

Awakening the Entrepreneurial Mindset

Research Article

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Whenever we hear the word entrepreneurial, many assume it refers to the process of setting up a business and that the individual who pursues this goal is an entrepreneur. This myopic perspective does not fully capture the concept's essence as it confines entrepreneurial meaning to setting up a business, which is only one outcome of being entrepreneurial. My goal as an educator is to widen perspective and awaken students' entrepreneurial selves. I believe we are all born entrepreneurial and all have the capacity to be entrepreneurial throughout our lives, in any role – we simply need guidance, (Forbes, 2017). As educators, we can offer insight into how to reflect on what entrepreneurial means to us individually, how being entrepreneurial relates to our personal and professional contexts, and how an entrepreneurial mindset can be nurtured through our approach to entrepreneurial education.

Entrepreneurial mindset refers to a specific way of thinking and approaching situations that is characteristic of successful entrepreneurs, and reflects the implicit intellectual, behavioural and emotional abilities of a person and their motivation (Kuratko et al., 2021). This type of mental disposition and opportunity beliefs helps distinguish those who can innovate, take risks, identify opportunities, and exploit them (Seoke et al., 2024). This mindset is beyond intent, broadly referring to ways of adaptable thinking based on changing deep beliefs in uncertain, complex, and dynamic environments (Naumann, 2017).

Entrepreneurial education is a prelude to forming an entrepreneurial mindset (Seoke et al., 2024), which when nurtured in a supportive educational environment, empowers students to come up with new ideas, solve problems, generate creative solutions, and take action to pursue opportunities (Kuratko et al., 2021). When viewed holistically, the entrepreneurial mindset facilitates an education approach that can impact entrepreneurial intention and behaviour among all students (Cui and Bell, 2022; Seoke et al., 2024), not just those who plan to set up a business.

So why isn't the 'entrepreneurial mindset' at the heart of entrepreneurial education endeavours?

While it is unlikely that a simple answer lies beneath this conundrum, whether we see ourselves as teachers, educators, or as facilitators of learning may hold some insight. Teaching comes from the Latin word 'taecan' which means "to show, point out, declare, demonstrate," and is more directive in nature. It tells the student what the teacher believes they need to know. Education comes from the word "educare" which means "to bring up", from e-"out" and -ducere which means "to lead; to bring forward". Education is therefore a process of drawing out what is within, from what it already known. It is based on the experience of the individual and is underpinned by a process of building self-knowledge. Drawing on these concepts, Rae (2005), with specific reference to entrepreneurial learning, proposed that the word 'education' be replaced with the word 'learning' to integrate the role of experiential and social contexts in turning entrepreneurial intentions into opportunities.

This insight suggests that our role as entrepreneurial educators is not only to teach, or even to educate, but to embrace the ethos that "entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and attitudes can be learned and in turn lead to the widespread development of entrepreneurial mindsets" (Bacigalupo, 2021). This approach propels us further into the continuum of entrepreneurial education, where the emphasis moves from the use of more traditional educational

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methods to allow the learner to experiment with and to experience entrepreneurial behaviours (Rae, 2005). It calls for different kinds of entrepreneurial education interventions, as one moves through the levels from learning 'about' to 'for' to 'through' entrepreneurial activities (Lack us et al., 2015). This form of entrepreneurial education promotes more active, social, formal and informal interventions, with an emphasis on experiential learning through life experiences and social interactions (Higgins and Refai, 2017).

Underpinned by the direct and indirect entrepreneurial experience of lecturers, this learning ethos leads us to experiential-led pedagogies that can help awaken the entrepreneurial mindset in ourselves and our students. Drawing on the analogy of the entrepreneurial mindset as a lifelong journey, I believe we can each build entrepreneurial mindset capacity by packing and repacking our own entrepreneurial 'suitcase', the contents of which includes,

- *Knowing yourself.* Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom (Aristotle). Packing a mental and emotional mirror reminds us to take time out to reflect on important questions - Who am I? What do I want to do? Where do I want to be? Regular reflection can ignite greater understanding of our identity, self-confidence, locus of control, self-belief, and self-emotion. We can draw on these insights when reflecting on our experiences - those that went well and those that went badly - and on the people we meet - those who positively affect us and those who do not. Building reflective practices into entrepreneurial education (Higgins et al., 2012) is therefore an important aspect of the entrepreneurial mindset journey.
- *Believing in Ourselves.*
"We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit."

E.E. Cummings, 1894-1962.

True travellers are curious beings. They tend to start with a question, asking *who, where, when, how, what and why*. They are open to talking to locals and other travellers. Most suspend judgement; actively listening, seeking to understand how others think, feel, live and work, and drawing on that insight. Our goal as educators is to entice and enhance a curious mindset within our students, preparing them for current and future journeys of discovery.

- *Staying connected.* Our entrepreneurial suitcase ensures we are simultaneously open to new adventures and to coming 'home'. Old connections provide an anchor, steadying our journey and offering access to mentors (and mentees) among our family, friends, peers, students and among those who influence us and are influenced by us. When searching for solutions or stuck on problems we can't resolve, we can channel 'what would so and so do' or call them! New connections both teach us and learn from us, enhancing our lives, and our understanding of 'how things are and how things can be done better'. We share what we learned with those we already know, expanding our connections, and theirs, regardless of age or stage of career.
- *Embrace learning.* Entrepreneurial mindset offers a starting point of pathways of lifelong learning activities (Giossi and Gkamanis, 2024), enticing the perpetual pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge helps us overcome fear of the unexpected. It keeps our mind and heart open to new opportunities and helps us mitigate risk. Tell people what you think. Listen to what they think. The goal of a traveller is to keep moving forward, opening new doors, doing new things, ensuring learning as a lifelong pursuit. In embedding a lifelong learning ethos in student mindset, we offer them a basis on which to navigate pathways of lifelong learning activities.

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Promoting learning through real life situations enhanced by personal experiences and social contexts affords a pathway to authentic entrepreneurial mindset development within ourselves as entrepreneurial educators and among our students. However, this journey does not occur in our students without authentic engagement with our own entrepreneurial mindset journey. Embracing entrepreneurial mindset requires us to take time out to look in the mirror – to see ourselves for who we are and what we can be – to self-reflect on how the planned and unplanned

learning experiences inform our entrepreneurial thinking, actions and behaviours. This is equally true of educator and student. Although often unlabelled, or dormant, many entrepreneurial educators have this mindset. Irrespective of our academic domain, we often find ourselves having to think outside the box, to grow outside our comfort zone, to be creative, to explore new avenues, to be curious, to take on new challenges, to apply new techniques, to negotiate new horizons, to take calculated risks, to empower others to seek their potential and to be passionate in doing so, to work with the resources we have as we effectuate, to connect with others to find a solution, and ultimately, to never give up by being resilient and persistent in the achievement of our goal.

In awakening our own entrepreneurial mindset, we have a wonderful opportunity to be role models for our students in exhibiting an entrepreneurial mindset in our ethos and approach. As scholars of teaching, learning and discovery, we have the privilege and honour to encourage, entice and inform the development of the entrepreneurial mindset of those around us.

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