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Experiential Learning Philosophies of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education

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Introduction

How can educators in entrepreneurship education apply an experiential learning perspective in their curriculum design and course planning? Hannon (2005) suggested using the notions on teaching *about*, *for*, and *through* when developing and researching entrepreneurship education. However, other notions and overall understandings may provide us with new perspectives that can advance the field by taking into consideration other elements—for example, *in*, *after*, *under*, *over*, *beside*, *during*, and *meanwhile* (Naia et al. 2015; Neergaard et al. 2016; Ramsgaard and Christensen 2016) or *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* (Pittaway and Cope 2007a; Rasmussen and Sørheim 2006).

The current conceptual chapter proposes that research in entrepreneurship education has developed a narrow perspective on learning if its focus relies only on *about*, *for*, and *through*. The chapter explores other points of view and furthermore discusses and explores central topics

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within experiential learning using the lenses of both educators and students. Research on entrepreneurship education and especially experiential learning has long pursued questions of how to apply the pedagogies and didactics of experiential learning into curriculum development and course planning (Krueger 2007; Pittaway and Cope 2007b), but the educator's own ability to differentiate and experiment with known learning approaches has been a highly overlooked topic.

The point of departure for the chapter will be Hannon's work on philosophies of entrepreneurship education (Hannon 2005, 2006) combined with Jason Cope's dynamic perspective on experiential learning (Cope 2003, 2005; Cope and Watts 2000; Pittaway and Cope 2007a; Pittaway and Thorpe 2012) and will further discuss in relation to lenses of transformative learning, entrepreneurial action, entrepreneurial reflection, and entrepreneurial identity in order to leverage an understanding of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education on a conceptual basis. Finally, the chapter will suggest a dynamic model that educators can use to design experiential learning activities that include an interplay of various models and understandings.

The chapter proposes that a narrow perspective on learning has been created in research in entrepreneurship education that focuses only on teaching *about*, *for*, and *through*. The purpose of this chapter is to present and further develop experiential learning philosophies of enterprise and entrepreneurship education.

Conceptual Background

Within theories on entrepreneurial learning, evidence suggests that experiential learning methods and approaches can enhance learning outcomes for students in higher education (Middleton et al. 2014; Neergaard et al. 2016). Hannon's contribution to entrepreneurship education with the concept of *about*, *for*, and *through* entrepreneurship education has received widespread recognition (Bridge 2017). However, current debates in learning theory address developments in the conceptualization of learning processes from both educators and students (Moon 2004), and recent research on Hannon's taxonomy suggests that the concept requires an update (Hoppe et al. 2017).

Review of Hannon's Contributions

Paul D. Hannon's paper *Philosophies of enterprise and entrepreneurship education and challenges for higher education in the UK* (2005) proposed important questions to be considered in entrepreneurship education: (1) Is entrepreneurship education management or business related? (2) Is entrepreneurship education a part of a learner's life capabilities? (3) Is entrepreneurship education a process of identifying organizational opportunity? Hannon states that an 'underpinning philosophy of an educational programme will partially determine the outcomes of the educational process and influence the educational experience' (Hannon 2005). He further elaborates that if concepts and approaches in entrepreneurship education are blurred and have mixed meanings it can lead to contrasting and even conflicting beliefs for both students and educators. In his conceptual paper, he includes philosophies of the more general frameworks for adult education. In his efforts to dissect the categorizations of different approaches in entrepreneurship education, he takes a stance on a somewhat narrow perspective on the commonly applied conceptualization of *about*, *for*, and *through*. Being published in 2005, it could be relevant to look at the developments within learning philosophies during the next 15 years in order to fulfillingly include approaches to bring into focus (Naia et al. 2015). However, Hannon has luckily published other important works on these matters. In another paper from 2005, he has expanded the views to focus on determining curricula content (Hartshorn and Hannon 2005). A key finding is that the specific course described ensured personal learning and prepared for an unsure future in entrepreneurship. Hannon does not relate this to underlying philosophies, but a viewpoint could be that the *about*, *for*, and *through* notions were not sufficient and that other relevant parameters such as legitimization, mentoring, and identity would be relevant parameters. One other Hannon paper stands out as bringing important aspects into these discussions, namely, his 2006 paper (Hannon 2006), where he touches upon the complexities of a number of interrelated aspects that could be relevant to consider when designing curricula in entrepreneurship education:

- Embedding across and within different subjects
- Location and ownership

- Purpose and outcomes
- Educators' roles and approaches
- Benefits
- Coherence and cohesion
- Quality (Hannon 2006)

All of these aspects can be considered as contributions to the ongoing discussions about underlying philosophies. At some points, these aspects question the above described categorizations about entrepreneurship education being management or business related, part of a learner's life capabilities, or a process of identifying organizational opportunity. The aspects can be seen as overlapping and therefore not fit particularly well into the three categorizations above.

A Dynamic Perspective on Experiential Learning

Jason Cope presented in his conceptual article '*Toward a Dynamic Learning Perspective of Entrepreneurship*' (2005) a learning perspective of entrepreneurship that built upon existing and widely accepted theoretical approaches to understanding entrepreneurial activity—what Pittaway calls inquiry-based learning (Pittaway et al. 2009). Pittaway and Cope (2007b) illustrated that it is possible to simulate some aspects of entrepreneurial learning, such as emotional exposure and situated learning, but not others.

Much research on learning processes influencing entrepreneurship education has been developed with a focus on entrepreneurs (Williams Middleton 2013). However, the connections between educational activities and later entrepreneurial careers are sparsely investigated, and the learning processes might not be easily transferred (Cope and Watts 2000) because of the extremely complex interplay of what Cope and Watts (2000) call 'critical incidents', incidents where entrepreneurs face emotional-laden or traumatic events in the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career. In experiential learning processes, the pedagogical activities seldom consist of traumatic events because of ethical implications. However, the dynamic learning perspective and experiential learning processes are widely used and accepted when educators design and plan courses and curricula (Honig 2004; Lackéus et al. 2016; Li et al. 2007).

Learning Outcomes in Entrepreneurship Education

Learning outcomes in entrepreneurship education have gained much attention (Gibb 2002, 2012; Politis 2005). Existing research shows no clear direction in the pursuit of clear understandings of approaches and broadly adopted understandings, because many elements and pedagogical activities influence curriculum design and course planning (Cope and Watts 2000). However, Hytti and O’Gorman (2004) found that the learning outcomes of entrepreneurship education represent three different types of overall goals: (a) increasing knowledge about entrepreneurship, (b) developing entrepreneurial skills, and (c) starting a new business. These learning outcomes are found to be too broadly defined, but the connection to Hannon’s concept is clear. Hoppe et al. (2017) argued that the concept of *for/in/through/about* leads to highly different pedagogical approaches for entrepreneurship education depending on their purpose, and their suggested inclusion of the notion of *in* subsequently offers new opportunities to enhance complementary student learning in higher education. The pedagogical approach to learning outcomes reinforces the importance of the educator, and other important research has investigated which specific didactical elements and activities work in an entrepreneurship education classroom (Lackéus 2015; Segal et al. 2007), providing an overview of terms and definitions currently used in entrepreneurial education.

When addressing experiential learning philosophies of enterprise and entrepreneurship education, the foundational works on the topic need to be considered in relation to the classic experiential learning literature. Here, David A. Kolb’s seminal work on the experiential learning cycle provides an extended view on learning outcomes. Kolb published the groundbreaking book *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* in 1984. This book explained that a person could pursue learning through discovery and experience (Kolb 1984). Kolb’s theory is called ‘experiential’ because of its academic origins in the work of Lewin, Piaget, Dewey, Freire, and others. Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through all the four stages of the learning cycle, namely, (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualiza-

tion, and (d) active experimentation (Kolb 1984; Kolb and Kolb 2005). Kolb's model of experiential learning has been the driving agenda-setter in experiential learning philosophies, even though it also has been criticized for its lack of focus on practical application in an entrepreneurship education setting, in addition to the difficulty of empirically validating the theory (Lackéus 2014).

Transformative Learning Processes in Higher Education

Transformative learning theories have emphasized the responsibility of the individual learner to engage and reflect on the learning process (Illeris 2014). A significant responsibility has also been put on the educator to design learning processes that create room for transformative learning. The adult-learning theory proposed by Jack Mezirow (1997) further highlights the importance of four processes of learning: (a) elaborating on an existing point of view, (b) creation of new meanings/establishment a new point of view, (c) transformation of a point of view, and (d) transformation of the existential habits of mind. Mezirow (1997) described the importance of critical reflections on assumptions that we base on 'our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or point of view' (Mezirow 1997), emphasizing the important role of reflection when dealing with learning processes. He explained, 'Transformative learning involves a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments' (Mezirow 1990, p. 18).

Learning theories in higher education differ greatly in relation to the contexts in which learning processes are situated (Welter 2011). Within business schools, there is a more traditional and historical agenda for entrepreneurship education, whereas institutions of applied science hold no long or widely evidenced approaches (Mwasalwiba 2010). Here, a closer look at reflections and entrepreneurial identity seems relevant to develop a thorough understanding of the state of the field, so this chapter will elaborate these developments and connect the terms of transformative learning and entrepreneurial leadership (Kempster and Cope 2010).

Entrepreneurial Identity: Educator and Student Perspectives

Within entrepreneurship education, studies on identity have developed evidence and applicable models for how this concept could be integrated into higher education. Recently, there has been considerable interest amongst entrepreneurship scholars in identity construction (Nielsen and Lassen 2012; Ollila and Williams Middleton 2013). Some researchers view participants in entrepreneurship programmes as active agents in the construction of entrepreneurial identity through engaging in the learning processes, but this is not necessarily the position provided by their entrepreneurship programmes or educational context (Hytti and Heinonen 2013).

Hannon (2005) also highlighted a focus on entrepreneurial identity. There is very little research on entrepreneurial identity of educators, but looking at students the evidence is much clearer (Donnellon et al. 2014; Williams Middleton 2013). It remains to be researched whether the entrepreneurial identity of the educator is an important factor in whether learning processes and activities lead to enhanced entrepreneurial activity.

Action-Based Experiential Learning

The topics described above suggest that there is a link in experiential learning philosophies between learning general topics, reflectional learning, and entrepreneurial identity, leading to a conception and understanding of action-based perspectives in entrepreneurship education. Austin and Hjorth (2012) suggested a distinction between action-based and experience-based teaching and learning; in addition, variation or didactical differentiation seems to be important (Austin and Hjorth 2012; Ramsgaard and Christensen 2016). In this light, Hannon's (2005) notions of *about*, *for*, and *through* do not seem to offer an adequate framework for understanding experiential learning philosophies.

About, *for*, and *through* relate to another view on learning that has developed much since 2005. The current focus on learning through experience, engagement in transformative learning processes, and through action-based activities resonates with the widely used concepts of effectuation

(Sarasvathy 2001, 2008), lean start-up, and business model generation (Blank 2013; Ries 2011). The underlying philosophy stems from John Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action and learning by doing (Foss et al. 2013; Pepin 2012; Schön 1992). Dewey provided learning theory with a highlighting of the relationship and connection between experience and reflection by adding practical, material life activity and non-reflective experience based on habits as important forms of experience (Miettinen 2000). In comparing the work of Dewey with Kolb's experiential learning cycle theory, Miettinen highlights that 'In contrast to Kolb's model in Dewey's conception every phase is necessarily interconnected. It is the problems and dynamics of life activity that are the common denominator in both habitual and reflective experience for Dewey, and which made him a philosophical pragmatist' (Miettinen 2000).

Debates about which action-related activities provide learning opportunity in experiential learning settings are much in opposition. Internships in terms of short-term work-related periods in organizations and institutions have been found evident in minimizing theory-practice gaps and therefore giving opportunity for learning (Piihl et al. 2014; Ramsgaard and Østergaard 2017; Varghese et al. 2012). Carrier (2007) also suggested games and simulations as elements to enhance learning (Carrier 2007). Also solution camps have been found relevant to consider (Bager 2011) since camps can complement the entrepreneurial activities and create a framework for intense cross-disciplinary creativity and innovation training. A comprehensive understanding of relevant and related pedagogical activities remains to be investigated within entrepreneurship education.

Discussion

What does an educator rely on when engaging in entrepreneurship education? How can he/she navigate in the diverse, contrasting, and manifold landscapes of approaches, theories, methods, and philosophies? Research within entrepreneurship education has so far failed to provide meaningful directions for the educator about the didactics of designing an entrepreneurial classroom or curricula (Bridge 2017; Fiet 2001; Blenker et al. 2012). What if the endeavour is not possible at all? In many

other aspects of life and learning, there are no specific and universal models or approaches that fit every situation and context, for example, in love, politics, raising a child, or sports (Lindgren and Packendorff 2009; Welter 2011). Choosing a narrow perspective on learning in a field may limit an educator's possibilities (Neergaard et al. 2016). If educators themselves embrace and pursue experiential learning methods when designing curriculum, then the expected outcome may be taken in other more fruitful directions (Feiman-Nemser 2001). Experiments therefore might be a relevant and obvious way forward in order to contextualize, adapt, and expand given methods and approaches (Vesper and Gartner 1997).

Feiman-Nemser (2001) argued that educators must know and understand the subjects they teach beyond a pedagogical perspective. Shulman (1986) identified three aspects of developing subject-matter knowledge for teaching in general: (a) knowledge of central facts, theories, concepts, and procedures in a given field; (b) knowledge of explanatory frameworks to connect and organize ideas; and (c) knowledge of the rules of evidence and proof (Gudmundsdottir and Shulman 1987; Shulman 1986). This indicates that general views of learning include levels similar to those suggested by Hytti and O'Gorman (2004). The transition of new teachers from a university college setting to a primary school setting has been documented especially well in research (Korthagen and Kessels 1999). This research adds to the discussion in the current chapter related to professionalism and the pedagogical side of teaching. How would entrepreneurship education be affected if all of the educators had a basic professional foundation in experiential learning methods, or what Mednick (1962) called a 'response repertoire' in creative methods (Mednick 1962, p. 22)? Further research must be done to expand these initial findings. Kolb's (1984) learning cycle is also widely used; more productive research could be conducted within entrepreneurship education to understand and explain experiential learning in connection to updated views on learning theory (Illeris 2004, 2014).

Within philosophies of experiential learning, basic evidence is still lacking about what specific pedagogical activities are related to the various notions of lecturing *about*, advocating *for*, and teaching *through* (Garavan and O'Conneide 1994), but these can still be adapted in different contexts (Welter 2011). If experiential learning does not involve the

same activities in differing contexts, maybe the conceptualization of learning should be elaborated and investigated much further, something Hoppe et al. (2017) also recommended.

The discussion will end with a short narrative illustrating the complexity of the problem of experiential learning philosophies of enterprise and entrepreneurship education: An educator told me that her campus hosted three different health education programmes under the same roof. But it was clear when it was pedagogues versus nurses versus therapists who had used a classroom. One clear indicator was the various materials used (and left) in the room. Materializations and manifestations in different professions need to be elaborated on and documented to inform educators who are designing curricula and learning processes, something that research within entrepreneurship education also indicates (Blenker et al. 2012; Juvonen 2012). Each professional group had its own ways of encapsulating and understanding experiential learning processes, and that may be the biggest problem within entrepreneurship education, something that Welter (2011) analysed in depth but also a topic that needs much more investigation.

Some educational settings can nurture entrepreneurship education with new students from day one, creating experiences of professional life in that particular field, whereas educators in other contexts argue that students need a professional foundational basis before endeavouring into experiential learning processes. Where lies the rationale behind these underlying philosophies of learning? Why are some students fit for experience learning while others are fit for theoretical learning? Are some educational institutions more or less fit for experience learning, eg. universities of applied sciences (Kettunen 2011).

One answer could be that only by raising the level of pedagogical knowledge and 'response repertoire' amongst educators can these very different contexts be met with appropriate pedagogical methods that meet the entrepreneurial potential of that specific group of students—that is, developing a professional entrepreneurial identity amongst educators that will allow them to design and develop relevant experiential learning activities and learning processes.

Figure 1.1 illustrates how the relation between philosophies of experiential learning can be viewed in order to provide educators with more clarity when choosing one or another approach and related pedagogical

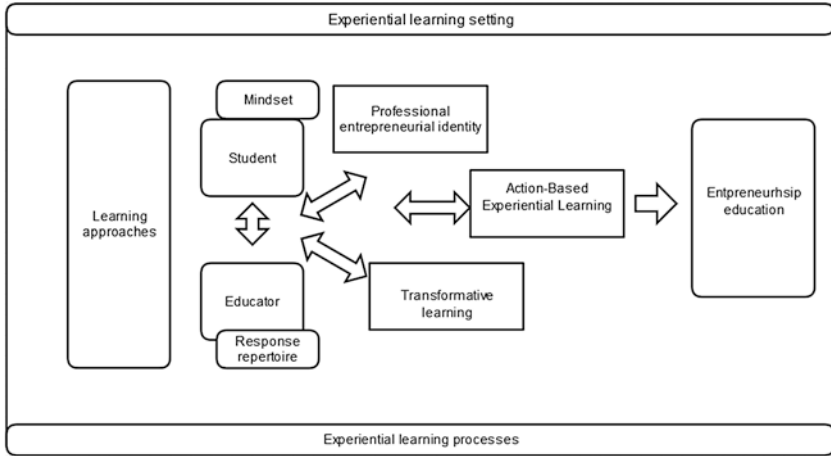


Fig. 1.1 Proposed relation between philosophies of experiential learning

activities in a curriculum design. No learning theory can stand alone, because interplay, variation, and differentiation are important in experiential learning processes in order to create a diverse pedagogical approach incorporating various different activities. The figure exemplifies some interrelated connections and dynamics between key processes within experiential learning process. At the same time, the figure highlights the complexities of understanding some of the causes and effects of learning. The mindset and development of professional identity amongst students (and educators) can serve as a reminder to focus on these aspects. Further research must explore the argument of this chapter: gaming, playing, acting, developing, advancing, and innovation in experiential learning processes in entrepreneurship education.

Conclusion

Where experiential learning philosophies of enterprise and entrepreneurship education interact with philosophies of learning theories, there are many relevant topics to be taken into consideration in order to fully cover the interrelated connections. Applying a one-size-fits-all learning philosophy in entrepreneurship education will result in the educator failing to

include other meaningful learning approaches in his/her curriculum design and, by that, limiting the diversity of pedagogical activities and narrowing interplay, variation, and differentiation in the entrepreneurship classroom. Many debates about learning philosophies provide models of educational approaches to entrepreneurship that can provide beneficial analytical structures to better research, undertake, and design activities. Hannon's notion on about, for, and through is an important point of departure for discussing approaches and understandings of the role of entrepreneurship in higher education. Moreover, the conception of experiential learning provided by David Kolb's four-stage cycle is a well-established model. The current chapter has advocated for an update of learning philosophies in entrepreneurship education. A key point is that philosophies of transformative learning, professional identity, contextualization, and reflection should also be included in order to expand the notions on about, for, and through. A possible way forward is to develop approaches that lead to different educational outcomes, something also Hoppe et al. (2017) highlight in their critique. Furthermore, the educator's own ability to differentiate and experiment with known learning approaches must be further investigated in order to develop new understandings of the manifold options of philosophies of learning provided and connected with their practical application.

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