STORYTELLING - AN EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT AN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching entrepreneurship at an undergraduate programme is a challenge in itself. The challenge is more related to inculcating an entrepreneurial spirit in the students rather than teaching the course. Risk taking, out of the box thinking, design thinking and strategy are some of the concepts that require not just academic rigor but a personal passion of the students.

Storytelling, acts as a facilitator for inculcation of these passions in the students during the teaching – learning process of the course. Unlike traditional courses on accounting, economics, commerce and the likes, a course on entrepreneurship is a learning journey going beyond the curriculum and assessments lifecycle of the student. The learning of the student cannot be measured by his grades and scores; rather it is difficult to measure the learning as the course is a life skills endeavor for the student. However using this research paper as a forum to express my experiences of teaching “Entrepreneurship” to 18 and 19 year old students, I would like to highlight a few success cases of student and alumni led start-up’s from our college campus.

This research paper highlights a combination of pedagogical tools for teaching various aspects of starting a business. The role of student centered learning is stressed upon. The student learning’s from role models and behavior modeling simulation act as external variables in the current study. The internal variables under the study are student perception, their personality, the family background, the career aspiration, their hobbies and their motivation.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, Start-up, Venture, Funding, Ideation, Innovation, Personality, Career Planning, Learning Styles, Story Telling, Narratives, Oral Traditions, Stories.

1.0 Introduction:

Story-telling which was once a part of our ancient Indian culture and tradition, called as “Oral Traditions” is being revived today as an area of pedagogical research and training. Technically this area is called as “Narrative approach” (Sandelowski, 1991).

Story-telling narratives have been a compelling pedagogical tool for inculcating values & ethics among young students at the school levels in India and across the globe (Mohapatra & Panigrahy, 2015).

In our ancient Indian culture, we had story-telling narratives in the form of short stories of Panchatantra and Jataka tales. These short narratives provided us with values and lessons for one’s conduct in life. These short narratives define the story-telling formats for getting a message across to the intended audience. The same taxonomy is now being applied to teaching pedagogy, which uses story-telling as a tool of communication.
2.0 Taxonomy of Story-telling:

According to Fran Stallings, the cross curriculum applications of story-telling can be done by using Bloom’s Taxonomy (Stallings, 1986).

Benjamin Bloom formulated a classification of “the goals of the educational process” (Bloom, 1948). Bloom identified 3 ”domains” of educational activities as follows:

- Cognitive Domain (knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking)
- Affective Domain (the way people react emotionally)
- Psychomotor Domain (ability to physically manipulate a tool or instrument)

Based on the above “domains”, Bloom formulated taxonomy of knowledge based on hierarchy of the same. This is illustrated in figure 1 below.

![Bloom's Taxonomy Diagram](image)

Source: Bloom (1948)

Fran Stallings proposed the following model based on Bloom’s Taxonomy for designing of story-telling as a pedagogical tool of Cross-Curriculum Applications of Storytelling. Fran proposes the story follow-up activities at different levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

- KNOWLEDGE - Review story material in preparation for higher level activities.
- COMPREHENSION - Reinforce ”basic thinking skills”.
- APPLICATION - Use story information in different ways or settings.
- ANALYSIS - Clarify elements, relationships, organizational principals within the story.
- EVALUATION - Use evidence or criteria to judge the new product.
- SYNTHESIS - Produce something new from story material plus fresh material.

(Source: http://www.franstallings.com/Performances/BloomsTaxonomy)
3.0 Review of literature.

1. Peter S. Sherman, Terry Sebora and Lester A. Digman, (2008) in their empirical research titled “Experiential entrepreneurship in the classroom: Effects of teaching methods on the entrepreneurial career choice intentions”, mention in their research paper that experiential approaches to teaching entrepreneurship to students would have a greater impact on the student’s decision to become an entrepreneur. They found this as a sharp contrast to other pedagogical tools like reading texts or learning theory. Their research also mentions another significant finding that the listening / watching components including guest speakers who on occasions have motivated the students decision on to taking up entrepreneurial venture. This research proved that students are more motivated to take up entrepreneurship when they listen / watch other entrepreneurs, rather than just reading about them. It was also proved that high impact activities like preparing a business plan and interviewing an entrepreneur scored high on the list of student’s factors leading to decision on becoming an entrepreneur.

2. Sherman, Digman, Sebora and Hansen (2006) found that giving a realistic preview of entrepreneurship may help nascent entrepreneurs make better decisions while evaluating opportunities. The study should encourage experiential learning, including the actual start-up of a new venture.

3. Hafiz Rehman and John Day, (2015) in their research paper titled “Involving the entrepreneurial role model: A possible development for entrepreneurial education”, discuss the importance of involving a role model in entrepreneurship learning and teaching. They mention that entrepreneurs could act as a mentor to whom students can talk and with whom they can establish a longer informal relationship.

4. Hainonen, J and Poikkijoki, S. A. (2006) mention that entrepreneurship education is the activities aimed at developing enterprising or entrepreneurial people and increasing their understanding and knowledge about entrepreneurship and enterprise.

5. Kuckertz, A. (2013) suggested that role models for students should be younger entrepreneurs who are two or three years ahead of the student, and those to whom the students can easily relate.

6. Arndt Lautenschlager and Hieko Haase, (2011) in their research paper titled “The myth of entrepreneurship education: Seven arguments against teaching business creation at University” suggest the following enhancements in any entrepreneurship pedagogy.

   a. The curricula should concentrate on nurturing creativity and critical thinking.
   b. The teaching method should not only focus on facilitation of knowledge about business creation, but should encourage students to be active learners by ways of self information collection in an experiential an experimental manner.
   c. The need for entrepreneurial talent is expected in most business positions by prospective employers today. This role is defined as “Intrapreneurship” i.e.: acting like an entrepreneur, within an organization where the person is an employee. Therefore the author suggests that hard facts about entrepreneurial talent should be considered important in the curricula of the standard business management education.
4.0 Use of Story-telling as a pedagogical tool – A case of undergraduate school of business management.

4.1 Background.

This case highlights the best practices followed in design and delivery of curricula for undergraduate study in the field of business management. The undergraduate school is a constituent body of a deemed university having pan-India presence. The school has formulated the course on entrepreneurship for the third year students of the business administration stream from the year 2013. However there existed a capstone project on Business Plan for the third year students’ right from the year 2010 onwards. The entrepreneurship course acts as a precursor compulsory course leading to preparation of a business plan as a major project having full credits.

4.2 Purpose of an experiential pedagogy.

The aim of introducing the compulsory course on entrepreneurship followed by preparation of a business plan was to inculcate an entrepreneurial culture among the final year students.

These students undergo a rigorous 2 years of academic inputs being given to them in all areas of business management, right from the legal process of starting a business to managing finances and human resources to marketing and strategically growing a business. The expected outcomes were two-folds viz: the students would start-up their own venture or take up jobs / internships with start-up’s so that they could eventually start-up a venture in the near future. A significant number of the students studying at the school came from business families from across India. Therefore the need to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship among students was acutely felt in the school’s academic ecosystem.

4.3 Discussion.

A variety of pedagogical mix was used to make the subject interesting and “real life” by use of both on-line as well as off-line resources. Online resources like videos of Young Turks by CNBC TV18, one of the most popular programmes aired by a national television channel profiling young entrepreneurs and their start-up’s, innovative ideas, business models. The programme invites venture funds to evaluate the young entrepreneur’s business plan and critically evaluate their business model for robustness, viability and scalability. The channel assigns mentors who are seasoned entrepreneurs or venture capitalist or Angel investors to such profiled entrepreneurs.

Another avenue for student learning was the international reality show “Shark Tank”. This show features real entrepreneurs “Pitching” their business ideas to a panel of angel investors and venture capitalists for getting their ventures funded. Watching these programmes and reality shows helped the students in understanding what was expected of their business idea and how to make a robust business model. They realized what the venture capital firms look for in a business plan. It gave them insights on “Pitching” their ideas in the form of a business plan.

Listening to mentors on these videos helped the students to differentiate between a fancy business idea and a scalable business idea. These videos acted as a base for our main pedagogical input i.e.: meeting and discussing face to face with an entrepreneur. We started off with a classroom based event called as “Entrepreneurial Talk”. As a part of this event we invite an entrepreneur in our class during the lecture hour for listening to his / her story on the journey into entrepreneurship. It was a story telling session where the entrepreneur narrated his life journey and his experiences in starting up his
venture. This is generally an unstructured narrative, followed by a well structured question and answer session by the students. After each such session an assigned group of students would be preparing a well structured report on the narratives experienced in the classroom. Such reports are taken as a graded assignment for all groups in the class. The learning’s from a series of “Entrepreneurial Talks” conducted during the course duration is tracked down to their business plan project. Some of the entrepreneurs called showed interest in becoming mentors to our students for making their business plan and also for its execution.

4.4 Methodology.

The students were divided into groups and each group would research on one start-up which was in existence for less than 5 years. The students make use of internet for their research by browsing through websites like www.yourstory.com and social networking sites like LinkedIn, facebook, etc. This was augmented by attending entrepreneurial networking sessions conducted by bodies like TiE (The IndUS Entrepreneurs), Mumbai Angels Network, VC Circle events and the likes.

Once they have identified a start-up which interests them, they need to contact the founders and convince them for an interactive session in the classroom. This process trained the students in data collection, evaluation, research and finally “Pitching” their intention to the founders of the start-up. The process also trains the students in “Contingence Planning” as they may face rejection from the founders of the start-up for their purpose. This exercise therefore teaches them to have a “Plan B” for this purpose. This exercise ensured that the students researched and contacted many start-ups.

The focus was on inviting young entrepreneurs in the age group of 18 – 28 years as the students would easily relate with that age group. The students were also given a choice to invite school alumnus who had successfully started up his own business venture during the last 3 years. This ensured commitment from the students’ side as they could connect well with their age group and also they had bonding with the alumnus who was their seniors some years ago.

4.5 The Story-telling Process.

Stories and story-telling practices are assumed to be closely tied up with phylogenies of language, human social formations and historically emerging vision of individuality and the modern person. Stories change to epics and narratives emerge as a new and central formatting device for the organization of self and identity. It successfully fed the common shared belief that who are we, or who we think we are, is realized in the stories we tell about ourselves; everyone not only has a story but also has a right to tell their story (Bamberg, 2010).

Our “Entrepreneurial Talk” is an unstructured narrative of the life story of an individual, who is an entrepreneur. He / she narrate experiences and words of wisdom from their entrepreneurial journey. Sharing of successes and failures is an integral ingredient of one’s entrepreneurial journey, and is the essence of such talks. The entrepreneur shares his dreams and his vision for his business. He shares his identity with his dreams of his start-up and how he is making a difference to himself and others around him. By understanding the students are exposed to the “Real” entrepreneurship world.

Narratives – The term narrative as a method implies a general approach that views the individual within their social environments as actively conferring meaning onto objects in the world including others and self. This is necessarily subjective and interpretative. Therefore narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful (Polkinghorne, 1988).
In the narrative interview there is collaboration between the interviewer and the participant, as the story emerges from the interaction, exchange and dialogue between the interviewer and the participant (Creswell, 2014).

The entrepreneur’s narrative on his life journey helps the students understand the struggles and compromises of the individual during his entrepreneurial journey. The students get an opportunity to actively participate in the story telling process by putting across their queries and thoughts to the entrepreneur. The students pose as interviewer and the entrepreneur is the story-teller or the participant. The interpretation of his life journey emerges from this collaboration between the students and the entrepreneur.

Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes into account the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Narrative knowledge is created and constructed through stories of lived experiences, and the meanings created, helps make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives (Bruner, 1986). Narrative knowledge derived through the shape of a story helps organize information about how people have interpreted events; the values, beliefs and experiences that guide those interpretations; and their hopes, intentions and plans for the future. Narrative knowledge provides us with memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understanding about a person, their culture and how they have created change (Etherington, 2000).

The students use structured interview technique to gather data to supplement the story of the entrepreneur. This generates knowledge by which the student’s are left to interpret the personality of the entrepreneur, his strengths and weaknesses, what opportunities did he get and how he used his talent and skills to get his business idea to benefit from such opportunities. Similarly they contemplate on how adversities affect the individual and his dreams. The students are exposed to the values, beliefs and an entrepreneurial culture existing in the real world through the contemplation of such narratives.

Narratives constructed to describe an entrepreneurial eco-system and where it is headed often represents a redemption story, which describes not only a vision of new possibilities and opportunities, but also a road map for how to achieve the envisioned future (Roundy, 2016).

While the students got an opportunity to understand the entrepreneur as a single entity they also had the opportunity to know and understand the eco-system that existed for the entrepreneur. The students’ interaction included dialogues on venture formation process, sources of funding, networking and its benefits, incubation process and organizational framework support for the entrepreneur are discussed during the discourse. These narratives envision the students’ dreams for starting up their own business venture.

4.6 Outcomes.

The outcomes of adopting an experiential learning pedagogy were many folds.

1. Experiential learning, rather than transmission of knowledge.
2. Learner’s active participation and student approved system to enhance student motivation in the learning process.
3. Diversity of educational experiences.
5. Direct participation of experienced entrepreneurs in the training programme.
6. Experience of failure in the learning process.
7. Risk, responsibility and opportunity identification training.
8. The use of internet/online social media.
9. A portfolio of techniques to practice entrepreneurship.
10. Develop entrepreneurship mindset and attitude.

Our endeavor at making our entrepreneurship pedagogy learner centered and experiential in nature bestow us all the above benefits as highlighted in the above mentioned bibliometric study. The proof of the pudding is the success stories of our student start-ups.

1. Frapp – A student discount App on mobile – www.frapp.in. This start-up was the venture of 3 students of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) programme of the 2013 batch. The start-up is featured on Yourstory.com.
2. Kitabi – A web portal and app on mobile for buying and selling pre-owned books. www.kitabi.in. This venture was founded on the campus during 2015.
3. IDEE – A web marketing institute for short duration certification courses on e-commerce and social media marketing.
4. Kunal Jessani’s Dance Academy – Started in the year 2014 by our student Kunal Jessani, the dance academy provides training in all pop dance styles and Zumba. The venture has scaled up with multiple branches and overseas exposure.
5. Pipes – A news app on mobile which filters the news feed as per user’s tastes. This app was featured on Techcrunch – an online portal for listing of most innovative tech gadgets and apps. The co-founder was also featured on VC Circle and Yourstory.com.

To support these students and alumni initiatives in start-ups, the school has started an incubation centre on the campus and a student driven Entrepreneurship Cell in the year 2015. Students are encouraged to start their venture on-campus where they are provided with mentors and funding support during their nascent stage of their venture.

5.0 Limitations and scope for further research.

The above case highlights best practices which could be adopted by faculty and institutions for teaching entrepreneurship course at an undergraduate level. Though this could be adopted by institutions there are some limitations as the curricula and the assessments also need to be tuned for the same. This may be a bottleneck for institutions not having autonomy for design of curriculum.

Researchers in future could develop a framework for theorizing the pedagogy using empirical data from students and institutions across varied academic eco-systems.
6.0 Conclusion.
Student centric learning tools and pedagogy are coming of age today. Academic institutions need to take cognizance of this and provide platforms of experiential and experimental learning to the student community. Learning should be fun coupled with challenges of the real world. Faculty need to be facilitators rather than knowledge providers. They need to take up mentoring roles for guiding the students. A culture of self research and exploration should be provided to the student community by the institutions and the faculty.

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