

Conference Proceedings

CIVAE 2026

8th Interdisciplinary and Virtual Conference on Arts in Education

March 18- 19, 2026

Edited by MusicoGuia

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Embedding Entrepreneurship in Arts and Design curricula: expanding innovation capacity through curriculum development in higher education

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Abstract

The transformation of contemporary labor markets, intensified by digitalization, cultural hybridization, and structural economic instability, has profoundly reshaped professional trajectories in the arts and creative fields. Linear career paths have increasingly given way to portfolio careers, hybrid identities, and project-based professional configurations. In this context, curriculum development in arts education must evolve beyond disciplinary mastery and incorporate entrepreneurship as a structural and cultural component rather than a peripheral add-on. This paper argues that embedding entrepreneurship within arts and design curricula expands students' professional agency, enabling them not only to access employment but to create opportunities across institutional and independent contexts. Drawing from established literature in entrepreneurship studies, creative industries research, and curriculum theory, the study proposes an integrated framework for curricular transformation based on three interrelated dimensions: entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial capabilities, and experiential venture engagement. The contribution aligns with the track on Curriculum Development and Evaluation by offering a theoretically grounded and structurally coherent model for embedding entrepreneurship in interdisciplinary arts education.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, curriculum innovation, Design management, Design-Driven innovation, creative industries, higher education.

Incorporando la dimensión emprendedora en los planes de estudio de Artes y Diseño: fortaleciendo la capacidad de innovación en la educación superior

Resumen

La transformación de los mercados laborales contemporáneos, intensificada por la digitalización, la hibridación cultural y la inestabilidad económica estructural, ha redefinido profundamente las trayectorias profesionales en los ámbitos artísticos y creativos. Las trayectorias lineales han dado paso progresivamente a carreras tipo portafolio, identidades híbridas y configuraciones profesionales basadas en proyectos. En este contexto, el desarrollo curricular en la educación artística debe evolucionar más allá del dominio disciplinar e incorporar el emprendimiento como un componente estructural y cultural, en lugar de considerarlo un complemento periférico. Este artículo sostiene que la integración del emprendimiento en los planes de estudio de Artes y Diseño amplía la capacidad de innovación del estudiantado, permitiéndole no solo acceder al empleo, sino también generar oportunidades tanto en contextos institucionales como independientes. A partir de literatura consolidada en estudios sobre emprendimiento, investigación en industrias creativas y teoría curricular, el trabajo propone un marco integrado para la transformación curricular basado en tres dimensiones interrelacionadas: mentalidad emprendedora, capacidades emprendedoras y experimentación práctica de iniciativas. La contribución se alinea con la línea temática sobre Desarrollo y Evaluación Curricular, ofreciendo un modelo teóricamente fundamentado y estructuralmente coherente para integrar el emprendimiento en la educación artística interdisciplinar.

Palabras clave: Educación emprendedora, innovación curricular, gestión del diseño, innovación impulsada por el diseño, industrias creativas, educación superior.

Introduction: Rethinking arts education in an entrepreneurial age

Since Schumpeter (1934) defined the entrepreneur as an agent of innovation and “creative destruction,” entrepreneurship has been associated with economic transformation and structural change. More recently, Drucker (1985) reframed entrepreneurship as a systematic practice grounded in opportunity recognition rather than mere business creation. While these theories emerged in economic and managerial contexts, their relevance extends increasingly to the cultural and creative sectors.

The creative industries (encompassing design, visual arts, music, performing arts, media, and architecture) have grown significantly over the last decades, becoming strategic drivers of innovation and urban development (UNCTAD, 2010). However, creative labor markets are characterized by high uncertainty, project-based employment, self-employment, and fragmented income streams (Menger, 1999). Graduates in arts and design frequently encounter precarious working conditions requiring them to operate simultaneously as creators, managers, communicators, and strategists.

Despite this reality, arts education has traditionally privileged aesthetic excellence, technical mastery, and critical inquiry, often marginalizing entrepreneurial competencies. Entrepreneurship, when present, is frequently confined to elective modules disconnected from core artistic practice. This structural separation reinforces a perceived dichotomy between artistic integrity and economic viability.

However, scholars such as Fayolle (2018) argue that entrepreneurship education should not be restricted to venture creation but should cultivate attitudes, reflexivity, and agency. In creative disciplines, this shift is particularly urgent. Bridgstock (2013) highlights that sustainable creative careers increasingly depend on entrepreneurial identity formation, networking capability, and opportunity generation.

Consequently, the challenge for curriculum development is not whether to introduce entrepreneurship in arts education, but how to integrate it structurally and coherently without instrumentalizing artistic practice. This paper addresses that challenge by proposing a curriculum framework that embeds entrepreneurship as an enabling dimension of creative education.

From employability to professional agency

The discourse on higher education reform has often centered on employability. Yet employability implies adaptation to existing labor markets, whereas entrepreneurship implies the capacity to shape them. Gibb (2002) distinguishes between traditional business education (focused on management functions) and entrepreneurial education (focused on behaviors such as initiative, resilience, and opportunity creation).

In the context of arts and design, this distinction is critical. Creative professionals rarely follow predefined corporate trajectories. Instead, they construct portfolio careers, combining freelance work, collaborations, institutional engagements, and independent initiatives (Bennett, 2016). Such careers require the strategic mobilization of different forms of capital (cultural, social, and symbolic) within dynamic fields of practice.

Entrepreneurial education in this context should therefore aim to strengthen professional agency: the capacity to intentionally navigate uncertainty, mobilize networks, generate value propositions, and sustain creative trajectories over time. This aligns with the broader understanding of entrepreneurship as method (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011), where effectual reasoning, experimentation, and iterative learning become central.

Design thinking literature further reinforces this orientation. Martin (2009) emphasizes abductive reasoning and integrative thinking as core capabilities for navigating complex environments. Garbuio et al. (2018) demonstrate how design cognition enhances opportunity development through reframing and iterative prototyping. When these cognitive orientations are embedded within curriculum structures, they cultivate entrepreneurial thinking without reducing education to business planning exercises.

Therefore, integrating entrepreneurship in arts curricula is less about teaching accounting or legal structures (although these remain relevant) and more about fostering the cognitive, relational, and strategic capacities that enable students to construct sustainable professional futures.

Embedding Entrepreneurship within curriculum structures

Curriculum development requires constructive alignment between learning objectives, pedagogical practices, and institutional culture (Biggs & Tang, 2003). If entrepreneurship remains external to core studios and artistic production, students may perceive it as secondary or incompatible with their creative identity.

Embedding entrepreneurship structurally entails three interconnected dimensions. First, entrepreneurship must be introduced as a mindset permeating artistic processes. Opportunity recognition, audience engagement, iterative experimentation, and value creation should be integrated into studio critiques and project briefs. For example, students may be encouraged to reflect not only on aesthetic coherence but also on societal relevance, stakeholder engagement, and potential impact. This cultural integration avoids the fragmentation between “creative” and “economic” spheres.

Second, curricula should incorporate strategic and managerial literacy contextualized within artistic projects. Osterwalder and Pigneur's Business Model framework, for instance, can be applied to cultural initiatives, exhibitions, or digital platforms. Understanding revenue logics, funding ecosystems, intellectual property, and partnership models empowers students to transform ideas into sustainable ventures. Such knowledge does not undermine artistic vision; rather, it enhances autonomy by reducing dependency on opaque institutional structures.

Third, experiential engagement is crucial. Entrepreneurship in arts education should include opportunities for real-world testing-micro-grants, collaborations with cultural institutions, community-based initiatives, or incubation labs. Lean Startup principles (Ries, 2011), emphasizing iterative testing and feedback loops, are particularly compatible with studio-based pedagogy.

Through this layered integration (cognitive, strategic, and experiential) entrepreneurship becomes embedded in the curriculum's architecture rather than appended at its margins.

Expanding Professional Opportunities in the Creative Fields

Embedding entrepreneurship within arts and design curricula fundamentally reconfigures the horizon of professional possibilities available to graduates. Rather than positioning students as passive entrants into competitive and often saturated labor markets, curriculum-integrated entrepreneurship equips them with the capacity to actively construct and diversify their career trajectories.

The creative industries operate through project ecologies in which temporary collaborations, cross-sector partnerships, and hybrid roles are common (Caves, 2000). In such contexts, the ability to initiate projects, articulate value propositions, mobilize networks, and secure resources becomes as essential as artistic skill. Entrepreneurship education broadens students' perception of what constitutes legitimate professional practice. Graduates may envision themselves not only as designers, artists, or performers, but also as cultural producers, founders of creative ventures, curators of digital platforms, social innovators, or intrapreneurs within established institutions.

Importantly, this expansion does not imply a reduction of artistic identity to market logic. On the contrary, by understanding economic mechanisms, funding models, and strategic positioning, creative professionals can better protect and sustain their artistic autonomy. Knowledge of entrepreneurial processes enables artists to negotiate partnerships more effectively, design sustainable revenue models aligned with their values, and reduce vulnerability to exploitative dynamics often present in precarious creative markets.

Moreover, embedding entrepreneurship fosters interdisciplinary dialogue. Creative ventures frequently intersect with technology, social sciences, business, and policy domains. When curricula integrate entrepreneurial thinking, they naturally encourage collaboration across departments and faculties. Such interdisciplinarity aligns with contemporary innovation ecosystems, where complex societal challenges require hybrid knowledge configurations.

Finally, entrepreneurship education contributes to resilience. The volatility of cultural labor markets demands adaptive capabilities. Iterative experimentation, tolerance for ambiguity, and reflective learning from failure (core entrepreneurial traits) become professional survival strategies. Rather than perceiving uncertainty as a threat, students trained within an entrepreneurial curriculum may interpret it as a space of possibility.

Thus, curriculum-integrated entrepreneurship expands professional opportunities not simply by adding business skills, but by transforming students' relationship to work, uncertainty, and value creation.

Challenges and critical considerations

Despite its transformative potential, embedding entrepreneurship within arts and design curricula entails a series of conceptual, pedagogical, and institutional tensions that cannot be overlooked. The integration of entrepreneurial logics into traditionally humanistic and artistic domains inevitably raises questions regarding purpose, values, and power structures within higher education.

A first and fundamental concern relates to the risk of instrumentalization. Critics of the entrepreneurial turn in higher education argue that the increasing emphasis on innovation, market relevance, and economic impact may align universities too closely with neoliberal logics, reducing education to a mechanism for economic productivity (Giroux, 2014). Within arts education, this tension becomes particularly sensitive. Artistic practice has historically positioned itself as a space of critical autonomy, symbolic production, and cultural resistance. If entrepreneurship is framed narrowly as venture creation or revenue maximization, it risks transforming artistic inquiry into a market-oriented activity, thereby undermining its critical and cultural functions.

To address this concern, entrepreneurship must be reframed not as commercialization, but as empowerment. By understanding funding structures, partnership ecosystems, intellectual property regimes, and value networks, artists and designers may gain greater control over the conditions of production and dissemination of their work. The challenge for curriculum development is therefore normative as much as structural: institutions must clearly articulate the educational philosophy underpinning entrepreneurial integration to avoid uncritical adoption of market rhetoric.

A second critical dimension concerns faculty expertise and institutional culture. The integration of entrepreneurship across arts curricula requires pedagogical hybridization. Arts educators may possess deep disciplinary knowledge but limited familiarity with entrepreneurial methodologies, strategic design tools, or innovation management frameworks. Conversely, faculty trained in business or management may lack sensitivity to the epistemologies and studio-based pedagogies characteristic of artistic education. Without intentional cross-disciplinary collaboration, entrepreneurship risks being delivered either as a detached technical module or as a superficial overlay lacking contextual depth.

Institutional culture plays a decisive role in this process. Embedding entrepreneurship implies rethinking not only course content but also organizational structures, incentives, and interdepartmental collaboration. Without such structural alignment, entrepreneurial integration may remain episodic, dependent on individual champions rather than sustained institutional commitment.

Pedagogically, assessment represents another significant challenge. Entrepreneurial learning is inherently process-oriented, characterized by experimentation, iteration, ambiguity, and occasionally failure. Traditional academic evaluation systems, however, tend to privilege stable outputs, standardized deliverables, and clearly measurable results. This misalignment can generate friction between entrepreneurial pedagogy and institutional quality assurance frameworks. Evaluative approaches may need to recognize reflective practice, learning trajectories, iterative prototyping, and collaborative dynamics.

Finally, there is a deeper epistemological consideration. Arts education has traditionally valued exploration, critical inquiry, and speculative thinking. Entrepreneurship, when reduced to efficiency and optimization, may appear at odds with these values. The challenge is therefore to conceptualize entrepreneurship in a way that resonates with artistic epistemologies. When understood through the lenses of design thinking, strategic reframing, and value co-creation, entrepreneurship can align with creative experimentation rather than constrain it. In this perspective, entrepreneurial capability becomes a means of amplifying cultural impact and enabling new forms of artistic circulation and engagement.

Entrepreneurship should be conceived as one dimension within a broader educational ecosystem that continues to prioritize critical thinking, cultural literacy, ethical reflection, and artistic exploration. Only through such balanced integration can entrepreneurship contribute meaningfully to curriculum innovation without compromising the foundational values of arts and design education.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of creative labor demands a structural reconsideration of curriculum development in arts and design education. Entrepreneurship, understood as a form of professional agency and opportunity creation, represents a crucial dimension of this transformation.

Rather than remaining an elective supplement, entrepreneurship should be embedded within the cognitive, strategic, and experiential layers of the curriculum. Such integration expands professional possibilities, strengthens autonomy, fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, and enhances resilience in uncertain environments.

Educating entrepreneurial artists does not mean transforming art schools into business schools. It means equipping creative individuals with the competencies and confidence necessary to shape their own professional futures and to contribute actively to cultural and socio-economic ecosystems.

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