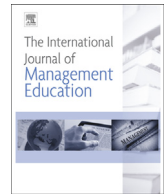




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Research Notes

Entrepreneurial development and the different aspects of reflection



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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that students' perceptions of entrepreneurship, as well as their attitude toward entrepreneurship education, are shaped by their previous experiences and contextual belonging. This longitudinal exploratory study explores how reflective practices that are part of entrepreneurship education work to challenge, change, or reproduce such attitudes, as well as the different path of entrepreneurial development students may follow as a result. The discussion also adds to theoretical development in the field by combining Dewey and Bourdieu into a framework for analyzing and understanding the different aspects of reflection and the differing outcomes reflection may yield.

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1. Introduction

The integration of the tenets of entrepreneurship throughout the educational system, from kindergarten through higher education, has become a means of preparing younger generations for an uncertain and rapidly changing environment by developing students' entrepreneurial behaviors (such as initiative and risk-taking), entrepreneurial characteristics (such as creativity, autonomy, and the ability to cope with uncertainty), and awareness of entrepreneurship as a possible future career choice (Athayde, 2009; Commission, 2013a, 2015; Fayolle & Klandt, 2006; Leffler, 2009; Moberg, 2014; Mueller & Anderson, 2014; Testa & Frasier, 2015).

Because of the complex and unpredictable nature of entrepreneurship, however, it is difficult to teach (Mueller & Anderson, 2014) and to assess as a learning outcome (Fayolle, Gailly, & Lassas-Clerc, 2006; Moberg, 2014; Pepin, 2012; Testa & Frasier, 2015). Whereas much prior research has been devoted to studying entrepreneurship education from a teacher or teaching perspective, researchers are now beginning to study its value (Kirkwood, Dwyer, & Gray, 2014) and effectiveness (Testa & Frasier, 2015) from a student perspective.

At the core of entrepreneurship education is a focus on students' own interests and their motivation for learning (Deuchar, 2004; Matlay & Pepin, 2012; Moberg, 2014). It is suggested that entrepreneurial behaviors originate in students' own ability to construct learning and to combine previous experiences with new insights and knowledge (Mueller & Anderson, 2014). The extent to which entrepreneurship education leads to such learning ability, and whether it increases students' interest in entrepreneurship, can be influenced by the students' socioeconomic environment (Dodd & Hynes, 2012; Dohse & Walter, 2010; Heilbrunn & Almor, 2014). Heilbrunn and Almor (2014) found that entrepreneurship education conducted in disadvantaged socioeconomic environments tends to strengthen, rather than change, resistant attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Indeed, young people living in economically disadvantaged areas have been found to have unfavorable attitudes to the

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importance of entrepreneurial skills and behaviors irrespective of their exposure to entrepreneurship education (Testa & Frascheri, 2015). In contrast, other scholars have shown that students in underdeveloped regions are more motivated to develop entrepreneurial thoughts and behaviors to change their current situations (Dodd & Hynes, 2012). In spite of the differing conclusions regarding the exact role of the environment in shaping attitudes and behaviors, it is clear that students' previous experience and perceptions of entrepreneurship can be crucial to understanding how and why their entrepreneurial behaviors and thoughts develop within an educational context. At the same time, one might argue that the objective of entrepreneurship education is, in essence, to change prior perceptions and attitudes toward future opportunities.

Entrepreneurship education is not about teaching students how or what to think about the future, but is about ensuring that they have the capacity to make sense of their own dreams in relation to the environment in which their dreams can be realized (Breslin & Jones, 2014). Students' ability to continuously reflect upon their own learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Dewey, 1910, 1925; Rodgers, 2002) is described as central to the entrepreneurial learning process (Cope, 2003; Kirkwood et al., 2014; Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Indeed, it is suggested that students' continuous reflection during and after the learning experience helps them to understand their own learning needs and to make sense of, and evaluate, both the meaning and use of both prior learning and new learning needs (Mueller & Anderson, 2014). Clearly, successful entrepreneurship education requires the learners to be capable of reflection, and of observing themselves in action in relation to their previous experiences and to others (Pittaway, Rodriguez-Falcon, Aiyegbayo, & King, 2011). Although the importance of reflection on the part of students is clear, there is substantial disagreement about what constitutes reflection, whether there are different types of reflection, and what effects reflection might have on teachers' practices and students' learning (Rodgers, 2002).

Students' reflections may vary because of their ability to reflect and also because of their different levels of social capital, personal backgrounds (Athayde, 2009), attitudes, and emotions (Dewey, 1910, 1916, 1925). More importantly, for entrepreneurship education to change students' thoughts and behaviors in an entrepreneurial manner, each student must develop an understanding of the context they currently reside within and assess their own capabilities, habits, and thoughts in relation to the personal development they want to achieve in that context (Breslin & Jones, 2014). Central to entrepreneurial behavior is an awareness of the environment in which one operates and an ability to adapt to that environment while also changing it (Breslin & Jones, 2014), but the literature on entrepreneurship education is still limited in its understanding of how reflection may contribute to changing the individual student and his or her environment.

In sum, there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the significance of prior experiences and context in shaping students' perceptions of entrepreneurship, as well as their openness to entrepreneurship education. Students' experiences of entrepreneurship or the lack of the same may therefore work as a barrier to, or as motivating force for, entrepreneurship education. Students' continuous reflective practice (Brian Jones & Iredale, 2010; Moberg, 2014) has, however, been suggested to make students able to construct entrepreneurial learning and development by using previous experiences to understand new ones (Dewey, 1910). Less is known about how such reflection may work to influence students' perceptions of and development through entrepreneurship education.

This paper has two overall aims: (1) to examine whether and how students' initial perceptions of entrepreneurship influence—or are influenced by—entrepreneurship education and (2) to explore the role reflection might play in changing such perceptions. Therefore, the questions this study aims to address are:

- *How might primary school students' perceptions of the meaning and value of entrepreneurship education vary?*
- *How might reflective practices work to change such perceptions among primary school students?*

In addition, this study also seeks to develop a theoretical framework in which the thought of Bourdieu and Dewey is combined to analyze and understand the outcome of students' reflective practices.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical framework for this study is a combination of the thought of Bourdieu and Dewey. Both Bourdieu and Dewey argue for a sociocultural perspective on learning, meaning that learning is part of people's everyday lives and cannot be confined to the educational context. They also both highlight the role of reflection in learning. But despite such similarities in their thought, there are also important distinctions. Whereas Bourdieu calls for a critical sociology that examines education in relation to the reproduction of dominated understandings and questions the intentionality of individuals' actions by arguing that individuals can only be understood in relation to their habitus (Bourdieu, 1980; Bourdieu & Nice, 1980), Dewey describes education as an act of democracy and emphasizes individual freedom of choice. For Dewey, the individual's experience and intentional acts are at the center of processual development and learning (Dewey, 1916, 2002). The following paragraphs will elaborate on how these theories can be understood in relation to entrepreneurship education, and how they might relate to each other.

With regard to cultural and sociological aspects of learning, this study departs from Bourdieu's work on capital, habitus, language, and fields of opportunity to understand the integration of entrepreneurship into education, and the outcome of that integration. *Capital* is an important aspect of Bourdieu's thought, but capital is not viewed simply in economic terms, but also as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2011). People may possess different kinds of symbolic capital, such as cultural capital, educational capital, and social capital. People and the capital they possess do not however develop in isolation, but rather in

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