New developments in enterprise and entrepreneurship education

Introduction

Every year, writing an introduction to my long-running, double special issue on Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education for Education + Training carries a mixed blessing: on the one hand, it completes yet another successful publishing endeavour on this emergent research topic; on the other hand, it highlights just how much more there is still to be achieved before this important aspect of entrepreneurship research can eventually reach maturity.

Invariably, as we approach the maturity stage, issues of quality, quantity, validity and impact begin to reflect and also affect the specialist body of knowledge relating (directly and indirectly) to enterprise and entrepreneurship education. Additionally, maturity tends to polarise opinions and positions in towards the relevance and value of associated publications. By now, the specialist literature on this topic includes a multitude of refereed articles, conference papers and research monographs. There also exists a growing body of teaching textbooks, tools and materials, practitioner papers and a mass of “gray literature”. These are complemented by relevant official and consultation reports of varying quality and relevance. How can stakeholders keep up, differentiate and choose from amongst this fast growing and rapidly developing body of knowledge […]? Perhaps the best answer to this pertinent question can be found at individual level, as it is largely dependent upon a stakeholder’s focus, access to relevant reading material, and his/her level of commitment or interest. Ultimately, whether the choice is a subjective or objective decision, it will influence an individual’s opinion, position and further development as a professional and/or a practitioner. I cannot overstate the importance of making, and also following up, the right choice of publications that form the basis of initial training and continuous professional development of stakeholders who profess an interest in enterprise and entrepreneurship education. The majority of the professionals interviewed by me, over the last few decades, claim to take a balanced approach, ranging between refereed articles, research monographs and relevant textbooks. In addition, they also prefer to complement their reading lists with relevant data gleaned from a variety of national, regional and international websites. Whilst, I obviously approve of refereed publications, research monographs and textbooks written by specialist authors and researchers, I would recommend that data collected from websites should be rigorously checked and validated for factual accuracy and current relevance.

Since the publication of the first Education + Training double special issue in 2000, we committed ourselves to maintain the high standards that are specific to quality refereed journal publication: empirical rigour, clearly defined and justified research methods, variety of perspectives and continuity of conceptual and contextual relevance. Over a 19 year period of continuous publication, we have successfully preserved the high quality, empirical rigour and conceptual relevance of each and every special issue. Long before other authors and editors of refereed journals, we acknowledged the need for contextual relevance to complement conceptual advances in entrepreneurship related research. Furthermore, we emphasised the importance and relevancy of context, in both theory building and practical impact of emergent results and related implications. Individually and collectively, articles published in Education + Training have contributed significantly to the emergence, growth and development of a number of distinct small business and entrepreneurship topics, including: vocational education and training, enterprise training, entrepreneurial learning, e-learning, and entrepreneurship education. Importantly, the emergence and growth of these main topics of research, as well as other minor subtopics, was not limited to qualitative,
quantitative and mixed method research approaches. We have also published innovative theoretical and “cutting edge” review articles, which pushed the boundaries of knowledge development, beyond traditional or organic growth. The international nature of the research published in these special issues has established not only its conceptual impact and practical relevance, but also facilitated the generalisation and applicability of emergent results to multinational contexts, in industrially developed and developing countries, as well as nations in transition.

It should be noted that a great deal of debate still exists on the topic of enterprise and entrepreneurship education, even though we have resolved and moved on positively from the initial question of whether entrepreneurship can or cannot be thought. In my experience, most researchers, teachers and practitioners at all levels of compulsory, further and higher education, would respond in the affirmative: the basics of entrepreneurship and new venture creation can be outlined, explained and illustrated. While their bias towards teaching this specialism is obvious and perhaps even inherent in their chosen profession, the commitment and the passion that they exhibit in encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship students is laudable, going above and beyond employment contracts, curriculum schedules and the standard call of educational duty. Much of the existing debate that surrounds enterprise and entrepreneurship education is about “what”, “how”, “when” and “where” specialist and relevant knowledge is created and shared with those who, for various reasons, set out to seek and acquire it. A less well known and somewhat neglected aspect of this debate also touches upon “who” might be qualified and/or experienced enough to guide, encourage and support students involved in enterprise and entrepreneurship education. Focussed and empirically rigorous research has produced a number of complementary answers, alternative approaches and, on occasion, truly innovative as well as futuristic ways of teaching and/or training existing and future entrepreneurs.

The current, as well as previous special issues published in Education + Training provide an international platform to a wide range of views, perspectives and approaches which, individually and collectively, contribute significantly to the progress and development of this exciting topic of research. We owe our success in developing new approached to enterprise and entrepreneurship education to the hard work and commitment of researchers, contributors, referees and advisors. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their expert, dynamic and continuous support. I am grateful to Dr Martin McCracken, Editor of Education + Training and the production team at Emerald Publishing Group, for their support in delivering this special issue.

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