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## Conceptualizing Entrepreneurial Education as a Social Justice Endeavor

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**Abstract:** Entrepreneurial education is typically capitalist and overlooks social change efforts. Grounded in the literature, we argue progressive adult education has potential to transform entrepreneurial education into a social justice endeavor.

**Keywords:** Social justice, entrepreneurial education, adult education

Community development through entrepreneurship is a key aspect of the progressive philosophical foundation of adult education. Elias and Merriam (2005) highlight that many practices in of adult educators are "inspired by progressive ideals" (p. 51). Dewey (1977) influenced progressive adult education in the US through the notion of a democratic society committed to shared growth and development through individual contributions and experience.

Progressive education philosophy centers the experience and development of learners in any educational setting while also uniting theory with practice (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Learners experiences are the starting point for education in this respect, allowing for non-traditional forms of education. Elaborating on Dewey's (1977) progressive ideas emphasizes democracy, not in the sense of government, but rather through a relationship between education, social engagement, and reform (p. 55). Democracy is not a transportable concept but is a practice of participating in learning and in society (Jarvis, 2008). Progressive entrepreneur education unites personal experience with social good and has implications for adult education practice in entrepreneur education that moves from a capitalist model into endeavors that develop individual earnings with a strong connection to social and community development (Ray, Zarestky & Baumgartner, 2017).

Entrepreneur and social justice education efforts prepare learners to not only consider individual profit attainment but also align behaviors with the broader social impact. Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern (2006) define social entrepreneurship as "innovative, social value creating activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, or government sectors" (p. 371). Social entrepreneurs, in some ways, connect with the social justice mission within Adult Education that break away from a capitalist perspective. Social entrepreneurship is an increasingly popular phenomenon, in which is "one of creating social value by providing solutions to social problems" (M. Dacin, P. Dacin, & Tracey, 2011, p. 1204). Typically, market value is prioritized above social value but this definition suggests the reverse.

Entrepreneur education benefits from a connection to the field of adult education. There is a need for the field of entrepreneur education to reflect and become more critical while breaking down walls between academia and practice (Fayolle, 2013). In academia, social entrepreneurs are not as well researched (M. Dacin, P. Dacin, & Tracey, 2011). Adult education is a field of diverse, interdisciplinary practitioners and researchers with an identity rooted in social justice, is uniquely positioned to collaborate with entrepreneur education. This partnership enhances the future of individuals and communities to develop socially engaged entrepreneurs (Knox & Fleming, 2010; Bierema, 2010).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Considering entrepreneur education that develops socially engaged entrepreneurs requires examining the learner as an entrepreneur, the educator as a learning facilitator, and access to participation in entrepreneurial learning endeavors. Assessing and providing a future direction for the philosophical underpinnings of entrepreneur education will fill a gap in the vast literature around business and industry research.

Fayolle (2013) acknowledges entrepreneur education is "rarely defined or conceptualized" (p. 695). Defining and conceptualizing entrepreneur education as grounded in progressive philosophies of adult education allows us to examine the literature through the following categories, adapted from progressive philosophy principles outlined by Elias and Merriam (2005): (A) View and focus of Entrepreneur Education, (B) Entrepreneur Educations views of Teachers, Learners, and Methodology and (C) Entrepreneur Education as an Instrument of Social Change. These principles outline the Progressive adult education philosophy and incorporate existing literature on current entrepreneur education efforts. This paper serves to (1) analyze and establish entrepreneur education within progressive adult

education, (2) present a critical analysis of adult education practices in entrepreneur literature, (3) provide connections to research and practice discourse on entrepreneur education.

### **View and Focus of Entrepreneur Education**

A learner centered approach in entrepreneur education is particularly relevant within the current context of entrepreneurship. What we understand about entrepreneurs is that learning interests are varied and diverse. There is no singular type of work for an entrepreneur learner but rather varied potential endeavors. The nature of entrepreneur education requires a learner centered approach, and, as indicated by Reynolds (2005), people are the driving force behind new ventures, making the learner centered approach relevant and necessary.

Within current entrepreneur education literature, learner centered competencies and behaviors are identified around understanding entrepreneur education. Numerous literature reviews and studies have emerged about the current focus of entrepreneur education in business and industry. The surge of entrepreneur education focused literature is concentrated in different dimensions that are explored by Loi, Castriotta and Chiara Di Guardo (2016) through an extensive co-citation analysis. The literature review finds the recent focus of entrepreneur education literature consists of five key areas: "(1) introspection, (2) entrepreneur intention, (3) pedagogy, (4) entrepreneur learning and (5) evaluation" (p.956). Additionally, the authors establish that the existing literature considers entrepreneur pedagogy in the development of courses that consider both theory and practice. Entrepreneur learning and evaluation is the other focus of existing literature around entrepreneur education. The current views and focus of entrepreneur education are concentrated in institutions of higher education, and though some aspects of the lessons are transferable, there are also limitations to only viewing entrepreneur education in an institutional setting.

Though literature focuses on learning within the university, "a region's economic prosperity is identified as a stronger determining factor for a student's entrepreneur potential than education at the university level" (Bergmann, Hundt, & Sternberg, 2016). While university-based studies have implications for a broader view of entrepreneur education, there are significant limitations, such as access, cultural differences, community practices to approaching entrepreneur education through an institutional lens rather than as a community endeavor responsive to regional needs.

Considering regions and communities in entrepreneur education endeavors offers a broader view with applications for entrepreneur adult educators. Jarvis (2008) emphasizes a connection between community/society, learning and democracy. The purpose of learning is

not only to work but also to continue the process of learning to better humanity. The conceptualization of learning in this context directly connects to progressive ideals of social engagement and reform as the goal of education. To further consider the entrepreneur education a definition that exists outside of institutional education and connects to community development supports the educational needs of entrepreneurs.

### **Entrepreneur Educations Views of Teachers, Learners, and Methodology**

Through progressive adult education, teaching methods and philosophies are approached by educators considering that "how we teach is intimately related to why we teach and what we teach" (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 65). Fayolle (2013) argues teaching methods require emphasis on real world examples. Experiential-learning pedagogies and co-construction of knowledge by teacher and learner based on what is desired to be taught are most successful in entrepreneur education programs.

The co-construction of knowledge approach to entrepreneur education was employed in a study where students collaborated with business and industry as well as community members. Lackeus, Lundvist and Middleton (2016) discussed value creation when students, through the learning process, worked directly with outside stakeholders (p. 791). The learners in these circumstances are students within a formal learning environment and are learning by doing. This process is tied to progressive adult education philosophy and Dewey's (1984) emphasis on learning by doing. The teaching tools helped educators deviate away from more traditional teaching methods.

Experiential learning is highly valued in the literature. Unfortunately, there are not always clear examples of how experiential teaching methods are executed. For example, experiential learning was identified as an effective way for women micro-entrepreneurs to learn in Malaysia (Mamun, 2016) but with little supporting evidence to demonstrate what teaching methods were employed. Additionally, limited detail is available regarding the most effective methods in educational settings.

Bhatt & Bhatt, (2016), through a literature review, examine curriculum design and pedagogical tools, the information was progressive in nature emphasizing experiential learning. Experience is a core component of entrepreneur education and experience based learning activities are a useful approach. Experience based learning activities "include industrial visits, participation in management games, effective and relevant assignments which together shape the learning of students as well as faculties" (, p. 25) and, coupled with business and industry and community partnerships, enhance the learning experience of entrepreneurs.

As with a learner centered approach to education, the appropriateness of teaching tools and learning activities will depend on the audience participating in the educational experience and the education environment. Fayolle (2013) maintains that the learners or audience, are context dependent and the objectives, contents, methods and evaluation may need to shift depending on the group of entrepreneurs seeking education. Context is a key element to entrepreneur education. Teachers, learners, and methodology for entrepreneur education must consider the context of learning to be effective.

### **Entrepreneur Education as an Instrument of Social Change**

Education for social change, in addition to the role of teachers, learners and methodology, is a foundational progressive belief that education exists as a way to engage people in changing society. Adult education as described by Lindeman (1989) is the coupling of education and active participation in society to promote social change. Like Lindeman, Blakely (1958) saw education as a form of social change. Entrepreneur education, as a progressive adult education endeavor, cannot exist without a connection to the social impact of entrepreneur efforts. The individual and social context in progressive adult education philosophy work collaboratively to achieve a society that could look to the future while learning from our collective past (Blakely, 1958). Imagining entrepreneur education for social change emphasizes respect for individual freedom to create and work while connecting individual ideas and ambitions to a larger community goal through social and economic mobility.

Individual and social perspectives are also deeply connected to culture. "Culture shaped the perceptions, intentions and actions of individuals and so is a critical determinant of the rate of entrepreneur activity across the nations" (Dheer, 2017, p. 832). High income countries may exhibit lower levels of entrepreneur activity than low-income countries because fewer wage earning opportunities make it necessary to begin a new venture for wage attainment. Additionally, formal education is not necessarily an indicator of increased entrepreneur intentions or success depending on the way in which the entrepreneur activity is occurring (Dheer, 2017). The function of entrepreneur endeavors and education must be specifically tailored to the needs of people and their cultural context.

Concerning cultural context, education has a positive effect on entrepreneur success in a study conducted on the success of women in microenterprises in Malaysia (Mamun, 2016). A government run program supported the efforts of the 407 women who were beneficiaries of financial and training service for micro businesses. Women with higher education indicated increased success in their entrepreneur endeavors. Yet the research falls short in addressing

social barriers to entrepreneur success because of a narrow focus on individual behavioral competencies. Social barriers are compounded by gender in entrepreneur efforts and limited education opportunities in support of business pursuits (Ahmad & Bano, 2010). When efforts do not prepare entrepreneurs for the potential social and political challenges within the societies where they plan to start their business, educators are not connecting the individual to the social dimensions of becoming an entrepreneur.

For example, Mamun (2016) indicated that financial investment in a micro-business coupled with education helped women in Malaysia move out of poverty through their entrepreneur endeavors. The women also shared their experiences with other women to inspire future entrepreneurs. Yet, the ability of women to help each other navigate societies perceptions and policies that impact their work has limitations in helping women achieve success. Corresponding social structures and governmental supports must also develop to ensure the physical and economic safety of women entrepreneurs.

Education is valued and supports the social impact of entrepreneur efforts but there is little explanation of how education occurs in ways that support social change. The literature about social entrepreneurship and entrepreneur education affirms that "often education systems concentrate on the transmission of professional or vocational skills, leaving social competences more or less to chance" (Bikse, Rivza, & Riemere, 2015, p. 475). Leaving the development of social competencies to chance will function similarly to asking women to ensure their own individual safety in a community that does not value women. Though all individuals play a role in social change, educators play a pivotal part in leading the way to ensure social competencies are a part of the learning curriculum for entrepreneurs.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Social injustices include various forms of oppression within different cultural contexts. Considering the inequities of sexism and other forms of injustice include racism, classism, hetero-sexism, able-ism and belief-ism all of these result in social inequity (Johnson-Bailey, Baumgartner, & Bowles, 2010). These various aspects of identity impact the experiences of entrepreneurs as well as the learning context within entrepreneur education efforts. Adopting an entrepreneur education model that integrates a commitment to social justice centers the importance of the cultural context in which learning occurs. Additionally, an individual's cultural and economic station may require an educative approach to social justice outside of the Western context.

Entrepreneur education calls for "the human dimension" to have "a greater place and role" (Fayolle, 2013, p. 698). Entrepreneur education and social justice place humans at the forefront of the educative process and situate social change as the primary goal. Adult education practice has far reaching implications for entrepreneurs who also want to develop and contribute to local communities. Embracing progressive adult education's implications for entrepreneur education as a social justice endeavor contributes to community development.

At the heart of adult education, beyond the view as a function for workforce development, lies a deep commitment to social justice and equity (Bierema, 2010). With an increasingly globalized and internationalized economy, and adult education goals and efforts aligning with workforce preparation, entrepreneur education is primed and ready for reorientation around issues of social justice.

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