

The Pitch as Meaning-directing Activity: Implications for Students and Education When Fast Pace and a Striving for Novelty Set the Scene

Nicolai Nybye 

*Department of Applied Business Research, UCL University College, Denmark
Seebladsgade 1, 5000 Odense C.*

The elevator pitch is part of a global tendency toward homogenization of entrepreneurial content in educational programs (Fletcher, 2018), and this article shows how the pitch is naturalized as a new language because it must be decoded in order to pass an innovation course for health students at a Danish University College. A core communicative component of the pitch is speed. Using pragmatism, the article shows how the pitch guides the meaning making of students and how the compressed time element reduces the space for reflection. Thus, the educational rhythm is set by values from the pitch and innovation. Further, the article problematizes how the pitching situation separates the *pitched* end product both from reflections on possible consequences of new solutions *and* from the dynamic forces that actually created the pitch.

Keywords: entrepreneurial education, pragmatism, meaning, communication, values.

Introduction

This article draws on findings from my PhD project (Nybye, 2020). In the project, from a perspective of pragmatism as philosophy of science, I studied *how, why and with what consequences* students from various welfare bachelor programs make meaning *through entrepreneurial projects* within their co-constitutive educational setting, a Danish University College.ⁱ In that context I have gathered rich, detailed ethnographic data from ten cases of students realizing ideas as part of entrepreneurship and innovation courses.ⁱⁱ In this article, I focus on one aspect of the PhD data, namely the pitch as a goal-directing activity for health

students in an interdisciplinary innovation and entrepreneurship course (nursing, radiography, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and bio-analytics). Generally speaking, the pitch has become an omnipresent, naturalized, contemporary form of communication used in educational institutions, entrepreneurship competitions, organizations, companies, investor springboards and on television (e.g., *Shark Tank*, *Dragons' Den* or the Danish version *The Lions' Cave*). The communication form is based on a *fast pace*, as in an elevator going up: in the *elevator pitch*, you pitch a proposal to a key person while going up the elevator, and hopefully you will get buy-in from that person as you reach the top floor of the building! Hence, the pitch is, conventionally speaking, often about values such as selling and persuading others. According to Fletcher (2018), there is a global tendency to homogenization of entrepreneurial content in education programs in the pursuit of “generic skill sets” among students, which Hytti (2018) critically discusses as a standardized “one-size fits all” model. The homogenization takes place as elements of entrepreneurship education spread worldwide, e.g., “principles of effectuation, business model canvas, the business plan, elevator pitches, pivoting, the notion of opportunity, prototyping etc.” (Fletcher, 2018). Findings in the PhD dissertation show that the *pitch* phenomenon in education organizes the way students orient themselves in terms of actions, decoding and speech and that tensions occur because the pitch as a tool and language is new to the health students (Nybye, 2020). As such, the pitch creates a certain educational *rhythm* from a dynamic relationship between educators and students. Thus, the questions at issue here are: How does the pitch affects the students’ meaning-making processes in the innovation course and what educational consequences arise from the pitch as a new language and practice of values?

I structure the article as follows. First, I turn to a theoretical perspective which has its roots in pragmatism. Here, I build especially on the communicative perspective outlined by J. Dewey to approach the processes of meaning making in an educational context. This holds a premise for my analysis that the making of meaning is dynamic and responsive and that *opposing energies resist each other* and form the undergoing processes of meaning (Dewey, 1934, pp. 161-163). This premise establishes *rhythm* as an analytical lens in the article. Thus, for Dewey, these energies form life that, metaphorically speaking, is a *drama* of rhythms that we explore more or less consciously, such as dawn and sunset (Dewey, 1934, pp. 153-155). In the theory section, I elaborate on this dynamic understanding of meaning, drawing on *values-*

realizing theory (Hodges, 2007, 2009) to discuss educational consequences for the meaning-making processes of the pitch as a new language and practice that realizes values. In the theory section, this fusion of dynamic meanings and values leads to a definition of rhythm. After the theory section, I present the data to be analyzed, followed by the analysis, which first addresses the research question with a focus on the meaning-making processes, followed by a discussion of consequences of the pitch as a values-realizing educational tool.

Theory

Entrepreneurship is a multiplying and heterogeneous phenomenon (Steyaert & Hjort, 2003; Landström, 2005; Hjort, 2012). As entrepreneurship has become institutionalized in research and higher education institutions, it has retained this multiplicity and complexity (Fayolle, Landström, Gartner & Berglund, 2016; Fayolle, 2018); in this, entrepreneurship education reflects its *mother field* of entrepreneurship (Thrane, Blenker, Korsgaard & Neergaard, 2016). At the same time, however, within this stream of multiplicity concerning the object of entrepreneurship, higher education programs explore the global and general tendency to homogenization of key entrepreneurial content (Fletcher, 2018). The pitch is part of this homogenization. The rhythm of the pitch is fast, compressed, focused, pre-structured and linear (see, e.g., the NABC approachⁱⁱⁱ). It involves several different performative settings, as mentioned in the introduction. These settings frame the pitch situation differently. An entrepreneurship competition is framed by a stage, judges and often a huge check, award or prize for the winners and pictures taken of the winners. In the reality shows on TV, investors act in a television set, often sitting in armchairs, waiting for the entrepreneurs to pitch their ideas. Values realization (Hodges, 2007, 2009) underpins the situations (e.g., being the best, making a profit, being unique and different, getting high TV ratings). Hence, neither the situations nor the content pitched in the situations are neutral elements. Educational content in general possesses this non-neutral status in spite of any given natural status (Dewey, 1929). In that sense, the pitch is *enacted* symbolically and is an element relating not only to students' idea-creating endeavors but to the ways that educational settings are *realized* (Nybye, 2020). This understanding has its roots in pragmatism and connects to meaning making among participants in communication (Biesta, 2013), to which I turn in the following passages.

The element of action, *pragma*, affects the way ideas and artifacts become meaningful in entrepreneurial processes, here understood as effectual processes as opposed to prescriptive causal processes *per se* (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008). Action is intertwined with how and why words are ascribed meaning by students and in entrepreneurial processes in general:

[A]ction is necessary for ideas to matter and words to acquire meaning; and action transforms matter and experience into useful artifacts. This effectual action may, however, find its distinct philosophical stance in pragmatism. (Sarasvathy, 2008, p. 190)

However, meaning is in its nature abstract and intangible, and requires some additional perspectives. J. Dewey (1859-1952), one of the founding fathers of pragmatism,^{iv} writes about meaning as part of his view on communication in chapter 5 of his *grand oeuvre*, *Experience and Nature*. In the chapter, Dewey explains this abstract and intangible nature, claiming that it is difficult to pinpoint the exact physiological mechanism of meaning, but that it can be ascertained as a fact in various situations (Dewey, 1929/2013, p. 229). Meaning is experienced and contains the difference in the structured relationship between mere *doing* and *undergoing* (Dewey, 1934, p. 46). If I put my hand in a fire, this is not necessarily to *have an experience* in a Deweyan sense. I must grasp the relationship between action and consequences, because this joined relationship “is what gives meaning” (Ibid.). To grasp this relationship is for Dewey “the objective of all intelligence,” which indeed nuances the famous notion *learning by doing*, because this *grasping* is a more conscious understanding above the practice of mere doings! Further, Dewey stresses that meaning is not a psychic existence but is part of cooperative behavior. Meaning is primarily “intent and intent is not personal in a private and exclusive sense”; meaning is only “secondarily a property of objects” (Dewey, 1929, pp. 229-230).

An implication of Dewey’s understanding of meaning is that the practice of education is constituted through communication and shared social participation (Biesta, 2006, p. 30). Thus, education *is* situations guided and generated by processes of meaning and interpretation, not a simple process of transmission of knowledge from A to B (Biesta, 2013, pp. 26-31). Moreover, education realizes intent and constitutes its own existence through “a sense of purpose, direction or orientation” (Biesta, 2020).^v Thus, education is not an egocentric

endeavor. Educators and students are responsive to intents, and students learn in that way not only about knowledge, say the curriculum, but also what certain intentions mean, say the fulfillment of more or less visibly defined criteria about how to “play” the very “‘game’ of schooling” (Biesta, 2013, p. 32). Dewey explains this responsive mechanism in the creation of meaning in his famous example where A requests B to bring him a flower that A at the same moment points to. B reacts to the movement and learns that this is *pointing*. B does not act according to the object in itself (the flower) but to A’s relationship to the object and the whole sequence of movement, gaze and sounds. B experiences this not egocentrically but as it can function in A’s experience, while A sees the object as something that can be “grasped and handled by B” (Dewey, 1929, p. 227).

When meaning is considered in the triadic light of communication and the responsive dynamic behavior between at least two people who communicate and *things*, it follows that meaning and communication unfold as *transactions* between subject and world (Dewey, 1929; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Brinkman, 2006; Biesta, 2020). No persons, physical objects or events are isolated “entities,” “essences” or “realities” as such (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 108). They are interrelated, non-static and undergo changes (Brinkmann, 2006, p. 55). Hence, my own actions affect the world, and this connection affects me as an organism (Biesta, 2020, pp. 121-122). Language plays a certain role here. Language is considered by Dewey “the tool of tools” because it makes “appliances, application, utensils and use” possible (Dewey, 1929, p. 217). Communication is in that sense both *consummatory* and *instrumental* (Ibid., p. 254). It creates the basis for different consequences: “It is a means of establishing cooperation, domination and order. Shared experience is the greatest of human goods,” as Dewey puts it (Ibid.). The ontology of such established output is dynamic. *Order*, for example, indicates a stable form, but – as Dewey (1934) explains in *Art as Experience* – form exists only in a dynamic sense, and a “final” end is nothing but a rhythmic pause (p. 143). In other words, order is also potential disorder and an “end” must be anticipated in an external way (Ibid.), which is a basic emergent openness in pragmatism (Elkjær, 2009; James, 1907; Sarasvathy, 2008).

Communication and openness impact our understanding of *form* – e.g., the pitch as performative form. Any expressive art (architecture, sculpture, painting, music) is language, and for Dewey “language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken” (Dewey, 1934, p. 110). The hearer is as such an *indispensable* partner to the speaker (Ibid.). Dewey defines

form in this dynamic sense as follows: “Form may then be defined as the operation of forces that carry the experience of an event, object, scene, and situation to its own integral fulfillment” (Ibid., p. 142). From this it follows that substance is inherent in the creating processes and created from the dynamic forces. Hence, substance is not imposed from without (Ibid.), and humans engage actively in communicative practice where messages and knowledge are not just *found* in the world and then transferred and transmitted instrumentally from one center to another (Biesta, 1994). Socio-cultural habituation is important here (Dewey, 1938/2013, pp. 762-764; Biesta, 1994).^{vi} Despite this dynamic worldview in pragmatism, humans establish stable symbols that we take for granted and as *ready-made* (Dewey, 1938).^{vii} These symbols – take, for example, our understanding of *subjectivism* (Dewey, 1929, p. 38) or a physical concept such as H_2O – represent what Dewey calls “true Being” (Ibid., p. 245). A symbol divides the experienced world from, for example, the essential properties of water, and in this process the experienced world is modified. In education, this symbolic division and modification is naturalized as everyday practice, e.g., communicating about adult human beings as Students or placing end value on the Exam and Numbers. In the classrooms such symbols are objectified in responsive communication, constituting significant meaning (Mead, 1967), e.g. when the educator expresses beliefs, *True* knowledge and desired actions to the students (Searle, 1976). In this process subject and object constitute each other (e.g. the *I as Educator*) (Dewey, 1929; Mead, 1967). A more hidden aspect here is that this objectification produces and reproduces values (“true Being”) (Dewey, 1929, p. 55). However, values are not static, isolated entities. As I show below, values create tensions because in practice they clash with each other and influence each other (Hodges, 2009).

In values-realizing theory, values are heterarchically defined, which according to Hodges means “that actions are mutually constrained by all the values, so that there is no fixed, hierarchical ordering of values; rather, across time and task, values vary in their ordering for the sake of the joint realization of all the values (i.e., the ecosystem as a whole)” (Hodges, 2009). For Hodges, realization of values is heterarchical, as when a driver follows the traffic rules and realizes the value of safety (rule-following) in one situation, while an emergency situation might demand increased speed, compromising safety (Ibid.). Further, values are an expression of a goal-seeking activity, something that people strive for and which is realized through actions and language in use (Hodges 2007; Hodges & Baron, 1992; Hodges, 2009;

Hodges, 2017). Hence, according to Hodges, *all* actions, whether driving or conversing with a colleague, are limited and legitimized by varying values. Values actually define what is good driving, conversation or good education. They are coherent with other values, and actions realize these values (Hodges & Baron, 1992; Hodges, 2009; Hodges, 2017). However, there are real tensions between the values in practice over time, giving “energy to action, emotion, and cognition” (Hodges, 2009, p. 632). At the same time, physical and regulatory conditions exist, or as Gibson (1979) puts it, *affordances* affect the human ability to realize values in the environment. Thus, despite the heterarchical relations, values work jointly as a coherent dynamic form such as in “good driving,” where there is a “continuous balancing act” between e.g., safety and efficiency (e.g., speed) (Hodges, 2009). This establishes *rhythm* as analytical lens in which variations of intensity and speed create rhythms that take place in a larger whole (Dewey, 1934) and leads to a definition of rhythm as “ordered variations of changes” (Ibid., p. 160).

Following the definition of rhythm, values create rhythms of tensions in the interplay between the individual and the environment that, with social/cultural researcher Ulrich Bröckling, I theorize as interplays of “affecting, being affected and self-affecting” (Bröckling, 2016, p. 2). According to Bröckling, market mechanisms intrude upon these interplays as they penetrate into other social areas outside economics and the medium of money in line with a discourse about the *entrepreneurial self* (Bröckling, 2016). Inspired by Foucault, Bröckling analyses how this discourse *tells* people how they should perceive themselves, how they should act and participate in the marketplace in the form of “utility semantics” that can be found in various contemporary social technologies such as training manuals, psychological advice books and management and self-management programs but that also extends, for example, to institutions, expertise systems and learning programs (Ibid., p. 4). As I will show in my data examples and analyze and discuss in the following sections, certain valued innovative skills manifest themselves to the health students as expectations that unfold in interplays of tense meaning making that the students cannot escape while they progress toward the pitch situated in a *fair for new solutions* at the end of the innovation course.

Field study data and empirical situation

As part of my PhD project, I gathered rich, detailed ethnographic field study data in the context of a Danish University College providing Professional BA programs in various welfare professions. The data was gathered through observation, video/audio-recordings, interviews and written and visual materials from ten cases of students realizing ideas as part of the following courses: Learning Material Design and Entrepreneurship (LMDE) (Teacher Education); Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SIE) (Social Education); Innovation Across Health Professions (IAHP). One case of three students (Occupational Therapy (OCT)) is not part of a course and is thus considered *extra-curricular*. The field study (Geertz, 1973; Lofland, 1995; Lofland et al., 2006, Eberle & Maeder, 2016) was carried out in the period from September 2016 until June 2017. The case data in focus in the article was gathered around the IAHP course. It was originally in Danish and is translated in this article.

In the IAHP course, the empirical situation is constituted by 50 students following a mandatory three-week full-time course. The course is part of a broad set-up for approximately 250 students from various health education programs (nursing, radiography, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and bio-analytics). On day 1, after a plenary presentation, the overall group of students are divided into five sub-courses called “islands.” Two educators introduce the *island* that I observe as field researcher. They introduce the course to the students using a PowerPoint presentation displayed on two whiteboards in the classroom. The scope of the course is written on the first slide of the PowerPoint. This first lesson is crucial for understanding the actual intent of the course. The intention occurs in a Deweyan sense as a responsive oral communication between *people and things* when the two educators, referring to the PowerPoint, communicate to the students as hearers. I present selected excerpts from this oral communication in the following section, because this situation is crucial to understanding a principal component of the actual meaning of the three-week course. The language in use is in itself important to consider in order to understand the intent as more than the educators’ own exclusive meanings. As stated theoretically by Dewey, language is “the tool of tools,” and it makes “appliances, application, utensils and use” possible (Dewey, 1929). Hence, the language communicated creates a focal ground for how the students are expected to understand the official order of the course and how they are expected to perceive themselves as participants in

the course and as health professionals in general. In that sense, the primary communication is instrumental, because it frames the context in which the *pitch* is included as the final step in the three-week period as part of a final fair for new solutions and thus becomes a goal-seeking activity. However, the language also reveals a desirable response in part of the students concerning innovative behavior. This points to what is a desirable purpose: the educational aim of an innovative health employee as socializing figure:

Educator 1 (ED1) tells the students: “[...] but the competencies that are the focus of the three weeks [...] are the innovative ones, and they are about collaboration and project management, so you will again train some muscles that are not quite as strong. [...] But I’ll be surprised if you can’t use this [the course] no matter what your professional background [health] will be in the future. That is at least what the intention has been.” Educator 2 (ED2) argues: “[...] you must be innovative in terms of thinking in new ways, you must be dead good [“dødgode” in Danish] at it; if you are, then you also get an exciting working life, [...] we must think completely new, new method of treatment, new... we have to implement something brand new [...]” (Audio file)

Further, it is stressed directly to the students by ED1 in a slightly abstract way that the educators (“we”) have to get the students (“you”) “to come up with something”. The actual process of the three weeks is outlined for the students, emphasizing six steps.^{viii} After the presentation, I explore a certain complexity associated with a subsequent group formation process. On the right and left side walls of the classroom hang a total of four sheets of A3. Each sheet describes a challenge that the students have to solve for an external organization: 1) “Happy kids”; 2) “Smoking cessation among young people – [name of school]”; 3) “Taking care of each other - infectious hygiene in a pedagogical perspective”; and 4) “Early detection of health problems among socially disadvantaged citizens in a Danish municipality.” All five “islands” are assigned the same challenges. During a break, students walk around the classroom and read about the challenges. Eight teams of six students are formed in a self-organizing process as the students choose which challenge they will work on. Due to a high group complexity with a large number of students in each group, I concentrated predominantly on two different teams.

On that basis, I followed two groups more closely as cases in the field study. Furthermore, yet other cases were already part of my overall field study design. One of the team cases was about the challenge “Smoking cessation among young people” [Team1], and the other was about “Taking care of each other” [Team2]. I also gathered data from a third group, “Smoking Cessation 2”, from situations in the classroom, an initial team contract meeting between the students (audio), data from their pitch (video) and a group interview. Team1 consisted of one occupational therapy student, two physiotherapy students and three from the nursing course. Team2 consisted of one radiography student, four from the nursing course and one from physiotherapy. In the following, I will not enter into the specific venture ideas but will concentrate on the meaning making in relation to the pitch with excerpts from my analysis in the PhD study. I will focus especially on qualitative data from the Team2 case.

Analysis

The first part of the analysis shows how the pitch as direction and established official order set by the educators in the innovation course affects the students’ meaning-making processes. This is a rather progressive analytical part in which excerpts from the rich ethnographic data speak. It shows how another, highly dynamic, tense, responsive and interpretative world occurs when the students act, learn and experience *through* their own projects as a contrast to the outlined stable intentions of the course. Secondly, I build on the first part of the analysis to discuss why the realization of values entails consequences relating to the pitch as educational tool. In this second part, I touch on strengths and a reservation in my analysis leading to an opening towards a value of reflection that might challenge the ongoing meaning making and rhythm relating to the pitch and the innovation course.

The pitch experienced

Although I emphasize the case data from Team2, I will mention that my analysis reveals that Team1 and Team2 have different approaches to the process in the course. Team1 acts with counter-reactions to the educational process outlined by the educators. From a video recording (data collection) in a group room at the educational institution, ST4 reads out that “there is a workshop on Thursday about the business model”, to which ST1 responds that “they have made

it.” There is a bit of laughter, and it is mentioned that there is a “workshop about pitching” the following Friday, to which ST3 laughs: “We do not show up at all” (Video file). One of the following messages from the students’ self-organized meeting, captured by the video recording, is that the students in Team1 do not think the course is “especially cool,” that they are looking forward to returning to their ordinary health studies and that they just have to be registered as being present to complete the course. In an interview with the group, the students explain their reactions as alienated meaning making: they feel that they had to “force the healthcare aspect like a hat down over their project,” and one of the students in the interview expresses this as a less positive, distanced *them vs. us* dynamic: “They [educators] say we have to think outside the box, but they put us in a box.”

Team2 is reacting more adaptively to the elements in the process outlined for them. They try to take the elements *in* and fit them to the intentions of the course. A consequence of this is that *doubt* occurs as part of the meaning making. The doubt occurs in various situations, e.g., as part of a supervision session between students and ED1 where the students are uncertain as to whether their venture idea *must* cost anything to develop. They look for an answer. Doubting and the search for meaning underpin the process leading towards the pitch, and by this they also create meaning. Little by little, in a responsive collective process, the underlying meaning of the pitch is decoded. As we will see later, the powerful index in this interpretation of a new language is not the *portability* of a flower as in Dewey’s responsive A/B example, but the *passing* of the course by *appearing* innovative. The meaning of the pitch is made (clear?) in a dialogue in which the students try to decode the meaning of the word “pitch” and the intentions that follow the pitch as practice.

From the audio data gathered at a meeting between the students, I hear that the criterion that frames the students’ understanding of the forthcoming pitch situation is a division between what is spelled out as “10 minutes’ presentation and 5 minutes’ feedback.” This is followed by the search for a clearer understanding of this. I present it here as excerpts from a longer dialogue. I have two audio files from this meeting. In the first part, before noon, the students have a first experience of the speech speed, which surprises them. Further, they try to decode the form with statements such as that “the pitch is the first two minutes” and, with reference to the online tool “Pitcherific,” that the pitch “is about a catchy introduction.” One of the students doubts whether they all are going to say something, and they discuss whether the pitch has something to do

with fine clothes. After lunch, they return to the topic (file 2) in approximately ten minutes of dialogue in which words, sentences and half-completed phrases succeed each other in a stream of decodings and discovery about the essence of the pitch. I quote excerpts here that highlight this qualitative aspect of the dialogue.

The structure of the pitch undergoes examination. First, about the beginning of the pitch:

- ST4: Are we not starting to pitch?
- ST1: Yes, but to start with, we just have to present who the hell we are.
- ST6: That's what they said, we should not come and say *Hey, we're so-and-so and we're here to talk about such-and-such.*
- ST1: No, no, but we probably still have to do..., how to say it... [...]
- ST6: Yes [weakly], I just thought we should pitch a bit in the beginning and then the presentation in the middle or a presentation and then a little pitch at the end ... but I don't know. [...]

Later about the completion:

- ST4: Yeah, what does it say in Pitch? [sentence not completed but refers to some sort of written guidance that they have access to on their laptops, e.g., the above-mentioned tool, Pitcherific.]
- ST5: Ehm ... [silence] it says ... [silence, pause] a strong ending ensures that the person you are pitching to remembers your pitch or a specific message after the pitch is completed. An ending could be a summary of what your main message is as well as a call to action...
- ST6: Yes... I understand the meaning of that... it's just damn hard to get it down on paper... It makes a lot of sense to just summarize quickly, *therefore you have to choose, bam, bam, bam... bam, bam, bam like...* it's almost like one of those advertisements on television... *Bang, and the dirt is gone* (slightly caricatured voice)... something you can remember [...].
- ST1: Start with them, end with them, do you get it, then you have come a long way... [silence] (Audio file, 00:55:00)

During the conversation, we hear that one of the students considers contacting a friend who, in another educational context, has been pitching in an entrepreneurship competition. In that sequence, it becomes clear that the pitch is a new experienced language that acquires meaning in communicative practice on the students' way towards the outlined pitch in the educational program:

- ST6: How on earth do you spell to pitch P I T C H ... [...] (Audio file, 00:52:28)

The day after, in preparation for the pitch, the students divide up who says what. This situation highlights how the pitch is intertwined with a business model discourse. ST5 mentions that they have to include the “the business model”, at which ST1 exclaims: “I don't give a damn.” They now talk about what the business model is. ST1 reasons “why it creates added value” and adds rejective meaning: “I don't think the business model did shit to help me [...]”. Two fellow students support this, stating that the business model was nothing but an element that they had to fill out and hand in as part of the course (Audio file).

A curiosity appears in the process because the group end up presenting two solutions to the challenge about *infectious hygiene in a pedagogical perspective*. One of the solutions is presented as the primary idea because it answers more directly the challenge issued by the partner from a Danish municipality. The students are arguing for the need to install alcohol dispensers in day care institutions, drawing on knowledge and positive experiences of this practice from the hospital sector. A part of their solution is an analytical poster outlining “the vicious circle” and how *infectious hygiene* in day care institutions emerges as a systemic chain that can be broken. One message is that their solution will break the chain of bacteria transmissions. The secondary solution to the challenge builds on a minor observation study the students conducted in a concrete day care institution. Here, the students saw the need for a children's book. The students pitch this as a secondary idea at the final fair. They have made initial drawings for the book of their own creations, “Snottus and Influz,” which appear on children's hands as bacterial monsters. The colorful drawings should be followed by rhymes and chants of how to perform proper hand hygiene. This idea is inspired by the now historical

story *Karius and Baktus* by the Norwegian author Thorbjørn Egner, in which the two tooth trolls play around inside Jens's teeth, making havoc.

The pitch as evaluative judgment of end products

The final fair takes place in a classroom. Because of the overall number of about 250 students in the entire program, fairs are distributed over several classrooms. I find the space in the classroom I observe to be rather crowded, with stands distributed along the walls of the room and relatively huge groups of students waiting to pitch at their stands. I have been allowed to video-record the group of students that I am following as field researcher. When the students have finished pitching their solution(s) about hand hygiene, the pitch is followed by an evaluative judgment. Educator (ED3) has a scorecard in her hand that represents a number of sub-categories, on which ED3, ED4 and an external consultant from the Municipality must provide evaluative feedback. In the following excerpt, a central illocutionary force (Searle, 1976) reveals a true-versus-false dimension regarding what is *evaluated* as innovative (*new*). ED3:

The innovative part of..., the innovative power..., it must be said, you didn't suggest anything new, but what you did, which was innovative, was that you put some already-known things together in a way that covered the challenge. You have clarified this, so in that way, it worked really well. Then you have thought further and made *Karius and Baktus* [...] eh potentials, yes certainly, in relation to the book maybe, right, it could make a big difference. The other [solution] would be fine to implement, but in reality the big difference could be with *Snottus and Influz* [...].

A rationalistic perspective dominates the situation. The "innovative power" is presented as an object that can be assessed on objective criteria. The communication to the students establishes a stable "order" in the form of a final judgment, and this in itself establishes an asymmetric form of "judges of innovation" evaluating "creating students". Thus, authoritative force defines the form and carries the experience of the situation, telling the students what is to be considered new and what the students have done. Basically, the feedback recognizes the students having made their work fit the expectations of the course. However, the view of innovation communicated seems difficult to discern, because the judgment both denies that it is something

new and in the same sentence acknowledges that it is something new, because existing things can be combined.

Pragmatism questions the tendency seen above to establish *true Being*. The analysis of the situation shows that the criterion is not a “thing” separate from the situation in which several people communicate responsively. The pitch situation itself is a game of persuasion. Whether an analogy is the pitch in music or in baseball, the pitch sets the tone of a game in actual relations between actors and artifacts, e.g., *the singer, the song and the listener; the players, the rules, judges, opponents and audience*. When the pitch is judged on objective criteria, it leaves the impression that the pitch is nothing but transmitting a message of truth from A to B. But the solutions cannot simply be transmitted linguistically. They are communicated within asymmetric interpretive relations (students and judges). The students’ solutions are interpreted from more or less implicit theory, and I interpret the confirmation of what is considered innovative as an unspoken Schumpeterian (1934) theoretical version of innovation as new combinations. However, no distinction is made between the interpretations that arise in the situation from the assessors and possible implicit and explicit theory. Students must accept this confusion as an overall objective judgment of what is considered new, and a distance in terms of a “final” overall judgement is created to the students’ own experiences and considerations during the creating process in the course. In the following, I discuss this “separation” further as a consequence relative to how values affect how and why students are expected to think, act and participate in the innovation course, and I end by discussing whether reflection is valuable when students are pitching in innovative endeavors.

Values-realization: discussion of consequences

Seen in the analytical light of rhythm as ordered variations of changes, the concept of innovation as a concept of judgment as a “final” end seems problematic, as it places one value, novelty, in the hierarchy above the obsolete past. Let us assume that the students’ hygiene station is brought into an experimental process in which, over time, actors actually come up with solutions to a hygiene problem. In this hypothetical yet possible and realistic situation, it would in a sense be of less importance whether the idea at a given time in a decoupled context were to be judged innovative. Thus, previous research shows that innovative solutions can benefit from practice because they are developed over time by co-creating, co-communicating and interpreting

stakeholders, as is known from research on the entrepreneurial and innovative emergence of modern wind turbines in Denmark (Garud & Karnøe, 2003). Through space and time, one trait originally developed for one purpose can serve as the basis for new success known as *exaptation* (Sarasvathy, 2008, p. 187). Hence, *new* ideas are not a dominant order in itself. The “order” of the rhythm in the innovative and entrepreneurial process is ongoing variations over time like the ebb and flow of tides (Dewey, 1934). New ideas about how something can be done are relative to the path of experience and knowledge from *old* ideas like the transformation of ideas from the *old* flour mill to *modern* wind turbines. In that sense, it could be valuable to consider the pitch as a rhythmic pause (Dewey, 1934) in an entrepreneurial process instead of as a final judgment of the students within a given time limit. The time limit is expressed through speech and a physical motion as the group of judges produce a *next institutional step* (Searle, 1976; Nybye, 2020, p. 188). They turn to the right and walk to the next group in the room, who must present their idea, and the very course process is in that sense rhythmic, a pause before the next group in a series must present their pitch. Here, time and space are organized through an educational norm of sequence that guides the right actions, just as the overall educational process was outlined in six steps in the first lesson. The order of succession is connected to the content, and this constitutes a certain perception of what is to be considered as *real* or said, with Dewey, to be *true Being*.

Fast pace

The real *true* meaning of the pitch is that it is conducted quickly at a fast pace, and there is no time to go into the students’ reflections, as the next pitch is waiting. Thus, when values of speed and efficiency intertwined with those of novelty and completion underpin the conditions of participation in the innovation course, these affect the pace of the learning process. Why is it actually the *secondary* solution, the one that the students themselves experienced as meaningful on the basis of their own inquiry, that actually gets the most recognition? Why is the students’ sketch model of the hand hygiene problem as a “vicious circle” not extremely relevant? In the evaluation of the students’ solution, the analysis inherent in the sketch model is not articulated. Why does it fall foul of the judgment of innovative force (novelty) and the realization of the next institutional step (completion)? The values are “rules” to be followed. The course in itself realizes efficiency. It is defined by a framework of 3 weeks. The setting defines the direction

and pace of acquisition and understanding of knowledge and skills. The pitch as educational tool represents the value of speed in connection with efficiency, novelty and completion. Is this argument valid? It seems efficient that over 200 students distributed in space are pitching ideas (discursively called *solutions*) at the same time through the same time slots, effectuating institutional steps towards the ending of the course. In Danish, the discourse of *solutions* can cover an “action, phenomenon or product that solves, for example, a problem, a conflict, a task or a riddle.”^{xix} But why is the discourse of solutions relevant? And, if we find an answer to this, it may be obvious to investigate some of the connotations that follow the discourse, which I admit complicate the assumption that objective value can be created rapidly over a short predetermined period and communicated in few minutes. It is possible, but are these solutions then lasting solutions?

Historically speaking, there are clear positive consequences from new inventions in the wake of sciences such as engineering and medicine that expand the human possibilities in life (Dewey, 1929, p. 35), and a reservation to the present analysis is that I do not explore the benefits of the outcomes presented as innovations by the students on the course. That said, a philosophical consequence for Dewey was the separation of subject and object and a world of things “indifferent to human interests” if one forgets the connection between the scientifically produced objects and that of primary experience (Ibid.). Educational research has argued that this separation of meaning and end products of practice risks creating “an artificial distance between the learner and the curriculum” because objective discoveries are valued in favor of the creative impact of humans (Biesta, 2006, p. 35). The focus on meaning in the present analysis as “located in human practice” (Ibid.) establishes an analytical contrast that actually shows that innovation as an educational topic creates this tendency to separation and distance between end products and primary experience. Thus, a strength of the present analysis is that it reveals a far more complex and hidden rhythm of education than evaluations of pitched end products (innovative solutions) *per se*, and this establishes a ground for consideration of how to scaffold future entrepreneurial education and bring the student’s primary experiences to the foreground through a focus on reflection on the interconnection between subject and object (Dewey, 1929, pp. 27-34, 39) which, in the following, opens up a choice regarding educational ideals that can be explored further in future works.

A self-questioning approach as a possible challenge to the rhythm of speed

An implication of Dewey's pragmatism for education and educational research is that students are not acquiring knowledge in any passive way (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 9). The immaterial mind is not acquiring the material world outside that mind (Ibid.); in Dewey's pragmatism, analytical thinking actually plays a crucial role in reflecting on what humans experience as naturalized qualities (Dewey, 1929; Dewey, 1938, pp. 762-764). The data reveals a positive opportunity in that the students experience engaging as active participants and voices in the current development and communication of health knowledge and future health practice. However, values of *speed* and the striving for *novelty* dominate expectations of students' outcomes amplified by course *efficiency* and the aim of *completion*. This values-realizing situation narrows down the room for deeper reflection on substance, on historical, political or environmental issues relevant to new ideas and on the student's own experiences of the learning process. Based on the present analysis, my argument is that speed and the striving for novelty become affordances for the health students, and through the pitch the students are expected to act as a version of saleswo/men in a marketplace for new solutions to an audience of assessing judges, while the active, reflective student as figure is left behind. This reflects the impact of the above-mentioned market mechanisms that constitute a subjecting contemporary cultural discourse of "utility semantics" (Bröckling, 2016).

But what is the educational ideal in this semantic development? What if the *why* in the naturalization of the pitch is further investigated (Hytti, 2018)? Why is the pitch as tool relevant to a specific knowledge area such as health? Is it to learn students to adapt strictly to externally defined criteria for what is judged new and useful, or to engage in a self-questioning approach to the entire chain of "affecting, being affected and self-affecting" (Bröckling, 2016)? I argue that a self-monitoring approach (Biggs & Tang, 2011) and a more critical pedagogical approach in entrepreneurial education (Berglund & Verduijn, 2018; Lackéus, 2017; Lindbergh & Schwartz, 2018) can lead to active participatory reflection among students: what do I affect in positive and negative terms when engaging in innovative endeavors? For whom and for what are my ideas good or bad? Which interests, tools and discourses affect me, why, and with what consequences? Such questions of course need scaffolding, and they will challenge the rhythm of speed and create a tension between values, because an analytical pace enters the game of persuasion relative to the pitch situation! The questions outlined draw on the basic openness in

pragmatism, treating more explicitly *the pitch as a rhythmic pause* – not the final *Truth*, which, to paraphrase Dewey's fellow spirit W. James, basically opens *the quest* rather than closing it (James, 1907, p. 21). Pragmatism then *unstiffens our theories* rather than finding final answers (Ibid.); this places reflection and analysis in the very stream of the student's experiences and makes reflection critical, non-static and forward moving.

Conclusion

The article investigates the pitch as educational tool in an innovation course at the health studies department in a Danish University College. On the basis of Dewey's pragmatism and his view of communication, the analysis shows that the meaning of the pitch is not a stable or neutral fact. It gains its "essence" from an educational rhythm of opposing energies among educators and students who make meaning as communicating and experiencing subjects. Values of *speed* and the striving for *novelty* dominate expectations of students' outcomes. Amplified by course *efficiency* and the aim of *completion* after three weeks on the course, these values support a rationalistic educational discourse in which educators, as judges of students' innovative solutions, mainly evaluate the end products of practice. A consequence is that this asymmetric structure establishes a value-based hierarchy (*true Being*, Dewey, 1929) in which news value is demanded and deeper nuances of innovation and the students' primary experiences that created the end products are absent in favor of "utility semantics" (Bröckling, 2016). The students can escape neither the values, the language nor the pitch as a sales practice if they are to pass the innovation course, and this illustrates how the pitch as a tool is naturalized as a normative element not only in society but within educational contexts. Finally, the article suggests an opening, self-questioning educational approach pointing towards the need for a reflective value that can challenge the established system of values and the "objective" innovation discourse. The standpoint in pragmatism then challenges the established meaning making relative to the pitch and the innovation course, offering a different pace and rhythm.

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Notes

ⁱ See Pittaway & Edwards (2012) for distinctions between four forms of entrepreneurship education: “About”, “for”, “through” and “Embedded” / “In”.

ⁱⁱ One case of three students (Occupational Therapy (OCT)) was not part of a course and is thus considered *extra-curricular*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Also referred to as the Stanford model. Developed from Stanford Research Institute: Carlson, Curtis R. & Wilmot, William W., (2006). *Innovation. The Five Disciplines for Creating What Customers Want*. New York, Crown Business. <https://archive.org/details/innovation00curt/page/n5/mode/2up>

^{iv} The historical roots of pragmatism were set by American philosophers of science C.S. Peirce (1839-1914), W. James (1842-1910) and J. Dewey (1859-1952) and further developed by e.g. G.H. Mead (1863-1931) (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

^v In his writings, Biesta argues for the functioning of education through three domains: “Qualification” (*knowledge, skills and dispositions – that qualify someone to do something*); “socialization” (*becoming part of existing traditions and cultures and ways of being and doing*) and the more philosophical domain “subjectification” (*the process of becoming-a-subject*) (Biesta, 2020, p. 34).

^{vi} Pragmatism was originally developed as part of a cultural critique of rational Cartesian thinking that e.g. leads to a mechanical understanding and of way of life that separates rational scientific thinking from human experience and feelings (James, 1907; Dewey, 1929/2013; Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

^{vii} According to R. Stacey, etymologically, the word “symbol” derives from Greek *symbolon* (a mark or token) and *sym-ballein* (to throw together) (Stacey, 2003, p. 68). Building on G.H. Mead, Stacey argues that a symbol means that meaning is *thrown together* with its object and as such is communicative action and stands for something for someone (Ibid.).

^{viii} Secondary data from the PowerPoint presentation. Six pre-defined steps: “(1) Research and analysis week one; (2) Vision/challenge week one; (3) Idea development week two; (4) Prototype/concept development, possibly tests and adjustments week two; (5) Implementation (or a plan for this) week three; (6) Knowledge sharing week three” (org. listed with bullet points).

^{ix} Ref.: <https://ordnet.dk/ddo/ordbog?query=1%C3%B8sning>

About The Author

Nicolai Nybye, MA, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Business Research, UCL University College, Denmark. He conducts qualitative research on the relationship between entrepreneurship, innovation and education.