

## **Business model design for the creative and cultural industries: enterprise education from the art school**

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Business model visualisation has become popular since Osterwalder and Pigneur published their 'business model canvas' in 2010. However, there have been few visualisations specific to the creative and cultural industries, despite the fact that these industries have particular characteristics and perceived lack of business knowledge is a barrier for graduates. This paper presents qualitative and quantitative data from a pilot project carried out in 2019-2020 at University of the Arts London (UAL) with funding from Enterprise Educators UK. The aim was to increase students' understanding of business models, specifically in the context of the art school and the cultural and creative industries. The project had two phases: the first looked at business models as a general concept, the second at the specific business models of graduate entrepreneurs. Core to both phases were three Design students, who created business model visualisations. In the first phase, the Design students tested their visualisation of the business model concept with a focus group of six fellow students. In the second phase, the Design students interviewed three graduate entrepreneurs about their business models, then tested their visualisations of the graduates' business models with a second focus group of five fellow students. While enterprise education is sometimes understood as something done *to* the art school, this project came *from* the art school, in that it deployed visualisation, testing and iteration as core methodologies. As well as the principles of design, the project was informed by active learning and 'learning by doing', which is key to effective entrepreneurship education.

### **Introduction: business modelling and the art school**

Teaching entrepreneurship in the art school – where it is often associated with a far-from-celebrated policy shift from public subsidy, associated with the 'arts' or 'cultural industries', towards innovation and growth, associated with the 'creative industries' or 'creative economy' (Hartley et al 2013) – is not the same as teaching it in the business school. The music industry is far from alone in being made up of 'reluctant entrepreneurs' (Haynes and Marshall 2017). Craft makers, for instance, may simply want to 'make a good living' from their practice – and "good" here refers to a not only financial reward but also operating a business in keeping with their value systems' (Luckman 2018: 324). At the same time, almost one in five graduates (19.85%) from UAL goes on to start a business; this makes UAL the number one university in the UK for graduate start-ups (Hitachi Capital 2020). It is our responsibility, then, to give our students the tools they will need to start a business and give those businesses the best possible chance of survival. The challenge is to introduce entrepreneurial concepts in language and imagery – and aligned to values – that resonate with students studying art, design, fashion, media and performance.

While enterprise education is sometimes understood as something done *to* the art school, this paper concerns a project that came *from* the art school, in that it deployed visualisation, testing and iteration as core methodologies. 17 students and recent graduates were involved in total, all recruited through an open call issued on our in-house recruitment platform, and all were paid for their participation with funding from Enterprise Educators UK. The project had a particular focus on business models, understood here to refer to the ways in which an organisation creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010). Much of the literature around business models dates to the dot com boom at the turn of the millennium, and the concept still tends to be associated with technological disruption – for instance, with companies such as Airbnb and Uber. In fact, every business has a business model, whether they realise it or not (Chesbrough 2006), including those in the creative and cultural industries.

The visualisation of business models – by which I mean design-led, visual approaches to understanding how organisations creates, delivers and captures value – has become popular since Osterwalder and Pigneur published their business model canvas in 2010 (Campbell et al 2017, Clark et al 2012, Van Der Pijl et al 2016, Van Wulfen 2014, Young Foundation 2013). Yet only Rodriguez (2016) has created a visualisation specific to the creative and cultural industries – despite the fact that these industries have particular characteristics (Kimbell 2018) and perceived lack of business knowledge is a barrier for graduates in the sector (Smith and Beasley 2011). The emergence of business model visualisation is linked to the rise of so-called

'design thinking'. Yet art schools were engaged in visual communication and idea generation – and emphasising the importance of prototyping, testing, iteration and co-creating with users – long before 'design thinking' was codified by business schools and management gurus. Design needs to be understood as a practice, not simply a set of tools (Hill 2012: 136), and Design students – unlike, for instance, your average management theorist – are deeply engaged in this practice.

As well as principles of design, the project was informed by active learning and 'learning by doing' (Bonwell and Eison 1991), which is a key to effective entrepreneurship education (Siok 2006). However valuable the business model canvas and its variants may be, from an active learning perspective it is even more valuable for students to create and refine their own business model visualisations. The project can be understood as an example of 'business modelling', defined by Rex et al (2018) as 'a heuristic technique organisations use to identify the range of activities and relationships (internal and external) they undertake where different kinds of value are exchanged... a means of enabling practitioners to define their own models which embody their values, objectives and position within the local creative ecosystem.'

### **Project structure**

The project began with a workshop to help the three Design students understand the concept of the business model and its possible applications in the cultural and creative industries.



Image 1: Based on the business model canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010) available from strategyzer.com. Issued under Creative Commons: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported

The Design students then worked collaboratively to develop an initial prototype that visualised the business model as a general concept, using their own words and images (image 1), developed from existing canvasses such as the business model canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010). This was followed by a focus group, in which

the Design students tested their prototype visualisation with six of their peers. They also engaged in focus group-style discussion on how the visualisations might be improved. Next, the Design students adapted their visualisation of the generic business model concept in response to the peer feedback (image 2). The students re-worked the business model canvas by adding colours to break the nine blocks into themed sections, and changed the fixed piece of paper or PDF into a set of interlocking cards which could be endlessly rearranged. The students also changed some of the language (was 'customer relationship', for instance, the right phrase, or would 'customer experience' or 'customer connection' be more relevant?) and added prompt questions to help students see the relevance to their own practice. Finally, to maximise the sense of interactivity, the students added a layer of acetate on top of each card, allowing users to write on each card and then wipe it clean. The students also created a film and a blog post, explaining how the visualisation had been developed and how it be used by fellow students and graduates.



Image 2: Based on the business model canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010) available from strategyzer.com. Issued under Creative Commons: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported

The second phase of the project, in which the Design students shifted from visualising the business model as a general concept to visualising the business models of specific graduate entrepreneurs, began with a second workshop in which each Design student prepared semi-structured interview questions for an entrepreneur. (These entrepreneurs only graduated in 2019 but all self-identified prior to graduation as committed to setting up their own businesses as they are making good on that commitment. Two work in costume design, while the third works in digital arts with a focus on gaming and virtual reality.) Each Design student then conducted a semi-structured interview with their respective graduate entrepreneurs, with the aim of identifying and then visualising the graduate's business model. Each Design student then visualised the business model of the graduate they interviewed. They then presented those visualisations to the graduates to ensure that the businesses were accurately represented, and modified them in light of feedback.

We then conducted a second focus group to assess the effectiveness of the visualisations of the business models of graduate entrepreneurs. There were five participants rather than six, since one fell ill on the day, but this

focus group otherwise worked as the first – expect that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had to be conducted online. Finally, the Design students finalised their visualisations, responding to feedback from the focus group. One graduate business model was visualised as a set of Perspex cards (image 3); another as a folded sheet of paper, allowing for the gradual reveal of business model segments (image 4); a third as nine circles, using a colour palette specifically chosen to represent the graduate in question (image 5). These were released under the same Creative Commons license used by Osterwalder and Pigneur for their business model canvas.

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## Business Model Design



Each piece will be made from perspex and laser cut to approximately A4 size. The perspex is to be used to lay images in a montage style of communication giving visual learners equal opportunity to engage. An identically cut plastic sheet will be attached at one side and layed over the top the of perspex. This will allow individuals to write words directly on the plastic using a wipeable marker. Once completed learners can use their camera phones to capture the final outcomes.

Image 3: Based on the business model canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010) available from strategyzer.com. Issued under Creative Commons: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported



Business model; unfolded

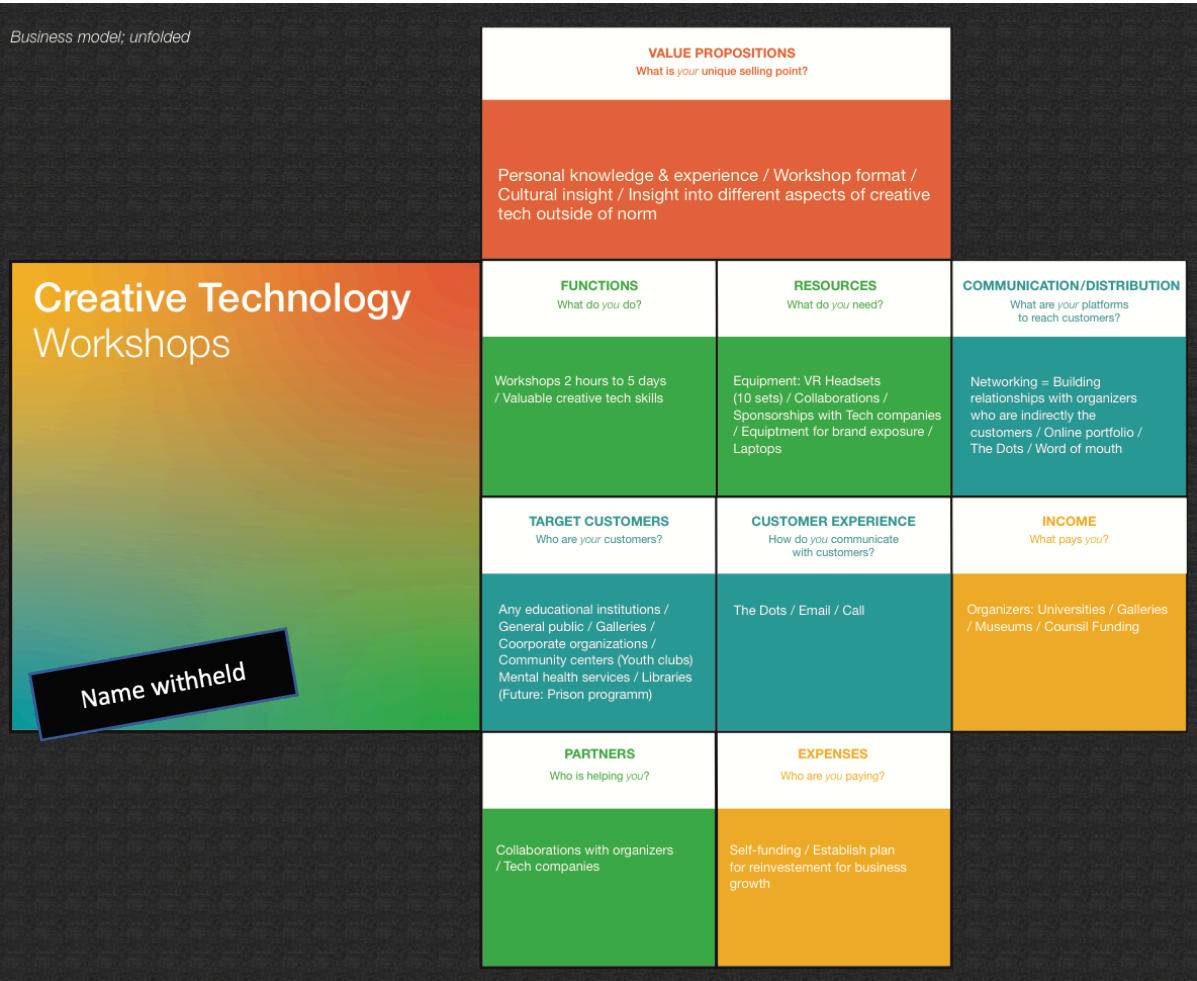


Image 4: Based on the business model canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010) available from strategyzer.com. Issued under Creative Commons: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported

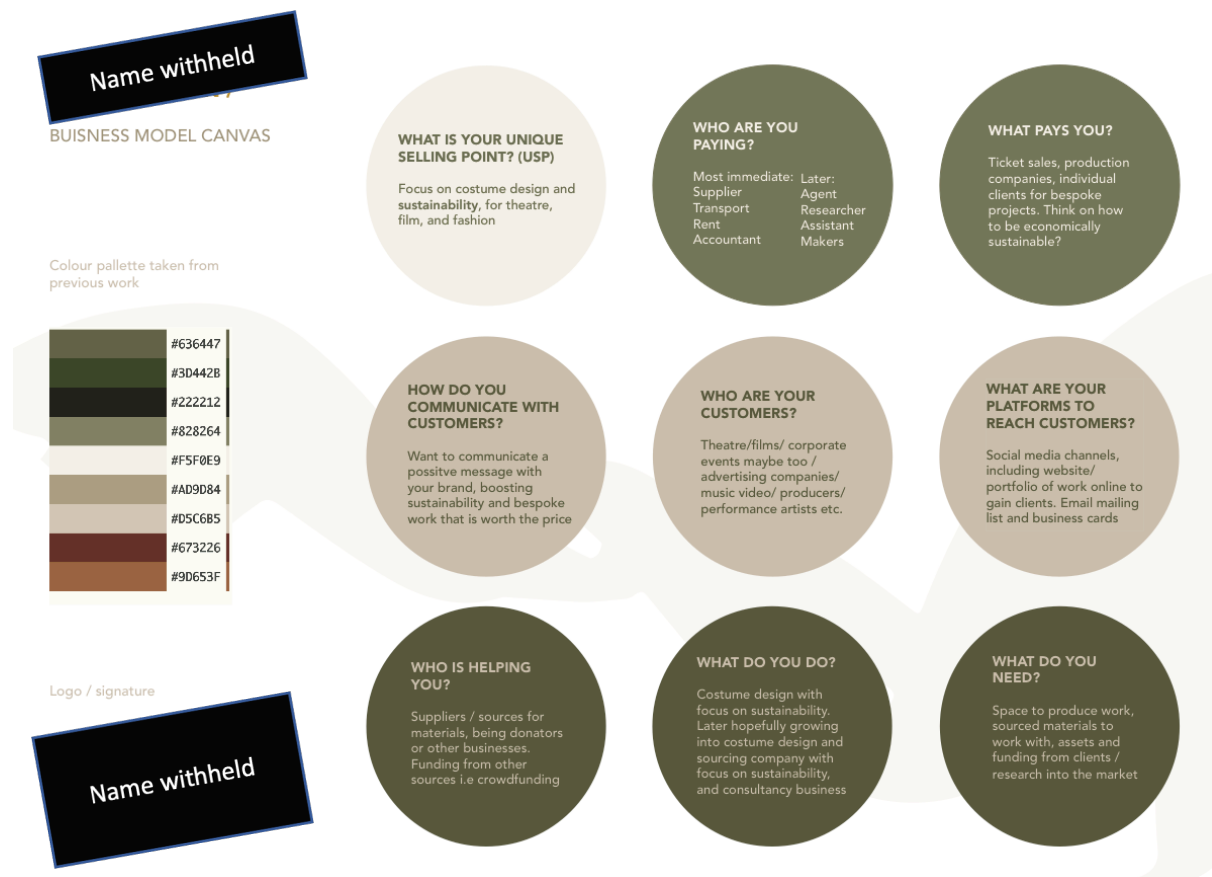


Image 5: Based on the business model canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010) available from strategyzer.com. Issued under Creative Commons: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported

## Findings and analysis

The project allowed me to collect qualitative data from the two workshops with Design students and the two focus groups. I also collected quantitative data through questionnaires completed by the 11 students who participated in focus groups and two of the three graduate entrepreneurs. (Data from the third graduate entrepreneur has not been used, because she dropped out during the project.) Analysing this data helps to answer two main questions. Firstly, what did participants already know about business models, and what was their attitude towards them? Secondly, to what extent did the visualisations increase participants' understanding?

### Initial knowledge of, and attitudes towards, business models

While participants came to the project with differing levels of knowledge, qualitative data from the workshops and focus groups suggests that there was in at least most cases some room for this knowledge to increase. The three Design students suggested in the first workshop, for instance, that business models were in some way related to business plans, but were not able to elaborate much beyond that. One of the graduate entrepreneurs and some participants in each focus group felt that knew what a business model was before the project began (see image 6). However, the data also shows some students began with far less confidence – including one of the two graduate entrepreneurs.



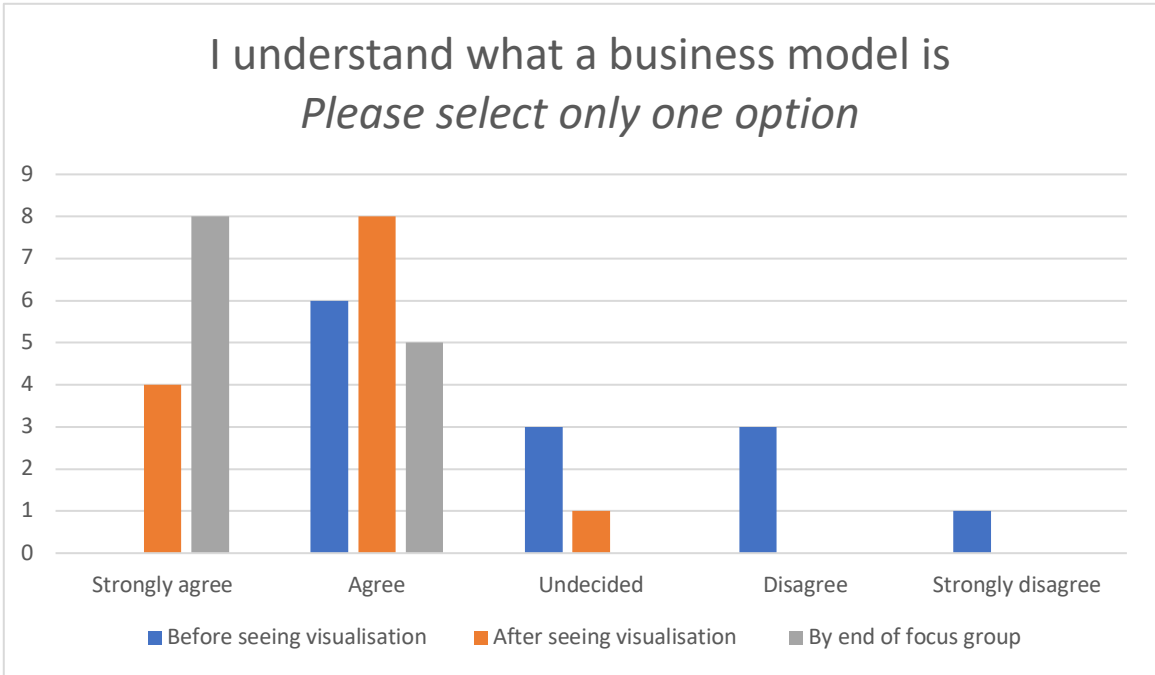


Image 6: Combined data from the two focus groups and the two graduate entrepreneurs

Quantitative data from interviews with the graduate entrepreneurs and from focus group participants suggests that several participants could already see the relevance of business models to the cultural and creative industries before participating in the project (image 7). Again, however, it is noteworthy that even one of the two graduate entrepreneurs came to the project 'undecided' as to whether or not business models were relevant to the cultural and creative industries. Quantitative data from the graduate entrepreneurs and participants in the two focus groups suggests that, while some began with an understanding of the relevance of business models to their own creative practice, this number increased in all three groups after engaging with the project (image 8).

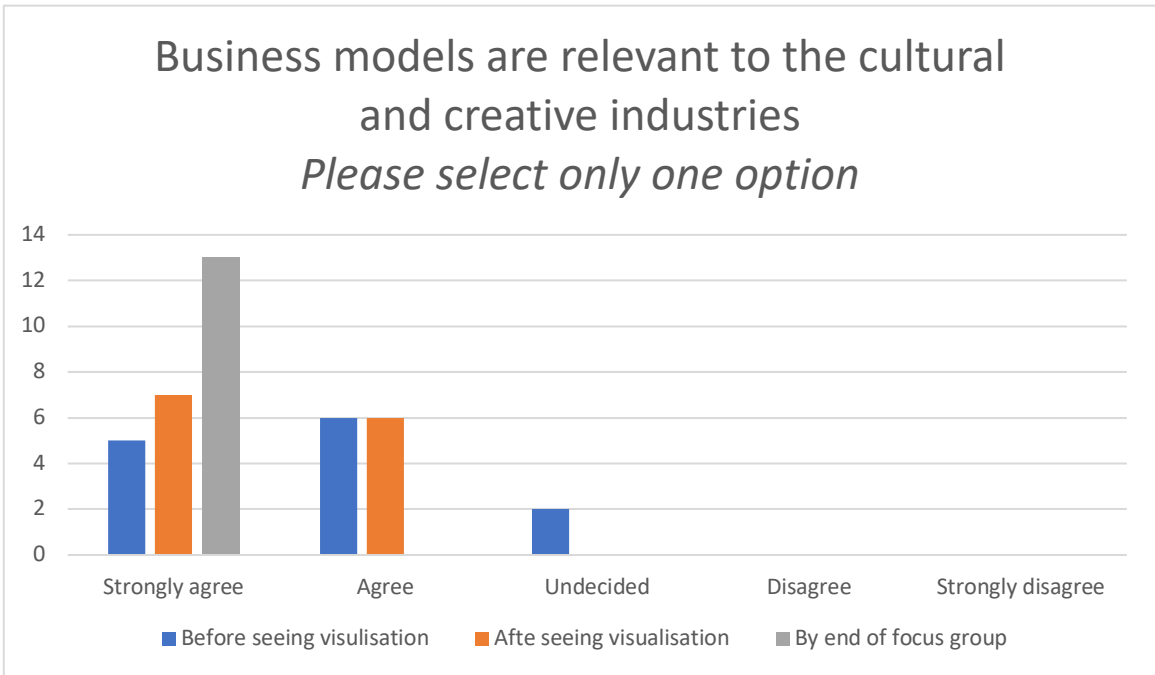


Image 7: Combined data from the two focus groups and the two graduate entrepreneurs

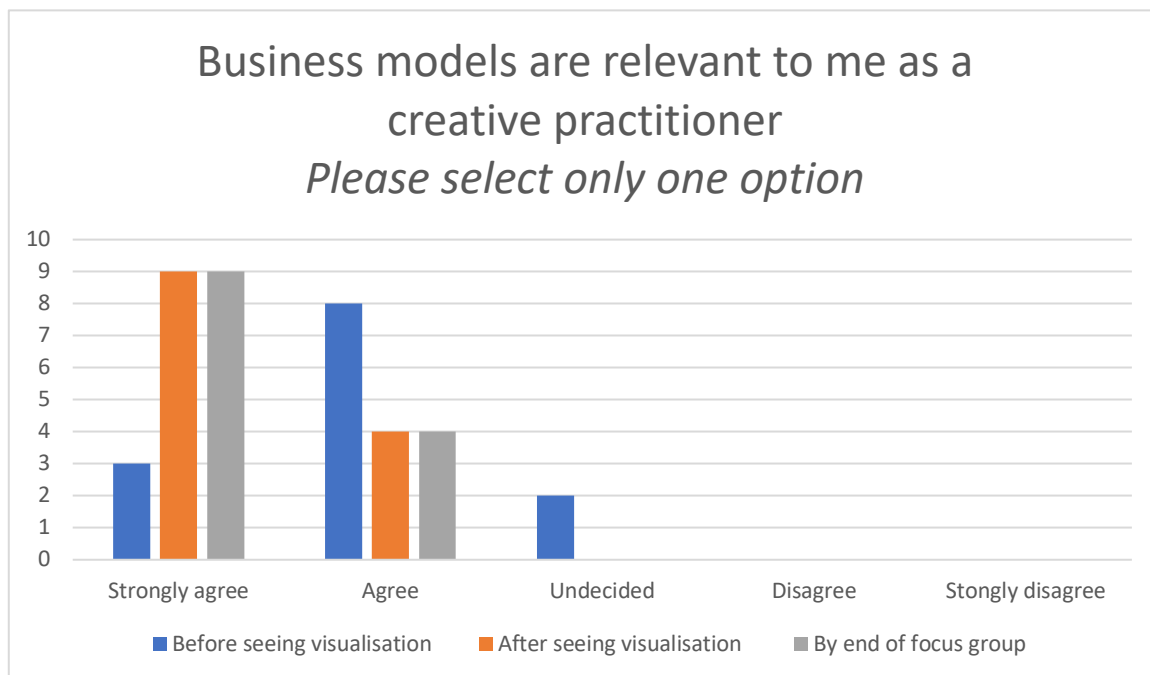


Image 8: Combined data from the two focus groups and the two graduate entrepreneurs

Qualitative data from the second focus group suggests that some participants began the project sceptical of the very notion of the business model and of entrepreneurship more broadly:

**Me:** I think we haven't heard from Student K, is that right?

**Participant K:** I think it [Participant J's visualisation] is very aesthetically lovely to look at. Um. I struggle with, um, I struggle with, um, like, losing things. And I struggle with... I'm a painter and, speaking of my student cohort, if we were presented this in a lecture, I'm not sure how, I don't know how positively it would be taken. I think that, like, in the art school, if we're talking about, like, trying to get business models to work inside the art school, like, unfortunately, a lot of my experience with painters in my year is, like, we're quite anti-business.

**Participant J:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Participant K:** I think it would perhaps be seen as sort of curtailing our creativity to try to fill in boxes like this. Even though it could actually be very helpful, I think you might you have to be aware that some people don't like doing this kind of thing. They see it as very corporate.

**Participant J:** Definitely. OK, cool...

As the second focus group continued, the conversation turned to the fact that Participant J had attempted to reflect the identity of the graduate entrepreneur he interviewed in his visualisation of her business model. The mention of 'branding' provoked differing views from participants, some of whom picked up on Participant K's comments quoted above:

**Participant A:** I think what [Participant K] is saying is really interesting, because whenever I hear the word 'branding', I just go 'agh'. Branding and business, on the one hand, seems to be the antithesis of the art school ethos. That, I think, is a real issue. And maybe we need to find different language around what is ostensibly planning your life. Because there isn't necessarily the scope, I mean even before the situation we're in right now [the COVID-19 pandemic], for every artist to become a business. And I think if you're actually looking at a really practical tool for students about to graduate – it doesn't matter what level they're at, even at PhD level you still have so pay your rent – is that there's a section of this thing, that could maybe not be called a business model, which actually does the practicalities of saying: how much do I need to earn in order to continue my painting practice, and where am I going to earn that from? How many hours do I need to work at the café or the pub while I build this up? So, it's not

about saying, it's just that reality check of saying, well, actually, my plan, whatever you want to call it, business model or career path or whatever, is based in reality. How much do I need to earn, how many materials, how much can I produce when I'm only earning this much from working in the café that's going to allow me to buy canvasses...? That is as much part of a business model as.... Anyway, I'll shut up now...

**Participant K:** I prefer that way more. That seems a much more pragmatic, real, down to earth way of talking about how we can sustain our creative practice. It's when it comes to making myself into a brand, I shut off, I just don't think that way...

Participants K and, to an extent, A, appear here to be expressing a Romantic or 'art for art's sake' (Caves 2000) perspective, not only assuming a binary opposition between culture and commerce but also assuming that the art school is firmly on the culture side of that divide. (Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it can be argued, by contrast, that art schools have in fact always been utilitarian; see, for instance, Quinn 2014). The participants' views may to some extent be due to language: at least some participants were more comfortable with 'sustaining their creative practice' than with acknowledging that they might have, or need to have, a business model. Data from the initial workshop suggests that the language used in typical definitions of the business model – for instance, relating to 'value' – does not communicate well to students in an art school context. There was likewise a sense in the first focus group that concepts such as 'value proposition' were difficult to understand.

Not all participants, however, expressed an 'art for art's sake' viewpoint. At least one participant in the second focus group, for instance, disagreed with the views expressed by Participants K and (to an extent) A:

**Me:** Maybe the phrase 'business model' is a very unhelpful phrase in the art school.

**Participant H:** Part of the purpose of this [project] is to also familiarise artists with the wider world, because a lot of the time artists do have a bohemian, almost, or not realistic, idea of how the world is functioning. So when... it's happened to me more than once. I've taken on a job and the language they are speaking in is not necessarily resonating with me because of my lack of experience. And then it's difficult for me to necessarily execute the thing [I am being paid to do], because I think of things in this individualistic way. Whereas as I feel that the construct of these business models is also to align you with the way the rest of the world is speaking in regard to how businesses do work. So, when you do approach your practice, [even though] you have, you know, some kind of qualms with the language that's used, you are able to translate that and understand that this is just basically a universal way of speaking. So, yeah, it is a business model. You don't really want to look at yourself as a business, but that's maybe your own personal way of interpreting it.

**Participant J:** Yeah.

**Participant H:** Whereas the things that [Participant J] and [Participant E] and I are designing are to familiarise you with some of these terms on purpose. Because you're going to have to come across them anyway, whether you like it or not. If you're costume designer, you're going to have to speak to some corporation to get a contract, you're going to have to sign something, do you know what I mean, to get that money into your account, to get paid, to get that invoice sorted out. It's quite interesting, as well, there is an element of this that is forcing people, artists, to adjust to the outer world, the world outside your practice, as well.

Interestingly, even Participant K's objection to branding, and apparent identification with an 'anti-business' viewpoint, was not fixed. Rather, her views appeared to vary according to her various professional identities:

**Me:** Maybe I didn't frame it particularly helpfully by telling everyone before we started that this was a business model. Maybe for [Participant K] that's immediately off-putting, before you'd even looked at the model.

**Participant K:** It is and it isn't. I do think of myself as a somewhat business-minded person. Like, I've set up a series of, I set up performance events with a group of my friends, where we charge for tickets, we run a bar, and it is about making money to put back into the events so there's more [money]. And that's the sort of thing where I do think of this as a business, where this kind of model would be useful, would be very useful. [Participant H's model] or [Participant J's model] would be really useful in helping with that. But when I think of my practice as a painter, it doesn't fit with that at all.

These findings challenge the stereotype of the art school as somehow removed from commercial realities and of art school students as commercially naïve. They also support those scholars who have argued for

entrepreneurship education now to be 'owned' by particular areas of the university, such as the business school (Carey and Naudin 2006, Hindle 2007, Jones et al 2012, Rae 2004).

#### Increases in understanding of business models

Qualitative data from the first focus group suggests that the visualisations did help make the concept of the business model more easily comprehensible, for instance through showing that it extended beyond revenue streams to 'back office' functions and communicating with customers. There is a clear sense in the qualitative data, too, that seeing the visualisation of the business model as a general concept, as experienced by those in the first focus group, increased understanding of business models. The subsequent focus group discussion increased this understanding even further. The same pattern – of the visualisations increasing understanding, and that understanding being further increased through subsequent discussion – can be discerned in quantitative data from the entrepreneurs and the second focus group, where discussions concerned the business models of specific business. The quantitative data also suggests that visualisations of specific business models in the cultural and creative industries (as seen by participants in the second focus group) were more useful than visualisations of the concept of a business models as a generic concept (as seen by participants in the first focus group), both in increasing understanding of business models and in showing the relevance of business models to the cultural and creative industries.

In terms of why the visualisations helped to increase understanding of business models, data from the second focus group suggests that participants liked the colours and (even though this focus group had to be conducted online) the fact that the visualisations were intended to be tactile. The following statement, for instance, was made after Participant G praised the tactile nature of the visualisations as helping overcome the 'off-putting' language of business:

**Participant H:** The physical aspect is really important. As artists, graphic designers, artists in general, we do work in a very tangible sort of way. Even though you might get this thing on your screen, there's a physical aspect to even getting it to that point. That's a lot of the time what is dismissed in this type of arena, when you're talking about corporate aspects like business: bringing this physical aspect where you use images, and moving around blocks, colours. Those things are way more inclusive for everyone, especially in art practice.

One unexpected finding in the quantitative data is that participants in the first focus group considered business models *less* relevant to the cultural and creative industries after seeing the visualisations than when they started the session, although all 'strongly agreed' about the relevance of business models by the end of the focus group (image 7). This is an anomaly. The graduate entrepreneurs clearly found the visualisations helpful, since both 'strongly agreed' with the statement that business models were relevant to the cultural and creative industries even before subsequent discussions. Quantitative data from the second focus group again suggests that the visualisations were very helpful – although in this case participants felt that their understanding was further increased by subsequent focus group discussion. Overall, all 13 participants who submitted quantitative data ended up 'strongly agreeing' with the claim that business models are relevant to the cultural and creative industries.

Members of the first focus group, who saw visualisations of the business model as a general concept, all 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that business models were relevant to their own practice after seeing the visualisations; all but one 'strongly agreed' by the end of the subsequent focus group discussion (image 8). The graduate entrepreneurs also 'strongly agreed' that business models were relevant to their industries after seeing the visualisations of specific business models. Finally, participants in the second focus group, who tested the visualisations of specific business models, all 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that business models were relevant to the cultural and creative industries – although, unexpectedly, the data shows a slight decline in the number who 'strongly agreed' after the subsequent focus group discussion. This again is an anomaly.

The project was not only intended to aid the understanding of focus group participants and the two entrepreneurs: it was also intended to help the three Design students who created the visualisations. Qualitative data from the second workshop suggests that there were improvements in their understanding of business models, apparently linked to the active learning component:

**Me:** Do you think that going through all this has helped you understand business models?

**Participant E:** When I look at this, I get it, I completely get it. But when I first looked at the traditional business [model canvas] I was so confused.

**Participant J:** It definitely says something. Taking the business model, which is quite complicated – not even complicated, very, I guess, bland, something that's a bit more corporate – and taking it a step back, just simplifying it, making it into something completely different, but still utilising the same qualities. I think it really does help. Like, I understand it a hell of a lot more than I did before the first session...

It is illuminating to compare these comments to those made by the Design students in the initial workshop, when they first encountered the original business model canvas:

**Participant J:** Oh my god. I hate it.

**Me:** That's so interesting. Why do you hate it?

**Participant J:** It's too boring.

**Participant H:** So boring, like, I'm already falling asleep.

**Participant J:** It needs to be more visual, the blocks, it's too... I don't know...

These findings support the move away from the business plan to business model that is evident in entrepreneurship education (Jones and Penaluna 2013) but suggest that even the shift to written business models does not go far enough: we need, instead, to consider the importance of visualisation, and to note 'the clear parallels' between the pedagogic approaches associated with design disciplines and the learning outcomes advocated in entrepreneurship education (Penaluna and Penaluna 2009).

## Conclusion

The sample size was small and not representative of the whole student body: the focus groups were made up of those who responded to an open call, while the two graduate entrepreneurs were approached directly. Any conclusions, then, must be tentative. However, qualitative data from workshops and focus groups, together with quantitative data from questionnaires, does suggest that the practice of 'business modelling' can be productive in an art school context. Several participants appear to have begun the project with little sense of what their own business model as a creative practitioner might be. There was a sense from some participants that the art school was essentially 'anti-business' or the 'antithesis' of business, although others acknowledged the need to familiarise themselves with business concepts. There was also a sense of participants shifting between professional identities, with one participant expressing 'art for art's sake' views in relation to one identity (painter) but self-identifying as 'somewhat business-minded' in relation to another identity (event promoter).

The data also suggests that this approach to teaching concepts related to entrepreneurship, in this case business models, has merit: all 13 participants who submitted quantitative data 'strongly agreed' that business models were relevant to the cultural and creative industries by the end of the project. On the whole, visualisations of specific business models appeared more effective in increasing understanding than visualisations of the business model as a generic concept. The Design students who created the visualisations also experienced an increase in their understanding. One reason for the effectiveness of this approach seems to relate to language: participants were more comfortable with the notion of 'sustaining their creative practice', for instance, than with the idea that they might have a 'business model'. Visual language appears important too: while the Design students found the business model canvas 'boring', focus group participants warmed to the fact that the Design students' visualisations were, by contrast, colourful and (at least intended to be) tactile.

In terms of next steps, there is potential to repeat the exercise with a larger sample, allowing more students and recent graduates to benefit. Repeating the project on a large scale would also generate more data, which would be useful in examining anomalies; these may be related to the small sample size, or flaws in the design of the questionnaire, but further investigation is required. While only the three Design students in this project saw the original business model canvas, it would be possible compare students' responses to the Design students' visualisations to their responses to the original business model canvas through A/B testing. It might be productive to undertake a similar project with a specific emphasis on business models with a 'triple bottom line' of economic growth, social justice and environmental sustainability (Elkington 1997, Honeyman and Jara 2019) or the circular economy (De Angelis 2018). Finally, the pedagogic approach adopted here, combining active

learning with visualisation, testing and iteration, could be used to teach other entrepreneurial concepts, for instance cash-flow forecasts.

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