

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education and context

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1. Introduction

Recently the importance of context and, in particular, the regional context and its function in shaping entrepreneurial capital, that is, the knowledge and skills as well as resources needed to start and grow ventures has been highlighted (Kotey 2006; Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes 2012). Given this increasing interest, our intention in this special issue is to highlight the role context has to play in entrepreneurship education, which is a key input to the development of appropriate knowledge and skills.

For many commentators the power of entrepreneurship and its importance in maintaining a growing and thriving economy remains unquestionable (Mitra 2008; Dutta, Li, and Merenda 2011; Liñán, Rodríguez-Cohard, and Rueda-Cantuche 2011; Raposo and do Paço 2011). Indeed, the implicit or explicit link between entrepreneurship and economic growth is evident in a variety of contexts and at different levels – international, national, regional and local (Minnitti 2008). For instance, at the European level, Bosma, Schutjens, and Stam (2009, 59) note that the goal of the EU 2000 Lisbon Agenda, for the EU, to become the world's most innovative area by 2010 was based on the entrepreneurial power of its regions, while in cities entrepreneurial initiatives have been introduced to address economic issues (Tretten and Welter 2007).

The interest in the connection between entrepreneurship and economic development has not been confined only to the domain of entrepreneurship but is also evident in related fields such as economics and geography (Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes 2012). In the economic growth literature, for example, there is increasing focus on the relationship between entrepreneurship, sustainable regional development and competitive advantage: after all, 'regional competitiveness and effective entrepreneurship are two sides of the same coin' (Nijkamp 2009, 1).

Entrepreneurial ventures help to maintain the economic vitality of a nation in a variety of ways including opportunity recognition, generation of new business ideas, economic activities, value creation and employment generation (Dutta, Li, and Merenda 2011, 163). However, it is not just economic ills for which entrepreneurship has been recommended as a panacea. Along with establishing a dynamic small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector it is now considered to be a vital factor in

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combating poverty, assisting in regional and local development as well as addressing social cohesion (Berglund and Johansson 2007; Steyaert and Katz 2007). In tackling socio-cultural, political and environmental concerns, entrepreneurship has become 'a model for introducing innovative thinking, reorganizing the established and crafting the new across a broad range of goals such as social change and transformation far beyond those of simple commerce and economic drive' (Steyaert and Katz 2007, 182).

A key instrument in the development of entrepreneurial attitudes is education (Potter 2008 cited in Mitra 2008), which can be particularly influential in increasing an individual's intent to start a business (Peterman and Kennedy 2003; Honig 2004; Dutta, Li, and Merenda 2011; Liñán, Rodríguez-Cohard, and Rueda-Cantuche 2011). The first recorded entrepreneurship course in the US was at Harvard Business School in the late 1940s while the UK and Western Europe followed suit from the early 1980s (Kuratko 2005; Kirby and Ibrahim 2011). While initial courses encouraged students to create new ventures on graduation more recently there has been a shift in focus to a broader concept which emphasizes entrepreneurship as a way of thinking and behaving (Kirby and Ibrahim 2011). 'The benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to start-ups, innovative ventures and new jobs...[but, rather to] an individual's ability to turn ideas into action' (European Commission 2008, 7).

Extending the focus of entrepreneurship education from skills development to learning about entrepreneurship as a phenomenon (Rasmussen and Sørheim 2006), increases not only entrepreneurial awareness but also entrepreneurial knowledge in individuals who subsequently might work for entrepreneurs or support entrepreneurial activity, such as investors, customers and suppliers. Indeed, Venkataraman and Sarasvathy (2008) suggest that the aim of entrepreneurship education within a region should be the creation of 'a support system' for its activities for 'entrepreneurs survive and thrive as much because of the context in which they operate as from their talents and efforts' (14).

While learning and educational endowments make an important contribution to a region's entrepreneurial capital and subsequent activity, few studies explicitly consider the importance of context or environment (Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes 2012). This is consistent with Hjorth, Jones, and Gartner's (2008, 81) observation, at a macrolevel, that even though 'entrepreneurship emerges from a particular context, entrepreneurship research has been remarkably unable to speak about context'. This, they attribute to the dominant hegemonic, objectivist approach to research that has been to seek 'general laws' which transcend context resulting in de-contextualized accounts. However, as the 'understandings of, appreciation of and even the value of entrepreneurship likely vary across nations, where different histories, politics and economics have formed different perceptions about enterprise' (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack 2009), then it follows that entrepreneurship will be enacted in different ways in different contexts. Indeed, in a pan-European study of the way in which entrepreneurs were perceived, Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack (2009) found that there were many different views including the 'tarnished hero', an 'exploiter' and a 'predator', a 'work-machine' and a 'maverick'. Furthermore, variation existed not just between more or less munificent regions but also among the respondents who included pupils, teachers, parents, entrepreneurs and administrators. While more investigation is required into why such

variations exist these findings, nevertheless, suggest that context-specific approaches to the promotion and education of entrepreneurship are appropriate.

2. The special issue

In the call for this special issue we indicated that topics of interest included, but were not limited to:

- Theoretical development of entrepreneurship education (e.g. adult learning, management education and the interface between entrepreneurship and education).
- Entrepreneurial learning theory and its relevance/applicability to entrepreneurship education.
- The purpose and assumed and actual meanings attached to entrepreneurship education by various stakeholders.
- The proposed and actual relationship between entrepreneurship education and regional development including: employability, new venture creation and competitiveness.
- Evaluating the impact and role of government (regional, national and international) and its policies in promoting entrepreneurship education (e.g. evaluation of the intended outputs, measures used to assess outputs, funding mechanisms etc).
- Interdisciplinarity and entrepreneurship education.
- Traditional and alternative pedagogical approaches to entrepreneurship.
- The impact of entrepreneurship education in different contexts (e.g. US, pan-European and/or transitional economies).
- Longitudinal and/or comparative studies.

Fifteen submissions were received from North America and Europe. While we were disappointed not to receive contributions from countries outside these continents, which would perhaps have drawn on different contexts and, thus, provided additional insights into entrepreneurship education and regional development, we recognize that this reflected where the majority of entrepreneurship education and research takes place. Seven manuscripts were desk-rejected either because they did not meet the requirements of the call or the quality standards of the journal. The remaining articles were subject to the journal's normal double-blind review process. After two rounds of review, three papers were finally accepted for publication (Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes, Gordon, Hamilton, and Jack and Walter and Dohse – see Table 1), which are briefly discussed below.

In addition to these three papers another commissioned paper is also included in this special issue. Unfortunately during the editorial process one of the guest editors, Jason Cope, tragically died. To commemorate Jason's contribution to the field of entrepreneurship education two of the guest editors (Hazlett and Leitch) asked Luke Pittway to conduct an overview of his work. In keeping with the requirements of the journal, this article, which was co-authored with Richard Thorpe, was also subject to a double blind-review. While this synopsis of Jason's role in shaping entrepreneurial learning and education does not specifically address the issue of context, nevertheless given the important contribution he made to the field in general, we felt it appropriate to include this fitting tribute in this special issue.

Table 1. Categorization of papers in the special issue.

Author	Location of research	Approach	Focus
Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes (2012)	Pan-European	Literature review/ Empirical (Qualitative)	The influence of the region on secondary-level entrepreneurship education initiatives
Gordon, Hamilton, and Jack (2012)	UK	Literature review/ Empirical (Qualitative)	The impact of entrepreneurship education delivered by a higher education institute (HEI) on individual (practitioners) and organizational development
Walter and Dohse (2012)	Germany	Literature review/ Empirical (Quantitative)	The effect of regional context and mode of entrepreneurship education on the development of entrepreneurial intention
Pittaway and Thorpe	UK	Literature review/ Theoretical	Overview of Jason Cope's contribution to entrepreneurship education and learning

3. Overview of the papers in the special issue

Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes's paper explicitly addresses the impact of regional entrepreneurial contexts on secondary-level enterprise education. This study is to be particularly welcomed given the tertiary-level focus in most entrepreneurship education research. Drawing on the new European School of Entrepreneurship where context is particularly emphasized they discuss the importance of a region's learning and educational endowments in contributing to its stock of entrepreneurial capital. They suggest that for young learners that enterprise education as an institution can mediate their local context. Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes report the findings of a pan-European comparative field study conducted within secondary schools in seven countries with not only different levels of economic development but also with varying types of entrepreneurship. Similarly, there was a wide variety in the nature, extent and success of the initiatives in the schools studied. In order to specifically capture the impact of regionality, two contrasting regions in each country were selected, one which was well developed economically and technologically with high levels of entrepreneurship and the other less well developed with correspondingly lower levels of entrepreneurship. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of stakeholders in each country with specific consideration given to the impact of enterprise education.

The findings clearly reveal that at the regional-level differentiation between lesser and more developed regions is evident with regard to the objectives and outcomes of enterprise education. In addition, a disparity in resources and opportunities was evident. Further, despite the divergence in national enterprise education evident, the authors stress that at regional level their results demonstrate consistency across each of the countries. It was also discovered that local enterprise cultures could vary, a result of the ways in which enterprise and entrepreneurship are socially constructed.

This is of particular importance for, as Drakopoulou Dodd and Hynes argue, embeddedness in a specific socio-cultural milieu impacts on all enterprise education, secondary school stakeholders (who clearly participate in this milieu) are vital in co-creating different regional narratives of enterprise with the next generation of would-be entrepreneurs. Obviously, the ramifications of this can impact on entrepreneurial activity by positively or negatively shaping pupils' views of entrepreneurship and, therefore, their likelihood or otherwise of engaging in entrepreneurship.

The qualitative study reported by Gordon, Hamilton, and Jack investigates the relationship between entrepreneurship education, delivered in an HEI, and its impact on the SME owner as well as the way in which they operate their business. They note that while HEI/SME engagement has been explored in a number of previous studies, their research is different as it focuses not on economic outputs but on the impact each business owner perceived entrepreneurship education had on them at both the individual level and organizational level. They argue that the study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between entrepreneurship education and the impact it can have on both individual development and organizational development and subsequently regional development.

Their paper engages with a wide range of literature including the role of HEIs in regional economic development, entrepreneurship education within the SME sector and, perhaps of particular interest, the emergent entrepreneurial learning literature which suggests that experiential learning theories can offer insights into structuring programmes to explicitly embed 'entrepreneurial learning mechanisms', especially the process of reflection (Cope 2003, 430).

The findings to emerge from their study are presented under three themes, including the impact on SME owners of engaging with entrepreneurship education, the evolution, and experience of engaging in networks and the function of trust as well as the role of experiential learning. From a regional development perspective, the creation of a network and the subsequent social capital created, which supports the network members, have had an enduring impact on the development and growth of both the entrepreneurs and their businesses. While the importance of trust and sociability are stressed as in programme content the authors note that these elements are likely to be context-specific and the mechanisms employed to generate them may not be easily transferable.

The premise underlying Walter and Dohse's research is that the extent of entrepreneurship education and students' entrepreneurial intentions varies substantially at both the institutional level and regional level. They suggest that the impact of entrepreneurship education is not the same in all contexts but is dependent on both how it is taught and where it is taught. In order to contribute to the debate on the impact of entrepreneurship education they draw upon two separate but complementary streams of literature, modes of education and regional context and embeddedness, involving transactions between individuals and the local environment.

Employing a multilevel data set on individual and regional/organizational-level information they tested their hypotheses. They present three findings. Firstly, their study demonstrates that active modes of entrepreneurship education are positively related to entrepreneurial intentions and attitudes. Further, they discovered that students who experienced extensive action-oriented courses were more likely to identify as well as exploit opportunities. Secondly, the regional context moderates the

effect of entrepreneurship education. In areas characterized by a high degree of entrepreneurial activity reflective modes of education are more effective, while active modes are effective irrespective of this contingency. Thirdly, their research suggests that both modes of education seem to impact upon students' attitudes to entrepreneurship rather than encouraging them to become self-employed. They conclude that the optimal design of entrepreneurship education depends on regional circumstances and that this should be taken into consideration in the design of courses.

Pittaway and Thorpe introduce Jason Cope's work by outlining the protocols that he developed and demonstrate how the ideas and the findings from his empirical work can advance our understanding of entrepreneurial learning as well as entrepreneurship education. Using the metaphor of a symphony advanced by Down (2010), they illustrate how the impact of his work on entrepreneurial learning had been drawing to a conclusion potentially providing him with the space to commence another. They observe that Cope's work provided a useful framework of entrepreneurial learning that drew on a range of concepts to offer insights into how entrepreneurs learn, especially in cases of crisis or venture failure.

From an entrepreneurship education perspective, his work has implications particularly for educational practice in higher education as well as for programmes offered to entrepreneurs. With regard to the former, his work calls for innovations in educational practice with a specific emphasis on the importance of embedding action learning approaches, not only learning by doing and reflection, but also learning through crisis into the design of programmes. In particular, the value of deep and sophisticated as opposed to superficial reflection was stressed. He believed that even though difficult, in formal education programmes explicit recognition should be made of the importance of learning from mistakes and failure, as this more accurately reflects what happens in practice.

From the viewpoint of designing programmes for entrepreneurs, Cope's work addresses the concern that too often they are supply-led and do not reflect fully the values and means by which entrepreneurs learn best. Of particular relevance was his recognition of the 'stock of experience' and 'entrepreneurial preparedness' which entrepreneurs bring to any educational context and thus programme designs should reflect this. His suggestions resonate with some of those made with regard to improving pedagogical approaches in general.

4. Conclusion

We are grateful to the contributors to this special issue for clearly demonstrating how the context in which entrepreneurship education, irrespective of level, is practiced can have an impact at both the individual level and organizational level. Adopting a context-specific approach overcomes the assumption that entrepreneurship process is similar or even universal (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack 2009). Given the importance of the environment in shaping, motivating and facilitating entrepreneurial activity we call for more context-specific research to be conducted to allow us to fully understand how the challenge of maximizing the contribution of such activity to economic development at different levels and in different milieu can be met.

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