

2023

Entrepreneurial Competencies in Action: Online Fundraising Initiatives by University Students

Thomas M. Cooney

Technological University Dublin, thomas.cooney@tudublin.ie

Martina Brophy

Technological University Dublin, Ireland, martina.brophy@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschmarart>



Part of the [Business Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cooney, Thomas M. and Brophy, Martina, "Entrepreneurial Competencies in Action: Online Fundraising Initiatives by University Students" (2023). *Articles*. 190.

<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschmarart/190>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Marketing and Entrepreneurship at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie, vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#).

Funder: No funding was received for this work.

Entrepreneurial Competencies in Action: Online Fundraising Initiatives by University Students

Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy
2023, Vol. 6(4) 721–737
© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/25151274231183384
journals.sagepub.com/home/eex



Thomas M. Cooney  and Martina Brophy

Abstract

It has been argued that entrepreneurship educators are inclined to let students learn in a safe controlled environment, with no pressure except to pass the module. Students working in groups of three were given 12 weeks (Target 1) to develop a fundraising initiative, work with various stakeholders, and execute their online fundraising initiative to meet a target goal of €2000 (Target 2) per group. Employing approaches such as Effectuation, Lean Start-Up and the Business Model Canvas, a self-directed learning approach ensured students were able to take ownership of their learning journey with the lecturer acting as coach or facilitator. The learning innovation stems from the highly experiential nature of the assignment, the various deadlines and targets that had to be met throughout the process, the promoted collaboration with real world environments, the introduction of mentors and other support actors, and the successful adaptation of the assignment to an online learning environment. The assignment can be undertaken in an online or offline environment, and it provides a highly practical learning experience that enables students to utilize and develop the 15 entrepreneurship competencies identified in the EntreComp framework under the pressure of meeting time and monetary targets.

TU Dublin College of Business, Dublin, Ireland

Corresponding Author:

Thomas M. Cooney, College of Business, Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), Aungier Street, Dublin D02 HW71, Ireland.

Email: thomas.cooney@tudublin.ie

Keywords

entrepreneurial competencies, self-directed learning, fundraising, time pressure, monetary target, online learning

Introduction

A wide approach to Entrepreneurship Education necessitates a shift in focus from purely venture creation to value creation, and from becoming entrepreneurs to becoming entrepreneurial through the development of competencies and skills (Baggen et al., 2022). There is a growing recognition that entrepreneurs learn from experience and that entrepreneurship curricula should facilitate these experiences among students (Blass, 2018). Entrepreneurship education generally focuses on three areas: content-based education (e.g., the basics or principles of business management/entrepreneurship), competency-based education, and experientially-based education (Morris & Liguori, 2016). The latter two forms of education have considerable potential for engaging students' ability to recognise and exploit opportunities, experience risk and reward, and encounter and overcome real-life challenges (Morris & Liguori, 2016). Importantly, entrepreneurial competencies can be learned and developed, thus making educational intervention possible (Man et al., 2002; Morris et al., 2013).

Prior to the development of the online fundraising assignment, which is one of the learning innovations detailed in this paper, the authors realised that entrepreneurial competencies of business and management students in their university were underdeveloped due to an overreliance on traditional teaching approaches, such as lectures, the use of case studies and guest speakers, and conventional academic assignments. Furthermore, beyond this local context, it had been recognised that entrepreneurship educators are inclined to let students learn in a safe controlled environment, with no pressure except to pass the module (Priem et al., 2021), thus limiting the opportunities for reflection and "hands-on" learning. This online fundraising assignment provides a highly practical and pressured experience (target of €2000 had to be raised within 12 weeks) that enables undergraduate students to enhance their entrepreneurship competencies such as creative problem solving, network building, persistence, tenacity, optimism, and passion (Morris et al., 2013; Morris & Liguori, 2016). Such is the strong experiential focus of this assignment, that the learning objectives are equally achievable in online or offline environments.

This article is organised as follows. First, we detail the key learning objectives of the assignment. We then offer a discussion of how the teaching philosophy and design underlying this assignment aided the development of entrepreneurial competencies. Following this, we offer details of the design and delivery of the online fundraising assignment for undergraduate entrepreneurship students. Finally, we offer a discussion around the student insights highlighted relating to the core competencies they identified as having been developed via the assignment.

Learning Objectives

In designing the online fundraising assignment for the New Venture Creation module, three learning objectives for the students were identified: (1) To engage and develop their entrepreneurial competencies; (2) To learn through doing (i.e. entrepreneurial action) and reflection; and (3) To demonstrate the use of entrepreneurial behaviour for the positive enhancement of society and disadvantaged communities.

In terms of the first learning objective, students were expected to demonstrate their capacity to develop and apply entrepreneurial competencies through the organisation and implementation of a fundraising initiative. Although the design elements of the assignment led to the development of particular entrepreneurial competencies (discussed later in the paper), there was a focus on allowing students to direct their own learning experience and decipher which competencies and mindsets they believed they have developed as a result of the assignment. In this way, the focus was more on encouraging students to unearth “learning surprises” than meet a set of fixed competency outcomes per se (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015; Baggen et al., 2022).

In terms of the second learning objective, students were expected to learn through entrepreneurial action and reflection. The development of a fundraising initiative required the practical application of business knowledge as students engaged in the following activities: idea generation, sponsorship, online fundraising, social media promotional activity, health and safety, insurance, gathering resources, team work, and business functions such as management, sales and marketing, finance, and operations. Student groups had opportunities to reflect on their actions at various stages throughout the assignment. For instance, they had to submit a detailed proposal for the planned fundraising initiative to an evaluation panel for feedback and approval, and they had to work closely with their chosen charity to develop the fundraising initiative. They also were expected to submit a Reflection Paper following Gibb’s (1988) Reflective Cycle at the end of the assignment.

The third learning objective stemmed from the volunteering aspect, which can be of great value to entrepreneurship courses, particularly those with a social orientation, because of the potential to facilitate the development of students’ civic engagement (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021). Students also garner a better understanding of the applicability of entrepreneurial competencies to the not-for-profit sector, thus highlighting that entrepreneurial behaviour is not confined solely to economic institutions (Drucker, 1985). The unique setting for this iteration of the assignment, during lockdown travel restrictions, ensured that students understood how entrepreneurial behaviour can be used to manage responses to environmental challenges (such as a global crisis), and to still bring about positive societal impact. COVID-19 presented many challenges for charities in developing fundraising initiatives. Understanding the importance of being adaptable and altering one’s way of doing business to ensure survival during turbulent and unpredictable times was thus an unintended, yet highly valuable, learning outcome for students undertaking this assignment.

Developing Entrepreneurial Competencies via an Online Fundraising Initiative

A useful starting point for understanding the logic behind this assignment is to refer to the three modes of entrepreneurship education, namely education that is *about*, *for* and *through* entrepreneurship (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015). Education *about* entrepreneurship is content focused and is aimed at the teacher imparting knowledge of entrepreneurship to the student. Education *for* entrepreneurship is based on providing students with the knowledge and skills to form their own business. Education *through* entrepreneurship is a process-oriented and experiential approach where students undergo entrepreneurial learning through collaboration and experience. The online fundraising initiative is primarily aligned with education *through* entrepreneurship, which is focused on the acquisition and development of entrepreneurial competencies (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). As students took a two-hour class each week during the 12-week module, they were also exposed to education *about* entrepreneurship as the lecture content discussed topics such as entrepreneurial competencies, Effectuation, Lean Start-ups, Business Model Canvas and business planning, which were considered as part of the wider New Venture Creation module.

Experiential “hands-on” learning and reflection on action are core elements that need to be incorporated into the design of an educational programme that is designed *for* or *through* entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Blass, 2018). Incorporating these experiences can be difficult as lecturers are inclined to let students learn by trial-and-error in a safe environment (Priem et al., 2021). However, this approach can stifle the students’ opportunities to learn through experience and making mistakes, outcomes that are core to entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). The online fundraising assignment was designed to enable students to undertake experiential learning in a pressured environment (due to time and monetary targets) and the pressure of these combined targets would enhance their entrepreneurship competencies.

A major design element that enabled students to enhance their entrepreneurship competencies was the teaching philosophy which was andragogical in nature. An andragogical teaching approach allows learners to direct and take ownership of their learning journey with the lecturer acting as a coach or facilitator. According to Neck and Corbett (2018), andragogical teaching is highly relevant to entrepreneurship education with the lecturer focused on facilitating learning rather than imparting knowledge, promoting the use of experiential techniques to address real-life problems, and linking the course content to the students’ goals and aspirations. This andragogical approach is closely associated with self-directed learning which can evolve across four stages (Grow, 1991):

- Stage 1: the student as dependent and the teacher as authority;
- Stage 2: the student as interested and the teacher as motivator;
- Stage 3: the student as involved and the teacher as facilitator;
- Stage 4: the student as self-directed and the teacher as consultant.

Table 1. Deadlines for Assignment.

Deadline	Activity to be Completed
Week 1	Introduction of the assignment
Week 2	Self-selected teams of 3 to be confirmed
Week 3	Presentation of charity event proposal to evaluation panel
Week 4	Completion of online health and safety modules
Week 5	Submission of insurance forms
Week 6	Approval for charity event to take place
Week 7	Venue and date to be confirmed
Week 8	Online platform to be available
Week 9	Financial budget to be finalized
Week 10	Marketing campaign to be completed
Week 11	Charity event to have taken place
Week 12	Submission of self-reflection paper

The online fundraising assignment is most reflective of Stage 3 of self-directed learning because of its focus on work in groups on open-ended (but carefully designed) projects and on the facilitator's role in empowering learning (Grow, 1991). Baggen et al. (2022, p.360) suggested giving students room to manoeuvre through "short cycles of prototyping and reflection under time pressure" and that "risk-taking and making mistakes is [made] part of the learning process". Target bound cycles of learning by action followed by reflection were incorporated into the course whereby students carried out a task, received feedback from the lecturer, business mentor, charity and/or other stakeholders, and reflected on the next actions to be undertaken. Parallels were drawn between this approach and the "build-measure-learn" method to lean start-up (Ries, 2011), where students had to turn their fundraising idea into a workable prototype (i.e. fundraising webpage), measure the response of customers (or donors), and learn whether to pivot or persevere. The student groups were allowed to change their plans if they determined that an alternative approach (or even an alternative event) was required to meet the target of presenting a minimum donation of €2000 to their chosen charity.

The students used their own discretion to set the pace of learning and when the activities would be undertaken. However, key deadlines (see Table 1) were given which created time pressure (Baggen et al., 2022). Moreover, to deliver an online fundraising initiative from conception to implementation, and achieve the target figure of €2000 in fundraising within 12 weeks, were ambitious yet achievable goals. It should be noted that the groups received no seed funding and had to resource the fundraising event through their own means. Students applied concepts from effectuation theory (Sarasvarthy, 2001) as they needed to leverage the resources available to them (bird-in-the-hand principle) and co-create solutions with different partners (crazy quilt principle).

When exploring the development and assessment of entrepreneurship skills, instruments developed by [Lichtenstein and Lyons \(1996\)](#), [Hannon \(2006\)](#) and [Herrmann et al. \(2008\)](#) were all considered. However, it was determined that the most appropriate approach to adopt would be the EntreComp framework ([Bacigalupo et al., 2016](#)), which is widely recognised and utilized across European universities. The EntreComp framework creates a shared understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that constitute what it means to be entrepreneurial. According to Entrecomp, 15 transversal and soft skills have been identified as key competencies for the development of entrepreneurial behaviour which are interrelated and interconnected. The three main components of Entrecomp are: (1) Ideas and Opportunities; (2) Resources; and (3) Into Action. Each component contains five competencies and the EntreComp framework was explained to the students during the first lecture.

While all 15 competencies were developed within the students to varying degrees, there were five competencies in particular that were strongly supported through the practice of this assignment. The first competency was coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. As already highlighted, [Baggen et al. \(2022\)](#) argued that “risk-taking and making mistakes” should form part of the learning process of entrepreneurship education. The assignment created the conditions for uncertainty, ambiguity and risk, as most students had no experience of developing a fundraising initiative, and were unfamiliar with issues such as logistics, health and safety, risk assessment and a variety of other considerations involved in organising such an initiative. Mechanisms were put in place to enable students to cope with this uncertainty, ambiguity and risk (i.e. development of a fundraising proposal, submission to an evaluation panel), plus each group was assigned a professional business mentor (volunteers from a large accountancy practice) to test ideas and reflect on their actions. The second competency was creativity. Creativity provides the impetus for opportunity recognition and ideation which are vital to new venture creation ([Fleck & Asmuth, 2021](#)). Throughout this assignment, students were challenged to conceptualise a new and creative, yet feasible, fundraising initiative. They also had to be imaginative in terms of how they promoted their event. The third competency was motivation and perseverance. In keeping with the andragogical teaching approach, which is recommended for entrepreneurial education, the assignment was designed to trigger the intrinsic motivations of the learner (e.g., personal interests, self-esteem) ([Neck & Corbett, 2018](#)). This was achieved through offering students the autonomy to choose their own charity (which was often of personal significance) and fundraising initiative. The final two competencies that were supported by the design elements of this assignment included mobilising others and working with others as students learned that they needed the support of a wide variety of people (e.g. family, friends, sponsors, owner/manager of the venue) if their initiative was to succeed. The role of external stakeholders is an important design principle of entrepreneurship education and was recognised through the purposive inclusion of the charities and business mentors in the co-creation of the fundraising initiatives ([Baggen et al., 2022](#)). [Table 2](#) provides a summary of the five core competencies identified and their application/relevance to the elements of the assignment.

Table 2. Examples of EntreComp Competencies Developed.

Example of EntreComp Competency	Description	Elements of Assignment
Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk	Within the value creating process, including structured ways of testing ideas from the early stages is one way to reduce risks	At each phase of the assignment (ideation, feasibility and implementation), provide opportunities for students to learn by testing ideas and reflecting on actions
Creativity	This skill has to do with the development of creative and purposeful ideas to create value, including better solutions to existing and new challenges	Produce a fully formed, realistic fundraising initiative that attracts sponsorship and support for fundraising activity
Motivation and perseverance	This skill has to do with one being determined to turn ideas into actions, resilient under pressure and adversity and remaining focused and patient to achieve a goal	Work towards fundraising goal whilst encountering any challenges relating to team work, developing a proposal and managing the initiative
Mobilizing others	This skill has to do with the ability to inspire and motivate relevant stakeholders to get the support needed in achieving valuable outcomes	Develop and maintain relationships with lecturer, team mates, business mentors, charity representatives, donors and customers
Working with others	This skill has to do with the ability to work together and co-operate with others to develop ideas and turn them into action	Students choose their own group, charity and fundraising initiative, and so learn to compromise and collaborate

The Innovations

The online fundraising assignment was designed and delivered as part of a 12-week New Venture Creation module for third year undergraduate students on a Business and Management degree programme. The module is an elective (optional subject) with 32 students opting into the first iteration of the newly designed online assignment (Semester 1 of 2020/2021). For 15 years, this assignment was delivered in the classroom before it was adapted to online delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of the conditions for online adaptation, entrepreneurship educators have been called upon to strongly consider their level of preparedness to quickly adjust their delivery modes (Liguori & Winkler, 2020). Furthermore, results from research undertaken by Chang and Rieple (2013) on live projects as part of entrepreneurship education found that there should be different experiential stimulants at the different

stages of learning, with regular feedback and mentoring processes to check on students' progress. This assignment introduced such supports that would be available across the duration of the module.

Several fresh elements were introduced to the online iteration of this assignment. Some of these adaptations were necessary for online delivery and some were an opportunity to enhance the assignment itself. These elements were as follows:

1. All classes (2-hour class per week) were delivered online using the university's online learning platform (i.e. Brightspace).
2. Students undertook their meetings online with their lecturer, business mentor, selected charity, and potential donors.
3. Students communicated with each other using online tools such as WhatsApp and group rooms on the university learning platform.
4. Students fundraising activities were promoted primarily through social media channels (e.g., Instagram, tiktok).
5. An online fundraising platform (iDonate.ie) agreed to become a partner in the initiative and so each group created its own fundraising webpage on this platform. The company operating the platform also made online presentations to the students offering advice regarding online fundraising, plus they provided continuous support to students by answering questions via email exchange.
6. A major accountancy firm agreed to become a partner of the initiative by providing each group with their own business mentor. Selected members of staff from the accountancy firm met with their allocated group online once every 3 weeks to provide mentoring support and to offer ideas regarding how the group's fundraising plans might be improved.

There were three very important elements of the support system that were retained from previous years and these were:

1. The initiative was supported by the university's Health and Safety Office as the students had to undertake online Health and Safety modules, plus submit a Risk Assessment Form relating to their initiative. This meant that the students had to learn about Health and Safety matters within the context of organizing an event, and understand the need to ensure the safety of themselves and others. While the Risk Assessment forms needed to be completed in previous years, this task was undertaken in hard copy within the classroom, but this became updated to an online format.
2. The insurance agent for the university also became a partner of the initiative and evaluated every proposal for risks relating to insurance. This was the first occasion that students had to learn about the importance of insurance in business and the critical need to act responsibly when hosting events or activities. Again, this work was completed within the classroom previously, but an online version was introduced due to COVID-19 restrictions.

3. The target of €2000 to be raised by each group was considered a critical element of the learning experience. When the assignment was originally introduced, students were given no target and so would organise minor events (e.g. pub quiz) to raise a small amount of money and would argue (justifiably) that they had completed the assignment. Setting a stretch-target of €2000 significantly changed the value of the assignment for the student as it introduced a substantial monetary pressure in addition to students needing to complete the task with 12 weeks.

While some measures were newly adopted due to COVID-19, these measures were maintained on returning to the classroom for the academic year 2021/22 (with the obvious exception of online classes). All forms, meetings, support activities and promotional activities are now undertaken online which has dramatically improved the flow, transparency, and development of the student activity.

A critical element of the learning innovation in this assignment is its extension beyond the confines of the classroom into real world environments and communities (Ratten & Usmanji, 2021). Students collaborate with external mentors, charities and donors throughout the assignment. This was made possible by the deep commitment of the university that hosts this assignment to civic and community engagement. Furthermore, the provision of feedback and support from external partner organisations, including business mentors, enhances the learning experience of students and enables the students to understand how they have fostered the entrepreneurial competencies identified in the EntreComp framework. This assignment also helped to foster the use of experience-based soft skills (e.g., networking, relationship management) related to entrepreneurship, which are difficult to develop within a classroom (Haase & Lautenschläger, 2011).

The following are the key steps that each group needed to follow during the assignment process:

- Step 1: Self-select into groups consisting of a maximum of three students, and then each group self-selects the charity it wishes to support and the nature of the fundraising initiative they wish to make happen.
- Step 2: Each group will then contact its preferred charity to get a better understanding of the work of the charity and seek its support for the group's fundraising event.
- Step 3: Each group will submit a detailed proposal for the planned fundraising initiative providing information such as the date(s) of the event, the location, nature of the event, and target market for fundraising. This proposal is evaluated by the (1) Lecturer; (2) Business Mentor; (3) Health and Safety Officer; (4) Insurance Agent; and (5) Representative from the Online Platform. Permission to host the event is only granted when all five members of the evaluation panel are satisfied that all of their requirements have been met and that the group have planned thoroughly for their event.

- Step 4: Once approved, the group must work with their chosen charity to develop their online promotional activity and their planned fundraising initiative. Working in partnership with their chosen charity enables the students to develop a deeper understanding of the business challenges facing not-for-profit organizations and how entrepreneurship skills can also be applied to these types of organizations.
- Step 5: Each group must then undertake all planned activities relating to successfully organizing a fundraising initiative, including securing sponsors and generating a variety of revenue streams.
- Step 6: Following the completion of the fundraising event by the group, the money raised is to be donated to their chosen charity and proof of receipt is submitted to the lecturer. Letters of thanks are to be sent to all organizations and individuals who have supported their initiative.
- Step 7: Submit a 4000-word personal Self-Reflection paper by Week 12 of the module detailing the learning experiences gained from the assignment. Students are asked to use the [Gibb's \(1988\)](#) Reflective Learning Cycle model to structure their self-reflection paper.

While many frameworks were considered to guide students through their self-reflection of their experiences, the Gibb's Reflective Cycle was determined to be particularly appropriate as it allows individuals to learn from things that either went well or did not go well. There are six stages to the framework which are as follows:

- Description of the experience
- Feelings and thoughts about the experience
- Evaluation of the experience, both good and bad
- Analysis to make sense of the situation
- Conclusion about what you learned and what you could have done differently
- Action Plan for how you would deal with similar situations in the future, or general changes you might find appropriate

While Gibbs originally advocated its use in repeated situations, the stages and principles apply equally well for single experiences too. Although the charity event was undertaken as a group activity, the reflection papers were individually-based as each student will have their own personal experience of what they have learned from their journey.

Although the learning innovation of a dual-pressured simulated scenario of new venture creation is a valuable exercise for students of any discipline or stage of study, the assignment is intended for advanced undergraduate business, management, and entrepreneurship students. The nature of the assignment involving group work, consultation with university and external stakeholders, and developing and implementing a fundraising proposal, requires students to demonstrate a considerable level of organisation, proactivity, and responsibility which are more likely to be found

in more mature students and therefore, less likely to be used with First and Second-Year students. Furthermore, students would be expected to have some base knowledge of business functions such as management, sales and marketing, finance, and operations, and therefore would be in the latter half of their degree course. It is possible that this assignment could also be utilized at Masters level, but it is less likely to be employed with non-business students since they would have little knowledge of the basics of business management.

The Student Experience

To help understand the nature of the work undertaken by the students, the following are a selection of the type of fundraising activities that took place during COVID-19 lockdown for this assignment:

1. Each member of a group ran the equivalent of a marathon a week during November
2. Online Instagram raffle of an expensive ladies' handbag donated by a fashion designer
3. 24-hour livestreaming of gaming using Twitch
4. A group invited family and friends to each complete 100 km walk
5. Online promotion of mental health by encouraging people to post pictures on social media
6. Online raffle of a Christmas Hamper
7. Group members collectively completed an 18-hour cycle on a stationary bicycle within the back garden of a house
8. A group cycled the equivalent of the length of Ireland while remaining within 5 km limits

While undertaking these activities, group members also urged their family and friends to share posts across social media and to persuade people to donate money online to the charity that they were supporting. When COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and the new cohort of students returned to the classroom for the new academic year, then the nature of the events differed as in-person events could take place once again. Therefore, initiatives such as golf classics, music gigs, pub quiz, road races, and other such events were popular with the new cohort of students. However, the traditional activities of promoting the charity events through posters and generating money simply through entry fees and sponsorship had been altered by the new cohort to incorporate all the online supports that had been developed during the previous academic year.

For the academic year 2020/21 (during COVID-19 restrictions), the actions and reflections of the students, as detailed in their reflection papers, strongly indicated that the learning objectives of this assignment were fulfilled. Furthermore, the students engaged and developed competencies that were supported through the design and

practice of this assignment. Some examples of how these competencies were used and developed are offered below.

Coping with Uncertainty, Ambiguity and Risk. As discussed at the beginning of the paper, this assignment was designed for students to unearth “learning surprises” rather than simply meeting a set of fixed competency outcomes (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015; Baggen et al., 2022). An unintended, yet impactful, learning outcome of the assignment was the reported benefit of the fundraising initiative on the mental well-being of the students and others who were involved. In the reflection papers, some of the students highlighted how they were quite nervous about the assignment at first, but later discovered that the assignment gave them a strong sense of purpose during the nationwide lockdown and made them feel good about themselves as they were contributing to society. In the words of one student:

I never realised the magnitude that the challenge would have on everyone involved, but I think the challenge really lifted everyone’s spirits during this time. It was all anybody who was involved in the challenge was talking about for the month of November. This challenge gave us a focus and helped us keep our fitness levels up during lockdown. It motivated us to get out of the house which not only helped our fitness, but our mental health too. I was so happy to hear that it motivated so many other people to do the same and I was thrilled to hear that so many people felt the positive impact on their mental health. (Student A)

Creativity. The students had to demonstrate creative problem-solving in developing and promoting their fundraising initiative whilst ensuring full adherence to COVID-19 restrictions. Exemplifying this creative approach was one student group that raised money to help ‘the hidden hungry’ in their community via their local Food Bank. The group encouraged people in the town to either walk 3 km or run 5 km in support of their fundraising initiative and donate to their fundraising page. To overcome the problem of lockdown restrictions, the group advised participants to walk/run on their own and within a 5 km radius of their home. To encourage participation, the group developed an online social media campaign using a clear and catchy marketing message (“run, donate, nominate”) and adopted promotional incentives (i.e. raffling three signed jerseys from professional athletes). The group raised €5,041, having decided to change their own target from €2000 to €5000.

Motivation and Perseverance. This assignment provided opportunities for students to practice and develop core entrepreneurial competencies such as motivation and perseverance. At the beginning of the assignment, most students were uneasy with the fundraising target of €2000 as they believed it was too high. In the reflection papers, several students commented that they would not have pushed themselves as hard if they did not have a target of €2000. It is important to note that giving the groups a ‘stretch target’ for fundraising was vital as it gave them a goal to strive towards. During the

assignment, the students also encountered some issues with regards to insurance which unwittingly became a significant learning opportunity for them. By the end of the assignment, every student was very familiar with the need for effective Health and Safety protocols when organising an event (even if it is online) and how to undertake a high-quality risk assessment of their event. These obstacles encouraged students to “dig deep” and persist through adversity, which is vital for entrepreneurship.

I would like to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of running my own fundraiser with my group as an assignment. I have learned that if I want to achieve something, I need to put my head down and work for it rather than sit back and let other people take over and do the work when I feel I could do a better job. Teamwork, communication, time management, computer skills and diligence were skills that we used over the last few months and I am proud of the amount of money that we have raised for our selected charity. (Student B)

Mobilizing Others. A core competency of entrepreneurs is relationship and network building. Students had to establish and maintain relationships with their charities/donors (e.g. clients) and partner organisations (e.g. business mentors). The students had to interact with their charity and become highly familiarised with its work and how it approaches fundraising initiatives. This experience is not dissimilar to how entrepreneurs become familiarised with their customers’ needs. Business support and mentorship is also highly important for budding entrepreneurs. The partner organisations made an enormous contribution to the learning process and in their reflection papers the students specifically remarked upon the fantastic support that they received from their business mentors.

I have enjoyed every moment of the assignment. It brought many emotional highs and lows, but I can undoubtedly say that the highs outweighed the lows. I have learnt so much about teamwork, organisation, interpersonal skills and most importantly kindness. The kindness we as a group received from our families and friends, the charity and most importantly each other was phenomenal and I am so grateful to have had this amazing opportunity from the university and my lecturer. My outlook on life has changed over the last 2 months and I have realised what is most important is human interaction and community spirit. Without our communities combined efforts and generosity, this goal would have been unattainable for us and I am forever grateful to them for raising awareness and funds for such an outstanding charity. (Student C)

Working with Others. This assignment created real conditions for students to develop their entrepreneurial competencies. Their engagement was ignited through the self-selection by the group of their charity organisations as this ensured that the initiative became less of an assignment and more of a passion project. Students were also actively involved in developing and promoting their fundraising initiative and communicating with their chosen charity. This gave each group a sense of ownership of the initiative

and a feeling of pride in the result. Many students spoke about their desire and willingness to organise another fundraising event in the future outside of their coursework. They emphasised the positive experiences of the assignment and a wish to raise additional monies for their chosen charity or even for sports clubs to which they were affiliated. Although low points were experienced during the assignment, students were able to maintain an optimistic outlook.

The students were also able to demonstrate the use of entrepreneurial behaviour for the positive enhancement of society and disadvantaged communities. The entrepreneurial actions (e.g., ideation, feasibility, marketing and promotion, finance, management) undertaken by the students in delivering the fundraising initiative supported various charities in continuing to deliver their social mission. A major outcome of these efforts was the fundraising total which amounted to €31,776. There were 12 groups in the class and each had a target of €2000 to donate to their charity. It was agreed by the students that having a target is important as prior experience had highlighted that without a challenging target, some students will minimize the work required for the fundraising activity. The figure of €2000 was deemed by the lecturer to be challenging, yet achievable. Only two of the 12 groups failed to reach the target, while two groups raised over €5000 each. This accomplishment is even more impressive when taking into consideration the impediments to running a fundraising initiative at that time (i.e. a government-imposed travel restriction of 5 km from one's home; a ban on physical events).

The principal novelty of teaching an entrepreneurship module using such an assignment is that a lecturer needs to become a coach or facilitator as much as a teacher. It was very important to work with the students to encourage them to utilise their entrepreneurial capabilities to achieve their targets. At the beginning of the assignment, most students believed that the target of €2000 was too high and therefore some time was needed in class to address this concern through interactive discussions. An evaluation panel was created to provide feedback to the initial proposals provided by the groups regarding their ideas for online fundraising and this provided very valuable direction regarding the work of the students; it also meant that some groups needed to significantly reimagine their planned activities. Supporting students through the Health and Safety and Event Risk Assessment stages was also critical as this was a new learning experience for the students. Initially, the forms were completed in a cursory manner, but when these were rejected by the relevant offices, then the students realised that more research and work was needed if they were to be given permission for their initiatives to proceed. For the lecturer, the number of online meetings with students and the answering of emails to their queries was substantially higher than traditionally-delivered modules as they sought reassurances regarding their work. It was in these communications that the role of coaching was particularly evident.

The single biggest challenge from a lecturer's perspective to organizing such an assignment is the amount of time required to set-up the assignment initially and then manage it during the semester. In addition to creating the various forms and templates for students to use during the assignment, there is also the need to engage with a variety

of internal (e.g. Health and Safety Office) and external parties (e.g. online fundraising platform, business mentors, insurance agents) to secure their support throughout the process. Furthermore, everything needs to be made available online and records curated to ensure transparency for all involved. All these tasks need to be undertaken in conjunction with the obvious action of teaching the module to the students. However, while the increased workload is significant, the rewards for the students are substantial.

Conclusion

There is a quote which is attributed to the Greek philosopher Plutarach which states that “minds are not vessels to be filled, but fires to be ignited”. This quote is used by the lecturer to explain their philosophy to entrepreneurship education. This fundraising assignment (whether online or offline) has significant potential to develop students’ entrepreneurial competencies and to ignite the fires within them. It is not expected that the assignment will lead each student to becoming an entrepreneur, but it is certainly the hope that each student will identify within themselves the entrepreneurial competencies that they possess, the opportunity that exists to develop them, and the willingness to use them in whatever career they might pursue. The andragogical, self-directed learning approach in a dual-pressured environment is most apt to this philosophy and is particularly suited to a highly experiential entrepreneurship module such as this assignment. Learning does not happen in the classroom alone and pushing the boundaries of spaces for entrepreneurship education to occur should be a lifelong pursuit for educators. This is just one example of how experiential learning can bring joy and knowledge to all involved.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Thomas M. Cooney  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5401-4366>

References

- Bacigalupo, M., Kampylis, P., Punie, Y., & Van den Brande, G. (2016). *EntreComp: the entrepreneurship competence framework*. Publication Office of the European Union. 10, 593884.

- Baggen, Y., Lans, T., & Gulikers, J. (2022). Making entrepreneurship education available to all: Design principles for educational programs stimulating an entrepreneurial mindset. *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, 5(3), 347–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515127420988517>
- Blass, E. (2018). Developing a curriculum for aspiring entrepreneurs: What do they really need to learn? *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 21(15282651), 1–14.
- Chang, J., & Rieple, A. (2013). Assessing students' entrepreneurial skills development in live projects. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 20(1), 225–241. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14626001311298501>
- Drucker, P. (1985). *Innovation and entrepreneurship*. Harper & Row.
- Fleck, E., & Asmuth, J. (2021). Building capacity for creativity: Rediscovering the inner “superhero” as a mechanism for developing a creative mindset for entrepreneurial problem-solving. *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, 4(1), 82–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515127420912503>
- Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford Further Education Unit.
- Grow, G. O. (1991). Teaching learners to be self-directed. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3), 125–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001848191041003001>
- Haase, H., & Lautenschläger, A. (2011). The ‘teachability dilemma’ of entrepreneurship. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 7(2), 145–162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-010-0150-3>
- Hannon, P. D. (2006). Teaching pigeons to dance: Sense and meaning in entrepreneurship education. *Education + Training*, 48(5), 296–308. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910610677018>
- Herrmann, K., Hannon, P., Cox, J., & Ternouth, P. (2008). Developing entrepreneurial graduates. available at: www.ncge.org.uk/publications
- Lackéus, M., & Williams Middleton, K. (2015). Venture creation programs: Bridging entrepreneurship education and technology transfer. *Education + Training*, 57(1), 48–73. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2013-0013>
- Lichtenstein, G. A., & Lyons, T. S. (1996). *Incubating new enterprise: A guide to successful practice*. The Aspen Institute.
- Liguori, E., & Winkler, C. (2020). From offline to online: Challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship education following the COVID-19 pandemic. *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, 3(4), 346–351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515127420916738>
- Man, T. W., Lau, T., & Chan, K. F. (2002). The competitiveness of small and medium enterprises: A conceptualization with focus on entrepreneurial competencies. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 17(2), 123–142. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026\(00\)00058-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(00)00058-6)
- Morris, M. H., & Liguori, E. (2016). Teaching reason and the unreasonable. In M. Morris, & E. Liguori (Eds), xiv–xxii). *Annals of entrepreneurship education and pedagogy* (2). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Morris, M. H., Webb, J. W., Fu, J., & Singhal, S. (2013). A competency-based perspective on entrepreneurship education: Conceptual and empirical insights. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 51(3), 352–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12023>

- Neck, H. M., & Corbett, A. C. (2018). The scholarship of teaching and learning entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, 1(1), 8–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515127417737286>
- Pittaway, L., & Cope, J. (2007). Simulating entrepreneurial learning: Integrating experiential and collaborative approaches to learning. *Management Learning*, 38(2), 211–233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507607075776>
- Priem, M., Smits, M., van der Zouwen-Koning, A. A., Ozoliņš, M., Irbe, M., Nemilentsev, M., & Martin, L. (2021). *Transdisciplinary entrepreneurship education design: a handbook and method for teachers*. Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences.
- Ratten, V., & Usmanij, P. (2021). Entrepreneurship education: Time for a change in research direction? *The International Journal of Management Education*, 19(1), 100367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2020.100367>
- Ries, E. (2011). *The lean startup: How today's entrepreneurs use continuous innovation to create radically successful businesses*. Crown Business.
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259121>