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OPINION PIECE

Everyone Could Use a Little Entrepreneurial Resilience

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Opinion

As educators, we regularly hear from partners in government, industry and community, of the need for graduates with transversal knowledge, skills and employability characteristics. But what precisely does this mean and how do we translate this into classroom practice? National policy documents point to *entrepreneurship* as a potential domain within which such transversal competencies might be situated. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Hunt Report) (DES, 2011, p.37), for example, identified the need to “foster *entrepreneurial imagination*” among graduates, in recognition of the environment of uncertainty and constant change facing them as they enter the workforce. Similarly, Ireland’s *National Skills Strategy 2025* (DES, 2017, p.17) envisages “... a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy,” and includes skills such as “creativity, innovation and *entrepreneurship*, critical & analytical thinking, team work, communication and business acumen” (p.33). Yet neither document provides a working definition of entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial imagination.

Perhaps, like me, you associate entrepreneurship with business activities. The Oxford English Dictionary definition supports this understanding - an *entrepreneur*, it explains, is a person who sets up a business, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit. But do our national policymakers expect us to produce graduates all destined to set up their own business? Surely not. It seems clear that the entrepreneurial behaviours or *competencies* to which they refer mean something a little different. The *European Entrepreneurial Competency Framework* offers us an alternative perspective, defining entrepreneurship as being “when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural, or social” (EntreComp, 2016, p.11). This lifts our understanding away from the world of business (without necessarily leaving it behind) and offers a domain neutral alternative. It is this broader understanding that I invite you to consider as we explore

whether entrepreneurial mindset, imagination, or resilience might in any way be helpful for students across any and all disciplines. This is an important question, given that it is the arts, humanities and social science, rather than the STEM or business subjects that have consistently attracted the largest numbers of students into the Irish higher education system (DES, 2011, p.38).

The EU's EntreComp framework offers a domain neutral model, which I have found to be a useful starting point. It purports to build a bridge between education and work (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p.7) by creating a typology of transversal competencies *and* providing some guidance as to how these might translate into teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The framework is a comprehensive 8-level progression model consisting of 3 competence areas, along with 15 distinct competencies, which together contribute to the development of an *entrepreneurial mindset*. Having an entrepreneurial mindset in this context refers to being entrepreneurial rather than being an entrepreneur – a distinction clearly made in the document (p.14), and suggesting its suitability across the disciplines.

It seems to me unwieldy, perhaps even over-ambitious to attempt to tackle all 15 competencies, with their 442 associated learning outcomes. I propose therefore to focus on a sub-set of only four competencies which, in my view, are most closely associated with personal resilience, and which I believe, most closely reflect the needs expressed by Irish employers. These are the competencies of self-awareness and self-efficacy; motivation and perseverance; coping with ambiguity, uncertainty and risk; and learning through experience. I have adopted the term *entrepreneurial resilience* to describe them collectively.

There are various definitions of resilience, although it is generally recognised as one's ability to adapt well to adversity (Southwick et al., 2014). Research into resilience began in the personal psychology domain, and interest has moved beyond mental health to consider how it might enable people to adapt and respond to ever-changing organizational and environmental demands. In the Irish context, four such demands, or trends, have been identified as currently impacting the future of work. These are: digitalisation, sustainability, globalisation, demographics, and in its *Future Ready* report (2021), IBEC stresses the need for graduates to have transversal employability skills “that enable individuals to fulfil their potential, gain employment, be effective in the workplace and successful in their chosen occupations” (p. 10).

The Irish education system plays an important role in enabling students and graduates to cultivate the skills required for the future of work, enabling them to be more resilient.

Importantly, research suggests that resilience is not a fixed trait and can be developed (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). This begs the question, how might we, as educators, create conditions in our classrooms that enable our students to develop and deepen their personal entrepreneurial resilience? Given its link with entrepreneurship, it seems obvious to look to business schools when considering the most appropriate learning methods to use; however, traditional business school approaches have avoided behavioural competency development and focused on business acumen (Aly et al., 2021; Neergaard & Christensen, 2017), neglecting to provide: “entrepreneurs with the skills and competencies for resilience in an entrepreneurial journey fraught with emotional landmines and challenges” (Aly et al., 2021, p.1161).

Moreover, Buchanan and Grieg (2021) stress the importance of vertical development in education through the development of mindsets which would act as a “frame of reference to shape the students’ capacity for perception and action” (p.493). Neergaard states that building self-awareness in the classroom is an important strategy to cultivate entrepreneurial mindset (Klapper, 2015). She proposes that business educators borrow from existential thinking and the discipline of psychology to enable students to understand their capacity to change, allowing them to “access the potential for entrepreneurship in their mind’s eye” (Neergaard, 2021). For Neergaard, the successful outcome is not the creation of an entrepreneur, rather a student who has gained an understanding of who they are, regardless of career choice (Klapper, 2015), emphasising the compatibility of this approach regardless of discipline.

Teaching and learning strategies which support this kind of outcome are learner-centred (Charrón Vías & Rivera-Cruz, 2020), offering transformational learning experiences (Bass, 2018), by drawing from heutagogical education techniques such as flash mobs (Tunstall & Neergaard, 2021), and incorporating reflection logs to enable students to absorb and consolidate their experiences (Klapper, 2015). Some go so far as to propose that students engage with clinical practitioners to enable them to understand their emotional challenges (Aly et al., 2021) and while I am inclined to take this viewpoint seriously, such approaches, of course, would require significant investment, not least in higher than average staff:student ratio (Bass, 2018).

All Irish institutes of higher education have a compelling opportunity to meaningfully craft an experiential, learner-centred approach which offers existential consideration of the student, who they are, and who they want to be in the world. To actualise this, significant investment would be required in thoughtful pedagogy, curriculum and learning supports. A starting point is for interested educators to come together to share experiences and best practice. At my own university, we have taken an important first step in establishing a Resilience Pedagogy Community of Practice. My colleagues and I are delighted to extend an invitation to interested faculty from across the Irish university network (technological and traditional) who wish to join us.

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