



# Best Practices

Accelerated & Advanced Curriculum  
Presented by Martin “Randy” Cox

Part of the *Best Practices Mentoring Program*, funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter School Dissemination Grant and administered by Star Charter School, in collaboration with Rapoport Academy.

**Notes on the Adaptation:** In thinking about visions of education, there is no place that serves the ideals of educational experimentation and a willingness to reinvent the philosophical foundations of our curricula as in the public charter school. The mission of charter schools is to reinvent public education, and to approach students according to specific needs and influences—some of which are culturally or intellectually determined, others of which may be geographically or demographically determined. Public charter schools accept the risks of innovation—the potential for failure, the challenge of changed expectations, the currents of political and social attack or acceptance. The founders and leaders of charter schools are, in the most direct sense, “intellectual entrepreneurs.” The following is an adaptation of an article on Intellectual Entrepreneurship, originally written by Richard A. Cherwitz and Charlotte A. Sullivan. While the article was penned for a rethinking of graduate education, the principles of Intellectual Entrepreneurship as laid out by the authors deserve reiteration. Those principles form the basis of accelerated & advanced learning and are the hallmarks of gifted and talented education. Thus, the following text has been modified from its original form to encompass education in general, rather than only higher/graduate education.

Adapted from:

“Intellectual Entrepreneurship: A Vision for Graduate Education,” by Richard A. Cherwitz & Charlotte A. Sullivan. In *Change*, November/December, 2002. Original Article found at: <https://webspace.utexas.edu/cherwitz/www/articles/change.pdf>

## Intellectual Entrepreneurship: The Philosophy

By Richard A. Cherwitz & Charlotte A. Sullivan  
Adapted by Martin R. Cox

Intellect is not limited to the academy, and entrepreneurship is not limited to business. As we see them, intellectual entrepreneurs, both inside and outside of education, take risks and seize opportunities, discover and create knowledge, employ innovative strategies, collaborate, and solve problems in diverse social realms, including corporate, nonprofit, government, and education.

Four values rest at the heart of intellectual entrepreneurship, and they form the basis for advanced curriculum planning and educating the gifted and talented: *vision and discovery*, *ownership and accountability*, *integrative thinking and action*, and *collaboration and teamwork*.

***Vision and Discovery.*** Intellectual entrepreneurs develop visions for their academic and professional work by imagining the realm of possibilities for themselves. This is a discovery process in which individuals continually and regularly learn more about themselves and their areas of expertise. It is also a rediscovery process in which professionals not only invent, but also reinvent, themselves. To accomplish this, intellectual entrepreneurship requires individuals to do more than simply perform their jobs. It also requires individuals to contemplate who they are, what matters most to them, and what possibilities are available to them.

From this perspective, students are asked to reflect on themselves and their disciplines, ascertaining what is important to them as a basis for constructing an academic vision. This, in turn, allows them to make conscious choices in tune with their interests and passions. A case in point is a doctoral student in government. Following the events of September 11, and as a direct result of reflection about his academic professional vision that began in an IE class, he decided to create a network of scholars in his discipline who are interested in using political theory to address real-world concerns. He has become an even more dedicated political scientist—one whose passion is producing a vision that capitalizes on the potential value of scholarship in political theory.

It is somewhat ironic that academics historically have eschewed the term *entrepreneurship*. After all, discovery and risk-taking are the essence of good scholarship—and all the other activities valued by the academy (such as teaching, research, and service).

Describing intellectual entrepreneurship as exactly the right way to conceive of education, Bartholomew Sparrow, a UT professor of government, notes, “I describe academic life to others outside of the academy in precisely that language [intellectual entrepreneurship]: the successful academic creates a body of work that distinguishes that same scholar from the others by reputation, much as a brand name or particular product distinguishes a category of goods. There is risk-taking and there is creation. But I make no immediate association with capitalism, since an entrepreneur (see ‘enterprise’) is simply one who undertakes some project and bears the risk. An artist or film producer could be an entrepreneur, not just the small businessman. Risk-taking by an academic could be within the scientific lab, within the concert hall, or in the pages of a manuscript.”

Imagine a system of education that begins by asking students to think about what matters most to them and then uses their answers to create research programs, while simultaneously exploring possibilities for using that knowledge. This approach applies to more than just educational institutions. What organization would not be improved by creating opportunities for its workers to discover what they do well and what they desire most, and then formulating plans to harness this passion and talent?

***Ownership and Accountability.*** Based on the preceding discussion, it follows that intellectual entrepreneurs own their education and development. Education is not handed to them. Having discovered more about themselves and their disciplines, intellectual entrepreneurs take responsibility for acquiring the knowledge and tools required to bring their vision to fruition.

Jobs are not predetermined outcomes or entitlements acquired after completing an education or obtaining a certain level of proficiency. Instead, jobs are “possibilities.” One of the goals of IE is to challenge students to think about the wide array of audiences to whom their developing expertise may be important. The educational program, then, is presented as being fundamentally connected to the initial and continuing choices that each individual will make about his or her intellectual identity, not as something that happens after the student’s intellectual development is complete.

Controlling one’s future is a major part of ownership and, therefore, has enormous implications for educational and later professional success. It is easy for people to doubt themselves if they believe they have no control over their futures. This self-doubt can be especially debilitating for high performing students, who tend to be in competitive, rigorous environments where they must “jump through the hoops” to succeed as budding scholars. In the words of one engineering graduate student, IE allows “students to re-empower themselves, so they can get back control over their own education, their own future.”

The link between ownership and accountability is important. Once individuals gain control over their own destinies, it follows logically that they will assume greater responsibility for decisions and their outcomes. “‘Accountability’ is this program’s watchword and ethic,” says Katie Arens, a professor of Germanic studies at UT. “It is the core of the new scholarly community that must be ‘citizen-scholars,’ not just specialists with senses of entitlement.”

An English PhD is a poignant illustration of accountability in action. Believing that his research in technology and literacy has profound implications for how developing nations educate their students, he has begun holding himself accountable for making sure that his state-of-the-art research translates into effective pedagogy and instructional technology. Accountability such as this does not come from a sense of being entitled to a job following completion of the doctorate; it results from an attitude regarding the importance of owning one’s professional identity and taking responsibility for creating one’s future.

A sense of accountability goes well beyond passing standards and state-mandated basics. The student trained in accountability is one trained in the ethics of interrelations, one who understands that knowledge gained must be well-used.

***Integrative Thinking and Action.*** Intellectual entrepreneurs, in our conception, know the limits of partial knowledge and particular perspectives; they understand the myopia that results when people work and think as individuals in a vacuum. For intellectual entrepreneurs, “synergy” is more than a buzzword; it means that something greater than the sum of the parts can indeed be produced when people engage in integrative thinking.

This requires individuals to move beyond conventional notions of discrete academic disciplines and lone scholars in search of the truth. The reality that complex issues and problems frequently don't fit neatly into one discipline is made clear in IE. Synergy groups also encourage participants from different disciplines and organizations to devise solutions to problems that reflect an integration of perspectives.

This reaction reflects one of the IE program's mottos: "I know, therefore I must act." Take the case of another IE student whose graduate specialty is poetry. Knowing that graduation was imminent, she began to ask: "What am I going to do with my degree?" The answer emerged when she enrolled in an IE class and began to develop a vision for "getting writing into the community," proposing that poetry might be used as a way to address community issues.

A focal point became teaching poetry and writing skills to schoolaged children not only to increase their creativity and critical thinking, but also to promote self-expression and self-confidence. She reasoned that children could write poetry as a way to deal with their problems, and she ultimately developed consulting contracts to conduct writing and creativity workshops with area high schools, the Austin Public Library, and several local writing groups. Her venture, "Creativity Matters," exemplifies what transpires when a student constructs a vision, takes ownership of her education and turns integrative thinking into action.

**Collaboration and Teamwork.** Collaboration and teamwork are clearly integral to the process we describe. People and relationships are the intellectual capital that make possible integrative thinking and synergy. While ideas are the commodity of academic institutions and, therefore, have been the traditional focus of the delivery of education, intellectual entrepreneurs understand that creativity and ideas are generated when people and networks are viewed as the primary resource.

In IE classes and synergy groups, students work collaboratively in undertaking scholarly projects and tackling complex issues. They quickly learn that many obstacles inside and outside of the academy stem from an inability to determine who really controls the resources required to take an idea or a project to the next step. When they discover that schools, universities, and intellectual communities are composed of vast networks of people to whom they can turn for help, students experience an epiphany. They realize, perhaps for the first time, that they "are not in it alone" and that answers to some of the most vexing challenges involve human resources—people who can help them overcome obstacles to their research or logistical barriers impeding completion of their degrees.

**Conclusion** More than a specific program or a particular vehicle for delivering content, intellectual entrepreneurship is a philosophy of education. It is also a philosophy for conceptualizing how educational institutions should work more collaboratively with their students and communities to solve complex problems. Hence, it doesn't take an enormous infusion of money or an organization of a certain size to accept the IE philosophy and incorporate it into existing and new practices for educating students. It does, however, require institutions to be true to the philosophy, assuming, as do all entrepreneurs, the risks associated with change. Coming up with novel ideas, identifying worthwhile problems to work on, securing resources needed to conduct research, and disseminating findings are all entrepreneurial.

The philosophy and practice of intellectual entrepreneurship serve as a catalyst, allowing students to identify opportunities to put their training and expertise to use in creative and innovative ways, whether in business or scholarship. Intellectual entrepreneurship mandates that students own and be accountable for their education. It recognizes the importance of students' discovering their personal and professional identities, and then developing an academic professional vision. Intellectual entrepreneurship assumes that creativity and innovation are inherently collaborative—that the ability to integrate different viewpoints is critical to success—and it obligates individuals to act on what they know.

Intellectual entrepreneurship is a way of thinking that harkens back to our earliest Western intellectual traditions—to a time when theory and practice were united. John Campbell, a scholar of classical rhetoric, sums up the approach:

Intellectual entrepreneurship seeks to reclaim for the contemporary world the oldest strain in our common intellectual tradition: the need for thought and reflection in the midst of the world of action. As the experiment of the original Greek teachers of practical affairs demonstrated, and as Plato demonstrated through his reflections on these very themes, some of the deepest problems of thought emerge from the affairs of practical life. When one brings together the demands for action and the equally unrelenting demands for reflection characteristic of the new electronic and global marketplace, the term "intellectual entrepreneur" describes a new form of union between the academy and the world and between the academy and its own deepest traditions.