University Faculty as Intellectual Entrepreneurs: Vision, Experiential Learning, and Animation

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Focusing on intellectual *entrepreneurship, I suggest in this article that entrepreneurial qualities can enhance faculty's roles in cultivating high-impact research, teaching, and service. Academic intellectual entrepreneurship involves vision and creativity in exploring, identifying, and creating opportunities; a process of experiential learning including craft and learning from failures; and team leading and* animation *in working to render a vision into an entity that interacts with others' experiences.*

The concept of entrepreneurship has long been associated with business and finance. In the past few years that concept has been broadened. One use came out a couple of years ago in a widely acclaimed PBS documentary on social entrepreneurship with the evocative title of *The New Heroes*. The documentary featured people like Sri Lankan Nobel Prize Laureate Muhammad Yunus and his microfinancing project, along with 13 other social entrepreneurs from all over the world—India, China, South America, and Africa. The emphasis was on people with extraordinary projects of social service and impact. These projects involved visions and innovative ideas, as well as tremendous persistence and the ability to work with various groups of people, negotiating and persuading them to carry these projects to fruition.

Focusing on *intellectual* entrepreneurship, I suggest that entrepreneurial qualities can greatly enhance faculty's roles in cultivating high-impact research, teaching, and service. Qualities already shared by entrepreneurs and academics include vision, fresh perception, and creativity in exploring, identifying, and creating opportunities; and persistence in a process of learning. Academic learning is often theoretical and text based. Entrepreneurship involves experiential learning that includes taking risks

and learning from mistakes. Moreover, one of the things that entrepreneurs in economic, social, and intellectual domains must do is to develop the projects to ensure that the "product" interacts with people's experiences so as to bring about change. This is different from the traditional roles of faculty. Faculty are expected to publish papers but are not responsible for their impact. They are expected to teach, but the onus on learning is on students. Academic intellectual entrepreneurs embody the commitment to usefulness and impact in their scholarship, teaching, and service. I regard the entrepreneur as an *animator*, working with others to render a vision into an entity that interacts with others' experiences.

The Context of Academia

In the contemporary academic scene, two forces seem to operate with great intensity: accountability and subjectivity. The first force, part of a knowledge society in a globalized information age, concerns increased accountability in the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. In the tertiary level, accountability entails stronger expectations for research products (e.g., papers, books), generation of grant money, and evidence of impact within the disciplinary field. This is happening not just in the United States but also in European and Asian countries, and is evident in universities where promotion and mission were traditionally related to teaching as opposed to research.

These processes and expectations are perceived by academics with apprehension. Mary Burgan (2006), former general secretary of the American Association of University Professors, regards the steady acceptance of the market model of competition applied to American education as a "colossal blunder that threatens its very identity" (p. xxi). Education, she writes, is one of our most precious services to one another: "Under market pressures, colleges and universities are in danger of losing their ability to provide human answers to the very human problems that are evolving in this 21st century." Burgan's concerns are shared by many, myself included. Given these economic contexts of academic life, it is important that academics reconsider our roles and missions in order to respond to those pressures with agendas that reflect our personal commitments and raison d'être, larger than the financial and more meaningful than sheer numbers.

These reconsiderations, I suggest, are supported by the second force operating in the social sciences—subjectivity. Subjectivity is central to the postmodern turn, which assumes that social reality is constructed and created (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) rather than objective and single. The postmodern turn highlights the researcher's perspective, voice, and subjectivities (e.g., Peshkin, 1988), suggesting that interpretive research begins with the biography and the self of the researcher (Denzin, 1989).[1]

This subjectivity accommodates a view of the researcher that shares important traits with artists. In my own work (Bresler, 2006), I have examined the ways in which the arts provide rich and powerful models for perception, conceptualization, and engagement for both makers and viewers.[2] I have been interested in the potential of the arts to cultivate habits of mind that are directly relevant to the processes and products of research.

In this article, I discuss what I regard as important mind-set and characteristics of academics within the current culture of the knowledge society. While many of these characteristics are related to those habits of mind of the artistically sensitized researcher, the concept of the entrepreneur highlights additional aspects.

Academic Intellectual Entrepreneurs

Before attempting to define academic intellectual entrepreneurship (AIE), let me say what AIE is not. The goal of intellectual entrepreneurs in academia is not to satisfy short-term university-market demands. It is not to produce a quota of publications to meet tenure or promotion requirements, nor is it to produce a prodigious number of (of necessity repetitive) works. Richard Cherwitz (2000) coined the term *intellectual entrepreneurship*, stressing the goal of educating citizen scholars, and defined it as follows:

> Intellectual entrepreneurs, both inside and outside universities, take risks and seize opportunities, discover and create knowledge, innovate, collaborate and solve problems in any number of social realms: corporate, non-profit, government, and education. The aim of IE is to educate "citizen-scholars"—individuals who own and are accountable for their education and who utilize their intellectual assets to add to disciplinary knowledge and as a lever for social good.

My own focus on academic settings defines academic intellectual entrepreneurship as cultivating high-impact research, teaching, and service. Indeed, these three traditional components of academe—research, teaching, and service—can be conceptualized as highly entrepreneurial activities, providing a rich space for creativity and innovation, compatible with the cutting-edge mission of academics.

The image of the academic as entrepreneur is motivated by the recognition of unprecedented opportunities to expand the role of academics beyond traditional, often self-imposed boundaries. The crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the ensuing cross-fertilization have generated new disciplines such as computational neuroscience, biophysics, molecular biology, and psychological economics. Not only do contents of academia change, but also their formats are being shaped by new information technologies and their audiences expanded. Although these trends have evolved over a long period, they have vastly accelerated in the last 10

years, reinforcing each other. The notion of AIE highlights the role of academics vis-à-vis these expanding opportunities in terms more traditionally associated with entrepreneurship.

In their study of the impact of learning opportunities in the art curriculum on students' academic learning and general attitudes, Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles (1999) found a variety of skills and dispositions associated with the arts. They conceptualized these competencies as habits of mind, the interweaving of intuitive, practical, and logical modes of thought that characterize arts learning. Similarly, Hetland, Winner, Veenema, and Sheridan (2007) discuss the habits of mind associated with studio art, including learn to envision, plan, and see beyond; observe; reflect; stretch and explore; engage and persist; express; find personal visions; and navigate domain and field. My own thinking of AIE is conceptualized in the same spirit. The focus is on the cultivation of intuitive, cognitive, and collaborative ways of doing and being, as they are manifested in an academic context. It involves envisioning, planning, and seeing beyond; observing; reflecting; persisting; and navigating domains and fields with an emphasis on communication and creation of change.

A Graduate Course on Case Studies of AIEs

My conceptualization of AIE has evolved out of interactions with real people that I have encountered; faculty members who exemplify a commitment to an idea and a "product" (broadly conceptualized) that can be used to enhance lives. To explore the dynamics and processes involved in academic intellectual entrepreneurship, I designed and taught in spring of 2007 a graduate course on academic intellectual entrepreneurship. Coupled with readings on innovative entrepreneurship, I structured the class as a series of case studies, inviting faculty members that I identified as AIEs to present in my class and share their experiences.[3] Faculty across various colleges on campus, from the arts and the humanities to the sciences and engineering, presented entrepreneurial projects that consisted of teaching, research, and service. For example, one colleague from Business pioneered new areas of inquiry and developed valuable synergies among research, teaching, and social initiatives. Another colleague from Visual Art Education has collaborated with a department of psychiatry and a local hospital to create a unique course for HIV patients that highlighted expression and interpretation. In addition to presentations by AIEs, university administrators, including the president of the university, the vice-chancellor of research, and the director of the Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership, provided an institutional perspective on entrepreneurial processes and products and discussed tensions between entrepreneurial thinking and the university bureaucracy.

The overall goal of my course was to develop an entrepreneurial perspective of the role of faculty in academia. Building on their individual passions, commitments, and strengths, the course aimed to empower doctoral students (prospective faculty) to experience research, teaching, and service along the three entrepreneurial axes: Recognize opportunities, acquire resources, and create a new entity of value. Specifically, the course addressed the following:

1. Expanding the contents, forms, and audiences in teaching.
2. Choosing research questions for significance and impact, garnering means for effective execution, and creating avenues to bring the fruits of research to society
3. Refocusing academic service as a vehicle for the building and nurturing of the intellectual community.

Below I address some of the characteristics of AIEs that emerged in this course.[4]

Vision

A core aspect of AIEs involves a vision and passion. The passion that drives academics (Neumann, 2006) also characterizes entrepreneurs (e.g., Spinosa, Flores, & Dreyfus, 1997). An example of AIE in art education is Elliot Eisner, whose scholarship has reconceptualized research beyond numbers and words to include the visual: the *enlightened eye* (1991). Once this vision was articulated in scholarly works, it took Eisner's organizational leadership and political role as president of the American Educational Research Association, his abilities to team-lead and animate (qualities discussed in the section *The Academic Intellectual Entrepreneur as an Animator and a Leader*), to transform others' notions of the contents and formats of educational research.[5]

I discuss here one case, that of Professor Madhu Viswanathan, a colleague in the College of Business, based on his class presentation, additional conversations, and his coauthored book (Viswanathan, Gajendiran, & Venkatesan, 2008). Viswanathan's vision concerned the development of consumer education and entrepreneurial literacy for low-literate, low-income adults in India. A follow-up goal was the encouragement of innovative products targeted at low-income consumers. These initiatives represent basic methodological and substantive research that charts new directions of enquiry, teaching that builds on state-of-the art research, and social initiatives that translate the research to specific applications for societal benefit.

Entrepreneurship often crosses borders, disciplinary and others. Eisner's visions juxtaposed the disciplines of art criticism with research methodology, venturing into the experiential settings of conferences. Viswanathan combined market

research with psychology, engineering, and education, and ventured beyond the ivory tower to rural and urban settings to reach diverse populations. The notion of *border crossing* (Bresler, 2003; Solomon, Marshal, & Gardner, 2005), undertaking work that goes beyond traditional boundaries and conventional understanding of knowledge, is manifested in the crossing of intellectual and organizational boundaries so prominent in the work of AIEs.

Experiential Learning, Craft, and Risks

AIEs learn experientially. Experiential learning theory is based on the demonstrated value of active, personal, and direct experiences in contrast to vicarious experience of watching others or reading about it (Kolb, 1984). The literature on experiential learning has focused on articulating the process of moving dialectically between the modes of action and reflection (Schon, 1983). This interplay of doing and thinking enables educators, scientists, artists, and businesspeople, among others, to interpret the outcome of their decisions and actions and introduce changes.

Creation, whether in art, research, teaching, or entrepreneurship, requires craft. Sociologist Richard Sennett (2008) suggests that, to be at its best, the craftsperson's deft use of tools and materials, combined with an intuition developed from years of practice, create reciprocity that animates the form. Sennett argues that the craftsperson, engaged in a continual dialogue with materials, does not suffer the divide of understanding and doing. The craftsperson must be patient, avoiding quick fixes. Good work of this sort emphasizes the lessons of experience through a dialogue between tacit knowledge and explicit critique (Sennett, 2008). These processes are manifested in the craft of AIEs.

An Important part of experiential learning and craft is the learning from failure. The understanding of failure as contributing to learning is increasingly recognized in the scholarly literature in various intellectual disciplines, from engineering and sciences to design and education (e.g., Cardon & McGrath, 1999; McGrath, 1999; Petroski, 1992, 1996; Politis & Gabrielsson, 2007; Thornhill & Amit, 2003; Vesper, 1980). As part of experiential learning, the act of failing can be confronted, studied, and dealt with systematically and productively (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). Discussing the context of entrepreneurship, Spinosa et al. (1997) suggest that people become competent not by abstracting theories but, by doing, failing (and, I would add, analyzing and modifying), and then doing again until they become sensitized in their habits to what is worthwhile and consider what is not. Since the question is not whether a failure will occur, but rather *when*, experienced entrepreneurs have developed a higher acceptance of failures (and thus risk) as a way of increasing variety and expanding the search for opportunities (Politis & Gabrielsson, 2007).

Viswanathan and his colleagues' project involved years of experiential learning and cultivating craft in research, curriculum development, and testing of the program. This learning is still going on as they expand the project to reach wider audiences. For Viswanathan, the experiential learning involved in conducting qualitative research in the rural and urban settings of South India is aimed at understanding lives and marketplace in subsistence contexts. Research findings are used to develop consumer and entrepreneurial curricula for informed buyers or sellers.

Viswanathan discussed learning from failures to construct more effective programs. Just as his consumers embarked on a path to lifelong learning, Viswanathan, too, seems to be on a lifelong learning path, expanding the model to other settings. In these ongoing processes of prolonged and intense engagement, data collection and analysis overlap, ideas and issues continuously emerge, in response to participants' voices and realities.

The context of academia offers a unique environment for entrepreneurship,[6] where the university's ethos of success (like business) is juxtaposed with the institution of tenure (unlike business). An "all or nothing" system, failing tenure means job loss. Consequently, job security looms centrally for junior faculty at their formative stage, promoting a risk-adverse culture that suppresses creativity and innovation. Once tenure is achieved, there is tremendous space for exploration, experimentation, and making mistakes through the institutional structures of sabbaticals and by allowing major changes in research direction. Indeed, mistakes and failures are an ongoing part of academia in grant proposals, in the processes of research projects, and in submitting works for publication. Thus, tenure system functions as a double-edged sword. As research on motivation has pointed out (e.g., Amabile, 1989; Lepper & Greene, 1978), the preoccupation with extrinsic rewards often suppresses creativity and innovation.

The AIEs of our course (all tenured) exhibited intrinsic motivation. They have continued to be engaged in experiential learning in a continuous journey toward expanded visions and possibilities. The risks they took consisted of lack of institutional acknowledgment for some of their unorthodox endeavors,[7] sometimes manifested as slower promotion to that next level of full professor. They perceived the real failure as stagnation, in giving up or not following their visions.

The Academic Intellectual Entrepreneur as an Animator and a Leader

Miller and Boud (1996) refer to the function of working with the experience of others as *animation* (p. 7) and to the person who works to promote others' learning as an *animator*. The notion of animator draws on such connotations as "to give life to," "to quicken," "to vivify," "to inspire," and "to activate." Miller and Boud see the function of animators to be that of acting with others in situations where

learning is an aspect of what is occurring. Indeed, I regard AIEs as educators in the deepest sense of the word. Behind any endeavor, but particularly one that is innovative and cutting edge, exists the need to give it life so that it interacts with people's experiences. The concept of animation captures the function of intellectual entrepreneur as working with others to inspire, negotiate, and lead in making things happen. Animators create the persuasive conditions that help members of a field or domain to accept their work.

Viswanathan's work with organizations in India and in the United States and the various participants in his research and teaching exemplifies his ability to animate. Similarly, another AIE in chemistry inspired students to rethink their notions of chemistry and then worked with a publisher to create a different kind of chemistry textbook. The role of working with others in product development practices that exists in any organization, whether in industry or the university, has generally been ignored or trivialized in the academic literature. Focusing on serial innovators and their innovation processes across diverse, mature corporations, Price, Griffin, Vojak, and Burgon (2008) examined the political actions that benefit new product development practices. Their results show that, though the innovators began with the belief that politics were avoidable, they eventually adopted a positive political outlook. The shift prompted them to use political actions, such as engaging people, positioning products, influencing action, breaking the rules, and iterating across the different types of actions, which enabled them to push cutting-edge projects and products through the organization and into consumers' hands.

All of these are clearly manifested in the dispositions of AIEs in the course, whether it was in developing and introducing an innovative interdisciplinary program; courses that involved new contents, formats, and audiences; or a different type of textbook. Even the modest development of products, suggest Price et al. (2008), meets resistance during invention and implementation, and the resistance surrounding a breakthrough new product is substantially greater. The same was often true for our AIEs. Successful AIEs assumed several of the different roles identified in new product development (Price et al., 2008), including building mutual respect and trust, sharing credit, engaging people by valuing individuals and their contributions, and, in general, recognizing the necessity of having people on board in order to accomplish the tasks to which they were completely dedicated. Just as innovators worked to gain a deep understanding of their customer requirements and possibilities for the project and to demonstrate value to the business, AIEs had to do the same. Like Price's innovators, they were determined, working at the issues until they found the solutions to technical and institutional problems. Viswanathan's mission, for example, required prolonged and continual dialogue with people and organizations in a collaborative process that included research participants, coresearchers,

and colleagues in other colleges to create intercollege courses. These negotiations infused the various stages of an entrepreneurial project.

Persistence in carrying a project necessitates a capacity for sustained attention. Attention is at the core of perception and exploration and the building block of intimacy, wisdom, and cultural progress. Attention, writes William James, "is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneous possible objects of trains of thought. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others" (quoted in Jackson, 2008, p. 13). The opposite of attention is the scatterbrained state of distraction. Jackson (2008) portrays the increased states of distraction in our society where we are pulled constantly by virtual universes and the addictive allure of multitasking people and things in a state of constant motion. Constant distraction and multitasking are increasingly part of academic life. In particular, working with people on projects poses a challenge to create spaces for an undistracted focus. However, these spaces are crucial. The challenge in intellectual entrepreneurship is to combine the intense focus of deeper thinking involved in a vision with multitasking involved in working with others, allocating time and space for both.

Creativity

What is the role of creativity in entrepreneurship? Creativity was clearly manifested in the visions of AIEs in the course. It was also manifested in the practical aspects of experiential learning and animating.

In his study of nearly 100 creative scholars, authors, and artists in various disciplines, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) identifies 10 *dimensions of complexity* of creative people, tendencies of thought and action containing contradictory extremes that in most people are segregated. Though the AIE course did not focus on these dimensions, a postpresentation analysis showed that the AIEs exhibited four of these characteristics: (a) passionate, yet objective; (b) ambitious, yet selfless; (c) playful, yet disciplined; and (d) divergent, yet convergent. Viswanathan, for example, was passionate about his project, yet thoughtfully discussed problems and areas for improvement. While ambitious in making the project happen, he communicated clearly that the project was not about him but about something bigger. The multiple tasks often involved playful, divergent thinking, yet the project was convergent and required tremendous discipline.

Academic Intellectual Entrepreneurship as a Mutual Shaping Endeavor

"We teach who we are," wrote Parker Palmer (1998) famously, making a case that teachers' inner landscapes are central to what they do. I have noted elsewhere

(Bresler, 2008b), that other occupations, too, to various extents, are shaped by those who "occupy" them. Indeed, one can distinguish occupations by the degree to which they offer opportunities to express oneself. Being an artist is an obvious example of an occupation that allows space to express who one is—as importantly, who one is shaped by their artistic experiences. I believe that academic intellectual entrepreneurs, like artists, pattern themselves after their visions, thus giving form to their spirit. In this article, I suggest that academic intellectual entrepreneurship allows faculty to manifest who we are, and in turn, be shaped by this experience.

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Notes

1. Art as a discipline has dealt with subjectivity for many years and has derived a range of methods to deal with it. As a field, we have developed ways of judging while factoring in subjectivity: There are still ways of discussing good and less good despite the acknowledgment of considerable (though not complete) subjectivity. Other disciplines just coming to grips with subjectivity could learn from this—if the concepts and methods are imported effectively, adapted to the local discipline and its communities, and communicated effectively (these are all classic entrepreneurial activities).
2. Related (but distinct) notions of the artist as researcher have been articulated by leading arts educators, most notably Rita Irwin and Graeme Sullivan. Irwin's conceptualizations of a/r/tography merge research, teaching, and art-making (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), and regard these three forms of thought as connected entities. Sullivan (2005), responding to misconceptions about the intellectual status of artistic inquiry that undervalues the scholarly, cultural, and social significance of the visual arts, argues that the visual arts can be theorized as a form of research.
3. In some cases, when entrepreneurial processes could be observed firsthand, interviews were combined with observations.
4. The course generated a research project on AIEs (Bresler, 2008a) that is funded by the University of Illinois Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership.
5. Eisner provides a role model of expanding visions on the educational possibilities of art. One can think of the art educator as in some ways like the entrepreneur, marketing artistic experiences so that the less artistically advanced can understand, appreciate, and enjoy them. A popular example included Sister Wendy for art. Educational entrepreneurs in other disciplines include Ken Burns for history, Stephen Hawking for astrophysics, and Carl Sagan for astronomy.
6. Or its sister term, intrapreneurship, to indicate work within institutions.
7. When their work became highly visible, the institution was typically supportive (Neumann, 2006).

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