This paper is taken from

***Developing Identities in Europe:
Citizenship education and higher education
Proceedings of the second Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network***

London: CiCe 2000

Edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe,   ISBN 1 85377 3239

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.

Entrepreneurship education: should it be taught? Can it be taught?

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Background

'Why does Scotland create so few new companies in relation to other parts of the UK, let alone many of our competitor nations?' This was one of the key issues addressed by Crawford Beveridge, former Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise, when he returned from the United States to take up his post, leading economic development in Scotland. From the research that was commissioned evolved The Business Birth Rate Strategy, 1993, which aimed to create and sustain businesses in Scotland.

Although Scotland had under-performed in terms of new business start-up compared to the rest of the UK, the research challenged some of the thinking about small business and enterprise;

- during the 1980s new start businesses accounted for 125,00 jobs
- since the early 1990s 750,000 people have said that they have a serious interest in starting a business
- the problem is not that people have tried and failed, or even tried and were frustrated at lack of finance or inefficient network support - in Scotland they simply have not tried
- the research also found that attitudes towards entrepreneurs were unduly negative compared to those in England, Wales, Germany and the United States. This suggested that Scottish culture was a constraint on our ability to generate more businesses. More positive attitudes towards entrepreneurs will make it less difficult to get a business off the ground.
- the research also exposed the fact that once our entrepreneurs got started their companies achieved growth that was comparable to their counterparts
- later surveys also revealed that Scottish entrepreneurs were just as ambitious as their counterparts in the United States
- the negative attitudes towards entrepreneurs were prevalent among Scottish institutions, (teachers, policy makers, business advisors and financiers). The widespread lack of belief in the economic value of start-ups, it was argued, made Scotland a less encouraging place for entrepreneurs.

Based on the research, The Business Birth Rate Strategy set six priorities

1. Unlocking the potential - building enterprise education into the education system at both school and university levels.
2. Improving the environment - making Scotland a more encouraging place for entrepreneurs by improving formal and informal support networks
3. Improving access to finance.

4. Widening the entrepreneurial base - unlocking the untapped potential among women, the under 35s and non-homeowners (all of whom are under-represented among Scotland's entrepreneurs).
5. Increasing start-ups in key sectors - clusters such as high tech., manufacturing and business services.
6. Increasing the number of fast-growing new start-ups.

Unlocking the potential - from Primary 1 To Plc

Scotland has become widely recognised as a centre of excellence in the development of enterprise education. In 1999, 44,000 students had some form of enterprise learning experience in schools, universities and colleges, representing 10% of the total population.

The European Round Table, in its report of November 1998, *Job Creation and Competitiveness through Innovation*, stated that there should be greater emphasis on entrepreneurship at all levels of education. Scottish Enterprise was commended for its innovative approach to developing the entrepreneurs of tomorrow through a series of enterprise education programmes. The report also stated that 'other European countries should pursue similar programmes without delay'.

The research questions

If there is a commitment to the development of an enterprise culture at government level, and it is recognised as being of value, the following research questions emerge:
1. Does formal intervention, through enterprise education programmes, make a difference to young peoples' attitudes to entrepreneurship as a possible career option?
2. Should enterprise education be a compulsory part of the 5-14 curriculum, so that all children are exposed to it?
3. What does 'effective' enterprise education look like?

The assumptions

1. The future of work for young people is going to be so radically different that a different set of skills and competencies will be required to equip them to face these challenges.
2. Involvement in enterprise education equips young people with the skills that employers are looking for.
3. Involvement in enterprise education impacts on self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept.
4. Involvement in enterprise education is a positive experience for young people of all ages.

The future of work for young people is going to be so radically different that a different set of skills and competencies will be required to equip them to face these challenges.
We live in a world that is changing at an unprecedented rate, and the world of work is changing beyond all recognition. Charles Handy refers to the future of work as being one of a 'contract culture' with portfolio careers becoming the norm. This infers a move away from the hierarchies and structures within an organisation to the quality of interaction and learning. Personal qualities are being recognised by employers as more important than academic qualification (Furlong 1987, Rikousski 1992). Indeed Rikowki (1992) found that the employers in his study gave greater weight to part-time work carried out by young people in their last year of schooling, as indicative of positive work value. As individuals we are going to have to move away from a dependency culture; from the 'take a job 'mindset to the 'make a job' mindset. Whether working within an organisation or for oneself, enterprise skills seem to be an integral part of employers' requirements.

The literature suggests that there is a general consensus amongst employers that young people lack the skills and attitudes necessary for the workplace. Moore (1976) reviews the arguments between employers' needs and young peoples' attitudes and draws the conclusion that one of the main criticisms from employers was the young peoples' 'little understanding of the role of industry'. Moore (1984) cites further evidence that employers feel that 'young people lack basic social and life skills', although he points out that research (Carter 1962, Ashton and Field 1976) demonstrates that most young people adjust fairly easily to working life.

Eggleston (1982) draws attention to the fact that most subjects only enter the school curriculum when informal education by family, church or the community becomes unable to ensure the learning needed for an adult role. It is only during the last 150 years that work has been transferred away from the home and the community to separate institutions, such as factories, shops and offices. These institutions have gradually become less accessible as legislation surrounding health and safety, hygiene and security has come to the fore.

Not only is work no longer a natural part of a young person's upbringing, but it is also something that is no longer available to all human beings (Eggleton 1982). This impacts on work identity and the requirement for intervention in creating formal mechanisms to help young people within a dynamic and changing society. The Association of Graduate Recruiters report *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century* (1995) tried to identify skills which graduates would need for the new millennium. The authors assert that the world in which there was a clear functional identity and security has now been replaced by a world of customers and clients, added value, lifelong learning, portfolio careers, self-development and an overwhelming desire in members of the workforce to stay employable. The self-reliance skills, encompassing self-awareness, self-promotion, exploring and creating opportunities, action planning, networking, matching and decision-making, negotiation, political awareness, coping with uncertainty, development focus, transfer skill and self-confidence, have become vitally important. Are these the skills that enterprise education equips our young people with?

Involvement in enterprise education equips young people with the skills that employers are looking for

Coffield (1990), in his article 'From the decade of the Enterprise Culture to the Rise of the TECs', concludes from his examination of the concept of enterprise as used on enterprise courses, that there is no generic skill of enterprise 'whose essence can be distilled and taught'. Others have created lists of skills that are identified as being enterprising, or can be developed through enterprise programmes. Durham University Business School, (DUBS) published Key Skills in Enterprise for 14-16 year-olds (Johnson et al., 1987a), for 16-19 year olds (Johnson et al., 1987b) and Primary Enterprise (DUBS 1989) which were all based on Gibbs Enterprise Culture – its Meaning and Implications for Education and Training (1987). Gibbs claims that there are twelve entrepreneurial attributes; these consist of initiative, strong persuasive powers, moderate risk taking, flexibility, creativity, problem-solving ability, need for achievement, imagination, high belief in control of one's own destiny, leadership, and hard work. Turner (Community Enterprise in the Curriculum, 1998) also identifies twelve core skills of enterprise, but only two, problem solving and creativity, appear on Gibbs'list. The City and Guilds of London Institute cite six key skills, three of which correspond to Gibbs'list, and The Scottish Vocational Education Council's model seeks to develop four skills.

These programmes assume that the process matters more than the content (Jonathon 1983). Coffield (1990) concludes there is lack of definition as to what constitutes enterprise education and points to the 'hurrah' words like 'creativity', 'initiative' and 'leadership', sometimes referring to an individual ability and at other times to an economic activity, usually in small business. A further concept requiring examination is the difference between education and training (Dearen, 1984), and vocational education and vocational training (Pring 1987). Is how you learn more important than what you learn? Holt (1987) examined the concept of whether 'skills' training was a fallacy, and whether it was superficial to use the term 'skill' to describe professional activities such as teaching. Johnson et al., 1897) described enterprise as 'a mixture of attitudes, skills and motivations' which Coffield argues are all interchangeable words.

The Industry in Education report (1996) presents evidence to show that both the young people and the employer believe that the young are poorly prepared for work by schooling. We need to question whether schools are indeed the best place for enterprise education to take place and whether teacher are the best people to deliver this type of education.

The learning

Research undertaken in the United States by Dr Marilyn Kourilsky of the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership has demonstrated the effectiveness of this type of experience-based learning, and has affirmed that participation produces outstanding gains in children's (ages 8 to 12 years) economic literacy and reasoning, entrepreneurial awareness and concept acquisition, as well as enhanced mathematics achievement and attitude towards school and learning (Carlson, 1994; Cassuto, 1980; Hopkins, 1989; Kourilsky, 1981; Kourilsky and Ballard-Campbell, 1984a, 184b; Kourilsky and Graff, 1986; Kourilsky and Hirshleifer, 1976; Kourilsky and Murray,1981; Kourilsky and Ortiz,1985).

The theory of generative learning, as expounded by Merlin Wittrock, clarifies the understanding that the brain is not a 'passive consumer of information; it actively constructs meaningful relationships between unfamiliar concepts and familiar relevant knowledge and experience' (Wittrock, 1974). As children construct connections between previous experience (the familiar) and new conceptual knowledge (the unfamiliar), they generate a meaning consistent with their perceptions or interpretations. The creation of connections, which children require in order to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar, enables them to generate meaning and understanding.

Experience-based learning is characterised not only by children's personal involvement in the learning experience, but also by their individual and group decision-making and the bearing of the consequences of their decisions (Dewey, 1933,1938; Dewey & Dewey, 1915; Stevens & Richards, 1992).

Traditional teaching methods are the antithesis of how the entrepreneur learns (Fletcher et al, 1997). Timmons (1994) established that although some people are born entrepreneurs, most become entrepreneurs through circumstance. He stresses the importance of external factors and suggests that interactive skills can be learned. If indeed circumstance is a key factor in determining entrepreneurial intention, then the knowledge and skills acquired through participation in entrepreneurship programmes equip young people to grasp opportunities as they arise.

The experiential learning and period of reflection as children are de-briefed gives them a frame of reference for transforming their experiential observations and cognitions into long-term concept and content acquisition in a variety of subject areas, but especially in entrepreneurship. The incorporation of the Dewey model into this type of programme enables the children to 'not only derive learning actively from their own experiences shared with their peers, but also to gain competence in functioning productively and responsively as citizens in a particular democracy' (Kourilsky 1996).

This paper aimed to examine whether entrepreneurship should be taught, and whether indeed it could be taught. An outline of the programmes enjoying huge success in Scotland, and the case study of one group engaging in the 'Be an Inventor' challenge, have hopefully demonstrated that it can be taught, and taught in imaginative and creative ways. The references to generative and experiential learning underpin the importance of having a solid learning theory infrastructure, and its impact on the learning process as the children engage in their entrepreneurial projects.

Educating our children for the new world of work, (a world where there are going to be few jobs for life and where today's children will not engage in a handful of different jobs, but a handful of different careers), we must review the skills, competencies, attitudes and values that are developed within our education system. Professor Kotter's 20-year tracking study of Harvard MBAs (1995) is one example of American research that clearly demonstrates that top MBA students have few aspirations to rise through the corporate ranks, and that many young professionals are simply using large corporations as a training ground before staring up their own businesses. Aspirations in Scotland may be at a different level, but there is certainly a trend towards more entrepreneurial careers, as evidenced by the demand and popularity of entrepreneurship courses at Scotland's universities. Technology is facilitating opportunity, and barriers to entry in business start-up are being lowered, thus creating a more favourable environment for young entrepreneurs.

The Association of Graduate Recruiters (1995) produced a report that set out to predict the skills that would be required by graduates in the next century. The predictions indicated a need to develop 'self-reliance' skills. The report challenges Higher Education institutions to equip their students with these skills and cites enterprise education as one example of a major initiative designed to develop students' transferable skills.

Conclusion

Many of the skills identified as being of critical importance in the future of work are indeed those that have been identified as key skills for an entrepreneur: self-confidence, coping with uncertainty and the generation of ideas. The cases reported in this paper illustrates that attitudes and behaviours can be influenced by intervention, and real challenges can be met by very young, motivated people.

As well as key skills for today's entrepreneurs, the Association of Graduate Recruiters states that these are the exact same skills needed by future staff in their 500 member organisations. People with this skill-set have traditionally been referred to as entrepreneurs: however, in today's inter-connected, networked organisations, this is will be the standard expectation for all key staff. In the 21st century, whether working for IBM, Microsoft or a start-up company, young people need to demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviour in order to succeed.

Entrepreneurship education throughout the education system, indeed from P1 to PLC, has to encourage individuality, creativity and leveraging knowledge. The development of individuals who can think for themselves and make things happen is the essence of entrepreneurship education.

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