

Critical Reflection Essay

TIMS3311 WIL Experience

By

Amirpasha Gholami

October 2025

S4784792

OTO

When I first started working on OTO, I didn't imagine how much it would change me. What began as a small idea to fix frustrations in my own piano and guitar lessons evolved into something that pushed me to learn, experiment, and grow. Through my WIL in TIMS3311, I've applied three main theories Effectuation, Lean Startup, and Design Thinking not only in class but in real decision-making. This experience wasn't just about building an app; it was about learning how to build myself as an entrepreneur.

1. The Overall WIL Experience

My WIL journey was messy, challenging, and full of surprises. From day one, I was forced to rely on myself. I had no formal coding background but decided to build the first version of OTO using Replit and AI support. I kept hitting walls especially when setting up WebRTC for real-time lessons and some days felt like I was going backwards. But even those frustrating moments taught me more than any smooth success ever could.

One of the hardest parts was staying within budget. To keep OTO lean, I committed to only spending about AUD \$150 so far. That decision came from the idea of *affordable loss*, a key principle of Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001). Instead of betting everything on a perfect app, I risked only what I could afford to lose. That mindset allowed me to experiment freely without feeling paralysed by fear.

Yet the highlight came when I began testing with real users. In interviews with Pejman (piano/harmony teacher) and Andre (guitar teacher), I found that my assumption that call quality was the main issue was only partly true. They cared more about teaching tools: fretboard overlays, notation sharing, and split screens. That pivot in insight reflects both Design Thinking (which pushes you to empathise and redefine the problem) and Lean Startup (which demands you test assumptions and pivot quickly).

Looking back, I wish I had started interviews even earlier, before trying to perfect the tech. But that's the reality of entrepreneurship progress isn't linear. Through this process, I learned patience, resilience, and how iteration leads to better outcomes.

2. Networks and Ecosystem

During the OTO project, I realised that the most valuable part of this course wasn't just learning frameworks it was the people I connected with. My WIL experience helped me build new networks both inside and outside the classroom. Talking with other student founders helped me think differently. For example, one of them suggested that I should also interview parents of students, not just teachers. That small idea opened a new perspective: OTO could include features like progress tracking and reports for parents, making the platform more useful for both sides.

In the broader startup ecosystem, my network grew a lot through the 20 teacher interviews I ran including music instructors from Iran and Australia across instruments like guitar, piano, vocals, and violin. These conversations gave me a clearer picture of how teachers actually run their online lessons. I found out that many are moving away from institutions because they prefer the independence of managing their own schedules and payments. This means the demand for digital tools that support self-employed teachers is growing fast.

Each interview revealed something new: teachers talked about the costs of internet and software subscriptions, and the frustration of switching between multiple apps for calls, notes, and resources. I also realised there's a global pattern in markets like Iran, teachers rely heavily on Telegram or WhatsApp for lessons, which aren't designed for education. That confirmed that OTO could fill a real gap. In short, my network helped me validate OTO's purpose and improve it. These relationships weren't just connections they became the foundation for how I shaped the next steps of the project.

3. New Knowledge, Insights, and Practical Skills

When I started this course, I already knew the basic theories like Effectuation and Lean Startup from previous entrepreneurship units, but I had never seen them play out in real life. Working on OTO changed that. It turned theories from just concepts into something I could apply and see results from.

The Past.

Before OTO, my understanding of entrepreneurship was mainly surface-level. I could define an MVP or value proposition, but I had never built one myself or validated it with users. I also didn't have any technical background I'd never coded before so the idea of building something functional seemed impossible.

Key Learnings and Skills.

The biggest growth came from seeing how the three frameworks connected.

- **Effectuation** taught me to start with what I have my skills in music, my experience with online lessons, and my connections with teachers. That's how I managed to get my first pilot testers and start small without overplanning.
- **Lean Startup** helped me focus on quick experiments instead of perfection. I built the MVP on Replit to keep costs low and test whether smoother online lessons with integrated tools worked (Ries, 2011).
- **Design Thinking** made me focus on empathy and usability. The interviews with 20 teachers and students showed me that the real value was in tools that made lessons easier and more interactive, not just better video calls (Brown, 2008).

Learning to code on Replit was another major skill. It pushed me to understand how WebRTC enables real-time connections and how backend and frontend systems communicate. I also became more analytical after getting feedback from my lecturer, I went back and analysed over 15 competitors, understanding their features, pricing, and market positions.

The Future.

Out of all the theories, Effectuation had the most personal impact. It showed me that I don't need to wait for the "perfect time" or external funding to start I can build from what I already have. That mindset now shapes how I think about every project I'll do in the future.

4. The Future and Course Reflection

This WIL experience has completely changed how I see entrepreneurship and my career. Before, I thought entrepreneurship was about building something huge or chasing funding. Now, I understand it's about solving real problems and creating something meaningful, even if it starts small.

OTO made me realise why I chose this major: I enjoy building, experimenting, and taking control of creative ideas. I've learned that I thrive in environments where I can innovate and take responsibility. I no longer see myself fitting into a traditional corporate path I want to keep building ventures that merge creativity and technology.

Even though OTO is still early, it has already shaped how I think long term. My next step is to finalise the foundation of the app before adding the requested teaching tools. Once the base is stable, I plan to expand testing to domestic teachers in Australia and eventually release the first public version. Whether OTO becomes a large platform or remains niche, it's already shown me how to turn an idea into action.

The project taught me that opportunities don't appear you create them. The first step is always the hardest, but once you start, things begin to align. I've learned to manage risk, adapt quickly, and stay consistent even when results aren't immediate.

Course Feedback

What I valued most about this course was how practical it was every concept connected directly to my venture. The mix of theory and action made the lessons more meaningful. If I could suggest improvements, I'd recommend:

1. More technical support sessions for students building MVPs with no coding background.
2. Networking opportunities with startup founders or alumni from previous WIL cohorts.
3. Workshops focused on interviewing and validation techniques since user insights shape everything.

Conclusion

The OTO project became more than a university task; it became a reflection of who I am and who I want to become. It challenged me to think, adapt, and act like a real entrepreneur. I've learned that building something meaningful takes time, but it starts with courage and clarity. This WIL experience didn't just teach me how to innovate it taught me how to believe in my ability to create change.

References

Brown, T. (2008). *Design thinking*. Harvard Business Review, 86(6), 84–92. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2008/06/design-thinking>

Ries, E. (2011). *The Lean Startup: How today's entrepreneurs use continuous innovation to create radically successful businesses*. Crown Business. Retrieved from <https://ia800509.us.archive.org/7/items/TheLeanStartupErickRies/The%20Lean%20Startup%20-%20Erick%20Ries.pdf>

Sarasvathy, S. D. (2001). *Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency*. Academy of Management Review, 26(2), 243–263. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/259121>

Diary Entry 1 Why OTO and How It Started

Date: 7th September 2025

Stage: Early Concept MVP Foundation

Today I've been thinking about how OTO actually started. It goes back to when Skype shut down and everything moved to Teams. Around that time, I was doing my piano and guitar lessons online, and honestly, the whole process just didn't feel right. The sound would lag, the quality was off, and I had to use multiple apps just to get through one lesson. That's when it hit me why hasn't anyone built a proper platform for music teachers and students that actually works?

I was already using Replit for another project, so I thought I'd give it a go myself. I started with a small MVP idea that could handle calls, scheduling, and messaging all in one place. I didn't have much coding experience, so learning WebRTC for the video and audio calls was a grind, but seeing it start to work was motivating. It reminded me that even without a team or big funding, you can still make something real if you stay consistent.

This made me realise how much I was already applying Effectuation's Bird-in-Hand principle without even knowing it using what I had, what I knew, and who I knew. My background in music gave me a clear sense of what was missing, and that became my starting point. That's where OTO really began from a simple frustration turned into something I wanted to fix myself.

Diary Entry 2 Building and Testing the MVP

Date: 14th September 2025

Stage: MVP Development and Early Validation

This week I've been focusing on improving OTO's first version and testing how teachers might actually use it. I had two key interviews one with my piano teacher, *Pejman Ghezelbash*, who also runs his own music institute, and another with my guitar instructor, *Andre Khajekian*. Both of them gave me insights that completely changed how I looked at the app.

Initially, I thought the main selling point for OTO was the *lossless quality* and *low-latency* video calls. But through these interviews, I realised teachers wanted much more than just better call quality. They wanted teaching tools things that actually make lessons smoother. Pejman told me he needed a split-screen for piano and a feature for teaching harmony that works like MuseScore but in real time. Andre wanted an AI fretboard reader that could recognise his playing without needing to plug in a MIDI cable. That feedback hit me it wasn't just about calls, it was about building a full experience around teaching.

From a learning point of view, this really connected with Design Thinking, especially the *Empathy* and *Define* stages. Listening to them helped me see that my assumptions were wrong and that users define the real direction of the product. It also taught me that real innovation comes from asking better questions, not just coding new features.

I've also realised that being solo on this project means learning how to wear every hat developer, designer, and founder but that's exactly what's making me grow. Every step, even the confusing ones, is teaching me something about how to turn ideas into something people actually want.

Diary Entry 3 Competitor Research and Market Insights

Date: 21st September 2025

Stage: Validation and Market Understanding

After the first two interviews, I decided to reach out to more teachers from Pejman's institute and Andre's network to get a clearer picture of what's really happening in the industry. I ended up talking to around ten teachers in total including vocal, violin, and classical guitar instructors. What stood out the most was how differently everyone runs their online classes, yet all of them share the same frustrations: poor sound quality, switching between too many apps, and unreliable scheduling tools.

Many of them currently use Zoom for lessons, Google Drive for resources, and WhatsApp for communication a messy setup that costs time and energy. They also mentioned the hidden costs of running lessons online: fast internet plans, microphones, and even paying separate fees to music institutions for hosting or listing their services. But what surprised me was how many are slowly moving away from those institutions altogether. They prefer teaching independently because it gives them freedom no middlemen, no fees, just direct lessons with students. That's when it clicked for me: OTO could be the platform that supports independent teachers, not replaces institutions.

This deeper look at the ecosystem made me realise that OTO's real value isn't just better technology it's giving teachers the freedom to build their own online teaching business. I also noticed that this aligns perfectly with Effectuation's "crazy quilt" principle, where you form partnerships with people who share your goals. Each conversation opened up a new idea or perspective that reshaped how I saw OTO and its potential place in the market.

Diary Entry 4 Technical Challenges and Learning Through AI Development

Date: 28th September 2025

Stage: Product Development and Experimentation

This week has been all about trying to actually bring OTO to life. After the interviews and validation, I decided to start developing the WebRTC (real-time video call) technology for the app using Replit. The goal right now is to build a solid foundation first a smooth, lossless call experience and then later start adding the specific teaching tools that the teachers said they wanted, like the AI fretboard reader and piano split-screen feature.

It's been a tough learning curve. I don't have a coding background, so I've been relying completely on AI agents to help me build and debug everything from the backend logic to the signaling system for peer-to-peer calls. Some days it feels like I make progress, and other days it's just endless trial and error. Getting WebRTC to actually work smoothly has been frustrating, especially without a tech background, but at the same time, I've learned a lot about patience and problem-solving.

The costs are slowly adding up too I've already spent around \$150 on hosting, Replit subscriptions, and testing features. Still, I'm looking at it through the Lean Startup principle of "affordable loss." I'm not trying to make something perfect I just want to get something working, learn from it, and then improve it step by step.

Even though it's been stressful, I can see how every mistake helps me understand the process better. What used to feel impossible now feels like something I can eventually master. This whole stage really showed me that entrepreneurship isn't about having all the answers it's about figuring things out as you go and trusting that consistent effort pays off.

Diary Entry 5 Reflection, Limitations and Future Steps

Date: 5 October 2025

Stage: Reflection and Future Planning

As this phase of the WIL wraps up, I've realised how much clarity I've gained about where OTO needs to go next. Up to this point, I've conducted around 20 interviews with music teachers from different backgrounds piano, guitar, vocals, violin, and harmony to understand what they really need from an online platform. Even though I spoke to a mix of local and international teachers, most of the strong feedback and long-term interest came from the overseas side, especially from Pejman Ghezelbash and Andre Khajekian, who are both active in the international teaching scene.

Because of that, I've decided to narrow my focus to overseas markets first. The reality is, it's been tough finding teachers in Australia who are open to trying something new most already have their systems set up with Zoom and payment tools. So, for now, I'm keeping my focus on where the opportunity is clearer. The idea is to finalise the foundational version of OTO (the WebRTC-based calling system) and make sure it works smoothly before adding the tools the teachers requested, like the AI fretboard reader and the piano split-screen. Once that's solid, I'll start reaching out again in Australia with something concrete to show a product that actually works.

This stage helped me understand that entrepreneurship is about pacing yourself. I can't chase everything at once, so focusing on one market at a time feels like the right step. It's also taught me that every setback, from technical bugs to people saying "no," is part of the process. I'm still motivated to push forward I know once I have a working version in hand, I'll be able to do more interviews, door-knocking, and demonstrations to build the next wave of users and partners.

Looking back, I'm proud of how far OTO has come from just being an idea to something real that people are actually testing. The next chapter will be about scaling slowly, learning from real users, and shaping OTO into a platform that truly bridges musicians and technology.