MAKING LEARNING ACCESSIBLE: MULTICULTURAL LEARNING USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO RUN TRANS-NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL "POP-UP BUSINESSES"

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ABSTRACT

Learning in multicultural contexts can compound teaching difficulties for the educator and students when introducing creative and experiential elements into the syllabus and pedagogy of an Entrepreneurship class. Having students from traditionally risk-averse cultures provides many opportunities for diverse points of view and innovative problem solving approaches, while also presenting potential risks if events don't go according to plan. Identifying cultural behavioural issues that affect student interaction in experiential, creative learning experiences learning activities is paramount to making appropriate technology tool choices This case study documents the synergy and creativity that emerged from the use of social media tools to facilitate learning and teaching for students of entrepreneurship interacting across multiple countries, philosophies, languages and cultural expectations

KEYWORDS

Multicultural, experiential learning, entrepreneurship, social media

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education is one of the fastest growing sectors of higher education globally, a trend confirmed through research by Finkle (2007) and Potter (2008). This growth challenges the notion as to whether entrepreneurship can be taught (or not), or if entrepreneurs are born or as commented by Dhliwayo (2008, p.331) if "entrepreneurs can be produced much like nursing schools produce nurses". This paper proposes that important functional elements of entrepreneurship can be 'taught' and through experience, entrepreneurs can be 'made'. Documented here is the implementation of an entrepreneurship course of study based around the use of social media by students in a multinational, multi culture, multi language cohort, operating in teams using virtual learning spaces to establish authentic 'pop-up businesses'.

Gorman, Hanlon, & King, (1997) contend that generally speaking entrepreneurship programs are not standardised, especially when compared to business programs. Kuratko, (2009, p.21) cites Vesper's (1999) observation on entrepreneurship education that "entrepreneurship in universities has so far been developed as an add-on to business education, first as an elective course, then more courses, and finally as a concentration, major or program. So far it has largely been tucked in and around the existing core...Its courses currently must fit into the existing curriculum, grading system, and calendar."

In the case study presented here, a lecturer in entrepreneurship at Solbridge business school (South Korea) sought to bridge this gap, by designing and implementing a scalable course based on authentic experiential activities. To analyse the effectiveness of this approach, real-time feedback and comments were gathered from individual participants through scheduled interviews, surveys and observations as the course was undertaken each semester. These data were analysed and findings documented using empirical methods and an ethnographic approach. Of special interest to the authors of this study was the effectiveness of social media tools and student driven entrepreneurial tasks; how to determine optimal lecturer support for this approach; suitability of the technologies; and, learning outcomes as planned or not.

2. BACKGROUND

The education model at Solbridge International School of Business is transnational and based on a ratio of 80% foreigners and 20% local nationality for faculty and students. It is typical to have at least 12 nationalities represented in a class of 25-30 students, with a foreign-born professor and content delivered in the English language. Very few of the foreign students and faculty have fluency using the Korean language above very rudimentary conversation levels. In the Entrepreneurship course 3rd or 4th year full time undergraduate students can enroll in the unit used for this study. On average, more than 60% of this class population is single semester exchange students not necessarily with an entrepreneurship specialization. The unit is a three credit elective course having two parts. Part I utilizes weekly team driven activities completed as workshops or working meetings (2 credits). Part II is mandatory and requires all students to participate every two weeks at the individual and team levels in an environment modeled as a mentoring Incubator (1 credit). A key difference between the models is that the workshops and Incubator meetings at Solbridge are conducted through social media platforms (to have a virtual presence to extend the students' learning space) for the majority of the schedule, requiring participants to have access using a device such as a smart phone. A key philosophical foundation for the course is to create a structure that allows students' to gain deep insights into their experience and their own identities.

2.1 Course Framework

Pertinent to this study is the Jones and Spicer view that "entrepreneurship is not a coherent and stable discourse which is held together around a stable center" (Jones and Spicer 2009, p.38). In this study, the authors support the view expressed by Jones and Spicer that "it is not in 'being' an entrepreneur that one secures identity, but in the gap between the subject and the object of desire", (Jones and Spicer, 2009, p.38). The entrepreneurship course at Solbridge is designed to point students towards this specific second gap, not necessarily to 'only' give them a tool-box of multiple business skills and theories ordered by a structure presented as academic pedagogy.

2.1.1 Experiential Learning Theory

The approach taken in this study was to use experiential ways (Kolb 1984) for teaching entrepreneurship that exposed students to different types of shared learning activities built around entrepreneurship transactions, managed through social media platforms. All activities were team-based, using the principles of experiencing-reflecting-theorizing-experimenting, and the research documented by Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, (2002), but there were opportunities for individual graded work as part of a team. Given the multicultural and transnational aspect of the class, and to avoid local languages dominating, all teams were arranged to represent more than a single culture and language group. This enforced the use of the English language at all times. Here, the lecturer is more a facilitator and manager as no transmission lectures for content are given. Learning activities were designed to encourage reflection and self-actualization via the action-based exercises. Learning activities used were of an authentic nature as was the multicultural setting in which they took place, using social media tools used to facilitate communication and learning. Synchronous and asynchronous communication methods were used throughout the project for clarifying questions about the content of the project, planning of the project and team-based socialization.

By its very nature, the cohort of students in this study represented multiple nations and cultures, thus creating a dynamic learning setting. The teaching approach used to manage the learning relationships here utilised the 'scaffolding' process present in the social constructivist theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978, p.86) by systematically withdrawing the level of support over time as the students develop their individual performances and peer relationships. The mechanism for doing this was to change the content delivery between the first half of the semester, with weekly graded exercises, experiential events and reciprocal teaching presentations, and the second half of the semester when no scheduled classes took place.

The content model for the Solbridge course is based on andragogic assumptions and principles derived from the discussion presented by Malinen (2000) and Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, (2005) who suggest focussing on the change in emphasis from pedagogic/teacher centred learning to andragogic/student centred learning with teachers as facilitators. The learning activities used seek to have students develop as self-motivated, autonomous learners operating with flexible content and self designed goals. Outcomes centre on

assessing patterns of behaviour through authentic learning activities with a focus on building relationships, creating collaboration and working on problem-based exercises rather than academic requirements such as memorizing content without genuine understanding.

2.1.2 Teaching Organisation

The first half of the semester was organized using entrepreneurship topics as content for the reciprocal teaching model (Vygotsky 1978). The structure for weekly sessions were designed to be in keeping with the learning approach proposed by Knowles et al., (2005), utilizing a cooperative-based model with emphasis on student autonomy characterized by:

> *All student teams are required to research the topic then design their presentation and delivery method. The students must then arrive at the designated location prepared and rehearsed on their chosen topic. The final participants for the presentation on that day are identified randomly by the Lecturer, minutes before the presentation is to commence.*

This technique created an environment where participants needed to rely on and trust others. It exposed them emotionally in unexpected ways through a form of simulation without the comfort of their known team experiences and relationships. These concepts are also addressed in the research of Pittaway and Cope (2007, p. 213) where the value of "uncertain and ambiguous contexts encouraging students to step outside taken-for-granted assumptions" is noted. The assessment activity is the audience generated feedback report and individual grading on pre-printed forms.

2.1.3 "Pop-up Businesses"

The second half of the semester was organized using one project; i.e. creating a "Pop-Up Business". Each team was required to find or recognise a business opportunity, discover the needs and wants inherent in the opportunity then create a "Pop-Up Business" to take to the new or known market they have identified. For this case study 22 students formed eight teams that ran entrepreneurial businesses for five to six weeks while a second, different group of 12 students were involved in entrepreneurial activities and events that ran for two to three weeks at the end of the semester during "Capstone Week". This group of twelve students fulfilled other team roles throughout the semester and were graded and assessed in the same manner as the eight teams running "Po-up Businesses". All of the "Pop-up Businesses" were encouraged to continue operations after the semester concluded, depending on partnerships and the geographic locations of team members. The "Pop-up" teams were strongly encouraged to plan their business in the manner of the model presented by Osterwalder et al., (2010) and equally strongly discouraged from writing a business plan. Outside community engagement was encouraged, which introduced the issue of inflated market value for anyone that can speak the Korean and English languages. This characteristic stretches the definitions of team membership to include students who were not enrolled in the course, and in some cases, the hiring of competing team members to fulfill 'consulting' roles for that language support.

2.1.4 Assessment

In the light of comments by Morris, Kuratko, Schindehutte, & Spivack (2012b) who noted that surprisingly little is known about the experience of entrepreneurship, the lecturer sought to use assessment methods that were not teacher-centered and reliant on evaluating how a student retains knowledge and skills through quizzes, exams and tests, but instead use a format that was student centered focused on student demonstration of behavioral growth and learning. Here behavior is viewed more as the social interaction needed for students to collaboratively build a business through appropriate discussions and shared contribution to decision making and task distributions. Thus, some assessment methods used here are drawn from the creative industries model as described by Carey and Matlay (2010) who contend that "creative disciplines education is characterized by experiential, project-based learning environments and regular peer reviews" utilizing feedback forms and presentation assessment templates. Other assessment methods were more in keeping with activities the students are likely to face when employed in industry. From this perspective, mid-term and final assessments utilised personnel assessment instruments frequently exercised by managers in large companies.

The mid-tem assessment involved a detailed Performance Review report, on all of their team members, to be completed by each team member. Each individual was scored against 25 criteria developed from student input and internet research on existing formats. The report included customized comments on how the

individual might improve their performance. These documents were returned to the individual team members after assessments were recorded and this generated intense discussions as team members sought explanations from their peers concerning the comments and grades awarded. The final term assessment had two elements: (1) a Ranking Review report completed by each team member ranking all team members on the same document, from best to worst against the 25 criteria used in the mid-term assessment document, and (2) a presentation to an invited audience of judges and peers where business partners tell the story of their "Pop-Up Business". Students were guided in this activity by the principles developed by Osterwalder, Pigneur, & Clark, (2010). The final element of assessment was a 'Team effectiveness score' which was based on a series of weekly assessments concerning team behaviours and the quality of the submitted assignments. This assessment was created to ensure fairness and trust in the learning environment through positive team behaviour, professionalism, and student delivery of quality academic work.

3. ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

In the learning and teaching situation reported here, the authors have applied the principles of experiential learning and a constructivist approach to teaching by building on their tacit knowledge of student use of social media tools and platforms for communication and collaboration. The aim was to utilise social media tools as a vehicle for transcending boundaries often found in multicultural cohorts collaborating using virtual means in real time. This was regarded by the authors as an approach in keeping with Challis, Holt and Rice (2005) who contend that there are "integrative developments in teaching, learning and technology, with overlapping areas of experiential learning, adult learning, self direct/autonomous learning and professional learning." Citing Jonassen, Peck and Wilson (1999, p.21). The learning experiences were authentic and organized around constructivist principles as described by Challis, et al, (2005) who note that "constructivist environments should engage learners in active, constructive, intentional, authentic and cooperative learning."

3.1 Asynchronous Learning

As the "Pop-Up Businesses" emerged the role of the Lecturer changed guises from mentor to business advisor or 'expert practitioner'. With no scheduled class meetings available, student-Lecturer interactions assumed a new form primarily through social media tools using hand-held devices such as smart phones, and usually with new expectations around time-frames for communication responses. The model adopted for this change in roles is asynchronous learning, a subset of constructivist theory reliant on peer-to-peer student-centred learning primarily through online media.

Some of the tools introduced to supplement the course include combinations of synchronous and asynchronous methods via Blackboard, for email, online forums and delivery of common documents, non-academic email accounts, and text messaging and voice chat between personal cell phone numbers. Also used was Skype video conferencing calls between non-academic accounts, 'YouTube' videos uploaded to a dedicated channel for the course, and 'Facebook' pages for the individual "Pop-Up Businesses", with privacy settings, under the parent banner of the course, with the Lecturer as Administrator. These postings tended towards blog or online forum discussions and small online communities instead of using the Blackboard discussion forum. 'Google' was the preferred 'method' for sourcing information and Google Docs was designated as the central 'library' resource for storing common documents.

3.1.1 Student use of Social Media

All students' in this course of study utilised social media, but not all students accessed the same platforms. In the multicultural class, not all students are familiar with the standards of Facebook and Google due to government restrictions, and are often unfamiliar with their native version of a similar platform. All students relied on their personal smart phone or cell phone device for primary digital communication in lieu of using a laptop or desktop computer. This device of choice introduced a wide range of restrictions, depending on individual calling plans, data download limits, message volume limits associated with text plans, SMS protocols and what bandwidth was available. Time was allocated for technology adaption.

3.1.2 The Language of Social Media

Not all of the students in this study were familiar with simple 'netiquette' rules. This meant that early in the study some students were inappropriately texting during meetings or not using a level of politeness appropriate to this type of communication. Given the intensity of discussions, decision making and problem resolution taking place, it took a little time for a common language of respectful communication to emerge. Simple 'etiquette' rules were established, including the exclusion of profanity and derogatory slang or expressions of displeasure and the implication of using all capital letters in English. The consistent emphasis was that the social media forums are public common grounds and the advice given to all students was to not type a message that they will regret at a later time. It became apparent that this took place quickly and resulted in ongoing respectful ways of communicating long after the projects were completed.

When students were given a choice between an academic course management system and social media platforms, the overwhelming response was in favour of social media for reasons relating to timeliness, convenience, speed, functionality, accessibility and informality. When students were given a choice between attending an in-person appointment during office hours or to interact on social media, all students expressed a preference for social media contact due to convenience and timeliness. Many students utilized both opportunities for discussion more than the minimum requirements, with frequent unannounced drop-in conversations in the office usually after a variety of social media sessions as well as fulfilling their required Incubator session meetings. The strongest underlying traits that students exhibited were the need for instant documentation, feedback and affirmation of their activities.

4. OUTCOMES

4.1 Andragogic Outcomes

As noted earlier in this paper, the content model for this particular learning activity at Solbridge was designed around andragogic assumptions and principles focused on student centred learning with teachers as facilitators. To examine outcomes emergent from this study, findings have been aligned in Table 1 to principles described by Knowles et al., (2005).

Table 1. Andragogic based observations and changes in student behaviour

Andragogic assumptions	Observed student behaviour
Adults are independent and self-directing.	The students demonstrated independent and self-directing behaviour within the first two weeks of the class after the first experience with reciprocal teaching, evidenced by their leadership and management of activities.
Adults have accumulated a great deal of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.	The students showed accumulated experience that when mixed in multicultural environments, provides a rich resource for learning.
Adults value opportunities for learning that integrate with the demands of their everyday life.	The students' value learning opportunities that integrated with the demands of their everyday life, which as noted, involves multiple hours daily on social media platforms.
Adults are more interested in immediate, problem centred approaches than in subject centred ones.	The students of the entrepreneurship course were more interested in immediate, problem centred approaches than in subject centred situations, as evidenced by the growth of entrepreneurial activities on campus after the course was completed.
Adults are more motivated to learn by internal drives than by external ones.	When students were given an opportunity to participate in experiential activities, the students learning appears to be a function of internal drives in preference to external ones, as evidenced by independent entrepreneurial activities continued outside of the academic environment and academic calendar.
Andragogic principles	Changes in student behaviour
Establish an effective learning climate, where learners feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves.	Felt safe and comfortable expressing themselves, as evidenced by the frequency and content of comments posted on Facebook.
Involve learners in mutual planning of relevant methods and curricular content.	Readily assumed responsibility for presenting the reciprocal teaching events.
Involve learners in diagnosing their own needs—this will help to trigger internal motivation.	Readily diagnosed their own needs and followed their internal motivations, as exemplified by the increased frequency of social media contact used to resolve situations or confirm decisions.
Encourage learners to formulate their own learning objectives—this gives them more control of their learning.	Were given permission to formulate their own learning objectives, as exemplified by the different levels of businesses in the class and different operating models.
Encourage learners to identify resources and devise strategies for using the resources to achieve their objectives.	Identified resources and devised strategies from the resources, often with an innovative multicultural character, to achieve their objectives.
Support learners in carrying out their learning plans.	Everyone completed their commitment for learning and participating in this process.
Involve learners in evaluating their own learning—this can develop their skills of critical reflection.	Developed and demonstrated reflection skills, then evaluated their contributions and those of their team mates through assessment processes.

4.2 Entrepreneurial Outcomes

As a result of the "Pop-Up Businesses" exercise, a narrow range of businesses emerged from a group of 34 students. The most popular business model was service-based and food related, perhaps more an indication of the circumstances the students perceive regarding cafeteria menus and the time and resources available for the project, than a true reflection of their entrepreneurial abilities. From the student's perspective, and noting that more than 90% of the class population had no prior work related experience, each idea involved a very high amount of contextual risk. This led to all ideas being executed seriously, over-riding a perception that the exercise is a simulation as described by Pittaway and Cope (2007). The number of "Pop-Up Businesses" initiated and operated or perceived profitability have never been primary determinants for assessing the success and outcomes for the course. A more meaningful measurement is if students believe they have obtained transferable skills that they can apply to self-employment in their next entrepreneurial venture or employment in the public sector. Table 2 shows outcomes from the "Pop-up Businesses".

Table 2. Outcomes from "Pop-up Businesses'

Site	Description of "Pop-Up Business"	Students	Status
Campus wide	Lunch-time food service reselling the local Korean McDonalds lunchtime menu through pre-orders.	2	Semester only but highly likely to re-emerge each semester, managed by different teams.
Campus wide	Lunch-time food service selling a limited menu (hamburgers cooked and delivered per individual request).	4	Semester only but highly likely to re-emerge each semester, managed by different teams.
In dormitory	A weekend food service selling a limited menu cooked to specific cultural preferences.	4	Semester only but highly likely to re-emerge each semester, managed by different teams.
In dormitory	'Convenience store' model on call 24/7 including different levels of service membership and credit plans available.	2	Ongoing
In dormitory	Event specific retail model for creating and selling festival related gift packs to the general public.	2	Date specific, but ongoing as per the festival calendar.
In dormitory	Event specific food service model to provide and sell custom-made coffee beverages to event participants.	2	Semester only but highly likely to re-emerge each semester, managed by different partnerships.
Campus wide	A social venture sponsorship model based on collecting donations and applying them to support needy entrepreneurs through the Kiva.org model.	5	Ongoing
Outside community	A web-design service that supported the class website and other web needs for the general public.	1	Ongoing
Campus wide	Transaction based, (free) online gathering place based on an 'e-market forum' for students to exchange, barter and sell academic and non-academic products to each other.	>10	Ongoing
Campus Wide + "Intra-prenurial"	Event specific entrepreneur events including Skype Guest Speaker events, Pitch competition, Entrepreneurs YouTube channel, Flash mob	>12	Capstone Week at the end of a semester. Each event can be ongoing.

At the end of the semester, six of the seven businesses described in Table 2 were generating revenues, and two of those businesses recorded modest profitability within four weeks once operations commenced. More businesses have reached break-even status or have become profitable over a longer operating time-frame beyond the semester calendar. A different generation of businesses emerged during the later months of 2011 and early 2012, modelled on the "Pop Up" concept. During late 2011, one student-owned business (web design) that serves the commercial internet business community in Korea registered as a legal entity and hired four contract employees located outside of Korea. What has also emerged in 2012, following the momentum of the development of "Pop-Up Businesses" is nascent entrepreneurial activity that had not existed before, representing the early seeds of an eco-system. Students went on to establish independent and new, small scale business ventures, an entrepreneurs club, a variety of social media enterprises and other related entrepreneurial events and activities, many of their native countries. By way of illustration, twenty two students have gone on to develop their "Pop-up Businesses" in Korea using their same teams, into the second semester. Another four have developed new separate businesses; three others have created new businesses in their home country; and, nine more have gone on to develop other kinds of entrepreneurial activities. Such outcomes confirm the ongoing application of learning in entrepreneurial studies and the effectiveness in the approach taken to empowering students to initiate and develop their own business ideas through authentic applications.

5. FEEDBACK

Feedback was gathered from multiple groups, including students registered officially in the class, students auditing the class and usually participating in the businesses, and other faculty. All feedback from the students was positive and supportive of the approaches taken, with one key insight expressed by faculty and subsequently confirmed by students. Overall it was evident that students enjoyed the andragogic approach noting that they felt empowered by having "ownership" of their learning experiences. Strong evidence emerged for student acceptance of social media platforms and technologies such as Facebook, Skype and smartphones as tools for learning using collaborative, interactive experiences. The following student comment is typical of many found in feedback gathered throughout this program.

"This is the best class I have ever taken – we are treated like real entrepreneurs in a real entrepreneur's way." (Chinese male student)

Students frequently commented on the value of being asked their opinions and being supported as they developed their ideas, and how powerful it is to receive peer feedback on Facebook and through text messages, largely due to the instantaneous nature of these interactions. The majority of students expressed their comfort in being able to talk with their Lecturer online using Skype, often in video conference mode with multiple participants, and through instant messaging services. Many stated that it was easier to use this option than to come to the Lecturer's office because of distance and schedules. In some contexts this would mean travelling between Russia, Uzbekistan and Korea or simply between tables in the Solbridge cafeteria.

6. CONCLUSION

Emergent from this study is an andragogic teaching style centred on experiential elements using social media platforms for delivery and management of the exercises. Of great value also was the peer evaluation methods for assessment that created a student centred environment that fosterer entrepreneurial activity amongst participants. It was clearly evident that Lecturer support must be based in trust such that students will motivate themselves through internal drives and peer benchmarking to perform at higher levels when operating in semi-autonomous teams on individually designed projects. Integrating asynchronous teaching principles enhances and extends the learning environment for students and Lecturer, that when utilizing social media, addresses key student needs for responsiveness and feedback. The students' continually proved that distance and time zones were not limiting factors when working in the asynchronous mode, however, the Lecturer needed to adapt their availability to social media hours that are typically outside of standard office hour schedules. Another key contribution from the Lecturer is providing support when the venture extends beyond the academic calendar. Being flexible and having an understanding of how the immediacy of culture of social media communication and interaction influences how students study and collaborate is fundamental to being an effective Lecturer in this learning and teaching approach.

Finally, there was consensus from the students that they gained significant value from participating in the experiential elements, especially when interference and interventions are kept to a minimum. Completing the "Pop-Up Business" exercise in a student defined context enhanced the outcomes of the course overall. The experiential approach attracts students for the practical value the course brings, as the students determine and express their needs, which in this case study, shapes the delivery of the course through social media. Overall, student and Lecturer expectations for the course were exceeded on all levels, as exemplified by exchange students introducing experiential elements into their home campus classes. By not applying stringent requirements on students to create sustainable and profitable businesses, students have gained experiences that are generally not taught or experienced in traditional entrepreneurship courses: dealing with failure, closing a business venture down, operating at a financial loss and eventually losing (their) money.

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