

'Creative Enterprise, from creative students to creative entrepreneurs'

Can it be taught, is it needed and if so what should it look like?

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Teaching - vs - Training

Outline:

Mindset

Definitions

How to teach or to train

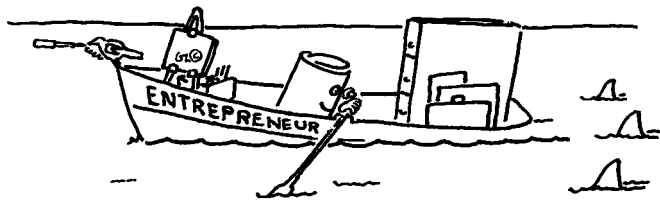
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Mind Set

In a wider context there is only beginning of an enterprise culture within British Society. Adults of my generation never or rarely heard the word 'enterprise' mentioned during our schooling, and unless your parents were in business it was unlikely you would rush out of school with the desire to set up in business.

In relation to UK Art and Design Colleges and other institutions of learning it is relatively a recent progression that some of the syllabus is set aside for what is often labelled dustily as 'Professional Development' or 'Professional Practice' modules.

My argument is based upon my own experience of attending Art College, being an artist and researching, teaching and mentoring creative people over the past seven years in
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professional development and enterprise my thoughts and own sketchy definitions are as follows.

Professional Development – a mixture of self - management and basics of practicing as a creative practitioner. How to manage putting on an exhibition, working through a commission, marketing, career planning and basic self-employment knowledge.

Business Start-Up – a mixture of business planning, developing marketing material, money management and financial planning, in depth study or analysis of creative product or service and market research.

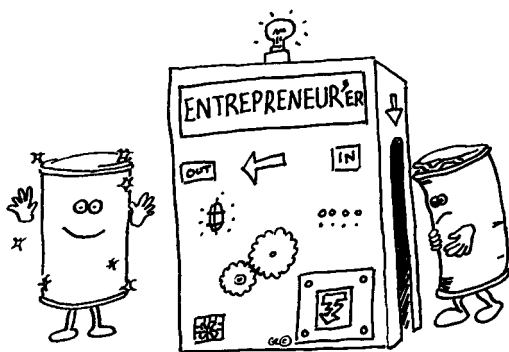
Enterprise/Entrepreneurship – a mixture of practical enterprise skills, such as vision, networking, presentation, self-promotion, branding, negotiation skills, nature of risk, action plans, teamwork, understanding innovation and technology, and how to generate profits from either creative work or more commercially applied ideas.

Big Business – a mixture of understanding regulations, legal issues, contracts, pitching for investment, PR, selling, using software/e-business, management, accounting, manufacture, retail, premises and employing people.

Never mind talent - even Professional Development is not enough to prepare graduates for the realities of a world dominated by market forces and popular culture. In my experience such courses within HE at under graduate level are often badly planned, funded and organised.

Creative individuals are also complex, and many may make a success in turning concepts into a consumable product or commodity, however there are a vast number who are more ethically and culturally orientated; 'a not for profit' outlook. There always will be creatives who struggle to earn a decent income from their skills and talents, and this is often due to a lack of understanding of commercial or socio-cultural enterprise. Artists and designers may be of a certain mindset, some towards the 'poet' and others the 'retailer'.

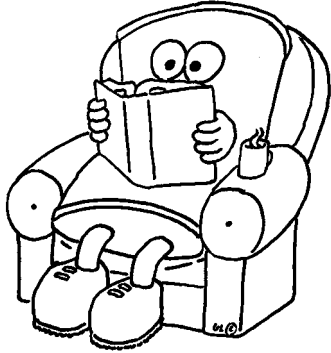
Either way it is possible to cultivate an enterprising outlook through preparing students for career, cultural or business roles within the visual arts and creative industries.



How to teach – how to train?

By integrated properly funded professional development and enterprise modules within the under-graduate studies from day one of the degree. The expertise of a number of individuals is required to run a successful vocational project; making learning a practical challenge and student focused is partially the answer. Setting up any kind of creative enterprise in today's world is a complex affair and requires accessing speakers with current, specialised and relevant knowledge.

Traditional methods of teaching business tend not to work with art students, due to the innovative nature of the type of work the students are creating, and the milieu of the creative industries sector. Entrepreneurial style training is key, and the importance of keeping up with technology. Business is a vocational subject, though creative, not just theoretical. Students need to be prepared with the specifics so they can cope with the highs and lows, plus the rough and tumble of business life.



Research and Practical Experience

I believe the key areas within any undergraduate programme should be a well balanced mix of: the basics of self-employment, being employed, self-management, active challenges/action planning, market/business research, debunking the myths of discovery, relevance of money or costs, legal issues such as 'rights grabs' developing networks, selling and self-promotion skills.

Expertise of facilitators is an important factor; setting up a business is difficult enough when supplying artefacts, which the populace demand, never mind the obscure, transient, experimental or futuristic.

It is only my exposure to the New Deal and working at the sharp end of business in its early stages with colleagues without exception twenty years older than myself. There is a mountain of shifting regulation and bureaucracy, as well as legal issues to grapple with. My experience as an ethical advisor at the Association of Illustrators has taught me what a danger a little knowledge of contractual matters can be, and how every few months, legal rulings can alter the advice you are able to offer.

During my researching years interviewing entrepreneurs, mainly within the visual arts, I was captivated by not only their abilities to spot opportunities but having the tenacity to pursue them. These London based entrepreneurs had been mentored usually by a number of different people ranging from their parents to paid business advisers. The facilitator or mentor needs to have the ability to think in an imaginative way to inspire creatives and be able to empathetic when things are not going so well - is essential. Developing role-plays or experimental exercises that aid students in grasping concepts or theories of 'selling' for example so the students leave workshops realising perhaps they need to develop other qualities like confidence, or presentation skills or being able to articulate in an intelligent manner or engaging fashion about their ideas or work to people who most likely have never been to art college, or possibly no college at all.

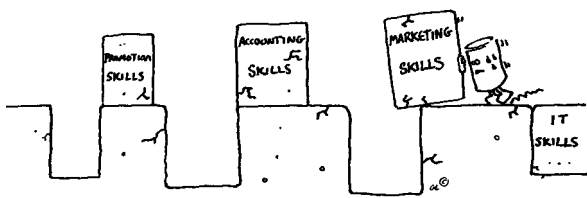
Being able to have the strength to say to someone who has worked really hard for months or years, '.....this isn't going to work' or '.....if only you had applied for a patent' or 'did you not understand this contract.....?' , or 'why didn't anyone mention Trade Marks or Design Right to you?'

It is not easy...it really isn't. I do recall visiting a careers adviser in the early '0' years, at the London Institute, that then was, (as it was then - now UAL) her office was packed with boxes of tissues, stacked from floor to ceiling. She observed my puzzled expression and said, 'Well it gets to the beginning of October and they all drift in, after three to four months out, they sit down utter a few words, and break down, they often haven't made very much money, if any, and don't know what to do'.

The academic and supporting staff within art and design faculties often do not have the luxury of funded research time to develop learning materials or knowledge they can bring back into the studio or tutorial. Many staff are hourly paid and after devoting time to their practice, struggle to financially survive themselves, I know this as I speak with personal experience working as a part-time lecture and artist in the past.

So more and more pressure for professional career or business information is placed upon small number of guest lecturers to cover, often late in the day, the last term of the final year of study for instance.

Finding a sufficient number of people who are competent, have a good range of skills, or specialist knowledge, and have an understanding of the visual arts and creative industries is increasing. However the support within undergraduate courses to pay them properly is not there in a realistic financial sense.



How do we teach enterprise to creative students?

So aside from these issues how do we teach it?

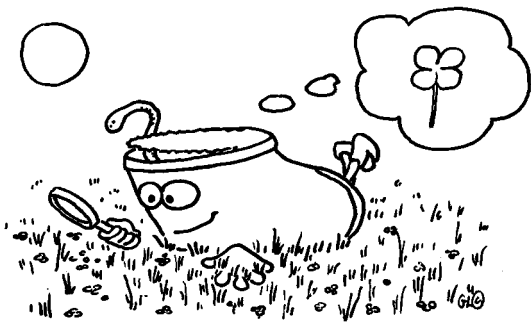
Well there needs to be a comprehensive culture shift within universities, to resource and develop not just modules but a programme of activities and events throughout the whole academic experience for the student. A mixture of structures lectures, practical exercises, seminars, real life experiences (work placement) and challenges. For example at the beginning of the first month of the first semester take one of the creative projects that has been set, and ask the students to work out what they have spent? Ask them how they could cut costs if they had to? Prepare projects that have set budgets, for particular venues or purposes, if proposals by students are submitted reject some of them, reward students who think through briefs thoroughly, get them to present their ideas, let them become used to being queried and tested, there will always be winners and losers. This may sound harsh, but we all know that life in the visual arts is highly competitive place. These activities will then encourage students to think about these things as they make their way through college and be more prepared for what's to come when they leave.

I recall from my experiences of devising and teaching a second year under graduate professional practice module at Hertfordshire University a few years ago Many of the students found summer work placements and some even jobs in local creative businesses, by setting active challenges. Others found out deadlines for things they wished to apply for had

an eighteen-month lead in time, not a three-month open application period. One student I recall went off to France to work for a glassmaker, what a fantastic way to spend the summer months!

The majority of the students thanked me for all the opportunities they had realised by engaging with the course and its challenges. Without it the course, it is more likely some of them would have ended up working for local cafés during the holidays and others missing their application deadlines for future opportunities, and having to wait a year after graduation needlessly due to a lack of information discovered or accessed at the right time.

Some students dropped out, as many do from these types of courses. (I find this is sometimes due to too many deadlines coming up at once, and students becoming pressurised for time) When I was lecturing at Goldsmiths College last year I was shocked at the small attendance at the first session, however word must have 'leaked out' that it was 'bit useful' and there was a packed hall for the next session.



Discovery Myth

I sense from my experiences over the years of wandering in and out of universities and attending art and design fairs, common preconceptions amongst students and recent graduates, which have remained, unchanged:

'I expecting a buyer/collector, someone will come along
and support me and be my agent or patron'
(They have invited no one and do not know who anyone is)

'What's IP?'
'What is copyright? Where do I register my copyright?'
'What is Design Right? How do I get a Trade Mark?'
'I've shown my invention at my degree show
and at this fair, now I'm going to apply for a patent'
(Shocking stories about these areas)

'I'm not a business, I just want to make and sell my work'
(Denial or naivety of creative practice/business approach)

'I'm a freelancer'
'I've not earned enough from workshops, sales
and commissions to register as self employed'
(I find at least 90% of all graduate I have taught have been trading without registering
with HM Revenue and Customs a.k.a. Inland Revenue)

'I am a company director'
(When a. person often has not set up a company,

b. often person has not even registered as self employed.)

'Do you like my business cards, I made them myself'
(Business cards badly printed on thin card, with hotmail email address)

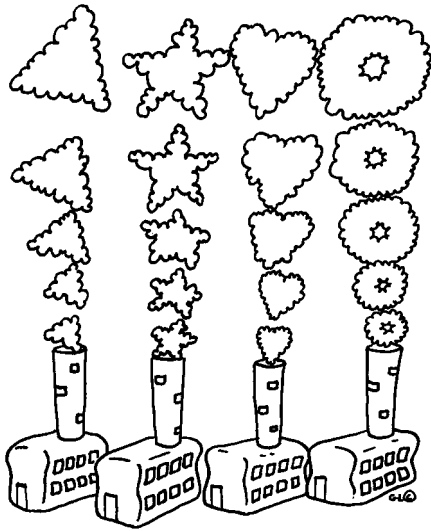
'Yes I told them all my ideas and left my portfolio there'
(No use of Non-disclosure/confidentiality agreements)

'Yeh! I sold all of them'
(No proper records of purchases or clients)

'I have accounts'
(Person often has a few bags of receipts and a pile of bank statements)

'I just signed the contract'
(a. person not read it. b. person not kept a copy.
c. now in a copyright dispute with client.)

There are sadly many more, such naivety is shocking and it is rare to meet graduates that are really clued up. With certain artists within the creative industries such as dancers or pop musicians there is a greater emphasis on accomplishing things and getting breaks before the age of thirty. Whereas artists, designers, photographers, architects, inventors, writers, filmmakers, actors and multi media artists there is a pressure in current times to achieve fame and fortune before the onset of early stage middle age. However arguably they have a lifetime to develop their businesses or careers. Though times have changed and many students are leaving with over £10,000 or more in student loans, and it is only right that they should have developed an enterprising mind set which will aid them in generating profits or a decent level of income from this investment of time spent in higher education.



Solutions

There are many solutions to teaching enterprise to creative students, all of them require a greater input of resources though there is no need to reinvent the wheel. There are creative consultants such as myself who have never been fully employed by Universities or supported in their research and practical experiences, though have a great deal of experience in constructing syllabus and learning material.

I have created and directed programmes for creative graduates at institutions such as Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design where I run a number of evening courses in

business start-up, marketing and self-promotion, entrepreneurship and presentations skills. Over the years I have developed many courses in Professional Development, Business and Entrepreneurship.

Some of the key activities I believe teaching should focus upon students at an undergraduate level are, in general but not sector specific:

- Undertaking continual market and career research into their chosen discipline.
- Developing an entrepreneurial outlook and accept that they need to acquire skills in order to generate money.
- Encouraging students to develop networks and networking skills amongst their creative and business contemporaries.
- Practical skills such as negotiating a contract, also how to make a sale and present their work or product.
- That they should be encouraged to keep up to date with the pace of technology and innovation and learn about the process of manufacture.
- Basic business introduction to self-employment, tax and marketing.
- CV writing and showcasing their practice within other marketing material.
- The basics of websites and how to sell work from them.
- How to set up having an exhibition and undertake a commission.
- Understand the importance of costing and pricing, and money management.
- Introduction to intellectual property, how to read contracts and other legal issues.
- Gain an understanding of how business works, for example using terms and conditions within their trading activities.
- Specific topics that are relative to the particular disciplines, which are not included above.

Summary

The methods of instruction should be a combination of lectures, some use of case studies, guest speakers who are running their own creative businesses, debate, practical workshops, student centred discovery and real life challenges; a combination of teaching and vocational training.

A speaker at a conference I attended last year, said they thought that business should be a sharp shock to graduates from art and design colleges and those that have the ability will grasp the nettle and move forward and those that can't won't. I disagree; it is my belief based upon my experiences that the majority of students if given regular integrated exposure to business activity and training within the creative sector will gain a greater ability to gain and evaluate opportunities, which will help them in making decisions; creatively and economically.



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