



Entrepreneurship pedagogies in lifelong learning: Emergence of criticality?☆

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to address an instructional perspective for entrepreneurship courses introduced to lifelong learners. The new approach combines critical thinking with experiential learning in a common framework able to facilitate entrepreneurship education for various heterogeneous populations through lifelong learning or vocational training. The proposed approach utilizes critical instruction embedded in experiential learning as to resolve possible disorientation of learners during the common experiential/reflective instruction for entrepreneurship. A critical-thinking-deviation from Kolb's experiential learning model is introduced and preliminarily tested empirically for two different groups of adult learners. Suggested conceptualization through critical instruction is expected either to resolve disorienting situations or to lead to postponement of courses and reconsideration of the theoretical framework. The latter is due to the emancipatory nature of critical instruction and depends on both learners' intrinsic needs, assumptions and on the specific framework under which entrepreneurship education is promoted. Empirical evidence for the dual consequence, due to the adoption of critical instruction, is illustrated for the two groups of learners. The theoretical scope of the paper concerns the appropriateness and the consistency of the suggested critical-experiential teaching for entrepreneurship designed for adult learners. Implications concern entrepreneurship curricula, innovative instruction and trainers' training.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship education (cf. Fayolle, 2007; Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Fayolle & Klandt, 2006; Fayolle & Kyrö, 2008; Gibb, 1987, 1993, 2002, 2005) is massively provided in higher education for the last decades, both in the U.S. (Katz, 2003; Kuratko, 2005) and Europe (Oslo Agenda, 2006; European Commission, 2008). The 'new' field is also introduced in secondary education and in lifelong learning settings. The European Commission comprises entrepreneurship among the eight key-competences to be cultivated through lifelong learning (European Commission, 2007). In these official recommendations, educators are encouraged to adopt innovative pedagogies for entrepreneurial courses in order to achieve positive impact on attendees. Hence, fostering entrepreneurship as a mindset (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000) can be thought a competency-based type of education, instructionally based on experiential learning (Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984).

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Gibb (2002) distinguishes three forms of entrepreneurship education: the 'for', 'about' and 'practice in' entrepreneurship. Only the first one is based on lectures and knowledge transfer while the rest two are experiential. Specifically, cultivation of entrepreneurial skills concerns the 'about' form of entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, the experiential basis of entrepreneurship pedagogy is in accordance with the conceptualized practical learning of entrepreneurs (Cope, 2005; Dimov, 2007; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001; Politis, 2005). Krueger (2007) discusses the transition of entrepreneurship pedagogy from the behavioral teacher-centered approach to the modern constructivist learning-centered instruction, which adopts problem-based learning. As a result, business planning has been a basic task for action learning in entrepreneurship courses (European Commission, 2008; Honig, 2004; Johannisson, 1991; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006).

To date, the majority of entrepreneurial courses and pedagogies have been developed inside business schools. A diffusion of the new discipline across many academic departments is now ongoing with parallel preparations for promotion of similar courses in secondary education and lifelong learning. Thus, the inclusive character of entrepreneurship education attracts wider populations of potential trainees. Following this trend, inherent 'problems' of teaching entrepreneurship require a reconsideration of the adopted pedagogies. For instance, social constructivist scholars reveal cultural differences in entrepreneurial meaning-making (e.g., Drakopoulou-Dodd & Hynes, 2012). Anderson & associates discuss the use of diverse metaphors to describe the entrepreneur in different cultural contexts (Anderson, Drakopoulou-Dodd, & Jack, 2009; Drakopoulou-Dodd, 2002; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005). Socially constructed meanings implicitly influence potential trainees' assumptions and beliefs. Anderson and Warren (2011) discuss the role of mass media in presenting entrepreneurial role models and in influencing the entrepreneurial context toward a collective entrepreneurial identity. Moreover, Shane (2008) presents several common conceptions about business venturing which contradict with worldwide data. These 'illusions', the term which Shane uses, have to be resolved for a precise academic teaching. Therefore, a question to be addressed is *how can an experiential learning pedagogy deal with possible disorientations due to meaning-making discrepancies among diverse populations of learners?* The particular question becomes crucial in lifelong learning and especially for the connection of entrepreneurship with vocational training and career planning.

Unlike the majority of the research in entrepreneurship education which employs socio-constructivist approaches focusing on socio-cultural issues, the present study focuses on the individual. As far as we envisage innovative entrepreneurship – tied to creativity and initiatives – personal learning, competencies and individual differences become central toward understanding why some, and not others, become successful entrepreneurs in a given socio-cultural environment. This perspective leads us to employ highly individualistic theories such as Kolb's (1984) learning cycle and Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation. Hence, the present study aims to originally contribute toward fostering the entrepreneurial mindset in a personal, humanistic and constructivistic framework. Then, voluntary social interaction can be expected by innovating individuals through their new firms that do occur in the social context.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, educational aspects of entrepreneurship are briefly addressed in association with underlying learning. Secondly, the present critical-experiential approach is theoretically introduced and then empirically tested for two groups of adult learners. Finally, implications for educators and educational agencies are discussed.

2. Entrepreneurial teaching, theory development and reflection

In this section, a state of the art description of how entrepreneurship is being taught is given for non-experienced readers. It appears that learning from experience, theory development and reflective processes penetrate all aspects of entrepreneurial learning. Since the relevance among these learning processes has not been clear enough from literature, we merely use these notions for a comprehensive description and attempt for a more concrete establishment of them in the next section where the current theoretical framework is presented.

2.1. Entrepreneurship: an experientially taught discipline

In the present paper, it is maintained that even though entrepreneurship is promoted experientially, the 'for entrepreneurship' form of Gibb (2002) underlies experiential learning as it is associated with the reflective observation learning mode (RO) of converting experience into knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Successful reflection enables meaning-making and leads to abstract conceptualization (AC mode). This is the 'theorizing process' (i.e., the assimilation phase) of experiential learning which refers to reflection which can also lead to the modification of the frame of reference of an individual – or his cognitive structures². According to Mezirow (2003: 58), a personal frame of reference includes 'assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)'. The reflection – on and further alteration of cognitive structures is a *metacognitive* process (e.g., Flavell, 1979; Kuhn, 2000) which characterizes *higher level learning* that is considered essential for entrepreneurship (Cope, 2003, 2005). Accordingly, Johannisson (1991) relates attitudes, values and motives of an individual to the 'know-why' competencies of entrepreneurship.

Uncritical adoption of 'myths' or doubtful 'stereotypes', relevant to business venturing, is expected to obstruct the experiential learning process during theorization. Such unjustified, 'common sense' legends (e.g., Shane, 2008) could either dispute or strengthen a person's assumptions, beliefs, perceptions or points of view. According to constructive-developmental psychology, deep beliefs are considered to affect the evolution of a person's cognitive structures (Kegan, 1980; Krueger, 2007). For instance, Kegan and Lahey (2001) describe, in their *competing commitments* approach, how a person's big assumptions shape any received information and

² The terms vary between different schools of thought. The aim of this paper is not to follow the terminology of a particular school but to address the interaction of externally adopted 'myths' (e.g., stereotypes) with personal assumptions and deep beliefs which are essential for metacognitive (or higher level) learning.

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