

Revisiting Entrepreneurship Education Literature: Implications for Learning and Teaching Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: Courses and programs about entrepreneurship show so much variation that it is hard to identify typical teaching strategies. Although diversity is good, consistency is needed because the value of entrepreneurship education has not been established. A literature review on teaching and learning in entrepreneurship was conducted; three challenges were identified.

In the 21st century, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship became critical factors for modern prosperity (Carden, 2008). Echoing this trend, there is an unprecedented student demand for business education that provides the skill set needed to succeed in an increasingly divergent business environment (Cooper, Bottomley, & Gordon, 2004). By 1995, over 400 institutions offered entrepreneurship courses in the United States (Vesper, Gartner, & Williams, 1997). Today, more than 2000 institutions offer entrepreneurship courses (Cone, 2008).

Despite the increasing energy and resources dedicated to teaching entrepreneurship, no clear relationship has been demonstrated between entrepreneurship education and students becoming entrepreneurs (Hostager & Decker, 1999). In fact, the proportion of people starting businesses shortly after graduation is minimal (Luthje & Franke, 2003). Research has even shown that after four years of entrepreneurship courses, interest in pursuing self-employment tends to dissipate (Whitlock & Master, 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the literature on teaching and learning in entrepreneurship education to understand what the current state of teaching and learning is in an effort to determine best practices. The paper is divided into four sections: method, teaching entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial learning, and implications and future research questions.

Method

An integrative literature review was conducted (Torraco, 2005). All databases relevant to business, professions, education, and social sciences were searched. Data bases included: ABI Inform, Anthropology, PLUS, Black Studies, Business Full Text, ECO (Electronic Collections Online), Education Full Text, ERIC, Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI) via UCLA, MEDLINE on Pubmed via National Library of Medicine, PsycINFO and Sociological Abstracts. The primary search terms were *entrepreneurship*, *small business*, and *new ventures*. These terms were added to a set of secondary search terms: *learning*, *training*, *teaching*, *competencies*, and *education*. Databases were investigated combining each primary search term with each secondary search term. Articles were analyzed using content analysis procedures (Boyatzis, 1998) to identify relevant information about how entrepreneurship is taught. While doing the analysis, the author identified challenges that make entrepreneurship education hard to conceptualize and measure. The following sections present the results of the investigation.

Teaching Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship teaching is “the process of providing individuals with the concepts and skills to recognize opportunities that others have overlooked and to have the insight, self-esteem,

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and knowledge to act where others have hesitated” (McIntyre & Roche, 1999, p. 33). Entrepreneurship teaching aims to be a source of trigger-events aiming to inspire students, arouse emotions, and change mindsets (Al-Laham, Souitaris, & Zerbinati, 2007; Lüthje & Franke, 2003). In this section, a general depiction of the literature on teaching and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is provided.

Entrepreneurship pedagogical design can be differentiated into three basic activities: the creation and maintenance of (a) an entrepreneurial culture at the university as a whole, (b) degree granting programs and majors, and (c) specific non credit training programs (Garavan & O’Cinneide, 1994). A balanced entrepreneurship program should contain these four components: (a) lectures on business concepts, (b) business-planning practices including competitions and coaching, (c) interaction with practitioners and networking opportunities, and (d), university support such as market-research resources, meeting space, seed funding, patenting advice, etc. (Al-Laham, Souitaris, & Zerbinati, 2007). However, there is no substantive agreement about what entrepreneurship means in educational settings and the appropriate content of programs is under permanent discussion (Gibb, 2002). It is not clear what to teach (Garavan & O’Cinneide, 1994; Solomon, 2007) and there is a lack of detailed consideration of how entrepreneurs learn (Garavan & Cinneide, 1994; Young & Sexton, 1997).

Teaching outcomes in entrepreneurship programs are generally assessed (e.g. Galloway & Brown, 2002; Luthje & Franke, 2003; Zhao, Seibert, & Gerald, 2005) using TPB (Ajzen, 1991) as a framework. TPB assumes that human social behavior is reasoned, controlled, and planned. TPB views people as rational beings who utilize information at their disposal to judge, evaluate, and decide actions. Three attitudinal antecedents are necessary to trigger the action of starting a business: (a) the desire to start the business, (b) the belief that the business contributes to well being of the society, and (c) the conviction that success is possible (Ajzen, 1991).

One of the most promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching (Angelo & Cross, 1993). To improve teaching effectiveness, teachers should make their goals explicit and assess the extent to which they are achieving those goals. Teaching goals are the set of knowledge, skills, and values that students will develop if they succeed in a given course (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Despite entrepreneurship programs having some basic features in common, educational activities seem not to share common teaching goals. A special effort needs to be made in order to achieve a common framework for learning outcomes among entrepreneurship educators.

Entrepreneurial Learning

Entrepreneurial learning is defined as “a problem solving process centered on the acquisition, storage and use of entrepreneurial knowledge in long term memory” (Rae & Carswell, 2000, p. 221). Entrepreneurial learning has been studied using a variety of learning theories such as competency (Man, 2006; Mulder, Lans, Verstegen, Biemans, & Meijer, 2007), co-participation (Taylor & Thorpe, 2004), problem based learning (Tan & Ng, 2006), action learning (Taylor, Jones, & Boles 2004), and learning organizations as an orientation towards learning (Kropp, Lindsay, & Shoham, 2006). New conceptualizations of entrepreneurial learning have also been proposed such as the triadic model of entrepreneurial learning (Rae, 2005) and the negotiated narrative (Fletcher & Watson, 2007).

Entrepreneurial learning is commonly simplified as learning how to recognize an opportunity (e.g., Lumpkin & Lichtenstein, 2005; Politis, 2005; Rae, 2003; Venkataraman, 1997). Opportunity recognition has been defined as the ability to identify a good idea and transform it into a business concept that adds value and generates revenues (Lumpkin &

Lichtenstein, 2005). *Opportunity identification* is a trainable competency and individuals can create opportunities from nothing (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004). Contrary to the “market research” view, where the environment is the source of all opportunities, opportunities come from the mind of the entrepreneurs and are never independent of him/her (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004).

Entrepreneurs identify opportunities when they become familiar with an industry (Rae, 2004) and combine information to come up with product or services valuable for others (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Special interest knowledge, general industry knowledge, prior knowledge of markets, prior knowledge of customer problems, and knowledge of ways to serve a specific market will all increase the likelihood of opportunity recognition (Politis, 2005). The cognitive abilities to combine information are present in people who pay less attention to failure and focus more on maximizing success (Baron & Ward, 2004).

Rae (2003) proposed to focus entrepreneurship education on opportunity recognition, arguing that the identification of an opportunity is an act of learning itself and a source of motivation to learn entrepreneurship. Opportunity centered learning mirrors the natural process of learning because the discovery and pursuit of an opportunity is stimulated by natural human curiosity and motivation to complete what is incomplete (Rae, 2003).

In other approaches to produce entrepreneurial learning, Shepherd (2004) proposed educating students about managing emotions associated with failure in order to maximize learning from experience. Fletcher & Watson (2007) propose a technique called *negotiated narratives* to trigger entrepreneurial learning. The objective of *negotiated narratives* is to encourage students to utilize their full range of experiences in the world. The technique invited students to look into their stories, identity, and personal experience to find business ideas and recognize how business ideas tend to be developed. Attention is on developing ideas from the environment in relationship to the contextual world (Fletcher & Watson, 2007).

Implications and Further Research Questions

The academic work about entrepreneurship is fragmented and controversial (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991). In part, this is due to entrepreneurship education being in its infancy. Insights found in this literature review cover teaching, learning, and program establishment. First, entrepreneurship programs show uncertainty about what to teach and how to teach for best results. Second, most entrepreneurship research reports the actions of instructors without further reflection on pedagogical implications and without the use of literature on teaching and learning from education or psychology. Third, the conceptual framework inherited from traditional business education limits innovative conceptualizations of how students learn entrepreneurship, how entrepreneurs learn, and best practices in teaching. Fourth, as an emerging field, entrepreneurship shows uncertainty as to its role in higher education and its relationship to other fields.

Entrepreneurship professors propose radically different methods to teach entrepreneurship. This might be partially explained because they adopt different schools of thought and definitions of entrepreneurship. Some scholars propose the development of the ability to identify opportunities (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004), others the management of emotions associated with failure (Shepherd, 2004). Another group suggests that entrepreneurial skills can be fostered through experiential learning and reflective practice (Pittaway & Cope, 2007), while others choose to innovate through fictional dramas (Fletcher & Watson, 2007).

The perspective adopted while teaching strongly influences the content delivered and methods used by instructors (Pratt, 1998). However, in the work reviewed here, researchers did

not explicitly discuss the perspective they adopted, or the conceptual framework/philosophy that informed their work. Entrepreneurship professors usually limit themselves to reporting their educational activities in academic journals without further analysis from an educational standpoint.

The traditional paradigm of business education (Gibbs, 2002) was designed to introduce students to corporate techniques, overemphasizing quantitative data and preparing students for rigid schedules and repetitive work. Traditional business education is not helpful in understanding what entrepreneurship education should be and confounds researchers and practitioners when new domains of practice are described using old interpretative systems. Traditional business education views students and people as objective rational decision makers. Entrepreneurial learning demands a new conceptual corpus to define the human beings and their interaction with the world.

In this complex context, the role of entrepreneurship in higher education remains unclear. Further research is needed to clarify the educational outcomes expected from entrepreneurship education. Other disciplines, especially those concerned with adult education, training, learning, and human development, might contribute to conceptualize entrepreneurship education processes and outcomes. A clear conceptualization seems necessary for good measures and good measures are needed for good assessment and continuous improvement.

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