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Publication date:
2014

Document version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):
Kristiansson, M. R. (2014). *Implementing entrepreneurial thinking into iSchool curriculum.*

Implementing Entrepreneurial Thinking into iSchool Curriculum

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Abstract

The session aims to bring together a group of researchers and educators within the iSchool community interested in implementing entrepreneurial thinking in curriculum (teaching and research). Entrepreneurship is a contemporary social and cultural movement extending beyond its starting point as a management discipline closely related to start-ups to gain a much broader meaning including social and cultural entrepreneurship. Today, entrepreneurship can be considered to be a part of a modern educational/ “bildung” ideal with the purpose to make pupils and students ready to cope with the challenges of modern life. Efforts are made to nurture the entrepreneurial literacies of students. The event is aimed at all those who have an interest in entrepreneurship, experimental teaching and in gaining experience in the use of alternative teaching methods, and interested in combining teaching and research activities. A participatory format will be used to organise the event. The goal is to produce a document that collects the activities and discussion and to also initiate an online community that can provide a basis for further work.

Keywords: entrepreneurship teaching, entrepreneurial literacies, innovation, creativity, knowledge management

Citation: Kristiansson, M. R., & Anderson, T. D. (2014). Implementing Entrepreneurial Thinking into iSchool Curriculum. In *iConference 2014 Proceedings* (p. 1231–1233). doi:10.9776/14238

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1 Overview

Entrepreneurship is a contemporary social and cultural movement extending beyond its starting point as a management discipline closely related to start-ups to gain a much broader meaning including social and cultural entrepreneurship or as “a skillful way of being” (Spinosa et al., 1997). “Entrepreneurship is beginning to be recognized as the greatest source of productivity in both Western and many nonwestern cultures” (ibid, p34). Today, entrepreneurship can be considered to be a part of a modern educational/ “bildung” ideal with the purpose to make pupils and students ready to cope with the challenges of modern life. Efforts are made to nurture the entrepreneurial literacies of students. For example, the OECD proposes to foster an entrepreneurial spirit and culture (OECD, 2010) and the European Commission suggests focusing school curricula on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2010). Adams (2006, p 43) suggests that teaching entrepreneurship can build students’ self-awareness about their own capacities and talents. As part of a lengthy examination of the sources of innovation and creativity in society, Adams studied the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs and observed that while they often have unexceptional backgrounds and academic records, the one thing many entrepreneurs have in common is a desire for experimentation and trial and error as their preferred learning style. There is also an observable inclination for and tolerance of uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. For this reason, the most effective teaching and learning design for such programs employs innovative and experimental methods that support experiential learning (ibid, p41-4).

For the teacher interested in developing such literacies through their curriculum, this prompts questions such as: What tools can enable students to shape their own lives and destiny; together with other people create their own being (including their own job) based on acquired academic and professional skills? How can we encourage students to be engaged and responsible citizens? How to develop the students’

knowledge and ambition to take action/ control; to create businesses and jobs, to increase creativity and innovation in existing or new organizations? The proposed session engages specifically with the challenges of teaching entrepreneurial thinking. Organisers of this proposed session, who have experience with experimental teaching, the use of alternative teaching methods and research-based teaching in relation to entrepreneurship teaching, will initiate a community discussion around the following questions:

- In what way can entrepreneurship contribute to LIS + KM research, education and practice?
- How can LIS + KM research and teaching contribute to entrepreneurship?
- Should we, and if so, how can entrepreneurship be implemented in LIS education?
- How can we implement entrepreneurship in LIS research?
- What teaching tools and strategies are appropriate? What has worked and why?

2 Purpose and Intended Audience

The session aims to bring together a group of researchers and educators within the iSchool community interested in implementing entrepreneurial thinking in curriculum (teaching and research). The overall objectives are to:

- initiate and build an academic network based on the participant group around entrepreneurship thinking; and
- inspire participants to use entrepreneurship and innovation means/ methods/ techniques in relation to teaching activities.

The event is aimed at all those who have an interest in entrepreneurship, experimental teaching and in gaining experience in the use of alternative teaching methods, and interested in combining teaching and research activities.

3 Proposed activities

A participatory format will be used to organise the event. The goal is to produce a document that collects the activities and discussion that can provide a basis for further work. Preparing a short statement collectively could be a unifying basis for community building and giving shape to a joint identity around this topic.

After initial introductions to the event, the session is organised in three parts:

- “lightning talks” round (15 Minutes) in which three examples from current practice will be shared;
- ”idea generation” round (15 Minutes) in which participants will be invited to reflect on the lighting talks on their own, in pairs and finally in small groups as part of an exercise designed to build a collective list of techniques of interest to the audience;
- ”technique sharing” round (45 minutes), in which participants will move around a series of tables (that will take shape based on the outcome of the idea generation round) in short, rotating segments.

The final 15 minutes will be used to wrap up the discussion and discuss next steps of interest to the participants. At this stage it is anticipated that an online community network would be established and that techniques and insights shared at the event would be disseminated via an online resource, such as a wiki or blog.

4 Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

Seen from the perspective of the conference theme “Breaking Down Walls” entrepreneurship is especially interesting because it has the capacity to draw together people from different disciplines and encourage close collaboration on a joint/ mutual multidisciplinary entrepreneurial project. Given that entrepreneurship

has become an important part of modern society and increasingly gained ground in education and university (see for example: Adams, 2006), it seems a natural thing to systematically implement entrepreneurial thinking in information studies.

Information and knowledge handling/ management/ processing contributes to the creation of many new businesses and jobs. It is a core business component of most industries, such as in the many new Internet-based companies extending the significance of information and communication industries. In order for our students to be able to put their information studies into action, however, the dynamics of the future-oriented and agile work environments they will enter makes entrepreneurial literacy very relevant to their professional success (e.g. in the form of effectuation as discussed in Sarasvathy, 2008). Therefore, we have an obligation to implement entrepreneurial thinking within LIS and KM teaching and research to promote the process and for the benefit of our students. We hope that this event will motivate and inspire the participants to take up the challenge.

5 References

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