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Curricular innovations for a proactive education. Social development from an individual initiative

Vicente J. Llorent *

University of Córdoba, Avda. S. Alberto Magno s/n, Córdoba 14071, Spain

Abstract

The societies of today and the future are characterized by greater adaptability and responsiveness to change, as they try to be as flexible and diverse as possible in the face of the huge number of challenges to be addressed. We all need to be educated in this way in order to acquire the range of basic skills that will enable us to adjust to various contexts. Education, in all its domains, undoubtedly provides a social return, which also involves high economic returns if the training is closely linked to the needs of the labour market. Our aim is to highlight the potential strong impact of proactive education in a sluggish labour market and in economic contexts that lack incentives and opportunities, i.e. a curriculum that fosters social development based on personal initiative.

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1. Introduction.

Education undoubtedly brings social returns that, in turn, involve high economic returns when the training is closely linked to the needs of the labour market. Adequate management of knowledge and the development of individual professional skills thus have direct and indirect effects on many aspects of society. The ever more extensive basic training required by society thus encourages the continuation of studies in secondary education. Many elements in different spheres are at stake. Society is very complex and nothing takes place in isolation (Gautier, 1992; Moreno, 2009).

In the case of Europe we are currently witnessing a major process of economic, political, educational and social unification. In order to establish the harmonious development of the European Union (EU), this approach is being promoted by several areas, of which education, employment and economic issues are basic pillars. This situation is influenced by the competitive modern economy, which leads to certain employment needs, and the continuous training of citizens in order to increase their productivity (Prais, 1995; Phelps, 2008).

The employment policies of the EU thus focus on optimizing training and education systems as sources of critical elements capable of overcoming current socio-economic challenges (European Commission, 1994, Requena, 2002; Goenaga, 2006; Moreno, 2009).

During the twentieth century we witnessed a shift in terms of the most important requirements of workers. At the beginning of that century it was considered important to know the task at hand, and to possess skills and ability to

* *Vicente J. Llorent Tel.: 0034 957212585
E-mail address: vjllorent@uco.es*

carry it out and make it according to the guidelines provided by superiors or clients. By the middle of the century it seems that the focus had shifted to the role of motivation and the responsibility of the employee to achieve the objectives of the company (Ranson, 1992; Moreno, 2009).

In recent decades, the economic systems of the EU and the Western world in general have evolved rapidly to take shape as a set of interrelated and globalized systems. This process has converged on a global market that is saturated with products. This situation has led to a change in the traditional sense of competitiveness and the introduction of innovative creative approaches that support an entrepreneurial attitude among workers (Agulló, 2002 and the European Commission for Education and Training, 2010).

According to reports of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) four main weaknesses restrict entrepreneurial activity (Ferreira and Reis, 2009 and Martínez et al., 2010):

- Barriers to access to capital and ignorance about available means of financing innovation.
- Inconsistency at policy level regarding strategies for national development and grant programmes.
- The low educational value placed on entrepreneurial initiative in schools.
- Inadequate development of business and professional services.

Entrepreneurial activity thus lacks support services in small organizations, legal and accountancy advice, and universities and research institutions, as well as an exclusive school for entrepreneurship. Thus, taking into account the weaknesses referred to in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reports, educational policies need to become actively involved in interesting and preparing students for the promotion of entrepreneurial activity as future professionals.

2. Management of training for social progress

We understand that employment is a key tool for social progress as well as an education-based economy, a relationship that is intensified between General National Vocational Qualifications and employment (Martinez, A. et al, 2010).

Government policies are firmly committed to creating jobs, being intended to cover not only the right to work, as raised in the Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 16, UN, 1948); but also to prepare members to join society in all its dimensions, strengthening both the economy and society as a whole (Barriguete, 2003).

EU politicians have expressed the importance and priority of employment as well as potential ways to orient citizens, whose needs, requirements, positions and solutions have been analysed and configured in meetings with representatives of individual nation-states (Garagori, 2007; Hisrich, Peter, and Shepherd, 2010).

The boost from public and private institutions to increase personal initiative, autonomy and entrepreneurship seeks to improve the competences of European citizens. This can be observed, for example, in programmes created by the European Commission, in force between 2007 and 2013, which appeal to "Learning throughout Life" and more recently to the guidelines proposed in June 2010 and known as "New Europe 2020" (European Commission for Education and Training, 2010).

The current education system provides training closely related to employment, as designated in entrepreneurial education, and is much more vocational, with the aim of strengthening formal knowledge of the steps to be taken during the entrepreneurial process, which favours a practical training; hence, according to Honig (2004), the almost nonexistent literature on methods for teaching entrepreneurship.

Business plan development should be the first area to be taught as part of the entrepreneurship process. It should focus on ideas rather than actions. Similarly, it is necessary to teach working methods for entrepreneurs (Hisrich, Peter and Shepherd, 2010).

The model created should help students learn to tolerate risks, learn from making mistakes and develop management skills, all of which are needed to motivate and lead the business idea in circumstances marked by uncertainty and risk.

Apart from the existing research on entrepreneurship, Baron and Shane (2005) add that real knowledge of such matters comes from the application of scientific methodology, comprising systematic observation, experimentation and reflection.

3. Entrepreneurial education for personal and collective development

Individuals can participate in entrepreneurial education and business training at several stages in their life. In Scotland, for example primary school pupils begin to learn to be entrepreneurs and businesspeople. At college level too there ought to be specific training to prepare students for employment; entrepreneurial education should be available at all levels of education: basic, secondary and superior (Martinez et al., 2010).

The European Commission (2010) has also suggested that entrepreneurial education fosters creativity, innovation and self-employment. So rather than management skills, individuals should be prompted to participate in unconventional activities.

According to Filion (1994) and Gasse (1985), the best age to acquire knowledge in areas related to entrepreneurship is during childhood and adolescence. Peterman and Kennedy (2003) attempt to support these ideas conducting research with a sample of 200 students of different ages. The authors conclude that entrepreneurial training at an early age is important as a means of helping students to define their careers. Shapero (1975) defined as antecedents of entrepreneurial intent a desire to develop active skills and a propensity to utilise them. The attitude of a person is decided when they are influenced by their priorities, their experience and the existence of models.

Successful entrepreneurs often have high academic qualifications. However, as Hisrich, Peter and Shephard (2008) state, having high ratings does not mean that the formal education system enhances the entrepreneurial skills of the individual. In fact, the school system does not develop such skills. We therefore believe that entrepreneurship education should be incorporated into the school system and that it should integrate interactive learning that fosters creativity and innovation, based on the experience of entrepreneur models, where there need to be networks of links with local businesses and the labour market (Marin, 2009).

We emphasize that training in entrepreneurship cannot succeed if it does not respond to any of these processes, particularly in terms of the growth in opportunities, lists of available and required resources, and the creation of a business. Educational researchers argue that findings at entrepreneurial level are the result of systematic research, and we can cite four modalities (Detienne and Chandler, 2004): Active search, Passive and serendipitous search, Opportunities to create, and Creativity and identification of opportunities.

Man, Lau and Chan (2002) state that at the time of entrepreneurial training, the individual needs to learn, to move beyond his existing competences (conceptual, organizational, strategic and commitment), and gain recognition and increase market opportunities, including training for the development of relationship skills and the creation of alliances.

3.1. *Advantages and Disadvantages of Entrepreneurship.*

At this point, we can define entrepreneurship as something that involves all the functions, activities and actions related to the creation of organizations. Entrepreneurship includes the process of building something new to make the organization grow. Ferreira and Reis (2009) suggest some national determinants that favor entrepreneurship, emphasizing:

- 1 – The intervention of central and local governments in economic activities through public-sector spending, efficient service provision and legislative and regulatory stability.
- 2 – The encouragement of efficient financial markets, capable of financing the growth of the national economy and thus capable of financing business projects.
- 3- The existence of an educational system based on entrepreneurship.
- 4 – The existence of a high-quality infrastructure that charges affordable prices.
- 5 – The recruitment of good managers to implement business projects.
- 6 – The creation of a dynamic and versatile labour market.
- 7 – The existence of public institutions such as justice, health, education, security, etc., as facilitators of entrepreneurial activity.

When these conditions exist, we can discuss the benefits of entrepreneurship that contribute to individual and societal development:

- Economic encouragement.
- Lowered unemployment.
- Responsibility of individuals for their own performance.

Similarly, the creation of new organizations has national effects at the level of innovation, on existing technologies and techniques, and on the encouragement of competition that becomes more efficient, flexible and innovative (Hisrich, Peter and Shepherd, 2010).

Despite the creation of business as a result of this creation, the only source of employment may be the organization, which should not be understood as the magic formula to combat unemployment or to tackle the economic crisis. Indeed, entrepreneurial training can also be an alternative for those who already have a job, but are dissatisfied with it and therefore wish to change.

In summary, the motivations that attract individuals to innovation and entrepreneurship are varied according to their personal and family background, area of residence, the existence of incentive systems and their educational background.

In turn, the concern of the new organization should be to encourage the entrepreneur to focus his strategy of action at the level of products/services offered, by creating value for the client and modeling his products not to the entrepreneur's own competences or technical skills, but to market demands.

The disadvantages of entrepreneurship are linked to the risk side of the picture. Ferreira and Reis (2009) refer to lack of capital, lower sales and higher costs than estimated, competitive pressures, lack of skills and entrepreneurial knowledge in managing the company. Just as care must be taken in preparing the advantages of entrepreneurship, disadvantages must be carefully examined in order to avoid an overly optimistic and thus distorted view of the reality of this method that can be useful for an organization, but not as a means of solving problems.

4. Strategies for an entrepreneurial training plan

We need to emphasize the importance of entrepreneurial education provided as a labour integration resource, approached from a practical perspective and with a methodology related to tutorial activities and pedagogical guidance on simulated situations.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the powerful impact that can be achieved in a sluggish labour market or in economic contexts that lack of initiative and opportunity, highlighting the virtues of an entrepreneurial education as a means of self-development and as an influence on the career trajectory of the individual.

This kind of education should be oriented to encourage people to start their own business. Questions therefore need to be asked about the characteristics of entrepreneurship, in order to meet requirements of the business environment (Hernandez et al., 2009).

In terms of content, it should be divided into two parts, the first related to the project design and the second to the development of the project and the results. The proposed curriculum plan should include the basic conceptualization of entrepreneurship and must deal with individual development, personal realization and a long-term vision regarding the labor market and society. Regarding the project itself, it should include the background, mission and objectives of the project to be carried out, the pre-production, production, implementation and monitoring of the production of goods and services, the preparation of a project schedule, and the presentation of the project, which should include an analysis and discussion of the various risks that the project involves and how to overcome them.

Wisdom increases the possibilities of using other techniques and creating new materials that improve the socio-cultural legacy. The inclusion of information and communication technologies, resource optimization, and a good educational system development, are the most common objectives of national employment and education policies.

Our contributions are not limited to the European context, but are applicable wherever greater economic dynamism and individual development and social progress are needed.

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