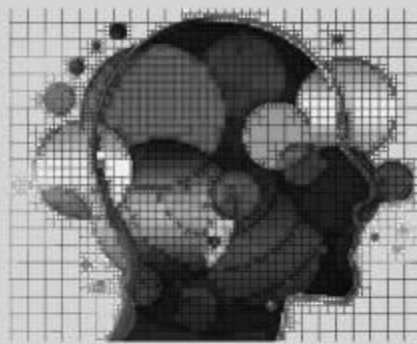


**6th Teaching Innovation  
& Entrepreneurship  
Excellence Awards  
2020**



**An Anthology of Case Histories**

**Edited by  
Dan Remenyi**

# 6th Teaching Innovation & Entrepreneurship Excellence Awards 2020

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An Anthology of Case Histories

Edited by Dan Remenyi

6th Teaching Innovation & Entrepreneurship Excellence Awards 2020: An Anthology of Case Histories:

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# Theatre Teaches: Art, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

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**Mariasole Bannò<sup>1</sup>, Sandro Trento<sup>2</sup> and Andrea Albertini<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor at University of Brescia, Italy

<sup>2</sup>Full Professor at University of Trento, Italy

<sup>3</sup>Actor at Betulla Teatro, Italy

[mariasole.banno@unibs.it](mailto:mariasole.banno@unibs.it)

## 1. Introduction

The worldwide competitiveness is asking for entrepreneurs and innovators something different from the past; they need to develop skills such as: empathy, creativity, spirit of collaboration and adaptation, flexibility, ability to understand, communicate and learn fast (Pinard & Allio 2005). Nowadays, entrepreneurs should be able to turn the complicated into simple, to find strong, effectual and creative answers for different problems and to communicate actually how, where and when the solutions identified must be put into reality (Shavinina, 2013; Violante & Vezzetti, 2017).

Technical skills can be learned, (Mourshed & Suder, 2014; Roos & Statler, 2004), however the future belongs to firms that hold not only most advanced technology and technical knowledge together but also entrepreneurs and innovators characterized by cognitive, methodological, creative and interpersonal skills (Yunus and Li, 2005).

The authors are well aware that knowledge and soft skills have to be considered together and integrated when working on entrepreneurship and innovation (Krathwohl, 2002). The involvement of the whole person is achieved through an approach that includes intellect, practice and emotion (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013) and this is even more true when talking about entrepreneurship and innovation.

As such, we illustrate the use of arts in teaching (named in the literature as Arts-based methods), in particular the art of the theater, to provide the new and aforementioned skills searched from entrepreneurial and innovation

teaching. Art helps to broaden the vision of real problems, and this implies the acquisition and practice of many different non-technical skills (Adler, 2006). Arts-based methods aim to teach through mechanisms in which, the use of art, reach hidden knowledge and creativity, typical of entrepreneurship and innovation, that are difficult to achieve only through logic and simple rational thought.

Thanks to our teaching method, named Theatre Teaches, students develop or improve a plenitude of valuable transversal skills, such as: communication skills (public speaking, writing, theatre performance, negotiations), team work and leadership (team activities involving students with diverse backgrounds), time management (re-organization of one's time in order to complete the program), and problem solving (activities are often challenge-based) (Vogler et al., 2018).

## **2. The infrastructure**

Theatre Teaches is a new Arts-base method carried out for the first time in 2015 (Bannò et al., 2018) by Professor in Industrial Economic at the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering Mariasole Bannò and the Actor and Author Andrea Albertini<sup>1</sup>. The case here analyzed is a specific step of the course of study of School of Innovation at University of Trento, Italy. Hereafter the description from the official website of the main objective of the School:

*The School of Innovation is an interdepartmental structure of the University of Trento providing a multidisciplinary extracurricular program focused on innovation and entrepreneurship to selected MA*

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<sup>1</sup>The method was carried out for the first time at master degree of Management and Economics, University of Trento. Prof Sandro Trento was the first professor who believed in this art-based method. In the last five years, we organize 11 Theatre Teaches editions with more of 1,500 students: five edition in master degree of management in University of Trento, three at University of Brescia, one in Brescia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, one at Clab at University of Brescia (we thank Prof. Sansoni who choose our art based method as a part of the entrepreneurial education of the students of Clab in 2019) and the last one at School of Innovation in Trento. In order to better explain the method, we focus only on the last edition at School of Innovation because it is the most recent one.

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*and PhD students from all University departments. It offers both up-to-date knowledge on innovation in different disciplines and skills necessary for the creation of innovative solutions. In addition to interdisciplinary technical knowledge, students acquire a set of highly appreciated economic and managerial competencies that can be used for developing of business ideas in any domain. (...) This structure will enhance educational and training programs of the University by stimulating innovative and creative approaches to the solutions of problems in different disciplinary fields. This project is the first one of this kind in Italy and takes a revolutionary approach to multidisciplinary university education by providing a unique offer of highly practical and interactive set of course, laboratories and case studies (...).*

During the School, as concern the specific teaching initiative (i.e. Theatre Teaches<sup>2</sup>), professor and actor asked students to write a play using topics such as entrepreneurial ideas, innovations, values, vision or epic and heroic way of thinking with the aim to stage in a real play in front of a real theatre audience.

Referring to Taylor and Ladkin (2009) it is possible to distinguish all four different methods of training using Theatre Teaches. In particular, Transfer of Skill and Manufacturing are the most developed ones<sup>3</sup>. Starting from the learning of selected artistic skills, the purpose is to transfer what achieved to business organizational contexts. Music, theatre or dance can create different abilities like taking advantage from mistakes, how to improvise, have full control of the surrounding space (Eisner, 2002). The human brain has evolved through the learning of manual skills and art becomes a means by which one can continue to develop its own brain skills (Dissanayake, 2015). "Manufacturing" implies a mental effort that activates intuition and creativity, elements that are fundamental in the process of forming new managers and/or entrepreneur.

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<sup>2</sup>Not to be confused to Business Theatre (D'Allura, & Faraci, 2018; Pearce & Sutton Brady, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Projective Technique and Illustration of the Essence are the other two.

### **3. The challenges**

In order to conduct Theatre Teaches you just need: creativity, an actor and a real theatre. The challenge is structured in 25 hours of work, usually from 9 a.m to 5 p.m, except last day that involve the students till 12 p.m.

The different heterogeneity of participants compels academic lectures to rethink classes' contents, trying to make them less technical and more comprehensible to diversified audiences. They also get an opportunity to share the topics of their expertise with the students of different backgrounds, getting new insights and fresh perspectives. Students act as co-creators since they are constantly encouraged to contribute. Unlike frontal lessons, students' active engagement during Theatre Teaches classes makes each lesson a unique experience due to the diversity of participants and their idiosyncrasies.

In the first day, we tried to know each other, teachers, actor and students, without the typical first-meeting-embarrassment, also trying to remove mental oxidations typical of our individual society, such as halfway gestures, voices that can't be heard, faint, almost inaudible etc. (Pfeiffer et al., 2017). To create a group imprinting, a scream of war was chosen to start each lesson, in order to free the tension, create a slogan, a recognizable sign within the same group. "Ut! Ut! Ut!" (Out! Out! Out!) was chosen, which was the motto that the troops of Aroldo II shouted to the Bretons of William the Conqueror during the battle of Hastings. All the diaphragms, half boys and half girls, made the walls of the Athenaeum to vibrate, overwhelming us like a wave, a sort of acoustic earthquake. To liberate the primordial instinct, students were asked to move, scream and communicate as monkeys, primordial hominids, in order to gain awareness of their body, space and voice. Finally, in the most authentic spirit of theatrical improvisation, the students were asked to alternate in groups and stage a small performance without preparation, choosing among the subjects of the course (Amaral et al., 2017; Senje, 2017). This has resulted in extemporaneous, exhilarating, grotesque and significant situations in which everyone was involved (Picture 1).



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**Picture 1:** First Day: trying to remove mental oxidations and embarrassment

In the second day, only after this first liberating phase, the Actor illustrated the basic and simplified characteristics of theatrical techniques.

Individual theatrical techniques are: to enhance expressive and communicative skills, through the use of body and voice; to widen the perception of physical and imaginary space; to develop the imaginary through improvisation; to improve self-image and self-esteem; to read a script, developing contents, gestures, rhythms and vocal emission; to learn how to use symbols and objects for a staging.

Group theatrical techniques are: to encourage the ability to listen oneself and within the group, promoting relationships with others; to learn their own limits and resources and those of the group; to bring out and promote potentialities and capacity, and putting them in relation to those of others; to increase self-confidence and trust with each other; to help each other through the common goal of the final representation.

The students, during the third day, were allowed to self-select into groups of 7 to 10 people and wrote a script, dealing with directing, with the description of the characters, the creation of movements within the stage space, the choice of furnishings and costumes, lights and music. Through a simple drawing, a sort of streamlined storyboard, Actor build, with students, the different moments of the play, choosing atmosphere, lights, theatrical

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costumes, objects and all what they need to organize the plot. The added value of this theatrical exercise was the writing of an original script by students, as the result of their ideas and fantasy concerning entrepreneurial ideas and values (Pfeiffer et al. 2017).

During the fourth day the script was then given a more institutional scenic form by the Actor, then it has become a real play where the actors and technicians were the same students that wrote the play (Senje, 2017). All students have to memorize and play the role during the rehearsal.



**Picture 2:** Fifth Day: the real performance, in a real theatre with a real audience



**Picture 3:** Fifth Day: Students on the stage

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The final day challenge consists in the most important effort. All pieces have been performed in one of the most important theatres in the city, under the patronage of the municipality, where two thousand spectators attend the entertainment (Fifth day) (Picture 2).

Students will represent the play in front of a real audience (Picture 3). No way out. No chance to go back. Whatever it happens. The last match with all the other teams. But it is not an extrinsic competition with a theatrical judgment about acting quality or plot attributes. All experience is, basically, an intimate contest with deep feelings inside students, a soul meeting with the deeper part inside them. A personal challenge with themselves and, at the same time, with all other actors inside play. They cannot win alone. They can't walk on the wood of the stage, behind the curtain few seconds before it opens, in the backstage one step before their first word will reverberate in the theatre, they can't make all without thinking about others. Only theatre is able to provide a wide spectrum of this inner capability.

In the next paragraph an example of script<sup>4</sup> and real play of the first edition is reported.

Figures 1 to 8 of this paragraph are neither numbered nor captioned so as not to disturb the reading of the screenplay. (Source: all the photos are of our production)

This play is about Time, its meaning and how it brings changes. The title is: Waves' thoughts. A man's rise or defeat depends on the flowing seconds just like the surface water is ruffled by the waves. The comparison between a businessman thoughts and the voices of two economists of the past lights the endless daily flow of concerns of the modern businessman. However, the best advice to overcome hardship of life will come from his mother.

(We are on a beach. The beach is done of nothing. The sea and the song of the birds are background sounds. On the left, a man sits on the ground and

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<sup>4</sup> The script was previously published as example in Bannò et al 2018. Photos by Valerio Villa and Ileana Bodini, University of Brescia.

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plays a guitar: “The sound of silence”. The guitarist is always on the stage, on a side, sitting downstage, cross-legged, on the ground)



*(A barefoot man arrives, wearing pants with cuffs to not soak them. He sits on the ground, in the sand, and starts talking)*

BUSINESSMAN: What have we lost? We lose our creativity or we were not from the beginning? Sometimes I ask myself how are the other me, the one who didn't go the university: better go to work. Or the one who didn't catch the bus that Saturday morning. You want to be a good guy, so you stop at crosswalk to let a woman with Russian eyes to cross the street. She thanks you and comes back home just 4.7 seconds early, so that a brick falls on her head. The Russian-eyed woman is dead now. You wait a minute, and think about how many people have you killed without knowing. Maybe none. Maybe one. Maybe one is my good friend. Another sucks. But the “butterfly effect” sucks, and fortunately we don't see it.



*(A man wearing '800 clothes arrives in a ridiculously way. He sits on the ground, next to the businessman)*

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ADAM SMITH: Where are we? || BUSINESSMAN: I don't know. It seems a beach. Who are you? || ADAM SMITH: Adam Smith. || BUSINESSMAN: Ah ah ah, good! And what are you doing here? || ADAM SMITH: I'm, somehow, waiting. Do you want a cigarette? || BUSINESSMAN: No, thanks. I'm not smoking. || ADAM SMITH: Good boy, smoking is a bad habit.

*[...] awkward silence*

BUSINESSMAN: Tomorrow I will have to shut down my business, my firm. It will not be exactly tomorrow, but tomorrow will be the day in which I will have to tell people. For a minute I'd like to be the head of a corporation: you are not required to look in the eyes your 600.000 workers when you're firing them. 21 people work for me. When 21 people work for you, if you don't look them in the eyes you're being rude. I know their name, in some terrible cases I also remember their wife's name, o their parrot. || ADAM SMITH: Never in a month of Sundays! || BUSINESSMAN: Ok! I know you came from the past, but you can talk normally! || ADAM SMITH: Thank you, you're doing me a favor. You have sympathy. You're nice, don't worry, but I don't mean in that way. You have sympathy, I mean, you are involved with emotions. Stoicism thinks the universe as a big living being, constantly crossed by the living spirit, the "pneuma". The sympathy is the interdependence between all the parts of the universe, where each event is related to every part of the world. || BUSINESSMAN: Wow. Did you copy it? || ADAM SMITH: Yes, I did. ||

*[...] awkward silence*

ADAM SMITH: And what could you do? Instead of closing, I mean?  
BUSINESSMAN: To slowly bankrupt, I think.

*(A woman enters, slowly, and sits on the ground)*

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BUSINESSMAN: And who are you? || GEORGESCU: I am Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen - BUSINESSMAN: And why don't you talk Romanian? || GEORGESCU: (Trying to hardly speak Romanian) sarutmana... pentru... masa... || BUSINESSMAN: Give it up. Why are you a woman? || GEORGESCU: Does it make a difference? I will give you an advice: you are too egocentric. Do you think you can decide on people's future? You think you're worth something? You think you can make a difference? Does the control you think you have on others turn you on? Have you ever heard of bio-economy? Physics laws are inevitable, and also economics sciences have to take them into account. Have you ever thought our blood as an endless battlefield of organisms, globules and so on? If this perfectly equilibrated conflict will end our body will not work anymore. Maybe you are not considering the problem from the right point of view. Don't you think you are a pawn in a bigger and inscrutable plan?

*A guitar life performance of "the sound of silence" starts. The guitarist is always on the stage, on a side, sitting downstage, cross-legged, on the ground.*



BUSINESSMAN: Just a question. Do you also hear a music? || ADAM SMITH: Of course, it is "The sound of silence". Whoever the musician is, he is undoubtedly poor. But this song is like the sea: you surely cannot complain even if it continues endlessly.

*A simply-dressed woman enters, and sits.*

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BUSINESSMAN: Oh my God, Mum, what are you doing here. Let me be, I'm thinking. || MOTHER: My son, you are disappointing me. I would have been there in the right moment you broke. In the right moment you became blind, and you stopped to look at your men. || BUSINESSMAN: But I know them, one by one. || MOTHER: No, you know how to count them. You know how to divide, multiply and weight them according to their productivity. Their time is money for you, and their life the added value on you CV. || BUSINESSMAN: Mum, how things got so complicated? Why do we feel so lonely in this universe, even if we behave as if someone is always looking at us? Mum, I have calculated the world debt: it is infinite. There is not enough money on this Earth to repay it. And, what name will we have to write on the check? || MOTHER: The tide's coming in, I have to go. || ADAM SMITH: "Mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent". || GEORGESCU: "It's all an entropy question, after all". || MOTHER: Wake up, and dig in the future.

*The alarm rings, darkness. The end*



#### **4. How the initiative was received by the users or participants**

Students report strong satisfaction with the Theatre Teaches program. In order to report how the initiative was received by the users we collect two different point of view, the first one from a student that attended the project and the second one from the actor that follow the students for all the week.

A Student5: (...) we were worried to make a fool of ourselves in front of the other colleagues, those serious, that would have seen us out in the garden making improvisation exercises, trying to act out machine parts too: that's crazy! (...) By the way, in state of the emotional distress, we just let things get

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<sup>5</sup> Ahlam Bender

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out of hand. We have not decided, we have accepted. (...) "But Prof, how I can do this? I've never done this before!". You'll learn, of course, you'll learn. And what happen when you put the squeeze on someone? He's doing, It's an inherent part of us, called self-preservation. And when everything goes on a roll, you feel like a super human, a hero that beat the villains. So, you discover that you have talent in creativity and managing tasks, often last-minute-assigned. And you are ready to address next difficulties. Theatre Teaches isn't only the theatre that we know. It's public speaking, creativity, improvisation, open-mindedness, overcoming the awkwardness, bringing us closer together. (...). Lately we talk a lot about soft skills, entrepreneurship and creativity, but do we know what these are? They aren't something that someone can teach, they are predispositions or elements that we can acquire by experiences. And experiences like theatre can spur us on develop them. These are competences that we aren't able to develop by the teaching we are used to. So, if participating actively to theatre means let us to find our best and it let us to be more ready to enter to the world job as entrepreneur, then all of this it's not more a craziness!

The actor<sup>6</sup>: I believe that acting a character in theatre is an expressive way of communicating with features that go beyond all other forms of communication. Acting a script character, treading the boards, is not just a narcissistic exercise to show themselves, but it is, above all, a team effort. Remember your own words and movements, but also pay attention to words of the other characters and, in the same time, also to their change of position on the stage, their scenic times. A mutual help, trying to let words and feelings flow, to achieve the exact viscosity of the entire theatrical mechanism. A narrative mechanism created to tell: body, voice, symbols, acting one of the endless possible realities, one of the infinitive symbolic possibilities. Free from rigidity, from masks, from that arid and binding attitude that thickens during the days and often does not allow us to be ourselves. Fiction must be relegated to the stage, not to everyday life. Theatre requires feelings to be brought to the paroxysm, to their extreme expression, to their ultimate meaning, so that they can become the symbol of a story. Students, after a first dubious and doubtful involvement in the project, have then expressed their enthusiasm. All played on the stage. Nobody wanted to give up. Those

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<sup>6</sup> Andrea Albertini



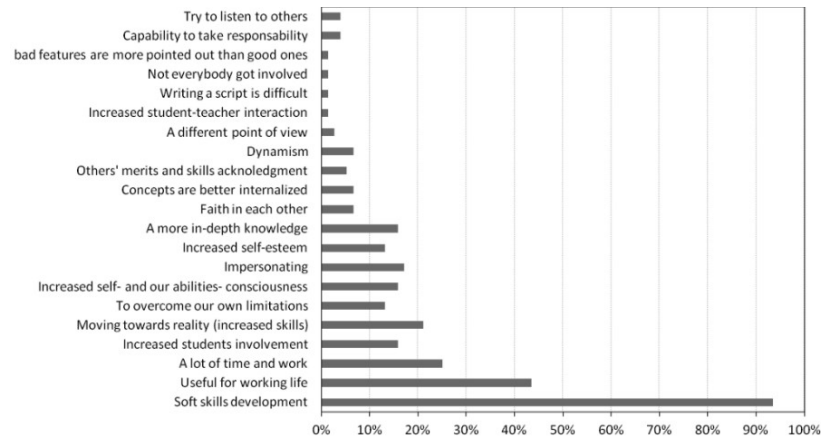
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who haven't acted, have coordinated the music or helped the others in a thousand other ways: writing the script, getting the props and costumes, choosing the songs. This was also the purpose of this experience. What the students really are have been shown: their contradictions, certainties, hardships, abilities, fears. The play showed life, a cross-section of the infinite kaleidoscope of reality, one of the possible innumerable stories and not just a business case or an economic or engineeristic situation. The entire theatrical machine is made up of an infinite amount of skills, and acting is only the final part of the mechanism. Impossible create a show without the help of many people. Director and actors are only what people perceive in the performance but without hair and makeup stylists, technicians, sound engineering, light designers and all those who allow actors to cry, kiss, screaming, kill, love, in essence tell on the stage the story that the author of the text invented. Theatre means knowing how to do many things. Theatre teaches you always how solve things anyway, even at the last moment, even a few minutes before going on stage. No escape. Fiction, but not untruth, not a lie. Making theatre actually makes everything more true and the people more authentic.

## **5. The learning outcomes**

A qualitative analysis were conducted in order to explicitate what was achieved. We go beyond the measurement of observable and try to understand the meaning underling action by resolving complex issues that are typical for teaching entrepreneurship and innovation (Eisenhardt, 1989). As such, to analyze the effectiveness of this type of teaching, a simple preliminar question was put to the students after the participation in Theatre Teaches: "Can you tell your experience? What did you learn?" We collected more than 200 responses in more that 300 pages of anonimous written answers.

A first analysis of responses, carried out by simply identifying keywords, reveals the results in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Percentage of identified skills by the students, text analysis,

Source: Our elaboration.

The students recognize many transversal competences as positive aspects, and, following Taylor and Ladkin (2009), we could realaborate and divide them in three main categories: relational soft skills (e.g. communication skills, team-working skills, conflict management skills); cognitive soft skills (e.g. problem solving skills, creativity, imagination, the ability to tolerate pressure and stress); managerial soft skills (e.g. leadership skills, negotiating skills and the ability to motivate). Many of that are fundamental for entrepreneurship. According to Fredricks et al. (2004) and Kahu (2013), these categories compose the emotional, cognitive and behavioral engagement of students. The result of this experiment indicate that there is a significant potential to improve students' competencies through creativity and entrepreneurship which is developed using Theatre Teaches.

A second aspect to analyse, is the impact in terms of creativity (Maritz et al, 2014). We submit the Forward Flow test to the students that participated in Theatre Teaches and to students of a control group. Forward flow by Gray et al. 2019 is a new measure able to quantify free thought and predict creativity, even when controlling for intelligence. Studies also reveal that membership in real-world entrepreneurs is predicted by forward flow, even when

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controlling for performance on divergent thinking tasks. Preliminary results are available upon request.

## **6. Plans to further develop the initiative**

The concept of Theatre Teaches is fully replicable in other university settings willing to adopt training where students from different departments attend short, practical, focused and engaging courses that provide insights into innovation trends in different domains. Moreover, this innovative art-based teaching methods can be used in different university courses regardless the subject area.

The plans to develop the Theatre Teaches initiative are organized in this way: Write a manual with: the detailed explanation of the methodology, the complete collection of all the different exercises for each of the five days, all the workshop experiences to reach the final theatrical performance and the interview to the participants. This manual is for everyone want to know and/or employ this art-based method.

Arrange a collection of accessory material for those wishing to implement the same method: all theatre scripts, all songs and all subsidiary material to reach the final result.

The complete and simple instructions for build sets and scenery suitable for all the plays. This project will be realised in the department of industrial and mechanical engineering of the University of Brescia.

We are sure that Theatre Teaches is a teaching method able to achieve a real training for educational aspects of an entrepreneurial history. Theatre is able to bring to light and discover what and who you really are. Hysteria and paroxysms emerge with bullying. Students release their primordial instincts, whit all flaws and defects but, above all, with the extraordinary capacity to feel yourself and the other. After Theatre, the genetic heritage will be changed forever, but also the cornerstone around which all interior world moves. Theatre is a training for existence that has no equal.

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### **Author Biographies**



**Mariasole Bannò** is Assistant Professor at the University of Brescia, Italy, where she teaches in the fields of economics and management. She published several articles, a monography and book chapters in international publications. Her research interests concern: family business, innovation and internationalization of firms and gender issue.



**Sandro Trento** is Full Professor at the University of Trento, Italy, where he teaches in the fields of strategy and management.



**Andrea Albertini** is an actor in the theatre group La Betulla, Italy. He is also a writer. Among other, his play “La Chimica Invisibile”, about woman and science, reached the fifty repeat performances in the last year.