

Integrating Entrepreneurial Mindset Education into a Midwifery Curriculum

Sarah Church

London South Bank University, London, United Kingdom

churchs@lsbu.ac.uk

Abstract: Against the background of national media criticism of the maternity services, an attempt to illuminate the midwife's role as a change agent, was made in relation to the current literature on leadership. Whilst the concept of the change agent is discussed as a pivotal role in midwifery leadership, less is understood about the skills and attributes midwives need to develop, to become effective leaders. Moreover, even less is understood about the meaning of the change agent in the clinical environment, when change, a nebulous concept, is typically associated with senior management roles. Using a case study, the development and delivery of entrepreneurial mindset education for student midwives is explored in the context of professional identity and their role as future leaders; and is framed as a necessity for personal and professional growth and development. This paper will examine how the focus on Entrepreneurial Mindset Theory (EMT) presents a teachable framework, in which skills, attributes and behaviours, can be explored to illustrate the synergy between entrepreneurial skills and those expected of the professional midwife. Making enterprise education relevant to the professional role is crucial and not without its challenges, therefore aligning curriculum content with programme objectives for practice learning and the development of clinical proficiencies, is essential. Exploring the features and implications of adopting a growth mindset, enables students to understand the importance of developing a strategic approach to navigate complex systems and processes, and the relevance of a solution focused lens to address issues in an ever-changing and challenging maternity environment. This paper illustrates that integrating entrepreneurial mindset education into the midwifery curriculum at its core, offers students the opportunity to find clarity in their role and use their skills, knowledge and current evidence in a creative and innovative way to make change happen, confirming that adopting an entrepreneurial mindset is crucial to the professional role of the midwife and the future of midwifery.

Keywords: Midwifery, Change Agents, Leadership, Entrepreneurial Mindset Education

1. Introduction

The maternity services have come under increased scrutiny over the last 10 years because of high profile media cases and national enquiries (CQC 2024), with successive reports raising issues in relation to the safety and quality of services (Kirkup 2015; Ockenden 2020; Kirkup 2022). Concerns related to poor teamwork, communication and behaviour, together with a lack of learning from failure, has increased the focus on the effectiveness of maternity leadership and the preparation of future leaders.

Whilst leadership concerns in the maternity services are complex, the need to prepare and develop the leadership skills of all midwives, starting with student midwives, is paramount. The focus therefore on the preparation of student midwives for leadership, is emphasised in the current Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)(professional regulator) Standards of proficiency for midwives (NMC 2019). A focus on the midwife as a leader is clearly defined and illustrated by the proficiencies students are required to achieve for registration; however, students may have a varied and possibly limited experience of leadership within their clinical placements. As a means of strengthening their exposure to leadership, students are now required to gain a broader experience of leadership by undertaking placements in different National Health Service (NHS) hospitals. It is understood that observing different leadership styles and recognising the attributes of good leaders is important to support the student's understanding of leadership within the clinical environment. Moreover, positive role models have an impact on students style of practise and are often noted as professionally inspiring in preparing future midwives (Nieuwenhuijze et al 2020). However, whilst mentorship and supervision play important roles, Abdul Rahim et al; (2025) draw attention to the importance of self-awareness for the student and understanding personal skills in building confidence, and in identifying strengths and limitations through reflection. Uytendogaardt (2020:141) states: *'By equipping midwives with the skills and knowledge on how to successfully lead in practice, it will ensure high quality service and create a positive working environment for all staff.'* A recent international study by Pezaro et al; (2024) reinforce the benefits of transformational leadership in which the characteristics of effective decision making, resilience and compassion, amongst others, are important attributes for strong midwife leaders.

By exploring leadership skills and the implications of leadership for the safety and quality of care with students, the role of the midwife leader as a change agent becomes central to the discussion of service improvement. The aim of this paper is to illuminate how the role of the change agent in the clinical environment reflects an

entrepreneurial intention, illustrating the synergy between entrepreneurial skills and those expected of the professional midwife in driving change. The discussion will introduce the application of Entrepreneurial Mindset Theory (EMT) as a teachable framework, with a focus on skills, attributes and behaviours followed by a case study in which the development and delivery of entrepreneurial mindset education for student midwives will be discussed.

2. The Leader as a Change Agent

The change agent is described as a role in which creativity and vision can be used to improve the quality of maternity care (Byrom & Downe, 2010; Dival 2015), and illustrates the relationship between effective leadership and change management. Medway & Rehayem (2023:5) suggest that *'...midwifery leadership is key to being a powerful driver of change. It is something all midwives can and need to engage in.'* Naccarella, Butterworth & Moore (2016) propose however that the role of the change agent can be defined in relation to whether they initiate, lead or facilitate change. Furthermore, Welker et al; (2014) confirm that change agents are effective if they are transformational leaders working within positive working environments. When their role is fully recognised as an added value, change agents can motivate colleagues and drive change forward. Kumar et al; (2015) add that a change agent can be a critical factor for success for the organisation, when they are passionate about implementing change.

However, De Leo et al; (2019) in the review of midwives' use of best available evidence, report that change leader midwives experience challenges in attempting to initiate innovation in practice and conclude that an unsupportive work environment and poor interdisciplinary collaboration are major barriers to support change and innovation. McCormack et al; (2013) suggest that change agents need a well-resourced supportive environment to become effective drivers of change. Stefanczyk, Hancock, Meadows (2013:14-15) further describe the context in which the change agent operates: *'...encourages the staff to share in decision making and change by promoting the exploration of creative solutions. When ideas are allowed to germinate, it generates enthusiasm and further creativity. Facilitating creative thinking enhances the process of finding the best solutions and ways to sustain the change. Again, a healthy work environment is essential to this process, as it builds a culture of trust where one can explore ideas.'*

Whilst the conditions required for successful change are complex and influenced by a multitude of internal and external factors, nurturing leadership attributes is pivotal for effective midwifery leadership, and motivation to make a difference is key (Adcock, Sidebotham & Gamble 2022). McCormack et al; (2013:8) also suggest that; *'...a change agent who has a positive attitude, with well-established respect and credibility, seems more likely to be able to build a critical mass of leadership influence, solicit the required resources from leadership, and establish the necessary supportive culture.'*

2.1 The Change Agent and Entrepreneurial Intention

Given this context, the role of the change agent reflects an entrepreneurial intention as a professional imperative to improve quality and safety. Whilst the use of the terms entrepreneurship and enterprise education are used interchangeably in the literature, and an in-depth discussion is beyond the remit of this paper, the definition of entrepreneurship offered by the Entrepreneurial learning initiative (2021:4) resonates with the midwife as a change agent and offers an overarching philosophy in relation to social value; *'...entrepreneurship as the self-directed pursuit of opportunities to create value for others...entrepreneurial activity is not limited to new venture creation but also includes those who identify opportunities to create value within established institutions and organizations.'*

It is clear, that the focus on the change agent in this context is preoccupied with driving change and service improvement from within. As a result, many positions within the maternity services in the UK (e.g. Consultant midwives), have been developed to address specific aspects of care for vulnerable populations which mainstream services have not been able to address. Whilst midwives in these positions could be described as intrapreneurs, many do not identify with the term. This may not be surprising, since the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in healthcare programmes is uncommon in the UK. Although midwives as well as nurses have a long history of independent practice, product design and development, and service change and quality improvement, this remains an under researched area (Drennan et al; 2007). Despite limited but interesting literature on embedding enterprise and entrepreneurship education in healthcare education globally (Salminen et.al; 2014; Refai & Thompson 2014), the focus in midwifery has received limited attention in the UK literature. The synergy between entrepreneurial skills and the expectations of the midwife as a change agent,

therefore, appear to be an appropriate and relevant way to introduce student midwives to the value and benefit of enterprise education. Whilst the use of enterprise and entrepreneurship education are used interchangeably, the use of enterprise education is used here to reflect the focus on behaviours, skills and competencies defined by the Quality Assurance Agency (2018:9); *'Enterprise Education is defined here as the process of developing students in a manner that provides them with an enhanced capacity to generate ideas, and the behaviours, attributes, and competencies to make them happen. It extends beyond knowledge acquisition to a wide range of emotional, intellectual, social, cultural and practical behaviours, attributes and competences, and is appropriate to all students. These are all underlying factors that can enhance employability prospects as well as be taken further through Entrepreneurship Education.'*

In this context, the use of enterprise rather than entrepreneurship education, highlights the focus on preparing students for complex working environments, which strengthens the focus on skills development. To support this, the focus on exploring mindsets and especially entrepreneurial mindset, acts to provide a framework for students, accepting that an awareness and development of an entrepreneurial mindset can be beneficial to both their personal lives as well as their professional careers. Whilst there are numerous definitions in the literature (Daspit, Fox & Findley 2023), for this paper, an entrepreneurial mindset is defined as; *'... an innovative approach to thinking and doing; the acquisition of an attitude and skill set that encompasses resilience, calculated daring and initiative...the common attributes associated with an entrepreneurial mindset include creativity, empathy, resilience, self-sufficiency and the ability to learn from failure.'* (De Carolis and Litzky 2019: 60).

In the first of two sections, an introduction to Entrepreneurial Mindset Theory (EMT) as a teachable framework is discussed and will be followed by a case study on the development and delivery of entrepreneurial mindset education for student midwives, framed as a necessity for personal and professional growth and development.

3. Entrepreneurial Mindset Theory (EMT)

The Entrepreneurial learning initiative (2021:20) suggests that; *'... entrepreneurial mindset theory assumes that the entrepreneurial spirit is the human spirit, it resides within all of us. The development of entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviours, and skills is largely dependent upon social, environmental, and situational factors rather than dispositional traits... and that the cultivation of these inherent tendencies is necessary not only to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world but also for economic prosperity and greater psychological well-being.'*

It is therefore focused on the understanding that people have the inclination to be innovative and entrepreneurial to solve problems and challenges in everyday life, and in this context, it reflects a humanistic view of entrepreneurship. It stresses the importance of the individual's responsibility to determine how to be useful to others, and that by doing so, they empower themselves. Key aspects of the theory which are relevant here focus on an underlying humanistic approach to solve problems, contributing to making people's lives better with integrity, honesty and truthfulness. This resonates with the midwife's role as a professional and as a change agent.

The Entrepreneurial Mindset Theory presented here as a teachable framework is influenced by the work of Entrepreneurial learning initiative (2021) as stated above but also developed in a practical context with the work of Coyle (2023). Firstly, to draw on the theoretical discussion of the Entrepreneurial learning initiative (2021) the entrepreneurial mindset is underpinned by five dimensions of mindset (Entrepreneurial learning initiative 2021) (Figure 1); each of which makes a specific contribution to the student's development of attributes and behaviours and draws on the relationship between how observable behaviour is influenced by deeply held beliefs that require further exploration. Students are presented with an opportunity to explore what factors may influence and contribute to their way of thinking, exploring issues which may impact their progress and success in their careers and aspects of their personal lives.

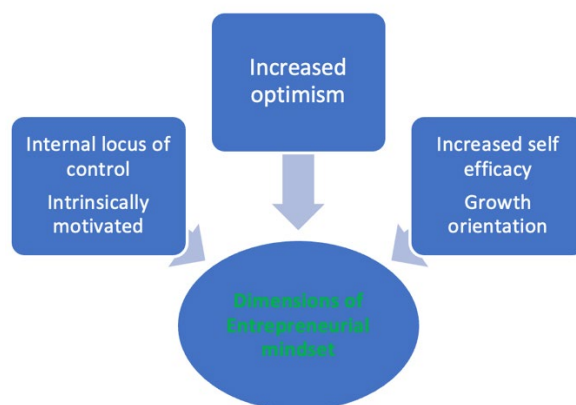


Figure 1: Five dimensions of entrepreneurial mindset

(Author's interpretation and illustration)

The work of Carol Dweck in relation to growth mindset is particularly significant here as Kolyda (2023:2) suggests that it *'...helps students cope with setbacks and embrace undeveloped success strategies perseverance and resilience.'*

Secondly, the practical definition of the entrepreneurial mindset proposed by Coyle (2023) illustrates the importance of seven essential entrepreneurial behaviours illustrated by the letters in the word MINDSET (Figure 2). These behaviours further illustrate the application of an entrepreneurial mindset as a practical and achievable process which enables students to consider the practical application of the entrepreneurial mindset.



Figure 2: Definition of the Entrepreneurial Mindset

(Resource: Coyle 2023; <https://entrepreneurial-mindset.network/#mindset-definition>)

4. Case Study: Entrepreneurial Mindset Education in Midwifery

Enterprise education is considered a tool to prepare students for changing environments. The integration of enterprise within the midwifery curriculum was proposed in 2019. With the publication of the new Standards of proficiency for midwives (NMC 2019), a mapping exercise was undertaken in which the NMC standards were mapped against the EntreComp competencies for enterprise education (<https://entrecompeurope.eu/>). This mapping exercise revealed a close alignment of skills and formed the justification for further development.

4.1 Design

The programmes offered in midwifery include a 3-year BSc (Hons) Midwifery and 2-year Postgraduate Diploma Midwifery. Each programme has a curriculum based on an accredited modular structure, in addition to practice placement experience. As the first University to consider enterprise education for midwifery students and in the absence of any previous examples, the aim from the outset was to design an offer in which the content was relevant to the midwife's role, demonstrating usefulness, importance and applicability. Since enterprise education was not reflected in the NMC (2019) standards, it was decided that enterprise sessions would be 'a

value added,' scheduled within practice modules and followed up in consolidation weeks at the end of an academic year.

Two specific design issues were noted at the time:

1. A series of sessions on their own would be considered of limited relevance for the students and the evaluation of impact would be challenging.
2. The timing and content of the sessions needed clear alignment with the student's knowledge and practice experience, to be of relevance.

4.1.1 Certificate of Enterprise in Midwifery

An optional Certificate of Enterprise in Midwifery was created to award students for engaging with and demonstrating their entrepreneurial mindset throughout their programme. Students identify, attend or participate in six events or activities and submit six pieces of evidence (100 words each) to demonstrate the relevance for their learning and development. An examination of the practice learning requirements for each year revealed an alignment with expected learning in practice. For this reason, students on the three-year programme submit two items of evidence at the end of each year with a focus on the themes illustrated in Table 1 and students on the two-year programme submit three items of evidence (Table 2).

Table 1: Skill development themes by year for BSc (Hons) Midwifery 3-year programme

Year 1: Developing personal and professional skills
Year 2: Teamwork & collaboration
Year 3: Preparing for registration & midwifery career

Table 2: Skill development themes by year for Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery 2-year programme

Year 1: Establishing professional skills, teamwork, collaboration
Year 2: Preparing for registration & midwifery career

At the end of each year, students are awarded a Statement of Enterprise Engagement (SEE) for the evidence submitted. At the end of their programme when six pieces of evidence are completed, students are awarded the Certificate of Enterprise in Midwifery.

4.2 Delivery

Enterprise education has now been offered since 2022. Classroom sessions are offered 2-3 times every year with content specially designed to reflect the student's knowledge and practice and are aligned with the completion of evidence for the Certificate of Enterprise in Midwifery (see Table 3). Tutorials are offered on an ad hoc basis to support student queries and support engagement with enterprise activities and competitions. Additional enterprise sessions are included in mandatory modules e.g. leadership and quality are discussed in the final year of both programmes.

Table 3: Enterprise Education offer for BSc (Hons) Midwifery 3-year programme

Year Of Study	Session Titles	Certificate of Enterprise Theme
Year 1	Introduction to Enterprise Education Developing your entrepreneurial skills for midwifery practise: recognising the mindset	Developing personal and professional skills
Year 2	Entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour in cultivating a creative approach to problem solving. Innovation in midwifery: exploring the experience of a midwifery entrepreneur	Teamwork & collaboration

Year Of Study	Session Titles	Certificate of Enterprise Theme
Year 3	How to view autonomy with an entrepreneurial mindset The importance of an entrepreneurial mindset behaviour and leadership An entrepreneurial mindset and the midwife professional registration and beyond	Preparing for registration & midwifery career

The introductory session in year 1 is key to identify the diversity of skills and work experience within the student cohort especially business experience and online platform selling. This is a good basis for students to consider how these skills can be useful for the midwifery role. In addition, students are actively encouraged to attend sessions delivered by the enterprise team and enter Ignite competitions and participate in marketplace events. In year 2, students work in non-maternity placements (e.g. medical), where they focus on team working and problem solving and consider the application of knowledge to address different patient problems. Relationships with midwife entrepreneurs have developed over the years and they are invited to speak to the students to discuss their experience of being intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs. The focus in the final year of both programmes is leadership and the midwife's role as a change agent and quality improvement. Reflecting on the learning in previous years, sessions focus on the importance of the role of the midwife and professional identity. There is also a focus on the importance of recognising the significant aspects of professional registration and career development.

4.3 Student Evaluation

Of the two cohorts of students who have completed their programmes since 2022 eleven students have completed the Certificate of Enterprise. Verbal comments at the end of sessions were very positive and encouraging, including; *'I hadn't thought of that,' 'I have always wanted to change things for the better,' 'Thank you for inspiring me.'*

Evaluation comments were received from three of the eleven students who completed the Certificate of Enterprise. Each one rated their overall experience as excellent. All three wanted more sessions to focus on topics such as: *networking skills, meeting more intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs*. One student wanted more specific information on midwifery innovations: *developing outreach programmes for underserved communities, creating sustainable maternal health solutions and learning from more midwives with independent practises or NGOs*

Students were asked to consider the extent to which learning about an entrepreneurial mindset had developed them professionally. Comments were very positive and encouraging and included:

- *Just think creatively, problem-solving skills, adapt and collaborate with others working as a member of a team*
- *Learning about an entrepreneurial mindset has significantly contributed to my professional development by enhancing my problem-solving skills, adaptability and proactive approach to work. To mention few key ways that has helped me grow professionally, I have learnt to approach challenges with a solution orientated mindset rather than viewing them as obstacles. I have developed proactiveness and initiative, I now take ownership of tasks and seek opportunities to contribute; initiating a mentorship programme to support new employees which improved team cohesion and productivity*
- *Increased my resilience: improved ability to cope with setbacks and learn from failures.*

Students were very appreciative of the opportunity

- *I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for being part of the enterprise programme*
- *Enjoyed the enterprise learning and the opportunity.*

One student highlighted the potential for further development and suggested: *Weekly or termly workshops: hands on training in leadership innovation and problem solving, deep dives into patient engagement networking and communication, more extensive topics such as financial skills decision making and business development and intensive training with guest speakers and case studies.*

5. Discussion

Whilst enterprise education has a long history in higher education in the UK (Pittaway et.al; 2024), this paper has illustrated that integrating entrepreneurial mindset education into the midwifery curriculum at its core, is an innovative and evolving contribution. It offers students the opportunity to find clarity in their role and use their skills, knowledge and current evidence in a creative and innovative way to make change happen. Although student evaluation is limited and a major shortcoming at present, student comments indicate that entrepreneurial mindset education offered in this way, is acceptable and well received. Some may argue that the use of entrepreneurial mindset education to underpin effective leadership and to drive quality improvement is at present, theoretical. As formal evaluation of all student engagement with enterprise education is currently scheduled, this together with further research, will be key to shape the development of enterprise education and to determine its impact on maternity services. Focused networking with professional organisations and academic colleagues is needed to raise awareness.

With an already full curriculum, the idea of entrepreneurial mindset education as an integral contribution to midwifery education may be challenged. Enterprise education is associated with business and not non-traditional programmes, especially in health. In the absence of literature in midwifery and recognising that enterprise education in nursing is not offered in the UK, the focus of international literature in nursing, appears to be on entrepreneurship and innovation related to business creation and employability. Although entrepreneurship education has received less attention in the nursing literature, the importance of education has nevertheless been highlighted to prepare students. Whilst mandatory and optional courses, extracurricular courses and certificate programmes are noted in the literature, content is considered theoretical and insufficient to demand curriculum changes in nursing programmes (Gardim et.al; 2024). However, Rahmianaraki et.al (2024:221) states that 'the lack of entrepreneurship education during nursing school is a significant obstacle.' They call for more entrepreneurship education to enable students to be more familiar with concepts and call for a review of nursing curricula.

The current structure and presentation of entrepreneurial mindset education are likely to be influenced by further student evaluation, developments to the curriculum due to NMC standards and strategic influences from external sources (e.g QAA, Advance HE). This will be an opportunity to further map content across mandatory modules to create a coherent offer for student midwives throughout the programme. Further emphasis on the use of interactive and experiential learning will require the review of class sizes and the learning environment. However, as education provision is developed, students will need further exposure to innovative midwives in clinical practice and observe their impact on the development of maternity services and midwifery care. As the main aim is to increase the number of intrapreneurs in the NHS, it is important to note that with workforce and workload challenges, opportunities for innovation and improvement may be limited (Bailey & West 2021). However, an increasing awareness of the NHS Clinical Entrepreneurship programme (<https://nhscep.com/the-programme/>) within clinical practice, will have a pivotal role on the development and provision of future enterprise education at undergraduate and postgraduate level and increase the visibility of innovation in clinical practice. Building a larger network of clinical midwifery intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs will expose student midwives to the value and contribution of an entrepreneurial mindset.

6. Conclusions

In summary, the paper has contextualised the introduction, design and delivery of entrepreneurial mindset education in midwifery. The relationship between the development, application and relevance of entrepreneurial mindset skills and the role of the midwife as leader and change agent in the midwifery context, is clearly illustrated. Whilst student evaluation of its current structure, presentation and impact is limited at present, the focus on Entrepreneurial Mindset Theory (EMT) as a teachable framework appears very promising. With further evaluation and research, a more persuasive case for the development and integration of entrepreneurial mindset education in midwifery, can be made. The case study presented in this paper, has suggested that adopting an entrepreneurial mindset is crucial to the professional role of the midwife and the future of midwifery. The concept appears sound, relevant and applicable to the midwifery role, but further work is needed to raise the profile of entrepreneurial mindset education within the profession.

Ethics Declaration

Ethical clearance was not required

AI Declaration

No AI tools were used in the creation of this paper

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