

A light gray world map is centered in the background of the page. The text is overlaid on the map.

## International Journal of Applied Entrepreneurship

Volume 2 Issue 1

## Optimising Learning in Enterprise Education

**Dr. Christina Wai Mui Yu**

Business Studies Lecturer  
Department of Information and Applied Technology  
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

ISSN 1742-5824

## **Abstract**

This paper details how a successful school event, the Teen Entrepreneurs Competition, creates an authentic learning environment and builds up a win-win mechanism for enterprise education and business teacher education in the context of Hong Kong. The detail of this competition, including the rationale behind it, its features, organisation, timeframe, level of participation, outcome, benefits, and some ideas for future development are clearly outlined.

**Key words:** Learning, Enterprise, Teacher, Education

## **Introduction**

More than 90 per cent of people in Hong Kong work in business-related jobs, and over 90 per cent of business establishments (around 300,000) are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These SMEs provide over 60 per cent of jobs in Hong Kong, and represent the backbone of the Hong Kong economy. However, the enterprise start-up rate in Hong Kong was just 3.4 per cent in 2002, which had dropped by 25 per cent from the 2001 rate and ranked Hong Kong near the bottom on a scale of 37 countries (Chua et al., 2002). A number of short-term factors may have influenced the enterprise start-up rate, such as the unsatisfactory financial situation in Hong Kong, but the lack of sufficient enterprise education in schools is a significant long-term contributory factor. Existing enterprise education in Hong Kong is mainly carried out in higher education courses, such as BBA and MBA programmes in universities. School students lack 'hands-on' experience of entrepreneurial activities, and there is an urgent need to initiate enterprise education in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools to inspire school pupils to be enterprising, and to allow them to acquire the basic competencies for entrepreneurship (Chua et al., 2002).

## **Teen Entrepreneurs Competition**

### **Rationale**

Enterprise education is able to develop enterprise competencies, such as risk and financial management, through any subject curriculum at any educational level. Enterprise education enables society to innovate, create new industries and produce aspiring human capital. The key teaching methods for enterprise education include lectures, seminars and workshops, case studies, projects, classroom and internet-based simulations and authentic trade. In view of the nature of entrepreneurship, the teaching approach should be experiential and collaborative, which also maximises the learning opportunities of students (Douglas & Adams, 1999; Solomon, Weaver & Fernald, 1994). In light of modern teaching trends and the need for enterprise education in Hong Kong, the Business Studies Teaching Team at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) initiated an innovative project, the Teen Entrepreneurs Competition (TEC), to simultaneously promote enterprise education in schools and train business teachers.

## Features

The TEC was an open inter-school competition in which students set up and ran a market stall to sell Christmas items at the HKIED campus. It aimed to provide an opportunity for secondary pupils in years four to seven to put business theories into practice and arouse their interest in running a small business. All local senior secondary schools were invited to form teams of 2 to 10 pupils to participate in the competition, which was judged according to business plans and selling performance. Each school paid a registration fee of HK\$1,800 for the enrolment of a maximum of two teams. The competition teams then brainstormed an innovative business venture on the Christmas theme, wrote up a business proposal, turned their business proposal into a real business and competed on the market days. Different prizes were awarded, such as best proposal, best product, best stall design and highest sales return, as adjudicated by a group of business teachers, school principals and local entrepreneurs.

Trainee business teachers from the HKIED were invited to guide the competition teams by providing a series of training workshops that covered the concepts and theories of entrepreneurship and the practical skills that are needed to conduct 'real trade'. They then worked with the business teachers at the schools to train the competition teams, and made sure that the teams engaged in training and planning activities and arrived at a business plan, established and managed a market stall in the start-up period, and evaluated their activities in the post start-up period. The TEC not only successfully promoted enterprise education in an authentic way, but also developed some methods for the training of business teachers.

## Organisation and timeframe

Twelve active trainee business teachers formed an executive committee to plan and run the TEC under the guidance and supervision of the Business Studies teaching team. They set up sub-committees to look after the various parts of the competition, such as promotion, finance, and management issues. The working schedule was evenly spread over four months and comprised the promotion and registration period, the training and preparation of the business plans, the opening ceremony and market days, and the closing ceremony and evaluation period. This organisational structure and timeframe allowed all of the parties that were involved to work efficiently and effectively.

## Participation

Nearly 200 participants from 14 secondary schools made up the 20 teams in the competition, and the two market days attracted more than 1000 customers. Three consumer education seminars were held for primary school pupils and the local community during the market days.

Nearly half of all of the pre-service trainee business teachers at the HKIED (47 in total) were recruited, and completed the eight-hour training sessions. They then paired off or formed groups of three to teach and assist the competition teams. They also created an in-house sharing website, <http://bus.ied.edu.hk/tec>, as a communication tool. All of the instructors and participants worked very hard and completed all of the required tasks on time.

## Outcome

The submitted business plans were well structured, and featured a venture description, a production/purchase plan, an organisational plan, a marketing plan, a financial plan, an operational plan and a risk management plan. Some of the product ideas were very creative, such as a hand-made fabric bookmark and a film key holder, which was made from recycled camera films. The adjudicators commented that most of the business plans demonstrated good ideas and an adequate understanding and application of entrepreneurship in the context of seasonal sales. About a quarter of the competition teams made a net profit, and the remaining three quarters broke even and or made a net loss. Some of the teams that made a loss held clearance sales at their schools, and some of the schools absorbed the losses by fund raising after the competition.

Most of the participants expressed that they had gained a rich and valuable experience from the TEC, which is reflected by two concluding statements that were made during the evaluation.

*I'm very happy, even though the process was very hard, because I have learnt a lot and did not have to work alone.*

*I think we should have the courage to face difficulties and be willing to take up responsibility to achieve our goals.*

The business teachers from the schools agreed that the TEC offered a safe area for their students to engage in a business venture and develop their enterprise competencies. The TEC also served to show schoolteachers how they could approach the challenge of teaching students the necessary skills for the highly demanding business environment in Hong Kong. The trainee teachers emphasised that the TEC was a golden opportunity to develop their teaching competence in enterprise education, and enlarge their network building with local businesses and schools. They particularly valued the interaction with the school students throughout the competition, which helped them to develop their professional insight. Most of the trainees suggested that the TEC should be an ongoing event.

## Benefits

The TEC is different from other similar activities because it is not just aimed at encouraging school pupils to be enterprising, but also at training teachers in enterprise education. It is a practical exercise that also stresses the multifaceted nature of the development of business ventures, and both encourages good teaching methods in enterprise education and applies them using a holistic approach from a learner-orientated perspective. It also serves to link teacher training institutions, local schools, businesses and local communities together.

## ***The way forward***

The TEC could be further developed by setting it up as an annual educational event for local schools with the collaboration of other outside parties, such as shopping malls and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), and could also be linked with educational research. Research projects on the TEC could focus on the study of the attitudes, competencies and teaching methods of enterprise education from the perspective of students, schoolteachers and trainee teachers by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The three possible research proposals for the next round of the TEC are as follows.

### **Proposal 1**

A quantitative study on whether enterprise education can orientate students towards entrepreneurship by using the Entrepreneurial Attitude Orientation (EAO) survey instrument to identify changes in the achievement, self-esteem, personal control and innovation of students who participate in the competition (Robinson, Simpson, Heufner and Hunt, 1991), with surveys being conducted in the pre- and post-competition periods.

### **Proposal 2**

A qualitative study on the perceptions of trainee business teachers on the use of authentic approaches in enterprise education, which would be carried out by asking trainee teachers about their understanding of authentic approaches in enterprise education and their personal feelings on the competition in group interviews to be conducted after the competition.

### **Proposal 3**

A study of the extent to which students who participate in the TEC acquire enterprise competencies using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study would first identify a checklist of the required competencies for entrepreneurship through a literature review and a questionnaire survey among the local business community, and would then match the performance of the competition team members in proposal writing and business management with the items on the checklist.

## ***Conclusion***

Entrepreneurship brings wealth and other benefits to individuals and society, but its existence depends on the acquisition of enterprising competencies through quality enterprise education at different levels. The Teen Entrepreneurs Competition was found to enhance entrepreneurial education in Hong Kong schools, and not only brought forward new teaching methods and assisted teacher training, but also highlighted some possible avenues of academic research. In view of its many benefits for the business community and for enterprise education, the TEC merits further development.

## References

Chua, B. L., Thomas, H., Au, K., Ahlstrom, D., Law, C. K., Makino, S. & Low, C. K. (2002) *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Hong Kong 2002*, Kong Hong: Faculty of Business Administration, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Douglas, M. E. & Adams, M. E. (1999) 'Developing and teaching a high school entrepreneurship course part II: teaching methods and resources', *Business Education Forum*, December, pp. 30-33.

Kavan, C. B. & O'Hara, M. T. (2003) 'Stimulating entrepreneurship in the classroom'. *Business Education Forum*, February, pp. 41-43.

Robinson, P., Stimpson, D., Huefner, J., and Hunt, H. (1991) 'An attitude approach to the prediction of entrepreneurship', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Spring, pp. 13-31.

Soloman, G. T., Weaver, K. M. & Fernald, L. W. (1994) 'A historical examination of small business management and entrepreneurship pedagogy', *Simulation & Gaming*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 338-351.