

Imagination, said Albert Einstein, is more important than knowledge. Now business leaders are saying it, too.

Teaching to the Imagination: Three Themes and 20 Principles for Encouraging Creative Genius

BY JOANNE M. LOZAR GLENN

Socially and economically the late-20th-century emphasis on information is shifting in favor of the imagination. Leaders who want to discover new markets or radically transform their industries or perhaps test their own mettle need to explore uncharted waters. They need to sail into the imagination.

—Harriet Rubin, *USA Today* editorial board member and consultant to media companies (Phillips, 2008; Rubin, 1998)

In early 2008, the Washington-based Arts Education Partnership (a coalition of about 140 organizations including the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts) released a document that echoed what Rubin had expressed 10 years earlier. The document posited that the imagination is as important as the so-called STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) to boosting innovation and U.S. competitiveness in the world economy (see sidebar, “Creativity: As Fundamental as Literacy and Numeracy”).

“[Without] a capacity to imagine, you’re not going to make anything anyway,” said Richard Deasy, Partnership Director (Trotter, 2008).

Business educators are no strangers to valuing creativity in their students. Business education courses such as marketing, graphic and Web design, and multimedia and technology communications frequently call on students to integrate a capacity to problem-solve, creatively and imaginatively, into their learning projects.

But what do we really know about enhancing the capacity for imagination? And how do we help students develop, perhaps even rediscover, their creative genius so they can “hit the ground running” when they get to the workplace?

That’s what this article explores.

Themes: Cross-Disciplinary, Collaborative, Conducive Climates

Three themes seem to emerge as important for enhancing a capacity for imagination: dismantling barriers between discrete disciplines, encouraging collaborative working styles, and creating open-ended, supportive environments.

Bridging discipline-specific silos. “Some people would say that imagination arises when we give up the walls between things,” says Val Marmillion, president of Marmillion + Company, who has worked with Arts Education Partnership campaigns. “The businesses that are successful today are those that are flexible and more global in their thinking, that really mirror this interdisciplinary approach.”

Those successful businesses want employees who are equally flexible and global in their thinking. And they seem to be recruiting them from universities that combine instruction in entrepreneurship and business with a focus on interdisciplinary studies—a combination now viewed as one of the most innovative approaches to business education.

Creativity: As Fundamental as Literacy and Numeracy

That's the premise Sir Ken Robinson proposed to the Education Commission of the States that met in Denver, Colorado, on July 14, 2005,¹ as part of the National Forum on Education Policy, and in February 2006 at the TED conference.² And it's a premise increasingly being touted by advocates of 21st-century education for the 21st-century workplace.

"The real growth [area] is the intellectual industries, including the arts, software, science, and technology. These are areas where new ideas matter most," Robinson said. "Many countries recognize now that the future of national economies depends upon a steady flow of innovative ideas."

Consequently educators must create a climate for creativity, which means moving away from a test-driven focus on right and wrong answers and toward more divergent thinking. "Divergent thinking is not the same thing as creativity, but it's a good example of it," Robinson explained. "It's the capacity to think non-logically, to think analogically and associatively"—the kind of thinking one practices in the arts, which, he says, are marginalized in education by "well-intentioned people . . . who believe that taking courses in the arts will not lead students to a job at the end of school."

Yet the arts teach many of the things children will need for new economies we may not even be able to imagine yet, Robinson believes: self-confidence, creativity, innovation, flexibility, social skills, and a sense of well-being.

"We need to rebalance the curriculum," he said, "to give equal weight to arts disciplines and not to live any longer with the hierarchy . . . [that puts] at the top . . . language and mathematics and then science and then the humanities and then the arts."

Though Robinson's presentation did not specifically address business education, it did address the situation business educators encounter daily: trying to prepare students who are in school now for careers that will carry them to their potential retirements in 2055 through 2076. "We're all trying to work out how to educate our children to survive in a world we can't predict and . . . in a world that's changing faster than ever."

The sanest approach seems to be teaching in ways that help students imagine possibilities, according to Dave Boliek, who heads the North Carolina-based Centers for Quality Teaching and Learning (QTL). Boliek believes that teachers must lead students on "journeys of discovery" that mirror how the business world really works, i.e., not concerning itself with the "right" answer but with what works in a given situation or context.

"When we go that way with students, we get them to . . . think and solve problems for themselves and for their school and community," he explains. "It's not one specific activity but a mindset—having students know that what they can imagine, they can create."

Which, in a world shaken almost hourly by unstable markets and reports of severe recessions, seems an inspiring, and welcome, message of hope.

¹ Robinson, K. (2005, July 14). Presentation by Sir Ken Robinson. Education Commission of the States. 2005 National Forum of Education Policy Chairman's Breakfast, Denver, Colorado. Retrieved February 25, 2009, from http://www.ecs.org/html/projectsPartners/chair2005/docs/Sir_Ken_Robinson_Speech.pdf

² Robinson, K. (2006, February). Do schools kill creativity? Presentation at the TED Conference (which bills itself as "the conference for ideas worth spreading"). Accessed 2/24/09 from http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

Bentley University (Waltham, Massachusetts), for example, offers an optional double major in liberal studies. "It must be paired with a business major," says associate dean Lynn Durkin, "and students must create an integrated course of study from among seven themes such as global perspectives, media arts and society, and ethics and social responsibility."

Durkin says that because business is changing so rapidly, it needs people who can take information from all directions, synthesize it, and find a creative way to address problems. She believes that multidisciplinary studies help develop these kinds of skills.

"Down the road, [because of their exposure to liberal arts]," Durkin says, "students get so used to looking outside their tunnel vision that a creative rather than linear thinking process becomes natural."

Harrisburg University of Science and Technology (Pennsylvania) also advocates multidisciplinary studies, noting that STEM-based technical competencies must be balanced with "softer" liberal arts competencies. "We would argue for structuring a program that brings multiple disciplines to bear at the same time," says Eric Darr, executive vice-president and provost. "Thinking about [business] problems from multiple perspectives will bring different principles to light and force a student to think beyond just an economic modeling perspective."

This philosophy underscores the "knowledge as web" idea, i.e., the idea that the kind of teaching and learning that fosters innovation is a web rather than a drop-down menu or hierarchy.

"I think about it not so much as teaching creativity, but as teaching knowledge in a way that prepares learners to be creative with that knowledge," says Keith Sawyer, associate professor of education at Washington University (St. Louis, Missouri). "When you memorize a bunch of facts, each fact tends to be its own bucket. But people who tend to be creative have their facts networked together and know how things are

related to each other. Creativity comes from being able to see analogies between one discipline and another.”

Incidentally, Sawyer believes that business education “...is pretty good at trying to teach that integrated understanding.” He cites, for example, the use of well-developed, open-ended case studies that take an integrated approach to exploring business problems.

Faculty at Babson College (Wellesley, Massachusetts) take this integrated approach a step further, insisting that freshmen actually *experience* business as an integrated enterprise and not just *talk* about it. In a year-long course, “Foundations of Innovation and Entrepreneurship,” students plan, launch, run, and then close a business of their choice. Babson funds up to \$3,000 of start-up expenses, which students must pay back at closing; only one business to date has lost money.

“We don’t teach in silos of marketing, finance, accounting,” says Heidi Neck, Jeffry A. Timmons Professor of Entrepreneurial Studies. “We teach in

an integrative way so that the student understands the consequences of decisions in their discipline.”

Results to date? “Anecdotally, the number-one thing recruiters feed back to us is that the Babson student is a much more holistic thinker,” Neck says.

Encouraging collaboration. The traditional notion of creative genius—the lone, brilliant, geeky guy working away in his garage—isn’t very useful, nor is it accurate, according to George Gendron, former editor of *Inc.* magazine and founder of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Minor at Clark University (Worcester, Massachusetts). “Steve Jobs is the prototype, but that’s a myth,” Gendron says. “Behind every successful corporation is a team.”

The February 2009 Academy Awards was a perfect example of how important collaboration is to creativity. *Slumdog Millionaire*, praised for its innovation and immediacy, took eight Oscars, including the award for “Best Picture.” When “Best Picture” was announced, director Danny Boyle invited

all cast and crew present to join him on stage (which they did), thanking them for their collaboration and teamwork.

It’s the “takes a village” concept, explains Nancy Clark, a consultant for small businesses and for Global 100 companies such as Chevron. “The idea generator may be very creative, but may not have the natural work strengths to create the plan and/or lead the implementation,” she says. “Therefore, it’s critical that leaders and managers understand the individual strengths of their employees and assemble complementary teams so that innovation is implemented and results are achieved. It’s not just one person with an idea; it takes the business village to get the innovation formed and implemented.”

School systems, on the other hand, seem structured to do just the opposite, according to some observers. Emphasizing individual over group achievement (which perhaps explains the never-ending cycle of reforms), the system creates a disconnect between how students operate in the classroom and how they

Serendipity: Recognizing the Significance of the “Convenient Accident”

Creative accidents are what happen when experiments that fail turn up something else that’s interesting and /or useful. In 1968, for example, 3M scientist Spencer Silver developed a reusable pressure-sensitive adhesive but couldn’t interest the company in it. Then in 1974 his colleague Art Fry proposed using the adhesive to anchor a bookmark in his hymnbook, and the Post-It note was born.

“A lot of the truly breakthrough ideas come from serendipity,” says Dean Schroeder, professor of business administration at Valparaiso University (Valparaiso, Indiana) and former consultant to international companies such as Toyota, Siemens, and Unilever. Take inkjet printers: one day, someone accidentally dropped a piece of ink on a soldering iron, and the ink exploded. It became a “eureka moment”: learning how to purposely explode the ink made advances in inkjet printers possible. “Now here’s what a lot of people don’t know,” Schroeder adds. “To turn serendipitous events into real outcomes, you need hundreds of small ideas to make it work.”

In a business, this means creating a simple system to catch the creative accident and the hundreds of ideas that will lead to its success as a service or product. It also means making sure the ideas are followed up, and that the originator is recognized for his/her contribution.

In a classroom, this means giving students assignments that allow them to exercise creativity (these kinds of assignments are not reserved just for art and creative writing classes, Schroeder is quick to point out) and fostering environments where it is safe to fail. It also means encouraging students to trust and explore even their “smallest” new ideas.

“When people think of creativity they tend to think of the big stuff. But [big creative ideas] are pretty rare and not even where the action is,” Schroeder says. “The real power of creativity is in the little everyday ideas.”

And in paying attention to the unexpected—for as creativity expert Michael Michalko¹ notes about creative accidents, the unexpected is simply a disguise for creative opportunity.

¹ Michalko, M. (2008, May 27). The creative accident: are you looking for the unexpected? Accessed February 22, 2009, from <http://www.copyblogger.com/creative-accident/>

are expected to operate in the workplace.

“In the business world, if you and I had a problem, we would pick up our cell phone, send emails, and text messages, call friends, and work together to solve the problem,” says Dave Boliek, executive director of the Carolina-based Centers for Quality Teaching and Learning (QTL). “In business, that’s called collaboration and teamwork. In school, it’s called cheating.” Boliek believes this calls for refocusing education toward cooperative learning and collaboration so that creativity can flourish.

Because, as Debora Sepich, assistant professor of management and marketing at the George Fox School of Management (Portland, Oregon), points out, “We’re better creatively as five than as one.” Students taking Sepich’s undergraduate “Introduction to Business” course work in teams to create business proposals for creative and visionary companies. “I tell them the product does not have to exist today,” she says. “This creates the space to look to possibilities outside their normal world.”

This semester, one company is building a hotel in space. Another is creating an invisibility cloak. “They still focus on the target market and all the things you need to have in a proposal, and they are graded on the true merits of their plan,” Sepich says. “But every day the class has energy and the final presentations are incredible.”

At the end of the course, Sepich asks students what is missing from making their company a success tomorrow. “If it is only the product,” she says, “then bingo! We know there’s an opportunity.”

To ensure that the collaborative process works well, Sepich cautions, “...people, early on, [must] understand convergent and divergent thinking and group process.” For example, students need to respect each other and to foster good group dynamics. But when it comes to this idea of the whole being greater than the parts, Sawyer notes, the process needs to be a little loose to allow for “emergence.” The perfect example of this, he says, is the anthill—a structure

not planned by any one ant. To express it in arts terms, an improvisational group generates a performance that no one could have predicted.

Which is, after all, the nature of innovation and of the creative accident (see sidebar, “Serendipity”).

Creating a culture that supports innovation. “The classroom or corporate culture is the most fundamental element that determines whether innovation is going to thrive or be stymied,” Clark says. “The biggest determinant is the [leader]. If there is fear, or retribution, ... creativity shuts down.”

Clark says that leaders, be they managers, administrators, or teachers, may be killing creativity and innovation unintentionally if they and those they work with are out of sync with respect to how each approaches creativity-related issues. She sees this most often in technical fields such as engineering and pharmaceuticals. Leaders can’t necessarily motivate, Clark says, but they certainly can de-motivate by creating environments that don’t allow people to develop their ideas. “Ideas come from people, they don’t come from machines,” she says.

“There are different kinds of innovators—those who think out of the box, who are not constrained by boundaries, and those who think inside the box, who find creative solutions within the boundaries,” she explains. “If we can help leaders understand themselves and what they may be doing to choke off innovation, then we can help them place people in teams that encourage creative bubbles rising to the surface.”

Principles and Practices for “Learning to Be Free Again”

Reveling in creativity can be a heady, even emotional, experience. “Our students tell us, ‘No one’s encouraged me to be imaginative since kindergarten,’” Gendron says. “They’re learning to be free again—and they get very emotional just talking about it.”

Don’t be surprised if you start feeling the same way. After all, when you give this gift to your students, you give

it to yourself as well.

So find that box of tissues if you need it, and dive right into these 20 principles for encouraging creativity in yourself and in your students.

- **Be a keen observer**, pay attention to detail, and especially to the unexpected. The unexpected, which sometimes masquerades as failure, is just creative opportunity in disguise.
- **Ask questions constantly.** Nobel Laureate physicist Richard Feynman uses these questions to judge the value of a new idea: Did it explain something unrelated to the original problem, i.e., what can you explain that you didn’t set out to explain? What did you discover that you didn’t set out to discover?
- **Play with ideas.** “Be intellectually playful,” Sawyer advises. “Try out new ideas in your head. Innovators are always trying to reinterpret or analyze things. Creativity comes from seeing something in a new way?”
- **Practice changing your point of view.** This may be more than just a mental exercise, states poet Quincy Troupe in the January 2008 Arts Education Partnership report. Reflecting on a collaboration that included artists, engineers, and civil servants in transforming a wastewater management site in Point Loma, California, Troupe said, “I had to literally change my [perspective] to conceive of new possibilities . . . I had to get in the boat with the architects and imagine what this place could look like from the water.”
- **Celebrate and practice different ways of thinking:** visually, nonlinearly, disjointedly, metaphorically, as well as logically and objectively. Remember that intelligence is diverse, dynamic, and distinctly individual.
- **But don’t just teach students how to think;** teach them how to apply knowledge. “The gap in many entrepreneurial programs is the talking about it vs. the doing of it to

make sure that students come out with actual project management skills,” Gendron says. “About 50% of the challenge is framing the project, because a project in its entirety looks really daunting.”

Gendron finds it useful to help students break projects into smaller pieces, match tasks to individual team member strengths, do a workflow analysis and update it regularly, and respect all the skills—the creativity skills *and* the organizational skills—team members bring to the table.

- **Get away from the textbook.** “There’s nothing wrong with using a textbook [per se],” says Cara Norton, a business education teacher at Dacula High School (Dacula, Georgia), “but be willing to do new, different, and somewhat unconventional things. Even if you teach the same thing every year, you can still put a different spin on it.”

For example, Diana Crites, chair of the business and information technology department at Sherando High School (Stephens, Virginia), has taught website creation and design for years. However, this year her students launched the site *Frederick County Career Connections*. “Students will be able to enter their skills, such as industry certification,” she says. “As employers need projects completed in the community, we’ll make [the work] a classroom project.”

Crites has also sponsored a film festival, and this year students developed commercials for local businesses. “We had 400–500 people attend,” she says. “Despite the down economy, we had more sponsorships than ever.” One student developed a commercial for Johnny Blue, a company that supplies portable restroom facilities for public events. “The student won first place, a cash award, notoriety, all because he used his imagination,” Crites says. “That boosted the other kids—it made them realize they could

make something that’s going to be used in the real world.”

- **Cultivate a tolerance for ambiguity.** How comfortable are you in the classroom if you don’t have a detailed plan, if what needs to get done depends on the students? “It’s easy to be a sage on the stage,” Neck says. “But the master teacher is a guide on the side.” Jane Knaub, a business education teacher at West York Area High School (York, Pennsylvania) endorses the “guide on the side” idea, adding, “Don’t talk so much. I limit my talking so that students can get on with things and explore. Give them the freedom to experiment, to learn by doing.”
- **Act creative yourself.** “They [have to] see [creativity] in you,” Knaub says, “your excitement, your smiles, your spark.”
- **But if you’re not feeling it, master your domain.** “If you’re not being creative, maybe you need to learn more,” Sawyer offers. “Those who make lasting creative contributions have really paid their dues.”
- **Embrace failure.** “No matter how brilliant you are, you will still have failures,” Sawyer adds. “But if your idea doesn’t work, keep it around. Three years later it could turn out to be just the thing you need.”
- **Learn from students** “... and have them show the class what they showed you,” Norton recommends. Be comfortable with the fact that you don’t know everything—and that you never will. “The educator doesn’t have to be the only one teaching in the classroom,” Darr says. “At our university we expect people to demonstrate that they’re lifelong learners. Maintaining a great degree of interest about the world ... is critically important for teaching imagination.”
- **Encourage ownership of ideas and direct experience.** Babson College’s flagship course, “Founda-

tions of Management and Entrepreneurship,” requires its freshmen, in teams, to identify business opportunities and to plan and execute that business, including the shut-down process.

“It’s hard to learn or even picture a business when reading textbooks or sitting in class,” Neck says. “[Doing it this way], teaching as students need to know, helps them imagine and experience the world of business, even at an elementary level. Then in their second year, they can look back at this experience as an internship.” In effect, the experience creates a context for further study of business concepts.

- **Don’t agonize over ideas, just start something.** “You’ll be amazed at how rapidly the idea will change, be modified, and improve,” Gendron says. Besides, in creativity, confidence is crucial. And confidence comes from doing.
- **Remember that “how” trumps “what.”** In 1981, when Gendron was editor of *Inc.*, the staff created the *Inc. 500*, the premier database of young, fast-growing companies like Timberland, Microsoft, and Patagonia. “If you asked these founders to describe their early ideas, they’d say they were ordinary, mundane,” Gendron says. “But they took an ordinary and mundane idea to an extraordinary level... [the companies succeeded because of] their superior execution of a mundane idea. So it’s *how* you do what you do, not *what* you do.”
- **Learn to manage passion.** Sepich encourages her MBA students to really argue for their ideas, “...in a nice way without putting anyone down.” In a six-week period her graduate students develop an *Art of the Start* business plan for a company that must be feasible today. The time period creates extra pressure. Although she encourages students to get passionate about their ideas, “...we also have to realize

when you have to back down a bit,” she says, “and when passion is overtaking the process and actually blocking creativity.”

- **If there’s no template for what you want to do, invent your own.** That’s what Paul Galbenski (Oakland Schools Tech Campus, Royal Oak, Michigan) and his colleague Mike Bernacchi (University of Detroit–Mercy) did when they started America’s Marketing High School. The project provides learning modules, including podcasts, and supplementary teaching materials, aligned with NBEA standards, that feature critical analysis of contemporary marketing data. “We had nowhere to look [for models],” Bernacchi says. “What we have is what we think we can put into play.” But that keeps it fresh. “We can’t be caught up in the academic presentations of the past. Students don’t have

that kind of attention,” Bernacchi says. “We have to constantly forge new ground.”

- **Look to other disciplines for inspiration.** Creativity is often a result of cross-fertilization. But there are other benefits besides just the creative idea. “Science, most people agree, has huge power to bring about positive change within society,” says Carlin Gettliffe, a student at the University of Rochester who created his own interdepartmental major in entrepreneurship and founded ArtAwake, an annual art and music festival (see “Business Spotlight,” p. 13). “What is much less well known is the power that art and music have,” Gettliffe says. “What I’ve discovered through ArtAwake is that art and music, when carefully harnessed, have the power to build communities, spark relationships based on

common experience, and spur self-awareness. It takes imagination to capture that kind of potential energy, and that’s exactly what I believe entrepreneurship is all about.”

- **Collaborate, and foster collaborative projects in your classroom.** “Collaboration is critical to helping me be more creative myself,” Norton says. “I can come up with an idea, but I may not be able to think of all the aspects.” So Norton regularly exchanges ideas with two professional colleagues in her county. “I almost never implement an ‘individual’ project,” she says. “My projects are usually the result of several different brains... we each have our different strengths.”

Norton’s collaboration with a middle school science teacher, for example, resulted in a web design

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Resources

People

Michael Michalko

Thinkertoys: A Handbook of Business Creativity (Ten Speed Press, 2006)

ThinkPak: A Brainstorming Card Deck (Ten Speed Press, 2006)

Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius (Ten Speed Press, 2001)

Sir Ken Robinson

www.sirkenrobinson.com

http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative (Capstone, 2001)

Keith Sawyer

Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration (Basic Books, 2008)

Explaining Creativity (Oxford University Press, 2006)

Dean Schroeder

<http://www.ideasarefree.com/>

Ideas Are Free: How the Idea Revolution Is Liberating People and Transforming Organizations (Berrett-Koehler, 2004)

Programs

America’s Marketing High School

www.americasmarketinghighschool.org

Babson College, Wellesley, Massachusetts

<http://www3.babson.edu/>

Bentley University, Waltham, Massachusetts

www.bentley.edu

Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts

<http://www.clarku.edu/>

George Fox School of Management, Portland, Oregon

<http://www.georgefox.edu/som/>

Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

<http://www.harrisburgu.net/>

Giving Students an Opening to the Imagine-Nation¹

BY JOANNE M. LOZAR GLENN

In a departure from our usual focus on established businesses, this installment of Business Spotlight looks at companies launched by students in business programs recognized for their emphasis on creativity and innovation. —Ed.

Downtown Rochester, New York, is like a lot of urban environments: Many businesses have moved out of the city, and the streets, especially at night, are deserted. The buildings, many of them architecturally interesting, remain vacant—available for events, but underused. Carlin Gettliffe, a senior at the University of Rochester, changed that by creating ArtAwake, an annual evening of interactive art and music that allows students and community members to experience the creative side of Rochester.

For One Day, Bringing a Space to Life

The numbers alone are impressive. At its debut on March 28, 2008, ArtAwake drew more than 1,500 students and community members, displayed 225 pieces of art from more than 75 local artists, and included performances by 15 different musicians, bands, and DJs.

“We wanted to bring in as much local and student art and [as many] bands as we could to bring the space to life for a day,” Gettliffe says. “The two months leading up to the event were the two most hectic months of my life.” Here’s a partial list of what he and his team, which included fellow student Zach Kozick and 13 co-sponsoring student groups, had to do to make the event happen:

- call for and select the art and music (selections were juried);
- arrange for installation (and later, dismantling and return) of the art;
- manage the entertainment, including equipment, sound, and light technicians;
- coordinate event logistics (security, ticket collectors, coat check, parking, food and drink, tables and chairs, and transportation from campuses to the event); and
- advertise and publicize the event, using traditional media, posters, and flyers, and viral marketing

Daunting? Yes. Enough to make it “one-time only”? No.

“This year we have 25 people regularly working on the event,” Gettliffe says. “Besides that, we have well over 100 people who will have contributed in some way, [including] other on-campus groups that are cosponsoring.”

The 2009 event was scheduled for March 27, from 5 P.M.–2:30 A.M. At press time tickets were being sold (\$4 for students; \$6 for community members) and attendance was projected to be 2,500.

Backstory: Ideas “Stacking on Top of Each Other”

Before he discovered entrepreneurship, Gettliffe wanted to study physics and religion. “But neither was something I wanted to be doing after I left college,” he says. After some soul-searching, he realized that what made him happy was “...coming up with some sort of idea and finding the resources to build it into something real.” He was able to create his own interdepartmental major in entrepreneurship, then worked on a number of entrepreneurial projects during his course of study.

Speaking of the genesis of ArtAwake, Gettliffe says that his ideas “...all sort of stacked up on top of each other.

Fast Facts: ArtAwake

Founded: Carlin Gettliffe

Date established: 2007 for launch in 2008

Location: Rochester, NY

Service or product provided: ArtAwake is an annual one-day art and music festival that takes place in an interesting underused urban location. ArtAwake's goals include drawing students off campus in order to help spur a stronger sense of community, encouraging awareness of and discussion about Rochester's abandoned and underused urban spaces, and promoting the creation, display, and enjoyment of art.

Targeted customer: Students and Rochesterians of all demographics

Quote: *ArtAwake has taught me a phenomenal amount about both the advantages and the difficulties of mobilizing a large group to work towards a single goal. In the future I hope to put that experience to use in a variety of projects and ventures. Seeing the world as full of entrepreneurial possibilities has certainly become integral to how I view things, and I think that's thanks in large part to ArtAwake.*

Website: www.artawake.org

More from the Imagine-Nation

A representative sampling of student-launched businesses from two leading programs in innovation and entrepreneurship.

Clark University (Worcester, Massachusetts)

Program or course: Innovation and entrepreneurship minor

Angle: Erase the boundaries that prevent students from seeing their passions and hobbies as sources of income.

Philosophy: "This illusion that you could plot this career path and make a ton of money on Wall Street? That's over," says program director George Gendron. "We're trying to do something here that seems to make sense right now...to capture the power of innovation as it unfolds in the real world. If you can forge a connection between the real world of innovation and your program, you have half the battle won right there."

Approach: Everything is designed for students in the performing arts, liberal arts, and sciences. Classes are a mix: 50% traditional lecture and 50% projects. Students are constantly pushed into the marketplace.

Businesses Launched:

- Spiritual Haze, a dynamic alcohol-free nightclub, launched as an alternative to binge drinking
- A (beta) website for extreme athletes listing locations where they can do workouts while on business travel
- Cook for Hunger, a high-profile "iron chef" competition in the campus dining hall; students also donate to a food pantry

George Fox School of Management (Portland, Oregon)

Program or course: Innovation and Entrepreneurship (MBA); Intro to Business (undergrad)

Angle: Applying the business basics in ways that are fun and real-world based, even learning to promote and price a product through a "reverse marketing" approach.

Philosophy: "Nowadays, the entrepreneur can be anyone with an idea that can address today's problems and has the courage to act," writes assistant professor Debora Sepich. "Yet there is more to entrepreneurship than formulating the business plan. The details of business plans are important, but not so important as to neglect creating a vision and story about the product and company. The business plan is less than 2% of the business start-up experience, yet in most MBA classes it comprises 75% of the final grade. Why? Because it is easy to do."

Approach: Bringing as much of the real world into the classroom as possible, including learning how to manage creativity as a process in business.

Businesses Launched:

- An inspirational speakers company that includes a blog and meeting sessions
- Green with Envy Home Builders
- eGo, an electric bike company
- A nonprofit African relief organization for the Congo
- SimpliciTee, T-shirts made of all green materials
- Capstone Custom Decals

One of the first things I started was a guerilla art group called the Tactical Art Underground. We would get thinking about the use of space on campus and do ‘underground’ art projects—projects without permission.”

The underground art led to the creation of an urban exploring club, which led to ArtAwake.

The planning began in 2007. “We wanted to build interest in off-campus life and generate ... increased interaction between students and community members,” Gettliffe explains. “We also wanted to create a memorable and fun event.”

The university’s office of student life was invaluable to creating an environment conducive to creativity and innovation, he believes, by providing resources for helping students develop

their ideas and a supportive atmosphere that was very tolerant of failure.

The Future: A Little Less Certain, but Worth Banking On

Gettliffe will graduate in May 2009. Ironically, his entrepreneurial experiences “... [are making] my future a little less certain. I realized I’m not the kind of person who can just jump into a job and follow a path that’s been set up for me,” he explains. “I have to be able to jump in from the beginning.”

Over the next couple of years, Gettliffe hopes to find business or social projects he can throw himself into. Meanwhile, during his remaining time in Rochester, he hopes to make progress on several other entrepreneurial projects he began during his time in college.

As for how important the skill of imagination is to the current and emerging workplace, Gettliffe says, “I am betting my own future on that. I trust myself enough to be confident that I can create opportunities.”

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Endnote

1. A term coined by the Arts Education Partnership to signify both the future generation of American innovators and the coalition of citizens who advocate for including the arts in the core curriculum. Details: www.theimagination.net

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project that supported the science teacher’s unit on the solar system. Her students, in pairs, researched one planet, created a web page for it, and uploaded the page to a central directory. On the project due date, the class reviewed and critiqued each website; they had one day to make revisions.

“Everyone was a team member, everyone had an important part, everyone was dependent on everyone else to make sure the final product was right,” Norton says. “And we had something the middle school teacher could use.”

- **Do something different, do something over, do something better.** “Good teachers are like good actors,” Darr says. “They’re always looking to do big or small things better.”

So start small, but start. Pick one or two or three ways in which you will practice enhancing your own and your students’ creativity. If you fail, try again. “The good thing about teaching is,” Darr says, “you get multiple chances.”

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