive Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013). I use the Gioia method to analyze empirical qualitative data consisting of interviews, student learning diaries, a researcher’s journal, and course deliverables from a five-week mandatory course in arts entrepreneurship for a master’s degree program in music and technology (see Table 1 for an overview of the data collected). Through analysis, I establish first order codes, second order themes, theoretical subcategories, and finally an aggregate theoretical dimension to build and present a model of how students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education.

### Research Design, Empirical Context, and the Arts Entrepreneurship Course

The empirical context for this study is a five-week entrepreneurship course I designed, planned, implemented, and taught at a large university in Norway. A unique aspect of this course was that it was taught in a state-of-the-art distributed classroom teaching environment, with students physically located in two different cities. In both research design and empirical setting, this study is largely a teacher-research approach, through its use of: (a) an insider perspective; (b) a pragmatic and goal oriented approach to solve problems faced by practitioners in the classroom; and (c) a practical approach to answering research questions (Baumann & Duffy, 2001). Inspired by teacher research and practitioner inquiry, I have researched my own classroom for the purpose of generating knowledge that may contribute to better teaching and learning, and that may help teachers “develop their capacity for making the kinds of sound autonomous professional judgments and decisions appropriate to their status as professionals” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 5).

This mandatory course in entrepreneurship was part of a master’s degree program in music

and technology. All students had: (a) a bachelor's degree, (b) personal and/or professional interest in and experience with music, and (c) interest in and experience with technology. The class most closely resembled the “being enterprising” (Bridgstock, 2013) type of arts entrepreneurship education rather than the “new venture creation” or “transitioning” type in arts entrepreneurship education (Beckman, 2007), and students were given a blank canvas with which to iteratively learn about, recognize, and act on an opportunity of their choosing. Students were encouraged to act on an opportunity that created either economic, social, cultural and/or environmental value for themselves and society. The course was pedagogically inspired by design engineering (Steinert & Leifer, 2012), experiential, andragogical, and action-based learning (Neck & Corbett, 2018; Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006), and effectuation (Saravathy, 2001).

Entrepreneurship was framed in the broader opportunity (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) and value-creation framing (Bruyat & Julien, 2001) senses for a few reasons. First, due to the heterogeneity of the students (including their educational and work backgrounds—see Table 2) and the degree's emphasis on team-based, interdisciplinary learning, students were not tasked with creating a portfolio, an artist website, arranging a concert or other professional development activities that sometimes accompany an arts entrepreneurship career transitioning offering (Beckman, 2011). Second, there is empirical evidence (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012; Moore, 2016; J. C. White, 2013) and theoretical argumentation (Toscher, 2019) that entrepreneurship needs to be reframed appropriately in the context of music education, given the historical conflict and tension between aesthetic values, artistic identity, and neoliberal notions of entrepreneurship. Situating entrepreneurship as something to deliver economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental value moves the discipline away from the notion that it has to do strictly with profit (Bridgstock, 2012). Finally, what I call the *blank canvas approach*, where students were free to define the scope of their work within the course, helps answer the research question: How do students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education? This pedagogical structure, which closely resembles the being enterprising type of arts entrepreneurship education, resulted in a research design in which I could observe how students explored and exercised personal agency based upon their own determinations of value.

## Course Timeline and Deliverables

Before week one, I met the students during an orientation session to learn about them, their experience, and their goals, and to understand any potential team dynamics that may emerge. Most lecturing occurred during week one, in which I went over the theoretical content provided in precourse readings. After discussion, we went over the deliverables for the course, which were comprised of: (a) a graded team project, in which they were to identify and act upon a value-creating opportunity, and (b) a nongraded, mandatory individual student learning diary, which consisted of a log detailing the actions they took to act upon their opportunity, reflections describing the action they took, what resulted from that action, how they thought and felt, what they learned, what assumption they were testing with their action, and any connections between this experience and their prior experiences, knowledge, and/or ideas presented both in this

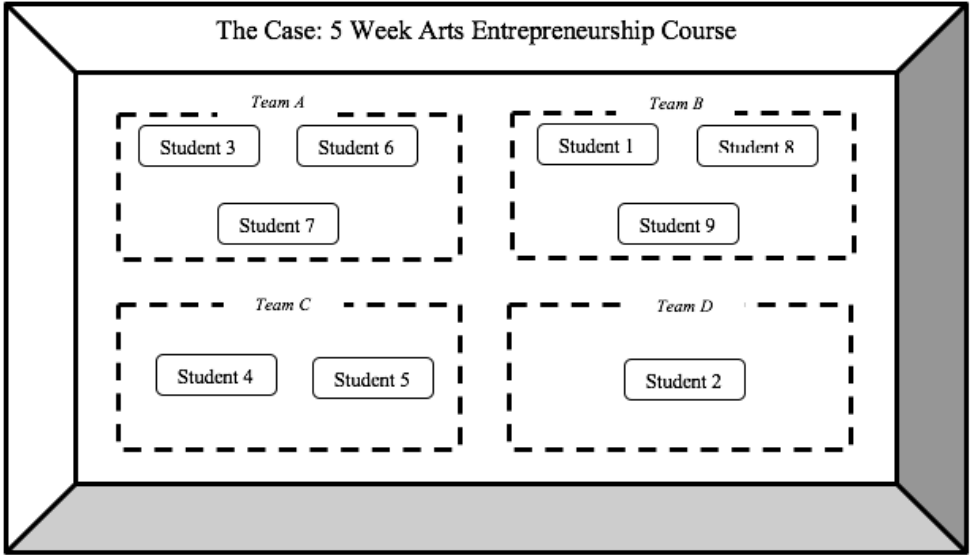
course and in their prior education. This reflective learning diary approach was inspired and informed by previous entrepreneurship education research, which has argued for the importance of synthesizing reflection and action in order to help students generate entrepreneurial knowledge in experiential entrepreneurship education (Hägg, 2017; Hägg & Kurczewska 2020). Students were encouraged to draw connections between course reading and what they experienced in their project work. I explained the theoretical support for this reflective and experiential learning approach (Boud et al., 2013; Dewey, 1938) to help students understand its value, in addition to being something they needed to do to just pass the course. Besides delivering eight entries in their learning diary (four action logs and four reflections, delivered once per week), the graded group project consisted of a final ten-minute pitch presentation before a jury, with a Q&A session. Students chose the appropriate audience for their pitches, whether it was an investor, a customer, a governmental agency, or other stakeholder.

Week two featured lectures about value creation and identifying problems. Weeks three, four, and five were used to discuss team project progression using a business model canvas (Pigneur, 2009) to guide discussion.

## Single-Case Embedded Design

This study uses a single-case embedded design (Figure 1), where the five-week course in entrepreneurship is the case studied and the embedded units of analysis are the individual students in the case. During the course, each individual student worked within their teams on the course project; students were placed into semester-long teams by the researcher and other music degree program staff to achieve a balance of background, experience, skills, interests, and gender. Students worked in these teams for the entire semester in all of their courses in the degree program.

The unit of analysis is the individual student, and the data that forms the basis of that analysis is described in Table 1. While some collected data articulates specific events and critical incidents that occurred within the team setting, the goal of this current study was to understand the phenomena of interest at the personal and individual level, not the team level. Thus, teams were not explicitly considered as a separate unit or level of analysis. Figure 1 displays the students who were willing to participate in this study and the teams in which they were members. Note that only one student from team D was willing to participate in the study.



**Figure 1.** Single Case Embedded Research Design

## Student Participants, Limitation of Potential Biases, and Ethical Considerations

Nine out of sixteen students in the course were purposefully sampled and agreed to participate in this study. To avoid biasing both their actions taken within the course and reflections made in their student learning diaries, students were not informed beforehand that their activity in the course could potentially be used at a later date for research purposes, should they consent to participate in such research. This decision was made to limit any potential self-censorship or self-presentation biases from the participants. After the course was completed and grades assigned, I approached the students to tell them about this study and asked if they were willing to participate. Students received grades prior to my request for their permission to participate so they would not feel pressured into participating. I told them our relationship would not change should they choose not to participate. Notification of this study was sent to the NSD, the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research, prior to the commencement of the course and received approval from NSD. Participants formally consented to participation through an NSD-approved consent form.



## Data Collection

Data Collected	Description of Data	Before Entrepreneurship Course	Entrepreneurship Course					After Entrepreneurship Course
			Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	
Interviews	Nine semi-structured interviews, varying in length from 20 to 75 minutes each. A total of 6.03 hours of interviews comprising 117 pages and 34,381 words.	X						X
Student Learning Diaries: Reflections	Nine student reflection journals comprised of 36 total learning reflections, 4 from each student.			X	X	X	X	
Student Learning Diaries: Action Logs	Nine student action logs comprised of 62 actions in which students describe actions they took and describe it with the date, time, what it consisted of, whom they spoke with, why they did it, what critical assumptions or hypothesis they were testing, and based on what they learned, their next planned action. The action logs total 44 pages with 4,716 words and also include numerous images.			X	X	X	X	
Project Status Update: Business Model Canvas	Eight <i>business model canvasses</i> , as populated by the Researcher during weeks 3 and 4 of the course, in order to integrate information provided by students via reflection journals and action logs. This enabled the researcher to keep track of student progress on course projects, facilitate group discussion, and to contextualize theoretical content into actual coursework.				X	X		
Researcher's Journal	A journal kept by the Researcher containing notes, observations, thoughts, feelings, and analysis related to the course. Comprised of 19 pages totaling 8,072 words, this journal was kept between August and December 2018 – covering the period before, during, and after the course.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Final Project Presentation	Four presentations archived as slide decks, including additional presentation material such as a business plan and a video of a pilot test, which represented the students' final presentation of their project.						X	

**Table 1.** The Data Collected

## The Students

I used a purposeful sample strategy to choose participants who could best help me answer my research question about how students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education (Creswell, 2007). As seen in Table 2, the participants had a substantial range of educational, work, and arts entrepreneurial backgrounds. While many had arts entrepreneurial experience according to a common definition (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015), they all had an interest in performing and/or making music, and they were all enrolled in a master's degree program offered by an institute of HME. This may represent a wider band of diversity than one may find in a specific arts entrepreneurship setting, compared to, for example a second-year bachelor's course for classical music performance majors. This relative heterogeneity in the participants created a high degree of variation in the domains of previous knowledge and experience amongst the participants. In addition, the selection of this entrepreneurship course as a

case offered an opportunity to create a pedagogical context that in some respects represents an extreme case. By creating a relatively open course in which students were completely free to explore, recognize, and act upon any opportunity of their choosing, I thought I could potentiate their opportunities to explore and use their personal agency.

Student	Age	Educational Background	Previous Entrepreneurship Education?	Has Pursued A Career in Arts (Arts Entrepreneurial Experience)?	Has experience with non-commercial musical activities (e.g. Playing an instrument for leisure, being part of a hobby band, etc)	Reason for Taking Masters Degree	Additional Notes on Arts Entrepreneurial Experience
1	Mid 20s	Bachelors in Music Technology	Yes (during bachelors, took one course in entrepreneurship and innovation from social scientific and humanities perspective)	No	Yes	Gain new professional and academic skills	
2	Late 30s	Bachelors in Music Performance – Jazz	No	Yes	Yes	Gain new music technology knowledge and skills; earn a masters; build network; expand creative toolset	Has worked professional as a freelance jazz saxophonist, composer, and music teacher.
3	Early 30s	Bachelors in Media and Visual Studies	No	Yes	Yes	Learn new skills and tools to enable new creative expression	Has worked as a musician, composer, lyricist, vocalist, and writer. Additionally, founded and managed design companies and cooperative record label and production companies.
4	Mid 20s	Bachelors in Theatre and Humanities	No	Yes	Yes	Satisfy intellectual curiosity	Has worked in journalism and film production
5	Early 20s	Bachelors in Informatics	Yes (during bachelors, took courses in economics and entrepreneurship – the latter in which they built a prototype and tested it with users)	No	Yes	Improve music technology skills	
6	Early 50s	Bachelors in Music Performance	No	Yes	Yes	Improve skills, perhaps open pathway to PhD	Has worked in video production for 30 years, the majority of which has run own company.
7	Mid 20s	Bachelors in Electrical Engineering and Music Technology	Yes (during bachelors, took one course in entrepreneurship for engineers focused on developing a business plan)	No	Yes	Further specialization in music technology	
8	Mid 20s	Bachelors in Financial Mathematics	No	Yes	Yes	Gain core knowledge in music technology	Has worked as a drummer, freelance studio engineer and in advertising analytics
9	Early 20s	Bachelors in Electrical Engineering (Acoustics and Signal Processing)	No	No	Yes	Further specialization in music technology and engineering; explore entrepreneurial opportunity and new product development	Has worked as video production technician

**Table 2.** Participants in this Study

## Data Analyses

Data was analyzed following guidelines for inductive qualitative research using analytic rigor (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2013). This analytical method resulted in building the data structure seen in Figure 2 in the results section. First, I started to analyze the data using an “open coding” approach to identify first-order codes that emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Van Maanen, 1979). I identified first-order codes by examining data for each student on a separate basis. This open coding procedure was performed by printing out all of the data on paper and coding chunks of text by highlighting and writing on the paper. These codes were then eventually placed into a spreadsheet to be used in later stages of the analytic process. Since I considered each student as a separate unit of analysis, the result was a set of independent codes for each student. I did not reuse a code generated from one student on another student. It was

not until the next step of analysis, in which these codes were aggregated to second order themes, that overlapping codes converged by means of higher-level abstraction.

Next, I looked for a deeper structure behind my first order codes that could explain my observations using a form of axial coding to group codes into second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013; Locke, 2001). These second order themes were then grouped into theoretical subcategories, which were sufficiently abstract to encompass the meaning of the underlying data while also situating the results within a more abstract theoretical subcategory. Finally, these theoretical subcategories were aggregated into an aggregate theoretical dimension. The first-order codes, second-order themes, theoretical subcategories, and aggregate theoretical dimension were then used to create a data structure (Figure 2).

Under this method, Gioia argues there is value in a “semi-ignorance or enforced ignorance of the literature” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 21). The inductive aspect of my analytical approach to generating first order codes reflects this. However, I did have a pragmatic intention to eventually situate my findings within existing literature to facilitate a meaningful conversation while also being true to the discoveries, whether novel or redundant. This approach is in line with previous research using the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2014). Thus, when discussing the results in increasingly higher levels of abstraction in this paper, I often present them alongside and in light of existing literature.

Finally, in order to improve the credibility and dependability of my interpretations of the data, as well as the emergent model and constructs from my analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I relied upon feedback, review, and engagement from peers and outside researchers in the field of entrepreneurship education from a diversity of cultural and educational contexts. This follows several research norms established by other single-author qualitative research studies in management and experiential learning (Laasch, 2018; Matsuo, 2014; Smith, 2014; Sonenshein, 2014) that use the “Gioia” method. I received this feedback and review throughout this article’s development as it was presented in courses, at conferences, and through paper development seminars. Despite being familiar with literature from the entrepreneurship education and arts entrepreneurship education fields, I restrained any inclination to immediately bind the data to any forms preconceived during initial coding. This was, to a large extent, performed to prevent potential transferability issues in applying previous findings from literature to my own context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conversely, in order to improve the transferability of my own findings, I have attempted to provide “thick descriptive data—narrative developed about the context so that judgments about the degree of fit or similarity may be made by others who may wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere.” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). I have attempted to provide this thick descriptive data through my description of the empirical context, the participants in the study, the types and forms of data collected, and the integration of actual participant quotes in the presentation and discussion of findings.

## Results and Discussion—Explorative Behavior and Personal Agency in Arts Entrepreneurship Education

The results show that within a teacher-created learning environment, students balance personal and social factors in order to take balanced actions to reduce uncertainty. Figure 2 displays the data structure resulting from the analysis and Figure 3 displays a model of how students take balanced actions to reduce uncertainty in the process of entrepreneurial knowledge generation. This model is comprised of five components. First, the process of generating new entrepreneurial knowledge begins with students who possess existing knowledge before they enter the context of a teacher-created learning environment. In this particular study, this learning environment was the five-week course in entrepreneurship. The teacher-created learning environment and the students are embedded in a broader social context which is not created by the teacher—in the model in Figure 3, this social context boundary is denoted by a dotted line. The next component consists of the personal factors that influence how students take actions within the learning environment, which include their existing values and beliefs, their prior experience and personal goals, and their habitual modes of thought (like whether they tended to think intuitively or analytically, to use reason or feeling). The next component is the social factors that also influence how students act, comprised of conditions of approval and social interdependencies. Actions to reduce uncertainty is the next component of the model, which includes concepts such as opportunity recognition, uncertainty, and taking action. The final component is balanced actions to reduce uncertainty, which is essentially an aggregate theoretical dimension that represents how the students in this study behaved exploratively and exercised personal agency, and thus in theory generated new entrepreneurial knowledge. Below I discuss each of these components, and at various points use quotations from the students. Words in brackets are my own, which I have inserted to improve the clarity of the quotation while preserving the contextual meaning. It should be noted that it is not the aim of this study to test the theoretical validity of entrepreneurial learning and subsequent entrepreneurial knowledge generation (Politis, 2005), thus the students' existing knowledge and entrepreneurial knowledge they generate is not the analytical focus of this study even though they are present in the model in Figure 3.

### Teacher-Created Learning Environment

It may seem obvious, perhaps it is an assumption taken for granted, that teachers are creating the environments in which arts entrepreneurship students learn. However, results from this study help explicate the different dimensions of this learning environment and how they may influence the processes under study. I found four themes that describe the different dimensions of this learning environment and set learning boundaries for students: (i) team-based learning, (ii) theoretical content, (iii) entrepreneurship education, and (iv) establishing a timeline for deliverables.

With regard to team-based learning, for example, Student 1 spoke of group decision-making in team-based learning, saying, “after the group decided to focus on loneliness, isolation,

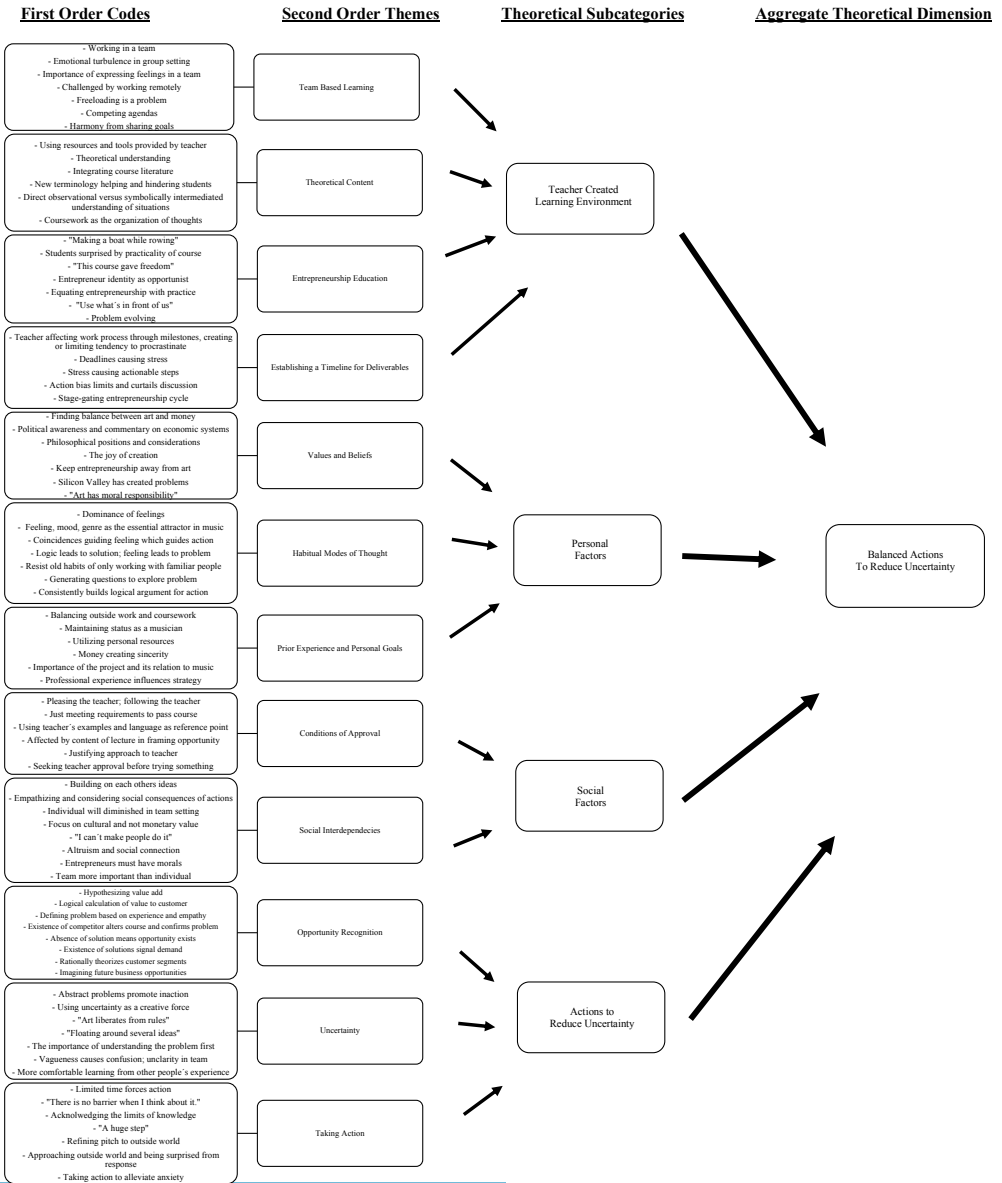
and rehabilitation of prisoners, I decided to gather some information about this problem as it stands in [ . . . ] society today” and Student 7 noted it “was important to get everybody involved.” While statements such as these related to the necessity of establishing consensus to proceed in the team project point to the overall team-based structure of the course, other statements allude to the types of challenges that emerged from the team setting. Student 4 spoke of learning in the team setting, which included dealing “with other people’s emotional boundaries, how far [they] can go with [ . . . ] critique, comment or dislike of something someone proposed.” This learning resulted from emotional disturbances within the team setting, and some students viewed the communication of such emotions as important. As Student 3 said: “One [person] was very . . . [they] didn’t feel welcome anymore. And I had no idea. Because people are afraid to say [what they feel]. But I think human emotions are so important to make a team work.”

The theoretical content framed how the students went about their coursework and what they felt they learned. The team project was theoretically rooted, at a fundamental level, in uncertainty (Knight, 1921) in the sense that students had to choose a problem to focus on and explore how a solution solves that problem, using information boundaries of their own choosing. As opposed to a teacher-framed or client-framed problem (Levy & Petrulis, 2012), they constructed their own sets of information related to a problem and drove the uncertainty reduction process. While this connection between their activities and this process was not repeatedly made explicit to the students and was a bit more implicit, it was discussed in terms of the intended learning outcomes and implied by the pedagogical emphasis on identifying and challenging assumptions through trial. Despite this, explicit theoretical content was a notable feature of the learning environment.

In terms of entrepreneurship education, Student 2 indicated one of the most important things they learned was “organizing thoughts” and “effectuation. Basically solve [a] problem with the means you have.” This “organization of thoughts” was something Student Two, who has worked for over fifteen years as a professional musician, expressed they wish they had been exposed to during their bachelor studies in music performance. A tool such as the business model canvas was a piece of theoretical content that several students recognized as useful in “organizing their thoughts.” While there were several instances of students using new terminology from the course readings to describe their teamwork and their actions, there were some instances in which words could be a hindrance. Student Four said that “this terminology is kind of good, but also limits because I instantly think of Silicon Valley.” Silicon Valley, entrepreneurship, its terminology, and the resultant values and beliefs that individual students had about these items are resonant with some discussion about entrepreneurship’s connotation in the arts (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012; Bridgstock, 2012), but is more focal to the personal factors component of the model described further below; however, the relevant observation here is that any teacher will, to a large extent, provide the theoretical frame and content used within the course.

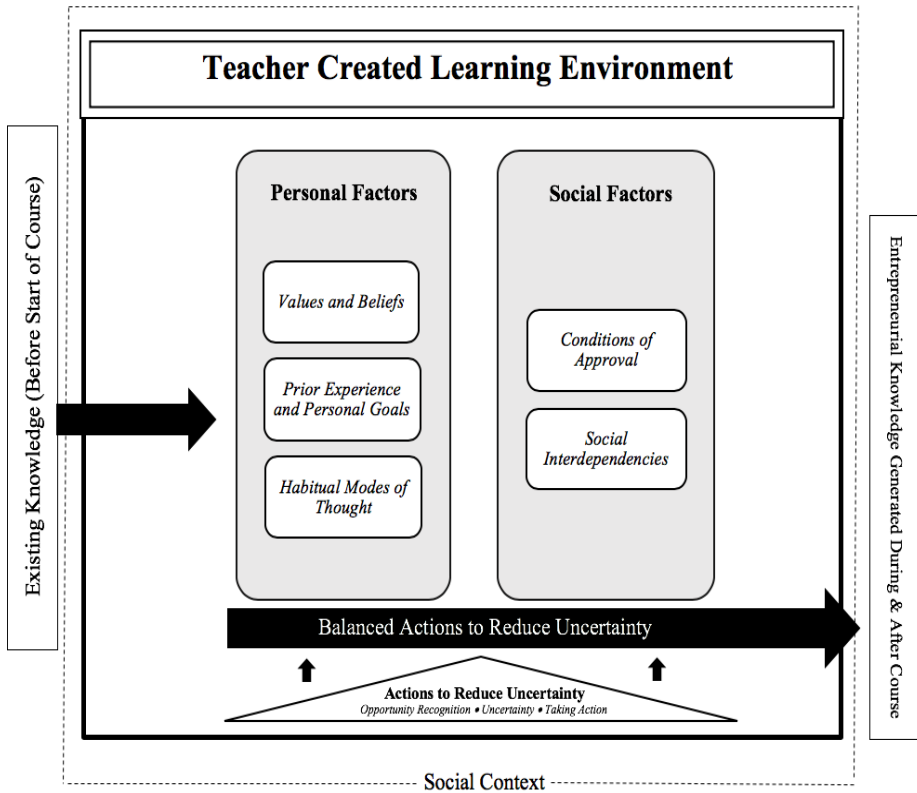
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While terminology was useful in helping students orient themselves in the course, the underlying context of action-based (Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006) entrepreneurship education elicited a more visceral reaction in their experience. One student borrowed an expression from their culture and said the coursework was like “making a boat while rowing” or “fueling while in the air”; Student 1 was surprised by the practicality of a course in which they tried to “do it themselves,” noting that “with [just] too much theory [about entrepreneurship] our personal



**Figure 2.** The Data Structure

relationship to entrepreneurship wouldn't really change." Student 8 thought the course "gave freedom" but also noted that this freedom created responsibility and it can "destroy you." In some senses, though, the students found relief and ease in taking inspiration from effectuation theory (Sarasvathy, 2001) by deciding to "just use what is in front of us." This particular student's team ended up creating a solution for a "superior musical jamming experience" using the state-of-the-art telecommunication equipment that formed the setup of the distributed classroom teaching environment itself.



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

Finally, the timeline and timing of the course and required deliverables was a noted feature of the learning environment. Researchers have explored how instructor-set deadlines have been shown to regulate student pacing (Roberts & Semb, 1989), yet some students prefer to set their own paces. In the learning environment of this study, the only instructor-set deadlines related to weekly delivery of learning diaries and the final presentation of their project. This created a five-week timeframe with no teacher-imposed interim milestones, thus students were responsible for the pacing and progress of their projects. Statements from several students indicated how the timeline established by the teacher affected the working process, which either created or limited tendencies to procrastinate based on their group working styles and the students' own

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preferences and schedules. One student felt it was difficult to know how much time “we should spend on these tasks” and that it was at times a challenge to balance individual tasks and group-work based upon different team members’ tendencies to engage in or avoid procrastination. The final deadline did create a sense of stress, which did prompt students to take “actionable steps.” This action served to alleviate anxiety, as Student 3 described: “we concluded there was not enough time to do both . . . [another team member] was annoyed that we made the decision without them . . . I can’t blame them, but we thought it was necessary to proceed as time is critical.” Student 5’s team spent a substantial amount of the five weeks deciding which problem to focus on for their project, ultimately leaving little time as they scrambled to explore their solution. Student 5 thought it might have been helpful if I stage-gated the process and “set time limits for different parts of the entrepreneurship cycle.” Based on these observations, I note that teacher-imposed interim milestones may result in more action, depending on students’ own time management tendencies—and that this is an aspect of the learning environment an educator can adjust for a desired effect.

## Personal Factors

Personal factors such as values and beliefs, habitual modes of thoughts, and personal experience and goals seemed to have played a role in how the students behaved. As I argued before, the freedom afforded to the students in defining their project is a part of both the course and research design which enabled these factors to emerge. As will be described shortly, these personal factors were balanced with social factors to ultimately take actions that reduced uncertainty.

The influence of the personal values and beliefs of the students was revealed through classroom discussion and interviews. My findings are consistent with literature that has explored the tension between art and money the literature describes (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2012; Bridgstock, 2012; White, 2013). Student 4, when engaging in a discussion about terminology and labels, said “I mean this artistic thing is one [thing]. It’s really nice for the soul [and] everything, but I don’t know, I want to keep it away from this entrepreneur thing.” Other examples of conversation with the students confirm views that art is imbued with an aesthetic or value-laden dimension, which may at times conflict with money. Student 3 spoke of their personal sense of empowerment in seeing that “art has a moral responsibility,” that in the face of bombardment from immoral images that we as “artists or professors have a moral responsibility.” But it is not just the artist with moral responsibility. Through a dialectical dialogue with Student 4, entrepreneurs were characterized as agents with free will, and for this reason entrepreneurs must also be moral. The philosophical positions the students articulated are possibly a basis for other commentary on politics and economic systems that surfaced during the course and interviews. A few times in both individual and group settings, anecdotal examples of entrepreneurs and solutions to problems in the market veered towards discussions of conservative values and environmentally imposed needs to make money and survive. But values and beliefs extended beyond spheres of money and economics; there was a notable commonality over the joy of creation experienced by most in the artistic process and that in this creative sense, artistic innovators were viewed by



some as entrepreneurial. Student 7, when describing the process of agreeing upon a problem to work on with the group, noted the importance of that problem being related to music as a basis to unify common interest and motivation in the team—“. . . because we're in the music [. . .] [our teammate has been] promoting this female artist and all of us had some music knowledge and all relate to the problem. Yeah. We felt it was important to get everybody involved.” Student 6 also noted that their team had to “find an idea that everyone could believe in and relate to” before they could achieve consensus and move forward.

Prior experience and personal goals were also a personal factor. Student 6, who had over twenty years of experience working as an entrepreneur in video production, noted that they had to overcome their own habit and preference for working with people they have known “for a long time” whom they “know very well.” I interpret this reflection to represent a desire to behave exploratively and explore “new possibilities and domains,” rather than “further development and refinement of [their] knowledge within their specialty” (Politis, 2005, p. 414). Several students noted the challenge of balancing coursework with outside demands—whether academic, professional, or personal. Prior to starting the course, Student 9, who had an educational background in electrical engineering and acoustic signal processing, had explored creating an app to replace cochlear implants. When reflecting upon the process of deciding what to work on with their team, they recalled “want[ing] to maybe look into this app development with cochlear implants. I think we briefly considered it . . . I guess we [as a team] weren't exactly suited [technically for it] . . . I don't really remember why we went away from that idea.” Personal goals of “channeling creativity” and “being true to myself” also influenced how and to what extent individuals were motivated by the team project. Interestingly, differing levels of personal flexibility, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity seemed to be an influential factor. As Student 3 noted: “I think it's important to [. . .] take the project in one direction . . . then [later] you can turn it again into something else because [it] was not what it was meant to be. And then the team also has to be on the same page when it comes to [. . .] mov[ing] it in a [new] direction. But sometimes in teamwork, I feel like someone really wants to have it a certain way because that's what we said originally.”

Through my observations and interviews, I noted a difference in what I call the habitual modes of thoughts of the students. This largely relates to how students processed information while making either intuitive or deliberate decisions regarding how to take actions in their project work (Hogarth, 2014). For example, I found that in their learning diaries and explanation of their course of action, Students 7 and 9 (with engineering backgrounds) consistently explained their reason and logic for doing certain things. They rationally deduced and induced why they thought a market would exist for their chosen solutions. While the basis for this observation is grounded in the exposition of their thoughts, I can fairly surmise that they tended to think more analytically than other students in the course. The more artistically inclined students tended to describe their process as more intuitive than analytic. For example, Student 3, who relayed important events in their life story in which they had been guided by coincidence, serendipity, and feeling to make big decisions, largely viewed entrepreneurial ideas as kind of like an animal that has to “be what it wants to be,” saying, “you can't really force an idea.” This

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contrasts to Student 7 who used empirical responses from a survey to generate user insight and argue for how the idea of their team's product needed to be. When reflecting on their teamwork, it appears that feelings tended to be used in identifying a problem whereas logic tended to be used in articulating a solution. Interestingly, these modes of thinking and meaning-making have been elsewhere discussed within the context of adult learning as a means to address disharmonies or disjunctures, which are often emotive and lead to a learning process (Jarvis, 2012; Koulaouzides, 2014). This finding also seems to be somewhat consistent with the feeling/thinking learning style dichotomy that Kolb and Kolb (2005) explored in their study of arts and management students.

## Social Factors

Social factors such as conditions of approval and social interdependencies also played a role in how the students behaved. These conditions of approval are conditions students attempted to satisfy in order to be approved by the teacher. The conditions of approval are either formal (like approval for passing the course) or informal (like a student seeking some sort of approval or confirmation that they are on the right path with their project). This included both explicit behavior and statements whose intent were to satisfy the requirements of the course and gain approval by me (the teacher), but also more subtle, tacit behavior to please the teacher by using the teacher's language or examples or to seek verbal approval, the latter of which have been studied in relation to reinforcement theory (White, 1975). I consider examples of student behavior that aimed to do minimal work for maximal effect (doing just enough to pass the course) as trying to satisfy some of the formal conditions of approval. But more telling are those instances when students would try to justify their plans or seek approval for their team project to the teacher before actually trying something or exploring something new. These conditions of approval seem to be an embedded factor in any classroom situation or teaching environment, and the student's habit of falling into an approval-seeking pattern has perhaps been developed and reinforced over their entire education by the time they enter the arts entrepreneurship classroom in a university setting.

The social interdependencies of working both within a team and on a project whose development was dependent on finding new information and feedback from other people outside of the classroom in the social context was a notable second-order theme. There were clear examples of students building on their teammates' ideas about how to proceed with their project but also examples of a single person attempting to dominate the direction of the team. As Student 4 explained: "Yeah . . . we have all different backgrounds and different taste in music and everything. For my sake, I would have done something completely different . . . but it's [about] going away from it and finding a compromise with their interest." An entrepreneurial project that depends upon actors outside of the classroom also presents its limitations. When reflecting on arts entrepreneurial experience, Student 3 shared that "everybody's just busy doing their own thing. I really want . . . things [to] start blossoming, but I can't make people do it." Interestingly, some aspects of these social interdependencies related to goals and outcomes have been

discussed within literature on cooperative learning and social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Irrespective of this goal-oriented social interdependency, students demonstrated that the social-moral consequences of actions had an impact on their behavior. Through empathizing, considering the social consequences of actions, and nurturing a sense of altruism and social connection, several students were guided in how to proceed with developing their entrepreneurial idea. Student 1 reflected upon the pain they felt firsthand when feeling lonely after moving to a new city, saying “. . . for me personally it is a relevant problem since I have firsthand experience . . . but creating a space where one can meet people or stay in touch with friends can be a powerful tool in combatting loneliness. . . .” Student 2 also drew upon their personal experience when identifying a problem early on in their project, and extended their situation to a problem facing many other musicians in a potential market, and argued that “this app/service/database is needed and will be worth investing for the common good.” These actions seem to relate to a broader sense that entrepreneurs must have morals due to their own agency and control over the consequences of their actions.

## Actions to Reduce Uncertainty

The students took actions to reduce uncertainty based on some sense of recognizing an opportunity (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). This opportunity recognition occurred both in theory and practice. Many students hypothesized how much value their solution would add and logically calculated the value of their solution. Student 8 wrote about their solution to facilitate online music therapy programs for prisoners, which “can be a way to provide daily or weekly therapy programs without actually [requiring physical] visits. So the prisoner can effectively follow up a program without interruption. . . . Research suggests rehabilitation programs [here] are not working so well. Maybe this is because of the difficulty of keeping the programs running. . . .” Interestingly, both the presence of a competitor and absence of a competitor indicated an opportunity for students. Student 8 continued, at a later point, “After searching the internet, I found out many impressive platforms that people are using for many years. Among them, [products X, Y, and Z] seem very popular. So I realized there is a demand for these kinds of platforms and nowadays musicians seem super excited [to do what our product does].” Yet, when exploring another opportunity, the same student found “no platforms that provide music therapy through the internet . . . I think this can be an opportunity to bring [our technology to the market].” Beyond this, students also engaged in activities such as customer segmentation and the imagination of future product offerings. As Student 3 reflected, “If we have [this] as our trademark, we might think of making other content for the clients we work with.”

This course was rooted in uncertainty (Knight, 1921) and it was not a surprise that this emerged as a theme. Students noted they “floated around several ideas,” and those having a background in the arts had some comfort with this since “art liberates from rules.” The abstractness of an ill-defined problem was a notable feature that seems to have caused students to be stuck in an inactive state and to learn from other people’s experience instead of generating their

own experiences. Student 4 noted “the less concrete the problem, the harder it is start up with action beyond online research.” Student 5, who had previous entrepreneurship education, explained to their team that “the problem was important” and they should spend time in understanding that before proposing a solution. Interestingly, students caught in the vagueness of a poorly defined problem had experienced unclarity within their team’s communications.

Taking action was one of the effective strategies to deal with the perceived opportunity, the uncertainty around that opportunity, and satisfying the conditions of approval. The limited timeframe of the course forced action. Student 7 wrote that this timeframe forced their team to “just do it instead of thinking too much.” Student 3 reflected on taking an action to alleviate anxiety and stress to “get things done . . . [the action] was needed for our project to proceed.” This action-taking also resulted from an acknowledgement of the limits of one’s knowledge. The learning outcomes from taking action were notable. Student 8 said “. . . this course was more practical, we really went into a project . . . it’s a real-life project that you can do. I mean, we really contacted some clients . . . It’s a huge step.” Upon further reflection on how this practicality contrasted with Student 8’s previous professional experience in statistics, actuary tables, and financial mathematics, they felt some people were just more comfortable with certainty and knowing what would happen but “. . . if you know what is going to happen, then there’s no point of doing anything.” This mindset is perhaps one of the more salient outcomes of the course. When probed further about a favorable response received by Student 8 from a real customer who had potential commercial interest in the solution they worked on during the course, I asked Student 8 what it would take to pursue a potential opportunity even though the course had ended. They responded that “there’s no barrier for right now when I think about it.”

## Conclusion—Balanced Actions to Reduce Uncertainty

In the beginning of this paper, I set out to answer the question, *How do students explore and exercise personal agency in arts entrepreneurship education?*

My answer is this: in a teacher-created learning environment, students balance personal and social factors to take balanced actions to reduce uncertainty. Further, these actions all took place within the context of the teacher-created learning environment that was an action-based entrepreneurship course with project work rooted in uncertainty. While this teacher-created learning environment is itself embedded in a broader social context, the model derived from this study shows that since students balance personal and social factors, teachers may influence how students explore and exercise personal agency by tweaking or adjusting the social factors they have control over in the creation of the learning environment. For example, by having students work individually on their own projects, rather than in teams, certain considerations and aspects of social interdependencies would clearly be affected. One could expect that a student’s own prior experience and personal goals, values and beliefs, or habitual modes of thought may have a greater weight in how they take actions than if they do not have to negotiate a project’s aims, scope, or tasks with other team members. Furthermore, the model shows that a student’s own personal agency is indeed influenced by these social factors, and that one may expect that

a student's own personal agency in a course without any team-based work may be observably different from what was observed in this study. While some may critique the ability of this study's design to answer the question of personal agency based on a sampling of individual students who worked in teams, a study design based solely on students who worked individually may be a less accurate reflection of professional and academic realities. The need for student graduates who have experience with and are skilled in teamwork, largely due to the nature of modern work, has been widely noted across the world in many academic disciplines (Crebert et al., 2004; Dunne & Rollins, 2000; Hodge & Lear, 2011; Jun, 2010; Kivunja, 2014). I would submit that in the future, if we are to consider a student's personal agency—as it is used and defined in this study, meaning the “the ability to accomplish action” (Campbell, 2009, p. 411)—then I think students must eventually work with other people in order to accomplish actions, rather than operate as socially isolated individuals. But more importantly, experiential learning theorists (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) argue that learning is the result from transactions between the individual and the environment, which is inevitably comprised of other people. So why not stimulate such transactional learning through teamwork?

While the answer and results may seem obvious and intuitive, that does not mean they lack a contribution. Obviousness is not antithetical to utility. In some ways, what I found reminds me of the story of a fish who is swimming along one day when all of a sudden, a second fish approaches. The approaching fish asks the first fish “Hey! How's the water today?” To which the first fish replies “Water? What's that?” (Wallace, 2009). It is easy for educators to forget and overlook the subtleties of the environment we are immersed in. It may also be easy to forget that both us and our students are immersed in a learning environment we create. Notably, the empirical context of this study was a course most closely resembling the being enterprising (Bridgstock, 2013) type of arts entrepreneurship education, a specific context reflected in the more general theoretical subcategory of teacher-created learning environment in the study's model (Figure 3). But future research may address how findings from this study may be applied to the context of a career transitioning (Beckman, 2007) course in arts entrepreneurship. For example, actions to reduce uncertainty may play a smaller role in an arts entrepreneurship course where students are responsible for creating an artist portfolio, writing a five-year plan, or learning how to bookkeep and file taxes as part of their career transitioning. It may also be interesting to systematically investigate how the results and the model from this study apply to different national and even broader entrepreneurship education contexts—how might personal factors such as values and beliefs or personal goals be observed in voluntary entrepreneurship education contexts where management/business students opt into courses and are motivated primarily to start profitable ventures? How might their balance of personal factors against social factors in order to take actions to reduce uncertainty compare to this study's context?

Irrespective, learning environments may trigger familiar patterns of teacher-student dynamics students are well accustomed to by the time they reach adulthood. By this I mean a dynamic in which a student focuses only on what I call the conditions of approval—including seeking the teacher's approval of their ideas for an action before trying something new or testing out that idea related to their entrepreneurial solution. This is a pattern that may demonstrate

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the mechanics of the model in Figure 3. Asking the teacher for their approval about a potential entrepreneurial solution and action is itself a form of taking action to reduce uncertainty—but the quality of that uncertainty reduction, and the entrepreneurial learning from it, is arguably different if such a student instead approached someone outside the classroom who actually had the problem they were trying to solve. In experiential entrepreneurship education, should the boundaries of certainty and uncertainty be established between student and teacher interactions, or between student and the outside world interactions? According to the model in this study, a teacher could tweak the social factors in this circumstance by doing the following: They could make a policy and tell their students that the teacher will not comment on or give approval based on whether they think something is a good idea or not, and instead students need to get that feedback from acting with real problem owners or stakeholders. This would affect the balance of action-taking to reduce uncertainty. As an example, before the COVID-19 pandemic, many investors would have thought the market for new solutions for livestreaming of music concerts was very small and not very promising. Those same investors probably think a bit differently now, given the sudden cancellation of physical concerts and the rapid transition onto online streaming by musical artists across the world. The point is that in a changing world only time and experience can reveal whether something is a good or bad idea. But these conditions of approval also include doing only the work which needs to be done in order to gain approval from the teacher to pass the course, as opposed to self-imposed standards that would help students achieve their broader life goals. If the arts entrepreneurship educator's goal is student independence, we might be aware of this. These created environments will influence how our students behave within the temporal context of their education. But if the goal of education is to influence how students behave outside and beyond the classroom, what can we do?

The first thing we can do is to be aware, as the model in this study shows, that each student has their own sets of values, beliefs, goals, experiences, and preferred styles of thinking that they have developed before they arrive in the classroom. Entrepreneurship educators Blenker et al. (2012) have argued that this challenge of idiosyncrasy and the unique nature of individual opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) can be met by embracing an idiosyncratic (as opposed to universalistic) paradigm of entrepreneurship education, where students utilize their everyday practice to understand entrepreneurial opportunities as “individualized and context specific, in the sense that their particular opportunities can only be created on the basis of their individual and idiosyncratic background” (Blenker et al., 2012, p. 426).

The sense of personal agency and empowerment expressed by students as they explored and took their projects outside the walls of the classroom and approached real-life stakeholders in their social context is difficult to understate. Despite the benefit of these types of interactions seeming to accrue on a personal level for the individual student (since they feel like they can actually try to affect change), there seems to be an even greater social benefit when considering the social interdependencies I spoke of earlier. In these circumstances, the content of an educational activity moves from the personal (the theoretical which exists in the mind) into the interpersonal (the practical that exists in society). If I was a civil engineering student, I could learn how to draw theoretical plans and theoretically calculate how much it would cost to build a

ladder to the moon—but what would that tell me about why anyone would want a ladder to the moon, who would climb such a thing, or the types of social regulatory processes involved with building such a lunar ladder? In this way I think educators can understand how they may tweak their learning environment in an effort to shift from the theoretical-ideal to the social-real.

Finally, a consideration of each individual student’s own sensitivity to uncertainty and tolerance for ambiguity might be useful for educators. Increasing our efforts to understand and engage our students can go a long way in encouraging them to try things they may not have considered before. And one potentially effective technique to accomplish this can be a bit Socratic in nature—if a student asks the teacher whether something is a good idea to try, the teacher may instead ask the student the same question—“I don’t know, do you think it is a good idea to try?” Experience has shown me that students already know the answer and have an understanding of why something does or does not make sense. And if the answer involves how somebody else might respond to their action (somebody like a customer, a user, or an audience), then it is incredible how the power of their ability to empathize might just illuminate the previously dark pathways of an uninitiated action. Our students can feel and empathize, and we should not overlook the fact that much of the arts is rooted in feeling to begin with. Further, it is this process of shifting the center of thinking back to the student (rather than on an expert, a source of information, or the teacher) that itself may be at the heart of the promise of any liberal education to begin with (Nussbaum, 2004).



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