



Two approaches to entrepreneurship education: The different effects of education for and through entrepreneurship at the lower secondary level

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to analyse the influence of two different approaches to entrepreneurship education at the lower secondary level of education. The influence of education *for* entrepreneurship and education *through* entrepreneurship on pupils' level of school engagement and entrepreneurial intentions is analysed and assessed. The paper builds on and extends research about entrepreneurship education for pupils at the lower secondary and upper secondary levels of education (Johannisson, 2010; Pepin, 2012; Peterman & Kennedy, 2003; Surlemont, 2007) by including theories about cognitive and non-cognitive skill formation (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002; Cunha & Heckman, 2007, 2008, 2010), school engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Libbey, 2004), and purposeful learning (Illeris, 2009; Newmann, 1991; Wentzel & Brophy, 2013) in the theoretical framework. It is found that education *for* entrepreneurship, which focuses on content and cognitive entrepreneurial skills, has a positive influence on pupils' entrepreneurial intentions but a negative influence on their level of school engagement. The opposite is true for education *through* entrepreneurship, which has a more pedagogical orientation and focuses on fostering non-cognitive entrepreneurial skills. Furthermore, the role of supportive teaching styles and action-based teaching methods in entrepreneurship education at this level of education is investigated. The analysis is based on data from two surveys including 801 randomly selected Danish ninth-graders (aged 14–15) and 576 randomly selected Danish tenth-graders (aged 15–16). The findings have implications for policy makers and curriculum designers, inasmuch as the influence of two educational approaches is assessed and analysed, but also for the academic community since it presents an alternative way to assess educational dimensions (content and teaching methods) separately.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has grown increasingly popular during the last decades and is today taught already in primary and lower secondary school to a large number of pupils (Rosendahl-Huber, Sloof, & Van Praag, 2012). Its popularity stems from an increased recognition that the economy is to a large extent dependent on new venture creation in order to create growth and innovation (Landström, Harirchi, & Åström, 2012). It is, however, also recognized that being able to

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exercise entrepreneurial skills and act in an entrepreneurial way is important to all citizens, as society has become increasingly characterized by constant change and uncertainty (Deuchar, 2006, 2007; Gibb, 2002). Being able to come up with new and innovative ideas and to carry them out in ingenious and resourceful ways is considered important within all sectors of society, regardless of whether it is organized as new venture creation or as innovation within established organizations (Foss & Klein, 2012). Typical entrepreneurial skills and abilities, such as creativity, pro-activity, and sense of initiative, are today viewed as key competences and the education system ought therefore to have a strong focus on entrepreneurship education (Humes, 2002; Pepin, 2012). Educating pupils to be able to act entrepreneurially is, however, quite different from educating them in entrepreneurship as a profession; and its implications for the education system are very different (Jones & Iredale, 2010).

Researchers within the field of entrepreneurship education have mainly focused on students at the tertiary level (Rosendahl-Huber et al., 2012). At this level, where the students are close to the labour market, the focus is mainly on new venture creation (Katz, 2008). At the lower levels of the education system, however, there is more disagreement when it comes to determining which learning goals education in entrepreneurship should have (Deuchar, 2004; Pepin, 2012), which naturally also has a major influence on how this entrepreneurship education is organized and assessed. The main disagreement revolves around whether it should be education *for* or *through* entrepreneurship (Hannon, 2005), that is, whether the focus should be on content or pedagogy (Jones & Iredale, 2010).¹ The proponents of the content-oriented perspective argue that we should encourage our pupils to consider a career as self-employed as early as possible and therefore we should have entrepreneurship as a school topic already in primary school. The proponents of the pedagogy-oriented perspective, on the other hand, argue that the focus on the cognitively-oriented skills of entrepreneurship should not be at a too early stage, as it will be problematic to convey the relevance of the topic when pupils are too far away from the labour market (Johannisson, 2010; Mahieu, 2006). In their view, it is however never too early to learn the “soft” entrepreneurial competences, as these are well in line with adolescents' learning processes (Pepin, 2012). Instead of teaching entrepreneurship as a sole standing school topic, proponents of the pedagogy-oriented perspective argue that entrepreneurship should be taught as a method, embedded in all school topics, and that the focus should be on personal development rather than on entrepreneurship as a profession (Johannisson, 2010; Jones & Iredale, 2010; Mahieu, 2006; Surlemont, 2007). Unfortunately, very few assessment studies of entrepreneurship education have been performed at this level of education (Jones & Iredale, 2010; Rosendahl-Huber et al., 2012).

Even though the amount of research about entrepreneurship education at the lower levels of the education system is limited, we can draw on the vast research performed within educational science in order to understand how entrepreneurship education affects adolescents. The extensive and rigorous research about school engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Libbey, 2004) and how it affects pupils' academic performance and emotional connectedness to learning is particularly crucial when analysing the implication and impact of entrepreneurship education. Another theoretical perspective that is necessary to our understanding of entrepreneurship education is the pioneering research by James Heckman about cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Rosendahl-Huber et al., 2012). This research stream has during the last decade changed our view on how education and schooling affect students and pupils and has had a major influence on educational science (Levin, 2011) and school policy (Tough, 2012).

In this paper these two theoretical perspectives are applied in order to analyse how education *for* entrepreneurship, which focuses on fostering cognitive entrepreneurial skills, and education *through* entrepreneurship, which focuses on fostering non-cognitive skills, affect pupils' school engagement and intention of pursuing a career as self-employed. Structural equation modelling is used in the analysis, and the results are based on data from two surveys including 801 randomly selected Danish ninth-graders (aged 14–15) and 576 randomly selected Danish tenth-graders (aged 15–16). The results indicate that education focussing on fostering cognitive and education focussing on fostering non-cognitive entrepreneurial skills have the opposite effect of one another. The pedagogy-oriented approach to entrepreneurship education has a positive association with the pupils' level of school engagement but a negative association with their level of entrepreneurial intentions; whereas the content-oriented approach to entrepreneurship education has the opposite associations.

2. Theoretical background

In this part of the article research on skill development, cognitive and non-cognitive skills and school engagement and how this relates to different approaches to entrepreneurship education, will be briefly summarized.

2.1. Cognitive and non-cognitive skills

It has long been acknowledged that the early school years play an important role in individuals' subsequent lives (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Cunha & Heckman, 2007, 2008; Finn, 1989). How these years are experienced and which abilities and skills are

¹ Education *through* entrepreneurship is sometimes understood as education for entrepreneurship taught through action-based teaching methods (see for example Lackeus, 2013; O'Connor, 2013) or as education for practicing small business owners (Kirby, 2004). In this article, education through entrepreneurship is understood in the way it is described by Hannon (2005) and Blenker, Korsgaard, Neergaard, and Thrane (2011), or as what Pittaway and Edwards (2012) describe as embedded enterprise education.

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