

## **In Quest of Legitimacy: The Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Entrepreneurship Education Research**

*Targeting, connecting and reflecting as key orientations for future research*

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The growing entrepreneurship education literature demonstrates the need for additional and robust intellectual foundations, both at the theoretical and methodological levels (Fayolle, 2013; Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Worldwide, the interest in entrepreneurship ranges from macro-economic policy makers, who view entrepreneurship as a potential mechanism to create economic growth, to individuals who pursue entrepreneurial opportunities for their own purposes. Between these extremes entrepreneurship is viewed as a way to increase the competitiveness of existing organizations (i.e. corporate innovation) (Miller, 1983; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996) as well as a potential method of addressing global social needs (Saravathy and Venkataraman, 2010). In response to this growing demand, schools and universities worldwide have emerged with courses, programmes, and fields of study. Incubators, accelerators, and regional ecosystems continue to emerge with the goal to support and increase entrepreneurial activity. Yet, from a theoretical and methodological perspective, a significant gap exists in our understanding of entrepreneurship education. What is it that we “know” and how can we be certain that our knowledge is making a contribution. Specifically, we identify two key issues: (1) what are the current pedagogies and practices, and (2) what knowledge have we gathered regarding the appropriateness, relevancy, coherency, social usefulness, and efficiency of our initiatives and practices in entrepreneurship education (Fayolle, 2013)? The first issue is a call to link deeply and adequately in entrepreneurship education research the fields of education and entrepreneurship, while the second highlights

the importance of being connected to the societal demand, in a broad sense, and improving our knowledge about the impact of entrepreneurship education on learning outcomes for both individuals and organizations.

Often in the entrepreneurship education literature, the pedagogies are described, but the papers lack conceptual and methodological foundations, inadequately describe the nature of intervention, and adopt a less-than-convincing critical perspective. Most of the studies focus on *a posteriori* contributions of teaching experiences. Instructor narratives are often based on implicit, taken-for-granted, assumptions about learning theories with little reflection, theoretical and didactical knowledge, and time for practitioners' reflexivity. For example, entrepreneurship educators' experiences rarely relate to the Bloom or Anderson taxonomy - developed in education to promote higher forms of learning including application, analysis, evaluation, and creation - to define precise entrepreneurial learning objectives for their programmes or courses. As a consequence, justification for learning activities and appropriate evaluation processes cannot be designed with a constructive alignment perspective (Biggs, 2003).

Considering the current state of knowledge in entrepreneurship education (see for example, Béchar and Grégoire, 2004; Edelman, Manolova and Brush, 2008; Honig, 2004; Neck and Greene, 2011; and Pittaway and Cope, 2007), Fayolle (2013) calls for a pragmatic and critical approach in the development of future perspectives on entrepreneurship education research. He highlights the need to develop research focusing on three main dimensions: target, connect and reflect. Target refers to building theoretical foundations. Connect and reflect refer to bridging disciplines and communities (research and practice) and increasing the critical thinking perspective respectively.

Our main objective, in this Special Issue, is to invite scholars to submit theoretical and empirical papers addressing issues in relation to these dimensions.

- 1) *Target*. To take into consideration the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship education, research should lead to the development of useful typologies and taxonomies. The outcomes of this stream of research could help researchers and educators to design and experiment specific teaching models (Béchar and Grégoire, 2007; Fayolle and Gailly, 2008). Research questions should also target relevant concepts used in the entrepreneurship literature to offer new perspectives in entrepreneurship education

(see for example, DeTienne and Chandler, 2004; Shepherd, 2004). For example, research designs might include:

- Entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurial thinking (Carsrud and Brännback, 2009)
- Entrepreneurial competences (Man, Lau and Chan, 2002; Lans, Verstegen and Mulder, 2011)
- Entrepreneurial action (Frese, 2009)
- Entrepreneurial method (Sarasvathy and Venkataraman, 2011)
- Effectuation and causation (Sarasvathy, 2001)
- Entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005)

2) *Connect*. The literature in entrepreneurship education shows that the domain is largely disconnected from the field of education (Fayolle, 2013) and from the entrepreneurial practice (Edelman, Manolova and Brush, 2008; Vanevenhoven, 2013). Research issues could include:

- The application of the concept of teaching model and other education theories, concepts and methods to improve our understanding of the ways individuals (students, adults, etc.) learn, to better assess the impact of entrepreneurship education or to better design entrepreneurship education courses in relation to the objectives and the specificities of audiences and contexts.
- The study of key problems experienced by entrepreneurs in a diversity of situations and contexts, to get a better understanding on how entrepreneurs learn to solve or to deal with the problems they are facing. The transferability issue of knowledge gained from studying real-life entrepreneurs to its use in the classroom with the students could also be examined.
- The use of vicarious learning, deliberate trial-error reflection cycles and tacit or conscious metacognitive processes to develop learning centered on reflexivity about dealing with complex and uncertain situations

3) *Reflect*. There is a lack of critical thinking in entrepreneurship education. How can we advance this line of research? It is a difficult question as it strongly relates the level of maturity of a research *domain*. However, we may suggest here some research avenues:

- Studying the background and the profiles of entrepreneurship educators and instructors in relation to their practices and the intellectual (ontological, theoretical, didactical) foundations on which these practices are based on.
- Examining the assumptions and the theoretical foundations of entrepreneurship education practices based on “learning by doing” or “experiential learning” pedagogies.
- Reflecting on the interest of multiplying the research on the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and education, knowing that intention is not behavior (Armitage and Conner, 2001). Research should address more explicitly the link between intention and behavior, applying, for example, the theory of implementation intention (Gollwitzer, 1999) or the commitment theories (Ajzen, Csasch and Flood, 2009; Fayolle, Basso and Tornikoski, 2011).
- Questioning the research streams, the main epistemologies, theories and methods in entrepreneurship education and moving “out of the box” to reinvent the future of entrepreneurship education

The editors intend to bring with this Special Issue a significant value to entrepreneurship education researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. Full papers should be submitted using the Manuscript Central ... and should make an explicit mention to the special issue. Papers should follow the ISBJ’s submission guidelines and formatting. Papers suitable for publication in the Special Issue will be double-blind reviewed following the ISBJ’s review process guidelines.

## **Timetable**

The Special Issue is scheduled to be published in early 2017. The following timetable/deadline dates are given for your information:

1. **Submission of the full papers – by 30 December 2014.**
2. First Feedback from reviewers - by 30 May 2015.
3. Submission of the revised papers – by 30 November 2015.

4. Expected delivery date to ISBJ - by 30 April 2016.

### **Contact information**

Details of the ISBJ, including submission guidelines can be found on <http://isb.sagepub.com/>

Please feel free to contact one of the Special Issue Editors if you have any queries.

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