

Developing and assessing entrepreneurial competences – interview with VET teacher Paz Fernandez de Vera

Paz Fernandez de Vera is a VET teacher at IES El Batán, a government-funded Secondary School in Mieres (Asturias). Mieres is a former industrial and mining town of about 40.000 inhabitants located in the North of Spain. It can be considered an underprivileged area since there has been a drastic reduction in the number of jobs and some of students belong to families in which both parents are unemployed or the father has stopped working at a very young age as they became eligible for early retirement when coal mines were closed.

The school educates 300 students at different levels ranging from Lower Secondary Education to VET tracks on Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy (ISCED 2 to 5). Paz teaches among other “Enterprise and Entrepreneurial Initiative”, a compulsory subject in all VET tracks. The time allocation for this subject is 4 hours a week.

EntreAssess is keen to know existing approaches to assessment of the entrepreneurial competence. In your opinion, to what extent is this competence important in your teaching?

This competence is essential in my daily teaching. I always tell my students that this competence deals with the development of skills for life. I embrace a broad definition of entrepreneurial competence, that is to say the ability to have a vision, dreams, goals, detect problems, see opportunities and to transform all of this in real and added value projects through action. The soft skills put into practice to develop this competence are always the same. It does not matter if the project is social, professional,

personal or financial. I do believe that this competence should be developed from the early school levels as a cross-curricular competence.

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What’s the best context to develop this sort of competences? Curricular, extracurricular? Projects?



Paz Fernandez de Vera, third from the left with the blue hat

I think that this competence can be developed in all the contexts you mention. I mostly do it through projects. When I present the subject I tell my students that as a group their goal is to generate an idea that brings an added value (be it social, cultural or financial). They will have to transform this idea not in a simulated project but in a real one. This means that they will be interacting with different stakeholders such as institutions, clients, neighbours, associations, providers, experts or even students from other

schools. On the first day of class I ask them to look through the window and write what they see so as to start spotting problems and opportunities. Then we go outside and I ask them to look at the same scenario in order to check how their answers to the same question change completely. I always tell them what defines “a real entrepreneur (understood as entrepreneur in life, not necessary in business), is a down-to-earth approach to problems and proper fieldwork”. So that is why I try to develop this competence through real projects in a real context.

What do you exactly assess and how? What works for you?

From my point of view, assessment is a key factor in the teaching and learning process. If assessment fails, the rest of the process collapses. In that case we will not know if there is a real learning and personal progression and we will not be able to modify things accordingly. I consider assessment as an improvement instrument that should guide the whole process and help the student (and also the teacher) to improve progressively. I assess the process and the results. How? I use different kind of rubrics. The students have the same rubrics from the beginning to assess themselves and eventually other classmates.

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I think that assessment implies ongoing personalised support. I provide feedback through personal interviews in which I motivate and support the student but I also place high demands

on them. Another key factor for me is the importance of high expectations according to the capacity they really have, even if at time they are not aware of it. I use different kind of evidences: learning diaries, graphic organisers, online evidences. All my students' projects are disseminated online through social media and a blog. An essential part of the entrepreneurial process is being able to communicate the project properly.

To what extent are students actively involved in the assessment?

I believe that our students should acquire the habit of assessing themselves, so they can be aware of their strengths and improvement areas. Therefore I have created a system of rubrics with colours that allow them to self-assess some of these skills on a daily basis in a visual and very easy way. As I mentioned before I conduct personal interviews with them to adjust and provide my feedback. They also assess their classmates.

What about feedback from other stakeholders?

Sometimes they get feedback from their collaborators or followers in their project but in a very informal way. It is an excellent idea, that would allow us to broaden the focus and get different and interesting perspectives.

Is this a way of assessing the entrepreneurial competence a widespread practice in your school? If not, what are the main barriers?

It is hard to tell. I would not like to make sweeping generalisations. It depends on the school and on the individual teacher but I don't think it is widespread at all. The assessment of these competences is complex and closely linked to an specific methodology with which not all teachers are familiar with. I reckon it is also a question of the importance you attach to it in your teaching, your disposition

if you wish, and last but not least, having access to training opportunities to tackle such a complicated matter with some confidence.

Progression, that is to say, envisaging a coherent and gradual acquisition of the competence, remains a big challenge. What's your opinion on EntreComp?

I like the framework, I consider it an excellent instrument for teachers and stakeholders. From my point of view these important competences have not been clearly explained yet. EntreComp does an important, necessary and timely pedagogical job here. I like its broad focus, not identifying the competence necessarily with setting up a business. Entrepreneurial Competence, as I mentioned before, deals with lot of important aspects of our lives that in my opinion should be developed from an early age.

What would you like to see happening next for the future?

Some time ago I was really impressed when I read a teacher quote that said something like "For a long time I pretended I was teaching and my students pretended they were learning." That statement struck me as being particularly accurate so, going back to your question, I wish we all become increasingly aware of the importance of having proper assessment systems in place and keep working and improving them. Although I know that this is easier said than done. However, that's the only way forward to ascertain if our students are really learning and developing this competence, guide them through the process and bring out the best of every single student.

Paz was interviewed by Iván Diego of Valnalon, partner in the EntreAssess project.