



## The Use of Innovative Tools for Teaching Entrepreneurship

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### Abstract

*The challenge of developing an “entrepreneurial mindset” exists in our courses of “Creation of Companies and Family Business” and “Setting Up Businesses” in the University of Cantabria. Especially when our students have different backgrounds (Business Administration Degree, Economics Degree, Labour Relations Degree, Erasmus students with several experiences and contexts...) and different future plans: only a few of them want to set up a company after finishing the degree. The question that arises is: How do we balance such a diverse audience?*

*Fortunately, there is available today a very broad compendium of pedagogies to teach entrepreneurship, given that it is a subject that is being promoted not only nationally but also at a European level. The use of different methodologies allows adapting the learning tools to the information we want to teach, so that advantages are clear. First, we consider that students are going to have a better follow-up of the course, acquiring different skills and abilities (teamwork, effective communication, better reading and summarizing skills), and they are going to be more motivated and engaged. Secondly, the use of different methodologies generates a greater dynamism in the classroom.*

*These are the methodologies we use in our courses: cooperative learning (students need to develop a business plan), jigsaw technique (increasing the reading comprehension and the ability to sum up), test of products or services (each team-member need to explain their project to other groups), entrepreneur fair (promoting the ability to attract customers), elevator pitch (promoting the ability to summarize and communicate the project), use of storytelling (promoting the knowledge of new attractive communication techniques) and social media (promoting and encouraging participation and networking).*

*It is precisely the combination of these methodologies, adapting them to the learning objectives, which favours the success of teaching entrepreneurship.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, Teaching Entrepreneurship, Innovative teaching;*

### 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is often associated “with innovation, technological progress, economic growth and the generation of employment” [1]. Fifteen years ago, [2] showed that most common teaching methods used in entrepreneurship education “were still the business plan, lectures by well-known professors, a handful of case studies and supervised reading programs” [2,3]. Nowadays, entrepreneurial content is delivered through “conventional lectures, flipped classrooms, online platforms, and through various other vehicles (live cases, in-class games, simulations, adopt a family firm, role plays, guest lectures by entrepreneurs)” [4].

Entrepreneurship is being promoted not only at a national level, but also at a European Level (see for example The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan of the European Commission). In a changing context, where students are digital native, more diverse and with different future perspectives (they do not usually want to set up a business in the future), we need to be more proactive and innovative to plan and organize our courses related with Entrepreneurship.

Our objective is that our students have a better follow-up of the course, acquiring different skills and abilities, and being more motivated and engaged.

### 2. Innovative tools to teach entrepreneurship

Today, there is a lot of literature on innovative tools to teach entrepreneurship [1,4,5,6], developed and used not only by academics but also in business and entrepreneurial sphere. [7] has explained the innovative methods as “those that demands the teacher to stimulate learning and encourage students

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to rediscover themselves in terms of their abilities, knowledge and attitude” [4,7]. The tools that we propose here are a selection of those that we normally use in our courses, and that allow us to adapt the contents to the learning objectives.

### **2.1 Cooperative learning**

Cooperative learning is “a teaching method where students of mixed levels of ability are arranged into groups and rewarded according to the group’s success, rather than the success of an individual member” [8]. In our courses, students need to make groups and write a business plan from a business idea designed by themselves. In this assignment, they can achieve various skills, such as face-to-face interaction, positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing and collaborative skills [8]. Teachers demand partial submissions during the course and provide feedback, so that students can improve their projects until the final submission.

### **2.2 Jigsaw technique**

Due to the restrictions in the number of students and in time, we usually perform an adaptation of the jigsaw technique. With this technique, students have the opportunity to become “experts” in a particular subject, and share that knowledge with their peers [9].

The jigsaw technique consists of several stages. First, the students make small groups (*home group*) and allocate each one a number (for example, from 1 to 7). Second, they find others with the same number and create a separate group (*expert group*), where they are going to discuss their piece of the puzzle (a concept or, in our case, a segment of a text...) and determine a way to explain it to others. Third, they go back to their home group and report their piece of the puzzle. Finally, they have to connect the pieces and understand the whole picture. With this technique, students increase the reading comprehension and acquire the ability to sum up. We use the jigsaw technique to learn about the steps to identify the target market of the business project, something they can use in their projects.

### **2.3 Test of products or services**

Within the commercial viability of their business projects, students have to test their products or services with their peers, who become potential customers. In this way, we form groups of students with representatives of each business project. Thus, all team-members need to know their project and, specially, need to know how to communicate, explain and defend their product / service, their pricing policy, their distribution policy and their promotion actions.

The most important issue about this technique is to obtain feedback (also different ideas or points of view) from their peers / potential customers, and especially, sensitivity to the proposed variables. After speaking with other colleagues, the students return to their original groups and share the information. This allows them to modify and improve their projects based on the comments received.

### **2.4 Entrepreneur Fair**

With the Entrepreneur Fair, we simulate a situation whereby students could have more choice in creating and operating their own businesses. In a real Fair, the students have the opportunity to sell their own products (we provide real examples with even smaller students). In our simulation, our students have the opportunity to evaluate their resources (they use coloured pencils and papers to create their stands), assess the market, and develop a plan to advertise their products and services to attract their customers.

This is one of the techniques that students value most, and results are shared on social networks to promote the competitive spirit and communication.

### **2.5 Elevator pitch**

An Elevator Pitch or Elevator Speech is “a brief overview of an idea for a product, service, or project delivered in the time span of an elevator ride” [4]. The purpose of using the elevator pitch is to compel students to prepare a short explanation of their business projects. The main benefits of this technique are to promote the ability to summarize and communicate the project in a focused way (one to three minutes). We have a lot of students and groups in some of our courses, so they need to be able to present their projects in a short period of time.

### **2.6 Use of storytelling**

Storytelling or the art of telling stories has benefits that transcend the academic context [10]. In the line of techniques linked to the presentation of projects, students are provided with storytelling techniques



in order to attract and engage the recipient of their ideas: investors, customers or other entrepreneurs. In order to be more attractive to the audience, stories need to include a purpose, create a connection with the audience, promote trust and transparency, and keep the interest [10].

## 2.7 Social media

The experiences of the use of social media in the university environment are not new and it is proven that they can favour the teaching-learning process [11]. We have created a Twitter profile in this course, because the content and structure of the courses we teach allow us to take advantage of many of its features.

In our case, with the Twitter profile 1) we can interact continuously with the students, reminding them important dates; 2) we can generate commitment among students, promoting and encouraging participation; 3) we can generate interactions and networking (we share information on Twitter about the guest speakers we have had during the course); 4) we can share the latest news almost immediately on topics related to entrepreneurship: blog entries, events and awards, examples of ideas and business projects, etc.; and, finally, 5) we can use hashtags to follow conversations about a certain subject.

## 3. Conclusions

All the techniques described above revolve around the development of the business project. The courses we teach about entrepreneurship are so multidisciplinary that allow us the application of different techniques, adapted to the type of content we wish to address. It is the combination of these methodologies, adapting them to the learning objectives, which favours the success of teaching entrepreneurship.

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