

## Chapter 13

# Multidisciplinary Group Case– Based Learning Environment: An Education Paradigm to Cultivate Entrepreneurial Thinking

**Despo Ktoridou**

*University of Nicosia, Cyprus*

**Epaminondas Epaminonda**

*University of Nicosia, Cyprus*

**Achilleas Karayiannis**

*Kes College, Cyprus*

### ABSTRACT

*Technological, economic, and social developments represent dynamic changes for businesses across industries, creating opportunities for young entrepreneurs to build profitable companies. A key consideration relates to the need to recognize market opportunities and understand when and how to capitalize on them, whether starting a new type of business or growing on existing ideas; entrepreneurial thinking is a central attribute in cultivating an answer to this consideration. This chapter examines the impact of case-based learning introduced in a multidisciplinary undergraduate course, “Management of Innovation and Technology,” at the University of Nicosia. A core element in this process are the students’ and lecturers’ experiences, benefits, and challenges of cultivating entrepreneurial thinking. The findings can be useful for academics teaching entrepreneurship-related topics and seeking ways to incorporate innovative approaches in their teaching and learning processes in order to motivate students towards the development of entrepreneurial thinking in their professional engagements.*

### INTRODUCTION

Living in a world of continuous scientific and technological change, university students need to be more prepared to effectively integrate themselves into the competitive working environments of the 21st century. A general observation is that teaching entrepreneurship through other courses besides business and management, generates important considerations such as: if any real world cases could be

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explained and if practical problems can be solved within a classroom environment; if all the knowledge generated within the classroom can meet students' ambitions and aspirations; if it is really motivating to tell students that they will someday need certain knowledge and skills in order to become successful in their professional engagements (Prince and Felder, 2006).

These considerations become more important when an educator has to teach entrepreneurial thinking to a multidisciplinary class with students coming from different specializations. Questions that are common include: How possible is it to convince such a diverse audience that a course that cultivates entrepreneurial thinking and acting skills will be useful for their professional careers? Which pedagogical approaches should be implemented to engage and motivate students towards entrepreneurial learning? Are there specific skills that students can learn in order to start thinking and acting as an entrepreneur? Some of these skills may be the following: be creative, come-up with innovative solutions, use problem-solving skills, work in teams, gather and evaluate data and finally take risks. These skills can be acquired through the use of a range of innovative teaching and learning methods such as student-centered methods that impose more responsibility on students for their own learning than more traditional teacher-centered methods.

In order to meet the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century employment, educators and practitioners should prepare students in order to work in different environments with many complex requirements, by introducing theory in combination with real-world cases/applications for analysis. A student-centered approach where the student is responsible for his/her own learning by building his/her own version of reality is an alternative approach to learning. More specifically, in a student-centered approach students are primarily presented to a precise challenge, through complex, open-ended, real-world situations/problems/issues to analyze and seek solutions through interpretation and experimental data. While dealing with these challenges, students realize that they lack skills, knowledge, facts and conceptual understanding and they request the help of the lecturer, who plays the role of the facilitator. Ramsden (2003), Norman and Schmidt (1992) and Felder and Brent (2004) demonstrate that student-entered methods can potentially encourage students to adopt a deeper approach to learning that can lead to further intellectual development.

The urge for students to build and use their own version of reality in learning, blends well with Brecht's Epic Theatre and the Theory of Alienation, one of the most well-known theatrical approaches to what can potentially lead to good performance by actors, when on stage. Brecht characterized his approach to theatre as 'theatre for the scientific age' (Gordon, 2002: 226), looking for a theatre which 'might induce in its spectators an attitude of active engagement with the world and the possibilities for changing it' (Gordon, 2002: 226). Reflecting on the multidisciplinary approach to learning induced in this chapter, it can be argued that theatre, in its scientific sense, is a potential source of learning that can be transferred to a classroom environment and act as an important motivator towards students' active engagement in their own process of learning, through their own version of reality and understanding. In fact, the lecturer-trainer within such a multidisciplinary classroom learning environment, can be 'demonstrating the story' (Gordon, 2002: 226) while reminding the spectator (student) that was he or she is watching is "not in itself reality but the playwright's and actors' view of it" (Gordon, 2002: 233).

The work presented in this chapter, examines the impact of Case-based learning (CBL) introduced in the 'Management of Innovation and Technology', an undergraduate elective course at the University of Nicosia. It examines the students' and lecturer's experiences, benefits and challenges of implementing CBL, and gives recommendations to lecturers for designing a CBL based curriculum which aims at the development of entrepreneurial thinking and acting.

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