
BOOK REVIEW

Classroom Exercises for Entrepreneurship: A Cross Disciplinary Approach, by James D. Hart

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Abstract

In *Classroom Exercises for Entrepreneurship: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach*, James D. Hart offers an expansive pedagogy for entrepreneurship training through creative play and experiential learning.

Nearly a century after political economist Joseph Schumpeter's (1934) gesture that entrepreneurship involves innovations developed to meet a societal need, the what-is-entrepreneurship debate continues—but not for James D. Hart, Director of Arts Entrepreneurship at Southern Methodist University. He quickly moves past definition roadblocks and sets about presenting aspects of entrepreneurship in a series of theatrical lessons. In *Classroom Exercises for Entrepreneurship: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach*, from the Elgar Guides to Teaching series, Hart elects to demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviors in action to support “‘dream making’ as an entrepreneurial lifestyle outside of the classroom” (p. xi). This book's wealth of classroom exercises supports learning about entrepreneurship. However, it does not follow a standard business format. It speaks directly to the artist-entrepreneur with a theatre or performance background whose nature might be aligned with Schumpeter's “getting things done” attitude or an action mindset. Hart intuitively animates his classroom practice and writes vividly about students' responses. For someone who does not have a performance background, leading these activities may not be as easy as Hart describes. Hart taps into his deep roots as a performing artist, identifies creativity as critical for entrepreneurial success, and through his training invites entrepreneurs to explore (or learn!) creativity alongside business practices. If neither instructor nor students embody a performative mindset, the activities may seem daunting.

Still, there are lessons less-theatrical entrepreneurship instructors might find workable for their less-theatrical students. In the forward, entrepreneurship scholar Gary Beckman states, “students make choices based on their desire for success – and intriguing life experience” (p. x). Hart knows classroom activities inform students' future actions, so he stewards students toward entrepreneurial actions through experiential learning. Hart posits *creativity* as a cycle of constituent parts—*stimuli* trigger *impulses* that spark *imagination*, eliciting *actions* refined through *reflection*, a necessary step in experiential learning (p. 11). From this cycle emerge powerful learning experiences (PLEs), exercises applicable and adaptable to entrepreneurship curricula. PLEs engage students in the moment, but more importantly, have an enduring “impact on one's thoughts and actions over time, and transfer to a wide range of contexts and circumstances” (Rowland, Lederhouse, and Satterfield, 46). Hart's learning objectives lead artists—and entrepreneurs-in-training—to understand the power that comes from a toolkit of entrepreneurial skills and competencies.

In addition to the focus on creativity, Hart emphasizes communication—*pitching* ideas, *networking* with others, *marketing* to publics, and the like. He stresses confident communication. “Confidence is the key. The more one publicly presents, the more comfortable they become doing so” (p. 27). Interestingly, the inability to “confidently communicate their ideas” (p. 27) is often an unforeseen stumbling block for artists. Despite artists' abilities to communicate stories, moods, or ideas within and through their craft, it is not always easy to talk *about* one's artistry or creativity. Understanding the artist-communication conundrum, Hart advocates that during “the entrepreneurial process it can serve students to articulate what is personally meaning to them” (p.

46). Over the course of more than fifty exercises, entrepreneurial pedagogy takes the form of creative action to support, among many outcomes, confident communication. Hart flips the business school script and takes advantage of artistic ways of working as the primary means to develop an entrepreneurial mindset.

Two core themes emerge from the text. The first gives educators and students across disciplines permission to explore entrepreneurship through creative play and experiential learning – whether wading in bit by bit or jumping into the deep end. The second encourages discussions and conversation among students to articulate their vision of change via entrepreneurial engagement. To those ends, classroom exercises mimic real world, day-to-day entrepreneurial work, which bode well both for creative classroom settings and for instructors and students who are less inclined to “play.” In sections “Part 1: Ideation” and “Part 2: Action,” the spectrum of classroom exercises aims to move students’ theoretical ideas into practices of action. “Part 3: Introspection and Reflection” cements the meta-cognitive nature of experiential learning, directing students to think about what they have created or done. Throughout the text, Hart also provides helpful citations and footnotes that, respectively, add context and direct readers across sections of the book to lessons with compatible outcomes. Hart extends broad creative license to instructors, encouraging them to map their course—pair, scaffold, or combine any and all exercises that meet teaching goals, imbuing classrooms with equal parts creativity and flexibility to benefit students’ learning. Any given exercise might be approached from different perspectives. Although students follow the same exercise an artist, for example, might focus their learning in the context of a local theatre scene, while another student interested in business might consider the larger context of international markets.

The activity titled “Find your voice” exemplifies the importance of communication. Hart notes, “by finding their creative voice, the entrepreneurial creator comes to best utilize their talents” (p. 79), ringing true in realms of art making and venture creation. By blogging, online participants use their “voice” to write about an idea or well-researched perspective and then respond to comments. Students explore the greater blogosphere for examples of different, unknown ways to connect with audiences or “develop the loyal following of ‘true fans’” (p. 80). “Finding your voice” also requires interaction with others. As one way to overcoming anxiety some feel in public forums, students are urged to consider what their audiences say. An audience’s collective voice, in turn, may inform an artist’s clarifying response or, perhaps, innovations to meet fan base expectations. A “Plans and strategy” exercise titled “Defense of plans” (p. 192) might be better called “Confidence in plans.” Through this lesson, students interrogate the breadth and depth of knowledge needed to defend their dream making. They also learn to accept critical feedback and suggestions made in the cycle of creative, entrepreneurial work. In short, “Defense of plans” stresses preparedness and knowledge, and engenders confidence—the confidence to communicate (incorporating “Find your voice”), to think quickly and deeply, and to respond professionally to queries about one’s ideas. The book’s final exercise “Why do you create?” (p. 295) represents a summative assessment of sorts. Taking Hart’s cue to use exercises in innovative ways, if “Why do you create?” is deployed as the first and last exercise in a course, instructors might collect formative and summative data to evidence students’ entrepreneurial growth over a semester.

The richness of Hart’s pedagogy applies to the various types of entrepreneurship—business, social, cultural, feminist, arts, intra-, collective—that have evolved since Schumpeter’s framing of the term. Beyond the classroom, Hart’s students will stand on a “philosophical foundation helping them to keep perspective regarding what stage of their entrepreneurial adventures they may be in” (p. 279). *Classroom Exercises for Entrepreneurship* reflects Hart’s commitment to entrepreneurship, and he shares the philosophies on which he meditates to

answer the “questions of ‘what makes you different and necessary’” (p. 36). For academia, Hart’s pedagogical innovations speak to what entrepreneurs do and accomplish, not how entrepreneurship is defined. Accordingly, for students, Hart frees the next generation of dreamers, artists, makers, and entrepreneurs to communicate their visions of change confidently.

References

Rowland, Gordon, Amber Lederhouse, and Diana Satterfield. “Powerful learning experiences within coherent learner groups.” *Performance Improvement Quarterly* 17.2 (2004): 46-64.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle*. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1934.