

How using a cross-curriculum approach in schools can boost entrepreneurship

By [Sheena Crawford-Kempster](#)

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That entrepreneurs and small businesses play a key role in job creation and economic growth in South Africa is an accepted reality. But is enough being done to prepare young people for entrepreneurial success?



Sheena Crawford-Kempster, Managing Director – Education & Ethos of Reddam House Schools South Africa

Clem Sunter, South African scenario planner, said in an [August 2021 article](#) in Engineering News that the most important sources of jobs worldwide are medium-sized and small enterprises. It is entrepreneurs who create the jobs.

“ South Africa is at an economic crossroads and the path it takes will define its future for decades to come... we need an inclusive economy with a new generation of young entrepreneurs at the helm. ”

School level is where this entrepreneurial education must start; it needs to ensure that students are able to embrace a leadership mindset that can manage the complexity and challenges inherent in developing small and medium businesses. Students should be encouraged to identify problems in our world and find solutions to overcome the problems all businesses encounter.

Enquiry-based learning

This requires teaching that delivers enquiry-based learning and asks, ‘what do you think?’ rather than instructing ‘this is what you need to think’. It requires teachers who collaborate with each other and seek out connections across subject boundaries because success rests on leveraging the wisdom of the group through a series of integrated projects, project-based learning days and informative outings to places encouraging students to capture curiosity and engage with people outside of their normal learning environment to come up with practical solutions for everyday problems.

Our schools practise cross-curricular teaching, placing students in multi-disciplinary teams and co-ordinating lessons across subjects to all tie into a common theme. This is where entrepreneurship learning is at its strongest.



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Using Reddam House Constantia as a case study, the idea for entrepreneurial cross-curriculum lessons started with a project-based learning programme called 'Seed Capital Project' for Grade 9 students, who planted a vegetable garden from seeds, then harvested the produce to sell at a market day. The Covid pandemic has forced students to think about the harsh realities of food security and what a world struggling with good food options may look like. The collaborative classes included Economic & Management Sciences (EMS), Design, Computers, Science and English, which all worked together towards a Spring Fair e-commerce website, where different parts of entrepreneurship combined in economic, technological, environmental and social contexts.

The project also incorporated T-shirt designs, ceramic plates and textiles, and interaction design lights that combine Arduino electronics, robotics and coding with 3D printing and laser cutting.

The design solutions started around food security: the food garden was planted and concept designs for bioplastic vertical planters were created. Seed Capital Project extended further into Social Entrepreneurship to plan and plant a food garden at a children's home.

Cross-curriculum teaching is continuing at Reddam House Constantia the entrepreneurial way – as a considered experiment. Areas of proven success encourage growth and further exploration; ripples are created that coalesce and form waves of change.

Collaboration

We recognise the importance of collaboration amongst subjects, opening our learning to real world situations and not simply the confines of our classrooms. This year, as students extend the food gardens into other locations on campus, in collaboration between Life Sciences and Design, they will also be synthesising bioplastics to be used in vacuum formed moulds to make containers for growing microorganisms. Monthly organic harvest markets will help students consolidate business plans in EMS for the Spring Fair in September where they will sell their product ranges. Here, the plant produce grown by the students will be supplemented with 3D printed and laser-cut lighting and jewellery made in the Innovation Lab, and hand-printed soft-furnishings, ceramics and artisanal confectionery created in the Makers Club. Marketing material will be generated in English and Drama which will help fine-tune online video posts. Importantly, a core group of the 2021 Grade 9 group will act as mentors to the 2022 group, together finding better ways of doing what we learnt last year to help them not repeat mistakes they made.



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We envisage that this project will ultimately have representatives from each grade involved as we look to grow a space where multigrade education can grow organically.

The outcomes are encouraging. Partnered teachers are sharing ideas and creating new innovations across subject fields; students are engaged as the relevance of independent learning becomes apparent as they experience it in a real-world context; and collaborators are coming on board.

This is improved education. In a [project-based learning article](#), Creative Educator highlights benefits of a more holistic approach to curriculum, stating that it helps students:

- See how content of one subject is interconnected with content from other disciplines.
- Delve deeper into fewer topics rather than skimming across the surface of many topics.
- Connect learning more easily with the experiences in their lives.

Taking it further, value has also been added to this entrepreneurial approach by inviting parents to share their experiences, passion, and expertise, which is inspiring and motivating students to see the bigger picture of what can be achieved, and how.

The project-based entrepreneurship curriculum approach is gaining traction, as evidenced in an [article](#) published on the Department of Science and Innovation website in 2019, titled *Entrepreneurship is the missing ingredient in our curriculum* by Professor Keolebogile Shirley Motaung, Assistant Dean of Postgraduate Studies, Research, Innovation and Engagement in the Faculty of Science at Tshwane University of Technology, and Founder and CEO of Global Health Biotech.



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She states, “Entrepreneurship is practical – it is not just about understanding business concepts in a theoretical way. It’s about taking risks and thinking on the spot about how these concepts can be applied practically.” Her suggestions for curriculum reform, while university-based, are highly relevant and applicable to high school level curriculums:

- Academics need to be encouraged to see a connection between enterprise and employability.
- When recruiting academic staff, experience with entrepreneurship education should be considered.
- Best practice seminars to showcase effective entrepreneurial teaching should be held.
- Lecturers should be encouraged to visit small and medium businesses in the local community.
- Social scientists should work closely with academics in the natural sciences to create spin-off companies from universities.

These are early days for this fresh new approach at Reddam House Constantia. We will continue to extrapolate the current project with improved iterations, and with more collaboration across different subjects and fields. Partnerships with our global schools will also ensure continued and exponential growth of project-based, cross-curriculum learning. Under this umbrella of learning, the future holds promise and opportunities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheena Crawford-Kempster, is the Managing Director - Education & Ethos of ReddamHouse Schools South Africa

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