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Writing a Business Plan for a School of Creative Music Education

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Writing a Business Plan for a School of Creative Music Education

by

Pamela A. Szalay

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2008

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

Writing a Business Plan for a School of Creative Music Education

This project was about writing a business plan for a unique school of music that fosters creativity and promotes fun in learning. It synthesized knowledge from the fields of business, education, creativity and music. The result was a forty-eight page document that showed the school's profit potential and made an argument for teaching music creatively. Resources for teachers were included. Additionally, a PowerPoint presentation was developed to present key concepts and features of the School of Creative Music Education to potential investors, partners, employees, teachers or clients. A highlight was the video clips of group piano lessons and student performances.

Signature

Date

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State University of New York
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Dates of Approval:

Dr. Mary Murdock
Associate Professor

Pamela A. Szalay
Student

Dedication

*With love to Benjamin
And to Mom and Dad—
These are the things that dreams are made of.*

Acknowledgments

I did not go on this journey alone. It began with the chance meeting of a graduate of the creative studies program. She pointed the way and I started on the path. This journey has brought many wonderful and dedicated people into my life: fellow students and faculty, distance students and alumni. Many have left a lasting impression and because of their influence I am not the same person who started the journey.

I am thankful to the instructors and professors at the International Center for Studies in Creativity—they all clearly love what they do and brought so much of themselves into the classroom. They nurtured my creative potential! Most specifically I am thankful to Dr. Murdock for her expert guidance during this project and for her inspiring chats; to Dr. Keller-Mathers, for her helpful advice in planning my course of study over the past two years; and to the department chair, Dr. Puccio, for his strong and sensitive leadership skills that have created an excellent environment for learning and inquiry.

I wouldn't have been here at all if not for alumna Christina Coyle who was willing to strike up a conversation about creativity during intermission at "Hello Dolly"—without her, I might still be searching for the "right" graduate program. I also owe a tremendous thank you to Cindi Thomason, senior advisor at the Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State College. She walked me through the process of writing a business plan and spent many hours sharing her expertise with me.

For stoking my entrepreneurial spirit, I must thank Jo Beth Dellinger, owner of Artist Pianos in Buffalo, NY, who was open to all my unusual ideas ever since I presented them to her three years ago. She allowed me to implement them in her piano store, providing both the instruments and the space. I am grateful for her words of encouragement and strong show of

support for music education. I must also thank the staff who dealt with the daily operations and student traffic.

I am indebted to the many teachers who worked with me over the past two years— Fran Landis, Sara Wargo, Tom McGinley and Yvonne Dryfhout. Their willingness to embark on the journey with me and take the risk of teaching in a different format allowed my ideas to go forward. I am deeply appreciative of their openness.

The video clips that became the highlight of the PowerPoint presentation came about through the combined effort of clients, who supplied me with their home-movie clips, Fran Landis, who worked with me in capturing additional footage during lessons, and my brother Peter Szalay, who transferred and edited video clips from several sources and formats to digital, and then taught me how to do it myself. He even did this without a Macintosh!

The world's best childcare service was run by a group of people who simply blurred the lines between family, friends and colleagues: Alexander and Patricia Szalay, Tom and Cathy McGinley, Peter and Danine Szalay, and Marinette Kozlow. I am so appreciative of the role they play in Ben's life. As for my "go-to-girl", well, that was my mom, Patricia Szalay, the human spell-checker who proofed this manuscript in between cooking up batches of amazing pasta sauce. Also, I am thankful to my big little brother Andrew Szalay for participating in spirited email debates, silly and serious, and for giving thoughtful feedback during my "alliteration phase" ☺

And all this did not just go on for one semester: the past two years I have requested help from all sources. The courses I took in preparation for this final project led me to need, on more than one occasion, a few "volunteers" to participate in resource groups or serve as the client. So with great respect I take off my hat to my friends and my friends' friends (you

know who you are) who were enthusiastic about bringing to me their “problems”, their ideas and the occasional box of donuts. Wait, I brought the donuts. Well anyway, thanks for coming and participating with gusto!

But most of all, this would not have happened, could not have happened in this short time, if my parents had not been there with such unconditional support. They gave more than words, picking up the slack by taking care of my most precious possession, Benjamin, on a near-daily basis. They earned this degree along with me. In more than one way I owe my life and my future to them. Because of the love they have shown in both actions and words, I am pursuing my dreams. Mom and dad, you are the best!

Finally, I want to say to my son, Benjamin, that I hope this journey of mine brings you great advantage in life. I think I am a better mom, a better teacher, and a better person as a result of completing this degree. May it help me to nurture all that you are so that you will fulfill your greatest potential!

So to my parents, who made sure I remembered to eat when things got busy...

To my son Ben who ensured I got out to play once in a while...

To my dear friends on whom I leaned and who tolerated my weeks of “total immersion”, and to L.S. who suggested I get some sleep rather than pull the all-nighter (even though it would dampen our plans for the next day)...

And certainly to my colleagues who put up with the chaos of implementing a new idea....

...I couldn't have done it without you.

I thank you with all my heart for allowing me to enjoy this journey!

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Section 1: Background to the Project

“No business plan has ever survived contact with the marketplace.”

Tom Kinnear

“No idea has ever survived contact with a business plan.”

Pamela A. Szalay

Introduction

In a broad sense, this project was about converting an idea into a workable solution. Every good idea remains only that without focused effort, evaluation, creativity, and perhaps a dose of good fortune. The odds are in the favor of those who perform thorough research, persevere despite obstacles, and harness the power of creative thinking.

In a narrow sense, this project delineated the process of writing a business plan for a School of Creative Music Education (SCME). My goal was to articulate “my vision for a music school that promotes creative learning” (Szalay, 2007) and give one example of how it might be translated into a practical business model. The final product was intended to satisfy the strictest requirements of financial institutions or investors, while also providing empirical support for the curriculum design which would satisfy educators, clients, or collaborators. A standard business plan was the framework for communicating my vision. The plan consisted of seven standard sections plus financial documents and exhibits.

The seven sections are as follows:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Business Goals
- III. Product or Services
- IV. Market Analysis

- V. Operations Process
- VI. Marketing
- VII. Management Plan

These sections included all the necessary components to convey financial viability and credibility to interested parties. They listed the programs to be offered, identified a target market, and summarized the teaching philosophy that would set it apart from other music schools: mainly, the emphasis on the role of creativity and fun in learning. Supporting data and documents in the Exhibits included financial statements, a studio floor model, a sample planning schedule grid, a portfolio of studio activities, customer feedback, and teacher aides.

A PowerPoint presentation was also developed which summarized the business plan and showcased various elements of the curriculum. My research showed that this mode of presentation was often more effective in enticing investors than a written document (Spors, 2008). However, the presentation was designed to be flexible with components that could be angled towards potential employees, teachers or customers as well.

In creating this business plan I learned a new skill while defining a product that has the potential to meet the needs of a community. The programs in the school were designed to attract and retain students, including those who might not fit well in traditional private lesson programs. This opens the door for more students to fulfill their potential as musicians while also developing valuable creative and cognitive skills.

Background

In the fourteen years that I have taught piano, I have worked with children and adults of all ages and abilities. In that time, I have developed a philosophy and methodology that is non-traditional but effective in engaging them and helping them grow as pianists and

musicians. I felt they enjoyed the approach and often wished that I could accommodate more students, but this was not possible with the traditional 30-minute private lesson format.

For two years I experimented by including group lessons along with private lessons and found that the combination had many benefits. Most students and parents preferred the format over the traditional model. Parents appreciated the novelty and energy of the group lessons as well as the individualized coaching that occurred in the private lessons. Students enjoyed the stimulation of learning with peers. As a teacher, I enjoyed the variety of activities and felt that the format promoted the acquisition and internalization of many basic keyboard skills. In addition to the group instruction, students were given the opportunity to work independently at computer stations and on digital pianos with instructional software. This provided an additional learning format and served to reinforce concepts introduced in group or private lessons.

Although the format was showing promise in accomplishing my curriculum goals, my current business was still unable to support the format adequately. A large pool of students and a team of teachers were required for the program to be efficient. Also, there were special space and equipment requirements.

I began to consider how I might transform my ideas into a new business, but I had never before attempted such a leap. I did not know the magnitude of my ideas or even how to evaluate them. It was clear that my capacity to create was going to be limited by my lack of expertise. Although I had been surrounded by business most of my life--as the grandchild of an entrepreneur, a working member in a family business, and a partner in two start-up operations--I had little formal training. I merely had a sense that the business could be profitable and valued by the community.

An initial investigation revealed that my first step should be to write a business plan. This would give shape to my raw ideas and reveal areas of strength and weakness. So learning how to write a plan that suited my needs became the focus of this project.

Transforming the ideas into concrete numbers was one of the most challenging tasks I ever did. Abstract concepts had to be articulated and then refined until specific criteria were met. New ideas emerged and some were cast aside. The various concepts underwent repeated refinement until a compelling document was created that spelled out my vision and plan for achieving it. Tom Kinnear, executive director of the entrepreneurial studies institute at the University of Michigan, said that “No business plan has ever survived contact with the marketplace” (Spors, 2008). I will elaborate on that point and say that that “no idea has ever survived contact with a business plan.”

Rationale

The following excerpts are taken from the concept paper for this project.

I choose this project because it unites my skills in music, music education, creativity and business. It will be a stretch experience because I lack formal business schooling and will need to acquire additional knowledge and skill sets in order to complete this project. Also, this project will bring closure to a concept I have seen evolve from the initial idea, to its elaboration, to its partial implementation. By disclosing the complete vision I have for a School of Creative Music Education, I am capturing the data for others to use or build on (Szalay, 2007, p. 2).

Why is it Important to Do This?

This project revolves around human potential. It is my wish that every child receive the tools that will help him reach his potential. I feel that this could occur through music lessons. The benefits of learning music have been well established (Bilhartz, Bruhn, & Olson, 1999; Schellenberg, 2005). But research also shows there are benefits to creativity training. I suggest that creativity and thinking skills can be taught through music lessons.

At the core of my teaching philosophy are the following beliefs:

- Each learner is unique—as shown by strengths, preferences and innate abilities.
- Teachers can make learning fun and engaging.
- Creative learning and thinking must be promoted in order for the students to reach their highest potential.

It is my wish that students of all ages and abilities come willingly, wanting to learn, and leave feeling like it was all play. So in the process of learning a skill they desire to have, they improve their ability to problem solve and to be creative. It is the best of scenarios: to teach people something fun in a fun way that has a trickle-down positive effect into other areas of their lives.

By sharing my concept for a School of Creative Music Education and writing a business plan that will support it, I am giving my ideas a chance to be considered, measured, evaluated, and hopefully replicated and enjoyed. If implemented, the community will benefit from quality education, children will be given wonderful opportunities to create music, and jobs will be created (Szalay, 2007, p. 4).

Section 2: Pertinent Literature

This section contains literature from the fields of business, education, music and creativity. At the start of this project, I had a familiarity with the standard creativity literature. I had also done previous research in educational psychology and the Suzuki (1983) method. However, my exposure to business literature was very limited.

In this literature review I will share the pieces that have influenced the development of this project. There are pieces that are prescriptive and others that provide the philosophical underpinnings. Both are important. Some are plainly cited later on, while others provided me with my own personal compass during this project.

Business Literature

My initial research in the field of business was exploratory. I was unsure of the terminology and needed to know what questions to ask. I initially relied on the internet to locate general articles about starting a business and writing a business plan. I discovered a wealth of reliable sources, including government sites with resources for small businesses. Many of the financial newspapers and magazines such as *Inc.* and the *Wall Street Journal* keep a database of articles online.

One particularly helpful piece was “The 100-page start-up plan--don’t bother” (Spors, 2008), which gave a rationale for spending less time on crafting a business plan and more time selling it to potential investors. This helped me to construct a realistic framework for the plan, and encouraged me that this project could be completed in the given timeframe of one semester.

There are two main sources that influenced the development of the business plan. The first was the local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) located on the campus of

Buffalo State College. SBDC's are a partnership program of the Small Business Administration which are administered by the State University of New York. They offer free counseling and assistance to new or prospective business owners. Although the information transmitted was done informally in the form of handouts and conversation, I found it to be substantial and accurate when compared with other research I conducted. Furthermore, it was customized to fit the needs of my plan. I was given advisement on the plan from start to finish, feedback on its development, and hands-on assistance when needed.

For example, since I had no experience in preparing the types of financial statements required, my advisor gave me templates to work from. I compiled data for a start-up costs spreadsheet (see Exhibit A of the Business Plan) which she then used to create cash-flow projections. As a result, I gained critical financial data such as the profit potential and the amount of financing required to open the School of Creative Music Education (SCME). This information was then written into the business plan.

The second primary source that contributed to the development of my business plan was *The Entrepreneur's Information Sourcebook: Charting the Path to Small Business Success* by Awe (2006). Written by an unlikely author--a librarian--this book contained current information on the basics of starting and running a business. Awe had investigated thousands of resources and presented the most valuable ones. This book provided solid support for the structure of the business plan and confirmed many of the points discussed at my meetings at the SBDC.

Another helpful book, recommended by Awe, was Mullins' (2003) *The New Business Road Test: What Entrepreneurs and Executives Should Do Before Writing a Business Plan*. Mullins provided general advice on averting business failure while also indicating the

potential pitfalls of specific industries. He recommended that new ideas be tested before they are crafted into a new business.

Awe recommended several websites, including http://www.bplans.com/Sample_Business_Plans, which offers free sample business plans from a wide-range of industries. I was able to locate a plan for a business offering music lessons for preschoolers. It provided a useful frame of reference.

Music, Education and Creativity

Although much of my curriculum has developed over time through my personal experiences, it was necessary to support my theories of learning and instruction with research. Any investor or teacher would want to know why I promote a certain philosophy or methodology for teaching piano. From a business perspective, the arguments formed the rationale for marketing the services and products of the SCME. From an educational standpoint, teachers needed to understand the benefits of certain modes of instruction.

First I needed to establish that there are cognitive benefits to formal music lessons. Second, I needed to establish the necessity of incorporating creativity throughout the curriculum and also provide explicit guidelines for the teachers.

Rauscher, Shaw and Ky (1993) were the authors of the study that gave rise to the well-known but controversial “Mozart effect”. This was a short-term but noticeable improvement in spatial intelligence following exposure by a subject to ten minutes of recorded music composed by Mozart. Although it is now known that “such enhancement is a consequence of the listener's arousal level and mood” (Schellenberg, 2006), the study created a marketing frenzy. Products were created and sold to parents who were eager to boost their children’s intelligence.

Other studies were conducted attempting to find correlations between music study and various aspects of intelligence. These are well reviewed in Schellenberg's (2006) "Long-Term Positive Associations between Music Lessons and IQ." In a study which included children and undergraduates, Schellenberg (2006) found that music lessons in childhood had significant correlations with IQ and academic performance. The effects seemed to be long-lasting. The children, who were between 6 and 11 years old, benefitted from the musical training regardless of family income, parents' education and involvement in nonmusical activities. Also, Bilhartz, Bruhn & Olson (1999) found an increase in spatial-temporal reasoning abilities in four to six-year olds following thirty weeks of weekly music instruction.

More specifically related to the educational programs in the SCME was Rauscher and Zupan's (2000) study that examined the impact of group keyboard lessons on kindergarteners. Children that received group piano lessons for twenty minutes two times a week showed a significant improvement on spatial-temporal tasks after four months, and an even greater improvement after eight months.

The market created by the now infamous study by Rauscher, Shaw and Ky (1993) showed that parents were eager to invest in programs that would boost their children's intelligence. Although the study proved to be germinal, it struck a chord in society that is still reverberating today. Entire lines of products have been developed to capitalize on the desire of parents to give their children an "edge". The learning in regards to the SCME was that parents were willing to pay for programs that they perceived would provide cognitive benefits.

A different approach was taken by musician and educator Shinichi Suzuki. He has greatly impacted the field of music education through his concept of “talent development”. His seminal work, *Nurtured by Love* (Suzuki, 1983), has changed the way many teachers approach the development of musical talent and has been part of my training. The emphasis on learning by ear rather than by note-reading or rote memorization has great merit, especially for the young learner. It is referred to as the “mother-tongue” method because it relates the learning of music to the learning of language. Suzuki (1983) argued that children first gain fluency in their native tongue before learning to read. They learn by constant exposure to the sound of the language. Therefore, immersion in the right environment would easily allow the learning of music by very young children as well. His ideas and methods have proven highly effective, as seen by the large groups of young violinists he trains to perform classical music in unison. However, this still does not complete the picture of musical potential, and we have not yet addressed the issue of creativity.

Music clearly has cognitive components. Music is also something that can be learned intuitively, as Suzuki and many musical prodigies have shown. How does creativity fit in? At this point, the literature was scant. Although there was growing research in the combined field of creativity education, there was much less research that incorporated creativity and music education. There was nothing I saw that specifically addressed the combination in my business plan: piano-based creative education for children in a group setting. Some piano programs I encountered purported to be creative, but there was no research behind it. Thus, the research supporting the programs in the SCME had to be woven together.

Gardner’s (1983) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* is a seminal work about the different ways individuals exhibit intelligence. He expanded intelligence

beyond traditional conceptions to include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. This was a core principle in the curriculum component of the business plan and supported the argument that instruction needs to be flexible in order to accommodate different learning styles. A great practical handbook for teachers based on Gardner's (1983) theories was Campbell, Campbell & Dickenson's (2004) *Teaching and Learning through Multiple Intelligences*. This book offered elaboration, suggestions for activities, and additional resources.

Creativity and the Arts with Young Children (Isbell & Raina, 2007) provided an excellent synthesis of creativity and educational literature. The book focused on art-based curriculum in schools and offered significant assistance with the application of theory by including lesson plans and activities. The first chapter was a tour of foundational creativity concepts and theory, while chapter six focused on music and chapter seven on creative movement.

The text by Isbell & Raina (2007) led me to the critical discovery of two position papers by the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) which summarized and supported many of my key beliefs about music education. The ACEI views the expressive arts as an essential component of education, not a frivolous accessory. "The Child's Right to the Expressive Arts: Nurturing the Imagination as Well as the Intellect" (Jalongo, 2007) was written in part "to examine the contributions of creativity and imagination to the total learning of the child" (p.333). "The Child's Right to Creative Thought and Expression" (Jalongo, 2003) proposed that all children be given opportunities to discover their creative and intellectual strengths and to have their "interests and abilities

affirmed and nurtured” (p.342). The full text of these two papers was reprinted in chapter 10 of Isbell & Raina (2007).

Knowing the curriculum goal is different from knowing how to reach it. Teachers may value creative learning but not have an explicit means of fostering it. The Torrance Incubation Model (TIM; Torrance & Safter, 1990) provided a framework for delivering content in a creative manner while also targeting the development of creativity skills in the learner. It was shown to be flexible and effective through all phases of the learning cycle. Extensive descriptions of the creativity skills and suggested applications are included in Torrance and Safter’s (1999) *Making the Creative Leap Beyond....* Also, a simple and straightforward guide to understanding and using the TIM was found in a collection of articles by Murdock and Keller-Mathers (2002, 2002a, 2002b) written for the *National Association of Gifted Children*. These articles were designed to introduce educators to the TIM and give them practical instructions so they could begin using it.

An additional benefit outlined by Torrance and Safter (1999) is the TIM’s ability “to arouse and to sustain motivation” (p. 40) while offering “a strategy that is especially suitable for reluctant learners because it makes use of their special strengths and learning styles” (p. 40). This is an especially attractive promise because a primary goal of the SCME is to attract students who were not motivated by traditional piano lesson methods.

Few educators would disagree that motivation is an important element in learning, but it is important to understand that the level of motivation in a student is greatly influenced by the learning environment. More than just the physical space, the psychological environment established by the teacher and the governing system of rules can dampen or enhance the desire to learn. Rogers (1962) first introduced the concept of a “safe” psychological

environment. Fleith (2000) discussed the attributes of the creative classroom, such as an atmosphere that tolerates mistakes, gives opportunities for making choices, and provides adequate time to think creatively. When students are at ease to explore their surroundings and journey at will through their own unique mental landscape, they can easily assimilate knowledge and make their own connections. This is the essence of “discovery learning” (Bruner, 1961) and it is one of the goals of the SCME.

Motivation and environment are also important in nurturing creativity. Ekvall’s (1987) ten dimensions of creative climate have become the basis for many subsequent studies in business and education, including Ekvall and Ryhammar’s (1999) study which showed that climate is one of the strongest influences on creative outcome. Amabile (1989, 1996) isolated environmental conditions as well as social-psychological factors that enhanced or killed creativity. Intrinsic motivation was a key factor of her componential model that also included domain knowledge and creativity skills. These studies showed that there are optimal environments and psychological states for promoting creative productivity.

Creative Problem-Solving

Finally, the rationale must be given for teaching thinking and problem-solving skills as part of the creative curriculum. Duckworth (1964) put it this way:

Good pedagogy must involve presenting the child with situations in which he himself experiments, in the broadest sense of the term—trying things out to see what happens, manipulating symbols, posing questions and seeking his own answers, reconciling what he finds one time with what he finds at another, comparing his findings with those of other children (p. 2)

Much creative effort can be described as a kind of problem-solving, and problem-solving can be explained in terms of various thinking skills (Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2007). My own experience in teaching private piano lessons allowed me a unique, long-term observational and influential role in the lives of many students of various abilities and ages. There is no doubt that learning how to problem-solve increases their ability to learn songs with less assistance. If the goal of music lessons is to give a lifetime of enjoyment, then students need to learn how to navigate by general principle. Learning songs by rote, without making connections to previous knowledge, limits student growth.

Therefore, teachers should also be trained in using Creative-Problem Solving (Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger, 1994). This would allow teachers to facilitate student learning by understanding ways in which people tackle problems, like how to navigate a musical passage or discern if a chord is major or minor. It would also help teachers to understand the value of asking open-ended questions, avoiding premature closure, delaying judgment, and being open to “wild and crazy” ideas. This is part of setting up the right environment for learning and creativity.

Many of these points depend on the belief that creativity can be taught or enhanced. Much research was available to support this notion. Alex Osborn, in his 1953 book *Applied Imagination*, was the first to present a set of principles for deliberately engaging in creative thinking. His model, known as Creative Problem Solving (CPS), has undergone many developments and transformations as his initial principles have been verified and built upon by over sixty years of research. Parnes and Noller conducted the comprehensive *Creative Studies Project* (Parnes, 1987; Parnes & Noller, 1972) to demonstrate that creativity was

indeed something that could be taught and enhanced. Torrance (1972) and Rose and Lin (1984) also showed the positive the impact of creativity training in educational settings.

Several studies conducted extensive reviews of the creativity literature of the past fifty-plus years (Isaksen & Treffinger, 2004; Puccio, Murdock and Mance, 2005; Puccio, Firestien, Coyle and Masucci, 2006). These studies underscored the effectiveness of CPS training in real-world situations with students and professionals. Scott, Leritz and Mumford (2004) performed a meta-analysis of 70 previous studies from both educational and business settings. They concluded that gains in creativity-related performance resulted from training programs that were well-designed, used real-life scenarios relevant to the particular domain, developed cognition and provided heuristic tools. Puccio et al. (2005) harnessed the power of a cognitive approach with the introduction of the “Thinking Skills” model of CPS, “developed primarily to facilitate more explicit teaching and learning of the CPS process, and to make these teaching and learning processes more generally accessible to different audiences” (p.58).

These studies offer substantial support to the philosophy and aims of the SCME. Furthermore, they will influence and guide the formulation of new curriculum.

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Section Three: The Process

The projected timeline developed for this project turned out to be invalid. The tasks remained essentially the same and were related either to the development of the business plan or to the support of the curriculum. But the order of tasks changed almost from the beginning. There was also a considerable overlap in the timeframe of various activities, plus new developments that added to the scope of the research. Two events led to these changes in the process.

First, I learned that a business plan was a flexible, adaptable, living document (Awe, 2006). Although there were general standards and guidelines, a plan should be crafted to

reflect the unique character of the business being proposed. It should be written to inspire the reader, conveying not only the hard data but the company's mission statement. So although my original conception for this project was to create three products—a business plan, a portfolio that highlighted the curriculum, and a PowerPoint presentation—it became clear that the first two products could be merged into one. I was able to elaborate on the school's curriculum throughout the main text of the business plan as well as in the exhibits.

Second, as a result of my first meeting at the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), I began working on the business plan before finishing my research. From February 29th to March 14th, I gathered the data that was needed to create a start-up costs worksheet, following a template provided by the advisor. Although I did not completely see the big picture at this point, I understood that the financial statements were critical to the development of the business plan. It would have no substance without evidence of profit potential and a realistic demonstration of how I proposed to allocate funds. An advantage of this approach was that I received feedback on the plan not just at the end but throughout the developmental stages.

I produced my first draft of the start-up costs worksheet in March 2008, spent a week revising it, and then my advisor and I agreed it was complete. She proceeded to create a cash-flow statement for the first year of business. Fortunately, it showed that my pricing was adequate for the volume of clients I was projecting. It was now time to move forward with the writing of the plan, integrating the data into an easy-to-read format. It was my chance to elaborate on my ideas and provide the rationale for the many decisions I made regarding pricing, the target market, the business location and equipment needs. With my advisor's

counsel, we approached the writing of the business plan section by section, saving the executive summary for last.

Throughout the writing process, I was also reading the business literature. Many of my learnings from the SBDC about writing a business plan were supported. I also discussed my project with several professionals and colleagues which led me to expand my research to include the topics of social entrepreneurship and business leadership. At the same time, I was reading and compiling data to support the proposed curriculum for the School of Creative Music Education (SCME). I continued to discover additional pertinent literature throughout the three months of the project. I included new sources in the PowerPoint presentation which were not cited elsewhere in the project. A slide in the presentation was created to include the new references.

Preparing the PowerPoint presentation was the most enjoyable part of the project as it became an artistic vehicle for the expression of my ideas. I wanted to capture the essence of the plan and unify the multiple influences (business, education, music and creativity) that contributed to the conceptual framework of the business plan. I also needed to synthesize the technical and inspirational components. The content took on new meaning as I began the process of choosing the elements to include in the presentation, as well as deciding how to best express them. Aesthetic considerations such as the design of the slides, the formatting of the text, and the means of displaying the visual and video elements, contributed as much to the evolution of the final product as the content.

As a result of the creative process, the presentation expanded beyond my initial conception to include over 95 PowerPoint slides. I began to edit video clips to create new slides that highlighted different types of lessons and student performances. The visual and

audio elements brought the School of Creative Music Education to life and added the “knockdown punch” to what was already substantial, well-researched content. Originally conceived solely as a means of enticing investors, it became clear that the presentation could be easily adapted to target other audiences: clients, employees, and academics as well. This led to additional product development and even more slides, further summarizing my ideas and experiences.

As a result, I gained an important means assessing my work. I truly felt the impact of the creative work I had done not just in the last three months, but over the last several years. I began to see additional potential in my work and was excited about sharing it with my colleagues, classmates, family and friends.

The following pages include the final timeline and task list required for completing the project. The tasks are separated into four major categories: The Business Plan, The Presentation, The Curriculum, and the Master’s Project Write-up. The hours for each are shown in Tables 1 through 7 and summarized in Table 8. Overall, over 200 hours were required to complete the project.

The Business Plan

Seventy-nine total hours were needed to create the business plan. Tables 1 through 4 show how the hours were distributed over four areas: gathering data, literature review, project costs, and writing.

Table 1

The Business Plan: Gathering Data				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
2/20/2008 to 2/28/2008	3.0			Make an appointment at the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Plan what I will need for the appointment. Assemble materials: current business financial statements, current portfolio
2/29	1.5			Attend appointment with an advisor at the SBDC, located on campus at Buffalo State College.
				Discuss my business idea. Review elements of a business plan. Advised to begin working on the financial statements (section 7 of a plan).
3/3	1.5		Assess	Review materials from appointment. Assess the situation: Refer to Concept Paper (CP) Project Timeline. Check steps needed to be accomplished in "Gather Data", check timeframe. Make modifications to plan.
3/3 to 3/12	0.5			Obtain sample marketing plan and business proposal
	2.3			Design questionnaire for clients. Distribute questionnaire to clients (adult students or parents of students).
2/22 to 3/7	1.5			Discuss master's project with business professionals. Receive feedback, valuable input, recommended reading. Two people agree to give feedback on business plan.
3/11	0.5			Brainstorm names for business
3/21 to 3/31	3.0			Conduct marketing research online: census data, competition
4/28	1.5			Research: seek to include data about private schools, karate, dance, and sports. Edit plan to reflect more demographic data.
Total Hours: Gather Data		15.3		

Table 2

The Business Plan: Literature Review				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
3/11/2008 to 3/17/2008	5.5			Scan and read Awe (2003), other literature.
	3.0			Answer question, "what is a business plan?" Read Awe ch. 4, take notes, check out recommended websites, find additional articles through google search. Key findings: learn about business forms (legal setup); find a sample music business plan.
	0.5		Assess	Journal, key learnings, overview - feel complete on business research.
	1.0			Research about social entrepreneurship, Collin's "Good to Great"
Total Hours: Research		10.0		

Table 3

The Business Plan: Project Costs				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
3/11/2008 to 3/21/2008	1.0		Assess	Use handout from Small Business Development Center to begin preparing data for "Start-up Costs" worksheet. How to begin?
	1.0			Draw floor plan of the ideal piano school studio: number and size of private instruction studios, classroom space, reception area, computer lab area, floor area (kinesthetic activities)
	1.0			Consider criteria for selecting types of pianos for studio: acoustic and digital. Select models of digital pianos to be used in studio. Get prices via internet. Consider accessories needed: stand, chords, pedals.
	1.0			Set up project costs spreadsheet: elaborate basic spreadsheet to include more detail. This will help me know where my figures came from.

Table 3 (continued from previous page)

	3.0		List the programs and prices. Set-up a sample schedule of lessons for the studio. Consider studio space. How many students per hour? How many teachers required? What is the possible income per hour? Per day? per week? What is the cost (teacher pay)?
3/14	1.5	Expert advice	Meet with my advisor at SMDC, review my progress on project costs. Finish a preliminary document. Do a cash-flow projection for one year. Decide to meet again in one week. In that time, I can review the data from project costs worksheet and cash-flow analysis. Changes can be applied at next meeting.
	0.5	Assess	Records my thoughts about the last few days of process working on Project Costs
	0.3		Request and download spreadsheet files from Friday meeting at SBDC
	3.5		Business plan: start-up costs. Tweak floor plan (get measurements). Get prices of additional equipment and supplies (internet). Price out full collection of Faber lesson books and disks.
	1.5		Finish start-up costs
	0.5	Assess	Journal
	1.5		Financial figures for summer, preschool, adult program
3/21	1.5	Expert advice	Prepare for and attend meeting at SBDC. Revise startup costs worksheet. Produce cash-flow projection. Get directions for starting the process of writing the business plan
Total Hours: Project Costs		17.8	

Table 4

The Business Plan: Writing				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
3/31/2008 to 4/1/2008	1.5		Criteria	Develop criteria for business plan
4/1	2.5		Write	Write sections 3 and 4 of business plan
4/6	1.0		Assess	Review criteria, notes on business plans, goals
4/6 to 4/7	5.5		Write	Begin writing part 5, 6 and 7
4/8	2.0		Edits	Review sections 3-7
4/8	2.0		Expert advice	Meet advisor at SBDC, review my draft of plan, make adjustments
4/8	0.5		Assess	Review notes from meeting, assess status, next steps, reflect
4/16 to 4/17	5.0		Revise	Document revisions. Correspond with advisor regarding "business goals" (sections 2)
	2.0			Scan needed photos. Import to "Publisher". Design pages to display photos for exhibits of business plan.
4/23	1.0		Edits	"Tweak" business plan - edit prose
4/28	3.0		Write	Work on business plan: work on executive summary.
4/29	3.0		Write	Finish executive summary of business plan
5/2 to 5/3	7.0		Format	Assemble exhibits for business plan. Format. Remove sensitive material from business plan and slides for use in master's project.
Total Hours: Writing		40.0		

The PowerPoint Presentation

Creating the PowerPoint presentation required twenty-six hours of work (see Table 5).

Table 5

The PowerPoint Presentation				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
4/1/2008	1.5		PowerPoint	Consider PowerPoint design, images to use, needs.
4/17	2.5		Video	Gather photos, videos. Select. Setup plan to get video portion completed. Email students requesting video.
4/18	2.5		Graphics	Work on professionally drawn floor plan - choose software, download, learn how to use. Replicate my sketch of studio with "Smart Draw". Print.
4/20	1.5		Video	Review video footage, note content. Plan how to assemble.
	0.5		Assess	Consider PowerPoint elements: photo, video, quotes
	1.0		Select	Find and insert useful feedback from clients
4/23	0.5		Assess	Review requirements of presentation, needs of my product. Consider how to complete presentation, accomplish many purposes
	1.5		PowerPoint	Begin to work on assembling PowerPoint presentation. Consider what video clips I will need.
4/24	3.0		Video	Plan for video transfer, prepare instructions for P.S. Oversee work of editing clips.
4/27	2.5		Video	Take additional video of honors recital, transfer to digital; incorporate video from other students.
4/29	4.0		PowerPoint	Piece together slide presentation, order of information, design of slides. Content and aesthetic considerations.
4/30	5.0		PowerPoint	Tweak the presentation: the order, the content, the formatting, the wording, the selection of items from the business plan. Check that everything is there. Additional video/photos added.
Total Hours: Presentation		26.0		

The Curriculum

The total time needed to gather, select and prepare elements related to the curriculum was 27 hours. Table 6 shows the tasks related to gathering data and Table 7 shows the tasks related to the literature review.

Table 6

The Curriculum: Gathering Data				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
3/3/2008	1.5			Setup up digital cameras, video recorder in classroom. Take pictures and video during group lessons.
4/6	1.5			Design "Recordings Release" Letter to obtain permission to use photos and video clips of kids. Make copies. Distribute during lessons.
4/18 to 4/29	2.0			Find curriculum components to include in exhibits.
Hours: Gather Data		5.0		

Table 7

The Curriculum: Literature Review				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
3/14 to 3/30	2.0		Assess	Journaling and reflection
	10.5			Read selected literature, take notes on Isbell & Raina (2007), others
3/31	3.5		Assess	Review research conducted so far. Look for gaps. Do additional research on the effects of music lessons on children; sources needed for creativity arguments
4/1 to 4/30	3.0			Additional research online and in Creative Studies Library
	1.0			Investigate programs at the Department of Learning and Instruction at the University of Buffalo
5/6 to 5/7	2.0			Find additional articles to include in literature review to support argument that creativity can be taught
Total Hours: Research		22.0		

The Master's Project Write-Up

It took 72.5 hours to complete the project write-up. Additional hours were needed to have the project duplicated and bound. The tasks are described in Table 8.

Table 8

The Master's Project Write-up				
Date	Hours	Total	Stage	Task
3/21/2008	1.0		Assess	What is needed for sections 1,2,3; lost notes to business texts, searched and finally discovered; organize artifacts, documents by education, business, etc.
3/25 to 3/26	3.0		Section 2	Literature review: start to piece together, decide on order of presentation, touch briefly on each piece
	2.0		Section 3	Process Plan and hours: organize to reflect redesigned approach
	3.5		Section 2	Elaborate
	2.5		Section 1	Write new material, synthesize with elements from concept paper
	4.0		Revise and submit	Edit and revise sections 1 - 3
4/12 to 4/14	12.0		Sections 4,5,6	Draft, revise and submit
	2.0		Section 3	Update timeline/process plan
5/2 to 5/3	8.0			Assemble exhibits for business plan. Format. Convert presentation slides to grayscale for use in appendix to project. Remove sensitive material from business plan and slides for use in master's project.
	1.0			Convert presentation slides to grayscale for use in appendix to project.
5/5 to 5/6	20.0		Final Revisions and Printing	Revise Sections 1 to 6 write-up; complete timeline; make sure everything agrees; obtain additional citations as needed. Assemble entire document. Format and prep for printing.
5/7	7.0			Proof documents for last time. Prepare electronic version of documents, convert to pdf. Buy paper, ink.

Table 8 (continued from previous page)

5/8	6.5	Print documents. Dr. Murdock reviews, we have "signing ceremony", and all is approved for binding.
		Deliver to printer and oversee assembly. Distribute bound copies.
Total Hours: Write-up		72.5

Project Summary

Table 9 summarizes the hours described in tables 1 through 8.

Table 9

Summary of Hours	
Total hours creating the business plan	79.0
Total hours creating the PowerPoint presentation	26.0
Total hours for the curriculum	27.0
Total hours to complete the project write-up	72.5
Total Project Hours	204

Section Four: Project Outcomes

This master's project resulted in two products. One was a business plan and the second was a PowerPoint presentation.

The business plan was entitled "A Business Plan for a School of Creative Music Education" and it was prepared in a standard professional format with seven sections plus exhibits as follows:

- A. Sections 1 through 7
- B. Financial statements/Tax Returns
- C. Other exhibits

An outline of the plan follows. The business plan is presented for this project without the financial statements and tax returns (see Appendix C). Other certain sensitive information has been altered or deleted as well, such as the names of colleagues, local businesses and critical financial figures embedded in the text of the document.

Outline of the Business Plan

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Business Goals (including Mission Statement)
- III. Services
 - A. Description of Services
 - 1. "Duets" and "Solos" for ages 3 to 5
 - 2. "Combinations" for ages 5 to 17 (Group and private lesson packages)
 - 3. "Introduction to Piano" Class
 - 4. Private Lessons
 - B. Proprietary Position
 - C. Customer /Client Analysis

- IV. Market Analysis
 - A. Description of the Total Market
 - B. Industry Trends
 - 1. Family Focus
 - 2. Flexibility and Convenience
 - 3. Sense of community
 - 4. Sense of fun
 - 5. Social
 - 6. Current
 - 7. Safe
 - 8. Developmental benefits
 - 9. Movement
 - 10. Clear marks of progress
 - 11. Performance opportunities
 - C. Target Market
 - D. Analysis of Competition
 - 1. Piano-based music programs
 - 2. Musical preschool programs
 - 3. Non-piano music programs
 - 4. Non-music programs
- V. Operations
 - A. Suppliers
 - B. Equipment Requirements

C. Personnel Skills

VI. Marketing

A. Pricing and Terms of Sale

B. Distribution channels

C. Advertising and promotion

D. Sales Plan

E. Market and Sales Projections

VII. Management Plan

A. Form of Organization

B. Key Personnel

C. Staffing Plan

1. Executive Director—Fulltime

2. Manager—Fulltime

3. Studio Assistant—Part-time

4. Teachers/Team Leaders

5. Teachers

a. Full-time (20 teaching hours/week) - two

b. Part-time (under 20 hours/week) - two

c. Assistant Teachers - two

Exhibits of the Business Plan

There were six exhibits. The first, Exhibit A, included the financial documents which are generally required for all business plans. The additional exhibits were optional. The financial documents included a start-up costs worksheet and cash flow projections for three

years. These documents were suitable for submitting to a bank for the purposes of obtaining a loan, soliciting private investors, and for beginning a dialogue about the viability of the proposed business.

Exhibits B through F related to both business and educational concerns, offering further elaboration of points presented in the main document. This was done as advised to promote the readability of the business plan, providing the reader with the essentials upfront with the option to dig deeper.

Exhibit B was a sample floor plan to show how equipment and musical instruments would be utilized. This sketch was used to determine many of the costs, such as the number of teachers and students that could be accommodated at one time, and the number of instruments and computers that could be placed in the studio.

Exhibit C contained two successful ads that were used to promote a similar music program for “Music by Pam”, my current piano instruction business.

Exhibit D was a collection of photos showing classes in action at “Music by Pam”, plus testimonials of parents and students. This was included to provide potential investors with evidence of past success using the curriculum. It might also help employees or clients understand what would occur in the combination lessons. (Live clips of student performances as well as group and private lessons were included in the PowerPoint Presentation.)

Exhibit E was called “Resources for Teachers” and it contained various educational components: a sample lesson plan, a lesson planning template, and resources for learning about creative education. This section was designed to show business people how teachers would create lesson plans that fit the teaching philosophy of the studio. It also contained a

sample schedule to show how teachers and managers would organize studio time and space during combination lessons.

Exhibit F included excerpts from a paper entitled “My personal philosophy of music and instruction” which I wrote as part of an assignment for a graduate class in educational psychology. This paper provided insight into my teaching style and described the theories behind it. It explicitly outlined my thinking regarding how students learn and how they should be taught in the environment I was describing. It provided further evidence of my educational background as well.

PowerPoint Presentation

Unlike the written business plan which was aimed primarily at investors and adhered to the customary format, the PowerPoint presentation served several purposes and included graphic and video elements in addition to text. It was designed to integrate the technical aspects of the business plan with a dynamic presentation of the musical programs, showcasing the potential of the School of Creative Music Education (SCME). It contained over 95 slides that could be strategically selected to suit any audience: potential investors, partners, teachers, employees and even clients.

Part I contained a summary of sections 1 to 7 of the business plan as well as a few supporting elements from the exhibits. Part II was called “Foundations in Music, Education and Creativity” and it contained an overview of the theories that support the curriculum of the SCME. Part III was a multimedia portfolio called “The Curriculum in Action”. Quotes from satisfied clients were presented along with photos and video clips of group lessons, private lessons and student performances.

Essentially, the PowerPoint presentation was a sales tool and vehicle for sharing my ideas with others. Although the establishment of a business would be exciting, at this point I see the presentation leading to dialogue, collaborations and improvements to the program. It is a visionary business plan, an example of what might be done to enhance music education and what role business might play. It is my hope that sharing the presentation will inspire others to consider the role of creativity in education across the curriculum, while also providing a moral high-ground for the establishment of a business that benefits members of the community. A sample slide is included in Figure 1.

Figure 1

A Sample Slide from the PowerPoint Presentation.



Section Five: Key Learnings

I absorbed a great deal of knowledge in the process of assembling the business plan. The learnings about the content enabled me to create the product to fit my needs. The learnings about the process will stay with me into every other project I am involved with in the future.

Content

There were several learnings pertinent to the general content of a business plan. The meetings at the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) combined with the review of the business literature consistently underscored the point that writing a business plan is an ongoing process (Awe, 2006). This helped me to stop obsessing over the fine details of the the business plan. I thought to myself, “why bother perfecting something that will most likely be changed?”

Related to this was the discovery that I did not need a 100-page plan that would require six months to research and prepare. According to Spors (2008), “many venture capitalists and investors now say an effective 10-minute slide presentation or executive summary can be more effective than a full-blown written plan”. This statement altered my perspective about the final products and led me to spend more time on the PowerPoint slides.

Second, I learned that the process of thinking through all the elements that traditionally make up a business plan can be “very helpful in honing strategy and dodging potential calamities” (Spors, 2008). Doing thorough research is not for impressing the bank, but for discovering weaknesses and increasing the chances of success. Building on that principle, Mullins (2003) argues that it is not until the idea or plan meets the market that many of the realities come to light. Without a “test-drive” some gaps are not apt to be

discovered. However, this gave me confidence because I had already gained two years of experience running a similar “pilot” program through my current business, “Music by Pam”.

Finally, I learned that the format is flexible enough to adapt to the specific needs of any particular business or situation. The exhibits gave me space to weave in several curriculum-related components, testimonials and picture pages of my current piano studio. More importantly, I was able to bridge the past with the future by moving beyond the context of my present piano studio, “Music by Pam”, and my experiences there. Discussions with the advisor at the SBDC and other business professionals led me to create a visionary business--one based on an ideal state and not constrained by the limitations of my current operation. This approach was suitable because it gave me permission to freely play with my ideas. Only later on did I work at taming them to fit into a realistic framework.

Overall, I was satisfied with the products that resulted. I believe the business plan was effective in conveying the overall concepts of the School of Creative Music Education. However, I viewed it as a prototype that would surely undergo many more revisions. The PowerPoint presentation has also proven to be an inspirational piece based on feedback collected so far.

Process

Reaching out.

When is it appropriate to draw on the expertise of others? At one point does self-reliance become a matter of pride, no longer giving an edge but presenting a limitation? These are questions that have repeatedly challenged me. At the onset of this project, I needed to address them. Since I was learning a new, complex task, had a limited timeframe, and wanted the idea to have every chance of success, I felt that my usual ways of tackling a

problem would be inadequate. With bigger dreams, I needed a bigger ladder! So I felt the best approach would be to make an appointment with an advisor at the SBDC, located right on the campus of Buffalo State College. Various people had been encouraging me for months to take advantage of the programs there but I had resisted. I was uncomfortable allowing someone to evaluate a raw idea before I had thoroughly researched it. But I went anyway, articulating my vision for a music school in the best way I could at that time. The risk paid off.

The result was a tailored approach for my situation. My advisor was able to offer not just technical assistance, but assurance that I was headed in the right direction. She saved me valuable time, always pointing me in the right direction, indicating the next steps, and assuring me when I was on the right track. For example, she helped me work through the challenge of estimating critical financial figures. She assured me that that estimating was standard procedure and perfection was not required. She helped me pinpoint the critical matters so I could focus on what was important. It was a great learning experience and I have recommended the SBDC to many others as a result of my positive experience there.

Proceeding in a non-linear fashion.

After my first meeting at the SBDC I was excited about the process that would transform my ideas into workable solutions. However, my enthusiasm was quickly challenged by the first task: producing the financial data for the project costs worksheet. Everything I did in the studio had to be converted to numbers! This posed an enormous problem for me: I was beginning with my weakest area and I didn't know where to start despite being given a list of tasks. There was a good amount of ambiguity.

For example, to calculate the startup costs of renting space, I had to know the answers to these questions: where would I be renting? What was the square footage? Would there need to be renovations? But I was unable to answer these questions unless I had identified who and where my target market was and how much space was needed to accommodate the proposed number of teachers and students. To answer these questions, I needed to do some planning and research. But it seemed that as I attempted to answer each question, I encountered additional sub-problems.

Finally it became apparent that my need for data revolved around a clear understanding of the school's physical space. Once I sketched out a floor plan with enough room to accommodate the instruments, equipment, staff and clients of the SCME, the answers came quickly. Although in hindsight the solution was simple, the process was not linear. Only in uncovering the central issue did the process begin to move forward in a more sequential manner.

Taking the leap of faith.

The process of moving forward based on the advisor's recommendations combined with the frequent use of estimated figures gave me a sense of proceeding blindly. I did not really understand the big picture and this gave me considerable anxiety. But once the first set of figures were presented and evaluated, I was more clear about my position and felt more comfortable. My advisor and I discussed what needed to be fixed, and chose the best way to do it. Overall, this process worked very well and saved time but it didn't happen until I first performed what felt like a "leap of faith". I had to give the advisor something to work from.

Later on, it made me wonder if this sense of unease would improve with experience or if it was something I should always expect when facing a new, large or ambiguous

challenge. Perhaps embracing this emotion, rather than simply enduring it, allowed people to be frequent risk-takers. Encouraged by my recent success in completing the business plan, I decided to personally test this theory by seeking bigger and more challenging projects in the future.

Converting the idea into reality.

The difficulties I encountered made me view the project differently. Although it was slated as a project about creating a music school, it was also about overcoming the obstacles that stood between the ideas in my head and the real world. The process led to a new subtitle which I used in the PowerPoint Presentation: “Idea Meets World”. Having a good idea is something that is much celebrated in virtually all aspects of business and daily life. But it is just the beginning: without refinement and follow-through, it may remain only an idea.

What I would do differently.

Since I was under the guidance of an advisor, the process plan shifted towards “doing” before I had finished my research. This prevented me from having a “big picture” approach and contributed to my sense of unease during the process. Since I did not clearly see the relationship between the business plan write-up and the financial documents, I was not efficient in the manner I preserved and organized the data I compiled. As a result, I later had to retrace my steps to recover the source of many calculations. I felt like I was repeating my work. However, in the future I would be able to avoid this “novice” error by preparing the documents differently. I would know which data was going to be needed for the write-up and would probably begin writing sections three to six as I went rather than waiting for the financial documents to be completed. This simply would work better for me, as it would

preserve my thinking regarding the production of the data. I could easily transfer the key figures into the project/start-up costs worksheet afterward.

Section Six: Conclusion

Learnings about Creativity and Change Leadership

As musician and composer, I began this project with some experience producing a creative product. Also from my studies in creativity, I understood that it was hard work to take an idea through to completion. But this project involved a domain in which I had limited expertise. The challenge was complex and ambiguous, and required me to rely upon my learnings of the past two years regarding creative process. There was a constant need to reassess the situation in order to monitor my progress, meet the deadlines, and move forward towards my goal. As I navigated through the many steps, I gleaned a number of specific learnings about creativity and change leadership.

The benefits of a formal process.

Although the creation of a product was not new to me, as mentioned above, I had not previously used CPS or any formal creative process for such a task. I had always relied upon my own intuition and implicit understanding of the task at hand. Although I would document the process at times and engage in reflection, it was not done for the purpose of formally conveying the process to others but merely for my own benefit. The format of this project enabled me to look back at my process, analyze it, and gain insight into my strengths and weaknesses as a creative person.

As a result, I have evolved as a creativity and change leader because in addition to knowledge, I have gained experience. I have modeled the way for others who might wish to

tackle a large and complex problem. I now have a concrete frame of reference for future endeavors. In that way, I am now better able to train and coach others more effectively.

Write in pencil.

Although planning is necessary, any action plan should be considered flexible. As new data emerge, the problem space evolves. Assessing the situation regularly helps to maintain focus, or redirect focus. I learned that it was necessary and appropriate to change the sequence or the emphasis when needed.

Basic tools can do the job.

Simple tools for diverging and converging—like brainstorming, PPCo, and action plans—can handle most of the tasks. I found myself diverging constantly for data, problem statements, ideas, criteria, action steps. I found the answers came rather easily once I explored available options, so I am not as “convergence-challenged” as I thought! This proved that quantity does breed quality. I also drew on a favorite tool, “Targeting” (Puccio & Miller), which was very helpful in giving me visual feedback in tracking my progress toward the goal.

Weaving a web.

With a complex, ambiguous problem, the road is not usually sequential. If I diagrammed my process, it would look more like a web than a line. When ideas were flowing, I had to get used to things being very “messy” as ideas diverged in different directions. At times, it was difficult to categorize or label where I was in the process, especially when I was working from intuition and experiencing “flow”. Many times, the process went ahead of my ability to document it: writing it down and labeling what I was doing prevented me from following a stream of thought. In those instances, I had to go back later and write down my

reflections. This phenomenon has led me to want to know more about mind-mapping as it seems it might be a more efficient means of documenting a process like this.

Risk is relative.

There are various levels of risk. There is the calculated financial risk of taking out a large loan to finance a business start-up. There are also smaller risks that can be personally challenging or present psychological barriers, such performing in public. Creative endeavors include risks large and small, public and private, depending on our personality and experiences. In the process of completing this project, I was confronted with barriers that turned out to be related to risk. Often, the benefit of facing risk-related fear outweighed the comfort of giving into it. When I analyzed my reasons for avoiding certain tasks or decisions, I realized that the fears were surmountable. A simple game of “Why? What’s stopping you” often uncovered my true motivations.

As a result of this personal insight, I have felt a growing desire to increase my assertiveness in several areas: in reaching out to people, taking advantage of available resources, finding answers to questions, and filling gaps in data. I realize that avoidance will prevent me from accomplishing my creative goals. Now that I am more aware of risk at various levels, I hope to adopt more productive habits (while dropping negative habits) and face challenges more quickly and more directly than in the past.

Next Steps

The writing of a business plan was a single stage of a longer process. I see this business plan as a prototype: a visionary plan that helped me formulate my ideas and has enabled me to share it with others in a concrete way. I do not feel ready to launch it, but I do feel ready to share some of its concepts. Therefore, the next step is to get additional feedback

from various experts in business, music, and education. I am interested in developing the concept to meet real needs as seen by these domains.

One of the key goals of getting feedback is to assess if the business as proposed could be done on a wider scale. Would this business idea fly in other cities or other regions? Can adequate evidence be gathered as to the demand for this service to justify its promotion as a potential chain? Additional marketing data would be needed. However, I am hoping the experts I contact will give valuable insight into the viability of such an enterprise.

There are two reasons that a wider target is desirable. I believe that private investors will be more interested if the potential market is regional or even national. This in turn would spread the message of creative education to more people, which is my primary mission.

However, while such success would be celebrated, it would also create pressure for me to expedite writing the curriculum. The lack of written curriculum is a critical gap in the business plan and it would need to be completed before the school could be replicated. . A Teacher Training Manual and Lesson Planning Book should also be created to provide explicit guidelines for carrying out my philosophy and style of teaching. Since writing these things would be a major undertaking—the equivalent of writing a book—having an immediate potential audience would justify the time and effort. The investment would become a calculated risk, not just a “labor of love”.

Finally, the business would need a unique name and a trademark.

Potential Elaboration

There are many directions upon which this project could be built. The most obvious is to adapt the business plan to include other art forms. Also, it could be crafted for non-for-profit purposes and used in a school or church.

Ideas for lowering the startup costs and /or increasing profitability would add to the strength of the business plan. Some ideas for addressing these issues follow.

Partnering with a school.

Establishing a partnership between the School of Creative Music Education (SCME) and a public or private school would provide many benefits. At a school, there is classroom space, adequate parking and a built-in market in the student population. The school might already have one or two pianos plus rehearsal space. They might also appreciate additional keyboard instruments being housed in their facilities. Additionally, the hassle of setting up as a non-for-profit could be avoided by subcontracting from a school that has non-for-profit status.

Partnering with another studio.

Many well-known restaurant chains have taken advantage of the cost savings of uniting under one roof. One example of companies that have done this are Kentucky Fried Chicken and Taco Bell. From this idea, new pairings are suggested. For example, offering lessons on instruments in addition to piano would increase the number of potential students, increase the number of collaborations, and widen opportunities for students in learning and performing. Another idea is to pair the piano or music instruction studio with a preschool, after-school care program or kid-sitter service.

Partnering with a piano dealership to provide instruments.

Many universities obtain quality instruments through special arrangements with local piano dealerships. They are often loaned to the institution and then sold the following year. The dealer gets the opportunity to essentially expand his showroom, gaining additional exposure for his products to people who might never have entered his store. The instruments

are seen, heard and used by students every week. At the same time, the music school lowers its costs.

Final Remarks

This project has fulfilled my desire of completing a business plan that shows the potentiality of a music school that promotes creative education. It has room for development, but is a strong first step toward implementing positive change in my community. As a result of this project, I now have a clearer understanding of the immense challenge of bringing a new product to market. I also learned a valuable skill that will boost my performance in any future business ventures. This project has increased my confidence, expanded my knowledge of business, helped me overcome weaknesses, and provided me with a platform to begin sharing my ideas. Most of all, this project has strengthened my belief in the importance of participating in the creative process—because not only are ideas transformed, so are the people engaged in the process. I am grateful for all that I learned and the ways in which my own thinking has changed.

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Appendix A
Concept Paper

Writing a Business Plan for the Establishment of a School of Creative Music Education

Name: Pamela A. Szalay Submitted: February 21, 2008

Project Type: Work on a new skill /Meet a product need or vision

What Is This Project About?

This project is about learning how to prepare a business plan and deliver it to the appropriate target. It is also about creating a product that will meet a need in my organization. I will explicitly articulate my vision for a music school that promotes creative learning, carefully delineate its various programs and the philosophy that guides them, share the available research supporting the programs, and write a business plan. In this way, I will be able to give outside interests the opportunity to evaluate the validity and assess the potential of a school of creative music education. Also, it is an opportunity to highlight the role of creativity in education, and argue that it is a valuable skill that can be taught.

Background to the Project:

There is an abundance of traditional piano lessons offered in Western New York, in homes, private studios and local music dealerships. However, that style of instruction does not suit all students. Furthermore, music lessons conducted in the proper environment can provide an opportunity for students of all ages to acquire and practice various thinking and creativity skills. Finally, there has been a commercialization of many children's programs over the years: sports, dance, martial arts all offer programs that provide rich social experiences and inventive ways of promoting progress in that discipline. It seems that parents are willing to invest in programs that both entertain and educate their children in novel ways, and that children stay with programs that offer interaction and low-risk, fun environments.

In an attempt to meet perceived needs in the market-place, I have been testing a new format of piano and keyboard instruction for about two years. It has been met with success, despite the fact that the program can only operate in a limited way (due to the small staff and space availability). It is now my wish to elaborate on the concept of a Creative Music Education Center, presenting it both as a viable business opportunity and as means of providing a valuable service. The goal is to attract investors, a partner, or a buyer. In order to do this, I will have to increase my knowledge and practical skill in business and use Creative Problem Solving.

Rationale for Choice?

I choose this project because it unites my skills in music, music education, creativity and business. It will be a stretch experience because I lack formal business schooling and will need to acquire additional knowledge and skill sets in order to complete this project. Also, this project will bring closure to a concept I have seen evolve from the initial idea, to its elaboration, to its partial implementation. By disclosing the complete vision I have for a School of Creative Music Education, I am capturing the data for others to use or build on.

What Will be the Tangible Product or Outcome?

I will create three products. The first will be a brochure/portfolio highlighting the music education and creativity components of the school. The second will be a business plan for a School of Creative Music Education. A power-point presentation will unify the two print elements.

What Criteria Will You Use to Measure the Effectiveness of Your Achievement?

Since I expect to present to skeptics, I intend to create products that are polished and professional, adhering to high standards for both content and appearance. The products will be something I am proud to stand behind. If they are not, then I will shy away from sharing them. So I will know I have been successful in my goal if I feel confident enough to present the materials to potential investors, partners or buyers. Another potential avenue would be presenting the concept at a conference.

The exact specifications needed to meet a high standard in my product quality will be determined by the research.

The ultimate benchmark for success would be that the business plan leads to the establishment of a commercially viable business. But in terms of ideas, a sign of success would be the adoption of my concepts by other institutions.

Who Will Be Involved or Influenced; What Will Your Role Be?

This project involves the following individuals and groups:

Myself

My job in the next few months will be to explicitly articulate my vision for the studio, carefully delineate the various programs that would occur and share supporting research, and to present a scenario of how a business might be built in support of such a concept. I must

present the information in such a way that outside interests may evaluate the validity and assess the potential of both the program and the business model.

Current Personnel

Instructors currently working in “Music by Pam” (the music school I am currently operating) will be asked to provide input at certain stages of the project. They may have ideas or insights about the program that will help in developing the final product. They may also have impressions about the clientele or other business matters that may help in preparing the business plan.

Clients

Students and their parents may provide valuable input on the current programs. They may also give feedback on outside programs they have attended. This could provide useful data in showing the value of the program to interested parties.

When Will This Project Take Place?

This project is the second phase of a larger piece. Phase one began about three years ago when I began planning the first group lesson. Here is a suggested scenario depicting the current phase as the second one of four:

Phase	Time Frame	Description
I	2004-2007	Research, development and testing
II	January to April 2008	Creation of brochure/portfolio and business plan
III	May 2008 to May 2009	Presentation of products to outside interests and at conferences Respond to feedback and refine products
IV	May 2009 to May 2010	Negotiate for successful implementation of concept

Where Will This Project Occur?

The research and production of this project will occur in the city and surrounding areas of Buffalo, New York, U.S.A.

Why Is It Important to Do This?

This project revolves around human potential. It is my wish that every child receive the tools that will help him reach his potential. I feel that this could occur through music lessons. The benefits of learning music have been well established (Bilhartz, Bruhn, & Olson, 1999; Schellenberg, 2005). But research also shows there are benefits to creativity training. I suggest that creativity and thinking skills can be taught through music lessons.

At the core of my teaching philosophy are the following beliefs:

1. Each learner is unique—as shown by strengths, preferences and innate abilities.
2. Teachers can make learning fun and engaging.
3. Creative learning and thinking must be promoted in order for the students to reach their highest potential.

It is my wish that students of all ages and abilities come willingly, wanting to learn, and leave feeling like it was all play. So in the process of learning a skill they desire to have, they improve their ability to problem solve and to be creative. It is the best of scenarios: to teach people something fun in a fun way that has a trickle-down positive effect into other areas of their lives.

By sharing my concept for a school of Creative Music Education and writing a business plan that will support it, I am giving my ideas a chance to be considered, measured, evaluated, and hopefully replicated and enjoyed. If implemented, the community will benefit from quality education, children will be given wonderful opportunities to create music, and jobs will be created.

Personal Learning Goals:

- Improve my performance in the implementation stage of CPS.
- Embrace my role as a leader.
- Learn not to avoid or be threatened by conflict.
- Finally realize that, often enough, all that stands between myself and a goal is a well-written action plan.
- Learn to love deadlines. (Or at least appreciate them!)

How Do You Plan to Achieve Your Goals and Outcomes?

State the Challenge

Based on the research so far and the criteria I wish to address, the chosen goal/wish/challenge is:

It would be great if I could write a business plan for a music school that fosters creative learning.

Gather Data

Data will have to be gathered to support both the business and educational strands of the project:

1. Define the terms I will use: “business plan”, “curriculum”, “creativity skills”, and others.
2. Search the literature to see what business models exist.
3. Find literature on how to write a business plan.
4. Gather needed data as suggested by the research.
5. Gather pertinent research that supports the program’s curriculum, plus all the pieces of literature I have already created. Use CPS to select which data to use.
6. Contact people who may be able to offer advisement and expertise. Include contacts in the field of music education, both in university and grade school settings, and in business. Make an appointment at the New York State Small Business Development Center located on the Buffalo State Campus.

Analyze the Data

Allow the data to “speak”. Consider any criteria. Confirm that I am solving the correct “problem”.

Be sure there is enough time to do what I need to do! Make modifications to the timeline or adjust my vision of the final product to accommodate all factors discovered. Is the learning curve harder than expected? Is there more data to wade through than I expected?

Take time to play

Play with the data. What new ideas did I encounter? What are the different ways I can organize and synthesize them? See what emerges.

Experiment with different models and/or modes or presentation. See what works or what the implications are.

Choose Wisely

Select the best, most relevant data (or combination of) for inclusion in the business plan and portfolio. Consider criteria.

Finalize choice of format.

Seek Experts

Undoubtedly, I will not know enough of the business domain to assess my work properly. Get feedback before putting the final products together.

Assemble the final products

Apply all my recent learnings about business plans and assemble the products.

Evaluate the Product

Allow classmates to view the product. Collect feedback.

Evaluate product using my personal criteria.

Prepare for Meeting the Marketplace

Before concluding this phase of the project, design a “Plan of Action” to help link the end of this phase to the beginning of the next. Consider questions like: How to find investors? How to find business partners?

Evaluation:

After the final product is assembled, I will present it to classmates and colleagues for evaluation. I will offer a short presentation to give them the highlights. I will prepare a feedback form that will allow them to rate the product according to several criteria. I will also ask them to reply to a few open-ended questions.

Possible questions include: Does it look professional? Is it inspiring? Is the connection to creativity clear? Do you agree that this product could benefit the community?

I will ask myself: Is it complete? Was I able to capture the essence of my philosophy of learning and instruction? Does the business plan meet the standards of professionals in the field of business? Does it contain all the necessary elements from a technical perspective? Quite simply, I will ask myself if I finished what I set out to do.

Also, I will look back at the process and evaluate how I handled difficulties and surprises, how I solved problems, and how I overcame my personal challenges as a change leader.

Prepare Project Timeline:

Step	Time Frame
Gather data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect definitions of key terms. • Meet with an advisor at the Small Business Center. • Read selected books, chapters and articles (print and electronic) on business. • Assemble supporting research for theories in music education and creativity. • Prepare a list of questions. Interview clients and teachers. • Diverge: what are all the components I might include in a portfolio highlighting a creative music studio? • Obtain photos and video footage of piano lessons and group activities. • Answer the question: what is a business plan? • Recruit one or two “experts” who may be willing to give feedback in later stages. (Will they be willing to look at a draft of the business plan? Will they review the portfolio?) • Investigate printing options for final, bound write-up. 	February 20 to March 7
Analyze the data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the volume of information. • Organize, compare and contrast the data. Create tables or graphs to help discover patterns. • Identify remaining gaps in knowledge that need to be filled. 	March 8 to 11
Take time to play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get away from the task if necessary. • Use tools for diverging and converging. • Consider novelty! 	March 12 to 14
Choose wisely <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop criteria to guide me through the process. • Adopt or create a business model. • Create an outline of a business plan • Select the elements to include in the portfolio 	March 15 to 19

<p>Collect business plan data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather any missing elements or information. • Perform any required calculations, measurements, projections or assessments. • Assemble all elements into the first drafts of the business plan and portfolio. 	March 20 to 24
<p>Prepare draft of write-up for sections 1-3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review requirements of sections 1, 2 and 3. Refer to completed master's projects for examples. • Write draft. 	March 25 to 30
<p>Confer with experts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver draft versions of the business plan and portfolio to chosen experts in the field of business, music education, and/or creativity. • Get feedback. • Reflect on feedback. • Do a PPCo. • Make any desired changes. 	March 31 to April 6
<p>Prepare draft of write-up for sections 4-6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review requirements of sections 4, 5 and 6. Refer to completed master's projects for examples. • Write draft. 	April 7 to 11
<p>Final assembly of all components</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make arrangements regarding the binding. • Make final revisions to the write-up. • Prepare the final versions of the products: the portfolio, business plan and powerpoint presentation. 	April 12 to 23
<p>Deliver materials to printer for printing and binding</p>	By April 23
<p>Prepare to present the project to my classmates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize the products. • Prepare a summary of my experience. • Choose criteria for evaluation. Prepare a feedback form. 	April 24 to 29
<p>Evaluation in class</p>	April 30
<p>Prepare to meet the marketplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw up a plan to bridge the end of this phase to the beginning of the next. • Develop a "Plan for Action" with firm deadlines for reaching various targets. 	May 1 to 6

- Remind myself of my personal goals.

Final steps:

May 5-May 7

- Pick up bound master's project from the printer.
- Hand in final project.

Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources:

Amabile, T. (1989). *Growing up creative: Nurturing a lifetime of creativity*. New York: Crown.

Awe, S. C., (2006). *The entrepreneur's information sourcebook: charting the path to small business success*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

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Appendix B

The PowerPoint Presentation