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Designing a Transmedia Entertainment Business Management Curriculum

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Abstract

The aim of this case study is to describe the development of a transmedia entertainment business curriculum to address many common concerns about modern entertainment business producing, and more specifically, to revise an existing entertainment business management program in an effort to make it truly transmedia. The term *transmedia* was coined by Jenkins (2006) as entertainment that "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (97-98). This paper discusses the program curriculum's goals, design principles, main methods of assessment including so-called term "hub projects," and key challenges. It also presents some observations and recommendations arising from the implementation and delivery of the program between 2010 and 2015.

Keywords: curriculum design, producing, transmedia entertainment, entertainment industry, pedagogy, andragogy, experiential learning, Vancouver Film School

Introduction

As the number, variety, and availability of postsecondary educational offerings in the entertainment business increases, so grows the body of scholarship on the content, development, and delivery of entertainment industry curricula. This is particularly true in the music sector, where the industry terrain continues to shift dramatically. Hill (2003), Marcone (2004), McCain (2002), and Sobel (2007), are among the advocates for a careful re-examination of music curricula and represent a small sample of the voices contributing to a vital and necessary dialogue. Less abundant, however, is the literature on pedagogy or andragogy[1] specific to other sectors of the entertainment industry, and more particularly, the business thereof. As Collis, McKee, and Hamley (2010) note, as recently as 2010 there were still relatively few university degree or certificate programs training the next generation of business-oriented producers of televisual content,

even though the technical production of film and TV has been taught for decades at many renowned institutions of higher learning. As such it's no surprise that scholarship on teaching and learning the business of producing *per se* has not attracted as much attention in the academic canon. Rarer still are those educational institutions and programs that train producers of *transmedia entertainment*—that is, entertainment that "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins 2006, 97-98).

The aim of this case study is to describe the evolution of one such transmedia entertainment business program curriculum from a constructivist perspective, outlining its goals, design principles, main methods of assessment, successes, challenges, and finally presenting some observations arising from the implementation and delivery of the program between 2010 and 2015 at the author's home institution.

Rationale for Program Redevelopment

The original Vancouver Film School (VFS) Entertainment Business Management program (EBM) was implemented in early 2006 as a natural complement to the range of entertainment production offerings at Vancouver Film School, which had grown gradually and organically from a single class in film production in 1987 (Vancouver Film School 2016). By the time the EBM program was launched, the traditional VFS program model was well established: each one-year, entertainment production-oriented offering is comprised of six terms of roughly two months each, and approximately 1,000 contact (classroom) hours. With rare exceptions, each individual, accelerated course consists of seven instructional sessions of three hours each, and aside from a relatively small number of full-time faculty members and staff members in each program, instructors are primarily (if not exclusively) current industry executives and practitioners. The school now houses a dozen such intensive technical/vocational programs including Programming for Games and Interactive, 3D Animation, and Sound Design. With a focus on hands-on learning of production tools and techniques, each student graduates with a portfolio of entertainment productions.

As originally designed, the EBM program bore only a superficial resemblance to this distinctive VFS model; it had all the basic duration and layout features, but lacked the production-oriented focus of the other VFS programs. The EBM student's portfolio was mainly limited to business

documents like production plans, budgets, marketing assets, and so on, with the assumption or expectation that these would be used to produce the entertainment after graduation. In contrast, the other, less technologically oriented programs like Acting or Writing for Audiovisual Media culminated in a portfolio of productions, or at least one capstone project (typically a short film), for each graduate. Thus, EBM differed in its absence of course content devoted specifically to production methodology. This was partly due to a desire to avoid overlapping or competing with other VFS programs, and partly based on the assumption that its students would already be familiar with entertainment production processes and workflows; its initial target audience included graduates from the school's other production-focused programs and mid-career learners with some entertainment industry experience. The early EBM also fell short of the "hands-on" instructional approach favored by the school, with the majority of in-class activities and assignments remaining cognitive and conceptual in nature.

In most respects EBM resembled the common college or university music and entertainment business programs where the courses were mainly theoretical in approach; more traditional in their assessment methods (i.e., essays, exams, and case studies); and delivered as discrete units in independent subject matter silos. It bore few hallmarks of the type of integrative experience envisioned by Chase and Hatschek (2011) or the "optimal experience" described by Beeching (2005, 145-46). Still, within its first three years EBM had demonstrated sufficient demand for a quasi-"360 degree" entertainment business program featuring music, broadcast, and film, but program and VFS administration felt the key to its long-term viability was to bring the program into closer alignment with the school's other cohort-based offerings.

The primary goal, then, was to develop a best-of-breed, MBA style vocational program in the full, competency-based VFS mold and inspired by innovative executive schools like Hyper Island[2] and Denmark's Kaospilot,[3] with their experiential approaches to executive education, particularly in the digital realm. Secondary goals included incorporating more course content to reflect newer entertainment realities such as branded entertainment, crowdfunding, and digital entertainment production; collaborating with other VFS programs and departments in one or more cross-disciplinary curricular (or co-curricular) projects to foster networking among the school's roughly 1,200 students; and identifying interdepartmental synergies and/or potential cost savings.

Design Principles

Although the program had been continually modified over the two-and-a-half years since its inception, early changes were largely incremental. Course sequencing was periodically tweaked for flow, and content regularly updated. In late 2009 the author was tasked with a complete, top-to-bottom redesign to achieve the new program goals. The redevelopment was founded on a handful of key premises and principles:

1. EBM Learning is Experiential

To be most effective, the new EBM curriculum had to be, first and foremost, learner-centered, engaging, and meaningful, not instructor-led and abstract. Students may be attracted to the program or school, in part, by industry expert practitioner-instructors, but what makes them succeed is learning that is experiential, i.e., active, reflective, applicable to their current tasks, and ultimately transferable to other situations and contexts (Beard and Wilson 2002; Kolb 1984; Kolb and Kolb 2012; Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis 2001). Until the curriculum redesign, learning seemed to last only until the next evaluation, when the latest chunk of course content was to be tested, then soon forgotten. Students' desire to achieve good grades, not ongoing practice, was a key driver of success. Reflection and application only became apparent in later years as graduates occasionally returned with tales of how they were finally able to relate EBM concepts to their real-world employment situations.

2. EBM Learning Activities are Problem-Based

In keeping with the first principle, problem-based learning (PBL) should be used wherever appropriate because when we "solve the many problems we face everyday, learning occurs" (Barrows and Tamblyn 1980, 1). A critical role of entertainment producers is that of problem-solver and troubleshooter, so it follows that we should train our students in this direction from the outset. From its origins in medical training, PBL has been applied successfully in a wide variety of disciplines and subjects, including business administration (Hung, Jonassen, and Liu 2008; Merchant 1995). The motivational aspect of PBL (Savery 2015) also makes it an attractive strategy from the instructor's point of view. Not surprisingly, under the original EBM curriculum, students found it harder to self-motivate when their classroom activities and assignments were purely conceptual and not grounded in their own experiences. These need to be applicable either immediately, or at least in a readily imaginable future.

Although some research suggests improvements over conventional instruction on a number of dimensions including student satisfaction and graduate performance, PBL is not without its caveats, including potential costs and determining the appropriate amount of instructor guidance; it's also unclear to what extent the research findings are reliable and can be generalized (Albanese and Mitchell 1993). There is also the question of instructors' relative ability to incorporate PBL into lesson plans, as discussed under Constraints. Our own anecdotal experience in EBM, however, showed that problem-based learning could be instrumental in motivating the learners and making the learning stick.

3. Articulation is Key

EBM needed to walk the talk and mirror the transmedia ethos. Just as each transmedia property in a given franchise must be self-contained, it also forms part of a larger, holistic entity that creates deeper meaning, invites active exploration, and fosters community-building among its consumers (Jenkins 2006). EBM should reflect this, and not just via the entertainment projects created by its students. Courses, lessons, and other units of learning should be able to stand alone, but stronger linkages needed to be forged between lessons, course content, learning outcomes, and the possible career paths. Skills and knowledge learned through application in one specific context must be seen to relate to other situations or sectors. These connections must be made explicit rather than implicit in case students, overwhelmed by an intensive workload, are unable to see them.

4. Transmedia, Not 360

The old EBM curriculum was more of a multimedia or "360 degree" entertainment business program. In this paradigm, a popular TV show might spawn a film and/or a soundtrack (for example), supported by a promotional website. These outlets may exist in parallel but one is entirely dependent on another. To be truly transmedia, as described in Design Principle #3 above, the EBM program needed to embrace other forms of self-sufficient but equally intertextual entertainment such as graphic novels, apps, and alternate reality games. It also needed to rebalance the emphasis on traditional, offline media like broadcast to put the digital realm front and center.

5. Authentic Environment, Tasks, and Assessments

Actual challenges—i.e., those that are not purely academic exercises—stimulate problem solving, critical thinking, knowledge synthesis, and applying skills in real-life contexts (Ormrod 2000). In the new EBM there are no thought experiments or purely theoretical drills. Every effort was made to reduce or eliminate any essays or exams because the entertainment industry executive's typical workday seldom requires her to recall and regurgitate facts for three consecutive hours. She is more likely to be planning and executing marketing campaigns, managing projects, or raising venture capital. Therefore, students should be creating real business artifacts such as marketing campaigns, project charters, or pitch decks, and not merely reading and discussing case studies (although these can have a limited place in the classroom). Logically, they must also put the business artifacts to use.

Accordingly, authentic assessment, or performance assessment (Hambleton 1996), measures student achievement using methods that mimic real-life tasks (Driscoll 1994, Ormrod 2000, Woolfolk 2001). For example, an EBM project pitch may be evaluated by members of industry whom the students have only just met for the first time. While the pitch meeting can be as stress-inducing as the prospect of taking an exam for some, it is a far more relevant and realistic scenario they would encounter on graduation. Exceptions to the principle of authentic assessment were allowed in the introductory Term 1, when students are still acclimating to the EBM learning environment and when much of the learning was necessarily definitional and exploratory (see Constraints for further discussion).

6. Portfolio Production

Consistent with the other VFS programs, students of the revamped EBM had to graduate with a substantial portfolio that contained not only the entertainment content they produced over the course of their year, but also a demonstrable record of their business achievements arising from those productions. These include sales, social media metrics, chart positions, and other key performance indicators common to industry. In each of their six terms, students were tasked with pitching and producing a minimum viable product (Ries 2011) for a given category, such as a game, licensed entertainment product, live event, etc. These were referred to as *term hub projects* (further described under Structure), and together with the capstone Final Projects, they constituted the student's portfolio along-

side the compilation of requisite business artifacts, such as the aforementioned project plans, pitch decks, budgets, promotional collateral, and other practical documents found in the original EBM graduate collection.

7. Most Activities, and All Major Projects, are Team Based

For the faculty, the obvious advantage of this principle was fewer assignment submissions to evaluate, a significant savings of time and effort. Its prime benefit to students was spreading the notoriously heavy workload among team members. But the main consideration was the substantial evidence of the effectiveness of collaborative learning and teamwork as a time-tested and legitimate instructional strategy (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 1991; Slavin 1988; Slavin 1989-90). Active exchanges among participants in group work have been shown to promote critical thinking, learner interest and engagement, and knowledge retention (Johnson and Johnson 1986; Totten, Sills, Digby and Russ 1991).

While most of the copious research to date has been done on learners at the pre-college level, scholarship on the brain and adult cognition increasingly supports the use of collaborative learning techniques in adult education (Barkley, Cross, and Major 2005). There is considerable discussion about the difference between collaborative learning and cooperative learning (e.g., Bruffee 1995, Matthews et al. 1995, McInnerney and Roberts 2009), terms often used interchangeably. Some of the debate concerns the degree of emphasis on individual input and achievement, relative interdependence, or age, experience and related factors, but the distinction is beyond the scope of this paper. The redesign of EBM allowed for both collaborative and cooperative strategies.

Another benefit of extensive team-based classwork, assignments, and term hub projects was that it provided fertile ground for the leadership component of the program, discussed under Structure. Most entertainment business productions or firms are necessarily group efforts, and the EBM teamwork principle helped ensure authenticity in this regard, while providing important social context for the learning of leadership and emotional intelligence skills and building a community of practice.

8. Learning, Like Industry, is Iterative

In the traditional college classroom, students are seldom given opportunities to try again, except after a poor grade—if at all. Discouraged by failure, they may not follow up. Under the old EBM curriculum, how

successfully students absorbed and processed feedback remained virtually unknowable, as they generally had one opportunity to submit their best effort. Businesses, however, must learn by reviewing internal and market feedback to survive and thrive (Senge 1990). To encourage active experimentation and (calculated) risk-taking in a safe environment, it was important that students consistently incorporate formative and summative feedback. With each successive assignment, project, or term, the goal was constant improvement, which meant repetition would not only be unavoidable but indeed desirable. This emphasis on constant iteration in response to feedback is also consistent with the prevailing "lean" entrepreneurial mindset and methodology.

9. Learn Principles, Not platforms

Given the rate of change of technology and the business landscape in general, we felt it important to maintain platform agnosticism throughout the program. Except where absolutely unavoidable, EBM embraced no particular tools; budgeting, for example, had to be learned just as readily with pen and paper as on Excel, FreshBooks, or Movie Magic. Principles transcend platforms, so truly mastering a skill is the ability to apply it, regardless of the context, with negligible additional effort or adaptation required. This design principle was doubly practical because most EBM students choose to bring their own notebook computers loaded with their preferred applications; this principle avoided the obligatory purchase or license of any additional software that might go unused after their EBM year.

Constraints

The three most significant constraints in the redesign project were likely familiar to most curriculum designers: time, budget, and accreditation.

Although discussions with the school's Director of Strategic Program Development about the program redesign took place in September of 2009, the rollout of the new curriculum was slated for January of 2010. That left less than three months to redesign the entire program, at least in broad strokes. It was technically feasible to implement one term while still developing the next, but that was tantamount to laying new track as the train sped onward: not a comfortable situation, and one fraught with potential dangers. Given the tightly integrated nature of each component of

the program, we felt compelled to redevelop the curriculum in its entirety in that three-month window so that only the operational details remained to be handled, and individual lessons planned. Most critical was the scheduling of key learning milestones and projects/assessments.

Because the program was still relatively new, and enrollment limited by physical capacity (maximum class size was twenty-five students), the budget was also restricted. There had to be no net increase in per capita expenses, except where a tuition fee increase could be justified or higher enrollment would cover any new costs. After a great deal of discussion, recalculation, and assurances, relatively modest additional funds were found to support one of the major term hub projects, but with it came both a tuition increase and one extra intake per year, for a total of three cohorts in various stages of the program simultaneously. There were obvious concerns about the increased workload of the extra intake, but these were offset by the hopes that the influx of additional students and the reduced gap between intakes would create an atmosphere of heightened camaraderie and mutual support more conducive to learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). Newer inductees could also apprentice with the more senior students on the term hub projects where appropriate, gaining experience and production credits.

In Canada, education is regulated at the provincial level. The new program had to meet the accreditation standards of the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA), the British Columbia (BC) government body responsible for registering and accrediting private post-secondary schools. Standards are set with input from the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (BC Ministry of Advanced Education 2016).[4] Having recently completed a periodic PCTIA school and program review to positive feedback, we were confident that the core of the new curriculum would likewise meet or exceed standards.

A constraint unique to VFS programs was the school's distinctive one year/six-term, cohort-based educational model, described earlier. Each of the six, two-month terms typically contained five to seven courses (for a total of about 40 to 45 courses over the program) of seven sessions each. Consistent with this, each course comprised three instructional hours per class, for a total of 21 instructional hours (the so-called "7-21 model"). This meant, in effect, that each course could only be roughly half as long as the typical college or university course in a normal trimester or semester system.

Another complicating factor was the school's recent implementation of the open-source Moodle learning management system (LMS). EBM had been chosen as one of the first VFS programs to migrate to the Moodle platform in preparation for possible blended and/or distance delivery. This transition coincided with the last cohort under the old EBM curriculum so instructors, teaching assistants, and the program manager were already familiar with the technology and processes, but did not anticipate the amount of work required to revamp the program structure and individual course content in Moodle.

Since the decision was made to refocus EBM on portfolio production, the new curriculum had to strike a delicate balance so that students would learn the basics of any entertainment production methodology and workflow, without competing or overlapping with other programs (such as the longstanding Film Production program, which had its own Producing stream of elective courses).

The final constraint on the program development was limited instructor input. As stated, the majority of VFS and EBM instructors are contract-based adjunct faculty, mainly industry practitioners with limited time—and sometimes patience—for the nuts and bolts of curriculum development. This could be a blessing or a curse, depending on one's viewpoint; the axiom of "too many cooks" and the parable of the five blind men and the elephant come to mind. But of the seven curriculum design principles espoused in Boyatzis, Cowen, Kolb and associates (1995), the sixth—that the curriculum change process should be led by the faculty—was given least consideration here. This was far from ideal but necessary for practical reasons, not the least of which was that the majority of the program had to be redeveloped over the Christmas/New Year holiday between 2009 and 2010.

Method

This is not to say that input was neither sought nor received from instructor-practitioners; on the contrary, their feedback on the curriculum design was essential. Consultations with faculty members mainly focused on how to best operationalize authentic assessments and evaluations, achieving optimum intra-program articulation, and the seamless integration with the newly-conceived term hub projects. Other VFS program Heads and faculty members were extensively involved in discussions about collaborations across the respective program curricula. Input

was also provided by the incoming EBM Head of Department, whose term of appointment coincided with the new curriculum rollout and who had valuable and specific proposals regarding the nature and form of some of the term hub projects, among other program aspects.

As a first step, however, the baseline competencies and learning outcomes for the multifaceted program had to be established. The daunting job of extensive curriculum redevelopment was streamlined significantly by the prior work of the Cultural Human Resources Council (CHRC). The CHRC is one of over thirty industry sector councils formerly supported by the federal department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), and originally created in 1995 to strengthen the Canadian cultural workforce (Cultural Human Resources Council 2016). One way in which the CHRC continues to do this is by preparing up-to-date training gaps analyses, job profiles, and competency charts for the benefit of employers, workers, and educators alike. These competency charts were invaluable in specifying the essential skills required of workers in entertainment media production, marketing, and distribution, specifically producers and other entertainment executives in the fields of digital media, film and broadcasting, live performing arts, music and sound recording, and writing/publishing.

Since their first publication these competency charts had been used periodically to vet the existing EBM curriculum, so the next phase was a matter of reviewing what could be kept, and what could be discarded; what worked previously, and what didn't; and what could fit comfortably into the new structure. This was achieved through subsequent consultations with instructor-practitioners and the program's advisory board members, all of whom were senior executives in their respective entertainment industry fields and disciplines.

The author then used the Designing A Curriculum (DACUM) method for competency-based learning to align individual learning outcomes with course and program goals. Coincidentally, the DACUM process had its origins in Vancouver (Joyner 1995, see also Adams 1972, and Blank 1982). The most arduous and challenging phase was mapping out the curriculum on a weekly, and even daily, basis to understand how it all needed to fit in order to integrate with the term hub projects and accomplish all goals in the context of the one-year program.

As ambitious and audacious as it was, there were understandable concerns about what we came to call "just-in-time learning," i.e., the ac-

quisition of key skills when students required them to perform their immediate tasks and complete their assignments. These concerns were allayed by the iterative nature of the program described earlier, which meant that students would have recurring opportunities to improve and perfect their skills as the program progressed.

The final step was to produce a series of visual aids, including charts and PowerPoint slide decks, to help orient students, instructors, and administrators at the start of each new intake. These soon became useful to review at the beginning and end of every term in order to help everyone maintain focus and understand how all learning, courses, and assignments fit in the "bigger picture." An example of one such aid is shown in Figure 1.

Program Structure

The most prominent feature of the new curriculum was the *term hub projects*, so called because these entertainment productions formed the nucleus of all instruction and assessment. They provided a vital, practical linkage to all courses, content, and evaluations, offering a platform for all the hands-on, experiential, and problem-based learning. As indicated, these productions varied each term to enable students to experience the ideation, development, production, and marketing breadth of transmedia content, including film and TV, live events, music recordings, and games. This is in contrast to (but does not necessarily contradict) Garfrerick's (2006) hub-and-spoke model, where the program major serves as hub and the supporting areas of study are the spokes.

Term 1's hub project was a short segment of a webisodic series called *The Blast Light*, modeled after an *Entertainment Tonight* type of newsmagazine show but focusing on the students creating hundreds of impressive works being generated every eight weeks within the many and varied departments of VFS. The reason for focusing internally was twofold: first, it would provide an opportunity for EBM students to network with potential collaborators and future colleagues as they sought subjects for their feature segment. Second, it would create goodwill between EBM and the rest of the school at a time when EBM was still the "new kid on the block," and not yet fully understood or appreciated throughout the school. One requirement of the project was to interview an external (non-faculty) industry executive for the piece, commenting either on the project itself or on the industry context in which the featured student work would eventu-

ally compete. This provided an early opportunity to extend their networks into the local industry, as well as enhance their understanding of the entertainment media business landscape. Once created, the EBM students' assignment was to promote the webisode online and generate relevant social media success metrics such as views, comments, likes, etc.

In Term 1 students also began to develop and pitch concepts for the Terms 3-4 Compendium genre film project, described below. Figure 1 depicts the relationship of the various Term 1 courses to the relevant hub project(s).

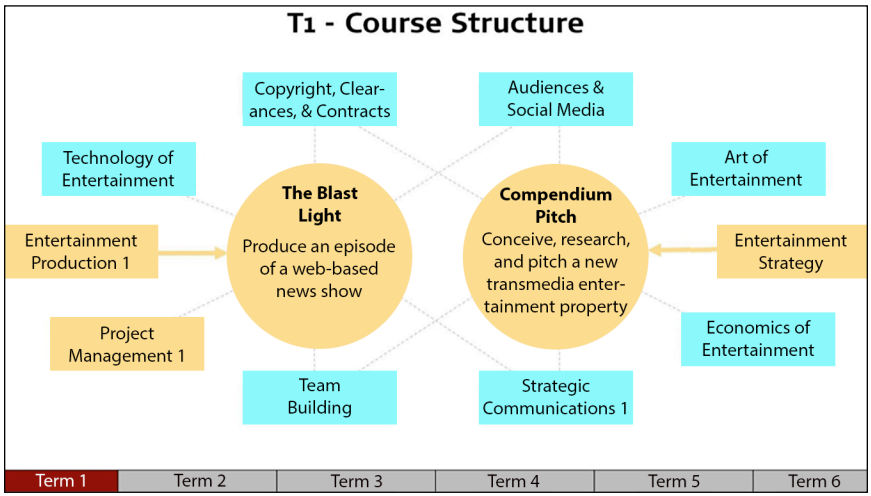

Figure 1. Term 1 course structure. Image courtesy Sebastien de Castell.

The Term 2 hub project was a compilation album of licensed tracks. The main goal here was to familiarize students with the processes involved in licensing intellectual property, product development, and the creation and execution of marketing strategies. The pre-launch market research and post-release sales and accounting gave students a second and more in-depth opportunity to engage in considerable data processing and analysis, as advocated by Wald (2011). For operational and motivational reasons, it was decided that one hundred percent of net proceeds from the sale of each album project would be donated to a charity of each student team's choice.

Concurrent with the album project in Term 2 was a live event. Typically, student teams chose some sort of album launch concert to support

their charity compilation at the end of the term, although for about a year the entire cohort collaborated to produce an award show officially known as The Impact Awards (and unofficially as the "E.B. Emmies").[5] Core skills learned using this vehicle included project management, sponsorship development, financial management, talent management, and promotion. Here too the students were afforded an opportunity to extend their internal and external networks by sourcing acts for the show, identifying nominees for the award categories, cultivating media contacts, etc.

The Term 3 term hub project was a short film, part of an ongoing series of short genre films called Compendium. Each cohort could choose its own genre, but the project had to meet three key criteria: first, it had to be based on a public domain intellectual property (for simplicity's sake, to avoid rights issues). Second, it had to feature some form(s) of special visual effects, whether practical, in-camera, CGI, or a combination, to ensure student-producers had the experience of budgeting, scheduling, and choosing the most appropriate method(s) of achieving their desired aesthetic. Third, to the fullest extent possible the project had to be feasible while making use of all existing film-related departments in the school: each actor (with certain exceptions) had to be an Acting Department student or alumnus, the script had to be written by a student from the Writing Department, makeup by the Makeup Department, any CGI effects or motion graphic titles created by Animation or Digital Design students, and so on. The project was mainly crewed by students from the Film Production Department. Development and pre-production for this significant project took place across the first two EBM terms, and postproduction carried on through the end of Term 4.

A game of some description was assigned in Term 4. This could range from a paper prototype of a parlor game to an alternate reality game (to promote or complement another term hub project) or even a lightweight demo for a video game. The acceptable level of complexity was dependent on the students' relative interest in games; the hardcore game fans were naturally predisposed to undertaking more ambitious projects such as the video game demos, in collaboration with the Game Design program students. As with other term hub projects, students were able to use the game project to rehearse or further refine skills that may have been first acquired in earlier terms, including, but not limited to, project management, budgeting, scheduling, and marketing. The game project commenced in Term 4 (with conception and development) and carried over into Term 5 (execution).

Terms 5 and 6 were otherwise reserved for the development and execution of the capstone Final Project. This was generally undertaken as a solo producer project, although students could choose to work in teams. The Final Project could be nearly anything entertainment-related, as long as the students could pitch it well enough to acquire the underlying IP, crowdfund or raise sponsorship for it, cast it, crew it, and realistically shepherd it successfully through all phases of production, postproduction, and marketing. It also had to be in alignment with their career aspirations. Students were required to negotiate the grading criteria for their Final Projects, and these were invariably pegged to skills and deliverables required by, and most relevant to, their intended career paths.

With these major projects defined, and the learning outcomes clearly identified, we had the basic framework for a curricular structure. We then set about putting flesh on the bones. This proved to be somewhat easier than imagined, when framed with two key questions: what do students absolutely need to be able to do, at minimum, to execute the full scope of this project? And to what level of expertise or granularity, for the given project at this particular point in time? The second question was critical in determining what outcomes could be saved for subsequent terms if necessary. For example, it might be enough to introduce students to the concept of audience analysis in Term 1 via a secondary market research assignment, but a primary market research activity could be postponed without harm.

As redevelopment progressed, each term took on a distinctive theme or thread. Term 1 was clearly about exploration, being necessarily introductory and definitional. It was about discovering and using new terminology, key concepts, identifying epochs and important works (artistically and/or commercially) in a given domain. We used this theme actively and deliberately to encourage students to explore genres, cultures/subcultures, and career paths unfamiliar to them, thus addressing (at least in part) concerns expressed by Ronkin (2000) and others regarding the expansion of student consciousness of an increasingly global entertainment context. Term 6, naturally, was about achieving a level of mastery in a particular domain and preparing for launch into the workforce or a business venture.

The entire program developed a narrative arc not unlike the classic hero's journey (Campbell 1972), complete with a series of trials and victories. Within it, each term had its own "mini-arc" too. We also began to use this consciously as a sort of template for further curriculum refinement, and to refocus students on their own paths to growth when they occasion-

ally became overwhelmed. It was also a useful symbol of the importance of narrative in a transmedia entertainment universe.

More intentional were the main academic "tracks" or business skill areas used to ensure consistency and reinforcement of key learning from term to term. The six tracks, as shown in Table 1, were Leadership, Strategy, Planning, Management & Finance, Production, and Marketing & Distribution. Each term was to contain at least one element of each, diving progressively deeper into the discipline as learning outcomes increased in complexity. Note that Strategy included two courses in Career Development, which was approached from a long-term, strategic perspective, but also timed to help students choose an appropriate Final Project. Management & Finance included a pair of courses called Results Management 1 and 2, which were fundamentally about business analysis and ensuring follow-up so that students did not focus exclusively on the "shiny new object" of the current term, losing sight of previously released projects that required attention and maintenance. Some courses, like Strategic Communications 1 and 2, were assigned somewhat arbitrarily to one particular track for convenience, in cases where course outcomes and content straddled multiple subject areas.

Design Benefits

Two main benefits were intended by incorporating term hub projects into this design. The first was to ensure the requisite experiential, problem-based, authentic experience for the learners. The second was to ensure each student graduated with a substantial portfolio of practical experience in lieu of—or preparatory to—an internship. The declining course load at the back end of the program, particularly Terms 3 and 4, was intended to give students more time to work on their capstone Final Projects.

From the instructors' perspective, the principal advantage of this design was that they could apply their own industry experience and expertise to a real-life problem or opportunity, serving as a facilitator of student problem-solving rather than a directive "sage on the stage." The instructor's traditional role of sourcing and adopting relevant course materials such as case studies, textbooks, etc., was still present but to a far lesser extent. Because of the highly specific, project-directed nature of the learning, no well-rehearsed lecture could adequately predict what needed to happen next in the classroom. Lessons could be somewhat more loosely structured to respond in the moment to every situation. Key concepts and principles

Term	One Year 1	2	3	4	5	6
Hub Project(s)	**Blast Light Webisode**	**Charity Compilation Album + Live Event**	**Compendium Film**	**Game**	**Final Project**	
Leadership Track Course(s)	Team Building	Leadership & Negotiations 1	Managing Creative Professionals; Business Ethics & Social Responsibility			Leadership & Negotiations 2
Strategy Track Course(s)	Entertainment Strategy; Art of Entertainment	Story & Script Development; Strategy & Analysis 1	Career Development 1	Final Project Development; Career Development 2	Business Development	Strategy & Analysis 2
Planning Track Course(s)	Project Management 1	Project Management 2	Project Management 3	Project Management 4		
Management & Finance Track Course(s)	Economics of Entertainment; Copyright, Clearances & Contracts	Fundraising & Sponsorship	Production Budgeting & Scheduling	Film Production 3 (Postproduction)	Proposal Writing	
Production Track Course(s)	Entertainment Production 1; Technology of Entertainment	Film Production 1; Entertainment Production 2; Event Planning	Film Production 2; Game Production 1	Game Production 2	Final Project Execution	Alternate Reality Game Production
Marketing & Distribution Track Course(s)	Audiences & Social Media; Strategic Communications 1	Distribution & Manufacturing 1; Strategic Communications 2	Results Management 1	Branded Entertainment	Developing Online Communities; Digital Technologies	Personal Brand & Identity; Results Management 2

Table 1. EBM program grid.

could be extracted from, or applied to, the immediate problem as needed.

From the school administration's perspective, the opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration created by the redesign provided a relatively low-cost way to leverage existing physical resources like studios and equipment. It also allowed for sharing of human resources (i.e., faculty and staff). The cross-program integration also offered new avenues of exposure and outreach, between students, with industry, and in all directions.

Design Risks and Challenges

Those few if compelling benefits were outnumbered by the potential risks and challenges posed by the new EBM design. Foremost was the "just-in-time learning," which left no room for errors of timing. With so many moving parts all so interdependently integrated, problems would arise immediately if the synchronization of some components wasn't near-perfect. Sequencing was critical: a missed class or misplaced course might be disorienting, and could derail an entire project. To take just one example, specific sessions on publishing contracts and negotiation needed to occur before students could be tasked with obtaining music licenses for the Term 2 project. This required significant planning at the level of the individual course or lesson in addition to the macro-scale curriculum work.

Equally critical was that current faculty members be given a thorough grounding in the new curriculum, and any new instructors be "plugged in" to the fast-moving system as early as possible. This is always a challenge with faculty members who, except for two or three instructors, were all adjunct faculty and full-time industry practitioners. They needed to understand the projects, assessments, and curriculum articulation in sufficient detail, at least as far as their own courses are concerned—and ideally, how theirs interrelated with others'. This meant doing their own homework to stay current with student and project progress, or risk throwing it into chaos. In this context, Clark, Threeton, and Ewing's (2010) recommendation to provide in-depth instruction to pre-service teachers in authentic experiential learning pedagogy resonated strongly. There was no "Term 0" where students and faculty alike could be adequately prepared for the experience. EBM did, however, require students to attend a full-day program orientation workshop (in addition to the general school orientations) with icebreakers, a variety of self-assessments including team role preferences and conflict styles, and other introductory activities. These allowed

the faculty and staff to better prepare for classes, and gave students useful self-knowledge to serve them throughout their EBM year.

Although it promised a real-world experience, EBM was not real life. As a result, student expectations required careful monitoring and management. Timing issues or other academic hiccups risked signaling students that this was, after all, "just school," and could be treated casually. For the program to be sufficiently engaging and authentic, students must not be taken out of the experience in the way distractions at the cinema can ruin a film. At the same time, students were cautioned that perfection was not expected out-of-the-box and that skills build progressively through constant iteration. Failure was, in fact, an option—as long as learning resulted from the experience, and students maintained the required minimum 65% (cumulative) passing grade over the entire year.

Other challenges had less to do with the design of the curriculum *per se* than to the nature and purpose of the program. A full decade after Jenkins coined the term, "transmedia" still has not penetrated the public consciousness. It seems that few even understand the fundamental role of an entertainment producer. Caricatures abound (Mel Brooks' *The Producers* or the Tom Cruise character in *Tropic Thunder* come to mind) but the reality is much more complex and nuanced. We instinctively know what an actor, writer, director, or game coder does, but not what the producer does. This may be more of a marketing issue than an academic one, but it relates to the saleability (and thus viability) of the program, and it too requires the faculty and administration to carefully manage the expectations of current and prospective students.

The diversity of instructor backgrounds, experience, methodologies, etc., created the potential for incongruent directions. We knew from the previous EBM curriculum that this was almost inevitable, as the program represented many disciplines and sectors, each with its own customs, processes, jargon, tools, and workflows. Here the key was to caution faculty, staff, and students alike to view any apparent contradictions not as conflicting but as complementary approaches. Cognitive dissonance was largely avoided by reminding all involved that there is seldom a single "right" way to do anything in business.

A final risk with the new EBM program design was the absence of elective courses. While this made it marginally easier to develop the curriculum, and less expensive to deliver or administer, it had the potential to frustrate any students wanting or expecting the freedom to either choose

courses they felt were more interesting or relevant to their interests, or opt out of those that weren't. This was a constant peril in a program attempting to cover such a range of entertainment sectors and disciplines. We addressed this, in part, by giving students other choices at frequent junctures throughout the program. The Term 1 Compendium project, for example, allowed teams to select any genre for their film pitch, and they could choose to adapt any of the countless public domain works available. The Term 2 charity compilation album gave teams the opportunity to decide by consensus on a project beneficiary, and to determine its musical direction, among other key decisions. With the Term 3 & 4 Game project, students could elect to develop a game to one of three levels of completion (playable paper prototype, concept art stage, or full demo), depending on their desires, intended career paths, and abilities. Within project teams, students could negotiate their individual roles and contributions with their colleagues. Students' Final Projects gave them full and complete control over almost every creative or business decision, and allowed them to propose the measures by which their final deliverables were to be evaluated.

Such agency wasn't a panacea, as many choices required compromises with their fellow team members. Negotiation and decision-making sometimes added to the existing stress of student workloads. When the occasional question about lack of electives did arise, it helped to remind students that in a transmedia business environment a successful producer needs to be sufficiently familiar with every role, task, medium, or business process.

Observations and Results

Ultimately the efficiency and effectiveness of the new EBM curriculum would be evident in the implementation and, as with every newly devised course or program, there were the inevitable hiccups. Surprisingly, the expected major issues and challenges seldom arose, and were promptly rectified before the next cohort intake. Most changes made to the revised program proved to be relatively minor adjustments. For example, Career Development was expanded to two courses and moved up a full term to start in Term 3. Originally we assumed students wouldn't be sufficiently equipped midway through the year to make decisions about their career direction. While that may have been true to some degree, it was outweighed by the need to give them more class time and assistance in actively exploring career options, at least insofar as choosing appropriate

Final Projects (conceived in Term 4). This additional support and emphasis was especially well received by the anxious millennials, as predicted by Twenge (2006).

Ultimately the diversity of possible career paths, breadth of program content, and variety of instructors did not pose significant issues. It did, however, become evident that sufficient scaffolding of all projects and assignments was critical, along with proper and ample contextualization. Faculty and administration had to be prepared to answer the inevitable "why" questions, which invariably ended with "…because I'm not going into [insert sector or business discipline] as a career." A larger issue turned out to be the diversity of the students themselves; EBM participants ranged widely in age, experience (from recent high school graduates to late-career adults in transition), and country of origin. Mostly challenges manifested in common intercultural or interpersonal misunderstandings. More frequently, because of the team-oriented nature of most projects and assignments, conflicts resulted from intergenerational impatience and differences in work ethic. This was not, strictly speaking, a curricular issue, although it did result (directly or indirectly) from the collaborative learning environment built into the program. Not surprisingly, another common source of conflict was team choice of assignments and projects. Almost any team decision was necessarily a democratic process and, as such, a competitive one. Not every idea could win. While this led to the occasional drama in or out of the classroom, it did reinforce the need to apply and improve the communication, pitching, and persuasive skills taught in the program. It also called on students to practice the conflict resolution skills learned in the program's Leadership track.

One persistent pedagogical issue encountered in the new curriculum was the tendency for the courses to support the term hub projects, and not the other way around as intended. In the students' (and some instructors') minds, the term hub projects could appear more attractive and important than the classes, effectively diverting time and attention from them. We sometimes found students prioritizing set decoration (for example) or other activities that were incidental to the student-producers' role, at the expense of their assignments, which were central. Attention to detail is important, but never at the cost of the larger objectives.

A related discovery was that some projects occupied a disproportionate share of time and attention, notably the Compendium films. It's natural that in a film school most students would be most drawn to the televisual

projects rather than, say, the music or game components. But the Compendium project was also paid more due by instructors. This might have been because film and TV professionals comprised the majority of the faculty, or because the film project took participants out of the usual classroom and onto the more stimulating set. We also noticed a distinct "post-production let-down," a sort of energetic anticlimax after the adrenaline rush of prepping and shooting their live action shows in Term 3. After the long build-up and eventual exposure to the on-set action it was harder to motivate students to follow through on the more mundane postproduction activities (for example), or indeed any work that was not perceived as equally sexy or fun. This required us to constantly look for ways to avoid allowing the production to overshadow the business elements.

Overall, the results of the new curriculum implementation were positive. This was mostly evident in the course evaluations and the school-wide, semi-annual student satisfaction survey, where EBM scores reached all-time highs. EBM grad placement rates, already high, edged up perceptibly. Anecdotally, at least, EBM students seemed to evidence Herrington's (2006) contention that authentic learning environments led to stronger student engagement and a greater grasp of how entertainment business disciplines fit into the bigger picture, compared to traditional MBA instructional strategies based on case studies and the like.

Attrition rates seemed to improve too; while the program still lost a modest number of students every intake, the new curriculum inductees tended to drop out at the beginning of the program instead of various points throughout the year. This could have been due to a number of factors, including a higher overall engagement level, loyalty to their teams, a desire to complete portfolio, or because they decided earlier whether they could survive the pace and volume of coursework, which were greater than in the previous program flow. Once committed, they tended to stay in the program.

An obvious outcome was the increase in quantity, quality, and depth of student portfolios. Final projects had always been part of the EBM curriculum, but not term hub projects, which automatically provided students a handful of practice pieces before attempting their capstone. Furthermore, EBM projects had seldom won awards, whereas the very first post-revision cohort produced a number of honors, setting the bar high for subsequent classes. (An unexpected side effect of this was a sense of rivalry from some faculty and staff members in other programs.) Many graduates

of the new curriculum went on to achieve significant career success with projects initiated or incubated in the new program, including one student's game-based business empire, a successful online and mobile DJ/remixing/mashup app, and assorted pilots or demos for TV shows and feature-length movies.

Areas for Further Research and Study

As a career college, Vancouver Film School is first and foremost a teaching institution and not a research school. The sheer volume of work that goes into instruction, as might be inferred from this paper, allows for little time for pure academic study and investigation. Clearly it would be beneficial to conduct a rigorous and thorough study of program outcomes and learner success, whether longitudinal, cross-sectional, or both. It would also be useful to perform a more careful analysis of student attrition rates, grades, course evaluations, and other measures.

One philosophical question that emerged during the curriculum development and subsequent deployment was whether or not to evaluate student success, in whole or in part, on the business results achieved by their work. When grading assignments such as marketing campaigns, for example, should we strictly evaluate on the basis of the content and structure of the plan, or should we also take into account the outcome of that marketing plan (i.e., sales, market share, or customer satisfaction achieved)? A mixture of both? If so, what is an appropriate blend? This suggests a review of the existing literature, and/or a comparison with disciplines such as mathematics, where grades might be awarded on the basis of obtaining the correct answer, the steps that went into obtaining the answer, or both, and how to weight them appropriately.

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Endnotes

1. The author prefers the term popularized by Knowles (1980). Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall/ Cambridge, 1980).
2. With multiple locations globally, Hyper Island "designs learning experiences that challenge companies and individuals to grow and stay competitive in an increasingly digitized world." For further information, visit https://www.hyperisland.com/.
3. Kaospilot is a hybrid business and design school, with educational emphasis on leadership and entrepreneurship. For more information, visit http://www.kaospilot.dk/about/story/.
4. For more information on the PCTIA accreditation process, see http://www.privatetraininginstitutions.gov.bc.ca/institutions.
5. The live event had originally been in Term 4, but was moved up to give students breathing room for their postproduction work on the Term 3 hub project and to develop their capstone Final Projects. It also made for a natural tie-in to the Term 2 charity compilation project.

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